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**SHELOM ‘OLAMIM—ETERNAL PEACE BY S.Y.
AGNON: YISHUV-ERA SOCIETY ON THE
BRINK OF STATEHOOD**

This 1942 satire is set in the period of Israel’s emergent statehood. Agnon delivers a critique of pre-statehood society and leadership at the nadir of drought, wrapped up in self-importance and internal rifts over inconsequential matters while the very existence of the people is threatened from without. While there is room for historical or theoretical examinations of such a story, this article adopts a literary approach for its methodology. It employs textual analysis to highlight a cluster of literary devices including a leitmotif, reverberations of classical Hebrew texts, and exaggerations. Together they animate the scathing satire in this period piece and trigger its irony. To deploy the irony in *Shelom ‘Olamim*—“Eternal Peace” Agnon installs each rhetorical device and echo in an inverted or perceptibly flawed fashion, and magnifies minutiae to hyperbolic proportions. In so doing he crafts a game of *nahafokh-hua* topsy-turvy puzzle, making his medium the message. The puzzle and its pieces carry the storyteller’s caustic criticism of the inverted priorities and unwarranted hubris of the leaders of yishuv-era society on the brink of statehood. In contributing a thesis based on textual analysis, an allegorical translation of the ambiguous Hebrew title, and fresh translations of selected excerpts, this article offers English-readers access to the humor and irony embedded in Agnon’s multivalent Hebrew writing and word play.

INTRODUCTION

“Eternal Peace” (henceforth *Shelom ‘Olamim*), published in the early 1940s, is a timeless gem that could have been written as recently as this morning.¹ This story is the second of four satires grouped by Agnon together with a preface as *The State Book*, or *The Book of State* (henceforth *Sefer Hamedina*).²

This article identifies a cluster of literary devices which, together with myriad exaggerations of minutiae, functions as the key to an

interpretation of *Shelom 'Olamim*. In my view these disparate elements share an important characteristic: that is, Agnon deliberately applies each in an overturned, subverted, or detectably faulty manner. Furthermore, I assert that Agnon does so in order to inscribe his story with *nahafokh-hu*: an upended or otherwise wonky puzzle in print that makes his medium the message. In short, Agnon criticizes *'anshei hamedina*—the statesmen and leaders such as politicians, entrepreneurs and journalists—for their collective pomposity, failures in metaphysical and interpersonal relationships, and for espousing priorities that are simply upside down. The puzzle itself and the literary devices which are its pieces, bolstered by hyperbole, comprise the characteristically Agnonian irony that in this instance carries the storyteller's scathing assessment of the leaders of the *yishuv* on the eve of statehood.³

First, this article distinguishes and foregrounds the function and implications of a pivotal leitmotif in positioning *Shelom 'Olamim* in the broader framework of *Sefer Hamedina*. Second, it presents a capsule version of *Shelom 'Olamim* with observations as a basis for the discussion that follows. Third, it identifies and analyzes the contribution of a cluster of literary components—to which the leitmotif also contributes—and ironic exaggerations that together convey the speaker's satirical appraisal of the leaders, their priorities and proclivities.

In addition to the leitmotif mentioned, the literary devices to be examined include a central intertextual conversation with *Parashat 'Ekev* in *Deuteronomy*; allusions to the motif of the Tabernacle (henceforth *mishkan*) described in *Exodus*, and to Creation by conceptual extension; directionality introduced through verticals and horizontals in physical, metaphysical and interpersonal relationships; irony in the story's ambiguous title; and satire in portrayals of the inflated sense of self exhibited by the characters: statesmen, committee chairpersons, food storage magnates, newspaper journalists, and poets. As we shall see, Agnon's embellished accounts are meant to take pointed jabs at the self-important workings of the forerunners of Israel's legislature, important figures in commerce, and The Academy of the Hebrew Language.

LEITMOTIF IN SEFER HAMEDINA

To begin with, Agnon harnesses an inconspicuous leitmotif which eventually proves essential to the interpretation of *Shelom 'Olamim* and its companion pieces. The narrator employs numerous words derived from the verb root 's.y. denoting "do," "doing," and "deeds."

These words are ubiquitous in the Hebrew language, sometimes serve an auxiliary role in idioms, and at first arouse no particular association or suspicion. The fact that these words appear throughout *Sefer Hamedina*, often in combination with a negative, sets a pattern which connotes a *lack* of deeds, indeed *inactivity*.

The developing trope of inertia motivates the whole of *Sefer Hamedina*, its preface and four satires: *Haḥoteḥim* (“The Abductors”) and *Shelom ‘Olamim* (“Eternal Peace”), both published in 1942, *Qelipat Tapuah Zahav* (“Orange Peel”) printed in 1939, and *‘Al Hamisim* (“On Taxes”) which appeared in 1950.⁴ All four stories revolve around an ethos that emphasizes talk and minimizes efficacious deeds (*ma‘asim*), particularly initiatives undertaken by “unauthorized” individuals. The inertia suggests that *Sefer Hamedina* is clearly not a chronicle of accomplishments (*ma‘asim*), nor is it an account of occurrences (also *ma‘asim*) on the scale of the “nightmare[s] of surrealistic proportions” that we encounter in Agnon’s *Sefer Hama‘asim* which precedes *Sefer Hamedina* in Agnon’s collected works.⁵

The lethargy in *Sefer Hamedina* finds expression in a preponderance of public speeches and multiple meetings, but deleterious deferral of decisive action. This tendency is very pronounced, for example, in the first satire, *Haḥoteḥim* (“The Abductors”). For a ratio of speech-making, expounding and deliberating to deeds—expressed through derivatives of the Hebrew verb roots *n. ’m* (for “speechmaking”), *d.r.sh.* (for “expounding”), and *d.u.n.* (for “deliberating”), in relation to derivatives of *’.s.y.* for “doing,” “creating” or “accomplishing”—we need only to examine a sample paragraph of the text. As mentioned, instances of doing or deeds in the story are usually rendered in the negative, suggesting a lack of activity.

The meeting-hall was filled wall to wall. Not a soul remained behind, as troubles had beset the State and no one knew **what to do**. Seeing that Mr. Schreiholtz was about **to speak**, the entire had city gathered and turned out because, as is customary in this land, people **do not do anything** without **discussing** it first, and they do not so much as **discuss** it as **expound** it at great length. Once they finished **expounding**, the members of the *medina* regarded themselves **as though they had already attained their goal** (literally, had done the deed). If the problem vanished, well and good; and if not, they would add another **speech** to the cause; that is until a more pressing problem arose and they appointed yet another **declaimer**. If the problem were resolved, well and good, and if not, and so forth.⁶

The disparity in the ratio of oration to deeds indicates that in the society the narrator sketches, words outweigh industriousness hands down. In fact, the same propensity is foreshadowed by the storyteller’s enduring lassitude in the preface to *Sefer Hamedina*. There he reports

his unfulfilled goal of chronicling *ma'asei hamedina*—the life and times of the emergent State, albeit for reasons other than apathy.

Eventually we shall see that Agnon reinvigorates the leitmotif 's.y. with activity in an ironically counterproductive episode in *Shelom 'Olamim*, by subtly evoking the numerous occurrences of the verb in the biblical accounts of Creation and the construction of the *mishkan* (the Tabernacle that traveled with the Israelites in the desert).⁷ Both biblical narratives convey contexts of creative, productive activity by or for God. For now suffice it to say that in *Shelom 'Olamim* words outweigh deeds, at least initially. The characters attend meeting after meeting for speeches and discussions, forming “umpteen” committees and subcommittees for more opportunities to talk. When the characters finally do reach the point of collective action, we shall see that their focus is wrong and their enterprise misguided.

STORYLINE WITH OBSERVATIONS

In Chapter One, Agnon presents a pre-statehood society so wrapped up in its self-importance and rifts that its members have forgotten how to relate to their Creator and to one another. The narrator pictures their polarization into factions that he characterizes as “head-coverers” and “head-barers.” He conveys that dissent is rife within each faction and presents the details through differences in style. Among the head-coverers, “some wear *yarmulkes* and others wear turbans . . . some are as large as *qin'a* (zeal), and others more minute than *kina* (a louse).”⁸ Among the head-barers, “some grow their forelocks, and others are shorn; some are completely bald, others just on top.”⁹ Even their internal schisms sprout schisms.

In describing the habitual attire of the two major alliances the narrator adopts a mischievous tone: he links each group's head-covering practice to alleged pre- and post-Sinai comportment. As a young author, Agnon himself struggled with the ethics and optics of covering or not covering his head. In a letter to his spouse Esther, in 1924, he indicates that despite not wanting to wear a *yarmulke*, a bare head was not an option for him in Jerusalem. An exhausted Agnon recounts having skirted the issue by wearing his outdoor hat indoors all day long while he received a string of distinguished guests, among them two *admorim* (Hasidic masters).¹⁰

Out of desperation due to a prolonged drought and eventual famine, the rival circles pull together by default. Those who cover their heads before God, those who expose their pates to the elements, and assorted echelons of each, convene to resolve the threat which

menaces their physical existence and prized social order: lack of rain-fall, leading to famine, starvation, illness and death.

Without mincing words, the first chapter lays out the strife festering between factions and among splinter groups. It sets out the famine plaguing society physically, and encodes the underlying metaphysical “disconnect” between the people and the Source of all Blessing, including rain. As we shall see, Agnon effects the encoding through allusions to biblical and liturgical sources, most of them inverted. The first chapter thus sets the stage for the plot to unfold.

In Chapter Two, in an effort of misguided hubris, the leaders of the two major societal factions deign to work together; however, they direct their concerted efforts against their constituents’ best interests. Their goal is to prevent, rather than facilitate, the potential efficacy of intercession by an individual who, beyond the scope of their approval, decides to pray for rain. Unable to find a setting for prayer, as all synagogues and houses of study have been commandeered for high-level meetings with low-level thinking, this Honi-like character minus the circle-making, dons penitential sackcloth and ashes and repairs to the field to petition God for rain.¹¹

The audacity of this maverick, neither selected by, nor representative of either major faction, galls them both and sends them into a frenzy of meetings. They seek a solution to this preposterous threat to the very order of the regime, that of the sacrosanct *medina* which the contending cliques vie to control. The fact that the parties pull together is neither the result of an awareness of God in the universe, nor a conviction of *’o hevruta ’o mituta*—the Aramaic adage connoting “do [together] or die” (literally, “either camaraderie or death”). That the factions condescend to meet at all arises from their affronted sensibilities in the face of the defiant individual who autonomously seeks recourse to a higher being than the leaders of either faction. Societal objection to this independent initiative is plainly flawed.

In commenting on the trends in *Sefer Hamedina*, Ephraim Urbach notes that its episodes exhibit a common denominator: “the initiative of individuals is what saves the *medina* from its trials and tribulations in an era when the *medina* casts most of its citizens as followers. Such individuals retain their autonomy, and in fact their adherence to forgotten fundamental traditions of the ages.”¹² Beneath the storyteller’s tale we detect Agnon’s spirit rebelling against a regime that wills its individuals to forgo their individualism—religious, linguistic, stylistic, political or otherwise—in order to pledge allegiance to the collective known as Zionism. This is a theme which Jeffrey Saks develops in his discourse on the role of the individual in the State in the work of Agnon. As well, in the context of *Shelom ’Olamim* and *Sefer Hamedina* altogether, he likens the use of the somewhat slippery term *medina* to

the philosophical construct of Herzl's *Der Judenstaat—The Jewish State*.¹³ Similarly, in discussing Agnon's political satires, Saks is in accord with Ariel Hirschfeld's suggestion that the lofty title—*Sefer Hamedina*—might well be a satirical gesture toward the exalted ideal of Plato's *Republic*.¹⁴

Lest the entreaty of the rogue supplicant be met with divine down-pour, the communal tribunal and its burgeoning sub-committees labor to produce and name an immense *shatiah*. *Shatiah* is defined as a *yeri'a*—a woven textile or swathe (henceforth *yeri'a*) to drape on walls as a wall hanging or covering, or spread out on floors as a rug (*Even-Shoshan Dictionary*, s.v. *shatiah*). The *shatiah* of Agnon's characters departs, in its placement, from the usual model: ironically, the characters plan to suspend it *overhead* as a covering to partition heaven from earth. Agnon's choice of the noun *shatiah*, from the root word *sh.t.h.*, is also phonemically and lexically ironic, adding to the satiric effects in the story: rather than prostrate themselves to petition God for rain—*lehishtatteah*, these folks set about weaving a *shatiah*!

Chapter Two describes the steps that the factions take to prepare their solution. Its exaggerated vignettes are the mainstay of the story and a source of hilarious satire. We shall return to them in an analysis of the text. Chapter Three completes the storyline by reporting the total failure of the *shatiah* and adds a divine reminder regarding the one actually in charge of the universe. This horizontally hung woven textile proves ineffective at keeping the torrential rain from reaching the parched earth. It is soon torn and the separate colors representing the guilds that wove it bleed and run together on the ground, at best suggestive of some minor blurring of the factions.

The narrator reports that the land resumes the production of crops and that the people believe they have now bested their internal enemy—the nonconformist who took it upon himself to pray for rain. Well, they certainly showed that enemy who was boss, did they not?! Their attitude reinforces their mind-set of smug self-sufficiency.

Even before the restorative rains fall, the stance of arrogant self-satisfaction is reflected in the business practices of *'osrei ha'okhel*—entrepreneurs who actually have abundant provisions put by. Instead of sharing they hoard the victuals for themselves, hoping to drive up the prices in order to line their own pockets. Despite the famine they somehow manage to set tables sagging under an abundance of provisions each time they hold meetings with their comrades.

After the rainfall the people still lack a sense that the termination of the drought was wrought at the volition of *Haraḥaman*, *Ba'al hage-shamim* (The Compassionate One, Source of Rain), two of the epithets that the narrator adopts to refer to God.

The people gradually revert to the proclivities of their factions and their pocketbooks.

Since plenty of rain fell, the land produced, the earth yielded its bounty: bread to eat and water to drink. As soon as that happened, the hungry grew content, whereas the sated were saddened, because all the food they had hoarded plummeted in price as did their profits. As for the leaders—even their joy was less than complete: the head-coverers because their *yarmulkes* and turbans were ruined; the head-barers because the rains beat down upon their bald pates.¹⁵

After the flurry of activity when the famine abates, the people and parties return to their usual patterns. Now everyone is satisfied in the main, but some peripheral, nagging disappointment persists. In other words *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*—the more things change, the more they remain the same.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Central intertextual conversation

With several well placed biblical reverberations in the opening paragraph, Agnon encodes the famine at the nucleus of the story. The extended set of allusions sets up an intertextual conversation between *Shelom 'Olamim* and *Deuteronomy* 11:13-21 in *Parshat 'Ekev*, specifically the segment referred to as *Vehaya 'im shamo'a*.¹⁶ In this text God promises rain and crops for the Land of Israel in acknowledgment of the people's recognition of divine sovereignty, and their allegiance enacted through attentive observance of God's commandments. The commandments of this text pertain specifically to the metaphysical bond between the people of Israel and God, referred to in Hebrew as the relationship *bein 'adam lamaqom*. The essence of the intertext is that rain for requisite sustenance serves as a gauge for the divine-human relationship and in turn as an indicator of how well the nation will fare on the land. An extension of the concept underlying the divine-human relationship and its inherent link to nourishment lies in the recognition on the part of people of the God-rain-land-crops connection; that is, with rain and dew God brings forth bread from the earth. Good crops are neither simply a result of human might, nor merely an outcome of human toil.¹⁷

In *Shelom 'Olamim* the “vertical” relationship *bein 'adam lamaqom* is subverted due to a human failure to heed the commandments. Famine ensues. We notice that in Agnon's text the biblical echoes and related phraseology are mainly formulated in the negative, overturning the precepts of the original source in *Deuteronomy*. Rather than the biblical promise, “I will favor your land with rain at the proper season...an ample harvest of grain and wine and oil...I will assure abundance in the fields for your cattle. You will eat to contentment...”¹⁸ the

narrator reports the opposite: “God did not send any rainfall upon the earth. The earth did not yield its produce.”¹⁹

The gist is that in light of the breach of the “vertical” divine-human relationship, God has withdrawn rain, the crops have failed, and the people are going hungry.

Directionality: vertical and horizontal relationships

An accrual of verticals and horizontals in metaphysical and interpersonal relationships, as well as physical factors to be outlined, present a trope of directionality in the story now to be addressed. While the “disconnect” in the vertical metaphysical relationship *bein ’adam lamaqom* spells drought and meager crops, it is the polarization in the horizontal *interpersonal* relationships—referred to in Hebrew as *bein ’adam lehavero*—that gives rise to a food distribution problem resulting in a nationwide famine. Widespread hoarding exacerbates the alarming scarcity of food, and widens the chasm between segments of the population with and without provisions.

To underscore the role that the negative liaisons *bein ’adam lehavero* play, I note the storyteller’s consistent use of the word *ra’av* (famine), rather than the term *bašoret* (drought): what might have started as a dry spell in consequence of a disruption in the vertical association *bein ’adam lamaqom*, is aggravated by obstructions in interpersonal rapport. Divinely-wrought drought has escalated to full-blown famine in the hands of human beings. The food stockpiled in the warehouses of wealthy hyper-entrepreneurial hoarders remains largely untouched and unshared. The general public therefore suffers hunger, illness and death.

Additional flawed horizontal and vertical relationships contribute to the motif of directionality that plays out in the story, notably in the workings of the societal factions and in the solution they endeavor to implement. The two major blocs—the head-coverers and the headbarers—pull together horizontally speaking, but end up working against the potentially rain-producing vertical metaphysical relationship aligned with their own best interests. Incensed by the audacity of an individual who, without the endorsement of either faction, takes the initiative to pray to God for rain, the leaders and wealthy elite members of both factions set about a series of backroom brainstorming meetings to come up with a solution to the nation’s problems.²⁰ While somehow ignoring the starvation of the general populace, they manage to produce groaning boards laden with comestibles to consume while they plan. This scenario reinforces a horizontal societal divide between people with and without vital resources.

The proudly-proclaimed outcome of the meetings is a scenario blemished from the beginning. To produce a *shatiah* and suspend it over the earth like tenting fabric or a canopy presents a defective horizontal physical solution to a vertical metaphysical problem. Agnon thus makes satiric use of the directionality inherent in the *shatiah*-episode, central to the plot, to underscore his critique of the faulty goals and ethics of the pre-state leaders.

Directionality: allusions to the mishkan and creation

Along with the foregoing, readers may entertain a deeper interpretive reading of directionality based on echoes of biblical texts in the narrative. As the plot progresses we hear an accumulation of scriptural reverberations suggestive of the *mishkan* (Tabernacle) outlined in *Exodus* 25-27. We gradually realize that the *shatiah* is being compared to the *mishkan*, but a deficient one, as befits Agnon’s medium of *nahafokh-hu* to convey his satiric message. When we originally encounter the *shatiah* we get our first subtle hint of an allusion to the *mishkan* described in the Bible. The general biblical use of the term *yeri’a* connotes an expanse of fabric used as tent drapery, literally and figuratively.²¹ The specialized biblical use of the term refers to the curtaining to form the sides of the *mishkan*.²²

The narrator presents a second allusion to the *mishkan* with his double use of the term *kelunsa’ot* (poles upon which the *shatiah* is to be draped), when he outlines the proliferation of committees for the production and installment of the *shatiah* and its components.²³ Not only is there a committee to organize the makers of the poles, there is also a committee of advisors for pole placement. While the term *kelunsa’ot* is perhaps best known in Mishna *Rosh Hashana* 2:3 and Babylonian Talmud *Rosh Hashana* 22b for the beacons that were set alight in ancient times to announce the new moon from hilltop to hilltop, it makes an earlier Bible-related *début* more to the point for Shelom ‘Olamim. Rashi (Rabbi Shelomo Yiṣḥaḳi, 1040–1105) refers to the poles, variously spelled *qelunsa’ot*, in his commentary as being among the hardware of the *mishkan* (Rashi on *Bemidbar* 4:32). Agnon’s lexical choice thus causes echoes of the *mishkan* to resound in his story and thickens the comparison between textile and Tabernacle.

The storyteller encrypts a third allusion to the *mishkan* in one of the titles proposed for the *shatiah*. The epithet *sokhekh-yah*—God’s covering or protection—is lexically reminiscent of an element in the description of the *mishkan*, specifically of the cherubs to adorn the ark therein. They were to be constructed as *sokhekhim bekhanihem ‘al*

hakapporet—so that “their wings would be cast over the covering of the ark” to swathe and protect it.²⁴

With this accrual of encoded allusions to the *mishkan* the storyteller initially gives the impression that the *shatiah* compares to it in magnificence and significance. He then embeds in the *shatiah* initiative subversive factors that are antithetical to the purpose of the *mishkan*, thereby conveying its wrongheadedness. In contrast to the biblical *mishkan* which is curtained vertically to welcome the divine presence, allowing it to flow down and symbolically dwell there among the people, *this shatiah* is suspended *horizontally*: the leaders with their inflated egos and delusions of self-sufficiency intend to keep God and all divine activity—even rain—out.²⁵

During the production-phase of the *shatiah*, Agnon breathes new life into the husk of the *leitmotif* ‘.s.y.—“do,” “create,” “accomplish”—which has been deflated to this point through its frequent use in the negative, as in most of *Sefer Hamedina*, to connote inertia. Now the storyteller makes repeated use of verbs from this root word in the positive to convey that the lethargic factions are finally taking action. The presence of expressions of “doing” and “creating” or “accomplishing” applied to the *shatiah* constitute an additional allusion to the description of the *mishkan*, as well as to the account of the Creation. The fact that the same verb root appears abundantly in both biblical texts, proportionally speaking, constitutes one of seven seminal correspondences in wording between them noted by Martin Buber, establishing a conceptual correspondence between the *mishkan* and Creation.²⁶ In the view of Nehama Leibowitz (1905–1997), the interpretive purpose of the correspondence may be detected in Rashi’s understanding of the content of the blessing which Moses gave to the people upon their completion of the *mishkan*, as consigning people to partnership with God in the continuation of Creation.²⁷ Leibowitz sums up the concept in Rashi’s commentary as follows: “It is incumbent on man to imitate his Creator, His ways and attributes and assume the role of being His partner in Creation.”²⁸ Ironically, the characters in *Shelom ‘Olamim* operate to the contrary. They do not endeavor to emulate God. They definitely do not work in partnership with God, and for much of the time their bloated egos preclude human partnerships as well.

Bearing in mind the posited connections between the *mishkan* and Creation, we are in a position to compare the *shatiah* to both, and to note further flaws in the solution attempted by the characters of *Shelom ‘Olamim*.²⁹ The imposition of a supposedly impermeable *shatiah* between heaven and earth *disrupts* Creation: it upsets the original layout of the layers of the universe with a concrete attempt to block celestial *mayim ‘asher me’al laraqi’a*—the waters above the heavens—from

reaching any of the layers of Creation below the heavens.³⁰ Previously we saw that the horizontal overhead suspension of the *shatiah* is a specious physical solution to a metaphysical problem. Now we also see that in its literal attempt to repartition, in fact disrupt Creation, ‘Operation *Shattiah*’ is a misguided endeavor in terms of placement. And figuratively, the woven textile of *Shelom ‘Olamim* is a seriously flawed Tabernacle: it is erroneously conceived and positioned to *deflect* God’s presence from dwelling among people and *deter* God’s influence on earth, in the form of rain in this case.

The only directions that the people attempt to integrate well are the horizontal and vertical threads of their weaving—the warp and weft, and at that they do an inadequate job. The parties’ joint venture yields a product with handiwork so inferior that it fails to shield the populace from precipitation, and proves ineffectual at long-term unification of the factions. In other words the enterprise is unsuccessful both vertically and horizontally.

To stretch the phenomenon of horizontals and verticals to an interpretive extreme, we might entertain Agnon’s interpolation of the medieval Hebrew literary symbol “warp and weft,” a weaving allusion that metaphorically connotes the cross of Christianity and the tents of Qedar, referring to Islam. While Agnon does not employ the expression *verbatim*, or refer to the *shatiah* as a tent *linguistically*, I suggest that its frenetic weaving and placement overhead hint that the idiom would have occurred to him *contextually*. In a strong figurative reading, then, the *sheti va’erev*—the warp and weft of the weaving—may be viewed as a symbolic reference to Christianity, and the resulting woven swathe used as tenting fabric, as a reference to Islam. Both may be considered references to following *‘elohim ‘aherim* (foreign deities) proscribed by the language of the story’s central intertext, and therefore to its pledged consequences: no rain, no crops, no living on the land.

To return from the above digression of interpretive fancy, we may summarize as follows. Owing to its mistaken directionality in intention, execution, physical orientation and placement, the *shatiah* fails at being a *mishkan* to invite God’s presence to dwell on earth. It certainly does not have the capacity to subvert Creation, never mind shield the earth from raindrops. It is a *mishkan* gone quite wrong. Below is the consideration of another aspect of directionality to reinforce that suggestion.

Directionality: questionable vertical gaze and horizontal aspirations

When the people finally suspend the *shatiah* and gaze up at the fruit of their labor, in worshipful unison they recite, “Beauty is thine, *Protest-*

yah. Lo, beauty is thine.”³¹ Their attitude gestures toward idolatry. With the people practically pledging allegiance to the *shatiah*, homage to this textile verges on worship of *'elohim 'aherim*—foreign deities of the sort forbidden by the story’s central intertext, another toppling of precepts hazardous to the state of their crops, livelihood and life on the land.

Often, people who aspire to *grandeur* project their visions—physically and figuratively—on high. The Tower of Babel comes to mind as the manifestation of human desire to reach extreme heights.³² So do the Azrieli Towers in Tel Aviv, the Eiffel Tower in Paris, the CN Tower in Toronto, and other assorted obelisks, monuments and skyscrapers. The characters of Agnon’s story suffer from an *inverse* Tower-of-Babel-syndrome with their relatively low-slung *shatiah*. Rather than aiming high, they aim low. In curtaining themselves off horizontally from God, for all intents and purposes they confine themselves in a faulty, earthbound, human tabernacle, whose covering disrupts the layers of Creation. Their *shatiah* is a monolith progressing in the wrong direction: a symbolic illustration of Agnon’s appraisal of the societal values and relationships, illustrated through directionality, both literally and figuratively.

Ambiguous, allegorical title: seminal irony

The bottom line in terms of the story’s interpersonal relationships is that if the society portrayed does not learn to promote *shalom bein 'olamot*—peace between worlds or factions—there will remain only *shelom 'olamim*—eternal peace, one of Hebrew’s euphemisms for the repose of the soul after death. The characters invert the promise of the central Deuteronomic intertext articulating God’s pledge of longevity for people on the land in acknowledgment of their attentiveness to the commandments: “Then your days and the days of your children on the land which the Lord swore to give your ancestors will endure. . . .”³³ The longevity is compared to, or contingent upon, depending on one’s interpretive bent, the status of the cosmos relative to the world: “as [long as] the days of the heavens over the earth.”³⁴ Ironically, in attempting to partition earth from heaven, the temporarily-united factions *breach* rather than bridge the physical relationship of heaven over earth. In this way they further undermine the already-disrupted transcendent metaphysical relationship that heaven over earth symbolizes, and in turn jeopardize their own longevity.

Agnon’s stylistic commitment to the language of classical Hebrew sources

As is customary in the work of Agnon, reverberations of Bible, Talmud, Midrash and liturgy resound in *Shelom ‘Olamim*. In their deliberately flawed state, the echoes fuel the game of *nahafokh-hu*—the muddled puzzle that Agnon delivers. Beyond the overturned central intertext previously discussed, this article will content itself with two more samples that demonstrate Agnon’s commitment to, allusion to, preservation of, and facility in manipulations of the phraseology of classical Hebrew sources. He compounds and adapts the wordings uniquely and renders his own brand of modern Hebrew language style.³⁵ With each allusion to classical texts Agnon enriches his writing and heightens the irony. The first sample echoes the tannaitic syntax of early middle Hebrew which permeates much of the literature of the sages (henceforth, *sifrut hazal*).³⁶

Just when the characters think that the dire problems of the State have escalated to their worst, the storyteller points out an unfortunate corollary: “an even bigger calamity surfaced, as the treasury of troubles is boundless and for every catastrophe there is another one yet greater.”³⁷ A similar expression to that of the storyteller—*devarim she’ein lahem shi’ur* (items or deeds of boundless or unspecified limits)—originates in *Mishna Pe’a* and refers, among other matters, to extending *gemilut hasadim* (acts of loving kindness).³⁸ Unfortunately, the principles inherent in acts of loving kindness appear to be altogether lacking in the society depicted in *Shelom ‘Olamim*. As mentioned, enterprising businessmen have the resources to rescue their peers in distress, but refrain in the name of capital gain. Using the resonance of the phraseology of *sifrut hazal* the narrator hints that potentially kindhearted people hold at least a temporary solution to the famine that would involve sharing their stashes of stored food. Using his technique of subversion to project criticism, the narrator conveys that the only boundless bounty for these people will be disaster.

A second sample demonstrating Agnon’s commitment to conserving the wording and style of classical Hebrew sources draws on Hebrew liturgy. In voicing their fidelity to the *shatiah* as though it is divine and in remarking on its beauty, the characters solemnly declare, “We are for *Protest-yah*, to *Protest-yah* are our eyes turned.”³⁹

To trigger the irony of his characters’ declaration, Agnon has incorporated almost *verbatim* an echo of a *piyyut*—a poetic medieval liturgical composition by Rabbi Amitai Ben Shefatya of Orya, Italy. In the original *piyyut* the speakers turned their eyes to God despite their sorrow over Jerusalem which still stood in ruins: “I remember. . . and I grieve. . . only the city of God thrown down. . . and yet we are for the

Lord, and our eyes are turned to the Lord".⁴⁰ By amplifying this echo of Hebrew liturgy, Agnon renders the characters' ode to the woven swathe an ironically idolatrous paraphrase of a ninth-century liturgical hymn addressed to God.

Besides illustrating Agnon's knowledge of, and commitment to, preserving the connection of modern Hebrew to classical Hebrew texts, his abundant allusions to them bear additional significance: they bolster his criticism of some of the early modern Hebrew orators and writers whom he accuses of being less well-versed in canonical Hebrew sources than they ought to be. Instead of making the effort to draw on their riches, they contrive flamboyant phrases whose "shelf life" he envisions as limited, and they liberally import foreign language words which Agnon usually eschews as diluting and weakening the integrity of already-rich Hebrew resources.⁴¹ The narrator makes these criticisms manifest in his satirical exaggerations to be discussed next.

Exaggeration of minutiae for satirical portrayals of realities

We shall now look at some vignettes in Chapter Two, the heart of the satire, to examine instances of the hyperbole which support the cluster of deliberately flawed literary devices examined so far in galvanizing the story's irony. In portraying the feverish activity to produce the *shatiah* this chapter functions as the platform from which the narrator lampoons the factions and committees laboring to partition earth from heaven. Agnon places minutiae under a microscope to comic effect. He examines dimensions, committees, modern Hebrew language development, as well as the skills of the journalists and poets of the era. The narrator treats us to exaggerations of realities to the point of distortion, another factor of the ironic puzzle that propels his story.

To get the satire rolling, the storyteller focuses on the movers and shakers of all factions and sub-factions and packs them off to a summit. He has them gather to confer in a locale he dubs *Siftotayim*, from the Hebrew word for lips, conjuring an image of multiple pairs of jabbering lips—what we might call "talking heads" in the vernacular of this day and age, perhaps paying lip-service to this or that impassioned speech-making political leader or controlling entrepreneur.

Dimensions of the medina. First the people carefully assess the size of the *medina*. The narrator's repeated use of the term *medina* (State), in lieu of *'ereš* for "land" or "country" or another term to connote surface area, adds to the irony. The setting of the story is *prior* to the 1948 Declaration of Independence of the modern State of Israel, and in any event, the term *medina* refers to the political entity, as opposed

to the measurable physical entity. The citizens nevertheless measure the land *le'orkah uleroḥbah* (its length and breadth), a phrase that recalls several biblical sources which deal with dimensions: the verbal blueprint for Noah's ark; the scope of the land promised to Abraham and his descendants; the measurements of the ark and altar to be constructed and placed in the *mishkan*; and the specifications for the length and width of the Tabernacle's curtains—*yeri'ot*.⁴² In *Shelom 'Olamim* it is as though the people are about to turn the surface area of their ancestral land into a type of watertight ark by draping over it a *yeri'a* (curtaining), in this case a *shatiah* of exaggerated dimensions.

Committees galore. After measurements are taken the people appoint multiple committees: one to organize the weavers, another to organize the makers of *kelunsa'ot* (the poles upon which to suspend it), a committee of advisors for pole placement, and so on and so forth. Then for no discernible purpose they form several more: “They then struck another committee, for no particular reason, that was divided into two: one *Stam Aleph* (Simply A) and the other *Stam Bet* (Simply B). After all the committees had been established, they then appointed an über-committee.”⁴³

We can imagine Agnon chuckling quietly as he exaggerated the penchant for meetings and decisions by committee. We can imagine him chortling aloud as he embellished an ironic array of names for the *shatiah*.

Hebrew language development: naming the shatiah At this point the narrator magnifies minutiae in a swipe he takes at the linguistic expertise of the members of the authoritative body charged with the development of modern Hebrew: “After all the committees were chosen, a special one was chosen to choose a name for the *shatiah*. . . . All the members assembled for the meeting. They ultimately entrusted the naming to the society called *Leshon-yah*, the selfsame *Leshon-yah* appointed in charge of the language, whose members are all language experts and wordsmiths, and among them are even members expert in the language of the *medina*.”⁴⁴

Agnon embeds witty slights similar to the one above in his works, alongside his frustration with people who purport to “own” the development of modern Hebrew. In some of his stories we detect Agnon's weariness with those less steeped in classical Hebrew sources than he, who have the audacity to question his turns of phrase and specialized uses of the language. Beyond the fact that they seem intuitively correct to him, and accord with his superior language knowledge, the phrases he uses are soundly anchored in canonical texts and commentaries. In

Hush Hareah (“Sense of Smell”), for example, the narrator turns those frustrations inward. He parlays them into sleepless nights which lead to increased textual searching and learning on his part.⁴⁵ In *Shelom ‘Olamim*, Agnon’s personal tensions with the uneven development of the policies of the Hebrew Language Committee, on which he served as a member for a time, spill out unreservedly and are turned outward toward the characters.⁴⁶ Rolled in with those tensions is his irritation with a number of personalities who contributed to the revival of Hebrew, or more accurately its continuation, in Agnon’s eyes. In his view, although they possessed linguistic expertise in their mother tongues and felt they had the right to make pronouncements on matters related to modern Hebrew—pronunciation, stress, register, and the like—some were not knowledgeable enough in the earlier layers of the language and literature from which modern Hebrew grows in order to do so competently. We hear that very accusation leveled in *Shelom ‘Olamim*, and in fact in a number of Agnon’s stories which rake certain orators and educators over the coals for related offences in speechmaking and school language policies. Aaron Bar-Adon points out such personalities of the era and identifies several characters Agnon has modeled upon them.⁴⁷ Agnon was resolutely in favor of schooling and seminary education that employed Hebrew as the language of instruction, rather than Yiddish, German, English or other original languages. His views on the use of Hebrew *versus* Yiddish are apparent in earlier stories as well, such as *Bine‘areinu wizegeneinu* (“With Our Youth and Our Elders”) set in Buczacz, Agnon’s birthplace.⁴⁸ As far back as the composition of that story, first known in print in 1920, Agnon aligns his predilection for Hebrew language use with Zionism. He himself relinquished writing in Yiddish when he left Galicia for *Ereš Yisrael*.

The Language Committee begins to deliberate on names for the woven product, some of them hilarious: *shatiah ma’asar-yah*—roughly speaking, the textile that restrains God; *shatiah makshir-yah* for which extreme readings might include God’s apparatus, and the textile that renders God *kasher*—kosher, ritually fit; and then there is *sokhekh-yah*—God’s covering or protection, God’s awning so to speak. When it comes to hyperbolic hilarity the *pièce de résistance* surrounds the actual choice of the name *Protest-yah*, both because it is based on a foreign loan word with a token Hebrew ending, and for its capacity to convey protest of God: “*Protest-yah* is an expression of protest, as the whole objective of producing the *shatiah* is to object to the rains which are liable to undermine the regimen of the regime.”⁴⁹

The characters then haggle over the spelling of the name and settle on a ludicrous compromise: “Immediately they struck two committees: one to sort out whether to spell the name with the letter *let* or

the letter *tav*, and one to sort out whether to spell the name with the letter *tav* or the letter *tet*. They struck a third to decide whether to use *plene* spelling or not, as the members of the State were still divided over every word. . . Finally they established the spelling of *Protest-yah* with one *tet* and one *tav*, in deference to those partial to *tet* and those partial to *tav*.⁵⁰

My interpretation of Agnon’s satire treats the syllable *-yah* as in *Protest-yah* as a theophoric suffix, the way it functions in biblical Hebrew. All told, the narrator delivers *Protest-yah* as a defective theophoric name—one that undermines itself as “Protest against God.” The writer further embellishes the ridiculous name with inconsistent spelling, presumably in semblance of kowtowing to the egos of dissenting factions within the Language Committee, the up-and-coming forerunner of the *’Aqademya lelashon ha’ivrit*—Academy of the Hebrew Language.⁵¹

Hebrew language development: foreign loan words. Early in the story when establishing the setting of famine, the narrator uses two Aramaic idioms that Hebrew has embraced. He mentions *nefuhei kafan*—the hungry (literally, “people bloated with starvation”) who went looking for *nehama dekhisufa*—contributions of food (literally, “bread of shame”). The use of these expressions which occur in *sifrut hazal* is natural in light of the close relationship enjoyed by Hebrew and Aramaic, amply attested in that collection of literatures from which subsequent layers of Hebrew progressed. It is not until the people of the State begin to pull together to plan, however, that we start to hear a slew of invented Hebrew words based on *lo’azit*—foreign languages that are further removed from Hebrew than Aramaic. At that point we hear a number of loan words dressed up with a specific set of feminine singular Hebrew phonemic endings: *-a* and *-ya*, or the corresponding feminine plural suffixes *-ot* and *-yot*. The storyteller’s insertion of manufactured terms such as *diputasyot* or *diligasyot*, and *disqiplina*, when there are perfectly viable, historically grounded words for the same in Hebrew, such as *mishlahot* and *mishma’at*, is his way of delivering a dig to the purported Hebrew proficiency of some of the linguists of the developing almighty *’Aqademya[h!] lelashon ha’ivrit*.⁵²

Today the venerated Academy of the Hebrew Language makes every effort to find semantic archetypes in the most ancient layers of Hebrew from which to build acceptable neologisms for use in modern Hebrew. In the rare event that there is no satisfactory precedent, or kernel of a precedent, in the Bible or *sifrut hazal*, members of the *’Aqademya* sometimes permit themselves to Hebraize a loan word.

Journalists. The narrator spares no one his gibes. *Bileshon sagi-nehor*—using Hebrew’s version of reverse euphemism—he tars and feathers the journalists and the ink they expend. In his view they aid and abet divisiveness in society and incite the masses with their tabloid captions and bylines. To that effect he makes the following facetious pronouncement with its veiled accusation for posterity: “The newspapers merit positive remembrance for converting thought to action. One small question remains for these newspapers: Who dispatched that man and in whose name was he received before God?”⁵³

The narrator delivers his tongue-in-cheek compliment about thought and action through a play on the wording encapsulating the concept *sof ma’ase bemaheshava tehilla* (the outcome enacted is precipitated by forethought). Despite the fact that very little could be done to eject the leaders from their meetings and launch them into action, the narrator attributes singular success in this area for once to the writing of the journalists.

Poets. The narrator also casts barbs at the poets of the era whose capability with verse he holds in lower esteem than the prowess of their predecessors. In a question and answer *spiel* akin to a nightclub routine the narrator asks and answers, “So why do all the names suggested conclude with the letters *yod-hei*—the syllable *-ya/-yah*? Because *shira*—with the *double entendre* of poetry and Torah—has grown scarce, but poets abound so linguists see fit to come to their aid by making rhymes easy for them.”⁵⁴ The contrast between the narrator’s underestimation of capabilities and overstatement of the case contributes to the irony of this blatant exaggeration.

In recounting the processes involved in the preparation of the *shatiah* ranging from preproduction to publicity, we note Agnon’s magnification of realities, sometimes to the point of distortion, often to the point of mirth. In each case the hyperbole sheds light on the realities of the people and the times, and contributes to the author’s growing game of subversive irony. In this way he effectively reinforces the message that there is something significantly amiss with the values of the society, particularly the priorities of its leadership.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, this article highlights a cluster of literary and rhetorical devices which invigorates Agnon’s satire, activates its irony, and contributes keys to interpretations of *Shelom ‘Olamim*. This cluster encompasses: an underlying leitmotif in which speeches trump deeds;

references to classical Hebrew sources, particularly in the deployment of a central intertextual conversation with *Deuteronomy* 11 in which God promises rain, crops, nourishment and life on the land in return for reverence and fulfillment of the commandments, “as [long as] the days of the heavens over the earth”; references to primary biblical motifs, particularly the *mishkan*; references to sources, wording and syntax in *sifrut hazal* and medieval Hebrew liturgy; directionality introduced through verticals and horizontals in social, physical and metaphysical relationships, in the spatial positioning of the *shatiah*, and in a strong figurative reading of its warp and weft; exaggerations of minutiae; and calculated ambiguity such as the *double entendre* which informs the title.

Agnon installs each literary device in a flawed, upended, thwarted or otherwise outlandish manner in order to make the medium of his jumbled inversions and subversions the message: that is, a critique of the inverted priorities of the moguls and magnates; of what he felt were the overturned values of some societal leaders of the fledgling state who spread their political wings and asserted their entrepreneurial aspirations during the 1940s; and of the tactics of the era’s media, literary and linguistic spokespersons such as the journalists, poets, and members of the Hebrew Language Committee. The narrator criticizes the leadership for engaging in too much talk, too little decisive action, defective “horizontal” interpersonal relationships, and deficient “vertical” metaphysical relationships. The ambiguous title serves as a warning against yishuv-era society’s collective demise, physically, socially, and metaphysically: without *shalom bein ‘olamot*—peace between factions, only *shelom ‘olamim*—eternal peace, euphemistically connoting death, will prevail; and without the appropriate rapport between the populace and God, the story’s central intertext warns that the people will swiftly perish from the face of the divinely-granted earth.

Tellingly the story is framed with references to the society’s internal and external enemies. Consistent with their habitually confused priorities, the characters elect to invest their energies in a *milhemet reshut*—a non-obligatory, discretionary battle. In this case they choose to perpetuate collective internecine strife and wage a campaign against a perceived threat posed by an individual within, over a more pressing *milhemet mitzva*—a required battle for self-defense, as legislated in legal texts, to protect themselves from adversaries threatening their existence from without.

With the techniques embedded in this story, Agnon emphasizes tongue-in-cheek exaggerations of minutiae for the satirical presentation of pre-statehood realities. He directs his target practice at the early regulators of executive business and linguistic affairs. He employs hyperbole to throw multiple darts at self-important leaders

who create countless committees to split hairs and legislate action-plans doomed from their inception. Agnon is likewise unstinting in his attention to the proclamations of opposing echelons on innovations in the Hebrew language, and unrelenting in his pejorative underestimation of the prowess of the era's mouthpieces: the press and poets. Neither the politicians nor the guardians of the language and its sanctioned development are immune to the slings and arrows of the narrator's wit. *Shelom 'Olamim* is vintage Agnon at his sardonic best.

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NOTES

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Translations: Unless otherwise indicated, the translations are my own.

Transliterations: This article uses the ending *ah* to render *mapiq-he* endings, and reserves *yah* to transliterate the theophoric suffix, but otherwise drops the “h” associated with the letter *he* at the end of a word.

1. Shmuel Yosef Agnon, *Shelom 'Olamim* (Eternal Peace), in *Samukh Venir'e* (Jerusalem, 1974), pp. 260-269.

2. S.Y. Agnon, *Sefer Hamedina* (The State Book), in *Samukh Venir'e*, pp. 250-87. For a foreword along with contemporary translations and annotations of the preface and stories see: Jeffrey Saks (ed.), *The Orange Peel and Other Satires by S.Y. Agnon* (New Milford, 2015).

3. The term *yishuv* refers to the settlement of Jews who lived in the emergent modern State of Israel prior to its formal declaration in 1948.

4. S.Y. Agnon, *Sefer Hamedina*, Preface, pp. 250-53; *Haḥotefim* (The Abductors), pp. 253-60; *Shelom 'Olamim* (Eternal Peace), pp. 260-69; *Qelipat Tapuah Zahav* (Orange Peel), pp. 269-74; and *'Al Hamisim* (Taxes), pp. 274-87. The Hebrew title is a play on words reminiscent of the text of *'al hanisim*—“On Miracles,” the prayer recited during Ḥanukka and Purim, commemorating divine wonders.

5. Gershom Scholem, “S.Y. Agnon - The Last Hebrew Classic?” in Werner J. Dannhauser (ed.), *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis: Selected Essays*. (Philadelphia, 2012), p. 108.

6. S.Y. Agnon, *Haḥotefim*, p. 253. Emphasis added.

7. *Gen.* 1:1-2:4; *Exod.* 25-27.

8. S.Y. Agnon, *Shelom 'Olamim*, p. 260.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 260-61.

10. Shmuel Yosef Agnon and Esther Agnon, *Esterlein yaqqirati: mikhtavim 5684-5691 (1924-1931) (Esterlein, My Beloved: Letters 1924-1931* [Jerusalem, 1983]), p. 26.

11. Regarding Ḥoni, sometimes called “The Circle Maker,” a miracle worker who was able to invite rain, see B.T. *Ta’anit* 23a.

12. Ephraim E. Urbach, *Peraqim shel sefer hamedina umeqomam besamukh venir’e* (Chapters of *The State Book* and their Context in *Samukh Venir’e*), in *Shai Agnon: Meḥqarim ute’udot* (S.Y. Agnon: *Studies and Documents*), edited by Gershon Shaked and Refael Weiser (Jerusalem, 1978), p. 219.

13. Jeffrey Saks, *Meqomo shel hayaḥid betokh hamedina* (Hebrew. *The Role of the Individual in the State*). Soundfile: <http://www.webyeshiva.org/class.php?material=3322>. (accessed March 18, 2012).

14. J. Saks (ed.), *Orange Peel*, p. xii.

15. S.Y. Agnon, *Shelom ‘Olamim*, p. 268.

16. These verses, referred to as *Vehaya ’im shamo’a*—“If you will attentively heed the commandments...” comprise part of *Qeri’at Shema*, the extended recitation of *Shema Yisra’el*—“Hear O Israel” the central affirmation of faith in the Jewish liturgy.

17. *Deut.* 8:17.

18. Translation: Jules Harlow, (ed.), *Siddur Sim Shalom* (New York, 1985), p. 101.

19. S.Y. Agnon, *Shelom ‘Olamim*, p. 260.

20. A portion of the narrator’s critique of the era’s statesmen concerns their interference in matters of religious conviction. Agnon contends that politicians should not engage in religious affairs in a 1959 letter to Ben Gurion stating that, “religion and state are at present like two neighbors who are uneasy with one another.” S.Y. Agnon, *Mihu yehudi, Mikhtav teshuva ’el David Ben Gurion*, in *Me’ašmi ’el ’ašmi*, edited by S.Y. Agnon (Tel Aviv, 2000), p. 445.

21. *Isa.* 44:2 and *Ps.* 104:2.

22. *Exod.* 26: verses 2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 12.

23. S.Y. Agnon, *Shelom ‘Olamim*, p. 266.

24. *Exod.* 25:20.

25. *Exod.* 25:8.

26. The significance of linguistic and structural correspondences noted by Rashi (1040–1105) are later discussed by early modern commentators such as Benno Jacob (1862–1945) and Umberto [Moshe David] Cassuto (1883–1951), early modern philosophers Martin Buber (1878–1965) and Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929), and modern era commentator Nehama Leibowitz (1905–1997). See: Nehama Leibowitz, “*Terumah* 2: Make Me a Sanctuary for Me to Dwell In,” in *Studies in Shemot* (Jerusalem, 1983), p. 474. In terms of Jewish law, the thirty-nine prototypes of *melakha*—labor and creative works forbidden on Shabbat, which itself recalls the culmination of Creation—reflect the types of labor and creative activity involved in the construction of the Tabernacle. Conceptual links between Creation and the *mishkan* appear in discussions

of prototypes of *melakha* and its derivatives in B.T. *Shabbat* 96b, B.T. *Baba Qama* 2a, and J.T. *Shabbat* 7:9, D2.

27. Rashi on *Exod.* 39:43: "...that the Divine Presence rest on the work of your hands."

28. N. Leibowitz, "Terumah 2," in *Studies in Shemot*, p. 481.

29. Further to the noted conceptual link between the *mishkan* and Creation, Alex Israel, a contemporary thinker, also links the two thematically. He asserts that both the *mishkan* and Shabbat—as the zenith of Creation and a time when people suspend creative activity—are emblematic of welcoming God's presence into, or *back* into, the world. See Alex Israel on *Vayakhel-Pikudei*, 2000: <http://www.alexisrael.org/#!vayakhel-shabbat-mishkan-connection/c1mab>. (accessed August 21, 2014).

30. *Gen.* 1:7.

31. S.Y. Agnon, *Shelom 'Olamim*, p. 268.

32. *Gen.* 11:4.

33. *Deut.* 11:21. Translation: J. Harlow (ed.), *Siddur Sim Shalom*, p. 103.

34. *Ibid.*; square brackets added.

35. Aaron Bar-Adon, "S. Y. Agnon and the Revival of Modern Hebrew," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (1972), p. 173.

36. The term *sifrut hazal* as used here encompasses mainly the texts of the Talmud, such as material derived from Mishna and Baraita, as well as collections of legal and aggadic Midrash.

37. S.Y. Agnon, *Shelom 'Olamim*, p. 261.

38. The "boundless" concept in *Mishna Pe'a* 1:1 is developed in J.T. *Pe'a* 1:1 15a and B.T. *Hagiga* 6b and appears in a passage incorporated in the morning prayer service known as *shaharit*. This phrase refers to the lack of legal "ceiling" or limitation specified for certain initiatives such as *talmud torah*—Torah study, and learning—broadly speaking, as well as *gemilut hasadim*—acts of loving kindness involving forms of material sharing and compassionate intervention in interpersonal affairs.

39. S.Y. Agnon, *Shelom 'Olamim*, p. 268.

40. This particular stanza beginning with *'Ezkerā* ("I remember") has been incorporated in some versions of the *maḥzor* (the High Holiday prayer book), for example, as part of the *Ne'ila* (Closing; literally, Locking) service for *Yom Kippur*. Jonathan Sacks, editor and translator, *The Koren Yom Kippur Maḥzor* (Jerusalem, 2006), pp. 1168–69.

41. A. Bar-Adon, "S. Y. Agnon and the Revival of Modern Hebrew," pp. 170–71.

42. *Gen.* 13:17 regarding the land; *Gen.* 6:15 regarding Noah's ark; *Exod.* 26 regarding the ark, the curtaining of the *mishkan*, and the dimensions of the altar.

43. S.Y. Agnon, *Shelom 'Olamim*, p. 266. Parentheses added.

44. *Ibid.*

45. S.Y. Agnon, *Hush Hareah* (Sense of Smell), in *'Elu Va'elu* (Jerusalem, 1974), pp. 296–302.

46. The Hebrew Language Committee, established in 1890, was the regulating body that eventually became The Academy of the Hebrew Language, recognized officially by Israel’s parliament in 1953.

47. A. Bar-Adon, “S. Y. Agnon and the Revival of Modern Hebrew,” pp. 150–55.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 151. For a translation of the story, see: Paul Pinchas Bashan and Rhonna Weber Rogul, trans., “Young and Old Together,” in J. Saks (ed.), *Orange Peel*, pp. 3–25.

49. S.Y. Agnon, *Shelom ‘Olamim*, pp. 266.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 267. In the early days of the Language Committee, there was more than one attitude toward the principles of transliteration for loan words, and more than one allegiance among its members, factors which Agnon harnessed for humor in his exaggerations of minutiae. The divergence in transliteration has since been largely resolved in the designation of certain consonants for consonants in loan words; for example, *ṭet* for foreign language /t/ sounds, and *tav* for foreign language /th/ sounds.

51. In his translation of *Shelom ‘Olamim*, Jules Harlow presents the proposed names for the *shatiah* as derivative of the adjective “terrific”: Preventerific, Enablerific, Coverific and Protesterific. The spelling with a single “r” reflects the inconsistent outcome of the pedantic deliberations by rival factions in the committee he labels *Linguistia*. See: J. Harlow (trans.), “Peace Everlasting,” in J. Saks (ed.), *Orange Peel*, pp. 137–46.

52. S.Y. Agnon, *Shelom ‘Olamim*, p. 264.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 263.

54. *Ibid.*, pp. 266–67.