

S. Y. Agnon and Amos Oz Then and Now*

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S. Y. Agnon is justly regarded as one of the great cultural icons of modern Jewry or, more precisely, of Jewish modernity. But in actuality, what is Agnon to us today? Who reads him now, other than specialists in modern Hebrew literature and Israeli high schoolers studying for the matriculation exam? What does he have to say to our time, assuming we can grasp what he was saying or trying to say to his? How many Hebrew readers are there today who can discern and savor the rich tapestry of intertextual—Jewish and non-Jewish, that informs almost every line of his fiction? I was put in mind of these questions after reading and contemplating Amos Oz's *Sippur 'al 'ahavah ve-hoshekh* [*A Tale of Love and Darkness*, henceforth TLD.]¹ That widely acclaimed book gives us not one but two fascinating and important narratives: a personal one of self-disclosure that is variously autobiographical and confessional and that tells the story of Oz's growth to artistic consciousness, and a national one that depicts the first years of the British Mandate in Palestine and the early years of Israeli statehood and is documentary and commemorative. But above and beyond these two narratives, or suffused within them, is something else: the presence of S.Y. Agnon. Agnon's spirit inhabits this book in many places and in many ways. Some of them are textual, some technical, some are thematic,

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— S. Y. Agnon and Amos Oz: Then and Now —

and some existential.² One gets the feeling in reading TLD that when Oz was writing it Agnon was present to him something like the way the Mishnah was to Joseph Karo. I want to argue that in examining Oz's transaction with Agnon we gain a better understanding of both writers and make some headway in addressing the questions I put in the opening paragraph above.

Oz himself acknowledges the anxiety of influence he feels in regard to Agnon:

For several years I endeavored to free myself from Agnon's shadow. I struggled to distance my writing from his influence. . . . from the influence of his sarcasm. . . . Despite all my efforts to free myself from him, what I have learned from Agnon no doubt still resonates in my writing (pp. 96, 74).

Consider, for example, the way Oz talks to his readers in chapter 5 of the Hebrew original (pp. 36–40, unfortunately omitted in the English.) In this chapter he is ostensibly answering a serious and important question about his fiction that he was, apparently, asked many times over the years: how much of it is autobiographical? Instead of responding to this question frontally he twists those who put it to him, distinguishing between “good readers” and “bad readers.” Bad readers, he says, are “lazy readers” because all they want is the real story behind the invented one, the gossip, and not the literary art of the fiction. The tone here is distinctly Agnonic, and so is the content, as Oz conceals more than he purports to reveal.

Or listen to the echo of an Agnonic sensibility—and the title of one of his short stories—we hear in this sentence when he is describing what he was doing on the day Agnon won the Nobel Prize:

One night, years later, I missed the last bus [*ha-autobus ha-aharon*] back from Rehovot to the kibbutz at Huldah and had to take a taxi (pp. 96, 74).

Consider, further, how Oz configures TLD with the number of chapters—63 in the Hebrew (62 in the English)—to correspond to his age at the time he was writing it, exactly the way Agnon configured “*Ha-mitpahat*” [The Kerchief], a story of bar mitzvah as the moment of initiation, with 13 chapters.

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These are stylistic flourishes. More significant are the instances in TLD where Oz drops verbatim snippets from Agnon into the text. These occur when he is talking about his mother. For example, immediately after he has related how his mother taught him the value of books, he inserts, without a word of comment, a passage from *Sippur pashut* [A Simple Story] about how Bluma would read books her father gave her (p. 316, omitted in the English on p. 275). In his chapter on Agnon (chapter 12, 11) he tells of the hold the opening of Agnon's story "Bi-demi yameha" [In the Prime of Her Life] has on him:

In the prime of her life my mother died. Some one and thirty years of age my mother was at her death. Few and evil were the days of the years of her life. All the day she sat at home. . . . Silent stood our house its sorrow. . . . Upon her bed my mother lay . . . (90, 69).

It is not hard to understand why this passage should so haunt Oz. Whatever else he is manifestly up to in TLD, his emotional agenda in it is to articulate the depths of the trauma his mother's tragic and untimely death by suicide precipitated upon him. Here we come to the place where Oz really meets Agnon, where the two writers, in spite of the differences between them in generation and in Jewish religious praxis, in some sense walk together. For Oz is engaged with and by Agnon at a much deeper level than stylistics and tone: he connects and resonates with the existential questions the master's fiction pose.

To see this spelled out we need to go back to the three essays on Agnon that Oz collected in *Shetikat Shamayim* [The Silence of Heaven].³ These essays were written before, in one case long before, TLD, and are testimony to a long-standing and ongoing encounter with Agnon. As a practicing novelist, Oz knows a thing or two about stylistics, narratology, and structure, and he certainly can talk about how they function in Agnon's writing. But these essays make it clear that when Oz reads Agnon, those matters don't interest him as much as do the metaphysical implications of the fiction. Not since Barukh Kurzweil has anyone read Agnon with such an intense focus on what I'll call the larger, cosmic questions. Except that whereas Kurzweil in his seminal treatment of Agnon focuses on the forces of "the demonic" and "the absurd," constructs of the Continental thought of *his* time, as the fulcrum of his fiction, Oz goes straight for the theological jugular and talks in good Jewish terms, about faith and God, fate, reward and punishment.⁴

Why is this? What is it that draws Oz to Agnon and impels him to read him at such a visceral level? I don't think we find the answer merely in Oz's impressive abilities as a literary critic, or, as the scion of the house of Klausner, his abiding interest in the Hebrew literary tradition. There's more going on here. All three works dealt with in *Shetikat shamayim*, "Tehillah," *Sippur pashut*, and *Temol shilshom*, are relevant to issues that are central to Oz's inner life. To understand them is to understand what he finds in Agnon.

What are these issues? Avraham Balaban, who grew up with Oz on Kibbutz Huldah, was among the first critics to identify them: fathers and sons; the kibbutz inside the floodlit barbed wire perimeter and the dark land of the howling jackals beyond it; the forces of light and reason and sanity over against the forces of darkness, the irrational, and madness that lurk outside the kibbutz and within the depths of the psyche.⁵ These three sets of polarities correlate with each other and collectively constitute the ideational microchip that drives Oz's imaginative life. Oz's novel *My Michael* (1968), his best-selling work until TLD, mapped out these polarities with an uncanny clarity. It presented to us a couple: Michael Gonen, the geologist who, in studying rocks, deals with what this world gives us on its surface, and the dreamy, poetic Hannah, who accesses what lies underneath, in the dark depths, and is in touch with the inner fires and pressures that produced those rocks. TLD confirms for us that to a large extent Michael and Hannah are fictionalized representations of his parents and that much, if not all, of Oz's novels are a palimpsests upon which are inscribed the binary opposition he introjected from his parents, Aryeh Klausner and Fania Mussman. Oz describes this duality as:

. . . the two opposing windows through which the world had first been revealed to me, at the beginning of my life: my father's commonsensical, optimistic window, over against my mother's window, which opened onto grim landscapes and strange supernatural forces, of evil but also of pity and compassion (pp. 512, 459f).

But these polarities in themselves do not explain why Agnon would have such a hold on Oz. It's more complicated than that.

In TLD, Oz tells us that in the Jerusalem in which he was growing up in the 1940s, in the Talpiot neighborhood, there lived his paternal uncle, the venerable Joseph Klausner. Across the street lived the no less venerable S.Y.

on. The two men themselves, we learn, were not friendly, but this did not matter to Amos Klausner and his parents. For on many a Shabbat afternoon, after having made the long trek from their home in Kerem Avraham, in what was then the city's northern reaches, to visit Uncle Joseph and his wife, Aunt Yehonah, the family, before it would start homeward, would frequently cross the street (unbeknownst to Uncle Joseph) to spend a few moments with the great writer.⁶ Those drop-ins led to a personal acquaintance with Agnon on Oz's part, not a close one to be sure, but one that he maintained throughout the years. His crossing of that street had, in retrospect, other significances. It refigures his forsaking the Klausner house, heritage, and vocation. Not only would he in time abandon the spiteful petit-bourgeois Revisionism of the 1920s in favor of the kibbutz, but he would also become a creator of literature, not a literary historian like his uncle or a bibliographer like his father. He would live in the world not of research but of the imagination and would write novels and not footnotes. And in going forth that way from his paternal home he would be replicating the change in identity and destiny that the neighbor across the street had long ago taken upon himself: just as Shmuel Yosef Czaczkes had, around 1908, become S. Y. Agnon so, in the early 1950s, after his mother had died, would Amos Klausner become Amos Oz.⁷ In short, Oz would ultimately embrace the world of his mother, not of his father, and all that that world entailed. That world—it was an inner world—shaped his muse through Fania's formidable powers of rich and exquisite imagination and narration. It also forced the son to witness her recurrent plunges into apathy, sadness, melancholia, punishing insomnia, and, in the end, madness and suicide. Oz lived with and through all of those. No wonder that so many of the women who populate his fiction are fictional refractions of Fania Mussman. No wonder that Oz could see in many of Agnon's women protagonists the same tormented persona. Thus, if most critics read "Tehillah" as a portrait of a saintly woman, Oz understands her very differently: as a woman who had been married to the wrong man and to whom:

after ninety years, it becomes palpably clear . . . that in her childhood, erotic iniquity befell her, and more and more iniquity branched out from it. And when she does understand that . . . her heart is a dead space inside her, and she passes out of the world slamming the door like a precocious girl who has

gotten the better of an argument with her elders, or like someone who is about to go mad.⁸

To my knowledge no one else explicates Tehillah that way. It frames the whole story in a completely different emotional and cultural context.

Oz's experience with his mother predisposed him to have an intuitive understanding of the inner dislocation that leads to madness and it enabled him to see, more than any of the major Agnon critics, I think, how central a subject this is for Agnon. It is why he is drawn to such works as "*Bidemi yameha*" [In the Prime of Her Life], *Sippur pashut* [A Simple Tale], and *Temol shilshom* [Only Yesterday]. I will presently discuss *Temol shilshom* as the key text that connects Agnon to Oz. But before doing so there is one more verbal parallel between them to note.

It is not an exaggeration to say that his mother's suicide is the central trauma of Oz's inner life and a key motor of his literary imagination. TLD makes this quite clear. In it he speaks of the trauma as a wound. It is first described as such not by Oz himself but by a close friend of his mother, Lilenka Kalisch. In a letter she wrote him twenty years after his mother's death, responding to an autobiographical note Oz had inserted into his two-novella work *Ad mavet* [Unto Death], Kalisch writes:

What are you hinting at now, in the "Autobiographical Note" in your book . . . when you talk of your mother dying . . . ? Please forgive me, I'm touching a wound. Your late father's wound, your wound especially, and even—my own (pp. 244, 209).

Apparently this image sticks in Oz's consciousness because a bit later, in the tormented Proustian reverie in chapter 33 (32), he compares the experience of memory assaulting him as he sits in Arad writing TLD to a woman grabbing him, clawing him, until he feels:

like a dolphin with the barb of the harpoon caught in his flesh . . . digging deeper and deeper, wounding you more and more because it is the catcher and you are the prey, it is the hunter and you are the harpooned dolphin, it gives and you have taken, it is that evening in Jerusalem and you are in this evening here in Arad, it is your dead parents, and you just pull and go on writing (pp. 283f, 245).⁹

Oz here adumbrates an idea originally put forth by Edmund Wilson in his essay (and collection of essays on the subject) “The Wound and the Bow” about the relation between artistic creativity and suffering.¹⁰ Great art, Wilson suggests, issues from the suffering that results from a wound to the artist—either a wound to the body or to the psyche. I don’t know if Oz knew of Wilson’s book, but in 1975, at a commemoration of Agnon at the Hebrew University, Oz spoke these words:

. . . [W]e must recognize the trauma that made Agnon what he is. For *every true writer becomes a writer because of a profound trauma experienced in youth or childhood*. And if we hedge our statement with a myriad of reservations, with all kinds of “although” and “nevertheless,” perhaps we might venture to say that *the flight of the narrator’s imagination is as high as the depth of his wound*, or, in other words, the force of his scream is as intense as his pain.¹¹

If this discussion has made anything clear, it is that Oz spoke these words out of his own flesh. As the saying goes, “it takes one to know one.” To be sure, Oz in his remarks qualified his generalization. “Yes,” he added parenthetically, “I hear you, there are people who suffer a trauma and don’t become writers, but rather saints or murderers or whatever, but I did say ‘with a myriad of reservations.’”¹²



Oz then continues:

If, for instance, we take a Hebrew writer today, we shall find that he is tormented with the question of whether it is good or bad to expel the population of an Arab village, and his hero suffers emotional distress because it is good according to one system of values and bad according to another, and he accepts both systems and both have shaped his beliefs. Or, another writer is torn between admiration for brute force, on the one hand, and respect for the spirit in general and the ethical spirit in particular, on the other. Yet, beyond all differences in talent, perhaps we may say that the trauma, the rift, in Agnon’s soul was deeper and more painful than those; hence the creative tension, the vigor of the sources energy, the depths of the torments are of a different order altogether.¹³

This brings me to *Temol shilshom* (henceforth TS).¹⁴ Whatever we can say about Oz’s reading of this monumental centerpiece of the modern Hebrew narrative canon, there can be no doubt that he is profoundly engaged by it, more engaged by it than by any other work of Agnon. His meticulous 130-page discussion of it, one of the most valuable studies of the novel that we have to date, shows us that he has lived with every page and every detail.¹⁵ It’s not hard to understand why. TS, I believe, addresses Oz more directly than any other work of Agnon, and maybe more profoundly than any other work of literature, because it deals with the issues that we have seen are central to him. In telling the story of Yitzhak Kummer, who goes forth from his father’s house “to build and be re-built” in Eretz Yisrael, Agnon does much more than tell the story of the Second Aliyah (of which he was for a while a part and yet from which he was, for many reasons, apart.) In introducing the dog Balak into the second half of the story and detailing Balak’s fevered peregrinations through the haredi world of Me’ah She’arim, Agnon uncovers the madness that pervades Jerusalem, that lurks within the bosom of the Zionist enterprise, and that lies at the heart of the human reality. “The face of the generation is like the face of a dog.”¹⁶ Both man (Rabbi Gronam Yekum Purkan) and dog are shown to be literally foaming at the mouth—until the rabid Balak sinks his spittled fangs into the doomed Yitzhak and brings about his horrible and untimely death. TS is as terrifying and disquieting today as it was when it came out in 1945.

We come here to a dimension of Oz that I have hitherto not mentioned and that needs to be factored into this discussion. That is his engagement with national questions, with the content and direction of Israeli life, and with the relationship between morality and public policy, especially as they relate to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. I did at the outset indicate that TLD has a national aspect to it, which, its personal and confessional agenda notwithstanding, places it squarely within the tradition of modern Hebrew literature as a “*tzofeh le-vet yisra’el*,” i.e., the custodian of the perennial question it puts to the Jewish people, or which the Jewish people puts to it: “Watchman, what of the night?” Part of the power and value of TLD derives from how it integrates the root polarity of Oz’s personal narrative into the grand narrative of Zionism and the State of Israel. It shows us how the Yin of his father’s rationality and pragmatism and the Yang of his mother’s melancholic madness inform and infuse the ideological disconnect between

the Klausners and Kibbutz Huldah, between Revisionism and Labor Zionism, between Begin and Ben Gurion.

In this respect TLD tells us nothing new. Back in the '80s, Gershon Shaked assessed the two stories in *'Ad mavet*, [Unto Death], and the novels *Har ha-'ezah ha-ra-'ah* [The Hill of Evil Counsel], and *Menuhah nehonah* [A Perfect Peace] in the following terms:

Underlying Israeli existence . . . are the basic forces of sane rationality and (Slavic) romantic and passionate visions: the archtypical, mythical struggle between the rational and the irrational, intellect and emotion. . . .

For Oz . . . the opposition between the Revisionist movement and Labor Zionism is more than a historical dispute between parties. It is a psychohistorical confrontation that doubtless exists within every nation and people. . . .

There is no question that Oz has a deep understanding of the complex mixture of the Zionist endeavor—the visionary, irrational romanticism of messianic fanatics and the rational pragmatism of sober pioneers.¹⁷

Nowhere does Oz, or anyone else in my opinion, see this tension more fully developed than in TS. TS is for Oz a vast literary screen on which he can see the issues of his inner life and of the Israel of his time played out in the Yishuv of the Second Aliyah. I will not review the details of how Oz explicates the novel in these terms. Suffice it to say that Balak for him is the objective correlative of what has bitten his mother and brought her to a death as tragic, as untimely, and as absurd as that of Yitzhak Kummer. For Oz there is a straight line between the two. This leads me to conjecture that *Temol shilshom* is the work that lies behind TLD, the work that precipitates in Oz the anxiety of influence that wells up from the pages of this book.

To show the connections, let me enumerate some congruencies and contiguities between TS and TLD:

1. Both works constitute the magnum opus of each writer (though Oz's career is far from over).
2. Both works have a double-barreled agenda. TS and TLD both seek to tell a personal story and a national one. In each, autobiography and epic are intertwined. Both writers tell the story of themselves as

isolados in the Land of Israel in their respective generations. But whereas Agnon displaces himself, or aspects of himself, onto the fictive persona of Yitzhak Kummer, who is narrated in the third person, Oz, living in a time when self-disclosure is more freely practiced, speaks in the first person singular, as author and narrator merge.

3. TLD exhibits the same symptoms of what Shlomo Tzemach has called "structural distress" that we see in TS, though it is manifest in a different way.¹⁸ Whereas in TS we have what Dan Miron described as "more a perfect soldering [of the Yitzhak and the Balak narratives] than one single casting," in TLD there seems to be no attempt even to integrate the two narrative strands, personal and national.¹⁹ They simply stand side by side as the chapters progress. In both cases, the authors have bitten off more than they can esthetically chew.
4. Both works are valuable as documents of social history. TS is interlarded with cameo shots of Brenner and communicates something of the social ambiance of Jaffa and Jerusalem of the Second Aliyah. TLD contains vignettes of Agnon, Klausner, Tchernichovsky, Zelda, Begin, and Ben Gurion, among others, and gives us the feel of Palestine and Jerusalem of the years of the late Mandate and early statehood.
5. The agenda of both novels includes an interrogation of the Zionist project—its assumptions and its achievements. And they each do this in Jungian terms, evoking the Jewish collective unconscious and its dangers, the seductions that lie submerged beneath the manifestly rational and humane surface of the Jewish national project.²⁰ The primordial energies that the rabid canine Balak signifies have their counterpart in the drooling jackals that we find in Oz's early work to which TLD is in many ways connected. But where Agnon ends with a frightening implication of nullity, Oz, in an ultimate and ironic appropriation of his father's rational pragmatism, embraces partition. In tacit dialogue with post-Zionists and the Left, he re-affirms the moral vision of what was once called Labor Zionism, now re-named in some circles as *tsiyonut shefuyah* (sane Zionism.) His exposition of the Arab-Israeli conflict is a model of lucid empathy with both sides.²¹

My view of TLD, then, is that in its fullest literary sense it is Oz's attempt to present the Hebrew literary canon with a sequel to TS. If I ascribe too much to an authorial intention I cannot empirically validate, then I'd state it this way: TS in the work against which TLD is best read. In terms of the glorious canons of Hebrew literature, modern and Biblical respectively, *Sippur 'al 'ahavah ve-hoshekb* is to *Temol shilshom* as Exodus is to Genesis.²²

What, then, can we learn from this life-long engagement of Amos Oz with Shmuel Yosef Agnon? How does Oz's reading of Agnon help us open—or re-open—our own path to the imposing corpus of text that sits on many a shelf in homes and in libraries?

I think the answer lies in Oz's sensitivity to what I pointed to near the beginning of this discussion: the existential implications of Agnon's created worlds, or to put it plainly, to the *theological* dimension of his fiction. A generation or two ago, it was Barukh Kurzweil who foregrounded this aspect of Agnon (and was derided for it by many in the Israeli—and not only the Israeli—literary establishment. How could a Bar-Ilan professor and an ostensibly Orthodox Jew possibly treat Agnon with the theoretical sophistication of formalistic criticism and the tools of structuralism and post-structuralism that the literature of high modernism requires?).²³ But by 1975, three years after Kurzweil's death, the secular kibbutznik Amos Oz presented Agnon to his Hebrew University audience in these terms:

For Agnon's pain and the distress of his generation were malignant: incurable, insoluble, inextricable. There is One Who hears our prayer or there is not. There is Justice and there is a Judge or there is not. All the acts of our forefathers are meaningful or they are not. And while we're at it—is there meaning to our acts or isn't there? And is there any meaning in any act at all? What is sin and what is guilt and what is righteousness?²⁴

These are ultimate questions, and in our generation they have metathe-sized beyond what they were in Agnon's. Oz's insight into how Agnon pushes them invites us to read or re-read him (Agnon) so we can get to see this for ourselves. But, adds Oz:

In all these [questions], Agnon is neither guide nor model, . . . [as] he and his heroes run around from one extreme to another in dread and despair. . . . And with all the restraint that imbues Agnon's writing . . . with all the moderation and dissimulation and muting and circumlocution and irony and sometimes even sophistry—with all that, the sensitive reader will hear a muffled scream . . . an open wound.²⁵

I agree with Oz about the writing manifesting a wound; I disagree that in exposing it to us the way he does, Agnon is not a guide or a model. I think he very much is. To explain why, I want, in conclusion, to expand on the nature of the wound beyond the terms in which Oz has depicted it when he says, correctly, that “the trauma, the rift, in Agnon's soul was deeper and more painful than” any other Hebrew writer.

Agnon is hard to read. Even Israelis struggle with him. He demands a lot. He does not fare well in translation (unlike Kafka, and the comparison of just this aspect of the two alone deserves a separate discussion.) Agnon really has to be read in Hebrew. He has to be read in Hebrew so he can be heard and understood as the ventriloquist *non pareil* who gives voice to the full range of the Hebrew literary tradition. T. S. Eliot famously wrote of literary tradition that:

It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense . . . and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence (a sense, that is, of its relevance now—*of the extent to which the past is entering into the content of the present, creating and forming the present into what it is*); the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.²⁶

If the genius of Agnon is that he demonstrates the truth of what Eliot is saying like no one else in modern Hebrew literature, we could say *dayenu*, it would be enough. But he does more: he also subverts this truth. For at the same time as he encompasses, stylistically and intertextually, the whole of the Hebrew literary tradition from the Tanakh through the Talmud and the Midrash and the Zohar and Rabbi Nachman and the Hasidic and Mitnagdic masters and Mendele and Berditchevsky and Brenner—and who have I forgotten?—he also forces us to see the profound disconnect between the Jewish past and the Jewish present. Agnon problematizes everything: religious belief, the authority of the halakhic tradition, and the relation between them.

This is an enormous and valuable contribution, especially in our time. Oliver Wendell Holmes is reputed to have said (among many other things): “I would not give a fig for the simplicity this side of complexity, but I would give my life for the simplicity on the other side of complexity.” Agnon, in his fiction and in his life, embodies this complexity. He lives and writes in the zone of unresolved complexity, inside the halakhic tradition even as he knows that its authority has eroded and that its official representatives are less than exemplary. He takes upon himself the full burden of the tension between the difficulties of *‘emunah* and the obligations of *shemirat mitzvot* and he eschews facile resolutions of this tension. He has been criticized in some quarters for not telling us what he really believes; the paradoxes and the contradictions of his position are what he really believes. Agnon knows that to man heaven is silent; yet he also knows that “the heavens declare the glory of God.”

How can we not claim him as a guide and a model?

NOTES

1. Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Ltd., 2002. The English version is *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, translated by Nicholas de Lange (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 2004.) Page numbers are cited with the Hebrew first in italics, then the English version in regular type.

2. See Robert Alter, “Past Imperfect,” *The New Republic* (December 27, 2004), p. 40.

3. *Shetikat ha-shamayim: ‘Agnon mishtomem ‘al ‘Elohim* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing Co., 1993. Translated by Barbara Harshav, *The Silence of Heaven: Agnon’s Fear of God* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

4. See Oz’s preface to *The Silence of Heaven*, vii and also p. 6.

5. Avraham Balaban, *Between God and Beast: An Examination of Amos Oz’s Prose*, (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 1993).

6. The account of these meetings is in the chapter on Agnon (12, pp. 87–97; 11, pp. 66–75.)

7. Arnold Band writes of Agnon that “his adoption of the pen-name ‘Agnon’ in 1908 must have deeper significance than the desire to rid himself of the ridiculous-sounding name Czaczkes. In the context of . . . [his signature story *Agunot*] *agunot* are souls in limbo, perhaps ‘the one who describes souls in limbo.’ Agnon’s critics have not properly assessed the inner relationship between his name and his artistic temperament” (*Nostalgia and Nightmare: A Study in the Fiction of S.Y.*

Agnon (California, 1968, p. 17f.) Of Oz, Balaban writes: “Fourteen-year old Amos Klausner changed his name of his own volition and initiative to “Oz” (meaning ‘power,’ ‘vigor’), a name containing a complex of oppositions and contradictions. How could he reconcile going to the kibbutz, which offers a sane, moderate way of life, with such a heroic name?” (Balaban, p. 11f).

8. *The Silence of Heaven*, p. 29.

9. See also chapter 52, p. 482 (chapter 51, p. 431) where he speaks again of his mother’s emotional paralysis as a wound.

10. Edmund Wilson, *The Wound and the Bow: Seven Studies in Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1941).

11. *The Silence of Heaven*, p. 3. Emphasis is mine.

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*

14. The English version is *Only Yesterday*, trans. by Barbara Harshav (Princeton, NJ, 2000).

15. See *The Silence of Heaven*, pp. 63–191.

16. Mishnah Sotah 9:16, B. Sanhedrin 97a, and elsewhere.

17. Gershon Shaked, *The Shadows Within: Essays on Modern Jewish Writers* (Philadelphia, New York, & Jerusalem: Jewish Publication Society, 1987), p. 177f.

18. *The Silence of Heaven*, p. 170.

19. *Ibid.*

20. See Balaban, pp. 3–7.

21. See chapter 43 (42), especially pp. 388f (342f).

22. Mordecai Shalev suggests that the multiplicity of forms and genres that we have in TLD—narration interrupted by historical data, flashbacks, reveries—makes it closer in style to Biblical narrative than to the linear progression of the classic European novel. See his “*Haladat ha-tragediah mitokh ruah ha-musikah: Me-Oslo ‘ad Geneva derekh ‘Simhat ani-yim*, ‘*Shir le-shalom*, ‘*ve-Sippur ‘al ‘ahavah ve-hoshekh*” [The Birth of Tragedy from Music: From Oslo to Geneva By Way of ‘The Joy of the Poor’, the ‘Peace Song,’ and *A Tale of Love and Darkness*], *Dimui* (23: Winter 5764), p. 22.

23. Yet it was Kurzweil who had written to the Swedish Academy nominating Agnon for the Nobel Prize in literature, which he was awarded with Nelly Sachs in 1966.

24. *The Silence of Heaven*, p. 3f.

25. *Ibid.*

26. “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1917). Emphasis is mine.

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