

# Challenging Contemporary Historiography in Shmuel Yosef Agnon's *Only Yesterday*

## ABSTRACT

Agnon's *Temol Shilshom* (*Only Yesterday*) masterfully depicts twentieth century Palestinian Jewish life and responds critically to Second Aliyah narratives popular in his day which lauded seasonal workers and stressed their critical role in Yishuv development. Agnon found the Second Aliyah image contrived; his novel presents an alternative view of the period. His protagonist Isaac Kumer, like other Second Aliyah workers, proves unable to resolve the ongoing tension between Zionist commitment and his lingering feelings of familial obligation. When he fails to participate in the grand redemptive narrative that would enable him simultaneously to persevere as a Zionist and aid his family, he is punished, "sacrificed" as a self-absorbed immigrant whose preoccupation with his own needs prevents him from conceiving a grander Zionist vision that would address the needs of European Jewry. In the wake of the Holocaust, Agnon encourages a broadening of the vision to meet the survivors' needs.

## INTRODUCTION

IN HIS NOVEL *TEMOL SHILSHOM* (*ONLY YESTERDAY*) PUBLISHED IN 1945,<sup>1</sup> Nobel laureate Shmuel Yosef Agnon (1888–1970) drew on personal experience and documentary evidence and wove together the adventures of a fictional protagonist named Isaac Kumer with historical figures, locations and events in an intricate portrayal of earlier twentieth century Jewish life in Palestine. As a result, the novel has always been viewed as an authoritative depiction of the Second Aliyah period (1904–1914).<sup>2</sup>

Though scholars have deemed *Only Yesterday* “an important historical source for Yishuv history”, they struggle to ascertain its value as a chronicle.<sup>3</sup> Arnold Band notes that to do so one must correctly identify the novel’s *Sitz im Leben*, or setting in life.<sup>4</sup> Authors of historical novels are apt to address contemporaneous concerns rather than those of the periods they depict, and in *Only Yesterday*, according to Band, Agnon’s growing awareness of the Holocaust is a key factor in his representation of early twentieth century Jewish life in Palestine. Subsequent critics have questioned this assertion.<sup>5</sup>

Although European events of the 30s and 40s undoubtedly influenced Agnon’s writing of *Only Yesterday*, the immediate Palestinian context is more illuminating. At that time the Second Aliyah and its ideologically-driven immigrants were enjoying notoriety. They dominated many areas of life in the Yishuv, and the historical material produced during the 30s and 40s conveyed their pivotal role in its formation. First, veterans of *ha-Shomer* [The Watchman] published memoirs and documents about the organization’s activities in the early twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> Next, labor leader Berl Katznelson (1887–1944) initiated the publication of the *Second Aliyah Book*.<sup>7</sup> Then, in 1942, Moshe Braslavski (1903–1961) published a volume of Palestinian Labor Movement texts surrounded by the interpretations of its leading thinkers in a layout that mimicked the Talmud.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the Second Aliyah, David Kalai (1898–1948) brought out a pocket-size book reminiscent of a Psalter small enough for Labor adherents to carry around and read at their leisure.<sup>9</sup>

Yet, “Agnon never accepted, even in the days of the Second Aliyah, the self-image reflected in its literature and public life.”<sup>10</sup> In fact, having arrived in Palestine in 1908, Agnon understood that referring to the years 1907–1910 as the Second Aliyah in *Only Yesterday* was anachronistic since this term was coined in 1919. It was only later that Agnon’s friend and fellow author Yosef Hayyim Brenner (1881–1921) used the term to glorify a small number of those he deemed ideologically conscious workers from amongst some 35,000 Jews who immigrated to Palestine between 1905–1914.<sup>11</sup>

By writing a multifaceted narrative about early twentieth century Jewish life in Palestine, Agnon intended to subvert the one-dimensional histories of the Second Aliyah. First and foremost, he wished to correct the portrayal of the immigrants as single-minded individuals striving ceaselessly to realize the Zionist dream. This portrayal misrepresented contemporary Jewish workers and completely overlooked most immigrants of the period. To challenge it Agnon composed *Only Yesterday* around an indecisive character who finds it difficult to forge his life into the Zionist ideal. Kumer seemed to him a more authentic representative of the period.

Moreover, he felt that most of the immigrants had been far more limited than the histories made them out to be. Kalai and Braslavski tried to suggest through the formatting of their books that the prominent Second Aliyah immigrants had preserved their continuity with the Jewish past and helped smooth the way for the Jewish people. In contrast, Agnon saw the rupture between Second Aliyah immigrants and the families they left behind, as well as their failure to consider ways to better the lot of East European Jewry—the terrible consequence of which became increasingly apparent by mid-century.

Agnon valued verisimilitude but had little interest in history *per se*.<sup>12</sup> While historians use rational guidelines to construct an intelligible account of causes and consequences out of a seemingly amorphous mix of facts, events, human considerations and emotions intelligible, Agnon dismissed such rules when trying to comprehend twentieth century Jewish life; as Jews had traditionally done, he selected “a narrative of redemption as his frame of reference for the [novel] and for the historical period observable within it.”<sup>13</sup> In this way, Agnon tried to help readers release their pent-up feelings of guilt and regret, and respond effectively to developing events.

To probe Agnon’s views and how he rendered them we shall begin with a discussion of the charged relationship between the pioneers of the Yishuv and the parents they left behind in Eastern Europe. Lacking a spiritual context for reconciliation, the young immigrants turned away and viewed their Zionist endeavors as ushering in a new epoch of Jewish history, severed from the past and papered over with new traditions meant to betoken continuity.<sup>14</sup>

Against the background of these circumstances and the efforts of pioneering youth to compartmentalize their all-consuming settlement life, the novel focuses on Isaac’s familial relationships and the equally complex and conflicted relationships of the other characters. Such marginal details in the emergent historiography of the Zionist settlement help clarify Agnon’s novelistic treatment of East European Jewry even after its spatial representation has ceased. Isaac’s ongoing relations with his family drive home the limitations of a Palestinian Zionism separated from a broader redemptive vision and the possibility of resolving the intergenerational conflict within a Zionist context.

Multiple forms of Palestinian Zionism existed. As we shall see, Agnon scatters myth-infused references to Isaac’s great-grandfather Reb Yudel Hasid throughout the novel as a means of subtly introducing an alternative Zionist narrative of redemption thereby offering Isaac an important role. While this narrative suggests a way to diminish intergenerational

tensions and allow fathers and sons to share equally in a New Jerusalem, the weak-willed Isaac forgoes this opportunity; his horrible death at the novel's conclusion can be understood as punishment for not advancing the redemptive narrative.

Isaac's punishment proves cruel and disproportionate to his "sin," but Agnon's aim here is not to convey a sense of divine justice. Rather, it allows him to depict Isaac as a scapegoat personifying the failure of his immigrant contemporaries to engage and promote a more expansive Zionist vision which might have made life better for the Jews of Eastern Europe while that was still possible and who must consequently be punished. In this way, Isaac's death provides the pioneers with a cathartic release of pent-up feelings of guilt, both justified and unjustified, for having failed their European brethren and implies that they might atone for the earlier failures by warmly embracing Holocaust survivors and integrating them into a grand narrative of Zionist redemption.

#### RELATIONS BETWEEN PALESTINIAN JEWISH PIONEERS AND THEIR PARENTS

Scholars have discussed the process whereby Palestinian pioneers assigned new meanings to Jewish holidays and lifecycle events as a means of maintaining continuity with the past and at the same time endowing life with newer, more relevant cultural features.<sup>15</sup> Alternatively, this and similar processes may be seen as eliding a rejection of the social values and institutional structures of East European Jews with a desire to create a disparate way of life in Palestine but failing to take the human cost of this into account.<sup>16</sup> Contemporary historians embraced the former interpretation, while Agnon considered the latter a more faithful representation of Second Aliyah experience for grounding *Only Yesterday*.

Earlier readings of the novel emphasized Isaac's suffering and unjust death.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, they shifted attention away from the role played by Isaac and his contemporaries in the continued suffering of their families and their tragic failure to help them in their ultimate hour of need. Isaac, like many of his contemporaries, abandons the world of his fathers in order to build the new society he imagines in Palestine, yet in so doing, obliges his aging father and younger siblings to pay for his principles. Isaac's failure to reckon with the source of his guilt prevents him from embracing the overarching plan of redemption introduced through the Yudel plot. Attempting instead to assuage his guilt through filial devotion to the artist Bloykof in

Jerusalem and a return to the religious way of life is eventually what leads to his death.

If the early twentieth century immigrants, Agnon among them, recognized the human cost of settling in Palestine, as this article contends they did, one would expect to find ample evidence of a hard-hearted disavowal of family ties, particularly vis-à-vis parents, and eventual pangs of conscience for not offering them enough support. And nevertheless, it is difficult to examine the continuing relationship between Second as well as Third Aliyah immigrants and their parents because they rarely addressed this highly charged topic in their memoirs. Although they often referred to family life in the shtetl, the arguments over immigration to Palestine, and homesickness (especially during the holidays), they showed little concern for their parent' health and how they were faring on their own, and barely mentioned their state of health or their visits. Consequently, historians must scour journals, newspapers, memorial volumes, and archival collections to fill in this desideratum. Their findings reflect the hard-heartedness and accompanying feelings of guilt shared by the real-life contemporaries of the pioneers in *Only Yesterday* and confirm earlier assertions concerning the novel's historical value.

Moshe Efrati's recollection of being caught reading maskilic literature by the rabbi of his yeshiva underscores the ideational gap separating the young pioneers from their East European parents and how this influenced their values and feelings towards their families. The rabbi of the yeshiva had spoken to Efrati's father who angrily confronted his son and destroyed their relationship beyond repair: "Do you know what the rabbi said to me [...] 'You are like Jeroboam son of Nebat, an errant sinner.' And with that our peaceful home broke up."<sup>18</sup> When Efrati expressed a desire to immigrate to Palestine, his father refused even to consider the matter:

I will not pay your fare. You want to hasten the end of days? When the Messiah comes we'll go together. 'Though he may tarry, we shall wait.' Now if you wanted to go to America, I would give you the money. But why should a young man like you want to leave his country? You have a whole year and a half before your conscription date. You could acquire a minor disability meanwhile (there are experts who arrange such things) and then forget your army service and marry—fetch a reasonable dowry, open a store, become a regular householder like the other yeshiva students.<sup>19</sup>

Efrati's father had his life all mapped out for him. He wanted his son to maintain Jewish social customs and religious standards; he could not

understand or accept Efrati's wish to lead a radically different life. Talmudic scholars had for centuries parlayed their yeshiva educations into a large dowry and financial independence. Immigrating to Palestine and engaging in agriculture there would be sacrilege. Redemption of the land must be enacted by divine, not human, will. Efrati, he insisted, should relent.

The same issues that played out in Efrati's family relationships led to estrangements between many East European Jewish parents and their Zionist children. A weakened commitment to the observance of rituals and commandments frequently accompanied the adoption of Zionist tenets and contributed to widespread parental disapproval of Zionism and immigration to Palestine. The children chafed at their parents' unwillingness to respect their religious choices and because of this concluded that they would never accept Zionism either. This led many of the children to harden their hearts and emigrate without confronting their parents or receiving their blessings.

Some parents and children were never reconciled. "I will always remember the difficult farewell between Ben-Ya'akov and his father," wrote a friend.

More than half the shtetl residents accompanied us to the river crossing. Because his father was weak, Yitzhak visited him at home to receive his blessing. Yet his father wanted to accompany him. When everybody arrived at the river, Yitzhak noticed that his father was not there. He went back and found him leaning against one of the ancient synagogue walls. "Father," he said, "what are you so worried about? Are you afraid that if I fail to muster on conscription day you will be fined three hundred rubles?" "God forbid," replied his father. "Certainly not. You promised to return three years from now. I expect you to keep your promise; that does not trouble me. I am worried, he groaned, that Judaism will be destroyed. We still have one corner of the world. That holy corner is the Land of Israel. How happy I would be if you were drawn there by its sanctity rather than the impurity and apostasy that influence you". Then he groaned and added, "When you come back three years from now to be mobilized, you will surely not find me alive."<sup>20</sup>

Ben-Ya'akov broke his promise to return; feelings of guilt and betrayal likely tormented him for the rest of his life.

The primary cause of the weakened ties between the pioneers and their parents was not the physical distance between Palestine and Europe. It was their conscious rebellion against their elders' generation and lifestyle and a lack of concern about the suffering they caused them.

Yosef Busel evinced this lack of empathy. This prominent Second Aliyah figure grew up in Tiberias, less than twenty miles from Degania where he settled to pursue his Zionist ideals. Nevertheless, the emotional distance that separated him from his mother and sister in Tiberias proved vast. In 1919, Busel's boat capsized in a storm on the Sea of Galilee. While local fishermen searched for him, his friends and family waited on the shore. Representing two different worlds, they stood separately. Finally, when Busel's corpse was retrieved, his anguished mother tried to cope with his death by giving him a religious burial.

Enough! Enough! Now give him back to me. God has brought him back to his mother's breast. Take him to the purification house immediately. There is a kosher cemetery here... Here he will be buried alongside his father, the saintly rabbi, and amongst kosher Jews... Jews!!! The silence was broken. The elderly mother, the *rebbetzin* rushed towards her son's corpse. She went crazy; her screams rent the heavens. The mute daughter, Yosef's sister, hugged her mother and cooed conciliatory words in her ears. Yet the bereaved mother angrily and hatefully screamed at the *kvutzah* members. A horse-drawn wagon brought to transport the corpse to Degania stood on the path. Call the *hevrah kadisha!* shouted the mother. Kosher Jews! Quickly take him to the cemetery. If he drowned here, it is a sign that it comes from God, who wished to return him to me. Here and nowhere else will he be buried!!!...<sup>21</sup>

Discounting her mother-in-law's grief, Busel's wife explained that he wished to be buried alongside his dead friends in the Kinneret cemetery. His mother responded, "He does not want anything [...] it is the Creator's will that lost sheep return to his breast."<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, the pioneers took Busel's body and buried him at Kinneret. At the burial's conclusion, Busel's mother ran around, beat her breast and head, and screamed: "Give him back to me! Give him back to me!" "A deeply jarring anguish filled the air," recalled the memoirist, but the pioneers offered no consolation.<sup>23</sup>

A 1923 poem published in *HaPo'el Haza'ir* gave real-time expression to the pioneers' guilt. Its speaker, a pioneer who has left home, expresses the deep despondency brought on by his regrettable parting from his parents:<sup>24</sup>

No father, no mother now/ Two letters arrived one after/ another from his town/  
He cried over the chance he'd missed to see them grow old, /He cried over the  
joys they'd missed with their children./ If now were then,/ he would kiss their  
feet! / Why does God so chasten Man? /His shoulders shook with a sudden sob.  
/ He understood, they went on living/ only in his mind/ They were no more.<sup>25</sup>

Through the speaker's guilt the poet gives rein to the dark underside of the Zionist ideal, something popular writing in Jewish Palestine hardly ever expressed.

Aryeh Shrekinger's tragic story illustrates how guilt could overwhelm the pioneers and bring about an untimely death. Shrekinger had immigrated to Palestine without parental permission; his mother had died soon after. Friends and acquaintances testified that she had died in anguish over her son's departure. Subsequently, Shrekinger's father had written to him expressing his loneliness and his wish to be near his son. Thinking it was unrealistic for his father to immigrate Shrekinger recommended against it, but he viewed his own return to Galicia as a kind of failure.<sup>26</sup> The pain of leaving home, his mother's death, the guilt of having betrayed his parents and the fear that being homesick was a sign of weakness were more than he could bear. Overwhelmed, Shrekinger committed suicide.

#### ISAAC KUMER CAUGHT BETWEEN ZIONISM AND FAMILY

Agnon's depiction of Isaac features many elements of the relationship between pioneers and their parents detailed above. Isaac denies his family financial support, conceals the content of their letters to him, and only expresses regret for betraying them during his leisure hours. Yet, these shortcomings and those of the other fictional pioneers are never spoken of in public, and they feel no compunctions about acting on them to help their families out in the Diaspora or to bring them to Palestine.

Secularization and modernization exacerbate the generational differences in the novel as well. Agnon portrays the complexities of Isaac's unfair treatment of his father Simon, his failure to acknowledge what Simon has done for him and his refusal to consider Simon's palpable need. Simon asks his adult son's help in raising his other children.<sup>27</sup> Yet Isaac contributes nothing to their home and shows no concern for his siblings. Instead, he privileges Zionist activities and undermines his father's business, the family's sole source of income: "And what does the son do?" the father asks himself, "Is it not bad enough that he doesn't help him, but he also drives the customers away to other shops?"<sup>28</sup>

The image of Isaac counting out "Zionist" money in front of his hungry siblings captures the tension between Zionism and familial responsibilities, particularly financial ones, shirked by the young pioneers. Ultimately, Simon helps Isaac immigrate to Palestine, but his behavior reveals how



deeply Isaac's priorities trouble him: "When Simon, Isaac's father, saw Isaac's activities, he was bitter and depressed and worried. He would stand in the door of his shop and wring his hands in grief, or would sit on the chair and lean his head back and blow out his lungs inside him. If you haven't seen Simon Kumer, the father of Isaac Kumer, sitting in front of his son you never saw a father's grief."<sup>29</sup>

The two men's divergent justifications for Isaac's immigration more directly conveys the unresolved tension between them. Viewing immigration ideologically, Isaac "ascends to the Land of Israel to build it from its destruction and to be rebuilt by it."<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, Simon views it as something that serves his family's interests.<sup>31</sup> First, it will protect his other children by distancing them from the Zionist "virus" infecting Isaac. Second, a visit to Palestine might cure Isaac: "There may be some profit in that for when he sees there is really nothing there, he'll come back to his hometown and settle down like everybody else."<sup>32</sup> Third, Simon recognizes that Isaac will be able to aid his family if he succeeds financially in Palestine.<sup>33</sup> Finally, Isaac will soon be conscripted. Since military service necessitates "profaning the Sabbath and eating forbidden foods" and he lacks the money "to bribe the army commanders," Simon looks at immigration as a preferable alternative.<sup>34</sup> Ultimately, neither personal initiative nor fervent ideology get Isaac to Palestine. Instead, Simon gets him there by closing his eyes to the destitute state of his family and taking out a loan to advance their interests. But Isaac never acknowledges his father's sacrifice or voices any gratitude.

Isaac's shipboard meeting with an elderly couple juxtaposes the New Yishuv, of which Isaac will soon be a member, and the Old Yishuv, whose worldview resembles his father's. This collocation brings the moral dilemma posed by the Second Aliyah into sharper focus.<sup>35</sup> When the husband asks Isaac if he has relatives in Palestine, he responds, "What do I need relatives for, all the Children of Israel are comrades, especially in the Land of Israel."<sup>36</sup> Here Kumer, like many pioneers, puts the fraternal bonds offered by nationalism before blood ties. Yet the man delicately questions Isaac's readiness to downplay family's importance: "Say that on a Sabbath when we bless the coming of a new month and we shall answer Amen, but on all other days it's hard to make it without a relative, especially in a new place you don't know."<sup>37</sup> The wife's happy response when Isaac asks if they have relatives in Palestine supports her husband's assertion. Rivka, the couple's daughter, receives them in Jaffa and demonstrates how family members provide a joy and comfort denied by national movements. The contrast is stark between Kumer, who privileges Zionists he has never met over needy family members, and Rivka, who brings her parents to Jerusalem to

live with her. Rivka embraces traditional East European family values and Isaac plays them down in favor of nationalist ideals. Yet he never considers whether it might be possible to foster both.

The moral dilemma raised aboard the ship continues to animate Isaac's life in Palestine. He remembers his father, two brothers, and five sisters, who look to him for financial help, and how he abandoned them.<sup>38</sup> Yet, since Isaac has no money, contemplating his family's needs seems masochistic to him, and it is easier to extol the virtues of Zionist bonds and build a life in Palestine.

In contrast with other pioneers, he quickly finds a livelihood, elevates his socioeconomic status, and meets a partner.<sup>39</sup> With what he earns as a painter, he rents a pleasant apartment in Jaffa and purchases furniture and housewares beyond his family's reach. He lives more comfortably than his siblings who share beds in a cramped and crowded house and his fellow pioneers who economize by sharing their quarters. Similarly, whether he dines in or eats out, he eats better than they do, purchases nicer clothes and saves money for winter wear.<sup>40</sup> Finally, adjusting to his new social environment, the young virgin has sex with Sonya Zweiering and falls in love with her.

Isaac's newfound affluence pushes him to consider whether the gap between his settlement activities and his father's modest hopes that he will improve his family's lot can be bridged. Perhaps they are not incompatible goals after all. Perhaps he could offer them succor, material and emotional. Yet, Isaac shuts his eyes to his family's deteriorating economic state, does not share his success, and displays a growing indifference to their plight. Simon who has financed Isaac's journey does not benefit from his quick and successful acclimation; Isaac further distances himself from Simon by sloughing off ritual observance like his peers. Eventually, he stops attending synagogue, putting on phylacteries, and observing the Sabbath and the festivals.

Nonetheless, readers are kept wondering whether Isaac will relent eventually and help his family:

[T]he postman throws him a letter from Father. Isaac reads tearfully and every letter of the alphabet stands out like a painful thorn. Isaac wipes his tears and says, Oh my God, what does Father want to tell me, didn't I know that things were bad with him? Isaac picks up the note again and sees disjointed letters there, where Blomtshe Leah, his little sister, wrote a greeting to her dear brother. Isaac tries to read, but the letters don't combine into words, because she didn't learn to write, because she doesn't have shoes and can't go to school. Isaac says

to himself, If God helps me and an extra penny falls into my hand, I'll send it to Father to buy her shoes. The Blessed Lord who is better than his creatures did put an extra penny into Isaac's hand. But Isaac didn't send it to Blomtshe Leah to buy shoes, but bought jam to sweeten his meals with Sonya. His heart rebuked him. And he replied, It's enough for Father that I don't ask him for money, like some of my comrades who bother their fathers to send them some.<sup>41</sup>

When forced to consider his family's situation, Isaac acknowledges that he abandoned them and displays a sincere desire to make amends. Yet he fails to meet the expectation that he will change. In the end he is unable to work through his feelings of guilt and re-establish family ties and likewise unable to realize a Zionist vision that would fulfill both his national and familial obligations.

Instead, he copes with his guilt towards his family by repressing it and ends up adopting a surrogate family, Simon Bloykof and his wife Tosya, with whom he is able to form guilt-free relationships.<sup>42</sup> Bloykof's deteriorating health reminds Isaac of his deceased mother, and to make amends for his perceived abandonment of her, Isaac tries to help the elderly couple.<sup>43</sup> He visits them regularly and does their shopping and even supplements their groceries with his own money to stave off their hunger.

This strategy does not assuage the guilt that gave rise to it. Isaac's siblings are just as hungry as the Bloykofs, and as Bloykof's death approaches, Isaac reflects on the scene of his childhood and his father's home. He considers addressing his guilt directly by sending money home: "when he added up his accounts, he found that he had five Bishliks left. A shame to touch them, for if he saved another five and another five and another five, he might succeed in putting together ten francs and sending them to Father. And that was about to happen, for he stayed away from Bloykof's home and didn't spend anything on him anymore."<sup>44</sup> Here too, Isaac fails to follow through.

When Isaac's brother Yudele admires his success and contemplates immigrating himself, Simon turns to Isaac for help. Isaac's failure to comply suggests that an unconscious hatred of the East European Jewish world has prevented him from respecting family obligations.<sup>45</sup> Helping his brother would reflect his Zionist commitment but Isaac neither defrays his brother's travel expenses nor bothers to offer him meaningful advice on immigration. Although the narrator explains that Isaac's behavior was not atypical, it seems unjustifiably callous. One must wonder about Isaac's priorities: "Much as we try to justify Isaac, we must say that he was no better than all our other comrades. What can words add to it? We all want the good, but that good we want isn't the real good."<sup>46</sup>

## ISAAC AS GENERATIONAL PARADIGM

Although the morally questionable nature of Isaac's failure to contribute simultaneously to Zionism in Palestine and his family's well-being across the sea runs counter to popular depictions of Second Aliyah immigrants as highly virtuous, Agnon shapes his character as a paradigmatic figure worthy of serious consideration. Through a technique of parallel narratives he highlights the tension between the two objectives, the moral dilemma underlying them, and the failure of individual settlers to resolve or move beyond the dilemma.<sup>47</sup> This tension, he asserts, animated the life of every participant in the Palestinian Zionist project and demanded a global solution.

The lives of minor characters like Ossip the anarchist, Jonathan Orgelbrand, and the vintner from Mahanayim parallel Isaac's life.<sup>48</sup> Ossip meets Puah Hofenstein in Palestine. When he goes hungry, she shares her food with him and they fall in love. In Palestine, Ossip is able to advance his political ideals and find happiness with her, yet he returns to Russia for his mandatory military service, feeling duty-bound to serve so that his father will not face a financially crippling fine. Jonathan Orgelbrand, a thoroughly bourgeois Anglo-Palestine Company manager, earns enough money to build a new life in Palestine but like Ossip, a sense of familial responsibility compels him to send more than half his earning to his stepmother and stepsiblings in Europe and even then he feels obliged to do more for them. Orgelbrand manages to live well nonetheless, and would be a fine catch for the Palestinian Jewish women of his day, only, his unrequited infatuation with a distant relative, Sonya Zweirling, prevents him from finding a wife. This infatuation and Orgelbrand's ongoing assistance to Sonya manifest his deep gratitude to Sonya's father for helping him immigrate but need not have obliged him to sacrifice his own happiness in Palestine for Sonya's sake.

The vintner from Mahanayim is the child of Galician immigrants. Although he has grown up in Palestine, he too finds it difficult to balance family duty and Zionist commitment. The settlement his father had tried to establish in Mahanayim fails. Miserable and destitute, he moves his family to Tzfat where they continue to suffer and a number of them die. When an Arab sells him some grapes on credit, the vintner produces wine and emerges from poverty. Eventually he goes abroad and succeeds as a vintner there capable of supporting himself and his family. He returns to Palestine once every three years to honor his father and show his abiding commitment to Zionism, yet although he seems to find a balance unattained by the others, the journeys to and fro bankrupt him in the end so that he is forced to return to the Diaspora in order to meet his family obligations.

Compared to these three men who express an active commitment to their families, it appears as if Isaac, though he harbors a desire to behave as they do, is so committed to Zionism he cannot follow their example. Compared to Sonya, however, a less flattering picture emerges.<sup>49</sup> Sonya, like Isaac, receives letters from her parents. Her mother expresses her feelings about the spurning of familial obligations which Simon, Isaac's father, kept bottled up prior to his son's emigration and which become accessible to the reader only through his letters to Isaac:

Sonya's mother didn't praise her or mention her sublime talents, but complained about her and about her brothers and sisters. Oh God, has such a thing ever been heard that grown children make an old and infirm father support them and don't lift a finger to ease his load? For if your father falls under his burden, you will all fall with him. And you, Sonya, are adding distress to our distress, for whenever the time comes to send you your share of money, I see your father's face fill with sorrow and suffering, for he doesn't have any ready cash. And the money he sent you today he took from the IOUs entrusted to him [...] And Sonya, you sit in the Chosen Land like the birds of the field who don't toil and don't know want. But what will you do when the hail comes down, and strikes the bird until it has no strength to fly?<sup>50</sup>

Sonya's mother speaks pointedly to Sonya about how she and her siblings have exploited their father. They never consider their filial obligations or the questionable things their father must do to provide for them. Sooner or later their parasitical relationship must come to an end, but Sonya's mother wants it to end sooner so that she and her husband will be able to enjoy their lives a little before they die. Consequently, she tells Sonya that she can lead her life as she pleases, but that she must stop exploiting her father's prioritization of his children and his difficulty in cutting her off. She tells Sonya to find a proper job or marry well. While the Zweirlings are wealthier than the Kumers, the parallelism here points to the morally questionable decisions some Palestinian Jewish immigrants made to build a life. They mercilessly took from their families with no intention of ever giving back.

Agnon assigns Sonya a prominent place in the novel in order to question the restricted form of Zionism she and Isaac give voice to and to highlight their animosity to the East European Jewish life that underlies this approach. As Isaac recognizes, American Jewish immigrants compare favorably with their Palestinian Zionist brethren: "Those who descend to America bring their brothers and sisters to them after a year or two; but as

for these who ascend to the Land of Israel, it's enough for them if they don't return outside the Land. The money father borrowed for Isaac he hasn't yet returned, and how can he hope to bring his sisters to Israel?"<sup>51</sup> Unlike their American counterparts, Isaac and the others in Palestine do not assist the families they left behind or help them *ascend* to Palestine. Isaac neither pays off the debt his father incurred in sending him to Palestine nor purchases tickets to enable family members like Yudele to join him in Palestine.<sup>52</sup>

### FAILURE TO ASSUME ONE'S DESIGNATED ROLE IN THE REDEMPTIVE NARRATIVE

Agnon began to develop the novel's metahistorical and historical layers between 1938 and 1940.<sup>53</sup> Agnon's references in *Only Yesterday* to Kumer's great-grandfather Yudel, the protagonist of his novel *The Bridal Canopy*, and his depiction of the establishment of Tel-Aviv constitute important new elements.<sup>54</sup> Thus, Yudel's role in the novel and Isaac's deferral of a construction-related job in Tel-Aviv suggest Agnon's response to popular Second Aliyah histories and the development of events in Europe.<sup>55</sup>

Yudel serves as a paragon of religious faith in *The Bridal Canopy*.<sup>56</sup> Lack of material reward for his piety does not disturb him. Yet, when his daughters mature, he must act. Sent out to collect money for their dowries, Yudel amasses enough to arrange his eldest daughter's engagement. Then he stops collecting charity and ignores the conditions of his daughter's engagement. He sits and learns and returns home. Yudel's failure to marry off his daughters might have denoted the bankruptcy of East European Jewish religious values, only his daughters discover a cave filled with gold that enables them to marry well and live pious lives. Ostensibly it is the omnipotent God who oversees their world and religious faith, rather than personal initiative, that insures Yudel's legacy.

Yudel's appearance in *Only Yesterday* raises issues of continuity.<sup>57</sup> For three generations Isaac's family lived by selling off the treasure, the implicit reward for piety and faith and by the time Simon is born, none remains.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, he preserves Yudel's legacy by naming a son after him. Isaac too embraces Yudel as a model. Before immigrating to Palestine, Isaac averts his eyes from the suffering of his family, and puts on metaphorical blinders just as Yudel did to avoid the temptations of the Diaspora. Then, in a state of anguish during his steamship voyage, Isaac recalls the difficulties Yudel endured travelling by sailboat. As a result, he understands his tribulations as trials to purify and prepare him for life in Palestine.

In Palestine, however, Isaac questions Yudel's service as a role model:

his heart became the home of thoughts for honest and naïve people, like Reb Yudel Hasid his ancestor and his three virgin daughters, who, when they were over their heads in troubles, the Lord Summoned up for them a cave and they found a treasure. Isaac raised his head slightly and peeped into the cave and said, But here there is no treasure. And he laughed at himself for expecting to find a purse of coins here or two or three pennies to buy him some bread. Needless to say that he didn't find anything, but we do need to say that he was sad because he didn't find anything, for he had no hope or expectation of finding a penny in a natural way to buy him something to save his soul from hunger.<sup>59</sup>

Isaac laughs at himself for using Yudel as a guide, but his growing disdain for the religious piety he embodies prevents Isaac from seeing his continued use as a model. In fact, the paint brush and paints given to him by a stranger pave the way for his professional career and prove as valuable as a treasure.<sup>60</sup> As the narrator reflects "the Lord had taken pity on him and brought relief to him from somewhere else."<sup>61</sup> Isaac's interactions with others and his developing skill as a painter take on added significance because the all-encompassing religious worldview of the omniscient narrator, embraced to some extent by Yudel, Simon and Isaac, prompts the reader to interpret various events in Isaac's life as "small miracles" that advance a redemptive narrative.<sup>62</sup>

Isaac continues to read his adventures through the prism of Yudel's story, but he increasingly dismisses it and the idea that he is a participant in God's redemptive plan.<sup>63</sup> Nonetheless, when Isaac "longs to tell" Yudel's story to a group of yeshiva-educated Jerusalemites he realizes that he has lost touch with something extremely significant.<sup>64</sup>

Amos Oz posits that Isaac's ongoing connection to Yudel enables him to maintain a childlike ability to view the world with fresh eyes as a naïve synthesis rather than a world torn asunder. Furthermore, the sublime unity he is able to convey to others constitutes one of his principle strengths. For example, when he interacts with Zionist functionaries in Lemberg and cynical immigrants in a Jaffa café, his naïve worldview remains intact and persuades his more realistic counterparts to see the world through his eyes. While this naïve worldview supports self-delusion, like Isaac's belief that his relationship with Sonya is romantic rather than carnal, its earnest representation through art offers those who see it access to the vital and affirmative essence of things. It is this unique quality and Isaac's willingness to stay true to this vision which lead the painters Leichtfuss and Bloykof to embrace

and mentor him. By yoking his painterly talents to the advancement of a broader redemptive narrative, Isaac can find a productive connection with his past.<sup>65</sup>

Like Isaac's successful rise as a painter, his chance encounter with Yedidya Rabinovitch can be interpreted as divinely wrought. Soon after Isaac's arrival in Palestine, the difficulties the two men share bring them together; Rabinovitch's generosity quickly makes their friendship blossom. When they do not find work, Rabinovitch takes Isaac in and tells him, "My house is your house."<sup>66</sup> Dwelling in a ruin, subsisting on tomatoes, olives, and bread off a newspaper-covered packing box and sleeping on a rickety makeshift bed Rabinovitch lacks the resources of a typical host, but Isaac nevertheless appreciates his warmth and recognizes that he has "found himself a friend."<sup>67</sup>

Ultimately Rabinovitch abandons the spartan agricultural lifestyle he long embraced to rise above mere subsistence. To make ongoing contributions to the settlement project, he believes, even virtuous settlers must occasionally satisfy their personal desires. They must be flexible and recognize that their shared vision can be realized in different ways. Consequently, he decides to sell fashionable clothes to buoy the spirits of those who wear them. Thus, rather than feeling ashamed of his temporary departure from Palestine to pursue this plan, he is confident that he is participating in a grander scheme: "And since he knew his calling, he took action and withdrew from the Land of Israel for the sake of the Land of Israel, for he trusted in the future when all those who reproach him will say on the day he returns, You did well to leave, because it was for the good of the Land that you left, just as the Land needs people to work the soil, so it also needs expert merchants."<sup>68</sup>

When he returns to Palestine, Rabinovitch responds to the founding of Tel-Aviv by abandoning his initial plan and choosing what he sees as a more productive and lucrative way to benefit the Zionist settlement. Having married a wealthy woman, he can become an investor and entrepreneur. While this plan runs counter to Labor Zionist ideals, Yonatan Sagiv has pointed out that the narrator has a positive view of Rabinovitch's return and his decision to take up capitalism in service of the Zionist project.<sup>69</sup> Rather than hold fast to a form of Zionism that displeases him, Rabinovitch embraces an alternative approach that suits him better.

Despite the changes he has undergone since his work as an agricultural laborer, Rabinovitch fondly remembers Isaac and invites him to work in partnership with him: "Out of his affection for Isaac, he decided to bring him into his business, and give him the job of painting as a



contractor or otherwise.”<sup>70</sup> Rabinovitch’s invitation coincides with a very difficult period in Isaac’s life. He feels compelled to choose between the restrictive Jewish model of the religious zealots in Mea Shearim and a spartan form of contemporary Judaism advanced by the secular Zionists of greater Jaffa-Tel-Aviv, but neither location and its associated lifestyle wholly satisfies Isaac and he tries to straddle the two.<sup>71</sup> However, the narrator does not foreground these locations and lifestyles to assert that contemporary Palestine offers its Jewish inhabitants only two ways of life but rather focuses on them to highlight the contradictions and tensions animating the Palestinian Jewish communities which make it difficult for Isaac to find his way.<sup>72</sup>

Rabinovitch’s invitation opens up a new approach to life in Palestine that makes sense to Isaac both in religious and secular terms and that can help him satisfy the desire to make a contribution as a pioneer while fulfilling his duties to his family. The traditional Jewish narrative of redemption that serves as the novel’s frame of reference suggests to the reader that Isaac’s acceptance of Rabinovitch’s invitation is a potentially crucial element in the contemporary movement of the Jewish people towards redemption. Even though Isaac shirks the personal accounting necessary to balance Zionist pursuits with his family’s needs and lacks a true awareness of his motivations, he is able to infuse an element of the sublime and advance Zionist development while painting Rabinovitch’s buildings:<sup>73</sup>

Paint opens man’s heart, returns him to the world, to the sky, to the root of his cosmic soul. It frees him from his limiting independence, and allows him to grow and change; for the ability to paint a yellow object red and green doesn’t always teach about a lack of a relationship to “the interiority of things,” rather it is frequently a revelation of the possibility of change, “That it is the way of people to change” like those objects that he painted with paint.<sup>74</sup>

By having faith and participating in Rabinovitch’s development plan, Isaac is able to produce a living environment conducive to individual and collective transformation that will help realize a more expansive Zionist vision. At the very least, the money Isaac will earn working for Rabinovitch will function like the gold discovered by Yudel’s daughters and help sustain his family for generations.

To take up this opportunity, Isaac must first recognize and renounce his active hostility towards the Jewish world of East Europe, cease fetishizing agricultural labor as the sole method to attain the aims of Zionism and embrace a new approach to its aims that will enable him to improve his

own life and the lives of his family and his people.<sup>75</sup> This might seem like a lot, but, if Isaac truly desires it, he can make it happen. As Rabinovitch explains:

A person has to get accustomed to luxuries. If he hasn't got a great desire for luxuries, he must desire them, for if you have great desires, you desire to fill them, and when you do you increase your strength of will, you don't sit idle, for lusts require money, and money requires activity. You get rid of laziness and bring yourself to activity and thus you are building yourself, and the Land will be built along with you. The Land of Israel is not given to those who eat manna. I'm not a great scholar, but I do know that when the children of Israel entered the Land of Israel, the manna stopped.<sup>76</sup>

While Isaac agrees to participate in Rabinovitch's plan, he does so half-heartedly; when his future wife and mother-in-law respond tepidly to news of Rabinovitch's job offer, Isaac forgoes it without a qualm.<sup>77</sup> A reluctance to confront his underlying hostility to the environment of his childhood, his continued idealization of agricultural labor as the exclusive means for attaining the goals of Zionism and his embrace of a "realistic" worldview denying the possibility of synthesizing disparate elements of his identity prevent him from doing something that might improve life for himself and others. Declining the chance to participate in a grand redemptive narrative like Yudel's, Isaac tries to emulate him by assuming a religious lifestyle and burial in the soil of the Land of Israel.<sup>78</sup> Thus, an attraction to death, individual and collective, returns Isaac to Jerusalem.

Once back in Jerusalem, Isaac purposely avoids harnessing his creative abilities to advance Zionist settlement and tries to live a pious life. Yet his embrace of a religious lifestyle proves less than sincere, something made clear when his failure to honor his commitment to Rabinovitch haunts his dreams. It is Isaac's breach of the promise he made to Rabinovitch rather than his spurning of agricultural labor that may be understood as the "sin" that brings about his death. Having eschewed the chance to use his brush for personal and collective benefit, Isaac paints the words "mad hound" on a stray dog named Balak in a moment of "trembling inspiration" that "arouses an almost sexual ecstasy" and sets events in motion that culminate in his painful death from rabies.<sup>79</sup> While Isaac's death portends a fertile and potentially better future, his burial marks something harsher and less grandiose, an ideal removed from Jewish tradition and the broader needs of the Jewish people which he might have avoided had he harnessed his artistic talent to the Zionist project.

## CONCLUSION

Building on Band's important insight concerning the proper contextualization of Agnon's *Only Yesterday*, the article reads the novel as a response to emergent Second Aliyah histories that celebrated early twentieth century Palestinian Jewish immigrants and praised their critical contribution to the "state in the making." Disturbed by these histories and the self-congratulatory triumphalism which were contemporaneous with the rise of Nazism and the agony of East European Jewry, Agnon introduced historical facts and metahistorical myth into *Only Yesterday* to create an alternative interpretation of turn-of-the-century Palestinian events.

Agnon shifts attention away from the accomplishments of the early twentieth century Jewish immigrants to their shortcomings. As has been emphasized, youthful immigrants hesitated to confront their charged relationships with those they had left behind, embraced a restrictive Zionist vision that downplayed blood ties, and dismissed familial responsibilities. In contrast, Agnon foregrounds these issues in the constant presence of Simon Kumer and his children in Isaac's psyche. Due to his fundamental weakness and indecisiveness, Isaac fails to acknowledge the hatred and anger he feels towards East European Jewish society and his reluctance to adopt the agricultural model he so idealizes. Consequently, he is unable to become reconciled with his past and fails to use his unique artistic talents to advance a more expansive narrative of Zionist redemption. This constitutes the "sin" for which Isaac is punished, since the rejection of his assigned role prevents his realization of the grand scheme.

Like Isaac, most Second Aliyah immigrants failed to envision and work towards a more robust Palestinian Zionist future. The price of this collective shortcoming went unnoticed during the first decades of the twentieth century. Yet as the New Yishuv became aware of the catastrophic conditions endured by East European Jewry, Agnon felt that the successful development of a robust plan for absorbing more European Jewish immigrants might have saved many Jewish lives.<sup>80</sup> Consequently, all the Second Aliyah immigrants bore responsibility for not doing their part on behalf of European Jewry while there was still time to act. Although they rarely discussed it, this failure weighed heavily on them.<sup>81</sup> Seeking to unburden these immigrants, Agnon has Isaac assume the role of a scapegoat "punished" for the sins of his community. Indeed, it is unfathomable why the God of the novel would "punish" Isaac so brutally for a sin others had also committed and for which they were not punished, but it is no less unfathomable than the biblical God commanding the High Priest to place the sins of the Jewish people

on a scapegoat to be sent into the wilderness on Yom Kippur. Nonetheless, by accepting the “just” nature of Isaac’s fictional death, Second Aliyah immigrants and later pioneers could vicariously acknowledge their own self-centered behavior and find expiation for it.

Ultimately, Agnon wanted to produce a positive and productive response to contemporary events and was not interested in flagellating members of the New Yishuv for failing to prevent the Holocaust. By and large, responsibility for it lay with the perpetrators. Nevertheless, the introduction of a redemptive narrative as a frame of reference for *Only Yesterday* and the failure of Isaac and his contemporaries to transcend their own fickle natures and act decisively for the sake of other Jews leaves the redemptive narrative hovering in the background, waiting to be advanced.<sup>82</sup> True atonement for their failure to adopt and promote a more expansive Palestinian Zionist vision required that the pioneers of the Second Aliyah as well as their more recently arrived counterparts embrace and advance such a vision. By bringing Holocaust survivors to Mandatory Palestine and incorporating them into its unfolding future, the New Yishuv would have served as “the beginning of [the Jewish People’s] redemption”, and a reconciliation between the East European-born pioneers with their past.<sup>83</sup> Agnon found this the best way to transcend the limited historical vision of the Second Aliyah.

## NOTES

1. Avraham Holtz, “Examination of the Details of ‘Temol Shilshom,’” in *Agnon Anthology*, ed., ’Emunah Yaron et al. (Jerusalem, 1994), 178–221 [Hebrew]. See also Benjamin Harshav, introduction to *Only Yesterday*, by S. Y. Agnon (Princeton, NJ, 2000), xi–xiii.

2. Yaakov Katz, “Agnon Confronts Religious Confusion,” in *Shai Agnon Critical Essays of His Writings*, ed., Avinoam Barshai (Tel-Aviv, 1992), 2:293–9 [Hebrew]. See also Todd Hasak-Lowy, *Here and Now: History, Nationalism, and Realism in Modern Hebrew Fiction* (Syracuse, 2008), 68–70.

3. Barukh Kurzweil, *Essays on Shai Agnon’s Stories* (Tel-Aviv, 1962), 103 [Hebrew].

4. Avraham Band, “Crime and Punishment in ‘Temol Shilshom,’” in *Shai Agnon*, ed., Barshai, 2:305 [Hebrew].

5. Dan Laor, “Did Agnon Write About the Holocaust?” in *Shai Agnon: New Aspects* (Tel-Aviv, 1995), 60–97 [Hebrew].

6. Shomer Organization, *The Watchman Anthology: Documents, Memoirs, and Evaluations Written by Veterans of 'ha-Shomer'* (Tel-Aviv, 1937) [Hebrew].
7. The volume was published after Katznelson's premature death. See Brakhah Habas, ed., *Second Aliyah Book* (Tel-Aviv, 1947) [Hebrew].
8. Moshe Braslavski, *The Palestinian Labor Movement: Remarks and Sources* (Ein Harod, 1942) [Hebrew].
9. David Kalai, *Forty Years of the Second Aliyah: (1904–1944)* (Tel-Aviv, 1944) [Hebrew].
10. Dan Miron, "From Allegory to Historical Story (Introduction to a Discussion of Temol Shilshom)," in *Agnon Anthology B*, ed., Emunah Yaron et al. (Jerusalem, 2000), 142–3 [Hebrew].
11. Hizky Shoham, "From 'Great History' to 'Small History': The Genesis of Zionist Periodization," *Israel Studies* 18.1 (2013): 41–4.
12. Holtz, "Examination of the Details of 'Temol Shilshom,'" 178–221; Hasak-Lowy, *Here and Now*, 77–8; Harshav, xii.
13. Ariel Hirshfeld, *Reading Shai Agnon* (Tel-Aviv, 2011), 153; Amos Oz, *The Silence of Heaven: Agnon's Fear of God* (Jerusalem, 1993), 95 [both in Hebrew].
14. Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago, 1995).
15. Anita Shapira, "Religious Motifs of the Labor Movement," in *New Jews Old Jews* (Tel-Aviv, 1997), 248–75; David Kenaani, *The Working Second Aliyah and Its Relationship to Religion and Tradition* (Tel-Aviv, 1976) [both in Hebrew].
16. Moti Zeirah, *We Are Torn: The Relationship of Labor Settlement Culture to Jewish Culture in the Twenties* (Jerusalem, 2002), 201–344 [Hebrew].
17. Gershon Shaked, *Hebrew Fiction 1880–1980* (Tel-Aviv, 1988), 2: 206–9 [Hebrew].
18. Ya'akov Sharett and Nahman Tamir, ed., *People of the Second Aliyah: Memoirs*, Vol. 4 (Tel-Aviv, 1970), 1 [Hebrew].
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*, 4:19.
21. Devorah Devir, "From an Old Album," *HaPoel HaZair*, October 11, 1960.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*
24. The advocacy of single-minded devotion to Zionism in David Shimonowitz's 1909 poem "Do Not Listen, Son, to the Instruction of a Father," contrasts markedly with this 1923 poem. David Shimonovitz, *Writings* (Tel-Aviv, 1925), 1:291. On the publication of Shimonowitz's poem in sacred text font, see Ya'akov Hazan, *Childhood and Youth: Autobiographical Chapters* (Tel-Aviv, 1993), 60 [Hebrew].
25. Y. Hananel, "Their Eyes," *HaPoel HaZair*, September 10, 1923 [Hebrew].
26. Obituary, *Kuntres*, June 16, 1922 [Hebrew].
27. Shmuel Yosef Agnon, *Collected Stories of Shmuel Yosef Agnon*, vol. 5, *Temol Shilshom* (Jerusalem, 1993), 9 [Hebrew]; *Only Yesterday*, trans. Barbara Harshav (Princeton, 2000), 5. Harshav's excellent translation sometimes fails to convey the

original intention. We provide her translation with occasional modifications for accuracy. Avraham Holtz, “Encomia and Corrigenda: On Harshav’s Translation of Temol Shilshom,” *Prooftexts* 24.3 (2004): 320–68.

28. Agnon, *Collected Stories*, 5:9; *Only Yesterday*, 5.
29. *Ibid.*, 5:8–9, 5.
30. *Ibid.*, 5:7, 3.
31. Oz, *Silence of Heaven*, 81–2.
32. Agnon, *Collected Stories*, 5:9; *Only Yesterday*, 5.
33. *Ibid.*, 6.
34. *Ibid.*, 5:10, 6.
35. Oz, *Silence of Heaven*, 108–9.
36. Agnon, *Collected Stories*, 5:33; *Only Yesterday*, 29.
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*, 5:226, 234–5.
39. Oz points out Isaac’s desire for these three things as bourgeois considerations motivating his immigration. Oz, *Silence of Heaven*, 76.
40. Agnon, *Collected Stories*, 5:68–69; 84; *Only Yesterday*, 68; 83–4.
41. Agnon, *Collected Stories*, 5:135; *Only Yesterday*, 137.
42. Arpali links these failures to Isaac’s unremarkable character. Bo’az Arpali, *Masternovel: Five Essays on Temol Shilshom by Shai Agnon* (Tel-Aviv, 1998), 167–86 [Hebrew]. Alternatively, Dekel sees Isaac drawn to Zionism by a desire to relinquish his minority status in Europe and become a majority subject in Palestine. In this scenario, if Isaac assists his family, he would need to confront their shared sense of racial inferiority and their history of trauma and persecution—things he works to put behind him. This theory is compelling, but requires substantiation. Mikhal Dekel, “Erasing Race: The Redemptive National Narrative of S. Y. Agnon,” *Cambridge Literary Review* 7 (2013): 139–52.
43. Agnon, *Collected Stories*, 5:243; *Only Yesterday*, 251–2.
44. Agnon, *Collected Stories*, 5:248; *Only Yesterday*, 256.
45. Hayyim Be’er, “Connected to Him Like a Dog,” *Haaretz*, September 24, 1993 [Hebrew].
46. Agnon, *Collected Stories*, 5:263; *Only Yesterday*, 272.
47. Gershon Shaked, *Agnon’s Narrative Art* (Tel-Aviv, 1973), 47–57 [Hebrew]. Shaked explains: “The different stories with their different characters are analogic, and the [text] itself is only unified in an analogic manner. [...] When we move from one character to another and from one story to another, we need to try to reveal the overarching analogy, the unifying theme, pointed to by all the plots.”
48. Oz, *Silence of Heaven*, 148, 160–1, 170–1; Arbal notes how Agnon develops issues surrounding the tension between familial responsibility and immigration to Palestine in Isaac’s psyche through parallelism, *Written on the Dog’s Skin: On Shai Agnon’s Creative Approach* (Jerusalem, 2006), 301 [Hebrew].
49. Oz, *Silence of Heaven*, 140–5.
50. Agnon, *Collected Stories*, 5:158; *Only Yesterday*, 161.

51. Agnon, *Collected Stories*, 5:236–7; *Only Yesterday*, 244.
52. Ship tickets to Palestine were cheaper than tickets to America. Gur Alroey, *Immigrants: Jewish Immigration to Palestine at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century* (Jerusalem, 2004), 81–83 [Hebrew].
53. Sarah Hager, “‘Temol Shilshom’—Formation of Its Structure and Its Unity,” in *Shai Agnon Critical Essays of His Writings*, 315–35.
54. Miron, “From Allegory to Historical Story,” 154.
55. On the connection between *Only Yesterday* and *The Bridal Canopy* as pivotal for the effective comprehension of the former, see Oz, *Silence of Heaven*, 132.
56. Agnon, *Collected Stories of Shmuel Yosef Agnon*, vol. 1, *Hakhnasat Kalah* (Jerusalem, 1993) [Hebrew]; *The Bridal Canopy*, trans. I. M. Lask (New York, 1967). See Dan Miron, *Under the Motley Canopy: A Study of S. Y. Agnon’s Narrative Art in The Bridal Canopy* (Tel-Aviv, 1996); Avraham Holtz, *Sights and Sources: An Annotated and Illustrated Edition of S. Y. Agnon’s Hakhnasat Kalah* (Jerusalem, 1995) [both in Hebrew].
57. Arnold Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare: A Study in the Fiction of S. Y. Agnon* (Berkeley, 1968), 440–1.
58. Agnon, *Collected Stories*, 5:10; *Only Yesterday*, 6.
59. Agnon, *Collected Stories*, 5:64; *Only Yesterday*, 64.
60. Even before Isaac arrives in Palestine, Agnon connects painting to providence. During his journey, a starving and penniless Isaac is pitied, fed, and protected by the ship’s assistant chef. In gratitude, Isaac helps him paint furniture. Oz, *Silence of Heaven*, 111–12.
61. Agnon, *Collected Stories*, 5:65; *Only Yesterday*, 65.
62. Oz, *Silence of Heaven*, 85, 117. As Yaniv Hagbi notes, “there is an inherent tension in Agnon’s work between faith and doubt”, *Language, Absence, Play: Judaism and Superstructuralism in the Poetics of S. Y. Agnon* (Syracuse, 2009), 7.
63. Isaac views Eyn Ganim’s inhabitants as modern versions of the hidden saint Yudel visits.
64. Agnon, *Collected Stories*, 5:235–36; *Only Yesterday*, 243.
65. Oz, *Silence of Heaven*, 73–219; cf. Arbal, *Written on the Dog’s Skin*, 198–254.
66. Agnon, *Collected Stories*, 5:49; *Only Yesterday*, 49.
67. Agnon, *Collected Stories*, 5:51; *Only Yesterday*, 50.
68. Agnon, *Collected Stories*, 5:92; *Only Yesterday*, 92–3.
69. Yonatan Sagiv, “And I Love You for Your Crooked Sandal: Capitalism and Socialism in Agnon’s *Only Yesterday*,” in *Thoughts on Shoes* (Tel-Aviv, 2014), 158–9 [Hebrew].
70. Agnon, *Collected Stories*, 5:450; *Only Yesterday*, 473.
71. Dekel, “Erasing Race,” 144–6.
72. Boaz Arpali, “Agnon Prophecies Israeli Society’s Future,” *Moznayim* 73.4 (1999): 9 [Hebrew].
73. Arbal, *Written on the Dog’s Skin*, 199–200.
74. Miron, “From Allegory to Historical Story”, 101.

75. Sagiv, "And I Love You," 164–70.

76. Agnon, *Collected Stories*, 5:454; *Only Yesterday*, 477–8.

77. Arbal, *Written on the Dog's Skin*, 219–20; Harshav, xiii.

78. Agnon, *Collected Stories*, 5:249 & 5:607; *Only Yesterday*, 257 & 642.

79. *Ibid.*, 103.

80. Agnon worked to disseminate information about the Holocaust; he likely strove to do more on behalf of European Jewry. Laor, "Did Agnon Write About the Holocaust?" 68.

81. See Dina Porat, *An Entangled Leadership: The Yishuv and the Holocaust, 1942–45* (Tel-Aviv, 1986), 11 [Hebrew]. See Tuvia Friling, *Arrows in the Dark: David Ben-Gurion, the Yishuv Leadership, and Rescue Attempts During the Holocaust*, 2 vols. (Madison, WI, 2005).

82. Palestinian critics trying to comprehend the developing catastrophe looked to Agnon's novel *A Guest for the Night* for guidance. When Agnon was completing *Only Yesterday*, he was likely aware of such expectations. Laor, "Did Agnon Write About the Holocaust?" 62–6.

83. This phrase comes from the Prayer for the State of Israel that Agnon helped formulate. Jules Harlow, ed., *Siddur Sim Shalom: A Prayerbook for Shabbat, Festivals, and Weekdays* (New York, 1985), 416; Dan Laor, *Agnon's Life* (Jerusalem, 1998), 406–8 [Hebrew].

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