

## Agnon's Dickensian Moment: "Baya'ar uva'ir"

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S. Y. Agnon's short story "Baya'ar uva'ir" ("In the Forest and in the Town", 1939) bears a striking resemblance to the opening chapters (1–6) of Charles Dickens's novel *Great Expectations* (1861).<sup>1</sup> In both Agnon's story and Dickens's first six chapters, initially written as a free-standing Christmas story,<sup>2</sup> a child-narrator recounts a bizarre and disturbing encounter with an escaped convict, culminating with the child watching the criminal being taken away by the authorities. In both, the narrative voice alternates between that of the adult looking back to relate a childhood memory, and that of a child, imparting a sense of immediacy to the incident. The children in both stories polarize the child's world with that of the adults and reverse accepted norms by viewing the social pariahs as victims and responding with sympathy and compassion to what they see as the outlaw's challenge to society and its rules.

In both accounts, a strange bond of secret complicity and emotional kinship is created between the child, the epitome of innocence and guiltlessness, and the hardened criminal, representing sin and lawlessness. The children's otherness in both tales makes them more open to the antinomian, the social or cosmic other. The corresponding elements of Agnon's and Dickens's works extend also to the final episode in Agnon's tale, which cites Franczisk's words at his hanging, and to a later scene in Dickens's novel, which quotes Magwitch's words to the judge at his death sentencing; in both instances the criminal comes to terms with divine justice and accepts his punishment. In both, the child-convict encounter becomes a meaningful experience not only for the impressionable child but also for the convict, who is introduced to the sphere of innocence through the child as well as to the concept of religious prayer and blessing. These encounters become life-changing or defining moments for the protagonists in both narratives, leading to some kind of redemption for the outlaws, and to a more nuanced understanding of good and evil for the child-narrators.

Agnon's many insightful interpreters, excavating his works for sources, allusions, and intertexts, have not remarked on the similarities between the two narratives, perhaps because Dickens was not known as one of the European writers that Agnon had read, or might have read, or mentioned in a letter or even

in a passing conversation. Agnon's literary sources were numerous and varied, including not only the whole spectrum of Hebraic literature – from the biblical to the midrashic and the kabbalistic to the Responsa, hassidic, and more modern texts, but also a vast array of European works. Whether by the author's design or not, Agnon's novella *Vehaya he'akov lemishor* (And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight) reads like a *shtetl* version of the Enoch Arden syndrome, the story of a husband, vanished and thought dead, returning home to find his wife married to another. The popularity of this motif across the European continent, appearing in Tennyson's poem "Enoch Arden" as well as in several European stories, most notably in Balzac's "Colonel Chabert", and in Jewish folk legends, points to the prevalence of the actual phenomenon of the disappearing husband in times when tracking individuals was more difficult than it is today.<sup>3</sup> Agnon may have read previous European masterpieces or Jewish and other folktales with the same motifs, or came to know of a real case, or cases, either directly or through hearsay.

But the correspondences between "Baya'ar uva'ir" and the episode in Dickens are more unique and therefore more intriguing. It is true that Agnon's letters and other biographical records make no reference to Dickens and, therefore, we have no way of knowing whether Agnon read Dickens or became indirectly familiar with Dickens's stories. Among the writers who are mentioned as having been read by Agnon are Balzac, Chekhov, Dostoyevsky, Goethe, Hamsun, Hauptman, Ibsen, Schiller, Strindberg and Tolstoy.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, it is not unlikely that Agnon was familiar with the works of Dickens, who became very popular quite early among readers of German and Yiddish. According to his own testimony, Agnon was an avid reader of German literature; he became proficient in German very early in his life, reading not only German literature but other world classics in German translation.<sup>5</sup> It is not unreasonable to assume that he also read *Great Expectations*, which was translated into German in 1862 (*Grosse Erwartungen*), only a year after it appeared in three volumes in English and two years after it had been serialized in the magazine *All Year Round*. Agnon might have also encountered the novel, or portions of it, in Yiddish translation. While the Yiddish translation of *Great Expectations* in book form appeared only in 1939 (*Groyse Oyszikhtin*), the year in which "Baya'ar uva'ir" was first published, it is possible that parts of the novel appeared earlier in serialized form in one of the Yiddish periodicals.<sup>6</sup>

But even if we will never be able to establish conclusively that Agnon was familiar with Dickens's novel, the remarkable similarities of the child–convict interaction in the two stories deserve attention as a way of bringing out the genius of Agnon's art and singular voice. We may cite Mark Spilka who, in his comparative study of Dickens and Kafka, argued that, by pointing out affinities between the two writers, new perspectives on each writer are revealed.<sup>7</sup> Our purpose is similar to Spilka's, namely not to claim direct influence but to compare patterns and motifs as a means of uncovering the distinct marks of these two writers and, especially, to illuminate Agnon's imaginative horizons.

The obvious differences between the two works should be dealt with first. To begin with, *Great Expectations* is a Victorian novel set in the English marsh country and, later, in London. "Baya'ar uva'ir" is a short story, written in the Hebrew language and set in the Galician *shtetl* of Agnon's childhood in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Dickens's novel is often described as a Victorian

*Bildungsroman*, tracing the development and progress of its protagonist over time, while Agnon's story is concerned with a single major event that takes place within a very limited period of time. Dickens's Pip is more mature in age and experience at the end of the novel, while the child in Agnon's story, unnamed but representing the author himself, is only several weeks older at the close of the story than he is in the opening paragraph.

Another obvious difference is the age of the young protagonists at the time of the encounter. Pip is a seven-year-old who is terrorized and traumatized by the sudden confrontation with Magwitch, the scary hardened criminal. Agnon's protagonist is a young teenager when he meets Franczisk, about whom he has known for quite some time, and whom he might have even secretly wished to meet; his attitude towards the criminal is more one of curiosity and amazement than shock and fear.

Furthermore, in Dickens's novel, Pip's encounter with the escaped convict is a critical moment in the protagonist's life: Magwitch becomes Pip's anonymous benefactor, responsible for the false "great expectations" that define Pip's journey into maturity, shape his character and conduct for a long time, and ultimately lead to his emotional and moral crisis. Agnon's work, being a short story, offers closure that comes quite soon after the first encounter between the child and the convict; the incident with the convict has an obvious impact on the child-protagonist, but a further exploration of the role of this incident as the child grows into a man is beyond the parameters of the story. Dickens's novel follows the spiritual and moral pilgrimage of a man from boyhood to maturity, while Agnon's short story captures a single episode in a young person's life.

The areas where the two writers differ are those where initially they appear similar: in their conception of childhood, the significance of the intruder from another social and experiential realm, and the nature of the redemption that gives closure to the child-criminal interaction.

The similarities between the two episodes are equally noticeable, and it is in those instances where Agnon's narrative recalls Dickens's story and yet departs from it that Agnon's work is better illuminated. If it is impossible to establish Agnon's debt to Dickens, it is quite possible to point out affinities and sameness of motifs in both writers. As to the question of genre, a novel versus a short story, it has been suggested that the first six chapters in Dickens's novel, beginning with Pip's frightening encounter with Magwitch at the cemetery and ending with Pip watching the captured Magwitch being led away, constitute a free-standing story.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, it seems that Dickens's initial focal point in this narrative was not the theme of the false "great expectations" but in fact identical to that of Agnon's, namely, the encounter itself. Dickens described the tale as a Christmas story, a "little piece", about a boy's relation with a convict; the story was only later expanded into a full-length narrative for commercial reasons.<sup>9</sup> With the expansion of the tale, the focus of the novel itself shifted, but we may still view the episodes dealing with Pip and Magwitch as a story unto itself. Thus, we are in essence comparing two tales that have at their heart a child suddenly coming face to face with an escaped convict, and ending with the convict being led away while the child, witnessing the scene, is overcome by a mixture of conflicting emotions – guilt, awe, regret, sympathy and even admiration.

The structural correspondences between the two narratives are even more significant when we realize that both writers engage in multiple twinings and

doublings of their characters. The convict serves as the child's polar opposite double, yet he also has his own double. In Agnon's story, Franczisk's double is the old man whom the child runs into in the forest before he meets the notorious criminal. In Dickens, the figure of the escaped convict is split into two: Magwitch, first feared and then pitied by the child Pip, and seen later in the novel as more of a victim than a brutal criminal; and Compeyson, the truly evil villain, whom Pip encounters when he goes to meet Magwitch the second time.

Both stories take the child out of town, away from human community and the family, where he meets the antithesis of his familiar world. The integrity of the family itself is put into question in both stories. Pip is an orphan raised by a tough and cruel older sister in whom he can never find comfort or emotional sustenance. Agnon's child has a traditional family and parents who are obviously worried about him, and yet, in the only scene in the family residence, the child who comes home drenched from pouring rain is seen alone, as if there is no one to take care of him. Both children try to escape the dreariness of home: Pip because he is oppressed by his sister and craves to connect with his dead parents and siblings; and Agnon's protagonist because the thought of entering adult life, that is, submitting to the "yoke" of making a living, is oppressive to him. Images of bone-chilling dampness and thick, dirty mud are used in both texts to convey the bleakness of life.

Social isolation and emotional loneliness within the confines of the "town" define both children, yet each writer views the sphere of childhood in the experiential as well as existential sense very differently. In Pip's childhood world there is almost no ray of light, except perhaps the presence of Joe, a childlike adult. In this novel as well as in Dickens's other novels, childhood is a dreary state of suffering, exploitation, and victimization. The Christmas meal, in the interim between Pip's second meeting with Magwitch and the latter's capture, epitomizes Pip's cruel environment at home. During the meal, Pip is verbally and emotionally assaulted by the adults simply because he is a child and therefore "naturally vicious" (*GE*, p. 23). Pip's status as the "other" is also reflected in the fact that he gets only "the scaly tips of the drumsticks and the fowls" and the "obscure corners of pork of which the pig, when living, had the least reason to be vain" (*GE*, p. 23). The cemetery to which Pip escapes offers the same kind of harshness that he experiences at home. Magwitch's initial brutality to Pip, swinging him upside down to empty his pocket and threatening to cut his throat, is no different from the physical and emotional abuse Pip suffers at the hands of his sister at home. Even nature is hostile, frightening: "and the sky was just a row of long angry red lines and dense black lines intermixed" (*GE*, p. 5).

Agnon's child, on the other hand, creates a duality of opposites between life in the town and life in the forest. For him, too, the family meal is an agonizing experience and therefore he avoids taking regular meals at home, though for different reasons than Pip's. Family meals in Agnon's works sometimes take on a mythic, sacred quality, as in *The Kerchief*, but they may also represent bourgeois greed and vulgarity, as in *A Simple Story*.<sup>10</sup> In the present story, Agnon's child rejects all components of community and family rituals in order to prolong his childhood and remain in a sphere free of responsibility and obligation. The family meal epitomizes the oppression of life not because the child will be deprived and shortchanged when the food is distributed, as in Dickens's tale, but quite the

opposite: because he will be fed lavishly. But the togetherness and abundance of the domestic table stand for the repressive values of the adult community, for its constraints and obligations, which the child-protagonist wishes to avoid. Meals at regular times in the day characterize a life controlled by the clock and punctuated by duties and responsibilities that have to be met at a given time. Moreover, social and intellectual activities in town (the Zionist club, for instance) are uninspiring and stagnant, and the winter landscape is sordid: the town “lies” or “crouches” in snow, the earth is “wet and defiled” and the skies are “dirty with clouds” (*FT*, p. 267).

The forest, on the other hand, offers a timeless sphere where the child can miraculously overcome temporal and geographical constraints and be transported to the primordial Garden. Agnon’s child-narrator escapes to the forest as both a place and a state of mind: the forest is an Edenic realm, displaying and celebrating the magnificence of creation. The dichotomy of “forest and town” represents the contrast between freedom and constriction, abandon and restraint, pristine beauty and ugliness, a vision of God’s handiwork merged into one seamless creation and a man-made reality in which demarcation lines are drawn between man and man, humanity and nature. By retaining the child’s ability to look at nature with a sense of wonder and oneness with it, Agnon’s young teenager tries to delay growing up into the adult world of drudgery and obligation.

Significantly, the protagonist-narrator of “Baya’ar uva’ir” also abandons the study of the Talmud, epitomizing the “town” and its observance of the constricting rabbinic law, in preference for the Bible and the midrashic interpretations of it. The deliberate abandonment of the study of the law, the Halakhah, further illuminates the boy’s state of mind. If the boy immerses himself in a paradisaal existence which is a restoration of the original Garden, then studying the law seems irrelevant. As Gershom Scholem explained, the Kabbalists faced the dilemma that if in the end of days paradisaal conditions will be restored and only the original good will be realized then there was no “real need for all those ‘fences’ and restrictions with which Halakhah was surrounded in order to secure it [the new order] from the temptation of evil.”<sup>11</sup> This thinking, says Scholem, introduced “an anarchic element” into “Messianic Utopianism”, which combined the idea of the restoration of original harmony, and repairing what went wrong subsequently, with a vision of a harmony that had never existed before.<sup>12</sup> Thus the child’s recreated paradise is a return to primordial harmony and yet at the same time it contains the seeds of anarchy.

For Agnon’s child, the Bible, especially its poetic portions that celebrate the beauty of creation, and the midrashic homilies, which exalt God’s majestic handiwork and the ability of even lowly creatures to participate in God’s glory, provide relief and respite from the burden of life in town. In the third sentence of the opening of Agnon’s story, it is the boy’s voice that takes over from the adult narrator, describing himself as “*ben horin*”, liberated, recalling the children of Israel being liberated from the oppression of the Egyptians. Again the narrator recruits a biblical experience to describe a magic, joyous, life-affirming period in his past.

The protagonist who flees the town in favour of the forest or the cemetery as a form of rebellion or disgust with social norms or laws is a familiar image in Agnon’s works, appearing in novellas such as *Vehaya he’akov lemishor* and *Sippur*

*pashut*.<sup>13</sup> The child-protagonist of "Baya'ar uva'ir" is still too young to mount full rebellion, but his forays into the forest are seen as a rejection of the town and what it represents.<sup>14</sup> By depicting the forest in language that recalls the primordial, Edenic realm of the opening of Genesis, the child is able to inhabit a zone free of time and its passage. The adult narrator, on the other hand, sees his boyhood self as a truant from time and the clock, describing his newfound freedom in vocabulary that is laden with the ethics of a society prone to using time for utilitarian purposes, work or study, not for "fun". It becomes clear that, in the first lines of the story, it is not the boy who speaks but the adult who, from a vantage point of life's experience, describes this carefree period in his boyhood as a time of "idleness" Thus, the narrator accomplishes two purposes: on the one hand, he provides an adult's perspective by casting a negative light on the boy's deliberate choice of this hiatus in his life, seeing it as escape from responsibility; on the other hand, he condemns adult life as burdensome, gruelling and oppressive, and portrays nostalgia towards an Edenic childhood period, an attitude found in many of Agnon's works including his other childhood stories, notably "Hamitpa-hat" ("The Kerchief").<sup>15</sup>

By contrast, Dickens's adult voice reveals no nostalgia for childhood, nor does it cast the child in the role of a conscious defector from time and its responsibilities. The adult's voice provides further condemnation of the brutalities of adults against the child and of their inability to sympathize with the terrors of childhood:

Since that time, which is far away now, I have often thought that few people knew what secrecy there is in the young, under terror. No matter how unreasonable the terror, so that it be terror. I was in mortal terror. . . . I had no hope of deliverance through my all-powerful sister, who repulsed me at every turn. (*GE*, p. 12).

Agnon's child's ability to experience an Edenic moment and sphere may be contrasted with the gloom of Pip's only escape, not to the pristine Eden, but the fog-laden, mud-covered cemetery. Pip's childhood is a world of dependency and deprivation, later deceptively and cruelly promising an affluent, genteel future that can never materialize. Critics have noted that Dickens perceived childhood as a "pre-Adamite Eden" and that his child protagonists often displayed angelic virtues, innocence, and closeness to God.<sup>16</sup> However, unlike Agnon's protagonists, his children never experience an Edenic moment. Their childhood is often a hellish period of homelessness, orphanhood and terror. Agnon's landscape of childhood is indeed a Garden of Eden, a recapturing of primordial splendour and beauty, which, while intruded upon by evil, is powerful enough to integrate even the outcast into divine harmony. The child identifies the forest in which he roams as the Genesis garden that "God planted" before humanity built the town, "which enslaves the body and tortures the soul" (*FT*, p. 270).

Yet the neat duality of opposites entertained by the child protagonist in the opening of Agnon's story – town versus forest, adult life versus Eden – soon becomes more complicated: the forest, where the glory and goodness of the creator are best reflected, also harbours the criminal who violated God's law of "Thou shalt not kill." Thus the freedom, abandon, and spontaneity of nature, in which the child luxuriates at first, also represent crime and mayhem; the forest reveals its tolerance of lawlessness and its potential for danger, while the town

consists of law-abiding citizens, whose locked homes and sheer togetherness may offer a modicum of safety.

The recognition of the untamed, destructive aspect of nature, revealed to Agnon's child during a period of torrential rains and flooding, prepares the way for the appearance of the human manifestation of nature gone awry, the escaped murderer. Aryeh L. Straus, who placed Agnon's short masterpiece under the critic's magnifying glass, described Franczisk as "the ruler of the dark side of the wild nature".<sup>17</sup> In the aftermath of the stormy rains, two inter-textual images, biblical and midrashic, reinforce the child's dual perception of creation. Immediately after the rains, a bird appears at the boy's window, reminiscent of the dove outside Noah's ark that announced the end of the deluge and the resumption of normal life, thus reaffirming God's kindness to man. The midrashic intertext is that of Honi, "the circle maker", whose pleadings to God for rain were answered first with furious downpours and then with moderate, benevolent showers. Honi's tale is brought to mind through the "truffles and mushrooms" (*kemahin upitriot*) that appear after the rains.<sup>18</sup> Honi's story reinforces the child's growing realization that nature can be both Edenic and destructive; the heavy, stormy rains reveal the malevolent side of nature and its menacing forces, inimical to man. Further foreshadowing of Franczisk's arrival are the unseemly worms that wriggle and scurry to hide from the boy.

The arrival of a stranger or an enigmatic figure with hints of the demonic, who wreaks some kind of mental or spiritual havoc on the protagonist, is a familiar pattern in Agnon's tales.<sup>19</sup> The beggar is often a messenger from the cosmic other side as well as from the depths of the protagonists' psyche. At times sacred, at other times diabolical, this figure becomes fully blown in Agnon's "Kafkaesque" stories collected in *The Book of Deeds* (*Sefer hama'asim*).<sup>20</sup> In the present story, Franczisk, a realistically drawn convicted murderer, serves as a catalyst in the child protagonist's spiritual quest to reconcile the paradoxes of criminality and lawfulness, of the presence of evil in a perfect, divinely designed universe.<sup>21</sup>

The escaped convicts in both Dickens and Agnon appear suddenly, yet the more dramatic of the two narratives is undoubtedly Dickens's. When we first meet Pip he is already in the midst of the traumatic encounter with the stranger, looking at the world from an upside-down position, because Magwitch has flipped him over to empty his pockets. When Franczisk appears to Agnon's child it is also suddenly: "As I was walking leisurely, a short, heavy-set, long-haired man jumped up in front of me and screamed at me, what are you doing here? I said, I am just taking a walk in the forest" (*FT*, p. 274). But the encounter with Franczisk is not entirely unexpected. Contrary to Straus and Band, who maintain that the child does not realize that this wild-looking man is the notorious fugitive until he sees him led to the gallows, and to Werses, who sees the encounter as "unexpected", I believe that Agnon's text is somewhat ambiguous.<sup>22</sup> Unlike Pip, who had never heard of the escaped convict before he was assaulted by him, the boy in Agnon's story has heard rumours of Franczisk and participated in the community's growing romantic conception of him and its attempts to justify the two murders attributed to him. Although the boy may be somewhat startled when Franczisk suddenly "jumps up" in front of him, there is no doubt that he has vaguely anticipated or even sought the encounter.

The escaped convicts in both stories are the children's social, moral and existential doubles, highlighting experience versus innocence, evil versus

goodness. But the technique of doubling and twinning applies not only to the duality of child versus outcast, but also to outcast versus another social stranger. In both stories, the criminal, while serving as the child's foil and opposite, is also twinned with another figure, and thus the criminal himself is seen from a different angle. Magwitch's foil is Compeyson, a hardened, heartless conman, whose gentlemanly appearance brought him a lighter sentence than was meted out to his more gullible, less evil cohort. The presence of Compeyson in the novel further enhances the casting of Magwitch in the role of the social victim, the disenfranchised orphan who was born into a life of crime.

In Agnon's story, the very old man, whom Agnon's child sees twice before he meets Franczisk, casts the criminal in a different light. This old serf, in many ways a mythic "father time" or the biblical Methuselah, directs attention to the social evils of a previous generation; his lifelong servitude has deprived him of the mental ability to be free. Just as he previously served the landed gentry, now he has found in Franczisk, the outlaw, a new master to wait on. Thus, in each story the criminal is measured against the practices of the established, law-abiding community, and found to be less guilty, while the society condemning him to prison or capital punishment is seen as more blameworthy and therefore less entitled to judge its outcasts. In both stories, the death sentence is viewed as too harsh and as a further indication of the brutality of society and its laws.

The reversal of values that occurs in the stories, and obviously, in the child-protagonists' minds, is enhanced by the introduction of the archetypal myth of fratricide, the Genesis account of Cain and Abel (Gen. 4: 1-15), in both. By giving Magwitch the name of the eternal victim, Abel, Dickens subtly reinforces the escaped criminal's image as a victim. In Abel Magwitch's case, the brotherhood of man has been broken and abused many times: in his abandonment by his parents as a young child and his betrayal by Compeyson as well as by a harsh and unfair legal system, which failed to distinguish between the hardcore felon and his weak, unwitting collaborator.<sup>23</sup> Travelling across the novel with the name of the primordial victim of a brother's treachery, Abel Magwitch is thus seen as the abused rather than the abuser, the wronged rather than the wrongdoer.

In Agnon's story, the old serf offers his own midrash of the primordial siblings, recounting the familiar story with an ironic twist that makes Abel the killer and Cain the victim. Thus, if Franczisk is seen as Cain in the eyes of proper society, he is in fact the sinned against, not the sinner. At the same time, the old man is suggesting a kinship between Franczisk and Abel: both have killed but since those killed were destined to die anyway, according to the old man's fatalistic philosophy, both killers are innocent. In the same vein of a topsy-turvy view of the world, the old serf expresses nostalgia for the corrupt previous order in which he was a servant, describing it as a carefree, idyllic era, in contrast with his present life of worries and deprivation. He reminds us of figures in Chekhov's works, notably the old servant Firs in *The Cherry Orchard*, who calls the emancipation of the serfs "the calamity."<sup>24</sup> The old servant, who speaks with romantic nostalgia of the days when "the Kaiser was a young man, the world also young and people happy" (*FT*, p. 271) may point to a connection between Franczisk, whose name is a nickname or diminutive of Franz ("little Franz"), and the beloved Kaiser Franz Josef. The Kaiser who stands for peace and order and the criminal who stands for murder and mayhem are twinned as polar opposites and at the same time as the admired masters of the old serf.<sup>25</sup>



The association of the criminal with the biblical Abel in each story introduces a counter-cultural way of thinking that questions the values of established society and generates in the young protagonists a sense of affinity with the social outcasts. Both children project onto the criminals their own situation, young Pip viewing Magwitch as a kindred soul and victim of a cruel, hypocritical society, and Agnon's rebellious boy regarding Franczisk as a free spirit unwilling to yield to social norms.

The protagonist in each story provides a description of the criminal that is a mixture of realistic details and a child's grotesque exaggeration, rendering the criminals less than human; both point out a single feature or gesticulation that reflects the criminal's total being. Pip likens Magwitch to the family's big dog, especially in the way he handles his food (*GE*, p. 17), and notes Magwitch's clicking of his throat, a wordless expression of overflowing emotions that makes him more animal-like (*GE*, p. 37). Franczisk is first described as a "strange" person, of a compact, square-like physique and eyebrows linked together as "one thick rope" (*FT*, p. 274). He is not entirely human: the boy likens him to a leather-made jug and marvels at his ability to assimilate quickly into the wooded environment, becoming part of nature (*FT*, p. 275). In the closing episode, the boy describes Franczisk's face in a Cubist manner: his two eyes merge together and look like one big eye, turning him into a mythic, Cyclops-like creature. A surreal element is also introduced when the child imagines Franczisk's joined eyes as separated from his body and floating independently in the air. Franczisk's grotesque appearance makes him less than human and presents him as a challenge to the symmetry and flawless beauty that the child has attributed to all of God's creation. On the other hand, the fugitive is very much at home in the forest and nature seems to collaborate with him by creating large holes in the trees into which he can easily disappear.

The ritual of eating and drinking, the presence of cooked meat and alcoholic beverage in the child-criminal encounter, which creates a sense of conspiracy and camaraderie between them, is another motif common to both stories. In Dickens's story, Pip steals from the food prepared by his sister for the Christmas meal and watches with pity and compassion while the criminal swallows the food voraciously. In Agnon's story, the child becomes part of the conspiracy when he meets the old man carrying a hot meal in the forest and makes no mention of it to his parents or anyone else in town; when he actually meets Franczisk, the boy shares an alcoholic drink with the criminal and keeps this meeting a secret. Thus in each story the first consequence of the child-criminal encounter is that the criminal brings the child into his own orbit: Pip turns into a thief and Agnon's boy into a silent collaborator. Both children are transported by the respective criminals to a state that Mark Spilka has called, in his comparative study of Dickens's *David Copperfield* and Kafka's *Amerika*, "sinful innocence."<sup>26</sup>

Yet these scenes involving eating or drinking are turned in both stories into a sacred ritual. Critics have remarked that the "real" Christmas meal in Dickens's story takes place not around the table of Pip's sister, where cruelty and hypocrisy prevail, but rather in the marshes, when Pip watches Magwitch gulp down the food, a scene of true Christian charity.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, in the conversation between Agnon's protagonist and Franczisk, the latter's interest is drawn to the "holy books" that the child is reading and to the blessing over the alcohol, which he recites in Hebrew. This traditional blessing, in which we thank God, the "king of

the world", for creating "everything according to His will (or word)", expresses our acceptance of God's rule and His way of governing creation. This blessing becomes the focal point of the story and the means of Franczisk's redemption. The escaped convict, pondering the blessing, grotesquely mispronounces the Hebrew name of the blessing, *shehakol*, which in his tongue becomes "tshakel". He tentatively agrees with the message of the blessing, uttering "perhaps it is so, perhaps it is so", and asks the boy to repeat it (FT, p. 275). Later, when the child watches Franczisk's execution, the latter emits an incoherent sound that the spectators fail to understand, but which the child interprets as "tshakel" or the Hebrew blessing *shehakol*. Thus, while the adult narrator neither verifies nor denies the child's interpretation, what is important is that for the child-protagonist, the hardened murderer Franczisk has accepted the verdict of the law and reconciled himself to God's ways.

Each story offers two types of closure: a reconciliation between the criminal and his maker and between the criminal and the child. In Dickens's novel these two types of closure happen at different moments in the novel, while in Agnon's story, which has a smaller canvas, these two closures are merged in one final episode. Magwitch and Franczisk are both pagan and Godless when the respective children encounter them. Magwitch knows the Bible only as a "charm" on which he swears people to secrecy, and Franczisk first looks angrily at the books in the boy's hands and, upon learning that these are "sacred books", he yells at him: "Why do you need these?" (FT, p. 274) In both cases, the child becomes a catalyst of redemption for the criminal. Towards the end of the novel, Pip introduces Magwitch to the Bible and recites a prayer for him: "Oh Lord, be merciful to him, a sinner!" (GE, p. 445); and upon hearing his punishment, Magwitch says to the judge: "My Lord, I have received my sentence of Death from the Almighty, but I bow to yours" (GE, p. 443). Agnon's boy introduces Franczisk to the blessing *shehakol*, which opens the way for the latter to see life as created and led by a power beyond him. Magwitch and Franczisk are thus redeemed from their outcast status in the eyes of the child as well as of God when they connect the sentence brought upon them by the court of human law with God's decree and accept the verdict as coming both from human society and God.

The second kind of closure, which takes place at the end of the short story in both, involves a secret bonding between the child and the criminal and a reaffirmation that both stand together against the entire world. Pip and Agnon's child both face the criminals when they are led away by the authorities, and in both cases, the criminals find a way of letting the child protagonists know that they do not suspect them of betrayal. In Pip's case, Magwitch avoids looking at him at the time of his arrest so as not to disclose the fact that the two know each other. Furthermore, before he is taken away to the prisoners' boat, Magwitch makes a small speech in which he takes the blame of stealing the food upon himself and thus frees Pip from any possible suspicion. In this way, Dickens's short story of a child and a criminal comes full circle: first there is the frightening encounter, then the child becomes the criminal's co-conspirator, and then the criminal redeems himself and proves his humanity by exonerating the child. Since Dickens later decided to expand his story into a novel, he developed the relationship between Magwitch and Pip into a complex web of ill-advised ambitions and false expectations leading to disillusionment and moral crises and, ultimately, to acceptance of a limited vision of life by Pip, and of the law by

Magwitch. But in what has been identified as a short story, Dickens offers a closure in which the dreaded outlaw is seen as capable of decency and, in fact, as the only person who fully understands the terrors of childhood.

In the case of Agnon's protagonist, the reconciliation between Franczisk and God's law and that of Franczisk and the boy are intertwined. When the boy witnesses Franczisk being led to his execution, the latter establishes eye contact with him which the boy reads as a message that "although I did not swear to him, he did not suspect me that I revealed his hiding place to others", and that the criminal was pleased that the child did not "join" those who were seeking his death (*FT*, p. 277). In his moment of death, Franczisk appears in two contradictory ways: first he is seen as a surrealist image – a big eye floating in the air – and yet when he looks affectionately at the child, he seems more human than the bloodthirsty mob that surrounds him. His eye contact with the boy and the blessing he utters bring him back to both the human community and to God's glorious, impeccable creation, and redeem him in the boy's mind.

An inter-textual network of midrashic and hasidic sources further enhances the commuting of the brute into a legitimate member of God's creations. Even before he meets Franczisk and, in fact, as a prelude to that meeting, Agnon's boy recounts the Midrash in which the frog tells King David that its song of praise to God is even better than David's psalms. Thus it seems that the bungled benediction uttered by the brutish Franczisk at his hanging would be worth more to God than a perfectly enunciated prayer by a God-fearing person. This concept also appears in hasidic stories, recreated by Y. L. Peretz and others, in which the illiterate country boy's whistle (and in other versions the somersault he performs) during the sombre High Holiday services mean more to God as an expression of genuine spirituality than the stylized, standardized community prayers.<sup>28</sup>

With Franczisk reciting the benediction before he meets his maker, it is not only the universe that is returned to its primordial perfect harmony but also speech itself. The story's text is polyphonic, consisting of biblical poetry, midrashic elaboration, the universe's song of praise to its creator, and kabbalistic imaginings, cited by the idealistic child-narrator. It also contains the adults' utilitarian vocabulary, the community's rhetoric of hypocrisy and cruelty, the outlaw's initial scoffing, the revisionist Bible commentary of the disenfranchised serf, and the traditional texts insisting on the letter of the law versus those rewarding the intention of the heart. This polyphony is overpowered by the simple word *shehakol*, which resolves all differences and wraps up all voices into one sacred utterance.

The differences between Dickens and Agnon are significant. Dickens is the social reformist whose imaginative vistas are neither theological nor cosmic but are rooted in contemporary social issues. Agnon, by contrast, is the spiritual seeker. Both writers presented numerous child-protagonists in their vast bodies of works; yet Dickens's gallery of children is broader. His children are often central characters in novels that explore social conditions of injustice and poverty and the commercial exploitation of children, a fate he suffered himself as a youngster. His child protagonist is, at times, "a potentially subversive figure" in Victorian climate.<sup>29</sup> In his portrayal of criminals Dickens condemns the heartless treatment of convicted prisoners and the injustice of the penal system, which is especially harsh towards the poor and the uneducated, and examines the socio-psycho-

logical makings of the criminal mind. Dickens's criminals run the gamut from the diabolical Fagin and the evil sociopath Compeyson to the orphan who grows up to be a petty thief, like Magwitch and some of the children in *Oliver Twist*.

Agnon has offered a diverse array of child figures, some as central characters in his short stories, yet not of his major novels. His collection of children ranges from the boys in the cluster of the pseudo-autobiographical stories to which the present story belongs (tales such as "The Kerchief", "My Bird" and "My Prayerbook"), through figures with a symbolic meaning, such as the daughter in "At the Outset of the Day"<sup>30</sup>, who stands for the narrator's soul, the legendary Rabbi Gediel the Infant and other images of mythical "wise infants".<sup>31</sup> It is true that some of Agnon's child figures are drawn realistically and represent the writer addressing himself to socio-economic and psychological issues in Jewish society of his time. In some of his novels he depicts young adults who have not outgrown their childhood, such as Hirshl Hurwitz of "A Simple Story", still tied emotionally to a controlling mother, Tirtsa, in "In the Prime of Her Life", incapable of emerging from under her dead mother's shadow and determined to relive her mother's life. In a different way, there is the childish naïve seeker Yitshak Kummer of "Only Yesterday", whose idealism clashes with the brutal realities of pre-statehood Palestine, and who is seen as Isaac, the bound son of Genesis. The girl Bluma in "A Simple Story", whom we first meet as a fourteen-year-old orphan, exploited and unkindly treated by her relatives, is a figure who might belong in a Dickens novel. She is also reminiscent of several "poor relative" figures in European social novels, yet we think of her more as a young woman than a teenager, and she recedes to the margins of the story rather early.<sup>32</sup>

But mostly, the presence of child figures and childhood in Agnon's works is not triggered by the social critic's campaign to improve children's plight. The Edenic possibility embodied in childhood underlies Agnon's body of works as a whole and therefore, for him, childhood is much more than the transitory state of being a child. Like other Hebrew writers, notably Bialik, Agnon views the Eden of childhood from an adult's bifocal perspective, nostalgia for a lost paradisaal era, and scepticism that it ever existed.<sup>33</sup> Often, the child figure evokes an idyllic world of wholeness, home life and maternal love, in contrast with the fractured reality, homelessness, and estrangement of the present. This idyll is both a past lost forever and a vision sustaining the narrator in this story and others throughout his life experiences. In "Baya'ar uva'ir" the adult narrator uses a different strategy to revisit the Eden of childhood. He speaks mostly in a child's voice and sifts reality through the child's prism, thus endowing a sense of immediacy, credibility and intimacy to the zone of childhood.

The function of the intruder from another sphere is also different in the two writers. Magwitch is a tool for Dickens to explore social injustice and a child's deep-seated dread, while Franczisk is a vehicle to pose a spiritual and theological dilemma for Agnon's boy. Born into the thicket of Judaic lore and imaginative texts, the boy needs to balance his cravings for the primordial Eden, which, he would like to believe, pervades the totality of creation, with the undeniable existence of the ugly and the destructive, both in nature and in humans. Franczisk, the escaped convict, is drawn as a real-life character, and the moral inconsistency of the community that erratically changes its view of the outlaw sounds like social criticism, but the social and psychological repercussions of the outlaw's presence in the story are only a minor function.

The criminal's main role is as a catalyst in the boy's growing awareness of the persistence of evil in the world, his curiosity about its human face, and his attempts to reconcile his undeniable fascination with evil with the need to reaffirm the perfect harmony and total goodness of creation. Franczisk's asymmetrical, misshapen face stands for the distortion of creation, but his recitation of the blessing, in spite of his grotesque bungling of its Hebrew words, makes him again part of God's benevolent creation. By bringing Franczisk back into the harmonious pattern of creation, Agnon's child accomplishes the kind of repair, *tikkun*, that the Kabbalists viewed as a necessary part of their utopian vision: the re-establishment of the pristine conditions before Adam sinned.<sup>34</sup> No wonder Dickens chose a very young protagonist to encounter the outlaw, since he wished to highlight the defencelessness of the child and the unmitigated terror of the encounter. Agnon has chosen a learned *shtetl* boy of thirteen or fourteen who is still naive enough to attempt to recapture an Edenic sphere, but sophisticated enough to acknowledge the power of evil not only to horrify and alienate but also to attract and seduce.

Peter Gay has argued that Dickens's *Bleak House* was a response to the writer's personal experience with the flawed British legal system and his need to take revenge on a society that he saw as vicious and unjust.<sup>35</sup> The need to "get back" at society and the impassioned urge to change it motivate much of Dickens's writings; but these impulses are not especially evident in Agnon's artistic canvas. Though social satire is a component of Agnon's writings, his works consistently recognize the metaphysical dimension of human existence and are filled with spiritual longings. They offer a vision, at times an absolute verity and at other times an illusive projection of a deep-seated nostalgia, of a pristine Edenic sphere, glimpses of which may be experienced at any time and any place. The Edenic possibility, remote and irretrievable as it sometimes seems to be, underlies all of Agnon's writings, and it is in the return-to-childhood scenes that the Edenic vision is reinforced and validated.

Dickens's portrayal of children is mostly driven by the reformist's urge to stop the commercial exploitation of children and his own personal experiences as a child put to work at a tender age; Agnon's children are a vehicle opening vistas to the paradisaical past of the writer as well as of humanity at large. His children are sometimes fashioned in the mode of the "wise fool" whose knowledge of his own environment is limited but who has an intuitive, deeper connection to the essence of things.<sup>36</sup>

Pip's acquired wisdom at the end of the novel is socio-psychological and moral: he acknowledges the hollowness of his pursuit to become a "gentleman" and the moral failings and misconduct that it bred in him. To quote Mark Spilka, Dickens's novel traces the "passage from unwitting sinfulness to acknowledged guilt".<sup>37</sup> By contrast, the boy's knowledge at the end of Agnon's story may be only a child's fantasy – that evil has redeemed and repaired itself – but it is in the order of a spiritual epiphany. Spilka discusses Dickens's "dream-like style" which points to an affinity between him and Kafka. Both writers, he says, display "an arrest or check in emotional growth, as if both writers were permanently fixed at childhood levels of feeling, and saw life from an infantile perspective. Their sensibilities meet, it seems, in childlike focus on a world controlled by elders, a dream-like urban world, where the violation of childhood peace defines existence."<sup>38</sup> Some of Agnon's works, such as the short stories collected in *The*

*Book of Deeds*, may be grouped with these two writers in the sense that reality in them also takes on a dream-like, or even nightmarish, quality. Yet the presence of childhood in Agnon's stories, as distant and unreachable as it has become, is not that of a violated sphere, but of a beacon of certainty and solidity in the midst of modern mayhem.

Baruch Hochman has suggested that while "Dickens's fiction abounds in reachings-out toward edenic possibilities" these glimmerings of vision are not sustained and that life offers only "the marginal possibility, that Pip achieves, of arriving at a consciousness of limits almost too painful to imagine" and at a "a consciousness of loss."<sup>39</sup> Agnon's sense of loss, underlying all his work, is even deeper, because in his universe the Edenic is not only a wishful thinking but a past reality. Yet the child figures in his world, often appearing from nowhere, proclaim that the Edenic co-exists with the flawed. His story thus ends not with a sense of the defective and irreparable nature of life, but rather of the possibility that even the greatest cosmic aberration, the murderer who has defied the laws of God and man, can be brought back to the majesty of creation. The thick, multi-layered inter-textual nexus of Bible, Midrash, the Passover Hagaddah, Kabbalah, hassidic lore, and the Hebrew prayerbook in Agnon's story saturates the modern point of view and balances contemporary scepticism and anarchy with visions of restored harmony and the possibility of bringing about *tikkun* not only in the immediate social or psychological sense, but in the existential and cosmic as well.<sup>40</sup>

## Notes and references

1. S. Y. Agnon, "Baya'ar uva'ir", in *Elu ve'elu*, Jerusalem: Schocken, 1972, pp. 267–278 (hereafter FT). Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, New York: Reinhart, 1972 (hereafter GE). The story "Baya'ar uva'ir" is available in English translation as "In the Forest and in the City", in Shmuel Yosef Agnon, *A Dwelling Place of My People: Sixteen Stories of the Chassidim*, trans. J. Weinberg and H. Russel, Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1983, pp. 94–109.
2. See Dennis Walder, *Dickens and Religion*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981, p. 200; and George Newlin, *Understanding Great Expectations*, Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2000, p. 29.
3. For the Enoch Arden motif and other structural patterns in this novella see: Gershon Shaked, "Kabtzan mul sha'ar na'ul", in Rella Kushlavsky (ed.), *Bikkoret ufarshanut*, Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2001, pp. 73–109. For the Jewish folktale it is based on, see: Arnold Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare*, Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Press, 1968, pp. 83, 84. For similarities with another Victorian novel, in which this motif is reversed (it is the lost wife who reappears), see: Nehama Aschkenasy, "Biblical Substructures in the Tragic Form: Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Agnon, *And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight*", *Modern Language Studies* 13: 1 (1983), p. 101–110.
4. Dan Laor, *Hayei Agnon*, Jerusalem: Schocken, 1998, esp. pp. 22, 23, 30; see also M. Beit Aryeh, "Me'igrot Shay Agnon 'el S.Z. Schocken", in Gershon Shaked and Raphael Weiser (eds), *Shay 'Agnon: mehkarim ute'udot*, Jerusalem: Bialik, 1978, pp. 97–100.
5. S. Y. Agnon, *Me'atzmi 'el 'atzmi*, Jerusalem: Schocken, 1976, esp. pp. 113, 115; and Laor, *Hayei Agnon*, pp. 22, 23.
6. For instance: the Yiddish weekly *Der Strahl*, which was published from January 1910 to March 1911, had original writings as well as translations from European writers such as Chekhov, Tolstoy and Dickens. See Leonard Prager, *Yiddish Literary and linguistic Periodicals and Miscellanies*, Darby, PA, and Haifa: Norwood, 1982, p. 147. Another

- possible source from whom Agnon might have become acquainted with the works of Dickens was his friend, the writer Y. H. Brenner, a voracious reader, who lived in London for a time and was familiar with British literature, reading it in the original. Agnon tells us (Agnon, *Me'atzmi 'el 'atzmi*, p. 121) that he and Brenner used to have long conversations on works from world literature that Brenner had read. Brenner mentions reading Charles Dickens in a letter to Sarah Mirmer dated 2 August 1907, in Y. H. Brenner, *Kol Kitvei*, vol. 3, Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1960, p. 314. For more on Agnon and Brenner see: Laor, *Hayei Agnon*; and Raphael Weiser (ed.), "S. Y. Agnon's Letters to Y. H. Brenner", in Gershon Shaked and Raphael Weiser (eds.), *Shay 'Agnon: mehkarin ute'udot*, Jerusalem: Bialik, 1978, pp. 39–56 [in Hebrew].
7. Mark Spilka, *Dickens and Kafka: A Mutual Interpretation*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1963, p. 241.
  8. Newlin, *Understanding Great Expectations*, p. 29.
  9. Walder, *Dickens and Religion*, p. 200.
  10. Food, family meals and gluttony are frequent motifs in Agnon's works. On the meal as representing bourgeois vulgarity see: Gershon Shaked, "Bat hamelekh use'udat ha'em", in Hillel Barzel (ed.), *Shmuel Yosef Agnon*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1982, pp. 262, 265, 266. For more on gluttony in Agnon as an expression of psychological and spiritual decline, see: Shaked, "Kabtzan mul sha'ar na'ul", p. 95.
  11. Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, New York: Schocken, 1972, p. 20.
  12. *Ibid.*, pp. 13–23, esp. p. 21.
  13. Baruch Kurzweil discussed at length the meaning of the escape to the forest as a form of rebellion in the present story and in other stories by Agnon: Baruch Kurzweil, *Massot 'al sippurei 'Agnon*, Jerusalem: Schocken, 1970, esp. pp. 35, 72, 220.
  14. Avraham Sha'anani disagrees with Kurzweil that the young protagonist's frequent visits to the forest represent rebellion; instead, he sees the child's experience in the forest as similar to the protagonist's encounter with primordial forces in the fiction of Knut Hamson and Anatole France, which crushes the protagonist's sense of harmony instilled in him by faith. See Avraham Sha'anani, "'Olam hasegirut vehama'avak 'im kohot haresha'", in Hillel Barzel (ed.), *Shmuel Yosef Agnon*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1982, p. 465.
  15. S. Y. Agnon, "The Kerchief", in Nahum N. Glatzer (ed.), trans. I. M. Lask, *Twenty-One Stories*, New York: Schocken, 1970, pp. 45–59.
  16. See Angus Wilson, "Dickens on children and childhood", in Michael Slater (ed.), *Dickens 1970*, New York: Stein & Day, 1970, p. 214.
  17. See "S. Y. Agnon's 'Baya'ar uva'ir'", in Aryeh L. Straus, *Bedarkei hasifrut*, Jerusalem: Bialik, 1965, pp. 148–153, 150.
  18. For the story of Honi, see H. N. Bialik and Y. H. Ravnitzky (eds), *The Book of Legends: Sefer Ha'aggadah*, trans. W. G. Braudi, New York: Schocken, 1992, pp. 202, 203.
  19. On the child–beggar interaction in Agnon's "The Kerchief", see Nehama Aschkenasy, *Eve's Journey: Feminine Images in Hebraic Literary Tradition*, Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986, p. 96–100. On the beggar in *A Simple Story*, see Shaked, "Bat hamelech use'udat ha'em", p. 285.
  20. See Hillel Barzel, "Mavo, darkhei haparshanut shel yetsirot Agnon", in Hillel Barzel (ed.), *Shmuel Yosef Agnon*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1982, p.82; also Laor, *Hayei Agnon*, pp. 339, 679, 732.
  21. Baruch Kurzweil saw the present story as forming an "emotional bridge" between the harmony of days past and the chaos depicted in *Sefer hama'asim*, see: Baruch, *Massot 'al sippurei Agnon*, p. 71.
  22. See Straus, *Bedarkei hasifrut*, p. 151; Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare*, p. 236; Shmuel Werses, *Shay Agnon kipeshuto*, Jerusalem: Bialik, 2000, p. 79.
  23. For a different interpretation of Magwitch's first name, see Baruch Hochman, "Bulrush and harvest home", in Murray Baumgarten and H. M. Daleski (eds), *Home and*

- Homelessness in the Victorian Imagination*, New York: AMS, 1998, pp. 60–61.
24. See Anton Chekhov, "The Cherry Orchard", in Allison et al. (eds), *Masterpieces of Drama*, New York: Macmillan, 1974, p. 552.
  25. This old man may be an emancipated serf, but when he talks about the "Keisar" he certainly means only one emperor, Kaiser Franz Josef, and not the Tsar, as suggested in the Weinberg and Russel translation (in *A Dwelling Place of My People*). Serfdon was abolished in Galicia (as well as Bukovina and Tyranscarpathia) in 1848, and in Russia in 1861. On the history of Buczacz, Agnon's hometown, and the various ethnic groups that populated it, see: Laor, *Hayei Agnon*, pp. 13–19. On the history of serfdom in Galicia under the Habsburgs, see: Danylo Husar (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993, p. 599.
  26. Spilka, *Dickens and Kafka*, pp. 138–149.
  27. See Katherine Carolan, "Dickens' last Christmases", *Dalhousie Review* 52 (1972), pp. 373–383.
  28. For more on this and other aspects of the story see the insightful comments of Shmuel Leiter, *Selected Stories of S. Y. Agnon*, New York: Tarbut, 1970, pp. 49–55.
  29. See Malcolm Andrews, *Dickens and the Grown-up Child*, Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 1994, p. 14.
  30. S. Y. Agnon, "At the Outset of the Day", in Nahum N. Glatzer (ed.), trans. I. M. Lask, *Twenty-One Stories*, New York: Schocken, 1970, pp. 252–260.
  31. On the Jewish sources of Agnon's story "*Ma'aseh Rabbi Gadiel hatinok*" and other mythic infants in Judaic sources, see Gershon Scholem, "Mekorotav hahasidiyim shel 'ma'aseh Rabbi Gadiel hatinok' besifrut hakabbalah", in *Le'Agnon Shay*, Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1959, pp. 289–305. On images of mythic "wise infants" see Anne Golomb Hoffman, *Between Exile and Return: S. Y. Agnon and the Drama of Writing*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991, esp. pp. 15, 17, 91–96, 195.
  32. For more on Bluma as a typical character in the European social realistic novel, see Aschkenasy, *Eve's Journey*, pp. 24, 25.
  33. On Bialik's dual attitude to the Eden of childhood, especially in his story "Safiah", see: Gershon Shaked "Hadramati, ha'epi, haliri: 'Safiah'", in Zvi Luz and Ziva Shamir (eds), *Al "Safiah" libialik*, Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, n.d., pp. 71–91. On the "linguistic drama" the sense of orphanhood and other aspects of Bialik's story see: Naomi B. Sokoloff, *Imagining the Child in Modern Jewish Fiction*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992, pp. 65–86.
  34. On the two aspects of the Messianic vision in Kabbalah, the restorative and the utopian, as well as on the concept of *tikkun* (repair), see: Scholem, *Messianic Idea*, esp. pp. 12–23. A fuller study of the kabbalistic inter-text in this story is outside the parameters of this article; suffice it to say that the story's linguistic fabric is weighted with kabbalistic symbolism, reinforcing the themes of *tikkun*, the transvaluation of values (especially in connection with the rehabilitation of the biblical Cain), the child figure as a catalyst of redemption, the correspondences between the material world and the divine sphere, the conception of the human world as a battlefield between the forces of divine goodness and those of the *sitra 'ahra* (the cosmic "other side") and God's dual treatment of creation, the measures of justice and of mercy. The metathetical link between the nouns *ya'ar* (forest) and *'ir* (town, or city), wherein the transposition of the letter *yod*, a potent mystical sign, changes the noun yet points towards the affinity between the two opposite realms, is in line with the various kabbalistic strategies of manipulating words and letters. Franczisk's name may also reverberate with kabbalistic significance. For more on this see the forthcoming Nehama Aschkenasy, "'And a little child leading them': the child and the biblical landscape in Agnon, Oz, and Appelfeld," in *AJS Review*, 28 (2004).
  35. Peter Gay, *Savage Reprisals: Bleak House, Madame Bovary, Buddenbrooks*, New York: Norton, 2002.



36. On the tradition of “wise fools” in literature see: Walter Kaiser, *Praisers of Folly*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963. The figure of the fool in its Christian or Erasmian sense is not evident in Jewish texts. Nevertheless, Martin Buber claims that Rabbi Zusha of Anipoli, often depicted as childlike and naïve in hasidic lore, was fashioned after the Christian idea of the “divine simpleton”. See Martin Buber, *’Or haganuz*, Jerusalem: Bialik, 1967, p. 30.
37. Spilka, *Dickens and Kafka*, p. 250.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 242.
39. Hochman, “Bulrush”, p. 63.
40. On intertextuality in Agnon, see Gershon Shaked, *Panim ’aherot bizirato shel Shai Agnon*, Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1989, esp. pp. 11–13, 26 n. 2.