"He Who Employs Funny Rhymes in His Speech": Parodied Poetics in the Works of Uri Zvi Greenberg and S. Y. Agnon

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This essay argues that Greenberg and Agnon employ simplistic rhyming in their works for rhetorical effect. It shows that both writers use this rather sophisticated literary device to express their criticism of inauthenticity in the sphere of religion: artificial worship in Agnon's case, and hypocritical divinity in Greenberg's. For Agnon, parody is used as part of an endeavor to provide historical documentation of certain institutional religious practices. For Greenberg, it is a means of representing the devastation of humanity following World War I. Methodologically, what follows is a formalist engagement with a particular literary idiosyncrasy: the incorporation of bad poetry into otherwise serious and skillful literary work.

INTRODUCTION

Shmuel Yosef Agnon (1887–1970) and Uri Zvi Greenberg (1896–1981), two of the most central figures in modern Hebrew prose and poetry, are usually considered representatives of two separate trends in modern Hebrew literature. While Agnon is seen as continuing and preserving the spirit of traditional texts within innovative, modernist forms of prose,[1] Greenberg's expressionist poetry is usually read as revolting against the old world and traditional Judaism.[2] In this essay, I show that the two writers have something significant and unique in common: both employ what I will call *parodied poetics.* I use this term to refer to the way in which they incorporate simplistic and artificial rhymes into their works for rhetorical effect,

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using them to ridicule this very style and those who employ it. Moreover, I suggest that they do this for similar purposes, namely to express their criticism of both bad poetry and inauthenticity in the sphere of religion: artificial worship in Agnon's case, and hypocritical divinity in Greenberg's.

In his publicist and poetic writings of the 1920s, Greenberg responded to various developments and historical events that he viewed as central to the shaping of his religious and national identity as well as his artistic style. One such event is World War I, in which he took part as a soldier in the Austro-Hungarian army.[3] In the aftermath of the war, he depicted a desperate and devastated humanity in his poetry. Humanity's new condition, he argued in his famous poetic manifestos, required a new kind of poetic expression, which he referred to as "modernist". During those years, he gained the status of an opinionated, almost prophetic writer, who held very clear and often provocative views about art and politics.[4] He also had strong views about religion, often pronouncing the death of God, and his poetry frequently deals with this subject. As we shall see, though, he later developed more nuanced religious attitudes, which were channeled into more subtle forms of expression, and had a complicated relation to his poetic agenda.

Agnon offered a similarly harsh, if less provocative, response to historical developments. Though he did not attempt to place himself in the same prophetic position that Greenberg did, he was no less effective in expressing his critical views, particularly concerning recent trends in Judaism. Indeed, much of Agnon's prose deals with aspects of the transition from traditional Judaism to modernity. In this essay, I focus on only one specific aspect of his engagement with this transition: his mockery and criticism of contemporary Judaism's inauthenticity as manifested in its cantorial style, which he thinks of as superficial in comparison to the more traditional style.

Greenberg and Agnon, then, are both concerned with authenticity in the realm of faith in the postwar world: one looked for an authentic way to express human concerns through poetry, the other for an authentic style of worship. In this pursuit, both used the literary device of rhyming to mock forms of expression that they saw as lacking such authenticity. But before we continue, let us first have a brief look at the role of rhyming in Hebrew literature, to see why these authors' use of it should be considered parodic.

Rhyming has been an integral feature of Hebrew literature from the very beginning. Different kinds of texts, including prose and even nonliterary genres, were rhymed in the premodern period. According to Benjamin Harshav, rhyming was an important factor in shaping the history of the Hebrew poem, and changes in the rhyming system influenced the entire tradition of poetic writing.[5] Harshav explains the distinction that scholars commonly make between "accurate" and "nonaccurate" rhymes: the first term describes rhyming words whose stressed ending sounds are identical, while the second describes rhymes without such identification.[6] In modern poetry, "accurate" rhymes are considered less sophisticated than "nonaccurate," as the latter hide the artificiality that is apparent in the former.

To achieve the effect of parody, an author needs to create a sense of surprise. In the case of the parodied rhyming I will discuss, this feeling depends on our expectation that a good poem will use more sophisticated rhyming, the kind that conceals its artificiality. Simple and symmetrically "accurate" rhymes within markedly contrived sentences, on the contrary, serve to expose this artificiality. At some periods in the development of modern Hebrew literature, this style was deemed acceptable. Among the Haskalah poets, for instance, it was a common practice to manipulate the order of the words within a given sentence in order to create a rhyming pair. According to Harshav, they saw this method as a sophisticated way to create a special poetic feeling. Their followers, however, felt that it produced a sense of artificiality in the poem, and they therefore tried to avoid it.[7]

Like Harshav, Leah Goldberg also suggested a hierarchy of rhyming. In the introduction to her book *Ha'omets le-ḥulin: behinot u-tea'amim be-sifruteynu ha-ḥadasha* (Bravery for the Mundane: A Study of the Principles of our New Literature; 1976), she tries to determine "the difference between a poem and a non-poem,"[8] asserting that poetic forms can be justified only if they correspond with the specific content of a poem: "Poetry is not only a means of expression; it is an expression of something that in its very essence is poetry."[9] Rhyming, she explains, plays an important role in true poetry:

> There is no doubt that in rhyming there is something of a game. But this is the same sublime, exalted game that exists in any form of art, and which pulls our lives out from the mundane and decorates them with a

> sense of a holy day. In the hands of the rhymer, a rhyme is only a random imitation of sounds that sometimes has something ridiculous in it. But in the hands of the poet, it is one of the steps upon the ladder to perfection, and sometimes it is even the criterion of poetic accuracy.[10]

Surprisingly, even a secular poet like Goldberg points to the dichotomy between the sacred and the mundane when explaining the difference between low and exalted poetry, and it is notable that she identifies the poet's ability to rhyme skillfully as a distinguishing feature. This same distinction, I argue, is evident and crucial in both Agnon's and Greenberg's works. For them, the evaluation of poetry as good or bad is associated with a wider theological context. Both employ pairs of rhymes that are either outworn or artificially connected, so that it is clear that they are adopting what Goldberg designates as the "ridiculous" element of rhyming. By using this kind of crude and artificial rhyming, both authors intentionally abandon the basic rule, as articulated in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, that such rhymes "must be actively avoided by serious poets."[11]

As I am about to show, Greenberg and Agnon deploy "accurate" rhymes in their texts as a rhetorical device. They use the modern hierarchy of these two categories to voice their critical perspectives not only on those who employ what they view as artificial rhyming, but also on what this sort of rhyming represented for them: cultural and religious shallowness.

Obviously, while rhymes are fairly standard in poetry, they are unusual in prose. One might therefore assume that Agnon's use of rhyming is more surprising than Greenberg's. However, as I will demonstrate, Greenberg strongly argued against symmetric and harmonic poetic forms—and indeed, he rarely used them. Therefore, his use of simple, "accurate" rhyming is a striking divergence from his typical method, and hence deserves our attention. Methodologically, then, what follows is a formalist engagement with a particular literary idiosyncrasy: the incorporation of bad poetry into otherwise serious and skillful literary works.

URI ZVI GREENBERG AND HIS SOLO-SINGING GOD

Given the kind of poetics Greenberg advocated and published throughout the 1920s, it is remarkable that in his *Anacreon al kotev ha'itsavon* (Anacreon on the Pole of Melancholy; 1928) he suddenly included rhymed poetry.[12] In an essay in the Yiddish periodical *Albatros* (1922), which he coedited, Greenberg presented his views about modern artistic representation and aesthetics. He rejected artistic attempts to embellish reality and argued that the chaotic should stand at the center of modern art. In modern poetry, he asserted, there is no place for rhyming, meter, or harmonic sound. Greenberg, a veteran of World War I, insisted that harmonic and symmetric forms are meaningless in a world that witnessed the horrors of the Great War.[13]

In his first Hebrew-language poetry book, *Eyma gedola ve-yareaḥ* (A Great Horror and a Moon), published shortly after his arrival in Palestine in 1924, Greenberg demonstrates his expressionist views, including his sharp rejection of the aesthetics of the beautiful.[14] In the poetic manifesto that opens the book, he attacks the poetics of the "devotees of aesthetics" (*ḥasidey ha'estetica*).[15] This rejection of the aesthetics of the beautiful is bound up in his work with a perception of the world as devoid of God. In his poetry from the early 1920s, Greenberg declares the death of God. As Greenberg scholar Shalom Lindenbaum writes: "[In Greenberg's poetic world,] one can no longer ask for moral and aesthetic norms that are derived from a view of the world as harmonic and as guided by an omnipotent God."[16]

In 1928, Greenberg published another manifesto, his famous and controversial "Klapey tish'im ve-tish'a" (Against the Ninety-Nine), in which he laid out his views on both the content and the poetic forms of modern Hebrew poetry. Greenberg argued that modern Hebrew poets should be committed to their national historic truth, and he accused his adversaries—the other "Ninety-Nine" poets—of not fulfilling this commitment. Furthermore, he asserted that the other poets were trying to embellish reality through their poetics. He argued that the beautiful and harmonic do not belong to the national poetry of the "people of expressionism," namely, the Jewish people, and that the modern Hebrew poet is compelled to touch the essence of Jewish national life.[17]

However, in the same year, only four years after the publication of *Eyma gedola ve-yareaḥ*, Greenberg seems to join the choir of his old foes. In *Anacreon al kotev*

ha-itzavon he employs harmonic and melodic poetry, with symmetric rhyming and sound, disobeying his own demands for a new and chaotic poetry, offering his readers a pleasurable aesthetic experience. Perhaps even more surprising is the fact that in this harmonic poetry, God is very much present. God, whom he portrayed in *Eyma gedola ve-yareaḥ* as an "entity that faded and turned into a cloud," is more than alive in *Anacreon*; he appears everywhere.

This new pantheism and the appearance of this unlikely poetics should be understood, I argue, as closely related. In *Anacreon al kotev ha-itsavon*, Greenberg uses a poetic mode that he himself rejects as no longer valid, in order to relegate God and his presence in the world to the past. He presents God as using the old world's aesthetic norms—beautiful, harmonic, and symmetric poetics—so as to portray him as irrelevant to modern man. In this respect, God is associated with the question of the place and value of "the beautiful" in the modern world in general, and in the Jewish people's new national reality in particular.

According to Dan Miron, the fact that Greenberg apparently employed in *Anacreon* the exact form of poetry that he so harshly criticized, should be understood in light of a simultaneous shift in Greenberg's poetics. Miron argues that in "Klapey tish'im ve-tish'a" Greenberg was defending poetic positions that his poetry "had already moved away from."[18] However, a close reading of *Anacreon* reveals that Greenberg did not, in fact, move away from his poetic style, but rather imitated the rejected poetics of the "Ninety-Nine" in order to denounce and ridicule it. In *Anacreon,* Greenberg presents a striking dichotomy between the poetics of humanity and that of the divine, and this dichotomy should be seen as analogous to the one between Greenberg's own poetics and that of the "Ninety-Nine." The book opens with a depiction of mankind as incapable of playing the violin, with hands "powerless from disasters," and with the "gift of giving . . . taken from them."[19] This mute state of humanity stands in sharp contrast to the art of God, who appears in *Anacreon* time and again playing an instrument or a music box, or just singing:

אלהי העיצבון לימיני... הו איזה מין קול לו!
והנה שם חליל בשפתיו...אלהי נוגן סולו-

The god of agony is on my right . . . oh what a voice he shows! [ho eyze min kol lo!]
And here he puts a flute to his lips . . . my God plays *solo* — [elohay nogen solo].[20]

In the Hebrew original, these lines end with a simple, one-syllable end rhyme (kol lo/solo), imitating the poetic style of God himself. The God who sings solo does not sing an expressionist poetry, but rather the kind of poetry that Greenberg denounces as merely meant to entertain. This is an artificial poetry, similar to the poetry of the Ninety-Nine.

The God that was absent in the earlier poetry is now found in *Anacreon*; his music fills the world. But God's art has nothing to do with man's experience, or with the suffering and horrified humanity whom he tries to amuse. In his essay "Tosefet ha-elementim ve-temurat ha-musagim be-da'at ha'adam" (The Addition of Elements and Permutation of Concepts in Man's Knowledge), which appeared in the same volume as "Against the Ninety-Nine," Greenberg asserts that "the spiritual power imbued in [artistic] expression needs to be grandiose . . . and not like the lyrical midget who stands to play solo amongst the chorus of many voices."[21] It is not by chance that Greenberg uses the same terminology when referring to the poetry of the Ninety-Nine and to the poetry of God; both are depicted as "playing solo"—that is, not taking responsibility for the whole nation, and acting in complete ignorance of the world around them.

God is mocked as producing poetry that can offer no more than a simple and poor—even cheap—game of rhyming. Now the god that was lost has been found, and his artistic expressions are shown to be part of creation, but this god is portrayed as a bad creator who cannot convince humanity:

ולאחר כל החקר בפנסים:
לא למצא בנבכים אלהים,
אני מצאתיו שליט בכל צבעיו:
ככורה זה שמצא את הזהב.

And after all the quests under the lights
Not to find God in the empty sites
I found the colors' ruler of the world
Like that miner who found the gold.[22]

Uleaḥar kol ha-heker ba-panasim:
Lo limtzo be-nevakhim elohim,
Ani metsa'ativ shalit be-khol tsva'av:
Ke-kore ze she-matsa et ha-zahav.

By depicting the god that he found as the ruler of the colors of the world, Greenberg reduces the divinity's role to mere pedestrian aesthetics. God's power is limited to controlling the colors of his kingdom. Again, in his expressionist manifestos, Greenberg argued against any artistic tools that would conceal reality, often using the metaphor of the human flesh as the real essence of man's being.[23] God, like the other poets, is a bad artist, one whose art is artificial and superficial. The symmetric rhyming of these four lines serves to illustrate this quality of God; he is just a poor artist, a "lyrical midget" whose only power is to cover the world superficially with his beautiful colors.

Throughout the book, Greenberg demonstrates this superficiality by using simple rhyming to represent the aesthetics of the beautiful, and time and again he contrasts the beautiful with the real:

ובוחר אני היות גויה כואבת
לשם הצפרן של אצבעי הורדה
שהיא לי חמודה.

I choose to be an agonized corpse	U-bokher ani heyot gviya koevet
For my fingernail, the honey	Le-shem ha-tziporen shel etsbai haverudah
Which is cute and shiny.[24]	She-hi li ḥamudah.

Greenberg's intentionally simplistic and childish rhyming is meant to exemplify what he means when he denounces the use of rhyming only for the sake of its symmetric sound. Rhyming is made to seem ridiculous both because it is childish and artificial (e.g., the feminine-ending combination of the sounds *verudah/ḥamudah*), and because it is employed senselessly in the poem. In "Against the Ninety-Nine," Greenberg alludes to the other Hebrew poets' "well cared-for fingers" [מטופחות אצבעות]. Here again he uses the same metaphor, as if to demonstrate this kind of poetic kitsch.

The first four chapters of *Anacreon* present a god that embodies the past aesthetics of the beautiful, but the fifth chapter focuses on the relation between God as creator of man and man as creator of poetry. The important poem "Im eli ha-napaḥ" (With My God the Blacksmith) seems to represent a different god, one who is not busy playing solo, but rather is using his power to shape man as a poet:

Like chapters of prophecy, my days are burning in all the revelations,
My body among them, like a lump of metal about to be forged.
And over me stands my God the blacksmith and hammers with might:
Each wound which time has cut in me, opens a crack,
And emits in sparks of moments the pent-up fire.

This is my destiny-sentence till evening comes down.
And when I return to throw my beaten lump on the bed,
My mouth—an open wound.
And naked I speak to my God: "you labored hard.
Now night has fallen; come, let us both rest."[25]

God appears here not so much as an artist but as a craftsman. Moreover, it is God's hammering into/of man that creates human experience, and the agony and pain that stand at the center of this experience shape man's ability to become a poet. As a result of God's hammering, the poet's mouth becomes an open wound, out of which pours the poet's cry.[26] This cry is in fact the poet's own creation, his poetry. This poetry, however, is dramatically different from the poetry of the "solo-singing" God. The hard work of God is actually the agony of man, but for Greenberg, good poetry cannot be written without this suffering. Man is a material that God uses in his creation, but the material of man's poetry is the agony that derives from God's actions. Moreover, God needs the human poet, perhaps Greenberg himself, in order to produce genuine poetry. In this respect, the poet has what God lacks, the aptitude to be a real modernist poet.

By depicting God as a blacksmith, Greenberg is making a defiant allusion to the liturgical poem of the Yom Kippur service, which depicts man as "a lump of clay in God's hand" (Ka-homer be-yad ha-yotser [Jeremiah 18:6]). At the same time, he is alluding to Hephaestus, the Greek god of fire and metalworking. In Greek mythology, Hephaestus is depicted as a creative and talented artist who is physically deformed; he suffers from a limp and therefore is ridiculed by the Greek poets. Greenberg depicts God as mirroring this handicapped god, whose deformity allows for the creation of poetry that is concrete and free from artificial decoration and embellishment. Using the metaphor of the naked human body as a

lump of metal, Greenberg stresses its physicality. Even man's poetry does not derive from his inner soul, but rather from a wound in his material, his body. It is from this deformed material that the fire pours out, embodying authentic artistic expression.

Clearly, this view is dramatically different from the one expressed time and again in the earlier chapters of *Anacreon*. There, humanity was mute because of its great agony, and was unable to play, sing, or write authentic poetry. Here, though, humanity can produce poetry, but this poetry is not meant to amuse or entertain, but rather to serve as a real expression of man's experience. This is the same demand Greenberg makes for modern poetry. The motif of the open, wounded mouth is very common in his poetry; and in "Against the Ninety-Nine," he argues that the mouth of the modern Hebrew poet should serve as an open wound, from which the cry of the history of the Jewish people can pour out.[27] In "Im eli ha-napaḥ," the poetry that God pulls out through man's suffering is an expressionist poetry, which, for Greenberg, is the only kind that is valid in the modern world.

In Greenberg's post–World War I work, the poetics of God is hollow and void, like the world he created. Greenberg uses simple rhymes and melody to imitate and ridicule God's bad art, and to show that such harmonic symmetry is outdated. The analogy that Greenberg indirectly makes between God and those he considers bad poets presents God as just another one of the "Ninety-Nine." What the "Ninety-Nine" and God have in common is inauthenticity, a desire to conceal the brokenness and agony of the world with lovely images and pleasing sounds, and it is this that Greenberg's use of artificial rhyming at once demonstrates and ridicules.

"FACELESS RHYMES" IN AGNON'S PROSE

Surprisingly, we can find a similar use of rhyming in the prose fiction of S. Y. Agnon. Both Greenberg and Agnon establish poetic hierarchies and use "low" poetic forms as a kind of criticism of what they view as inauthentic and therefore hollow. In Agnon's case, though, the parodied poetics is aimed not at God or other writers, but at inauthentic religious practice in contemporary Judaism.

Like Greenberg, Agnon often uses the literary device of employing bad rhyming to parody the society or person he is imitating. In other words, he deploys bad poetry in his prose in order to mock the state of affairs he is representing and to express his own critical views of it.[28] In such cases, he builds a clear distinction between different poetic norms and uses rhyming as a rhetorical device to create a sense of surprise, and thus calls the reader's attention to the linguistic style of his characters as well as to their aesthetic values. Like Greenberg, he juxtaposes two different poetics, the elevated and the lowly. As in Greenberg's *Anacreon*, a simplistic, symmetric, and rhymed poetry appears in Agnon's work to indicate superficiality and shallowness.

This is the case in Agnon's 1940 story, "Ha-mikhtav" (The Letter), which appeared in his short story cycle, *Sefer ha-ma'asim* (The Book of Deeds). The story describes the narrator's wanderings through the city of Jerusalem following the death of Mr. Gedaliah Klein—an admired philanthropist and a central figure in the Jewish community in Jerusalem. One night, the dead Klein joins him and they stroll around the city in a dreamlike journey. The two arrive in what appears to be an old Torah study hall (*bet midrash*), which, as it turns out, is where the dead are praying. In this hall, the narrator experiences a sort of religious revelation, when he sees an illustrious, long-dead scholar, whose books he has been studying, praying in the corner. The following day the study hall disappears and the narrator is left to wander around the city, searching for a similar experience.

The narrator's search results in the disappointing realization that in the reality of modern-day Jerusalem, he will not find the same religious elevation that he experienced in the old study hall. Agnon scholar Baruch Kurzweil, understood this disappointment as an expression of the author's critique of contemporary Judaism's religious decay.[29] However, Agnon is doing more than that: he is also mourning the loss of a certain aesthetics of Jewish worship—an aesthetics that the old world still had but which current Judaism, as exemplified in modern Jerusalem, lacks.

Agnon represents this gap between the desired and the despised aesthetics of worship even in the formal aspects of his text.[30] In order to represent one of the most important aspects of worship—the prayer itself—he uses rhymed prose to describe the singing of the cantor in the Jerusalem synagogue during Klein's funeral:

> המצנפת טופפת בראש חזן בית הכנסת, ופיקת גרונו, למטה מלשונו, פעמים פוססת ופעמים בוססת , מנענע הוא קולו, לימינו ולשמאלו, ולאבלים ולמנחמים, והקרקפת, והמצנפת, אומרים, אל מלא רחמים.[31]

> On the cantor's head the biretta quivered; on his throat his Adam's apple shivered; around the hall the echoes rolled, over consolers and consoled; while biretta and pate, with every nod, invoked the infinite mercy of God.[32]

If this text appeared in the format of short lines, it would be considered poetry. A few lines before, the narrator stated that he is "no judge of music," using this fact to explain why his thoughts were wandering during the prayer.[33] But this note about music actually directs us to think of the text as if it were performed as song, drawing our attention to its musical qualities. Agnon represents these qualities through the simple, almost childish rhyming and the balanced, symmetric rhythm of his description. Perhaps relying on the genre of the *maqama*, which functioned as a social critique often directed at the unjustifiably high social status of a religious figure such as the Kadi, the priest, or the cantor,[34] he ridicules the cantor and offers a parodic imitation of his singing. The cantor's overly festive and flowery singing is reflected in the style of the text, which imitates the cantor and recreates the experience of listening to his prayer. The aesthetic experience of the reader is similar, then, to that of the narrator, with the poetic text intended to parody the singing of the prayer and to present it as hollow.

This parodied poetic text serves to reconstruct the act of public prayer and to revisit the role of the cantor.[35] Interestingly, only two pages earlier, the narrator himself was tempted to use the same kind of coquettish musical mode that he seems to mock here:

> קמעה קמעה חוזר הרחוב להוויתו הקודמת. אבטומובילים רצים, ואנשים אצים, אלו מגדלים בלורית ואלו מגדלים פימה, אלו מרחפים באויר ואלו תלויים על בלימה, וכל בעל בעמיו וכל אשה עדינה, מדברים בלשון כל מדינה ומדינה, וכל בחור וטוב, וכל גבר וגברת, בפיה ציגרטה ובפיו מקטרת. ובתי הקהוה מלאים בחור ואיש שיבה, נקבה תסובב גבר וגבר נקבה. היא צובעת שפתים, והוא שותה וויסקי, הוי מוזה בת השמים, מה זה עסקי.[36]

> Little by little the street returns to normal. Buses run and people rush; some of their heads are hairy, and some of their chins are double; some of them float on air, and some are always in trouble; men with serious mien and women with delicate hands chatter in all the tongues of all the far-off lands; every stalwart lad and every maiden ripe puffs at a cigarette or pulls away at a pipe. The coffee-houses are full of people young and old; the men make eyes at the girls, and the girls are just as bold; the men drink beer and whiskey, the women paint their faces—O heavenly Muse, what have you to do with such peculiar places?[37]

The symmetric rhyming and rhythm create a sense of irony. The author (via his narrator) offers a view of a Jerusalem street, but the poetic elements in this depiction produce an ironic tone. The author's subtle criticism of the emptiness of the Jerusalem community derives not from the lexical meaning of the words, but from the simplicity of their poetic aspects.

Irony marks a situation of incompatibility between competing meanings, between proffered and implied alternatives.[38] This dual structure is irony's basic feature, and it assumes a conflict between two orders.[39] This gap of meaning produces a "space" between what is said and what the readers know to be the truth or the norm. The intention beyond what is stated needs to be reconstructed by the readers. Agnon employs simplistic rhyming to create this space, letting his readers reconstruct his critical look at what on its surface seems like an attractive, even ideal, depiction of reality.[40] The poetic aspects of the text expose a much less naïve point of view than the one the narrator pretends to hold.

By making his narrator blame the muse for this mode of writing, Agnon shifts our attention to the poetic mode itself. His narrator dismisses this mode as ostentatious and, in a meta-poetic gesture, points out the different ways in which the text itself uses the same superficial artistic expressions that the characters are tempted to employ. The musicality of this passage is similar to that in the description of the cantor's singing, in that it has the same kind of posturing quality. By employing it in his narrator's depiction of the Jerusalem street, Agnon reveals his awareness that this style can be tempting for writers as well as for cantors.

As we have seen, Agnon inserts rhyming into the otherwise unrhymed text of "Ha-mikhtav" in order to mock and criticize contemporary cantorial style. This is not to suggest, though, that he rejects *all* forms of rhymed poetry. Instead, his work establishes a hierarchy of different poetic modes, a hierarchy that serves to devalue contemporary Judaism while glorifying and lamenting the loss of the traditional Jewish world and its humble and sincere ways of worshiping. Indeed, in his story "Ha-siman" (The Sign),[41] he presents us with an alternative model of rhymed poetry, by glorifying the traditional liturgical poem (the *piyyut*) and declaring that it is an ideal poetic model.[42] In this story, he describes the *payytanim*[43] as "good intermediaries between the hearts of Israel and their Father in heaven."[44] The aesthetic qualities of the *piyyut* are so magnificent that the poem itself can do what the cantor's singing in "Ha-siman" is unable to achieve: it mediates between the people of Israel and God.[45] Due to the poetic power of the *piyyut,* the prayer does not need the exaggerated and hollow singing of the cantor.

The cantor in "Ha-siman" is depicted as a poor old man who recites *piyyut* from memory, and whose singing is so enticing that the narrator was attracted to his words even as a child, when he barely understood their meaning. Not until later in life does he learn that the words of the old cantor were those of Salomon Ibn Gabirol, whom he considers the greatest poet among the *payytanim*.[46] Ibn Gabirol plays an important role in the story as a model of poetic perfection. "Ha-siman" deals with the day on which the narrator hears the dreadful news about the Nazis' murder of the people of his hometown, Buczacz. This day happens to be the holiday of Shavu'ot, and the narrator struggles with his grief amidst the injunction not to mourn the dead during the holiday. As a way of easing his pain, he reads *piyyutim*, noting that the *payytanim*, as mediators between man and God, know "what we need to ask of God and what He demands of us," and so were able to write "hymns to open our lips before our father in heaven."[47] The narrator finds in the *piyyutim* answers to the question of how to pray, especially in times of despair. In fact, in using the point of view of himself as a young boy, he analyzes two poems by Ibn Gabirol. By employing this literary device, Agnon points out the vivid and lively metaphorical language of Ibn Gabirol and stresses his magnificent linguistic and formal skills.

Moreover, in a way that is similar to his use of the *maqama* in "Ha-mikhtav," he tries to integrate the poetic style of the *piyyut* into the narration of "Ha-siman."

The narrator, or perhaps Agnon himself, is looking to find a personal voice to represent a collective sentiment. While reading Ibn Gabirol's *piyyutim* late on the night of Shavu'ot (as a way of keeping with the holiday custom of all-night study), the narrator sees an old man and slowly recognizes him as Ibn Gabirol. The poet asks him why he is crying, and the narrator, after beginning to tell him about the destruction of Buczacz, bows his head and says: "In my sorrow and in my humility, I am not worthy. I am not the man in whom the greatness of our city can be seen."[48]

This is, in fact, a direct quotation from Ibn Gabirol's poem "Ani ha-ish" ("I Am the Man") which opens with the strident claim:

> I am the man who harnessed his spirit
> And will not rest with his promise unkept.[49]

Using these words, but in negation ("I am *not* the man"), the narrator/author implies that Ibn Gabirol can do what he himself cannot. After the narrator makes this statement, Ibn Gabirol then starts moving his lips and echoing his poem "At Dawn I Seek Thee." In so doing, he offers the narrator (Agnon) the poetic model that the author lacks:

> I turned my ear and heard him recite a poem, each line of which began with one of the letters of the name of my town. And so I knew that the sign the poet made for my town was in beautiful and rhymed verse, in the holy tongue.[50]

Earlier in the story, the narrator explained that he recognized Ibn Gabirol's poems by the acrostic of his name in their first lines. In the memorial poem that Ibn Gabirol recites, it is the name *Buczacz* that appears in the acrostic. The narrator praises the poem for its "beautiful and rhymed verse," an acknowledgment that can be seen as revealing Agnon's poetic and aesthetic values. But what, then, is this poem, which the narrator—who stands for Agnon, the already famous author—cannot write, but which Ibn Gabirol recites for him in the middle of the night? In the first, short version of the story, published in 1944—the same year that Soviet forces retook the city to find a mere hundred survivors out of an original Jewish

population of ten thousand—the author remembers one line from the seven that would have comprised the acrostic:

> The sound of a rhyme [*haruz*] was heard again and said, blessed of all towns you are the city of Buczacz, and he went on to rhyme all the seven letters of the name of my town, in a rhythmic poetry and faithful rhymes.[51]

In the later version, published in 1962,[52] the narrator forgets the entire poem and, as if to make up for its absence, uses words extracted from Ibn Gabirol's poems to create his own prose version of it. In this respect, Agnon makes an aesthetic choice that is bound up in his own belief. By choosing to reconstruct the words of Ibn Gabirol, he shows that he sees himself as mediating between the medieval poet—who used to serve as a mediator between God and the congregation—and contemporary readers. Ibn Gabirol's words still serve as the bridge between man and God, and in this case also between man and eternity, but they need Agnon, as the modern author, to revive them:

> סמרה שערת בשרי ונמס לבי ונתבטלתי ממציאותי והייתי כאילו איני. ואילולא זכר השיר הייתי ככל בני עירי אשר אבדו ואשר מתו בידי עם נבל ומנואץ אשר ניאצו את עמי מהיות עוד.[53]

> The hair of my flesh stood on end and my heart melted as I left my own being, and I was as though I was not. Were it not for remembering the poem, I would have been like all my townsfolk, who were lost, who had died at the hand of a despicable people, those who trampled my people until they were no longer a nation.[54]

The first line of this paragraph is in fact a paraphrase of a line from Ibn Gabirol's poem, "Amnon ani, ḥoleh" (Amnon I am, sick).[55] Agnon's incorporation of the actual words of the poet into his own prose serves to establish the connection between the old poet and the modern writer. The poetic harmony of the *piyyut*, according to the narrator, has the power not only to bring back the memory of

Buczacz, but also to restore the order and the harmonic balance that had existed before the catastrophe.

In both stories, then, we find a very similar topos: the figure of the cantor reflected in the poetic mode, and the cantorial poetic style serving as a metonymy for the cultural and religious values of his time. In "Ha-mikhtav," as if to recreate the ludicrous experience of hearing the contemporary cantor, Agnon uses simple and symmetric rhyming, a low poetic form. By contrast, he treats the cantor in "Ha-siman" respectfully, imitating the *piyyut* and incorporating its words into his prose, using sophisticated alliteration (סמרה שערת בשרי ונמס לבי ונתבטלתי ממציאותי והייתי כאילו איני.). The two cantors, moreover, are described in very different terms. Consider, for example, the way the narrator in "Ha-siman" recalls his first impressions of the old cantor:

> Let me describe him. He was tall and straight-backed; his beard was white, and his eyes looked like the prayer books published in Slavita, which were printed on blue-tinged paper. His voice was sweet and his clothes were clean.[56]

Compare this depiction to the way the narrator in "Ha-mikhtav" describes the contemporary cantor and his singing:

> והאיש בעל המצנפת, עם מזלג של חזנים, נעימתו נוטפת, כשיר ורננים. ומותח את גרונו,
> כלפי קונו, ופולט כל תיבה, בפנים מתוקות ובפנים של איבה, והכל עומדים על רגליהם,
> ברוח נכאה, ומוחים מעל פניהם, אם דמעה אם זיעה.[57]

> And the man with the biretta, with his cantor's tongs, warbles his notes like a bird's sweet songs, stretching his throat toward God on high, emitting each word with a groan or a sigh; and everyone listens to the lamentation—wiping his tears, or his perspiration.[58]

Instead of the admiration that we see in "Ha-siman," we find parody here. The cantor is depicted as a caricature, as nothing but a bad singer. The singing of the prayers is symbolic, and its genuineness is associated with its aesthetics. In

"Ha-siman," the old cantor is so immersed in the prayer, and his singing is so meaningful, that his listeners can picture his words. In "Ha-mikhtav," the cantor lacks this genuine intention: his prayer is a show, and he is constantly aware of his performance, "revering [his] throat with his trill," as Agnon later puts it when describing present-day cantors.

In "Ha-siman," then, Agnon employs highly elevated rhyming as a way of commemorating the old cantorial singing. One reason he does so, I argue, is to present himself as a lamenting author, whose mission is to preserve, or perhaps salvage, this old Jewish world and its aesthetics. By using what might be considered authentic rhyming, Agnon aligns himself with this lost world. The cantors and poets of the old world provide counterexamples of Jewish religiosity, humble rather than pompous, sincere rather than artificial.

Agnon employs the rhymed poetic mode throughout his work. In many cases, he uses it to recreate the experience of a text that might indeed have been written in a rhymed format, but it can also serve as a mode that sets a certain ironic and critical tone.[59] Unlike many of his contemporaries, including Greenberg, Agnon generally avoided writing literary manifestos.[60] In this discussion, though, I have tried to show that Agnon's use of the poetic mode may help us reconstruct his views on literary aesthetics, in particular on rhyming. Poetry is a prevalent theme in his work, and here it is linked to his perception of the differences between traditional and contemporary Judaism. His hierarchy of poetic expression and genre reveals his association of "good poetry" with authentic worship and "bad poetry" with artificial and empty prayer.

CONCLUSIONS

As we have seen, two of modern Hebrew literature's great writers present contrasting poetic styles in their works in an attempt to build a hierarchy within these styles, a hierarchy that they use in a subversive manner for the purpose of cultural critique. In highlighting the contrast between these poetic styles, both authors also point toward the difficulty—and the necessity—of finding authentic modes of poetic expression in the post-catastrophic world. In this world, as Greenberg understands it, there is no place for inauthentic art. In his view, modernist

poetry ought to avoid the poetic and decorative techniques that are simply meant to entertain. He uses rhyming and other poetic elements that are associated with harmony to distinguish between the inauthentic poetry of God and the poetry of the suffering modern man. For Agnon, by contrast, the closer the poetic expression is to the sublime, the closer it gets us to God. Unlike Greenberg, he associates the sublime with harmony, and he struggles to find harmonic forms that will have both aesthetic and religious potency. His search for such a combination in the postwar world leads him to the poetry of the *payytanim*, who serve as his poetic models, perhaps because he perceives their poetry as genuine and authentic. The mediating role that he ascribes to the *payytanim* is crucial, because it gestures toward the importance he sees for poetry within the world of faith.[61] Although neither Greenberg nor Agnon writes about rhyming only in relation to religious experience, both associate a certain empty poetry with hollow and artificial worship. On a cultural level, then, these two authors choose a similar literary device to critique inauthenticity in religious and artistic expression.

Both writers, as we have seen, reveal the type of literary representation that they regard as ideal. Greenberg discusses his ideal in his literary manifestos, and demonstrates it throughout his poetry. Agnon uses his story "Ha-siman" as a sort of a literary statement, integrating his ideal type of poetic style into the prose of this work, just as he did with the style he rejected in his previous work.

In a more theoretical sense, this observation raises an important question about the difference between incorporating rhyme in prose and in poetry. One might argue that rhyming in poetry is not a unique mode of expression; however, as I have shown, Greenberg's incorporation of a specific type of rhyme allows him to create a sense of polyphony that is normally associated with prose. To be more precise, *polyphony* is a term coined by Mikhail Bakhtin to describe the plurality of voices which he identifies as a unique feature of the novel.[62] Bakhtin analyzes the novel as a genre that incorporates other discourses.[63] The current discussion suggests that such incorporation might also be possible in genres other than the novel. Interestingly, though, while Bakhtin argues that this kind of polyphony is meant to create *equality* between different ideological voices,[64] both Agnon and Greenberg use it to reveal a certain *hierarchy*.

We have seen that the poetic mode allows these two towering figures in modern Hebrew literature to subtly express their own critiques—of the Jewish community in Palestine, of contemporary poetry and religion, or even, in Greenberg's case, of God himself. Both writers expressed their views on these subjects outside of their literary works, but this essay focuses in particular on one sophisticated artistic means by which they communicated them, namely their purposeful employment of the kind of poetry that they generally ridicule. In this sense, we might say that bad poetry can be very useful in artistic representation, as it has the power to imitate and expose the ridiculous. Both writers were undoubtedly familiar with the famous injunction of the medieval polymath, Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089–1164): "Thou shall not rhyme *ḥamor* [donkey] with *shor* [ox]." Although Ibn Ezra's rhyming norms were obviously different from those of the two modern writers, his advice encompasses a similar critique of those who employ cheap and crude rhyming. Greenberg and Agnon, however, intentionally employ cheap rhyming in order to allow us to experience the artificiality of bad poetry. In doing so, they criticize artistic, religious, and divine inauthenticity. The alternative they offer, a genuine and deeply felt poetics, is expressed nicely in Agnon's declaration at the end of his story "Im libi" (With my heart): "[I sang] in a manner I have never sang before, with an idea, words, and rhymes, because my heart was with me and with my mouth."[65]

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NOTES

1 See, for example: Baruch Kurzweil, *Masot al sipurey S. Y. Agnon* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1970), 1–17.

2 On Greenberg's expressionism, see Hillel Barzel, *Shirat eretz yisrael: expresionism nevui: Uri Zvi Greenberg, Yitzhak Lamdan, Matityyahu Shoham* (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Poa'alim, 2004) and Avidav Lipsker, *Shir adom, shir kaḥol* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2010), 81–120.

3 David Kna'ani describes it as "the lesson of the trenches [which Greenberg] expanded to life as a whole" (David Kna'ani, *Le-nogah etz rakav* [Merhaviah: Sifriat be-ma'avak Po'alim, 1950], 29). On Greenberg's response to World War I,

see Glenda Abramson, *Hebrew Writing of the First World War* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2008), 88–110.

4 For further reading about his political and publicist writing, see Tamar Wolf-Monzon, *Le-nogah nekudat ha-pele: ha-poetica ve-ha-pobletsistica shel Atzag bi-shnot ha-esrim* (Haifa: Zmorah Bitan, 2005).

5 Benjamin Harshav, *Toldot ha-tsurot shel ha-shirah ha-ivrit* (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2007), 143.

6 Ibid., 162.

7 Ibid., 101.

8 Leah Goldberg, *Ha-ometz le-ḥulin*, ed. A. B. Yaffe (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Poa'lim, 1976), 13. Translations are my own.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., 25.

11 *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Ronald Green (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012).

12 Chapters from the book started to appear in Spring 1927 and continued through 1928 in the literary supplement of *Davar*.

13 Uri Zvi Greenberg, *Albatros* 1 (Warsaw, September 1922): 3.

14 See Greenberg, *Kol ketavav* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1991), vol. 1, n.p.

15 Ibid. For a detailed discussion of this manifesto, see Wolf-Monzon, 69–73.

16 Shalom Lindenbaum, *Shirat Uri Zvi Greenberg ha-ivrit veha-yidit: kavey mitar* (Tel Aviv: Hadar, 1984), 172.

17 Greenberg, *Klapey tish'im ve-tish'a* (Tel Aviv: Sadan, 1928).

18 Dan Miron, *Akdamut le-atsag* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 2002), 95. Greenberg also employs rhymed poetry in his later book, *Reḥovot ha-nahar: sefer ha-iliyot ve-hakoaḥ* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1951). His rhetorical purposes in this book are much different from those in *Anacreon al kotev ha-itsavon*, and his rhyming is far more sophisticated, but it still serves to emphasize the artificiality of the poetic writing processes, as Harshav claims in his essay on the book's poetics (*Toldot ha-tsurot shel ha-shirah ha-ivrit*, 212–13).

19 Greenberg, *Kol ketavav*, 1:109.

20 Ibid., 1:151. The italics appear in the Hebrew original. All translations of Greenberg's poems are my own, unless otherwise noted. In order to convey the nature of the simple rhymes in the poems, I have on occasion been less than literal in my translation.

21 Greenberg, "Klapey tish'im ve-tish'a," 42.

22 Greenberg, *Kol ketavav*, 1:125.

23 On this motif in Greenberg's work, see David Weinfeld, "Artila'im tzeu' min ha-semalot ha-me-khasot," in *Ha-matkonet ve-hademut*, ed. Hillel Weiss (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2000), 385–90.

24 Greenberg, *Kol ketavav*, 1:119.

25 Greenberg, "With My God the Blacksmith," trans. Arieh Sachs, in *The Modern Hebrew Poem Itself*, ed. Stanley Burnshwa et al. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003), 68.

26 Reuben Shoham discusses this poem in the context of Greenberg's prophetic poetry and shows that God as the blacksmith is the one who sends the poet on his prophetic mission (*Sneh basar va-dam: po'etica ve-retorica be-shirato ha-modernistit ve-ha-architipit shel Uri Zvi Greenberg* [Be'er-sheva: Ben Gurion University Press, 1997], 168–71).

27 Greenberg, "Klapey tish'im ve-tish'a," 6.

28 This habit of shifting back and forth from poetry to prose has not yet received the scholarly attention it deserves. In a short article, Y. A. Zaidman points out various poetic elements in Agnon's work, but does not fully analyze this tendency, and does not explain its rhetorical purposes ("Sirtutim le-signon Agnon," in *Yovel Shay*, ed. Baruch Kurzweil [Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1958], 49–59). Following Dov Sadan, Arnold Band discusses the young Agnon's somewhat premature poetry in Hebrew and Yiddish (*Nostalgia and Nightmare: A Study in the Fiction of S. Y. Agnon* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968], 31–35). In a more recent article, Ber Kotlerman discusses Agnon's use of "musicalization" in his early Yiddish story "Toytntants" ("'And His Heart a Precious Violin': The Musical Layering of S. Y. Agnon's Yiddish Story 'Toytntants,'" *Jewish Social Studies* 18 [Fall 2011]: 127–44). According to Dan Laor, Agnon's first works were rhymed poems in Yiddish and Hebrew (*Hayey Agnon* [Jerusalem: Schocken Books, 1998], 24–26). Throughout Laor's biography of Agnon, we can trace Agnon's tendency to rhyme his personal letters to friends and family. In Agnon's archive at the National Library in Jerusalem, I have found more evidence of

Agnon’s playful use of rhyming in the form of nonliterary personal materials. This article does not deal with the broader use of poetry in Agnon’s work, but rather focuses on this specific element of rhyming.

29 Kurzweil, *Masot al sipurey S. Y. Agnon,* 342. Similarly, Michal Arbel argues that this story can be assigned to the genre of literary accusations, as the narrator strolls around the city and denounces its current decadence. See Michal Arbel, *Katuv al oro shel ha-kelev* (Jerusalem: Keter, 2006), 94.

30 Kurzweil mentions only in passing what he calls “the grotesque and comic style” that Agnon uses in this story. (*Masot al sipurey S. Y. Agnon*, 343). I would argue that he misses an important aspect of Agnon’s criticism here.

31 Agnon, *Samukh ve-nire* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1966), 245.

32 Agnon, “The Letter,” trans. Misha Louvish, in *S. Y. Agnon: Twenty-One Stories*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 230–31.

33 In the article cited above (note 29), Ber Kotlerman shows that Agnon the author had in fact a rich knowledge of and sensitivity to music.

34 See Yehudit Dishon, *Haruzim shel ḥokhmah* (Bney Brak: Ha-kibbutz ha-meu’had, 2012), 27–28.

35 On the centrality of cantors in Agnon’s work, see Hillel Weiss, “Sipurey ḥazanim le-Agnon,” *Ma’ariv*, August 4, 1977; Shmuel Werses, “Ha-tefilah be-yetzirat Agnon,” in *Hekrey Agnon: iyunim umehkarim be-yetzirat Agnon* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1994), 49–80; Michal Arbel, “Ha-ḥazanit ha-atzuva Miryam Dvora ve-ḥazanim aḥerim be-sipurey Agnon,” *Ayin gimel* 2 (2012): 108–30.

36 Agnon, *Samukh ve-nire*, 243.

37 Ibid., 228.

38 See Douglass C. Muecke, *The Compass of Irony* (London: Methuen, 1969), 23–29.

39 Jonathan Culler, *Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1974), 186.

40 Gershon Shaked has argued that Agnon’s work is highly sophisticated in the ways it manages to shape the distance between the author and his work. Irony is one of the tools that Agnon typically employs, according to Shaked, to create double meanings (*Umanut ha-sipur shel S. Y. Agnon*, 31, 45). On this topic also see Ariel Hirschfeld, *Likro et S. Y. Agnon* (Tel Aviv: Ahuzat Bayit, 2011), 45–62.

41 A short (one-page) version of the story was first published in the literary periodical *Moznayim* in the spring of 1944. A longer version appeared in 1962 as part of the

volume *Ha-esh ve-ha-etsim*. It was republished in 1973, in the collection of stories *Ir u-meloa'*, edited by Agnon's daughter, Emuna Yaron.

42 Many scholars have dealt with this important story. See, for example, Hillel Weiss, *Dyukan ha-lokhem* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 1975); Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, "Agnon before and After," *Prooftexts* 2, no. 8 (1982): 78–94; Hanna Ya'oz Keset, "Beyn hilun le-mistika," in *Hikrey Agnon: Iyunim u-mehkarim be-yetsirat Shay Agnon. Mugash le-Professor Yehuda Friedlander*, ed. Hillel Weiss and Hillel Barzel (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1994), 337–40; Alan Mintz, "Beyn shoa ve-moldedit: ha-siman le-Shai Agnon ke-sipur hakdasha," in *Idan ha-ziyonut*, ed. Anita Shapira, Yehuda Reinhartz, and Ya'akov Harris (Tel Aviv: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 2000), 317–35; Michal Arbel, "Hemshekhiyut ve-shever ba-zehut ha-le'umit be-yetsirat Agnon," in Michael Gluzman, Tamar Hess, and Gidi Nevo, eds., *E'atot shel shinuy: safruyot Yehudiyot ba-tekufa ha-modernit: Kovets ma'amarim likhvodo shel Dan Miron* (Be'er Sheva: Ben Gurion Institute, 2008), 173–208; Michal Arbel, *Katuv al oro shel ha-kelev*; Nitsa Ben Dov, *Al otobiogra-phyot Israeliyot* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 2011), 31–52; Rachel Elior, "S. Y. Agnon ve-hamasoret ha-mistit shel hag ha-Shavu'ot," *Ha'aretz*, 18 May 2010, 4–5. My discussion here is limited to the role of poetry in the story.

43 The *payytanim* (from Greek *poiētēs*, "poet") composed poetical additions to the liturgy for special Sabbaths and festivals.

44 Agnon, "The Sign," trans. Arthur Green, in *S. Y. Agnon: A Book that Was Lost and Other Stories*, ed. Alan Mintz and Anne Golomb-Hoffman (New York: Schocken, 1996), 381. With my own minor modifications.

45 In his article "Ba'al ha-bayit ve-orhav," Hillel Weiss deals with Agnon's special relation to the *piyyut*. Weiss discusses the centrality of the Shabbat eve *piyyut* "Kol mekadesh shvi'ee" in Agnon's *Korot bateynu*. See Weiss, in "Hazmana le-piyyut," http://www.piyut.org.il/articles/528.html.

46 Ibn Gabirol was born in Malaga, Spain, in 1021 or 1022. He is considered to be the "true founder" of Jewish poetry in Spain and is regarded as one of the most innovative and creative poets of the time (Yisrael Levin, *Rabi Shlomo Ibn Gabirol: ha-ish ve-yetsirato* [Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2007], 38.) According to Levin, Ibn Gabirol contributed more than any other poet to the perfection of the artistic, aesthetic, and thematic values of medieval Jewish poetry.

47 Agnon, "The Sign," 381.

48 Ibid., 408.

49 Ibn Gabirol, "I Am the Man," trans. Peter Cole, in *The Dream of the Poem*, ed. Peter Cole (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007), 86.

50 Agnon, "The Sign," 409.

51 Ibid.

52 In *Ha'esh ve-ha-etsim* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1962), 229–52.

53 Ibid., 252.

54 Agnon, "The Sign," 409.

55 Compare with Ibn Gabirol, "Libi asher bila, bsari asher samar" in Levin, 97.

56 "The Sign," 401.

57 Agnon, *Samukh ve-nire*, 246.

58 Agnon, "The Letter," 231.

59 There are many more examples of Agnon's use of mocked rhyming in his prose, perhaps the most famous of which can be found in his first novel *Hakhnasat kalah* (1931). In a few places in the novel, Agnon employs rhyming, and then his narrator comments on this mode. For example, after imitating the wedding-jester's rhyming in a realistic manner, the narrator comments that the jester "felt that he ruined [the party] with his faceless rhymes, and he wished to stop but he couldn't because this is the nature of rhymes: that one rhyme leads to another, and you need great wisdom not to be led by your mouth" (*Hakhnasat kalah*, 387; my translation). Ironically, the narrator then goes on to describe the jester's silly rhymes using nothing other than a rhymed text. Not accidentally, this text associates rhyming with the cheap mixture of the holy and the mundane: "And thus he was mixing the holy with the profane, now in a whisper and now in a blare, and the players play and every heart longs, and the hour enters and leaves alone, and the shame is a huge blow, and the evil is great, no cure for it yet" (ibid., 388; my translation). As he did with his ironic rhymed depiction of the social environment that surrounds the rich Mr. Klein in "The Letter," Agnon depicts here the debauched mixing of the holy and the mundane in a rhymed text, in order to illustrate a similar decadence around the affluent Reb Yudel Nathanson in *The Bridal Canopy*.

60 See Shaked, 13.

61 Thus, when depicting the lack of faith, he uses what seems to be "bad" poetry. In one of the scenes in "The Letter," he depicts the words of a new German immigrant, who claims that he and his generation have no God in their hearts, using artificial,

simplistic rhymes like those in his parodied depiction of the cantor. Agnon, *Samukh ve-nire*, 235.

62 See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 5–46.

63 In Michael Holquist, ed., *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 259–61.

64 Bakhtin, 5.

65 Agnon, *Elu ve-elu*, (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1959), 306.