

Colloquium: Jews and Melancholia

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Freud and Agnon: Melancholy Objects, Language, Identifications

Literature and psychoanalysis meet in the dynamics of melancholia as delineated by Freud and enacted in Agnon, or, one might say, as delineated by Agnon and enacted in Freud. In "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917) Freud introduces an understanding of melancholia on the model of internalization of an object that has been lost. Seven years later in *The Ego and the Id* (1923), he generalizes to argue that this is how the ego forms, shaped by the residues of abandoned object cathexes. This paper explores ambivalences in the work of each writer that concern identifications with elements of European culture, or more specifically, the German language. Agnon's years in Germany (1913-1924) give evidence of shifts in linguistic identification, particularly in the history of translations of an early story, "Agadat haSofer" ("Tale of a Scribe"), from a Yiddish original, to Hebrew to a German translation (by Gershom Scholem, who read it aloud to Walter Benjamin), and back again to Hebrew. Freud's depiction of melancholic internalization is thus suggestive for considering the ambivalent identifications that we find in both Freud and Agnon.