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 The Evolving Masks of  
S. J. Agnon

The growing interest of both the general reader and the professional literary critic in the writings of S. J. Agnon is doubtless one of the most fascinating phenomena in Hebrew literature in the twentieth century. Having first attracted considerable attention in 1908 with his story *Agunot*, Agnon has risen decade after decade in critical esteem. This phenomenon, extraordinary in literature as a whole, is all the more remarkable in Hebrew literature of this century with its violent upheavals and rapid shifts in taste. In Israel, one often finds the eight-volume set of Agnon's stories and novels in an amazingly wide range of homes, among the old and the young, the religious and the non-religious. For some readers, Agnon is the epitome of traditional Jewish folk-literature; for others, he is the most daring of modernists. For the older reader, Agnon conjures up memories of Jewish life in Eastern Europe; for the younger reader, he wrestles with the central universal problems of our agonized century. And though he appeals to such a wide range of devoted readers, Agnon is the most individualistic of writers whose indelible imprint remains upon the pages of those who try to imitate him.

Since Agnon is so protean, displaying several masks at the same time while concealing several others, it is only natural that literary critics have often fallen into the trap of homily and personal confession; each critic finds in Agnon what he was looking for. When one plows through the hundreds upon hundreds of articles written on Agnon's works, the question arises: which is the real Agnon—that of Brenner or of E. M. Lifshitz, of Sadan or Kurzweil, of Kariv or Tochner? The answer probably is: all of them, not separately but together, complementing and correcting each

other. Objective control over all the conflicting views can be gained only by the application of historically oriented scholarship, tracing the growth of artistic talent, the evolution of motifs, the permutations of obsessions. Agnon at twenty-five offered an entirely different portrait of an artist than Agnon at fifty, or today at seventy-six. The ultimate portrait must be a gallery of individual portraits observed in time sequence rather than the last member of the series. It is the last member of the series of portraits that we ordinarily see: the standard collected works of Agnon used by most readers is the eight-volume 1953–1962 edition that was edited and arranged by the author himself. What we have, therefore, is an edition that is aesthetically satisfying but confusing for the critic; the stories presented were written over a period of over fifty years and were edited several times each by Agnon as his taste changed.

Any sensible treatment of Agnon's works should, therefore, be historical. And inasmuch as his writing is often so autobiographical, the dichotomy conventionally drawn between the man and the writer has to be rejected. We should remember the oft-proven guide rule that the relationship between the life and the works is never direct, and one must always lean heavily on common sense to avoid over-psychologizing. But the danger of excessive reliance upon biography is slight in comparison with the opposite danger: the complete divorcing of the works from the man who wrote them.

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If Buczacz, the town of Agnon's birth and childhood, has gained a widespread reputation in the last half century, it is primarily because Agnon has made it the focal point of much of his writing, at times using the exact name of the town and at times calling the town of his story Shibbush, which is but a lightly veiled disguise for Buczacz. Buczacz was hardly different from several dozen other middle-sized towns with sizable Jewish populations in Eastern Europe, and it was actually overshadowed by other towns of Eastern Galicia such as Lemberg, Brody, and Tarnopol. Treating the town of his childhood and its history with love, and with nostalgia tempered with irony (after all, he did betray his town by leaving it to go to Palestine in 1908), Agnon has succeeded in shaping a literary world with which many readers can identify since Buczacz was so similar to other towns.

Shmuel Yosef Czaczkes, later to be known as Agnon, was born and raised in a middle-class family in Buczacz during the last decades of the

Austro-Hungarian Empire, a period in which the sharp dividing lines between Hasid, Mitnaged, and Maskil had been somewhat dulled, and political movements such as Zionism, anarchism, socialism, etc., had begun to capture the imagination of the young. The Czaczkes family itself was an interesting mixture: the father, Shalom Mordechai, an ordained rabbi and learned in medieval philosophy, prayed and studied with the Tchorikov Hasidim; his maternal grandfather, Yehuda Farb, a dominant figure in Agnon's life, was an influential merchant in town and a keen Talmudist; his mother, Esther, was well-versed in German literature. Shmuel Yosef, the eldest of the five Czaczkes children, unquestionably owes the shaping of his intellectual profile to the joint influence of these three figures and their individual interests. Aside from six years in various private *hadarim* in his childhood and a short period in the Baron Hirsch school in his early teens, the young Czaczkes had no formal education to speak of but profited enormously from the tutelage of his father, his studies in the Beth Midrash of Buczacz, which had a well-stocked library, and from his private reading.

Agnon's early years varied little from those of scores of other writers and public figures whose biographies have been recorded. In his adolescence he was active among the young Zionists in town: these were the days of the early Zionist Congresses, of the Kishinev pogrom, of Herzl's death. Much of his time was taken up by early attempts at writing both in Hebrew and in Yiddish. And though there is nothing in these stories, poems, and incidental articles which adumbrates the great literary talent of later years, or which distinguishes them from other stories and poems that appeared in the same periodicals, the years of intensive practice in Buczacz provided the basis for the growth of the later years. Galicia was on the verge of a new renaissance of Hebrew literature during the first decade of the twentieth century, after over a generation of aridity, and Agnon served his early apprenticeship under several of the more energetic figures of the period: Elazar Rokeah, Gershon Bader, and Yitzhak Fernhoff. Nonetheless, had he not left Galicia for Jaffa in the heady days of the Second Aliya, it is highly doubtful whether we would have heard of him afterwards. Agnon did not produce great literary works in Buczacz, but the experiences of the period provided him with an inexhaustible source of material for his creative imagination, and the very fact that his experiences were far from atypical of his generation explains how this highly individualistic writer could appeal to so wide an audience.

The emotional and literary atmosphere of Jaffa of the Second Aliya was far more challenging than Buczacz: a new society was being formed; great personalities such as Brenner, Rav Kook, Ruppin, Aharonovitz, S. Ben-Zion, A. D. Gordon either lived in Jaffa or visited it frequently. Serving as the secretary of several of the more important committees in Jaffa, Agnon was in the center of affairs. The contact with the resurgent yishuv and the trips throughout the country, to Jerusalem in particular, were invigorating, and the young writer's writing reflected the new burst of creative energy: though some of the themes first struck in Buczacz are repeated in Jaffa, the quality of writing here is so superior to that in Buczacz that it is difficult to identify Czaczkes of Buczacz with the Agnon of Jaffa (Agnon adopted his pen-name, which was later to become his legal name, from the title of "Agunot" his first story published in Jaffa). To this day, both "Agunot" and "Vehaya he'akov lemishor" of the Jaffa period stand out as two of Agnon's better stories, and the latter is certainly one of the finest literary works in Hebrew of this century.

In each of these stories we can already detect a considerable mastery of two types of narrative that recur frequently in later years: the folktale bordering on fantasy in "Agunot"; the realistic description of society charged with deft usage of symbolic detail in "Vehaya he'akov lemishor." "Agunot" is the story of chained souls, of young lovers whose love cannot be realized, of a world turned into nightmare and desolation. "Vehaya he'akov lemishor" begins with the economic failure of its hero, the childless Menashe Hayyim who descends to beggary, degradation, loss of identity; finally he suffers the loss of his wife who marries another man on the assumption that her beloved Menashe Hayyim is dead. In both cases, the traditionally Jewish milieu is the situation of a plot whose implications suggest that something is horribly out of joint in this milieu, though its various aspects are described lovingly and nostalgically. The reader who is charmed by the warm ambience of the traditional Jewish way of life, and the peculiar style that Agnon employs to convey it, might not feel the shudders of nightmare. Certainly, most of Agnon's early readers either did not feel or could not describe this shudder. But the reader who follows the plot-line to its logical conclusion cannot escape it.

The ambivalence of sentiment that we feel even in these stories, published over fifty years ago, continues throughout most of Agnon's works and is one of the identifying marks of his narrative style. There is, furthermore, one salient aspect of Agnon's narrative technique that also begins to appear as early as the Jaffa period, albeit in rudimentary form. Among the other stories written in those years, we find several highly

romantic fantasies in which the young artist-lover describes his yearning for an imaginary girl Salsebila. The haunting tone of these stories, with their shifting planes of consciousness, are so unlike “Agunot” or “Vehaya he’akov lemishor” in style and tone that it is difficult to imagine that they were written by Agnon. Indeed, in later years, Agnon himself either remodelled them completely (a practice he had adopted throughout his career) or simply eliminated them from his collected works. These personal fantasies, unknown to the general reader and usually neglected by critics, are essential for forming a comprehensive image of the writer before he left Jaffa for Berlin at the end of 1912. There is hardly a motif or a narrative technique in Agnon’s later works that cannot be found at least in embryonic form in the Jaffa period.

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When Agnon arrived in Berlin at the age of 24, he was already an experienced short-story writer with an enviable reputation: some of the major literary critics of the day hailed him as a young man of literary genius. He had not only acquired much experience in writing but had also read widely both in Hebrew literature of all periods and in German and Scandinavian literatures (in German translations). Agnon’s early familiarity with Schiller, Jean Paul, and Chamisso, on the one hand, and Hamsun, Ibsen, and Bjornson, on the other hand, deserves special attention, inasmuch as many critics tend to attribute this familiarity to his twelve-year sojourn in Germany. In Germany, Agnon expanded his previous knowledge of European literature, including the major Russian and French novelists that he read in German translation. To attribute Agnon’s literary technique to Jewish folk-literature alone, as many tend to do, is sheer nonsense: Agnon was well-acquainted with the best in modern European literature at a relatively early age; the writers of Jewish folk-tales rarely achieved the formal perfection which Agnon did by the end of the 1920s.

And yet, when we survey his output during the years in Germany and the five following years (1924–29) in Jerusalem, leading up to the first edition of his collected works published in Berlin in 1931, we are struck by the paradoxical fact that most of the stories of the period are folk-tales that reflect Jewish life in Galicia. Precisely when he was confronted by the sophisticated culture of Berlin and Frankfort, Agnon wrote some of his most charming tales of the lives of the pious Jews of past generations and different regions, such as “Agadat Ha-Sofer,” “Maase Rabi Gadiel

Ha-Tinok,” and “Maase Ha-Ez.” One group of tales was collected under the rubric *Polin*, and a second group was incorporated into his major effort of this period, the two-volume novel, *Hakhnasat Kalla*.

To this day *Hakhnasat Kalla* remains the favorite novel of many of Agnon’s readers of more traditional backgrounds. The delightful tales of the adventures of the lovable hero, Reb Yudel, traveling the roads of Eastern Galicia in order to collect dowry money to marry off his daughters, is unquestionably one of the major artistic achievements of modern Hebrew prose. Dozens of well-wrought episodes portraying the inner life of the pious Jews of the area, bathing them in an aura of affection, are strung together around the main character whose charming innocence is so beguiling that we accept the world he moves in as plausible even though it is now quite remote from us.

It was logical, then, that critics writing of Agnon upon the publication of the four-volume 1931 edition, stressed the fact that his greatness lay in his ability to bring the Jewish folk-tale to artistic perfection in his short stories and to epic scope in *Hakhnasat Kalla*. That these stories often contained inner tensions that undermined or negated the placid surface texture, at times leading to death or nothingness, was completely overlooked. Agnon struck a responsive chord in the hearts of many who, like him, had abandoned the small towns of Eastern Europe and their families for the cities of Europe and America or the new *yishuv* in Eretz Yisrael, but who could somehow never recapture the wholeness and coherence of the society from which they had uprooted themselves. In their alienation, however unconscious and undefined, they found solace in the innocent reaction of Reb Yudel to a way of life which they wished they could have embraced.



In retrospect, the appearance of the bewildering stories of “Sefer Ha-Maasim” in the early 1930s was a natural development of Agnon’s creative personality, but the reaction it then evoked was utter consternation. Here were stories apparently unlike anything Agnon or, for that matter, any other Hebrew writer had published before. Densely written, bristling with symbolic reference, they conveyed an air of anxiety of the spirit, a confession of the profound difficulties involved in the maintenance of traditional faith and the practices prescribed by Jewish law. Many of the symbols had not yet been interpreted, many of the stories were not fully understood, but the spiritual perplexity was unmistakable.

Some readers found these stories an incongruously modernistic departure for so traditional a writer, or an aping of the techniques of Kafka. As the years passed and these stories were elucidated, the Hebrew reader began to find this strain in Agnon no less natural than the folk-tales that he continued to publish at the same time. Though there is a world of difference between the atmosphere of Kafka and that of Agnon, we are struck by similarities in narrative technique: we should recall that both grew up in the last decades of the Austro-Hungarian Empire; both read extensively the German and Scandinavian writers popular at the time; both were fascinated by the tales of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav. The relevant question is not one of influences, but rather of the artistic necessity to employ the bizarre narrative technique.

We can only speculate on the writer's motivation that prompted the injection of this new element: perhaps it was the evacuation of his home in Talpiot during the Arab riots of 1929; perhaps it was the confrontation with Buczacz the following winter during a brief tour of Galicia, a confrontation that was patently painful since the Buczacz of his dreams, of Reb Yudel, could not possibly withstand the brutal comparison with the Buczacz of reality, a community clearly in ruins. Of greater significance, however, is the fact that the very existence of the stories of "Sefer Ha-Maasim" forces us to reconsider Agnon's previous works, which seemed so tranquil, and we then discover that the nostalgia of the *Polin* cycle or of *Hakhnasat Kalla* is the counterpart of the nightmare of "Sefer Ha-Maasim" and the stories of that type. Inasmuch as Agnon has continued to write in both modes for the last thirty years, it is inconceivable that there is no internal relationship between them. Many of Agnon's most avid readers delight in only one of these two basic modes: Agnon himself delights in both.

In addition to the nostalgia of the folk-stories and the nightmare of "Sefer Ha-Maasim," a third significant mode emerges with great frequency in the 1930s—as early as "Vehaya he'akov lemishor," in 1912, Agnon displayed an amazing ability to handle realistic situations, rendering both the sensual surface and the psychological undertones with telling accuracy. This ability develops slowly in the early 20s in such stories as "Bidmi Yameha", the second version of "Givat Ha-Hol", or the satire "Bine'arenu Uvizkenenu." Agnon, we should remember, read Hamsun and Bjornson at an early age, and could also draw upon his predecessors in Hebrew and Yiddish, the two languages he knew most intimately: Mendele, Peretz, Sholom Aleichem, and Berdichevsky. Agnon suffered no lack of models of excellent realistic writing. It is little



wonder, then, that in the middle thirties, along with the folk-tales and “Sefer Ha-Maasim,” we find *Sippur Pashut*, his most sustained attempt at that time at purely realistic composition.

Obviously, in the great tradition of the European novel of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, *Sippur Pashut* is the portrayal of a segment of middle-class Jewish society in a small Eastern European town, here Shibbush again. The situation is the essence of simplicity: Hershel, the son of middle-class shopkeepers, loves Bluma, a girl of lower social status than he, but is forced by his domineering mother to marry Mina whom he does not love; unable to bear the strain, Hershel goes mad, but is finally cured and returns to Mina whom he learns to love. Around this conventional situation Agnon drew a picture of Shibbush, not of the pious and the saintly but of the practical shopkeepers, salesmen, and their mundane affairs. In that world there is little room for sanctity or romantic love. The tone of the novel is all the more remarkable when we compare it with “Agunot,” *Polin*, or *Hakhnasat Kalla*.

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The young writer who had just come to Berlin from Jaffa and was about to reach his twenty-fifth birthday in 1913 had already attracted considerable critical attention, particularly with his two stories “Agunot” and “Vehaya he’akov lemishor.” Twenty-five years later in 1938, the Hebrew literary world celebrated his fiftieth birthday with great fanfare, in the realization that here was one of the major figures of modern Hebrew literature. And yet, the years proved that much of his greatest writing was still ahead of him. The very same year Agnon published both his *Yamim Noraim*, an anthology of source material relating to the High Holydays, and the newspaper installments of his novel, *Oreah Nata Lalun* (A Guest for the Night), which appeared daily throughout the winter of 1938–39. Indeed, when one peruses the chronological bibliography of Agnon’s publications, one is struck by the fact that considerably more than half of his works were written after the age of fifty. And at the same time Agnon was constantly revising and reworking previously published stories.

In many aspects, *Oreah Nata Lalun* is the central literary creation in Agnon’s career: it contains all the major themes and techniques of his other stories; it is the link between his previous and subsequent works. The hero of the novel is a narrative “I” who returns to his home town,

Shibbush, after an absence of many years and finds it in physical and moral ruin. The confrontation is crushing, since the real decay of the town, so pervasive and unavoidable, is accentuated by contrast with the childhood image the grown man had held of the town in his imagination. The hero makes an attempt to revive the spiritual life of his town, but it is all in vain; one man cannot stem the relentless flow of history. Technically, the novel is a series of confrontations with the various characters still left in town; through these confrontations we begin to see a complex, horrifying canvas conveying the tragic fate of a generation. The hero can maintain his identity and integrity in these surroundings only because he realizes that at the end of his sojourn he will join his wife and children in their return to Eretz Yisrael where there is a future. In Shibbush there is only a past and a grotesque present. Some of the glory of the past can be recalled in folk-tales told by the aged in wistful nostalgia; but the present is to be treated either in grim realism or in nightmarish sequences reminiscent of "Sefer Ha-Maasim." As we follow the hero in his walks through the desolate streets of his childhood, we share in his sorrow, which generates the peculiar but mercilessly authentic blend of nostalgia and nightmare. These are probably the two dominant emotions of Jewish experience in the twentieth century, and Agnon has captured them poignantly in his novel.

There is very little in the thousands of pages Agnon has written since *Oreah Nata Lalun* that cannot be directly related to this novel of his fiftieth year, either thematically or stylistically. Though the narrative "I" cannot be directly related to Agnon himself, it is undeniable that he draws upon his personal experience for the material of his writing; the personal experience is viewed from a distance and molded by aesthetic needs. The hero sees himself as representative, yet somewhat beyond the characters he portrays; they, in turn, are the feeble descendants of a stronger and nobler generation when Torah and sanctity were revered, and society had a coherent form. The world today is peopled by cripples and empty shells who can sense no divine order in the cosmos. Beyond the area of desolation there still gleams the ideal of renewed life in Eretz Yisrael, an ideal which combines both the aspirations of modern Zionism and an almost mystic vision of Jerusalem which somehow reflects, however palely, the Jerusalem of pious yearning. The hero experiencing all this is fundamentally a man alone, alienated from meaningful social relations, even from his family. He is not challenged by momentous moral decisions but rather seems to float along, bewildered in a stream which he does not control.

The notion of man's inability to control his own destiny is also felt throughout the novel *Temol Shilshom* (Only yesterday) in which the hero, Yitzhak Kummer, unlike the narrative "I" of *Oreah Nata Lalun*, is incapable of comprehending the world around him. Significantly, the novel takes place in Jaffa and Jerusalem of the Second Aliya, since these cities in that period are second only to Buczacz as focal points of Agnon's creative imagination. (It is interesting that Germany, where Agnon spent almost twelve years, appears several times as the locale of a story, but it never looms in his imagination as a coherent unit which he might portray epically.) As a literary subject, Buczacz presented two possible approaches: the sphere of love, on the one hand, which Agnon described tenderly in his folk-tales and clearly employed as a base or criterion of moral values against which he could measure the decline of society; his own personal experience, on the other hand, which, with the exception of childhood family memories, were not identified in his psyche with his intuitive notions of meaningful living. Agnon's attitude toward Buczacz, therefore, has always been singularly ambivalent. His attitude toward Jaffa and Jerusalem of the Second Aliya, however, is infinitely more complicated. While it was the period of youth, of young love, of warm, care-free nights by the sea at Jaffa, it was also the period of ideological challenge that is ultimately charged by sentiments concerning the town of his childhood and his family there, both of which he abandoned when he left for Palestine.

The story of the clumsy experiences and the tragic end of Yitzhak Kummer is fabricated out of the personal experiences of thirty-five years earlier, and though it is idle to consider the novel as autobiography, it is, nonetheless, impossible to comprehend the total meaning of the book or its artistic coherence, in spite of the variety of styles, unless we realize that the writer is taking stock of his past and, through it, of the world whose streets he walked. So obsessive were the memory of this period and its evaluation that Agnon wrote an entire novella, *Shevuat Emunim*, and several other stories describing various facets of the period. The novel *Temol Shilshom*, then, is not so much a realistic epic of the Second Aliya as a highly personal projection of conscience through memory. The hero, Yitzhak Kummer, is presented as a fairly typical *halutz* of the Second Aliya, and his experiences are treated as normative for the group he represents. We should, however, be mindful of the fact that this novel is utterly unlike any other novel dealing with the period. Yitzhak does not fulfill his ideal to settle on the soil, but becomes a house-painter in Jaffa and Jerusalem. In neither of these two cities (the former embodying

the values of the new *yishuv*; the latter, of the old) does Yitzhak seem comfortable. And when he does make a final decision in favor of Jerusalem and all it implies, while marrying Shifrah, the daughter of the fanatically religious Reb Payish, he is bitten by a rabid dog and dies a dog's death.

Both *Oreah Nata Lalun* and *Temol Shilshom* were molded from fragments of memories; both are testaments of disintegrated values and broken dreams. In the former, the tone is uniform, and if the society described is a living graveyard, there is at least hope for revival elsewhere, in Eretz Yisrael; in the latter, however, the style varies from satire of the legendary heroes of the Second Aliya, to realistic narrative, to expressionistic description of the flight of the dog Balak, and all add up to a nihilistic rejection of the values of the new *yishuv* and the fanaticism of the old. *Oreah Nata Lalun* captured the pessimism and sense of impending doom which were the inescapable, radical sentiment of Jewish communal life on the eve of the Second World War; *Temol Shilshom* was a more daring, individualistic expression of deep-seated doubts about some of the sanctified ideals of Jewish life and, with it, a savage condemnation of a generation "whose face was the face of a dog." Though set in the early part of the century, *Temol Shilshom* was composed during World War II, a fact not without meaning in the case of a Hebrew writer whose sense of history is so keen. Both chronologically and thematically these novels are correlatives of the nightmarish stories of "Sefer Ha-Maasim."

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Unlike most writers who seem to lose their public after they reach fifty, Agnon's popularity has increased enormously since then. This is partly due to the improvement in the considerable body of literary criticism written on Agnon's works, particularly noticeable in the articles of Kurzweil, Sadan, and Tochner. Of greater importance, however, is the often overlooked fact that the reader of the 1950s had at his disposal a much more impressive corpus of writings than the reader of the 1930s. The Agnon we envisage in the light of the 1953 edition is a much greater writer than the one we envisage in the light of the 1931 edition. Between them loom such memorable works as we have discussed above, and many of his best short stories. And inasmuch as Agnon's writings include such a wide variety of milieus and narrative techniques, any conscientious reader of good literature can find among the seven volumes many

pieces to his taste. The 1950s, furthermore, were marked by a de-emphasis in criticism of the ideological aspects of Hebrew literature and a concomitant interest in the problems of aesthetic form and the existential facts facing the individual as individual. It was Agnon in particular, of all Hebrew prose writers, who seemed able to fulfill these two needs: the aesthetic and the psychological.

No Hebrew prose writer of the modern period has been as scrupulously dedicated to the perfection of expressive form as Agnon. More than anyone else he has worked assiduously at his craft, developing style, narrative technique, and final mastery over his material. Though a born story-teller, Agnon has always spent much effort to find the right word, the proper phrase, the telling cadence. No manuscript is submitted for publication without much reworking and even those stories that have been published are revised for subsequent editions. As a result, there is always a finished, well-polished feeling about all Agnon's stories, a quality that some critics feel is somewhat overdone: at times, stories seem over-structured. The example of conscientious craftsmanship, however, is one that can only have a salubrious effect on younger writers.

Tutored by the articles of Baruch Kurzweil, the Hebrew reader has learned to realize that Agnon, in many of his works, probes the problems of the spirit that seem to be shared by many people in the twentieth century. And though Agnon's milieu is almost always specifically Jewish, the problems he deals with can be related to the preoccupations of serious writers in Europe and America. We find the disintegration of conventional social patterns and with it the loss of orientation in a world of bestiality. Under the seemingly placid surface of Agnon's prose style, there clearly boil whirlpools of spiritual torment. The tension between the surface calm and the stormy deep energizes many ostensibly simple stories and illuminates even homely detail with symbolic significance. Like much of Bialik's poetry, Agnon's stories are a radical expression of the loss of innocence of the modern Jew, however orthodox and observant he may be. Reb Yudel of *Hakhnasat Kalla* is a figure to be admired, but he exists no more, and his descendants are the bewildered, often nameless heroes of a certain strain in Agnon's later prose. The spiritual confusion seems to have found its natural expression in the enigmatic atmosphere of such stories as "Ido Ve'Einam" or "Ad Olam," two of the most discussed stories of the fifties and sixties. It is no wonder that we find unmistakable traces of Agnon's style in the later stories of Aharon Meged, in Amichai's prose, and, more recently, in Yoram Kaniuk and Avraham B. Yehoshua; for the mode of conscious-

ness which they try to capture, the logical precedent in Hebrew is Agnon.

Agnon, then, has enjoyed what few writers ever enjoy in their lifetime—continued admiration by intelligent readers over a span of two generations. Many of his works have already been adopted as school texts, as classics of modern Hebrew literature. And yet, Agnon's writings are still in the stage of a work in progress. The *Complete Stories*, recently expanded to eight volumes, does not include many of the hundreds of pages published since the 1953 edition found in thousands of homes. The longer of the uncollected works have not been published in their entirety. We anxiously await the publication of the last half or two-thirds of *Shira*, the intriguing novel of the foibles and follies of academic life in Jerusalem. Of a two or three volume work on the history of Buczacz told anecdotally, only fragments have been published in the weekly literary supplements. The two anthologies, *Atem Re'item* dealing with Shavuot, and *Sefer, Sofer, veSippur* containing stories about books and their writers, are each less than one-quarter published. Add to these, dozens of items which do not fit into any of these larger rubrics, and it becomes quite clear that at the age of seventy-six, the major Hebrew prose writer of our times still has many surprises and delights in store for us.

#### POSTSCRIPT: FORTY YEARS LATER

This article was written during the preparation of my lengthy study of Agnon's fiction, *Nostalgia and Nightmare* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1968). Both the article and the book presented for the first time a historical analysis of Agnon's fiction. This study, though never translated into Hebrew, is still widely used in both Israel and elsewhere. It has not yet been supplanted. Dan Laor's *Hayye Agnon* (Tel Aviv, 1998), a biography but not a literary study, builds on the first chapter of my book, but adds much rich archival material.