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Rabid Reading: Melancholia and the Mad Dog in S. Y. Agnon's *Temol shilshom*

Sunny S. Yudkoff

ABSTRACT

In 1945, the writer S. Y. Agnon published his magnum opus—the Hebrew novel Temol shilshom (Only Yesterday). The novel follows the life of Second Aliyah immigrant Yitshak Kumer, who eventually dies after being bitten by a rabid dog. Informed by the growing field of the medical humanities, the present article reexamines the aesthetic significance of this canine figure. I begin by tracing the medico-cultural history of rabies, its etiology and symbols, and its relationship to melancholia. I then analyze the variety of melancholic symptoms and cultural-historical signifiers that are woven into the novel. Finally, I conclude by drawing on Sigmund Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" in order to investigate the intersection of melancholia, rabies, and style in Agnon's text. Rabies and melancholia, as will become clear, are not only conditions thematized by Temol shilshom. They are also the stylistic ciphers of the text.

Key words: S. Y. Agnon, rabies, melancholia, Temol shilshom

In 1945, after nearly two decades of labor, the Hebrew writer and future Nobel Prize-winner S. Y. Agnon published the novel *Temol shilshom* (Only Yesterday).¹ Though some critics initially dismissed the work as confused and structurally wanting, the nearly 500-page novel became an overnight sensation.² Overshadowing the negative critiques were articles that praised the work in hyperbolic terms. Perhaps most famously, the literary critic Baruch Kurzweil declared

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the text to be “the great novel of the Land of Israel” (*ha-roman ha-erets yisreeli ha-gadol*).³

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The book was indeed *great*—long, complex, and encyclopedic in scope. At its base, *Temol shilshom* narrates the lives of two wounded creatures: the Galician-born housepainter Yitshak Kumer and the Palestinian-born dog Balak. Kumer arrives in Ottoman Palestine in the first decade of the twentieth century, during what would become known as the Second Aliyah. Eager to become a field hand, the dedicated Zionist is unable to find work as a laborer. Instead, he finds employment as a housepainter in the coastal city of Jaffa, where he spends his time meeting various archetypes of the Jewish immigrant—sometimes Jewish farmers, more commonly café dwellers, among the ranks of whom are Hebrew writers, small businessmen, and urban bureaucrats. After a fraught romance with the secular, gamine Sonia Zweiering, Kumer leaves Jaffa for Jerusalem. There, he continues to work as a painter, now of buildings and signs. He eventually settles down and marries Shifra, the pious daughter of a Hungarian Hasidic zealot and the granddaughter of kindly, anti-Zionist Jews who immigrated to Palestine on the same ship as Kumer—not to work the land but to die there. Shortly after his wedding to Shifra, Kumer himself dies, having been bitten by a rabid dog.

The rabid dog, as the novel details, had begun life as a rather unremarkable canine denizen of Jerusalem; however, his biography soon comes to take on an outsized meaning in the Yishuv as well as the novel, where large sections of the text are focalized through his perspective. In the second of the novel’s four books, the dog approaches Kumer while the latter is at work painting a sign. Intrigued by his paintbrush, Balak refuses to leave the painter alone. Kumer eventually responds to the curious animal by painting the words *kelev meshuga* ‘crazy dog’ on his back. The first word is later misread by a well-intentioned observer, who declares the dog’s name to be Balak, mistakenly reading *kelev* from left to right and substituting a *kof* for a *kaf*.⁴ Kumer’s incidental artistic act also assumes a treacherous patina, as the residents of Jerusalem become frightened of the dog. For the majority of the novel, that public fear is misplaced. But by the end of the text, the words on Balak’s back have evolved from the appellative to the infectious. The initially kind and inquisitive Balak becomes rabid and attacks the man who had first branded him “crazy.”

Considering the bestial drama of Balak’s transmogrification, it is perhaps not surprising that the canine antihero of *Temol shilshom* has been the object of much scholarly attention. As Kurzweil explained

in a letter to Agnon in January 1946, the figure seems to belie a singular allegorical meaning. *Ein po simliyyut ahidah*, he wrote with what might be read as a combination of exasperation and admiration: “There is no uniform symbolism.”⁵ As such, Balak has been read and reread as the novel’s multivalent hermeneutic key, engendering an ever-expanding tradition of interpretation. Kurzweil, in a reading that has been picked up by Amos Oz, Michal Arbell-Tor, and others, argues that Balak serves as an extended metaphor for Kumer’s sexual frustrations; unlike Balak, Kumer is unable to overpower the object of his desire, be it Sonia or Shifra.⁶ Reading Balak intertextually, Dan Miron counters by examining the dog as “a canine blend of Faust and Mephistopheles.”⁷ Looking not to Goethe but toward the book of Numbers, Ilana Pardes has recently reread the Balak narrative as an ironic commentary on the excesses of Zionist biblical exegesis.⁸ From a postcolonial perspective, Uri Cohen suggests that Balak is the inscription of imperialist violence evidenced in the text.⁹ Anne Golomb-Hoffman has also analyzed the story of Balak as an allegory of a “text cut loose”; in Todd Hasak-Lowy’s parallel estimation, it is an allegory of the eruptive potential of vernacular Hebrew.¹⁰

What has remained underanalyzed in this tradition of interpretation is the question of rabies itself.¹¹ According to Avraham Holtz, the answer is simply historical. Approaching the novel as a work of “documentary fiction,” Holtz reasons that Agnon chose to render Balak rabid because, around the end of 1906 or early 1907, directly before the start of the novel’s action (and directly before Agnon’s own immigration to Palestine), there were 70 reports of dog bites in Jerusalem.¹² A look at the Hebrew press from the first half of the twentieth century shows that rabies was a prominent and much-publicized concern in Palestine. In 1933, the Hebrew daily *Doar ha-yom* issued a warning to Jerusalem residents to keep their dogs indoors as part of a citywide rabies alert.¹³ Four years later, 1,140 cats and 1,668 dogs were killed in Tel Aviv out of fear of rabies, and a total of 128 people were reported to have been bitten.¹⁴

Holtz’s historicizing agenda offers vital contextualization and source material for Agnon’s work. At the same time, its reference-finding mission stands at odds with Kurzweil’s assessment of Balak as an allegory that resists singular interpretation. The goal of this article, then, is to add a complementary layer to the novel’s extant critical apparatus. Specifically, it approaches the question of rabies in *Temol shilshom* as a reflection of the sociocultural legacy that has consistently linked this condition to another, namely, melancholia. I will argue that rabies serves as a zoonotic vector of the melancholic aesthetics that

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productively afflict *Temol shilshom*. I begin by briefly sketching out the medico-cultural history of rabies, its etiology and symbols, and its relationship to melancholia. In the second part of the paper, I move on to examine the variety of melancholic symptoms and cultural-historical signifiers that are woven into the action of the novel, its discursive landscape, and the profiles of its major figures. Finally, I conclude by drawing on Sigmund Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" in order to investigate the intersection of melancholia, rabies, and style in Agnon's novel. Rabies and melancholia, as will become clear, are not only conditions thematized by *Temol shilshom*. They are also the stylistic ciphers of the text. To read *Temol shilshom* is not only to learn about Balak's illness or Kumer's demise but also to explore the textual effect of rabid melancholia.

From Rabies to Melancholia

Despite its prominence in *Temol shilshom*, rabies is not a disease commonly associated with Hebrew literature. Unlike tuberculosis (the disease of romantic genius) or malaria (the disease of Zionist labor) or even leprosy (a disease that features prominently in Agnon's oeuvre), rabies makes only rare appearances in the modern Jewish canon.¹⁵ In Russian and European literature, more generally, the specter of the disease looms largest in texts populated by werewolves and vampires, where echoes of rabies—no less than the specter of antisemitism—impinges on the actions and profiles of these supposedly monstrous figures.¹⁶

In contrast to its limited presence as a modern literary subject, rabies bears an extensive medico-cultural history that reaches back to ancient Greece. According to Aristotle, "rabies produces madness, and when rabies develops in all animals that the dog has bitten, except man, it kills them; and this disease kills the dogs too."¹⁷ After Aristotle, Greek and Roman authors such as Pliny, Galen, and Celsus countered that rabies "was caused by a poison"—what Celsus called a "virus"—"which came from the fangs of the mad dog."¹⁸ The idea persisted well into the Middle Ages, when Maimonides described the rabid condition at some length in his *Treatise on Poisons and Their Antidotes*. In writing about the disease, he also identified its extended incubation period and recommended that every effort be made to suck out the poison from the afflicted patient.¹⁹ It would take until the 1880s for Louis Pasteur to create an effective treatment plan for those who had been bitten by a rabid animal—albeit when applied soon after the bite.²⁰

Agnon was well aware of Pasteur's work, which immediately gained international attention. In *Temol shilshom*, Kumer's doctors even advise him to seek treatment at the Pasteur Institute in Egypt.²¹ (The Pasteur Institute for Health, Medicine, and Biology in Palestine would not be founded until 1916, several years after Kumer's fictional death.²²) But Agnon's text also draws on an etiological understanding of rabies distinct from the viral, one that looks back to ancient and medieval humoral sources. According to this theory, the body is governed by four humors—blood, phlegm, yellow or red bile, and black bile. The last is stored in the spleen, which, as the ancient writer Horapollo states, is the “dominant organism of the dog [*beherrscht die Milz den Organismus des Hundes*].” Horapollo explains that “if the spleen should deteriorate ... then the dog is said to lose its vitality and become rabid.”²³ Rabies, accordingly, would become causally linked to a preponderance of black bile. As late as the eighteenth century, physicians across Europe would note that their autopsies revealed rabies victims to be in an atrabiliarious state.²⁴ The narrator in *Temol shilshom* also makes an explicit connection between rabies and black bile at the very moment when Balak first appears to manifest rabid symptoms:

Balak folded his paws and shut his eyes and lay and thought of the same thing all the scholars of all generations are toiling to discover, What are we and what is our life, and are all the sufferings and pains and insults and grief [*ha-tsarot*] that come to us worthwhile for the sake of a little bit of ephemeral pleasure. Especially me, since I don't have even a bit of pleasure, but I do have many pains, and on top of every pain comes an even harder pain. Black bile [*marah shehorah*] overcame him and he wanted to die. But death is wont to come when you don't want it and not to come when you do want it. With so many thoughts, Balak's brain grew weak and his mind was about to go mad....

When he was about to run away, his legs became heavy. Even the spleen that attracts the waste of the black bile [*marah shehorah*] ejected by the liver, to purify the blood, also stopped acting right. Black bile [*marah shehorah*] overcame him and all kinds of evil thoughts were born in him, until he was filled with them and couldn't lift himself up, not to mention run away.²⁵

In this scene, part contemplative reflection, part medical exam, Balak begins to transform physiologically. First he is given the contemplative power of scholars. Then he deploys those skills only to reflect on all of the “pains” in his life. Reflecting on these pains overwhelms him, and his body reacts with an onslaught of black bile and suicidal thoughts.

However, any suicidal impulse he might manifest is precluded by a state of complete enervation. He is physically debilitated. His mind continues to rush. And he is poised to go insane, standing ready “to go mad [*lehitaref*].” On the cusp of becoming fully rabid, Balak assumes an attack position. Yet once again he cannot immediately act on his “evil thoughts,” for he is simply too drained to move.

It is of critical importance that his descent into madness is moderated by a general weakness. Balak does not attack Kumer for pages and instead spends his days struggling to make sense of his grief (*ha-tsarot*). In other words, Agnon’s depiction of Balak’s transformation limns the border of rabies and melancholia. For along with the literal translation “black bile,” the Hebrew term *marah shehorah* connotes the condition of *melancholia*. The term itself derives from the Greek *melaina chole*, also meaning black bile.²⁶ The Greek physician Rufus of Ephesus even claimed that “rabies was a form of melancholia.”²⁷ After all, melancholia was also long considered an affliction determined by an overabundance of black bile produced by the spleen. The connection is central to the scene of Balak’s transformation. Balak experiences not just the onset of rabies but also the classical symptoms of melancholia, such as abiding sadness and suicidal impulses. To return to the question “Why rabies?” the answer now appears to be one of coinfection: to become rabid for Balak is also to become melancholic.

The connection is only further reinforced by its manifestation in the figure of the dog. In his 1914 Hebrew pamphlet *‘Al ha-kalevet* (On Rabies), Aryeh Beham notes that there are many animals that may become infected by or be the vectors of rabies; however, it is most often a bite from a dog or a cat that infects the human species. Emphasizing the prominence of the dog as carrier and agent, Beham adds that the Hebrew term for rabies—*kalevet*—is derived from the Hebrew word for dog—*kelev*.²⁸ In A. M. Masie’s *Dictionary of Medicine and Allied Science*, edited by the Hebrew poet Saul Tchernichowsky, the term for feline rabies is translated as *kalevet ha-hatulim*, what we might liberally translate as “the canine-itis of cats.”²⁹

In addition to serving as the icon of rabies, the dog has historically served as a symbol for melancholia, as in Albrecht Dürer’s iconic engraving *Melancholia I* (1514). Dürer’s piece famously features a slumbering dog at the foot of a female figure (see figure 1). In this position, the dog embodies the state of *acedia*, the combination of idleness and inertia that defines the melancholic.³⁰ Similarly, one finds reference to metaphorical “black dogs” hounding famous figures, such as the depressive Winston Churchill.³¹ The association of the canine with the melancholic was also promulgated across Hebrew literature in the

earthly discomforts.”³² In Agnon’s handling, Balak is confronted with a parallel experience—one marked by a mind on the verge of insanity and a body immobilized by pain and grief. As we will see, these links between the rabid and the melancholic are only the first clues to *Temol shilshom*’s physiological aesthetics.

***Temol shilshom*’s Melancholic Network**

Balak’s descent into madness points toward both the excitement and the lethargy of his melancholia. Indeed, melancholia is a condition with a variety of recognizable if sometimes oppositional symptoms. Melancholia’s “definition fluctuates even in descriptive psychiatry,” asserted Freud in his 1917 essay “Mourning and Melancholia,” and “takes on various clinical forms the grouping together of which into a single unity may not seem to be established with certainty.”³³ What Freud explains here in the language of twentieth-century psychoanalysis, Robert Burton had similarly acknowledged centuries earlier in his 1621 tome *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Ostensibly a medical work, Burton’s ambitious text spends more than eight hundred pages narrating the wide range of symptoms, cures, types, and cultural perceptions of the titular ailment. As Michael O’Connell notes, Burton’s work itself “oscillates between melancholy as a disease and melancholy as a metaphor, or more properly, melancholy as a metonymy of human misery.”³⁴ Long after Burton, if not so long after Freud, *Temol shilshom* would also acknowledge, enter into, and exploit a variety of melancholic discourses. The result is a novel that functions as an ersatz textbook of transhistorical, medieval, and modern perspectives on melancholia. The following sections sketch out three of these considerations, as we delve further into the melancholic landscape of Agnon’s work.

i. Melancholia, Kumer, and the Yiddish Name

If rabies offers the first signpost of melancholia in *Temol shilshom*, it does not take long to find others. Most notably, Agnon inscribes the “severe depression” and “gloominess” characteristic of melancholia in his protagonist’s name: Yitshak Kumer.³⁵ It has been common for scholars to read the name as a Hebrew/Yiddish hybrid. According to this line of interpretation, the character’s first name as well as his violent death connect him to the biblical account of *’akedat Yitshak* (the binding of Isaac) in Genesis 22. Unlike the Genesis narrative, however, there is

no divine command to spare Kumer's life at the end of the story. But if his first name points to biblical sources, his last name points to a more imminent context. Linguistically and geographically, Yitshak's surname identifies him as a Yiddish-speaking *newcomer* to the land of Israel: *kumen*, in Yiddish, means "to come." With this last name, Kumer thus appears always to be in a process of coming and never in the process of arriving, settling, or finding a home. His Yiddish surname repeatedly gestures toward his diasporic origins and to the Yiddish-speaking world of his youth, in contrast to the increasingly insistent Hebrew space of the Yishuv. In Aaron Bar-Adon's formulation, the name presents Yitshak Kumer as an ill-balanced "mixture of light and shadow, of positive and negative . . . half-Hebrew and half Yiddish."³⁶

The shadow cast by the protagonist's name grows even darker when we consider a secondary connotation of the name Kumer. Both in Yiddish (*kumer*) and in German (*Kummer*), the term means "grief," "woe," "misery," or "sorrow." Onomastically, Kumer arrives in Palestine under the sign of melancholia and never chooses to relinquish this mark. He does not, for instance, follow the Zionist custom of fully Hebraicizing his name, as Agnon himself did. After arriving to Palestine, the young author replaced his Slavic-sounding surname Czaczkes with the Hebraic Agnon. The new last name made reference to Agnon's first Hebrew story published in Palestine, "Agunot" (Abandoned Wives), drawing on the Hebrew root meaning "to anchor" or "to be anchored" and indicating that Agnon had connected himself permanently and securely to the Hebrew culture of the land of Israel. Perhaps better known than Agnon is the lexicographer and Hebrew-language zealot Eliezer Ben-Yehudah, who shed his Yiddish surname, Perlman, upon moving to Ottoman Palestine. After dubbing himself "the son of Judah," he proudly declared, "I have been reborn."³⁷

Unlike Agnon and Ben-Yehudah, Kumer does not baptize himself anew upon his arrival in Palestine. His decision to remain Kumer also seems to conflict with the optimism of the novel's opening line, which reads: "Like all our brethren of the Second Aliyah, the bearers of our Salvation, Yitshak Kumer left his country and his homeland and his city and ascended to the Land of Israel to build it from its destruction and to be rebuilt by it [*livnot otah mi-hurbanah u-lehibanot mimenah*]."³⁸ The sentence is an intertextual hallmark of the novel. In the first half, it harks back to Genesis 12:1, where God sets Abram on his path to Canaan, commanding him, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will show thee."³⁹ But unlike the biblical Abram, whose name would be changed to Abraham after making a covenant with God, (Genesis 17:5), Kumer

remains Kumer even after completing his journey to the land of Israel. The opening line also riffs on a well-known Zionist folksong, which declares *anu banu artsah, livnot bah u-lehibanot ba* (we have come to the land to build it and to be rebuilt by it). But once again, Kumer would remain Kumer, never abandoning his diasporically inflected grief. On this point, Walter Benjamin has argued that the act of naming is itself fundamentally melancholic. Since only God can provide a proper name, any human act of naming is already an act of “over naming” and always contains within it “an intimation of mourning” for the creative limitations of humankind.⁴⁰ Agnon makes that melancholic subtext explicit, writing grief into Kumer’s name and not allowing him to relinquish it at any point. As such, Kumer continues to bear a sense of loss—perhaps for eastern Europe, perhaps for Yiddish, or perhaps for the Zionist icon he does not become even after arriving in Palestine.

ii. Melancholia, Love-Sickness, and the *kelev meshuga*’

In the *Yishuv*, Kumer also encounters a society already enveloped in a melancholic mood. Whether in Jaffa or Jerusalem, he finds Jewish society populated by an array of sorrowful characters. *Tsa’ar*, “sadness,” afflicts everyone from Kumer to Kumer’s fiancée Shifra, to Shifra’s mother Rivka, to Kumer’s Jaffa acquaintance Pnina, to a wealthy Bukharan landlord who hires Yitshak in Jerusalem.⁴¹ This network of *tsa’ar* further expands as it becomes discursively linked to an array of synonyms, from the sadness (*’atsivut*) that entwines Kumer to the joy mixed with grief (*tugah*) that arrives in a letter from Shifra’s grandfather, to the depressed (*medukah*) state of the agronomist Yarkoni.⁴² *Temol shilshom* projects a melancholic atmosphere, one determined by the nearly ubiquitous pain, grief, and sadness experienced by its subjects. After Kumer dies, Balak himself becomes “grief-stricken, like someone who has suffered an irreparable loss [*’agmah nafsho, ke-mi she-’avdah lo ’avedah she-einah hozeret*].”⁴³

Balak’s loss is, in fact, irreparable. With Kumer’s death, Balak is never able to understand why the painter chose to label him a *kelev meshuga*’. On that ostensibly ordinary day but fateful day in Jerusalem, an eager dog had approached Kumer just as he was finishing painting a sign for the Bukharan landlord. For some reason, Kumer and the dog were drawn to each other. Looking at the dog, Kumer’s hand began to shake, and in his singular artistic act of the novel (that is, one he was not hired to do), he wrote the word *kelev* on the dog’s back.⁴⁴ “From now on,” he remarked, “folks won’t mistake you, but will know you’re a dog.”

Consider here that Kumer's actions appear to be the opposite of those undertaken by René Magritte in his 1929 painting "The Treachery of Images." Rather than distinguish between a pipe and the image of a pipe, Kumer declares that the word *dog* asserts the "dog"-ness of Balak. The inscription of *kelev* appears to state the obvious. But just as Magritte's painting forces the viewer to consider the disconnect between an object and the representation of the object, so too do Kumer's subsequent comments confound any clear relation between *kelev* and *dog*. Addressing the dog directly, Kumer states, "You won't forget you're a dog either." It is, of course, impossible for the dog to see the words on his back or, for that matter, to read the words. This is the readers' first clue that something is amiss and that, perhaps, the word *kelev* will point to a representational context outside Kumer and the dog's immediate environs. Returning to the text, we read that the dog now refuses to leave Kumer's side, the newfound attention having prompted him to stay. Uncomfortable with the situation, Kumer turns to the dog and asks, "Are you crazy?" Then, with a hand tingling like that of "an artist whose hand approaches his work," Kumer dips his brush in paint and approaches the dog, who looks at him with affection (*himud*). We read: "The brush didn't dry out until the words Crazy Dog were written on the dog's skin [*lo nistapeg ha-makhhol 'ad she-hayah katuv 'al 'oro shel ha-kelev kelev meshuga*]."45

But the phrase *Crazy Dog* does more in the text than brand the animal. As an act of *himud*, the normative distance between human and animal is transgressed, making it possible to read the phrase *kelev meshuga'* as a simile. Kumer writes not just *Crazy Dog* but rather *ke-lev meshuga'*, "like a crazy heart." For many of *Temol shilshom's* critics, the dog represents Kumer's repressed sexual urges.⁴⁶ He inscribes the dog with the phallic paintbrush to substitute for his inability to maintain a sexual relationship with any of his female partners. But rereading the two terms as *ke-lev meshuga'* draws readers into an older, pre-Freudian context and into the world of mad love. In ancient and medieval texts, the symptoms of lovesickness were often compared to those of melancholia. As Peter Toohey has argued, "an attack of lovesickness could not easily be distinguished from an attack of depressive melancholia."⁴⁷ In Jacques Ferrand's 1610 *Treatise on Lovesickness*, for example, the author states that "love or erotic passion is a form of dotage, proceeding from an inordinate desire to enjoy the beloved object, accompanied by fear and sorrow."⁴⁸ Closer to the context of *Temol shilshom*, Agnon himself had examined the link between love, melancholy, and madness—or the *lev* that is *meshuga'*—in his 1935 novel *Sipur pashut* (A Simple Story). There, the protagonist Hirshl Horwitz is sent away

after suffering a depressive breakdown. Trapped in a marriage to the daughter of a well-to-do businessman but still in love with his impoverished cousin, Hirshl is placed under the care of the aptly named Dr. Langsam (Yiddish for “slow”), who recognizes Hirshl’s “meekness, resignation, and sadness [‘*anavah, ve-hakhna‘ah, ve-‘atsivut*]” and patiently supervises the young man’s recovery.⁴⁹ Unlike Hirshl, however, Kumer will not recover after he has been bitten or, more generally, after he sets into motion Balak’s descent into madness. Rather, having written *ke-lev meshuga‘* on the *kelev* who will become *meshuga‘*, Kumer writes himself into a melancholic relationship with Balak.

iii. *Melancholia as Mania*

As Freud would later assert, the “most remarkable characteristic of melancholia” is that it has a “tendency to change round into mania.”⁵⁰ Indeed, this tension between the melancholic and the manic reverberates across *Temol shilshom*. The short distance between the two is implied, as an example, by Kumer’s name. When read in full, Yitshak Kumer becomes nothing less than a multilingual sentence. Half-Hebrew, half-Yiddish, Yitshak Kumer might be rendered as “grief will laugh.” His name, as such, does not bespeak the restorative laughter through tears of Sholem Aleichem. Instead, this grief-stricken cackle harks back to the biblical scenes of Isaac’s birth and childhood. In Genesis 21:6, Isaac’s mother Sarah contends that God must be making a joke of her. After all, it is only through divine intervention that Sarah is able to give birth at such an old age. “All who hear of it,” she says, “will laugh on account of me [*yitshak li*].” The statement, of course, also anticipates her son’s name. Three verses later, the Bible begins to explore the relationship between Isaac and his half brother, Ishmael. The latter, we learn, laughs [*metsahek*] at Isaac, mocking him. As a result, Sarah beseeches Abraham to expel Ishmael and his mother, Hagar, functionally sentencing them to death. The death sentence is only commuted through divine intervention after God hears Ishamel cry.

The laughter encompassed by Yitshak’s name is decidedly not jocular. Instead, it is derisive and condemnatory. Along with a grief-stricken surname, Yitshak Kumer projects the possibility of mockery, the potential for an act of laughter to turn against its subject, and the probability that a figure understood to be melancholic is always on the cusp of becoming manic. In *Temol shilshom*, Balak embodies that transformative potential. For if the initial scene of encounter between Kumer and Balak appears at first more flirtatious than manic, the feeling soon changes. What begins as playful affection turns aggressive as

Kumer kicks Balak, “to make him wander around the city and advertise his deed.”⁵¹ The dog proceeds to spend most of the rest of the novel roaming the streets of Jerusalem, desperately looking for someone to explain to him why all those who see him are frightened. “How Balak’s soul longed for a place of rest,” we read, “but wherever he went, his luck went with him.”⁵² Some people kick him when he shows them affection;⁵³ others throw stones.⁵⁴ He begins to grow ever more agitated, his skin afflicted by rashes and fleas.⁵⁵ His search for relief also grows increasingly frantic as the streets of the Jewish neighborhoods in Jerusalem will not offer him sanctuary.⁵⁶ His heart becomes “bit-ter” and filled with evil thoughts.⁵⁷ And he repeatedly lies in wait for Kumer, seemingly haunting the painter and barking at him whenever the two meet.⁵⁸

Most significantly, after finally biting Kumer, Balak continues on his treacherous path. “Since he had tasted the taste of human flesh,” the narrator tells us, “he went on biting [*kevan she-ta’am ta’am basar adam hayah noshekh ve-holekh*].”⁵⁹ The novel ends with the dog remaining in a manic, rabid attack mode. We also never directly learn of Balak’s death. Rather, his teeth marks come to signal his continued existence. “The dog disappeared,” we read, “but his bites attested [*he’idu*] that he was alive.”⁶⁰ Like Kumer’s own artistic act, Balak’s persists, making its presence known on the bodies of his victims. Long after Kumer dies, as the text implies, Balak is still wandering on his manic, violent quest for clarity and closure.

Melancholy and Style

The various marks of melancholia—grief, lovesickness, and mania—are inscribed at anecdotal junctures, in figures, and in acts across *Temol shilshom*. Balak and Kumer have been caught in and written into a textual network of rabid melancholia, which seems only to expand across a novel that now reads as a medico-cultural handbook. We might reexamine here the scene in which Balak becomes rabid:

Balak folded his paws and shut his eyes and lay and thought of the same thing all the scholars of all generations are toiling to discover, What are we and what is our life, and are all the sufferings and pains and insults and grief [*ha-tsarot*] that come to us worthwhile for the sake of a little bit of ephemeral pleasure. Especially me, since I don’t have even a bit of pleasure, but I do have many pains, and on top of every pain comes an even harder pain. Black bile [*marah shehorah*] overcame him and he

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wanted to die. But death is wont to come when you don't want it and not to come when you do want it. With so many thoughts, Balak's brain grew weak and his mind was about to go mad [*'amdah lehitaref*]. Nevertheless, Balak did not tend to the opinion of the philosophers who say that madness [*tiruf*] comes from black bile [*marah shehorah*] and not from demons [*shedim*], but he did admit their error, that the cause is black bile [*marah shehorah*], and the black bile [*marah shehorah*] itself comes from the demons who inject their venom and give rise to black bile [*marah shehorah*]. There is no doubt that black bile [*marah shehorah*] that clapped him like scabies and bubbled up all over his body came from them, from the demons in the windmill [*beit ha-rehiim*], for as is well known, nothing in the world can endure emptiness, and since the windmill is empty of humans, demons come to take up residence in it. And he didn't know that in the sign of the month of Heshvan [*mazal Marheshvan*] black bile [*ha-marah ha-shehorah*] dominates. Balak began to be frightened and wanted to run away.⁶¹

The scene of Balak's transformation introduces two additional resonances of rabid melancholia. According to the narrator, Balak agrees that madness comes from black bile. What he disagrees with is the source of the black bile, arguing that demons are the cause of its increase. As such, the paragraph also points to the long-standing connection of melancholia to demonic possession—a facet of religious melancholy, as described by Robert Burton.⁶² Centuries earlier, the Babylonian Talmud (*Yoma* 83b) had put forth a similar hypothesis, identifying two sources for rabies: witches or an evil spirit (*ruah ra'ah*).⁶³ Alongside the demonic, the narrator further adds that Balak's transformation takes place in the Hebrew month of Heshvan. Known as *Marheshvan*, or Bitter Heshvan, the month is “characterized by lowliness.”⁶⁴ It is a somber period, one that lacks Jewish holidays and one that is traditionally defined by such events as the beginning of the biblical flood, the death of the matriarch Rachel, and the blinding of Zedekiah, the last king of Judah.⁶⁵

In the end, then, this passage works to add to the growing list of melancholic symbols in the text. At this point, it would be reasonable to argue that the novel repeatedly returns to and promotes these signs to communicate that the entire historical epic described between its covers is a fundamentally melancholic one. This would be in line with evaluating *Temol shilshom* as a stark if lamenting critique of Second Aliyah culture and politics.⁶⁶ I would contend, though, that beyond a historical allegory, the insistent and encumbering presence of so many melancholic symbols points to a writerly concern on the part

of Agnon. More than a thematization of melancholia, *Temol shilshom* manifests the condition as its signature style.

Consider, for example, the text's garrulity, ambivalence, and open-endedness. Freud describes these hallmarks of melancholia in "Mourning and Melancholia," an unnamed intertext of Agnon's work.⁶⁷ Mourning, as Freud explains, is a finite response to the loss of an identifiable object. As such, it is a process that is able to be worked through and that reaches completion. In contrast, melancholia may be a response to a loss, but it is one in which the object that is lost is of "a more ideal kind," such as love. Alternatively, it may not be clear what has been lost. As a form of mourning, melancholia is obsessional and without a clear point of conclusion. Whereas one can "rely on [mourning] being overcome after a lapse of time," one cannot assume the same for melancholy.⁶⁸ Instead, the melancholic continues to dwell on his state and to exhibit his condition through an "insistent communicativeness which finds satisfaction in self-exposure."⁶⁹ The melancholic is verbose, his talkativeness becomes a liability, and his condition is under constant threat of "chang[ing] round into mania."⁷⁰ At the root of this condition, explains Freud, is also a fundamental ambivalence once directed at the now-lost object. Without that object, the melancholic directs that ambivalence toward him- or herself, resulting in a condition that is self-negating, self-injurious, and perpetual.

It is a fundamental ambivalence that we find at the heart of *Temol shilshom*, specifically, its own ambivalence toward melancholia. In the prologue, the narrator tells us that Kumer "was not a melancholy type [*mi-ba'alei ha-marrah ha-shehorah*]," only to add, "but neither was he one of the optimists who relieve their chests of worries [*she-mesim libam mi-daagoteihem*]."⁷¹ This denial of his melancholic predisposition rings hollow as the subsequent clause asserts that worry is a constant presence. The narrator is evidently just as uncomfortable labeling Kumer a melancholic as he is labeling him immune from melancholia. Appearing so early in the narrative, the sentence may be read as a subtle directive to the reader to be on the lookout for melancholic signs. Yet rather than identify something coherent, the reader will be confronted by a surplus of melancholic symbols, each of which begs for in-depth analysis while being complemented and supplanted by another. Recall here once more the scene in which Balak becomes rabid and melancholic. In a single paragraph, the source of his rabid temperament is explained through humoral theory, Jewish folklore, and calendrical-astrological symbols. This is in addition to references throughout the novel to abiding sadness, lovesickness, and

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mania. Ambivalence functions in *Temol shilshom* not to direct attention to a singular lost object, such as an ideal love. Rather, ambivalence manifests itself in the novel as a function of the text's own inability to decide the source and meaning of its melancholic compulsions. There is a loss at the center of *Temol shilshom* that its proliferating melancholic symbols continually point to but never name, a situation that only reinforces the inability of the text to properly work through its grief and overcome its *kumer*.

The result of this ambivalence also hedges toward the injurious, as it results in a text that seems to talk and talk and talk some more. In the scene of Balak's transformation, as elsewhere in the text, the narrative proceeds not through a concision of language but through a surfeit of expression: commas and conjunctions proliferate; sentences begin to run on; the term *marah shehorah* is repeated seven times; and the third-person omniscient narrator is interrupted by free indirect discourse as well as Balak's own thoughts. What this paragraph demonstrates in miniature here bespeaks the larger phenomenon of the text's "insistent communicativeness" as a whole.⁷² For in its entirety, *Temol shilshom* is long, repetitive, and sometimes feels more like narrative bricolage than a linear saga. Historically speaking, this may be the result of reworked text that was created by combining a number of different shorter and longer stories.⁷³ Balak and various other dog narratives were published as stand-alone works before being combined with Kumer's story.⁷⁴ This overflowing text has presented scholars with interpretive and aesthetic problems, as they struggle to define the novel according to a generic category. Is it a bildungsroman? An antibildungsroman? Rather than limit its generic capacity, Boaz Arpali has famously called the text a *rav-roman*, a "multinovel," one that comprises many narratives and many genres simultaneously.⁷⁵ In conversation with Arpali, Dan Miron has suggested that it is precisely Agnon's resistance to a single genre type within *Temol shilshom* that allows his text to stand as a critique of the western European form. As Miron contends, Agnon critiques the European "novel as an 'alien' genre, separated by a fundamental cultural-aesthetic gap from his own work and, likewise, from authentic Jewish literary tradition."⁷⁶ Against the paradigms of any single genre—such as a novel of education or an apologue—Agnon encloses within *Temol shilshom* a multitude of contradictory literary assumptions, communicating via the literary model of argumentative Jewish commentary.⁷⁷ Though Miron's reading is certainly compelling, it also sets itself up for a rather mundane retort: perhaps Agnon's text is not so much a critique of the western European novel as it is simply messy.

To be clear, I do not think that *Temol shilshom* is a messy text so much as one constructed to always appear to be at the point of disassembling or, like Balak, going mad. This is only reinforced by the text's verbosity or what Freud identifies as the melancholic "communicativeness which finds satisfaction in self-exposure."⁷⁸ Melancholics talk endlessly in an attempt to overcome a pathological experience of mourning. By talking, they attempt, if fruitlessly, to find and name that which they have lost. But, like the melancholic whose words pour forth uncontrollably, so too do the words and ideas of *Temol shilshom* seem to overflow their boundaries, struggling to be contained. The text is also aware of its own potential verbosity. At one point in the novel, the narrator famously mocks the multiple attempts of communities around Palestine to interpret the report of a mad dog in Jerusalem. "When the Jerusalem newspapers reached Jaffa," we are told in the prolix, clause-heavy style of the novel, "Jaffa thought that dog was a parable, like Mendele's horse and other stories of livestock and animals and birds which a person reads for pleasure, and if he's intelligent, he applies his intelligence to the moral."⁷⁹ But "when the newspapers of Jerusalem arrived outside the Land, the Jews of Diaspora understood that they said dog only as a euphemism."⁸⁰ The moment might be read as one in which Agnon satirizes the compulsion to interpretation, a metanarrative critique that mocks all of his subsequent readers (including me) who try to interpret the allegory of the rabid dog. "The historian," the narrator notes further, "will have to conduct an exhaustive study to determine where the adventures of human beings end and the adventures of dogs begin."⁸¹ I would add that the recognition of the multiple interpretive possibilities and the near-endless discussions that the novel has elicited are part and parcel of the melancholic loquaciousness of the text. *Temol shilshom* anticipates and induces a similarly insistent garrulity—and, by extension, melancholia—on the part of the critic whom it satirizes. Any possibility for a consistent or coherent interpretation of the novel is itself willfully and irreparably lost.

As indicated at the conclusion of the novel, this communicative compulsion also will not cease. After Balak bites Kumer, the dog continues on his violent path. Eventually, Kumer dies and is buried. Then it begins to rain, and the land begins to bloom again. After hundreds of pages detailing the drought afflicting Jerusalem, the rains offer relief and, arguably, closure. But any sense of closure is soon negated. The final lines of the novel read as follows:

Our comrade [Kumer] wasn't blessed to stand on the ground and plow and sow, but like his ancestor Reb Yudel Hasid and like some other Saints



and Hasids, he was blessed to be given an estate of a grave in the holy earth. May all mourners mourn for that tortured man who dies in a sorry affair [*yitabelu kol ha-mitabelim 'al me'uneh zeh she-met be-'inyan ra*]. And we shall tell [*ve-anahnu nesaper*] the deeds of our brothers and sisters, the children of the living God, the nation of the Lord, who work the earth of Israel for a monument and fame and glory.

Completed are the deeds of Yitshak.

The deeds of our other comrades

The men and the women

Will come in the book *A Parcel of Land* [*Helkat ha-sadeh*].⁸²

This final scene announces a state of mourning that will never be complete, the command to mourn appearing always as a future endeavor. For even if readers are told what precisely has been lost (namely, Kumer), the deferral of mourning into the future prevents them from beginning and, by extension, completing the process. As such, the command to mourn actually serves to induce melancholia.

Although it is given in the third person, the command also follows shortly on the narrator's invocation of the first-person plural. It is *our* comrade Kumer who dies. This move erases the boundaries of text and reader, implicating Agnon's audience in the constantly expanding melancholic web of *Temol shilshom*. The perpetuity of the mourning process is also highlighted by the scene's insistence on positioning Kumer as the inheritor and ancestor of other literary works. The narrator reminds readers that Kumer is the descendant of Reb Yudel Hasid, the protagonist of Agnon's 1931 novel, *The Bridal Canopy*. Similarly, Kumer may be dead, but the longer arc of his narrative will continue in *A Parcel of Land*, a text that Agnon would not write.⁸³ With these lines, Agnon taunts his readers with the specter of a conclusion but ultimately leaves his text and audience reflecting on—and arguably in—an induced state of never-ending melancholia. Kumer's death does not bring closure so much as it reminds readers of a persistent sense of loss constitutive of Agnon's literary project writ large.

Conclusion

Considering how often *Temol shilshom* is lauded as a masterpiece, it might also be argued that the novel as a whole reflects one additional cultural connotation of melancholia—the link between the disease and artistic genius. “Why is it that all those men who have become

extraordinary in philosophy, politics, poetry or the arts are obviously melancholic?” asked Aristotle, forever linking melancholia with creative pursuits.⁸⁴ In this reading, the novel would be the pathological reflection of Agnon’s own melancholic pose, one overtly recognized in the romantic if gloomy title, *Only Yesterday*. But as I have argued, *Temol shilshom* should be read as more than a mirror held up to Agnon’s face, no matter how disappointed in, critical of, or laudatory toward the Zionist settlement of Palestine he was. Rather, with a nod to Aristotle, I have suggested that we approach *Temol shilshom* as a work that thematizes precisely the potential of melancholic writing.

As such, this essay argues for a need to reassess Agnon’s larger oeuvre from the point of view of the physiological aesthetics of disease. The melancholic perspective disrupts and complements other paradigms ascribed to Agnon’s work. Scholars of Agnon’s literary style often focus on the intertextual quality of his work. Agnon’s work demonstrates his knowledge, flexibility, and engaged relationship with Jewish textual traditions from across the ages in arguably a more dynamic form than any other modern Hebrew writer. From the Bible to the midrash, from the Talmud to Kabbalah, from maskilic Hebrew writing to contemporary Yiddish prose, Agnon’s work offers a masterclass in Jewish canonical and noncanonical writing. In light of this rereading of *Temol shilshom*, might we reapproach this style in all its garrulity and surfeit of interpretive lines as similarly melancholic? Does the overreferentiality of his work point us toward the melancholic openendedness of his literary project or to the irreparable loss of liturgical Jewish literacy in secular Hebrew society? To that end, when Stephen Katz examines Agnon’s “centripetal novels”—those that “possess a structure which forever leaves them as open novels”—might he not also be identifying the melancholic texts constituting Agnon’s oeuvre?⁸⁵ With Katz in mind, can we examine Agnon’s novels not for their centripetal or centrifugal form but for their melancholic or antimelancholic organizing structures?

For with melancholia as analytic prism, Agnon’s work engages a series of challenges concerning the capacity of illness to participate exegetically, artistically, and formally. More germane to the article at hand, an insistence on the melancholic focus of *Temol shilshom* points to the dangers involved in linking pathology and writing. It is here that we must return to the problem outlined at the beginning of this essay concerning the reason behind Agnon’s decision to render Balak rabid. As indicated above, rabies is one overt sign that directs readers to examine the complementary, atrabilious concerns of the novel. But more than a signpost, the disease points to the devastating capacity of a melancholic

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text. The *kelev meshuga*, after all, attacks Kumer. Melancholia is a mode, argues *Temol shilshom*, that will ultimately bite back.

For running through the disjointed, verbose, and generically confounding novel is a dog who demonstrates text- and world-destroying potential. As such, *Temol shilshom* stands as an experiment in Agnon's oeuvre: it delves deeply into the cultural history of melancholia; it identifies the stylistic potential of the illness; but, ultimately, it recognizes the condition as devastating and fatal. Melancholia may be *necessary*, Derrida teaches.⁸⁶ But, as *Temol shilshom* counters, it is also treacherous. The challenge for Agnon's readers and critics, therefore, is to articulate the subject and style of the novel without contracting the melancholic symptoms of the text itself. To do so requires a distance and disinterest that the text repeatedly resists. It is, after all, *our* comrade Kumer who is mortally wounded by Balak's bite. And, if the voluminous critical apparatus surrounding the text tells us anything, it is that diagnosing melancholia and assuming its obsessional, verbose, and closureless form are inseparable. *Temol shilshom* stands as both the evidence of and the warning against rabid-melancholic prose—work that is simultaneously productive, affective, and injurious.

Notes

My thanks extend to Ilana Pardes, Ofer Dynes, Sam Spinner, and Adam Stern for commenting on earlier iterations of this project.

- 1 Throughout this article, I draw on the English translation of *Temol shilshom* by Barbara Harshav: S. Y. Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, trans. Barbara Harshav (Princeton, 2000). However, unlike Harshav, I have rendered the name of Agnon's protagonist as Yitshak rather than Isaac. All references to the Hebrew are to S. Y. Agnon, *Temol shilshom* (Tel Aviv, 2008).
- 2 On the less successful nature of the novel, see Shlomo Tsemah, *Shetei ha-mezuzot* (Ramat-Gan, 1965), 137.
- 3 Baruch Kurzweil, *Masot 'al sipurei shel Shai Agnon* (Jerusalem, 1966), 103.
- 4 Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, 303; idem, *Temol shilshom*, 223.
- 5 Baruch Kurzweil to S. Y. Agnon, Jan 23, 1946, in *Kurtsvail, 'Agnon, Uri Tsevi Grinberg: Hilufe'i iggerot*, ed. Liliyan Dabby-Gouri (Ramat-Gan, 1987), 18.
- 6 Amos Oz, *Shetikat ha-shamayim: 'Agnon mishtomem 'al Elohim* (Jerusalem, 1993), 182; Michal Arbel, *Katuv 'al 'oro shel ha-kelev: 'Al tefisat ha-yetsirah etsel Shai 'Agnon* (Jerusalem, 2006), 103.

- 7 As summarized by Ilana Pardes, *Agnon's Moonstruck Lovers: The Song of Songs in Israeli Culture* (Seattle, 2013), 10. For Miron's work, see Dan Miron, "Bein shetei neshamot: Ha-analogiyah ha-faustit bi-Temol shilshom le-Shai 'Agnon," in *Mi-Vilna li-Yerushalayim: Mehkarim be-toledoteihem uve-tarbutan shel yehudei mizrah Eyropah mugashim le-profesor Shmuel Verses*, ed. David Assaf et al. (Jerusalem, 2002), 549–608.
- 8 Pardes, *Agnon's Moonstruck Lovers*, 10–11.
- 9 Uri S. Cohen, "Only Yesterday: A Hebrew Dog and Colonial Dynamics in Pre-Mandate Palestine," in *A Jew's Best Friend? The Image of the Dog throughout Jewish History*, ed. Phillip Ackerman-Lieberman and Rakefet Zalashik (Brighton, 2013), 156–78; see also the work of Alon Hilo, "Sipuro shel kelev shahid," *Ho* 4 (2006): 54–66.
- 10 Anne Golomb Hoffman, *Between Exile and Return: S. Y. Agnon and the Drama of Writing* (Albany, N.Y., 1991), 8; Todd Hasak-Lowy, "A Mad Dog's Attack on Secularized Hebrew: Rethinking Agnon's *Temol shilshom*," *Prooftexts* 24, no. 2 (2004): 167–98.
- 11 An exception to this rule is the recent work of Noam Pines, *The Infrahuman: Animality in Modern Jewish Literature* (Albany, N.Y., 2018). Of concern for Pines is the relationship between animality and the becoming rabid of Kumer (and others).
- 12 Avraham Holtz and Toby Berger Holtz, "S. Y. Agnon's *T'mol Shilshom* as a Medical Record," *Korot* 14 (2000): 273, 278.
- 13 "Kalevet," *Doar ha-yom*, Aug. 25, 1933, p. 4.
- 14 "Ha-milhamah ba-kalevet," *Yedi'ot Tel Aviv* 8, no. 5–6 (1937): 130.
- 15 In Yiddish literature, for example, mostly one finds various characters insulting each other with the invective *meshugener hunt* (crazy or rabid dog). Agnon famously thematizes leprosy in his 1954 short story "Ad 'olam," rendered in English as "Forevermore." See S. Y. Agnon, "'Ad 'olam," in *Ha-esh veba-etsim* (Jerusalem, 1998), 255–69.
- 16 On reading the figure of the werewolf as an antisemitic figure, see Peter Arnds, *Lycanthropy in German Literature* (Basingstoke, 2015), 69–96. For a discussion of the relations of the figures of the Jew and the vampire, see Carol Davison, *Anti-Semitism and British Gothic Literature* (New York, 2004), esp. 87–157.
- 17 Aristotle, *History of Animals, Volume III: Books 7–10*, ed. and trans. D. M. Balme (Cambridge, Mass., 1991), 182–83.
- 18 As cited in John Douglas Blaisdell, "A Frightful, but Not Necessarily Fatal, Madness: Rabies in Eighteenth-Century England and English North America" (Ph.D. diss., Iowa State University, 1995), 15, 17.
- 19 Moses Maimonides, *On Poisons and the Protection against Lethal Drugs: A Parallel Arabic-English Edition*, ed. Gerrit Bos, trans. Michael R. McVaugh (Provo, Utah, 2009), 35–36.
- 20 Bill Wasik and Monika Murphy, *Rabid: A Cultural History of the World's Most Diabolical Virus* (New York, 2012), 128–44.
- 21 Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, 640; idem, *Temol shilshom*, 463.

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- 22 For a history of the Pasteur Institute in Palestine, see Nadav Davidovitch and Rakefet Zalashik, "Pasteur in Palestine: The Politics of the Laboratory," *Science in Context* 23, no. 4 (2010): 402.
- 23 Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (New York, 2009), 142. Horapollo is unnamed in Benjamin's text. Benjamin himself cites Carl Giehlow, "Dürers Stich 'Melancholia I' und der maximilianische Humanistenkreis: Part V," *Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für vervielfältigende Kunst* 4, no. 4 (1904): 72.
- 24 Blaisdell, "Frightful, but Not Necessarily Fatal, Madness," 36.
- 25 Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, 608–9; idem, *Temol shilshom*, 440–41; translation modified.
- 26 For just one source, see Martin Middeke and Christina Wald, "Melancholia as a Sense of Loss: An Introduction," in *The Literature of Melancholia: Early Modern to Postmodern*, ed. Martin Middeke and Christina Wald (New York, 2011), 3.
- 27 Rufus of Ephesus, *On Melancholy*, ed. Peter E. Pormann (Tübingen, 2008), 41. This fragment from Rufus's work is quoted from Paul Aegina's *Seven Books of Medicine*.
- 28 Aryeh Beham, *'Al ha-kalevet: O, mahalat he-hayot ha-shotot* (Jerusalem, 1914), 6.
- 29 A. M. Masie, "Rabies," in *Dictionary of Medicine and Allied Sciences: Latin-English-Hebrew*, ed. Saul Tchernichowsky (Jerusalem, 1934).
- 30 Cassian, "Accidie," in *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva*, ed. Jennifer Radden (Oxford, 2000), 69–74. Radden's explanatory introduction to the selection is especially helpful.
- 31 For just one example in the popular press, see John Gray, "A Point of View: Churchill, Chance, and the 'Black Dog,'" *BBC News*, Sept. 23, 2011, <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-15033046>.
- 32 Noam Pines, "The Love of a Dog: Melancholia in David Vogel's *Before the Dark Gate*," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 23 (2016): 184.
- 33 Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, 23 vols. (London, 1957), 14: 243.
- 34 As quoted by Douglas Trevor, *The Poetics of Melancholy in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, Engl., 2004), 117.
- 35 "Melancholia, n.," *OED Online*, accessed Jan. 24, 2018, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/115994>.
- 36 Aaron Bar-Adon, "S. Y. Agnon and the Revival of Modern Hebrew," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 14, no. 1 (1972): 149.
- 37 On Zionist naming practices as well as Ben-Yehuda's declaration, see Naomi Seidman, "Lawless Attachments, One-Night Stands: The Sexual Politics of the Hebrew-Yiddish Language War," in *Jews and Other Differences: The New Jewish Cultural Studies*, ed. Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin (Minneapolis, 1997), 293.
- 38 Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, 3; idem, *Temol shilshom*, 5.

- 39 I have drawn on the Jewish Publication Society's 1917 translation.
- 40 Walter Benjamin, "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913–1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge, Mass., 1996), 73.
- 41 On Kumer, see Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, 627; idem, *Temol shilshom*, 453; on Shifra, see Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, 440; idem, *Temol shilshom*, 319; on Rivka, see Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, 588; idem, *Temol shilshom*, 426; on Pnina, see Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, 184; idem, *Temol shilshom*, 138; and on the Bukharan landlord, see Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, 285; idem, *Temol shilshom*, 210.
- 42 On 'atsivut, see Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, 540; idem, *Temol shilshom*, 390; on tugah, see Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, 577; idem, *Temol shilshom*, 308; and on medukah, see Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, 425; idem, *Temol shilshom*, 308.
- 43 Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, 611; idem, *Temol shilshom*, 442; translation modified.
- 44 On this being Kumer's first artistic act, see Arbel, *Katuv 'al 'oro shel ha-kelev*, 202.
- 45 Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, 287; idem, *Temol shilshom*, 21.
- 46 See n. 6, above.
- 47 Peter Toohey, "Love, Lovesickness, and Melancholy," *Illinois Classical Studies* 17 (1992): 266.
- 48 As quoted in Marion A. Wells, *The Secret Wound: Love-Melancholy and Early Modern Romance* (Stanford, 2006), 2.
- 49 S. Y. Agnon, *Sipur pashut* (Jerusalem, 1993), 150. I follow the translation of Hillel Halkin. See S. Y. Agnon, *A Simple Story*, trans. Hillel Halkin (New York, 1985), 178.
- 50 Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 253.
- 51 Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, 287; idem, *Temol shilshom*, 211.
- 52 Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, 593; idem, *Temol shilshom*, 429.
- 53 Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, 325; idem, *Temol shilshom*, 238.
- 54 Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, 485; idem, *Temol shilshom*, 351.
- 55 Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, 297; idem, *Temol shilshom*, 218.
- 56 He finds momentary relief first among the Christian communities of Jerusalem, for, as the narrator explains, they could not read the Hebrew on his back. Later, Balak finds brief respite in a monastery. Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, 295, 601; idem, *Temol shilshom*, 216–17, 435.
- 57 Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, 566; idem, *Temol shilshom*, 409.
- 58 Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, 566; idem, *Temol shilshom*, 409.
- 59 Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, 640; idem, *Temol shilshom*, 464.
- 60 Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, 640; idem, *Temol shilshom*, 464; translation modified.
- 61 Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, 608–9; idem, *Temol shilshom*, 440–41.
- 62 For a discussion of Burton on the connection between madness, melancholy, and the demonic, see Philip C. Almond, *Demonic Possession*

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- and Exorcism in Early Modern England: Contemporary Texts and Their Cultural Contexts* (Cambridge, Engl., 2004), 6. The demonic implications of the condition are also key to Noam Pines's analysis of the book. As Pines explains, "demonic bestiality" of animals "does away with meaning altogether." It is precisely the erasure of meaning that so frustrates Balak. See Pines, *Infrahuman*, 113–16.
- 63 Avraham Holtz and Toby Berger Holtz also turn to b. *Yoma* 83b, to a section in which the rabbis narrated the symptoms of a rabid dog. "Without citing this reference," they claim, "Agnon relies on the reader to recognize that this is the Talmudic description applied to Balaq." Holtz and Holtz, "S. Y. Agnon's *T'mol Shilshom* as a Medical Record," 277.
- 64 Gad Erlanger, *Signs of the Times: The Zodiac in Jewish Tradition* (New York, 2000), 145.
- 65 *Ibid.*, 147.
- 66 For an analysis of the melancholic politics and perspectives that attend Hebrew writing of this generation, with a focus on the work, poetics, and critical potential of Israel Zarchi, see Nitzan Lebovic, *Tsiyonut u-melanholiya: Ha-hayim ha-ketsarim shel Yisrael Zarchi* (Jerusalem, 2015).
- 67 As scholars have demonstrated, Agnon was intimately familiar with the psychoanalytic establishment both within and beyond Jerusalem; his wife was a patient of the analyst Max Eitingon, and he read Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* as early as 1930. Arbel, *Katuv 'al 'oro shel ha-kelev*, 153–54; Eran J. Rolnik, *Freud in Zion: Psychoanalysis and the Making of Modern Jewish Identity* (London, 2012), 200–202.
- 68 Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 244.
- 69 *Ibid.*, 247.
- 70 *Ibid.*, 253.
- 71 Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, 25–26; *idem*, *Temol shilshom*, 22; translation modified.
- 72 Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 247.
- 73 Sarah Hagar, "'Temol shilshom': Hithavut ha-mivneh ve-ahduto," in *Shai Agnon: mehekarim u-teudot*, ed. Gershon Shaked and Raphael Weiser (Jerusalem, 1978), 154–93.
- 74 *Ibid.*, 156.
- 75 Boaz Arpali, *Rav roman: Hamishah maamarim 'al Temol shilshom le-Shai Agnon* (Tel Aviv, 1998).
- 76 Dan Miron, "Domesticating a Foreign Genre: Agnon's Transactions with the Novel," *Prooftexts* 7 (1987): 19.
- 77 Dan Miron, "Mi-mashal le-sipurei toali: Petihah ve-diyun bi-Temol shilshom," in *Kovets 'Agnon*, ed. Emunah Yaron et al., 2 vols. (Jerusalem, 2000), 2: 117, 131.
- 78 Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 247.
- 79 Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, 485; *idem*, *Temol shilshom*, 351.
- 80 The Hebrew translated here as "euphemism" is *leshaber et ha-ozen*, literally "to shatter the ear." In short, the newspapers outside of Palestine read

the dog as a symbol of the distribution of charity donated by Jews living outside Palestine to those living there. Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, 488; idem, *Temol shilshom*, 353.

- 81 Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, 498; idem, *Temol shilshom*, 360.
- 82 Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, 642; idem, *Temol shilshom*, 465.
- 83 Agnon, in fact, drafted an epilogue for *Temol shilshom*. The short text was found in his archive and offered an all-too- neat conclusion to the novel. In this final scene of four paragraphs, readers learn that Shifra has a baby named Yehudit (“Jewess”) after Kumer dies. Yehudit falls in love with Gidon, who, unbeknownst to her, is Sonia’s son. In the penultimate paragraph, for no clear reason, Sonia (who is now a farmhand) begins to think about Kumer and falls asleep dreaming about him. The final paragraph offers a reflection on the category of destiny, explaining that some souls find their portion of love in the world. Others pass on their allotment to their children only after they have died. The epilogue offers a decidedly optimistic vision of the Jewish settlement in Palestine that is at odds with the published version of *Temol shilshom*. The next generation seems to have brushed off all the concerns, critiques, and social problems of their parents’ generation. This level of self-satisfied closure is directly resisted in the published and willfully melancholic ending of *Temol shilshom*. For the archival document, see S. Y. Agnon, “Epilog li-‘Temol shilshom,” *Moznayim* 32, no. 3 (1917): 212–13. For an analysis of the text, see Gershon Shaked, “Helkat ha-sadeh ha-netushah: Hearot ahadot le-epilog mushmat,” *Moznayim* 32, no. 3 (1971): 213–15.
- 84 Aristotle, *Problems*, ed. and trans. Robert Mayhew and David C. Mirhady (Cambridge, Mass., 2011), 276–77.
- 85 Stephen Katz, *The Centrifugal Novel: S. Y. Agnon’s Poetics of Composition* (Madison, N.J., 1999), 27.
- 86 As quoted in George Bennington, *Not Half No End: Militantly Melancholic Essays in Memory of Jacques Derrida* (Edinburgh, 2010), 39.

[25]

*Rabid
Reading*

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