â€œA Reversed Version of *Bidmi yamehaâ€•:* A. B. Yehoshuaâ€™s â€œSippur *pashut* beÊ¾Erets YisraÊ¾elâ€•

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"A Reversed Version of *Bidmi yameha*"
A. B. Yehoshua's "*Sippur pashut* be'Erets Yisra'el"

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Throughout his career A. B. Yehoshua interacted with Agnon's tales of frustrated love, going so far as to even design a sequel to Shmu'el Yosef Agnon's Sippur pashut (A Simple Story), *which he set in Tel Aviv of the 1920s and described as a "reversed version of* Bidmi yameha" (In the Prime of Her Life). *Yehoshua never completed that sequel, at least not in the manner that he originally sketched in the brainstorming sessions that he archived at the National Library in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, this archived document helps us deepen our appreciation of Agnon via the eyes of one of his most attentive readers. Yehoshua's sequel highlights motifs that preoccupied him and Agnon, especially the biblical Aqedah, which he links thematically to baby Meshulam's unfulfilled* pidyon haben *("redemption of the firstborn son") ceremony that Agnon left pending at the end of* Sippur pashut. *This becomes a key element in Yehoshua's interpretation of Meshulam and Blume's plights. He brings them together into an extended tale of star-crossed lovers that crosses over into the next generation in the manner of Agnon's* Bidmi yameha.

It was likely in the mid- to late 1980s that A. B. Yehoshua played with the idea of creating a sequel to Shmu'el Yosef Agnon's iconic tale of star-crossed lovers, *Sippur pashut* (*A Simple Story*).[1] By then he was already an internationally famous short story writer and had also published several provocative novellas and three major novels. But his extraordinary historical novel, *Mr. Mani*, which he completed in 1989, proved to be an unprecedented challenge, and he deferred it in various ways, including by writing *Molkho* (*Five Seasons*, 1987). My educated guess is that it was around this time that Yehoshua came up with the idea of creating a sequel

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to Agnon's *Sippur pashut*.[2] He called this sequel a "*Sippur pashut* beʾErets Yisraʾel" ("*A Simple Story* in the Land of Israel") and also "Not a Simple Story—A Literary Exercise." He describes it as a "reversed version of *Bidmi yameha*" (*In the Prime of Her Life*), in reference to another Agnonic tale of star-crossed lovers in which family dysfunctionalities and unfulfilled longings are passed down from one generation to the next in the Eastern European town that Agnon labelled "Szybusz" ("Confusion").

Yehoshua outlined the sequel in the following manner:

התוכנית הגדולה. משולם הולך בעקבות .בלומה. הוא מגיע לארץ ישראל הירשל וטוייבר מגיעים בעקבותיו לעצור את .זה, ולשדך אותו עם מישהי אחרת הכנסת כלה. תמול שלשום. בדמי ימיה וסיפור פשוט. *לוקחים איתם את הכלה המיועדת???* *אולי המסע על הים לבב ימים*	Masterplan: Meshulam follows Blume and reaches Erets Yisraʾel. Hirshl and Toyber come after him to stop it and to match him with another woman. *Hakhnasat kallah [Bridal Canopy]. Temol shilshom [Only Yesterday]. Bidmi yameha [In the Prime of Her Life]* and *Sippur pashut [A Simple Story].* Do they bring along the intended bride perhaps??? For the voyage by sea, *Bilvav yamim* [*In the Heart of the Seas*].[3]

As this master plan reveals, aside from *Sippur pashut* and *Bidmi yameha*, the projected sequel would incorporate elements from other Agnonic works to provide the contextual background and intertextual references for the journey of Szybuszian characters from a dissolved Austro-Hungarian Empire to Little Tel Aviv in its earliest days.

At the end of *Sippur pashut*, Agnon had acknowledged that "Hirshl and Mina's story is over, but Blume's is not. Everything that happened to Blume Nacht would fill another book. And [. . .] how much ink will be spilled and how many quills will be broken before we're done. God in heavens knows when that will be."[4] But Agnon did not fulfill his promise to extend Blume Nacht's story. Picking up this gauntlet, Yehoshua conjures up a middle aged Blume pursued by Mina and Hirshl's now grown-up son (Meshulam, who is half her age), with a host of other Szybuszians in tow. The farcical scenario is heart wrenching, too, since Yehoshua's brainstorming notes indicate that this intergenerational love affair might end more tragically than Agnon's ambiguous ending allows.

Yehoshua's brainstorming notes comprise ten typescript pages, some of them sparsely filled and others densely packed. Three different layouts and fonts suggest they were drafted separately over the course of several sessions. The longest among them is mostly taken up by a verbatim transcription of two sections from *Sippur pashut*'s denouement in chapters 33 to 37, which interested Yehoshua because they highlight the plight of baby Meshulam, born while his father is convalescing in a mental sanatorium at Lemberg and his distraught family neglects to prepare the pregnant mother or take care of the newborn child. Here as well as in a scholarly essay that he published in 1981 about *Sippur pashut*'s denouement, Yehoshua focuses on the novel's ending, where a sickly baby Meshulam is sent away to grow up in the countryside with his maternal grandparents. As we will see over the course of this article, Yehoshua feels that this is an immoral banishment of an innocent, unfortunate child. The transcribed passages from Agnon's *Sippur pashut* probably helped him internalize the exact wording and style of baby Meshulam's plight so he could prepare a convincing backstory and riposte for the sequel.

Apart from transcribing the passages from *Sippur pashut* that are most closely related to baby Meshulam, Yehoshua's longest set of brainstorming notes for the sequel stages a conversation between Meshulam's father and grandmother (Hirshl and Tsirl Hurvitz). Yehoshua invents an entirely new conversation in which Hirshl and Tsirl discuss his youthful attachment to Blume and allude to his mental breakdown after his marriage to Mina. But the now-elderly Tsirl in Yehoshua's version is still bent on gaslighting Hirshl's feelings for Blume and denying any responsibility for their orphaned cousin. In Yehoshua's sequel, Tsirl's narcissism continues to prevail as her sole behavioral compass. A shorter version of this same dialogue reappears in another one of Yehoshua's brainstorming sessions, where he adds that the belated conversation between Hirshl and Tsirl would be triggered by Meshulam's inquiries about his father's mental breakdown. Yehoshua traces here a cumulative deficit of love and generosity in the Hurvitz family, extending it through the twenty-year-old Meshulam who "takes along the suicide rope" even to Tel Aviv.

Yehoshua's sequel elaborates on Meshulam's psychological makeup by comparing him to his younger brother. As adumbrated already at the end of Agnon's novel, the sickly and sidelined Meshulam is contrasted with his baby brother, who is surrounded by the love and attention that Meshulam lacks. Fast forwarding into

Meshulam's childhood, Yehoshua invents a new scene in which the sidelined firstborn visits his parents' home on Shabbat and wanders alone all night in the house because he feels more like a guest there than a member of the family. This episode mimics Agnon's style so convincingly that it took me a while to realize I could not locate it in Agnon's novel because Yehoshua had completely invented it.

The most substantial part of Yehoshua's brainstorming work are two densely typed pages headed by the master plan quoted above. Here Yehoshua summarizes his plan for the sequel and poses to himself a series of loaded questions, which I will present and unpack over the course of this article. At the bottom of this document Yehoshua adds one last question by hand in blue ink: "Haʾim kedai lehishtageaʿ beʾErets Yisraʾel?" ("Is it worth going crazy in the land of Israel?"). This ominous consideration seems to jeopardize the entire Zionist narrative that promised a national redemption through the ingathering of exiles in the ancestral land. To diffuse the gravity of a potential failure of Meshulam's redemption, Yehoshua plays with the idea of also bringing the idealistic Landau to the land of Israel, too. This would create a multiplot novel around two minor Agnonic characters (Meshulam and Landau) in ways that open up an intriguing set of narrative possibilities and counterpoints.

To explain this intimate engagement of one strong writer with another, I will first trace Yehoshua's general indebtedness to Agnon. Then I will present in greater detail the content of Yehoshua's plan, with its proposed setting in 1920s Tel Aviv and the implications of Meshulam's unfulfilled *pidyon haben* ("redemption of the firstborn son") ceremony. Finally we will consider whether or not Yehoshua's sequel

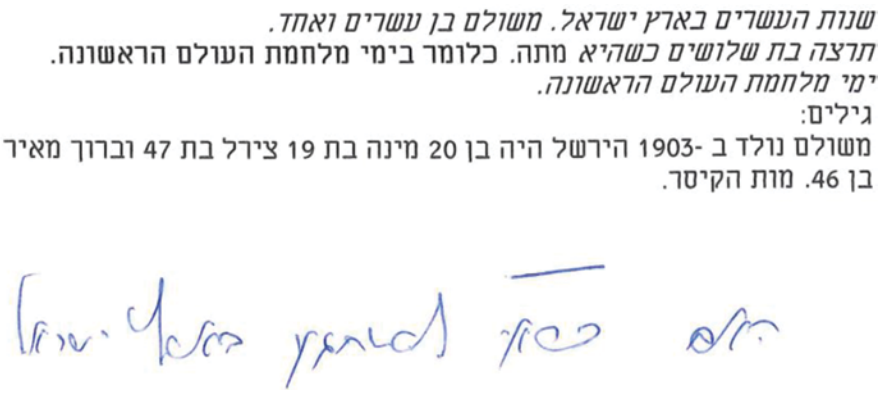
שנות העשרים בארץ ישראל. משולם בן עשרים ואחד.
תרצה בת שלושים כשהיא מתה. כלומר בימי מלחמת העולם הראשונה.
ימי מלחמת העולם הראשונה.
גילים:
משולם נולד ב -1903 הירשל היה בן 20 מינה בת 19 צירל בת 47 וברוך מאיר בן 46. מות הקיסר.

Figure 1. Screenshot from A.B. Yehoshua's Plan for Sippur Pashut.

to *Sippur pashut* is really a "reversed version of *Bidmi yameha*," in the sense of actually repairing the dysfunctionalities passed down from one generation to the next as a burden imposed on innocent, vulnerable youth by their elders.

Yehoshua did not implement his projected sequel to *Sippur pashut*, at least not in the manner that he envisioned in the archived document. But the thought experiment that he fortunately sent to the National Library of Israel is nonetheless valuable for a number of reasons. Key aspects of this plan manifest themselves across Yehoshua's fiction as well as in the two sole essays that he published about Agnon, one of which focuses on the denouement of *Sippur pashut* and the other on the moral crux of *Bidmi yameha*. Furthermore, Yehoshua's understanding of Agnon deepens our appreciation of the role that neglected offspring played in his work, children condemned to repeat the destructive behaviours of their elders. In his completed novels, Yehoshua often hints at the possibility of breaking out of the self-destructive circumstances that he illustrates so dramatically in his fictional worlds. Here, too, despite the tragic outcome that he envisions for his Meshulam, Yehoshua hints at a potentially redemptive intervention by Landau, a minor character that Yehoshua pulls out of *Bidmi yameha* rather than from *Sippur pashut*. This reminds us that *Bidmi yameha* is itself a kind of prequel to *Sippur pashut* because of the overlap of characters within them.

YEHOSHUA'S INDEBTEDNESS TO AGNON

Throughout his career Yehoshua proudly acknowledged Agnon as his principal literary model. He learned from him to project traditional Jewish concerns and symbols upon a microcosmic family affair that activates a larger conversation about Jewish redemption and modern national repair.[5] Nitza Ben-Dov, in *Vehi tehilatekha,* demonstrates how from the beginning of their careers, Agnon functioned for Yehoshua and Amos Oz as a literary sparring partner and a source of conceptual features that each adapted into their own works; she identifies in Yehoshua's fiction what she calls an "Astarte paradigm" that he derived from Agnon, in which a powerful woman dominates a younger man who adores her.[6] Elsewhere Ben-Dov extends Yehoshua's 1981 interpretation of *Sippur pashut* by analyzing the pattern of withheld parental love that bothers Yehoshua—Tsirl from Hirshl and Hirshl from Meshulam—to examine

also a multigenerational streak of madness that runs across Hirshl's lineage, fully blown on his mother's side and merely alleged on his father's side.[7]

Indeed the only reason that Tsirl, a rich grocer's daughter, marries her father's clerk, Boruch Meir, is that her brother had been driven to madness and suicide by the rigidity of their parents. Ben-Dov points out that, in Boruch Meir's mind, eccentricity is associated with his own brother, Meshulam, who bears the same name as Hirshl's firstborn.[8] The alleged madness of Uncle Meshulam is ascribed merely to his habit of composing little ditties in Hebrew and his dream of becoming a farmer in Erets Yisra'el instead of attending more diligently to his grocery store, unlike Boruch Meir and Tsirl, and eventually Hirshl, who are devoted to theirs.

In addition to these broad aspects of Yehoshua's indebtedness to Agnon, it is important to recall Yehoshua's reliance on multigenerational love structures to tell a story of compromised attitudes toward family and nation passed down from one generation to the next. In an article entitled "The Double-Triangle Paradigm in Hebrew Fiction," I showed that this plot pattern is associated in the minds of Israeli writers unequivocally with Agnon's *Bidmi yameha*, with its fraught Oedipalized love triangle in which the younger generation enters into a sexual relationship with a parent substitute in ways that complicate rather than repair the family's shortcomings.[9] This scheme also guides Yehoshua's sequel to *Sippur pashut*, which he himself described as "a reversed version of *Bidmi yameha*."

Shortly after Agnon won the Nobel Prize in 1966, Yehoshua announced in an interview that he and other Israeli writers of his generation were "still thirsty for Agnon."[10] Seeking to diffuse potential rivalries between himself and his Israeli peers like Oz and Aharon Appelfeld, Yehoshua indicated that their work should be taken as seriously as that of the new international giant of Hebrew literature. At the same time, Yehoshua drew attention to what he called the "hidden drawers" in his narrative method, the moral dilemmas that he presents through references to historiosophic symbols that have preoccupied Jews since ancient times. Agnon achieved this multifocal narrative style by toggling between his characters' personal struggles in their realistic settings and the plight of an ancient Jewish people struggling anew with ideological challenges.

Twice in his life Yehoshua published Freudian and biblically attuned analyses of Agnon's work. First he focused on the denouement of *Sippur pashut*, emphasizing

the plight of baby Meshulam and blaming Hirshl and Tsirl for a congenital incapacity to nurture their offspring; and nearly twenty years later he focused on a link to the Akedah that he found in *Bidmi yameha*, which he interpreted once again as an immoral threat to a vulnerable child. In both cases Yehoshua underscores that the Oedipal forces at work in the psyche of the younger generation—be it Hirshl in *Sippur pashut* or Tirtsa in *Bidmi yameha*—compel them neurotically to accept empty substitutes for their selfish, manipulative, or absent parents.

Yehoshua's analysis of *Bidmi yameha* was published in his collection of essays, *Koḥah hanora shel ashmah qetanah* (*The Terrible Power of a Minor Guilt*). There he argues that Tirtsa's fascination with Akavia Mazal, an attractive middle aged teacher for whom Tirtsa's mother had once pined away, was orchestrated not by sixteen-year-old Tirtsa, as the narrative seems to show, but by Mintz, her bereaved father, in an attempt to atone for his wife's unfulfilled love toward Akavia. Mintz's wealth had been expected to relieve Leah's congenital "heart condition" by paying for her medical treatments and offering an easier lifestyle than she would have had with the scholar Akavia. But Mintz's material comfort clearly failed to save her.

Instead of viewing Tirtsa as a romantic heroine who now rescues both her mother's jilted lover and her bereaved father from poverty and loneliness, Yehoshua interprets the teenager's desire for her mother's discarded lover as an immoral manipulation by her father. Yehoshua hinges this interpretation on a strategic reference to the Aqedah—the biblical binding and near-sacrifice of Isaac by his father Abraham—at the moment in which Mintz brings Tirtsa to meet Aqavia for the first time. Agnon's novella notes that Mintz brings "his daughter, his only one" ("bito yeḥidato") to encounter Aqavia in an unmistakable echo of the Aqedah, which narrates that Abraham had brought "his son, his only one" to God upon His command.[11] Yehoshua argues that Agnon's use of this loaded phrase in the context of the sad trek of the bereaved Mintz with his daughter to visit Mazal a month after Leah's death suggests that Mintz wishes to bind Tirtsa to Aqavia in a re-creation of Abraham's readiness to sacrifice Isaac on Mount Moriah. In other words, Yehoshua interprets the Oedipalized love triangle in *Bidmi yameha* as reference to the traumatic experience suffered by Isaac, who was bound to God but ultimately not sacrificed.

Although this Aqedaic allusion to "bito yeḥidato" is undeniably present in Agnon's *Bidmi yameha*, this motif is far more operative in Yehoshua's works and

essays than in Agnon's. Relatively early in Yehoshua's career, the scholar Mordechai Shalev noticed that the Aqedah was reappearing in different guises across Yehoshua's work.[12] Yehoshua attributed this to his childhood unease with that biblical episode when he listened to it every Rosh Hashanah, sitting next to his father in his grandfather's synagogue.[13] Be that as it may, it is from his artistic father, Agnon, that Yehoshua learned how to wrap Aqedaic allusions into a modern family drama set in a realistic historical framework with allusions to contemporary national dilemmas.

Long before his identification of Oedipal and Aqedaic features in *Bidmi yameha*, Yehoshua had interpreted *Sippur pashut* as a sacrifice of children and youth at the service of unresolved moral dilemmas in the lives of their elders.[14] To be sure, *Sippur pashut*'s narrative arc traces the stifling of Hirshl and Blume's burgeoning love affair by the Hurvitzes' mercantile values. But what especially irks Yehoshua is that baby Meshulam, the first product of Hirshl's arranged marriage to the wealthy Mina, is banished to the countryside at the end of the novel in a gesture that perpetuates the Hurvitzes' tendency to avoid seeking moral solutions to their practical problems.[15]

Like Yehoshua's analysis of *Bidmi yameha*, his interpretation of *Sippur pashut* revolves around the family's unfair treatment of a vulnerable child in the novel's ambiguous denouement, where Hirshl appears to have achieved a harmonious relationship with Mina, the woman he was enticed to marry, but reaches this equilibrium only after casting off their firstborn, sickly Meshulam. Yehoshua interprets this "expulsion" as Hirshl's neurotic attempt to bypass unresolved anger and longing for his own mother, who had driven true love away. The passages from chapters 33 and 37 that Yehoshua transcribes verbatim in his preparations for writing a sequel to *Sippur pashut* dwell on Hirshl's decision to banish Meshulam; these are the same passages that Yehoshua discusses at length in his scholarly analysis of Agnon's novel. In Agnon's novel the decision to send Meshulam to his maternal grandparents appears to be an extended family decision, but Yehoshua attributes it almost entirely to Hirshl. Yehoshua also minimizes Hirshl's desire for Blume as well as Blume's attractiveness, concentrating instead on Hirshl's hidden struggle with his mother, whom Yehoshua accuses of having withheld intimacy and love from her son. Yehoshua contends that Tsirl had offered Hirshl such meager crumbs of emotional nourishment throughout his life that he is terrified of losing even this

modicum of attachment to his parent, and this fear impedes his ability to connect to anyone else, including his son.

According to Yehoshua, Blume, too, is not an ideal lover. She bakes delicious cakes and is very pretty; but in his 1981 essay Yehoshua describes her as *blumah*, a Hebrew reference to something halted or closed off, a connotation that Agnon indeed encoded in this name choice but only alongside the name's equally apposite Yiddish reference to a fresh flower.[16] Ultimately, Yehoshua argues that, although Hirshl forgives his mother for chasing Blume away, he fails to acknowledge his own emotional shortcomings, choosing to accuse only Blume of cold-heartedness. Moreover, Yehoshua underscores that, a year into his marriage, Hirshl jumpstarts his sexual and romantic abilities by distancing himself from the initial faulty product of his relationship with Mina, Meshulam, the sickly son born before Hirshl had succeeded in establishing a romantic relationship with Mina, his wedded wife and the baby's mother. Yehoshua concludes that *Sippur pashut*'s denouement expunges Meshulam from Szybusz in order to enable his family to circumvent the psychological shortcomings that had led to Hirshl's mental breakdown in the first place. However, according to Yehoshua, this is merely a "neurotic solution" that circumvents Hirshl's desire for full accountability and genuine love from his mother.

Even in his sequel to *Sippur pashut*, Yehoshua imagines, as we saw, that the elderly Tsirl would still continue to impede a genuine communication with her son. Even twenty years after the dissolution of Hirshl's relationship with Blume, Yehoshua's elderly Tsirl does not allow her son to vent his resentment toward her or to fully discuss his feelings for Blume. In Yehoshua's notes for the sequel, when Hirshl suggests that his longing for Blume had led to his nervous breakdown, Tsirl retorts that his feelings were one sided and therefore imaginary. Thus, even in Yehoshua's sequel a deeper repair appears to be foreclosed for Hirshl's generation: the relationship of this mother and her firstborn is unredeemable. And so, it is indeed intriguing and alarming that in the sequel Hirshl chooses to do to his son what Tsirl had done to Hirshl, namely to impose a matchmaking choice on Meshulam. This repetitive compulsion is the behavioral flaw around which Yehoshua weaves both his 1981 scholarly interpretation of *Sippur pashut* and his projected sequel to Agnon's novel.

To what extent is Yehoshua's sequel to *Sippur pashut* a reversed *Bidmi yameha*? In his most elaborate brainstorming notes, Yehoshua describes his proposed sequel explicitly as a "reversed version of *Bidmi yameha.*" Immediately, he wonders if the plan will be "just to bring Meshulam to Blume?"—a transposition of gender and age so that, instead of a young woman pursing an older man as in *Bidmi yameha*, a young man will pursue his father's old flame—or will the sequel offer a more radical reversal of the personal, familial, and national difficulties that confront these characters within the grand arch of Agnon's lifelong preoccupation with traditional Jewish narratives of exile and homecoming?[17] By choosing to bring *Sippur pashut*'s characters to Erets Yisraʾel and by situating *Sippur pashut*'s unresolved *pidyon haben* ("redemption of the firstborn") at the center of his sequel, Yehoshua opens up the possibility of a "repair." It is therefore perplexing and perhaps even disappointing that two of his three brainstorming sessions hint at a tragic outcome for the forlorn Meshulam via his potential suicide. If Meshulam is the main protagonist of the sequel, this is an even more stunning outcome.

One of Yehoshua's brainstorming exercises imagines that "Tirtsa doesn't envy Blume" even though Tirtsa "keeps shrinking" and eventually dies in the prime of *her* life, like her mother before her. Here Yehoshua attempts to use materials from *Bidmi yameha* to fashion a backstory for his sequel. We may recall that when Blume escapes from the Hurvitzes' household in *Sippur pashut* -after she realizes that she has been discarded by Hirshl and manipulated into working for the Hurvitzes as a housemaid for free because she is their cousin- she finds refuge and paid employment at the home of Tirtsa and Aqavia Mazal.

It is in their front yard that Hirshl searches for Blume shortly after his marriage to Mina; it is "on the handles of the lock" (*ʿal kappot hamanʿul*) of their front gate that he leans his forehead for a long time, under the pouring rain, more distraught than the lovers in the Song of Songs to which this phrase alludes. In view of these connotations, one can assert that *Sippur pashut* is itself a sequel, not only to *Bidmi yameha* through the presence of the Mazals, but also to the biblical tale of star-crossed lovers which Agnon revisited through his lifelong engagement with the Song of Songs and its midrash.[18]

In his sequel to *Sippur pashut* Yehoshua participates in this complex literary heritage of sundered attachments. The midrashic interpretation of the Song of

Songs allegorizes it as a poetic expression of an exilic relationship between the people of Israel, God, and their lost land, a relationship marked since ancient times by the longing for restitution, reunion, and repair.[19] Although this Zion-oriented discourse hovers around the edges of *Sippur Pashut*'s occasional references to the ideological positions of different characters—for example, the contrast between the idealistic Uncle Meshulam and his materialistic brother Boruch Meir—the system of historiosophic references in Agnon's novel mainly exposes the danger of passively expecting restoration, a dangerous passivity that Agnon presents so obliquely that his religious discourse can be mistaken as naively pious, as many of his interpreters noted, from Gershon Shaked to Oz.[20]

Yet, in view of the Zionist ideals strongly held by Agnon and Yehoshua, one wonders if the mere arrival in Zion of the sequel's Szybuszians would be expected to reverse what had been warped in the lives of these characters. In other words, does merely bringing characters from *Sippur pashut* and *Bidmi yameha* to Erets Yisraʾel reverse some of the counterproductive and ineffective patterns of behavior that had plagued one generation after the next in the diasporic fictional worlds of Agnon and Yehoshua? The answer, of course, is "no." For Yehoshua, like Agnon, the work of national restoration entails an arduous process of self-criticism and cultural repair that depends on the reformation of individual Jews as much as on a broader reformation of Jewish institutions, including family behaviors. For Yehoshua, this process revolves around mutual validation by and toward vulnerable youth, as well as members of alternative ethnic, religious, and national identities.[21] For Agnon, this redemptive work takes place solely within the wider Jewish community in relation to its history and faith. The arrival of Szybuszyans in Erets Yisraʾel thus represents a *potential* repair - but certainly not an automatic reversal of damaged Szybuszyan patterns of behavior; on the contrary, the need for a personal and collective process of repair intensifies in the old-new homeland, as indicated by Yehoshua's warning that Meshulam may commit suicide there, and as expressed in his polemics about the tensions between the diaspora and Erets Yisraʾel.[22]

Yehoshua's master plan outlines that Meshulam would pursue Blume all the way to Tel Aviv and that Hirshl and the matchmaker, Toyber, would follow to entice Meshulam away from Blume, as Hirshl and his father Boruch Meir had been enticed away from the women to whom they had pledged their hearts. Yehoshua

wonders, "will they bring along the intended bride?" He does not answer this question. And strangely, he never mentions Mina at all in the brainstorming sessions. Does he envision her as still alive? If so, how would she deal with Hirshl's proximity to his original beloved, now that Hirshl stands between Blume and Meshulam, just as his mother and especially his own lack of independence had stood between himself and Blume before he adapted himself to Mina?

If Yehoshua imagines that Mina is no longer living, what scenarios would arise for a potential rapprochement between the former lovers reunited under such extraordinary circumstances? In *Sippur pashut*, Blume slams the Mazals' front gate in Hirshl's face when he dares to visit her following his marriage to Mina. Later, she also rejects the amorous advances of Getzel Stein and Dr. Knabenhut, and by the end of *Sippur pashut* she is notably unattached in ways that lead Yehoshua to view her as *blumah* ("sealed off," "halted," "locked").

Nevertheless, there is one character in Yehoshua's sequel who has the potential to effect a real change in the botched-up dynamics of these Agnonic love stories. This is Landau, whose role in the sequel is not assured, insofar as itis accompanied by a question mark in Yehoshua's notes: "Will Landau show up?" Unlike the cameo appearance of the Mazals in Agnon's *Sippur pahsut*, Landau is a minor character who appears only in *Bidmi yameha*, but his potential presence in Yehoshua's sequel indicates a cognitive breakthrough or new perspective from which to understand Yehoshua's sequel as a reversed *Bidmi yameha*. In that exquisite novella, Landau had courted the sixteen-year-old Tirtsa, offering her a sensible alliance between two healthy youth from more or less the same socioeconomic and educational status. Their prospective union enjoys the support of both their families, but Tirtsa's imagination is already aflame with her mother's desire for Aqavia, and Landau receives little encouragement. He eventually pines away, partly out of unrequited love and partly because he needs to appear sufficiently ill to avoid forced conscription into the Austro-Hungarian army, which he could have avoided by getting married. In Agnon's novella, Landau becomes another discarded love interest in an environment festering with ill-fated liaisons. Landau, however, distinguishes himself through the letters that he writes to Tirtsa in a mellifluous maskilic Hebrew, which romanticizes a longing for Erets Yisraʾel that he also supplements with his knowledge of agriculture, given that he belongs to a family of well-to-do farmers.

Landau knows how to till the land; he is fluent in Hebrew and courts his intended partner with descriptions of Zion. Could Yehoshua's now–middle aged Landau, discarded by Tirtsa in Agnon's *Bidmi yameha*, become a suitable partner for someone else, perhaps for Blume? How would such a scenario play out in 1920s Tel Aviv? Would Landau and Blume remedy their losses while rebuilding Zion? Could they crack open the allegorical lock of the Song of Songs? After all, they belong to the same age group, although Blume is poor and well educated, while Landau is courteous and affluent; he represents a literary *Hibat Zion* (the love of Zion movement coupled with a practical farming enterprise) through the Hebrew *melitsot* (ornate, biblically allusive poems) that he had composed for Tirtsa with the help of their matchmaking Hebrew teacher. Can Landau bridge the gaps left open in Agnon's *Sippur pashut* as well as in *Bidmi yameha*? It is therefore highly appropriate that in his sequel Yehoshua considers Landau's role as a potential lover of Zion, a path that had been foreclosed in *Bidmi yameha* and is now reopened in Yehoshua's "reversed *Bidmi yameha*."

TEL AVIV IN THE 1920s

Time and again Yehoshua lamented that if only 10 percent of the world's Jewry had picked up and immigrated to the land of Israel immediately after the Balfour Declaration and the British conquest of Palestine, the greatest disaster that befell the Jewish people in modern times two decades later might have been prevented or at least diminished.[23] The truth is that it did become briefly easier for Jews to return to their historical homeland immediately after the Balfour Declaration and Britain's conquest of Palestine, but the difficulties of daily life were enormous, and growing animosity from some of the local Arabs was also a considerable deterrent, although the Arab leadership's opposition to Jewish immigration spiked only in the late 1920s and 1930s and led to the British quotas for Jewish immigration that remained in place even during the Holocaust and its immediate aftermath.[24]

By setting his imagined sequel in Tel Aviv of the early 1920s, Yehoshua therefore chose a relatively open historical window of opportunity for the Jews to return to their ancient homeland, while remaining faithful to *Sippur pashut*'s original chronology. In light of *Sippur pashut*'s original setting at the end of the nineteenth

century, Yehoshua's brainstorming document calculates that in the 1920s Meshulam would be a young man in his early twenties, and Blume a middle aged woman nearly in her forties. This situates their arrival in Erets Yisraʾel within the overlapping historical frameworks of the third and fourth modern waves of Zionist immigration, the so-called Third and Fourth Aliyot.

During a previous wave of immigration, the twenty-year-old Agnon himself arrived in Jaffa in 1908 and stayed until October 1912. He spent World War I in Germany and returned to settle permanently in Jerusalem in 1924, where he lived until his death in 1970. Among the works of fiction that he set in Erets Yisraʾel, his unfinished novel *Shirah* takes place in the 1930s and early 1940s in Jerusalem, while *Temol shilshom* toggles between Jerusalem and Jaffa during the first decade of the twentieth century.

Thus, although Yehoshua remains faithful to *Sippur pashut*'s original chronology by setting his sequel in 1920s Tel Aviv, this framework does not coincide with any clear descriptions of Erets Yisraʾel in Agnon's major novels or in Yehoshua's published work.[25] In Yehoshua's fiction, any scenes that precede the establishment of the State of Israel are typically set in Jerusalem, where his family had lived for several generations and where he grew up; none of Yehoshua's characters visit Tel Aviv in its early days, although some characters in *Mr. Mani* transit through the port in Jaffa.

Yehoshua's masterplan for a sequel to *Sippur pashut* does recall Agnon's historical novel *Temol shilshom*, which is set partially in the Mediterranean coastal environment of the city of Jaffa and Tel Aviv in its earliest days, but *Temol shilshom* takes place over a decade earlier and moves from the coast to Jerusalem. As such, it does not offer a definitive atmosphere from which to imagine Agnon's characters in 1920s Tel Aviv. Furthermore, Yehoshua's brainstorming notes do not mention Jerusalem at all, although based on Jewish history and the typical coordinates of Agnon and Yehoshua, it is unlikely that these Szybuszian travelers would fail to visit the holy city. Moreover, given Yehoshua's lifelong tendency to rewrite the Aqedah in different formats, it is likely that the showdown between Meshulam and his father would occur in or around the biblical site of Isaac's near sacrifice on the Temple Mount. This is indeed where the showdown happens between Abraham Mani and his wayward son in Yehoshua's magisterial family saga, *Mr. Mani*.[26]

Despite these lacunae, what can we imagine about Yehoshua's Szybuszians arriving in Tel Aviv of the 1920s? At one point in his brainstorming exercises, Yehoshua wonders whether the action should take place in the 1930s and notes that Meshulam would be thirty years old at that time. His most elaborate brainstorming exercise judiciously shifts the setting to the 1920s, indicating that Meshulam would be twenty-one years old. Setting the action in the 1930s would have required a much more complicated political context, including the rise of Nazism and the Arab riots of 1929, as well, perhaps, as those of 1936–39. The decision to focus on an earlier historical juncture makes more sense not only in terms of the age of the principal characters of the sequel, but also because this simplifies the historical context and arguably enables a keener focus on intergenerational family dynamics as a microcosm of the complicated relationship between Szybusz and Zion.

Regarding the means of transportation that Yehoshua's Szybuszians would have used to reach Erets Yisra'el, Yehoshua's master plan indicates "journey on the sea," with Agnon's *Bilvav yamim* (*In the Heart of the Seas*) serving as a paradigm. Agnon's novella, however, is not an entirely apt model, for it employs a semifantastical narrative style to recount the actual historical "migration of some 300 *hasidim* to the Land of Israel in 1777," who "laid the foundations for what would come to be called the Old Yishuv."[27] Although this Hasidic aliyah really took place, Agnon uses a Hasidic storytelling style that melds realistic and supernatural elements in a pious framework, including a miraculous transportation of one character on a kerchief across the Mediterranean. The sea voyage of Agnon's Hasidim is rough, but rougher is the waiting period at the port when an argument breaks out between husbands and wives, which somehow gets resolved harmoniously, and all of them reach their desired destination.

In this context, the sea voyage of Yehoshua's Szybuszians would provide plenty of drama and comic fodder. As for the land journey, one can easily grasp how Yehoshua could have modelled Hirshl and Toyber's land trek from Szybusz to the port based on Reb Yudel's chit chat with his traveling companions from Agnon's *Hakhnasat kallah (Bridal Canopy)*. Yehoshua's master plan nods explicitly in this direction, although the mission of the impoverished Reb Yudel is to find dowries for his daughters, which he miraculously achieves, while Hirshl and Toyber's mission in Yehoshua's sequel is to tear Meshulam away from Blume in order to marry him to someone else.

It is quite unclear how *Hakhnasat kallah*'s comic and picaresque scenario could have served Yehoshua's purpose. Moreover, in *Temol shilshom* (*Only Yesteryear*), Reb Yudel's descendant Yitzhak Kumer dies tragically of rabies in an Ultra-Orthodox neighborhood in Jerusalem, thus extinguishing his hope of building his family and livelihood in Erets Yisra'el during the initial years of the twentieth century, when Agnon himself moved to Jaffa. It is hard to fathom how Yehoshua would have pulled off his "*Sippur pashut* be'Erets Yisra'el" in 1920s Tel Aviv from this conflation of tragic and farcical intertexts, even if we consider that Yehoshua was indeed a wizard at turning absurd situations into tragicomic family sagas with poignant historiosophic innuendos.

On the one hand, he notes that Hirshl and Toyber's voyage by land and sea will be a "comic" journey; on the other hand, he sketches an intimate conversation between them that serves to expose the pathetic undertones of their relationship. Conducted in a friendly manner that does not exhibit any resentfulness, their exchange is nonetheless appalling when we consider that Hirshl is casually probing Toyber about the matchmaking methods that Toyber had used to snatch the teenage Hirshl away from Blume in order to foist Mina upon him. This switch of partners had led to Hirshl's breakdown and Meshulam's chronic illness, yet Hirshl and Toyber are now plotting to repeat this manipulation against Meshulam. Yehoshua's essay on *Sippur pashut* argues, as we saw, that Hirshl's unresolved Oedipus complex led to his mental breakdown rather than his ostensible attachment to Blume. His sequel, moreover, suggests that Meshulam might kill himself rather than achieve a harmonious understanding with his father as a way of repairing the trust that had been broken in each generation of their family. Still, it is quite possible that even if Yehoshua had completed the sequel, the suicide option would not have carried the day, and the outcome would have been more positive. After all, in his 1994 novel *Hashivah meHodu* (*Open Heart*), Yehoshua fully intended that the protagonist would commit suicide but the character's "will to live" triumphed over his creator's plan.[28]

Be that as it may, stylistically it remains unclear how the comic pockets in Yehoshua's sequel would coexist with the madness motif that he associates with Meshulam, unless the threat of suicide in Yehoshua's plan would serve as a mere feint from which to generate narrative suspense. Furthermore, Yehoshua sketches a cathartic encounter between Meshulam and Blume in which the young man begs

his father's original beloved to let him suckle on her breasts. This climactic pseudo-maternal scene resembles a scene from one of Yehoshua's later novels, *Ḥesed Sefaradi* (*The Retrospective*, 2011), in which an elderly cinematographer performs a bizarre act of atonement by photographing himself suckling on a stranger's breasts. This is one of several instances in which elements from the archived sequel manifest themselves clearly in Yehoshua's published works, including *The Retrospective*, *Open Heart*, *Mr. Mani*, and *A Journey to the End of the Millennium*. The overlap further helps us situate the date of composition of the notes for the planned sequel in the mid to late 1980s, prior to the design of any of those novels. In any case, the Oedipal breast-feeding scene that Yehoshua imagines for his sequel to *Sippur pashut* could be either a healing moment, as in *The Retrospective*, or a futile attempt to overcome a pattern of neglect in the Horowitz family, as occurs across several generations in the Mani family. The tension that Yehoshua establishes between the image of Meshulam suckling on Blume's breasts and the threat of his suicide rope remains open.

From a practical perspective, Yehoshua's decision to set his Agnonic sequel in Little Tel Aviv of the 1920s would have required a description of daily life in this first modern Hebrew city in the earliest period of its establishment. What employment opportunities were available in that place at that time? Yehoshua tended to elaborate on the professional occupations of his characters because he believed professional occupations reveal core aspects of one's psychological identity. His characters' professional occupations also enabled him to develop the socioeconomic context of his novels' realistic settings.[29] From this point of view, Tel Aviv in the 1920s would not be an optimal location for a penniless orphan like Blume. In her youth she might have joined one of the pioneering kibbutzim of the Second or Third Aliyot, but Yehoshua does not specify Blume's arrival date. He says only that Meshulam follows her to Tel Aviv. Sending Blume to Erets Yisraʾel earlier—for instance, when Agnon and his Yitzhak Kumer had arrived there—would be in keeping with some aspects of her ideological and practical orientation in *Sippur pashut* because she visits the Zionist club of Szybusz and attends some socialist meetings.

Setting the sequel in Tel Aviv would have entailed retelling the story of the lots drawn for family dwellings on the dunes designated for the construction of this first Hebrew city in 1909.[30] Would Blume have found suitable employment among its first rows of houses and iconic cafes? Tel Aviv in the second decade of the twentieth

century would not have enabled her to work as a servant, as she had done in Szybusz, or to be hired to take care of children except as an actual teacher in the new Hebrew school system, for even in its earliest days Tel Aviv invested in highly qualified teachers trained according to new standards for a modern Hebrew education. To become a teacher would fit well with Blume's skills as the daughter of a scholar, who, despite his poverty and illness, made a point of instructing his daughter, presumably in Hebrew and holy texts; Hirshl, too, had courted her with books as a weekly treat, including both light and serious reading. It is conceivable that Blume could have been provided with the necessary funds to complete a Hebrew teachers' college in Warsaw or Odessa. Although Blume may have acquired the skills to become an elementary or kindergarten teacher, however, that path was arduous and required a substantial financial investment, which the Blume of *Sippur pashut* entirely lacks.

How, for that matter, would the twenty-one-year old Meshulam occupy himself in 1920s Tel Aviv aside from begging Blume to allow him to suckle on her breasts? The sickly Meshulam hardly conforms to the image of a resilient pioneer ready to till the soil or pave the roads in those heady days of Zionist infrastructure building. But much the same can be said about Agnon's Yitzhak Kumer or any of Yosef Ḥayyim Brenner's neurotically suicidal Jewish immigrants, who are portrayed as suffering from loneliness, illness, and guilt in Jaffa, Jerusalem, and the new Zionist *moshavot*.[31] As a grandson of two sets of wealthy grandparents, Meshulam might have brought with him ample means of support, at least temporarily. If so, he could have relaxed in one of Tel Aviv's signature cafés, sipping lemonade in the summer to cool himself from the Levantine heat or chatting with acquaintances, as Agnon's characters do in *Temol shilshom*.

While it is fairly easy to fill in the contextual details relevant to the setting that Yehoshua chose for his sequel, the only concrete image that his notes offer is that the young man would bring to Erets Yisraʾel a "suicide's rope," which, according to Yehoshua, had been used by his maternal uncle, and a pendant that was hung around baby Meshulam's neck when he was thirty days old, according to Agnon. To this pendant we now turn, for it symbolizes an unfulfilled duty that lies at the center of Meshulam's family history and tests his identity as a Jew. Wearing it around his neck at all times, as Meshulam presumably does according to Yehoshua's notes, dovetails with the suicide motif, which remains suspended in subtle ways across

Agnon's *Sippur pashut* and more explicitly so in Yehoshua's sequel. Both the pendant and the suicide motif activate ominous referents to a fraught relationship between God and the people of Israel in Szybusz and in Erets Yisraʾel.

THE *PIDYON HABEN* (REDEMPTION OF THE FIRSTBORN) ISSUE

When I picture Yehoshua's twenty-year-old Meshulam arriving in Tel Aviv in the 1920s, I imagine him weighed down by two ropes, as it were, hanging around his neck. One is the lethal suicide rope that he brings from Szybusz, which signifies a struggle with madness that had been coursing through his family for many generations. The other is not exactly a rope but a pendant hung around his neck when he was a one-month-old baby, when his father was unavailable to redeem him from a Kohen. The circumstances surrounding this situation are presented fleetingly toward the end of *Sippur pashut*, and, like Blume's predicament, they remain tantalizingly unresolved in the novel:

> Meshulam was circumcised at thirty days because he was frail and they were afraid to do it at the regular time. The day of his circumcision was therefore also the day to redeem him because he was a firstborn son. Since his father did not redeem him they hung around his neck a copper disk with a ה׳ carved upon it to indicate that he owes five coins to a Kohen.[32]

Rather than circumcise Meshulam on his eighth day as customary, they circumcise him at thirty days because the trouble that beset his family during his gestation had caused him to be born frail and to become weaker from inadequate care after his birth. One blunder after another—an enormous *shibush* ("blunder" or "confusion," the meaning of the fictional place-name "Szybusz")—triggers this perilous outcome. First, Mina is so shocked by her husband's descent into madness, when he publicly cries "Ga Ga Ga" in the forest after informing her that he still longs for Blume, that she collapses onto herself and cannot get up from the couch during her pregnancy. While Hirshl is convalescing in a mental sanatorium, Meshulam's grandmothers forget to prepare Mina for the imminent birth and its aftermath,

so she does not suckle the newborn. They hire a wet nurse who pretends to adore the infant but secretly eats unwholesome foods and drinks alcoholic beverages that seep into her milk; at night she drugs the baby and escapes to frolic with her lovers. Consequently, the baby fails to thrive and the wet nurse even damages his hips while trying to strut him up in front of his relatives. By the end of the novel, Meshulam's distraught parents pack him off to live with Mina's old parents in the countryside, alleging that the milk on their farm is fresher.

Not widely practiced today, the *pidyon haben* ceremony is still performed among observant Jews.[33] It resembles a Berit Milah (circumcision), except that the central action revolves around the ceremonial presentation of five coins to a Kohen selected from among the synagogue's congregants or special guests. This tradition derives from one of the ancient commandments given to the children of Israel after their exodus from Egypt to dedicate to God all of their firstborn. Over time it evolved into a ceremonial exemption from priestly service in ways that responded to the people's changing needs and abilities. The first commandment involving the firstborn occurs as they leave Egypt and is repeated when they arrive at Sinai: "The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 'Consecrate to Me every first-born; man and beast, the first issue of every womb among the Israelites is Mine'" (Exodus 13:1–2 [NJPS]; see also Exodus 22:28). The command is given a third time as the Israelites prepare to leave Sinai. This time it mentions only humans (not animals) and stipulates that a Levite serve in the sanctuary in place of each firstborn male (Numbers 3:40–43). If there were more firstborn males than Levites, the excess firstborn males had to be redeemed at the cost of five sheqels each (Numbers 3:44–51; 18:16). In practical terms this meant that firstborns could stay and work on their family homesteads, while the priestly offices were performed by the landless Levites and Kohanim on everyone's behalf.

Building on his extensive familiarity with Jewish texts and traditions, Agnon created a situation in which *Sippur pashut*'s protagonist, Hirshl, is unable to redeem his firstborn because he is hospitalized far away from his home. The pending obligation is never brought up again over the course of Agnon's novel, but Yehoshua's emphasis on Meshulam's plight sheds significant light on his "banishment" from his parents' house because indeed, until this child is properly redeemed, he is technically not free to stay in his family's home. An attentive reader of Agnon and a public intellectual interested in reckoning afresh with Jewish traditions, Yehoshua

magnifies the symbolic importance of the missing *pidyon haben* in Agnon's novel.[34] He highlights this episode in his projected sequel by pushing the issue *ad absurdum* and imagining a grown-up Meshulam "walking around all the time with the copper pendant with the name of G-d carved upon it" (*Hu mithalekh kol hazman ʿim tas haneḥoshet shekatuv ʿalav* ה').[35]

This absurd image is the most brilliant feature of Yehoshua's engagement with Agnon's *Sippur pashut*. It offers a tragicomic crux similar to those around which Yehoshua built the plots of many of his works, in order to reveal to his readers the full extent of the absurd attitudes and counterproductive choices made by his characters.[36] Yehoshua's sequel to *Sippur pashut* magnifies the drama encoded in the pendant draped around baby Meshulam's neck with an expectation that his father would eventually return to perform the *pidyon* ceremony. While the expectation is never mentioned again in Agnon's novel, however, Yehoshua uncovers its conceptual significance within *Sippur pashut*'s overall structure.

The *pidyon haben* pendant with the letter ה' carved upon it in reference to the ineffable name of God functions in Agnon's plot first and foremost as a pragmatic adjustment to evolving circumstances. Just as the status of the firstborn was repeatedly adjusted to fit the needs and abilities of Israel's relationship with its God in ancient times, so, too, the pendant in Agnon's novel represents an adjustment to an imperfect reality when the baby's father is absent. From a realistic point of view there would be absolutely no expectation that a child in a semimodern town like Szybusz would continue to wear the pendant after the ceremony in the synagogue. But Yehoshua latches on to the implications of the pending or missing redemption and brings the issue to the front and center of his newly imagined *Sippur pashut* set in 1920s Tel Aviv.

Two other biblical motifs are connected to Agnon's *pidyon haben* episode when we consider it in light of Yehoshua's sequel. One of them we already mentioned—namely, the Aqedah allusion to Abraham's binding and near sacrifice of Isaac, which Yehoshua underscores in his scholarly essays on *Bidmi yameha* and *Sippur pashut*, and which he dramatizes in his novel *Mr. Mani*. From this perspective it is remarkable that, while the *pidyon haben* unbinds a male firstborn from the commandment to serve God, the Aqedah illustrates a traumatic binding from which Isaac never recovers. This binding obsessed Yehoshua throughout his life, as I noted above.

The second biblical motif connected conceptually to the *pidyon haben* ceremony in Agnon's novel is the *ʿagunah*, the wife who cannot remarry because her husband has disappeared or refuses to grant her a divorce. The *ʿagunah* is a figure helplessly stuck in a marital state of limbo, a painful state of unresolved existential suspension that Agnon revisited throughout his career, as a symbolic expression of a suspended harmony between God and the people of Israel in exile.[37] This metaphor was so significant to Agnon that, as a teenager named Shmuʾel Yosef Czaczkes, he turned the *ʿagunah* into his own penname when he came to live in Jaffa in 1908; when he settled in Jerusalem in 1924, he officially adopted this epithet as the family's name: Agnon.

The idea of a wife stuck in limbo, unable to get on with her sexual, social, and procreational life constituted for Agnon more than a rare sociological or halakhic phenomenon. He activated through it midrashic references to a suspended relationship between God and the people of Israel after they lost their national center following the destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and subsequently the destruction of the First Temple and finally the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. Scathingly wielded by the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah as warnings of impending destruction or as marks of provisional punishment, the *ʿagunah* metaphor also turned into a midrash for the Song of Songs, along with other marital metaphors that alluded to the sundered relationship between the land and the God and the people of Israel.[38] Agnon strategically referred to this painful alienation via the Song of Songs in *Sippur pashut*, for example, when the distraught Hirshl leans "on the handles of the lock"; Blume shuts the door in his face when he tries to visit her after marrying someone else.

To unpack these referents requires more extensive elaboration than this article allows; suffice it to say that, when we consider *Sippur pashut*'s unfulfilled *pidyon haben* in connection to the story of the binding of Isaac and in relation to Agnon's lifelong engagement with Israel's exilic condition via the *ʿagunah* metaphor and the midrash on the Song of Songs, it becomes clearer that Yehoshua's planned sequel aims to tie all of this together by dealing at once with all the issues left unresolved at the end of *Sippur pashut*. Yehoshua connects Blume with Meshulam, and she is left hanging in a romantic state of limbo, in a quasi-*ʿagunah* position with Meshulam, whose father returned to Szybusz allegedly cured but failed to redeem his firstborn and even cast him off altogether from the Hurvitz household. Yehoshua's sequel

imagines the yet-to-be-redeemed Meshulam pursuing Blume to Erets Yisraʾel at a time of unprecedented hope for Jewish national regeneration.

Elaborating on Meshulam's predicament growing up under the shadow of a more fortunate brother who enjoys the health and attention that Meshulam lacks, Yehoshua's backstory recounts that Meshulam "was not indulged like his brother, for Mina's parents were no longer young and had forgotten how to talk to a small boy. Not that Meshulam was badly off. But his little brother had it better."[39] This extrapolation from Agnon's novel echoes the final words of *Sippur pashut*, where Hirshl informs Mina that love "cannot be divided." Although Hirshl pretends to be talking about their sons, indicating that the younger one will be chosen, he is really trying to reassure Mina that Blume no longer dominates his thoughts as she had when they had conceived their sickly Meshulam.

A Simple Story thus ends under the sign of irresponsibility toward baby Meshulam as well as toward Blume, and this is the matter that Yehoshua's "*Sippur pashut* beʾErets Yisraʾel" amplifies. His 1981 scholarly essay about *Sippur pashut* had placed the Aqedah at the center of his interpretation of the novel, but in the sequel he instead places the *pidyon haben* issue at the heart of the action. Both the yet-to-be-performed *pidyon haben* and the Aqedah strike Yehoshua as dangerous manipulations of a child's psyche: a father expected to protect his child instead privileges an ideological commitment to another entity or cause—God or a romantic allegiance—over the vulnerable child.[40] Both the Aqedah and the commandment to redeem a firstborn son revolve around theocratic consecrations that assume a priori that a child belongs to Him who bestows or takes away according to His command, but Yehoshua and Agnon both translate these transactions into the microcosm of a Jewish family's dysfunctional life.

In view of the attention that Yehoshua directs toward Meshulam's unredeemed status, one wonders how his sequel would have dealt with the onomastic paradox of Meshulam's name. Neither his notes for the sequel nor his 1981 essay on *Sippur pashut* bring up the name that Agnon assigned to Hirshl and Mina's complicated firstborn, a name that contradicts the child's actual condition, for Meshulam, to put it plainly, is definitely not *meshulam* (meaning "paid"), nor is his status in his family anything close to *mushlam* ("perfect"). Yehoshua's sequel confronts this dilemma, but he provides no explicit analysis of the comic paradox encoded in this name.

Ben-Dov's close analysis of *Sippur pashut* approaches Meshulam's predicament as an instance of Agnon's riddling "art of indirection."[41] In conversation with Yehoshua's 1981 essay highlighting Meshulam's plight, Ben-Dov traces some of the onomastic and conceptual connections that link the firstborn to his namesake, such as the paternal great uncle who does not appear in the action directly but is recalled by Boruch Meir as a dabbler in Hebrew poetry and a Zionist dreamer who fails to attend to his Galician grocery store. Ben-Dov, too, discusses neither the irony of Meshulam's name nor the unresolved *pidyon haben* issue, although she recalls the final passages of *Sippur pashut*, where much fanfare surrounds the many names given to Meshulam's brother, who gets a new pet name every day, "some of which made sense and some which did not."[42] By contrast, Meshulam's sole name makes no sense, except to deliberately misrepresent him.

Like Tirtsa's mother, Leah Mintz, in *Bidmi yameha* and like Tirtsa herself in Yehoshua's sequel, Meshulam, too, may die heartbroken in the prime of his life according to some of the hints in Yehoshua's notes. We encounter him as a young man bravely following his passion to Tel Aviv with the *pidyon haben* pendant hanging around his neck, seemingly ready to redeem himself, but his family background is still riddled with mental illness. Having followed his father's first love to Erets Yisraʾel and succeeded, as Yehoshua indicates, in suckling on her breasts in a belated attempt to draw some nourishment from them, Yehoshua's Meshulam is nevertheless in danger of succumbing to an ancestral streak of madness instead of finding his redemption in the Holy Land. Yehoshua therefore asks himself in his notes: "Is it worth going crazy in the land of Israel?"

IS IT WORTH GOING CRAZY IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL?

Jotted at the bottom of the most elaborate brainstorming session, this question sticks out as the sole handwritten element in Yehoshua's archived sequel to *Sippur pashut*. It foregrounds the madness motif that courses through Agnon's novel and that Yehoshua extends in the two sketched dialogues between Hirshl and his still-narcissistic elderly mother. Yehoshua indicates that Hirshl and Tsirl's conversation about madness would be prompted by Meshulam's discovery that his father once suffered from a mental breakdown. But the file in Yehoshua's archive does not

clarify whether his question about madness in the Erets Yisraʾel comes from the point of view of Hirshl or Meshulam, or whether it stands as a general rumination on the prospects of Zionism in the 1920s. Likely it is all of the above.

In *Sippur pashut* we are told that madness had plagued Meshulam's family from the day one of his ancestors commented that their rabbi was losing his mind, whereupon the insulted rabbi cursed the family. Since then every generation in Tsirl's family had its "madman," including her brother, disowned and expelled by their father for refusing to drop his secular studies. Eventually he perishes in the forest near Szybusz, totally unprepared for the world after finding himself banished from his parents' table.[43] Without articulating this explicitly, Agnon's narrative hints that Tsirl's parents are "madder" than their son, insofar as their rigidity leads to his death. Yehoshua follows Agnon by portraying madness as an outcome of a lack of empathy toward a child. By contrast, however, when Hirshl goes mad he is helped by his father and recovers from his mental breakdown thanks to the patient ministrations of Dr. Langsam. Hirshl's breakdown is triggered by a lack of empathy toward his desire for Blume, but he is not as stubborn (or impractical) as his mother's brother, and he adjusts to the roles assigned to him by his parents. Even in Yehoshua's sequel, when Hirshl attempts to discuss all this with his mother years later, she declares that madness tempted her, too, but she held it at bay and remained responsible for the family's business. She thus deflects a heart-to-heart conversation with her son and in fact leaves the family's madness hovering ominously over them like Yehoshua's question at the end of his main brainstorming notes. Now the repressed madness is ready to return and pounce on Meshulam. But what emerges from the dialogue that Yehoshua sets up between Hirshl and his now elderly mother is that madness can be a choice, a willful escape from professional or communal responsibilities.

Since Yehoshua assigns the suicide rope to Meshulam, it is likely to him that he also directs the provocative question about madness as an ultimate act of despair. "*Sippur pashut* be'Erets Israel" provides no other insight into Meshulam's actions or goals in Tel Aviv other than his pursuit of Blume and his arrival with the *pidyon haben* pendant and the suicide rope. However, if we consider Yehoshua's provocative question in the context of Little Tel Aviv of the 1920s and link it again with the concepts of the Aqedah and *ʿaginut* in terms of *Sippur pashut*'s unresolved filial and romantic dilemmas, then the question about madness in Erets Yisraʾel also turns

into a broader consideration of the challenges facing the people of Israel in modern times. What does it mean to ask "is it worth going crazy" in Tel Aviv of the 1920s?

Yehoshua's classical Zionist attitude holds that, as an escapist fantasy, the mythic or passive hope for national restitution offered diasporic Jews great solace throughout the ages. But the State of Israel as Yehoshua knew it afforded the new worry that the Zionists' hard-won self-determination might be lost. This threat loomed large for Yehoshua from practical and moral perspectives, as he pointed out repeatedly when discussing Israel's predicament at home and abroad.[44] Among the many characters he invented throughout his career to represent this threat of destabilization in Zion, Naomi Qaminqa from *Gerushim Me'uḥarim* (*A Late Divorce*, 1982) is the only Yehoshuan character who experiences a full-blown case of schizophrenia. Her life in an insane asylum enables Yehoshua to showcase madness as a flirtation with the theocratic forces that Naomi calls "Elohima" (the feminine form of *elohim*, "God"). Her inability to identify and overcome this alter ego plunges Naomi into chaos, which she initially blames on her husband, Yehuda, because he is unwilling to help her confront this alter ego and instead runs away to Milwaukee. Shortly before completing *A Late Divorce*, Yehoshua published his most notorious essay, in which he describes the retreat from national responsibility as a form of neurosis. In "Golah: The Neurotic Solution" (1980) he claims that the atavistic theocratic forces that are an inalienable aspect of Jewish identity need to be reconfigured into a more practical modern adjustment to the national codes relevant to a sovereign state.[45] Only in this manner, he argues, will the intensity of the religious codes not push Israelis to madness or the diaspora, as represented by Naomi and Yehuda Qaminqa's respective escapes in *A Late Divorce*.[46]

Having learned from Agnon how to embed historiosophic Jewish concepts into a literary plot, Yehoshua's sequel to *Sippur pashut* picks up the madness motif not only as the representation of an individual's psychological struggle within the confines of a particular family and community, but also as a larger conversation about Jewish history and identity that stretches from ancient to modern times. To be truly a "reversed version of *Bidmi yameha*," however, Yehoshua's "*Sippur pashut* be'Erets Yisra'el" would need to repair the cycle of defeatist behaviors passed down from one generation to the next in Agnon's two interrelated tales of frustrated love. Instead, Yehoshua's creative interplay, as indicated in his notes, merely transposes

Agnon's troubled characters into a tragicomic situation that extends the vulnerability of these Szybuszians even to Zion.

Yehoshua's sketch remains inconclusive on all points except one: it brings some of Agnon's characters to Eretz Yisra'el and specifically to 1920s Tel Aviv. It leaves us curious to learn whether a new and better life would have emerged there for the jilted Blume and the forlorn Meshulam, born at that sour stage of Hirshl's marriage to Mina, when Hirshl still longed for Blume. Yehoshua's sketch does not indicate whether his Szybuszians would find a cathartic redemption through their encounter with each other in Erets Yisra'el.

The closure that Agnon withheld from *Sippur pashut* therefore remains elusive, even in Yehoshua's imagined sequel. Yet even without a full knowledge of its narrative arc, Yehoshua's engagement with the dilemmas left open by *Sippur pashut* opens a deeper window into Agnon's conceptual universe, as well as into Yehoshua's re-creative engagement with that master storyteller. As Dan Miron notes, Agnon rejected an easy romantic closure for his love stories because this struck him as a capitulation to a grander vision of national redemption that melds ancient Jewish concerns with modern literary forms.[47] Yehoshua shares such a national vision with Agnon, but the latter's ambiguity does not sit comfortably with the former. Nevertheless, even in his planned sequel to Agnon's tales of frustrated love, Yehoshua, too—as far as one can glean from his brainstorming exercises—can imagine a resolution to the inherited dysfunctions of the Szybuszians only through the suicide of its most vulnerable offspring. Whatever this implies about national redemption, the artistic truth is that a conventional happy ending would have been beneath the intellectual dignity of both these writers. They strove to channel a comic and ironic style into provocative narratives that tease their readers into a riddle game about urgent and sometimes painful questions of Jewish behavior and identity in their own eras and in an historical spectrum.

The possibility of ending the sequel to *Sippur pashut* with Meshulam hanging himself from the suicide rope clashes with the gentle ambiguity of Agnon's original ending. Yet it fits with some closures in Yehoshua's novels, especially *A Late Divorce*, which ends unambiguously in madness and murder. But is suicide the only option for the sickly young man whose father failed to pay five shekels to a Kohen? Is it feasible instead to imagine a courageous and dashing Meshulam courting a still

alluring Blume and surmounting their personal shortcomings and societal challenges? Or would the ultimate contact between them end just with Meshulam trying to suckle on Blume's dry breasts? How would Meshulam's interest in Blume affect the rest of his choices upon arriving in Eretz Yisraʾel? It seems that only Landau can bring a genuine measure of repair into the botched circumstances of these characters.

"Will Landau come?" Yehoshua asks himself. This lover, who appears briefly in *Bidmi yameha* and is discarded by Tirtsa, represents a road not taken in both of these Agnonic tales of frustrated loves. In *Bidmi yameha* Landau courts Tirtsa through a literary *Ḥibbat Zion* ("love of Zion") that takes the shape of Hebrew *melitsot* in which he describes the landscape to which Yehoshua's sequel might bring him. Thus, Landau represents a choice that is not fully articulated in Agnon's *Bidmi yameha*, yet it hovers in the background as a missed opportunity that could have mended broken expectations by bringing Agnon's disappointed lovers all the way back to the Song of Songs.

We will never know if Yehoshua would have picked up the full range of midrashic interplay with the biblical texts to which Agnon points in his tales of frustrated love, but the showdown between Meshulam and his father would likely have included an Oedipal confrontation and perhaps a breakthrough at the site of the Aqedah on the Temple Mount. This is a natural outcome for the *pidyon haben* issue that Agnon left unfulfilled at the end of his novel as an ancient commandment calling for an active unbinding for or by Meshulam, who in *Sippur pashut* is left suspended like an *ʿagunah* in existential limbo.

I asked Yehoshua a couple of times about this archived sequel to *Sippur pashut*. I especially wanted to find out why and when exactly he had worked on it. But every time he laughed me off, admitting only that he played with it for three weeks and then put it aside when his wife and Oz advised him to do so. The file that he sent to the archive nonetheless serves as an invitation to revisit the master through the attentive eyes of one of his most perceptive disciples. Yehoshua's attention to Meshulam's plight in the third generation of Horowitzes sharpens the latent historical and historiosophical contexts of *Sippur pashut* by emphasizing the question of whether it is possible to repair what was botched up in previous generations.

Yehoshua's discarded sketch offers a rare insight into the mind of one creative Israeli writer in dialogue with another. It highlights their mutual preoccupation

with psychological mishaps that nod to a larger problem of national redemption, which they portray comically and also ominously in their fictions. Once exposed to Yehoshua's persuasive interpretations of Agnon's tales of frustrated love, it becomes very hard to shake off the impact of Yehoshua's interpretation. Unless we are careful, we may become a little confused about what originally came from Agnon and what was added to him by Yehoshua. And although his "*Sippur pashut* beʾErets Yisraʾel" may have ended tragically for its protagonist, Meshulam, the potential arch of Landau's arrival to Erets Yisraʾel offers a glint of hope, both for the land and for Blume.

NOTES

1 A shorter version of this material appears in chapter 7 of Yael Halevi-Wise, *Retrospective Imagination of A. B. Yehoshua* (Penn State University Press, 2020).

2 I thank Avi Gil for clarifying to me that in 1987 Yehoshua switched from typing on a mechanical typewriter to typing on a computer. The archived sequel was typed on a computer, which strengthens my intuition that he worked on it during the break that he took from *Mr. Mani* in the late 1980s, when the latter proved too challenging to complete all at once. When I asked Yehoshua about his archived sequel, he would admit only that he played with the plan for three weeks before giving up, on the advice of his wife and Amos Oz. The file at the National Library is stamped with the date when it was catalogued (2014), which has nothing to do with the date of composition, for he periodically sent to the archive materials that he composed as a youth or even as a child. Yaron Sachish, Yehoshua's archivist, confirmed that the date on the folder is merely a technical date, signifying the year when the file was processed at the National Library.

3 A. B. Yehoshua's archive, National Library, Jerusalem, AC-1841, Arc. 4* 1579 05 369.2819897–10.

4 Shmuʾel Yosef Agnon, *Sippur pashut* (Schoken, 1993 [1935]), 195 and Agnon, *A Simple Story*, trans. Hillel Halkin (Schocken, 1985), 230.

5 In 1968 Yehoshua expressed his earliest public admiration for Agnon in A. B. Yeshoshua, "Anu adayin tsmeiʾm leʿAgnon," *Haaretz* (August 2, 1968); see also Yehoshua's "ʿAgnon vesifrut zemanenu. ʿEdut ishit," *Yediʿot Aḥronot* (April 4, 1980), 20 and 24.

6 Nitza Ben-Dov, *Vehi tehilatekha. ʿIyunnim biytsirot S. Y. ʿAgnon, A. B. Yehoshua veʾAmos Oz* (Schocken, 2006), esp. 214–15.

7 Nitza Ben-Dov, *Agnon's Art of Indirection: Uncovering Latent Content in the Fiction of S. Y. Agnon* (Brill, 1992), chapter 5, esp. 100–101.

8 Ben-Dov, *Agnon's Art*, 92–95.

9 Yael Halevi-Wise, "'The Double Triangle Paradigm' in Hebrew Fiction: National Redemption and Bigenerational Love Triangles from Agnon to Oz," *Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish Literary History* 26 (2006): 309–43. See also Halevi-Wise, "Reading Agnon's *In the Prime of Her Life* in Light of Freud's Dora," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 98, no. 1 (2008): 29–40.

10 Yehoshua, "Anu ʿadayin," 14.

11 A. B. Yehoshua, "A Father and a Daughter in an Unconscious Relationship: *In the Prime of Her Life* by S. Y. Agnon," in *The Terrible Power of a Minor Guilt*, trans. Ora Cummings (Syracuse University Press, 2000), 108–29.

12 As early as 1968, Mordechai Shalev noticed an Aqedah motif in Yehoshua's fiction and began tracking this pattern across Yehoshua's work, culminating in Shalev, "Ḥotam haʿaqedah bi'Shloshah yamim vayeled,' 'Beteḥilat qayits 1970' uve *Mar Mani*" in *Bekhivun hanegdi*, ed. Nitza Ben-Dov (Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1995), 399–448.

13 In conversation with Yehoshua, December 23, 1997. See also Avi Gil, *Shliḥuto shel A. B. Yehoshua. Biographiyah* (Zemorah, 2024), chapters 3, 31–33. Yehoshua claimed that in his masterpiece *Mr. Mani* he attempted to "cancel" the Aqedah's hold on his imagination by "acting it out"; see A. B. Yehoshua, "Ḥatimah: Levatel et haʿaqedah ʿal-yedei mimushah" [Conclusion: To cancel the akeda by acting it out], in Nitza Ben-Dov, ed., *Bekhivun hanegdi* (Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1995), 394–98.

14 For a brilliant discussion of the Oedipal underpinnings of Yehoshua's representations of the Aqedah, see Yael Feldman, *Glory and Agony: Isaac's Sacrifice and National Narrative* (Stanford University Press, 2010), esp. 284–300.

15 A. B. Yehoshua, "Nequdat hahatarah beʿalilah kemafteaḥ leferush hayetsirah. Hadgamah ʿal-pi *Sippur pashut*," *Alei siaḥ* 10–11 (1981): 74–88.

16 Shira Hadad, "'A Thousand Names They Called Him': Naming and Proper Names in the Work of S. Y. Agnon" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2012), 96 discusses the polysemic referents of Agnon's name choices.

17 Anne Golomb Hoffman, *Between Exile and Return: S. Y. Agnon and the Drama of Writing* (SUNY Press, 1991).

18 Song of Songs 5:5. Agnon's relationship with the Song of Songs has been recently revisited by Ilana Pardes, *Agnon's Moonstruck Lovers: The Song of Songs in Israeli Culture* (University of Washington Press, 2014).

19 For discussion of the midrash to the Song of Songs and Agnon's relationship to it, see Yael Halevi-Wise, "Agnon's Conversation with Jeremiah in *A Guest for the Night*: ʿAginut in an Age of National Modernization," *AJS Review* 38, no. 2 (2014): 395–416, esp. 410–12.

20 Gershon Shaked, *Shmuʾel Yosef Agnon: A Revolutionary Traditionalist* (New York University Press, 1989) and Amos Oz, *The Silence of Heaven: Agnon's Fear of God* (Princeton University Press, 2000).

21 See, e.g., Gilead Morahg, "Testing Tolerance: Cultural Diversity and National Unity in A. B. Yehoshua's *A Journey to the End of the Millennium*," *Prooftexts* 19, no. 3 (1999): 235–56.

22 Se, e.g., A. B. Yehoshua, "Hagolah—hapitaron hanevroti," in *Bizkhut hanormaliut* (Schocken, 1984), 27–73, translated by Arnold Schwartz as "Golah: The Neurotic Solution" in *Between Right and Right* (Doubleday, 1981), 21–74.

23 He expresses this view, for instance, during his comments at the American Jewish Committee's Centennial Symposium in 2006, published online as *The A. B. Yehoshua Controversy: An Israel-Diaspora Dialogue on Jewishness, Israeliness, Identity*, Policy Archive, policyarchive.org, 7–13; see also Gil, *Shliḥuto shel A. B. Yehoshua*, 124.

24 Oren Kessler, *Palestine, 1936: The Great Revolt and the Roots of the Middle East Conflict* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2023).

25 On this topic, see Jeffrey Saks and Shalom Carmy, *Agnon's Tales of the Land of Israel* (Pickwick, 2021).

26 Regarding Akedah motifs in Yehoshua's work, apart from Shalev, "Ḥotam haʿaqedah," see A. B. Yehoshua, "From Myth to History," trans. Harvey Bock, *AJS Review* 28, no. 1 (April 2004): 205–12 and Feldman, *Glory and Agony*, esp. 284–300.

27 Immanuel Etkes, "On the Motivation for Hasidic Immigration (*Aliyah*) to the Land of Israel," *Jewish History* 27 (2013): 337.

28 Regarding this last minute alteration of Yehoshua's plans for *Hashivah mehodu*, see Gil, *Shliḥuto shel A. B. Yehoshua*, 204–6.

29 Yehoshua's attention to professional identity is discussed at length by Yael Halevi-Wise, "A. B. Yehoshua and the Novel of Vocation," *Prooftexts* 37 (2019): 688–710.

30 The centennial commemorations of Tel Aviv's establishment generated retrospective studies about this first modern Hebrew city, among them Barbara E. Mann, *A Place in History: Modernism, Tel Aviv, and the Creation of Jewish Urban Space* (Stanford University Press, 2006); Maoz Azaryahu, *Tel Aviv, Mythography of a City* (Syracuse University Press, 2007); and Anat Helman, *Young Tel Aviv: A Tale of Two Cities* (University Press of New England, 2010).

31 Ortsion Bartana, "The Brenner School and the Agnon School in Hebrew Literature of the Twentieth Century," *Hebrew Studies* 45 (2004): 49–69 presents a provocative argument about whether Yehoshua and other leading Israeli writers follow Brenner's bitter approach to Jewish life rather than Agnon's ironic engagement with Jewish tradition and modernity.

32 Agnon, *Sippur pashut*, 166, my translation; in Halkin's translation (Agnon, *Simple Story*, 196) the episode appears in chapter 31.

33 For example, a religious Israeli soldier stationed on reserve duty in November 2023 had been present at the Brit Mila of his firstborn son but was unable to return home to perform the *pidyon haben* ceremony thirty days after the birth. In a brief ceremony that was recorded on video and later posted on Facebook, the father performed the *pidyon haben* commandment by reading the relevant text from the Torah and, having found a Kohen among his company, he gifted him a tefillin holder worth even more than the stipulated five silver coins. For recent halakhic discussions on the timing and possible delays of a *pidyon haben* ceremony, see "When a Bechor's Bris is Delayed beyond the Day of Pidyon HaBen," Mi Yodeʿa, https://judaism.stackexchange.com/questions/9149/when-a-bechors-bris-is-delayed-beyond-the-day-of-the-pidyon-haben.

34 Unlike Agnon who lived as a modern-orthodox Jew, Yehoshua was an avowed atheist who nevertheless called on secular Israelis to embrace the commandments in order to expose them "to the complexities of life, to observe them while changing them." A. B. Yehoshua, Bizkhut hanormaliut [In praise of normalcy] (Jerusalem: Schocken: 1980), 67; translated by Arnold Schwartz as in Between Right and Right, 68.

35 A. B. Yehoshua, *Sippur pashut beʾerets Yisraʾel*, in A. B. Yehoshua's archive, National Library, Jerusalem, AC-1841, Arc. 4* 1579 05 369.2819897–10.

36 Further examples of such absurd situations around which Yehoshua weaves his plots are shown in Halevi-Wise, *Retrospective Imagination*, 19–20, 80–81, and 148.

37 On ʿ*aginut* as a metaphor in Agnon's imagination, see Halevi-Wise, "Agnon's Conversation," 27–34.

38 For a broader analysis of this theologized marital discourse in the Tanakh, see Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, *Idolatry* (Harvard University Press, 1992), 9–36; Larry L. Lyke, *I Will Espouse You Forever: The Song of Songs and the Theology of Love in the Hebrew Bible* (Abingdon, 2007); and Sharon Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors in Hosea, Jeremiah, Isaiah and Ezekiel* (Oxford University Press, 2008). Roman Katsman, *Literature, History, Choice*: *The Principle of Alternative History in Literature—S. Y. Agnon, The City with All That is Therein* (Cambridge Scholars, 2013) discusses another manifestation of Agnon's relationship with this metaphor.

39 A. B. Yehoshua archive, National Library, Jerusalem, AC-1841, Arc. 4* 1579 05 369.2819897–10.

40 Yehoshua, "Ḥatimah," translated by Harvey Bock as "From Myth to History."

41 Ben-Dov, *Agnon's Art*, 101.

42 Agnon, *Sippur pashut*, 194; Agnon, *Simple Story*, 229.

43 I am echoing here the wider phenomenon described by Alan Mintz, *Banished from Their Father's Table: Loss of Faith and Hebrew Autobiography* (Indiana University Press, 1989).

44 The clearest expression of this attitude appears in Yehoshua's 2006 remarks to the American Jewish Committee; see *A. B. Yehoshua Controversy*.

45 Yehoshua, "Golah."

46 Gilead Morahg, "Facing the Wilderness: God and Country in the Fiction of A. B. Yehoshua," *Prooftexts* 8, no. 3 (1988): 311–31 offers an illuminating analysis of Elohima's role in *A Late Divorce*.

47 Dan Miron, "Domesticating a Foreign Genre: Agnon's Transactions with the Novel," *Prooftexts* 7 (1987): 1–27. On Agnon's sense of an ending, see also Michal Arbell, "Sof hamaʿaseh. ʿAl ofanei hasiyyum biytsirotav shel Shai ʿAgnon" (PhD diss., Hebrew University, 1999).