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New Readings of Jewish Texts in
Honor of Arnold J. Band

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S. Y. AGNON'S "FROM FOE TO FRIEND":
AGNON BETWEEN *BERIT SHALOM* AND
BERIT YOSEF TRUMPELDOR

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Agnon's "Me'oyev le'ohav," variously translated¹ as "From Foe to Friend" or "From Enemy to Friend" (in Hebrew the words rhyme and appear as a couplet in other stories by Agnon),² is a very short story, less than eight hundred words, first published in the weekend literary supplement of the workers' daily *Davar* on May 3, 1941. Twelve years later, Agnon included the story in the volume *Elu ve'elu*, the second volume of the second edition of his stories.³

Dan Laor's comprehensive Hebrew monograph on Agnon does not mention the story.⁴ However, Arnold Band, in his pioneering book on Agnon, devoted half a page to the story, citing it as "a standard anthology piece."⁵ Indeed, along with "Ma'aseh ha'ez" and "Afar Erets Yisra'el," this is one of Agnon's most reprinted stories, included in anthologies and

¹ The story has been translated into English five times so far: Joel Blocker in *The Jerusalem Post*, August 1, 1958, and *The Reconstructionist* 25 (7) (1959): 30-32; Jules Harlow in *Mosaic* (Cambridge, Mass.) (Fall 1966); anonymous in *Jewish Echo* (Glasgow), February 9, 1968; Misha Louvish in *Israel Magazine* (1969): 70-71; and Reuven Morgan, "From Foe to Friend," *Mediterraneans* 6 (Summer-Fall 1994): 112-16. I am grateful to Nili Cohen from the Institute of Translation (Ministry of Education and Culture) for this information. I also thank Professor Dan Ben-Amos, Edna Heichal, Dr. Bracha Fischler, Dr. Gila Shenberg, and Emunah Yaron for their assistance.

² See, e.g., S. Y. Agnon, *Ad henah* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1953), 330; idem, *Samukh venireh* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1953), 320.

³ S. Y. Agnon, *Elu ve'elu* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1953), 480-82.

⁴ Dan Laor, *Hayyei Agnon* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1998).

⁵ Arnold J. Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), 278.

Hebrew textbooks (though not in all schools—some fear the implied political message). In Agnon's House in the Talpiot neighborhood of Jerusalem, a twelve-minute animated film is screened, in which the story is read, accompanied by Yossi Stern's illustrations. Agnon's House holds frequent tours titled "From Foe to Friend," guided by one of Band's students, Balfour Hakkak.

Several years ago, I included the story in a show on Jerusalem aimed at twelve- to fourteen-year-old children. Two actors and two actresses read and acted the story in story-theatre style, using pantomime that often turned to slapstick. Despite the teachers' fears that children would not understand Agnon's style, the young audience reacted with laughter and energy throughout the story, not only at the actual events, but also at the fine linguistic humor and the text's irony and sarcasm. The plot's structure—a five-round struggle between the narrator attempting to build a home and the wind that keeps trying to destroy it—and the story's tension fused with humor greatly enchanted the children. The story still awaits imaginative artists to use it as a basis for a musical piece or a plot for a short ballet.



Only a few Hebrew scholars have dealt with this story, each emphasizing one interpretation or another.⁶ The story can be read in at least half a dozen ways. Following Band's footsteps in teaching and research, I attempt here to review these various readings and expand one of them, though all are just as fascinating and enjoyable.

One reading, of course, is a textual analysis per se: structure, language, versions, the various and varied types of humor, the many linguistic associations, character representation, the tension and

⁶ Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare*, 278; Yitzhak Ben-Yosef, "S. Y. Agnon lekitha het (gil 13)," in S. Adan, ed., *Agnon beveit hasefer* (Jerusalem: Ministry of Education, 1960); J. Marek, "Me'oyev le'ohav," in *Bisdeh Hemed* 10 (4) (1967): 231–35; Dov Sadan, "Beinenu leveinam," *Mibifnim* 21 (1959 [1979]): 249–59 (repr. in *Al S. Y. Agnon* [Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz hameuhad, 1967], 119–35); Malka Shaked, "Ha'alegoria hamerubedet," in her booklet, *Iyyunim besipurei Agnon* (Jerusalem: Ministry of Education and Culture, 1975), 7–55 (repr. in her *Hakemet shebe'or haraqia* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2001), 159–74, 206; Galia Shenberg, "Agnon kesofer yeladim? misheloshet hazironim ad 'Me'oyev le'ohav,'" *Maaglei Qeria* 23–24 (1995): 95–110; idem, "Between Metaphor and Metonymy" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Haifa, 1995); idem, "Sheloshah hazironim, ze'ev ehad ume'ah sipurim," *Maaglei Qeria* 25–26 (1998): 77–92; and Hillel Weiss, *Aharit davar lesefer 'Me'oyev le'ohav'* (Jerusalem: Ministry of Education and Culture, 1992).

denouement (almost as in a classical comedy synopsis, also formed of five parts). The second reading examines the story's relation to the many folktales of which it is reminiscent. This approach was taken by Galia Shenberg, who sees the story as an "alternative adaptation" of the three little pigs story,⁷ known to every English-speaking child. Agnon's story deals with a struggle between humanity and one of nature's forces, the wind, over the building of a house on the top of a hill. Though the English nursery tale deals with a struggle between animals, the bad wolf in that tale, just like the wind in Agnon's story, huffs and puffs and blows the house down.

The tale of the three little pigs has been examined in several literary, linguistic, folkloristic, and psychological essays.⁸ Shenberg devoted a whole chapter of her dissertation to the tale's various incarnations and its relevance to Agnon's story, as well as two essays⁹ in which she points out that the story is a known "type" of folk tale.¹⁰ Interestingly, the three pigs appear only in the English version, whereas in all other languages the wolf, the fox, or the troll threaten other animals—kids, billy goats (for whom the vow made by the pigs "by the hairs of my chin" is more appropriate!), geese, and sometimes other small, nonkosher animals—rabbits. According to Shenberg, it is due to a "kosher code" that the story of the three pigs has no parallel version among the ten thousand versions of Jewish folk tales in the Dov Noy Israeli Institute of Folk Tales at the University of Haifa. Until the mid-1990s, most Hebrew versions of this story told of kosher animals. Then, following Disney's animated television film of the three pigs and the popularity of Miss Piggy and *Babe*, along with some translated American parodies, young Hebrew readers got to know the heroes of the 1813 English story.¹¹

⁷ Shenberg, "Sheloshah hazironim," 77–92.

⁸ Bruno Bettleheim, *The Uses of Enchantment* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 41–44; Zena Sutherland and May Hill Arbuthnot, *Children and Books*, 7th ed. (Glennville, Ill.: Scott, Foresman, 1986).

⁹ Shenberg, "Agnon kesofer yeladim?" 95–110.

¹⁰ Cited in A. Aarne and S. Thompson, *The Types of the Folktale: Classification and Bibliography* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1961), as number AT 124 immediately after two similar types (122–123). See also Adir Cohen, *Liyshon im kippah adummah, laqum im sheloshah hazironim haqetanim* (Haifa: Amatsyah, 1997); Shenberg, "Agnon kesofer yeladim?"; idem, "Sheloshah hazironim."

¹¹ Meir Shalev, in *Sod ahizat ha'ainayim* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1999), associates the wolf from the tale of the three pigs with that of Red Riding Hood: "as a child I thought this was the same wolf, a creature evil from snout to tail." According to

Almost all the structural, literary, and folkloristic elements cited by Sutherland and Arbuthnot to explain the popularity of the mentioned folk "types" are present in Agnon's story, complemented by the writer's talent, sophistication, and humor. Was Agnon, who did not know English, aware of the story of the three pigs, which is far closer to his story than the other, more kosher versions? In October 1999, I wrote to Emuna Yaron, Agnon's daughter, asking whether her father knew such a version or perhaps even told it to his children as a bedtime story. Mrs. Yaron's answer, dated November 7, 1999, says:

To your question, my father never spoke to us of his writing, although at times, on a Sabbath eve, he would read us a new story. As is well known, he never discussed his writing, not even with us, his children. When "Me'oyev le'ohav" was published I was no longer living in my parents' home, but in Safed, teaching the children of Israel to read and write.

Nevertheless, the close resemblance between the two stories cannot be coincidental, and it seems Agnon did know some variant—written or oral—of the story of the three pigs.¹² The version about the wolf and the three kids is included in the Grimms' books, known to Agnon. According to Thompson,¹³ this version was prevalent throughout Europe during the Middle Ages in collections of Aesop's tales. Variations of the English tale may have appeared in German children's books. Agnon may have heard such a variation being read or told to the children of friends during a visit.¹⁴

The struggle of the narrator, who repeatedly returns to the piece of land on the top of the hill in an attempt to build a secure house, can be related to at least four themes, each wider than the other, each enabling yet another fascinating reading. The widest, of course, is the universal mythical struggle between humanity and nature, humanity and wilderness, and

Katharine Briggs, *Dictionary of British Folk-Tales in the English Language* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), there are some English variants of the story without pigs, also belonging to type AT 124.

¹² Type AT 123, for example.

¹³ S. Thompson, *Motif Index of Folk Literature*, rev. ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955), nos. 200–299.

¹⁴ I would be grateful to any reader who could help in locating any possible source of influence.

the attempt to build a home, symbolizing culture and civilization—similar to early myths of humanity's struggle with wind, sand, desert, sea, or fire. Thus Band sees the story as a description of "man's conquest of nature."¹⁵ Shaked also offers an anthropological interpretation,¹⁶ and Shenberg rightly points to the midrash of the wind, which "as it leaves the Blessed-be-His-Name seeks to destroy the world" (Bereshit Rabbah 24; Vayiqra Rabbah 15). In the struggle between the forces of building and the forces of destruction and devastation, the wind appears as a satanic figure, a representative of the forces of evil.¹⁷ Bettleheim, too, in his discussion of the story of the three pigs, notes that the animals symbolize "phases in man's development," and "their houses symbolize the history of human progress: from cabin to stable to brick house."¹⁸

Dov Sadan associates the archetypal interpretation of Agnon's story with its Israeli political perspective, tying the struggle between desert and civilization to the struggle between human enemies: "the parable of the wind and the tree, the desert and the building, where the conquest of the wind over the tree and of the desert over the building means hatred between neighbors and the war between them. The tree's conquest of the wind, and the building's over the desert means love among neighbors and peace."¹⁹

"My wisdom also ruled over my judgment as I dug the deep foundations," says the narrator in Agnon's story.²⁰ The necessity of building a strong house with deep foundations on firm land is mentioned in various Hebrew sayings: Rabbi Binyamin, son of Rabbi Yehuda, says in his introduction to *Diqduqim*: "A house built on earth without foundation will soon fall," and Stahl cites the folk saying: "If you build, strengthen the foundation and you will not fail."²¹ These fables are preceded by two proverbs in the Christian Bible: "a wise man, which built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon the house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock" (Matthew 7:24–25); and "a man which built a house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream

¹⁵ Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare*, 278.

¹⁶ Malka Shaked, "Iyunim besippurei Agnon," in *Madrikh lamoreh* (Jerusalem: Ministry of Education, 1982), repr. in her *Hakemet shebe'or haraqia* (see n. 6 above).

¹⁷ Shenberg, "Agnon kesofer yeladim?" 108.

¹⁸ Bettleheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, 41–44.

¹⁹ Sadan, "Beinenu leveinam," 120–21.

²⁰ "From Foe to Friend," trans. Reuven Morgan, 114.

²¹ Avraham Stahl, *Pitgemei edot Yisra'el* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1975), no. 1084.

beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock" (Luke 6:48).

Sutherland and Arbuthnot hear in these Christian Bible parables "biblical echoes" of the types of animal tales mentioned.²² However, in contrast to these folktales, in which small animals build a house in an attempt to find refuge from bigger animals, in the Christian Bible parable it is humanity itself trying to build a house, struggling against a force of nature—not the wind, as in Agnon's story, but water. Agnon's story is closer to that of the three pigs than to those of other animal versions, and its moral is closer to that of the Christian Bible parable than to that of the many variations that may have inspired him.



I turn from the wider mythical-universal, ethnographical-folkloristic approach to a narrower approach: reading the story for its distinct autobiographical elements. There seems to be no coincidence in Agnon's choice to narrate the story in the first person, in a manner similar to that of the surrealist stories in *Sefer hama'asim*.²³ These symbol-laden stories, which tell of strange incidents in the narrator's life in Jerusalem, revolutionized the understanding of Agnon's modern and complex storytelling. Agnon's attempt to encourage the reader's sense that the story is autobiographical can be seen in the third and fourth words in the version published in *Elu ve'elu: nivmetah Talpiyot* (translated by Morgan as "before the Jerusalem neighborhood of Talpiot was ever built..."), alluding to the neighborhood in south Jerusalem to which Agnon was drawn in 1912, his fourth year in the Land of Israel, and where he himself had lived since 1927, first in rented accommodation and later in a house the family built, known today as "Agnon's House."²⁴

The story "From Foe to Friend" tells of the narrator's four attempts to settle in Talpiot and build his home there. The biographies and monographs on Agnon²⁵ clearly show that the stages in the story parallel, in many ways, Agnon's own life story: his various attempts to emigrate to

²² Sutherland and Arbuthnot, *Children and Books*, 162.

²³ The first of these appeared in *Davar's* literary supplement nine years before our story.

²⁴ However, Shenberg rightly comments that in the first version the hill is called "Zofit," a name coined by Agnon.

²⁵ See Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare*; Laor, *Hayyei Agnon*; and especially Agnon's daughter Emuna Yaron's essay "Midirat aray leveit qeva" in S. Y. Agnon, *Esterlain yaqirati* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1983), 5-17.

Israel and his (and his family's) return to Europe; his various ascents from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem; and especially the stages of moving from within Jerusalem to Talpiot itself, then a secluded neighborhood far from central Jerusalem. It seems the author and his family moved through dozens of rented rooms, hotels, pensions, rented apartments, and rented houses before settling in a house of their own in Talpiot. They were later forced to leave that as well during the Israeli War of Independence. Throughout these moves, a catalogue of catastrophes befell the various apartments and houses in which the family lived, caused by forces of nature (a fire in their Bad Homburg flat in 1924, an earthquake in their central Jerusalem apartment in 1927, and oppressive heat in that apartment's attic that summer) as well as human actions (the looting of the house in Talpiot in 1929 and its bombing in 1948). All these wanderings are certainly reflected in the story.²⁶

In his later story, "Hasiman" ("The Sign"), Agnon ties the building of his house in Talpiot to the destruction of his childhood hometown and the Jewish home in Europe. He tells of living in a rented house in Jerusalem when news reaches him of the mass murder of the Jews of his hometown. He then tells of the night in 1929 when his house in Talpiot was looted by Arabs (when he and his family were forced to leave Jerusalem) and of the vow he made that night to build a house in the very Talpiot that the Arabs had sought to destroy. He concludes with the building of the house in Talpiot, surrounded by a garden and trees, where he now lives, at times peacefully and at times in fear of the "sword of the desert" threatening the dwellers of the land.²⁷ The house, the trees, and the garden are all reminiscent of the ending of "From Foe to Friend" and are in a certain sense an answer not only to the "sword of the desert" (also mentioned in his novel *Shirah*) but also to the destruction of the old home overseas.



Along with the odyssey of building a permanent home in the Jerusalem of this world, one may also find in "From Foe to Friend" echoes of Agnon's long and manifold journey toward a "heavenly Jerusalem"—

²⁶ Baruch Kurzweil, *Massot al sippurei S. Y. Agnon* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1963), 86-94, 104-15, elaborates on "the house as a key symbol in Agnon's opus," and Sadan discusses the "problem of the house—the fear of losing it and the fear of discovering its loss—as a central problem in Agnon's stories" (Sadan, "Beinenu leveinam," 106.)

²⁷ See also Shenberg, "Agnon kesofer yeladim?" 103.

his journey towards God and faith. Agnon was born to a religious household and received a traditionally religious upbringing. When he first came to the Land of Israel in 1908, Laor says, he still "behaved like a God-fearing Jew," but since "the life style here was free, and most of the young people had deserted the way of the Torah and the commandments—he was obliged to change his ways and adapt to the ways of the new surroundings."²⁸ Could there be an association between removing the headcover because of that new, tempting, and mischievous modern world and the fact that the wind, in its first encounter with the narrator of the story, "whipp[ed] my hat off my head. As I bent down to pick up my hat, the Wind blew away my clothes over my head, thus making a laughing-stock of me"?²⁹

One year after the publication of "From Foe to Friend," Agnon published the satirical chapter "Shelom olamim" ("Eternal Peace")³⁰ describing the struggle within the State of Israel between the "covered-head" and "uncovered-head" camps:

There was one man in that land, belonging neither to the covered-heads nor to the uncovered-heads, just an ordinary man, who, if he needed to scratch, would uncover his head, and if he didn't need to scratch, would not uncover his head.³¹

These lines are often quoted as a clue to the viewpoint of the writer, the holder of the "torn rucksack,"³² toward the two camps. It may be that "From Foe to Friend" can also be read in view of the storyteller's manifold deliberation between faith and tradition on the one hand and, on the other hand, the persistent attraction to the "mischievous" wind. It was only after he had extended the house's foundations (his faith), learned to shelter in the shade of the trees (the Torah, of course, is described as "the tree of life"), and carried out the commandment to "love the Lord thy God" that he could live in peace with that mischievous wind and no longer fear it or its temptations. And the wind, too, learned to accept him and coexist with him in friendship, even in love.

Agnon's manifold struggle between the allure of faith and the many temptations of the wind—the same wind that is often referred to as *ruah*

²⁸ Laor, *Hayyei Agnon*, 62.

²⁹ "From Foe to Friend," trans. Reuven Morgan, 112.

³⁰ Included in "Peraqim misefer hamedinah" ("Chapters from the Book of the State"), which appeared six years before the establishment of the State of Israel.

³¹ Agnon, *Samukh venireh*, 262.

³² See his earlier story "Tishrei."

shetut, "a silly wind" or "folly" (see Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav's prayer for peace), or as Satan or as the evil inclination—is highly reminiscent of the classical medieval religious morality plays, where Everyman, usually a young man, is repeatedly caught between the angel or the good inclination and Satan or the evil inclination. Such struggles appear in Hebrew medieval liturgy and *maqamot*³³ and in some of the early Hebrew plays. Yehuda Sommo (or Leone di Sommi), the sixteenth-century Jewish playwright and director from Mantua who is considered the first Hebrew playwright, wrote *A Comedy of Betrothal*, considered by Dubossarsky to be a typical morality play. Sommo attempted to prove the Jews' originality in world drama through an "ancient Chaldean morality play" that he claimed to have translated. The as yet undiscovered *The Course of Life* tells of a young man's passage between the good and evil inclinations.³⁴ A close examination of some sections of Laor's monograph dealing with Agnon's "way to God" reveals that "From Foe to Friend" can be also read as an *argumento*, a *fabula*, a synopsis of such a morality play, a kind of condensed *Pilgrim's Progress*.³⁵

Along with the two aforementioned themes—the universal-mythical as well as the personal, quasi-autobiographical—the story can also be seen as a parable or allegory with national-historical perspectives, dealing with the connection between the Jewish people and their land. One perspective is millennial, spanning the nation's history since Abraham's arrival at the land through the nation's repeated attempts to return to their land after each exile and build their home again. Such a reading is reminiscent of Natan Alterman's 1945 poem, "Admat Biryah," speaking of the Jews' attempts and repeated struggles to settle on the top of a mountain near a holy city (in this case, the Mountain of Canaan, near Safed), from whence a foreign force—not the wind or the Arabs, but the British occupiers—try to uproot them. The poem first appeared in

³³ E.g., Ibn Zabara, *The Book of Delight*.

³⁴ See Y. Sommo in J. Schirmann, ed., *Tsahut bedihuta deqidushin* (Jerusalem: Sifrei Tarshish, 1965); and the English version by Alfred F. Golding, *A Comedy of Betrothal* (Ottawa: Dovehouse, 1988). See also Dan Almagor, "Sommo's Dialogues on Theatre" [Hebrew], *Bamah* 17 (1963): 38–52; Allardyce Nicoll, *The Development of the Theatre* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966), 256–57; Yohanan Dubossarsky, "The First Hebrew Drama Reconsidered," in Ezra Fleischer, ed., *Mehqerei sifrut mugashim leShimon Halkin* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1973), 1–14.

³⁵ Laor, *Hayyei Agnon*, 62, 72, 75–76, 167, 173–75, 192–93.

Alterman's *Davar* weekly column, preceded, as was Alterman's wont, by an explanation of the events inspiring its writing: "Three times [again the formulaic number three!] the army uprooted the fences of Biryah, and again they were planted. The inhabitants and the hundreds who came to their aid lay on the ground and the soldiers labored to shake them and uproot them by force from the earth of Har Çanaan."³⁶ At the end of the ballad, the earth itself apostrophizes the youth with whom it proclaims an eternal covenant.

According to the national-historical interpretation that prevails today in Israeli schools, the story is about the Jewish settlers' struggle in the past 120 years to establish themselves in the Land of Israel and build a "national home" (in the words of the Balfour Declaration), in defiance of the Arab inhabitants. Humanity's struggle with the desert and the attempt to turn it into a green garden is met here with "the desert sword" of the neighboring people.³⁷ Dov Sadan, who for many years served as Agnon's secretary, elaborates on this issue in his essay "Beinenu leveinam" ("Between Us and Them"). He quotes various relevant passages from novels (*Oreah natah lalun; Temol shilshom*) and short stories ("Taht ha'ets"; "Midrash zuta") and ends with a discussion of "From Foe to Friend," in which he sees "symbolically, a dramatization of the theory [about the distinct relation between the people and their land] throughout the three periods in Agnon's life, here focused on the main problem mentioned in the stories, that of the home."³⁸ Others see the story as a "narrative of the national occurrences in our time."³⁹ Such a complex issue obviously calls for further research. I limit myself here to a few typical points that may subtly assist such a reading.

The story's optimistically idyllic ending seems to hint at a possible happy ending in the future (the story was first published in 1941), sounding almost like a vision of messianic days. However, a close inspection of some of Agnon's later stories reveals yearnings for a past, too. Not a far-away place, but one closer to home. Nor a distant past, but a near one: the past preceding the 1929 disturbances, which Agnon saw as the turning point that brought about the loss of paradise.

³⁶ Nathan Alterman, "Admat Biryah," in *Hatur hashevi'i* (Tel Aviv: Davar, 1948), 1:319-20. See also the ballad "Hinne tammu yom qerav ve'arbo," in N. Alterman's *Ir hayonah* (Tel Aviv: Mahbarot lesifrut, 1957), 184-85.

³⁷ The same sword appears in Agnon's later story "Hasiman," as mentioned above, as well as in the novel *Shirah*.

³⁸ Sadan, "Beinenu leveinam," 105-21.

³⁹ Malka Shaked, "Iyyunim besippurei Agnon," 5. See also, Yitzhak Ben-Yosef, "S. Y. Agnon lekitah het; "Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare*; Weiss, *Aharit davar*.

In the story "Hasiman," as well as in the novel *Shirah*, the pre-1929 coexistence between Arabs and Jews in Talpiot is described as peaceful and calm. In *Shirah*, Arab and Jew greet each other "wholeheartedly, with true love,"⁴⁰ to the extent that people predict "that Jews and Arabs will live as one nation in the land." In "Hasiman," written several years after "From Foe to Friend," the "King of Winds" is described, sympathetically, as bearing "a pleasant scent from the hills and the valleys,"⁴¹ and the Arab women peddlers arrive from the villages, filling the neighborhood with "good air." The winds and scents of Talpiot are lovingly described in *Shirah*, this time unrelated to the neighbors: scents of "cypresses of pines of garden flowers of wild weeds of desert shrubs of cool earth."⁴²

The almost heavenly idyll is shattered one Saturday with the beginning of the 1929 riots. In *Shirah*, the rioting Arab neighbors are described as having lived "like beloved brothers" among the Jews.⁴³ In "Hasiman" the Arabs are described as "suddenly" attacking their neighbors. In a letter to Schocken, his publisher, written some two months after his home in Talpiot was looted, Agnon writes: "My attitude to the Arabs has changed since the riots. Now it is thus: I neither hate nor love them. What I ask for is never to see them. In my humble opinion we should now build a big ghetto of half a million Jews; if we don't, then, perish the thought, we are lost."⁴⁴ In the same letter Agnon relates the political arguments between the various camps in Israel regarding the Jewish-Arab question over the Jews' right to the land and the attitude of the British police: "The *Stimmungen* [moods] in Erets Yisrael are various. On the one hand the *Berit Shalom* people, cut off from reality, and on the other hand those high-talking mouths who want it all." Most of the Yishuv, according to Agnon, was between these extremes of right and left. Among them was a third camp, the Orthodox old Yishuv, fearing mostly for the fate of the Western Wall. In a sermon Agnon quotes having heard at the time in a Meah Shearim synagogue, a rabbi claimed: "The Arabs demand the nullification of the Balfour Declaration, but we have a greater declaration, earlier than Balfour's, the one in which God promised us this land." Like many others in the Yishuv, Agnon was caught between these two, or rather three, camps. Here too is a struggle of many courses, moods and surprisingly extreme changes of mind.

⁴⁰ S. Y. Agnon, *Shirah*, trans. Zeva Shapiro (New York: Schocken, 1989), 95-96.

⁴¹ S. Y. Agnon, "Hasiman," in *Ir umelo'ah* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1973), 482. First printed in Agnon's *Ha'esh veha'etsim* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1962).

⁴² Agnon, *Shirah*, 30-31.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁴⁴ S. Y. Agnon, *Me'atsmi el atsmi* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1976), 406.

The first camp Agnon mentioned, *Berit Shalom* (Covenant of Peace, better known in the United States as the Peace Association), was a small, intellectual movement that sought peace and dialogue with the Arabs. Founded by the first president of the Hebrew University, Y. L. Magnes, and others in 1925 (the same year in which the university was founded), the association included several of Jerusalem's foremost scholars, such as Buber, Bergmann, Simon, and Scholem, as well as Rabbi Binyamin (Y. Radler-Feldman), Agnon's close friend since his first arrival in the country. Rabbi Binyamin wrote in the association's manifesto: "And when you come to inherit your homeland / come neither as enemy nor as foe / but greet the inhabitants with peace. / Build your fathers' dwelling with neither hate nor wrath nor loathing / but with love and grace, justice and faith. / And love the inhabitant of the land, for he is thy brother / your own flesh, do not disregard him."⁴⁵

Agnon, the *Ostjude*, was attracted to the Jerusalem scholars, who were mostly German speakers. He respected some of them and was contemptuous of others, deriding them in conversation and writing, openly or indirectly. Of Rabbi Binyamin Agnon said, "many of his actions are close to our heart, others are not close to our heart."⁴⁶ One can imagine Scholem did not like his alter-ego's description in "Ido ve'Einam" (a story written in Scholem's house) and other stories. Many of the Peace Association are depicted mockingly in *Shirah*. The hero, Manfred Herbst, belongs to the association and like them believes that "every Jew living in Erets Yisrael usurps the place of the Arabs, to whom the land belongs."⁴⁷

In other letters Agnon was much more vehement than in his letter to Schocken describing the Peace Association members as "cut off from reality." In an interview with a Jewish newspaper during a 1930 visit to Poland, Agnon is quoted as regarding the movement's central members as "a great danger threatening the building of the land" and having "not enough harsh words to describe them."⁴⁸ He is even more caustic in a letter to Magnes, where he sounds more like the Meah Shearim sermon quoted above.⁴⁹ He was writing in response to a letter by the founder of the Peace Association following the publication of Agnon's two short allegorical parables, written after the 1929 riots and published

⁴⁵ *Mediterranean* 6 (1994): 116–17.

⁴⁶ Agnon, *Me'atami el atsmi*, 180.

⁴⁷ Agnon, *Shirah*, 82.

⁴⁸ Sadan, "Beinenu leveinam," 109.

⁴⁹ See Agnon, *Me'atami el atsmi*, 413; and Agnon, *Shirah*, 106.

in November 1930 in *Moznayim*, the journal of the Hebrew Writers' Association, titled "Midrash zuta."⁵⁰ Both parables use the wolf and lamb from Isaiah's vision of peace at the End of Days—"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb" (Isaiah 11:6)—and are a sarcastic parody using the carnivore wolf and the herbivore sheep. The clearly stinging remarks are directed not only at the Arabs and occasionally the British, but also at the Peace Association members who call for reconciliation and concessions for the wolf.⁵¹ The wolf is absent from our story, perhaps because Agnon had already used it as a political allegory nine years earlier.

Did Agnon identify more with the camp on the other extreme, those people he had described as "high-talking mouths who want it all," that is, the revisionist camp? (Ze'ev Jabotinsky's hymn, "The Jordan has two banks / This one's ours, the other, too," was written during this very period.) The answer can be seen at the end of his harsh letter to Magnes, in which he accuses the Rabbi, founder of the association, of being willing to give up the Land of Israel. "I have no solutions to the questions of this difficult time. . . . But we certainly do not want swords and bows."⁵²

In 1898, a year after the first Zionist Congress, Jabotinsky wrote a poem in Russian about Jerusalem, entitled "City of Peace," describing himself kneeling down side by side with an Arab sheik at a vision of Jerusalem, breaking through the walls. His 1929 poem "The Left Bank of the Jordan" ("The Jordan has two banks"), written while in exile in Paris, describes his vision of a state: "There, satiated with abundance and joy /

⁵⁰ Agnon, *Me'atami el atsmi*, 409–12.

⁵¹ See discussions of *havlagah*, the restraint policies, also in S. Y. Agnon, *Shirah*, 95.

⁵² One of Jabotinsky's greatest admirers lived across the street from Agnon (Agnon's House stands today on a street bearing his name). Professor Yosef Klausner, head of the Hebrew Literature Department at the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus, was a die-hard right-wing supporter who edited several collections of Jabotinsky's essays. Klausner thought little of Agnon's work and did his best, already in the 1930s, to recommend the poet Zalman Schneur for the Nobel Prize. Agnon, on his part, depicted a highly unflattering character of "Doctor Doctor" (even in describing the attack on Talpiot, in his letter to Schocken). In his opposition to Klausner, Agnon had been preceded by other authors, headed by M. Y. Berdyczewski, who had a long-standing account to settle with Klausner dating back to the days of the Hebrew journal *Hashiloah*.

The son of Arabia, the son of Nazareth and my son. / For my flag, pure and just, / Will purify my Jordan's two banks."⁵³

According to Jabotinsky, before such harmonious coexistence could materialize, with foes turning to friends, one condition had to exist: that of "the wall of iron" (*qir habarzel*), using the terminology of building. The term appears in Jabotinsky's writing from 1923 onwards, about two years after the riots of 1921, when he—a veteran officer of the British Army's Hebrew Battalions during World War I—was arrested by the British and sent to the Acre prison. This was shortly after the death in battle at Tel Hai of his comrade-in-arms, Yosef Trumpeldor. Jabotinsky had immortalized Trumpeldor in the name of the revisionist youth movement Betar, combining the name of the fortress from the days of the rebellion against the Romans with the acronym *Berit Yosef Trumpeldor* ("Yosef Trumpeldor Covenant").

The "wall of iron," in Jabotinsky's words, was

the only way to reach an understanding [with the Arabs] ... that is, a force in Israel whose foundations no Arab influence can destroy—our settling in the land must continue without paying attention to the natives' [i.e., the Arabs'] attitudes. In other words, it can continue and develop under the protection of a force that is independent of the local inhabitants' [the Arabs'] attitude; a wall of iron, which the local population cannot break. ... As such, there is not much difference between the "militarists" and the "vegetarians" among us—except that the former demand an iron wall of Jewish soldiers, and the latter—of English soldiers.⁵⁴

Jabotinsky developed this theme in two essays published in Berlin in 1923 and 1927, in the journal *Raszvet*, which he edited and published in Russian and German: "The Morality (Ethics) of the Wall of Iron" and "On the Wall of Iron (We and the Arabs)." The term received wider publicity in Europe and the Land of Israel with the essays' Yiddish translation ("Der eizerner vant"), which appeared in a Betar pamphlet published in Warsaw in 1933, the year Hitler came to power. The essays appeared in Hebrew papers, too, before being collected along with Jabotinsky's writings, and would undoubtedly have reached Agnon.

⁵³ Z. Jabotinsky, "Semol haYarden," in Jabotinsky's *Shirim* (Jerusalem: Eri Jabotinsky, 1947), 201–2, 305–6. The poem was sent by Jabotinsky in his letter to the Yardenia Student Association in Kovna on November 18, 1929.

⁵⁴ Moshe Bella, ed., *Olam shel Jabotinsky* (Tel Aviv: Defusim, 1972), 415–16. On Jabotinsky and "the wall of iron," see also Lenni Brenner, *The Iron Wall: Zionist Revisionism from Jabotinsky to Shamir* (London: Zed Books, 1984).

What, then, is Jabotinsky's emotional attitude to the Arabs? "Just as my attitude to all nations: disinterested indifference" (compare Agnon's letter to Schocken: "I neither hate nor love them"). Jabotinsky strongly criticizes the "vegetarians," the "heralds of peace" whose attitude, he feels, stems from a patronizing attitude to the Arabs. He firmly opposes driving the Arabs away and usurping the natives ("Two nations have always inhabited the Land of Israel"). Only when the Arabs recognize the force of the iron wall will the extremists among them make way for the moderate ones, who "will start negotiating with us about practical matters such as assurances against usurping the Arabs' national and civil equality of rights." In short, "a 'credo' that is peace-saying in its entirety." Jabotinsky summarized his essay about the "wall of iron" by declaring: "My hope and faith is that we can then provide them with satisfying assurances, and both nations can live in peace as good neighbors."⁵⁵

The steady home, surrounded by trees, in Agnon's story, can also be seen as a literary materialization of the "wall of iron." Jabotinsky writes: "both nations can live in peace as good neighbors"; and Agnon says, at the very end of the story: "I invite him to come back again, as one does with a good neighbor. And indeed we are good neighbors." The final words of the story, immediately after "we are good neighbors," speak of love—mutual love: "I love him with all my heart. And maybe he, too, loves me." This sentence echoes not only the "wholeheartedly, with true love" coexistence of pre-1929 life in the mixed neighborhood of Bakah described in *Shirah*, but also the words of Rabbi Binyamin, adopted as the Peace Association manifesto: "And love the inhabitant of the land, for he is thy brother / your own flesh, do not ignore him."

As an observant Jew, Agnon recited in his daily prayers the commandment to "love the Lord thy God." He also believed in the saying "Love thy neighbor as thyself." Contrary to the teachings of some rabbis in Israel today, "thy neighbor" means all humankind, not Jews exclusively. Thus, in the final sentences of this short story, Agnon optimistically (some may say naïvely) fuses the two *Stimmungen* mentioned in his 1929 letter to Schocken—the activist "militarists" (in Jabotinsky's words), and the "vegetarians."

Faithful to the story's title, Agnon may be hinting at a possibility of coexistence, peace, and even love, not only between the wind and the man who built his house on top of the hill (and the two nations they symbolize), but also between the two politically extreme camps in the Jewish Yishuv. Each camp's name bears the Hebrew word *berit* (covenant), implying a bond, an agreement. Thus, remarkably, the "good neighbors"

⁵⁵ Bella, ed., *Olam shel Jabotinsky*, 260–67.

from the "wall of iron" coined by the founder of *Berit Yosef Trumpeldor* (Betar) are merged with "love the inhabitant of the land" of the other covenant, *Berit Shalom* (the Peace Association).

History plays ironic games. In 1968, a year after the Six-Day War, Band described the story as reflecting "the pioneering spirit of the Palestinian community."⁵⁶ He meant, of course, the Jewish Palestinian community. It was not long before a different reading could be given not only to Band's statement but also to one of the story's first and most meaningful sentences that refers to the King of the Winds, whose "princes and all his slaves were stormy winds who dwelt on the mountains and in the valleys, on the hills and in the dales, each doing as he wished as if the land was given him alone." At the time of writing, Agnon may have meant this as a description of the Arabs. Since 1967, the tops of the hills are inhabited by many people of another nation, the Jewish settlers, who trust and behave "as if the whole land was given to [them] alone."

The story is not over, and the *Stimmungen* among the present-day Yishuv are just as polarized as in the days of Agnon's letter to Schocken. In the popular Israeli protest song "We Are the Children of Winter 1973," written by Shmuel Hasfari twenty years after the Yom Kippur War, the twenty-year-old soldiers sarcastically remind their elders, "You promised a dove bearing an olive branch / You promised to turn a foe into friend." Sixty years after the publication of "From Foe to Friend" many people of both nations still hope for the fulfillment of the title of Agnon's story, and of its optimistic ending.

⁵⁶ Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare*, 278.

IS TEHILLAH WORTHY OF HER PRAISE?

Risa Domb

In his book entitled *Nostalgia and Nightmare*, Arnold Band describes the eponymous character of the story "Tehillah"¹ as "a loving yet wistful glorification of a pious old lady, a type that, the narrator suggests, is very rare today." Band goes on to say that "the heroine, Tehillah, whose name means 'praise' and 'psalm of praise,' is clearly one of Agnon's finest character creations, one whom he loves and admires." He also characterizes the story as "a wistful lament for the Old City types, personified in a pious, pleasant old lady."² Most critics endorse Band's evaluation of Tehillah and, like him, sing her praises. Gershon Shaked, for example, recognizes in Tehillah a pious heroine who suffers for the sins of her parents and represents the highest ideals of Jews in the Old City of Jerusalem in the 1920s. Hillel Barzel cites other critics whose perception of Tehillah is similar. Leah Goldberg suggests that Agnon employs her to express his yearning for a lost world, to which Barzel adds that the key to Tehillah's character lies in the book of Psalms and in particular the atmosphere of devotion described in it.³ He cites, among other critics, Baruch Kurtzweil's allegorical reading regarding Tehillah not only as a perfect individual but also as a metaphor for the Jewish people, its beauty shrouded by traditions. For Hillel Weiss she is a metaphor for Jerusalem and the eventual advent of the Messiah, whatever delays are involved.

Eddy Zemach sees, in Psalm 104 in particular, an explanation for Tehillah's attitude to the world and to God, and he reminds us that she

¹ First published in 1950. For the Hebrew version, see *Ad henah* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1971), 176–206. All English quotations are from I. M. Lask's translation in S. Y. Penueli and A. Ukhmani, eds., *Hebrew Short Stories* (Tel Aviv: Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature, 1965), 1:24–52. Another translation, by Walter Lever, may be found in *Ariel* 17 (1969): 75–108.

² Arnold J. Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), 398–99, 406, 409.

³ Hillel Barzel, *H. N. Bialik, S. Y. Agnon* (Tel Aviv: Yahdav, 1986), 308–13.