NOSTALGIA AND NIGHTMARE *a Study in the Fiction of S. Y. Agnon*

by Arnold J. Band

University of California Press
Berkeley and Los Angeles
1968

9 · *Temol shilshom (Only Yesterday)*, 1945

> There is an opinion among the dogs that they, too, were human beings, but inasmuch as they rebelled against their Lord He made them dogs. Some of them returned in repentance and were returned to their original form, but those who persisted in their rebellion remained dogs. Needless to say, this opinion has no scientific basis. For the scholars have already agreed that the dog comes from the fox or the wolf or the hyena or from a type of primeval dog which is already extinct (p. 472).

THOUGH NOT WRITTEN AS A TRILOGY, AGNON'S THREE major novels, *Hakhnasat kala*, *Ore'aḥ nata lalun*, and *Temol shilshom* are related in several crucial aspects. All have their roots in Galicia and extend, in varying degrees, to Erets Yisrael; the degree of extension toward Erets Yisrael increases from novel to novel. The articulation of the relationship between Galicia, which is galut, and Erets Yisrael is one of the central concerns of the writer. The relationship between the heroes is striking. Reb Yudel Ḥasid of *Hakhnasat kala* is an ancestor, five generations removed, of Yitsḥak Kummer of *Temol shilshom*; both the narrative "I" of *Ore'aḥ nata lalun* and Yitsḥak Kummer of *Temol shilshom* go from Galicia to Erets Yisrael. Ḥemdat, the young writer in *Temol shilshom*, is as much a projection of the writer's own personality as the narrator of *Ore'aḥ nata lalun*, but in a more removed and objective sense. And finally, all three novels display an unrelenting obsession with the broader problems of faith, identity, and home which beset many writers in this century. Consequently, while trigolic neither in intent nor in chronological order (*Hakhnasat kala* takes place about 1825; *Ore'aḥ nata lalun* in 1929 and 1930, *Temol shilshim* between 1907 and 1910, approximately) the three novels do form a cycle in which each member is illuminated by the other two. The novelistic structure and ultimate implication of *Temol shilshom* can be delineated more sharply in contrast with the previous novels. It is doubtless the most successfully realized of

the three novels, the richest in connotation, and the most universal in import.

In this novel, Agnon adopts a more straightforward narrative method in which a central figure, Yitsḥak Kummer, is observed moving through a series of episodes that affect him directly. In *Hakhnasat kala* Reb Yudel is so much part of the world in which he moves that one cannot speak of an effect upon him; and in *Ore'aḥ nata lalun*, the narrator is also the central figure, a technique that complicates and enriches the point of view. The plot line of *Temol shilshom* is as simple as the hero himself. In the prologue, he journeys from Shibush to Jaffa, an idealistic young haluts (pioneer) aspiring to find self-fulfillment in the life of a farmer rebuilding Erets Yisrael. In the four subsequent sections we follow him geographically: Jaffa, Jerusalem, Jaffa, Jerusalem, and witness his fall from innocence into an intermittent but unrelenting sense of guilt which appears to culminate in his tragic-ironic death by rabies just at the moment when most of his personal problems seem to be solved. The book is a *Bildungsroman* that does not follow the conventional passage from innocence to experience but progresses from innocence to a feeble state of experience marked by its periods of bliss and composure often ruffled by the irrepressible consciousness of guilt and failure, and finally moves back to a state of innocence which our hero is not allowed to enjoy for he must pay with his life for his failure. The progression is from innocence to a dog's death and each episode in the novel is a step toward this end, sometimes a step that adumbrates this end but more often tends to rob it of its moral justification, hence its meaning. In this respect, *Temol shilshom* is nearer to *Hakhnasat kala*, which, with its comic irony, questions the very placidity and wondrousness of the world the novel portrays so lovingly and nostalgically, than it is to *Ore'aḥ nata lalun*, which ends on a note of hope and affirmation in spite of the many chapters of desolation and death. It is no coincidence that Yitsḥak Kummer often remarks that miracles like those that happened to his ancestor Reb Yudel Ḥasid do not happen any more, or that he even makes bold to deny the historical authenticity of the miraculous story of the treasure found in the cave. The discovery or redefinition of "home" or the getting there is one of the major themes in Agnon's works and Kurzweil has stressed many times that Yitsḥak Kummer fails most tragically in this quest. Reb Yudel assures the future of his "home" through a questionable miracle; the narrator of *Ore'aḥ nata lalun* discovers that the "home" of his childhood is no more, but categorically accepts his new "home" in Erets Yisrael. Yitsḥak Kummer dies a violent death bound, like a mad dog, in a darkened room; he cannot build his home.

Like the two preceding novels, *Temol shilshom* has its specific milieu,

mostly Palestine of the central years of the Second Aliya. Inasmuch as Agnon presents here many more realistic elements such as historical figures, actual places, and easily verifiable events than in the other novels, one might think the novel the most realistic of the three. Many critics, in fact, have called this "the novel of the Second Aliya" and have found in its vivid re-creation of a dynamic period in the growth of Palestine its cardinal virtue. While the writer has unquestionably succeeded in evoking the mood of a past period (almost forty years before the actual composition of the book), two questions that tend to contest the "realism" of the book should be posed at this point: (1) Why is much of the realistic detail presented in a satiric vein? (2) What is the relationship between the realistic detail and the tragic fate of the hero who is portrayed as a representative haluts of that period? The answers to these questions are clarified with abundant documentation throughout this chapter. It suffices at present to state that the historical background of the Second Aliya is the raw material for the story of Yitsḥak Kummer, as Galicia of the 1820's or 1830's was for the story of Reb Yudel Ḥasid, or as Shibush of 1929–1930 was for the narrator of *Ore'aḥ nata lalun*. The milieu, in other words, is treated by Agnon as a means and not as an end, as material that he can manipulate for artistic purposes and not as material presented for its own sake. Agnon is not fundamentally a realistic writer and his use of detail peculiar to a period or a milieu should be termed quasi-realism. Were we to treat the book as a work of realism how, then, integrate into it the more than one hundred pages in which the dog, Balak, wends his way through the streets of Jerusalem?

It is the presence of Balak, who ultimately bites Yitsḥak Kummer, which has distorted much of the critical reading of the novel.[1] The critical fallacy, that is, the preoccupation with one aspect of the novel to the exclusion of the others, has been engendered by the ever present temptation to explicate an arresting symbol and by the historical fact that parts of the Balak episode were printed separately in journals before the publication of the novel (1941),[2] and then separately in 1950 and 1960 as a complete book called *Kelev ḥutsot* (*A Street Dog*). The explications have ranged rather amusingly from the inevitable hypothesis that the dog symbolizes the Jewish people, to more ingenious exercises that characterize the dog as a detailed articulation of the psyche

[1] For various opinions on *Temol shilshom* see **48, 49, 51a, 92a, 102, 124a, 156, 160, 168a, 170, 176, 183a, 187, 188, 192a, 199a, 205, 216** (chaps. 9, 10), **232, 249, 250, 330, 332, 356, 363, 364, 410a, 417, 419a, 424, 428, 429, 432, 449, 474, 476, 479, 486, 487, 490, 535, 541a.**

[2] "Teḥilato shel Yitsḥak" (1934); "Balak" (1935); "Yom eḥad" (1936); " 'Oro shel Balak" (1941).

of Yitsḥak Kummer which is presented in the simplest terms. Agnon, himself, has anticipated these critical gymnastics by including in the novel (pp. 459 ff.) a riotous satire of the many possible ways of interpreting this symbol, and he pokes fun at his critics: "The people of Jaffa who are all opinionated turned their attention to these matters, but did not know to whom they referred. One says 'there's something to it' and another says, 'we should learn the implicit from the explicit.' Meanwhile opinions were split, and there were as many opinions as people in the city" (p. 459). Agnon's satire of his explicators actually reveals part of the truth. I demonstrate later in this chapter that the dog is a many-faceted symbol alluding to different things in different places. The total meaning of the dog symbol is the sum total of all these facets, the core of which is the ambiguous, bold statement of the preacher Rabbi Gronam Yekum Purkan, "I consider the face of this generation to be like the face of a dog" (p. 586). But the dog and its manifold connotations are only a part of the novel and not its totality.

The statement screeched by Gronam Yekum Purkan that the generation has the appearance of a dog, or more particularly of a mad dog, prepares the reader for a proper reading of the novel. Ultimately, the subject of the book is not Yitsḥak Kummer, the typical haluts of the Second Aliya, but all of Western civilization, which behaved very much like a mad dog in the late 1930's and early 1940's when this novel was composed. Balak, himself, could surmise that dogs were originally men "since he saw some human beings whose temperament was canine" (p. 472). Certainly the most felicitous artistic choice of the novel was the demonstration of the real or imagined loss of innocence; the fall from humanity to dogdom through the relatively harmless sins of a simple, idealistic soul, Yitsḥak Kummer, the descendant of Reb Yudel Ḥasid. Through a mordant irony, Agnon accomplished his purpose. Yitsḥak's guilt is the guilt of a mediocre young man who fails to achieve his ideals, and this sense of guilt attaches itself to the most insignificant misdeeds. Yitsḥak slips away from the ways of his ancestors and fails to realize the dream of settling on the soil, but his sense of guilt focuses on a concrete deed, however trivial. That Yitsḥak should have died the way he did not only emphasizes the nature of the generation, but indirectly points an accusing finger toward the Creator and Governor of both the generation and Yitsḥak.

Various motifs and sequences of *Temol shilshom* had taken form in Agnon's imagination in the 1930's, but it appears that the fusion of these elements and most of the novel date from 1942–1945. Stories about the young Ḥemdat, particularly his aliya to Erets Yisrael, appeared as early as 1910 in "Be'era shel Miryam" and other romantic

stories of the Jaffa period. A satire entitled "Rabbi Gronam Yekum Purkan" appeared in 1931. (The figure of a ridiculous maggid can be found in *Hakhnasat kala* too.) A brief sketch about a haluts named Yitsḥak Kummer was published in 1934 as "Teḥilato shel Yitsḥak" ("The Beginning of Yitsḥak"). In that sequence we follow Yitsḥak from Galicia to Erets Yisrael, his early experiences in the new colonies, his first jobs, his vague romance with Sonia, and the first meeting with Shifra in Jerusalem. Yitsḥak also appears as a haluts in the chapter "Yom eḥad" ("One Day") of 1936. The preceding year Agnon published his first "Balak" story in which Yitsḥak is already connected with Balak, the dog, in that he is the painter who marks his hide with the Hebrew words *kelev meshuga'*, "mad dog," but after this Balak is on his own and never returns to bite Yitsḥak. Balak does meet Rabbi Gronam Yekum Purkan and Reb Faysh. By 1936 we have all the basic figures of the story, but there is no evidence that the writer intended to unite Yitsḥak, Balak, Gronam Yekum Purkan, Reb Faysh, Shifra, and Sonia in one tightly constructed plot that cumulates in a devastating statement on the doglike nature of human beings in our generation and on the very nature of the universe in which we live.

It is a commonplace of Agnon criticism that many of his works, with the outstanding exception of *Hakhnasat kala*, are based on his own lifetime experiences. Like Yitsḥak Kummer and Ḥemdat, Agnon did leave his ancestral Galicia "to build the land and be built in it." In this sense, *Temol shilshom* displays many "autobiographical" elements. In a more profound sense, however, the agonized conclusion that the face of the generation is like the face of a mad dog is the result of the writer's disillusionment with certain ideals that give life meaning, and of his horrified witnessing of the disintegration of human values in Europe as the twentieth century progressed.

Structure

As in the case of *Hakhnasat kala* and *Ore'aḥ nata lalun*, the structure of *Temol shilshom* is a brilliantly designed artifact that fits the type of novel Agnon wanted to write. *Hakhnasat kala* was episodic, organized in two cycles, *Ore'aḥ nata lalun* followed the cycle of the year and its coherence was enhanced by a pervasive tone and recurring motifs. *Temol shilshom* is closer to the standard nineteenth-century novel in which the development of plot is based on the changes, however slight, of the hero's attitude toward the world through which he moves. Inasmuch as the hero, Yitsḥak Kummer, is basically mediocre and a bit dull, the writer had to design major environmental shifts. After an opening prologue,

the novel is divided into four parts, the first and third in Jaffa, the second and fourth in Jerusalem. The alternation of locale allows for alternation in the hero's attitudes and the realistic setting of the two emotional and ideational poles of the book. There are, moreover, other internal symmetrical aspects in the book. In parts one and two, the first half of each part is devoted to Yitsḥak's adaptation to his new environments, first Jaffa then Jerusalem, while the second half contains his two romances, each with a girl who is characteristic of the environment, Sonia in Jaffa and Shifra in Jerusalem. In parts three and four, a similar but less pronounced internal division can be detected. The symmetry holds the variegated material in focus.

The prologue presents us with the provincial, Galician background of the hero, his preparations for aliya to Erets Yisrael, his trip through Lemberg (Lvov) and Trieste to Jaffa. His descendance from Reb Yudel Ḥasid of *Hakhnasat kala* places him within the world of Agnon's literary imagination; his discussion on the ship with Moshe 'Amram on the difference between the religious and the secular concept of Erets Yisrael introduces the Jerusalem-Jaffa polarity even before his arrival in Jaffa.

In Jaffa, Yitsḥak's naïve idealism is quickly sobered by the harshness of pioneering life. There is little work on the soil and Yitsḥak accidentally finds employment as a house painter. Though he paints poorly, his income is secure. He can even send some money home to his poor father, but never does. He is befriended by Rabinovitz, a typical haluts, and by Leichtfuss, a bohemian, but he is very lonely. In his loneliness he falls in love with Sonia who had previously been Rabinovitz' girl. He feels his relations with Sonia are a betrayal of both Rabinovitz and his family and though Sonia soon leaves him for someone else, he cannot escape either his love for her or his guilt. More and more he senses an emptiness in his life in Jaffa, particularly after a visit to the agricultural colony of Petah Tikva. Driven by a vague ennui, he moves to Jerusalem.

After his initial discomfiture in Jerusalem, Yitsḥak quickly adapts himself to its conservative ways. He finds employment and is befriended by fellow workmen and by the artist Blaukopf. Though he had abandoned the religious practices of a pious Jew when he came to Jaffa, Yitsḥak begins to look and act more and more like a Jerusalemite. His equanimity there is disturbed by occasional thoughts of his family and his longing for Sonia. When his friend Blaukopf dies, Yitsḥak suddenly feels terribly alone. During this period he often listens to the fiery sermons of the maggid, Rabbi Gronam Yekum Purkan.

He meets Moshe 'Amram and falls in love with his granddaughter, Shifra, the daughter of the religious fanatic, Reb Faysh. While painting

one day, he whimsically paints the words MAD DOG on the hide of a dog that was watching him. People believe the dog is mad and drive him away. Constantly hounded, the dog (given the name Balak) begins to go mad and wanders about Jerusalem seeking the truth about his condition, why people persecute him. When Reb Faysh meets Balak in the dark, he is so terrified by the words MAD DOG that he has a stroke. With Reb Faysh paralyzed, Yitsḥak can now enter his house freely and court his lovely but shy daughter. Yitsḥak, however, feels that he has left an unsettled love affair in Jaffa and decides to go there to speak with Sonia. Before leaving Jerusalem, he goes to the Old City to visit Reb Alter, the old mohel who had circumcised him.

In Jaffa Yitsḥak surprises Sonia with his Jerusalem clothes and beard. She dismisses the entire affair between them as an insignificant episode in the past. In the next few weeks he establishes many new friendships, particularly with the poet, Ḥemdat, and enjoys the company of such figures as Yosef Ḥayim Brenner. These are the most carefree weeks spent in Erets Yisrael though he often longed for Shifra. Leichtfuss leaves town and Yitsḥak can sleep in his hut by the sea. Rabinovitz returns from abroad with his new wife and befriends Yitsḥak again. It never occurs to him that Yitsḥak has betrayed him with Sonia. When Leichtfuss returns, Yitsḥak has to move out and decides to return to Jerusalem and Shifra.

During the months of Yitsḥak's absence, Balak becomes a public figure in Jerusalem: the newspapers carry stories about him, the scientists explain what he is, the pious attribute his presence to the moral failings of the times. Balak is still tortured by his inexplicable persecution. Jerusalem at this period is afflicted by a drought and there are those who blame the drought on the dog. Yitsḥak returns to his Jerusalem habits. He paints houses by day and visits with Shifra by night. He moves in with a family, prays daily, and studies the weekly portion of the Tora as he did at home in Galicia. When he visits Alter and Hinda Pu'a, his wife, he tells them of his love; they agree that he should marry and offer to speak on his behalf to Rivka, Shifra's mother, since Faysh is still comatose. The wedding is arranged but is avoided by most pious people who feel that Faysh was being disgraced by this Galician painter. During the week of the wedding, Yitsḥak joins many people in the Me'a She'arim district in listening to the maggid, Gronam Yekum Purkan, attribute the terrible drought to the perversity of the generation. In the midst of the harangue, Balak crawls out from under the maggid's caftan. The crowd flees; only Yitsḥak remains, thinking that the dog is not mad since he, after all, was the one who labled him MAD DOG. The dog recognizes him and bites his leg. Shortly afterward, Yitsḥak feels feverish,

begins to foam at the mouth, and has to be bound to a bed in a darkened room. After much agony he dies. On the day they bury Yitsḥak the sky finally clouds over; on the morrow, the rains come ending the drought.

THE MOTIFS

In my study of *Hakhnasat kala* I emphasized plot structure; in that of *Ore'aḥ nata lalun*, character. *Temol shilshom*, because of its density of varied episodes and recurring motifs, requires emphasis on the patterns of motifs and their significance. Neither the plot nor the character of Yitsḥak is responsible for the excitement of the novel. The plot takes us back and forth from Jaffa to Jerusalem with many digressions that, on first reading, seem to have little to do with the main story line. Yitsḥak Kummer is a deliberately flat character. Why would a writer choose to bother with him? As we shall see, both the meandering, seemingly suspenseless plot and the lackluster hero grow enormously in interest and significance when we begin to respond to the novel's patterns of motifs. They run throughout the entire novel and relate one episode to another, one attitude to another, even though a particular motif may imply different things in different contexts. And when we note the complex interrelationships of the major motifs, we begin to appreciate the fertility of the writer's imagination and his masterly control over the nagging anxieties of his life during the trying years of the novel's composition, mostly during World War II.

Religion

The disintegration of traditional religious practice and belief is the central motif to which all other motifs are organically related. This is why Yitsḥak must be portrayed as a flat personality. His gradual neglect of religious practices and his family, his assimilation of the behavior patterns of the ordinary haluts, his vague sensation of the tastelessness of life are certainly not due to the specific complexities of his personality, but rather are symptomatic of a generation. As a result, the religious motifs stand out more vividly than the personality of the hero himself. Yitsḥak's falling away from traditional religious behavior begins on the train to Trieste: he does not pray for three days and when he does pray, he does not put on his phylacteries (p. 30). His decline into the ways of the typical haluts is traced subtly in the first ninety pages; he no longer keeps the Sabbath or puts on his phylacteries (p. 80), he no longer wears the talit under his clothes (p. 85), he reads only secular newspapers and books (p. 84), he feels that miracles no longer take place in his time as they did in the days of his ancestor Reb Yudel Hasid (pp. 64, 228) and

that the only traditional trait he has not yet lost is his modesty. This falling away is attributed to his leaving home: again traditional practices are associated with family (p. 258). The fact that the society of halutsim in Jaffa is a society of bachelors assumes added significance in this context. When the memorial day of his mother's death comes, he discovers he barely remembers the kaddish prayer honoring the Lord, and, through Him, the dead (p. 341).

The decline of faith as portrayed through Yitsḥak Kummer is actually universal, affecting Jews and Gentiles alike (p. 165). Often the relationship between God and man is presented in the most general terms: man thinks of God only when tortured or guilt-ridden (p. 152); prayer, the banker Orgelbrand claims, is worthless because man knows he can really live without prayer though he may, at times, yearn for God (p. 163). Brenner says man no longer has a place in the universe; the Jew faced with this predicament can try to find meaning in the building of Erets Yisrael (p. 167). Yitsḥak, however, finds life in Jaffa of little spiritual value, particularly as he does not settle on the soil (p. 544). From the pious farmer, Menaḥem (p. 176), we hear a denunciation of secular substitutes for religion like Aḥad Ha'Amism, "the religion of labor" of A. D. Gordon, and secular literature. In Jaffa, Yitsḥak is rootless, partly because his religious practice is superficial and mechanical, partly because he is the type of person who needs a family and community to sustain him. Only in Jerusalem can he possibly find the tranquillity he is missing; but it is in Jerusalem that he meets his doom at the end of the novel, ironically during the week after his wedding with Shifra when he finally reaches what seems to be the tranquillity of spirit, the *midat hahishtavut* (equanimity), he obviously was lacking before.

The midat hahishtavut concept bears close study for it is thrust forward a half dozen times in the novel and is posited as that tranquillity of spirit which Yitsḥak lacks, hence the opposite of Yitsḥak's malaise and his tragic fate. The term is first introduced prominently as the title of chapter 7 in Part Two (p. 229); Yitsḥak first gains this state when he settles in Jerusalem and associates with a group of pious students who are searching "for the true purpose for which the world was created and for which it is worthwhile to live"; they admire him because he has a skill as a painter and can support himself. His equanimity is strengthened the more he forgets Jaffa, Sonia, and his guilt toward Rabinovitz (p. 239). After Blaukopf's death, however, he is disturbed by thoughts of Sonia and regrets that he did not persevere to settle on the soil; he has lost his midat hahishtavut (p. 257). Significantly, Yitsḥak hears the most straightforward definition of spiritual tranquillity (*menuḥa* here, not midat hahishtavut) from Brenner (certainly the most turbulent soul of the

Second Aliya) as he speaks to Ḥemdat, "Ḥemdat, Ḥemdat: Do you still think that tranquillity is something dependent on externals? It is an internal matter" (p. 382). Leichtfuss, on the other hand, defines midat hahishtavut as something more than calmness. It is tranquillity coupled with spiritual elevation (p. 430). And finally, in the moving conversation with Menaḥem (pp. 539–541), Yitsḥak perceives that his friend has achieved a remarkable degree of midat hahishtavut in that he has maintained his religious beliefs and settled on the soil. Yitsḥak cannot claim either achievement.

One must ask in any work preoccupied with the falling away from religious behavior whether a return is at all possible. The return to religious behavior, repentance, the repair of broken vessels compose the major motif. I limit my concern first to Yitsḥak, though the universality of this motif is one of the major themes of the book. The name of the novel, *Temol shilshom*, appears in an interesting passage (p. 227) that sheds light, however indirectly, on the entire religious problem. In recalling his family back in Europe, Yitsḥak imagines a typical scene of poverty. They have hardly enough oil to light the stove, only a few drops left from "yesterday and the day before" (*temol shilshom*). The few drops of oil, so reminiscent of the Hanuka story, has been used too many times in essays and public addresses (to signify the few drops of inspiration left from the past) to escape our notice, particularly when coupled with the phrase that is the very title of the novel. Yitsḥak, too, has a few "drops" left from his childhood. Like his small talit, the only piece of clothing originally brought from home to Palestine not eaten by the moths, they suggest that there is still something on which to build a return. Return is possible in Jerusalem but not in Jaffa. The dog Balak, which, as Tochner suggests,[3] seems to verbalize many of Yitsḥak's sentiments more articulately than Yitsḥak himself, realizes that he "is missing a life of *ta'am* [purpose/taste]" (p. 572) when he is away from his home quarters in Jerusalem. Yitsḥak begins to enter the world of ta'am when he first settles in Jerusalem. He finds companionship with the religious students at the teachers' seminary (pp. 229–238) and with the artist Blaukopf (pp. 209 ff.). In both cases Yitsḥak feels a striving toward a life of meaning. The students seek a broader scope for their imagination; Blaukopf yearns to conquer mortality through enduring art (p. 210). For Blaukopf, artistic vision is God-given, even though he does not adhere to the ways of the Tora (p. 210); he would assert that "the essence of man is his deeds" (p. 242). On the holiday of Shavuot, however, he makes it a point to visit King David's tomb on Mount Zion (p. 216). Blaukopf's

[3] **474, 476, 479.**

life and death suggest that midat hahishtavut might be achieved through art; but Yitsḥak, in contradistinction to Blaukopf, is only a house painter.

When Yitsḥak first visits the Wailing Wall (p. 263) he is carried away by a sincere spirit of religious exaltation, and he feels a sense of purgation, however, temporary. He is still capable of religious ecstasy even after his first period in Jaffa. The day he spends in a bet midrash (p. 342) studying Mishna in honor of his dead mother would indicate the same shaky capability. Shortly afterward (p. 345), he finally visits Reb Alter, the old mohel of his hometown, who has come to spend his last years in Jerusalem, a visit that both testifies to his abiding allegiance to his hometown and provides him with "family" in Jerusalem. (Reb Alter is, in a sense, the chronicler of the Jewish community because he has the records of all the males he has circumcised for about two generations.) By the end of the book, Yitsḥak has developed roots in Jerusalem (p. 544); "he keeps his Judaism like a Jew" (p. 542); he reads only the traditional books found in the bet midrash (p. 533); and when he meets a girl whom he had previously met at Blaukopf's, she barely recognizes him because of his beard and his external appearance, "Your face is fenced in like he who has fences between himself and the world" (p. 507).

The writer's attitude toward pious Jews, nonetheless, is somewhat ambiguous and far from naïve. Agnon does not conceive of Judaism in the abstract, but rather in terms of human actions, a conception both congruous with traditional Jewish attitudes and essential to a novelist. Some of the more forcefully portrayed pious Jews, for example, Reb Faysh and Rabbi Gronam Yekum Purkan, are either inhuman or ridiculous. Me'a She'arim, the Orthodox quarter of Jerusalem, is not the most fragrant place in the world. The burial society there is singled out for its callousness (p. 248). Moshe 'Amram, whom Yitsḥak had befriended on the ship to Jaffa, later expresses his disillusionment over religious life in Jerusalem: the pious are always bickering; there is no real love of Tora in Jerusalem (p. 283). Ironically, the gentle Moshe 'Amram's son-in-law turns out to be Reb Faysh, the archfanatic of Me'a She'arim. Religious fanaticism is one of the dominant themes of the novel and Yitsḥak encounters it first on the train to Jerusalem when he innocently gives a piece of chocolate to a child and the child's father sweeps it out of his hand because it may not be kasher. Among the pious of Me'a She'arim, the most fanatic are the Hungarians (p. 266), and among the Hungarians, the most fanatic is Reb Faysh, ironically fated to become Yitsḥak's father-in-law.

Reb Faysh's fanaticism is unreasoning and infectious. Even Moshe 'Amram is less tolerant in Faysh's house, afraid lest Faysh become enraged at the presence of an irreligious Polish (hence, less worthy than a

Hungarian) Jew (p. 271). Faysh's rejection of Yitsḥak (p. 296) is only one of his many acts of fanaticism. In his rounds of Jerusalem, as he pastes notices of excommunication on the walls (pp. 311–313), Faysh encounters the dog that Yitsḥak has labeled MAD DOG (p. 275); the mad dog frightens Faysh out of his wits, makes him mad too; Faysh falls and walks on all fours (p. 311). Fanaticism, then, is but one step from madness. Note the juxtaposition of incidents: the dog meets Faysh after having spent some time under the caftan of Rabbi Gronam Yekum Purkan (pp. 304 ff.), the wild-eyed itinerant preacher; as Balak barks in his sleep, his voice mingles with that of the preacher. The same sequence of events takes place in the climactic second, fatal encounter between Yitsḥak and Balak (p. 595). There is a four-cornered relationship among Yitsḥak, Balak, Faysh, and Gronam Yekum Purkan, in which fanaticism and madness are dynamic vectors. The pathological aspect of Faysh's religiosity is dominant and Agnon documents its history as Faysh lies paralyzed in bed (pp. 314 ff.). So single-minded was Faysh in what he considered his duty toward God, that he rejected local religious practices in Slovakia, had no love for his wife, Rivka (p. 432), terrified his friends who quickly abandoned him once he was stricken (p. 321), and considered all pleasures as obstacles to worshiping God (p. 517). In consonance with his ironic bent, Agnon places the only positive statement about fanaticism in the mouth of Mr. Menaḥem Gedalia Posek (p. 330), a caricature of a bombastic Zionist orator in Jaffa, who might rhapsodize about religion but never practice it.

Causation

In a novel about religious decline, return to God, and punishment, the allied motifs of human behavior and cosmic causation are doubtless the structural armature of the work. Yitsḥak's behavior was, on the whole, nonoffensive and, at times, nondescript. Though a flat character, he arouses sympathy by his sincerity, his naïveté, his fundamental innocence. Why, then, was Yitsḥak struck down at the moment of his return to the religious way of life? If the universe of the novel (I am discussing *that* universe only) has the shape we assume it to have—given the many factually ascertainable aspects of the book—there should be some sort of God, most likely the traditional God of Israel, controlling human destiny, judging human behavior, meting out justice. The universe of *Temol shilshom*, the world of Yitsḥak Kummer, can have shape and meaning only if it is governed by a just divinity. But this does not seem to be the case. Yitsḥak dies a dog's death, bound to a foul bed in a dark room; that is, he is bound on a meaningless altar, unlike the biblical Isaac whose binding was an act of enormous import for all humanity, and who was not

killed in the end, but lived on to bear the message of Moriah to the world through his descendants. There is nothing Yitsḥak Kummer has done to warrant such punishment. If he had fallen away from the path of his father, it was not out of malice, and by the end of the novel he had already managed to return completely to the ordained life of the pious Jew. The one clear act that ultimately brought him his tragic doom was the whimsical painting of two words MAD DOG on the back of a stray dog, an act that is certainly the only direct cause of Yitsḥak's violent death. That such a brutal punishment should be meted out for so whimsical an act (which does not lend itself, incidentally, to any deeper interpretation) cannot be condoned by any stretch of the imagination. It is therefore necessary to probe the problem of causation to arrive at some concept of the writer's point of view regarding divine justice.

Relatively early in the book, Agnon tells us that Yitsḥak became a house painter and not a farmer, as he had hoped to be, because God had mercy on him and put him in the situation where he was hired by chance, or rather by mistake (p. 65). Agnon's attribution of Yitsḥak's employment to divine providence can only be ironical since it is not borne out by the facts of the situation. The passage is significant because this chance determines Yitsḥak's course throughout the novel and later becomes a source of remorse for he feels he has betrayed the Zionist ideal by not settling on the soil. Man, in general, we learn further on (p. 136), has moral qualities (*midot*), but it is the environment, the causes (*sibot*) that are more effective. Causation is a conscious component in the novel. When Yitsḥak writes to his father explaining the circumstances of his future marriage to Shifra (p. 534), or when he thinks of his obligation to Rabinovitz (p. 534), he employs the terms of causation consciously (*siba and mesubav*). When necessary, Agnon takes pains to clarify for the reader the central sequence of causes and effects in the plot (p. 514). Yitsḥak could gain access to Reb Faysh's house and, hence, to his daughter, only because Reb Faysh was paralyzed in his encounter with Balak, whom Yitsḥak had originally labelled MAD DOG, a whimsical act that precipitated Balak's exile and actual madness. If causation is so conscious a component in the novel, it is then impossible to write of Yitsḥak's death without a probe into the nature of divine justice in the novel.

But what, during the initial encounter between Yitsḥak and Balak, made Yitsḥak paint MAD DOG on the dog's skin? Agnon takes great pains to demonstrate that there was no detectable purpose in the act (pp. 274–275). Yitsḥak, indeed, acts like an automaton, completely bereft of either foresight or insight. In a succession of negative qualifying terms we read, "Yitsḥak did not know [why he picked the brush up] . . ."; "it is

impossible to say that he [Balak] wanted to lick the brush"; "we do not know if he [Yitsḥak] had originally intended to write what he wrote. . . ." The only statement of "intent" is Yitsḥak's whimsical "From now on people will not be mistaken about you, but will know that you are a dog. And you, too, will not forget that you are a dog." But this is not a statement of deliberate intent because Yitsḥak is talking flippantly to the dog. The possible grave overtones of the remark rise not so much from intent, but from situation. (Agnon himself writes in the middle of the passage, "But why should we put ourselves in this doubt; it is better that we see his actions.") In this situation, as in the second, fatal encounter, Yitsḥak and Balak seem to be drawn to each other by an undefined, uncontrollable attraction. It is evident that there is some kind of identity between the hero and the dog, but it is equally evident that we cannot or even, should not, attempt to identify it too precisely. The most one can possibly say about the suggested intention of Yitsḥak's act is that it reveals a degree of self-incrimination.

M. Tochner has pointed out that Balak is actually an articulation of Yitsḥak, an alter ego that is more introspective and articulate than the ego. Persecuted by the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Balak questions heavenly justice (p. 578), something Yitsḥak never does. Even such pious women as Rivka and Hinda Pu'a entertain thoughts that might challenge God (pp. 602–603), but Yitsḥak does not. The conversation with the pious but reasonable Efraim in this passage is central to the basic problem of the book. To Rivka's complaint about the fate of her Faysh, her Shifra, and of Yitsḥak, Efraim answers with the standard religious arguments: Who are we that God has given us life? All that God does is right and we have no right to question Him. Summing it up, Agnon comments that the questions are not unique, that men always ask these questions when confronted with inexplicable evil; but just as Rivka and Hinda Pu'a do not accept Efraim's answers, he does not accept their questions. The discussion reaches its climax on the very next page (p. 604) as Yitsḥak lies abed before his final madness and death. Efraim prays for Yitsḥak at the Wailing Wall, places a note with Yitsḥak's name between the holy stones, but to no avail, as we are told: "The decree had already been sealed." And in a revealing confession, the writer tells us:

> And now, good friends, when we contemplate Yitsḥak's experiences, we stand trembling and astonished. Why was this Yitsḥak [Isaac], who was no worse than other men, punished so much? Is it because he antagonized a dog? But he only meant it as a joke. Besides, Yitsḥak Kummer's end was not predicated upon his beginning. By nature and training, Yitsḥak should have been able to persist on the soil and enjoy life on the earth and bring his father, his brothers and his sisters to Erets

> Yisrael. . . . And You, rock of our salvation, great of counsel, mighty of deeds, would have heard Your praise all the days from those who thirst for Your salvation. It is easy for those who do not bother themselves with excessive reflections, either because of excessive naïveté or excessive wisdom; but what can one answer or say if one is neither very naïve or very wise?

And when Yitsḥak dies: "Finally he ejected his agonizing soul and returned his spirit to the Lord of spirits in whose presence there is neither laughter or frivolity" (p. 605).

The concluding chapter brings a deliberate shift in mood. On the very day of the burial, the long drought is finally broken; rain soaks the parched earth. Behind this paean to the productivity of the soil and, less directly, to the power that gave the rain, the reader senses the contrast with Yitsḥak's tragic fate. Yitsḥak's death is presented as the expiative event after which the earth can resume its natural processes. But we still must ask, why was this one undifferentiated and well-intentioned youth sacrificed? The resumption of nature's processes even after a devastating drought can restore confidence in a benevolent diety, but how does one explain the meaningless death of an innocent man, the archetypal Binding of Isaac, but on a meaningless altar?

Sin and remorse

Objectively, Yitsḥak Kummer cannot be considered an evil person, a sinner; Agnon certainly does not portray him as such. Yet Yitsḥak Kummer is plagued by feelings of guilt. The guilt he feels matches in mediocrity his personality. One of the most remarkable aspects of this novel lies in two concomitant sets of disparities: the gulf between Yitsḥak's deeds and his feelings of guilt is as wide as that between his deeds and his punishment. This gentle Isaac suffers from a violent fate and persistent feelings of sin and remorse. Remorse, Agnon tells us (p. 540), is one of the features of Yitsḥak's character, and as far as remorse goes, "He who regrets something he has not done, is likely to regret every single thing." His pervasive feeling of guilt fastens upon several of his deeds or misdeeds: failure to settle on the soil, forsaking ancestral religious ways, abandonment of his family in the poverty of Galicia, betrayal of Rabinovitz by falling in love with Sonia and its erotic ramifications. Paradoxically, the betrayal of Rabinovitz, the deed having the least grounds in reality, seems to bother Yitsḥak the most. So many of his considerations regarding Sonia, Jaffa, his own future are tied up with this obsession (pp. 106, 152, 225, 270, 331, 332); he cannot conceive that both Rabinovitz and he were but successive links in a long chain of young men whom Sonia

had charmed; and even when Rabinovitz returns from Europe (pp. 442 ff.) apparently unconcerned about an affair between Sonia and another man, Yitsḥak feels uncomfortable.

More reasonable and understandable is Yitsḥak's remorse over his physical contact with Sonia (p. 127): Yitsḥak, we are reminded, came from a society where young boys and girls did not mix freely, where the only girls he actually had any contact with were his sisters. The first awkward kiss (we are not informed of any further contact) is shattering: "This was the kiss which was kept in his mouth since the death [dying] of his mother. Sonia kissed him, too; but this kiss was not a virgin's kiss." It is far from insignificant that the event takes place on Sonia's couch on which is spread a coverlet with an embroidered emblem of a dog. Shortly afterward (pp. 143, 146), Pu'a Hoffenstein, Sonia's friend, expatiates on the concept of original sin as formulated by Tolstoi and wonders why Adam was accused of it when "it came through Eve." We hear a similar remark in a different, but highly significant setting. When Yitsḥak accidentally meets Moshe 'Amram and his wife in Reb Faysh's house in Jerusalem, Moshe 'Amram jokingly warns him: ". . . we have to learn from experience and not act as did Adam who was seduced and punished. Are you married, Yitsḥak?" (p. 269). In Jerusalem, among the pious, the insight has a meaning different from that in Jaffa, among the irreligious intellectual dilettantes. The comparison between the two cities on this point is drawn sharply on page 480 where the Leviathan, ordinarily cited as a reward for the righteous in the next world according to rabbinic Judaism, emerges as a primitive sexual symbol. Agnon delights in the rabbinic support of this contention: "Leviathan is in charge of the lust of copulation." The contrast is illuminated by the comparison of the two girls. Sonia ("intelligent" in Russian) and Shifra ("beautiful" in Hebrew); the former is free in the presence of men; the latter is embarrassed and feels sinful when Yitsḥak holds her hand (pp. 339, 340). While Yitsḥak's sense of sin diminishes in the presence of Sonia, Shifra's sense of sin increases sharply because of her involvement with Yitsḥak (pp. 421 ff.). Shifra, indeed, feels guilty for her father's paralysis and the gossiping neighbors (p. 511).

One would think that Yitsḥak might be ridden with remorse over his falling away from the ancestral religious practice, but this is far from true. Only rarely does he connect a sinful deed, for example, the affair with Sonia, with his weakening of faith (p. 164), or think of his sin with Sonia and his abandoning the soil as a result of the fiery sermon of Rabbi Gronam Yekum Purkan (p. 257). He does not rebel or smash idols, but follows the path of indolence and convenience; his regrets, therefore, are mild and intermittent. Ordinarily, Yitsḥak is annoyed not by meta-

physical considerations (these are beyond him), but by simpler sensations that are usually connected with feelings of guilt. The flies and mosquitoes recall the affair with Sonia in Jaffa (pp. 332, 333); he dreams of the affair and its complications (p. 355); dogs bark outside when he feels morally uncomfortable (p. 392). He is overcome with shame when he writes his father (p. 534), or lies about his past (pp. 537, 534), and actually seems to accept his tragic fate as a judgment at the end of the novel (pp. 591, 598). His acquaintances in Jaffa, Yarkoni (pp. 405 ff.), Leichtfuss (pp. 424 ff.), and, of course, Rabinovitz and Sonia, all commit many acts that would give Yitsḥak ample cause for moral compunction, but *they* do not seem to be perturbed by them. And when it comes to perception or articulation, Balak is more adept than he. Balak can ask why he is persecuted (p. 281); Balak notices that the Jews chase him away while the Gentiles do not (p. 284); Balak can think in terms of causes and motivations (pp. 284, 472, 474).

Repentance and repairing

The problem of Yitsḥak's "sinfulness," his turning from the correct path of life, is relevant only if we assume that, from the author's point of view, there is such a path—an assumption not to be made hastily in this novel. Agnon indeed talks at length about Yitsḥak and his background, leading the reader to this assumption (which I question later). If waywardness and backsliding are considerations in this world, so are repentance and return. Ordinarily, in Jewish life, the gates of repentance and return are always open. The irony of the novel (which ultimately challenges its fundamental assumption) lies in the "punishment" of Yitsḥak at the moment of his complete return, his wedding to Shifra, and the resumption of the practices of piety. And yet, the writer often deals with return and is fascinated by the root *tkn* and by situations of repairing. The most accurate statement, and one that, not coincidentally, contradicts the ending of the book, is to be found on page 543: "But Yitsḥak was a simple boy without excessive investigations, and like simple Jews who will ultimately return if they stray from the road." Even his faith deepened, for at first, even at home, he performs the commandments perfunctorily following whichever custom he encounters, but during his second period in Jerusalem, he seeks "that which the soul seeks." Partly under the influence of the pious Jews of Jerusalem, partly through his own development, he seems to approach a position of religious security. Using the biblical image, Agnon compares his previous condition to the tree with few roots and his present condition to the tree with abundant roots. His return seems to be complete when the wedding day is compared, as it often is in Jewish tradition, to the Day of Atonement (p. 552). The

process of return, which begins with cursory thoughts at the beginning of the book (p. 83), and continues through his moving to Jerusalem, not only reaches the point of his original piety, but passes beyond to a higher plane. So important is repentance that we are told that those men who had been turned into dogs in some primeval time, recovered their humanity by repenting (p. 472). But the possibility of return through repentance, of redemption through determined action which is always held out to a Jew, and held out menacingly and grotesquely by Rabbi Gronam Yekum Purkan (pp. 585 ff.), is actually denied Yitsḥak. Even in the central passage describing the remarkable improvement in his faith and behavior (pp. 543 ff.), his dreams are disturbed by the incessant barking of a dog outside. Clearly, then, there is something either in his psyche or in the cosmos which frustrates his efforts to return.

The generation

Yitsḥak Kummer is an ordinary personality, hardly different than "our other brothers . . . the members of the Second Aliya" (p. 7). Yitsḥak's typicality stressed in the very first line of the novel parallels his flatness; he has to be representative and, therefore, devoid of any special virtues or vices that would create a figure larger than those of his contemporaries. For instance, he could not be a Brenner or a Gordon. If there is something in Yitsḥak's psyche which frustrates his efforts at redemption, at return, it is not a character trait peculiar to him alone. It is a flaw of the generation. From the very outset of the novel the hero's outlook differs from that of his father, Reb Shim'on Kummer (pp. 7, 10), and, all the more so, from his ancestor five generations back, Reb Yudel Ḥasid of the novel *Hakhnasat kala*, mentioned many times throughout the present book. They are men steadfast in their faith; he is not. We hear the condemnation of the generation of the Second Aliya of the novel (actually the generation of the 1930's and World War II contemporary with the writing of the novel) from several characters different in personality and belief. Ya'akov Malkhov complains: "[This generation] has no Tora and no commandments and no manners" (p. 351). Ḥemdat, the young writer, quite removed from the world of Jewish tradition, bemoans the decline in the generation (p. 417). Rabbi Gronam Yekum Purkan fulminates that the evildoers of the past are as virtuous as the righteous today (p. 586). "We see the face of the generation like the face of a dog, and not like any dog, but like a mad dog. . . . The mad dog is better than they are because he declares that he is mad." Nakedness, emptiness of spirit are the dominant aspects of the generation. "This generation, which has not created new life and has alienated itself from the old, inasmuch as it has seen that it is naked, takes a garment left over from its ancestors and

covers itself in it" (p. 560). But this garment is dusty and moth-eaten, consisting of such vicarious exercises as the love of hasidic tales, synagogal melodies, and moralistic sermons that expound that the face of the generation is the face of a dog. Yitsḥak is representative of his generation, but this, in my opinion, does not explain or justify his death: his sin was mild and he did repent.

Dog, and man as dog

In the mind of many readers and critics, the dog Balak stands out as the central memory of *Temol shilshom*, partly because Balak is more interesting than Yitsḥak, and partly because of the history of the novel's growth and publication. As a result of the piecemeal publishing history, many critics find it difficult to accept the integration of the *Kelev ḥutsot* chapters into the novel. It should be evident by now that the dog, taken generically, is the dominant metaphor of the novel, is a major structural element, and contributes significantly to the book's total meaning. Three events involving a dog which occur before Yitsḥak encounters Balak and labels him MAD DOG are of special import. The first dog encountered belongs to the enigmatic Leichtfuss (pp. 73, 75, 76). That intimate relationship between man and dog foreshadows Yitsḥak's deeper relationship with Balak and evokes memories of Mephistopheles. In the second, the dog is actually a picture embroidered on the coverlet of Sonia's bed (pp. 115, 142 ff.), a yellow dog with a stick in its mouth. When one sits on the coverlet or ruffles it in any way (p. 149), the dog seems to come alive and bark. It is on this couch that Yitsḥak first kisses Sonia, the kiss that was a source of such remorse. The embroidered coverlet, finally, so intrigues Yitsḥak that he tells the Arab watchman about it (p. 139), thereby eliciting from him several statements highly symbolic of the entire pattern of the novel. "The watchman said, 'A dog like that does not bite and a stick like that does not beat.' Yitsḥak said, 'Who knows?' . . . The watchman said, 'I would take the stick out from between the dog's teeth and beat him with it. . . . He who deserves the stick is beaten.' "

Dogs appear or are mentioned in five other, briefer, contexts before the first encounter between Yitsḥak and Balak; each context is central to the motif structure of the novel. Walking through the filth of Me'a She'arim, Yitsḥak surprises a dog that nevertheless neither barks nor bites (is this Balak?) (p. 204). As Blaukopf, the artist, coughs up blood, he cries *dam kelavim* (dog's blood) (p. 218). In one of his fiery sermons, Rabbi Gronam Yekum Purkan decries the deluding effect of "the evil inclination" on the transgressor. "The evil inclination" is "like those who tease dogs. They show the dog a piece of meat but always remove it far from him when the dog jumps to take it, until he goes mad from lust" (p.

221). Arzaf, the taxidermist, stuffs and collects all types of animals (though not usually dogs) thereby giving them a life after death (p. 234). Yitshak, who learns the craft of sign painting from Blaukopf, paints a picture of a dog whose colors last for many years (p. 272).

After the labeling encounter (pp. 274, 275), dogs and, more specifically, Balak, appear with greater frequency. Two essential aspects of narrative technique are noticeable here. The Balak or *Kelev ḥutsot* episode is inserted into many other chapters dealing with Yitshak alone, with scenes of Jerusalem, with haluts life in Jaffa. The separate publication of these episodes after 1946 was a regrettable venture: parts of the work taken out of their proper context lead the reading public to think that the *Kelev ḥutsot* sequence stands by itself and that its integration in the novel is forced. And secondly, the tone of the passages on Balak are charged with irony, satire, simple buffoonery, striking out in many directions at the same time. In the best comic tradition, Agnon has his fun with the inanities, self-deceptions, and hypocrisies of mankind which are always to be found in abundance. Just as it is impractical, even impossible, to define the precise point of view of the author in these passages, so is it foolhardy to try to assign an exact referent for the figure of Balak. The best one can hope to arrive at is a defined semantic range based on significant situations. If there is anything "demonic" or "mephistophelian" in the novel, it is less Balak—as many critics contend—than his creator, Agnon, who cannot resist an opportunity to poke fun.

Agnon anticipates the quandary of the critics by satirizing the supposed reaction of the press of the Second Aliya to the phenomenon of the animal labeled MAD DOG. Most readers, he writes, understand the newspaper story as a parable and seek the moral behind it; there are as many opinions as there are people in the city (p. 459). The story gains worldwide attention for the reason that "the tale of Balak was credible and fascinating because it resembled so many aspects of human behavior" (p. 463). Using the dog as a multifaceted object reflecting the endlessly varied foibles of mankind, Agnon deliberately confuses the critic bent on identifying the one referent symbolized by the dog. In the tradition of the comedian, he catalogues the suggested hypotheses: ". . . it was concluded that the intention here is not to an actual event, but there is here an allusion which the scholars have not yet understood and it is worthwhile to study its nature" (p. 469). And yet, Agnon's warnings aside, some of the possible explanations he cites in his usual ironic tone, calculated to be discounted as ludicrous, bear close study. In spite of the mirth, the irony, the complex allusions, there emerges a semantic range of possible referents that definitely echo the general lines of the novel. The anthropologists in the novel claim that the inhabitants of Jerusalem write MAD DOG on their dogs

in order to exorcise the demons of madness in a certain house (p. 463). In the stories the Hasidim tell, the dog is a representative of the devil (pp. 464 ff.); some quote the saying that "the ignorant are like dogs." The historians quote a myth that in antiquity men were turned to dogs because of their sins; those who repented usually regained their humanity (pp. 471 ff.). The historians, indeed, were hard pressed to tell "where human acts end and where canine acts begin." The scientists trace the dog to all sorts of primeval animals connected with the period of creation, the vulture and the hyena in particular (p. 473). The hyena is mentioned several times and is particularly significant because the root of the Hebrew word "hyena," *ṣv'* is also used for *tsavu'a* (hypocrite) and for *tseva'* (paint), Yitsḥak's craft. (Arzaf, the taxidermist, spins an elaborate tale about a hyena [p. 573].) The climactic theory is that of Rabbi Gronam Yekum Purkan whereby the dog simply illustrates the talmudic saying that is the metaphorical basis of his sermons, "The face of the generation is like the face of a dog" (p. 573 ff.). Immediately after Yitsḥak paints the dog, we are told that it was an old custom in Jerusalem for rabbis to tie to the tails of dogs notes signifying that someone had been excommunicated (p. 276); once, indeed, a Jerusalem sage inscribed this message on the very skin of a dog.

The most interesting hypothesis is advanced somewhat indirectly by Balak himself, and it is most effective that Agnon makes Balak the exponent of this view: the similarities between man and dog are so striking that it is often difficult to tell them apart. Balak becomes more articulate, more perceptive as the novel progresses. His troubles, his exile make him introspective and he tries to understand why he is rejected, who he is. At one point he actually thinks he is a man because he sees so many men with doglike qualities (pp. 432, 474). Since men, when bitten, taste like dogs (p. 594), or even die of dog bites (p. 474), this suspicion is confirmed. If man is different from dogs, he is, nonetheless, no better than a dog (p. 474); man, in fact, can protect himself only with a stick, otherwise he would be vulnerable to the dog's attacks (p. 474). This affinity sensed by Balak is attested to by the satirical passage in which dogs are described as fallen, sinful men (p. 472); the assumption is that sinful man is subhuman, is a dog. This notion, put forward in satire, is repeated in the grotesque sermon of Rabbi Gronam Yekum Purkan delivered immediately before Balak finally meets and avenges himself on Yitsḥak. The semantic range of possible referents of the dog taken as symbol has as its focal point the doglike or bestial aspects of human behavior; other meanings are rarely more than a few shades from this focal point.

With this semantic range in mind, it is fruitful to follow the meanderings of dogs or Balak through the plot; Balak's interpretation of his predica-

ment is highly suggestive. Kicked away by Yitsḥak, Balak leaves the Bukharan quarter for Me'a She'arim where he is actually a stranger. Every object seems to bruise him and he begins to understand the saying, "The dog was worthy of the stick and he was beaten" (p. 277). In Me'a She'arim, when the people run away from him, he interprets this turmoil to be a crowd rushing to hear Rabbi Gronam Yekum Purkan (p. 277). Rejected by the Jews, he hides among the Gentiles "like those converted Jews who are drawn after whoever gives them more" (p. 283). Balak cannot understand why the Jews reject him and the Gentiles do not; unlike most people, he does not blame others for his difficulties, but rather attributes them to some defect in his character; his "canine intelligence is not sufficient to grasp the truth of the matter" (p. 284). In his wanderings (an almost picaresque, satirical panorama of Jerusalem), he passes the Alliance Israélite School and entertains the thought that they might teach him what is wrong with him (p. 290). Only then does he begin to connect his difficulties with the encounter with the painter.

As the summer heat and drought begin to stifle the city (a natural setting for feelings of human helplessness, contrition in a pretechnological society left entirely to the mercy of the divinity that controls nature) the four figures, Yitsḥak, Balak, Reb Faysh, and Rabbi Gronam Yekum Purkan, are drawn together by the lines of the plot. When Yitsḥak is scorned by Faysh at the entrance to the latter's house (p. 296), he calls him in his heart "mad dog." Balak, meanwhile, has been saved from further blows because the dust has so obscured the letters on him that he no longer frightens the Jews; but now, he is spiritually afflicted, and wants "to return" to his former way of life. "Evil Jews are compared to dogs," Agnon writes: "at times they return, at times they don't return" (p. 298). Balak returns by himself, since he delights in the association with pious Jews: he feeds upon the impure portions of the animal which were thrown away; he loves to lick the paste used in pasting announcements of excommunication to the walls (p. 299). As the Talmud tells us, "the dog's evil inclination entices him to bark" for the dog is like Sama'el, the angel in charge of Hell. The encounter between Faysh and Balak takes place shortly afterward (p. 310). Making his rounds in the dark, pasting up excommunication posters, Faysh is terrified out of his wits by Balak, falls on the ground on all fours, and begins to foam like a dog (p. 313). Significantly, the encounter with Balak produces in Faysh the same result as it later does in Yitsḥak (though Faysh is not even bitten). Both are reduced to dogs and demonstrate canine symptoms.

In the latter half of the book, the dog's bark reverberates as a sign of moral recrimination. A bark is heard when Yitsḥak holds Shifra's hand (p. 339) for the first time and when he returns to her after his sojourn in

Jaffa (p. 494). Rivka's desperate prayer for help when Faysh is stricken is punctuated by a bark (p. 341). Yitsḥak himself is plagued by barking when he goes to mail the letter to his father telling of his future marriage (p. 534), when he tries to sleep (p. 497), and, most significantly, when he has two dreams inspired by his guilt at having abandoned the ideal of the haluts on the soil (p. 545). And why is it, muses Yitsḥak (p. 392), that Arzaf the taxidermist doesn't stuff dogs? Dogs are obviously worthless because they bark.

Balak, of course, is not the only canine in the story; we cannot assume, for instance, that all the barking is his. Among the many other dogs that appear in the novel, two stand out. The enigmatic Leichtfuss has a dog that seems to understand Yiddish and that possesses an uncanny sense of intuition for when Yitsḥak thinks of Shifra, this dog jumps at him (p. 428). The Sabbath Tora-reading was then, as Leichtfuss mentions, the chapter of Balak in Numbers (p. 429). Thematically, then, Leichtfuss' dog is associated with Yitsḥak as is the dog in Rabinovitz' romance with his wife (p. 452). Rabinovitz first makes the acquaintance of his wife Hilda when he offers a piece of chocolate to her dog. She is already married but she leaves her husband for Rabinovitz. This strange concatenation of events prompts Agnon to add, "Something like that which happened to Rabinovitz happened to Yitsḥak." Yitsḥak writes on the dog; the dog goes mad; the dog frightens Faysh out of his wits; with Faysh incapacitated, Yitsḥak can gain entry into the house to see Shifra. Every dog incident or episode is ultimately connected with Yitsḥak and affords the writer the opportunity for the most whimsical and deliberate intervention in the plot.

Madness

The dog with which Rabbi Gronam Yekum Purkan compares the face of the generation is mad, and Yitsḥak, dies in a fit of rabies. Madness, the degeneration of the rational (*sekhel*) that characterizes man, is far from an infrequent theme in this book. Madness, like the sense of sin, first appears in reference to Sonia; Agnon describes the process from unrequited love to longing to madness (p. 151). Yitsḥak is driven to distraction because of his love and begins to neglect his work (p. 154). On his first night in Jerusalem, he talks in his sleep; his neighbors think him crazy, thereby foretelling Yitsḥak's ultimate fate in Jerusalem (p. 196). Madness, like everything else of significance in the novel, elicits conjecture. Rabbi Gronam Yekum Purkan seems to attribute it to excessive lust that can never be fulfilled (p. 221); the anthropologists record an old custom in Jerusalem whereby dogs were used to exorcise madness (p. 463). Yitsḥak, scorned by Faysh, calls him a mad dog who should be labeled as such (p. 269), an appelation that proves to be fitting later when Faysh

actually acts like a mad dog (p. 313). Balak grows progressively mad as a result of his rejection, he sees shapes in the shadows (p. 281); he has illusions of water (p. 287); he walks backward like a crab (p. 298); he foams at the mouth (p. 312); and by page 475 the signs of rabies are distinct and persistent. In his madness, Balak is usually remarkably rational, indeed, abnormally perceptive. Shortly before the second fatal encounter with Yitsḥak, Balak sees windmills and ghosts in his dreams (pp. 570, 576); he arrives at Me'a She'arim during a period of drought salivating profusely (pp. 582, 583). In true tragic irony, only Yitsḥak doubts that the dog is mad (p. 589), only Yitsḥak does not run away. While there is no intelligible medical cause for Balak's rabid condition, Yitsḥak's infection is portrayed realistically. The dog bites him (p. 595) and the infection slowly spreads throughout his limbs until he goes mad and crawls like a dog (p. 605). Bound to a bed in a darkened room, Yitsḥak sings the verse from Lamentations: "She shall cry at night, her tear is upon her cheek." In his last fits of agonized madness, he seems to sense the proportions of his own ruin, the meaningless binding of a modern Isaac.

Paint

The situations, incidents, or juxtapositions that seem most coincidental are, as noted repeatedly, the most deliberately structured. The entire plot depends upon a whim, the painting of the dog so carefully described by the writer. Yitsḥak's entrance into the painter's craft is also a deliberate accident. Ostensibly, the converted Jew in whose garden Yitsḥak falls asleep (p. 65) mistakes him for a painter who has abandoned his job; Yitsḥak is persuaded to finish the work and thereby receive his first day's pay in Palestine and a set of painter's tools. But this is no mere accident for paint, the Hebrew root sv', which is also the base of tsavu'a (hypocrite) and tsavu'a (hyena), runs through the novel like a binding leitmotiv. More often than not, the notion of paint has a negative connotation, a superficial covering of the ugly, the shabby. Ḥemdat, the young writer who arrives in Jaffa the same day as Yitsḥak, complains, "It is the practice of painters to improve ugly things" (p. 377). Rabinovitz puns on the similarity between the verb "paint" (*tsove'a*) and "hypocrite" (tsavu'a) in Hebrew: "Do you [Yitsḥak] paint the hypocrites [in Jerusalem]?" (p. 446). And even when the hues of paint are cited as sources of human pleasure (p. 136) since they resemble "the colors of the firmament from which man's soul is called," Agnon goes on to describe Yitsḥak's newly acquired frivolity in terms of paint, "Don't wonder that people are liable to change like utensils that the painter paints." The effect of paint on an object is like the effect of environment on personality

traits. Painting as a craft, furthermore, is scorned by the teachers (p. 201) and, most important, is contrasted with life on the soil (p. 182), the ideal that originally drew Yitsḥak to Palestine. Painting is not a rooted occupation. Yitsḥak paints everyone's house in Jerusalem (p. 324), but he himself has no home. A house painter like Yitsḥak, furthermore, cannot be compared to a real artist like Blaukopf, one of the most admired figures in the novel, who can capture and transfigure the fleeting moments of life through his colors.

Yitsḥak's involvement with paint falls into two distinct phases, Jaffa and Jerusalem. In Jaffa, painting is Yitsḥak's livelihood, begun entirely by chance (p. 35), and at which he does not excel. The materials, Agnon tells us (p. 70), control him; he does not control them. The materials seem to select him. Even on the boat to Jaffa, he is called on by the cook to paint (p. 35). At first, he derives little satisfaction from his work, since he is less a painter than a "dirtier" (*lakhlekhan*) who constantly repeats and relearns his own mistakes (p. 70). The terms Agnon uses to describe Yitsḥak's work are taken, significantly, from a more metaphysical vocabulary: his work is not *metukan* (faultless) (p. 70); he is far from *shelemut* (perfection) (p. 77) in his craft. Perfection in craft is represented by Leichtfuss with his uncanny ability to repair anything, or by Leichtfuss' father, a master painter who refurbishes the churches and icons of the Christians (p. 73). When Yitsḥak does begin to derive satisfaction from his work, it is mostly because of his love for Sonia (p. 136); we notice that he loses all pleasure and confidence in his work when he begins to sense that Sonia's attitude toward him has changed (p. 154). Painting in Jaffa, then, is a function of Yitsḥak's moods and behavior.

In Jerusalem, Yitsḥak's craft is a source of satisfaction and identification with the city. As a painter, he associates with a group of humble fellow craftsmen, each admirable in his own way (p. 218). The presence of Blaukopf, portrayed as an archetype of the artist, with his devotion to craft, his tuberculosis, and his early death, inspires Yitsḥak to improve his own humbler skill and learn sign painting. Yitsḥak's work can be found everywhere in Jerusalem (p. 273) particularly in the memorial plaques on the walls of houses in the pious districts (p. 272). Yitsḥak is, in fact, painting a memorial plaque shortly before his first encounter with Balak (p. 274). Yet, it is through paint that Yitsḥak starts the chain of events that ultimately bring about his death: he paints the words MAD DOG on Balak's back (p. 275). When Balak returns to Me'a She'arim, he smells paint and decides to take revenge upon his enemy, the painter, if he can find him (p. 477). In Jerusalem, too, then, paint is an extension of Yitsḥak's condition and conveys the paradox of his behavior and

destiny in the Holy City. He finds satisfaction in his work, he returns to the life of his ancestors, but he commits with paint the whimsical act that ultimately brings about his tragic death.

The soil

It is not to paint houses that Yitsḥak goes to Palestine, but to work the soil as a pioneer in the Second Aliya. This is his expressed purpose as he leaves home (p. 7), as told to the surprised professional Zionists in Lemberg (p. 16) and to Moshe 'Amram on the boat to Jaffa (p. 32). But, like many of the other young halutsim, Yitsḥak cannot realize his ideal; there is no work for Jewish laborers. Some, like Rabinovitz, become salesmen (p. 86) or leave the country; Yitsḥak becomes a house painter. Agnon himself comments on boys like Yitsḥak and Rabinovitz, "If they had been fortunate [to find work], they would have persisted on the soil, but since they were not fortunate, one wanders [rolls about] abroad, and one [Yitsḥak] is like 'a wayfarer who sojourns for a night' (*ore'aḥ nata lalun*)" (p. 166). Away from the soil, Yitsḥak is described as "rootless" (p.167), a tourist (pp. 172–173). The visit of those who have succeeded in settling on the soil, be it the boys from Petaḥ-Tikva (p. 337), Victor (p. 424), or Menaḥem (p. 540), always evokes profound feelings of guilt in Yitsḥak. Even after his wedding has been arranged, he feels, at times (p. 545) that he has failed the test. The ideal of living on the land is articulated in the novel, by Brenner "Only those who live on the soil are not in galut (exile)" (p. 389). The pioneering society of Jaffa is contrasted with the pious community of Jerusalem throughout the book, but the striking figure of Menaḥem, a religious farmer (p. 540), proves that the two positions are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Yitsḥak, therefore, can never claim that he prefers the religious life of Jerusalem over the life of the pioneer on the soil. The soil, finally, seems to be aware of its rejection by Yitsḥak for after Yitsḥak dies, the skies fill up with rain clouds finally bringing relief to the drought that plagued the land all summer. In the same passage at the end of the novel (p. 607), we are told that the land yields bountiful crops that year, but "our friend Yitsḥak" is not privileged to partake of them. The concurrence of Yitsḥak's death and the first relieving rain seems to indicate that the death is an expiation of a guilt or sin thereby leading to the rain.

Family

One of the few salient features of Yitsḥak Kummer's figure as it emerges in the novel is his isolation from his family; like other halutsim, he goes to Palestine alone, leaving his family behind. The loneliness is all the more

profound because Yitsḥak knew little social life outside his family circle before leaving home. His sisters were the only girls he knew (p. 29); when he eats with Rabinovitz in his hut (p. 50), it is the first time that he does so at a stranger's table. In his conversations with Moshe 'Amram on the boat, Yitsḥak's loneliness emerges for the first time because he has no family in Palestine (p. 33) and no one will meet him at the port. It is Brenner, again, who summarizes the condition of the halutsim: "No one here has a home" (p. 391). As usual in Agnon's stories, home, house, wife, and family are associated in one cluster of emotions. Yitsḥak's homelessness, furthermore, leaves him open to the temptations of his new environment, to the gradual erosion of the religious practices observed at home.

Yitsḥak is alone, but carries the memory of his family and his ancestor Reb Yudel with him. Conscious of the poverty at home, he repeatedly resolves to send his father money, but never does so (pp. 85, 225 ff.). He writes occasionally to his father, but never tells him what he is doing; when he is happy in Jaffa, he tends to forget his family completely (p. 133). The memory of his mother who died a young girl is perhaps his strongest bond to his childhood. In kissing Sonia he feels he is betraying his mother (p. 727); he delays his visit to Sonia and Jaffa because of the memorial day of his mother's death (p. 341). In more ways than one, the memorial day is the turning point in Yitsḥak's development. In his mother's memory, he returns to the synagogue to pray and study after a prolonged absence; he finally visits with Reb Alter in the Old City (p. 344), thereby re-establishing his link with Galicia; he visits the Wailing Wall in the Old City. Yitsḥak's "return" becomes complete toward the end of the novel when he abandons the isolation of bachelorhood for family life. He marries Shifra; Reb Alter and his wife become surrogates for his family in Galicia; he visits the elderly of his home town who have settled in Jerusalem (p. 543).

Agnon is careful to impress upon us the historical fact that Yitsḥak Kummer is five generations removed from Reb Yudel Hasid, the pious hero of the novel *Hakhnasat kala* (p. 10). Yitsḥak's reflections on his ancestor's piety and the comparison between the behavior of the ancestor and the descendant give the reader his orientation in the historical scheme of the writer. Reb Yudel's descendant is a haluts who still retains many of the fine virtues of his ancestor, but slips easily away from the religious practices and scruples of his upbringing. The difference between the two is brought out at the beginning of Yitsḥak's trip to Palestine. Yitsḥak pays hardly any attention to the material splendor of Lemberg, so intent is he on reaching Erets Yisrael, while his ancestor binds his eyes with his kerchief to deprive himself of the very sight of this world until he has reached Jerusalem (p. 14). The contrast in treatment between the folkloristic

narrative of Reb Yudel and the psychological realism of Yitsḥak is notable. The difference between the two is cited again when Yitsḥak returns to Jaffa to visit Sonia; when his ancestor went to Erets Yisrael it was for purely religious purposes (p. 361).

Yitsḥak thinks of his ancestor repeatedly, during trips by sea (p. 30) and by wagon (pp. 190, 353, 360), or in dreams (pp. 355, 458). He ponders Reb Yudel's miracle, the discovery of the treasure in the cave (pp. 61, 228), and tends to doubt its authenticity: at any rate, miracles no longer take place. Significantly, he spends many months in Jerusalem without visiting Reb Yudel's grave (p. 249), extremely unusual behavior even for a boy who is no longer scrupulously religious. The final irony of this family relationship is also connected with graves for after Yitsḥak's tragic death, depicted so vividly, the writer comments with biting nonchalance that both Yitsḥak and Reb Yudel Ḥasid are at least buried in the sacred soil of Jerusalem (p. 607).

Yitsḥak as Hero

Though Yitsḥak occupies our attention most of the time, there can be no doubt that he is an unusually commonplace hero for so long a novel. While there is a tendency among critics to find fault with this flat characterization, it cannot be denied that it is aesthetically justified by the total meaning of the book: Yitsḥak has to be flat because he is really a pawn in a complex historical situation over which he has no control and which he really cannot understand. While the writer clearly likes his main character, he insists on being in full control of him; Yitsḥak Kummer, it must be said, is likable but a bit boring. His awkward naïveté in politics, in sex, in his ideals in life may be charming, but, coupled with his unrelieved seriousness, make for a predictable dullness. He is honest in his work, scrupulous in his friendships, extraordinarily generous with others. He helps the passengers on the ship (p. 37), shares his food with the destitute halutsim (p. 46), contributes substantially to the support of Blaukopf's widow (p. 253), and even helps feed the stricken Faysh who previously insulted him consistently. His attacks of remorse are characteristically brief and relatively shallow, more often focused on a false object, for example, his betrayal of Rabinovitz, rather than on the more crucial objects, the family and religious practices he had abandoned and the ideals he could not realize. Agnon, in fact, admits that Yitsḥak is weak, that he more or less drifted into his painter's craft (p. 182); very likely, were Yitsḥak a more decisive personality we could not have this masterful novel with its specific implications.

Yitsḥak seems to be well liked by many friends and acquaintances

throughout the novel, but he is always lonesome because all the new relationships do not succeed in relieving the painful loneliness of the uprooted haluts. The writer actually applies to Yitsḥak the striking phrase, ore'aḥ nata lalun (a wayfarer who tarried for the night) (p. 166), the very name and theme of his previous novel, because Yitsḥak is not absorbed in the rebuilding of the land, in settling on the soil. In that Yitsḥak is the representative haluts, his personal loneliness conveys a broader significance; against this background of universal loneliness, the traditional phrases, "all Jews are comrades" or "all Jews are mutually responsible," echo wistfully throughout the book (pp. 33, 50, 228, 270, 491). The hero "has no relative, no redeemer [in the sense of biblical usage in Ruth], no wife" (p. 293).

Loneliness makes Sonia seem attractive to him, even though the writer repeatedly calls our attention to her emptiness and dullness (pp. 102, 103), her stupidity (p. 105), her nonchalant indolence in a society that knew few luxuries. Aside from her rather pedestrian love affairs there is little to say for her. One wonders if Yitsḥak would have found Sonia so attractive if he had had any experience with girls before; we are reminded that Yitsḥak is chaste when he goes to Jaffa (p. 83), that the only girls he has ever spoken to are his sisters (p. 89), and that Sonia's room is the first girl's room he has ever seen (p. 114). Sonia, then, can fill the role of the temptress, a plausible object of Yitsḥak's natural yet newly awakened impulses, his *yetser hara'* (inclination for evil). We notice that his impulses begin to stir as soon as he leaves home and his family (p. 28); significantly, the dangers of the yetser hara' are first articulated by an apostate Jew (p. 68). The various aspects or symbols of temptation are concentrated shortly afterward in the beguiling figure of Leichtfuss: he lives alone; he has a dog; he is an artist; he lives a life free of all social restraint; and he has his women. Leichtfuss contrasts marvelously with Yitsḥak Kummer, his feeble impulses and inevitable remorse. Shifra, of course, is a more natural match for Yitsḥak because she, like Yitsḥak, is the product of an insulated religious upbringing. In comparison with Shifra, Yitsḥak is bold and aggressive.

The flatness of the portrayal of Yitsḥak is modified by the incomplete yet unavoidable identification between him and Ḥemat. They are both the same age, come from the same country, arrive in Erets Yisrael the same day, and are escaping military conscription back home (pp. 377, 411, 415). Aside from the fact that Yitsḥak admires Ḥemdat (pp. 222, 369 ff.), we should pay careful attention to the fact that Ḥemdat, like Yitsḥak, finds something missing in Jaffa and is fond of reminiscing about Galicia. While the average reader cannot be expected to know that in "Be'era shel Miryam," which contains the kernel of the opening sequence

of *Temol shilshom*, the hero is Ḥemdat, not Yitsḥak, the literary historian cannot overlook this fact. Agnon obviously could not use Ḥemdat for his hero in *Temol shilshom* because Ḥemdat was too colorful a figure both in the writer's previous works and in his artistic imagination, and would therefore not fit the type of plot he was contemplating. The hero of *Temol shilshom* had to be flat. Ḥemdat is not only an interested poet, but a personality respected by great historical figures of the Second Aliya like Yosef Ḥayim Brenner, A. D. Gordon, and by many of the younger halutsim. And since Agnon has peopled his novel with many interesting characters, some imaginary, some taken from history either under their real names or pseudonyms, it is no accident that Yitsḥak Kummer was realized the way he was, for he had to be simple enough to be both representative of a generation and to allow the situation to emerge as the more dominant narrative aspect.

That Yitsḥak resembles the other halutsim of the Second Aliya is made clear in the opening words of the novel: "Like our other brothers . . ." (p. 7). In the first part of the book, the introduction and the first period in Jaffa (pp. 7–188), he is a rough approximation of the prototypal haluts; in Jerusalem he develops more individuality. His loss of faith and almost unwitting abandonment of religious practices is paradigmatic (pp. 83, 263). Even in Jerusalem, Yitsḥak is more type than individual; accordingly, it is possible for Agnon to have him identified, however faintly, in the reader's mind with Balak. Like Yitsḥak, "Balak was no better than all his other brothers" (p. 476). We become accustomed to Yitsḥak's lack of distinctive traits and accept his typicality as his authentic individuality. We can therefore sympathize with Yitsḥak even though it is difficult to sympathize with a type; he is carefully posed on the borderline between type and individual. The writer, however, can still use him as a representative figure. When Yitsḥak meets Balak in the second, fatal encounter, he is, in a sense, meeting himself.

Yitsḥak differs from his peers in two aspects. He is a Galician while most of the other halutsim are Russians; he adheres to certain middle-class attitudes, for example, orderliness, modesty, neatness, fear of poverty, which are not shared by his friends. These two aspects are not unduly stressed, but they suffice to create the minimal distancing necessary for the tragic, though not heroic, stature of Yitsḥak Kummer. As a Galician and an independent, semiskilled, urban craftsman, he is somewhat inferior to the ideal norm, the young Russian Jew who adheres to the ideals of A. D. Gordon and settles on the soil, often in organized groups. Since our hero cannot find a new home in the circles of halutsim to replace his original home, he is all the more prey to circumstances, his own remorse, and his own naïveté. Perhaps precisely because he is

a Galician and temperamentally estranged from the labor-class ethos of his Russian acquaintances, Yitsḥak is more innocent of the realities of the world when he goes to Erets Yisrael, more relentlessly naïve throughout the book. One would think that Yitsḥak would lose his fundamental innocence after the recurring disappointments of his first weeks in Jaffa, the unscrupulous porters and hotelkeepers, the harsh facts of the labor market and political parties, the self-seeking of certain Zionist officials, the emigration of some of his closest friends, especially Rabinovitz. We learn, moreover, that Yitsḥak forgets the original reasons for his settling in Erets Yisrael, namely, the perfection of his soul (*tikun hanefesh*) and the revival of the nation (p. 137). As opposed to his ancestor, Reb Yudel, who was a holy innocent, Yitsḥak's innocence is not matched by a piety and a world in which the holy innocent is protected by a providential God. In *Hakhnasat kala* the hero cannot really be harmed; in *Temol shilshom* the hero can be destroyed, but his fundamental innocence raises many questions about the quality of justice in the world in which he lives.

Yitsḥak's death is all the more ironic because he is bitten and infected by the dog just when he has finally returned to his point of departure: he has returned to the religious practices of the traditional Jew, is married to a pious girl, and therefore theoretically beyond the reach of further temptation. It is absurd to posit Yitsḥak's death as the just punishment for his waywardness: his sins were minor and he did repent, actually returning to the path of piety. Throughout the book, he seems to be on a quest, however feeble and inarticulate, to return, to recapture the midat hahishtavut he assumedly had before his aliya to Erets Yisrael. The quest has two geographical and behavioral focuses: Jaffa and Jerusalem. While Jaffa is the new life of halutsim, labor, national revival and Sonia, Jerusalem is the eternal city with its traditions, possibilities for return to religious behavior, and Shifra. The difference in Yitsḥak's mind is distinct even in the early stages of the novel (p. 83). He is never tempted to visit Jerusalem during his first stay in Jaffa, yet he rapidly responds to the atmosphere of the city once he settles there. He dresses like the Jerusalemites (p. 223) and begins to feel more guilty for his failings. The vectors of the plot and, hence, Yitsḥak's yearnings, oscillate: Jaffa, Jerusalem, Jaffa, Jerusalem. The novel is, in effect, a literary statement that redemption can be found in neither place, in neither way of life. Jaffa is unsatisfying; the satisfaction that Jerusalem offers is only a brief prelude to a brutal, meaningless death. The total impact of *Temol shilshom* can only be a confession of the writer's nihilism.

A novel that ends with its hero, Yitsḥak, bound and dead on a befouled bed in a darkened room cannot escape the reader's natural association of this act with the biblical Binding of Isaac, the significant difference

being that in the biblical account, Isaac is released, a ram is sacrificed, thereby indicating the concern an omnipotent, just divinity has for human life, whereas here, Yitsḥak Kummer dies a dog's death, alone. His death is no sacrifice, the proof of no test. If it is a test or proof of anything, *Temol shilshom* rather raises again two fundamental and allied questions: the viability of traditional Jewish existence in this century and divine justice. It is hardly coincidental that both Gentiles and apostate Jews appear with extraordinary frequency in this novel. Apostasy is a constant temptation to the Jew who has lost his faith in his ancestral religion. Alter, the old mohel of Buczacz, tells Yitsḥak, "Be a Jew and don't be a Gentile" (p. 345). Since Yitsḥak himself never entertains the idea of conversion, the reference is to his "un-Jewish" behavior. There were many Gentiles in Palestine of the Second Aliya and the Jews would, of course, be aware of their presence and mindful of past persecutions; what is most exceptional, however, is the number of converts who move on the periphery of the plot. Apostasy is definitely alluded to at least fourteen times (pp. 66, 68, 87, 88, 201, 282, 283, 287, 297, 408, 409, 429, 461, 474), at times as one of the perplexing and threatening paradoxes of life in Palestine, but, more centrally, in reference to Balak who hides among the Gentiles like a meshumad (convert) (p. 283) yet is not, we are told, "a spiteful convert" (p. 297). The Gentile and apostasy themes occur with sufficient frequency to be evoked by Rabbi Gronam Yekum Purkan's final harangue which culminates in the cry, "We see that the face of the generation is like the face of a dog" (p. 586).

Temol shilshom is not only the most sustained of Agnon's literary efforts, but is probably one of his most intricately textured books. Against a background with enough realistic documentation to evoke some of the feeling of the Second Aliya, he draws a basically simple plot line and enriches it with innumerable thematic ramifications, a satiric, often ironic tone, elaborate dream sequences, and a lengthy excursion into fantasy. All the disparate elements are fused by interaction and lead inevitably to the binding of this modern Isaac, Yitsḥak Kummer. And withal, *Temol shilshom* is a marvelously comical book, a fact that precludes any facile dichotomy between the comic and the tragic. The novel abounds with hilarious satires, of Yitsḥak's naïveté, of Zionist bureaucrats, of religious fanatics like Reb Faysh and Gronam Yekum Purkan, and the self-confident foibles of the modern settlers of Palestine.

To Agnon, the comic writer, the archetypal impostor is the man who pretends to know the truth when he really does not. Reb Faysh and Gronam Yekum Purkan fall into this category as do the many half-educated Maskilim of Jaffa with their amateurish biblical criticism (p. 102), ideologies (pp. 255, 264, 459–461 ff.), and inflated literary pretensions.

The scholars and scientists are derided for their blind faith in their methodology which is proven fruitless and ridiculed by their absurd attempts to understand the phenomenon of Balak. The critical faculties of the anthropologists (p. 462), the philologists (p. 468), the biologists (p. 472), and the physicians (p. 557) are dumbfounded.

While Reb Alter and Brenner, two contrasting types, are clearly admired for their vision of the truth maintained in saintly humility, it is the painter, Blaukopf, the authentic artist, who seems to be the possessor of the truth. Blaukopf paints with "the spirit of holiness" (*ru'aḥ hakodesh*) (p. 208); his creativity forms new life (p. 209). His affection for Yitsḥak is, at first, perplexing; while he is an artist concerned with ultimate truths, Yitsḥak is, at best, a craftsman who can enhance the surface appearance of buildings. Like Ḥemdat, he is somewhat similar to Yitsḥak, but fundamentally different. Blaukopf, like Yitsḥak, dies within the confines of the novel (these are the two significant deaths in the book), but Blaukopf's death elicits regret at the waste of unfulfilled talent, whereas Yitsḥak's shocks with its pointlessness. It has none of the romance of Blaukopf's death. Ḥemdat and Blaukopf, moreover, extend the scope of Yitsḥak's personality by being similar enough to him to generate association, but so much more interesting that they intensify his pallor.

In one of his key satiric passages (pp. 463 ff.), Agnon parodies the various attempts at understanding the true meaning of the strange, mad dog, Balak. Balak himself searches for "the truth" of his strange existence, the truth he assumes to be the explanation of his suffering, "Everybody who sees me knows the truth within me, but I, the possessor of the truth itself, do not know what it is" (p. 291). Balak intuits that this truth has something to do with "the painter" who marked his back; *he* must have the truth. Balak must find the painter before the latter dies, for certainly this truth will die with him (p. 577). When Balak finally confronts Yitsḥak after weeks of searching, he is perplexed by the painter's tranquillity and attributes it to his possession of "the truth" for "Whoever knows the truth is not afraid of anything in the world" (p. 591). Balak decides to bite "so the truth will drip out of his body. And Balak already envisages the truth dripping from the painter's blood like beneficial rain when the Great Dog bites the sky" (p. 593).

Jerusalem, we should remember, was undergoing severe drought relieved only by the first rains that came after Yitsḥak's death. When the rains revive the earth, the writer comments, "Only yesterday (*temol shilshom*) we stood in prayer [for rain] and today we recite Hallel (Praise) with thankful voice" (p. 606). Significantly, the only other passage where the title words temol shilshom appear in the novel is also associated with drops. When Yitsḥak first settles in Jerusalem, he often

thinks of his impoverished family in Galicia. He imagines a scene where they are sitting in the dark because "it is a sin to waste the two or three drops of oil which were left from yesterday (temol shilshom)" (p. 227). Because of the recurring and inter-locking motifs of the story, this aphoristic statement lends itself to more general interpretation; one should not squander the drops of vitality or inspiration inherited from previous generations.

We do not know if Balak learns "the truth" from that fateful bite. Yitsḥak Kummer certainly learns nothing from the second encounter with Balak, the mad dog that is in some sense Yitsḥak's alter ego; on the contrary, he dies from it. Blaukopf dies after achieving a great vision of truth which he paints feverishly on his last canvas; Yitsḥak Kummer leaves no message about life as he expires, bound to a foul bed in a dark room. Agnon himself seems to be disturbed by the nihilistic implications of Yitsḥak's death, for he asks in the moving passage on page 604: "Why was this Yitsḥak, who was no worse than other men, punished so much?" A possible answer to this question is suggested by the *Sitz im Leben* of the novel, most of which, we should recall, was written in the dark days of World War II when news of the meaningless slaughter of millions of Yitsḥaks in Europe reached Jerusalem. The correspondence between the central metaphor of the novel and the historical situation is too striking to be disregarded, particularly in a writer so steeped in Jewish literary sources as Agnon.[4] In that the novel implies that there is no satisfying answer to this question, it is an honest, literary confrontation with one of the hard facts of our existence in the twentieth century.

[4] For a more detailed study of this question see my article, "haḤet ve'onsho bi*Temol shilshom*," *Molad*, 211 (May–June, 1967), 75–81.