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JAFFA VS JERUSALEM
ON THE MEANING OF THE SOCIAL-IDEOLOGICAL COMPOSITION
OF *TEMOL SHILSHOM* (ONLY YESTERDAY) OR AGNON
PROPHESES THE FUTURE OF THE ISRAELI SOCIETY

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The description of *Temol Shilshom* (TS) as an ideological-social “geometric structure” that Jaffa and Jerusalem are its two contrasting poles, is well known and accepted in criticism. The centrality of Jaffa-Jerusalem polarity in the spatial and linear structure of TS is indeed indubitable, and the critics have well motivated it in several ways. Nevertheless, it seems to me that this organization of the novel is neither obvious nor self-explanatory and that perhaps nothing has been written on its central significance.

The Jaffa—Jerusalem centrality in the novel seems problematic from three aspects: the formation of the social world in itself, the historic background of the novel, and lastly—the ideology of its implied author. From the *first* aspect I would argue that the contrasting organization might be perceived—and in isolation indeed it is—as oversimplified or superficial, since apparently it imposes two ideological options both limited and somewhat extreme, on a world that otherwise Manifest itself as much more complex and heterogeneous.

From the *second* aspect, I would argue that in relation to the historical period represented in the novel as well as the period during which it was written and published, this organization, seems anachronistic. Throughout this entire period never had the orthodox community in the land of Israel (*baYishuv haYasban*) occupied a status that could justify its position as an ideological counter-balance to secular Zionism or non-ideological modern life in a city like Jaffa. From the *third* aspect, I would argue that by setting this polarity in the seemingly social-ideological center of the novel and lead his hero to choose, or to be torn between Jaffa and Jerusalem, Agnon in fact, distracts the reader’s attention from what was to be, the ideological center of that world—the materialisation of Zionism in the Land of Israel. Both Jaffa and Jerusalem are conceived and presented in the novel as entities beside Zionist fulfilment or even—Jerusalem in particular—opposed to it. Out of these three contradictory aspects that lead to the conclusion that the meaning of this organization of the novel is not realistic or historical but mainly symbolic and spiritual—I will focus my lecture on the third aspect—the contrast between the centrality of Jaffa and Jerusalem in the novel on the one hand and the ideology of the implied author within it, on the other.

I will begin with a short survey of that ideology, then continue with a description of the presentation of the two towns in the novel, and in conclusion,

will propose, on the basis of these contrasts, the meaning of this presentation for the novel as a whole.

My thesis is that by positing Jaffa and Jerusalem, which apparently occupy a place *outside* the central Zionist activity, as central co-ordinates in the representation of the social space of the novel and as alternative lifestyles that the hero struggles between, Agnon points to contrasts or conflicts *within* Zionism itself—contrasts and conflicts whose significance reaches far beyond the historical background of the novel.

Agnon's ideology, as the author of TS, can be described as "synthetic Zionism," a Zionism that aspires to combine both its secular-revolutionary aspects as well as its traditional-religious aspects. Deep appreciation of the active minority of Zionist, "our brothers in redemption"—the workmen who are conquerors of labour, and the settlers who are conquerors of the land and builders of the country—who are for the most part secular—is a characteristic mark throughout the novel. Agnon presents them as a living example for the generations to come and all the immigrants who people the novel are measured and challenged by it. Significantly, throughout the novel Agnon reveals sympathy and empathy towards the agony of the settlers, denouncing those who are held responsible for that agony. He even explicitly declares the historical rights the settlers have justly earned and further validated through their ability to neglect their personal welfare in favour of the general interests of the nation and the land, and to act upon the Love of Israel and of Erez Israel even towards farmers who have caused them "great evil and disgrace" (TS, 60, 44–64).¹

Yet he speaks more vigorously in praise of the "true-lovers of the land," the people of Ein Ganim, "which is the first *moshav* for Hebrew workmen in Israel who acquired their place by their labour," "a living and faithful evidence of the possibility of our existence in Israel" (168–173). The "Love of the Country and the Love of Labour" are definitely the ideological focal points that govern the author and the novel. They serve as the criteria for the judgement of those who take the name of Zionism in vain, and the source of all guilt complexes, "our own fault that we came to work the land and didn't," filling the souls of those that could not fulfil or live up to their Zionist commitments.

On the other hand, the implied author of TS, without this fact ever affecting his personal support of Zionism, is a religious Jew, whose sympathy is naturally aimed towards righteous men who live by their faith. He is a Jew who does not and cannot accept the abandonment of the religious way of life and the abstinence from practising of the commandments. This view is implicit in many places in the novel and is presented explicitly in some of them. "We all seek the good," the narrator says of the pioneers of the second *Aliya*, "but the good we seek is not the true goodness. This needs explanation and I will try to explain," and from his words it is clear that the true good is practice of precepts and good deeds commanded by the Torah. The narrator explains how and why the new generation released itself from religious duties but maintains a view that this shift is faulty and its motivations idle (263–264). Agnon does not conceal his

view that the attempts of "our friends" to rescue and adopt, out of the ruins of tradition, its moral values (a "good heart and love of kindness or righteousness") on the one hand, and its emotional-aesthetic features ("[religious] yearnings," Chassidic melodies, stories) on the other—is bound to fail. The feeling of holiness, "the light of heavenly grace" might fill the secular Jewish' heart, but they cannot exist for more than a short time without a positive religious mode of life containing prayer, Torah learning and maintenance of its commandments (163 ff., 264 ff., 399, 590). Agnon's position in this matter is, to use Bialik's phrasing, that "Agada" is insubstantial without "Halacha."

Agnon's tendency to combine these two positions—the adoration of secular Zionist implementation on the one hand and the clinging to faith and the religious life style on the other manifests itself also in his Zionist broadmindedness. Historically, he remembers that the rebuilding of the land of Israel in the new age did not commence with the Second *Aliya* and he continuously depicts the labour and suffering of the First *Aliya*, comparing the pioneers of the Second *Aliya* to their predecessors (45, 170, 192–193, 498–500). Alongside the detailed and concrete description of the negative behavior of the farmers of the *Moshavot* towards the Hebrew workers of the Second *Aliya*, Agnon reminds us of their devotion and sacrifice for Zionism in the past. Without forgiving the "sins of Jerusalem" at the present of the narrative, he speaks in favour of the people of Jerusalem who built in the past the quarters outside the walls and expanded the Jewish settlement in the city and its outskirts. He even speaks (historically) in praise of the *Haluqa*, in contradiction to the attitude against it, of Zionist circles at that time (33, 198–200, 202–203, 237, 232, 381).

Moreover, in spite of Agnon's obvious esteem towards the *Halutzim*, the active Zionists, who built the land, he does not abstain from discovering merits in workmen and craftsmen who live in the city as well as in men of property, bankers and professionals, who all participate, each in his own way, in building the country. His treatment of artists and craftsmen in Jerusalem and of workmen in Jaffa is generally positive (44, 88, 108, 218, 219, 259–261, 388–389, 427–441, 451–455). This broad viewpoint is foregrounded especially in the description of the establishment of Achuzat-Bayit, soon to become Tel Aviv. Agnon does not hesitate to apprehend the importance of the establishment of the first Hebrew city and of the urban activity in building and trade in general, as a fundamental layer in the whole of the Zionist enterprise. Moreover, even in the building of the most secular of cities—Tel-Aviv—Agnon discovers the hand of the creator, the eternal god (388, 437–441, 455 etc.).

It seems that Agnon activates a very simple and general criterion of value, according to which he examines and judges ideas and deeds within the national-ideological dimension: everything that contributes to the growth, development and strengthening of Jewish life in the land of Israel is usually positive, whereas what harms or narrows it, is grasped as negative, no matter its ideological origin.

Within this combined view, the "land of Israel" is the key concept: the first reason is the parallel place of importance it has both in religious tradition and in Zionist ideology. The second reason is that the land of Israel is the touchstone that distinguishes between "verbal" Zionists that remain abroad and those who

¹ All the references are to Agnon, S. Y. 1979. *Temol Shilshom*. Tel Aviv: Shoken Publishing House.

come to Zion in body, between real "faithfuls of the land" and others, who talk about it, but are occupied mostly in the building of themselves.

Agnon's attempt to combine the religious point of view on the land of Israel with the secular acts that fulfil it, is foregrounded especially in the description of the settlers of Ein Ganim as a community of "hidden righteous persons," a description which combines traditional Jewish values with new Zionist ones. The Utopistic view of Zionism as a combination of religious precept and Zionist actions also sets itself forward in the author's treatment of some of the minor characters, who combine in their personal life both the Zionist and the religious dimensions (Menachem Haomed, Zerah Barnet, Malkov and others). And of course in the recurring connection between Yizchak Kummer and his great-grandfather, Rabbi Yudil Hassid and in many other matters.

I hope that there is no need to emphasise now the contrast I have already noted, between the ideology described so far, and the powerful Jaffa-Jerusalem bipolarity that Agnon made so central to the structure of his novel. It is clear that this bipolarity serve first of all as a reminder that the harmonious combination of the traditional-religious and the secular-revolutionary in Zionism, that the author would have so much wanted to be realised, is nothing but a Utopia, a wish-of heart that might perhaps materialise in the life and thought of individuals, but is extremely problematic, perhaps even impossible, in the collective domain of the regenerating land of Israel. Let us now look schematically and briefly at this bipolarity.

Jaffa of TS is a secular city, earthly, physical and erotic. A city of individuals, bearing no social or distinguishable class barriers. Life in this city, takes place entirely in the present and is constantly emerging. The town is full of newcomers, casual immigrants and converts, workers, politicians and writers, clerks and contractors, all mingling with each other and involved in each others' lives. Even though some of them regard themselves as laying the foundations for a new culture in the land of their fathers, one can easily conclude that this self-view is probably unreliable—Jaffa as we know, is built on sand. The city is full of beginnings, ambitions, fresh starts, and initiatives which contain, as expected, an amount of superficiality and ludicrousness, arrogance and an unjustified sense of self-importance. Many of the manifestations of life in the town are portrayed as false attempts to cover feelings of solitude and orphanhood that bother people who have severed themselves from their traditional homes and lifestyle but have not yet found new alternative for them (book one, chaps. 8, 9; book three, chaps. 5-9).

Unlike Jaffa which is an heterogenic city, "Jerusalem" of TS is dualistic—an unsettled, unlinked combination of "high roof" and "deep pit," of the celestial and the earthly. The Celestial Jerusalem does not exist in reality, only in the belief and aspirations of the religious people, as also in the nostalgia of secular people with a religious soul. It is sometimes revealed at night, when its "sweet darkness" covers the poverty, distress and filth of its real streets, or at dusk when the spectacular landscapes of sunset and the cool wind enable one to forget the hardships of the day. And also on Friday nights and Saturdays when the streets are empty and melodies of prayer and the study of Torah ascend from

the synagogues. The Celestial Jerusalem is a city with historical depth, a city of holiness and eternity which God's keeps his eyes forever on. Earthly Jerusalem in contrast is a threatening city, a city of rocky ground and dust, full of dirt and litter, carcasses of reptiles and animals are scattered all over its streets. A city of tombs, diseases, poor people, cripples and other deformed persons (189, 192, 202, 204, 206, 210, 222, 261-263, 267, 331, 326, 333-334, 347, 349-350, 396-397, 490, 510-511, 557-559). Its portrait in the novel is shaped for the most part, by the old orthodox community who conduct a life full of gossip, intrigues over the money of the *Haluqa*, bans and excommunications, pettiness and hypocrisy; a life that is governed by paralysed religious norms based apparently on the Halacha and ruled by self appointed officials and fanatics who do for themselves under the guise of fighting in the name of the Torah for the holiness of Jerusalem (323, 325, 481-490, 511).

The social and cultural world of the Jerusalem's orthodox community (Mea Shearim) is represented by two of its leaders—Rabbi Feish, an extreme fanatic, a pursuer of power, who rules this world through excommunications and bans (311, 315-318, 394-395, 517-519), and Rabbi Gronam Yakum Purkan, the preacher, an extreme hypocrite, a specialist in religious demagoguery (277, 304, 306, 307). Both of them embody in many ways and from different angles the moral deterioration and the stagnation of life in that world.

There are among the orthodox in Jerusalem those who conduct a life of true faith and true love of Jerusalem, who sacrifice their personal convenience in earthly Jerusalem for celestial Jerusalem. Agnon does not ignore their personal traits but it is clear even to him that their ways do not and cannot set an example for the majority who cannot and would not pay the price these individuals are paying for ignoring the concrete dimensions necessary for existence in the earthly Jerusalem.

By its landscapes and lifestyle, Jerusalem is depicted as a city covered with dust where each and every house resembles a pile of dust, as a city of man-hated fanaticism and pettiness. Jaffa, in a stark contrast, is depicted as city of pleasure, abundant with greeneries, shade providing trees and fruit trees. It is an oriental city of "houses dipped in orchards," surrounded by vineyards, not to mention its seashore that "rejoices the heart." Wherever you go, you find friends. In Jaffa even members of good homes do labour, and labour honours them—unlike Jerusalem where "labour is great so long as you do not smell its sweat." Even spiritually speaking, the comparison between Jaffa and Jerusalem does not implies that Gronam and his like are better than "our friends" in Jaffa. The wholeness of his "garb" (actions and lifestyle) is only extrinsic, and the dust, that covers its rags, this time in a symbolic meaning, goes to show that his clothes have been neither nurtured nor regenerated (560).

The many partial contradictions between Jaffa and Jerusalem in TS can be summarised in more general and abstract way by the following principal contrasts: Life in Jaffa is free and reckless, lacking norms, values, or frames of guidance, unclear in the cultural-spiritual sense, a life that turns towards the unknown future. Orthodox Jerusalem, in contrast to it, is looking always to the past, clinging to traditional frames of existence and to old fashioned institutions.

Its leaders using these institutions, often unintentionally, to suffocate life, and subjects it to dubious aims, at the same time distorting the essence of these frames and the goals for which they were established. (Jewish existence in the Holy Land) and also their soul (love of the land, of the people, and of the Torah). Jaffa lacks clothes; Jerusalem's old clothes are ragged and dusty (83, 560). Or, to bring another parable from the novel: The "two-storied building" parable (542)—Jaffa is like a two storied building of which only the first is occupied (earthly life) while the second floor (spiritual meaning) is empty. Jerusalem, too, is like such a building, but while its first storey (earthly life) is ruined (or missing), its upper storey (Judaism, prayer, and faith) perhaps exists. Jaffa is full of life, though perhaps not the "correct" life according to the author. Orthodox Jerusalem relies on Torah's values, that are correct in the eyes of the author, but has no real life in it, no creativity, and no development. Secular Jaffa therefore stands a better chance for the future, though culturally shallow and spiritually anarchistic. Orthodox Jerusalem bears the mark of a clear spiritual identity, is captured in its "eternity," in a kind of social and national dead end, which embraces a potential for regression and constitutes a concrete danger to the renewal of Jewish life and culture. It would seem that in this phase of Agnon's creation, the tension between "life," ultimately identified with God as the "life-giver," and between the values that bring meaning and order to them is tipped in favour of life itself. The parable of the two storeys hints just at that, since there is no possibility of maintaining a second floor without the first (In fact, this parable can be understood as a variant of one of the most ingrained ideas and images of traditional Zionism). The novel as a whole and especially the fate of Yitzhak Kumer, its principal hero who died in a narrow room in Mea Shearim, points also toward this implication.

We may conclude now: The polar presentation of Jaffa and Jerusalem in TS, is meant to be conceived of, beyond its historical realistic features, primarily as carrying a fundamental-symbolic-spiritual significance. In this sense it points out the utopian and problematic aspects in the combining of secular Zionism with religious tradition in the project of renewing the life of the Jewish nation in the land of Israel. By presenting these two contrasting abstract entities, Agnon seeks to expose the principal conflict built within the overall enterprise of the return of the people of Israel to their country, a conflict existing in the inner portrait of the Zionist movement which leads this act, a conflict that reveal itself and becomes all the more intensified as time goes by. The conflict is between the secular energy of life, aimed towards renovation, sometimes revolutionary, of Jewish life, and the aspiration to conduct this new life as a Jewish life, bearing the mark of historic-traditional lifestyle. It is also this conflict that manifests itself through the tension between the secular Zionism which is threatened by the danger of cultural deterioration and loss of identity and Orthodox clinging to religious-traditional modes of life that may lead to fundamentalism and stagnation. It goes without saying that these conflicts are part and parcel of Zionism by virtue of its very nature, since Zionism is a movement of renaissance, i.e. a movement that combines a return to the past (traditional Judaism) and a revolution that aims at a modern national life in the future. From this aspect, the set

of contrasts between Jaffa and Jerusalem in the novel, is not merely a set of contrasts between two complex geographic and social entities, but also a set of contrasts between two separate entities—mostly ideological—bearing a symbolic and principle position. Each city in the novel embodies within it in extremity, one of the poles in the immanent conflict which has accompanied Zionism from its beginnings, appears time and again in modern Judaism in general, and in the new Jewish existence in Israel in particular, ever since the novel was published. This conflict tears the social formation of the State of Israel to this very day.