

CHEWING ON AIR: TOWARD A SENSORY  
INTERPRETATION OF S. Y. AGNON'S  
'*OREAH NATA LALUN*

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THE STUDY AND ENJOYMENT of the fiction of S. Y. Agnon has occupied and inspired Hebrew and non-Hebrew readers for a greater part of this century. Agnon's penchant for depicting his East-European Jewish cultural and spiritual heritage, compounded by his literary genius, has rendered his fiction a veritable treasure-trove of detail portraying traditional Jewish life. Agnon's work is an expression of his world-view and the dilemmas of the Jew in the modern world. Even now, a decade after his death, the study of Agnon's writing has not abated in the least bit but appears to be growing and spreading, a fitting testimony to the author's greatness.

As any experienced reader of Agnon's fiction has learned, the elements comprising "local color" also serve as significant symbolic devices in the works of this modern Hebrew writer. It is needless to add that, in this respect, the Hebrew novel we shall be dealing with, '*Oreah nata lalun*, namely *A Wayfarer Who Tarried for a Night*,<sup>1</sup> is not unlike the rest of this author's literary creation. The novel's rich detail depicts Jewish life in the hero's past and present. To these details Agnon adds more universal embellishments which seem to pertain less specifically to Jewish custom. These elements, as will be

1. For the English translation of the Hebrew title (see Agnon, 1967) I am indebted to Arnold Band's scholarly work on Agnon (1968, pp. 283-327). Passages, and some of the proper names, cited in this article will come from M. Louvish's English translation of the novel entitled *A Guest for the Night* (see Agnon, 1968). Page numbers from the English source will follow in parentheses each quotation or reference.

illustrated below, are at times used as symbols which, in turn, mirror, elaborate and create variations on the major theme of the novel.

An additional factor which needs to be considered is Agnon's prose. It has been described, and quite deservedly, as structurally, stylistically and thematically the most sophisticated in modern Hebrew literature. The unity of the seemingly disjointed plot and rambling prose of this particular novel has already been dealt with by scholars.<sup>2</sup> Rather than possessing a clearly unified plot, the novel is comprised of numerous episodes and subplots. The principal plot, in brief, is an account of the narrator's return visit — from Jerusalem — in the years between the two World Wars, to his East-European home town of Shibush. Witnessing the erosion of life and of the institutions of the past, he vainly struggles to single-handedly resurrect the town and its life as they were before the Great War. The futility of attempting to re-establish a bygone world wrecked by time and war is the novel's main theme and this unifies its episodic format by providing the subject-matter for numerous encounters and what appear to be story-within-story "digressions."

As a first-person narrative, the novel is a record of the hero's senses as they are confronted by the particular phenomena of his surroundings. Nevertheless, the more than cursory treatment accorded to specific senses requires an examination of their role as a thematic device supporting the novel's major theme.

The sense of sight, the most significant in any first-person narrative, is of obvious importance and the narrator, too, is conscious of the function of this sense as a means for recording the wonders of creation:

. . . sometimes a man's eyes rest on a leaf . . . and the Holy One, blessed be He, reveals His mysteries to him. (297)

In these words, the narrator implies that by examining minute details, one becomes conscious of the totality of creation. The implication is that the chaotic abundance which makes up reality may be comprehended by a sensory grasp of its components. And as we shall demonstrate, microcosmic phenomena do impinge on the hero's senses to confirm his fears that the past is no more and that the universe itself, which appears to be in disarray, is vainly seeking and yearning to reunite its scattered components.

More significantly though, upon examining references made to the senses of smell and taste, one discovers that their functions are connotatively utilized by the author — and perhaps also by his narrator — to comment on, and illustrate many facets of, the novel's central theme.

2. The most significant contribution with regard to the study of this novel's form has been made by Shaked (1966; also 1973, pp. 47-64, 228-278).

The following study shall explore the function of the sense of taste, for the hero's inability to eat, or its proscription, places him in a state of spiritual hunger. Then the role, significance, and meaning of the various manifestations of the sense of smell will be explored with an eye toward revealing their common thematic function.

### **Chewing on Air: The Functions of the Sense of Taste in the Novel**

The guest's arrival in Shibush on Yom Kippur eve is symbolically significant. Here, as in numerous other works by Agnon, Yom Kippur represents for the hero an opportunity for atonement, not merely in the ritualistic sense but also in the spiritual, existential vein. This day is a reminder for Agnon's hero that there exists a possibility of finding saving grace, atonement and a new life in a state of spiritual peace and harmony. His nostalgic recollections of the way Yom Kippur was celebrated in his orthodox past thrust the guest into an obsessive attempt to catch-up with lost time and to begin the celebration as prescribed by Tradition.

His late arrival, though, is irreversible and dooms his longing for a fresh start. This failure is indicated in numerous ways, among them the comment that the guest—due to the late hour—cannot eat of the last meal prior to the fast. This renders the hero, who is familiar with the obligatory ritual to partake of that last meal, to bathe and to change his garments, unable and unfit to realize his goals.<sup>3</sup>

The hero's break with the traditional life-style of his past stems in good part from changes in his own personality wrought by time, space and world-view. These causes are shown to be stumbling-blocks in the hero's endeavor to find and re-experience phenomena from his past. Rather than discuss these causes openly in the novel, the author underscores the significance of individual situations which illustrate the matter. That, for example, is the case with the guest's changed eating habits about which the narrator comments:

Men's talk, it is said, is worth half as much as study, yet they talk about the rise in the price of meat and the controversies between butchers and slaughterers. I am half a vegetarian and find no interest in their chatter. What harm is there if people do not eat meat and do not slaughter living things? My vegetarianism

3. Customs and ritual laws regarding eating, bathing and dress for Yom Kippur may be found in *Kitzur Shulhan Aruh* (see Ganzfried, 1963, vol. 3, ch. 131, paragraphs 3, 6, 8, 12, 14, 15, pp. 82–85). Agnon's familiarity with these laws is self-evident, but their significance is attested by his own compilation of laws and customs pertaining to the High Holy Days in *Days of Awe* (1965, esp. pp. 202–203).

gave great grief to my father and mother, but between ourselves, this world does not give satisfaction even to its Maker. (104)

The hero's adoption of vegetarianism is a measure of his altered self and his break with the past. Significantly, his yearnings to symbolically taste of the past are forestalled by his own adoption of vegetarianism. By this change, the nexus with the hero's past—as represented by the non-vegetarian foods—has been eliminated. The dietary change, so fraught with implications about a transformation in the hero's world-view, in turn disturbs and haunts him, for he now must choose between his present values and the opportunity to recapture an experience from his past. As it turns out, his frustration in failing to realize his wishes is due not merely to changes in the Shibush he has known in childhood, but also to transformations within his personality.

When some of the residents of Shibush ask the guest whether, while in the Land of Israel, he has missed his home town, their questions are formulated in terms of missing specific foods. For instance, Yeruham Freeman (*Hopši*, in the Hebrew) asks the guest about missing the berries eaten in Shibush (301) and his friend Aaron Schutzling asks a similar question regarding ale (316). These foods, among other items, are associated with Shibush and represent a world abandoned by the hero who, as a youth, left for Jerusalem in search of an ideal haven. Significantly, the Land of Israel, too, is represented in terms of foods such as olives (56) and oranges (211ff).

Since the hero is unable to enjoy the same meals as prepared in the past by his mother, how, one may ask, is he to expect to succeed in his pursuit? For any significant act of eating, whenever depicted, becomes a veritable parody of the eating for which he yearns but cannot realize. For although we are informed that the guest eats and enjoys meals, those meals only satisfy his physical hunger. And as will be illustrated, the spiritual hunger becomes thwarted by the hero's vegetarianism. This, in turn, serves as a barrier in his quest for an opportunity to re-experience his fondly remembered days.

The obsession with eating or tasting of foods which evoke the blissful past for the guest is introduced at the story's opening. As his train pulls into the Shibush station, the local, invalid, railway dispatcher and guard Rubberovitch (*Gumovic*, in the Hebrew) calls out the town's name. Following the announcement, the narrator-guest notes that

After Rubberovitch had got the name of Szibucz out of his mouth, he licked his mustache as if he had been munching sweetmeats, carefully scrutinized the passengers stepping down, stroked his rubber arm, and made ready to send off the train. (1)

The sweet taste savored in the process of pronunciation is obviously intended as a form of psychological projection, a product of the guest's observations and associations. The impression of the tastiness in the sounds is a reflection of the hero's romantic, star-struck attitude regarding his home town. Regrettably though, the guest is incapable of personally savoring the taste since—he feels—it is reserved exclusively for the town's residents, those 'lucky' people of Shibush. Such a romanticized notion on the guest's part places in doubt his authority as a reliable witness and judge of events. Due to the proliferation of similar narrator-to-reader asides, the story necessarily becomes a portrait of the guest-narrator as affected by the lingering memory of his visit to Shibush.

The guest's observation concerning the sweetness savored exclusively by the town's residents—the only ones able to properly pronounce the town's name—underscores his acute sense of alienation and apartness from the object to which he so longs to return. In light of this realization, the hero is painfully aware that although formerly a resident of Shibush, he is no longer so but is only a guest, an outsider. In addition, the hero's attitude betrays a degree of naiveté regarding the literal and negative connotations associated with the Hebrew term *šibbuš* ('defect,' 'breakdown,' 'disruption'), which stands in marked contrast to the association of sweetness so fervently attributed by him to the same term. His innocence is made even more poignant by his obliviousness to Rubberovitch's physical appearance which so fittingly corresponds to the literal meaning of the town's name as announced by the dispatcher.

While the guest unrealistically associates sweetness with the mention of the term *šibbuš*, he is unable to escape the true meaning of the word and its applicability to the town. The real image of the place invades his dream world, there to haunt him to no end.<sup>4</sup> His encounter, in one of his dreams, with a mysterious old man points to the lifelessness in Shibush of the present. When, in that episode, the old man pronounces the name Shibush, the hero's immediate association contradicts the ostensible sweetness he found in Rubberovitch's utterance. In this instance, the old man's words are devoid of any sweet taste, a detail painfully noted by the narrator (p. 93). The dream episode, then, imposes upon the hero the image of a reality he attempts to evade during his waking hours.

In a later encounter, the very same elements—the guest, Rubberovitch and the pronunciation of a place-name by the latter—coalesce into an episode which sheds light on the significance of the act of tasting: when the guest goes to receive a shipment of oranges ordered by him from Israel, he notes that

4. On the interpretation of dreams in this novel see Shaked (1973, esp. pp. 52, 62–63).

The station is covered in snow; facing it, the iron rails, on which the cars run, stretch out. Few persons leave Szibucz and few enter Szibucz, but the train continues to do its duty. Twice a day it leaves and comes in. Whenever it comes in, Rubberovitch the guard goes out with his rubber hand and calls out melodiously, 'Szibucz.' His clothes are clean and his mustache is neat. I say to myself: Let me wait and see Rubberovitch licking his mustache when he cries 'Szibucz.' But no sooner had I a chance to see him than the bright snow dripped into my eyes and blinded them. (213)

The true aspect of reality in Shibush negates all hope of deriving pleasure from anything in the crippled dispatcher's behavior. Instead, snow, representing cold and harsh reality, punishes the audacious guest by falling in his eyes and blinding him momentarily.

Upon presenting Rubberovitch with the notice about the oranges, the guest is again treated to a pantomimic act of the latter, also associated with eating:

I handed Rubberovitch the form I had received from the station office. He read it and said, 'Oranges from Palestine.' He chewed the air and read again 'Palestine.' Dear bretheren, the way this guard says 'Szibucz' with a melody, as I told you before, is nothing compared with the melody of 'Palestine.' (216)

When Rubberovitch brings out the crate of oranges, the guest purposefully refrains from treating him to a tasty fruit. Instead, he compensates the dispatcher with money, thereby saving all the oranges as a gift for the Freemans. By this act the guest is symbolically also preventing Rubberovitch, who so aptly represents the dying Shibush, from being associated with the Land of Israel, the hero's refuge, in any way at all.

The above-quoted passage contains an enigmatic pantomimic description of Rubberovitch chewing air. When examined in light of its context, the phrase serves to express the character's vicarious enjoyment of something beyond his grasp. Chewing on air, then, is a parody of the act of eating since it emulates it without the benefit derived from eating. We find this very paradoxical formulation in two additional passages in this novel. The first episode to contain this phraseology details the guest's experiences in Shibush on the first night of his return, on Yom Kippur eve. After services, the guest stands on a bridge recalling how his father, too, used to come to this very place on Yom Kippur eves. His pleasant musings are interrupted by a group of mischievous and rebellious youths returning from a feast they held on the night of the fast. Their pranks and rude behavior contradict all that is precious and dear to the guest. Following their departure, he notes that "a fine odor arose from the river. I breathed in deeply and savored [*ta'asti* ('chewed')] the air." (7). The river, which in this passage is the source of the "fine odor," is also a con-

ventional symbol for the passage of time. These two, odor and time, share an ephemeral quality which points to the guest's sensory distance from the object of his desire. However, even though he may not taste of the source of the fragrance, he is still permitted an olfactory enjoyment of the waters of the river which is at once the same and yet unlike the river of his childhood.

The third passage wherein the phrase "chewing on air" is used depicts an idle Jew who is "chewing on air" while looking for a way to make a living (442).

In all three episodes, the act of chewing on air points to the guest-narrator's vision of reality as being one of a perpetual Yom Kippur. The characters described as chewing the air are unable to directly enjoy the object of their desire, be it water for the guest, the Land of Israel for Rubberovitch, or a livelihood for a Shibushnik.

The most revealing, touching, and intense expression of the hero's thwarted desire to eat a specific type of food is depicted in his encounter with Freide the Kaiserin, a vestige of his past. The passage describing his visit captures and crystallizes his dilemma. He is fond of Freide because she was his mother's servant and governess, and is also one of the few remaining natives of Shibush to have known the hero in his youth. His attachment to her is out of regard for her as a mother figure. In addition, she is proof that some fragments of the past have survived after all. Her tenacious though tragic existence confirms for the guest that there is some hope in his attempts at reviving the past. Therefore he cares for her and visits her occasionally. During one such visit she offers him some cakes. At the recollection of having eaten cakes of this type in his youth, the guest-narrator stops the forward and external motion of the plot in order to brief the reader about the odor of these cakes and their significance:

Freide brought fine little brown cakes arranged in a tin; their smell was good. This smell is not an object, not a body, and there is no substance in it at all; but when it reaches you, you are changed at once. Since the day he was exiled from his father's house, this man had not seen cakes like these; at the moment he smelled them he felt as if his youth had come back, as if he were with his mother. (264)

The guest realizes that he must not miss the opportunity presented to him. He knows that this seemingly insignificant moment may be the very link for which he has been searching. By eating of the cakes in Freide's presence, he may confirm for himself that his beloved past does still exist in the form of a surrogate mother serving him his favorite childhood cakes. Reality, though, jars him from his romantic speculations. The tense and dramatic moment, so deliberately extended by the narrator's discourse, must end in failure if the truth regarding present reality is to prevail:

I took a cake and said to Freide, 'Surely they are not made with fat?' 'Do you think,' replied Freide, 'that I deceive the world and make cakes without fat? You yourself sent me a pot of fat.' Said I, 'I don't eat meat.' (264)

The guest's chance to taste a food representing his past is foiled by his own undoing, for now he is a vegetarian. Modern life has wrought significant changes in man, thereby rendering him unfit to recapture a romanticized world of innocence and bliss. His yearning, then, is not to be realized, making his existence a perpetual and frustrating search for a way back.

Throughout the novel, the hero's desire to eat cakes is symbolically important. Cakes apparently are meant to either link him with his past, or simply represent a pleasurable eating experience. Consequently, and for both of the above reasons, episodes presenting the guest with the opportunity to taste cakes—as in the above—result in failure.

In an earlier episode, the guest, upon visiting the Bach family, is invited to have some tea by his hosts who, apologetically, explain that they do not have any cake to go along with the tea:

Said Daniel Bach to his wife, 'Perhaps we should have tea? . . . 'The kettle is boiling,' said Mrs. Bach. 'I'll bring the tea right away . . . I'm sorry I didn't bake a cake.' Daniel Bach smiled and said, 'My wife is of the opinion that one does not fulfill the duty of after-Sabbath supper with a cup of tea. . . .

'It is the Shavuot festival that calls for cakes,' said her husband. (249)

Poverty, the true reason for the lack of cake, prevents the hero from having cake with the Bachs.

And as if to put Daniel Bach's above-quoted last words to the test, our hero is presented with an opportunity to partake of some cake prepared specifically for 'the Shavuot festival' by the young Jews who live out on the farm.

On the day of that holyday, upon their return from religious services in a nearby town, the guest and his hosts discover, much to their chagrin, that their festival meal—including the raisin and butter cheesecake—has been stolen (285). All they are left with are some used tea leaves with which to make some tea (286).

Here too, as in the above-mentioned episode, the guest is left to drink only tea, for here it is the absence of ethical behavior on the part of some neighbors which is the cause preventing him from tasting the cake. So then, ironically, when the time—Shavuot—is right, and when the cake—i.e. dairy—is right, and when his hosts' economic condition is right, then reality (or Fate?) intrudes in other ways, thereby depriving the hero of his piece of cake.

Lastly, when the raisin cheesecake of Shavuot is not stolen, as is the case at the Freemans', then the guest is no longer able to taste of the left-over piece

because it has been spoiled by time and ants. And again the guest and his hosts drink tea without cake (pp. 301–302).

In this instance, though, the merit of the Land of Israel intercedes to save the day. Rachel, it seems, has prepared preserves made, significantly, with the peels of the Israeli oranges brought earlier by the guest.

Likewise, and to further broaden the subject, the guest is also unable to eat of the bread which used to be baked by Genendel's family, for now they are scattered throughout the world. In the hero's eyes, the bread they baked is unlike any other bread in the world (314–315). This bread carries the same significance for the guest as do Freide's cakes.<sup>5</sup> The scattering of the bakers becomes a symbol for the nature of the world at the present. Genendel's brother, Aaron Schutzling is, admittedly, back in Shibush, but he is unable to take up his ancestors' occupation. So, while the hero can share memories of bygone days with this friend, any chance to taste of that which represents the past is denied him almost entirely.

Albeit, he does enjoy the taste of one of his favorite foods reminding him of the past, millet boiled in honey. Although some pleasure is derived from this experience, the fact that this dish is prepared and served by Reb Hayim (393–394) is an indication of the brevity of the return. Reb Hayim, also a survivor of the hero's past, is destined to die soon after this episode (432).

### **The Sense of Smell**

The hero's inability to surmount the taste barrier becomes a significant objective-correlative reflecting his shortcomings in reviving the past. Although frequent statements are made to the effect that he does indeed eat and enjoy meals in Shibush, those meals are new meals, vegetarian meals, lacking the essentials for transporting him back to his fondly-remembered days.

Agnon, however, does not close all gates before his hero. Saving grace manifests itself through other means. Often, the sense of taste is replaced by the sense of smell as a limited, though effective, means by which reaching back into the past may be possible. Through such allowances, Agnon keeps his world-view from being totally pessimistic.

In the above-noted episode regarding Friede's cakes, the association of taste with the function of smelling establishes the significance of the latter. So while it appears that all hope for a truly physical link with the past via the eating of

5. The significance of bread is also a central symbol in Agnon's short story "A Whole Loaf" where not only is the "whole loaf" unattainable, but so is the piece of bread held by a child reminding the hero of his own mother and childhood (1970, pp. 91–92).

specific foods is blocked, the sense of smell remains as a figurative, ephemeral bridge to momentarily unite the here-and-now with the past. In the same manner as the ritual laws of Yom Kippur are used to trigger a dilemma in the hero's ceaseless search for his spiritual roots, so also are they applied to the category of aromas and the act of smelling.<sup>6</sup>

As was the case with the sense of taste, the sense of smell too is associated with the observance of Yom Kippur. As the guest stands on the bridge over the Stripa on the eve of Yom Kippur savoring the waters' aroma, he recalls how his father used to observe this very custom:

I walked to the river and stood there on the bridge, just as my father, of blessed memory, used to do on Atonement Eves; he used to stand on the bridge over the river because the odor of the water mitigates thirst and leads men to repentance; for as this water, which now meets your eye, was not here before this moment and will not be here afterwards, so this day, which was given us to repent of our sins, was not yet in the world before and will never be in the world again, and if you do not use it for repentance you have wasted it.

The water comes and the water goes; as it comes, so it goes, and an odor of purity rises from it. It seems as if nothing has changed since the day I stood here with Father, of blessed memory, and nothing will change here until the end of all the generations. (6)<sup>7</sup>

6. The literary use made by Agnon of the sanction to savor odors on Yom Kippur has already been noted by Holtz (1972, p. 526).

7. Halakā (Jewish ritual law) permits the enjoyment of odors on Yom Kippur. As a matter of fact, it is customary to refresh oneself by means of spices and fragrant fruit during the fast. The *Kitzur Shulhan Aruh* (see Ganzfried, 1963, vol. 3, ch. 133, par. 20) states:

It is advisable to smell spices several times during the day and to pronounce the prescribed benediction, in order to complete the necessary count of one hundred benedictions a day . . . It is best to smell different spices each time . . .

In *Days of Awe* (1965, pp. 202–3), his masterly compilation of the laws and customs pertaining to the High Holy Days, Agnon discusses the significance of the sense of smell and its place on Yom Kippur:

All the senses are mentioned in the story of the sin of Adam (Gen 3:6–8), save the sense of smell, for all the others shared in the sin: "And when the woman saw"—the sense of sight; "she took the fruit thereof"—the sense of touch; "and did eat"—the sense of taste; "and they heard"—the sense of hearing. So we perceive that because the sense of smell was not defective like the other senses, it has been said of the Messiah of our salvation, who will be revealed speedily in our days, "and his scent shall be in the fear of the Lord" (Isa. 11:3). Therefore it was said: "What is it that the soul enjoys, but the body does not enjoy? It is the sense of smell" (*Berakhot* 43). And that is why the

Thus it may be surmised that, in this particular novel, the external world is depicted as affecting the hero's innermost being through the vehicle of odors. For this hero, the sense of smell becomes the only sensory means by which to infuse a semblance of life into the past, thereby achieving some measure of success in his quest. As an instrument intended to represent the hero's quest, the sense of smell evokes memories of the past for him by association. At times, the objects or situations through which odors are manifested for him become linked with his past. The resultant juxtapositions create either a positive experience to confirm for him that some continuity is maintained with those bygone days, or they become a means by which his search for spiritual fulfillment is rebuffed.

A careful examination of the functions of odors (using the Hebrew term *reyah* 'odor') in the novel reveals the intentional use of this motif throughout the plot. The categories of pleasant and unpleasant odors are utilized to elicit meaning and to echo the novel's central theme concerning the search after a lost paradise. The list of positive, or pleasant odors associated with literal or figurative responses made to them is a long one.<sup>8</sup> They are associated with the hero's retrospective, nostalgic orientation and are the most vivid ties with his lost paradise. What follows is a representative selection of examples illustrating the function of positive odors in the novel:

- a. Even in the face of physical ruin of the town, the odor of Shibush remains that of "millet boiled in honey" (2, 393, 463).
- b. The guest savors the aroma of good foods from his childhood on Yom Kippur eve (7).
- c. Though piety, as demonstrated by the study of Torah, has vanished from Shibush, the fragrance of Torah lingers, we are informed (119).
- d. Yeruham's Hebrew reminds the guest of pure, plowed earth, while Erel's Hebrew, as that of her pupils, is filled with words devoid of taste, whose odor is repulsive (217).

While good and pleasant odors serve as a spiritual and physical link for the

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pleasure we receive from the sense of smell is not forbidden on Yom Kippur. [Alumat Yosef quoting Beney Yisakhar]

There are some whose custom it is to take various spices with them in order, by reciting benedictions over them, to be able to recite a full hundred benedictions on that day.

8. In addition to the passages discussed below, the mention of pleasant odors may be found on the following pages: 1, 7, 53, 56, 58, 63, 132, 210, 220, 264, 277, 280, 281, 298, 301, 302, 372, 374, 375, 430, 447.

hero with his fondly remembered past, pungent and irritating fragrances represent reality encroaching on his dreams. Examples illustrating this are:<sup>9</sup>

- a. The smell of plaster used to repair the old House of Study repels the guest who cannot accept the fact that even this building, a symbol and a vestige of enduring Tradition, stability, and continuity, is crumbling and needs repair (181). Escaping the smell and what it signifies, the hero heads for the market place. But, alas, there too he is accosted by an array of wintry odors (42, 184).
- b. The odors of winter are directly opposed to those of spring and summer by the narrator's observation that in winter his beloved smell of millet boiled in honey fades from the air of Shibush only to return in the spring (277). Instead, winter is associated with rancid and sour smells of pickled cabbage, rotting fruit and salted herrings (42, 184).
- c. The smell of ink disturbs the hero, himself an author by profession (449), apparently because it is his task as a writer to record a reality which he finds so difficult to accept.
- d. The odor of cooking meat is disagreeable for the guest who is a vegetarian (450).

Odors in the novel are a leitmotif mirroring the principal themes concerning the futile pursuit after a lost past. By the use of various fragrances, the author also implies a solution for the guest: for, as winter and its allied odors are associated by the hero with a sad and sorrowful reality, so spring, conversely, is coupled by him with the largest set of positive, enjoyable odors. Shibush of the present is particularly allied with bleak, wintry odors, resulting in a series of motifs denying all hope for a revival of the past. Springtime, by contrast, draws the guest out into nature where he is reinvigorated and comforted.

Being a common mythic symbol for life, springtime—especially with its nature-oriented aromas—awakens the hero to a new optimism. Frequent reference is made during the spring season to odors of fields and forests, grasses and farms. These scents are pleasant ones for the guest who is often drawn by them away from Shibush into the countryside. As a matter of fact, the symbolic significance of farm fragrances is so strong that even the smell of hogs is mitigated by the overwhelming effect of nature's pleasant scents.

Were one to follow the implication of the theme of city and country odors one would notice that it is in the lap of nature, on the farm, where the guest witnesses the future in the image of the young Jews who, in the footsteps of

9. In addition to the passages discussed below, the mention of unpleasant odors will be found on pages 1, 57, 60, 280, 323, 367, 392, 394, 437.

A. D. Gordon, are preparing themselves for agrarian work in the Land of Israel.<sup>10</sup> These youths, who practice a lifestyle unlike that of their fathers in the shtetl, advocate an agrarian life in the Land of Israel. Their ideology does not altogether break with the past, however. It only reinstates elements of a lifestyle long absent from Jewish life in the Diaspora. Consequently, it is significant that the only one from Shibush to successfully settle in the Land of Israel is Reb Shlomo Bach.

While odors linked with Shibush may or may not be positive ones, those associated with the Land of Israel are only good and pleasant. Thus for example, the refreshing and invigorating fragrance of Israeli oranges (210, 220) is sharply contrasted with the sour, stifling odors of the Shibush market-place in winter (184). As the aromas of oranges and berries in Yeruham and Rachel Freeman's home evoke the memory of the Land of Israel (301), so do the odors of forests and fields later evoke in the hero memories of fragrant pines in that Land (447).

The negation of pleasurable eating or tasting of certain foods is an indication that physical contact with the past is impossible. Similarly, the pleasant odors of Shibush only reinforce the unlikelihood of attaining a more concrete contact with the source of the fragrance. The only links which may be realized are with unpleasant scenes of reality associated with unsavory odors.

Therefore, it is in the profusion of scents and aromas of nature that the hero finds comfort and spiritual renewal. The sharp distinction made between the unattainability in Shibush of the desired objects associated with pleasant fragrances and between life as realized in the lap of nature—especially in the Land of Israel—points to the only viable solution for the guest's search. Through the vehicle of odors the author alludes to, and foreshadows, the hero's ultimate decision: to return to Jerusalem, strike roots in her soil and hope for an eventual reunification there with his past (476).

10. Agnon's affinity for the teachings of A. D. Gordon has been noted by Barzel (1972, p. 168).

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