

**READING AGNON THROUGH AGNON:
CREATING THE LEGEND
OF THE INSPIRED GENESIS OF FICTION**

by

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Visitors dropping in at the Agnon House in Jerusalem's Talpiot neighborhood seem to seek that measure of experience which would concretize for them what the nation's greatest author was like. Shown its interior, they try to imagine what the ground floor must have looked like when many rooms filled the space now occupied by a single large public space. Screening a video documentary featuring the great author commenting on his work and life and guiding the viewer to his library, the audience becomes accustomed to the cadences and peculiar intonations of Agnon's voice. Undoubtedly, the high point of each visit is the guided tour of Agnon's work-room and library, still intact and containing some ten thousand volumes, occupying three rooms upstairs, where the author spent much of his life composing some of the greatest works of Hebrew literature. Many of the newer books bear autographed dedications to Agnon by authors great and less so while dark and ancient volumes still hold slips of paper, book-marks, left there by Agnon.¹

¹For samples of authors' dedications to Agnon in books sent to him, see Tzvi Kaspi, "Mar Shai 'Agnon hayakar" [Dear Mr. S. Y. Agnon], *Ha'aretz* (March 5, 1993), p. 6. For sample dedications of books by Agnon to others, see Yoḥanan Arnon, "'Agnon behakedashotav (bimelot shalosh shanim lifirato)" [Agnon's dedications: Three years following his death],

Left to the eye is a view of the author's work-room, its walls lined with bookshelves rising to the ceiling. In the center, by the south-facing window, stands his desk. Often missed is a glance into a small wooden box on that desk, one containing white slips of paper which were used as the author's book-marks and notes to himself and others. In the summer of 1986, the topmost slip in that box bore a pencilled note in the author's unique hand which read, in Hebrew, "Bakhlam=Klausner." Readers of Agnon's writings will easily recognize this as a reference to a character in his novel *Sbira*² in which Professor Bakhlam appears to have been fashioned after Professor Joseph Klausner, the celebrated scholar of Hebrew literature and Jewish history, who was also a neighbor of the Agnons.³

The candor contained in that slip of paper, and the way it represents Agnon's process of creation of a figure in a novel, are largely unavailable to the contemporary student bent on investigating this author's writing habits. While much of Agnon's archive is accessible for such perusals, it too

Yedi'ot 'abronot (February 23, 1973). Regarding the mutual admiration and reciprocal dedications carried on by Agnon and Bialik, see Hiam Be'er, *Gam 'abavatam gam sin'atam: Bialik, Brenner, Agnon ma'arekhot-yehasim* [Their love and their hate: H. N. Bialik, Y. H. Brenner, S. Y. Agnon—relations] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1992), pp. 197, 200, 288, 293, 298, and more.

I wish to acknowledge and thank the assistance given me at the Agnon Archives, situated at the Jewish National and University Library at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and by its director, Mr. Raphael Weiser. The availability of the archival resources and the readiness with which Mr. Weiser and his able staff stood to be of help in all matters, have made a significant part of the following observations possible.

²S. Y. Agnon, *Sbira* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1971 and 1979); English version, *Sbira*, trans. Zeva Shapiro (New York: Schocken Books, 1989).

³Agnon lived on 16 Klausner Street, the name bearing tribute to the famous scholar whose home stood near the Agnon house, facing it across the street. Corroborating the identity of Professor Klausner with Bakhlam is G. Shaked, *Shmuel Yosef Agnon: A Revolutionary Traditionalist* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1989), p. 115; also see Be'er, *Gam 'abavatam gam sin'atam*, p. 193, who adds that Klausner also served as model for the character of Doctor Doctor of Agnon's "Bin'areynu uvizkeneynu" [With our youth and with our aged], in S. Y. Agnon, *Al kappot baman'ul* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1966), pp. 273–350. While no translation of this work has been published as of now, it has been surveyed in a number of studies, among which are Arnold J. Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare: A Study in the Fiction of S. Y. Agnon* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press), 1968, pp. 121–125; and Gershon Shaked, "Hasetiyya miderekh hayashar" [The turning off from the straight path], in his *'Ommanut basippur shel 'Agnon* [The narrative art of S. Y. Agnon] (Merhavia and Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, 1973), pp. 65–68.

lacks those notations and sketches which would have formed the earliest skeleton of any of the author's works. What remains is for scholarship to strive and reconstruct the sources—biblical, talmudic, and other texts of traditional and world literature—employed by the author, a pursuit which has become *de rigueur* for anyone attempting to interpret Agnon's works.

In many ways, the Agnon House, in its current form and contents, stands as a fitting metaphor for the way scholarship has endeavored to approach the author so as to derive some insight into his genius. In each case, the edifice is readily accessible. Closer up, however, it is evident that the place has also been altered in such ways as to render impossible any access to the "original," to that which preceded the public face of this monument. Insights into that which would aid in appraising the process of becoming a completed work are, at best, rare and fragmentary. The seeming openness of Agnon is merely another mask, safeguarding the insulated privacy of the creative individual within.⁴

The foregoing discussion raises the issue of working from manuscripts and other unpublished sources. Specifically, I propose to address the case of S. Y. Agnon and the implication his archival bequest has had on future study of this central writer. Addressing this issue is but an added means to probe the meaning and nature of creativity involved in a work of fiction and the artistry of its author. For when available, the literary notes of any author or poet can offer scholarship an opportunity to view the processes and habits of that individual and measure the stages of a work's "becoming" through to its final product. When absent, the stages of a writer's creativity are less easily discerned, depriving scholars of an added path in their pursuit of the nature and processes of the imagination of great authors.

The argument voiced by the likes of I. A. Richards, that the sole province of literary criticism should be the completed work itself, and not its intermediate processes, may still be raised.⁵ It must be admitted that Richards' reasoning still bears some validity, as we read:

Literary Analysis [sic] gives rise, by accident as it were, to a set of unreal difficulties and imaginary obstacles . . . [as if] to read aright we must .

⁴Gershom Scholem, "S. Y. Agnon—The Last Hebrew Classic?" in G. Scholem, *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis: Selected Essays*, ed. W. J. Dannhauser (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), p. 125.

⁵Ivor Armstrong Richards, "Poetic Process and Literary Analysis," in *Poems in the Making*, ed. W. Gibson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1963), pp. 228, 238, 241 [originally in *Style and Language*, ed. T. A. Sebeok (Cambridge: M. I. T. Press, 1960), pp. 9–23].

somehow divine all the uses of a world that may have beguiled and guided a poet in the manifold choices of Poetic Process [sic]. (p. 238)

As Richards sees it, unpublished materials are invalid tools for literary analysis in that they lack the authority and artistic completeness of the final work. Yet today little if any of an author's activity is allowed to go unheeded by students of literature. Richards' claim, followed to its logical conclusion, would even challenge the propriety of studying earlier versions of a published work, as when an author revises his stories and reissues them as the new, and possible final, authorized *œuvre*.

A similar challenge may be raised with regard to Agnon's posthumous works, whose publication in one form or another was executed not by the author but by others, though purportedly at his expressed will. The difficulty arises when considering whether the author would have authorized the publication of any of his incomplete works, and in the form chosen by its editor. Also, the notion of a work being "authorized" is itself problematic in that authorial revisions tend to redefine prior, though possibly final, work. Yet, in ways which will be described below, Agnon's behavior leads one to conclude that he viewed his papers, containing the incomplete stages of composition of his works, as analogous to published documents. Such indications lend further credence to the claim that we are to accept even unpublished manuscripts and former editions of a work of fiction as creative products. This view constitutes significant grounds for the study of an author's literary craft, its evolving style and form, and his changing sensibilities about art and the world.

Reception of the fiction of Agnon (1888–1970), Israel's premiere literary figure and 1966 Nobel Prize laureate, has been characterized by awe and admiration ever since the first decade of the twentieth century. Indeed, Agnon's unrivaled mastery of the range of the Hebrew (and Jewish) literary tradition, combined with the unique expression he has given to the clash of that world with a humanistic, secularized modernity, make his contribution the most insightful and expressive among Hebrew writers. In many ways, Agnon's style, vision, and quality of literary output remain unmatched in Hebrew literature; nor can one point today to any Hebrew writer approaching his caliber to compete with the aura he has attained.⁶

⁶On the influence of Agnon on modern Israeli writers, see Dan Laor, "'Agnon kedegem ukhemusa hityahasut basifrut ha'ivrit hatze'ira" [Agnon as model and inspiration among young Hebrew authors], *Alpayim* 6 (1992): 131–158.

In examining his writings from any number of perspectives, Hebrew literary criticism has contributed to a greater following by a more enlightened and appreciative readership of the persona that became S. Y. Agnon. Among its vast array of insights, interpretations, and analyses has been the assertion that Agnon worked to develop sophisticated strategies to project of himself a literary persona for public consumption, one which came to serve as a shield for the private man behind it. Ever since his early years, the young Czaczkes, as Agnon was first called, appears to have been a shy and introverted individual.⁷ Yet those who knew him found a curious, lively, and subtly humorous facet in his personality. From their testimony we learn that, during his early years, Shmuel Yosef Czaczkes was initially insistent on separating himself from the fictitious, literary persona he was creating for himself. While in Germany during the years of the First World War, he made great efforts to distinguish for his fellow intellectuals between what his admirer and long-time friend Gershom Scholem called “Agnon the artist and Agnon the human being.”⁸

⁷These details are compiled from studies by: Yitzhak Bakon, *'Agnon batza'ir* [The young Agnon] (Beer Sheva: Ben Gurion University, 1989), esp. pp. 7–29; Arnold Band, “‘Agnon, Shmuel Yosef,” in G. Kresel, *Leksikon hasifrut ba'ivrit badorot ba'abronim* [Lexicon of Hebrew literature in the last generations], vol. 2 (Merḥavia: Sifriat Poalim, 1967), pp. 541–551; also see Band's *Nostalgia and Nightmare*, pp. 1–53, and more; also Band, “Agnon, Shmuel Yosef,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Encyclopaedia Judaica, 1971), pp. 367–371; also “Shenot hasheloshim hanishkahot babyografiya shel 'Agnon” [The forgotten 'thirties in Agnon's biography], *Ha'arets* (July 22, 1988), p. B7; Hillel Barzel, “Sippurim metabiografiyim shel 'Agnon” [Agnon's metabiographical stories], *Yedi'ot 'abronot*, literary supp. (July 18, 1975), p. 1; H. Be'er Gam 'abavatam gam sin'atam, 1992; Dan Laor, in “‘Ezvono shel Shai 'Agnon: sefirat melai” [S. Y. Agnon's bequest: An inventory], *Ha'arets* (April 5, 1989), p. 12; also Laor's “Agnon in Germany, 1912–1924,” *AJS Review*, 18:1 (1993), pp. 75–93; also his “Massa veshivro: polin, kayitz 1930” [A journey and its meaning: Poland, summer 1930], in *Hikrei 'Agnon* [Studies on Agnon], ed Hillel Weiss and Hillel Barzel (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1994), pp. 261–281; Dov Sadan, *'Al Shai 'Agnon: massa 'iyyun vabeker* [On S. Y. Agnon: Essay, study and research] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1967), pp. 125–154; G. Scholem, “S. Y. Agnon—The Last Hebrew Classic?,” pp. 93–125; Gershon Shaked, *Shmuel Yosef Agnon: A Revolutionary Traditionalist*, pp. 1–59; also Shaked, “‘Agnon, Shmuel Yosef,” in *Ha'entziklopedia ba'ivrit*, vol. 26 (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Hevra lehotza'at 'entziklopediot, 1974), pp. 728–734; Emunah Yaron, “‘Im 'avi beshtokholm” [With my father in Stockholm], *Ha'arets* (December 30, 1994), p. B9.

⁸Gershom Scholem, “S. Y. Agnon—The Last Hebrew Classic?,” p. 119; an early essay on this subject was by S. Homelsky, “‘Al kappot haman'ul,” in *'Eyn bakore*, 2–3 (Berlin, 1923): pp. 166–170, as cited by Judith Halevi-Zwick, *Reshita sbel bikkoret 'Agnon 1909–1931* [Agnon and his critics, 1909–1931] (Haifa: Haifa University Press, 1984), pp. 86–89, 99 n. 58; also see Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare*, p. 504 n. 150, and Be'er, *Gam 'abavatam gam*

In 1924, the author's happy existence of openness was dramatically brought to an end. A fire in his home in Bad Homburg consumed his library and unpublished writings. Among the losses were an autobiographical novel, *Bitzeror babayyim* [In the bond of life], ready to go to press, and the notes for "a thesaurus of Hasidic stories on which he had agreed to cooperate with Martin Buber," as Scholem recalls.⁹ The destruction of his writings, library, and other personal possessions had a deep and lasting impact on Agnon. He abandoned the two literary projects noted above, never to return to them. The fire marked a watershed in his literary career and outlook. Following that, notes Scholem, a "splendid period of Agnon's life" came to an end.¹⁰ He became "locked into himself," using words as a buffer or a wall against the intrusiveness of the outside world so as to shield himself in his isolation.¹¹ The Homburg fire—which was the first of at least two occasions to bring havoc upon his library and unpublished writings—appears to have sharpened Agnon's proclivity for privacy and a particular regard for the security of his manuscripts.

Ever since the period following the First World War, when the young author Shmuel Yosef Czaczkes had his name legally changed to Shmuel Yosef Agnon, the distinction between the biographical man and the fictitious construct posited by him has been blurred and rendered problematic. The published self became ever more analogous with the private and more concealed self. To come to an understanding of the strategies which have contributed to this effect means obtaining new insights into Agnon the man, but even more into the author possessed of great literary creativity. The issue also reveals Agnon's sense of his place in the Hebrew literary

sin'atam, p. 32.

⁹Gershom Scholem, "The Last Hebrew Classic?," p. 102; also see Martin Buber, *Hillufey 'iggrot: kerekb sbeni, 1918-1938* [Correspondence: vol. 2, 1918-1938], trans. J. Amir and M. Ron (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1990), pp. 171-72. Aside from this failed project, they cooperated in collecting Hasidic tales. In the same source we also learn that Buber also published stories of the Baal Shem Tov, pp. 236-37, 238-39, 260-61, 268-69, 285, 381-82. Also see Be'er, *Gam 'abavatam gam sin'atam*, pp. 206-209. Dan Laor observes that Buber's "'Or haganuz" represents the latter's published version of this initial attempt at a partnership, and see his "'Ezvonno shel Shai 'Agnon," p. 21. Some insight is provided as to the checkered history of the Agnon-Buber cooperative project in Emunah and Hayyim Yaron's afterword, "Sippur hasefer" [Tales of the book], in S. Y. Agnon's *Sippurey habesht* [Tales of the besht] (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1987), pp. 238-244.

¹⁰Scholem, "The Last Hebrew Classic?," p. 125.

¹¹Scholem, "The Last Hebrew Classic?," p. 125.

continuum and illuminates some of the ways by which he employed his writings to mythicize himself for posterity as the great Hebrew storyteller.

Over the years, many apocryphal tales have revolved about the author and his sense of self-importance. In other instances, Agnon appears to have purposefully or inadvertently contributed to the process of mythologizing his persona. Among these is Agnon's conflating many of his experiences, including his initial arrival in the Land of Israel with the festival of Lag Ba'omer, joining many fortunate or unhappy events with the fast day of the Ninth of Av (*Tisb'a be'av*), and the like.¹²

The end product of these processes of mythicizing the author has been, most justifiably, an overwhelming national veneration of Agnon. The proliferation of Agnon-related signs to this effect is evidenced by the adoption by some Israelis of the name Agnon for a last name; the establishment of "Yad Agnon" as a separate Agnon archive at the Jewish National and University Library; the establishment and granting of the Agnon Prize, one of the most prestigious literary prizes in Israel; and the creation of a museum at the Agnon home, one which stands only second to the Bialik House in importance. Agnon's likeness also appeared on Israel's currency while his name adorns many streets in Israel's towns and cities.

In sum, Agnon and the nation were of one mind in paying lasting homage to the great author through gesture, edifice and institution. There is no disagreement as to Agnon's unique knack for telling stories or his imaginative mind that has produced works of insight, nuance, and complexity. Among the primary products of that visionary mind was also, as noted, the formation of Agnon's own persona which, for decades, was carefully cultivated by the creation of a mythicized image to be eventually preserved in a fitting archive. The collection, which Agnon knew would be enshrined at the Hebrew University's Jewish National and University Library, a literary mausoleum dedicated to the amassing of Jewish creativity and culture from all corners of the world, would be the sole and most fitting "resting place" for the contributions made by such a national figure as himself. There, his contributions will last for posterity in the company of the likes of Maimonides, Freud, and Einstein, and in a special Agnon Archive at that. By means of this process, and in addition, of course, to his

¹²See Yitzhak Bakon, "Hamitos shel lag ba'omer: me'eyn sikkum" [The Lag Ba'omer myth: A summary], in his *'Agnon batza'ir* [The young Agnon], pp. 173–184. Also see: Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare*, p. 16; Be'er, *Gam 'abavatam gam sin'atam*, pp. 23, 25; for the sources he drew from, see there pp. 313–314.

literary genius, Agnon ushered himself into the intellectual, scholarly, and spiritual life of his people. At the same time, he permitted himself the privilege of ordering and controlling his canon, including that part which was to be published later from among all that lay in state at the archive bearing his name.

While some attention has been paid to the author's construction of his own persona, what has been overlooked in this regard is Agnon's intentional manipulation of his legacy through the archival materials he was amassing. His compulsion for preserving, categorizing, filing, and storing manuscripts, even decades after their publication, characterizes Agnon's self-consciousness about the image he wished to bequeath to posterity. The Agnon to be preserved for the ages was to be the one projected in his fiction: the image of the implied author, mythicized by Agnon and an adoring public who, having read him only in part or not at all, continue to regard him with awe and reverence as a national treasure.

Promoting this image, Agnon remained, for example, reticent about settling questions of contradictions in his work, matters of his personal demeanor, and the veracity of what was being said about him. In fact, he seems to have enjoyed the position he adopted while following the debates among critics, remaining aloof from the fray, seemingly paring his nails as if beyond such petty interests.¹³

In a revealing talk presented at Tel Aviv University, Emunah Agnon-Yaron recounted how her father willed and prepared his archive of manuscripts to the Jewish National and University Library at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Among his actions was a request that his son and daughter publish those stories which have not seen the light of day during his lifetime. In 1961, she adds, Agnon and his son organized in files and boxes all items in his archive and labeled them because

My father kept every page and note he needed for his work and was accustomed to burn in his stove in his home everything he no longer had need of. He objected to using the term *genizab* [hiding, storage, repository] in conjunction with manuscripts since a *genizab* is merely torn and worn

¹³Bakon, "Hamitos shel lag ba'omer," p. 97; testimonies abound about Agnon's ego and great sensitivity to criticism. For example, see Haim Be'er's *Gam 'abavatam gam sin'atam*, pp. 29, 31, 144, 145, 168, 174, 188, 212, among others; see also page 59 of Delia Karpel, "Hatzela' harevi'it" [The fourth side], *Musaf ha'arets* [Ha'arets supplement] (Sept. 25, 1992), pp. 56-59, 92.

pages of sacred books being interred.¹⁴

That last observation is especially telling. In shunning the use of the metaphor of a *genizab*, Agnon has underscored the notion that his manuscripts, unlike those in a *genizab*, constitute a valid, viable, and valuable resource, not “torn and worn pages.” Agnon’s distancing of his archive from a *genizab*, yet implying that he viewed them as belonging to the category of sacred works still in use, also signals his perception that the archive belongs to the domain of holy books and is analogous to viable and sacred scriptures upholding a Jewish heritage. The author’s reverence for the archive is hence noted, rightfully, as a separate entity from Agnon, as a manifestation of the creative artist held above the merely mortal part of the self.

Reaffirming this observation in another forum as well, Emunah Yaron tells of the process of transporting Agnon’s papers to the archives at the Jewish National and University Library:

When we came to Agnon’s house to take the manuscripts to the university, we found in the stove many torn scraps of paper belonging to *Sbitra*, which he intended to burn. This I considered evidence that all the manuscripts in the boxes or files were either completed, or kept for later perusal and rewriting.

A “completed” manuscript, one would surmise, represents several stages of writing into the preparation of a published work, not the expected scratch notes, sketches, and assorted researched notations prepared as the initial skeletal forms of the work in progress. Those torn scraps of paper, which indeed formed the initial stages of a novel or its parts, were the items typically destroyed by the author, whose preparing of the complete manuscript was surely done with its audience in mind. So while Emunah Yaron continues by asserting that “Agnon altered and amended in all phases of his work, and even after the books were published he made changes in each new edition,”¹⁵ scholarship and the curious have been deliberately kept at arm’s length from the most intimate stages of creation, phases visible today only due to the survival of such minor remnants as those in the stove and the wooden note box.

¹⁴Emunah Yaron, “Halevanim vehashehorim” [The white and the black], *Ha’aretz* (April 5, 1985), p. 21.

¹⁵Emunah Yaron, “Editing My Father’s Work,” in *Agnon: Texts and Contexts in English Translation*, ed. Leon I. Yudkin (New York: Markus Wiener Publishing, Inc., 1988), pp. 6 and 8.

What Agnon has left for the world of scholarship is a contrived, or quasi, archive, one which he not only permitted but invited readers to pursue. The fact that some might discover that selected works of his fiction have had their origins in other works was not, it seems, an issue of concern. In fact, such discoveries would only underscore the pervasiveness of an intimacy closer than intra-textuality among his works. If anything, the upshot of such a revelation would be that the meaning of these writings may be affected by the newly learned relationship which, at the least, stands to add another layer of density to works whose meanings continue to inspire, puzzle, or evade readers.

The conclusion which one may reach is that the archive, as currently constituted, is not a collection of all of Agnon's notes. Rather, it represents a premeditated, planned, and formed (even fabricated) collection to satisfy reader curiosity and the scholar's desire to probe into Agnon's creative processes. It becomes a monument of the national author's bequeathing of his image to posterity.

Recognizing that the Agnon archive is a selection only, merely that which the author deemed worthy of preservation, must affect our evaluation of its contents. Its function approximates all those aspects in the Agnon persona which the author manipulated. Numerous as they may be, the manuscripts which were retained represent only those items Agnon wanted scholars to see as a record of his creative process. No actual face-to-face encounter is possible. Given the absence of all such preliminary notes, the author's privacy prevails, as it had during his lifetime when, as reported by Elhanani,¹⁶ Agnon was never willing to talk about any work still in the writing stage. Any preliminary notes, outlines, traces of the novel's germ idea, character sketches, or records—such as from interviews or readings—of the author's arduous process of composing were apparently destroyed, at least as far as concerning the manuscripts examined in the course of my study. The sole exception is those remnants of *Sbira* found in the stove by Emunah Yaron and the note in the card box. The remaining materials stand as a grand testimony to a mythicized author who appeared to have written his work effortlessly and with barely a blemish, as if merely copying from memory. Any hope of meeting the author face to face in the extant materials has been blocked, limited, and orchestrated by him from the outset.

¹⁶Avraham H. Elhanani, *'Arba'a shesippu* [Four who told stories] (Jerusalem: Bama'arakha, 1978), p. 42.

Given the manner by which the unpublished materials were preserved, the perusal of Agnon's archive becomes a pursuit analogous to the study of his published work. The apparent care with which he selected and preserved specific kinds of materials implies that Agnon had an audience in mind for these bequests. His request to publish later that which did not appear during his lifetime grants similar status to the contents of his "black books," as Agnon's (now thirteen) posthumous volumes are termed.

All studies of Agnon's manuscripts depart, whether implicitly or overtly, out of the assumption that such explorations do not constitute an invasive entry into a private domain. Rather, it is an encounter with those writings made public in a different way, through the public archive.¹⁷ There, Agnon has preserved the notes of his published (and some unpublished) writings.

In preserving these items, Agnon was making many conscious choices, among them aesthetic, technical, Jewish, personal, and universal. Unlike authors who explicitly forbade the reading of any of their earlier editions Agnon seems to have made no such claims. In fact, the openness of the archive is a clear invitation to see all as related, as the output of a single creative mind. Yet, the openness is illusory and limited to those stages of writing deemed appropriate for public viewing.

Any study of Agnon's archive, then, of necessity meets up with the persona interred therein by the author himself. Any such encounter offers a measure of insight into the workings of an author bent on projecting of himself that which he deemed sufficient, good, and proper for the reader to know, that of Agnon as the Great Author. One cannot see Agnon the private man or the hard-working writer behind these items, except the aspect he permits to be seen. Being a form of mirror, the archive does permit a glimpse of the author in the process of presenting himself publicly. Yet, as a mirror, the archive's silver coating blocks any view to that which lies beyond, or before.

¹⁷Dan Laor, in "Ezvonon shel shai 'Agnon," [S. Y. Agnon's bequest: An inventory], p. 12, calls for a removal of boundaries between Agnon's canonical writings, those published in his lifetime, and his posthumously published "black books."