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Generic Hybridity, or Mediating Modes of Writing: Agnon's Magical Realistic and Gothic National Narration

S. Y. Agnon (1888–1970), winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1966, is well known in Israel and beyond as the national author of the early Israeli nation. His work has been perceived as magical realist as well as Gothic and neo-Gothic. This paper explores a dual generic reading of Agnon's work as both Gothic and magical realist. Specifically, the analysis focuses on two of his stories, "Avi Hashor" ["The Ox's Father"] (1945), which has been mostly neglected by critics, and "Tehila" (1950), which has been subjected to numerous readings from various perspectives, yet not in comparison to the earlier text under consideration in this paper. The following examination of the location of these narrative moments in both generic rubrics allows for a more productive exploration of personal and national identities in these texts. The possibility of the movement from the imperialistically engaged Gothic into (post-)colonial magical realism and back again reflects the unsettled essence of the Jewish-Israeli identity. The manifestation of this generic hybridity of the Gothic and magical realism in Agnon's work echoes the tensions within Jewish-Israeli identity, which attempts to (re)construct itself upon the land of Palestine-Israel, within the new Israeli nation-state.

S. Y. Agnon's work has been perceived as magical realist,[1] as well as Gothic and neo-Gothic.[2] The Gothic reflects the fears of the colonizer[3] and magical realism has been interpreted as a mode of writing that allows the former colonized to

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1 Tamara Kaye Sellman, "Jewish Magical Realism: Writing to Tell the Tale," in *Margin: Exploring Modern Magical Realism*, revised December 16, 2005, http://www.angelfire.com/wa2/margin/nonficSellmanJewishMR.html (accessed February 28, 2013). Sidra Ezrahi links Agnon's work also to the fantastic and to magical realism in "Sentient Dogs, Liberated Rams, and Talking Asses: Agnon's Biblical Zoo or Rereading 'Tmol shilshom,'" *AJS Review* 28.1 (2004): 105–135, 130.
2 Arnold Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare: a Study in the Fiction of S. Y. Agnon* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1968): 37–38, 47, 57, 67, 261–262; Robert Alter, "Magic Realism in the Israeli Novel," in *The Boom in Contemporary Israeli Fiction*, ed. Alan L. Mintz (Hanover, NH: Brandeis UP, 1997): 17–35, 17.
3 Andrew Smith and William Hughes, *Empire and the Gothic: The Politics of Genre* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003): 1–2; Angela Wright, *Gothic Fiction: A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007): 1–2.

explore identities within the discourse of postcolonialism.[4] Yet "identity" itself is no longer perceived as a rigid, fixed, or stable term. Rather, it has in recent research been formulated as fluid, embracing several, sometimes contradictory notions, ideas, and characteristics. For example, both Robert Young and Anthony Smith question the core of a stable Englishness or British identity.[5] Furthermore, Young argues that "fixity of identity is only sought in situations of instability and disruption, of conflict and change."[6] Within postcolonial discourse the term "hybridity" refers to the effects of synthesis upon identities and cultures of the colonized.[7] Moreover, hybridity, suggests Young, alters the different components that might have originally been its parts in a way that makes it hard to discern and differentiate them from one another.[8]

Following Young's exploration of hybridity in the postcolonial context with regard to theory, culture, and race, in this article I will apply the concept in relation to literary genres, or modes of writing. Particularly interesting for this examination is Young's analysis of linguistic hybridity. Based on Bakhtin's conceptualization of "hybridity" as a philosophical notion that explains linguistic multilingual, or polyglot, instances, the kind of hybridity Young outlines "describes the condition of language's fundamental ability to be simultaneously the same but different."[9] Young and Bakhtin analyze language itself, discerning how "hybridity delineates the way in which language, even within a single sentence, can be double-voiced,"[10] and suggesting that "this double-voiced, hybridized discourse serves a purpose, whereby each voice can unmask the other."[11] In this article, I take a further step, suggesting that a similar process occurs in Agnon's writing with regard to two modes of writing, the Gothic and magical realism. Since Agnon produced his work at the spatial and historical junction between the British imperialist hold of Palestine and the emerging

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4 Stephen Slemon, "Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, eds. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham: Duke UP, 1995): 407–426, 408; Theo D'haen, "Magical Realism and Postmodernism: Decentering Privileged Centers," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, eds. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham: Duke UP, 1995): 191–208, 195.

5 Robert Young, *Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995): 2–3, 17–19; Anthony Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999): 164.

6 Young, *Desire*, 4.

7 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1982): 132; Homi K. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990): 4.

8 Young, *Desire*, 26.

9 Young, *Desire*, 20.

10 Young, *Desire*, 20.

11 Young, *Desire*, 21.

Israeli nation-state, his work may be read as a hybrid between the Gothic and magical realism.

The dual generic location of Agnon's works reflects his engagement with the complexities of the emerging hybrid Jewish-Israeli national identity, which is the product of both aspects of colonialism, as the Jews in Mandate period Palestine were subject to British colonialism, and then became colonizers themselves, as they settled in Palestine-Israel. This paper explores a dual generic reading of Agnon in "Avi Hashor" ["The Ox's Father"] (1945), and "Tehila" (1950), as both texts offer instances of what might be read as either magical realism or Gothic elements, and both texts explore issues of nationalism as part of a (post)modern narrative. The following examination of the location of these narrative moments in both generic rubrics allows for a more productive exploration of personal and national identities in these texts.

Though the attribution of one generic rubric or another to a text or author might seem arbitrary at times, as these labels are devised by critics (as well as some writers, and booksellers) in order to organize and categorize the literary world, there is some merit in these generic categories. This is because they allow for a comparative evaluation of literature in relation to geo-historical locations as well as structural and thematic differences and similarities. Furthermore, the investigation of the works of one author in relation to different generic categories reveals certain tensions within the author's work that might otherwise remain hidden.

Before proceeding with the examination of Agnon's texts as Gothic and magical realist, a working definition of both genres is required. The definition of both modes of writing is problematic, as both have been subjected to numerous, and sometimes conflicting interpretations.[12] Since its emergence in the twentieth

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12 In addition to the debate regarding the Gothic and magical realism, there are several inter-pretations of the term "genre." The definition of the concept as it appears in textbooks might shed some light upon the term and the manner by which it is used. These sources suggest that it is "a French term for kind, a literary type or class. The major Classical genres were: epic, tragedy, lyric, comedy and satire, to which would now be added novel and short story" (J. A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* [London: Penguin, 1999]: 342). Another definition suggests that genre, which is initially "a kind or type of literature" (Martin Gray, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* [Beirut and Harlow: Longman York Press, 1992]: 127), can also be perceived as one of three major categories: poetry, drama, and the novel, which are then subdivided into: lyric, narrative verse, tragedy, comedy, short story, autobiography, etc. (Gray, *Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 127). While "from the Renaissance till well into the eighteenth-century the genres were carefully distinguished, and writers were expected to follow the rules prescribed by them" (Cuddon, *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 342), modern literature permits and even embraces intermingled and hybrid genres as a reflection of

century, magical realism has been established in critical thought as a "kind of fiction,"[13] or a "'label' for some forms of fiction."[14] Over the years, it has been subject to numerous interpretations and reconfigurations. While Wendy B. Faris argues that "magic realism combines realism and the fantastic in such a way that magical elements grow organically out of the reality portrayed,"[15] Stephen Slemon asserts that the term is an oxymoron, "a binary opposition between the representational code of realism and that, roughly, of fantasy."[16] The very basic definition of the term, as a combination of, or tension between two conflicting realms, neither of which dominates the other, renders it both alluring and challenging. Also, it bears an affinity to an essential aspect of the Gothic as integrating contradictory notions.[17]

As Slemon notes:

> In none of its applications to literature has the concept of magic realism ever successfully differentiated between itself and neighboring genres such as fabulation, metafiction, the baroque, the fantastic, the uncanny, or the marvellous, and consequently it is not surprising that some critics have chosen to abandon the term altogether.[18]

While acknowledging the problem of its definition as a genre, Slemon locates the magical realist mode of writing within postcolonial narrative.[19] Furthermore, Slemon argues that the established systems of generic classification are examples

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the ever-changing and (re)constructed (post)modern identity. While it appears that the rigid definition of "genre" denies both the Gothic and magical realism the title, both are "kinds of writing" and therefore can be referred to either as "modes of writing," or "genres." The various literary techniques these modes of writing utilize, as well as recurring themes and motifs establish them as distinguishable modes or kinds of writing, which allots them a place alongside other genres. Both the Gothic and magical realism are referred to as "genre" by scholars such as Stephen Slemon, and Chris Baldick, and the terms "genre" and "mode of writing" will be used interchangeably in this paper.

13 Cuddon, *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 448.

14 Cuddon, *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 448.

15 Wendy B. Faris, "Scheherazade's Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, eds. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham: Duke UP, 1995): 163–190, 163.

16 Slemon, "Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse," 409.

17 The affinity between both genres and the Freudian uncanny has variously been noted, see Chris Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth Century Writing* (New York: Oxford UP, 1987); Slemon, "Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse"; Lucie Armitt, "The Magical Realism of the Contemporary Gothic," in *A Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter (Oxford, MA: Blackwell, 2001).

18 Slemon, "Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse," 407.

19 Slemon, "Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse," 408.

of centralized totalizing systems, because they have been constructed primarily through readings of European or American provenance.[20] Slemon suggests that the use of the concept "magic realism" "can itself signify resistance to central assimilation by more stable generic systems and more monumental theories of literary practice."[21] In addition, Slemon suggests that

> [t]he incompatibility of magic realism with the more established genre systems becomes itself interesting, itself a focus for critical attention, when one considers the fact that it seems, in a literary context, to be most obviously operative in cultures situated at the fringes of mainstream literary traditions.[22]

Magical realism, according to Slemon, is first and foremost a nationalistically subversive genre. Continuing Slemon's line of argument, Theo D'haen contends that magic realism "reveals itself as a *ruse* to invade and take over dominant discourse(s)."[23] As such it is a genre that offers an avenue for authors from the cultural fringes to enter Western literature without adopting hegemonic perspectives. This aspect of magical realism is a subliminal, though potent, presence in the Agnon texts examined in this article.

For the purpose of this analysis, the interpretation of magical realism as a fundamentally decentralizing concept will be key. Additionally, it will rely upon Rawdon Wilson's reflections on the spatial elements in magical realism. Wilson argues that "literary space, in being conceptual, cannot be measured, but it *can* be experienced,"[24] and therefore "space is invariably present in literature though never precisely so."[25] Space, he argues, "is a rudimentary fictional world."[26] Accordingly, as Wilson suggests, the term magical realism "can be, and indeed *is*, used to describe virtually any literary text in which binary oppositions, or antinomies, can be discovered."[27] Wilson questions the imprecise use of the term as historical-geographical criterion that obscures its textual implications.[28] Likewise, Jeanne Delbaere-Grant challenges the historical and geographical specificity of magical realism. In addition, while acknowledging Slemon's "indisputable

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20 Slemon, "Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse," 408.

21 Slemon, "Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse," 409.

22 Slemon, "Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse," 409.

23 D'haen, "Magical Realism and Postmodernism," 195; emphasis in the original.

24 Rawdon Wilson, "The Metamorphoses of Fictional Space: Magical Realism," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, eds. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham: Duke UP, 1995): 209–233, 215; emphasis in the original.

25 Wilson, "The Metamorphoses of Fictional Space," 215–216.

26 Wilson, "The Metamorphoses of Fictional Space," 216.

27 Wilson, "The Metamorphoses of Fictional Space," 216.

28 Wilson, "The Metamorphoses of Fictional Space," 216.

merit of breaking new ground and encouraging a comparative analysis across postcolonial cultures,"[29] Delbaere-Grant claims that "magical realism is not exclusively a postcolonial phenomenon, but a much older one."[30] Hence definitions of the genre should be limited neither to one particular area nor period.

Furthermore, a fundamental aspect of magical realism is its use of the setting in order to explore and reflect individual questions as well as social and political issues. The particular importance of the setting is noted in Wilson's discussion of magical realism, which suggests that it requires "a faculty of boundary-skipping between worlds."[31] The "irreducibly hybrid nature of experience" in magical realism allows for diverse spaces and "different geometries [to] superimpose themselves upon one another."[32] The setting in magical realism facilitates, and even invites, subversion of spatial assumptions. Delbaere-Grant notes the connection between characters and the landscape in magical realism, specifically in relation to myths and superstitions.[33] Magical realism utilizes the setting in order to explore and undermine the readers' grasp of reality.

As in magical realism, the setting is crucial for the Gothic: "the buildings are as important as the protagonists"[34] because we construct our sense of self through the use of metaphorical settings.[35] Also, like magical realism, the Gothic has always been an unruly concept, and there have been many attempts to define it. Primarily, the Gothic novel or fiction is "a type of romance."[36] Based upon its initial meaning of that which is opposed to the Roman or Classical, the Gothic is the rejection of the norms of the prevailing social order. The Visigoths were a Germanic tribe that was to some extent responsible for the downfall of the Roman Empire, and their name came to connote an antonym to Roman, with the implication of anticlassical.[37] The term Gothic, relating to genre, was transferred from

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29 Slemon, "Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse," 249.

30 Jeanne Delbaere-Grant, "Psychic Realism, Mythic Realism, Grotesque Realism: Variations on Magic Realism in Contemporary Literature in English," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, eds. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham: Duke UP, 1995): 191–209, 249.

31 Wilson, "The Metamorphoses of Fictional Space," 210.

32 Wilson, "The Metamorphoses of Fictional Space," 210.

33 Delbaere-Grant, "Psychic Realism," 252.

34 Wright, *Gothic Fiction*, 36.

35 Lacan argues that the formation of the "self" in relation to the Other in dreams is conducted within spatial symbolism, such as the fortress, lofty remote castle, and marshes, see Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the *I*" in *The Symbolic Order: Ecrits*, trans. A. Sheridan (London: Routledge, 1966): 6.

36 Cuddon, *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 355.

37 Wright, *Gothic Fiction*, 1.

architecture to political and literary discourses, and was initially attributed as a pejorative term to politics and novels that appeared to subvert in some manner the prevailing social order and its norms.[38]

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the novel gained shape in England as the new canonical literary form, and the Gothic novel proliferated.[39] Due to the contempt it elicited in the academic and literary circles of the time, in contemporary British politics the Gothic was used to express scorn and repulsion.[40] The two discourses, the political and literary, reinforced the perception of the Gothic as unsettling and harmful. The Gothic suggested an aesthetic representation of political turmoil that was tied to the French Revolution (as well as to modern changes such as the industrial and mass-print revolutions), and reflected fear of change. Maggie Kilgour connects the Gothic directly with the French Revolution, as well as internal political issues and social concerns.[41] Furthermore, the Gothic has been linked with the colonial enterprise and its critique. For example, the two quintessential Gothic novels, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), reflect social and racial anxieties as well as fears from the encounter with the Other that was colonized.[42] This perception of the Gothic has been rooted in contemporary literary analysis, as is evident from M. H. Abrams's textbook, which asserts that much of the eighteenth-century and long Victorian era's writing dealt with or reflected the social, economic, religious and intellectual concerns of the Victorian era.[43] The rise of the novel, and more specifically the rise of the Gothic novel, was the literary response to contemporary socio-political changes.

Yet, while David Punter asserts that the Gothic is, indeed, political,[44] Elizabeth Napier claims that it is not essentially about politics, but is a conglomeration

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38 Wright, *Gothic Fiction*, 1–2.

39 Maggie Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995): 66, 73; Wright, *Gothic Fiction*, 1–2.

40 *Mary Shelley: Frankenstein. A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism*, ed. Berthold Schoene-Harwood (London: Icon Books, 2000): 13–29.

41 Kilgour, *Rise of the Gothic Novel*, 73.

42 Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow*; Smith and Hughes, *Empire and the Gothic*, 1–4; John Bugg, "'Master of their language': Education and Exile in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 68.4 (2005): 655–666, 665; Adriana Craciun, "Writing the Disaster: Franklin and Frankenstein," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 65.4 (2011): 433–480, 470; Joseph Valente, "Double Born: Bram Stoker and the Metrocolonial Gothic," *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 46.3 (2000): 632–45, 632–634.

43 M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, eighth ed. (Boston: Thompson, 2005): 117–118.

44 David Punter, *The Literature of Terror a History of Gothic Fictions From 1765 to the Present Day*, second ed. (London: Longman, 1996): 14.

of frightening elements that result in a genre of imbalance.[45] The Gothic is considered by some a category of prose fiction that flourished through the early nineteenth century in which "the locale was often a gloomy castle furnished with dungeons, subterranean passages, and sliding panels";[46] however, as Abrams notes, many of the novels are now read "as period pieces, but the best opened up to fiction the realm of the irrational and of the perverse impulses and nightmarish terrors that lie beneath the orderly surface of the civilized mind."[47] The Gothic itself, like many of its characters, is torn between conflicting ideas; and it disturbs and unsettles preconceived notions.

Nevertheless, Chris Baldick cautions that "under the old Freudian dispensation, Gothic fiction could readily and often simply enough be diagnosed as an instance of the 'return of the repressed.'"[48] Baldick rejects criticism that suggests that

> the virtue of any given [Gothic] novel or poem, and the only quality that makes it valuable or even interesting, is invariably the degree to which it can be made, by whatever ruse of contemporary unreason, to appear "subversive" or "transgressive."[49]

Nonetheless, Baldick acknowledges that these subversive elements are a part of the Gothic. This mode of writing may therefore be defined as "a *language of panic*, of unreasoning anxiety, blind revulsion, and distancing sensationalism, as well as a particular 'literature of terror.'"[50] Fundamentally, the Gothic is a platform that explores individual and social concerns, particularly through the use of setting, in order to question the formation of modern religious and national identities.

The comparison between the Gothic and magical realism reveals that both share two fundamental characteristics: both are inherently political and reflect social critique, and both use the settings in order to marshal these subversive perspectives. The supernatural or unnatural elements have an opposite parallel function. As the supernatural appears to threaten social norms or social structure, in the Gothic it is perceived as malign or threatening, while in magical realism it appears to be benign and constructive. The links between the Gothic and magical

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45 Elizabeth R. Napier, *The Failure of Gothic: Problems of Disjunction in an Eighteenth-Century Literary Form* (Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, Oxford UP, 1987): 5.
46 Abrams, *Glossary of Literary Terms*, 117.
47 Abrams, *Glossary of Literary Terms*, 117–118.
48 Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow*, 225.
49 Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow*, 225.
50 Howard LeRoy Malchow, *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996): 4; emphasis in the original.

realism have been noted by Lucie Armitt, who suggests the two genres are located upon a spectrum of generic production.[51] The following analysis of Agnon's texts will argue that both "Avi Hashor" and "Tehila" are located upon this spectrum, that they explore and express subversive elements, and that they use their settings in order to undermine preconceived notions of reality and to question conventional social structure. In both texts, we come across elements that can be read both as Gothic and as magical realist. The supernatural or unnatural in the two texts can be perceived as both benign and malign, and both narratives offer instances of subverting, and tampering with, the Jewish notion of the word as sacred in conjunction with the relationship with the land.

Though the particular two Agnon texts examined here were not read previously as Gothic literature, Gothic elements in Agnon's work have been noted. For example, though "Helena of 'The Lady and the Peddler'" ("Ha-'Adonit ve-ha-rokhel") is not immediately identified as the vampire she is,"[52] the lady is, indeed, a vampiric character that feeds on the peddler. Similarly, Harold Fisch's examination of Gemulah, the demon-haunted wife of the antiquarian bookseller Gamzu in "Ido Ve'enam" (Edo and Enam) (1950) asserts the story's Gothic essence.[53] In a manner reminiscent of the characters in Stoker's *Dracula*, "every month on the night of the full-moon [Gemulah] rises in her sleep, leaves her home, and wanders about the city in a trance-like state."[54] Even while Robert Alter claims that until the 1980s it would have been a "contradiction in terms" to read Israeli fiction within the bounds of magical realism,[55] he nonetheless acknowledges that Agnon's work is an exception, and includes clearly fantastic and neo-Gothic elements.[56] The two texts explored here, "Avi Hashor" and "Tehila," share not only some of the frightening elements and the use of setting that align them with the Gothic tradition, but also the preoccupation with the tensions between the self and the Other, specifically within a political nationalist context, which is also very much a defining feature of the Gothic. Yet, as noted above, these very elements can, and I would argue that in Agnon they, indeed, should be read, as magical realist as well.

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51 Armitt, "The Magical Realism of the Contemporary Gothic," 306.
52 Esther Fuchs, "Ironic Characterization in the Works of S. Y. Agnon," *AJS Review* 7.8 (1982/1983): 101–128, 120.
53 Harold Fisch, "The Dreaming Narrator in S. Y. Agnon," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 4.1 (1970): 49–68, 49.
54 Fisch, "The Dreaming Narrator in S. Y. Agnon," 49.
55 Alter, "Magic Realism in the Israeli Novel," 17.
56 Alter, "Magic Realism in the Israeli Novel," 17.

"Tehila" follows an unnamed narrator's visits to Jerusalem, where he encounters Tehila, a seemingly righteous old woman. As the novella progresses, we learn that, as a child, Tehila was promised in marriage to a young boy called Shraga,[57] but that the engagement was broken when her father heard the boy's father was following the Chasidic movement. She later married another man and suffered several misfortunes, which she blames upon her father's reluctance to ask forgiveness from Shraga's family, as was the custom in cases of broken engagements. Her last wish is for the narrator to help her prepare a letter of apology she will take to her grave. This notion of taking an urn with the letter to her grave with the belief that it will be possible to meet someone in the land of the dead and present him with the letter in order to obtain redemption, can be read as either a Gothic or a magical realistic element, as it is supernatural or unnatural. Yet whereas the supernatural or superstitious element would be read as an integral part of magical realism, in a Gothic text it would be a subversion of a religious doctrine. The text lends itself to both readings, leaving the verdict with regard to the benign or malign essence of the supernatural elements to the reader's discretion. As noted above, if the supernatural element is benign, the texts will be aligned with the magical realist tradition, and if it is malign it will be more in accordance with the Gothic. This allows the reader to align the narrative with both traditions, and consequently, by extrapolation, the text can be read within its production context as both a rejection of British colonialism as well as, simultaneously, an assertion of the Israeli new colonialism.

This supernatural element can be read as a superstitious belief, which is a subversion of both the secular, (post)modernist post-Enlightenment notions of reality, and the Jewish religious tradition's set of beliefs and doctrines. According to the Jewish tradition, one can only be redeemed and forgiven by God after having been granted the wholehearted forgiveness by the person sinned against. This rule applies to the yearly Day of Atonement as well as to the final one. The rationale for this obviously is that people ought to be better neighbors, husbands and wives, and treat each other with dignity and respect; it is not possible to behave immorally all year and then attain easy forgiveness from God.[58] By contriving to take the letter to her grave, Tehila tries to bypass this fundamental

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57 The name Tehila, apart from meaning fame, connoting the renown of the city, is a direct reference to Psalms, which is *Tehilim* in Hebrew. The book of Psalms tells the praise of the Lord, and the story tells the praise of the woman, who is an embodiment of the city. The book is constantly evoked through the numerous allusions and specific quotes, and Tehila reads it daily. *Shraga* in Aramaic means the useless candle at noon, and indeed, he is a useless light she follows to her grave.

58 Leviticus 16:23; *Masechet Yoma* 85b.

aspect of Jewish tradition which insists on righteous earthly conduct rather than to rely on divine redemption. Tehila treats the letter of forgiveness as a "ticket" into the world of saintly redemption and subverts one of the main ideas of the Jewish tradition.

Moreover, though the narrator accedes to her request, indeed producing the letter, the narrative undermines the direct connection between the breech of promise and the misfortunes that befell Tehila, suggesting these might have been unrelated, and that in many ways she had a successful and full life. Thus, it is doubtful whether the restoration of order through the written letter of apology will ensure that Tehila may enter the realm of the holy and be worthy of resurrection on the last Day of Atonement. Rather, the story implies, it might be due to the many charitable actions and her humble character that she will find her peace in the Mount of Olives.

Tehila is in a way a representation of the Holy City, righteous and merciful, and like the city, she combines both the "earthly" and "heavenly" aspects, secular and sacred. Jewish tradition distinguishes between the "Earthly Jerusalem" and the "Heavenly Jerusalem." The former is the tangible city in Palestine-Israel and the latter an imaginary space. These imaginary and real spaces coexist, and form a complete unity under the sovereignty of God. Jewish tradition suggests that the deeds of the people in the earthly Jerusalem are reflected in heaven, and either hasten or defer the salvation and redemption of Jerusalem and the people of Israel. In correlation to this myth, Tehila believes that her deeds in the earthly Jerusalem might either hasten or delay her salvation, and is therefore eager to rectify any wrongs that might prevent her from entry to the kingdom of heaven and deny her the ultimate redemption.

Tehila's character has been subject to many conflicting and contradictory readings. Her character has been understood to be an expression of the *shechina*;[59] her death has been read as a *gniza*[60] until the coming of the messiah,[61] as well as an articulation of a rejection of life.[62] The alignment of Tehila with the

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59 The *shechina* is the feminine compassionate aspect of God. The Jewish God can be a wrathful vengeful God, but it has a kinder side that, according to tradition, used to reside in the temple in Jerusalem. The temple was the house of God, the place of residence and manifestation of the sovereignty of God and the Jewish nation over the Holy City and Holy Land.

60 *Geniza* is the internment or safe keeping of scriptures that are no longer in use.

61 Hillel Weiss, "Mota Shel Tehila Kebitui Legnizah ad Biat Hagoel" [Tehila's Death as Expression of Geniza till the Coming of the Messiah] in *Parshanut Lechamish Mesipurei Agnon* [Interpretation of Five Agnon Stories] (Tel Aviv: Aked, 1974): 75–93, 76.

62 Amos Oz, "Laag Hagoral Veterufa shel Hatzadecket" [Destiny's Scorn and the Righteous' Madness] in *Shtikat Hashamayim: Agnon Mishtomem al Elohim* [The Silence of Heaven: Agnon's Fear of God] (Jerusalem: Keter, 1993): 19–38, 19.

shechina suggests there is something unreal in her, an un-earthly essence that renders her ethereal. Yet this aspect of her is a part of her realistic character. Hence, this aspect of her can be read as magical realist. Additionally, if one accepts her death as *gniza*, she becomes in a sense, dehumanized, like a scroll or book that should be interned after they are no longer in use. This can reinforce the reading of her character as an element of magical realism, as she becomes neither entirely human nor an object. Yet, this can also be read as a Gothic element in which the woman is dehumanized. While Hillel Weiss considers the denial of the righteous aspects of Tehila's character a rejection of the messianic elements in Agnon's work (and in Hebrew literature at large), Eddy Zemach and Moshe Granot reject her depiction as an almost saintly woman, suggesting she conducts all her charity merely in order to attain redemption as a reward and therefore is not really righteous.[63] Arye Nave reveals heretical tendencies in Tehila's conduct, such as seeking death in order to reunite with her lover. The absence of God's name from the last part of the story supports the suggestion that Tehila is, in fact, rebelling against the divinity.[64] Alongside the previous reading of Tehila as near angel, and her alignment with the divine dwelling, the *shechina*, these rebellious, subversive qualities, render Tehila a quasi or neo-demonic character. Tehila can be read along the angel-demon axis, allotting her a place on both sides of this non-human spectrum. Tehila's character is utilized in order to explore possible connections between the holiest place for the religious Jew, Jerusalem, and total rejection of Jewish doctrine.

Since Agnon was a religious man, one ought to be careful with these claims; nevertheless, the implication is present, if subtle. The debate regarding Tehila's character reflects the problematic tensions between the religious and secular sects in the Jewish-Israeli community (in Israel and worldwide). The novella lends itself to both readings – of Tehila as righteous or as manipulative – and reflects the possibility of subtly undermining or questioning Jewish belief in the power of charity and the written word when it is perceived within a superstitious context. Once again, these explorations can be read as either Gothic or magical realism, and taking into consideration Agnon's particular spatial and historical situation, they should be read as both.

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63 Eddy Zemach, *Kriah Tama Besifrut Ivrit Bat Hameah Veesrim* [Fine Letters: Hebrew Literature of the Twentieth Century] (Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 1990): 119; and Moshe Granot, "Tehila Hacazav Shemeachorey Habdaya" [Tehila the Fraud Behind the Fiction] in *Agnon Lelo Masve* [Agnon Revealed] (Tel Aviv: Yaron Golan, 1991): 23–27, 23.
64 Arye Nave, "Tehila – Ha'moredet Hakdosha" [Tehila – The Holy Rebel] in *Bamikhlala* 9 (1997): 33–37, 34.

When the narrator and Tehila commence the writing of the redemptive letter asking for forgiveness that she intends to take to her grave, Tehila tells the narrator that she will speak to him in Yiddish, but that he should write in "the holy language."[65] She adds that she heard that now "they teach the girls to speak and write in the holy language."[66] This is an innovative approach to the education of women in the Jewish community. Traditionally, women were excluded from the study of the Talmud as well as Hebrew; they were usually assigned to the domestic realm and the Yiddish language. As Daniel Boyarin explains, in the Ashkenazi Diaspora, "[w]omen of the learned classes were encouraged to become competent scholars of everything *except the Talmud itself*."[67]

Tehila did not attend the *yeshiva*, where the Mishnah (Jewish oral tradition fixed in writing) is read and explored in depth. Yet she inherits her father's books, and appears to be well-versed in the scriptures. This is not explained in the narrative, and the reader may conjecture as to the reasons. The only explanation we are given is the fact that her brothers gave up the books and that Tehila brought them along when she came to Palestine-Israel ("T," 198). Nevertheless, a clue to the reason why she inherited the books instead of her brothers might be that her father used to write the dates of each of his children's birth in the *chomesh*.[68] According to some traditions this would be considered a sacrilege, as one must neither add to nor subtract words from the Holy Scriptures.

In addition to subtly questioning Jewish norms and beliefs, the novella undermines the validity of the British Mandate, which was in place from 1918/ 1922 to 1948. Walking in the streets of Jerusalem, the narrator notes the never-ending masses of immigrants flooding the city, and acknowledges their ethnic diversity and homelessness ("T," 183). The narrative depicts Diaspora Jews as they come to Palestine in an attempt to find a home, followed by a pivotal scene that depicts British soldiers by the Western Wall on Temple Mount. As they attempt to uphold British Mandate law that does not allow anyone to make seating arrangements in the square in front of the Wall, they knock a very old

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65 "לשון הקודש"

66 Shmuel Yosef Agnon, "Tehila," in *Thus Far*, vol. 7 (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1977): 178–206, 194; further references in the text, abbreviated as "'T.'"

67 Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1997): 179; emphasis in the original.

68 The *chomesh* are the first five books of the Old Testament (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), which are considered the basic learning of the Jewish tradition, the *torah*. The word *chomesh* comes from the root for the word five, *chamesh*.

woman off her stool. Tehila arrives and stares at the soldier until he contritely retrieves the stool for the other old lady ("T," 183).

The political potential of this episode is explained by the narrator: "the power of your eyes is better than all of England's promises, as England has given us the Balfour Declaration and lashes her clerks at us to no avail, and you my old one fixed your eye upon that bully and undid his evil plotting" ("T," 183).[69] The narrative suggests that Tehila has some kind of magical power over the soldier, and indeed, by extrapolation, over the British colonial enterprise. This magical power can be read as either part of a rejection of the British colonial oppressor, or as part of the assertion of the new Israeli colonizer. Indeed, it becomes clear that Tehila's magical powers, her power as the manifestation of the female Jewish divine dwelling in the Holy City of Jerusalem, should be read as both Gothic and magical realistic. This magical power is both malign and benign, as it simultaneously asserts the sovereignty of the new settler even while rejecting the previous colonizer. In the Balfour Declaration (1917), Britain had promised Lord Rothschild as a representative of the Zionist Organization to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Agnon refers dismissively to the failed political promise. His rendering suggests instead the Jewish religious right to sovereignty over Jerusalem. This is embodied by Tehila in the novella; she is the symbolic representation of the *shechina* and imbues the declaration with authority, and not vice versa. Agnon's story merges with the Zionist master narrative in insisting on the legitimacy of the Jewish claim to the land; yet while the Zionist master narrative attributes this claim to modern nationalism and the British declaration, Agnon attributes it to religious right.

Similar questions regarding the moral validity of Jewish settlement in Palestine-Israel arise from "Avi Hashor." Like "Tehila," this story is located in Jerusalem. As a significant part of the Holy Land, Jerusalem occupies a unique place and is sacred to all three monotheistic religions. Legend has it that Jerusalem was built on the place where the universe was created, and where Abraham went to sacrifice his son. Another myth suggests it is the place where Abel constructed his altar, and the ascension of the prophet Elijah to heaven is linked with Jerusalem as well, as the city is considered a pathway to the heaven.

As noted above, one of the main reasons the city of Jerusalem has a special status in Jewish tradition is that it is considered the place where the feminine aspect of God, the *shechina*, resides. The importance of Jerusalem as the center of the home of the Jewish people is addressed in "Tehila" by the alignment of Tehila

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69 פקידיה לבטלה, יפה כח עיניך מכל הבטחותיה של אנגליא, שאילו אנגליא נתנה לנו דקלרציא של בלפור ומשלחת בנו את "
"ואת זקנתי נתת עיניך באותו רשע ובטלת את מזימותיו הרעות

with the *shechina* and Jerusalem.[70] In "Avi Hashor," the merging of the protago-
nist's identity and the place occurs as the name of the place *is* the old man's
name. *Avi Hashor* [The Ox's Father] is a Hebrew translation of the Arabic Abu-Tor,
which is the name of a neighborhood in Jerusalem. Abu-Tor has a unique history,
as it is one of the first attempts at an Arab-Jewish hybrid neighborhood in
Jerusalem. It is situated on the outskirts of the city and is the signifier of the
border between countries, cultures, and peoples. One of the folk traditions related
to the place suggests that when Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn placed the siege on Jerusalem, one
of his officers bragged that it would be so easy to conquer Jerusalem that he
would be able to do it on an ox.

According to Band, Agnon's story resembles the political parables he wrote in
the 1930s, referring to the Arab Jewish tensions.[71] Band suggests the story is a
parable and an "etiological myth purporting to explain the name of the Abu-Tor
district of Jerusalem near Agnon's home."[72] During the time the story was written,
the neighborhood was literally partitioned and divided between the Emirate of
Transjordan and the British Mandate; today it is in Israel, and represents an
attempt at coexistence. Agnon's translation of the name of the neighborhood into
Hebrew is a linguistic appropriation of the place, and after the heroic act in which
the ox saves the town from raiders, the narrator reiterates the appropriated name
of the place. Agnon offers a new myth to explain the name of the place, which
locates it within Jewish culture and hence suggests that it should be under
Jewish-Israeli sovereignty. This linguistic appropriation can be read as a rejection
of the Arab hold on the land, as well as an attempt to assert a Jewish right to the
territory. In relation to the linguistic aspect of hybridity, this philological maneu-
ver is both the assertion of a new territorial colonialism as well as the rejection of
previous claims to the land.

"Avi Hashor" is one of the most intriguing and potentially subversive texts
Agnon ever wrote. The story tells of an old man who had neither wife nor
children, but had an ox. Since the Jewish tradition considers marriage, procrea-
tion, and the communal aspects of life the most important in a person's life, the
old man's solitude locates him on the margins of the socially acceptable. Further-
more, the Talmud aligns the home with the wife. One without the other is not
complete; hence, though the old man might have a home, his home is an empty
shell. David Aberbach notes that Agnon's characters,

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70 Weiss, "Mota Shel Tehila Kebitui Legnizah ad Biat Hagoel," 76; Werses, *Shy Agnon Kepshuto*,
44.

71 Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare*, 409.

72 Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare*, 409.

for various reasons and to varying degrees, are deflected from normal heterosexual attach‑ments and are inclined, for this reason, to forms of perversion which at times mirror the distortions and breakdown in the societies in which they live.[73]

The old man is a recluse, and his marginality already undermines Jewish social conventions.

One day, when the city is raided by enemies, the old man mounts the ox.[74] They charge into the city, attack the enemy and save the day. At this climactic moment of the story the old man is united with the ox to the point of being transformed into a minotaur‑like creature that charges triumphantly into the battle. However, the old man and the ox enjoy their heroic status only briefly, as soon after the ox is slaughtered in a socially charged maneuver by the old man's neighbor.

The second chapter of the story furnishes the necessary background and tells of the neighbor who marries another wife.[75] When, after seven days of feasting, he runs out of cattle and can no longer feed all his guests, he finds and slaughters the ox.[76] The animal is killed neither as an acceptable religious sacrifice nor as substitute for a human sacrifice; rather than actual cruelty or lack of moral stature, its slaughter is an act of moral negligence. As the ox was the old man's substitute for family, servant, and perhaps even lover, the irony of the neighbor's slaughtering the animal for the celebration of an additional wife renders the act even more cruel. This is despite the neighbor's later attempts to redress his transgression by compensating the old man's loss with land and cattle.

The ox represents both the old man's family and his link to the land. Indeed, as the ox is the beast that is used to farm the land, in the unification with the ox the old man is fused with the land. The literal and allegorical unification of the ox and the old man as the reunion of the Jews with the land reflects Agnon's (and the *yishuv*'s, the Jewish settlement in Palestine) exploration of a yearning for the connection with the land. The minotaur‑like creature, which is comprised of man and ox, redeems the land from the enemy, and consequently is entitled to appro‑priate it as part of war‑spoils. This new mythology supports the Zionist enterprise, as it participates in constructions of the national identity of the sovereign "new Jew" as a courageous warrior creature.

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73 David Aberbach, "Fantasies of Deviance in Mendele and Agnon," *AJS Review* 19.1 (1994): 45–60, 45.

74 The old man mounts the ox following the inarticulate "request" of the beast.

75 It is permitted according to Muslim tradition to marry up to four wives, while the traditional Jewish interpretations of the Torah usually negate or advise against polygamy.

76 Shmuel Yosef Agnon, "Avi Hashor," in *Thus Far*, vol. 7 (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1977): 336–342, 337; further references in the text, abbreviated as "'AHS.'"

With the unification of man and ox, "Avi Hashor" reworks several old myths about oxen whose origins can be traced back to both Jewish and Greek mythology.[77] Found both in the Greek and Roman mythologies, the Minotaur is a creature part-man and part-bull, which was the product of two sinful actions: first Minos's defiance of the divine decree and then Pasiphaë's copulation with the bull. The former is a sin against the gods; the latter a moral transgression. The ethical question resonates in Agnon's texts and beckons the reader to choose between a religious and secular narrative; between social injustice and religious entitlement.

Similar mythical creatures existed in other Mediterranean cultures, such as the *moloch* of the Canaanite culture. This is one of the idols mentioned in the bible and whose worship the Jewish tradition attempted to eliminate. In one of the references, as part of elaborate rules and regulations regarding copulation, we find a decree that forbids the insemination of the *moloch*.[78] The word in Hebrew, *moloch*,[79] comes from the same root as king, *melech*.[80] The word "king" is one of the names for the Jewish God, which is equivalent to another, *ribbon*,[81] which comes from the same root as the word for sovereignty, *ribonut*.[82] The *moloch* is connected to notions of sovereignty on several levels: first, linguistically, as it is linked to the word for king, the sovereign; second, as the King of Kings decrees it an abomination; third, the rejection of the *moloch* is part of the rules and regulations given to the Israelites in relation to processes of the conquest of the Promised Land. The importance of sovereignty for this discussion lies in the crucial role it plays in both Gothic and magical realism. Both genres are, as noted above, a reaction and exploration of issues of sovereignty, hence the significance of these themes.

In the Jewish tradition, the adamant negation of bestiality is connected to the conquest, and later the redemption of the land. Interestingly, while Agnon's narrative appears to subvert the social conventions that require a man to have a wife and children, the result of this abominable union is yet the redemption of the

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77 The Minotaur was created as the result of copulation of Pasiphaë and the bull. The bull was supposed to be sacrificed by Minos to the god Poseidon for the triumph in the battle, but Minos defied the decree and kept the bull alive. In order to punish Minos for this act of defiance, Aphrodite, the goddess of love made Minos's wife, Pasiphaë, fall in love with the bull. The fruit of this love affair, the Minotaur, was imprisoned by Minos in a labyrinth. Ariadne, the daughter of Minos and Pasiphaë later assists Theseus to kill the Minotaur (see Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VIII).

78 Leviticus 18:21.

79 "מולוך"

80 "מלך"

81 "ריבון"

82 "ריבונות"

land. Aberbach suggests that "[c]ertain obscure features in [...] Agnon become clearer if the possibility of latent deviance, homosexuality in particular, is taken into account,"[83] and though one ought to be cautious in suggesting that Agnon consciously intended to explore issues of bestiality, the story arguably lends itself to such a reading.

Though Agnon attempted to create a myth of himself as a writer who rejected the non-Jewish tradition, he was well-versed in Western culture.[84] Nonetheless, Agnon was a religious Jewish man, and it is not likely that such a scandalous subversion of the Jewish tradition could have been his deliberate intention. Therefore, though the story may support this reading, one might consider an alternative, which suggests that the ox represents the old man's holy sacrifice for the redemption of the land. This reading implies that Agnon offers an allegory of legitimate sovereignty, as the old man receives the land in compensation for the loss of his beloved ox. The themes of sacrifice, sacrificial acts, and redemption are prevalent in Agnon's work, reflecting a similar pervasiveness in the Jewish scriptures.[85] Reading the slaughter of the ox as an integral part of the Jewish tradition suggests that the old man is required to sacrifice everything the ox means to him – his wife, son, servant and lover – in order to redeem the land.

The narrative echoes the sacrificial act Abraham is required to commit in Genesis.[86] This sacrifice follows the initial promise God made to Abraham upon his departure from Ur[87] and precedes the promise of the land.[88] However, while in the biblical narrative, Abraham was required to sacrifice his son and was given a ram as substitute, in Agnon's narrative, since the old man has no family, the ox is taken as the substitute for family. Also, while in the biblical narrative Abraham was blessed with prolific procreation, as well as triumphant glory,[89] in Agnon's narrative, the old man receives land, seven healthy cows, and seven calves. Furthermore, among these calves there is an innocent calf, which is presented in the narrative as an equivalent to the neighbor's little daughter ("AHS," 342). The narrative suggests a substitution between the little girl and the calf, as if the neighbor recognizes the importance of the ox as substitute for the old man's

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83 Aberbach, "Fantasies of Deviance," 59.
84 Alan Mintz and Anna Golomb Hoffman, "Introduction," in *The Book that Was Lost: Thirty-Five Stories* (Tel Aviv: The Toby Press Schocken, 2008): 14–18.
85 Fuchs, "Ironic Characterization in the Works of S. Y. Agnon," 120; Aberbach, "Fantasies of Deviance," 45.
86 Genesis 22:1–20.
87 Genesis 12:1–4.
88 Genesis 15:7–13.
89 Genesis 16–18.

family. While in the biblical narrative Abraham sacrificed the ram instead of his son, in Agnon's story, the old man receives a young innocent calf that is supposedly the equivalent of the neighbor's daughter. The old man substituted family with an ox, and then the ox is substituted with land. While in the biblical narrative the substitution was between cattle and family, and then Abraham was rewarded with both the promise of land and virile productivity, eventually, at the end of Agnon's narrative the old man does not have any offspring, but only land. Hence, even when read as a continuation of the Jewish tradition, the story offers a problematic subversive narrative in that it replaces the man's healthy procreation with the attainment of the land and cattle.

The land, in both "Avi Hashor" and "Tehila," is utilized in order to marshal subtly subversive ideas and to question social and religious notions. These subversions operate specifically in relation to the land, and issues of sovereignty, and therefore should be read as either Gothic or magical realist and, in Agnon's specific case, as both. Tehila is an embodiment of Jerusalem, and Avi Hashor is, literally and figuratively, the old man and the place. The characters *are* the settings – Tehila is an embodiment of the holy city, and the ox's father is Avi Hashor, which is Hebrew for Abu Tor. These are mythical and mystical representations of the Jewish nation and its connection to the land.

In addition to questioning the communal role of man and his relationship with the land, like "Tehila," "Avi Hashor" offers certain elements that can be read both as Gothic and magical realist. When the old man discovers that his ox is gone, he cries, roams the fields, bellowing like his ox, and finally finds the animal's severed horns in a pile of garbage ("AHS," 338–339). As the old man howls and weeps for his ox, he hears a haunting howling that seems to come from horns, like the sound of the Jews' shofar. The Gothic scene of the grieving old man roaming in the darkness (both literally and allegorically) is linked to a linguistic confusion regarding the severed horns. Linguistically speaking, the horns are animated, as the old man wonders why the horns "left their owner" and the narrator suggests that the ox abandoned them ("AHS," 339). While the ox was everything to the old man, the animal's horns on their own are useless to him[90] and bring nothing but grief. The element of the bellowing and howling in the night is not a "scare"; rather, it functions as ironic amplifier of the readers' unease as they know what happened to the ox. Like the supernatural elements in "Tehila," these elements can also be read as either magical realist or Gothic. The

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90 Horns, as in the shofar, are the Jewish way to call upon God, and therefore are perceived as sacred; however, as opposed to other horned animals like the ram whose horns are hollow, the ox's horns are solid and cannot be used to make a shofar and call upon God.

texts lend themselves very well to both these readings, yet the two are distinctly different in meaning. The Gothic is related to fears of the colonizer, and magical realism allows for the colonized to explore identity. As noted above, the particular spatial and historical location of these texts by Agnon require the reader to permit both readings, creating a kind of hybrid genre that conjoins the Gothic and magical realism.

After the miserable discovery of the horns the old man suffers several nights of torment as he hears the bellowing of his beloved ox. He is tormented by these sounds and consults his Jewish friend ("AHS," 339). This is the first time religion is explicitly mentioned in this story. The point of doing so is that something beyond reason, something inexplicable has occurred. The rupture in the natural world leads the old man to seek the assistance of his Jewish friend, as if the Jew holds the secrets of natural philosophy and, even more importantly, beyond. The reader wonders for the first time to which religion the old man belongs and, based on phrases and the cries to God in the Jewish format, "see the salvation of the Lord that the Lord hath done for us," ("AHS," 337) concludes that he most probably is Jewish as well. Omitting to mention the religion of the old man may raise doubts regarding the potential subversive reading of the text. Indeed, as Ezrahi points out, doubts have been expressed about the alleged ironic undertones in Agnon's work.[91] Furthermore, the premise of the story is a linguistic and mythical appropriation of the land, and undermining the power of the word places the entire credence of this linguistic appropriation in question. The narrative explores the core of the Jewish tradition, which is its sanctification of the word. Questioning this aspect of the Jewish tradition is, in fact, undermining its very base.

Like in "Tehila," we find instances of subtle subversion or questioning of the Jewish belief in the power of the word. Specifically, in the manner this power might be perceived as part of superstitious beliefs, rather than a true respect for the word. The Jew advises the old man to seek the advice of "a wise one, Docsostos, the writer from Kiryat Sefer,[92] who was removed from his craft, because he used to write charms of healing verses, we shall go to him for he is a deeds-man, he might tell you something" ("AHS," 339–340).[93] The "Docsostos" is the part of a beast's skin used to produce the scroll on which the scriptures are written. There is a controversy regarding the "Docsostos"; most rulings deem it flawed for writing the Torah and say it is only suitable for secular uses. The

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91 Ezrahi, "Sentient Dogs," 115.

92 The name of the place translates as "the town of book."

93 בהם נלך אצלו אחד דוכסוסטוס הסופר מקרית מקרית ספר שהעבירוהו מאומנותו מפני שהיה כותב קמיעין של פסוקים להתרפאות"

"שהוא בעל מעשים אפשר שיזדקק לך ויאמר לך דבר

controversy surrounding the occult in Jewish tradition is represented by the name given to "Docsostos," one who was rejected from the mainstream religious apparatus because he was dabbling in the occult. In Agnon's narrative, however, in order to solve the conundrum of the howling in the nights, the narrative passes into the occult, the Kabbalistic part of Judaism that maintains the power of the word to cause action and create reality. At Docsostos', as the old man touches the horns they produce a sound like the shofar, and the wise man deduces that the ox has been slaughtered and this is the beast's cry to his beloved master. This supernatural element, once again, can be read either as Gothic or magical realist, and again offers simultaneously a possible subversion of both the secular reality as well as the Jewish religious norm.

Both "Tehila" and "Avi Hashor" undermine the readers' preconceived notions of reality – whether within or outside the Jewish tradition; both offer elements that can be read as both Gothic and magical realist. In addition, both stories use space as a means to question fundamental notions of reality and identity. Both texts are set in Palestine-Israel, The Holy Land, which is the quintessential legendary land, and functions both on the real and imaginary axes. The actual territory has been subject to many interpretations. The initial biblical reference maps it "from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates,"[94] which would locate it between the Nile at the heart of present day Egypt in the West and the Euphrates in the East, a river that runs through modern Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. The land in the biblical promise is not given any northern and southern boundaries, leaving this imaginary map open to even further expansion, both literally and metaphorically.

In conclusion, this analysis of "Tehila" and "Avi Hashor" reveals that both can be read as samples of the Gothic and of magical realism. In addition to unnatural or supernatural elements, such as the "curse" Tehila believes she has to undo by taking a letter of apology with her to her grave, or the severed horns howling in the night in "Avi Hashor," both texts can be read as both Gothic and magical realist due to their essential link with social reconfiguration. Moreover, both narratives disturb preconceived notions, as they undermine the boundaries between realms through the use of settings. Reading Agnon as writing within both the Gothic and magic realism enables us to recognize his attempts to create continuities within Jewish culture. Agnon's work reflects the tensions between perceptions and notions of the "old" and "new" Jew, the Ashkenazi Diaspora and the *yishuv* in Palestine-Israel, and the British Mandate, exploring the (re)construction of a new Jewish-Israeli identity. Moreover, Agnon's works *should* be read

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94 Genesis 15:18.

both as Gothic and as magical realism, as they reflect as well as participate in the construction of Jewish-Israeli identity which is simultaneously the product of British Imperialism, postcolonialism, and the Zionist enterprise. The texts are a product of the shattered world Agnon was trying to depict and come to terms with. The collapse of the reading from the imperialistically engaged Gothic into (post-)colonial magical realism and back again suggests the unsettled essence of the Jewish-Israeli identity.