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S.Y. AGNON READS THE SONG OF SONGS?

Introduction

This paper describes S.Y. Agnon's ironic, dual, modern attitude to the Song of Songs, as a traditionalist and as one who identifies himself with the doctor's statements: "We are enlightened individuals, modern people, we seek freedom for ourselves and for all humanity, and in point of fact we are worse than the most die-hard reactionaries." Agnon's attitude to the world of love is the attitude of a young Jewish artist of the late 19th century who lives in a world of revolutionary changes that also affect the Jewish world. Agnon's work stands as a tombstone of the gradually unraveling Jewish *shtetl* and its institutions and values, specifically, the declining status of love and its significance for the values of family, society, and the Jewish nation. The young Jewish man experiences the changing seasons of the late 19th century and early 20th century, reflected in the vacillation between the traditional conception of love by the traditional world, and the modern perception that views love as an element in individual self-realization. "They say that love exists in the world" – but what is love in Agnon's world? What are the sources of the gap that many of Agnon's protagonists experience – the gap between yearning, dreams, and heart's desires, and the potential for their realization in practice?

Man and Wife – Old and New in *The Doctor's Divorce* and *Metamorphosis*

A. Shaping the Characters

Many commentators and critics noted that Agnon, a contemporary of Freud, attributed psychological significance to the sickness that is love, originating in the psyche. This is the foundation for forming his short story *The Doctor's Divorce* as a confession recounted in the first person by the doctor, the story's protagonist, who tells his friend of the emotional process he experienced as he confronted his own previously unacknowledged truth. In this article, however, we focus on the dual morality reflected in the attitude to the Song of Songs text, which accompanies the protagonists' worlds in two of Agnon's stories: *The Doctor's Divorce* and *Metamorphosis*.

To what extent is the moral duality, the vacillation between both sides of the coin – the values of tradition and the values of modernity – part of the madness in Agnon's protagonists' world and of the destruction that they bring upon their love and home?

1. The Love-sick Lovers

The biblical Song of Songs introduces the character of the individual who is “**love-sick**” (Song of Songs 5:8), and relentlessly searches for his love, caught in a never-ending cycle of seeking.

From the perspective of the modern, intellectual doctor, Dina committed a shameful act, but it is the doctor, due to his suspicions and the dual values he holds dear in the depths of his soul, who in fact commits a shameful act. The doctor, who is expected to cure people, becomes not only psychologically ill; his entire world of values is undermined and he knows no peace. Perhaps this is how he causes Dina’s illness. The medicine, the doctors, the nurses, and the hospital, the concentration of analgesic external means are ineffective against the agonies of the protagonists who oscillate between two value systems.

Values such as status, money, fame, and respect devour the marriage of the doctor and the nurse. The protagonist’s awareness of his situation, which appears to remain unchanged over the course of the story, does not transform into insight that allows him to adopt a different perspective on his own life. The doctor is aware of all the facts and details. He is aware of his thoughts and emotions. His knowledge of reality is more comprehensive and precise than that of most other people – yet all this is insufficient to help the love-sick hero facing a world of confused values and superficiality. Still, his soul relentlessly seeks the voice, the voice of the biblical lover: the words of the Song of Songs still pound in his thoughts and emotions, and become part of the doctor’s world, beyond any reason.

When Dina confesses to the doctor the reason for her sadness, “You know, I have been with somebody else,” his feelings cool for her immediately in response: silence, investigation, wonder, and remonstrance toward Dina: He had never conceived of such actions on her part. There is a great divide between his declared opinions and what he really believes. Outwardly he is a doctor, an enlightened individual, a man of the great open world, highly intellectual, progressive, and modern. In this liberated world, intimate relations between a man and a woman are common and accepted. But deep inside him, he is a captive of conservative values that are deeply imprinted on his soul.

The doctor feels that his status has been damaged, because her former intimacy was with a person of lowly status – a mere clerk. He cannot conceive of love as an emotion free of any interests, independent of any position or status. Still, he decides to disregard this and marry Dina, but he cannot control his behavior towards her and he tortures both her and himself. He is overwhelmed with jealousy and suspicion that destroy any chance of happiness. In his eyes, the beloved is property, property to which he claims exclusive title. When the doctor saw **Dina** smiling, he asked her if she was smiling because she was thinking of that “louse” (the clerk). Dina sobbed and he confessed: “From all the anguish I caused her, she fell **sick**.”

Although the doctor declared, “I am a doctor and can only go by what my eyes see,” this was far from the truth. He makes an attempt to establish his credibility, since he is a doctor, and he recounts the events as they occurred, but the contrasts between his account and the events undermine his credibility.

The story *Metamorphosis* similarly focuses on the psychological change that Hartmann experiences. Hartmann presents a retrospective account of his life and explains his failures, while Toni judges and assesses the change.

2. “Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon; for why should I be as one that veileth herself beside the flocks of thy companions?” (Song of Songs 1:6)

It is notable that one of Solomon’s names in the *Song of Songs* is “Yedid-Ya” – literally, companion of God. For the modern writer, **companions** and friends play a moral-psychological role in the transformation that his protagonists undergo.

A companion or companions appear in both stories. Some view the companion, who is the repeatedly mentioned addressee in *The Doctor’s Divorce*, as a psychologist or mental healer, because the narrator speaks of the psychological concerns that he developed over his three years of marriage to Dina. Companions also feature in *Metamorphosis*: Toni’s friends, Svirsh (the dancer), Tanzer (the cricket) are easy spirits who clown and joke and try to see the advantages in Toni’s divorce.

3. “Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled...” (Song of Songs 5:3).

In *The Doctor’s Divorce*, Dina the nurse is considered a transcendent figure. Purity, merit, and cleanliness build up a **spiritual figure that transcends material reality**.

“**Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my bride**” (Song of Songs 4:9) – In the first chapter, the narrator introduces the character of Dina, the beloved **nurse** [sister] who works in the same hospital as the narrator. Her name is not mentioned. She is called “that woman,” “her” or “Nurse.” A foundation of love is shared by all those surrounding her – this is platonic love, free of any sexual urges, saturated with love that offers the protection of a loving mother rather than of a woman: “...the patients would sit up in their beds and stretch their arms toward her like an only child reaching for its mother.” The description of her physical appearance also serves this pattern. She is described through an exclusive focus on her face, with no reference to her body. Later in the story, her description focuses on “that smile on her lips, and that blue-black in her eyes.” The oxymoron “blue-black in her eyes” expresses innocence and purity on the one hand, and on the other hints to a seductive, threatening mysteriousness. Possibly Dina shares the same moral duality: She is the nurse who helps all patients, yet fails to provide a remedy in her own home. Her fate is sorrow.

“**As a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters**” (Song of Songs 2:2) – The descriptions of her outward appearance speak of purity. She appears as utter perfection: She is beautiful, has blond hair, her eyes are light-blue black (an allusion to the shadow that eclipses her life) and her smile causes everyone to follow her wishes. The

narrator describes how the patients, even the most impatient of them, love Dina and call for her to care for them. All the nurses, including the wicked head nurse and the doctors, are captivated by her charms, and love her. Even the professor refrains from reprimanding her when she breaks the rules (by sitting on a patient's bed). It seems that, from the outset, Dina the nurse, similarly to biblical Dina, is portrayed as a rule-breaker. She is not an obedient, submissive follower. Ironically, Dina contributes her part in missing the marriage **“but mine own vineyard have I not kept”** (Song of Songs 1:5).

The presence of the **guards** in the story recalls the Song of Songs (3:5) – but they are powerless to save the marriage. Although in the bible the beloved is the one who grasps her lover and does not let go, in our story it is the doctor who does not loosen his hold.

“Behold, thou art fair; thine eyes are as doves” (Song of Songs 1:15) – Dina experiences a transformation. Initially this is gradually coming under the control of an illness that is expressed in her eyes as the light-blue of her eyes becomes darker. This black light-blue adds to her mystery: “...but that smile on her lips, and that blue-black in her eyes had the distinction of doing on their own more than their mistress intended.” Dina's power lies in her withdrawal. In the course of the story she shows signs of independence as she grows more distant from the doctor. The light-blue of her eyes becomes darker as her marriage draws closer, before her confession, and the darkening increases after the marriage when the shadow of the past becomes part of their shared life. The color of her eyes return to normal after the divorce, and Dina becomes part of the protagonist's yearnings. The illness ends when Dina closes the door to him. At this stage, she opens a door to herself: she grows her hair long, and seeks other places and other interests.

“Look not upon me, that I am swarthy” (Song of Songs 1:6) – The oxymoron “the black-blue of her eyes” appears repeatedly in the story. The color black symbolizes something dark and somber for the doctor: the fact that Dina was not a virgin before they married. The black-blue of her eyes is mentioned three times in the story: first, when the doctor first meets Dina; second, before she reveals her “secret,” and third, when the doctor reminisces of his longing for her. The third appearance indicates the doctor's madness: “But in my heart [...] I see the blue-black in her eyes.” In *The Doctor's Divorce*, the shadows have not dissipated, and the companion continues to imagine his shadow as the antithesis to the Song of Songs (2:17) **“Until the day breathe, and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be thou like a gazelle or a young hart upon the mountains of spices.”**

The color black also appears in *Metamorphosis*, in the description of the couple's relationship. When the couple is at the inn in the garden, Toni orders black bread with their meal when the waiter asks whether they prefer white or black bread.

In *Metamorphosis*, Toni's dark eyes, which are warm and moist, are described using a metonym of the root מ.ר.ר. in Toni's description as a warm [brown] woman.

“My dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the cliff” (Song of Songs 2:14). Dina's name is first mentioned in the second chapter of *The Doctor's Divorce*, at which point she becomes a flesh and blood character. In the first two years of her marriage, her behavior indicates that she is hurt. She responds with sad smiles, em-

barrassment, and tears. She undergoes a change in the third year of her marriage. She becomes indifferent and no longer responds to the doctor's remarks concerning her former lover. She grows her hair longer without asking him, she does not speak, but she clearly feels the decline in their relationship. From the time when the topic of divorce is raised, she opposes her husband more actively and remains within the confines of her home. Following her psychological transformation, she decides to take care of an ill woman, which attests to her desire to attain independence by earning her own living – although in fact she does not earn anything because the girl is unable to pay for her services. She does not complain. She becomes more loving and giving toward others. Then, she herself falls ill and requires care.

Dina the beloved is **“in the covert of the cliff,”** implying the mysterious allure of her inferiority (this is how the doctor views Dina and her moral decline). Some secret matter is being hidden, which the doctor tries to discover.

“Who is this that cometh up out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant? Behold, it is the litter of Solomon; threescore mighty men are about it, of the mighty men of Israel. They all handle the sword, and are expert in war; every man hath his sword upon his thigh, because of dread in the night” (Song of Songs 3:6–8) – The ill Doctor is attracted to Dina the nurse, the most loved of all. Of everyone, he was the only one who dared to marry her (“others did not dare while I dared”).

In Song of Songs (7:2), the beloved is called **“O prince's daughter.”** In *The Doctor's Divorce*, the doctor ironically views Dina as one who sacrificed herself on behalf of her lover.

“...let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely” (Song of Songs 2:14) – Dina does not stand out merely for her beauty. Although her own voice is silent, the voice of her lover is heard loudly, causing insanity and assuming control of memory. This is expressed in an extreme manner on the wedding night, the day of their happiness, when the couple enters the room and finds the flowers. The doctor immediately suspects that Dina's lover ordered the flowers. In their hotel room, the doctor hears steps and is certain that these are the steps of Dina's lover. It is as if **“and the voice of the turtle-dove is heard in our land”** (Song of Songs 2:23). Ironically, the doctor feels that his turn has now come, after the lover who preceded him.

“The king hath brought me into his chambers; we will be glad and rejoice in thee” (Song of Songs 1:3) – When the doctor speaks of Dina for the first time, he describes how her patients repeatedly called to her. When the doctor asks Dina about the “black light-blue” in her eyes, she answers “Let's be happy darling, let's be happy, and do nothing that might put an end to our happiness.” The joy assumes an ironic meaning in their shared intimate lives, as the doctor cannot stop thinking of the clerk. He is so overwhelmed by his thoughts that he shies from having children with Dina for fear that they might look like the clerk.

Dina is a well-developed character who changes and develops over the course of the story. She does not succumb to the repressive social conventions; she struggles for her

freedom, and ultimately prevails. She reveals her secret and demands a divorce from her husband, disregarding his hurtful remarks, and she withdraws from him when their relationship becomes insufferable. She rehabilitates her life. Her victory is reflected in the symbolism at the close of the story, when the doctor expresses his sorrow caused by her leaving. He still wakes up at night and calls to her “Nurse, nurse, come to me,” as he realizes that his treatment of her was wrong.

The Doctor’s Divorce and *Metamorphosis* are realistic-psychological stories that focus on the soul of an ill person – protagonists whose worlds and souls have been disrupted, and are engulfed by their moral duality to the point of self-destruction.

B. Motifs in *The Doctor’s Divorce* and *Metamorphosis*

The Doctor’s Divorce and *Metamorphosis* are in a collection which Agnon called “At the Handles of the Lock,” which is an allusion to a verse in the Song of Songs (5:5) “upon the handles of the bar [lock].” These verses hint at a failed search for love, and the topic of these stories is the account of a failed love. The marriage in *The Doctor’s Divorce* is a missed opportunity for love resulting from the doctor’s own character: He is unable to forget his wife’s past, and repeatedly projects the memory of her former lover onto their own lives.

In effect, these tales could both have ended with the divorce. Agnon, however, chose not to end them at this point in order to reverse their ending. In both stories, the protagonists are left with a sense of yearning and longing for the ideal, unrealized essence, exactly like the state they were in before their respective marriages. The reversal represents man’s issue of living a shared life in practice and not only dreaming of ideal, transcendental, unattainable love. The protagonists of both stories preserve their marriage after their divorce.

1. The motif of love and failed love

“...if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, he would utterly be condemned” (Song of Songs 8:7). The doctor does not understand the reason for Dina’s sadness during their engagement. According to modern moral standards, he is concerned that she is sad because her family is financially impoverished, but when he discovers that her family is wealthy, he loves her even more. When she reveals to him “I have been with somebody else,” he wishes to learn more details about the lover, and is surprised to discover that he was a simple clerk. He claims that he did not change his attitude toward her, or remind her of the lover before their marriage. The matter of payment for the attendees is mentioned **three** times in the description of the wedding: The first time, the payment and how it will be used by its recipients after the wedding is mentioned: “... when they could go into a bar with the money they had earned at my wedding.” The second time, the payment and its future use receives a different interpretation: “Let others be led under the bridal canopy by renowned and wealthy wedding guests; I would be married in the presence of poor people who, with what they would earn for their trouble, could buy bread.” The third time, the payment is mentioned with reference to the award of the payment itself and the description of the narrator’s expectations of the recipients.

This description emphasizes the gap between actual reality and unrealized expectations. “I put my hand in my pocket and pulled out several **shillings** which I handed to the sexton to give to the men over and above the agreed **price**. I was afraid they would overwhelm me with thanks [...] but not one of them came up to me...”

The narrator purchases the wedding party with Dina by paying the wretched guests that attend the ceremony. The matter of purchased control is possible only because the “goods” are considered defective. When his ideal assumes a real form and becomes an everyday element of reality, the routine detracts and perverts the ideal’s value. Dina becomes perfect once more when she is unattainable, after their relationship has ended. The price that the doctor pays for his urge for control and aggression is the absence of a shared life with Dina, and he remains alone and lonely.

Agnon tells us of the beginning of the relationship between Toni and Hartmann in *Metamorphosis*: “their love was [...] strong,” but Michael was very pre-occupied and concerned with his business. Since he drew a clear boundary between his work and home, between work and life at home, he gradually withdrew from the external world into his own inner world, became angry, critical, and isolated. Hartmann’s dream in the story is the Freudian realization of his subconscious self-criticism – the home is the division between business and intimacy. The office is “...an observatory from which to view the frozen birds?”

Toni is more strongly connected to life than Hartmann. She speaks to men, chats with women, plays with children. Hartmann is jealous of Toni’s openness to others: “Michael Hartmann was a merchant and he sold his goods by weight and by measure; he knew that to waste a measure meant losing it.”

Hartmann does not share his business and financial problems with his wife, and they cause him agitation and anger that he brings home with him. Business enters his home, and he starts to work from home too. He has no time to spend with his wife or the patience to do so, and he gradually grows distant from her. “His father had not left him any inheritance; whatever he acquired had been the result of his own exertions.” He treats marriage pragmatically, as a business. His isolation increases and he becomes jealous of Toni as the cigarette smoke separates them. Withdrawn, Hartmann does not know that the world of the mind is unlike the material world, and that the laws of trade and commerce do not apply there. His jealousy swells until the household collapses.

In both stories, financial values have the upper hand, and the lovers build walls of regard for money which separate them from their loving wives. “We have a little **sister**, and she hath no breasts; **what shall we do for our sister** in the day when she shall be spoken for? **If she be a wall, we will build upon her a turret of silver; and if she be a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar**” (Song of Songs 8:8–9).

2. The Motif of Silence

The motif of silence characterizes the relationships of both couples in these stories. In *The Doctor’s Divorce*, Dina initially responds to the doctor’s attempt to delve into her past and understand the source of her sorrow in the following manner: “Please, darling, don’t say anything more. I was silent and asked no more questions.” His response to the

discovery is similar: “I sat without saying a word.” In the third year of their marriage, when Dina ignores his harassment, and does not answer him, he interprets this as a lack of emotion. Finally, she closes the door on her marriage and commands him twice to be silent and stop digging into the past.

In *Metamorphosis*, Toni is introverted and generally listens. She sees a lot but speaks little. Toni helps Michael open up, talk, confess, and change, through her active attentiveness, her looks, and her sensitive personality. Toni is the main reason for the healing process. Toni’s description as she walks with Hartmann sheds additional light on her character. Toni speaks little. Very few sentences are spoken by her, yet she is not silly or unintelligent. Toni “speaks” from her heart, through her body movements, through her moist brown eyes, through the quivering of her mouth, and through her connection to the flowers she loves. Her femininity is made concrete through the eau de cologne that she sprinkles on her hands.

In Pirkei Avot it is written: “The Sages said ‘do not increase conversation with the wife.’ His wife, they said, a fortiori, with another’s wife.” The message of these stories contrasts the Sages’ teachings. In fact, Agnon identifies the couples’ detachment, lack of sharing, and silence as the root of their failed relationships.

The modern “tikkun,” similar to the biblical tikkun, is a covenant (Genesis 34 – in the story of Dina, the men of Shchem repent for the rape through an act of circumcision) which is not only physical but refers to the couple’s verbal relationship.

3. The Motif of Jealousy

“...for love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave” (Song of Songs 8:6). The origin of Dina’s name is the bible (Genesis 34:31). Dina is the daughter of Yaakov and Leah, whose innocence was abused by Shchem, son of Hamor, who raped her. The young man tried to repent for his action, with the assistance of his father and townsmen, and to compensate Dina and her family. Yaakov’s family responded to his offer of marriage by stipulating that Shchem and his people would have to undergo a circumcision. After their circumcision, while they were still sore, Shimon and Levy attacked and killed them. Yaakov reprimanded his sons for their deed, and they justified themselves by saying, “Should he treat our sister as a harlot?”

Based on the biblical association, we can assume that a traumatic event accounts for Dina’s submissiveness in Agnon’s story, and she was so humiliated by her relationship with the clerk that she was unable to say more than “...I have been with somebody else.” Both stories illustrate destructive, merciless, unforgiving jealousy. In *The Doctor’s Divorce*, Dina tries to appease the doctor. In both cases, the marriage should have been a remedial experience, but remedy is impossible. In our story, the “rapist” turns out to be the doctor himself, for whom the disclosed secret becomes a blot in his mind. Crazy jealousy is what seals Dina’s fate in both cases.

The biblical layer of jealousy that extinguishes the efforts at remedy reveals the gap between the doctor’s cultural mask and his instinctive roots. When taboos are violated, there is no difference between men then and today, whether they be cultured or members of the old guard.

In *Metamorphosis*, toward the end of the first chapter, it is after the divorce that “He looked at her as he had not seen her for a long time past, and he beheld her as he had not beheld her for a long time past.” – after he had during his marriage been jealous of everything she did. This is the meaning of the name of the story: Toni’s eyes and face appear to him as a new, different face. He has undergone a transformation and when he looks at her now she appears to be attractive to him, and therefore he sees that he can speak to him about his business. It is her very attentiveness that helps him understand the events better. Hartmann may also have been beheld differently by Toni after the divorce. She understands the reasons for his anger, his isolation. Hartmann sees himself differently through this new face that was Toni’s. “He realized that he was seeing his affairs in a new light.” Perhaps had he looked into her eyes before, and shared his problems with her while they were married, their relationship would have collapsed.

The motifs of *love gone sour* and *vengeful love* are intertwined and reappear in Agnon’s love stories. According to Agnon, internal and external forces prevent the realization of true love. As a result of their failure to realize their love, the lovers are in a state of psychological isolation and abandonment.

In contrast to the biblical jealousy that consumes all remedial efforts, Agnon leaves open an option for a remedy, because yearning for love and the search for love are infinite. “**Draw me, we will run after thee**” (Song of Songs 1:4). Agnon shapes the character of the beloved woman in a way that makes it difficult to leave her.

“**Return, return, O Shulammitte; Return, return, that we may look upon thee**” (Song of Songs 7:1) – In both stories, the divorces were external acts, yet inside, the lovers continue to love and miss their former wives. After the separation, when the beloved is once again unattainable, she once again becomes the object of desire that she once was.

D. Symbolism

The symbols in these two stories represent two time frames: the modern era, and the traditional-conservative era.

The selection of time frames has great significance in understanding the nature of the characters. The time frame described in *The Doctor’s Divorce* is the 1930s, a time of global economic crisis, as the doctor describes: “It was not customary to have parties and public rejoicing. Governments came and went, and between one and the next there was panic and confusion, turmoil and dismay.” An additional description of the period is by the professor who was abused by Nazis. In both stories, the events take place in two time frames: **one**, the time of the events of the story, and **two**, the time at which the retrospective account of the events occurs.

In both stories, Agnon describes how individuals cope with a collectivist culture. This is the spirit of the times marked by the transition from the world of tradition and the world of the collective, in which the individual was one element of many, to the world of modernity that focuses on the individual. During this period, Agnon has special status: When collectivism flourished, artistic expression was the sole channel for individual expression. Agnon expressed the depths of the individual anguish from behind the walls erected by the spirit of the times.

“My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies” (Song of Songs 6:2) – In *The Doctor’s Divorce*, **flowers** first appear when the doctor arrives at Dina’s room for a visit. The educated Doctor wishes to impress Dina and demonstrate his knowledge by calling each flower by name. Later, on their wedding night, red roses have been placed in a vase near their bed. The red roses, combined with the steps that the doctor hears, symbolize the peak of the doctor’s madness. He suspects that Dina’s former lover sent her the roses, and he forces her to address the flowers on their wedding night, as he insults her for her defects.

Flowers also create a frame for the story. At the beginning, Dina buys flowers for herself, and at the end, she buys them for the handicapped young woman for whom she cares. This frame creates a closed circle that signifies the trap in which the doctor is captive, and the connection between the two. That theirs is an inseparable connection is proven by the fact that the two continue to meet even after their divorce.

Flowers also appear as a symbol in *Metamorphosis*. There, a young child wishes to sell the couple flowers. The child seeks human warmth and caring that only the sensitive woman Toni is can give. In contrast, Hartmann treats this little girl as a tradesman treats goods. He gives her the money and does not take the flowers from her hands. This situation alludes to the cause underlying Toni and Hartmann’s divorce – a lack of communication, and the absence of words in their relationship, and the absence of any remedy or corrective action through a covenant.

2. **“A garden shut up is my sister, my bride; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed”** (Song of Songs 4:12) – A locked garden is a metaphor for virginity. The first meeting between the doctor and Dina takes place in an amusement park, where he proposes to her. In *Metamorphosis*, Toni and Hartmann see a light in the distance and discover a garden contained in an inn. “At last they came to a garden fenced in on three sides. The gate was open, and to the right of it shone a lamp. Some smaller lanterns in the shape of apples and pears hung from the trees in the garden.”

“My beloved is gone down into his garden” (Song of Songs 6:2) – In Kabbalistic symbolism this verse is interpreted as the concrete realization in this world of the holy coupling that occurs in the heavens, and therefore the symbol of the garden emits the erotic perfume of the Song of Songs. In our story, the garden is locked, but has an opening. The garden that is locked on three sides has one side open for Toni and Hartmann. Similarly, in *The Doctor’s Divorce*, at the end of the story, Dina leaves her home and locks the door after her. Locking the door symbolizes the end of their relationship. She hints that the situation is hopeless – Dina refuses to let the doctor into her life, although the doctor continues to call her “Nurse, nurse, come to me.”

3. **“... also our couch is leafy.” “Behold, it is the litter of Solomon”** (Song of Songs 1:16; 3:7) – The narrow bed in Dina’s room hints that there is not enough room for both the doctor and herself. Even their courtship, which is described as the most beautiful period in their relationship, contains allusions to separation. The first allusion appears when the doctor comes to Dina’s room. He sits on her bed and complains that it is narrow, with the implication being that there is no room for them both. Hartmann and Toni

end the night in separate rooms at the inn – Hartmann sleeps on the billiard table because there is no bed available. As he lies there, he thinks of Toni on the other side of the wall.

4. **The first tram** that the doctor wanted to take on the evening of their first meeting is full. When the second tram arrives, Dina boards it, but when the doctor boards after her, the driver says that there is no room and they must disembark. This alludes to their fate that determines that there is no room for them together. The doctor also quotes others as saying that you should not be sorry if you miss a girl or a tramcar. Such a comment, although he does not agree with it, indicates that their shared fate will be similar to a tramcar that comes and goes. The third hint is in the tramcar which Dina and the doctor take to travel outside the city. In Agnon's stories, "outside the city" is a place of no consensus, a place outside conventional norms. And indeed, their marriage exceeds the boundaries of conventional norms, and their marriage is clouded by an event which the doctor views as being out of the ordinary.

We can say that the first tramcar represents traditional society, which believes that a woman has no rights over her own body, and that she must be faithful to her husband. The second tramcar represents the clerk, Dina's former lover, to whom she lost her virginity. There was only room for herself on the car; there was no room for the doctor. The third tramcar represents Dina and the doctor's future – they travel out of town, out of civilization, where they have no need of any social conventions. All these allusions lead to the unexpected ending – the two are not meant for each other, and their marriage fails.

Similarly, in *Metamorphosis*, the story describes a transition from the permanent aspects of married life to the undefined, unwritten reality of the relationship between Toni and Hartmann. The story is a transition from the house to the inn and hotel, from the city to the countryside, from bright, scorching, unpleasant sunlight to darkness filled with fireflies where even electricity spoils the atmosphere; a transition from smells of burning to more pleasant scents. *Metamorphosis* ends in the world of dreams that are separated by no boundaries, in contrast to reality (metonymically, from the physical to the symbolic), where boundaries are very real partitions. In his article on the story, Barzel developed an extensive interpretation of this phrase, based both on the time it was stated and the meaning of the partitions.

5. **"I have taken off my coat; how shall I put it on?"** (Song of Songs 5:3) – In Agnon's stories, a new dress hints to the desire to change reality, on the one hand, and on an illusion of renewal, on the other. In other words, there is a desire to change and assume a new countenance (become outwardly modern), yet this transformation is merely superficial (because tradition and conservatism are embedded deep in the soul). Dina sews a new dress for herself, alluding to her desire for something new. She sews a dress that symbolizes perfection, an item absent of any defect. Ostensibly, the dress symbolizes Dina's character, reflected in the eyes of the patients and the doctor. However, we later discover that the perfection is only an illusion: In the doctor's eyes she is far from perfect. It should be noted that the issue of sewing appears frequently in Agnon's work, including *Simple Tale*, *In the Prime of her Life*, *The Dune*.

6. In *The Doctor's Divorce*, the **wedding** was a small affair, attended only by the handful of people whom the sexton brought to make a quorum, including some who had come directly from a funeral and others who came in order to earn a paltry sum.

The fragile balance between the forces of irrationality related to urges and impulses and the forces of rationality is undermined during the **bridal ceremony**. The description of the ceremony reveals the gradual transformation in the way reality is perceived. In the transition from a neutral, objective reporting of the wedding to a subjective account in which the narrator is involved, the wedding becomes a grotesque event. The witnesses appear absurd in their borrowed suits. One limps, the other is cross-eyed, and yet another stares at the bride indecently. The bridal canopy also collapses, and all the while the groom is thinking of the story he heard, of the young man whose girlfriend forced him to marry her and he brought all of her former lovers to the ceremony in order to shame her. The doctor identifies with that young man, which attests to his feeling of being cheated.

The groom's subconscious feelings are revealed through the associated story which he contemplates as he stands under the wedding canopy. There is a sense of coercion – the wedding was forced upon him, seemingly through deception employed by his beloved. Blaming Dina for her love affair with the clerk, and indirectly blaming her for breaking the moral code of marriage relations: "...he went and gathered for the ceremony all the lovers who had lived with her before her marriage." He wished to take revenge on Dina, to remind her of her "contemptible act," yet he directs his self-destruction, aggression toward himself "to punish himself for agreeing to marry such a woman."

The fictional story reveals the narrator's state of mind and true consciousness. It is analogous to the real event of the doctor's marriage to Dina, until ultimately, when he places the ring on Dina's finger, the analogy peaks in a complete fusion of fiction and reality: "And in the same way, just before, when my wife put out her finger for the wedding ring and I said to her 'Behold thou are consecrated unto me,' I knew without anyone's telling me the feelings of that man at that moment."

The events of the wedding hint that it is doomed from the start, a hint which is reinforced by the collapse of the canopy. The repetitive pattern – "How pitiful [...] how comic [...] how audacious" – emphasizes the absurdity of the event. Numerous verbs transform the bridal canopy into an aggressive event "...the sexton **chose** four of his quorum, **put** a pole in the hand of each of the four, **stretched** a canopy over the poles, and, in doing so, **pushed** one man who lost his balance and thus **brought** the canopy **down**."

The festivity, food, joy, participants, and presence of family members – all are erased and disappear, and are replaced by an unappealing scene of strangers who are full of desires and urges, people from the margins of society, creating a defective wedding whose peak is the collapse of the canopy. This description reveals the narrator's inability to distinguish imagination from reality.

7. "...**behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh in through the windows, he peereth through the lattice**" (Song of Songs 2:9) – When the doctor harasses Dina on their wedding night, she tells him to open the **window** so her can announce her sin to the entire world. "Open the door and the window and tell the whole world how bad I am."

Similarly, in *Metamorphosis*, Toni and Hartmann pass the buildings on their walk. “Hartmann fixed his gaze on a **window** being opened across the way, trying to remember what it was he had wanted to say. He saw a woman peeping **out**.” The new chapter starting in Hartmann’s relationship with Toni is symbolized in the window opening.

Toni and Michael are alone throughout almost the entire story. They walk together, talk, reminisce about their marriage, and reveal the reasons for its failure. “The windows looked out from the walls of the houses, strangers to themselves and to the houses. Hartmann fixed his gaze on a window being opened across the way, trying to remember what it was he had wanted to say. He saw a woman peeping out.” The window is part of a series of “apertures” embedded throughout the story: “...he waved despairingly at the things that were coming out of his mouth and that he was laying before Toni.” He looked at her and saw her as if he had not seen her for a long time. His eyes were opened.

“**Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages**” (Song of Songs 7:12) – Agnon embeds in their walks the story of Toni and Hartmann’s love and disappointment of marriage, and sets out a psychological description of the failure that frequently occurs in married life. In the corrective journey that Agnon gives them, they gain new insights into themselves and their partner. In contrast to Hartmann, Toni not only feels but also understands things through her heart: “...what she did not grasp with her mind, her heart understood.” On their walk, they each reach an understanding about the failure that occurred in their relationship, and a new understanding of each other. Toni understands how difficult it was for Hartmann and how lonely he was with his problems, and why he was constantly angry. Hartmann understands that “...if he had not snapped at her every time she wanted to know something about his doings, perhaps her interests would have grown closer to his, and they would not have come to regard themselves as such strangers to one another.” On their walk, Hartmann tells Toni about his complicated business, and things begin to seem clearer to him. The portrayal of the couples’ characters and lifestyles presents Hartmann as a person in need of a change. Our story concerns a relationship “correction,” but the emphasis is on the journey that Hartmann experiences, therefore he is the protagonist of the story and he has the dream of correction. In fact, the beginning of the story already alludes to the fact that their emotional bond remained intact. They were not indifferent to each other. When Hartmann exits the rabbi’s house, and sees Toni with Svirsh and Tanzer, he asks her, “Going with them?” She does not respond that she is free to go with whomever she wishes, but instead asks what he prefers. He answers, “Don’t go with them.” He still speaks as if she was his wife and he cares whom she walks around with. Toni’s stance says: “Do I look as if I could go alone?” Notably, the meaning of the name Tanzer is dancer. The entire beginning of this story deals with the motif of walking – walking alone, assistance in walking as a sign of ownership, etc.

E. The Biblical Stratum in *The Doctor’s Divorce* and *Metamorphosis*

The biblical foundation is established by the author’s use of a verse or portion of a verse which encourages the reader to compare the biblical source and recognize the similarities or contrasts with the author’s text. The biblical stratum expands the meaning of the text, and in the case of contrasts, adds an ironic aspect to the au-

thor's text. Several biblical foundations and their implications are explored below.

1. By naming his protagonist **Dina**, the author introduces a biblical stratum into his story. The bible recounts the **rape** of Dina, daughter of Jacob, by Schem son of Hamor. When Jacob learns of the rape, he attempts to conceal it. Both Dina in Agnon's story and the biblical Dina became defective – the innocence of both was defiled before marriage. Similarly, both stories contain an attempt to remedy the defect. These attempts are related to “*tikkun*” in its biblical sense (circumcision) and in its modern (psychological) sense.

Dina is also sister to Joseph, the interpreter of **dreams**. In Agnon's story, the doctor recounts his dream to Dina. The dream appears at a critical stage in the doctor's life, during which he is desperately trying to save his marriage but he is unsuccessful in changing the dreamer's consciousness. The overt story implies that the clerk raped Dina, but in the dream, the act appears as the dreamer's wish. The dream has several functions in the story: to present the dreamer's mind and sub-consciousness, to alert the dreamer, and to express his aspirations. In *The Doctor's Divorce*, the doctor dreams that he sees the face of his wife's lover, a face which appears both pleasant and in suffering. In the dream, the doctor accuses the lover for his own suffering, but the lover replies that the doctor cannot accuse him because he “forced” him to enter their lives. The dream appears after the doctor treats the lover. While caring for him, the doctor tries to discover what kind of person he is, and learn something of Dina's attitude toward him. Even though he feels scorn for him, he administers perfect treatment and prevents him from leaving the hospital even after he is healed. The dream shows us that the doctor felt guilty for his condescending attitude when he said goodbye to the lover. The doctor also learns of his illness through the dream, and perhaps begins to understand that he is the one who has the problem, and not the lover. He is the one who imposed the lover's presence on himself and Dina. He also blames himself for forcing the lover to remain in the hospital more than necessary.

The dream may be seen as a key to understanding the plot: the theme of obsession emerges in this dream. The doctor is unable to let go of his obsession over an event that occurred before he met Dina, and all his efforts in the story are focused on his attempt to relinquish himself from his growing jealousy. The more he makes an effort, the more the thoughts from which he tries to escape return to him and impose themselves on his thoughts and conduct.

The end of the story may be viewed in two ways: One, as a closed ending in which the issues that were raised in the course of the story are resolved (the couple's relationship ends in divorce), and two, as an open ending: Despite the divorce, the doctor continues to seek Dina out, which reflects the fact that their relationship has not ended.

The collection of short stories “At the Handles of the Lock” contains stories of unrequited love. While Agnon conceptualizes love as an idea that is not realizable, at the same time he emphasizes that love is the most important thing in life. As a result, Agnon's protagonists yearn for love, and die, either psychologically or physically, or go mad in the attempt to attain love. His protagonists are in agony over their inability to realize love, and their inability to live without it. The stories also reflect social criticism: Agnon describes a society in crisis, in transition, in a confused era where old and new norms exist alongside each other. This ambiguous situation is the cause of the characters'

catastrophe. We are led to conclude that society forces on the individual a situation that leads to catastrophe.

Dreams also play a role in *Metamorphosis*. We may say that there are several similarities between the story and the world of dreams: the story proceeds without a clear separation between reality and imagination, between inner and outer worlds, or between consciousness and sub-consciousness. However, this fluidity functions as the background music for the story, and the plot develops despite this blurring of boundaries. Out of the revolving cycle of inside and outside, and out of unconscious behavior, emerges an awareness of the voices of the sub-consciousness, an awareness that sprouts buds of consciousness, and the dream that Hartmann tells Toni, like any other dream, presents a distilled version of everything that the sub-conscious has to tell the conscious.

Viewing the dream from a therapeutic perspective requires that we identify the key symbols that arise from the dream. Identifying the central theme of the therapeutic encounter leads us to identify the story's main motif, to which the dream is possibly directed. The theme of the story appears to be Hartmann's attitude to the woman and femininity in his world. In the dream, the key figure is the landlady, an erotic symbol: "She seemed to dance along rather than walk. A secret joy twinkled on her lips, a hidden, yearning joy, a virginal joy."

The protagonist undertakes two journeys: He takes a walk with Toni in the "real" world, which is not completely real, and he takes a walk in his dream. The figures that appear in his dream represent Hartmann's difference faces, the different facets of his personality. The apartment represents Hartmann's married life, and the search for a new apartment represents his divorce. The stove represents the warmth of his marriage with Toni. Just as Sussenschein failed to see the stove, Hartmann failed to realize the love that existed in his marriage to Toni. Hartmann closed himself off in his study without any stove, without love. Love always existed in his marriage, but he detached himself from it. The windows in his study represent his orientation to the world outside his marriage, and his lack of interest in this world.

The landlady represents Toni. Like Toni, she too has flaws. Initially Hartmann only sees Toni's flaws, but now he sees the whole picture. The landlady has no defect, she walks as a dancer (using the recurrent theme of walking) and her eyes twinkle with joy. The landlady's attractive description reflects Hartmann's transformation: now he only sees Toni's beauty. Hartmann says that he wishes to escape the cold – just as in reality he wishes to return to love. In *A Guest for the Night* Agnon writes, "There is one man, Hartmann is his name, who divorced his wife and when he existed the Rabbi's house, her love re-entered him and brought her back."

The main motifs in the dream are the home, which is a theme that engages Hartmann extensively, and the theme of observation. In the dream, Sussenschein is the positive representative of childhood who represents one facet of Hartmann's personality. Sussenschein is seeking an apartment and Hartmann helps him, and changes places with him so that Hartmann is the one who is searching for the apartment (an expression of his divorce from Toni and the dissolution of his family – a typical Freudian manner of camouflage and alleviation). The apartment Hartmann enters has a stove in the bedroom, but none in the study – the stove symbolizes the boundary that Hartmann drew between this family life (the bedroom) and his work life (the study). This dream symbolizes Hartmann's fear

of losing his family and love. This is a warning light for Hartmann, because his divorce from Toni is the gravest mistake in his life.

“I will get me to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense” (Song of Songs 4:6) – The **mound** that appears in the dream is a symbol of Hartmann’s fear of falling and loss of control. Fear assumes a tangible form through his divorce from Toni and the dissolution of his marriage. Fear of falling and failure is even greater than his fear of falling into the abyss. The hill that Hartmann falls from in his childhood reappears in his memory – the fall causes him injury but afterwards he feels as if all the badness is behind him and he feels relief. The hill symbolizes difficulty, obstacles, and unresolved issues from his past that scarred him for life.

At its conclusion, the story *Metamorphosis* hints at the possibility that Hartmann and Toni reunited as a couple. Toni is symbolized as the solution to Hartmann’s problems: only she can give him support and love. The story ends in optimism, with a sense of salvation and reconciliation.

Hartmann recounts his dream to Toni after the meal. He tells her about a dream that he had “yesterday or before.” The dream marks his development, presages and draws attention to the psychological transformation of which the dreamer is not yet aware, and before it has any expression in reality or in his conduct. Thus, Hartmann experiences a journey in his walk with Toni that is presaged by his dream. In his dream, Hartmann is visited by his friend and world-traveler, Sussenschein. Hartmann reminds Toni, “I’m always glad to see him, for he brings with him an atmosphere of the far-off places I used to dream of in my childhood.” Thus, Sussenschein is generally liked by Hartmann, apparently as an object to which Hartmann can project his thirst for freedom and open spaces. But in his dream, Hartmann is not pleased to see Sussenschein, and the latter even becomes an object of Hartmann’s hatred in the dream because, as Hartmann says, “...in dreams we aren’t always happy to be with the people we enjoy when we’re awake.” The dream’s compensation mechanism affords therapeutic value: the dream tells us truths of which the conscious is unaware.

In the dream, Sussenschein’s travels represent the protagonist’s search for self, in the outside, in the distance. He represents Hartmann’s bitter and impatient side, the unsatisfied side that does not settle for what he has at home or what is available to him. Therefore Sussenschein’s search for an apartment is actually Hartmann’s search for a “home.”

In these stories we find a cyclic progression in which the protagonist ultimately returns to his first home or apartment. The home symbolizes the dreamer’s inner world, and the search for a home is the inner journey which is primarily the discovery of the soul’s inner resources, the discovery of a “place.” This search directs the dreamer to his own “home” and his own self.

In contrast to Sussenschein who reflects one facet of Hartmann, Hartmann himself in the dream appears as someone who has the ability to find the favorable rooms in the house, and the ability to identify erotic warmth in the landlady who is far from perfection, with one leg shorter than the other. For Hartmann, her crippled walk appears as a kind of a dance, and joy and eroticism peek at him from her very being.

Toward the end of the dream, Hartmann appears to be dominated by the Sussenschein’s facet of himself, but Hartmann awakes in a lighthearted mood. He looks at Toni and “...it seemed to him that it was with just such eyes that the landlady had looked at

him [...] he felt that if Toni were to get up, she, too, would turn out to be lame. However since that should not seem like a blemish – as he knew from the woman in the dream – it followed that even if Toni were lame, she would not seem crippled to him.” We see how the recuperation process takes place in the dialogue between the dreamer and his dream.

Metamorphosis is an account of the protagonist’s psychological development, through the salvation of his feminine side, and its implications for the protagonist’s relationship with his partner. The combination of dreams and daydreams frequently appears as a priming allusion, as a set of symbols that conveys the ideas of the story, and consistently reflect the protagonist’s state of mind.

“**Hark! My beloved knocketh**” (Song of Songs 5:2) – Agnon also addresses young people’s growing remoteness from a traditional lifestyle. He describes family life that is almost completely void of any connection to Jewish tradition. This is conspicuous in *The Doctor’s Divorce*, in the relationship between Dina and her lover, and at the marriage ceremony, which differs starkly from ordinary Jewish ceremonies. Both the doctor and Dina are examples of intellectual Jews who grew apart from Jewish tradition in favor of modernism and intellectualism. Furthermore, on her wedding night Dina discovers a Christian book in their room entitled “Wait for your master until he arrives.” The doctor takes the book from Dina’s hands and says, “Your master has already arrived.” The book obviously refers to Jesus, but the doctor’s interpretation tells us of his attitude to the man who preceded him, the lover who was her “master.”

The encounter between the two characters is an encounter of two extreme poles of Jewish society. The doctor comes from a poor family “I, a poor boy, son of a lowly tinsmith” while Dina’s family were “industrialists and some were people of distinction in other fields and that they all made comfortable livings.” The poor society from which the **doctor** came was a **conservative, traditional society**, while **Dina** came from a **liberal society that opened itself to the world and grew away from tradition**.

Summary

The Talmud teaches that 40 days before physical conception takes place “announced in heaven” are the basic characteristics of the soul that is about to come into the world.

The Doctor’s Divorce, and the love-sickness which it describes, offer a critique of men’s attitude toward women in the transition from the tradition to the modern era. The doctor represents the old conservative attitude that compels a woman to maintain her virginity before marriage, while Dina represents the modern woman who wishes to own her own body. Their marriage ends in divorce and in the doctor’s loss of sanity.

Outwardly, the doctor maintains a modern value system in which materialism, status, and prestige have supreme importances. However, in the depths of his soul, he believes in a conservative value system. When Dina tells him about her former lover, he is surprised that the lover was no more than a simple clerk. The doctor’s worldview is thus presented in a somewhat absurd light: He is angry that she lost her virginity to another man, but perhaps he would have been mollified and the act would have been less improper had the lover been a senior lecturer or professor. The phrase “I discovered a blonde nurse” hints to the doctor’s materialism and his attitude toward his wife as a possession or object. He believes that everything comes down to money and riches and initially guesses that the blue-black in

Dina's eyes is caused by concerns over her family's economic woes. Throughout the entire story, the doctor adopts an exclusively superficial perspective and fails to see anything that occurs beneath the surface. He does not understand the real meaning of the blue-black in Dina's eyes, and his decisions are guided entirely by social conventions: "We are enlightened individuals, modern people, we seek freedom for ourselves and for all humanity, and in point of fact we are worse than the most die-hard reactionaries." In this statement, the doctor expresses his awareness of his own problem, his old-fashioned conservatism. Dina refuses to succumb to the oppressive social conventions and she fights for her liberty and prevails.

The psychological transformation experienced by Agnon's protagonists could cast a shadow over love ties and marriage. At the beginning of the work, the reader is introduced to the world and generation of *The Doctor's Divorce*. This world is described as an immoral world, a world that is indifferent to the individual and his suffering. We learn of this world through various marginal characters such as the head nurse (described as indifferent to the patients' suffering, preferring animals over people, and taking more care over making the beds than caring for the patients).

When Dina understands that she is unable to continue in the life imposed on her, she prepares the ground for her divorce. Although she is the one who requests the divorce, it is clearly the doctor who caused the situation. He officially divorces her, but is unable to detach himself from her. "And so we parted from one another, in the way a man and wife part outwardly [...] Sometimes at night I sit up in bed [...] and call out, 'Nurse. Nurse, come to me.'" They divorce, but the doctor cannot part from her – and the title of the story is evidence of the persistent connection. We know that the story is told from the distance of time, and therefore the doctor can tell his story calmly. He is aware of his errors, and he knows that he was overwhelmed by his own emotions and allowed jealousy to control him. From his statements we understand that he was also aware of this when he was married but was unable to control his urges. He was a slave to his urges and his loneliness. Loneliness is one of the main causes of the doctor's sick jealousy. He can cope with it either through love or by dedicating himself to his work. The doctor gambled on love, but since his relationship with Dina was based mainly on external attraction, he fails to establish a relationship with her that can heal his loneliness.

The issue in our story is the gap between ideals and reality. A man wishes to marry a wife who will be his helper and, even more – will be someone who complements him, creates a unity of spirit and flesh – and a woman seeks the same. But the course of life disrupts the desires of the heart. The man and wife find themselves facing a different reality, and they are quickly required to determine their position to this reality, each according to his own worldview. The protagonists devise a modern solution to the problem: divorce. Still, in their consciousness, they continue to maintain an emotional and morally valid relationship with their loving wives. At the end of *Metamorphosis*, Hartmann hears the cooing of a dove from Toni's room. The conclusion of the story is open-ended and alludes to two types of endings.

Sensuality and poetry, passion and language: these are the elements of love and love discourse. In both stories, Agnon gives a creative, original, and inspiring expression to these elements. Similar to his own style, the alliance between the author and the word is full of deliberations and self-examination, as he seeks to find the way to express love and intimacy, to explore boundaries and examine closeness to and distance from the world of Jewish law and norms of religious society. In his stories, Agnon describes young people who belong to a traditional conservative society who yearn for love, but this solid society where everything is clear and certain is punctured by doubt, distress, and suspicion, creating tension between social boundaries and liberty, between intimacy and alienation. Agnon's version of *Song of Songs* receives a new life within contemporary modern reality. We are introduced to a world that remains connected to yesterday, yet oscillates between morals anchored in ancient sources and those grounded in modern values.

Agnon subverts the biblical *Song of Songs*. The world of his protagonists, both male and female, is a world that knows the sickness of love. Both the physician and the nurse maintain dualistic moral systems – a modern, intellectual system and a conservative traditional system. Modernism appears to be merely an illusion, like the protagonists' friends, who do not appear to be true friends of God: they are grotesque, clown-like characters, similar to their contemporaries. Still, the values of Judaism that are

imprinted deep in the protagonists' souls do not detach easily. The protagonists, the doves in the cleft, in the depths of the souls, are oriented to the absolute values originating in time immemorial, antiquity. The voice of the Song of Songs still knocks, and accompanies, albeit in secrecy, the Jewish individual throughout his entire life, even in his most intimate events. Outwardly we see the irony and the skepticism the ancient Song of Songs raises, but inwardly, in the depths of the soul, the souls of the young Jewish people are strongly entwined in love for their beloved.

In *Metamorphosis*, Agnon offers a different perspective on the Song of Songs. In this view, his protagonists, his contemporaries, are drifters whose lives have gone wrong, yet their souls still yearn for remedy.

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