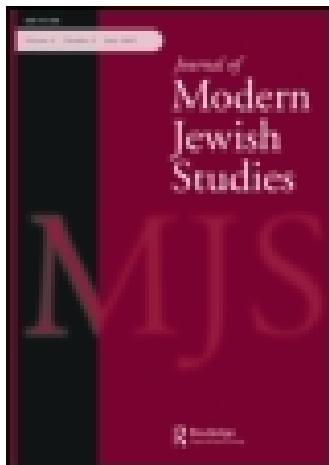


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David Aberbach

BEGGARS OF LOVE

Flaubert and Agnon

*The Nobel laureate for Hebrew literature S. Y. Agnon (1888–1970) acknowledged Gustav Flaubert (1821–1880) as an inspiration for his fiction, a master perfectionist and totally dedicated to his art. The extent of Flaubert's influence on Agnon is greater than previously realized by scholars. This article considers numerous parallels that have not been brought together before: in Agnon's psychological realism and the pattern of relations between the sexes, notably in *Sippur pashut* (A Simple Story); the portrayal of small town life, its maddening pettiness and boredom; the clash of romance and reality; triangles and the passive subservience of the hero to dominant women; idealization and disillusionment; sickness and sadomasochism, latent homosexuality and incest; imagery of clay and wax, children and flowers, dogs and cannibals, to depict the hero's inner world. Both writers repeatedly use the figure of the blind beggar to incarnate the hero's sense of inferiority, his emotionally impoverished life, given meaning in art.*

The influence of the French novelist Gustav Flaubert (1821–1880) on the Israeli Nobel laureate S. Y. Agnon (1888–1970) is reflected in a variety of shared characteristics in their fiction: similar scenes, images and psychological patterns and relationships. The extent of these parallels is considerably greater than has been observed by scholars.¹ Agnon, unusually for a writer wary of admitting debts to other writers, was openly reverential toward Flaubert. This article explores some of the similarities and discusses why they are central to an understanding of Agnon's artistic aims, both in style and in the realistic socio-psychological depiction of individuals in small towns. There are also significant differences between the two writers, and Agnon had literary influences other than Flaubert, which include German as well as Russian and Scandinavian writers in German and Hebrew translation.² Yet, Flaubert was exceptionally meaningful to Agnon, and Agnon's fiction can be understood more clearly with Flaubert in mind.

Clear signs of Agnon's debt to Flaubert are found in the novel *Sippur pashut* (*A Simple Story*, 1935), set in a provincial town in Polish Galicia around 1905. The deceptively simple story tells of Hirshl Horowitz, his scholarly father and manipulative mother, the little shop his parents own, his frustrated love for his orphaned cousin, Blumah Nacht, his unhappy arranged marriage to Mina Tzimlich, his breakdown and recovery. Lovelorn as a married man, Hirshl wanders through town finding himself repeatedly in Synagogue Street where Blumah lives. Sunken in melancholy yearning, he gazes at the light in her window above (*CW* 3: 186).³ Similarly, in Flaubert's *Education Sentimentale* (*Sentimental Education*, 1869), Frédéric Moreau stands under Madame Arnoux's window in the Rue Paradis in Paris in a hopeless gesture of desire (*SE* 86, 352).⁴ While Frédéric can live with his suffering, even wallows in it, Hirshl crosses the border into madness. Terrifying

fantasies, particularly of being a cock about to be slaughtered, make him break down. Sent to an asylum in Lemberg (Lviv/Lvov), he sits quietly while his psychiatrist, inexplicably but with therapeutic effectiveness, spins stories about his own small town with its blind beggars. When Hirshl, apparently cured, leaves the asylum with his wife, the couple meet a blind beggar. Hirshl tosses him a coin: "Had the beggar not been blind he would have marvelled. The coin was worth more than all the coins he was usually given" (*CW* 3: 268). Here again, Agnon evidently borrows from Flaubert. Madame Bovary, tormented by her provincial marriage, failed love affairs and mounting debts, visits Rouen in a desperate last attempt to raise cash. Passing a blind beggar, she impulsively throws him a coin worth far more than he is usually given. After Emma swallows arsenic in despair, the beggar reappears as she dies "laughing, a ghastly, frantic desperate laugh, fancying she could see the hideous face of the beggar rising up like a nightmare amid the eternal darkness" (*MB* 337).⁵

From early in his career, Agnon saw Flaubert as a literary master. In a letter dated 12 December 1916 to his friend and publisher, Salman Schocken, Agnon wrote reverently of Flaubert as a "poet who sacrificed his life to art".⁶ Agnon's love for Flaubert continued throughout his life.⁷ Flaubert was "Agnon's major literary idol", perhaps the principal model for the "moderate and controlled realism" to which he aspired (Shaked, *Agnon*, 41, 42).⁸ Perfectionists both, Flaubert and Agnon were fanatically dedicated to art and identified with their fictional characters.⁹ Flaubert's immersion in his art fascinated Agnon. Flaubert became an expert on the Punic wars for *Salammbô* (1862), on hunting for "The Legend of St Julian Hospitator" (1876), and for a few brilliant, frenetic pages (consulted by historians to this day) in *Sentimental Education* (1867), on the 1848 revolution in Paris. Agnon, too, did his homework. He made himself a leading expert on rabbinic and hasidic literature, whose style he imitated; and in his years of labour on his last, unfinished novel, *Shira* (1971), he read widely on the crusades. The Flaubertian ideal of artistic perfection to which Agnon aspired could be seen as being analogous to the total, selfless religious dedication to the study of Torah.

Flaubert and Agnon were committed monk-like to art, living for it, making everything else—including life itself—subservient to it. From Flaubert, Agnon apparently learned to identify himself with his characters, whether or not as autobiographical portraits. When asked about the origin of Emma, Flaubert famously declared: "Madame Bovary, c'est moi!" While writing "Un Cour Simple" ("A Simple Heart") in 1876, he borrowed a stuffed parrot from the Rouen Museum to put on his desk to inspire his creation of Felicity's parrot and its metamorphosis into the Holy Ghost. Agnon, too, would "live" his characters' lives. In the late 1920s, he startled a visitor to his Jerusalem home by appearing in his best suit, wearing a top hat and holding a glass of whisky, in celebration of the wedding of Reb Yudel's daughter in the closing scene of his novel *Hakhnasat kallah* (*The Bridal Canopy*, 1930).

Flaubert and Agnon came from religious cultures in which novels—both writing and reading them—were looked upon as evil. Emma Bovary's mother-in-law tries in vain to wean her from her wicked novels (*MB* 138–9, 204). Agnon's family hoped that he would become a rabbi; they were shocked when he announced that he intended to become—God forbid!—a writer.¹⁰ His family was strictly Orthodox, and East European Orthodox Jews at the time discouraged men from reading secular literature, particularly fiction. Yet there was greater leniency with women, especially in bourgeois homes in which some secular education (e.g., reading German or playing the piano) was a status symbol,

improving matrimonial prospects. Since Agnon's mother (confined to home with a heart ailment) and sisters had access to secular literature, Agnon did too, and this reading contributed to his decision as a teenager to become a writer. Agnon found in Flaubert's depiction of mid-nineteenth-century rural France significant parallels with the Galicia he knew a half-century later: in both worlds, secular learning replaces traditional religious faith which, nevertheless, has a powerful undertow.

The Jewish view of secular literature as a dangerous lure to a forbidden gentile world retarded the development of the Hebrew novel: Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, one of the most sophisticated modern novels, appeared in 1857, just a few years after the first Hebrew novel, Abraham Mapu's *Ahavat tsiyon* (*The Love of Zion*, 1853), which, despite its historic and linguistic interest, has scant artistic merit. The absence of a modern Hebrew and Yiddish tradition of fiction (and of a Jewish homeland where this tradition could develop) helps to account for the exceptional importance of European literary models to Hebrew and Yiddish novelists—for example, Gogol to Mendele Mokher Sefarim, Dickens to Sholom Aleichem, Chekhov to Gnessin, Dostoyevsky to Brenner, and Flaubert to Agnon. These writers imitated not for the sake of imitation, but to find their own voices as Jewish novelists writing about and for Jews. Translation was a vital creative tool by which Hebrew literature, in an extraordinary leap, caught up with European literature by the early twentieth century.

Consequently, Flaubert could teach Agnon much about literary art that he could not learn from Hebrew or Yiddish fiction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There was, of course, the colossal achievement of Mendele (1835?–1917), Agnon's main contemporary inspiration in Hebrew, a stylist of enormous invention and versatility, the predominant creator of modern Hebrew (and Yiddish) fiction as art. Yet Mendele, like other *Haskalah* writers, used his art as a tool for social change. Flaubert, in contrast, was closer and more congenial to Agnon's artistic instincts: he saw art as supremely valuable for its own sake. This dedication to art, to *le seul mot juste*, was part of Agnon's heresy, his break with Jewish tradition, seeking the beautiful almost, at times, as the Greeks did, while seeming to remain within Jewish tradition. Flaubert also taught Agnon how ordinary people—a housewife, doctor, chemist, labourer, psychiatrist, professor—could be elevated above more heroic figures. Agnon seems also to have been fascinated by Flaubert's psychological realism, particularly his depiction of men and their relationships with women. The men tend to be introverted, malleable and passively subservient to dominant women; they generally need caring for—at times they want to suffer illness for this purpose—and their relationships are often triangular, with hints of latent homosexuality, sadism and incest, in a counterpoint of romantic idealism and cruel disillusionment.

Flaubert and Agnon were drawn to the small town: Flaubert in France, Agnon in Poland. Agnon made East European Jewish provincial life, particularly in Polish Galicia, his main literary territory. He admired Flaubert's accuracy—especially in *Madame Bovary* and perhaps also *Bouvard and Pecuchet* (1881)—in depicting small town life, its pettiness, illusions, narrowness, frustrations and stupidities. Agnon's satirical purposes, inspired perhaps most immediately by Mendele's fiction,¹¹ are apparent in his creation of the fictional *shtetl* (small town) of Shibush, a play on Buczacz, the name of his birthplace in Galicia, and meaning “Muddle” or “Distortion”.¹² There are striking parallel scenes and uses of imagery in Flaubert and Agnon—of flowers, dogs and cannibals; of children who enter at moments of tension or crisis between grown men and women, as

though to suggest childhood roots of their behaviour; and of beggars who appear at critical junctures, evidently with symbolic meaning. There are also comparable existential agonizing and questioning of life's meaning amid unfulfilled dreams. Flaubert, confessing to an admirer his aim in writing *Sentimental Education*, denied any intention to satisfy the public's desire to exalt its illusions: "[Flaubert] turned his big hands upside down and opened them as if to let his dreams fall into a bottomless pit" (Baldick 13).

Agnon's distinctiveness

Agnon's world in some respects has little in common with Flaubert's. In particular, Frédéric's Parisian social life in *Sentimental Education*, with its hard-up university students and powerful aristocrats, grand madams and courtesans, duels and races, revolutionary passions and brothels, is alien to Agnon, who is largely confined to *shtetl* life, with its types and customs, its religious piety and unique valuation of study. Flaubert's works are almost all set in early and mid-nineteenth-century France and rooted in French society, while Agnon's fiction is set in four main locations, corresponding with the main geographic upheavals of his life: from Galicia (1888–1907) to Ottoman Palestine (1907–1913) to Germany (1913–1924) to Palestine under the British Mandate and Israel, where he lived until his death. In a manner characteristic of diaspora Jewry until the modern period, Agnon's characters, mostly diaspora Jews, tend to see themselves as being in exile—and the non-Jews around them see them likewise. Born in Eastern Europe, they cannot regard themselves as Europeans, as do the assimilated West European Jews. Their only spiritual home is the Land of Israel.

The different backgrounds of the two writers are evident in their writings. The almost clinical picture Flaubert gives of his characters, his unflinching accounts of their suffering and darker motivations, remind us that he was a doctor's son, while Agnon's remarkable scholarship testifies to his upbringing by a father and grandfather steeped in Torah. Flaubert's relatively unambiguous, authoritative narrative voice clashes with Agnon's mock pietistic naïveté, slyly disguising and revealing endless subtleties and meanings. Against Flaubert's richly sensual style, with its musical and visual beauty, Agnon's style—though fascinating in its intellectual complexity and psychological penetration, rising to moments of tremendous emotional power—seems at times tone-deaf and colour-blind. Also, in much of Agnon's work, especially *Oreah natah lalun* (*A Guest for the Night*, 1939), set in Galicia after the First World War, the owl of Minerva evidently has arrived in the dusk to give its judgment on a doomed world before the final cataclysm. French society in Flaubert's time faced no comparable crisis. The survival of French republicanism was threatened, but not the survival of France.

Triangles, sadomasochism and incest

Differences aside, Flaubert's influence on Agnon was stimulated by the psychological affinity the Hebrew novelist evidently felt for him. Agnon's creations, like Flaubert's Frédéric in *Sentimental Education*, tend to be inhibited and immersed in their inner lives. They endure frustrating triangular relationships, often in a heady brew of romantic idealism and incestuous sadomasochism.¹³ In his handling of triangles, which appear

from “Agunot” (1908), the first story signed “Agnon”, to *Shira*, his last, unfinished novel, Agnon might have learned from Flaubert. The sadistic scenes in *Salammbô*, which Agnon apparently knew,¹⁴ foreshadow Charles’ first encounter with Emma, the young, beautiful, headstrong, farmer’s daughter from Les Bertaux, as he brushes against her and she hands him his whip (*MB* 29). Once married to Charles, Emma, bored and seeking romantic stimulus, has affairs with the dissolute aristocrat, Rodolphe, and the opportunistic young lawyer, Leon.

In *Sentimental Education*, likewise, Frédéric, though platonically attached throughout his adult life to Madame Arnoux, has affairs with various women, including Rosanette (“the Marshal”) and Madame Dambreuse. He is also intermittently infatuated with Louise Rocque, whom he has known since she was a child in Nogent, and nearly marries. Yet, his love for Madame Arnoux is constant. His idealization of her persists even in later years, when she becomes, in Rosanette’s (admittedly biased) words, “a dumpy, middle-aged creature with a complexion like liquorice and eyes as big as manholes” (*SE* 404). Frédéric remembers every detail about her: the shape of her nails, the rustle of her dress, the scent of her handkerchief, her comb, gloves, rings, “as important as works of art, almost endowed with lifelike human beings; they all took possession of his heart and strengthened his passion” (*SE* 66).

These fetishistic attachments have many parallels in Agnon,¹⁵ whose characters, too, often idealize, even worship, women who, like Madame Arnoux, seem to be surrogate mothers (see Aberbach, “The Lost Mother”, 52–6). Ben Uri adores Dinah in “Agunot”; Raphael the scribe in *Aggadat hasofer* (*The Legend of the Scribe*, 1919) is totally devoted to his wife Miriam; Hirshl yearns hopelessly for Blumah in *A Simple Story* (1935); Gamzu in *Iddo and Enam* (1950) elevates Gemulah to the level of a virginal *Shekhinah* figure; Hemdat in *Giv’at hahol* (*The Hill of Sand*, 1910) describes himself as a “sleeping prince whose love rouses him to dream again” (*CW* 3: 371).

In Flaubert and Agnon, the hero’s yearning for an out-of-reach beloved is often coloured by the language of religion. Frédéric’s desire for Madame Arnoux is held back by “a sort of religious awe [une sorte de crainte religieuse]” (*SE* 202) for her, as when he visits her home to gaze sadly at the light shining in her window above (*SE* 86, 352). Agnon, adapting this scene in *A Simple Story*, characteristically dresses it with religious associations, of Jewish exile, yearning for the *deus absconditus* and messianic salvation, and of being “at the handles of the lock” (*al kapot haman’ul*, the phrase from the Song of Songs, which recurs in his fiction and he used as the title of his love stories). Hirshl’s beloved Blumah is as much out of reach as Madame Arnoux to Frédéric. Hirshl’s incessant romantic dreams make him a potential soulmate/victim of Emma Bovary. He gazes longingly up at the light in Blumah’s window as though he were praying on the Ninth of Av (*CW* 3: 186).

The inner violence that accompanies this idealization and brings Hirshl to emotional breakdown also recalls Flaubert. Frédéric’s lyrical vision of Madame Arnoux, for example, is broken constantly by frustration and violent fantasies. All women remind him of her “either through some resemblance or some violent contrast” (*SE* 78). The sexual side of Frédéric’s attraction to Madame Arnoux is diverted onto Rosanette (and, presumably, other women): “If Madame Arnoux merely brushed him with her finger, his desire immediately conjured up the image of the other woman” (*SE* 149). Frédéric’s beloved is the eternally blessed virgin, uncontaminated by his lust: the same is true of Agnon’s longed-for women—for example, Dinah in “Agunot”, Blumah in *A Simple Story* and Gemulah in *Iddo and Enam*.

In Flaubert and Agnon, sadomasochism is unleashed in nightmare. In one of Frédéric's fantasies in *Sentimental Education*, "he thought he was harnessed side by side with [Jacques] Arnoux in the shifts of a cab, and the 'Marshal', sitting astride him, was tearing his belly open with her golden spurs" (*SE* 134). In Rosanette, Frédéric finds an outlet for emotions blocked by Madame Arnoux: not only lust, but also his desire to degrade her. In his Paris home, he keeps a room for a never-to-be rendezvous with Madame Arnoux, and takes perverse satisfaction in bringing Rosanette there: "[A]s a refinement of hatred [un raffinement de haine], in order to degrade Madame Arnoux more completely in his mind, he took Rosanette to the house in the Rue Tronchet, and into the room prepared for the other woman" (*SE* 283). Towards Rosanette, similarly, Frédéric feels unspoken, unexpressed sadistic hatred: "Sometimes he was so exasperated by her that he could have watched her die without feeling the slightest emotion" (*SE* 386). A similar split between the idealized woman and the hated woman appears in *A Simple Story*, between the virginal Blumah, whom Hirshl idealizes, and Mina, his wife who, like Rosanette, becomes the object of his suppressed murderous rage (*CW* 3: 172).

Incestuous undercurrents of Frédéric's relationships with women are psychologically linked to his father's death in a duel before his birth (*SE* 23). An only child, he is raised entirely by his mother, as Emma Bovary is raised by her widower father. Frédéric discovers his mother in other women, and recreates with them a pattern of filial dependence. Melancholic at school, he sees a woman's face shining in his poetic paradise, "so that, the first time he had seen [Madame Arnoux], he had promptly recognized her" (*SE* 270). Though her name is Sophie, he calls her Marie (*SE* 223, 271), with connotations of holiness and virginity. The psychological barrier to the consummation of his love for Madame Arnoux is clear in his final meeting with his beloved, when he is filled with "a frenzied rabid lust such as he had never known before" together with "a repugnance akin to a dread of committing incest [comme l'effroi d'uninceste]" (*SE* 415).¹⁶ As Madame Arnoux leaves him for the last time, "she kissed him on the forehead like a mother" (*SE* 415).¹⁷ Frédéric's obsession has a suicidal side: "If he had made [Madame Arnoux] his mistress, it had been out of despair, like somebody committing suicide" (*SE* 353).

Sadomasochistic triangular relationships in Agnon, too, recreate an infantile pattern of dominant mother and passive son. The maternal image inhibiting Frédéric's sexual feeling for Madame Arnoux in *Sentimental Education* has many parallels in Agnon, who often writes of ailing mothers who die young, leaving their sons withdrawn and troubled in their relationships with women (see Aberbach, "Dmut ha-em be'khite Agnon" ["The Lost Mother"]). Like Frédéric, the Agnon hero tends not to be jealous when he loses his "beloved" to another man. *Temol Shilshom* (*Yesteryear*, 1945), set in Jaffa and Jerusalem around 1910, tells of a young man, Yitzhak Kummer, recently arrived from Galicia. Yitzhak is curiously untroubled when Sonia, with whom he has a brief flirtation in Jaffa, turns to other men: "Yitzhak knew that he should have been jealous, but he wasn't" (*CW* 5: 239). In search of a replacement for his dead mother—"He was certain there was no one on earth like his mother. Now she was dead, another woman, modest and kind as she, would take her place" (*CW* 5: 90)—an orange Sonia gives him reminds Yitzhak of his mother (*CW* 5: 116). When he kisses Sonia, he thinks of the kiss he gave his mother on her deathbed (*CW* 5: 127). Yitzhak tries to escape this incestuous dead end by becoming engaged to another woman, Shifra, the daughter of a religious fanatic in Jerusalem. The prospect of marriage fills

him with further anxiety and conflict. Shortly before the marriage, he dreams of the woman who has “abandoned” him and the one whom he is about to marry. Shifra asks “Do you love me?” He takes her in his arms and finds that he is embracing Sonia (*CW* 5: 393). This psychological self-revelation recalls Flaubert in its cruel inadvertent truth.

Shira is the last in a long line of Agnon’s stories of men in pursuit of an obscure object of maternal desire. The novel, set in 1930s Jerusalem, opens as Manfred Herbst, professor of ancient Greek history at the Hebrew University, begins an affair with Shira, a nurse in a local lepers’ hospital, as his wife gives birth to their third child. This rendezvous coincides worryingly with the anniversary of his mother’s death¹⁸: in fact, Shira’s name is a variation of that of his mother, Sarah, after whom the newborn is named. Herbst’s graphic fantasies of Shira are full of infantile murderous rage whose irrationality recall Frédéric’s cruel impulses toward Rosanette in *Sentimental Education* (*SE* 283). No sadistic relationship in Agnon’s earlier works is quite as explicit as in *Shira*, though there are hints in *A Simple Story*, for example, when Hirshl’s wife accuses him of wanting her to die (*CW* 3: 172).¹⁹ Sex, in Agnon as in Flaubert, is inseparable from death. The carriage in which Madame Bovary has a rendezvous with Leon is “sealed tighter than a tomb” (*MB* 256); and in “Agunot”, the Holy Ark carved by Ben Uri expresses his sexual longing for Dina, but when he pushes it over in a fit of rage it resembles a coffin (*CW* 2: 209).

Romance and reality

In Flaubert and Agnon, innocent romantic idealism cannot exist free of cynicism and harsh truth. Emma Bovary’s adultery with Rodolphe begins at an animal show, in a subtly satiric counterpoint of romantic love, with its cruel, alluring linguistic legerdemain, and the direct, earthy language of the stable. Underneath Rodolphe’s flowery language are his sly seduction and Emma’s animal lust, unsatisfied and increasingly desperate:

“We, now, why did we meet? What turn of fate decreed it? Was it not that, like two rivers gradually converging across the intervening distance, our own natures propelled us towards one another?”

He took her hand, and she did not withdraw it.

“General prize!” cried the Chairman.

“Just now, for instance, when I came to call on you . . .”

“Monsieur Bizet of Quincampoix.”

“. . . how could I know that I should escort you here?”

“Seventy francs!”

“And I’ve stayed with you because I couldn’t tear myself away, though I’ve tried a hundred times.”

“Manure!”

(*MB* 61)

Emma discovers the truth about Rodolphe when he abandons their elopement and abandons her. In the crisis before she takes her life, he refuses coldly to help her. Yet Emma, addicted to romance, remains open to seduction. For her, the language of love

is not the coin of cliché, but burning reality. She cannot face the truth which, as Flaubert describes it, is as beautiful as it is cruel: to men such as Rodolphe, “human speech is like a cracked kettle on which we strum out tunes to make a bear dance, when we would move the stars to pity” (*MB* 203). Nature herself hints at the betrayal and heartache that follow Rodolphe’s empty protestations of his adoration for Emma: poplar branches cover the moon “like a torn black curtain” (*MB* 210).²⁰

In *Sentimental Education*, too, romantic attachment—this time genuine and lifelong, that of Frédéric to Madame Arnoux—is played against the disgustingly vulgar. The wealthy, elegant (and conveniently widowed) Madame Dambreuse takes Frédéric to an auction of the possessions of Jacques Arnoux and his wife who, bankrupt, have vanished. The auction tolls the doom of Frédéric’s creaky affair with Madame Dambreuse. She commits the unforgivable sin of denigrating Madame Arnoux’s belongings, which he worships practically as holy relics. She bids successfully for the casket, linked with Frédéric’s dearest memories, in which Madame Arnoux kept her love letters. Frédéric, overwhelmed by love for Madame Arnoux, is furious at Madame Dambreuse’s desecration: as the auction ends, so does their affair.

Similar romantic yearnings punctured with vulgarity fill Agnon’s fiction. In *A Simple Story*, Hirshl’s engagement to Mina is foisted on him in an atmosphere of forced celebration. His strong-willed mother, driven by the allure of bourgeois respectability, wants him to marry Mina as her family is well-off and “seemly” (“Tzimlich” is her family name). Yet, the impoverished, Blumah, devoid of a family, obsesses him. Hirshl’s frustration and uncertainty reach breaking point at a Hanukkah party given by a friend of Mina’s, Sophia Gildenhorn. With psychological precision, Agnon sets out the process leading to Hirshl’s unexpected and unwilling engagement to Mina, though Blumah is always in his thoughts. In his confusion and anger, Hirshl takes Mina’s hand, whereupon one of the card-playing men comes to shake Hirshl’s hand in mockery: “*Ich gratuliere*” (*CW* 3: 108)—as though Hirshl has won at cards. This “*Ich gratuliere*” deflates Hirshl’s romantic longings much as “Manure” does Emma’s at the animal show.

Latent homosexuality

Frustration with women inclines the characters in Flaubert and Agnon to homosexuality. They are often attracted to men, whether out of resemblance or because these men seem to have the forceful ambition and capability they lack. As mentioned earlier, in *Sentimental Education*, Frédéric evidently feels no jealousy toward his beloved’s husband, Jacques Arnoux (*SE* 79), though he becomes obsessed by Rosanette’s former lovers. He is drawn to Arnoux, perhaps because of a “hidden resemblance” (*SE* 176). Even greater is Frédéric’s attraction to Deslauriers, his childhood friend. Precisely when Arnoux invites Frédéric to his home for the first time, Deslauriers appears, and his effect on Frédéric is to make him tremble “like a guilty wife under her husband’s gaze” (*SE* 54). Frédéric is also drawn to dominant masculine women such as Rosanette (“the Marshal”), toward whom he has fantasies of cross-dressing and sadomasochistic encounters (*SE* 134, 309).

In Agnon’s fiction, too, there are coded signs of latent homosexuality,²¹ a clear example of which is in *A Simple Story*. Hirshl, blocked in his sex life, is alarmed by his responsiveness to the touch of Yonah Toiber, the matchmaker who arranges his

marriage to Mina: “Isn’t it a disgrace that when he takes my hand in his I want to kiss it? ... How smooth are Yonah’s hands” (*CW* 3: 213).

In Flaubert and Agnon, men are often attracted to the lover or husband of women who obsess them. In *Sentimental Education*, Frédéric becomes unbearably curious to know of Rosanette’s former lovers. His sexual impulses are mixed with hatred and latent violence:

He ... went on trying to find out the names of her old lovers. She denied them all. A sort of jealousy took hold of him. He took exception to the presents she had been given in the past and was still receiving; and while her personality irritated him more and more, a sensual urge, bestial and violent, would still impel him towards her, producing a momentary illusion which always turned to hatred.

(SE 385–6)

In Agnon’s *Harofe ugrushato* (*The Doctor’s Divorce*, 1941), a doctor comes unhinged by thoughts of his wife’s former lover and his marriage breaks down.

Passivity

Gripped though they are with sadomasochistic fantasies, the male characters of Flaubert and Agnon are notably passive and inconsequential in their outward behaviour. In contrast, the women to whom they are attracted are often strong-willed and dominate them. This pattern is especially clear in *Madame Bovary* and *A Simple Story*, in which a dominant, manipulative mother determines the psychology of the central male character. The opening of *Madame Bovary* gives the background to Emma’s mismatch with Charles Bovary. As a child, emotionally damaged by his dissolute, drunken, philandering, often-absent father, Charles shuns his father’s haphazard efforts to “make a man” of him. He retreats into the arms of his lonely, doting mother who transfers her frustrated ambitions onto him. She guides him through medical school and arranges his first marriage, to a 45 year-old widow from Dieppe, who is similarly dominant: “his wife was master” (*MB* 24). In *A Simple Story*, too, Hirshl is the victim of a match engineered by his mother. He goes through life convinced that “everything is in the hands of the woman” (*CW* 3: 98).

Madame Bovary opens not with Emma, but with the awkward, unloved 15 year-old Charles in boarding school in Rouen. Years later, Charles qualifies as a doctor, and his first wife dies of a stroke. Only then does Emma enter the story. So shy is Charles that he asks her father, not her, for her hand in marriage. Emma is drawn to the gawky widower to escape her suffocating life on the motherless farm. From the start, Charles is set in uxorious passivity toward her, which suits her. Just as Charles fails in his medical ambitions (he risks a dangerous operation and, out of his depth, kills the patient), his marriage, too, becomes gangrenous with Emma’s adulteries. Yet he tolerates Emma’s self-destructiveness as his mother endured his father. He is blind to her betrayals.

In Flaubert and Agnon, the men wait for the women to make the moves. Emma is manfully assertive in her affairs: with Rodolphe, she steps out squeezed into a waistcoat “like a man” (*MB* 204), puffing on a cigarette—a too-daring scene in a novel

of 1857: Flaubert was tried for offending public morals with one of the first women in fiction to smoke. Her other lover, Leon, becomes her “mistress” (*MB* 289). Similar sexual reversals are frequent in Agnon, signifying male submission to dominant females: in *The Hill of Sand*, for example, Hemdat has the hands and the laugh of a girl (*CW* 3: 363, 405), while Sonia in *Yesteryear* is compared to a boy (*CW* 5: 94, 95, 116).

In Flaubert as in Agnon, the unwhole or unconsummated attachment to women is paralleled by the unfinished deed. Despite his mother’s “lofty ambitions” for him (*SE* 23), Frédéric has “no ambition at all” (*SE* 93). At the most, prodded by Madame Dambreuse, he contemplates becoming a government minister (*SE* 107), but in the end he achieves nothing in life. Frédéric’s lack of drive emerges in his relations with women, and not only Madame Arnoux. When Madame Dambreuse tells him of her husband’s hopes to get him into the Council of State, he thinks: “So that was her wish. He obeyed” (*SE* 160). As for Rosanette, Frédéric is “her property, her chattel” (*SE* 350). Frédéric never proposes marriage, but is proposed to, futilely, twice by Louise Roque (*SE* 253, 347) and once by the widowed Madame Dambreuse (*SE* 372). When Louise first asks him to marry her, his response is: “But . . .,” replied Frédéric, searching for a reply, “probably . . . I should like nothing better” (*SE* 253)—presumably with emphasis on the conditional.

Agnon’s characters share the subservience of Flaubert’s characters and their wariness of attachments. In the story *Be’era shel Miryam* (*The Well of Miriam*, 1909), Hemdat (a loose self-portrait of the young Agnon) drifts with no direction: “Hemdat did not decide his actions. He was blown by every passing gust of wind.”²² Hirshl’s belief in *A Simple Story* that women control his life (*CW* 3: 98) is generally shared by Agnon’s men: “A man cannot change himself. Mina and the others do with us as they please” (*CW* 3: 163). In his deeper psychological workings, Herbst in *Shira* is an older version of Hirshl: “By nature Herbst is a passive man, with no small measure of infantilism” (Schocken 230).²³

The clay of personality

Flaubert and Agnon use imagery of clay, wax or dough to convey the malleability of their characters in the hands of women. In *Sentimental Education*, Frédéric visits Jacques Arnoux’s dilapidated pottery factory near Paris, where his beloved shows him round. Amid the dust, noise and junk, he declares his love—and a wish that he too might have become a potter, “because then I could have lived close to you!” (*SE* 199). In reply, Madame Arnoux takes balls of paste from failed repairs, flattens them into a cake and imprints her hand on it. Frédéric, filled with his usual veneration, asks to keep it, a memento of his malleability, for he himself is a failed repair in the hands of the “eternal Potter” (see Jeremiah: 18). Madame Arnoux can shape him as she wishes. It is her decision to keep her love for Frédéric platonic and remain a faithful wife, regardless of her husband’s infidelities.

Agnon uses similar imagery, of dough or wax, to describe Hirshl’s passivity in *A Simple Story*. Hirshl is “not kneaded from the dough of men of action” (*CW* 3: 80). Otherwise he would marry his beloved cousin, Blumah, in defiance of his mother. His mother ordinarily treats Hirshl coldly, and it is easy for her to manipulate him into marrying the more respectable Mina instead: “his heart became soft as wax which can be shaped however one wants” (*CW* 3: 100). Once married, Hirshl is driven to madness,

starting in synagogue when he takes wax from a candle and kneads it: “He hid his hand in his pocket so no one would see him kneading. The wax fell from his hand and he kneaded himself. Fear hit him that he was doing this without sensation—his fingers seemed to have lost the sense of touch. Perhaps he had died” (*CW* 3: 214).²⁴

Illness

In Flaubert and Agnon, the hero often wants to be ill and cared for, recreating the maternal bond. In *Sentimental Education*, Frédéric “longed for a dangerous illness, hoping that he might arouse [Madame Arnoux’] interest in this way” (*SE* 79). Agnon’s Hemdat, in *The Well of Miriam*, longs to be cosseted with ambiguous maternal and sexual care. He hopes to waste away from tuberculosis to have the pleasure of being nursed.²⁵ In Agnon’s *Ad olam* (*Forevermore*, 1954), originally part of *Shira*, the medieval scholar, Adiel Amzeh, voluntarily enters a lepers’ hospital in a scene which recalls the end of Flaubert’s “The Legend of St Julian Hospitator”: the formerly bloodthirsty prince, scourge of all living creatures, murderer of his own parents, completes his penitential saintly self-abnegation by warming a dying leper with his own body. Perhaps Adiel, too, is a saint, but he comes to the lepers not to perform acts of selfless charity, but because they possess an ancient scroll that unlocks secrets that have baffled him for years. Like those willing to die for the Torah, he is ready to risk his life out of love for his “scripture”.

Flowers, dogs and cannibals

Flaubert and Agnon use flowers, dogs and cannibals to give heightened intensity to the emotional troubles of their characters. Madame Arnoux in *Sentimental Education* throws out the flowers her husband has bought her (*SE* 94, 190), while Toni in Agnon’s *Panim aherot* (*Metamorphosis*, 1941) tosses away a bunch of flowers that her ex-husband, Hartmann, has bought her (*CW* 3: 463). In both works, the discarding of flowers might symbolize a woman’s rejection of a man much loved, whose self-centredness undermines the marriage.²⁶

Dogs appear in Flaubert and Agnon in times of sexual conflict and guilt.²⁷ On the night before Madame Arnoux is to rendezvous with Frédéric at his Paris home, she dreams of a horrible barking dog and wakes to find her son seriously ill (*SE* 278–9). She interprets this as a heaven-sent warning to avoid adultery. The dog in her dream might represent both her animal instinct and guilty conscience. The dog in Agnon’s *Yesteryear* is a more complex symbolic creation reflecting, among other things, the hero Yitzhak Kummer’s psychological sickness. Driven mad by rabies, the dog bites and infects Yitzhak a week after his marriage, though the marriage itself might be considered a fatal infection. Similarly, Frédéric’s “frenzied rabid lust” for Madame Arnoux (*SE* 415) is an outer sign of an incurable disease of the soul. Men are consumed not only by their psychological failings, but also, at times, figuratively by women who dominate them. “Poor darling, I could eat you!” says Rosanette to Frédéric (*SE* 350). In Agnon’s *Ha’adonit veharokhel* (*The Lady and the Peddler*, 1943), a woman literally slaughters and eats her lovers.²⁸

The child

In Flaubert and Agnon, children appear at critical moments. From the start of his chaste affair with Madame Arnoux in *Sentimental Education*, Frédéric is drawn to her daughter, Marthe. As he rides at night through the Bois de Boulogne, with Marthe asleep on her mother's lap, her head supported by his leg, Frédéric feels that he is communicating with the mother through the child's body (*SE* 94–5). Later, Frédéric imagines having a daughter with his mistress, Rosanette: this daughter "took after Madame Arnoux and a little after him" (*SE* 356).²⁹ In his hometown of Nogent, Frédéric is attracted to a child, Louise Rocque, as she reminds him of Madame Arnoux and Louise and Marthe are the same height. When he shows Louise his room, she stretches out on his bed pretending to be his wife (*SE* 103). Such a "marriage" to a child seems less threatening to Frédéric than the prospect of marriage to an adult. Yet, Louise's love for Frédéric does not die. When years later she has become a young woman, he returns home from Paris and his feelings for her reawaken: "For the first time in his life, Frédéric felt himself to be loved" (*SE* 251). He understands, perhaps for the first time, that neither his mother nor Madame Arnoux has ever loved him. Louise could fill the void in him and transform his life. Yet the pattern of unsatisfactory relationships is deeply ingrained. He abandons Louise for Paris and continues his bachelor existence for the rest of his life—like the unloved Agnon heroes, "at the handles of the lock".

Little girls appear repeatedly in Agnon's stories of relationships between men and women: for example, in *The Legend of the Scribe*, *A Guest for the Night*, *Metamorphosis*, *The Doctor's Divorce*, *Shvu'at emunim* (*Betrothed*, 1943) and *Shira*.³⁰ In *Betrothed*, Jacob Rechnitz, in his twenties, is reunited in post-First World War Palestine with Shoshana, whom he has not seen since they were children in Vienna. A little girl, about the same age as Shoshana when he last saw her, approaches them and he lifts her up and swings her in the air: "Darling, I'd love to carry you off" (*CW7*: 270). In *Shira*, a little girl appears the morning after Herbst first commits adultery with Shira. Riding on a tram, Herbst is offered a seat by a little girl, but another man sits down instead and he is left standing with the girl (Agnon, *Shira*, 32). This pairing hints at Herbst's immaturity, which is exposed in his sadomasochistic relationship with Shira and his unsatisfied infantile craving for maternal love.

The beggar

Flaubert and Agnon repeatedly use beggars to incarnate a sense of inferiority, a life of emotional poverty. In *Madame Bovary*, the beggar marks the heroine's deterioration (*MB* 90, 311, 337). Emma Bovary might be described as a "beggar of love", seeking fruitlessly in adultery what she lacks in marriage. Her tossing of a valuable coin to the beggar, like Hirshl's identical act in Agnon's *A Simple Story*, suggests a symbolic acknowledgment of inner poverty, an identification with a fellow beggar. Hemdat, in Agnon's *The Hill of Sand*, describes himself as "a beggar of love who puts his love in a torn knapsack" (*CW3*: 371). Other Agnon protagonists are beggared by love to madness, as is Hirshl. In *Shira*, the beggar, as in *Madame Bovary*, is the ugly image of adulterous neediness. *Shira* opens with Herbst's fantasy at the time his wife is giving birth. Displaced from the marital bed, he is about to start his affair—unplanned, like his newborn child. A blind beggar singing

a song with “no beginning and no end” is swallowed by Shira (Agnon, *Shira*, 8), a distorted reflection of an infantile wish, perhaps, to have the maternal figure all to himself, even if he is destroyed by it.³¹

The quest for meaning

The beggar, the cripple or leper appear in the stories of Flaubert and Agnon to symbolize the purposelessness of their characters, troubled by feelings of emptiness, uselessness, coldness, numbness and futility. Whatever ambitions they may have, come to dust. In *Sentimental Education*, Frédéric, torn all his life by hopeless idealization of a perfect maternal image sexually out of reach, and loveless lust for real, but imperfect, women, sums up the futility of his love life: “Women’s hearts were like those desks full of secret drawers fitting one inside another; you struggled with them, you broke your fingernails, and at the bottom you found a withered flower, a little dust, or nothing at all!” (*SE* 384). The narrator of Agnon’s novella *Ad hena* (*Thus Far*, 1951), convinced that his life is empty, tells a parable of a man’s quest ending with his discovery of a scroll with the words “Fool, what have you left here that you’re so anxious to find?” (*CW* 7: 51). The rabid dog in *Yesteryear* is given a conscious awareness of its suicidal misery—and that of the human characters in the novel: “What are we and what is our life? Are all our sorrows and suffering worth the brief moments of pleasure which come our way? As for me, there is no pleasure at all but many troubles, each leading to greater ones.’ He became depressed and wanted to die” (*CW* 5: 575).

Conclusion

Flaubert’s influence on Agnon derived mainly from the example Flaubert set as an artist, his style and insight. Taken together, the similarities in the writings of Agnon and Flaubert indicate how much Flaubert meant to Agnon, as the highest exemplar of the fanatically dedicated artist and as a guide to the depiction of emotional and spiritual suffering. Their works might sometimes be interpreted as having social or religious significance: Madame Arnoux, for example, could be identified with the true and faithful ideals of revolutionary France, steadfast though betrayed and tempted to betray; while Agnon’s idealized women, such as Blumah, might be seen as symbols of the divine presence (the *Shekhinah*), wandering with and comforting the Jews in exile, always out of reach, yet rousing hope of messianic redemption. Yet the main parallels in their works are in the psychology of their characters and their relations with women. They are mostly ordinary flawed people—except for the authors’ genius in bringing them vividly to life. Even when beggared by love, horrified by life’s vagaries and defeated by its cruelty, they do not stop dreaming.

Notes

1. For Agnon’s acknowledgment of Flaubert’s influence, see *Ha’aretz* (26 July 1963, p. 10) and Agnon (*From Myself to Myself*, 245). Among the scholars who have drawn

attention to Agnon's debt to Flaubert are: Aberbach, Alter, Band, Hochman, Hoffman, Laor, Shaked, Werses and Yaffe. Details are given in the notes below. Agnon did not know French and read Flaubert in German and Hebrew translations. However, neither the scholarly sources nor the autobiographical and biographical writings on Agnon refer to specific translations he would have read in Hebrew and/or German. On the important role of translation in the development of modern Hebrew literature, particularly Agnon's works, see Miron (397–419).

2. On literary influences on Agnon, including that of Flaubert, see Band ("Negotiating Jewish History", 36ff); Laor (109–10); and, more generally, Werses. Flaubert's possible influence on Agnon's love stories has, however, been neglected (see Barzel).
3. Page numbers and references to Agnon refer to the 8-volume *Kol Kitve* (*Collected Works*, CW) unless indicated otherwise. Translations from Agnon are mine.
4. Page numbers for Flaubert refer to the Penguin editions (see the References section): *Madame Bovary* (MB), *Sentimental Education* (SE).
5. On the symbolism of the beggar in Flaubert and Agnon, see Aberbach (*At the Handles*, 73); Alter ("Blind Beggars").
6. *Ha'aretz*, 26 July 1963, p. 10. The Hebrew reads: *Hameshorrer shehaya memit atzmo be'ohala shel hashira* (literally: the poet who would kill himself in the tent of poetry), alluding to a talmudic saying attributed to the early 3rd century CE rabbi, Resh Lakish: "Where do we learn that Torah survives only through the one who kills himself for it? From the passage (Numbers 19:14): 'This is the Torah: A man who dies in the tent ...'" (Babylonian Talmud *Berakhot* 43b). Agnon, then 28, wrote to Schocken from the Berlin Jewish Hospital, where he was undergoing five months convalescence with kidney trouble (evidently self-inflicted through excessive smoking and sleep deprivation to avoid conscription into the Austro-Hungarian army in the First World War). Schocken had recently sent him Emile Zola's book on Flaubert. Agnon's autobiographical novella *Ad hena* (*Thus Far*, 1952), set in Germany during the First World War, reflects his interest in Flaubert at this time: the narrator refers to the father of a friend of his as looking like Flaubert (CW 7:52). Agnon's wartime convalescence in Berlin, when "books were Agnon's entire world" (Laor 109), seems to have been crucial in his education as a writer: "While cannons roared at the front and privation began to gnaw at the civilian population, Agnon was cocooned in the heart of Berlin. Instead of the terror of combat and the misery behind the lines, Agnon spent his days and nights in a stirring encounter with the great European writers. At that fateful moment they alone truly interested him" (Laor 110).
7. In 1962, Agnon spoke of his joy in reading Flaubert, among others (Agnon, *From Myself to Myself*, 245). One stylistic trick he might have learnt from Flaubert is the diffusion of unusually powerful emotions and conflicts with seemingly naïve throwaway endings. "The Legend of St Julian Hospitator" ends: "And that is the story of St Julian Hospitator, more or less as it is depicted on a stained-glass window in a church in my part of the world" (*Three Tales* : 87). The end of Agnon's *A Simple Story* is similarly flat: "And so ends the story of Hirshl and Mina, but not Blumah's story. What happened to her is a story in its own right. And the same with Getzl Stein, whom we mentioned briefly; and as for other characters in the story, infinite pens and ink will be needed to get their stories down. God in heaven knows when" (CW 3: 252). These endings, uncharacteristically clumsy, throw into relief, and create aesthetic distance from, the shocking scenes preceding them, with which the stories actually end: Saint Julian lies down with the leper to keep the dying man warm; Hirshl, the psychiatric patient, just

restored to his wife as his sickly firstborn son is sent away, psychologically takes the son's place in his wife's care. Dry and banal, the concluding words enhance the credibility of the scenes preceding them.

8. Shaked, however, has practically nothing on Flaubert's influence on Agnon. Band, similarly, while acknowledging that Agnon "waxes ecstatic over Flaubert's dedication to his craft" (*Nostalgia and Nightmare*, 22), does not pursue the comparison. Hochman (81, 96) also touches on the general similarity between Agnon's Buczacz and Flaubert's Yonville de l'Abbaye. Buczacz, he suggests, "is often more horrible" because of the "vain egotism" of its inhabitants—though it is hard to imagine a character more vulnerable to the charge of "vain egotism" than Emma Bovary. Hochman, too, takes the comparison no further. Aberbach (*At the Handles*) points out some key elements of the comparison with Flaubert, but, again, omits detailed discussion. Most other critical and biographical works on Agnon have hardly, if any, entries on Flaubert in the index.
9. Considered as a Gestalt, the similarities suggest a very strong influence of Flaubert on Agnon. Yet Agnon was always cagey in acknowledging influence. His writing from the 1930s onward indicate a fascination with Kafka, but when asked about the collection of Kafka in his bookcases, he replied with typical slyness that they belonged to his wife: he did not read them. Apart from Agnon's somewhat uncharacteristic admission of admiration for Flaubert, which falls short of confessing a literary debt, he gave no sign that any of the similarities between his work and Flaubert's were owing to direct influence.
10. Personal communication with the author, Emunah Yaron (Agnon's daughter).
11. On Mendele's extraordinary degree of identification with his characters, which might have inspired Agnon, see Aberbach (*Realism*, 30–1). Mendele had a good deal more influence on Agnon, both in style and content, than is generally realized (see Aberbach, "Fantasies", 45–60). In particular, Agnon's account of Hirshl's breakdown in *A Simple Story* evidently owes much to Mendele's depiction of Israel's breakdown in *The Mare* (also see Aberbach, "Enlightenment", 214–30).
12. Compare Saltykov-Schedrin's Glupov or Dylan Thomas' Llareggub.
13. On love triangles in Agnon, see, among others, Barzel, *Sippure ahavah shel S. Y. Agnon*; Aberbach, *At the Handles*.
14. Agnon had read *Salammbo* by 1913 (Shaked 259 note 55). The sadomasochism in *Shira* and other works by Agnon might have been influenced by Flaubert—especially *Salammbo*.
15. Agnon's characters sometimes attach almost fetishistic importance to objects associated with the beloved: e.g., the prayer book in *Hanidah* (*The Outcast*, 1919), the asters in *Metamorphosis* (1941), or seaweed in *Betrothed* (1943).
16. Similarly, in Agnon's *Yesteryear*, the moment of Yitzhak Kummer's greatest attraction to Sonia—repeatedly described as a mother figure to him (CW 5: 90, 116, 127)—is the moment when he parts from her (CW 5: 185). Incestuous inhibition evidently contributes to Frédéric's difficulties with women. Flaubert's observation on Frédéric's passivity with women might apply to some of Agnon's characters as well: "For some men, the stronger their desire, the more difficult it is for them to act [L'action, pour certains hommes, est d'autant plus impracticable que le desir est plus fort]" (SE 174).
17. The pattern of attachment of men in Flaubert's stories to older women evidently had its life model in Flaubert's romantic passion for Elisa Schlesinger, who was 26 when he met her aged 14 in 1836. In *Madame Bovary*, Emma is several years older than her

- lover, Leon, and behaves “like a virtuous mother [comme une mere vertueuse]” to him (*MB* 294).
18. Similarly, Charles Bovary marries Emma during the period of mourning for his dead first wife, and Emma’s adultery with Leon coincides with the death of her father (*MB* 33ff, 261).
 19. According to Robert Alter, “Herbst, unlike Flaubert’s Emma, does not ‘discover in adultery all the platitudes of married life’ but, on the contrary, finds that a fleeting carnal encounter with an unlikely object of desire opens up vertiginous new perspectives, makes bourgeois hearth and home unliveable for him, impels him in ways he is hardly conscious of to do something radically other with his life” (Alter, “Afterword”, 575–6). In fact, for Emma, too, adultery opens new perspectives—including the possibility of eloping overseas with her lover—and makes her home life ultimately unliveable: what she does that is “radically other” is try to take control of her life through her adulteries and, when this fails, commits suicide. A death-wish or preoccupation evidently afflicts Herbst as well, as suggested in his morbid interest in burial customs in ancient Greece and his fantasies of contracting leprosy. Herbst’s lack of productivity is comparable to that of Flaubert’s Bouvard and Pecuchet (see Hoffman 17).
 20. Similar imagery of torn cloth, symbolizing damaged relationships, recurs throughout Agnon, starting from the opening of “Agunot”.
 21. On homosexual fantasies in Agnon, see Aberbach (“Fantasies”).
 22. In Yaron et al. (13); originally in *Hapo’el hatsa’ir*, 21 May 1909.
 23. There seems to have been a strong autobiographical basis to the passivity of Agnon’s characters. Like the narrator of Agnon’s posthumous novella *Behanuto shel Mar Lublin*, who says “I am not a man of deeds” (CW : 12), Agnon said of himself “I am not a man of deeds and, if given the opportunity by Heaven, I would almost certainly choose the spirit, not the deed” (Agnon, *From Myself to Myself*, 41). Yet, according to Dov Sadan, a Hebrew University professor who knew Agnon well for many years, Agnon actually “hated passivity” and wanted badly to create strong and active characters, but found, however, that his work was too closely anchored to his own psychology (personal communication with the author, Dov Sadan). Similarly, Robert Baldick (8) points out in the Introduction to *Sentimental Education* that Frédéric, including his passive temperament, “is basically a self-portrait of the author”. Nevertheless, Flaubert and Agnon shared a healthy egotistic self-regard for their own talents. Flaubert, for example, was deeply annoyed at being awarded the *Legion d’Honneur* with another writer whom he despised as a nonentity, while Agnon, awarded the Nobel Prize jointly with Nelly Sachs in 1966, lamented that in his old age he had been saddled with a “concubine”.
 24. Hirshl’s breakdown has limited points of contact with Emma Bovary’s. Both collapse when their futile romantic hopes prove to be illusory (when Emma is frustrated in her love for Rodolphe, and Hirshl in his love for Blumah), both require several months convalescence and neither tells their spouse the true reason for their unusual behaviour.
 25. In Yaron et al. (21); originally in *Hapo’el hatsa’ir*, 3 June 1909.
 26. In contrast, when Herzog, at the end of Saul Bellow’s novel, “being thoughtful, being lovable”, picks flowers for Ramona, his lover who is coming to dinner, he considers throwing them away—he has suffered much and caused much suffering in his two marriages—but he keeps the flowers for the coming rendezvous.
 27. Sexual disgust in Flaubert might be attributed partly to the fact that the author contracted syphilis during his travels in the Middle East (1849–1851), and his early death at 58 was brought about by this disease. On similarities in descriptions of dogs

in Flaubert and Agnon, see A. B. Yaffe, *Davar* 24/31 May, 1984. In both Flaubert and Agnon, dogs symbolize not just the animality of human nature, but also the folly of ambition. In a scene that Agnon might have had in mind in his portrait of the dog Balak in *Yesteryear*, Flaubert's Bouvard and Pecuchet decide to commit suicide (unsuccessfully) after seeing the corpse of a dog: "The four legs were all dried up. The jaws grinned to reveal ivory fangs beneath bluish lips; in place of the belly was a muddy coloured mass, so swarming with vermin that it seemed to palpitate. It shook, struck by the sun, under the buzzing flies, in this intolerable stench, a savage and almost devouring stench" (*Bouvard and Pecuchet*: 218). Agnon's description of the death agonies of Yitzhak Kummer, who dies after being bitten by a rabid dog at the end of *Yesteryear*, might be compared to Flaubert's gruesome account of the protracted death of Emma Bovary.

28. At times, though, the woman is consumed: the auction of Madame Arnoux's clothes, suggesting to Frédéric crows tearing a woman's body to pieces (*SE* 406), recalls the end of Agnon's *The Lady and the Peddler*, when crows literally consume the lady's corpse.
29. Frédéric's fantasy of having a child with some of his own traits is paralleled in an extreme form in Agnon's *The Doctor's Divorce*. The doctor in Agnon's story also imagines having a child, but is driven insane with irrational jealousy. He is terrified at the idea that the child will look like his wife's former lover.
30. On the appearance of children in moments of crisis in adult relationships in Agnon's stories, see Aberbach (*At the Handles*, 66–9).
31. The phrase about songs "with no beginning or end" recalls the beggars in *A Simple Story* (*CW* 3: 233, 236).

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