

## BOOKS

## The Stranger

He flew across Europe like one of Chagall's airborne bridegrooms, bringing greetings from an ancient culture to the modern world which honored him. Seventy-eight-year-old Shmuel Yosef Agnon, who had left Israel only three times in 40 years, last week spoke to the English in London, and the French in Paris and Strasbourg after having received his Nobel Prize for Literature from, as he put it, "the sages of the Swedish Academy" in Stockholm.

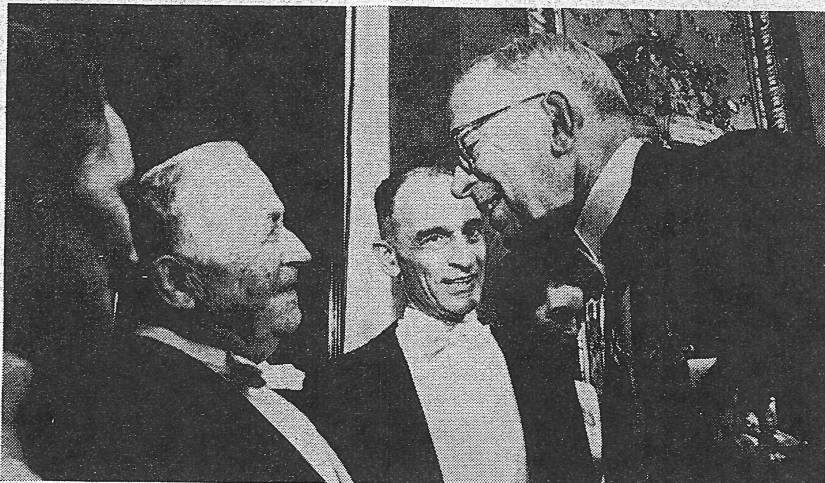
There was a slight touch of irony in Agnon's description of the eighteen men who had given him the highest accolade of official culture. He himself is a sage, indeed a prophet, and he bears himself with the genial gravity which is the poetry of his wisdom. "I am one of those

But the great writer, who in eleven published volumes of lyrical and mystical fiction had made his Israelites as universal as Joyce's Dubliners or Proust's Parisians, was a stranger only to the pomp and panoply of public acclaim. "I am a foreigner in the land," he had told NEWSWEEK's Joel Blocker in Stockholm. "Why am I wasting my time with all these foolish things? For two months, I haven't written a line or opened a book, except for this pocket Talmud. Why, my father would have laughed had he seen me with such a tiny Talmud. This Nobel Prize may not be good for me. What I should have done was accept the prize, keep quiet, and go off to some little town and hole myself up."

But there he was in Stockholm's Grand Hotel, and Agnon accepted his responsibilities, dressing properly, struggling to be on time for receptions, eating the

Agnon was amazed and delighted at his reception by the French. "Future generations," he told an audience at the Sorbonne, "will see in the Swedish Academy decision a confirmation that the vigor of the Hebrew language has not been exhausted." But he himself was tired from his happy mission. "People write me letters," he said, "4,000 letters and cables since I got the prize. I get letters from people I never heard of and who tell me I'm their cousin and ask for money. Women write asking to marry me. But there are good letters, too, and I must answer them—these things have to be warm and heartfelt."

And he turned away with a Chaplinesque shrug—the man who had written of one of his own characters that "the same love of learning which had used up so much of his energy and strength, furrowing his brow and bowing his shoulders, had touched his face with a special kind of radiance that one doesn't find except among those who are truly devoted to wisdom."



Morris McNamara

## Shmuel Agnon and King Gustav VI: Prophet with honor

spirits," he told his select London audience of writers and notables, "born before the generation of the Tower of Babel, of whom it is said 'and the whole earth was of one language and of one speech.' And what language did they speak? They spoke Hebrew."

**Mystical:** The sing-song Galician accent coming from the half-saintlike, half Chaplinesque figure stuffed into starched formal clothes and wearing a black velvet *yarmulke* was a voice from another world. "Every time I tried to learn another language," said Agnon, "my heart said to me: before you try . . . first learn Hebrew properly . . . I asked the angel Gabriel—he who is responsible for languages—to make a pact with me. For each language that I undertook *not* to learn, he would teach me ten Hebrew words." And he added: "I kept my part of the agreement and learned no foreign tongue. But the angel Gabriel, because of my sins, did not sign the contract. It was not worthwhile for him to waste his time with a man like me who is a stranger to both his time and his place."

kosher food prepared especially for him by the wife of a Stockholm rabbi—washed down with some delightfully un-kosher French brandy. The Israeli Ambassador to Sweden treated Agnon as if he were Israel's precious new *Mystère* jet. After a churning week of cocktail parties and Hanukkah celebrations, the frail Agnon had an electrocardiographic examination before flying off to London, Paris and Strasbourg.

**Heartfelt:** In Strasbourg, Agnon received his most astonishing European welcome. "They practically broke the doors down," said Israeli Ambassador Walter Eytan of the crowd that surged into the just-completed amphitheater of the University of Strasbourg. "And they were all young—girls in miniskirts, long-haired French students. Most astonishing, more than half of the audience seemed to understand Hebrew—they were laughing at Agnon's jokes before the interpreter could translate them. I've been in France almost six years and I never would have believed such an audience existed."

## Ye Olde Hucksters

THE MAD OLD ADS. By Dick Sutphen.  
128 pages. Dick Sutphen Studio.  
\$4.95.

In the beginning, advertisements promised her anything and gave her nothing. Dr. Warner's Health Underwear, a camel's-hair shirt or camel's hair-shirt, depending on the lady's taste, offered protection against "colds, catarrh, consumption, neuralgia, rheumatism and malaria." Madame Rowley's Toilet Mask provided a whole new set of features while it cleared blemishes from the old. And Professor Baker's Belt of Life, a quasi-magnetic cummerbund, rid the sufferer of gout. Ads for men were equally insouciant. The Health Jolting Chair (a sort of armchair catapult), the Ferric Odyline (a pair of electric insoles) and the Pocket Mosquito Bar (an insect net in the shape of a fishbowl, guaranteed the user against everything but the screaming meemies).

Dick Sutphen, a former advertising-company art director, has gathered these and many other preposterous old pitches into a lively, liberally illustrated history of early hucksterism. Sutphen devotes only a single chapter to Quacks and Impostors but almost everyone in the book qualifies as one or the other. Perhaps the most grandiose of his knaves is London's Dr. Graham who, in 1779, concocted his celebrated Celestial Bed. A stupendous four-poster, it was robed in elegant silks, steeped in perfumes, supported by 28 glass pillars and designed "for the propagation of Beings, rational and far stronger and more beautiful in mental as well as in bodily Endowments, than the present puny, fee-