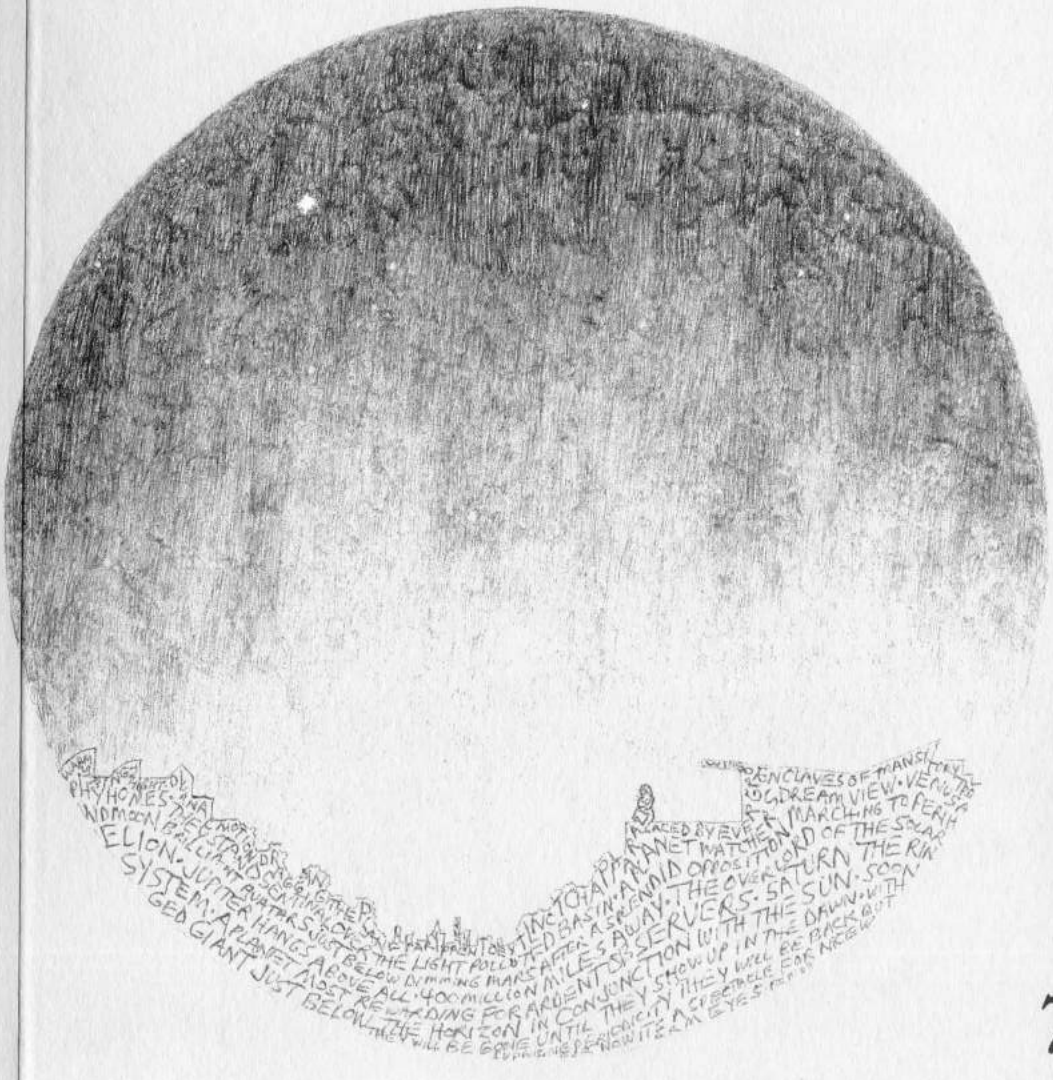
Cambridge Literary Review.



But if Sebald's appreciation of the history of Jewry in modern Europe was much less subtle, after all, than what most have given him credit for, should this change our appreciation of him as novelist? Perhaps. How you interpret the tensions between Sebald's different projects depends on how urgently you see the tying of loose ends. When describing in 1973 what he saw as a point of friction in Döblin's work, Sebald inadvertently described what would, until the end, remain one in his own: "the problems arising from the ill-fated dream", he wrote, "that a Jewish-German synthesis might be possible".[37] Looking for consistency in a writer is a fool's errand, but neglecting the full range of their writings makes for a shallow understanding of their thought. The celebration of Sebald as Holocaust writer has taken into account only a small portion of what he wrote about the subject. We appoint representatives too quickly.

37 Quoted in Sheppard, 'W.G. Sebald"s Reception of Alfred Döblin,' p. 366.

Mikhal Dekel

Erasing Race: The Redemptive National Narrative of S.Y. Agnon

IN 1945, 57-year-old Hebrew writer and Nobel laureate Shmuel Yosef Agnon published *Temol shilshom* (*Only Yesterday*): the first Hebrew bildungsroman to be entirely set in Ottoman Palestine. Agnon had come to the novel late in life, when he was almost forty, with twenty years of writing in other, more distinctly "Jewish" styles (like the Jewish epic of *Ve'haya ha'akov*) behind him. A literary protégé at fifteen, he would take up the novel only upon leaving Europe for Jerusalem, where he would reside continuously from 1924 until his death in 1970.

Temol shilshom is Agnon's first novelistic attempt to assess the Zionist project as a political and cultural alternative to assimilation or to Jewish life in Europe. It demonstrates the aesthetic, emotional and cultural possibilities of a separatist Jewish national identity. But it also portrays the ways in which the nation-form replicates some of the problems that, as Adorno, Sebald and others argue, have haunted the European Jewish subject since the Enlightenment. That Agnon had worked on this novel for nearly twenty years of repeated revisions attests to his difficulties resolving the tensions inherent in the nation-form in general and in a Jewish national identity in particular. Nonetheless, the novel as a whole ends up affirming a separatist Jewish national identity above all other options for future Jewish life.

It is an epic novel—607 pages—with a winding, expansive plot.[1] At its center is Yizhak (Isaac) Kumer, a young man who in the first decade of the twentieth century travels from his provincial Polish town to the

1 The Hebrew novel was published by Schocken Press (Tel-Aviv) in 1945. An English translation by Barbara Harshav was published by Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ) in 2000. Unless noted otherwise, all subsequent quotes are taken from the English translation.

Land of Israel in pursuit of his Zionist ideals. Once there, these ideals are quickly tempered by a harsh reality of poverty and strife; nonetheless, as the novel chronicles Isaac's slow, painful, and often comical induction into life in the Middle East, the history of the space and its people unfolds in an anthropological exploration of the roughly 35,000 socialistically-oriented, young Jewish men and women who immigrated to Ottoman Palestine between the years 1904-1914. Though most of these young people were ideologically motivated, their objectives were relatively modest: the 'normalization' of Jewish life away from Europe, cultural autonomy, and economic survival, and the novel depicts their erection of 'national farms,' of the first kibbutz, of political parties, workers' unions, Hebrew newspapers, and the first modern Jewish city, Tel-Aviv. The novel also portrays, though with sparse detail, the first encounters and conflicts with native Arabs, mostly as landlords and agricultural workers.

In *Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure* (1975), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari famously distinguish between major and minor literature: major literature relies predominantly on sight; minor literature on the imagination. Quoting Kafka ("I do not see the world at all, I invent it"), they maintain that while major or established literature depicts content that is a priori given, "a minor or revolutionary literature begins by speaking and only sees and conceives afterward." *Temol shilshom*, or at the very least its first, realistic half, is a work of major Jewish literature. It *sees* a people, a landscape, and an intricate social reality in Palestine. Seeing as a majority subject, however, requires that Isaac cease to gaze at Europe through the eyes of a minority subject. Here is how the narrator describes Isaac's passage through a European town on his way to Palestine:

> Isaac walked along the streets of Lemberg. Before him and behind him, men and women are wearing expensive clothes like guests at a wedding, and heavy carriages run hither and yon, and people who look like Bishops walk around like ordinary human beings, and if not for the schoolgirls pointing at them you wouldn't have known that they are famous theater actors. And shops filled with all the best are wide open, and clerks in uniforms come and go. And a lot of other things can be seen in the streets of Lemberg and every single thing is a wonder unto itself. *Isaac looked neither here nor there.* Like that Hasid, his ancestor Reb Yudel, who blindfolded himself with a handkerchief a few years before his ascent to the Land of Israel because he didn't want to please his eyes with the beauty of Outside the Land, so did Isaac walk around *with eyes shut tight* (p. 5; my emphasis).

To transform from a minority to a majority subject, Isaac's eyes must therefore be shut to Europe: not to see Christian Europe and not to be seen by it. This blindness allows Isaac to see himself at the center of his own universe, rather than as a minority subject in a majority European Christian culture. Isaac is blind to his own difference because, as the narrator tells us, Christian Europe does not appear in his field of vision and therefore his own racial difference is out of sight as well. Though the novel, which is centered on a half-witted protagonist and steeped in irony, can hardly be said to depict a violent, deliberate rejection of Europe à la Frantz Fanon (1965) ("I am no longer on tenterhooks in [the colonist's] presence; in fact, I don't give a damn for him... his presence no longer troubles me"), it does depict a willed blindness to and a complete turning away from Christian Europe. And though Agnon's narrator mocks Isaac's provincial disregard for the beauty of the European city, he makes clear that blindness to Europe, particularly as home for the Jews, is a necessary condition for the creation of national culture as well as for the creation of his own literary oeuvre. "As a result of the historic catastrophe in which Titus of Rome destroyed Jerusalem and Israel was exiled from its land, I was born in one of the cities of the Exile": thus the European-born Agnon begins his 1966 Nobel acceptance speech, delivered in Hebrew to the Swedish Academy in Stockholm. "But always I regarded myself as one who was born in Jerusalem."

Not only does Isaac long for that which he has never seen (the Jewish nation) and which does not in fact exist (in the 1910s, when the novel is set), but the very act of conveying Isaac's experiences *in Hebrew* is itself revolutionary. The revival of Hebrew as a modern, secular, spoken

'national' language had famously preceded settlement in Palestine by several decades; it is in this sense that Agnon's novel itself follows a vector that moves from minor to major, expression to content: in the twenty years that had passed from its initial date of composition to its publication, an imagined community that began in linguistic expression had turned into an actual national community in Palestine. And as Isaac's bildungsroman proceeds from the tale of his travel to Palestine to his life in Palestine, the text becomes increasingly oriented towards sight and description, portraying the emergent reality of Jewish national life.

Agnon's territorial politics here are coupled with an emphasis not only on Jewish difference, but on Jewish sameness: "To be a nation like all nations," as Theodor Herzl had famously declared; to create national difference for the purpose of erasing racial difference. The morphology of the "nation," Stathis Gourgouris (1996) writes, "exemplifies the predicament of the Enlightenment insofar as it bears its central paradox: it is at once particular and universal"; and though Agnon is quite far from Herzl's vision of Jewish sameness—Herzl famously modeled his imaginary New Society in Haifa on a pristine, modern, German city—*Temol shilshom*'s realistic first half offers, to an extent at least, a portrait of normalization, secularization and modernization of Jewish identity.

Zionism, it is well known, fostered several schools of thought: from Political Zionism (Theodor Herzl)—which sought a political solution to the "Jewish Problem," to Cultural Zionism (Asher Ginzburg)—whose focus was on preservation of Jewish culture—to Religious Zionism (Zvi Kalisher)—which feared assimilation and wished to hasten the coming of the Messiah, to Socialist Zionism (Dov Borchov)—which combined Marxist socialism with Zionism. These schools of thought are represented in the various characters Isaac encounters along his travels. Yet beyond any particular and concrete ideological affiliation, *Temol shilshom* depicts the kind of psychological and physical liberation brought about by the turn away from Europe and the collective drive towards national autonomy. Thus, and despite considerable difficulties

and setbacks, Agnon's Isaac finds a measure of emotional and cultural freedom in his Land of Israel, where he turns from Other into (lowly and impoverished) everyman. Isaac's transformation, in fact, begins with his ocean-crossing: a symbolic rite of passage through which, as literary critic Hannan Hever (2004) has demonstrated, the European Jewish subject of early Zionist literature in Palestine is de-racialized, universalized and 'baptized' into a new form of citizenship. Increasingly, as the plot progresses, Isaac sheds all remnants of European Jewish difference for a secular, modern, proto-national identity in Jaffa.

Temol shilshom, in short, marks and even facilitates the transition from a European Jewish minority identity to a national Jewish majority identity. But precisely because of this, the novel should not be read as part of an autonomous Zionist Hebrew canon unrelated to Europe; rather, it should be understood, in my view, as a unique manifestation of the post-colonial novel. Such a reading, of course, raises several difficulties: the first having to do, particularly since the Enlightenment, with the difficulty of positing a clear demarcation between 'Jew' and 'European' and of classifying the Jews as Europe's internally colonized people; the second with the role of Jews themselves as colonizers in Palestine. Nonetheless, the pressure against forms of traditional Jewish life, language and culture in Europe, the variety of Jewish communities and practices that developed in Europe (sometimes as a consequence of this pressure), as well as the actual physical violence against Jews, which worsened in the early twentieth century, instilled in Agnon and other European-born Hebrew writers both the revolutionary energy and the anxieties inherent to postcolonial nationalities.

It is within this context that we should read *Temol shilshom*'s second half, where Agnon's turns *against* the modern, secular, liberatory identity that he painstakingly traces in its first half. In this part, Isaac, who has recently settled into the secular-socialist life of a house painter in Jaffa and a tepid love affair with a girl named Sonia, finds himself inexplicably drawn to holy Jerusalem, where the narrator describes his meeting with "the beautiful and pious lass" Shifra (280), the granddaughter of an acquaintance, in half mythical terms: "At that moment, Isaac's eyes

grew dim and his heart began pounding. What was Isaac like at that hour? Like the First Adam when the Holy-One-Blessed-Be-He took one of his ribs and stood Eve before him" (p. 281). In the wake of this encounter, Isaac abandons Jaffa for a more authentic (Jewish) space: the *Haredi* neighborhood of *Me'a she'arim* (A hundred gates) whose residents reject not only all forms of nlightenment modernity but all forms of nationhood, Zionism included. And as Isaac reclaims the features of a traditional Jewish identity (covering his head, growing his beard, praying), he begins to move in the opposite direction from the novel's first half: abandoning the secular-universal identity of liberal nationhood for a pious, spiritual, anti-materialistic life in Jerusalem.

With Isaac's entrance into Haredi Jerusalem, the national space and the national subject depicted in the novel are thus doubled or split between secular, Zionist, hedonistic Jaffa and tribal, religious, anti-Zionist Jerusalem, between promiscuous, intellectual Sonia and pious, modest Shifra. In other words, the tension between the Enlightenment concept of citizenship and Jewish particularity is restructured in this latter part of *Temol shilshom* as a split within Zion itself: lower and upper, Jaffa and Jerusalem, materiality and spirituality, modernity and tradition are figured as an internal fracture in national identity as well as in the identity of the individual Jewish subject in Palestine. Though Agnon's depiction of the Ultra-Orthodox world and mentality is full of ridicule, Isaac's inexplicable pull towards Jerusalem and the mythical power of his union with Shifra also reveal skepticism about Zionism's normalizing politics and the possibility of severing ties both with a long and deep religious history as well as with a history of trauma and persecution.

Temol shilshom thus displays a somewhat circular plot trajectory: it replaces the politics of racial difference with the politics of nation, endowing the minority subject with majority consciousness; yet as the narrative progresses, its subject is presented as inherently split, haunted by the ghosts of its past. Franz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, Partha Chatterjee and others have theorized extensively on the inner/outer split of the post-colonial nationalized subject, pointing to the falsity of a rhetorical resolution of a colonial and/or racist past by repressing its effects. It is in

this sense that the sensibility of Agnon's text is post-colonial: it allows that the national solution constitutes and empowers Isaac as a subject; it demonstrates, in its breadth and descriptive detail, the enabling power of what Hebrew writer Ronit Matalon (2001) has called "a certain ownership vis-à-vis the language and the place". Yet in the end Isaac is constituted as a fractured subject, shuttling between two cities (Jerusalem/Jaffa) and two women (Shifra/Sonia), each element of the pair demonstrating the contradictions inherent in a separatist Jewish national identity.

Isaac's split identity is most poignantly symbolized, as critic Dan Miron (1987) has shown, in the metaphor of a two-floored house, which appears in Isaac's dream shortly after he settles in Jerusalem:

> The Lord of Dreams came to Isaac and pulled him to the sea. There he forgot his shoes. He went back to his shoes and the wind blew his hat off. A man encountered him and said to him, Come and I'll show you where your hat is. When he went with him, the man disappeared. Isaac stood in the street barefoot without shoes, his head bare. He heard the sound of prayer and followed the sound. He came to a two-story house, the bottom story in ruins and you climbed a ladder to the top story where they were praying. And the ladder stood straight. He leaned the ladder against the wall and ascended. When he put his head in, the door closed on him from inside and his body was outside. That's how it was one night and two nights and three nights, and he thought he would never get rid of this bad dream. Finally, the dream went and didn't come back. His soul came back to him and he forgot the dream, as he had forgotten many things he saw while awake, like Jaffa and its pleasures. (p. 573)

The house's two stories, Miron argues, stand for the upper and the lower realms, Jerusalem and Jaffa, Jewish and universal identity. Isaac, who has "forgotten Jaffa and its many pleasures" yet is not pious or Jewish enough by Jerusalem's fanatical standards, is at risk of losing both worlds - the lower and the upper: his shoes (material existence) and his skull-cap (spirituality). The house, moreover, is imagined as unable

to contain a unified self within its territorial bounds. It is a ramshackle structure, prone to collapse.

To Agnon, and to those who would read *Temol shilshom* upon its publication in 1945, the image of the ruined house is hardly a metaphor. It is a palpable image, taken not from the reality in Palestine, but from war-struck Europe and the ruin of its Jewish civilization and peoples. Thus, despite its initial optimism, and deliberate blindness to Europe, the demarcation, racialization, brutalization and final destruction of European Jews progressively make their way into the novel's latter half as well, in imagery, allusions and narratorial digressions; gradually, the portrait of a Jew as a universal, modern, de-racialized, carefree subject—the essence of the novel's first half—is undone. And though Isaac remains consciously blind to the world he had left behind, that world seeps into the text in the form of dreams, fables and premonitions. Dream and waking life cease to be clearly distinguished and now reside in a single sentence ("When he put his head in, the door closed on him from inside and his body was outside. That's how it was one night and two nights and three nights, and he thought he would never get rid of this bad dream"). Mentions of catastrophe, only tangentially tied to the plot, are now narrated almost at random. In a long digression, for example, the dream of an old Hasid in Jerusalem is told:

> Once [the Hasid] went to the butcher to get meat for the Sabbath. At night, he saw in a dream a lamb with a Shtrayml [fur hat worn on holidays] on its head, and carved on it were the words, o my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, and next to it stood a butcher his arms as strong as Pharaoh in the time of Moses. But he wasn't Pharaoh, he was Bismarck. And he wasn't Bismarck but the Military Commander of the King of Poland. He interpreted his dream. The lamb refers to the children of Israel who live amongst the Gentiles like this lamb among seventy wolves, and they sacrifice themselves for the Torah like lambs on the alter. And the Shtrayml is the Saint of the Generation who defends the children of Israel who stretch their neck like an innocent dove to the slaughter, and Bismarck... (p. 491)

The Hasid's story continues over numerous pages, as dream follows dream and interpretation follows interpretation: "All the while, that old man was sitting and pondering his dream, and he didn't know if he was dreaming a dream or pondering a dream he had already dreamed. The dream began evolving from lamb to lamb, and from one Goy to another Goy" and so on and so forth. When the Hasid finally arrives at the meaning of his dream, it is only loosely linked to its imagery. The narrator's telling of the dream and its manifold interpretations in *Temol shilshom* remains ironic throughout; yet the references to a butcher, Bismarck, and the carving in the fur hat leave their mark on the text. In this way, the novel increasingly sheds its lighthearted realism for something of a schizophrenic plot, narrated through Isaac's nominally universal, racially-blind eyes but simultaneously through the narrator's increasing references to Jewish history, Jewish tales, Jewish memory and the history of anti-Jewish violence as preserved in these tales. This tendency peaks when Isaac, the protagonist himself, is split and doubled, the novel's hold on realism is lost, and a new, non-human protagonist enters the plot.

During one of his house-painting stints, the narrator tells us, Isaac comes across a friendly dog, on whose back he jokingly, semi-consciously paints, in Hebrew letters, the words "kelev meshuga" ("mad dog"). From this moment on, the dog—appropriately named Balak, or Black—is excommunicated, hounded, starved and beaten by the terrified Jerusalem residents who had formerly embraced him. And after much suffering, indeed he turns into his label: a mad dog who kills Isaac and eventually dies himself. Much of *Temol shilshom*'s second half, no longer bound by the limits of realism, centers on Balak's story and perspective: his wanderings across Jerusalem neighborhoods, his suffering and distress, and his thoughts, which are narrated through a series of internal monologues.

It is important to note here that, like his Jerusalem neighbor Gershom Scholem, Agnon was deeply drawn to and thoroughly versed in Kabbalistic literature and symbolism. Agnon's marriage of realism and mysticism, mundane language and Kabbalistic imagery—which characterizes

all of his oeuvre—should not be read as a feature of his quarrel with modernity but rather, as for Scholem, Walter Benjamin and Kafka, as a feature of his modernity. Nonetheless, Agnon's initial embrace of the realistic novel as he moves to Palestine, and then his subsequent turn away, both in content and in form, from the comedic realism of the novel's first half, corresponds to a parallel unease with the normalizing "realistic" politics of practical, secular, socialist Zionism.

Balak, who is endowed with thought and consciousness, meditates on the cause of his sudden dejection by Jerusalem's inhabitants:

> Balak shouts in torment, Oh, why am I hounded out of the whole world, everyone who sees me wants to kill me. Did I ever do anybody any harm, did I ever bite any one of them. So why do they hound me and not leave my bones alone. Balak complains to heaven and shouts, Arf arf, give me a place to rest, give me righteousness and justice. And when Balak's shout is heard, they assault him with stones and sticks (p. 503).

A great deal of scholarly exertion among Agnon critics has been spent in the past sixty years on debating the meaning of the dog Balak, from its Faustian to its Biblical connotations. In the Book of Numbers 22:2–24:25, Balak is the King of Moab who commands Balaam, the prophet of the nations, to curse the Jewish people. In this reading of Balak, he represents the metaphorical enemy—a Pharaoh, a Bismarck—who periodically descends on the Jews from without. Yet Agnon imagines Balak as a victim no less than aggressor; he is after all, the one whose name designates his racial marking and on whose skin a racial label is tattooed. The dog becomes, as the novel progresses, Isaac's racialized double. Like Isaac, or perhaps like European Jews, he cannot see the racial labeling on his back.

Bal Ha-Turim, a classical fourteenth century biblical commentator interprets the name Balak as "Ba-lak," the one who "comes to lick" the blood of Israel (the Hebrew root לקק is related to the verb "le-lakek": to lick). This reading of the dog as a Draculian figure seems fitting. It

implies that those who like *Dracula*'s Lucy are poisoned by racial hatred become themselves vampires who bite. That Agnon had foreseen, in the story of Balak's excommunication, some racial tendencies of the future Jewish state is possible, but in 1945, prior to the foundation of Israel and the 1948 war, not particularly likely. Nonetheless, and perhaps contrary to Agnon's explicit intentions, the Balak portion of *Temol shilshom* reveals the mechanisms of racialization as essentially paranoid and masochistic, doomed for repetition when they are repressed.

We are reminded here of the 1937 novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by the African-American novelist Zora Neale Hurston. This work as well is set in a separatist space: the all-black town of Eatonville, Florida, where Hurston was born and raised. It too consciously represses the effects of racism and the world of white America out of its plot, charting instead its heroine's trajectory towards a true identity within an all-black space. It too is structured by the logic of nationhood: the all-black nation of Eatonville is monochromatic and its heroine is therefore oblivious to color. Hurston herself (1928) has referred to her childhood in Eatonville as her "precolored" years, professing that she became "colored" only when leaving Eatonville for school in nearby Jacksonville: "I left Eatonville, the town of the oleanders, as Zora. When I disembarked from the riverboat at Jacksonville, she was no more. It seemed like I had suffered a sea of change. I was not Zora of Orange County any more, I was now a little colored girl."

Like Europe and Palestine, Eatonville and Jacksonville are separated both literally (the river crossing) and metaphorically ("a sea of change") by a body of water. If the young Zora first crosses the river to become a gendered, racialized subject, with *Their Eyes Were Watching God* the adult Hurston crosses the river back into the continent where she and her heroine are majority subjects once more.

Like Agnon, Hurston depicts a complete, round all-black world. She describes in minute detail the unique landscape, people and dialect of the black south—Henry Louis Gates, Jr. famously called her novel "the first example in our tradition of 'the speakerly text'"—and in doing so

suggests the possibility of a normalizing, separatist black identity politics away from white America; it is a suggestion that her contemporaries Langston Hughes and Richard Wright totally abhorred.

Within this all-black world, Janie, the novel's heroine, journeys through a series of marriages: the first to a husband who represents hard work, frugality, independence and asceticism: the values of protestant America; the second to an entrepreneurial man who is "kind of portly, like rich white folks" and delivers Janie, at least for a time, into a world of middle-class normality. Yet like Agnon's Isaac, Janie soon abandons this seemingly viable world for a third and last marriage to Teacake Woods, a handsome, dark-skinned itinerant worker representing blackness itself. Like Agnon's portrayal of Isaac's marriage to Shifra, Hurston portrays this marriage—where Janie at last finds "a bee for her blossom"—in mythical terms, drawing on the myth of Isis and Osiris and consciously grounding the union in African culture. Here too, as the narrative moves from the all-black town of Eatonville to an even "blacker" space—the Everglade marshes where itinerate laborers like Teacake Woods reside—space in Janie's white-free nation, as in Isaac's Gentile-free continent, is doubled or split. Similarly to *Temol shilshom*, the split between black America and white America gets organized in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as a fracture *within* black space itself.

Their Eyes Were Watching God and *Temol shilshom* thus display an identical plot trajectory: they replace the politics of race with the politics of nation, endowing the minority subject with majority consciousness; yet as their respective narratives progress, their subject is presented as doubled. "One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro," W.E.B. Dubois writes. But the "twoness" expressed by Hurston and Agnon is presented as something else: an internal fracture in national or individual identity that displaces the gap between minority and majority consciousness.

As in *Temol shilshom*, Janie's attempt to bridge this fracture results in disaster. For like Isaac, no sooner than she has settled into her idyllic marriage to Teacake than a hurricane arrives, a flood of biblical

dimensions erupts, and out of the waters emerges the demonic figure of "a massive built dog" who bites Teacake. "I'm pretty sure that was a mad dawg bit yo' husband," the doctor tells Janie, as Teacake himself is transformed into a mad dog: vengeful, violent, uncontrollably lashing at Janie, who by the novel's ending becomes his killer.

Isaac too is turned into a mad, black dog:

> The dog's venom penetrated all of Isaac's limbs. His face blackened, his eyes glazed over like glass, his tongue swelled up like a shriveled date. A harsh thirst choked and strangled him. If he took some water to drink, he imagined a delegation of small dogs was dancing in the water. (And people said that he too started barking like a dog.) (p. 640)

If in trading Europe for Palestine, Isaac had become deracialized, on his deathbed in Jerusalem his face turns dark once more. Racism and its attendant violence, that is, re-enter the plot like in Hurston's narrative, as a demonic irrepressible force. After all, though both *Temol shilshom* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* are post-colonial in the sense that each portrays a 'nation' where previously racialized or semi-colonized people reside, they are hardly written in the 'post' moment. In 1937, when Hurston's novel was published, an anti-lynching bill was again shot down in senate and the Civil Rights movement was decades away. Not post-racism, not post-anti-Semitism (as if such a post-moment can ever be clearly marked) but during, exactly *during* and *at the height of*.

We can sense then in Agnon's and Hurston's shared narrative trajectory and themes—neither novelist appears to have read the other's work—a similar attraction to the national solution coupled with a similar anxiety about a separatist identity achieved through repression of a traumatic past (and present). Both writers end up portraying the pitfalls of such an identity, yet in the end, their novels close on an optimistic note. *In Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Janie walks away from Teacake's dead body, only to return to Eatonville an autonomous, liberated subject. In *Temol shilshom*, a Biblical flood erupts with Isaac's

death, and the narrator ends with a post-apocalyptic, messianic meditation on the revival of the land:

> For six, seven days the rains descended, and when they stopped they began again. At the end the rains ceased, the clouds dispersed, and the sun shone. And when we went outdoors we saw that the earth had been covered in grass and flowers. And from one edge of the land to the other herdsmen and their cattle were walking, and from the drenched land we heard the cattle call and the songbirds answer. And great happiness was in the world, such as had never been seen before... (pp. 606-7)

Though Agnon had clearly struggled through the contradictions and the dangers inherent to a Jewish national identity, he chooses to end the first Hebrew bildungsroman set in Palestine on this affirmative note, suggesting that the national solution, despite its impasses, nonetheless contains the potentiality of salvation. Both he and Hurston turn in their respective endings to what can perhaps be called an aesthetics of tragedy, or what Nietzsche had coined in *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* as "Pessimismus der Stärke", a pessimism of strength: salvation born out of death and sacrifice. It is perhaps the only viable narrative and political solution both writers could imagine at their historical juncture—1945 and 1937, respectively—and an imperfect solution at that. Yet nonetheless, neither Hurston's nor Agnon's works end up rejecting the national solution, but rather deploying a politics of hope in a separatist black/Jewish space.

Rosie Šnajdr

Review of Sandeep Parmar (ed.), *Hope Mirrlees Collected Poems* Manchester: FyfieldBooks (Carcanet), 2011, paperback, 143 pp.

I want a holophrase[1]

THE FIRST LINE OF 'Paris' marries that most primal of utterances, "want," with its description in philological terminology. From a child saying "up" when they want to be soothed, to an inebriated adult saying "another" when their glass has become empty, holophrasis is "the expression of a whole phrase or combination of ideas by one word."[2] Holophrasis can be related to any number of avant-garde movements—Impressionism, Symbolism, Cubism, Futurism. Arguably, it can be seen as the logical end point of Imagism, a conclusion lent support by Ezra Pound's enthusiasm for the ideogram. Mirrlees' first line expresses her desire for a holophrase to contain the experience of modern Paris. Unable to perform so absolute an act of condensation, Mirrlees adapts holophrasis into a writing style.

Brekekekek coax coax[3]

This short line, which is deftly unpacked in Julia Briggs' notes on the poem, is a quotation of the chorus from Aristophanes' *The Frogs*. It provides the sound of the metro passing under the Seine, mythologising the train's descent into the underworld. At the same time, it parades the otherness of the compositor, since the chorus in the tunnel are "Frogs," English slang for the French. Throughout the poem, words must multi-task to project a psychological experience of the

1 Hope Mirrlees, *Collected Poems*, edited by Sandeep Parmar (Manchester: Fyfield Books, 2011), p. 3.

2 "Holophrasis, n." **OED** Online, December 2012. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/87813?redirectedFrom=holophrasis (accessed August, 2013).

3 *Op. cit.*, Hope Mirrlees, *Collected Poems*, p. 3.