



CONFLICT WITH CONVENTION  
IN TWO HEBREW NOVELS:

סיפור ששון מאת ש.י. עגנון (1935)

אפרים חוזר לאספסת מאת ס. יזהר (1938)

by

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This thesis is dedicated to significant  
human feelings: ambivalence, conflict  
and inner struggle.

To S.Y. Agnon and S. Yizhar for capturing  
the expression of these feelings in two  
masterpieces of Hebrew literature,

And to everyone who helped me work my way  
through the material at hand.

חן שלווה ותן גם כוח  
לכל אלה שנאהב  
כל שנבקש  
לו יהי.

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## DIGEST

Conflict with Convention is the title given to a study which grew out of the desire to examine the theme of alienation and inner struggle of the protagonist in Modern Hebrew literature. My initial goal was to trace this theme in three Hebrew novels spanning three significant social settings: the shtetl, the kibbutz, and the modern city. This proved to be too bold an endeavor, so I limited my goal to two novels; Shmuel Yosef Agnon's Sippur Pashut, and Smilansky Yizhar's Efraim Chozair L'Aspeset. Both of these authors examine the struggle of the protagonist with his social setting. As the two heroes, Hershel Hurwitz and Efraim, struggle with the conventions of their environments they undergo intense psychological conflict as they attempt to emerge as autonomous human beings without compromising their personal integrity and identity.

This study analyzes the dilemmas of the protagonists in relationship to 1) their social settings, 2) the significant secondary characters with whom they relate directly or indirectly, and 3) their own inner turmoil. The problems that emerge from the external worlds of the protagonists become internalized by them, and consequently they struggle to free themselves from this overwhelming influence.

## INTRODUCTION

כשברא הקודש ברוך הוא את אדם הראשון דו  
 פרצופין בראו ונסרו ועשאו גביים, גב מכאן  
 וגב מכאן, מכאן ואילך כל הדורות שעמדו ממנו  
 כל אדם לעצמו נברא ואינו מצווה לחזר אחרי  
 גבו דוקא.

(סיפור פשוט ע' 219-220)

Two people are struggling to maintain their identities; both are trying desperately to resist the magnetic power of their environments. Hershel Hurwitz, the protagonist in S.Y. Agnon's novel Sippur Pashut, and Efraim in S. Yizhar's Efraim Chozair L'Aspeset are the victims of such a conflict. Each character is placed in a social setting, defined by the decrees of an exacting heritage which deems its values and customs to be of greater importance than the autonomy and well-being of its members.

Hershel Hurwitz's society, the shtetl milieu at the turn of this century, expects him to follow the religious custom of marrying a woman he neither knows nor loves for the sake of his parent's acquiescence to the strictures of a crumbling society. Efraim's society, the kibbutz milieu of pre-1948 Israel, demands that he repress his desire to exchange an oppressive appointed work assignment for a more pleasant job detail. The overwhelming pressures of their environments throw both protagonists into painful inner conflicts. Both heroes struggle with the tension between their personal yearning for freedom and the expected sublimation of this desire for the sake of group cohesiveness.

Hershel and Efraim are depicted as social deviants, victimized because they are peculiarly human. Complex and ambivalent personalities, they reflect the denied and suppressed state of their cultures. Tormented and neglected by their environments, they both experience states of mental desperation; Hershel by way of a mental breakdown, and Efraim through intense ambivalence.

Agnon's Sippur Pashut guides Hershel through his conflict with convention. From his birth to his marriage, we experience the calculated conditioning process by his parents and environment leading him to adhere to the bourgeois ethic of material wealth and social status over personal fulfillment, achieved love and happiness. Gradually becoming aware of his victimization, Hershel rebels against his society by completely rejecting its values as he slowly loses his mind and suffers a mental breakdown. His struggle with social convention recedes as he readjusts to his society with the help of a psychiatrist. His conflict with convention is superficially resolved. However, he remains ever aware of the sacrifice he had to make in order to re-enter Shibush.

Yizhar's Efraim Chozair L'Aspeset, follows the meandering consciousness of Efraim as he presents his proposal for a job transference to the members of his kibbutz. In the short period of one evening, we experience the turbulent battle that ensues within his consciousness as to whether he is justified in his desire for freedom and a more comfortable job. The general reaction of the kibbutz members to his request is non-affirming, for it represents the possibility

of change and the fear of the chaos that would result if such requests were commonly granted. Because of the pressure of the group's response and the lack of support that his environment affords him, Efraim decides on his own to give in to fate and convention and to return to the alfalfa fields.

Both Hershel and Efraim undergo intense internal examination. Both of them are portrayed as confronting the tenuous balance in their psyches between that which is infinite and that which is finite; between that which is sane, pleasant, and fulfilling, and that which is insane, uncomfortable, and restricting. Both characters ultimately are unable to transcend the boundaries of the environment. Though they have grappled with its problems, they are still bound by its restrictions. However, the process of their conflict with convention evolves an internal transformation and exposes the social problems existing within their cultures.

This thesis is a literary analysis focusing on the struggle of these two individuals against the norms and traditional modes of behavior of their social surroundings.

CONFLICT WITH CONVENTION:

סיפור פשוט

...literature "imitates" "life"; and "life" is, in large measure, a social reality, even though the natural world and the inner or subjective world of the individual have also been objects of literary "imitation."<sup>1</sup>

Shmuel Yosef Agnon's novel, Sippur Pashut (1935) is a social novel; it presents the intricacies of inner human existence within the context of an external social and cultural environment. The dynamic interplay between the internal and external world; between that which is felt and that which is perceived, sets the stage upon which Agnon enacts his "simple" story. As a social novel, Sippur Pashut dwells at length on the particulars of its culture. Trilling, in his essay on manners and morals observes that these particulars are "the voice of multifarious intention... all the buzz of complication... that which never fully gets stated... looks, gestures, songs... the whole evanescent context in which its explicit statements are made."<sup>2</sup> For the reader of Agnon, it is important to be aware of his preoccupation with that which never becomes fully stated, especially in the realm of human interaction within a social context. Just as the society he creates is a mosaic of different settings

and characters, he likewise renders a variety of manners. Because he portrays a complex society which reflects a conflicting network of manners it is difficult to categorize his work according to a particular system of morality or ethics. Trilling deftly notes that a culture's "attitude toward manners is the expression of a particular concept of reality."<sup>3</sup>

For Agnon, the search for this concept of reality is represented at different levels. Band praises Agnon's versatility in the renderings of reality; "for some readers, Agnon is the epitome of a Jewish traditionalist; for others, he is the most daring of modernists. For the older reader, Agnon conjures up memories of Jewish life in East Europe, for the younger reader, he wrestles with the central universal problems of our agonized century."<sup>4</sup> The trained and sensitive reader of Agnon's work need not maintain Band's division of a separate perception for old and young readers; for such a reader can read Sippur Pashut and simultaneously comprehend the levels of nostalgia and social convention on the one hand, and the psychological growth and turmoil on the other.

The notion of presenting "reality" alone, however, is far too general a concept in accounting for Agnon's work. If we assume that literature is concerned with the question of "reality," then the presentation of "reality" becomes an equally important issue. Wellek and Warren discuss two important elements of literature in the presentation of "reality;" the "romance" and the "novel".



The two types, which are polar, indicate the double descent of prose narrative: the novel develops from the lineage of non-fictional narrative forms-- the letter, the journal, the memoir or biography, the chronicle or history; it develops, so to speak, out of documents; stylistically, it stresses representative detail, 'mimesis' in its narrow sense. The romance, on the other hand, the continuator of the epic and the medieval romance, may neglect verisimilitude of detail (the reproduction of individuated speech in dialogue, for example), addressing itself to higher reality, a deeper psychology.<sup>5</sup>

If the novel is a representation of the real life and manners of a particular milieu, then the romance represents the realm of the imagination; that which is invisible to the eye, the myth, or unspoken implication of the writing. Similar to the "novel" and "romance" classification, is Trilling's discussion of contradistinction between "reality" and appearance." To him, reality is what 'is', while appearance is what 'seems to be'. "When the conceptual, the ideal, with past and future notions, and the fanciful, come into conflict with the reality of the present moment (which makes no account for past and future) disaster results."<sup>6</sup>

Gershon Shaked aptly describes Agnon's Sippur Pashut as the combination of these two levels of expression; that which on the surface appears to be real, the novelistic element of "life"; and that which is reality, the romantic underground of personal need and inner conflict.

יחס גומלין הדוק שבין מוטיבים  
 "נובליסטיים" ו"רומנטיים" מצוי  
 בכלל יצירתו של עגנון והמחח ביניהם  
 מאפיין את יצירתו. תאור הגלוי  
 והכסוי ביצירתו אינו אלא חשיפת  
 היחס הפנימי שבין ה"מסגרים החברתיים"  
 והמוטיבים ה"חברתיים".



At the core of Agnon's work is the fine line of interplay between that which is revealed and that which is hidden. Such a fine line ultimately creates a tension between that which is determined in the world and that which evolves through the yearning for freedom. This tension is the blade that Agnon hones in his novel Sippur Pashut, A Simple Story.

As a social novel with psychological implication, Sippur Pashut is about Hershel Hurwitz, the only son of Baruch Meir and Tsirel Hurwitz, a bourgeois Jewish family living in Shibush at the turn of this century. Hershel's story is that of a young boy growing up under the influence of a very rigidly defined system of social convention and custom. His parents, his town, his adolescent romance with Bluma, and his wife Mina stir up in his mind a conflict which ultimately results in his mental breakdown. On the surface, this story is "simple," for it is about Hershel marrying Mina according to the social convention of the pre-ordained 'shidach,' and working with his parents in their store. Behind this social facade is Hershel's struggle with his parents, his marriage, and his inherited life style. This situation results in his attempt to emerge as an individual capable of love and a normal life.

The focus of the novel is the struggle Hershel experiences between the convention of his milieu as exemplified through his parents, and his inner and personal desire to live and love as he wishes. The tension that results from this conflict creates the tone of the entire novel. The

resultant struggle between Hershel's social condition and the existing inner layers of his psyche may be seen in the following passage:

כמה שנוחיו של הירשל, שש עשרה וכבר הכיר  
שהעולם הזה לא כל מה שיש בו הוא טוב, יש  
אומרים שכל הצרה משום שהעולם חלוק לעניים  
ולעשירים. אפשר שדבר זה צרה. מכל מקום  
לא עיקר הצרה. עיקר הצרה היא שהכל בא  
במכאוב.<sup>8</sup>

In these lines the omniscient narrator flaunts the bourgeois assumption that the major problem of the world is class struggle-- the problem of money and the gap between rich and poor people. However, the protagonist's internal realization is that this is not the fundamental problem; life in general is painful. These two interpretations delineate the different levels of implication working in this novel. It is the realization of the inherent difficulty of maturing, or as Baruch Hochman says, "the forced rejection of Eros," that marks Hershel's development in the story and that maintains the tension between the acceptance and rejection of social convention.

Commenting on the relationship of Hershel to the omniscient narrator and the over-riding tension of social convention and personal need, Shaked notes:

...ספק אם האושר עצמו הוא יעוד אנושי  
ואם אין המכאוב למעלה ממנו, חמיהות  
אלה, שהן ספק של הירשל ספק של "המספר"  
מגלות ספק מעניניו של הרומאן, הבא  
להאיר באור אירוני אותה חברה בורגנית  
שעיקר גדול מעיקרה הוא שהכסף יענה את  
הכל, באמצעות המוטיבים, הנובליסטיים  
של הרומאן מחגלות אשיות החברה, באמצעות<sup>9</sup>  
המוטיבים הרומנסיים-- סחירות וניגודיה.

The paradoxes and contradictions that arise in Hershel's personal life are a direct consequence of the shallow bourgeois assumption determined for him by his environment that compliance passively with social convention is superior to a mode of behavior directed by understanding and human love. In this light, Hershel's planned marriage is doomed because it was motivated not by love but ordained by social custom and parental will.<sup>10</sup>

The whole notion of simplicity as suggested in the title of the novel, A Simple Story, is nothing more than an ironic lure, a foreboding hint. That which appears to be simple is in reality very complicated. Dov Sadan illustrates this thought well:

הריהו הדור שבראשית המאה הזאת, שבנואחו  
נשקפה ברוב סיפורים של אחרים, שאינם  
פשוטים כל עיקר, בבואה המשקפה פרצופי-  
חיים, ששרטוטיהם עשויים עיקולים-עיקולים--  
שירטוטי האוכלוסיה הגדולה של צעירים-  
זקנים, המהלכים על חרבות שבחיים, פוסחים  
על החומות שבנפש, מחלבים ללא הכרעה  
בין יאוש וחולת והם כסמל העוית הטרגית  
של עם-לא-עם, התמוטטותו בחינה ודאי  
והתנערותו בחינה שמא. והנה דמור חיים<sup>11</sup>  
בדור הזה נדרך תיאורה-- הסיפור הפשוט.

#### PLOT STRUCTURE

Sippur Pashut has a three part structure. The first section introduces the social context; the town of Shibush and the central characters of the novel: Bluma, Tsirel, Baruch Meir, Mina, and Hershel. As the environment is introduced, so are the conditions set for Hershel's victim-

ization by it. Clearly portrayed as a passive victim, Hershel is matched by his mother in marriage to Mina Tsimlich, the daughter of a well-to-do land owner, and he suffers the fate of the unrequited lover with Bluma Nacht. The second part of the novel finds Hershel beginning to realize his status as a victim and the consequent disintegration of his marriage. The more he becomes aware of his lack of interest in Mina, the more he retreats into himself only to find loneliness, sleepless nights and frightening dreams. This alienation ultimately leads to his mental breakdown and institutionalization in a psychiatric clinic. The third and final section of the novel deals with Hershel's psychotherapy with Dr. Langsam; his rehabilitation and return to Shibus, and a conclusion open to interpretation as to whether he has indeed readjusted to his milieu.

My goal is to present Hershel Hurwitz as a victim of social convention and the accepted modes of his environment. In portraying him as a victim, I will show him in conflict with these force by discussing the social setting he lives in and its peculiarities; and the people he has the most intimate relations with; Mina, Bluma, Baruch Meir, and Tsirel. After dealing with the prominent forces that throw him into conflict, I will discuss Hershel himself, and finally his therapist, Dr. Langsam, and his psychiatric methodology. The setting and the important secondary characters all effect Hershel in significant ways. He is created in relation to them, he becomes delirious because of them, and he returns to "normal" life with them.

## SETTING

There are many different settings in Sinour Pashut and changing atmospheres within each setting, reflecting the many facets of the culture. The characters of the novel move through all its variegated scenery with ease. Hershel, however, is confined by the setting. The environment either confuses him, soothes him, over-stimulates him, or drives him mad. To the characters of the novel for whom contradiction and rapid change may be easily sublimated, the setting is of no great import. To Hershel, whose consciousness changes throughout the novel, the varied settings magnify his confused and conflicted personality. Just as Hershel is in a state of significant personal change, so is his environment.

The name of Hershel's town, Shibush, is considered by many critics to be a metathasized form of Agnon's childhood home in Galicia, Buczacz. In Hebrew, 'shibush' means entangled, confused, disrupted or disturbed. Cutter translates 'shibush' as "malfunction." Whatever the precise definition may be, the reality of the town indeed arouses in the reader a sense of instability or lack of order. Something smells in Shibush. The fact that commercial modern life and the customs of traditional Judaism are mingling together is clearly apparent. However, neither aspect is well defined in terms of fixing the identity of the setting of Shibush and therefore a state of transition, or wavering between the two modes of life characterizes the setting of the city.



Concerning the setting of Shibush, Baruch Hochman notes:

The religious culture of the Eastern European shtetl, with its age-old sanctions, was being superseded by the random secularism of the 19th century. And the social structure of the Jewish community was buckling under the pressure of economic change and political persecution.<sup>12</sup>

Evidence of this cultural transition taking place in Shibush; from the religious and spiritual realm to the secular realm, is stated explicitly by the narrator of the story:

באותה היהם ניטל כבוד החורה ובחורי ישראל  
מניחים, כנני, את לפניהם, ופניהם, ולדבר, ארץ  
אח בעליה, ובינונים עוסקים במשא ומתן של  
מסחר... מהם בציונות מהם בסוציאליזם. (p. 16)

Religion has not died in Shibush, however, other forms of life and belief have found their way into a culture that was previously dominated by religion. Hershel spends his leisure time at the Zionist club; the servants in homes of the middle class merchants are attracted to the ideology of socialism.

In discussing Sippur Pashut, Kurzweil recognizes this theme of town in transition. He views the transition as a generation gap problem. Religious culture and its ethic is identified as traditional collectivism, and the availability of different forms of social and ideational identity are classified by him as individualism.<sup>13</sup> He points out, and I agree with him, that religion is still the dominant influence in the social structure and personal life in Shibush:

המסגרת החברתית, שנחוצה נולדו רוב אישי  
הסיפור, היא כה חזקה שאינה מניחה להם  
להרים את ראשיהם. באובייקטיביות אמיתית  
מראה לנו עגנון את הצדדים החיוביים של  
המסגרת הדתית, אשר היא, בראש ובראשונה,  
הנותנת לחברה את צורתה, הערכים הדתיים  
הם הקובעים עוד במידה רבה את מעשי האדם.

הם הנוהגים קצב ומידה לחיי המשפחה  
והחברה.

The religious customs still determine the ambiance of this social milieu. They define the characters interaction with each other. However, they have become empty social conventions because the traditional ideal religious ethic of love and human compassion has been replaced with social expediency and predetermined modes of behavior. Religion as social convention merely inhibits the characters in the story. What has remained from religion is merely its shell. Agnon illustrates the tenuous position of religious custom in Shibush as he describes the events leading up to Ter-shel's marriage. The Sabbath before the wedding, Baruch Meir attends synagogue and distributes the customary Torah aliyot. The women do what women should do in shule; they throw raisins and nuts at the groom. The cantor sings the 'me sh'bay-rach' prayer. To honor the occasion, Baruch Meir promises to donate a new Ark to the synagogue. (We are never told if the promise is fulfilled.) Immediately following Baruch Meir's obligation to religious convention, we read about Tsirel's obligation, the arrangements for the wedding:

קשה מזה היה הסכסוך שנפל בין המוחזנים  
על עסקי החופה. מנחג של ישראל שעוסקין  
החופה בבית הכלה ונעקשה צירל לעשותה דוקא  
בביחה. סייעו לה כמה בעלי בתים שאומרו.  
הרבה נכנסין לחופה באותו היום ואם אנו  
הולכים לכפר אין אנו מספיקים לילך אצל  
שאר החתנים ונעלה עלינו חמתם. סייעו  
להם הרב והחזן שאמרו, שורה הדין שעשו  
אח החופה בעיר, שכמה חופות יש באותו היום  
ואין אנו מספיקים לילך לכפר. סייע להם  
גבאי ביה הכנסת הגדול שאמר, חופה אחת יש  
בעיר ואי אפשר לשגרה לכפר בזמן שכמה

זוגות ממתינים לה. כהראו ברסה וגדליה  
 כך הסכימו לעשות את החתונה בעיר. (p. 107)

The changing of the religious custom to suit the needs of the individual in the city is clearly taking place. Religion is bent because of Tsirel's power. Her stubbornness is catered to by her fellow citizens, and finally the symbolic leaders of the religious institution, the rabbi, the cantor, and the gabbai all acquiesce to her demands. What else is there to do but to comply with the selfish needs of the community; a compliance with a new ethic, bourgeois convention. The cultural tension between religious convention and new forms of behavior may be seen in the dance scene after the wedding:

משאכלו ושתו ובירכו עשו מחול לילה.  
 נסל הרב מספחתו ונחנה לילה ואחז  
 בקצה המספחת ורקד ריקוד של מצוה...  
 אחר כך ריקדו כל המסובים כאחד, עד  
 שהלך הרב וריקדו אנשים עם נשים עד  
 הבוקר. (p. 114-115)

It is only after the rabbi has left that the mask of the extant religious convention is dropped. As soon as the religious symbol of modesty drops the 'mechitza'-like handkerchief of social convention, men and women embrace in celebration. This attitude of the equality of the sexes expresses the change taking place in Shibush and in Hershel's life. As the Torah of religion recedes into the background, a new Torah appears to take its place:

אדם אחד יש בשבוע דוקטור קנאבינהום  
 שמו שהביא חורה חדשה לעיר שכל בני  
 אדם כולם שווים ואין אחד מעולה מחבירו,  
 מקהיל הוא קהילות ודורש דרשות ומכנים  
 ערבוניא בלב ההמון. (p. 26)



Even though Dr. Knabenhaut represents socialism and economic equality, the social and cultural implications of his philosophy effect the manners and morals of the people of Shibush much more personally.

Just as there is a noted transition in terms of religion in the setting of Shibush, so is there transition in terms of social and ideological change:

הזמנים משתנים והדעות מחלפות. זמרים  
וזמרות שהיו נחשבים כחבורה של זלין,  
פתאום החחיל העולם נוהג בהם כבוד.  
סטודנטים מטיילים עמם בפרהסיא וקוראים  
להם אומנים ומחקבים בבית המסחה ונואמים נאומים  
לשם ולשם השירה העממית, ובלילה, מושיסים  
לזמרות אגודות של פרחים וממלאים את גרונן  
במיני מחיקה. (p. 29-30)

As religion becomes devoid of meaning and merely conventional fallout, the people of Shibush seek new meaning for their lives. Folk singers become the moralists of society and the cafe shows signs of replacing the synagogue as a house of meeting. Accompanying the "changing times" are changing behavioral moods. Isaac Gildenhorn, the traveling life insurance salesman and husband of Mina's best friend Sophia, represents yet another transition in the setting of Shibush.

מיום שבא גילדנהורן לדור בבוש חשש כחם  
של גדולי שבוש וכהה מאור עיניהם וליצני העיר  
הרימו ראש ונעשתה שבוש כיישוב של הוללות  
ואין מי שימחה בהם, שאנשי שבוש או שמחיראים  
להתגרור בגילדנהורן או שמשוכים אחריו. (p. 58)

Whether the inhabitants of Shibush are afraid of Gildenhorn, or whether they enjoy the atmosphere of his home, the reality remains that they frequent his home often and it becomes one of the major social centers of the town. Joking, drinking, card playing, and eating are the dominant features of Shibush

society. People look forward to the setting that religious convention creates so that they may resume their joking, drinking, and eating.

Food and eating are important elements of the society, for it is around food that Hershel is attracted to Eluma, and it is through food that Tsirel satisfies her personal needs and fulfills the requirement of matching her son to the daughter of a respectable countryman. Gershon Shaked develops this food motif excellently in his article "Bat Ha Melech U' S'udat Ha-Em." Food also represents the nostalgia and uterine comfort of Shibush. Emigrants to America who return home are enticed by Shibushian cuisine:

בריה כרוחה לשבוס שכל האוכל מאכילה  
דבק בה. (P. 75)

Even for Hershel, who seems to be aware unconsciously of the problems of his society, the food and the accompanying lethargic comfort of his city attract him greatly. This accounts for his passivity and victimization:

כה יש באויר שאין בו ממש להחזיק את  
ילידי שבוס בשבוס, כל שכן כר רכסה שיי בהם  
ממש. הרי שהירשל נחן לבו לברוח משבוס,  
כיון שמניח ראשו על כרו ומתכסה בכסתו  
מיד הוא יודע שלא יזוז משבוס. (p. 76)

And indeed, Hershel never does leave Shibush, except for his therapy in Lemberg.

With the reality of life in Shibush and his newly appointed wife, Hershel moves into the main stream of "adult" life in Shibush. He now is a 'bal-habayit', and his apartment clearly reflects his status in society:

הירשל ומינה ביתם מחוקן וכליו נאים.  
וילונות לבנים חלויים על חלונותיהם

ורצועה אדומה קשורה להם באמצעיתם.  
 העולם נשקף להם מחוץ חלונותיהם  
 כמשולש. ברם מינה אינה עומדת  
 בחלון. מי שביחו נאה מבפנים מה צורך לו  
 להסתכל בחוץ. הירשל ומינה דרים כאחד,  
 אי אפשר לומר שהם שמחים ואי אפשר לומר  
 שאינם שמחים, אלא שביחם מחוקן ואינם  
 חסרים כלום. (p 128)

Mina and Hershel have internalized the bourgeois ethic. Their inner happiness with each other is irrelevant. What is important is the mask they present to the world. As Trilling points out, the bourgeois snobbery is pride in status without pride in function.<sup>15</sup> Their apartment reflects the assumption that all is well, for it is furnished "properly." For their society which lacks 'function,' or meaningful existence, money and what it buys is the important sign of being established. To appear to be established is one of the ways of becoming established.<sup>16</sup> In essence, this passage reflects again the emptiness of their lives because of convention, for the outside world becomes unimportant when a person's house has the appearance of order. This sterile existence foreshadows the collapse of their marital relationship.

## SECONDARY CHARACTERS

### Mina

Mina Tsimlich, Hershel's wife, is a product of the life style of the city. Agnon creates her character in order to personify the transition of life from the traditions of country existence into modernity and the cultural life of the city.

אף מינה ריבה נאה וחסודה. בח כפר היא,

אף על פי כן נחקיימו בה כל המעלות שנשתבחו  
בהן בנות כרכים, לפי שנחנכה בסטניסלב  
בפנסיון ולמדה צרפחית ומעשה רקמה ופירוס  
על פסנחר, עד שנחקקע הכפי ממנה ולא ניכר  
בה שבתו של יהודי כפרי היא. (p. 43)

Her experience in the big city has refashioned her identity. She is no longer identifiable as the daughter of a village Jew. Having acquired the attributes of a cultured lady; educated, and artistically inclined, she rejects her home and its particular characteristics.

...אלא שלא מצאה קורת רוח משיבתה בכפר.  
אפשר מפני שלא שינחה את בגדיה בבגדי כפר ואפשר מפני  
שרגילה בעיר מקום שעוברים שם בהמוניה, מה  
שאינן כן בכפר, שחוץ מבהמות ועופות ושיחים  
ואילנות אין רואים שם כלום. וכשרוח עוברת  
היא מעלה ריח זבל וריח חלב ומפריחה את כובעך  
וסותרת את שערך. כל יום ויום כל הימים שמינה  
יושבת בכפר היתה מצפה שיעבור הקיץ ויגיע זמנה  
לחזור לסטניסלב. (p. 44)

She has become everything that her birthplace is not. In contrast to her parents, she wears fancy clothes and they wear plain clothes. She strolls and they hurry. She has grown to love the movement of the city, fine clothes and sweet smells. She has outgrown the natural smells of the country and its isolation.

In spite of her city education and her cultural air of dignity, Mina is portrayed as naive and innocent about life; especially about the opposite sex: --

מינה לא הכירה בחורים הרבה... כיון  
שישבה לפני חירשל היחה חמיהה על  
עצמה ועל חירשל, על חירשל שאינו בהול  
ליפסר ממנה ועל עצמה שהיא חשובה כל  
כך להיות מרבין שיחה עמה. (p. 62)

Her initial perception of Hershel is at best superficial:

אם על פי מלבושין אדם מודרני הוא...  
ודאי יש עוד דברים שצריכים לו לאדם  
כדי שיקנה לבה של נערה, אבל מינה אינה

בעל נסיונות ואינה בקיאה בדברים. (P. 44)

The striking polarity in her character, her appearance of wealth, culture, and education, and her innate ignorance and naivete present her as an easy personality to manipulate into a marriage doomed to failure because of forced conventional manners. As Mina's and Hershel's relationship is described to be deteriorating, we notice her exuding the pungent odor of cologne and constantly changing her clothes; both signs of trying to cover up something unpleasant. All those descriptions of Mina occur in the first half of the novel. In the second part, she is depicted as passive and trapped into a bad marriage. We have seen her in her new apartment where she doesn't even have the motivational strength to look out of the window. Her entire life is the interior of her apartment. Consequently, Hershel tires of her quickly. Both of them suffer from sleeping problems; Hershel from insomnia and Mina from too much sleep:

שואלת ברטה, ישנחת? פושטת מינה ימינה כלפי השולחן ונוטלת את השעון ומפהקת ואומרת. אם על פי השעון ישנתי כל צרכי ואם על פי עצמי אין כל הלילות מספיקים לי לשנתי. (p. 122)

Gradually Mina begins to emerge from her shell of artificial odor, affluent apparel, and escapist sleeping into the recognition of her needs as a woman. For the first time in the novel she speaks with a notable degree of insight as she analyzes her less than acceptable relationship with Hershel:

אמרת מינה, אילו אהבת אותי לא היו דברים כגון אלו עולים על לבך. ושמה טועה אני,

שמה אי אתה שונא אותי. בחור פיקח אתה  
היינריך ואחך יודע שאיני גרועה מכל הנשים,  
ואם אני משה אין אתה מוצא אחרת טובה ממני...  
בתו של אדם עובד אני שאוכל לחמה של עבודה  
ואינו אוכל לחם של חנופה... עצובה אני פתאום.  
שיחה זו על המיחה הביאתני לידי עצבות. בוא  
היינריך ושקה לי. לא על מצחי יקירי, אי אתה  
צריך להראותני שמכובדת אני עליך, שקה לי  
על פי. וכי נשיקה אחת בלבד יש לך בפוך.  
מי שיראה אותך כך יחשוב שכל נשיקה עויה  
לך בדינך זהב. (P. 136-137)

Where before Mina disregarded her country background, she now finds pride in it. Where she was once satisfied with repressing the sensual stimulus of the world, she now recognizes her feelings of sadness and desire for heartfelt affection. As Mina's awareness begins to sharpen and her need for sexuality heightens, Hershel's insanity draws nearer and nearer. Mina exposes Hershel's discomfort with erotic love as she challenges him to kiss her fully and passionately on the lips rather than sheepishly on the forehead. Hershel's inability to express erotic love to her is the primary expression of the conflict she represents in him; his rejection of eros.

### Bluma

It is only with Bluma Nacht that Hershel allows himself to feel passionate love. His erotic desire is frustrated however, for he never is fully able to express it. On the one hand he desires her intensely, on the other, he does not:

מחביש היה חירשל לעמוד במחיצתה. מחאווה  
לראותה ומתחבא ממנה. כמה ימים לא ראה  
אותה. אבל קרן הזהב שמפציעה ועולה מבין  
ריסי עיניה של בלומה כשהיא מביטה בבני



אדם היחה מבחיקה כל הזמן כנגד עיניו  
של הירשל, כאילו היא עומדת לפניו. (P. 36)

His intense relation with her is on the level of fantasy alone. To allow himself to express his feelings would be far too threatening, for Bluma is socially unfit to be his lover in his mother's eyes. She is the exact opposite of Mina and was raised in a poor family where reading and sincere emotional expression take precedence over social convention and the repression of emotion.

Bluma is depicted as a loner able to fend for herself. Her father influenced her deeply in her love of reading and respect for books. Because of this upbringing she found solace in their company in her periods of loneliness. Her ability to find self-expression through books makes her a unique personality.

אלמלא מרחם של בני אדם לקבול לא היחה  
בלומה צריכה לקבול כלום. אלקים בשמים  
נחן לה כח וחן ושכל טוב, דברים שיש בהם  
כדי לגחם אדם ביגונו... עושר ונכסים אין  
לה לבלומה. כל עצמה של בלומה הן יריה  
שהשכירה לאחרים. אבל נשמחה בה חורין. (P. 24)

Though she gives the appearance of being sad, alone, and dependent on her relatives for whom she does housework, she is essentially a woman of substance as well as a free spirit.

Though it is clear that Hershel loves Bluma, we know that she does not feel the same for him. She is far more independent and mature than he. Recognizing that Hershel is totally dependent on his mother, she shows her lack of love for him and her concern for herself:

שאלה בלומה את עצמה, כלום נגזר עלי  
להיות משרתת כל ימי? וכי בשביל

שנסחלקתי מבית צירל נסחלקו קיוויי?  
 נזכרה בלומה כניסחה לבית הורביץ. מה  
 הייתה כל הקוטה באותה שעה? (51 .)

The circumstances of Bluma's visit with the Hurwitz family emphasize the point that she landed in an already tense and conflicted situation for which she had no responsibility. She was caught in their web. In essence, she had no real desire to be there in the first place and the setting she became involved in was beyond her control.

אמרה בלומה בלבה, וכי בשביל שהירשל  
 משוך אחרי אמו צריכה אני להתיאש. אם  
 ידיו אסורות אני בה חורין. (p. 51)

Bluma represents the yearning of young Hershel. She stands for everything his family reproves and refuses to allow him to have. As a character of contrast, Bluma highlights Hershel's harnessed yearning for eros. Her Hebrew name expresses her function. Bluma means 'blossoming,' and also 'restraining.' On the one hand she is seductive, on the other she is unattainable. Ultimately she does not feel for Hershel what he feels for her, and consequently, by leaving the Hurwitz house, her absence intensifies his aloneness and frustration.

### Baruch Meir

Baruch Meir, Hershel's father, is a complicated personality. At once he is passive and agreeable to anyone or anything, and at other times he is aggressive and keenly per-



ceptive of situations that take place around him. Agnon demonstrates these aspects of Baruch Meir's character quite precisely:

ברוך מאיר שומע לאחרים ואינו מקפיד  
להיות עשוי הכל מעצמו... כשם שדר  
בשלום עם כל אדם ומבטל את רצונו מפני  
רצון אחרים כדי שחא דעתו פנויה  
לעסקיו כך הוא דר בשלום עם משרתיו  
ואינו מראה לפניהם שררתו ואדנותו...  
(p. 13)

This compromising aspect of Baruch Meir's personality depicts him as a congenial fellow who would sacrifice his own pressing needs for the sake of other people. However, such an impression is only one dimension of his character for another aspect of his personality emerges which contradicts this one. The following description takes place when Baruch Meir, a young man at the time, returns home after arranging for his future marriage with Bluma's mother Mirel.

בלילה במלון היה שם אדם אחד והיה  
רץ בחדר כשהוא מחשב חשבונות בקול  
ולא הניח לאדם לישון. הרגיש בברוך  
מאיר שמביט בו ושאל אותו, מפריע אני?  
השיב ברוך מאיר בנחת, חס ושלום, ובשעה  
דיבורו עלה על השולחן וכבה לפניו את  
המנורה. היה שם באותו חדר שמעון הירש  
קלינגר, הציץ עליו שמעון הירש ואמר לו,  
מרוצה אני ממך, סבור הייתי שכבשה חמה  
אחה, והרי אחה בן אדם. (p. 14-15)

At the moment that Baruch Meir assures the man that he is not bothering him, he acts as if he really was, by abruptly climbing on top of a table and turning off the light. In praise of such a definitive action, which is also an expression of Baruch Meir's persistent personality, his boss and Tsirel's father, affirms his status as a human being. When at one time he thought him a lamb. Shimon Hirsch Klinger

offers Baruch Meir his Tsirel in marriage. No sooner than he plans to marry Mirel we find him marrying Tsirel. Apparently he does this to please his boss and gain social status and money. He does not marry out of love. Agnon alerts us to Baruch Meir's relationship with Tsirel:

פעמים הרבה היה יושב לפניו והוזה, מה יש  
בה שאין לי חלק בו. הרי היא מראה לי  
סתירה כגילייה, אלא שגילוייה עצמם כסויים...  
( . 15)

He is baffled by her. He senses something bizarre. Their wonderment about each other defines the early part of their relationship and more so, their own individual personalities.

כל יום היה מחבבה יותר, ויותר שהיה  
מחבבה היה חוזה...משנולד בנו הכיר שהכל  
ניחן לו מה שהיה סמון במסמוני לבה  
מסרה בידו. ( . 15)

The birth of Hershel represents the hidden love that Baruch Meir could not find in Tsirel. As a form of his wife's love, Hershel represents the compensation for a loveless marriage to Baruch Meir, and so he not only loves him for himself, but also for his mother. In essence, there is no love from Tsirel as experienced by Baruch Meir. By overwhelming Hershel with the love unreceived from his wife, Baruch Meir transfers a confused identity upon his son. Just as any child needs equal love from both parents, an imbalance of love from either side will ultimately conflict the child. Baruch Meir's effluence of love alienated Hershel and so the two grew far apart. Hershel identifies mostly with his mother. As a consequence, his masculine identity is thrown into question throughout the novel. In discussing the prob-

lem of Hershel's identity with his parents, Dina Stern notes the following concerning lack of identity between Hershel and Baruch Meir:

כך נודר פער רגשי בין הירשל ואביו, דבר  
שהקשה עליו את ההליך ההזדהות עם האב.  
הזדהות עם האב פירושה הזדהות עם ביני מינו,  
הזדהות עם המין הזכרי ועם הגבריות הזדהות  
עם האב סומנת בחוכה דחף אנרגטי עצום  
להתבגרות ולבשלות. בעוד כשלון ההזדהות  
עם האב משאיר את הילד מרוחק לרמחו הילדותית...  
אב זה, שכול כולו אומר התכחשות ועמדת פנים,  
לא היה יכול לעסוק להירשל החם, שלא ידע  
להתכחש לעצמו.<sup>17</sup>

Baruch Meir sublimates his love for Mirel at the expense of social status and his marriage to Tsirel. Hershel on the other hand is unable throughout the novel to separate himself from his yearning for Bluma and accept his relationship with Mina, social status and convention.

The irony of Baruch Meir's relationship to Hershel may be seen in his final estrangement from him. What was perceived by him to be love turned out to be separation and alienation between them. In a revealing dialogue between Baruch Meir and an unknown soldier as Baruch Meir travels by train to pick up Hershel from his therapist in Lemberg, Agnon clearly analogizes Baruch Meir's relationship to his son Hershel:

שאל ברוך מאיר את החייל, מה שלומך ניקופר?  
השיב החייל, השבח לאדון האלקים, שלום וטוב  
לי אדון.  
אמר ברוך מאיר, אי אחה מחמה ניקופר שאני  
יודע את שמך ניקופר.  
השיב החייל, כן אדון.  
אמר ברוך מאיר, אמור לי ניקופר מנין יודע  
אני שניקופר שמך, והלא לא ראיתך מעולם.  
השיב החייל, כן אדון.  
אמר ברוך מאיר, כן אדון כן אדון. מוטב  
שחשאלני מנין לי שניקופר שמך.  
שאל החייל את ברוך מאיר, מנין לו לאדון

שניקופר שמי?  
 אמר ברוך מאיר, ניחשתי, ניקופר, ניחשתי.  
 אמר החייל, הרי לא ניקופר שמי.  
 אלא מה שמך?  
 אמר החייל, אם האדון יודע לנחש ינחש מה שמי.  
 אמר ברוך מאיר, גחכן אחה איוואן.  
 אמר החייל, לא איוואן שמי.  
 אם כן שמך? סטיפן?  
 ינחש האדון ינחש.  
 אמר ברוך מאיר, סבור אחה פסרי שאין לי מה  
 שאעשה אלא לנחש מה שמך.  
 כן אדון.  
 (P. 210-211)

Baruch Meir's inability to confess his ignorance of the strange soldier's name indirectly expresses his frustration in not knowing his own son. The soldier's formality and politeness to Baruch Meir, calling him 'sir' repeatedly, likewise shows his cold military distance from him. This relationship of a father trying to relate to his son, and his son refusing to respond to his father's gestures, is succinctly illustrated by Agnon as he joins Hershel and Baruch Meir in the train together after Hershel's long stay in Lemberg.

ברוך מאיר נפל על צוארי בנו וחיבקו  
 ונשקו ושאל אותו שאלות של מה בכך,  
 כאילו לא אירעו כלום, וכן נהג עמו  
 כל הדרך. הירשל הרגיש בדבר. כשישב ברכבת  
 נטל ידו של אביו וביקש להודות לו, אלא  
 שנחירא שמא יבכה ושחק.

(p. 214)

### Tsirel

Hershel's mother Tsirel, according to Cutter, is the prime mover of the major events in Sippur Pashut.<sup>18</sup> She

determines her husband's decisions and the course of her son's life. In relation to her, Baruch Meir is passive; not only because her father matched them together but also because of her ability to sway his decision making process. Kurzweil analyzes Baruch Meir in relation to Tsirel:

...בנפשו נשאר ברוך מאיר השמש, והוא  
מקבל בהכנעה את החסותיה של אשתו.<sup>19</sup>

This quality of submission to her will may also be viewed in the narrator's description of him supporting her decision to match Hershel to Mina:

אין דרכו של ברוך מאיר לומר דבר שאין  
משל צירל, פעמים חוזר על דבריה ופעמים  
מוסיף עליהם לשם חיזוק הענין.  
(p. 47)

Tsirel is described as constantly preoccupied with her store. Her life revolves around it as does her husband's and her son's. Her behavior in the store foreshadows the overriding aspect of her personality; her cold logic and pragmatism.

יודעה צירל להתנהג עם הבריות. חנוכה  
חוננת דעת, מלקוחותיה לוקחת לקח. צירל  
אינה מזלזלת בשום אדם, אפילו בעניי הל קח  
משהו. אומרת צירל היום הוא לוקח בפרוסה  
ומחר יכול לזכות בלוטריה ויקנה בדינר.  
אפילו חינוק הבא ליקח דבר מועט צירל מראה לו  
חיבה, נוסלתו בסנטרו ונוחנת לו למעלה מן  
המדה. בקסנותו צרכיו מועטים לכשיגדל צרכיו  
מרובים, אם אני מסבירה לו פנים בקסנותו  
הרי הוא מרגיל רגליו להיות קונה אצלי  
בגדלותו. (p. 10)

This passage does more than show her manipulative nature, treating people nicely simply to fulfill her selfish needs; it also hints at Tsirel's concept of how to condition and control people; more particularly, her son Hershel. Tsirel's

control of Hershel ultimately becomes an expression of Hershel's dependence upon her. She controls his education at first by hoping he would pursue Jewish learning to ward off the family curse of madness. At the moment she feels he is uninvolved in this pursuit, she removes him not only from the 'Beit ha-Midrash' but also from the possibility of any further form of education. He is placed in the store under her supervision.

Hershel's dependence on Tsirel may be viewed in light of the following passage:

יחיד הירשל לאביו ולאמו... לאחר שנגמל  
נכנסה צירל בראשה ורובה לעסקי התנות...  
מעצמה לא בקשה על בנים, שאינך יודע אם  
לא נוח להם יותר שלא נבראו... לא הראתה  
לו חיבה יחירה כדי שלא חזוה דעתו עליו  
בן יחיד. (P. 12)

Dina Stern analyzes this passage in various ways by showing Hershel's dependence on Tsirel and her personality in general. She notes Tsirel's ambivalent feeling toward her child, especially her fear of insanity prevalent in her family. In addition, early weaning is another cause of his dependence upon her.<sup>20</sup> Such ambivalence and lack of love make Hershel afraid of love and unable to transfer love onto another person. His source being deficient, he consequently becomes deficient and is in constant dependency upon his mother in terms of remaining at her inadequate emotional level.

הפירוד וכן דרכה של צירל לנהוג התאפקות  
רגשית בבנה "כדי שלא חזוה עליו דעתו"  
עלולים היו ליצור אצל הירשל מניע חזק  
של התקרבות אל האם בשל חסך בה.<sup>21</sup>

Stern cites another passage which clearly illustrates Hershel's infantile dependence on Tsirel resulting in her



implied betrayal of him.

... יושב הירשל לפני אמו ועיניו מרטיבות  
והולכות. כמה היה רחוק ממנה, לבסוף אין לו  
קרוב יותר ממנה. חבר היה לו בילדותו, שטעה  
בו לחשוב שהוא אוהבו. פעם אחת בגד בו והיה  
הירשל נצטער הרגישה אמו בצערו ונסלחו  
והחליקה לו בראשו ונשקתו על מצחו. לבסוף  
הסיח דעתו מחברו ונמשך אחריה, מה שאירע  
להירשל בילדותו, אירע בבחורו.<sup>22</sup>

This passage recalls two levels of narrative intention. Superficially, Tsirel appears kind and loving; in reality, she is revealed to be crafty and authoritarian. Her authoritative nature is hidden by her control of her son's emotions. Tsirel displays this trait in her feelings about Bluma, especially in terms of her relationship with Hershel. Aware of the scrutiny that unmarried people are subjected to in their society, Hershel and Bluma try to keep their desire for each other at bay. To keep this a secret from Tsirel was impossible. On the one hand, we note her accepting Bluma and again she appears kind and loving. On the other hand, her manipulative authoritarian control emerges as the narrator explains her hidden agenda for Hershel.

צירל ראתה מעשה בנה ולא אמרה ולא כלום.  
פקחות שהיחה בה שהיחה אומרת לא נשחטה  
בני שיחן עיניו בעניה זו גרמה שחשוק.  
אמרה בלומה, עכשיו הוא משחק עם בלומה,  
כשיגיע לפרקו ישא אשה ההוגנת לו.  
עשתה צירל את עצמה כאילו אינה רואה ואינה  
שומעת. לא נחדיינה עם הירשל ולא הרחיקה  
את בלומה. אדרבא טובה גדולה החזיקה לה  
בלומה, שעל ידיה של זו ניצול בנה משאר  
נערו, שכבר שמעה צירל שאף בשכוש נפרצו פרצות.  
כל זמן שלא מצא הירשל את בת זוגו אין לו  
יפה מזו, שהיא משמרתו מן החטא. (P. 37)

As long as Bluma is of utilitarian use to Tsirel, be she a good housekeeper and cook or a protector of her son's virtue,

she admires her. The moment she gets in the way, Tsirel loses respect for her and has no further need for her presence.

When Tsirel finally arranges for Hershel to meet Mina, and after the arrangements are set by Yonah Toiber the shadchan, Bluma realizes that she has been squeezed out of the picture. Hershel is not yet aware of what will be happening to him. As he descends the steps on his way to the wine cellar, he hears his mother following him and immediately feels she is eavesdropping into his relationship with Bluma. After she explains that she is not hounding him about his feelings for Bluma, she relates her honest opinion about her, and her view of life as she thinks Hershel should see it:

אוי לעולם שהבריות הולכים אחר לבם. אני איני  
מחקנאה בעולם שכזה. חס ושלום שיש לי כנגד  
בלומה כלום. אין הרבה בלומה בשוק. ברם דבר  
זה אי אחת צריך לשכוח שהיא עניה,  
שבחמלתנו שחמלנו עליה הכנסנוה לביחנו ונחננו  
לה כל מחסורה ומובטחני בה שהיא מכירה את  
מקומה ואינה מעמידה את עצמה בינו לבין מזלך  
כקיר. בן בעלי בתים אחת הירשל וגדולה מזו  
אחת מחוקן.  
הירשל עמד ושחק. אף אמו לא ביקשה לשנוע  
השובה פסוקה מפיו, להכשיר לבו נחכוונה.  
ידיו של הירשל נחרפו. בקושי החזיק את הקנקן.  
היין הזה לא שחה ממנו וראשו ככומר של ענבים  
שהומה מאליו. (49-50.)

Tsirel has stereotyped Bluma as poor and beneath Hershel's social status of 'bal ha-bayit'. She tells her son that his life is predetermined, and it is she who determines what course it will take. Tsirel's callousness disregards her son's shocked reaction to her soliloquy; all she is concerned about is that his heart has been set straight, and that her



control and autonomy is established.

In deference to Tsirel, though she is portrayed as an authority figure controlling her son's life, her home, her business and her husband, she is also a victim, and being such, raises her son in a similar fashion. A symbol of her victimization is her dependence for pleasure on food.

כל שמחחה של צירל סעודה נאה...עד שלא  
נכנסה צירל לסעודה היא יושבת בינה לבין  
עצמה וגופה ממלא את הכסא והיא מעבירה  
לפניה כל מה שעמדה לאכול.

(p. 27)

Her craving for food is not only a sign of sexual frustration, (for her only intimate relationship with her husband is the counting of their money, p. 46), but also her inability to love anything more human than food or money. In defense of Tsirel postponing love for money and food, Jacques also sees her as a victim of circumstance:

אבל מתוך שהיא עצמה לא נישאה מאהבה  
לא ידעה את כוחה של אהבה ולא העריכה  
את ערכה כראוי, שהרי בזה עדיין שום  
כוח הירושה שעבר מעולם האצילות לעולם  
העשיה, ומנהגים שהשחמשו בהם בקודם  
נהגו גם בחול.<sup>25</sup>

Hershel becomes a link in the vicious circle of victimization of which his mother is an important element.

### Hershel

Hershel's victimization by his family and his environment leave him with little in the way of ego strength and responsibility for self. As a passive character, no definite

descriptions concerning his autonomy emerge in the course of the novel. Cutter notes that the lack of physical description concerning Hershel tends to depict him as an abstraction.<sup>24</sup> In fact, his life is nothing more than the result of the circumstances that surround him. What does emerge clearly in the novel is the conflict that has been generated within Hershel's psyche as a result of his victimization. The slow transformation that he undergoes; from an innocent young boy to a stark raving mad young man unfolds before the reader in the form of the descriptions of his inner thoughts and confusion.

The first impression perceived concerning Hershel is his innocence.

מיום שיצא הירשל לאויר העולם פחו מצויה  
ובגדו מוכן ובני אדם טובים מאירים לו  
פנים ועושים רצונו מאהבה.

(P. 12)

People treat him like a child. He is shielded from reality. A bit later, his personality defenses are broken down a bit and we learn a little more about him:

הירשל אינו ממולח כאמו ואינו זריז  
כאביו אבל מעלה אחרת יש בו שעושה  
כל מה שאבוהיו אומרים.

(P. 16)

His passivity is defined and any future hope for his autonomy is dissolved.

As he enters his adolescence, the confused feelings of his mixed desires initiate the conflict that plagues him throughout the story. His passion for Bluma serves to agitate his conflict to the point of throwing him into throes of guilt. This guilt is a result of the conflict between

religion and its strictures and the needs of his sexuality. The following passage illustrates the guilt that religious convention has instilled in Hershel. Just as his environment is a reflection of a deteriorating society with fall out conventions left over from a once religious culture, so are his adolescent fantasies the repercussion of such empty conventional fall out.

יודע הירשל שהיום או מחר לא יפטר ממצוקתו.  
 חורה שלמד בנערותו משמרתו בחרותו. הוא  
 חולה עיניו בבנות הארץ והחורה הופכת לו  
 עיניו מהן, הוא מבקש עצה להגיע אצלן והיא  
 אומרת לפניו דברים שעשו חכמים הראשונים,  
 כגון מעשה רבי מתיא בן חרש שמימיו לא נשא  
 עיניו באשה, ראהו שטן ונחנקא בו ונדמה לפניו  
 כאשר יפה שלא היחה כמותה בעולם, כיון שראה  
 אותה הפך עיניו לצד אחר, וכשראה שהיא מכהפכת  
 לכל צד הלך והביא אש ומסמרים ונחן את המסמרים  
 באש וסימא את עיניו.

(p. 30)

As a prelude to his limited physical engagement with Bluma and the resultant erotic fantasies about her, this section clearly illustrates the psychic torment residing in Hershel's being, regarding women and his feelings of virility. As a reflection of the tale of א. Matya b. Heresh, who physically tortured himself because of his fantasies, Hershel's fate of self-effacement and madness as a result of inner conflict becomes quite apparent.

Agnon continues to evolve Hershel's damaged personality by showing the result of his growing conflict. We note in the following scene with Mina, his wife to be, Hershel's perceiving himself to be nothing.

עכשיו שנכנס למחיצה ועמד פתאום לפני  
 נחבלבל... פיו נחרקן מכל דיבור. כמה  
 פעמים אמר לעצמו הרי היא מצאה את המלה

הנכונה לסמן בה את הענין, והרי אני עמדת  
 לפני כגולם. מה אני בעיניו, אדם שאין לו  
 נימוסין והיא... נחנכה בפנסיון ויודעת...  
 ואני כמעט שלא יצאתי מחוץ לעירי...  
 (p. 52)

As he tries to understand his conflict he succeeds only in showing himself how much of a victim he really has become. At one point in the novel, he blames Bluma for his predicament because she walked out on him leaving him alone and helpless to face the restrictions placed upon him by his mother and the conventions of society. His desperation is apparent. At another point in the story he feels nothing for Mina, on the other hand, when he begins to feel a spark of genuine love for her, his mother enters the scene to repress his outlet of emotion. Perhaps the most graphic illustration of the reality of Hershel as a passive victim of convention and maternal control is the short dialogue between him and the matchmaker of Shibush, Jonah Toiber. In this scene, they meet at Mina's parents home in Malekrovik immediately preceding his engagement.

אף אחת כאן? שאל יונה סוֹ'בר הירשל בחמיהה.  
 אמר הירשל, דומני שאף אני כאן.  
 שיפשו ברוך מאיר ידיו בהנאה. חשובה ניצחת  
 השיב בנו ליונה. חשובה כזו לא עלתה אפילו  
 על דעתו של הנידון לחליה כשעמדו ליתן את  
 החבל על צווארו ושאל אותו החליין אף אחת כאן.  
 (p. 82)

Comparing him to a sentenced man about to be hanged, Hershel's father quips at his son's realization that he is surely becoming locked into the conflicting situation of the victim.

Agnon continues to develop the process of Hershel's

dilemma by gradually revealing Hershel's psychological symptoms that lead to his final breakdown. Married to Mina, Hershel is constantly depicted as harried by her need to communicate her banal existence to him. He feels that in reality she doesn't bother him any more than most people, however, he feels more uncomfortable with her than with others. He poignantly describes his feeling of estrangement from Mina in the following passage:

שואל הירשל את עצמו, מסריחה היא עלי? והוא  
 עונה לעצמו, לא יוחרמשאר כל אדם, אלא שאני  
 מרגיש כה ביוחר, כבגר שמקיף את הגוף ואינו  
 מחמם. (p. 133)

This useless and burdensome description of Mina leads the way to the beginning of his mental breakdown. Shortly after the recognition of his lack of feeling for Mina, Hershel reveals to her his family legacy:

...אמר הירשל, אומר אני דודי שפוי בדעתו  
 היה ועשה עצמו שוטה, שאילו נבג כבריא היה  
 אביו... משיאו אשר שאינו אוהבה והיה מקפח  
 כל ימיו עמה... אילו הצליח דודי היה נחשב  
 לחכם, מאחר שלא הצליח נחשב לשוטה. אין אדם  
 משחנה על ידי עצמו. רשות אחרים עלינו מינה והם  
 עושים עמנו כרצונם.  
 (p. 137)

Identifying with his uncle who purposely went mad to spare himself a wasted life of societal acquiescence, Hershel yearns to find his freedom in madness just as his uncle did. He feels that his fate is determined by others and that he cannot free himself from the yolk of the acceptance of forced convention. He admits his deep sadness to his wife. Trying to cheer her up with a story, his desire to free himself from her clearly emerges with the hidden message of the anecdote.

עכשיו אספר לך דבר שמח. רואה את ספר עבה  
 שם בארון, ספר מלים הוא. מחבר מלון זה  
 בנערותו השיאו אביו אשה ולא שאלו אם הוא  
 רוצה בה, כמנהג אבותינו שלא היו שואלים את  
 בניהם אם רוצים זה בזה. מה עשה הבן,  
 כשהגדיל וביקש ליפטר מאשחו, עמד והלביש  
 את החתול את התפילין שלו. אם בעלת דמיון  
 את מינה דמי בנפשך סוף הדברים...  
 (p. 138)

Whether Hershel is aware that he is telling his own story or not is not stated. The implication is clear. His story ends with the person divorcing his wife and remarrying out of love.

With the recognition of his unhappy state of affairs, and the conflict he experiences in the realization that he cannot escape its entanglement, Hershel begins to isolate himself by spending time in the synagogue alone and by taking solitary walks. With the advice from his mother that walking is good for ridding states of depression, he routinely hikes to the outskirts of his city. The setting of stillness of nature relaxes him. He is able to ponder without the disturbance of his nagging wife. However, his lonely hiking leads him back into the vicious circle of his conflict, for he passes daily the home of Akavia Mazal, the place where Bluma now resides. His yearning becomes rekindled as he tries to catch a glimpse of her through her window. His entire focus returns to Bluma; he becomes obsessed with her. One rainy evening, he sees her, calls out to her and she retreats back into the house without responding to him. The weather and his resultant mood blend together as he cries over the rejection he has just incurred.

עצוב עצוב הלב, עצוב ומבוזבז. כל פעם היה



חופס ראשו וזועק מה אירע, מה אירע?  
הגשמים סיפחו על פניו וזיעה ביצבצה מגופו,  
ואח מקומו לא הניח... הניח הירשל ראשו על  
כפות המנעול והתחיל בוכה.

(P. 159)

This is the first overt expression of his sadness and long repressed need for love and affection. From this point on, his mental breakdown is imminent. He suffers from constant insomnia and his dreams and fantasies terrify him. As he thinks about taking a sleeping pill with a cup of coffee, he freely associates the following fantasy which graphically represents his bottled up anger and repressed emotions.

...אח שקי הקהה כשמכחפים אותם מביח  
הנחיות לחנות, אח השקים כשהם לעצמם  
ואח העכברים כשהם מקורקים בשקים. הרי  
שרץ לו עכבר ונחבא בשק ופתח הירשל את השק  
וקפץ העכבר לפיו של הירשל וסגר הירשל את  
פיו ונשחית העכבר בפנים כשהוא מכשכש בזנבו  
מבחוץ ומחליק את נחיריו של הירשל עד שהוא  
מחנמם.

(P. 174)

The rats springing out of the bag represent the anger Hershel feels toward his parents, and his wife, and even Eluma. However, the image of the rat jumping into his mouth represents the turning of his anger against himself, forcing him to sleep, and keeping the anger and repressed emotion contained within his psyche. At this point Hershel has no where to turn psychologically but to the expression of his conflict and inner turmoil by way of mental breakdown. Leaving the synagogue for the last time, he retreats into the forest, takes off one of his shoes and acts out his grotesque state of mind.

...נשחטח על העשב כשרגלו אחת נעולה  
ורגלו אחת יחפה ושעונו חלוי למטה מחוץ  
לכיסו והוא שורק גע גע מחוץ צחוק  
ומחוך שמחה... שכב הירשל במקום ששכב

כשפתי פתוחה ושחוק של הזיה מרחף  
עליהן... רקק כלפי מעלה וחזר הרוק  
ונפל לחור עיניו... ספח על צדעיו וחבם  
על ראשו, אחר-כך נסל נעלו ונחנה על  
ראשו, וחזר וקפץ עד שנקל באבן ונפל.  
(p. 133)

Dr. Langsam

Hershel's recovery

Hershel's breakdown is the high point of the novel. Incapable of continuing his life with Mina in Shibush, he is taken to Dr. Langsam for psychiatric therapy. The contrast between Hershel's experience in Lemberg with Langsam and his conflicting years in Shibush is striking. While his parents isolated him from affection and emotion, Dr. Langsam and his assistant Shreinzel shower him with love and sympathy.

Dr. Langsam initially practiced internal medicine. However, when he experienced the insensitivity by which doctors treated sick patients, he redirected his talent in order to help the soul rather than the body.

פעם אחת שמע שרופא קורם לחולה סיפס...  
באים לרפא את הגוף ומחליאים את הנפש, נחן  
הדבר על לבו עד שנכנס לאוניברסיטה... לבסוף  
הניח את חולי הגוף ונתעסק בחולי הנפש,  
שכשארם בא לידי חולי זה מצערים אותו וסופו  
שדעחו נטרפה. אבל הוא סיפל בהם באמונה  
ויש מהם שהחזיר לבריאותם.

(p. 188)

Langsam treats his patients like human beings. For him, mental illness is not taboo. His therapeutic technique is a reflection of his feelings, not the conventional detach-

ment of a doctor. He treats Hershel as a healthy person, someone he truly care for and believes in. Langsam does not intimidate Hershel because of his hospitalization.

הוא לא בחן שכלו של הירשל בחידות ולא שאלו  
כמה שנותיו של הקיסר, כדרך שהרופאים רגילים  
לשאול את החולים כדי לידע סיבם ומדח שכלם,  
אלא נחן לו שלום ושאל, ואחא מה לך? כרופא  
שטיפל עם כמה חולים לבסוף מביאים לפניו בריא  
שאינו חסר כלום.  
(P. 189)

In this light Hershel is treated not like a sick person but like a tired man in need of rest.

The relationship that develops between Hershel and Langsam is an especially close one. Langsam does not maintain any observable therapeutic distance from Hershel. Agnon often reiterates Langsam's love for Hershel:

ענוה והכנעה ועצבות שלושה סימנים אלו  
שנצטירו בפניו של הירשל משכו לבו של  
הרופא הזקן אחריו לאהבו. (p. 189)  
פעמים הרבה כשישב הרופא לפניו וידבר עמו  
כאדם שמדבר עם חבירו... (p. 195)  
...אחר כך בא הרופא ומדבר עמו דברים  
שמעוררים את לבו, אף הם מעוררים לבו של  
הרופא והיא מספר ומוסיף. (p. 201)

Langsam's love and concern are felt by Hershel and he responds accordingly:

...אבל הירשל לא קינטר על הרופא ולא  
היה עצב, אדרבא טובה גדולה החזיק לרופא,  
כאדם שהיה מושלך שעולם ונחרחמו עליו  
והכניסוהו לביח.  
באמת ראוי היה לו להירשל שיחזיק טובה  
לרופא, שמימיו לא היה הירשל שרוי בטובה יותר  
מאזם הימים. (P. 201)

Their love for one another is what might ideally exist between a parent and child.

Langsam's encounters with Hershel revolve around the stories and incidents he remembers concerning the small town

where he was raised. It was a warm town, full of love and fond memories. Structurally, Langsam's romanticized town was much like Hershel's Shibush, however, internally they were worlds apart. By relating his happy childhood memories filled with nostalgia, Langsam simultaneously imbues Hershel with the feeling of warmth and love that his home neglected to give him. If religion seems empty and restrictive in Shibush, Dr. Langsam's home town literally shone from the light of Torah learning:

ופעמים סיפר לנגזם להירשל על בית מדרשו  
 שבו למד חורה, שכתליו נוטים ליפול וחקרתו  
 שחורה כזפת, אבל כל הביח מאיר מפני לומדי  
 חורה שבו... אמר לנגזם, שחי מחנוח טובה  
 נתן חקדוש ברוך הוא לישראל ואלו הן חורה  
 ושבת, אלמלא הן איני יודע היאך היו ישראל  
 שבאותו הדור יכולים להתקיים.

(p. 194-95)

Langsam's sensitivity to religion and its ability to illuminate the unstable exterior of the Beit ha-Midrash points to the void within Hershel's life: the emptiness of his marriage and his conformity to shallow religious and social conventions.

Technically speaking, Dr. Langsam's therapeutic approach is similar to the philosophies of Frankl's Logotherapy and Glasser's Reality Therapy. All three approaches differ from conventional psychotherapy in that they stress the importance of the therapist actively relating positive values to the patient by which to guide his life. These theories also stress the therapist's personal involvement with his patient. Even Langsam's assistant's name, Shreinzal, 'the father of the sick,' points to Frankl's notion of the importance of experiencing love in the therapeutic encounter.

No one can become fully aware of the very essence of another human being unless he loves him. By the spiritual act of love he is enabled to see the essential traits and features in the beloved person; even more, he sees that which is potential in him, which is not yet actualized but yet ought to be actualized. Furthermore, by his love, the loving person enables the beloved to actualize these potentialities. By making him aware of what he can be and of what he should become,<sup>25</sup> he makes these potentialities come true.

We have noted how Dr. Langsam de-emphasized Hershel's status as a sick person. In this light he resembles Glasser's criteria for Reality Therapy. Contrasting Reality Therapy to conventional psychotherapy, Glasser notes that "... the patient cannot become involved with us as a mentally ill person who has no responsibility for his behavior... We relate to patients as ourselves, not as transference figures."<sup>26</sup> By stressing the personal involvement of the therapist with the patient, Glasser breaks the transference barrier that is erected in a conventional therapeutic situation. The therapist remains who he is, a real person, as opposed to what the patient would like to imagine him to be. Langsam does not become Hershel's father, mother, or wife. He remains himself, sharing his own memories of his childhood and his dead wife. By talking about his own past and not Hershel's, he resembles another characteristic of Glasser's therapeutic method:

Working in the present toward the future, we don't get involved in the patient's history because we neither change what happened to him nor accept the fact that he is limited by his past.<sup>27</sup>

Langsam uses his own experience to fill the void of Hershel's



past, pointing him toward the possibility of a renewed future.

In essence, the uniqueness of Langsam's therapy is that it provides a model for an alternative mode of behavior. His method points to the fact that an understanding of the patient is not necessary for behavioral change, and that an intense personal involvement is vital for helping the patient relearn how to live comfortably. The love that exists between doctor and patient enables Hershel to love his wife and re-enter Shibush.

Dr. Langsam is preoccupied with the blind people of his city playing endless sweet tunes. This motif is important for understanding his therapeutic method and also the course of Hershel's recovery.

ועוד היה הרופא מרבה לספר על המנגונים  
הסומים שיושבים על שקיהם בשוק ופורסים  
באצבעותיהם על כלי שיר שירים עריבים  
ומחוקים שאין להם תחילה ואין להם סוף  
ואתה עומד ושומע ולבך מחעטף. כבר נחיישן  
קולו של הרופא, ברם העצב המחוק היה מחלחל  
מגרונו ועוסף את הירשל כשירי רגנות, אלו  
שירי רגנות שהירשל לא שמעם בעריסתו.  
(p. 202-)

The seductive tune of the blind singer is developed by Langsam and it soothes Hershel greatly. The tune fills him with the warmth and human love he never received from his mother because of her inability to sing. Dr. Langsam refers to the elusive tune from time to time:

פעמים היה הרופא מחזיר פניו לקיר ומשורר  
לפניו משירי הקבצנים הסומים שיושבים מקופלים  
על שקיהם ושרים לפנייהם.  
(R. 203)

The force of the story about the blind singer and the repetition of his tune of melancholy love stir up powerful emotions



in Hershel; emotions that had lain dormant in him many years and were now emerging. These feelings cause him symbolically to experience his childhood and clearly see the reality of his life in Shibush. In the following passage, we find Hershel unable to sleep as his mind races about his home town:

שוב ששכחתי הרים וגבעות גיאיות ועמקים  
מצמצמה עצמה ונכרכת ככף יד ובין אצבעותיה  
של אותה היד יושב קבצן סומא ומשורר על העשבים  
הגבוהים יורד שלג, שם באחו צפרדעים רועות...  
בתוך שהניגון מחונק באה אשה עטופה וכפפה  
עצמה לפניו ופירטה לו פרוסה של עוגה. אינה  
מספקת ליתן לו עד שבא אדם אחד ונטל מלא  
חפניו מסבועה וזרקן לו, לא לידו, אלא לתוך עיניו, עד  
שנחכסו עיניו כשחי גועה. צעק הירשל ובכה, אבל קולו  
לא נשמע...

( . 205-6)

Since this is a representation of Hershel's imagination, it is reasonable to assume that he identifies himself as the blind person. In this passage, he recalls himself situated in the forest at the time of his breakdown. The woman who approaches him may either be Bluma or his mother. Just as she is about to offer him cake, symbolic of the erotic love he felt for Bluma who baked him tantalizing cakes, another man comes between him and the woman (perhaps Akaira Mazal or Baruch Meir), frustrating him by not only taking away his woman but by throwing a handful of coins into his sightless eyes. The coins represent the imposition of material wealth over the human need for love and attachment. In addition, the blindness of the person in this fantasy may represent Hershel's lack of virility and his inability to avoid the consequences of his victimized life.

After Hershel has returned home from Lemberg, recovered from his depression, we note him walking with his wife Mina in Malekrovik in the the winter towards the end of the novel. Once again Agnon recalls the theme of the blind person. Hershel and Mina confront him together:

לא זהו הסומא שדיבר בו לנגזם הרופא, שכל  
אימח שהיה לנגזם מספר על המנגנים הסומים  
שבעירו רואה היה הירשל לפניו עיר שוכנת  
בחמה ואילו זה יושב בכפר ביום השלג.  
מקופל בשלג יושב לו המנגן ומנגן אח. ניגונו העצב  
שאין לו תחילה ואין לו סוף. דמומים עומדים  
מינה והירשל לפניו, דומה שכן יעמדו עד שלא  
יפסיק המנגן אח ניגונו.  
פתאום תפס הירשל אח מינה בזרועה ואמר, נלך.  
קולו קשה היה, אלמלא לא נחלחלה מקולו היתה  
חמיהה.  
כיון שהלכו חזר הירשל אצל המנגן וזרק לו מטבע.  
אלמלא לא היה סומא היה חמיה מן המטבע שקיבל, שהיא  
גדולה מכל המטבעות שנותנים לעני.

(p. 240)

The blind person first appears in a warm reminiscent story told by Dr. Langsam. His second appearance is in Hershel's fantasy where he is abused at the moment that his melody is capturing the heart of a woman. The final appearance of the blind person places him in a real situation. His alluring tune captivates Hershel and transfixes him in an almost hypnotic trance. Perhaps Hershel experiences a rush of emotion that he missed as a child at that moment; perhaps he experiences the pain of rejection. The importance of the moment is that it envelops him in silent rapture for an undetermined amount of time. When he snaps out of his trance, his behavior changes abruptly. He grabs his wife, turns away from the blind person, and throws him a generous coin. With such action, Hershel assumes the role of the man in his

fantasy and he pulls the woman away from the blind person. The action not only expresses Hershel's discomfort in confronting himself, but implies that he has accepted the values of a society that were once destructive to him.

The ending of the story may be viewed in light of the implications of the blind person motif. We learn that Mina and Hershel's first child, Meshulam, must be taken out of their home and put in the custody of Mina's parents. We are also made aware of Hershel's ambivalent feelings toward his son who was not conceived out of love. Meshulam represents Hershel as a child, suffering from lack of love and attention. After his therapy, Hershel is able to love Mina and enjoy her as a woman. Their second son is a reflection of their new relationship. He is healthy, alert, and loved by all. In the last scene of the book, Hershel and Mina stand over his crib and talk with each other in a reflective mood:

שאל הירשל את מינה כשעמדו שניהם אצל עריסה  
הקטן ואמר, מינה במה הגיח?  
אמרה מינה, על אחיו של זה שאינו כאן.  
אמר הירשל, טוב שהוא דר עם הזקנים.  
אמרה מינה, אף אני סבורה כך.  
אמר הירשל, סבורה אתה כך, אבל לא מן  
הטעם שלי.  
אמרה מינה, טעמך מה?  
אמר לה, מפני שאין אהבה מחלקת לשנים.  
אמרה לו, סבורה הייתי שדרכה של אהבה שהיא  
גדלה עם כל אחד ואחד.  
הוריד הירשל ראשו ואמר, לא כן, אלא שהיא  
באה אם אין מי שחוצץ בינה ובינינו.  
(p. 244)

Many critics have analyzed the ending of Sippur Pashut. Band sees the ending as a "...viable compromise between the two opposing ideals of the novel, a compromise that leads to

a life of happiness, love, and beloved offspring."<sup>28</sup>

Hochman notes that in the end we approve of the reconciliation of Hershel to a milieu which has shown to be inimical to every value of youth, life, love, or for that matter authentic tradition.<sup>29</sup> Ewen notes an artificial transformation in Hershel's character at the end of the novel:

בסוף כל סוף... הוא משחק בהצלחה את דמות  
הבעל האב והאב המסור, הוא חדל להיות הירשל  
הקודם האמיתי, מופנם, פורד, העצוב, והמחנענע  
אל העולמות העליונים.<sup>30</sup>

He further notes that the tender intimacy represented in the final dialogue between Hershel and Mina is an expression of their purification from suffering. In essence Ewen feels the ending is a positive beacon for the future of a happier and better life with children and each other.

I do not see the ending of this story as a happy one. It is impossible to conceive that Hershel's conflicted life can be summed up as "living happily ever after." His own admission that love is incomprehensible, that it cannot be mediated by a third party clearly points to his realization that he had to gain independence from his mother for his own fulfillment through love. The tragedy of the need to sever from his life his first child dramatically illustrates Hershel's need to act out the severing of a part of his personality in a reality situation. The interaction with the blind person in Malekrovik foreshadows Hershel's need to distance himself from any elements that remind him of disturbing memories. The gesture of Hershel walking away from the blind person in a manner of abrupt disturbance and sadness and his

bowing his head as he explains to his wife that love comes only when there is no one to keep them apart, both emphasize boldly the ambivalence yet remaining in Hershel, even though he seems to have rediscovered love.

CONFLICT WITH CONVENTION:

אפרים חוזר לאספסת



The problems of the individual in conflict with social convention and the resultant turmoil of the inner self, are prominent themes in the life experience of Efraim, Yizhar Smilansky's protagonist in the novella Efraim Returns to Alfalfa (1938). Concerning itself with an agrarian kibbutz milieu, an environment ridden with a certain system of expected behavioral patterns, the story depicts Efraim embroiled in an intense inner examination of his psyche, his identity, and his physical and emotional needs. To see the story in the narrow sense of Efraim as a young man struggling to mature in order to assimilate into an already mature community, would be to undermine the overwhelming human struggle that he experiences. Efraim's struggle is so self-oriented and critical to the development of his own personality that it comes into conflict with the demands of community, which subsume immediate acceptance of individual turmoil in order to fulfill the more pressing needs of the group.

Efraim's struggle is presented in the vortex of the kibbutz environment; the weather of the region, the atmosphere of the kibbutz dining hall, the members of the kibbutz, and

finally, Efraim himself. As the focal point of the novella, Efraim is a reflection of all of these facets of the kibbutz as he attempts to make a "simple" decision. This "simple" decision is the plot of the book. In the course of one evening, Efraim struggles with the desire to present before the kibbutz community a request of transfer from the alfalfa fields to the orange grove at their evening work organization meeting. Being the social arbiters of all individual requests, the kibbutz members convene as a group to discuss Efraim's request. After much debate, flashbacks, self-examination, and secondary characters' reactions, the protagonist decides by himself to return to the alfalfa fields.

On the surface, a simple story; yet the genius of the author is his use of language and technique in building and lowering tension through psychological probing and nature description, while the process of decision moves toward completion.

My concern in this presentation lies with Efraim and the forces surrounding him as he struggles with them and himself. In discussing Efraim's conflict with convention I will deal first with the external forces affecting his life, the various settings, and the secondary characters, and the internal forces of Efraim and his own consciousness.

### SETTING

In Ralph Ellison's discussion of the novel he says that the "...novel seeks to take the surface facts of experience and arrange them in such ways, that for a magic moment, reality comes into sharp and significant focus."<sup>31</sup> The reality that Yizhar creates in the opening description of the dining hall gives the reader the impression that he is able to freeze the moment, so to speak, in which a given action takes place, and thereby to display a far more precise and translucent reality. That which is surface reality gains richness in intensity as the artist applies his skill of describing the setting.

דלה חדר האוכל נפתחה בצויחה...סינוור  
נוגה החשמל שהצהיר כהילחו כחור מחנה  
רפרפים עסקניים...חרקיה כסאוח...  
32  
נקישה כלים מצלצלים...

The opening description of the setting of the dining hall is one of a bustling, screeching, and nervous atmosphere where moths symbolically are drawn against their will to the power of the sharp and imposing dining hall light. In the midst of this agitated atmosphere, a sense of the routine and the familiar become intermingled:

אך הללו שכבר הסכו כמחיצה השולחן הרחוק  
פיזמו שאננות, מהם גומעים לאטם חה פושר

כאוחם הספלים הכבדים; ממלאים חלקם כניגון  
 באנפוף ובחפיפה שכלאחר-יד, ומהם מחלזנים  
 טבעות-עשן נלאות והוזהות.  
 (p. 179)

The motif of the recurring tune emphasizes the monotony of the area and begins to express the convention of group uniformity in this communal atmosphere:

זמר זה שלא פסק פה ושם כל היום, והיה  
 נשמע כרננה, כשריקה, כריסון וכהמיה דקה,  
 נצמד לכל מלאכה, פושט צוהל מגן-הירך.  
 מתנגן חולם כמתפרה, נגרס כפי ההינזקות,  
 נישא בין טירטור לטרטור כטראקטור  
 המתלבט כנמלה כשיפולי השדות מפולשי  
 האופק, ועולה בבעייה של כלות-נפש כמקלחת  
 בין סיכון לזילוף-- עד שאין פינה שלא  
 חכיל הדו, ואין אדם שלא נוגע בו ולא פצה  
 פה כמחכוון או שלא-מדעה לזמרו כפי כוחו.  
 (p. 179)

All aspects of the kibbutz environment are woven together by the tune. The tune is part of the consciousness of all together as a communal group. Just as there exists a conformity through the humming of the tune, so does there exist conformity in dress and compulsive cleanliness:

מדשדשים סנדלים עלה ורדה, וחולדות כחולות  
ובהירות נחלות מעל למכנסיים בקפלים רחבים...  
ורעננות- המקלחת...  
(p. 180)

A constant overtone of conversation blends into the recurrent humming of the tune:

וכן נשחקעו בשירה, חזור ושנה ושלש  
נמסים כנגד סלסול אחד ומחמוגים מן  
ה"ניצוץ" המסוחר, ומוסיפים יתר רוח  
ועצבות שבהחרפקות לזמר חסידי זה...  
(p. 180)

Yizhar picks up the theme of the group adhesion quality of the tune and follows it with a more involved description of body movement in response to the power of the tune:

ומה שאין הקול אומר-- יביעו הידיים המחופפות,  
הרגל המקישה, הגו המתנועע כדכקוה, העיניים  
המבקשות אחיות, ונענועי-הראש האומרים ללטף  
סרבול מגושם זה של ימות-חול.  
(p. 180)

Efraim makes his first appearance against this setting of group activity. The contrast produced is striking, for at once the focus of the story is revealed; the group versus the loner. Where as the initial description of setting elicits a bustling sensation, Efraim stands in opposition to this feeling for he is totally passive and marginal:

כשנכנס אפרים נכרך החילה... המק והגיע

לחלון... וסקר מחונות לעברים בנחיות  
של משקוף מן הצד.  
(p. 181)

Efraim is portrayed as an outsider within his own community.

### SECONDARY CHARACTERS

As soon as Efraim enters the action of the story, Yizhar continues his narrative with a rapid survey of the secondary characters that comprise the total setting. The secondary characters reinforce the general atmosphere of the setting. As integral components of the kibbutz, they develop the animated tone of the dining hall and accentuate the unique chords which ultimately produce the harmony that symbolizes the group. The overall impression that the short sketches of the secondary characters bring to the foreground may be understood in terms of the manners of this particular milieu. Lionel Trilling's thoughts about manners highlight the significance of the secondary characters in this work. He notes that manners are

...a culture's hum and buzz of implication... the whole evanescent context in which its' explicit statements are made. It is that part of a culture which is made up of half uttered or unutterable expressions of value. They are hinted at by small actions, sometimes by the acts of dress or decoration, sometimes by the words that are used with a special frequency or a special meaning. They are the things that for good or bad draw the people of a culture together and that separate them from the people of another culture.<sup>33</sup>



The manners of this particular kibbutz are presented through characters who reflect the pressure of communal living. Forced uniformity accentuates their personal diversity. In the case of the kibbutz members this diversity is displayed in their manners; their idiosyncratic body gestures and their psychological moods. Taken together, the various secondary characters define the communal setting and accentuate the "hum and buzz" of this particular social milieu.

פרץ... קולו מעכב את החכורה ככבדו כמצחו  
רוחשים כבר קמט הרהורים.

(p. 181)

The screeching of the chairs in the physical description of the dining hall may be seen as psychologically manifested in the behavior of Peretz, whose laborious verbal expression and facial tension reflect an internalized environment.

שרה זו שילכה ראשי אצבעותיה על כרכיה  
מתכוננת כהם כהסם-הדעת ושרה כהסם-הדעת  
(כבר צפד וקומט עור כל היד...)...מבארת  
כעיניים לחות וכידיים פשוטות... גדוע  
ולמה ההפקעה מצחוק אחמול, וקולה משחחז  
ומתקחה חליפות ואוכד כפעם כפעם כפרפורי-  
צחור סוערים.  
(pp. 181 & 184)

Sarah's mindless staring at her finger tips and her sudden outburst of emotion and apologetics add to the picture of the community. She also seems to have internalized a tense environment, for her body's deterioration and her self-consciousness leaves her depressed.

מאיר...מלהיב עצמו ואחרים..."אל החשוש  
שאני מן הרפה, גם בזאת רכה לי ידי!"

(pp.181 & 184)

Mayer is portrayed as a self-righteous and conscientious kibbutz member who has been working in the cowshed for many years. Because his status is fixed, he shows the need to emphasize his desire for autonomy throughout the novella. In contrast to Efraim, Mayer's "aloneness" is expressed as a positive trait and not a disability. Dov is described as a serious man whose age is undiscernable. Avramke is briefly portrayed as a jumpy man:

וגופו אחרז עויה של צדק... ופניו זורים  
משעור שהגיעה...

(p. 184)

Much like Mayer, he is self-righteous and highly opinionated. D'vorah and Tziporah are the models of stock kibbutz femininity:

שקועה כשירה... מכנסיהן הכחילים והחולצות  
הבהירות נקיים ומגוחצים, שערן מסודר ומכהיק  
רעננות ולחות.

(p. 182)

Fresh and clean, ordered and glistening; both are settled and well integrated into the group.

יצחק... בטלאי החמיד... שואג ומריע וספיה  
זקנו הדוקרני מוסיף לו נוי שביהירות הפקר.

(p. 184)

Itzhak is a stark figure who elicits an electric image. His dagger-pointed beard clearly evokes his argumentative nature. Avigdor, described as broad shouldered, balding, and heavy jawed, is the chairman of the kibbutz meeting. He is described as being articulate and healthy. Shmuel stands out as the loner of the group. His marginality is also unlike Efraim's, for it is Shmuel's identifying characteristic and not his inner dilemma.

כבר חטמו כמי שגם לכו על הכל... צימצם  
 שפחיו וציץ כהחזה מודגשה קטע מאיזו  
 סימפוניה ידועה... לא איכפה לו אם ישימו  
 לב אליו אם לאו... וטלטל ראשו כהחלכור  
 נעלכה לקצב מפוקפק והריחו מחלבס בחור...  
 אין איש שים אליו לב מחמת הרגל...  
 (p. 183)

No one pays attention to him, and he, engrossed in his own particular world of classical music, ignores the group and in his opinion, its seemingly plebian taste in music.

Perhaps the most striking secondary character is Shlomke. He is perceived as a tangible symbol of the working of Efraim's mind in relationship to all the characters that surround it:

ידו... ממשכה שלולית חה על השולחן לנחלים  
 מסוככים ומפוחלים... נחליו נסחככו וחצרו  
 להיות שלולית... מרטן אוהו זמר לעצמו בדכקוח  
 שחוהה וחרישיה ובשכחה חדר ומלאו...  
 (pp. 181 & 184)

The controlled image of the puddle of tea branching out into numerous tributaries is reminiscent of the tendency of people to test the boundaries of any particular environment or situation that they find themselves to be in. Shlomke's behavior

of manipulating the spilt tea into complex meandering rivulets points to his own inner frustration and also symbolizes kibbutz life itself.

Just as Yizhar contrasts Efraim to the physical setting of the dining hall, he differentiates him significantly in relation to the members of the kibbutz. Because of their unique gestures, statements, and appearances, each member becomes a personification of the "hum and buzz" of the dining hall. Viewed in their totality they posit Efraim the observer in a confused frame of mind. In the context of this group Efraim is described as "... glancing from place to place, seeing yet not seeing, hearing the thoughts of his heart and not knowing... wondering at the stifled longings within him."

וכחור כך ככר היה אפרים עומד וסיגריה  
חדשה בפיו, סובב בקימוט-גבוה קשה אחרי  
איזה חוט-הרהורים שניחק ככיכול ושאסור  
משום-מה לאכזר למרות כל אלה ההסחות של  
מה בכך המבצבצות, מחמת עייפות כנראה,  
ומטרידות כהמיה רצופה של זכר: מחחכה ככוס.  
(p. 184)

At the end of the presentation of the secondary characters Efraim is depicted as confused, tense, and in search of the thin thread of sanity that seems to have snapped in his effort to integrate the diversity of the group within his own mind. Philip Slater's analysis of the individual in relationship to the group illustrates Efraim's relationship to the kibbutz members quite well:

An individual, like a group, is a motley collection of ambivalent feelings, contradictory needs and values and antithetical

ideas. He is not, and cannot be, a monolithic totality, and the modern effort to bring this myth to life is not only delusional and ridiculous, but also acutely destructive, both to the individual and to his society.<sup>34</sup>

The secondary characters as a group are the entity called the kibbutz. As a group they are nothing more than a collection of vastly different personalities with vastly different needs. The implied myth of the story is that they are a homogenous group. Efraim's character demonstrates that this notion of the group is false for his very presence emphasizes the diversity of the kibbutz community. As a reflection of this community, Efraim is in a state of constant inner conflict. As an individual, he is unable to unify his various thoughts and emotions, much in the same way that the secondary characters are unable to conform to a single personality type. The recurrent images of his tiredness, or a thread of thought snapping, or the continuous buzz of a fly beating about in a glass, all point to the existing turmoil within his consciousness.

#### NARRATOR

#### Psychological Novel

A central key to an understanding of Yizhar's protagonist is the narrative voice that he employs; the technique of the stream-of-consciousness, and the literary genre; the psychological novel. The narrative voice in this novella is an all encompassing vehicle used by the author to control all aspects of the story; from the description of setting, to the

manners of the secondary characters, to the internal monologue of the characters, to the description of nature, and finally, to the sparse verbal dialogue that ensues throughout the narrative. In similar fashion, Yizhar manipulates Efraim, describing him as immersed both in inner conflict and in the density of the surrounding natural landscape.

Wayne Booth discusses this "dramatized and disguised" narrator:

...many novels dramatize their narrators with great fullness, making them into characters who are as vivid as those they tell us about... we should remind ourselves that many dramatized narrators are never explicitly labeled as narrators at all... most works contain disguised narrators who are used to tell the audience what it needs to know while seeming merely to act out their roles.<sup>35</sup>

The narrator in Efraim Returns to Alfalfa is a disguised narrator. On the one hand, the narrator speaks through the protagonist's consciousness as if he were the character himself. On the other, the narrative voice takes on its objective role as puppeteer by regaining control of his protagonist's moods. Booth continues to discuss the disguised narrator as the "...third person center of consciousness..." through whom the author filters his narrative. Booth calls the disguised narrator a "reflector" or a "highly polished mirror reflecting complex mental experience, or rather turbid sense-bound 'camera eyes.'" Narrators such as Yizhar's, functioning within a novel dealing with the conscious and unconscious mind "...fill precisely the function of avowed narrators though they can add intensities of their own."<sup>36</sup>



An illustration of the flexibility of this type of narrator may be seen in the following passage. After describing Efraim's entrance into the dining hall at the outset of the novella, Yizhar displays the variegated forms of his narrative involvement:

והיה אפרים מוסיף ומרפרף מכסיו לכאן ולשם,  
רואה ואינו רואה... קוטם אפר הסיגריה, מרגיש  
כרוח שהלכה על ערפו. (p. 182)

One face of the narrative voice is third person description. The narrator then slips into Efraim's consciousness:

והמיה כבושה שהמחה בו. (p. 182)  
Immediately connected to this sentence is a thought that expresses another level of narrative point of view; that of analyzing the character's actions:

ושאפשר אינה אלא עייפות כלבד... כרוך.  
אימתי היה דוב זה עצמו מטיח פזמון אוקראיני  
כריקוע רגליים וטלטול כלוריה ודש חולצה  
רוסית? (p. 182)

After a few more internal questions about his surroundings, the narrator uses the voice of the second person as if he were a part of Efraim's thinking apparatus, consecutively verbalizing his thoughts:

רואה אחה לפניך פלוני זה, השר ורעהו  
העונה... אף אותם הצוללים היום כהרהורים  
וכי לא מחר ישירו הם ואחרים יטפלו אל עצמם.  
(p. 182)

After Efraim's surroundings are filtered through the observations of his consciousness, the narrative voice uses

Efraim's consciousness to question the secondary characters behavior. In so doing, the narrator uses 'er lebte rede' or imitated speech to unite the narrative voice with the character:

מנהגו של עולם בכך. אך נניח לזה. ובדרך-  
אגב, הרי כיסא פנוי.  
( p. 182)

A final aspect of the narrator is his ability to present a character using direct speech.

"איזה חום הערכ-- להיחנק!" פלט פלוני  
אליו בקוללנה מקורכים.  
(p. 182)

In essence, the versatility and flexibility of the disguised narrator allows him to move from the innermost consciousness of a character to a character's direct discourse in the space of one page of narrative.

Leon Edel discusses the psychological novel, or the stream-of-consciousness novel, in terms of author subjectivity. Yizhar fits this categorization, for he presents an artistic record of Efraim's mind at the very moment of thought.<sup>37</sup> In essence, the plot of Efraim Returns to Alfalfa is of little importance in relationship to the central character and the working of the mind. Yizhar's special talent is that he succeeds in drawing the reader into this single consciousness thereby making the reader feel with the character.<sup>38</sup> In dealing with the working of the mind and in attempting to portray thought and feeling accurately, not only is the use of the disguised narrator employed but also the isolation of time. Intense centralization in this area is of the utmost

importance:

Because the time of the action is limited spatially, it must be viewed as psychological time, which is dependent upon an endless continuation of a singular momentary experience. 39

Edel quotes the philosopher Henri Bergson in light of the centrality of time in the psychological novel:

In the mind, past and present merge: we suddenly call up a memory of childhood that is chronologically of the distant past, but in it, memory becomes instantly vivid and is relived for the moment that it is recalled. 40

#### EFRAIM

The merging of past and present in displaying the working of the mind may be seen in Yizhar's presentation of Efraim becoming lost within himself. His pleasant thoughts of the past are an escape mechanism shielding him from the pain of accounting before the kibbutz members for his desire to leave alfalfa. Through the stream of consciousness Yizhar controls the images of Efraim's mind in a rambling description of freedom in the years gone by. The stream of consciousness in the following passage is a free association of natural images and inner psychological feelings:

לאן הם מובילים הגעגועים? אותם השכחות  
שכימות חורף רחוק, שחמה צוחקת בשמיהם ועבים  
ככדי-כרס מגובכים שיפוליהם, ואילו מהם מרחפים  
וצלם עמם על ההרים ועל השדות, ומחנה-אהלים נטוש  
בגבעה, ואי-סדר מוכן וקרוב כיניהם, ונוטלים סוס  
וזהרים כמרחב... וכלניות מבוונות ומרוות-דגולות  
ואיריסים סגולים... וכחמים כחמים מאירים ממלאים  
אח השטח ואין בהם מטושטש וחירור ואין שרטוט וקר  
שיגביל ויחחום בין שירת אור לצבע... (p. 226)

This monologue continues for six pages. We note a continuous flow of psychological material; the open, limitless, infinite feeling of the past rushes to the foreground of Efraim's consciousness at the present moment of his need to confront the issue at hand; his leaving or remaining in alfalfa. The harmony and fullness of the above description breaks suddenly with the words:

אולם, אפרים, היכן אחה? ! עולמו של הקורח  
נקצרים נופלים כפישוט קומחם, מחחח ידיך  
נשמטים ואוזלים, ואחח? מה אחח? היכן אחח?  
(p. 227)

The central problem in the novella is this very question: Where is Efraim? And what is troubling him?

Efraim is fighting social convention and a behavior prescribed and deemed acceptable by the milieu that he lives in. The conventional attitudes of the kibbutz community are illustrated vividly in various places throughout the novel.

At first:

ועוד זה שלא נוח להסכים ולקבל מנה המוגנים  
וכשרים שנוח להם ככל, ושדי להם כניהן וכמצוי  
כידם: ומוטב שלא להרהר במר, שחחח שמש ואספסח  
יומם, ועייפות וזמן מחכזבו לשוא-- לילה  
ועייפות ושמש ואספסח למחרתיים ולילה רצוף עייפות  
וזמן מכוזבו לאחר-כך, הרכה ימים, הרכה לילות  
צופים וצמודים שורה ארוכה הנכלעת לאפקים סמויים.  
ומכל מקום צריך לשחוק, ולהחמרמר אסדב. ולא למרוד  
ולהשתער בכידון על טחנות שלווה ונאות.  
(p. 202)

Such an environment has no room for the liberated will and imagination of a quixotic personality. The acceptance of a daily routine and the repression of rebellious moods or restless feelings are common to his society. In the midst of

this reality, where people gossip about comrade's tragedies and where maturity is defined as the love of homeland and the rejection of childish trifles of human confusion and conflict, Efraim breaks his silence and exposes his need for autonomy, freedom, peaceful nights and new work.

Edouard Dujardin defines internal monologue as the speech of a given character which expresses the most intimate thoughts of the character, those closest to the unconscious.<sup>41</sup> In the following soliloquy Yizhar reproduces Efraim's intense desire to exercise his freedom. This pressing need occurs to him spontaneously in relation to the overwhelming convention that surrounds his field of existence.

ומדוע להוסיף לשחוך ולא לצעוק ולדבר חמס,  
עד מהי לשחוך ולמה? מדוע לא לאמר בלוייה  
וכרורות בסוף כל הסופות: בכך וכך רצוני,  
ובכך וכך איני רוצה! ממש. רצוני כמה שמגיע  
לי בחור אפרים, ולא כמה שמזכה אותי המקרה  
וכפוי עלי מן המזדמן... מדוע לא יוקדשו כל  
הכוחות למה שמציק באמת, למה שקשה לי כאשר  
אני--אפרים אני?... מדוע לא יהא כנו הכוח  
לכור לנו לעצמנו מכין המזדמן, מתוך השוטף  
ובא, את מה שחסר לנו באמת, את מה שאני אוהבים,  
ולדחות ככוח רצוננו את מה שאינו נראה בעינינו,  
ולא להסכים לו שחולשה-זיקנה קופצת עליך...  
שינוי מוכרח לבוא, שינוי פנימי הכרוך בחיצוני.  
על כן רוצה אני לעבור לפרדס... שהוא יהיה  
סימן כלכד, רק אוח, או דומה לזה, לשינוי שנעשה.  
(pp. 198-199)

This cathartic interior monologue expresses one side of Efraim's dualistic character. Here we note how desperately he seeks his identity and how great is his need for authenticity. The ability to direct his own fate is most important. He must choose what is meaningful to him by realizing his inner state of need and by changing his position in the

oppressive external environment. In this there is no resignation. On the contrary, it evokes an infinite will to overcome the impotency of humble modesty by boldly proclaiming the importance of the "I"-- of Efraim the individual. However, this is only one half of Efraim's consciousness. The other half is finite in that it gives in to the internal and social pressures by seeking escape through sleep. It is this component of Efraim's personality that creates conflict between his inner vitality and the resignation to a routine of no change or inner growth.

אכן, לשחוק צריך. לניח למים לזרים באפיקם.  
 הכל יהיה כשהיה. ויש לשנן, לכסוף לראש בעיקש  
 הזה, שהתחדשו והתנערו אינן רשומות בפנקס  
 שלו. ולהסגל צריך לחוק הזה, כי מה שבא ממילא  
 היה בא, ואי-אפשר היה לו שלא לבוא. ואין להחקומם,  
 ושוא המרדה והכל ההתמרמרות. ככה, צמום, צנוע,  
 ועניו, וקשם ב"אמן" חרישי אה הקיים ואה הכאות.  
 (p. 202)

This silent resignation to the forces that exist from without lies in direct opposition to Efraim's initial thirst for change. These two forces, one opposing the other; the will to change and the resignation to conformity, produce the unbearable inner conflict that causes Efraim's inability to arrive at a decision. Yizhar portrays this conflict in the following passage which brings to light the apparent split in Efraim's consciousness. The resulting feeling of this conflict is loneliness and alienation; moods that Efraim suffers throughout the novella:

ונעשה אז אדם קרעים קרעים, ועצבנות נובה



מהחלה בו וקול שכהבאי לוחש: למרור "על אפם  
ועל חמתם", וקול משיב: "עבוד שוטה ואל  
חכלכל את המוח", ודממה רכה, דממה שנואה  
שורצח ובאה על כל הקולות, והופך הכל חסר  
טעם ואין כמה להיאחז עוד, והקרקע נסחפה  
חחתיך, וחמת-רצח מטיחה אברופים קמוצים  
להרוס, לאכזר, להעליכ, לפגוע, להרגיז,  
לזרוק הכל לאכזר, על שכך עלחה שזה סוף  
לכל החלומות, ונהי גלמוד מחסא וזועק שאי-  
אפשר לו עתה להישער כאן לכד, ולמעלה  
מנשוא שאין מישהו על ידך, ועד להיחנק  
חקועה ההתייחדות הזו. הוי, היוחרו על  
ידי אחים, אל חניחוני כאן, אל חשיוני כדך,  
קחוני עמכם, כיניכם, ככל שחלכו-- אל  
חניחוני לכד!

(p. 211)

#### NATURE

The use of the stream of consciousness and the interior monologue in this story brings to light the verbal expression of Efraim's struggle. Although these techniques express the protagonist's feelings, Yizhar broadens the scope of Efraim's emotional expression by reflecting it in the symbolic use of nature. Yizhar creates elaborate scenes of nature which continue and grow out of the flow of consciousness of the protagonist. He thus sets down in concrete terms the sense perceptions of the hero which are not generally expressed on a verbal level. In so doing these impressions embody the evanescence of Efraim's life experience. As a symbol both of change and of the contours of the protagonist's consciousness, the use of nature description aids in the total emergence of Efraim as a three dimensional figure.<sup>42</sup> The reader not only

comes to understand Efraim's struggle, he also feels the moods that this struggle produces as a result of the kibbutz environment. Edmund Wilson notes that:

Every feeling or sensation we have, every moment of consciousness, is different from every other; and it is in consequence, impossible to render our sensations as we actually experience them through the conventional and universal language of ordinary literature. Each poet has his unique personality; each of his moments has its special tone; its special combination of elements. And it is the poet's task to find, to invent, the special language which will alone be capable of expressing his personality and feelings.<sup>43</sup>

Yizhar uses nature to express the personality and the feelings of his protagonist. He intertwines the natural environment and the complexity of Efraim's inner struggle with himself and his milieu. Different variations of the natural elements are interwoven within the context of the protagonist's changing moods. Gradations of natural description mirror the varied emotions of the protagonist. Nature mirrors Efraim, and Efraim, so involved in nature, becomes an affect of it.

Lionel Trilling's insight into the meaning of environment in relationship to people sheds light on Efraim's relationship to nature. In his essay "Sense of the Past," he notes the following:

The poet...is an effect of environment, but we must remember that he is no less a cause. He may be used as a barometer, but let us not forget that he is also part of the weather.<sup>44</sup>

There is a reciprocal relationship between the environment and the character. As the character is effected by his

environment, so does his unique perception create his environment. Both character and nature interact with each other and magnify each other's innate intensity and depth.

In quoting Bergson, Leon Edel illuminates Trilling's insight by pointing out that consciousness is the continuation of an indefinite past in a living present. This concept of the past influencing the present is the 'raison d'être' for Efraim's close relationship to nature. The essence of this natural relationship of past and present and of character and environment may be illustrated by the connection between Efraim's consciousness and nature through the device of flashback.

The significant nature descriptions arise three times in the novella. Each time they arise in the form of a mental flashback. Those flashbacks always occur at moments when Efraim is either frustrated by his inability to define his needs, or moments when he is called upon to describe his needs to the group. In both cases the flashback into nature serves as an escape into the past. However, the past always yields the conflict of the present, and every time a nature flashback occurs the recurrent theme of the clash between the yearning for freedom and the restriction of convention meet head on and continue to agitate the protagonist.

Each description of nature represents a part of the kibbutz working day. The first one describes the atmosphere and feeling of the early morning hours of Efraim's life:

וממילא זורח ועולה יום המחרת רשיהא אפרים  
מטפל ויוצא מן החצר באשמורה-בוקר ויורד לשדות-

האספסה שכעמק, מטביע עקבותיו כאותם של חמול  
 ושלשום שהחול ספגם... ואותה חדוה ידועה תהא  
 מחגנכת כהמיד, מכלי לשעות לסופה הממשמש-וכא  
 כחחילה, אותה חדוה של חירות... ושוב יהא הלב  
 מנכא מה, נענה כרצון, מוכן לדחות את השאר  
 לצודדין, מחרפק בכיסופים על השטח המכהיר ומרמז  
 על החורשות שאפלוליתן משכיחה ערירותן כמחשוף  
 שמיכיב. ושלפי השדות המטוללים יהיו מזהיכים,  
 ואיזה הד רחוק יטלטל צלולות, וציפרים חחינה  
 מחוכחות כציוץ גובר וצוהל. (p. 189)

The picture of the lushness of the alfalfa setting, the long-leaved eucalyptus branches, the harmony of reds, blues and greens and the thickness of all the colors combined in the rich dewey mist elicit an ethereal natural sensation. The intoxicating effect of such a setting allows Efraim to become part of the natural vastness and forget his troubles completely. The reverberation of a distant echo and the merry argument of birds helps to release his soul from conflict and transfer it into the realm of yearning. However, this feeling is short-lived:

ובינתיים תהא הדרך ניסוטה לאחור ותפוש ככביש  
 שאוטו-משא חולף בו כרננת מכונה ופולט ואחוריו  
 ענני-אבק מחגוששים ועגלה חרקד כצלצול כרגל  
 וקרש. ופלונני שעובר יהא נענה ומכרכו לשלום--  
 והמציאות תהא נופלה פתע וטופחת בכל ההשליות  
 הפורחות הללו. ומרד חשאי ושואג מכפנים ידחוף  
 אז להתקומם ולא לוחר, אפילו המכנסיים נראים  
 קשים ומזוהמים וחרטומי הנעליים מחייכים  
 כחוצפה. והשכיל המסתיים בשדות-האספה הללו  
 נעשה זר ונעשה מאוס וקשה מנשוא-- ככל שנדף  
 הטל וסדקי האדמה הצחיחה משהרגלים ואובדים  
 בין קוצים מאובקים, וכל מה שהיה יפה ונאה  
 כל כך מתעבר ועמיד פנים יכשות משועממות... (p. 189)

All the vitality of the lush description suddenly dries up.

That which was beautiful seems ugly. The golden dew which covered the fields is now an impenetrable mist. The deeper Efraim becomes involved in his work and relating with his companions David and Nahum, the more he catastrophizes about his unbearable state of existence. The yearning of the past becomes stultified by the harshness of present reality. The conflict which rises out of the clash between these opposite poles of natural description, finds its final expression in a primal outburst of emotion by Efraim:

ואתם החלומות הקרובים יהרגו לפרוץ באדרים  
 גועשים ומשחוללים וגועים מורות ונואשוח:  
 "אפרים! עד מהי! עד מהי!" ... עד מהי!  
 ובמפגיע דוקה! חה-חה! ועכירות דלוחה חומרה  
 ועולה בזרם רחב, ולולא יהא עוקר וזע וזועק  
 דבר שבהלצה לנחום המחקרב, לולא זה... אך  
 נחום בחור טוב הוא ורוחו טובה עליו,  
 וההבלים הללו מופקדים לאור החמה שהעפילה  
 בינחיים וסקרה את השדות בחום נוקשה.

(p. 191)

Efraim's frustration, illustrated in his shouting to himself "How long, How long" finds its symbolic representation in the image of the turbid seething flood and the relentless heat that lock him into his oppressive environment.

The second flashback into nature describes Efraim in the midst of the alfalfa field at noon time:

...ובכל זאת היחה השמש עומדת שוב גבוהה  
 ולוהטת בברק מועם מחום, וסופי השדות היו  
 מרטטים בשלהם, ואלה הערוגות שנובטת בהם  
 אספסס ביקר טהור ואומר שירה, והמים  
 זורמים בערוצם ומחפלים בפכפון ומציפים  
 את הערוגה, והמגפיים הבוססים בבוץ צמיג  
 ודביק במציצה לחה-- אלה היו קרובים מאוד,  
 ועל כן גם גדולים מאוד. וכשהוצפה ערוגה  
 אחת היה פתחה נסתם בחוליית עפרה שבערוץ  
 וערוגה אחרת היחה נכבשת כבדות במים שעל



קמטיהם החופחים מרקדות שמשוח מרוסקות  
ועכורות. ונימה אחת מוחרת פתאום והיא  
מנהמה בעריגה של חלומות-הילדות, שנשכחו  
לכאורה, וסוענה את הלב פרכוס אחד שאין  
לו מנוח, בכייני כמעט, יחוס וגלמוד,  
הגואה ופושט בעורקים...

(p. 192)

As in the first flashback, Yizhar renews the image of the limitless vibrancy of nature. In this passage, the heat of the afternoon makes the fields quiver, the alfalfa sings greenly, and the water in the furrows bubbles. These pulsating images highlight the human need of escape felt by Efraim at the moment when he seeks advice from Nehama but receives only silence. This description has Efraim yearning, his heart convulsing, and the veins of his body expanding from the rush of excited blood. The dominant image of both nature and the protagonist is that of fullness, sensation, and possibility. Again, the sensation of the infinite, of desire and virility begins to wane. As reality repossesses Efraim he is dragged back into the boring routine of his work and the lunal relationship he has with David and Nahum. He begins to question his status in life and senses its futility. At this point a natural description embellishes this mood:

וכנגד העיניים המכווצות ומצומצמות מפני  
האור החריף, שסחרה אין ממנו, מאחורי  
חורשות דלילות של אקליפטוסים צהובים-  
קלפיים, מאחורי עמק השדות שחמורת של  
עשן קוצים כסוחים עולה ממנו-- חובקים  
אותן הרים ידועים ומוכרים כבסבעה אדירה  
אשר בחוכה דרכים מוכרות, גבעות ידועות  
ודממת-אור מאובקת, מוכרה לזרע וידועה  
עד לשממון. רוח ים רחוק, רוח-צהריים,  
מדליחה את הדממה, מרעשה את החורשות,  
מכרעה את העשן ופורגת באדות-גלים על פני



האספסוף שהפכה לבנונית ומבהקת לכל סריקה  
 וסריקה שלה. והשמים הולכים ומחלבים,  
 הולכים ויורדים ומתקרבים לאדמה, והם כבר  
 נמוכים ולוחשים. והזיעה מרטיבה את  
 הכותונה, והרוח משיבה עליה צינת-מה,  
 ועייפות הרבנים מעמוד. הגוף נמשך  
 לאדמה הרבוצה סדוקה ואלמח, לבהור וגפול  
 אפיים בין הרבנים החמים ופרירים ולא  
 לזוה, לא לנוע, לא לנשום ולא לחשוב  
 ולשקוט כאבן אחת, כקלח של קוץ נוקשה מחום  
 ואבק, עד חום, עד חלוף, עד...

(p. 194)

As the sun reaches its hottest Efraim experiences its oppressiveness, he becomes subjugated by nature. In contrast to the lush groves of trees, we note here only sparse copses. The mountains are familiar and boring and they seem to imprison Efraim. Nature begins to close in on him. The burning sky descends earthward and Efraim's body seems wedged between the descending sky and the thorny, parched earth. He becomes mindless, breathless; veritably a stone-like person. The only escape is the fantasy of the evening shower, for without this fleeting mirage his life is totally finite and impotent.

The third and final nature scene finds Efraim awaiting the end of the day. He slips into this flashback after hearing the response of various kibbutz members regarding his wish to leave the alfalfa fields. The overwhelming attitude up to this point in the story is that Efraim should be envied for his special status as a skilled alfalfa worker. This response troubles him so he seeks refuge once again in the past. Again, the nature description begins in a soft ethereal tone blending into the routine

chores of David, Nahum and Ephraim. The description then falls into the tormented consciousness of Ephraim who is trying to come to terms with his inability to find peace of mind. The more he thinks, the more anxious he becomes: and the more he anticipates the end of the day and his evening shower of escape.

ומעתה חבקשנה העיניים בסדרה רבה אח בוא הרכבת,  
שאחריה רק שעה ומשהו נותרו עוד לעבוד, וזו איננה  
ואיננה. וצעיפים לבנים ורעלות שקופות פורחים  
בגבהים, מארכים צללים ומצללים מרומים בכמיהה  
דמוח זו, והם חופחים ועולים וקמרונם מחנשא,  
ומצולות-שחקים גואות ללא מצרים עם שפרירי זוהר  
וחכלת, ואין-סוף של גבהות זקופה לאין-סוף.  
ואין מאומה שיאבד ויתמעט בשטח ובחלל, ולכל  
עצם שיר של גוף וצבע, ואד חשאי מהלך בין  
הדברים, ומלוא-חבל עוטה פלומת-גובה, ומקום רב  
ורחב יש לעצבת זו לשוטט בו, בחדות נגוהות-חמה של  
אחר-צהריים, בחכלת שהוחכה לזהב והוצקה לאופק,  
במכיחה ענן מזהיר בצחור, בגבעות שהפכו אבק-אור  
ובירק מחפיל. נראה וברור שהגיעה שעתה של חבל,  
מובן ומוחש שמלבד זיו שדי גדוש-זוהר זה-- אין  
אמת ואין יופי ואין מאוס, וזה בלבד הכל, ואין  
למעלה ממנו, וצר על אשר כה ריקות הידיים  
וקצרות-פורקן מהכיע מה שיש ומוכן בלב לאמור מאז,  
ועל אשר כה מגושם ומשומש המצוי עמו ואין לחדור  
ולהתמוגג לתוך חוכו של זה הרוטט כאן מכורר  
ולהמוס בחוכו כקורים רופסים אלה המנצנצים  
וכבים במוץ-זהרורים מכל עבר.

(pp. 212-213)

This last flashback confronts the reader with the final battleground of Ephraim's desire to unite with the infinity that has been identified as nature. At the moment when nature presents the possibility of the infinite, Ephraim becomes aware of the reality of his inability to fuse with it. As a result, his separateness moves to the foreground. The special quality of nature in this description is sym-

bolized by yearning heavens, unrestrained radiance and the vastness of heights rising to infinity. The effluence of this heavenly radiance points to the truth that besides this infinity of nature there is no other truth for Efraim. Against this background, Efraim appears in his naked status of mortal man. He cannot penetrate the infinite universe. He is left alone and finite.

### NEHAMA

Efraim's most intimate relationship in the story is with Nehama. Her presence is used throughout to highlight his inner emotional conflict. She is the primary character with whom he engages in dialogue. Her response to him is almost negligible both in measure and in substance. His aloneness and separateness become intensified because of this relationship with her.

Nehama is used mainly as a sounding board for Efraim's consciousness; she rarely expresses well constructed ideas. She is portrayed in an almost nonhuman manner. Since she is so assimilated into the kibbutz milieu and remains alone, Yizhar describes her as an integral part of the natural environment.

ואותה נחמה מובלעת בחושך ורק ראשה צף וטובל  
באור החלון, כשגרמי לחייה שוקעים בצללים ומבע-  
פניה הרציני מחרבן קמעה בחיוכן החשאי של העיניים  
ובחלוגה השותקת שנשפתיים המעודבות ענוגות וברוך  
השיער השחור, עם אותה נדיפה חשאית ומבושמת של  
טהרה שהיתה מזכירה בוקר חלכל ורטוב וירק דשאים  
וחוצי-סל ומשעולי-אדמה ריחניים ומרובצים, ועולם  
שחשכה הלילה עוד לא נמוגה בו והריהי מחלמת פה  
ושם. (p. 185)

In essence, her beauty and physical appearance are mysterious, even elusive. This pastel image of Nehama is the most descriptive the reader receives from Yizhar. She is usually described in relationship to darkness:

...ועוד עיניה נעוצות באלומת האור הרוששת האלפה (p. 187)  
 ...ועיניה אינן משות מן החשכה שרצדה לעומק ולמרחב (p. 192)  
 ...צינת הלילה וקולה של נחמה היו פתע מובנים וקרובים (p. 195)  
 ...כשנפנה אל נחמה, היחה זו שוחקת בחשיכה (p. 196)

The description of Nehama cast in darkness serves to buttress her attribute of impenetrability. The deeper Efraim digs into his conscience finding conflict and indecision, the more rigid and unapproachable she becomes. Throughout the story and especially in relationship to Efraim's soul searching stream-of-consciousness, Nehama is described as a very cold and emotionless person. For example, Efraim sees her as they enter the dining hall immediately after he has revealed to her his innermost fears:

והבחין אגב בנחמה שנשארה ליד הפתח תומכת גוה  
 בכוחל ידיה שלובות לה על חזה, רגליה צמודות,  
 ומסנדליה עד שערה אין מקום להיאחז בו מחמת  
 יהירות סגורה... (p. 201)

Her entire body is closed and untouchable. In other parts

of the narrative she is described with her "mouth compressed," or holding her peace all the time," or "her hands were as granite."

Nehama's weakness is her inability to aid Efraim through the agonizing struggle of making his decision. Yizhar deftly captures Nehama's weak personality as he describes her inner consciousness after she has absorbed a very penetrating expression of Efraim's turmoil:

וזה, נחמה, שהיחה מרכינה ראשה ככל שנמשך  
דיבורו, ומתכווצת לחוכה ומצטמצמת כמה שיכלה  
באותה סלידה איסטיניסית, המרחעת עצמה לגוף  
כשכלול אחוז-אימה, ואיזה כאב נקב וכסס בפנים...  
(p. 199)

Just as a snail seeks refuge when attacked, in its protective shell, so does Nehama retreat inside of herself in order to escape Efraim's pain. His explosion causes an emotional implosion within her.

At the height of this intense emotiveness, Yizhar continues with a very sensual fantasy which relieves the tension that has been built up as a consequence of Nehama's encounter with Efraim. By now the reader is aware of her character in its fullest dimension. She is depicted as self-contained and incapable of expressing her empathy to Efraim for she becomes paralyzed by it. Though part of the group, her acquiescence to group pressure and conformity is far more passive than to the communal ideology of accepting one's acquired status. Her darkness is a sign of her inscrutability which ultimately locks Efraim deeper within himself, leaving him alienated and completely alone.

## FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Rene Wellek, Austin Warren, Theory of Literature, p. 89.
- <sup>2</sup> Lionel Trilling, The Liberal Imagination, p. 200.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 201.
- <sup>4</sup> Arnold J. Band, Nostalgia and Nightmare, p.VII.
- <sup>5</sup> Rene Wellek, Austin Warren, op. cit., pp. 223-224.
- <sup>6</sup> Trilling, op. cit., p. 202.
- <sup>7</sup> Gershon Shaked, "Bat Ha'melech u'Seudat Ha'em," p. 135.
- <sup>8</sup> Shmuel Yosef Agnon, Sippur Pashut, p. 12.  
(All other page references for quotes from the novel  
will be included within the written text.)
- <sup>9</sup> Shaked, op. cit., p. 136.
- <sup>10</sup> Band, op. cit., p. 239.
- <sup>11</sup> Dov Sadan, Al Shai Agnon, p. 32.
- <sup>12</sup> Baruch Hochman, The Fiction of S.Y. Agnon, p. 8.
- <sup>13</sup> Baruch Kurzweil, Masot Al Sippurei Shai Agnon, pp. 40-41.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 40.
- <sup>15</sup> Trilling, op. cit., p. 203.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 203.
- <sup>17</sup> Dina Stern, "Ba'yot Ha'tlut V'hahizdahut B'Chayai Hirshel Hurwitz", p. 302.
- <sup>18</sup> William Cutter, Study of the Protagonist in Three Novels, p. 212.
- <sup>19</sup> Kurzweil, op. cit., p. 40.
- <sup>20</sup> Stern, op. cit., p. 297.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 297.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 300.
- <sup>23</sup> M. Jacques, Beyn Ha'shlabim, p. 135.
- <sup>24</sup> Cutter, op. cit., p. 173.



- <sup>25</sup>Victor E. Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning, p. 113.
- <sup>26</sup>William Glasser, Reality Therapy, p. 44.
- <sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 44.
- <sup>28</sup>Band, op. cit., pp. 242-243.
- <sup>29</sup>Hochman, op. cit., p. 45.
- <sup>30</sup>Yosef Ewan, "He'arot A'chadot h'Sippur Pashut L'Shai Agnon," p. 403.
- <sup>31</sup>Ralph Ellison, The Twentieth Century Novel, p. 62.
- <sup>32</sup>S. Yizhar, Efraim Chozair L'Aspeset, p. 179.  
(All other page references for quotes from the novel will be included within the written text.)
- <sup>33</sup>Trilling, op. cit., p. 200.
- <sup>34</sup>Philip E. Slater, The Pursuit of Loneliness, pp. 27-28.
- <sup>35</sup>Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction, p. 152.
- <sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 153.
- <sup>37</sup>Leon Edel, The Psychological Novel, 1900-1950, p. 34.
- <sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 33.
- <sup>39</sup>S. Yizhar, Midnight Convoy, p. 261.
- <sup>40</sup>Edel, op. cit., p. 41.
- <sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 80.
- <sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 111.
- <sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 113.
- <sup>44</sup>Trilling, op. cit., p. 89.

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