

# Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

TCLC 151

# Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Criticism of the  
Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,  
Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers  
Who Lived between 1900 and 1999,  
from the First Published Critical  
Appraisals to Current Evaluations**



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## Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism, Vol. 151

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**LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER 76-46132**

ISBN 0-7876-7050-2  
ISSN 0276-8178

Printed in the United States of America  
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



## Preface

Since its inception more than fifteen years ago, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC) has been purchased and used by nearly 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. TCLC has covered more than 500 authors, representing 58 nationalities and over 25,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as TCLC. In the words of one reviewer, “there is nothing comparable available.” TCLC “is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own.”

## Scope of the Series

TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1999 and to the most significant interpretations of these author's works. Volumes published from 1978 through 1999 included authors who died between 1900 and 1960. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of the period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, TCLC helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in TCLC presents a comprehensive survey on an author's career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of TCLC is devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

TCLC is designed as a companion series to Thomson Gale's *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, (CLC) which reprints commentary on authors who died after 1999. Because of the different time periods under consideration, there is no duplication of material between CLC and TCLC.

## Organization of the Book

A TCLC entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author's actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the original date of composition.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.

- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).
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- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Thomson Gale.

## Indexes

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An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *TCLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Thomson Gale also produces a paperbound edition of the *TCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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# S. Y. Agnon

## 1888-1970

(Born Shmuel Yosef Czaczkes) Austro-Hungarian-Israeli novelist, short story writer, and poet.

The following entry provides criticism on Agnon's works from 1975 through 2003.

### INTRODUCTION

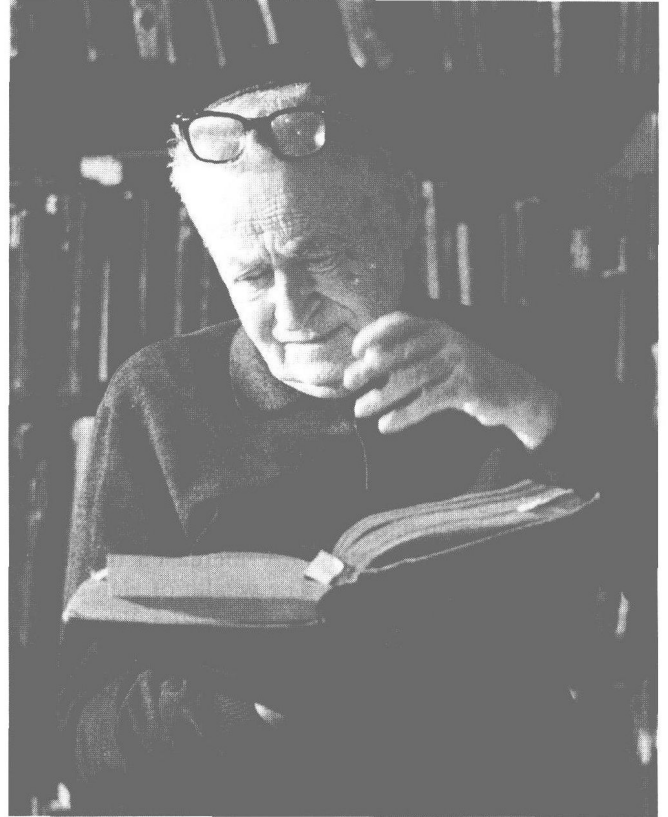
Agnon was known for his ironic and lyrical fiction, based largely on Hebrew folklore and tradition.

### BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Agnon was born Shmuel Yosef Czaczkes in Buczacz, Galicia (then Austria-Hungary, now Poland) 17 July, 1888. His father, a rabbi, taught him the Talmud and Hasidic literature, along with secular Hebrew and Yiddish writings, while his mother recited German stories. His love for literature led him to publish stories in Hebrew and Yiddish while still a teenager. In 1908 he settled in Palestine, but was rejected both by the Russian-Jewish population and the new settlers who prized manual labor above intellectual rigor. Agnon took his pen name, which later became his legal name, from the title of his first published story, "Agunot," which was published in Jaffa, Israel, in 1909. "Agnon" is based on a Hebrew word meaning abandoned or forsaken. In 1912 he settled in Germany, finding a more comfortable life there for around twelve years and forming friendships with well-known Zionists. In 1919 he married Esther Marx, with whom he had two children. Agnon became well known among German Jews and achieved literary success when his Hebrew works were translated into German. He also built a notable collection of ancient Hebrew manuscripts and was devastated in 1924 when a fire in his home destroyed them, along with his personal manuscripts. Agnon then returned to Palestine, settling in Jerusalem. In 1929 his personal library was again destroyed by fire when Arabs rioted in the city. Agnon won the Israel Prize in 1954 and the Nobel Prize in 1966. He died in 1970.

### MAJOR WORKS

Agnon was virtually unknown to Western readers until his works began to be translated from Hebrew into English after he won the Nobel Prize in 1966. Unlike



many other modernist Jewish writers of his era, he emphasized original folk sources and dwelled on the lessons of the Torah. His earlier short stories and novellas concerned Jewish life in Eastern Europe, but after his immigration in 1924 until his death, he wrote almost exclusively about life in Palestine. Agnon's work has been compared to that of Cervantes and Kafka in its air of mystery and its imaginative power. His short stories are remarkably diverse, some magical fables, some accounts of modern-day alienation and exile. Others attempt to deal with the ways Judaism has survived throughout history in periods of political turmoil. His first successful work was a novella, *Ve-Hayah he-'Akov le-Mishor* (1912; *And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight*). After the manuscript for his first novel was destroyed in a fire, he produced *Hakhnasath Kallah* (1931; *The Bridal Canopy*), a novel set in the eighteenth century about a Jewish man who travels about seeking dowries for his daughters. While continuing to write short fiction, he published the novel *Sipur Pashut* (1935; *A Simple Story*), an account of the development

of a psychosis and its ultimate cure. *Ore'ah Nata Lalun* (*A Guest for the Night*) appeared in 1937 and in 1945, *Tmol Shilshom* (*Only Yesterday*). The former novel, a comment on the waning spirit of European Judaism, was written just before World War II; the latter is a picaresque and imaginative story set in Jerusalem, told from the point of view of a dog whose astute social and political commentary exceeds that of most of his human counterparts. *Bi-levav Yamim* (1948; *In the Heart of the Seas: A Story of a Journey to the Land of Israel*), which follows a group of Jews in their journey from Galicia to Palestine, was followed by *Edo ve-Enam* (1950; *Edo and Enam*), a tale of the supernatural. *Shirah* (*Shira*), posthumously published in 1971, is a story of a bourgeois German exile in 1930's Palestine who seeks an escape from the conformity of his life. Several editions of Agnon's short stories and a collection of his poetry also were published after his death.

### CRITICAL RECEPTION

Critical discussion of Agnon's work has truly been what one commentator called an "industry." Agnon's multifaceted writings, concurrent with the growth of Hebrew as an accepted language in American and British universities, have also substantially increased interest in literature in modern Hebrew. The wealth of Hebrew and German criticism during Agnon's earlier career presaged a still-growing American and British critical following, encouraged by scholarly journals such as the *Hebrew Annual Review*, *Judaism*, and *Prooftexts*. Early English-language Agnon critics, such as Arnold Band, used New Critical and comparative literature approaches or discussed the dilemmas of relating modern Jewish culture to the past. From the late 1970s through the early 2000s, critical approaches to Agnon came in what eminent Agnon scholar Alan Mintz called "a polyphony of voices," following the general trends of scholarly inquiry. Gershon Shaked and other critics emphasized the rich intertextuality of Agnon's fiction, which has provided a rich vein for further critical analysis. A variety of approaches to Agnon's work, including poststructuralism, psychoanalysis, deconstruction, postcolonialist theory, reader-response criticism, and feminist criticism, have developed among Agnon scholars. The close text-centeredness most Agnon critics embrace, Mintz says, suggests "the hovering spirit of classical Jewish learning."

### PRINCIPAL WORKS

*Ve-Hayah he-'Akav le-Mishor* (novella) 1911-12  
*Das Buch von den Polnischen Juden* [editor, with Ahron Eliasberg] (folk tales) 1916

*Giv 'at ha-Hol* (short stories) 1920  
*Be-Sod Yesharim* (short stories) 1921  
 "Me-Hamat ha-Metsik" (short story) 1921  
*'Al Kapot ha-Man'ul* (short stories) 1922  
*Bidmi yameha* [*In the Prime of Her Life*] (novella) 1923  
*Ma'aseh he-meshulah meerets ha-Kedosha* (short stories) 1924-25  
*Polin: Sipure agadot* (short stories) 1924-25  
 "Ma'aseh rabi Gadiel ha-Tinok" (short story) 1925  
*Al Olam* [*Forever More*] (novel) 1926  
 "Ha-Nidah" (short story) 1926  
*Sipur ha-Shanim ha-Tovot* [*Ma'aseh ha'Rav Veba-Orah*] (short stories) 1927  
*Agadat hasofer* (short stories) 1929  
*Laylot* (short stories) 1930-31  
 \**Hakhnasath Kallah* [*The Bridal Canopy*] (novel) 1931  
 \**Me-Az ume-Ata* (short stories) 1931  
 \**Sippurei Ahayim* (novel) 1931  
*Sefer HaMa'asim* [*The Book of Deeds*] (short stories) 1932  
 \**Be-Shuva u-ve-Natat* (short stories) 1935  
 \**Sipur Pashut* [*A Simple Story*] (novel) 1935  
*Kovets Sipurim* (short stories) 1937  
 \**Ore'ah Nata Lalun* [*A Guest for the Night*] (novel) 1937  
*Yamim Nora'im* [*Days of Awe: Being a Treasury of Traditions, Legends and Learned Commentaries Concerning Rosh ha-Shanah, Yom Kippur and the Days Between. Culled from Three Hundred Volumes, Ancient and New*] [*A Treasury of Jewish Wisdom for Reflection, Repentance, and Renewal on the High Holy Days*] (nonfiction) 1938  
 "Pi Shenaim: O me-Husar Yom" (short story) 1939  
 \**Elu va-Elu* [*A Dwelling Place of My People: Sixteen Stories of the Chassidim*] (short stories) 1941  
*Shevu'ath Emunim* [*The Betrothed*] (novella) 1943  
 "Al Berl Kaznelson" (character sketch) 1944  
*Sipurum ve-Agadot* (short stories) 1944  
*Sipurim* (short stories) 1945  
 \**Tmol Shilshom* [*Only Yesterday*] [*Just Yesterday*] (novel) 1945  
*Bi-levav Yamim* [*In the Heart of the Seas: A Story of a Journey to the Land of Israel*] (novel) 1948  
*Edo ve-Enam* (novel) 1950  
 \**Samukh ve-Nireh* (short stories) 1950  
 \**Ad Heinah* (short stories) 1953  
 "Sifrethem shel Anshe Butshatsh" (article) 1956  
*Tihella, and Other Israeli Tales* [with others] (short stories) 1956  
*Atem re'item* [editor] (collection of rabbinic sources) 1959  
*Kelev Hutsot* (excerpts from *Temol shilshom*) 1960  
*Sifrethem shel Tsadikim* [compiler] (articles) 1961  
*Ha-Esh ve-Ha'etsim* (short stories) 1962  
*Sipurum* (short stories) 1966  
*Two Tales: "Betrothed" and "Edo and Enam"* (novellas) 1966  
*Sipure Yom-ha-Kipurim* (short stories) 1967  
*Selected Stories of S. Y. Agnon* (short stories) 1970  
*Shirah* [*Shira*] (novel) 1971



- Twenty-One Stories* (short stories) 1971  
*Ir u-Melo'ah* [A City and Its Fullness] (short stories) 1973  
*Mr. Lublin's Shop* (novel) 1975  
*A Book That Was Lost and Other Stories* (short stories) 1995  
*Present at Sinai: The Giving of the Law* (non-fiction) 1996  
*Agnon's Aleph Bet: Poems* (poetry) 1998

\*These works published in the collected works, *Kol Sipurav Shel Agnon* (Jerusalem, Tel Aviv), 1947-1957; standard edition, edited by Agnon (Schocken Books) 1953-1962; [*Kol sipurav shel Sh. Y. 'Agnon*] 8 vols., 1968.

## CRITICISM

### Bernard Knieger (review date 1975)

SOURCE: Knieger, Bernard. "Shmuel Yosef Agnon's 'The Face and the Image'." *Studies in Short Fiction* 12, no. 2 (1975): 184-85.

[In the following review of an Agnon short story, Knieger calls attention to the Hebrew meaning of the phrase "face-to-face," concluding that the narrator is facing his own isolation from traditional faith.]

One of the Agnon stories in *Twenty-One Stories* (New York: Schocken, 1970) is "**The Face and the Image**." But this title is a metaphorical translation of the Hebrew *Ha-panim la-panim*, which literally translates into "The Face to the Face." The editor Nahum N. Glatzer in his "Editorial Postscript" writes (on page 283) that the "Hebrew title of the story is taken from Proverbs 27:19, which the standard translations render as, 'As in the water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man.'" But what is the relevance of this proverb to the story? Presumably the reference exists to establish an ironic contrast: the proverb asserts that man comforts man, but the narrator of the Agnon story is an isolated individual.

As is characteristic of many titles, the title *Ha-panim la-panim* provides crucial guidance to the central meaning of the story. But we do not realize the full nature of this guidance unless we recognize that this phrase not only appears in Proverbs; more crucially, it appears in a variant form—*panim el panim*, "face to face"—in Genesis and in Exodus. In Genesis 32:30, after his famous wrestling match where he has been renamed Israel, Jacob says, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." And in Exodus 33:11 it is written, "And Jehovah spoke unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend." These are well-known passages:

*panim el panim* is as famous a phrase to a Hebrew speaker with a minimum knowledge of Jewish culture as, say, "Home of the Brave" would be to the average American. Therefore, part of the content of the Agnon title is in its echo of *panim el-panim*: that is, in the contrast between the face confronted by its mirror-image and with "God."

The central plot situation in the story is the narrator's failure to be able to visit his ill—dying or perhaps already dead—mother as a result of a series of awkward mishaps set up by the narrator himself. "**The Face and the Image**" is from the collection *The Book of Deeds*, and the characteristic story there is non-realistic, as the English reader can judge for himself, for Glatzer has included nine other stories from this source in the *Twenty-One Stories*. In any event, the mixture of realism and surrealism in "**The Face and the Image**" encourages a symbolic interpretation of this story in which the mother emerges as, say, the "old faith," certainly as its representative. As Glatzer writes in a general comment on *The Book of Deeds*: "Deep faith is a matter of the past . . ." (pp. 277-278). Thus the narrator at the end of the story is not sitting face to face with his mother, the representative of the old faith, but rather in strange surroundings. He is surprised by a mirror-image of himself "reflecting back every movement of the hand and quiver of the lips, like all polished mirrors, which show you whatever you show them, without partiality or deceit." Significantly, the "image rose" when he is trying to avoid recognizing the consequences of his not being by his mother's side. In the final line of the story, the "I" says that "it, namely, the revelation of the thing, surprised me more than the thing itself, perhaps more than it had surprised me in my childhood, perhaps more than it had ever surprised me before." Presumably what is revealed to him is his isolation, his folly, his impotence.

Instead of wrestling with God or speaking to Him face to face, the narrator at the end is speaking with himself and wrestling with his own self-image: man in his folly, his self-confusion and isolation, in his impotence, and perhaps in his vanity as well, cannot return to the old faith—some such statement emerges as the central theme of this story, a meaning that is anticipated by the title *Ha-panim la-panim*, and by its echo of the more famous *panim el panim*.

### Nehama Aschkenasy (essay date winter 1983)

SOURCE: Aschkenasy, Nehama. "Biblical Substructures in the Tragic Form: Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*; Agnon, *And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight*." *Modern Language Studies* 13, no. 1 (winter 1983): 101-10.

[In the following essay, Aschkenasy compares biblical references in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *And the*

*Crooked Shall Be Made Straight*, concluding that Agnon's use of the biblical dimension is more subtle than Hardy's.]

Bringing together Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886)<sup>1</sup> and Agnon's *And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight* (1912),<sup>2</sup> a novella not yet translated into English, may seem an arbitrary yoking of different social milieus, cultural frames of reference, and verbal associations. But the apparent gap between Hardy and Agnon, and especially between these two particular works, is reduced considerably once we become aware of striking similarities in a number of artistic motifs and dramatic coincidences, as well as in the central tragic vision. Though both stories first appeared in serialized forms, they manifest an unmistakably Aristotelian "unity of action" in their unrelenting focus on the decline and fall of their respective protagonists. In both stories, an initial act of "shame and horror," to use Dorothea Krook's tragic formula,<sup>3</sup> triggers a series of dramatic coincidences that, abetted by forces of fate and chance that seem to have been let loose, contribute to the inevitable tragic catastrophe.

While it is impossible to establish a direct influence, the glaring affinities between the two works call our attention to the sometimes mysterious ways in which folk motifs and literary patterns travel across countries and cultures and find themselves in different settings.<sup>4</sup> The fair as a grotesque reflection of moral and social chaos, and as the actual and symbolic backdrop for the protagonist's intoxicated surrender to temptation, is a powerful vision in both stories. A wrongful, immoral "business transaction" is at the heart of the tragic entanglement in both. In Hardy's story, the selling of the wife in a moment of drunken rashness, with which the novel starts, sets off a series of coincidences beyond the protagonist's control. In Agnon's tale, the "act of shame and horror" is not one single episode but rather a protracted state; it starts with the protagonist's ill-advised departure from his hometown and wife for the purpose of collecting alms, and culminates in his selling the letter of recommendation given to him by his rabbi. In both stories, the protagonists' final failures are tied to the obscure vicissitudes of the business world as well as to the uncertainty of harvest. The reappearance of a person thought lost and dead, the mishandling of letters, the motif of the "double," and the case of the wife who is married to a second "husband" while her lawful first husband is alive are elements of fateful significance in both stories.

But it is not only in the plot that the similarities between the two stories are so provoking. In fact, in terms of plot line alone, Agnon's tale seems to be a prose version of Tennyson's poem "Enoch Arden" (1864).<sup>5</sup> Like Enoch Arden, Menashe-Hayim, Agnon's protagonist, comes home to find his wife nursing a child by a sec-

ond husband whom she married when the first husband was declared dead. Like Enoch Arden, Menashe-Hayim chooses to spend the rest of his life in self imposed exile and complete anonymity, away from human community, rather than ruin the happiness and reputation of his wife, who is unaware of the sinfulness of her second marriage. But while Tennyson's hero does not offer any philosophical observations regarding his personal experience, both Henchard, the deposed mayor of Casterbridge, and Menashe-Hayim, Agnon's hapless protagonist, comment on the moral and theological implications of their tragic predicament. The central situation is similar: in both cases: the first marital union, sanctified by God and community, was fruitless. Henchard's child died in infancy, and Menashe-Hayim's marriage never produced an offspring. However, the wife's second marriage, though impure and unlawful, seems to have been blessed by nature; the wives of both protagonists bear children to their second "husband." In both works, the bewildered protagonists question the moral order of the universe in words which reverberate with Jobian echoes. Hardy says of his protagonist: "Part of his wish to wash his hands of life arose from his perception of its contrarious inconsistencies—of Nature's jaunty readiness to support unorthodox social principles."<sup>6</sup> Agnon's protagonist expresses a similar sentiment while at the same time accepting God's verdict.<sup>7</sup> In fact, the Jobian stature of both protagonists, while not fully developed in either story, is quite apparent; Hardy's Henchard "cursed himself like a less scrupulous Job,"<sup>8</sup> while Agnon's hero is described in words taken from The Book of Job (14:1): "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble." Moreover, both Henchard and Menashe-Hayim find solace in The Book of Psalms, and see in it a reflection of their own predicaments.

Both stories are saturated with Scriptural citations and references that are not just isolated allusions that illuminate individual episodes. In both, a specific Biblical pattern provides the structural meaning of the total work, and serves as a scaffold that supports the entire narrative. The main dramatic situation in Hardy's novel, the conflict between Henchard, the old mayor of Casterbridge, and Farfrae, his successor, is described as analogous to the Saul-David conflict in 1 Samuel. In Agnon's story, the protagonist who leaves his home and wanders among strangers is seen as reenacting his nation's destiny of dispossession and exile, a major Biblical theme. But the differences between Hardy's and Agnon's treatment of the Biblical structures are of great significance. Let us first see how the Biblical materials are evoked in these two stories and incorporated into the narrative.

On several occasions in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* Hardy likens his protagonist to specific Biblical characters. At times, it is only the writer who is aware of the analogy, while his protagonist remains oblivious to the

Biblical dimension of his own predicament. In addition to the reference to Job, Hardy also tells us that Henchard felt "like Saul at his reception by Samuel,"<sup>10</sup> and at another point he depicts him as "Samson shorn."<sup>11</sup> On other occasions, it is Henchard who suggests the similarity between himself and a Biblical character: "I—Cain—go alone as I deserve—an outcast and a vagabond";<sup>12</sup> and, "I felt quite ill . . . and, like Job, I could curse the day that gave me birth."<sup>13</sup>

But the only parallelism that extends to the entire plot and is sustained throughout the story is undoubtedly that between Henchard and Saul.<sup>14</sup> To delineate briefly the major features of this analogy: Henchard is a Saul-like figure in his potential of greatness as well as in his lapses into rages and depressions. Gloomy and lonely, he is drawn to the younger man, Farfrae, who, like his Biblical counterpart David, possesses musical skills. But the loving relationship between the two men deteriorates into suspicion and animosity when their fortunes change. Henchard loses his business, his social position, and even his daughter; while Farfrae gains the admiration of the townspeople, prospers financially, and marries first Henchard's fiancée and then his beloved stepdaughter. Eventually, the younger man will inherit the older man's position as the mayor of Casterbridge. The Biblical parallels are obvious. Saul, too, felt betrayed by people whose loyalty he demanded on the basis of their natural ties to him: his son Jonathan and his daughter Michal. The loving friendship between the two Biblical characters also sours when the older man is threatened by the younger man and sees in him the potential usurper of his title and power. Henchard's secret visit to the weathercaster parallels Saul's nocturnal trip to the witch who raises the prophet Samuel from the dead. It is in this scene that Hardy himself draws the readers' attention to the parallelism between Henchard and Saul. In the modern story, as well as in its ancient counterpart, the encounter with the prophet bodes ill for the seeker of the future and marks his final doom.

Since Hardy's focal point is Henchard and not Farfrae, the correspondence between Henchard and Saul is much closer than that between Farfrae and David. While Farfrae possesses David's good looks, fine voice and social charm, he ultimately emerges as lackluster, a pale reflection of his glamorous counterpart in the Bible. Furthermore, while in the central conflict Henchard's role parallels that of Saul, Hardy attributes to Henchard some of the qualities of David. In one instance, Henchard fights with Farfrae, yet at the last moment he refrains from destroying him; this is reminiscent of two Biblical incidents in which David has a chance to kill Saul, yet he decides to spare the king's life. In another scene, Henchard identifies with the "Servant David" and asks the church choir to recite Psalm 109 to him.<sup>15</sup>

Henchard, then, incorporates in his character a variety of Biblical figures: the ill-fated Saul, the strong Samson rendered powerless, the puzzled sufferer Job, and the prototypical sinner, Cain. While each Biblical figure illuminates one aspect of Henchard's personality, the most dominant is that of king Saul.

At the same time, a different frame of reference that becomes apparent in the novel links the mayor of Casterbridge to another ancient king, Oedipus of Thebes. While the Biblical parallelism is established by the actual naming of Biblical figures, the analogy between Henchard and Oedipus is done mainly through a series of incidents as well as imagery. One of the first scenes in the novel portrays the arrogant mayor confronting the embittered townspeople who complain about the damaged wheat that the mayor had sold to the bakers and that produced debased bread. The theme of pollution and the protagonist as responsible for it suggests an analogy with the first scene in *Oedipus Rex*, in which the people of Thebes complain about the plague to Oedipus, who turns out to be the source of it. Hardy, then, draws the image of the diseased monarch from both Hebraic and Hellenic sources.<sup>16</sup> The analogy with Oedipus reinforces the tragic framework of the novel and suggests the existence of malevolent forces in the universe. Henchard's one act of violence has unleashed those irrational forces and, no matter how much he tries to make amends for his initial act of "shame and horror," those forces, in the form of chance coincidences, fatal reappearance of people, and the vicissitudes of nature, will finally defeat and destroy him. "Tragedies end badly," says George Steiner, the tragic personage "is broken by forces which can neither be fully understood nor overcome by rational prudence."<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, the introduction of the Biblical pattern takes the novel away from the exclusively tragic domain and anchors Henchard's predicament in a sphere that emphasizes human responsibility and free will, and calls for a just punishment for man's sin. If the analogy with Oedipus implies that Henchard's universe is a vicious circle in which he is trapped regardless of what he will do, the Biblical dimension offers another vision that sees human life in terms of progress and change and views time as a healing mechanism.

The Greek conception of time recognizes no historical development says Tom Driver, "and the changes come about not through the guilt of man but through the will of the gods."<sup>18</sup> The Judeo-Christian consciousness of time, on the other hand, emphasizes "the significance of action taken in the historical present."<sup>19</sup> The Hellenic element in Hardy's novel would suggest that Henchard's tragedy lies in his imperfect human nature, in his inability, as man, to alter or control the powers around him. And the novel offers many instances of Henchard's sense of entrapment. The Hebraic presence, on the other

hand, sees Henchard's predicament in the context of a dynamic moral frame in which human suffering is a consequence of the wrong human action. Henchard accepts his role as sinner and understands the nature of his punishment in Biblical terms when he likens himself to Cain and adds: ". . . But my punishment is not greater than I can bear."<sup>20</sup> The Hebraic conception of human life as determined by human action is certainly present in the story. Hardy, who read Matthew Arnold,<sup>21</sup> was undoubtedly acquainted with the chapter "Hebraism and Hellenism" in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) in which Arnold sees the polarity between Hellenism and Hebraism as that between pursuing knowledge ("right thinking," in his words) and choosing moral action ("right acting").<sup>22</sup>

It is hard to say which vision ultimately wins in *The Mayor*. Both the Hellenic and the Hebraic are present as optional conceptions of man and his place in the universe; one is stark and uncompromising, the other demanding but reconciliatory. It is not surprising that there is no critical consensus as to whether Hardy's novel achieves full tragic proportions.<sup>23</sup> The Biblical figures who function as the archaic prototypes of Henchard are remote from the tragic sphere.<sup>24</sup> However, one may wonder why Hardy chose Saul as the main counterpart of his protagonist. While the Biblical vision as a whole is non-tragic, as Steiner explains, it is undeniable that there are tragic moments in the Bible. Moreover, of all Biblical characters, it seems that Saul comes closest to the tragic.<sup>25</sup> In fact, the tragic potential of the Saul story has been fully utilized by the Hebrew poet Tchernichovsky in two ballads which emphasize the heroic stature of Saul, the starkness of his fate, and the sense of doom that accompanies him. In one ballad ("Shaul B'Ein Dor"), Tchernichovsky recreates the scene of Saul's painful confrontation with the ghost of Samuel the prophet. The king emerges as an appealing figure, attempting to understand his fate, trying to impose order over chaos. The prophet speaks in the name of an irrational, obscure power, the laws of which are arbitrary and inscrutable. This episode is reminiscent of the Oedipus-Tiresias bitter exchange in *Oedipus Rex*. Interestingly Hardy has also anchored the analogy between Henchard and Saul in the protagonist's attempt to gain knowledge with the aid of a soothsayer.

It seems that while Hardy used the Biblical prototypes for the non-tragic dimension that they would introduce in the novel, he singled out the character of Saul as Henchard's ancient counterpart because of an intuitive perception of the tragic potential of this particular Biblical figure.

The protagonist that Agnon has chosen to carry the weight of the tragic predicament is different from Hardy's hero. Henchard's personal traits immediately suggest that he is likely to come under the tragic pall: he

exhibits a capacity for great rages as well as a hubristic defiance of the laws of nature and man; yet he is not evil. Agnon's protagonist, Menashe-Hayim, is colorless by comparison. While Agnon couches his story in an archaic idiom and sets it in an old-fashioned, dying folk culture, he seems to offer the modern idea that even the "little" man, the man of no special "character," is capable of the tragic experience. Indeed, Menashe-Hayim's act of defiant impiety, the selling of the letter of recommendation, is not less outrageous than Henchard's selling of his wife, especially in the light of the dramatic events that it triggers: Menashe-Hayim will lose his wife, who will unwittingly enter a marriage that is sinful and defiled in the eyes of Jewish law.

Unlike Hardy, Agnon does not name any Biblical figure as the ancient prototype of his protagonist; nor does he recreate a particular Biblical episode of dramatic potential in his story. Instead, the Biblical language of exile and redemption that suffuses the narrative, and that is implied in the title itself, suggests that Menashe-Hayim reenacts his nation's entire historical destiny of punishment and restoration. Menashe-Hayim thus relives not an isolated Biblical episode, but the main drama that underlies the total Old Testament vision. The title, which is an exact quotation of Isaiah 40:4 (. . . and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain"), sets the tone; it offers an eschatological vision of national redemption, and establishes the Biblical terms of the story.

However, the Biblical structure is only one of several layers of verbal and cultural associations that exist in the story. In fact, the nineteenth century protagonist and his milieu serve as the middle point of a number of concentric circles of ideas and concepts. The other prominent layers are: the Talmudic, marked by the use of Aramaic as well as of legal-halachic terms such as "deserted wife" ("Agunah"), "halachic problem" ("sugiah"), "borrower" ("shoel"), "legal evidence" ("siman"), "testimony" ("eduth"), "transgression" ("averah"), "adultery" ("Issur Arayoth"); the Literature of Ethics, identifiable by wise sayings and ethical aphorisms which are either quoted from actual Rabbinic texts, or imitate their style; the Hassidic-mystical, made up of tales of miraculous, last minute rescues, in which words such as "faith," "salvation," "miracle," and "fate" are predominant; and the popular layer, which represents the ambiance of the contemporary folk culture and is marked by the language of superstition ("the devil," "shed mi'shahat"), premonitions (the protagonist kissing the empty mesusah space, the ballads sung in the fair), and the callous, mocking voice of the community that sometimes intrudes into the tale.<sup>26</sup>

The Biblical layer of the story cannot be read in isolation; it is inextricably tied to the other circles of associations which, together, exhibit the mutation, transfor-