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ספריית הר-הצופים
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in a pattern of semantically parallel utterances in each half of the line, usually accompanied by an equal number of accented syllables in each half-line—precisely the form of biblical poetry. The prophet Isaiah might have been puzzled by the nihilistic theology and the occasional postbiblical locutions of Bialik's *The Desert Dead*, but he would have had little difficulty grasping most of its language and appreciating its mastery of a poetic form familiar to him. In fact, the poem—prosodically, lexically, and conceptually—is a kind of palimpsest in which one stratum of Hebrew experience has been inscribed on top of another, the language of Job and Psalms overwritten with phrases and images from the Talmud, all of it limning a spiritual abyss which is perceived through an early twentieth-century sense of historical crisis.

The texture of Hebrew prose in the European period can be as densely allusive as that of the poetry. The exemplary instance of S. Y. Abramowitz is a case in point. But even when allusion is not crucial or abundant, the language woven out of age-old antecedents creates a kind of stylistic echo chamber, simultaneously embracing and artfully distancing its modern objects of representation. (S. Y. Agnon (1888–1970), the undisputed master of modern Hebrew fiction, illustrates this paradoxical dynamic through the extremeness of his own stylistic practice. Early on, he adopted a beautifully synthesized distillation of the Hebrew of the rabbinic sages of Late Antiquity as the language of his novels and stories, and he almost never veered from this fundamental choice of stylization, even though he spent most of his adult life in Jerusalem with modern Hebrew spoken all around him. By and large, Agnon has not fared well in translation precisely because of the peculiarly Hebraic evocative power of his stylistic achievement. His symbolic inventiveness, his psychological insight, his shrewd perception of social milieu may be more or less visible in translation, but without the allusive music of his archaizing Hebrew, for which there is no viable equivalent in Western languages, the writing is liable to seem flat or even awkward. Let me offer a small characteristic example, where explicit allusion is not prominent, of this untranslatable

echo play indigenous to the Hebrew tradition that culminates in Agnon's prose.

Hirshl Hurvitz, the protagonist of Agnon's 1935 novel, *A Simple Story*, stands forlorn in the rain at the garden gate of his lost love, Blume Nacht. I offer my own rather literal translation instead of Hillel Halkin's fluent, idiomatic English version which in its freedom with the original substitutes a modern American literary diction for Agnon's arch stylization:

Silently, silently the rain fell. A veil is cast over all the world, and you don't even see yourself. But Blume's image rises up before you as on the day she stroked your head when you entered her room and she fled and came back. Hirshl rested his head on the handles of the bolt and began to weep. (Chap. 23)

In translation, these lines are quite unremarkable. In the Hebrew, the vocabulary and grammar are those of early rabbinic literature, though it must be said that the language also exhibits a *composed*, aesthetic character that owes more to a discipleship to Flaubert than to the Mishnah and Midrash. Thus, the first short sentence repeats a recurrent pattern in the novel of beginning passages with a doubled adjective ("silently" is actually adjectival in the Hebrew), and it also produces a nice onomatopoeic effect of dull drumming: *d'mumím d'mumím yardú hag'shamím*. The switch to second person and present tense—one of several different techniques Agnon uses for reporting inner experience—for the interior monologue picks up the quasi-colloquial nature of his rabbinic sources. Hirshl's anguish is meant to be very real, yet the language flaunts its archaic background. Instead of any of several words for "veil" current in modern Hebrew, Agnon uses the recondite Greek loanword *pruzma* redolent of the Talmud (the original meaning is "apron"), and another Greek loanword with similar talmudic midrashic associations, *ikonía*, for "image." And even on a sublexical level, instead of standard modern (and biblical) *'ein 'atah* for "you don't," he chooses the distinctively rabbinic *'i 'atah*, which has the odd effect of making Hirshl as he talks to himself

also sound like a fourth-century Galilean or Babylonian sage enunciating a legal or exegetical principle. The only specific literary allusion here is in the last sentence, where Hirshl's head—caressed in memory, rain-soaked and sorrowing in actuality—rests "on the handles of the bolt," a recollection of the phrase in the Song of Songs, when the beloved's perfumed hand reaches out to open the lock for her lover who has gone. In any case, the quality that pervades the passage, and Agnon's prose in general, as well as a good deal of modern Hebrew writing in all genres, is not allusion but allusivity. The events of the novel take place in a Galician town in the first decade of the twentieth century. The novelist's imagination of Hirshl's stymied psychosexual development is informed by Freudian notions of the unconscious and the psychopathology of everyday life. But the language that conveys all this is an odd affirmation of continuity with three millennia of Hebrew literature. The effect of this archaizing affirmation is hard to describe and is no doubt perceived differently by different Hebrew readers: in part, it bespeaks a classicizing, aesthetic impulse; in part, it generates a sense of ironic distance between the language and the world it purports to represent; in part, it is a declaration of allegiance to the national literary tradition.

I have invoked Agnon as an extreme instance which in its very extremity lays bare a typical tendency. Contemporary Israeli writing, as one would assume, more characteristically turns for its lexical and idiomatic norms to Hebrew as it is spoken formally and informally and as it is written in the daily press. But that commonsensical assumption is only partly sustained by the literary evidence. To begin with, Agnon, through the sheer power of his example, has exerted a certain intermittent influence on later Hebrew prose, directly felt in the style of a few writers, like A. B. Yehoshua, Aharon Appelfeld, and Yehuda Amichai (in his fiction), and obliquely present in other writers—minimally, in a surprising fondness for the occasional rabbinic locution in the midst of contemporary-sounding prose. The phenomenon of generalized allusivity, however, is by no means limited to the influence of a single older stylist. Writers, after all, are by the dictates of their art hypersensitive to their linguistic medium, which for Hebrew

means an acute awareness of the expressive possibilities, and the spiritual dangers, of exploiting words and phrases embedded in long past ages. Such awareness continues to make the texture of Hebrew writing in certain ways different from its contemporary counterparts elsewhere.

Dan Pagis (1930–1986), a poet whose own work is on the whole very sparing in the use of allusion, shrewdly defines this peculiarity of the Hebrew medium in a posthumously published poem entitled "A Problem of Language":

The girl called Hebrew
is the last child of a very good family.
But you know what? She flits around.
Every day something else.
You can't count on her,
her word is no true word.
She's not even pretty: acne,
big feet. And she's shrill,
and stubborn as a mule.
And what's worse:
She doesn't allow whoever wants
to throttle her wild voice
and to give her a decent burial
in the double cave.

The poem's Hebrew is ostentatiously colloquial—in contrast to Pagis's general practice, which cultivates a poetic middle diction—and the use of colloquial language makes a certain thematic point: even the speaker of up-to-the-minute street Hebrew cannot escape the long history of the language. The only words here one would not hear in a Tel Aviv taxi or a Jerusalem living room are the last two of the poem, *me'arat hamakhpelah*. The double cave is the cave Abraham purchases from the Hittites in Genesis 23 to bury his dead. Words, unlike people, resist burial. A person who really works with them seriously, as does a Hebrew poet, is repeatedly confronted with their primordial past, their terrific momentum of associations generated in a world of theological and mythic and moral values alien to the poet, challenging him, sometimes perhaps subverting him. Pagis, whose na-

tire cluster of themes is a virtual obsession of Agnon's, from "Agunot" and "Tishrei" (1911) down to *Shira*. Perhaps this affinity between the two writers is no more than a common impulse of the early twentieth-century zeitgeist, though Agnon's thematic exploitation of leprosy in conjunction with the writer's art in *Shira* and in the related story "Forevermore" makes one wonder whether he may not have taken a clue from Mann's use of cholera in *Death in Venice*. And, indeed, as the Israeli scholar Nitza Ben-Dov has recently shown, the gesture at the end of *A Simple Story* (1935) in which the protagonist throws an inordinately large coin to a beggar is an actual quotation of Mann's report of the identical action by Aschenbach in *Death in Venice*.

The other two literary antecedents I want to propose (and this is of course not meant to be an exhaustive list) make their presence felt in his fiction in more clearly demonstrable ways. If Mann was the ascendant figure in the German novel during those crucial years in Germany when Agnon was devoting himself to tireless autodidactic reading in many directions (as his friend Gershom Scholem would later testify), Freud was one of the dominant innovative figures in German-language thought of this period. (Mann himself, we should remember, was abundantly attentive to Freud.) The importance of Freud for Agnon, though hinted at as early as the 1930s by the Hebrew critic Dov Sadan, is just now beginning to be generally grasped. My own awareness of it has been significantly heightened by Nitza Ben-Dov's illuminating work on dreams in Agnon's fiction, and I would also mention useful recent articles by Yael Feldman and Gershon Shaked that deal with psychoanalytic motifs. This particular influence is one that Agnon took pains to hide. The narrator of his short novel *Until Now* (1952) at one point, having reported a dream, professes to be like neither Joseph and Daniel nor their latter-day descendants who claim to know the meaning of dreams. Agnon comes no closer than this in his fiction to explicitly invoking the founder of psychoanalysis, and those of his letters that have been published contain only a couple of brief, facetious references to Freud. An instructive instance of his characteristic procedure of camouflage has been aptly observed by the Agnon scholar Arnold Band. The initial, 1932 version of the story "Another

Face" contains the sentence, "Hartmann was grateful that she did not interpret his dream as would Freud and his circle," which Agnon was careful to delete from the 1941 revision of the story that was subsequently printed in later editions of his collected fiction. Arnold Band identifies the 1930s as the period during which we can assume with confidence that Agnon came to know Freud's work. It was then that he and his wife became good friends with Dr. Max Eitingon, a member of Freud's inner circle; it was then, according to the testimony of their daughter, that Esther Agnon used to read aloud to her husband from Freud's collected works, which were part of her library. But I think there is evidence in the stories themselves of familiarity with Freud even before this period.

From the midpoint of Agnon's extended stay in Germany, Freud begins to emerge as a powerful presence in his fiction: in the ubiquity of dreams and hallucinations, which are characteristically seen as expressions of an individual unconscious, not a collective or archetypal one; in the pervasiveness of neurosis, the repeated perception of thwarted eros as a condition of civilization, the conception of the world as a dark tangle of psycho-sexual determinisms. More specifically, a whole spate of symbols that we now readily identify as "Freudian" are deployed in Agnon's fiction, early and late, and if he may have hit on some of them intuitively, their abundance suggests at least that *The Interpretation of Dreams* offered him certain eminently usable images. Thus, the novella *The Hill of Sand* (1919, based on the earlier "Tishrei"), a story deeply involved with castration anxiety, and, concomitantly, with the poet-protagonist's fear of female sexuality, is a small thesaurus of upward displacements: itinerant Arab tooth-pullers with their ominous pliers are encountered in the Jaffa streets; a playfully aggressive young woman bites off a lock of the hero's hair; later he shocks her by having his hair cropped at the barber's; when he is visited in his room by a certain Miss Eylonit (roughly, Miss Epicene), he nervously lights matches that go out one after another, and she finds a pair of his trousers thrown on his bed, the empty legs dangling.

In a 1962 speech in honor of the critic Dov Sadan, Agnon, after again

dismissing any link with Kafka ("he has nothing to do with my soul's root," he observes, invoking a Hasidic concept), mentions seven European writers that touch him deeply: Homer, Cervantes, Balzac, Gogol, Tolstoy, Flaubert, and Hamsun. Of the six novelists in his list, the first three would be associated with various premodernist aspects of Agnon's narrative art (the use of frame-stories and interpolations, the chatty, authoritative narrator, elements of fantasy and the comic-grotesque), while Hamsun has been duly connected by Arnold Band and others with the neo-Romantic vein in Agnon. It is Tolstoy and Flaubert who are most pertinent to his psychological realism, and of the two, there is some evidence that Flaubert loomed especially large. In 1916, just three years before revising "Tishrei" into *The Hill of Sand* and on the verge of the remarkable realist achievements of the 1920s and 1930s, Agnon wrote to his patron, Zalman Schocken, "Flaubert and everything about him touch me deeply. This poet who immolated himself in the tent of poetry [*hayah meimit 'atsmo be'ohalah shel shirah*] . . . deserves that every writer read about him before writing and after writing, and then no book would be desolate" (quoted in Gershon Shaked, *The Narrative Art of S. Y. Agnon* [Hebrew], Tel Aviv, 1973, p. 25).

The testimony of this letter, it should be observed, is a little ambiguous, because the emphasis is not on the novels but on the figure of Flaubert as sacrificial devotee to art and on reading *about* Flaubert. Clearly, at a moment in Hebrew literary history when varying combinations of bombast and effusion were the order of the day, Flaubert's literary ascesis must have appealed to Agnon and, more particularly, the French novelist's ideal of a perfectly wrought, painstakingly refined prose that would usurp the traditional function of poetry (hence Flaubert is referred to as *meshorer*, "poet," an evident equivalent of the German *Dichter*). Agnon may have also been struck by the oscillation in Flaubert between the realist restraint of *Madame Bovary* and *L'Education sentimentale* and the phantasmagoric excess of *Salammbô* and *La Tentation de St. Antoine*, for there is a related pendulum-swing in his own writing. In Flaubert, too, the crisscrossing an-

tagonisms between artist and society, eros and society, that we have already noted, would have been evident to Agnon.

The French writer's novels themselves were accessible to Agnon only through German translation, but his fiction from 1919 onward bears abundant signs that he read them attentively. There is at least one explicit borrowing from Flaubert in the 1935 novel, *A Simple Story*, Agnon's most impeccably sustained work of psychological realism. One recalls that in *Madame Bovary*, Emma's departures by coach for her trysts in Rouen with her lover Léon are marked by the presence of a blind beggar who sings an old romantic song of nubile maidens on a summer day. At the end, racked with pain after having taken poison, she hears the voice of the blind beggar singing outside her window, starts up in bed, and expires. *A Simple Story*, also a novel about how the crass materialism of bourgeois society thwarts romantic aspiration, has its own recurrent blind beggar, associated with other motifs of singing in the book. In the course of Hirshl's cure after his psychotic break, the psychiatrist Dr. Langsam tells him about the blind beggars he remembers from his youth who would sing "sweet and lovely songs without beginning or end that made your heart faint away when you heard them" (chap. 19). Hirshl cannot exist in this timeless cycle of ecstasy beyond the burghers' realm where time is money, and he ends by accommodating himself to society. In the penultimate chapter, walking through the snow with his wife, to whom he has become reconciled, he encounters a blind singing beggar and gets rid of him, in that gesture borrowed from Thomas Mann, by tossing him a surprisingly large coin. On the surface, this is a much gentler use of the blind beggar in the denouement than Flaubert's, but the act invokes the most corrosive irony: throughout the novel, coins and those who count or touch them have been hateful; now at the end, Hirshl uses a coin to banish from his life the dream of desire perfectly fulfilled that had driven him to madness.

There are certainly other Flaubertian motifs in Agnon, and perhaps even the use of leprosy in *Shira* and "Forevermore" may have still another source in *St. Julien l'hôpitalier*. What is more pervasive is a mat-