holiness" and relates the external facts as they happened: the funeral to the Mount of Olives, the two postal clerks, the laws of packaging, and so forth. When the sons persist in their wonderment, he concedes, "It was not I who calculated the day [of death], but the land, since Erets Yisrael itself possesses the spirit of holiness" (p. 288). Moreover, the very fact that the sons had decided to settle in Erets Yisrael, proves that the father had always wanted to do so and therefore deserved the sacred soil.

The final paragraph on the everlasting holiness of Erets Yisrael balances the graves of the Diaspora of the opening paragraph of the story, thereby completing the thematic framework for the central problem of skepticism, the concomitant paralysis of will, and their conquest after a crisis of the soul, after a nightmare. As in *Ore'aḥ nata lalun*, the regenerative force is the enduring holiness of Erets Yisrael.

"Baya'ar uva'ir" ("In the Forest and in the City"), 1938

So many of the most fundamental themes of Western literature permeate and energize "Baya'ar uva'ir" that the reader is repeatedly amazed that the writer succeeded in handling them so succinctly (ten pages) and unobtrusively. "Baya'ar uva'ir" is presented as a sentimental recounting by a mature writer of a boyhood experience: the delightful, carefree summer days in the forest and the encounter with the condemned murderer Franczisk. But through this narrative the writer deals with God's governance of the universe, the nature of evil, innocence versus experience, social norms versus natural feeling, and, more concretely, the forest versus the city. The story is far more complicated than suggested by certain critics for this is more than a thematic antithesis between city, the realm of life by law, by the Tora, and the forest where man is open to the temptations of his natural inclinations. Historically, "Baya'ar uva'ir" is probably the most sophisticated of many attempts on the part of Hebrew prose writers to give literary expression to the confrontation with a natural landscape and all the emotions or thoughts it evokes. A. L. Strauss has sensitively described the thematic complexities of the story;[21] our reading agrees with his in most points.

"When I was a boy, I spent most of my time in the forest" (p. 267). The narrator is carefree at the period of the story: he has cast off "the yoke of Tora" and has not yet been burdened with earning a livelihood, the perfect condition for an *éducation sentimentale*. The sheer sensual delight of the boy in the lush forest with its clear stream and swarming wildlife, evokes some of the finest paragraphs in all Agnon's writings.

[21] On "Baya'ar uva'ir" see **400, 417, 459, 569.**

Every new sensation impresses upon the boy the marvels of creation and the goodness of the Creator. So seductive is the forest that the boy refuses to share his parents' fear that the recently escaped murderer, Franczisk, might be hiding there.

The fear that the presence of Franczisk has instilled in the townspeople becomes the matrix of a penetrating study of society which is juxtaposed to the previous passages of precivilized nature. Shutters and doors are bolted at sunset. After the initial terror struck in all hearts by the murderer's escape, people grow accustomed to the danger, minimize it, and even begin to sympathize a bit with Franczisk, either because of natural sympathy for a fellow human being or out of admiration for a man who has defied and rejected a world "in which there are many things that bring a man to evil" (p. 270). The boy continues to frequent the forest despite his parents' fears.

We expect an encounter between the boy and Franczisk in the forest: all the lines of the story converge toward this meeting. But before coming to it, Agnon cleverly introduces another figure who enriches the thematic range of the story and thereby colors the encounter with Franczisk, to be presented later in the most simple yet suggestive dialogue. An old farmer comes by and engages the boy in a deceptively naïve conversation. Years before the farmer was a serf, but had been emancipated by the government. With the wisdom of age, he yearns romantically for bygone days "when the Emperor was a boy, and the world was young, and people were happy" (p. 271), and the problems of livelihood were cared for by a master. The old farmer, a Gentile, yearns for the condition now enjoyed by the young Jewish boy: romance and nostalgia transcend all boundaries of religion or nation. To concretize his account of the fall of mankind to its present state, the old man tells the boy who, ironically, usually has a Bible with him, the story of Cain and Abel, amusingly confusing Cain with Abel. The story of the archetypal murder both echoes the crimes of Franczisk and expands the scope of the boy's immediate experience. Cain's crime is the paradigm of all sin in that it is the very negation of life that God has created. The forest, we should recall, repeatedly elicits comparisons with Creation and, for the boy, is clearly his personal Paradise (*gan 'eden*). The archetypal imagination shapes the story: Paradise, the forest, innocence as opposed to a world of evil, the city, and experience. In the story the old farmer provides the structural bridge between these two worlds. Indeed, in the first encounter with the boy, he predicts correctly that it will not rain thereby suggesting a continuation of the idyllic setting; in the second encounter, however, he errs in his prediction because it soon begins to rain and the boy is driven back

to town where he is shut indoors for several days. When he returns to the forest, all has changed.

The dank, dim forest after the rain is cold and a bit forbidding. In this setting "a short, stout, hairy man jumped out toward me and shouted: 'what are you doing here?' " (p. 274)—Franczisk, of course. The dialogue between them is a masterpiece of understatement and suggestion. The boy seems to be entirely unaware of the identity of the man and uses the same phrases as the naïve old farmer, "From whom should I fear? There are no lions or leopards here, no bears or other dangerous animals. So why should we fear?" (p. 274). The old farmer tells a Bible story; the boy shows Franczisk the Bible he carries. Franczisk appears to be surprisingly human. He offers the boy a drink and, when told that the Hebrew blessing the boy recited over the drink is ". . . Who created everything according to His will" (p. 275), he remarks thoughtfully, "Perhaps it is so, perhaps it is so." Franczisk's tentative assent to the divine governance of the universe, uttered so softly here, swells to become the dominant, final comment of the writer as he looks back on the man's execution. Franczisk is intrigued by one of the Hebrew words of the prayer the boy recited, *shehakol* (Who . . . everything), which Franczisk pronounced "tshakel."

Several days later, the boy reads many newspaper accounts of Franczisk's past exploits, but never connects them with the stranger he met in the forest. One day as he starts out to the forest again he notices a crowd before the town courthouse. Franczisk has been caught and is being led between two soldiers. As he passes the boy, he looks at him and obviously recognizes him. From his expression, the boy is certain that Franczisk believes correctly that he had not betrayed him to the police. The boy proudly interprets this expression as a sign of gratitude; Franczisk must be gratified to know that at least one human being had not betrayed him. But the townspeople, who had been so timid and merciful before, now vie with each other in their suggestions for punishment. Again, the boy maintains his innocence in the presence of a corrupt society.

Franczisk's death climaxes the boy's education into the ways of the world. Before his execution, the condemned man harshly rejects the priest's blessing, but, as he expires, whispers "tshakel." All the townspeople fail to understand the meaning of this strange word, but the boy, who is bound in a tacit friendship of trust with the criminal, knows that Franczisk was expressing faith that all creation, including his own execution, is the expression of divine will. Just as the criminal has rejected the conventional blessing for one that was foreign, but more meaningful to him, so the boy has preferred, throughout the entire story, ennobling

experiences that were more significant to him than the conventions of his parents.

" 'Enenu haro'ot" ("Our Eyes See"), 1941

The Day of Atonement has always been a focal point in Agnon's creative imagination and therefore serves as the time setting for many of his stories that naturally result in a confessional or a searching review of public events and practices. The Day of Atonement is consequently the natural setting for moods of nostalgia or nightmare. In " 'Enenu haro'ot" the narrator calls our attention in the very first sentence to a synagogue not far from the Wailing Wall which was once a populous house of worship but no longer attracts a large congregation, even on the Day of Atonement. The lost, former glory of the building, originally built by the Sanz Hasidim but now used by various bickering factions, is repeatedly cited as a symptom of the spiritual decline of our times. The writer, in fact, allows himself a lengthy polemical digression on the practice of shaving one's beard or uncovering the head. The extreme traditional position expressed on these points seems to be advanced in earnest at first, but the reader is soon startled to discover that the writer implies exactly the opposite, that these external signs of piety prove nothing.

We learn of a more immediate problem, apparently the danger facing the Jews of Palestine in the late 1930's which even prevented the narrator from reciting the afternoon prayers of the Day of Atonement next to the Wailing Wall as was his custom. (Since tradition holds that Isaac was bound toward evening on the Day of Atonement on Mount Moriah near the present site of the Wailing Wall, it was customary to recite the "Binding of Isaac" passage from Genesis near the wall.) The scene of spiritual decay is reminiscent of *Ore'aḥ nata lalun* set in the Diaspora; " 'Enenu haro'ot," however, is actually more surprising since it is set in Jerusalem which, in *Ore'aḥ nata lalun*, is held out as the only refuge from the decay of the Diaspora.

Just as the ideal of Erets Yisrael illumines the otherwise unmitigated gloom of *Ore'aḥ nata lalun*, a miraculous event so indigenous to the hasidic tales of Galicia and Podolia relieves the suffocating grip of decay in " 'Enenu haro'ot." Almost unnoticed by most of the worshipers, a man enters the synagogue. His wisp of a beard and his tiny talit, if judged according to the criteria of piety the writer outlined in the passage that precedes it, would signify a man who took his religion lightly. When the time comes to assign the raising (*hagbaha*) of the Tora scroll after the afternoon (*minḥa*) reading, there remains no one who has not yet been