13 *Israel as redemption in S.Y. Agnon's* A Guest for the Night

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S.Y. Agnon's book *A Guest for the Night* appears at first to be the simple story of a man's return to his native town (Shibush) after a protracted absence. It describes the town and its inhabitants as they unfold to the narrator in his wanderings through its environs over the duration — just under one year — of his return. But the actualities of Shibush, the composition of its hypothetical present moments as perceived by the narrator, extend across the boundaries of limited space and time.

By the blending of waking and dream, imagination and logic, present and past, Agnon introduces a timelessness into the limited world the book explores. This is enhanced by the employment of such technical devices as analogy and parallelism[1] — across characters, stories and situations — which create echoes that reverberate in a tenor more encompassing than any singular representation of the facts would allow. But most effective in the creation of a feeling of ubiquity is the structure of the tale which is not a tale at all (in the sense of plot, central motif and sequential development), but a series of digressions spreading over a multitudinous array of events with an ever-shifting locus of narrative.

While the narrator's pilgrimage to the past with its accompanying motifs of the key and Beit HaMidrash comprise the manifest purpose of the account, they are essentially only the symbolic emodiments of the thematic concerns which are basic to the book.[2] These are centred upon both the separateness and the unity of all things. The notion of unity and separation gives rise to a great number of associated issues revolving upon the question of opposites, complementaries and the ultimate resolution of apparently disparate elements in an all-containing union. *A Guest for the Night* deals with the tension that derives from the paradoxical relationship in which separate-opposite stands to merged-unity, and attempts to reconcile its inherent difficulties so as to attain redemption — to arrive at a standpoint from which action is possible. The answer of course can never be simple or wholly rational.

The apparently jumbled, structureless narrative mode faithfully explicates both its concrete and conceptual intentions. It expresses the "facts" of the story, creating a feeling

of immediacy, of an approximate identity between narrative and narrated time, by its implication that the facts of the story are being presented almost as they occur, without the intervention of the time-gap that the ordering of them would demand. Similarly, the frequent transitions between direct and reported speech, the changes in the pronouns used to denote one and the same speaker at one and the same time, the shifts in the use of tenses within one episode, are all apparently reflective of the movements of a receptive consciousness. The implicit statement of the book is also served by its form. Separateness is portrayed in its description of linear journey (the arrival of the Guest, his stay, and his departure — i.e. the beginning, middle and end of the book, and even the progression of the words and sentences themselves) and by the cohesion imposed upon the tale by the existence of a central reference point (the Guest).[3] The unity of all things is expressed in those factors mentioned in the discussion on narrative mode. Gershon Shaked (via T.S. Eliot) appositely describes the function of the structure of the book as objective correlative to its concerns: the form accurately echoes its content.[4]

At the core of the narrator's journey to Shibush is a desire to revive and recapture the past. He left the town as a youth and he returns to it some 20 years later as a 41-year-old man, prompted in his quest by the destruction of his home in Jerusalem, which he has neither the strength nor the motivation to rebuild.

מה טעם אני כאן ואשתי וילדי במקום אחר אחרי שהחריבו האויבים את ביתי ולא הניחו לי כלום נכנסה בי עייפות יתירה ונחרשלו ידי מלהקים את ביתי, שנחרב חורבן שני.
(p. 193)

He looks to the past for sustenance and for regeneration — perceiving it as an ideal in which to immerse himself, hoping it will prove redemptive. To this end he undertakes a pilgrimage to his native town, Shibush, thereby leaving the conventional locus of pilgrimage, the Holy Land. But, despite the central intention underlying this journey, the enterprise is characterised by a lack of definite purpose and plan. Once the initial stages of the pilgrimage — the journey to Shibush and the acquisition of lodgings — are successfully dealt with, the narrator enters a world which lacks definition. The desire to return which inspired him to assertive action is dissipated by its fulfilment which leaves him denuded of clear intention and therefore prey to whatever circumstances chance upon him. This is, however, as it should be; for, in aspiring the world of the past, the narrator is attempting to actualise that which, in accordance with the linearity of the waking-state world, is irretrievable and incapable of repetition. By invoking the past he leaves the realm of the waking-state with its attendant conditions of linearity, logic and intentionality and enters a world over which sequence, initiative and even individuality hold no sway.

Soon after his arrival, however, he is provided with a purpose which is an external expression of the motive of his pilgrimage. On Yom Kippur, or rather at the end of that day, he suddenly finds himself appointed (albeit in a disparaging manner) as Keeper of Beit HaMidrash — as Master of its Key. Both Beit HaMidrash and its key are laden with emotional value for the narrator. They fulfil a double function. They act as symbols — the first as a symbol of Jewish life of the past, and the second as a symbol of the means

to its attainment — and also hold a literal value: Beit HaMidrash is the place in which he studied in his youth, while its key was an object he used in his childhood years. And his home, like the temple, is twice destroyed.[5] These objects and events serve to connote the personal history of the narrator as well as the collective history of the nation. By this merging of both worlds — the individual and the communal — Agnon highlights a variation on the theme of unity and separation: the nation is comprised of individuals while the individual is the embodiment of the nation — each contains the other.[6]

THE NATION AND THE INDIVIDUAL

The identity of nation and individual is further explicated by a series of parallels between the narrator's experiences and the similar experiences undergone by the inhabitants of Shibush.[7] The immediate cause of the narrator's return is the violent destruction of his home in Israel, yet the first sight his home town reveals to him bespeaks much the same fate — Shibush in ruins.

Similarly, the narrator's spiritual crisis, which leads him to seek out the past, is echoed by the spiritual poverty that characterises Shibush. Shibush is crippled in both its physical and metaphysical guises. Just as the narrator is incapable of movement, so the town is suspended in a limbo of inaction and degeneration. War has wrought desolation over Shibush — nothing remains of her former glory but the shells of buildings echoing the skeletal remnants of her earlier religious urge. Similarly, the violent effects of politics have brought about the ruin of the narrator's home, which in its turn is both the representative of and the cause of the spiritual desolation within him. Thus the physical objects of the book act as an objective correlative to the inner states of its inhabitants, and by the paralleling of these elements Agnon emphasises the indissolubility of the individual and the nation.

The identity between the individual and the nation is echoed by the identity between the town and the nation. Just as the individual is the embodiment of the collective people, so is Shibush the metaphoric ubiety that exemplifies both its history and its present state of being. Shibush performs the function of surrogate world, both material and spiritual, of the Jewish people. Even the name of the town is suggestive of a sense of upheaval, of irreparable misconstruction, and may be seen as a comment on the physical and the emotional-religious circumstances of the nation.[8]

In Chapter 40 the names of Shibush personalities parallel names of biblical figures akin to them in function. By this device a meaning is placed upon the present which ramifies beyond its domain and reaches to the historical antecedents of the nation, bringing them to bear upon twentieth-century Europe. The family described in this chapter was once the town's leading family. Its male members were, appropriately, named after the fathers of the nation: Rabbi Abraham and Rabbi Ya'akov-Moshe, whose widow is called Sara. The men of the family are dead as the result of either war or starvation and their widows live in considerably straitened circumstances, barely able to survive. The outer form of the home they live in is analogous to the condition in which the family is situated. This reciprocal relationship is emphasised by the concurrence of these two elements within the same paragraph:

הבית חרב וראשו ניטל ממנו. אדם שניתז ראשו אינו חי כיוצא בו בית. אף דיוטא זו שנשתיירה שם, בסיסו של הגוף, שבה היתה החנות הגדולה שנתפרנסו הימנה כמה משפחות, ספק קיימת ספק חרבה. אף על פי כן צימצמה שרה עצמה שם, היא וארבע גיסותיה, נשיהם של אחיו של בעלה, שקצתם נהרגו במלחמה וקצתם מתו ברעב.
(p.216)

The identity between the names of Rabbi Abraham and his family with the patriarchs and the matriarch suggests not only a correspondence between these two sets of people — contemporary and ancient — but amplifies it into a total identity. The state of Rabbi Abraham's family thus becomes emblematic for the state of the nation for the original Abraham and his descendants are, in fact, nothing less than the source and the subsequent representation of the nation in its entirety. Thus the present condition of the Shibush family and its home may be seen as a portrayal of the nation itself and the narrator is therefore justified in the conclusion he reaches when visiting Sara's home:

נפל פסוק לתוך פי, היתה כאלמנה. כשראה ירמיה את החורבן הראשון ישב וכתב ספר קינות, ולא נתקררה דעתו בכל הקינות שקונן, עד שהמשיל את כנסת ישראל לאלמנה ואמר היתה כאלמנה, ולא אלמנה ממש, אלא כאישה שהלך בעלה למדינת הים ודעתו לחזור אצלה. כשאנו באים לקונן על חורבן אחרון אין אנו מספיקים אם נאמר היתה כאלמנה, אלא אלמנה ממש בלא כף הדמיון.
(p.216)

Shaked is correct in asserting, by extension, that Sara's initiation of the transfer of the book *Yadav Shel Moshe* — whose miraculous properties save mothers and their nascent offspring during difficult births — from Shibush to Israel, constitutes the nation's implicit recognition that the future of the Jewish people is incapable of realisation in the Galut.[9] The Galut as expressed in Shibush is, at least at this stage in the story, barren, both literally and figuratively: for many years no child has been born within its confines.

ISRAEL

The coincidence of the narrator's return to Shibush with the eve of Yom Kippur displays another aspect of the synecdochic relationship between individual and nation. By mentioning it at the start of the book, Agnon immediately introduces the analogic tone which echoes through its pages. The narrator returns to his home town on the festival of Return, when most of its inhabitants are striving to achieve a Return.[10] He barely succeeds in arriving before the onset of the Holy Day, as is shown by the hotel inhabitants' reaction to his appearance:

אנשי המלון קיבלוני כאורח שבא שלא בזמנו, שכבר קמו מסעודה המפסקת ועמדו לילך וחששו שמא יצטרכו להתעכב על ידי.
(p.10)

His timely arrival is tragically ironic for he is, in fact, an "אורח שבא שלא בזמנו". The time he

attempts to reinstate in Shibush is long past and it is doubtful whether his idealised picture of it was ever a reality.

The theme of journey and return is not confined to the adventures of the narrator, but receives further dramatic exposition in the histories — both collective and individual — of the inhabitants of Shibush. The town-collective was forced into exile during the war years when the men joined in the fighting, while their families (e.g. the Bachs and the Zummers) fled to Vienna to escape the violence of advancing armies and the starvation resulting from the prolonged hostilities. Most of the survivors return to Shibush to try to re-establish their lives there. The collective return is not, however, successful: the unyielding atmosphere of Shibush is stagnant and sterile. This is portrayed by the collective barrenness that overlays the town, of which Daniel and Mrs Bach's lack of employment is an expression: he is a builder, she a midwife. Neither birth nor building are features of contemporary Shibush, whose chief characteristic — collective hunger, physical and spiritual starvation — is condensed in Elimelech Kaiser's bitter observation:

שמא יודע אדם במה ישבור צומו?
(p. 19)

The individual accounts of journey and return, narrated in the stories of people encountered by the Guest during his stay in Shibush, comply with one another in their overall features. But the specific detail in which they differ is of importance to the book for it serves to introduce and expound upon various thematic strands pertinent to the concerns of the narrator in the process of learning he undergoes over the one-year period of his return. It also contributes to a primary aspect of the technique on which the book is structured: Agnon's exploitation of antithetical correspondences resonates through the work, giving dramatic actuality to the paradoxical tension in which unity and separation are attuned one to the other by accentuating the notion of unity in diversity and its complementary opposite — diversity in unity, with each informing the other by highlighting the identity and disparity between the items under consideration.

Among the characters whose experience of journey and return corresponds in some way to the narrator's are Yeruham Hofshi, Rabbi Hayim and Reb Shlomo Bach, all of whom reflect different aspects of the dilemmas and revelations he experiences.

Yeruham Hofshi's journey to Israel and his subsequent return to Shibush is both parallel to and distinct from the narrator's. Inasmuch as his departure from the town received its impetus from the example of the Guest's departure some years earlier, which infused the possibility of settling in Israel with a reality it had up till then lacked —

אמר ירוחם, עד שלא עלית לארץ ישראל לא היתה לארץ ישראל בעירנו מציאות של כלום. . . . אבל מיום שעלית לארץ ישראל נעשתה ארץ ישראל דבר שבמוחש, שהרי אחד מבינינו עלה שם. . . . נמשכתי אחריך, שאתה וארץ ישראל נעשיתם לי חטיבה אחת. הייתי אומר הריני עולה לארץ ישראל ונכנס אצלך ואומר לך בן עירך אני ובזכותך עליתי אף אני. . .
(p. 87)

— and, in that it is inspired by the Guest's impulse in leaving, the trace of which lingered in a poem "אהבה נאמנה עד שאולה"[11,12] written by the narrator, it is one and the same journey. But whereas the narrator's return to Shibush is voluntary, Yeruham's is not, and it is in the divergent causes which prompt their return that the essential difference in their attitudes is embodied. The narrator leaves Israel to return to Shibush because of a spiritual crisis which he hopes to resolve by communion with the past. Yeruham is banished from Israel because of political causes — illegal immigration and an adherence to a communist ideology — and returns to Shibush, to the past, because he has no alternative. Yeruham's political ideology is forward-looking and utilitarian at base; the narrator's ideology is rooted in the past and is spiritual in character. Ironically it is Yeruham who establishes his life in Shibush while the narrator realises that Shibush no longer holds anything for him, and moves on to the future. But Yeruham's life in Shibush is not a perpetuation of the past. It is, instead, an assertion of the possibility of the unfolding of the future within the confines of the past. This positive statement is brought to full explication in Yeruham and Rachel's gift to the town in providing it with its first birth since the onset of the war. Thus, by the end of the book the journeys of Yeruham and the narrator are once more merged, for they reach the identical destination: the narrator learns to accept the new, while Yeruham manages to integrate the past. Both face forward to the future.

Rabbi Hayim's journey differs from both the narrator's and Yeruham's, but implicit in his behaviour on his return is the seed of the realisation the narrator arrives at by the close of the book. Rabbi Hayim is forced into exile during the war years by the Russians, who take him as their prisoner. After his release he wanders around Eastern Europe for many years, finally returning to Shibush during the course of the narrator's stay here. Unlike the narrator, he does not return in a bid to reclaim the past because he is not deluded into attributing it a glory it did not possess. In fact, quite the opposite is true: Rabbi Hayim, who was once one of the town's leading scholars, who so gloried in his knowledge as to seek recognition of it at the price of communal harmony, refuses on his return to open a book, claiming — falsely — that he has forgotten all he once knew. Rabbi Hayim renounces the past so entirely as to abnegate his rights as husband and father. Although the reason for his return is never stated, it is evident from the course of his action that his purpose is one of repentance — of true return. He comes to Shibush not in order to benefit or extract profit from it, but with the intention of giving, of compensating for his past misdoings. He has realised that the expression of worship is not confined to the scholarship obtained in Beit HaMidrash, but that it entails a broader, more integrated approach which brings into closer cohesion the word and the deed of which a true religious life is composed. But Rabbi Hayim never grasps the full meaning of his realisation for, in his enthusiasm to correct the past, he immerses himself in "the deed" to the detriment of "the word".

Although the zeal with which Rabbi Hayim applies himself to the task of repentance is somewhat excessive, he does finally achieve a full return. He becomes truly righteous and is transformed into a true Zaddik, whose humility and faith do not fail him even at the final moments of his life. It is thus fitting that Rabbi Hayim's final request —

אבל אני מבקש, שילמדו למנוחת נפשי פרק משניות. לשם זה אני מניח צרור כסף שהרווחתי בגופי. ואני מצפה לרחמי שמים ולרחמי הבריות שייטיבו עם נשמתי במיטב וילמדו משניות עם פירוש, וילמדו מלה במלה, ויאמרו קדיש דרבנן אחרי הלימוד כנהוג וכמנהג. ואחר קדיש דרבנן יאמרו מזמור ק"ב תפילה לעני.
(p. 406)

is instrumental in awakening the narrator to a clear spiritual resolution which releases him from the bonds of the past. For it is while sitting in Beit HaMidrash, in compliance with Rabbi Hayim's wish, that the narrator comes to the full realisation of that which he has always known but has never fully accepted[13]

שאין תורה כתורת ארץ ישראל.
(p. 417)

and becomes resigned to his impending and permanent (at least in terms of the pre-Messianic world) leave-taking of Shibush — of the past. His new-found understanding is portrayed in an imagined dialogue with the walls of Beit HaMidrash:

מסתכל אני בכתלי בית המדרש הישן ואומר להם, רואים אתם כבר הגיע זמני שאעלה לארץ ישראל. מטים עצמם כתלי בית המדרש, כאילו מבקשים לחבק אותי בזכות שאני עולה לארץ ישראל. אומר אני להם, רצונכם ואני טוען אתכם על כתפי ומעלה אתכם עמי. אומרים כתלי בית המדרש, כבדים אנו ואין כוחו של אדם אחד לטעון אותנו על כתפיו. אלא טול את המפתח ועלה, וכשתגיע השעה נבוא אחריך.
(p. 417)

where their response to his leaving is but a projection of his own stance. Thus, at first, Rabbi Hayim and the narrator stand in antithesis to each other, whereas, at the close of the book their positions are synthesised: like Rabbi Hayim the narrator no longer seeks the past — he knows it to be too heavy a burden for any one man to bear. The death of Rabbi Hayim is testimony to that.

Reb Shlomo Bach's successful journey represents the culmination of the position at which Rabbi Hayim arrives. Rabbi Hayim attains virtue, but a reconciliation of the past evades him because he is too fervent in his denial of it, as his refusal to acknowledge both his scholarly ability and his role within his family portray. His past is too laden with guilt and the memory of it is too painful to allow an admission of its reality. Yet it is incapable of being dismissed; it cannot be demolished. The content of Rabbi Hayim's meditations before his death testify to the insistence with which its sibilance has, through the years, resonated in him —

סבור הייתי שהוא ישן וראיתי שהוא מרחש בשפתיו. הטיתי אזני ושמעתי שהוא אומר ואלו כשרות בעוף, ניקבה הגרגרת או שנסדקה. כיון שהרגיש בי לחש לי, באותה הלכה התחילה המחלוקת.
(p. 402)

Though he travels away from Shibush, Reb Shlomo, by contrast, does not attempt to deny the past. When he first arrives in Israel he continues, as before, in his study of the Mishnayot. But he is not so rooted in the past as to be shackled by it. The sanctity of the

land soon prompts him to a new spirit. He finds a new form of worship, which consists of the union of spirit and matter. Reb Shlomo abandons the conventional study of the Mishna to work in the fields, for it is there that he finds the essential content of the Mishnayot is revealed. He neither denies nor longs for the walls of Beit HaMidrash. In Reb Shlomo the past and the present are fully integrated. In him the spiritual dilemma of the nation is resolved and he stands as an emblem of its hope, as the augur of a free and glorious future.

It is a small wonder that Reb Shlomo's peer group on the kibbutz look upon his activities with disdain, for, despite their residence in Israel, they still inhabit the world of the past. Their approach to religion is fragmenting in its effects and consists of passionate arguments about the most petty and peripheral aspects of worship (p. 443). This attitude is but an echo of the religious atmosphere which prevailed over the Shibush of old, typified in the controversy started by Rabbi Hayim, the crux of which were the conditions pertaining to the Kashrut/non-Kashrut of birds, and the object of which was not spiritual refinement but personal vainglory (pp. 148–9); in the division between the Hasidim and the Mitnagdim, and in the endless disputes, divisions and sub-divisions between the numerous groups of Hasidim, each declaring its ultimate and absolute claim to sanctity (Chapter 43). It is not surprising that adherents to such a posture are incapable of comprehending life as a unified whole: theirs is a fragmented intellect whose partite mode of functioning divides all that with which it is confronted. Their "spiritual" life consists of mere religiosity — not true religion.

The religious position that Reb Shlomo achieves, which recognises the coherence of spirit and matter, is portrayed in the book as the desirable one, in that the narrator has his most profoundly religious experiences in those moments in which nature, as exemplified in the mountain, and spirit, as exemplified in Beit HaMidrash, are brought into alignment within his consciousness. An example of this may be found right at the start of the book, in Chapter 3, where the reciprocal relationship between these two elements is emphasised:

אור מופלא האיר מבית המדרש על ההר וכן מן ההר על בית המדרש. אור שכמותו לא ראיתם מימיכם. אור אחד היה ומאורות הרבה היו בו. מקום שכזה אי אתה מוצא בעולם. עמדתי לי והרהרתי בלבי, איני זז מכאן עד שיעלה רצונו לפניו ליטול את נשמתי ממני. ואף על פי שנזכרה לי מיתתי לא הייתי עצב. אפשר שפני לא היו שמחות, אבל לבי היה שמח. וקרוב בעיני לומר, שמעין זה לא הרגשתי זה שנים הרבה, שהלב שמח ואין הפנים משתפות עצמן בשמחתו.
(pp. 16–17)

The narrator's attempt to revive the spirit of old Shibush is contrary to nature: it succeeds, or at least appears to, when nature is at her most hostile and dormant — in midwinter — but spring, the time in which nature generates birth and all attains new being, heralds the failure and death of his endeavour. His unease at the first slight signs of warmer weather —

המולד נראה בעליל. האדמה הבהיקה מן השלג והצינה כאילו הפשירה קצת. דומה שהאויר משתנה והולך. השם יודע אם לטוב ואם למוטב.
(p. 171)

— proves to be valid: the arrival of the warm spring air renders visits to Beit HaMidrash unnecessary to the citizens of Shibush who congregated there in the colder days so as to enjoy the warmth of its fire.[14]

Thus the nation's return in the literal sense of the word, to its former position, is not a desirable or redemptive proposition, for its harmony and beauty have long since dissipated and its strength is exhausted. Just as Rabbi Hayim's death is rumoured to have been directly caused by his attempt to rectify past mistakes —

> אמרתי לה, ומה גרם לו שיחלה? אמרה צפורה, הדעות מחולקות. יש אומרים שהלך אצל הרב ליפטר ממנו והיתה שם גרגרת של עוף מוטלת לפני הפתח בחוץ והחליק ונפל. ויש אומרים אצל ביתנו עמד ונתקל שם בפרץ אחד שכור ונפל.
> (p. 393)

— so any attempt to correct the past while acting within its boundaries may be presumed to be destructive.

But there is a return which is immensely desirable, for it comprises the ultimate union of the material and spiritual, and that is the return undertaken by both Reb Shlomo and the narrator — the return to Israel, for "אין תורה כתורת ארץ ישראל" (p. 417). This return is so desirable that even nature expresses its striving to partake of it by leaning eastwards —

> היום ירד וצללי אילנות ושיחים מתמתחים והולכים לצד מזרח. אין אני מן הרגשנים, אבל אותה שעה אמרתי, אילנות ושיחים שהם מן הדומם פונים כלפי מזרח ואני שהייתי במזרח פניתי לכאן.
> (p. 268)

The approbation of this return is counterpointed by Gündel's request for holy earth for her grave and by Lebtche sending a copy of his book to Jerusalem so that it will have perpetuation and remembrance —

> מה שביקשה גינדיל לגופה עשה לייבטשי בודינהויז לנשמתו, העתקה של ספרו שלח לבית הספרים הלאומי שלנו, כדי לעשות לו זכירה בירושלים.
> (p. 444)

There is little hope for the continuation — both spiritual and material — of the nation outside Israel, for —

> ברית כרותה לארץ ישראל, מי שאינו עולה לארץ נשכח ומשתכח, אבל כל שזכה יהי בה נזכר ונכתב, שנאמר (ישעיהו ד') כל הכתוב לחיים בירושלים.
> (p. 445)

The return to Israel does not, however, of itself comprise a total return or redemption. It requires the emphasis of one of its supplementary aspects so as to bring the power of its positive agency to full fruition.

BAYIT

The old way is played out — it no longer holds the potential for renascence. It has been impinged upon by too many confounding circumstances of which war was but the final cataclysmic factor in contributing to its destruction. This situation and its logical corollary — the need to find a new way with which the old may be substituted — is reflected in the accounts described above. Of these the stories of Reb Shlomo and Yeruham Hofshi stand out in the message of hope they provide and the viable alternatives they present. Reb Shlomo's transition from the old to the new is a smooth one though it is not entirely devoid of pain, for its antecedent conditions entail the death of one son — Yeruham — and the virtual loss of another — Daniel. His lack of sentimentality towards the past allows him to discover a new essence, a mode of redemption which is embodied in the land of Israel. Yeruham Hofshi, on the other hand, discovers a different means of salvation which is, in the final analysis, but the complementary correlate to Reb Shlomo's solution. While Israel lies at the core of Reb Shlomo's regeneration, the home and the family form the central focus of Yeruham's new-found resolution. However, as these two characters both represent the nation's successful passage into the future it is fitting that the life of each contain, as it does, not only the thrust of its own direction but traces of its complementary correlate as well. Yeruham Hofshi has lived in Israel and silently longs to return there, while Reb Shlomo's journey to Israel is prompted by familial concerns.

The ironic correspondences between the lives of Reb Shlomo and Yeruham reveal the level of sophistication to which Agnon extends his technique of multi-layered analogy. Yeruham, who is orphaned in infancy, becomes the proponent of family life, while Reb Shlomo, whose son loses his life in Israel, develops into an advocate of life there. Furthermore, the complementary nature of their respective earlier losses combines with the correlation and identity between their spiritual attainments to render Reb Shlomo and Yeruham in the symbolic relationship of father and son. This symbolic relationship is lent concrete credibility and emphasis by the following circumstances: when Yeruham is orphaned at birth it is Reb Shlomo's family who adopts him; Reb Shlomo's dead son was also named Yeruham and he and Yeruham Hofshi were close friends; Yeruham Bach dies at Ramat Rachel and, by his burial there, is united with it, his body materially contributing to the land's creative process of providing nourishment to Israel; Yeruham Hofshi marries Rachel Zummer and the result of their union is the creation of a new life which provides spiritual nourishment to Shibush and to the people of Israel, as it heralds the rebirth of the nation.

The symbolic filial relationship in which Yeruham stands to Reb Shlomo, and the interdependence indicated thereby, corresponds to the supplementary position in which the ideal of "Home" stands to the ideal of "Israel" and to the inextricability of these two concepts within the national *Zeitgeist*.

The narrator's pilgrimage likewise portrays the valency of these two ideals, and the vicissitudes in which they are explicated therein serve to bring into cohesion the concomitant issues of nativity, family and religious worship with which both the narrator and the nation grapple. The Guest's return to Shibush indicates that Israel is, in itself, not

sufficient to the task of abolishing spiritual stagnation but is in need of the accompanying ideal of "Home", while Shibush's failure to fulfil that function asserts the impotence of mere nativity in this role. The narrator's recognition of Shibush's deficiency in this regard is suggested in his acceptance of the applicability of the epithet "Guest" as an apposite description of his position in the town —

לאחר התפילה בירכו המתפללים זה את זה בשבת שלום ומבורך והלכו לבתיהם בנחת. אף אני הלכתי לביתי זה מלוני, שהרי גר אני בארץ וביתי רחוק מכאן מהלך כמה מאות פרסאות ואיני אלא כאורח נטה ללון.
(p. 122)

— and his awareness of the link between "Home" and "Israel" is expressed in Chapter 24 in his exposition of the Weekly Portion —

פתחתי חומש ודרשתי בפרשת השבוע בפסוק וייקץ יעקב משנתו וגו' ויירא ויאמר מה נורא המקום הזה, אין זה כי אם בית אלקים. לא כאברהם שאמר, בהר ה' יראה, ולא כיצחק, שנאמר בו, ויצא יצחק לשוח בשדה, אלא כיעקב, שקרא בית. ודרשתי בשלש בחינות של עבודת השם. בחינה אחת שאדם מבקש לו דברים גבוהים בחינת הר, ומהלך כל ימיו במחשבות גבוהות. בחינה שנייה בחינת שדה, שדרכה של שדה שזורעים בה וקוצרים בה ויש לה ריח טוב, כמו שנאמר ראה ריח בני כריח השדה. בחינה שלישית, שהיא אהובה על הקדוש בדוך הוא ביותר, זו בחינה בית, שכתוב ביעקב אבינו המובחר שבאבות. ואף הוא יתברך משתבח ואומר, כי ביתי בית תפילה. מובא בזוהר, בית לישראל למהוי עמהון כאתתא בבעלה בדיורא חד בחדוא. שהר ושדה הם מקומות דרור, אבל בית הוא מקום משומר ומכובד.
מובא בספרים, שזכות שלושה אבות עומדת להם לישראל בשלוש הגלויות. זכותו של אברהם עמדה לנו בגלות מצרים, כמו שנאמר, כי זכר וקו' את אברהם עבדו ויוצא עמו בששון וגו'. זכותו של יצחק בגלות בבל. חזכותו של יעקב בגלותינו זאת האחרונה. לפיכך צריכין אנו לתפוס ביותר בחינת יעקב, בחינת בית יעקב לכו ונלכה באור ה'. ועליהם אמר יעקב, ושבתי בשלום אל בית אבי, ועליהם נאמר כל הפסוק כולו, והיה ה' לי לאלקים.
(pp. 128–9)

Thus his journey to Shibush may be seen to be at odds with the knowledge he already possesses. He leaves Israel — the true national home — and travels to Shibush — an arbitrary geographical location which happens to be his birthplace — abandoning his family — the human component and primary aspect of his individual home — in the process. But his voyage is, in fact, a voyage of confirmation, for, in moving in a direction so contrary to his intellectual awareness he arrives at a spiritual affirmation of its precepts, thereby attaining an integrated understanding which may be called revelation. His return to Israel at the close of the book is a threefold return entailing a return to his family — his personal home — a return to Israel — the national home — and an inner return — to his essential home — arriving at his beginning and knowing it for the first time in its fullness. The narrator is finally able to leave Beit HaMidrash the old house of worship — "בית ביתי תפילתי" (p. 369) — for he has found his new centre of worship in the synthesis of Israel extension, the disrupted linear mode of the work may be seen, not only as an exposition of his familial home — who initiates and enables his return from the shapeless mazes of the past.[15,16]

WHOLENESS AND REDEMPTION

The relationship between name and form serves to highlight the undeniably tragic elements of the book. Shibush is, as its name implies, misconstrued. And as Shibush is emblematic for the nation, the nation is likewise in a state of misconstruction. Thus, by extension, the disrupted linear mode of the work may be seen, not only as an exposition of a philosophic proposition, but as the portrayal of a ruined society as well. The book is therefore also an historical statement which, by breaking the code of linearity, faithfully serves the essentially linear demands of history, in that it accurately describes a disintegrated civilisation.

The final resolution of the tale is punctuated by an admission to, and a dramatisation of, the dictates of linearity. The narrator is finally able to act upon the world because he concedes to the inevitability of linearity: he accepts the irretrievability of the past, moves into the present and thereby advances to the future. The culmination of this process is reached in his journey away from Shibush to Israel — the redemptive locus, a spatial redemption — on a train, whose progress is nothing if not linear. This climax is echoed in Shibush's release from its static condition by a birth — a redemptive function, a temporal redemption. Shibush's saviours are Yeruham and Rachel Hofshi, who both represent the potential of the future. Yeruham's idealism is forward-looking though it is not devoid of spirituality, as his abstinence from the eating of meat indicates. Shibush's freedom is heralded by the linear passage of a child into life — a passage which is not only linear in itself, but which delivers its passenger to the dictates of linearity.

These two journeys — the child's and the narrator's — are brought into explicit cohesion by a number of circumstances: the narrator performs the role of Sandak at the child's Brith-Milah; the child is named after the narrator; the narrator gives the child the new key to Beit HaMidrash which he no longer needs,[17] only to find the old key in his possession when he arrives back in Israel. Thus the narrator's spiritual rebirth receives dramatic support from the actual birth of the child, and Israel receives affirmation as the binding centre of worship by the reappearance there of the historical key.[18]

But, though the action of the story ends in an affirmation of linearity, of actual journey to an actual place — the land of Israel — its conceptual latitudes anticipate a finer all-encompassing reality of Zion. This is to be attained at some future time with the advent of the Messiah, when all creation will merge in a joyous undivided unity. Thus the original key waits in Israel to be reunited with Beit HaMidrash at the end of the days, the narrator joins with Israel in longing for that time when all will be immersed in the unity of creation, when name and form will be perfectly one and will reveal their inherent perfection —

התורה שלימה, אלא שהארון שנתונה בו שבור. הכיסופין הללו שאנו נכספים יביאו אותנו לקבל את התורה שנייה, זאת התורה הנצחית שאינה נחלפת לעולם לא במסיבות הזמן וחילופי העתים.
(p. 253)

— in Full Redemption: wholly merged and beyond all separation.

NOTES

1 G. Shaked, *Omanut HaSippur shel Agnon,* pp. 47, 50–55, 233–9.
2 For an exposition of the key as a central motif in *A Guest for the Night* see B. Kurzweil, *Masot al Sippurei Shai Agnon,* pp. 54–68. Kurzweil was the first to point to its importance. Also see A. Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare,* pp. 316–7 and Shaked, op. cit. pp. 242–3.
3 Shaked, op. cit. p. 247. Shaked observes that the main function of the narrator is that of witnessing.
4 Ibid. p. 233.
5 Ibid. pp. 268–9. For Shaked's analysis of the two destructions.
6 Ibid. p. 236. Shaked comments on the commonality of fate of nation and individual.
7 Ibid. p. 265. Shaked refers to these and to the biographical connection between Agnon and the narrator but says this is of little consequence.
8 Band, op. cit. p. 290. Band refers to the meaning of the root š b š and to its being a metathesis of Buczacz, Agnon's home town.
9 Shaked, op. cit. p. 245.
10 Kurzweil, op. cit. p. 235, on a flawed Yom Kippur and pp. 272–3 on Yom Kippur, Return and the future. For same theme see Band, op. cit. pp. 292–3.
11 Shaked, op. cit. pp. 265–6 for the relationship of the poem to Agnon's biography, its significance in the book and Yeruham Hofshi's reactions to it and complaints about it.
12 Kurzweil, op. cit. p. 306. Kurzweil comments on the poem and its implications for an integrated conception of Jerusalem — composed of ideal and reality — within the narrator's consciousness.
13 For the narrator's complex feelings and guilt about having left Israel see Shaked, op. cit. p. 269, and Band, op. cit. p. 310.
14 Ibid. p. 317.
15 Ibid. p. 312. Band points out that it is the narrator's wife who urges him to leave the key in Shibush, and later to send it back to Shibush; that she also prompts him to return to Israel and sends him the return ticket. Furthermore, he observes that it is she who finds the lost key in his baggage while setting in order their home in Israel. These observations support the thesis forwarded in this chapter about the symbiotic function of Home and Israel in the redemptive process.
16 Kurzweil, op. cit. p. 304 on the blurring of the boundaries between Shibush and Jerusalem, the home and the wife.
17 Band, op. cit. pp. 317–18. Band notes that the key is given "in anticipation of the child's eventual settling in Eretz Yisrael".
18 Kurzweil, op. cit. pp. 304–5. Kurzweil sees the doubling of these circumstances as a resolution of the old and new.

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14 The gates of Zion and the dwellings of Jacob: Zion and Zionism in the work of Isaac Bashevis Singer

Joseph Sherman

Like the Psalmist (Psalm 87:2) who differentiated "the gates of Zion" from "the dwellings of Jacob", Singer distinguishes between the Holy Land as spiritual Zion, the eternal hope of Redemption; and the State of Israel as secular Zionism, the contemporary realisation of Restoration. In all his stories set in the vanished world of *shtetl* Poland, dreams of "the Holy Land", as it is always called there, are clearly linked to the coming of the Messiah and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. The obsession which, in "Passions",[1] drives Leib Belkes painstakingly to construct a model of the Temple out of matches, is an expression of an unassuageable yearning for Redemption at which all the worldly folk around him, including his own wife, brazenly scoff. When they destroy his model, the way materialistic people always destroy spiritual visions they cannot share, Leib Belkes leaves his wife and walks all the way to the Holy Land, on a pilgrimage which stills his longings and is sanctified by God who, as the narrator assures us, "preserves the simple".[2] In "The Little Shoemakers",[3] one of Singer's most overtly allegorical tales, the patriarch of the family, whose name — Abba Shuster — denotes his mythic status,[4] imagines that the rise of Hitler is the last battle before the End of Days, and dreams that soon he and his family will sit "sewing golden sandals for the daughters of Zion and lordly boots for the sons".[5] But the "tremendous crash" which the old man takes to be "the blast of the Messiah's trumpet" is in reality the Nazi bombardment of Frampol,[6] and Abba is resurrected, not in the Holy Land, but in America, to a way of life that is entirely alienating.

Individuals throughout Singer's work tend to find that the easy Messiahs they follow invariably turn out to be false, and the Zions in whose restorations they rejoice remain illusions. The reports of Sabbatai Zevi's triumph which so excite the inhabitants of Goray are meant to bear a striking resemblance to the expectations of our own time:

> At first the kings and princes of the earth had dispatched hosts of giants with drawn swords against Sabbatai Zevi, that they might take him prisoner. But a torrent of great

The Holy Land in History and Thought

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on the Relations Between the Holy Land
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JOHANNESBURG 1986

Edited by

MOSHE SHARON

E.J. BRILL
LEIDEN · NEW YORK · KØBENHAVN · KÖLN
1988