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ALWAYS ALREADY GOTHIC

S. Y. Agnon's European Tales of Terror

In 1916, a German literary anthology entitled *Treue* (Fidelity) was published and presented as a Passover gift to Jewish soldiers serving on the German front during World War I. The anthology included works by the foremost Hebrew and Yiddish authors of the day, but it is perhaps best remembered today for cementing the importance of the renowned Hebrew author S. Y. Agnon (1888–1970) in the discerning German Jewish intellectual milieu.[1] Printed as a preface to Agnon's contributions to the volume and, more broadly, as an introduction of Agnon to a German audience was an admiring letter from Martin Buber to the editor, Leo Herrmann. In his letter, Buber prophetically asserts that Agnon's "vocation is to be the poet and chronicler of Jewish life; of that life which is dying and changing today, but also of the other life, still unknown, that is growing."[2] Buber's enthusiastic public endorsement of Agnon helped establish his reputation as a leading Hebrew literary figure whose writing mediates not only between Europe and Palestine but also between fiction and history. *Treue* included German translations of two stories by Agnon: "Aliyat neshama" (Ascent of the soul), about an untimely death brought about by Hassidic fervor for the coming of the Messiah; and "Meḥolat ha-mavet" ("The Dance of Death"), a gothic story involving the kidnapping of an innocent maiden and ghosts rising from their graves for a midnight dance.[3]

Almost three decades later, another wartime literary anthology, this time in Hebrew, hosted fiction by Agnon. Titled *Ba-sa'ar* (In the storm) and described as a literary response to the horrific news from Europe, it was published in 1943 by the Union of Hebrew Authors (Agudat ha-sofrim ha-ivriyim) and included contributions from the most highly regarded authors

and poets of the time, such as Leah Goldberg. Whereas *Treue* was distributed to Jewish soldiers on the German front in 1916, *Ba-sa'ar* was produced for the Hebrew Brigade, Jewish soldiers from the Yishuv who volunteered to fight with the British Army during World War II, and was small enough "to fit into their kit bags."[4] The story that Agnon chose to submit to the collection, "Ha-adonit ve-ha-rokhel" ("The Lady and the Peddler"), was not an obvious candidate for the explicitly political endeavor, rooted in contemporary events, undertaken by the Union of Hebrew Authors in *Ba-sa'ar*. Like "The Dance of Death," it is a gothic story, complete with a foreboding forest, a bloody dagger, and a murderous vampire.

Agnon's contribution to *Ba-sa'ar* departs from the others, and more generally from literature produced, translated, and consumed in the Yishuv during the war.[5] As Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi notes, Hebrew authors at that time subscribed to a "mandate to reenter history as acting [subjects]" through "revisionist symbols that invert the archetypes of martyrdom."[6] She points to the poetry in *Ba-sa'ar* as exemplifying the call for "heroic acts of revenge."[7] Agnon diverges from these poetic tendencies, offering no semblance of valor in "The Lady and the Peddler." If heroism, revenge, and defiance were seen by his contemporaries as paving the way to reenter history and assert a Jewish presence in the here and now, then Agnon's characters challenge the binary logic undergirding heroism and cowardice and offer a different historical orientation in the face of violence and war—one that is not linear but cyclical, not liberated from the past but perpetually revisited by it. This engagement with history is the first indication of a shared sensibility with gothic fiction, in which, as Catherine Spooner puts it, the "past chokes the present, prevents progress and the march towards personal or social enlightenment."[8]

Furthermore, Agnon's choice to respond to contemporary violence through narratives set in the distant and unspecified past complements his consistent borrowing from the themes and imagery of European gothic. Deeming the gothic a literary mode devoid of literary prestige, many readers of Agnon have tended to disparage its role in his oeuvre. For Agnon as for its most enduring eighteenth- and nineteenth-century practitioners, however, the gothic not only provides an alluring aesthetic but also allows for serious social and historical commentaries. This point is lost if we dismiss the pervasive, persistent, deep-seated gothic sensibility in his fiction as the awkward birth pangs of an author destined for greatness. Agnon without the gothic would not be Agnon.

In this chapter, I argue that taking Agnon's gothicism seriously sheds new light on his engagement with the Jewish past, which has been conceptualized primarily in terms of loss and memorial. Agnon's unconventional figuration of key themes at the intersection of Jewishness and the gothic, blood and wandering, in "The Dance of Death" and "The Lady and the Peddler" suggests a disconcertingly active past that invades and affects the Jewish present. The gothic evocation of fear, anxiety, and persecution structures these stories' vision of a restless past and links it to an uneasy present. Even as the past shapes the present, the stories themselves shape the past, as evidenced by Agnon's appropriation of familiar antisemitic tropes. By exposing the affinity of the gothic to the Jewish experience, Agnon recalibrates the dynamics between Christian and Jew, fiction and history, and, in particular, the past and the present. Though in the popular Hebrew imagination his fiction is associated, sometimes nostalgically and sometimes ironically, with an irrevocably lost Eastern European Jewish world, Agnon's gothic stories bring us face-to-face with a violent history that refuses to retire into the grave.

What does Agnon gain by summoning these ghosts of history, both literal and metaphorical? What does he disrupt by delineating Jewish history as gothic? One of the most productive critical approaches to the gothic situates it vis-à-vis national narratives and their need to maintain coherence through exclusion. As Teresa A. Goddu notes, the gothic's restoration of repressed narratives "disrupts the dream world of national myth with the nightmares of history." At the same time as it discloses a haunting past as the source of the instability of national self-representation, she points out, it paradoxically "can also work to coalesce those narratives."[9] Agnon's gothic, however, is not positioned politically; it addresses the past of the Jewish people rather than that of the Jewish (or Polish) state. Furthermore, the violence his stories expose is not intended to restore a marginalized or suppressed narrative. It is accessible not to the descendants of its perpetrators but to those of its victims: readers of Hebrew, who, in the first half of the twentieth century, were grappling with a relentlessly increasing barrage of anti-Jewish violence that would culminate in the most incomprehensible event in Jewish history. Agnon's gothic, then, invites his Jewish readers to confront the violent past to better understand their brutal present—indeed, the gothic in Agnon unsettles the very boundary between the past and the present.

I begin with a discussion of Agnon's gothic oeuvre and of the discomfort his gothicism has engendered among some critics. I then consider his

historic vision, first in terms of his fiction's relation to specific historical eras or events such as the Holocaust, and then through broader conceptualizations of the past. Moving to the two stories at hand, I examine their multiple modes of temporality and historicity as evidence of a restless past that intrudes on the present. The final two sections of this chapter closely read the motifs of wandering and blood in the stories to show how the gothic complements the Judaic and activates Agnon's history not only temporally but also thematically and aesthetically.

In "The Dance of Death" and "The Lady and the Peddler," the gothic shapes Agnon's vision of Jewish history on several levels: in the emphasis on fear and anxiety as defining features of the Jewish presence in Europe; in the depiction of time as cyclical and the past as perpetually returning to and rupturing the present; in the thematization of these phenomena through supernatural figures; and, finally, in the portrayal of historic Jewish experiences in terms of certain key motifs that mediate between the gothic and the Judaic. The persistent gothic image of the past that accompanies Agnon's modernism points to anxieties of the present and parallels similarly jarring encounters in gothic literature, in which, as Fred Botting notes, "gothic figures have continued to shadow the progress of modernity with counter-narratives displaying the underside of enlightenment and humanist values."[10] As the dreams of Zionism came ever closer to realization while blood flowed in the fields of Agnon's lost world, the lines collapsed between the gothic and the modern, the past and the present, the dead and the living, creating fertile ground for these stories.

Agnon's Jewish Gothic: Critical Repressions

Though doomed love, death, and violence are prominent themes in Agnon's oeuvre, they are not the ones with which he is primarily correlated. As the inimitable master of the Hebrew language in all its forms, a practitioner of a densely nuanced and allusive poetics, and the gatekeeper of the Eastern European Jewish past, Agnon is imbued with a gravitas that precludes the thrills and chills associated with the gothic. As such, Miriam Roshwald's denial of Agnon's gothicism, though perhaps more explicit than most, is typical. "Agnon could have been compared with the nineteenth-century Gothic writers in England, notorious for their flair for mystery and terror set among medieval castles, ruins, and cemeteries," she observes. "But the similarity is totally misleading. Ruins and cemeteries in Agnon's writings

are not settings for theatrical effects, but form an integral part of the scheme of the Jewish shtetl. Even though occasionally Agnon indulges his gnomish imagination in a 'Gothic' prank, ultimately it leads to a serious . . . purpose and not to a cathartic thrill."[11] This evaluation is based on a misrepresentation of the gothic, which, as a vast body of criticism attests, amounts to more than the "theatrical effects" and "cathartic thrills" with which it is often disparagingly associated.

Numerous critics have acknowledged Agnon's proclivity for the macabre and the supernatural, but most consider it a characteristic of the great author's unrefined first steps. Gershon Shaked, for example, observes that "the sentimental foundation dominated" in Agnon's early works.[12] These features, he argues, provided the counterpoint to the ironic distance that Agnon was developing and for which he would become famous; as the author matured, the poetics of "emotional excess," associated with the "nonrealistic" (בלתי-ריאליסטי or לא-ריאליסטי) mode of some of his stories, diminished.[13] Some critics invoke the term *gothic* to signal the triviality of characteristics associated predominantly with Agnon's early style, while others eschew this term altogether in favor of the more serious *romantic*, a related term more acceptable for an author of Agnon's stature.[14] Shaked attributes the author's "sentimental topics," preoccupation with death, and "melodramatic style" primarily to the German and Scandinavian romantic traditions and to neoromanticism, read as antithetical to Judaic motifs.[15] That Romanticism offers a more palatable framework for Agnon's gothic writing is evident even in Arnold Band's monograph on Agnon's work, *Nostalgia and Nightmare*, one of the only studies to have recognized and meaningfully engaged with Agnon's gothicism as an integral component of his poetics.[16]

The critical literature on Agnon attributes his gothic propensities, however they are designated, to two influences that were formative in Agnon's education and background: European, especially German, secular literature by authors such as E. T. A. Hoffmann, and the Jewish mystical tradition. Though both these influences undoubtedly played a role in the development of Agnon's gothic poetics, I am interested more in the tendencies with which they are associated in Agnon's writing than in identifying their source. Moreover, this approach not only fails to differentiate between the gothic and Romanticism, resulting in the occlusion of significant forces in Agnon's stories, but it also, as we see in Roshwald's statement and in studies by Shaked and others, presumes an inherent antithesis between the

concerns of secular European literature and those of a world governed by Jewish tradition.

The latter point speaks to one of the most popular critical orientations toward Agnon and his work: the author's duality. This duality takes several frequently cited forms: Agnon's works encompass both the realistic and the nonrealistic; they both conceal and reveal; they can be characterized as both nightmare and nostalgia; they are both "revolutionary and traditionalist"; and, most significantly for my analysis, they subscribe to incompatible themes espoused by European Romanticism and Jewish tradition.[17] Yet certain expressions of Judaic faith, such as Jewish mysticism and Hassidism, are readily associated with a spiritual fervor similar to that of Romanticism. The intense emotions brought on by the romantic encounter with nature and the sublime find expression in the extreme emotional and psychological states depicted by gothic literature.

Positioning the gothic as a counterforce to Agnon's Judaism, then, charts a rigid literary cartography of mutually exclusive poetics and praxis, despite the constant trespass evidenced by Agnon's texts. Further, it discounts key characteristics of these texts' representation of the past. Whereas romantic authors and poets idealized the past—particularly the medieval era—imagining it in terms of a "lost paradise," authors of gothic texts look to the distant past with fascination tinged with dread.[18] The past in the gothic threatens rather than comforts because it is not fully consigned to the past: it repeatedly breaches its own bounds and disrupts the present, exposing its dark underpinnings. Band titled his study *Nostalgia and Nightmare* to express what he saw as the two "antithetical but complementary" focal points of Agnon's "sentiment," the romantic and the modern, because they offer different modes of engagement with the past.[19] Nostalgia is aligned with the lost traditional Jewish world, while nightmare expresses its violent destruction. If, in addition to the *attitude* Agnon's stories convey regarding the historical past, we also consider the *structure* of history as it emerges in his fiction, then we can understand how the "nightmare" of Band's title encompasses not only the modern but also the gothic.

Already evident in his earliest stories, written at the turn of the century, Agnon's gothic inclinations intensify in the two decades or so after his return to Palestine from Berlin, from the 1920s to the 1940s. Though his "neoromantic" stories are identified primarily with his period in Jaffa and considered representative of youthful literary experimentation, his post-Weimar years spawned some of the most gothic stories in his oeuvre,

including "Yatom ve-almana" (An orphan and a widow, 1931); "Ha-yalda ha-meta" (The dead girl, 1932, 1935); "Kol ha-em" ("The Mother's Voice," 1941); "Ha-lev ve-ha-einayim" ("Heart and Eyes," 1943); and "The Lady and the Peddler"; as well as revisions of earlier stories, such as "The Dance of Death" and "Ḥupat dodim" (The bridal canopy, 1931), originally published in 1913 as "Ha-ḥupa ha-sheḥora" (The black bridal canopy).[20]

In these stories and others, the gothic sensibility prevails not as a counterforce to the Jewish world of the past but as an integral component of it: a gaunt orphan's corpse prays with other departed souls in the great synagogue; a Polish king's Jewish wife wanders restlessly after death; a girl rises from the grave after being buried prematurely in an effort to comply with halacha. Here, then, the opposition between the gothic and the Judaic collapses. Far from posing a challenge to the "portrayal of a traditional Jewish milieu," the gothic mode in these stories intensifies their Jewish mores, offering concrete manifestations of otherwise abstract Judaic notions such as *ha-olam ha-ba* (the world to come), *tohara* (purity), and *galut* (exile). Clearly, the young Czaczkes who conceived of "Ha-panas" (The lantern) in Buczacz and revised it for publication during World War I was not so far removed from the revered S. Y. Agnon who, almost four decades later, would use the same gothic motifs to comment on contemporary Jewish crises. Like the vision of history his gothic tales espouse, Agnon returns again and again in his career to the terror, fear, and anxiety that characterize both the gothic and the modern confrontation with the present.

Agnon's Historiography

Though the preoccupation with the past is one of the characteristic features of gothic literature, the gothic has little interest in historical veracity, revealing more about the present's anxieties than about the past as it was. The gothic past is the site of paradox, housing the finest and most virtuous sentiments as well as the most barbaric and violent ones. Gothic authors strove to evoke the distant past not only by setting their narratives in medieval times but also, occasionally, by fabricating their historicity, through devices such as the discovered manuscript. Such devices operated both outside and inside these texts, ascribing to them a sense of historical authenticity and contributing to the aura of mystery suffusing their plots.[21]

Perhaps the most forceful feature of gothic historicity has to do with the supernatural figures that populate this fiction, calculated to terrify

readers because of their ability to cross back over the boundary between life and death. Reanimated representatives of the past, they threaten the present with long-forgotten curses, buried secrets, and unfinished business. Explained or unexplained supernatural figures and events distort temporal progression and contribute to the subjective affective experience of reading gothic texts. Invasive, disruptive, and violent, the past in gothic fiction surfaces in a present trying desperately to maintain an illusion of wholeness and peace, exposing the chaos that reigns.

This gothic vision of the past helps shape "The Dance of Death" and "The Lady and the Peddler." Agnon's pronounced historicity is often conceptualized as a window into the lost world of Galician and Polish Jewry, affording a gaze that is nostalgic and wistful at the same time that it is critical and ironic.[22] In these gothic stories, Agnon structures the past poetically: not as a rupture of linear progress—since history for him is not linear, even when it involves redemption—but as a repeated series of ruptures. The cyclical temporality that operates in many of his stories gestures to the modern and its redemptive possibilities. At the same time, it adorns the experience of modernity with the inescapable shadows of a dark and violent past—a specific historical event or a more general pattern—destined to repeat itself. Agnon also invites the past's returns by evoking multiple temporalities through his distinctively historicized Hebrew and through allusion and intertextuality. In these stories, those temporal and historical frameworks are complemented by elements more readily associated with gothic literature: supernatural beings, a macabre atmosphere, and the central gothic motifs of blood and the Wandering Jew.

The gothic, which works to resist both historical forgetting and romantic idealizing of the past, is certainly not the only force that shapes European Jewish history in Agnon's fiction. Still, even texts that are not predominantly gothic articulate key historical tensions by drawing from gothic conventions. The morbid essay "Ir ha-metim" (City of the dead, 1907), about Agnon's hometown, Buczacz, and its inhabitants' "fondness for death," signals one of Agnon's earliest forays into this mode and coincides with the publication of "Ha-panas" and "Toitentans." The fact that it is nonfiction makes Agnon's invocation of gothic imagery noteworthy, suggesting that his aesthetic repertoire developed in tandem with his preoccupation with history. The collection *Sipurey Polin* (*Stories of Poland*), whose tales engage with Jewish settlement in Poland, demonstrates the primacy of the Jewish past and of historiography in Agnon's mind.[23] The gothic framework of

many of these historicized depictions enables the mediation between the Jewish and the non-Jewish elements of this history and exposes their interdependence. Straddling the line between legend and history, the stories in *Sipurey Polin* are set in an "Agnonian time and space," in Boris Kotlerman's phrase, distinct from concrete events and historical conventions.[24] Beyond *Sipurey Polin*, several stories about ravaged Jewish communities probe questions of historical memory and forgetting by drawing on gothic imagery and atmosphere. These include "Bein ha-bayit la-ḥatser" (Between the house and the fence), later titled "Im knisat ha-yom" ("At the Outset of the Day," 1943); "Ba-derekh" ("On the Road," 1944); and "Ha-siman" ("The Sign," 1943). "On the Road" evokes medieval elements in its depiction of this destruction, telling of a narrator who finds himself in the midst of a small remnant of a massacred medieval German Jewish community. The medieval revisits the present, framing the contemporary events that are themselves seldom articulated explicitly.

Agnon was not alone in evoking the medieval past to comment on (or avoid) the violent events of the present. In his preface to a 1945 collection of Hebrew narrative and liturgical poems written in response to contemporary antisemitism in Germany and France, Abraham Meir Haberman asserts, "These days it is incumbent upon us to read again these ancient texts. We have not expected that the Middle Ages would come back to haunt us. . . . The Middle Ages are back with us, on a greater scale, and with even greater ferocity."[25] Explicitly linking the barbaric historical past with the violence of the present, Haberman calls on Jewish readers of Hebrew to return to their ancient texts to help exorcise the specter of the Middle Ages. Zalman Schneour's 1913 poem "Yemei ha-beinayim mitkarvim" ("The Middle Ages Draw Near"), written in the aftermath of the Beilis blood libel, makes dramatic use of gothic imagery such as the raven to personify this historical era as an embodiment of antisemitic violence risen again in the present. Shaul Tchernihovsky's ballad "Shney ha-kvarim" (The two graves, 1942) forges a connection between the persecution of the Jews during the Crusades and the growing awareness of the scope of the Holocaust. As in Agnon's stories, these texts' disconcerting depictions of the barbaric past threatening the present exemplify one of the gothic's paradigmatic features.

Agnon's historical sensibility, as expressed in his fiction, changed over the course of his life. Gershom Scholem notes that after World War II, Agnon shifts from a poetic historicity to a more "ethnographic" one charged with the task of memorialization and preservation.[26] The seeming absence from

Agnon's works of the Holocaust, the greatest catastrophe in modern Jewish history, has attracted critical attention. Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi charts the shifts in Agnon's understanding of the role of the Jewish author who represents catastrophe "from chronicler to threnodist," from an author "who had set out to write of the internal collapse of European Jewish civilization" to one "who finds himself bereft of his subject."[27] Identifying cyclical phases in his fiction moving from irony to elegy and, finally, despair, she points to his use of diverse historical-literary approaches to these events, including straightforward ethnographic preservation, piyyut or lamentation, and restoration. Dan Laor argues that the Holocaust reverberates in a sizeable portion of Agnon's oeuvre, but he points to Agnon's "spiritual and esthetic predicament in addressing it" as evidenced through "unfinished stories, ideological contradictions, even return to traditional literary genres."[28] He observes Gershom Scholem's disappointment regarding what he considered to be increasingly ethnographic tendencies in Agnon's writing, and ultimately asserts that "the artistic enterprise of Agnon after the Holocaust [is] commemorating the Holocaust."[29] Alan Mintz, too, interprets Agnon's literary confrontation with the Holocaust as "an alternative to forms of memorialization that brought destruction and loss to the forefront," an authorial choice "to recreate in words what is lost."[30] Hillel Weiss, addressing those works that deal indirectly with the Holocaust, identifies Agnon's employment of "unique disguises to escape into the German past in its encounter with the Jewish past."[31] They all concur that the historical dimension of Agnon's fiction, despite its lack of explicit engagement with the events of the Holocaust itself, is profoundly affected by it.

Beyond specific historic frameworks such as that of the Holocaust, Michal Arbel interprets Agnon's "constant engagement with the past" as producing writing that is "a gravestone" for what has been and no longer exists.[32] Identifying a mystical, redemptive "historiosophy" at odds with and critical of the present-centered Zionist notion of redemption, she contrasts the cyclical temporality of certain Agnon stories with the "realistic" linear history associated with nationalism. The act of writing, defined by this tension, is linked to the memory of loss and catastrophe but ultimately consigns the past to its grave. Yet how is it then possible to reconcile the circular temporality she rightly identifies with the stasis and finality of the grave? By contrast to Arbel, I interpret this temporality as evidence that the past *cannot* be buried. Rather, it constantly and energetically impinges on the present. This is clear in both the explicit thematization of revenants

in Agnon's plots and the stories' more subtle metatextual investigations of the past's role in the present. In other words, if we consider Agnon's stories as a gravestone, we must acknowledge that the grave it marks will, inevitably, open.

As Agnon's use of the Hebrew language makes clear, his writing not only memorializes but also actively intervenes in history, inviting the past into the present. Gershom Scholem, the philosopher and historian recognized as the foremost modern scholar of Jewish mysticism, met Agnon in Germany, maintained a lifelong friendship with him in Israel, and translated his work into German. In his essay "Reflections on S. Y. Agnon," he discusses the Hebrew language as inherently weighted with history.[33] Whereas authors after Agnon are liberated from this heavy burden, Agnon and his contemporaries, writing at a critical moment for the transition of Hebrew into a spoken national language, had to shoulder it.[34] Jewish history resides in the Hebrew language itself, which was subject to modernization through literature at the same time as it had to contend with the perpetual revisitations of its own past. Agnon, Scholem points out, with his mastery of midrashic and biblical Hebrew and his prolific reading of secular Western literature, was well positioned to delve into various historical forms of the Hebrew language while shaping its most modern contours.

Commenting on Scholem's essay, Kenneth Hart Green argues that Agnon's idiosyncratic, self-consciously historicized Hebrew expresses Scholem's nonrational Jewish historiography.[35] Agnon's language operates via "a conscious memory of the past as marching (even if unseen) alongside the present and the future."[36] In the historic transition of Hebrew from a literary to a spoken language in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Agnon maintains Hebrew's past within his development of the language in a contemporary cultural milieu. Hebrew "is not only the product of history, but it is also the shaper of history," and no author has been better equipped to carry out this process than Agnon, whose Hebrew uncovered for Scholem "poetic truths about history."[37] As such, Agnon plays a central role in the development of Scholem's historiography. "If Scholem 'invented' a historical unfolding of medieval Jewish mysticism for the benefit of modern Jews," argues Green, "he did so with the aid of Agnon, who showed in his unique Hebrew literary style how it is possible to historically express, preserve, and advance (rather than betray) an ancient wisdom by letting it speak in a modern 'dialectical' idiom."[38] This interpretation presents Agnon's language as epitomizing a vision of history that brings the past into

inevitable, dynamic interaction with the present. Though one may argue that modern Hebrew, rooted in biblical Hebrew and necessarily dependent on classical texts for its development, by definition (not only in Agnon) brings its own history into the present, Agnon's self-conscious use of the language's myriad historical manifestations points to a highly considered historiographic strategy residing in his poetic language.

Agnon's mastery of Hebrew means that his evocation of diverse points in its history through a tactical use of language is fully accessible to a handful of erudite readers. But the gothic, too, hosts the coexistence of the past and the present, offering an expression of the dynamic presence of history that is immediately evident. Indeed, the resurrection of spoken Hebrew is itself a gothic story.[39] Just as the gothic affords the ability to sustain the dead in the world of the living, so does it create the conditions for the past's sustenance in the present. In Agnon's narratives, the gothic vision of history invites and accommodates the intrusions of the violent past in an uneasy present.

Temporality and Historicity in "The Dance of Death" and "The Lady and the Peddler"

It is clear why a story like "The Dance of Death," which Agnon wrote before bursting into the Hebrew literary scene in Palestine, was later included among the folkloristic-historical tales of *Sipurey Polin*. It offers a poetic ethnography chronicling certain customs of Polish Jewry at the same time that it narrates a melodramatic tragedy culled from the annals of Polish Jewish folk history. "The Lady and the Peddler" looks to the timeless past of the folktale to subvert contemporary antisemitic propaganda.[40] Both stories structure history through a gothic temporality characterized by the compulsive returns of a barbarous, threatening past. The ideal vehicle for the expression of the fear and anxiety provoked by antisemitic violence in Europe, this temporality also articulates the dynamism of the Jewish past—the way it revisits, affects, and clings to the no less frightening present.

"The Dance of Death" is perhaps the most quintessentially gothic tale in Agnon's oeuvre. Set in a Polish town in an unspecified past, it depicts a wealthy father of a beloved only daughter on the eve of her wedding. The father is denied a request to allow his daughter to wear silk on her wedding day, and though he accepts the ruling, he remains uneasy and preoccupied with it. As the couple stands beneath the wedding canopy surrounded by

guests, the arrival of a feudal lord or count (פריץ) on horseback evokes a fearful tremor from the celebrants, who meekly invite him to join the wedding party. Struck by the bride's beauty, though, he unsheathes his sword, slits the throat of the groom, and kidnaps the young woman. The guests can only watch this horrific scene unfold, and the bride's cries for help are for naught. In her kidnapper's castle, the bride spends her days gazing from the window in the direction of her town, eventually dying of grief. After death, she rises from her grave every midnight for a danse macabre with the specter of her murdered groom.

The danse macabre motif illuminates the affinity between the Christian European sensibility and the Judaic.[41] The term *meḥolat ha-mavet*, which ostensibly refers to the spectral dance of the tragic couple, is a Hebrew rendering of the French *danse macabre*.[42] One of the most popular nineteenth-century motifs in European arts and literature, the danse macabre can be traced back to performances in Christian weddings in the fourteenth century and in Jewish weddings by the seventeenth century, a reminder, in the midst of the most joyous occasion, of the universality and inevitability of death.[43] In Agnon's hands, the danse macabre motif brings together death and power not to demonstrate that the finality of death equalizes the powerful and the powerless but that it actually makes possible the transgression of the boundary dividing them.

The groom's kittel, a key image in the story, offers a direct parallel to the danse macabre: the kittel, a simple white linen robe worn by Ashkenazi Jews in weddings and on certain holidays, is also used as a burial shroud for men.[44] Emblematic of purity and simplicity, the pocketless kittel disallows the deceased to bring his earthly possessions to his grave, signifying the equality of all in death—precisely the motivation of the danse macabre. In the story, however, burying the groom in his bloodstained kittel will not only equalize power relations but will also compensate for his powerlessness in life by fueling his vengeful resurrection: folk belief transforms the kittel into a vehicle of revenge. Yet the groom declines this opportunity, instead using his supernatural ability to return from death to consummate his interrupted love.

The full title of the story, "The Dance of Death, or the Beloved and the Pleasant," links the European danse macabre to the citation in the story's epigraph from *Kinat David*, King David's lamentation for Shaul and Yonathan after their death in battle with the Philistines: "Beloved and pleasant in their life, in death they were not parted." Agnon's reference to

Kinat David alters the purpose of the danse macabre: whereas the dance of death reminded its medieval audience that death spares no one, from the poorest beggar to the most powerful pope, the epigraph suggests that love can transcend death, allowing the persecuted to overcome their earthly oppressors—whether Philistine warriors, Central European crusaders, or Polish aristocrats. In its juxtaposition with the epigraph, the danse macabre motif not only harks to the generally gothic theme of the intertwining of love and death but also alludes to various flash points in Jewish history: biblical, medieval, and post-Enlightenment.

The story's subtly multifaceted historicity complements its narrative temporality. "The Dance of Death" is a frame story. Its opening paragraph creates suspense and temporal displacement between the narrative frame, in which the narrator announces his intent to tell the story, and the story he will tell, which is embedded within it.[45] The first sentence of the embedded narrative offers its only temporal marker: "בימים מקדם" (long ago), suggesting an ahistorical, folkloric notion of time. The frame device, however, suggests that the narrator and the reader occupy a shared present, another of the story's multiple historical moments. Supplementing the distinctive historiography that Scholem identified in Agnon's Hebrew, the title, the epigraph, and the various intertextual allusions to both ancient and modern enemies of Israel, from the biblical battles against the Edomites to the pogroms of Eastern Europe, confirm this temporality.[46] The story is structured on the basis of both folkloric time and historical time, as Kotlerman has argued for the *Polin* collection as a whole. This is further complicated by an ambiguous narrative temporality: the narrator does not reveal how much time passes in any of the main sections of the story—before, during, and after the wedding. Though some readers have assumed that the bride spends months or even years with the count after she is kidnapped, the story provides no definitive evidence for such interpretations, resisting attempts to pin down its temporality.

These multiple temporalities and historical moments contribute to the story's different historiographic modes. Its attentive chronicling of Polish Jewish customs—related to weddings, burials, and legal decrees—point to a documentarian impulse that positions the text as recording or memorializing a community that no longer exists. The frame narrative, however, suggests a different engagement with history, situating the narrator in the reader's present and pointing to the cyclicity of the dramatic plot. Before the melancholy bride dies, she dons her wedding dress, the object of so much

tension earlier in the story, revisiting her moment of historical rupture. She dies wearing her dress and is buried not according to Judaic custom in a Jewish cemetery but in a non-Jewish grave, "קבר בקברות אל נכר"[47]—literally denoting "a grave among the graves of a foreign god," the phrase emphasizes the bride's estrangement from Judaic practice and identity.

However, though the bride's exile as a Jew in Eastern Europe reaches a tragic apex in her foreign burial, it is this improper burial that loosens the nail from her coffin, so to speak: this foreign grave will not be her final resting place. Her nightly reappearance as a ghost provides a consistent respite from the grave. The same is true for the groom. Buried on the spot where he was murdered in front of the old synagogue to allow him to avenge himself, he, too, is denied a proper grave. Instead of taking revenge on his murderer, though, he returns after death to dance with his spectral bride. Their regular nocturnal visitations, rather than a singular return of revenge, point to the same cyclical temporality that compels the bride to wear her wedding dress on the day she dies. Whether interpreted as triumphantly redemptive or tragically doomed, the spectral dance evokes an infinite loop. The two conceptions of history that emerge from the narrative structure are evident also in the plot: linear, documentary, and objective, on the one hand; and cyclical, fantastic, and subjective, on the other. As a chronicle, the story is situated in the lost past documented by the narrator at a later time. As a myth, it operates not in the historical past but in a timeless, recurrent past, illustrated by the repeated dance of death.

Like "The Dance of Death," "The Lady and the Peddler" is set in an unspecified past. It opens with a Jewish peddler wandering the Eastern European countryside with his wares on his back. He arrives at the isolated home of a crude woman who threatens him but eventually buys a hunting knife. When a storm approaches, he wanders around the forest and loses his way, returning to the woman and asking for shelter; she allows him to sleep in the barn. As the rain continues, he begins doing odd jobs for the "lady," who eventually invites him into the house and finally into her bed. As their relationship develops, it becomes clear to the reader that the woman is dangerous. Indeed, she makes little effort to conceal her intention of drinking the blood of the peddler, who is so naive that he cannot recognize the danger. She prepares food for him, yet she never eats; when he asks about the whereabouts of her previous husbands, she gestures at her belly. When he probes further, she warns him explicitly about her intentions: "'I drink men's blood and I eat human flesh.' As she spoke she embraced him

with all her might and placed her lips against his and sucked. 'I never imagined,' she said to him, 'that a Jew's flesh would be so sweet. Kiss me, my raven. . . . O my own sweet corpse!'"[48] Ignorant in love, he tries to quiet his nagging sense that something is not quite right: "This is the kind of poetic language that noblewomen must use when they address their husbands with affection."[49] Indeed, his fundamental misunderstanding of romantic love reveals a comic strain in the otherwise grim story. What does a Jewish peddler know about romantic love? Here Agnon acknowledges explicitly the kind of disjuncture that readers might expect between a practicing Jew and bourgeois romantic love, which parallels the assumed incompatibility between the Judaic and the romantic.

Whether he is truly in love with the lady or just victim to a perception of love that has invaded even the highly proscribed personal world of pious Jews, however, is irrelevant, because he does, in fact, become involved in a love affair with the lady. He finally senses danger—"even the bed made up for him shrieked, 'Pick up your feet and run!'"—and decides he must leave, but can only bring himself to move to the storeroom after having two ominous dreams.[50] One night, he suddenly feels compelled to recite the Shema, going outside to pray because of the crucifix on the wall. When he returns, he finds the lady on the floor of his room, bleeding from wounds she sustained while violently attempting to murder him in the darkness of the room. As he tries to revive her, she bites him, but she finds his Jewish blood intolerable and dies after a few days. The icy ground is too hard for burial, so he places her coffin on the roof, where birds devour her corpse.

Unchanged by the violent episode with the lady, the peddler continues to wander with his wares on his back, the archetypal Wandering Jew—without the characteristics that frightened British readers of nineteenth-century gothic. He is not threatening but pathetic, not cunning but naive, not evil but kind. Much as the circular temporality and perpetual returns of "The Dance of Death" are ambivalent, lending themselves to several contradictory interpretations ranging from triumph to futility, the same characteristic in "The Lady and the Peddler" courts ambiguity. The depiction of the peddler as hopelessly naive suggests a critique of his unreflective reentry into the circular temporality of wandering. At the same time, though, the story as a whole impugns the European stereotype of the Wandering Jew.

As in the earlier story, this one delineates a narrative temporality that mirrors the recurrence of violence in European Jewish history. The story begins with a folkloristic ahistoricity, offering specificity in neither time

nor place: "One day," recounts the omniscient narrator, the peddler "found himself in a wooded region far from any settlement."[51] It ends on the same note: "And that peddler took up his pack and traveled on from place to place, traveling and crying out his wares."[52] The story's final sentence might easily serve as its own first sentence, a narrative mirroring of the peddler's ceaseless meandering.

The story thematizes repetition in other ways. The peddler sells the lady the knife and then gets lost in the darkening forest, only to arrive at the lady's house once more. The lady herself has sated her bloodlust by murdering several previous husbands and intends to reenact the ritual on the peddler. In this story, unlike in "The Dance of Death," the timelessness suggested by the peddler's meanderings and by the fairy tale conventions to which Agnon seems to adhere in tone and diction are continually disrupted by markers of temporal specificity that provide a clear sense of time's passing: a sunset, the end of the rainy season, several months passing, five days later, and so on. Even these seeming disruptions, however, contribute to the story's cyclic temporality, as their main purpose is to indicate the perpetual stasis of the peddler regardless of time's passing. "I have to get out of here," thinks the peddler when he finally begins to comprehend that he is in danger. "If not now, then tomorrow morning. . . . When day broke, he would be on his way."[53] Yet he stays: "A day passed, a week passed, and he did not leave her house."[54] It is difficult to imagine that Agnon, in Palestine following reports of the atrocities blackening Europe a decade after Hitler's rise to power, could write such lines without awareness of their applicability to the events at hand.

The repetitions of both plots gesture at the returns of the stories themselves on the timeline of Jewish history, all the way to the contemporary events that contextualize their publication. The performance of this temporality is made possible by the most explicitly gothic elements of both stories: the ghosts in "The Dance of Death," who are able to traverse the boundary between death and life and return from the grave; the peddler in the "The Lady and the Peddler," whose resumed wandering restores the Jew to his gothic place and time, even as it reassigns his bloodlust to the Christian lady; and the vampiric lady herself, whose intolerance of Jewish blood confirms the Jew's inherent difference and ultimately makes possible the peddler's return to wandering and to his Jewishness. Agnon revisits these gothic devices to undermine and revise common antisemitic stereotypes while maintaining the notion of Jewish difference. In these two stories,

two themes, in particular, host these subversions and mediate between the gothic and the Jewish: wandering and blood. These themes trace a direct route from medieval folk beliefs to their consolidation in popular European gothic literature in the century and a half before World War I, and finally to their terrible apex in the anti-Jewish ideology of the Third Reich.

Perambulatory Narratives: The Wandering Jew

The legend of the Wandering Jew, a prominent figure in the gothic imagination, can be traced to the 1602 publication of a pamphlet in Germany by a student of Martin Luther's, at the height of Luther's antisemitic activity. The pamphlet builds on earlier versions of the story, in which the figure, not specified as Jewish, is punished with eternal life after he refuses to let Jesus rest on the Via Crucis; it replaces his eternal life with eternal wandering and his unspecified identity with a concrete Jewish identity.[55] Folklorists agree that the legend of the Wandering Jew took shape after the publication of the 1602 pamphlet and the subsequent rapid spread of the legend throughout Europe, as part of the Christological worldview. As R. Edelmann puts it, it was "a cunningly camouflaged statement of the new theology about its attitude towards the Jew and his position in the world, an attitude which in itself was not new but had only to be restated."[56] Jesus condemned the Jew to eternal wandering, and the figure, which became associated with Cain, emerged in British gothic literature as an archetype. Seldom the main character, he haunts the pages of gothic novels, entering, departing, and reappearing in the narrative. Having accumulated a wealth of knowledge over the centuries of his wandering, this supernatural, immortal being is highly intelligent and usually portrayed as either evil or miserable, desperate to do the one thing his immortality does not allow him: to die. The spatiality of the Wandering Jew complements the temporality of the Eternal Jew: he lacks a place and suffers from an overabundance of time.

The archetypal Wandering Jew reflects the antisemitism of British gothic literature since its inception, as Carol Margaret Davison argues in her important study. In the pages of gothic fiction, she shows, "wherever he appears . . . the question of the nature and parameters of European national identity, as constituted by various commercial, religious, and social practices and values, is raised."[57] The Wandering Jew came to represent the antithesis of the various European national identities that were coming into being. Stateless, unbound to temporal and physical laws, desiring death

yet unable to attain it—the Wandering Jew compelled European readers because he embodied difference. His representation in gothic fiction provided a useful contrast against which to define British national identity and helped crystallize this contrast in the popular imagination.

The Wandering Jew signifies twin specters haunting gothic literature, as Davison points out: Jewish assimilation and Jewish difference.[58] Jewish difference threatened the stability of European national identities from the outside, while the prospect of assimilation threatened to corrode it, unsuspected, from within. In Germany by the early nineteenth century and in England by the late eighteenth century, the medieval legend of the Wandering Jew began to be associated with the "Jewish Question" that emerged in the wake of debates about Jewish assimilation, transforming the Jew from a religious to a secular, political, racialized figure and rendering his representation increasingly sinister.[59] The legend itself is markedly ambivalent, regarding the Wandering Jew by turns with sympathy, admiration, and scorn, and depicting him as intelligent, handsome, or tragic.[60] His post-Enlightenment literary manifestations in both the German *Schauerroman* (terror novel) and British gothic literature, however, focused increasingly on the threat he posed. In Germany, France, and Britain, the birth pangs of national identity in the nineteenth century were accompanied by and defined against the development of the Wandering Jew from a religious outcast to a demonic vampire.[61] It is not difficult to identify parallels between these anxieties, articulated in the context of newly defined national identities, and those that would culminate in National Socialist ideology in the fourth decade of the twentieth century. The Nazi regime notoriously exploited antisemitic stereotypes, foremost among them that of the Eternal Jew, "*Die Ewige Jude*," in its propaganda materials. Though invoked in the service of genocide, the grotesque figure the Nazis reproduced on posters, newspapers, and films disseminated throughout the Third Reich was a direct descendent of the Wandering Jew who appeared in gothic literature as a counterpoint to rooted nativeness.[62]

The Wandering Jew as the figure haunting the margins of gothic literature and threatening national stability is maintained in "The Lady and the Peddler": he still haunts the margins, and he is still different. But Agnon appropriates his position and embraces the Jew's difference as a way of proclaiming his ever unassimilated national-cultural sensibility as distinctly Jewish. Maintaining the equation of Jewishness and difference, the story outlines the dangers of assimilation not to the rooted European Christian

but to the wandering European Jew himself. Furthermore, Agnon's story undermines the binary logic of home and exile, rootedness and wandering: rejecting assimilation as the means to rootedness, the story also challenges the stereotyped perception of wandering as profoundly derogatory.

Introduced as the familiar Wandering Jew, Agnon's peddler has an outward appearance that projects the despised Christian stereotype as it had developed by the nineteenth century: he carries a heavy pack on his back, wears distinctively Jewish clothes, and is obsequious in his interaction with the lady. That the narrator does not reveal the names of the two main characters, Joseph and Helen, until well into the story confirms the reader's understanding of them as archetypes.[63] However, despite the seeming concord between Agnon's peddler, most at home in wandering, and his predecessor in gothic literature, it becomes clear fairly quickly that neither he nor the lady conforms to associated stereotypes. As the story progresses, the peddler is revealed to be naive, vulnerable, kind, and rather stupid, a far cry from the worldly, cunning, sometimes tragic figure encompassed by the gothic paradigm of the Wandering Jew in novels such as Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1795) and Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820). Similarly, the so-called lady is crass, violent, and threatening—anything but noble. Beginning with its title, the story invites readers to rely on existing archetypes even as it almost immediately works to dismantle them.

Agnon's peddler gradually penetrates the most intimate recesses of the lady's home, but he does so by her own invitation and at his own peril. His increasing sense of security and comfort in the lady's house is inversely proportional to his observation of the *halachic mitzvoth*, the commandments of Jewish law, which proscribe every act. He stops eating kosher food, exchanges his peddler's clothes for "the garments of aristocracy," and falls in "with the people of the place until he [is] like one of them."[64] As the narrator asserts explicitly, "he had forgotten that she was a lady and he a Jew."[65] The lady, however, does not forget, referring to him as a Jew: "I never imagined . . . that a Jew's flesh would be so sweet," she exclaims while kissing him aggressively.[66] After their relationship deteriorates, he persistently questions her about her murdered husbands, and she asks: "You're a Jew, aren't you? . . . Well, the Jews don't believe in God, for if they believed in Him, they wouldn't have murdered Him. But if you do believe in God, pray to Him that you won't end up the way they did."[67] Though he sheds outward trappings of his Jewishness as he becomes more intimate with the lady, they both remain alert to their differing cultural sensibilities. It is this

awareness that allows him to explain away the most egregious signals she sends of her intention to devour him. Despite the comedic effect of this endeavor, the humor is laced with anxiety, not least on the part of the presumably distraught reader. How can the peddler not recognize the danger that openly announces itself? Does he believe that she accepts him as one of hers because he eats her food and dresses like a forest dweller? These questions would have surely resonated profoundly with Jewish readers in the 1940s.

It is worth noting that the sinister hospitality experienced by the peddler recalls a key motif in perhaps the most famous vampire narrative, Bram Stoker's 1897 novel *Dracula*. Hospitality in *Dracula* is a grotesque business, whether in the experience of the hapless Jonathan Harker, who finds himself a prisoner in Dracula's castle, or in the broader implications of Count Dracula's attempt to inhabit England, adulterating it with Transylvanian soil and with his own contaminating presence.

Though Agnon's unassuming and guileless peddler attributes his confusion regarding the lady's behavior to his being a (formerly) pious Jew, the narrator suggests that it is the peddler's naivete that prevents him from recognizing the lady's dark but readily apparent intentions. After the lady smiles ominously at him, the narrator observes that her smile is subject to interpretation: the "peddler, who was a naïve man, interpreted the laughter of that woman in his own favor and for his own benefit."[68] Though a practicing Jew like the peddler, the narrator is knowledgeable about romantic love. Drawing on biblical narrative to illustrate his knowledge, he delegitimizes the supposed incompatibility between romantic love and Judaic practice: "Anyone who has to do with women knows that a love that depends upon the physical bond alone will come to an end before long. And even if a man loves a woman as Samson loved Delilah, in the end she will mock him, in the end she will oppress him, until he wishes he were dead."[69] Nevertheless, the peddler's assumption that his ignorance of romantic love prevents his recognition of the many hints and even explicit assertions of the lady's murderous intent reveals the chasm between Jews and the hegemonic cultural sensibility that they have resisted and within which they have maintained this difference.

The story associates the act of wandering with Jewishness itself: the pause in the peddler's wandering not only results in his abandonment of Judaic practice and observance but also nearly costs him his life. He can resume his wandering and reclaim his Jewishness only after his sudden

urge to recite the Shema saves his life by taking him outside just when the lady enters the room to murder him. The lady's rejection of his blood at the end of the story, even as she hovers at the threshold of death, indicates that beneath his clothing, he is still a Jew. She cannot tolerate the taste of his "icy" Jewish blood, spits it out, and dies. At the same time as this scene corroborates Christian European fears that the assimilated Jew will always be different, it also demonstrates that it is precisely this difference that ultimately saves the Jew from the lady's fangs.

Agnon's rendition of the Wandering Jew explicitly restores *Jewishness* to a key gothic figure, one who was "a Christian invention" from its origins and subject to a "problematic de-historicization" in British gothic literature, to cite Edelmann and Davison, respectively.[70] The key transformation of the basis of the antisemitism undergirding representations of the Wandering Jew, from religious principles to secular, racialized notions, occurred in Germany in the mid-nineteenth century and in Britain by the fin de siècle.[71] This shift finds expression in Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya, or the Moor: A Romance of the Fifteenth Century* (1806), ostensibly about a black-skinned Moor, but which arguably deflects its Jewish author's internalization of contemporary British antisemitism onto a racial Other depicted as the Wandering Jew.[72] It is not by chance that the gothic emphasis of the Jew's ethnic difference over his religious difference coincided with the development of race-based nationalism in Europe.

By depicting the centrality of the Judaic in this gothic archetype, Agnon resists the Christian European attempt to appropriate Jewishness for its own purposes, reclaims religious practice and identity as central to the Jew, and reintroduces the European Jew into history, even as he critiques the repeated returns of this history in the continued wanderings of the peddler, who, as Band observes, is "probably no wiser for the nightmarish experience."[73] In the context of World War II, the Holocaust, and the looming establishment of the Jewish state, Agnon appropriates the Wandering Jew from what had become his dehistoricized antisemitic provenance, reinscribing his Judaism as a practice, as a confirmation and affirmation of his difference, and as the primary basis of his identity.

At the same time, in Agnon's vision, the Jew's return to history is not a return to *linear* history. By invoking multiple narratives and historicities in the story, he positions the peddler's cyclical movements as geographic as well as, and perhaps primarily, temporal. Agnon's Joseph wanders not only in the Eastern European forest where the story is set but also, via

allusion, through biblical Egypt and Hellenistic Greece, and via the legend of the Wandering Jew through eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain and Germany—themselves literary conduits into chronotopes as varied as Inquisition-era Spain and nineteenth-century Transylvania. As such, he evokes a multilayered historicity of recurrent returns that invites this figure, again, to haunt 1940s Europe.

Circulatory Stories: Blood

One of the distinctive traits of the European gothic representation of the Wandering Jew is his vampiric impulse: he must drink blood to sustain his immortality. The gothic representation of vampires coalesced various "discourses of blood," in David Biale's phrase, that predated it in centuries of European folk tradition.[74] The popularity of gothic literature ensured that these symbols and associations would be firmly entrenched in European minds by the fin de siècle. Besides its role as an elixir of supernatural power and immortality, blood in the gothic context carries multiple related significations. A currency of life and death, it courses through gothic fiction, signifying violence, transgression, corrupt genealogies, power, and vulnerability. From Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872), which briefly portrays a Wandering Jew who is also a vampire, to Stoker's *Dracula*, British literature by the early nineteenth century increasingly identified the vampire with the Wandering Jew.[75] Indeed, as Davison asserts, Stoker's infamous Count "represents the apogee in the development of the vampiric Wandering Jew in British gothic literature."[76] The vampire's mobility, indicated by his transnational inclinations, generates as much anxiety as his thirst for blood.[77] In the stories at hand, the significance of blood is evident not only in the convergence of the Wandering Jew and the vampire but also in the intersection of other blood idioms: its role in Judaic practice and law, its folk interpretations, and its signification of violence. In Agnon's appropriation of the "blood language" of the gothic, blood emerges as the very ink of the Jewish experience in Europe.[78]

In the Judaic context, the Torah states unequivocally "הדם, הוא הנפש" (the blood is life), a point that becomes the ironic motto of Count Dracula himself (Deuteronomy 12:23). The prohibition of the consumption of blood forms the basis for the Judaic dietary injunction to drain meat of its blood (Leviticus 7:26–27, 17:10–14). The rigorous rabbinic interpretation of this law, which instructs Jews to salt, broil, and boil meat until no drop of blood

remains, tinges with irony the tragedy of the centuries-long persecution of Jews on the basis of their supposed bloodlust. Indeed, it is impossible to reflect on the Jewish experience in Europe without considering the blood libel, the accusation, which persisted in Europe for centuries, that Jews kidnapped Christian children to use their pure blood in religious rituals such as the preparation of Passover matzah.[79] There is evidence linking the blood libel to the crucifixion of Christ, an event marked in Christian practice at around the same time that Passover is observed by Jews. This link takes us back to the Wandering Jew, whose interaction with Christ dooms him to eternal life—a punishment sustained, in gothic literature, by the consumption of blood. Further, the Jew's bloodlust was figured as a literalized manifestation of his parasitic nature, expressed through his involvement in commerce and usury as well as through his menacing sexuality, which threatened the social and moral fabric of the societies he penetrated.

Manifestations of the demonic Jew, Davison has shown, emerge in several gothic works explicitly in the context of posing a threat to British women, expressing "what was clearly regarded by many at the fin-de-siècle as the extremely unsettling idea of the physical union of male Jew and female non-Jew."[80] The blood spilled by the lady when she tries to kill the peddler points to Agnon's dismantling of such gender dynamics in the relations between Christians and Jews. To the antisemitic mind, the Jewish man was effeminate and lacking virility, a consequence of his circumcision, which has historically been confused with castration; at the same time, he was lascivious and lustful, and his eagerness to violate and corrupt pure Christian womanhood was a metaphor for his corrosive desire to take over the world.[81] Agnon's depiction of a lady as a bloodthirsty vampire threatening a foolish but kind peddler not only disrupts the Christian-versus-Jew dynamic of violence and power but also upends the notions of femininity and masculinity that so often inform this dynamic, from gothic tales of helpless heroines imprisoned and dominated by evil men to Nazi images of hook-nosed men leering at Aryan milkmaids. As Biale has shown in the context of National Socialist ideology, the "main corporeal anxiety was sexual. . . . Because this kind of pollution required injection of the pure essence of blood, the obvious vector was a Jewish man assaulting an Aryan woman. While the blood libel was less gender-specific, *Rassenschande* had a rigid gender code."[82] It is blood that activates the heart of these gendered anxieties. The Nazis' racial utopia depended on, first and foremost, the protection of the purity of German blood. "If the blood libel reflects fear of

the *extraction* of Christian blood for Jewish rituals," Biale points out, "'race pollution' involves the *injection* of alien blood into the bloodstream of the Aryan nation."[83]

The blood libel, which promoted the depiction of the Jew as a parasite or a vampire sucking the lifeblood of his host society, is one of several "discourses of blood" that expressed different historical dimensions of antisemitism, from the medieval to the modern. While the blood libel spoke to a medieval Christian suspicion of an isolated, alien community, the fear of Jewish blood pollution reflected modern secular apprehensions about assimilation and integration, which belied an essential, radical difference that threatened the hegemony of European culture and biology.[84] The characterization of "Nazi anti-Semitism as *both* medieval and modern" is based on the Nazi mobilization of various "blood languages" rooted in diverse historical stereotypes that converged in the gothic representation of vampires.[85] Observing that "vampire stories and the blood accusation against Jews have a family resemblance, if not more," Biale connects "the same kind of anxieties over race, nationalism, and sexuality that pervade modern vampire stories" to the blood libel: "It may well be a coincidence that Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) was published just as the modern ritual-murder accusation was reaching its crescendo, but both traffic in the same idea that those who threaten the stability of the nation do so by sucking its blood."[86] As numerous studies have shown, it was no coincidence. Gothic fiction in Europe buttressed an energetic public interest in vampires, explicitly linked to antisemitism and to fears related to modernization, that persisted into World War I.[87] Agnon's revisions of these "blood languages" respond to the multilayered historicity of antisemitic blood discourse and imagery in kind.

Several studies have noted explicit allusions to the blood libel in Agnon's writing, reading it as one component of his literary-historical project.[88] Though the two stories at hand do not engage directly with historical instances of the blood libel, they represent blood in ways that subvert the stereotype associating Jews with bloodlust, reassigning this bloodlust to Christians. Band addresses this phenomenon specifically in the context of the blood libel allusion in "The Lady and the Peddler," pointing to the story's "paradigmatic projection of Christianity's guilt and desires, its imaginary construction of those they dominate."[89] Agnon thus not only disrupts the Christian worldview and the Jew's assigned place within it but also holds up a dark mirror to European antisemitism. The thematization of the blood

libel in the figure of the vampire writes the violent history of European Jews in the literary language of those eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European texts that continued to propagate, popularize, and legitimize this violence.

In Agnon's story, the lady's dependence on human blood for sustenance establishes a fundamental difference between her and the peddler by dehumanizing her. Even before the peddler finally understands the fate that is about to befall him, he is puzzled and disturbed by her refusal to join him at meals and questions her abstention from food on several occasions. Unable to participate in the social act of taking meals together with her companion, the lady is beholden to a perversion of Jewish dietary laws—the same dietary laws that the peddler has abandoned. The complex, highly proscribed laws of kashruth not only made social relations between Christians and pious Jews nearly impossible in Europe, but they were also the basis for some of the worst misconceptions about Judaic practice writ large, feeding extant suspicions about Judaism. Though the narrator informs us that Joseph himself had taken upon himself the customs of food and dress of "people of that place," the truth is that the lady herself, his hostess and the house's owner, does not share these customs, having abandoned human habits long ago. In fact, despite Joseph's ministrations, she finally dies five days after wounding herself because "whatever food she tried to eat she would throw up, for she had already forgotten the science of eating ordinary human food, as it was her practice to eat the flesh of her husbands whom she slaughtered and to drink their blood."[90]

The gulf of difference between the lady and the peddler exists, just as the antisemitic worldview insists; but its contours are dictated first and foremost by the nefarious needs of the lady and not by the naive foolishness of the peddler. She thus takes on the role of caricatured Jew in the story, not only owing to her bloodlust but also in her extreme perversion of Jewish difference, which takes her beyond the realm of the human. For his part, the peddler's abandonment of Jewish dietary laws implies that he has transgressed and consumed blood literally by eating nonkosher meat, suggesting that it is assimilation into a Christian milieu that can transform the Jew into the monstrous stereotype promulgated by non-Jews.

As the lady brings to life an inverted version of the antisemitic stereotype of the bloodsucking Jew, the peddler takes on the characteristics of the gothic victim. On the night the lady will attempt to murder him, he is compelled to go outside: "That night was a winter night. The earth was covered

with snow and the sky was congealed and turbid. He looked up to the sky and saw no spark of light; he looked to the ground and he could not make out his own feet. Suddenly he saw himself as though imprisoned in a forest in the midst of the snow around him that was being covered over by new snow. And he himself was also being covered over. He uprooted his feet and began to run."[91] Evoking imprisonment in the form of one of the most terrifying conventions in the gothic arsenal, live burial, Agnon's portrait of the peddler suggests that he is the victim not only of the vampire-lady but also of her milieu. Live burial, a phenomenon that famously preoccupied Edgar Allan Poe in life, is depicted as a central horror in many of his stories, including "Berenice" (1835), "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839), "The Premature Burial" (1844), "The Cask of Amontillado" (1846), and others. Agnon himself was no stranger to the concept. As Dov Sadan has shown, his stories indirectly express the opposition by the maskilim (proponents of the Haskalah, or Jewish Enlightenment) to the Judaic custom of interment soon after death, an act that risked premature burial.[92] In "Ha-yalda hameta" (The dead girl, 1932), Agnon depicts premature burial literally; in "The Lady and the Peddler," the burial is less literal but nevertheless material and real. The foreboding forest, the suffocating snow, the dark night—all conspire against the Jew, delaying his departure, imprisoning him, swallowing him alive. He is saved only when he finally "uproots" himself (עקר את רגליו) and returns to wandering. The return to wandering, however, is clearly not accompanied by increased wisdom. The inversion of the gothic victim and perpetrator results in a Jew who is a victim of his own naivete as much as of the vampire who would consume him.

"The Lady and the Peddler" maintains the Jew's difference. At the same time, it subverts the antisemitic image of the vampiric Jew by assigning bloodlust to the Christian hostess, illustrating the idea that antisemitism, in Davison's words, "has been the real vampire that has birthed demons by projecting its macabre tendencies onto the Jew."[93] Following Adorno and Horkheimer, Davison discusses Nazism in the context of the dark mirror that antisemitic rhetoric holds up to those who propagate it: "Ironically, in its organization and belief system, Nazism resembles Judaism as it had been demonically portrayed in the European world-view: it was a conspiratorial, millenarian, kabbalistically grounded secret society whose leader regarded himself as the new German messiah."[94] Agnon's story confronts the insidious, centuries-old stereotypes of Jewish bloodlust and the Wandering Jew to rewrite European history, undermining the stereotypes that dictated the

terms of Jewish-Christian relations as cemented in the popular European imagination by gothic literature, and adapting their symbols to confront the demons that threatened Jewish particularity.

In "The Dance of Death," too, "blood languages" circulate between the Jewish and the anti-Jewish, locking these two worldviews in their own macabre dance. The frame narrative of "The Dance of Death" opens and closes at the scene of the crime, the square before the great synagogue. Already in the second sentence, blood emerges as a central symbol. Foreshadowing the tragedy of the embedded narrative, the narrator describes the red weeds sprouting from the site of the groom's murder, a spot where weddings are not performed and where Kohanim, priests, do not tread. We learn later that the groom has been interred in the spot of his murder to facilitate vengeance. His corpse contaminates the earth and bars the proximity of priests. The spilled blood, "the soul of the flesh" in Jewish tradition, becomes a metonymy of the groom's murder.[95]

Despite the arid, measured symmetry of the narrator's words, the melodramatic moment of the groom's death is repetitive and excruciatingly concrete:

> The groom fell to the earth and a sad laugh hovered on his lips. He silently spread his arms to dance with the bride. In his throat was an oily, sweet moistness. The skin of his neck contracted and his lifeblood flowed from his neck. A hint of laughter played on his lips, his tongue between his lips. He silently lifted his eyes before the face of his bride, and his bride he did not see. His blood flowed in his eyes, and in his blood he wallowed. The groom died. Before the great synagogue he lay dead. From his neck flowed his blood on the whiteness of his clothes and on his wedding attire.[96]

The vivid depiction of the groom's blood—seeping into the earth in the square in front of the great synagogue, staining his white wedding attire, hemorrhaging from his slit throat—is uncharacteristic for a story whose characters are enigmatic and whose plot hints at cryptic undercurrents. A decidedly physical depiction, it contrasts with the spectral form the groom will take at the end of the story.

Blood in this scene is a material substance, as concrete as the silk gown on which the narrator elaborates in the first half of the story. Whereas the narrator's disproportionate focus on the matter of the silk clothes links them to power and money, suggesting a symbolic relation to the blood that will be spilled at the wedding, the materiality of the blood in the moments following the murder reveals its substance. The celebrants-turned-mourners,

though utterly impotent themselves, believe that burying the groom in his bloodstained clothing and shoes will avenge his murder. As a physical element and not only a symbol, blood is power. As such, this story, too, appropriates the antisemitic vocabulary utilized by gothic literature to express fear of corrupting external elements. In Agnon's adaptation, however, the power offered by blood goes unclaimed. With its potential to disrupt the victim/oppressor dichotomy that structures many European gothic narratives, the burial of the groom in his bloody kittel only demonstrates his dissociation from such earthly concerns. While he does rise from his grave, he does so not to exact vengeance but to reunite with his bride.[97]

Where the Jewish groom is ultimately spirit, the Polish count is entirely physical. His blood, the story suggests, primarily functions as the source of his violent lust: on seeing the bride at her wedding, his "blood vessels became confused."[98] His physical and political power belies a profound moral weakness, signified by his confused blood, and satiated only through the *spilling* of blood. In the story's penultimate scene, he returns from the hunt to find his Jewish bride, clad in her wedding gown, dead. His hunting clothes, "soiled with blood," mirror the bloodstained kittel of the unfortunate groom, paralleling the transgression of murder with the distinctly un-Jewish pastime of hunting animals for sport.[99] Both acts revise the lust for sex and for blood ascribed in the antisemitic imagination to Jews, exposing how these traits actually correspond to the nature and practice of the murderous Pole. Besides enhancing the macabre atmosphere of the story, the juxtaposition of the bloody garments—the count's hunting attire and the groom's pure white kittel—forcefully announces their difference and coalesces the tension between power and powerlessness even as it laces both with ambivalence. If the Torah instructs us that "the blood is the life," the gothic tradition suggests that it is also very much *the death*, an idea that was always already enfolded in the rabbinic understanding of blood. Blood goes both ways: it sustains, purifies, and empowers, but it can also defile, corrupt, and weaken. Acknowledging this tense duality in the figures of the groom and the count, Agnon's story accentuates the gothic tenor in the experience of Eastern European Jews.

The story clearly invokes the gothic economy in which blood is the foremost currency, first through the preoccupation with material wealth, conveyed through the father's dissatisfaction with the matter of the silk clothing, which may have precipitated the tragedy. It also calls on this gothic economy through the white kittel, whose bloodstains imbue the

groom with the ability to avenge himself after death, and through the Polish count's nonchalant and unimpeded spilling of blood, a habit that indicates his political power. At the same time, the story inscribes the count's power as a moral failing and indicates that the groom is not the sort of man whose blood vessels would become confused. Renouncing the opportunity offered by his spilled blood to overturn in death the power relations that sealed his fate in life, the groom chooses instead to dance with his spectral beloved. In this story, as in the later one, the treatment of blood helps dismantle antisemitic stereotypes and reflect them back at their inventors.[100] The language of blood circulates from the medieval anti-Jewish lexicon to the nineteenth century and into the 1930s, appropriated by Agnon to express the history of persecution of Eastern European Jews. Even as these stories disown and reassign the most insidious and persistent antisemitic tropes, they look back to the images and devices of the gothic to do so.

Back to the Present

"The Dance of Death" and "The Lady and the Peddler," as noted early in this chapter, were written in the context of key moments in twentieth-century history. Though neither story comments directly on the turbulent historical events that accompanied its writing and publication, both were first published in an explicitly political contemporary context. For an author like Agnon, who generally refrained from involvement in political activities, this is unusual.[101] *Treue* and *Ha-sa'ar* bookend the two world wars, defining events of the twentieth century, and both collections were specifically intended to be read by Jewish soldiers fighting in those wars. Agnon's choice to contribute these stories on two of the few occasions he agreed to participate in such projects suggests that the gothic offered a way of responding to the events at hand without actually engaging with them.

It is possible that Agnon intended these stories, with their supernatural figures and historical displacement, to provide escapism to the soldiers who would read them in the trenches, tents, or battlefields of war. On the other hand, though, it is difficult to imagine a Jewish soldier who would read these gruesome stories about Jewish life in Europe without linking their events to those unfolding there in the second and fourth decades of the twentieth century. In other words, just as Agnon addressed the historical trauma of the Holocaust indirectly in much of his later work, so does he represent the implications of volatile contemporary events implicitly. Though the gothic deflects realism through its devices, style, and historical setting, it is also,

by definition, amenable to a multivalent temporality, refracting historical reality through its shadowy lens. It thus allows Agnon to connect contemporary events to key moments in the Jewish past, producing a historiography that encompasses and links diverse historical moments.

Agnon's gothicism is evident in the macabre atmosphere and supernatural devices of many of his stories as well as in the fear and anxiety emanating from his depictions of the relations between Christians and Jews. Hosting a literary repository of antisemitic imagery and discourse, the gothic provides an idiom for Agnon to subvert and appropriate anti-Jewish stereotype from within, while maintaining the notion of Jewish difference. Revising antisemitic iconography, his stories mirror and recalibrate the dynamics of victims and oppressors associated with Jews and Christians in the European past, a textual vindication of past misrepresentations.

At the same time, though, these devices leave the past restless. Wanderers return to their travels; ghosts emerge from their graves; narrators end their tales midcycle. This cyclical temporality operates together with the multiple historical layers informing these stories—through language, allusion, and, critically, the revision of antisemitic images and themes integral to the gothic—to activate a vision of the Jewish past that is itself gothic, perpetually returning to inform and disrupt the present. Actively intervening in the past, Agnon's stories both recall and revise multiple layers of Jewish history, not as eulogies to a finalized past but as disturbing mirrors of history's continued violations of the vulnerable present. The result is a gothic historiography at odds with the kind of static "ethnographic impulse" Scholem identified in Agnon's post-Holocaust fiction. In his ironic exposure and appropriation of the gothic forces always underlying Jewish histories, Agnon disrupts the boundary between the past and the present, an act that can be understood as one of the defining characteristics of his distinctive brand of modernism. The next chapter considers how such gothic disruptions are deployed in distinctly feminine narratives of the traditional Eastern European Jewish world.

Notes

1. Other notable contributors included Zalman Schneour, David Frischman, and Shalom Aleichem. For more on the role of *Treue* in Agnon's reception among German Jews, see Laor, "Agnon and Buber." See also Barzilai, "Agnon's German Consecration."

2. Laor, "Agnon and Buber," 54.

3. "The Dance of Death," the seeds of which appear as early as 1906 in the Hebrew story "Ha-panas" [The lantern, 1906–7] and the Yiddish "Toitentans" [Dance of death, 1908], was written during a period of multiple transitions in Agnon's life: from Buczacz to Jaffa, from writing in both Yiddish and Hebrew to writing solely in Hebrew, from the position of a promising writer to that of an acclaimed one. Likely one of the last stories he conceptualized before leaving Buczacz in 1907, its publication coincided with that of his macabre composition on the city, "Ir ha-metim" [City of the dead]. The story underwent further revision during Agnon's period in Germany and was published in the *Polin* cycles of 1919 and 1925 together with "Bimtsulot" ["In the Depths," 1917], another markedly gothic story.

4. Roskies and Diamant, *Holocaust Literature*, 39.

5. Translation of world literature to Hebrew thrived in Europe and Palestine in the early twentieth century because of the widely held conviction that it was integral to the formation of a Jewish national culture. The major works of gothic literature, however, except stories and poems by Edgar Allan Poe, remained untranslated until late in the twentieth century. Until then, Hebrew readers could access gothic works only in their original language. On the dearth of Hebrew translations of gothic literature in the twentieth century, see the introduction to this study, specifically the section entitled "Gothic in Hebrew Translation: A Brief Nonhistory."

6. DeKoven Ezrahi, "Revisioning the Past," 251.

7. Ibid.

8. Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic*, 18–19.

9. Goddu, *Gothic America*, 10.

10. Botting, *Gothic*, 1.

11. Roshwald, *Ghetto, Shtetl, or Polis*, 63. Roshwald later discusses the "macabre touches of death, shrouds, spectres, and grotesque desecration" in Agnon's *Sefer ha-ma'asim* [The book of deeds] as kabbalistic (ibid., 147). There is no doubt that, as numerous studies on folk elements in Agnon's fiction suggest, Judaic folk as well as mystical traditions provide Agnon with an array of specifically Jewish demons and monsters. See, for example, Shenhar, "Motivim amamiyim." Other critics, however, regard similar devices of a non-Jewish European provenance as superficial, insignificant, and irrelevant to the Judaic.

12. G. Shaked, *Omanut ha-sipur*, 33.

13. Ibid., 41, 89. Shaked argues that even in the early gothic story "Be'era shel Miryam" [Miriam's well], which was lamented by his contemporaries as overly sentimental, Agnon was already attempting to moderate emotion both thematically and stylistically, and to establish ironic self-awareness as the dominant mode of his poetics.

14. The slippage in the critical literature between the terms *gothic* and *romantic* warrants brief clarification. Most scholars agree that the historical boundaries of British gothic writing predate Romanticism, beginning in 1764 and winding down by 1820. Despite their aesthetic and poetic overlap, the gothic and romantic fulfilled two different needs in the literary economy of their time and place. Romantic authors in early nineteenth-century England saw themselves as participants in high culture, whose literary productions were far removed from the vulgar popular fiction of the "German School." Even as they themselves borrowed from the "lowbrow" poetics of the gothic, they were often its most vociferous detractors. While some contemporary critics argue that gothic and romantic are essentially one and the same, or that the gothic is a darker subset of Romanticism, others insist on fundamental differences in their confrontation with moral ambiguity, fear, and transgression; still others contrast the romantic embrace of nature as leading to "emotional certainty" with the gothic rejection of

the very notion of transcendence. See Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic*; Williams, *Art of Darkness*; and Hume, "Gothic versus Romantic."

15. G. Shaked, *Omanut ha-sipur*, 33, 36–37.

16. Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare*, 91.

17. For example, citing "the fascination with the macabre" in Agnon's *Ve-haya he-akov le-mishor* [*And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight*], Band writes: "We are here confronted with the same romantic ethos that militates against the portrayal of a traditional Jewish milieu governed by divine providence and halakha" (*Nostalgia and Nightmare*, 91). See also G. Shaked, *Omanut ha-sipur*, especially "Galui ve-samui ba-sipur," 89–132. An exception is Shenhar. Though she describes Agnon's fiction as indicating his "dualistic world-view" and the broader dialectic that governs his fiction (gothic, romantic, and "international," on one hand, and Jewish, on the other), she is more inclined to see these forces as mutually reinforcing than opposed (Shenhar, "Motivim amamiyim," 61). In an altogether different approach to Agnon's duality, Weiss proposes a "dual generic reading" that melds gothic and magical realism (V. Weiss, "Generic Hybridity," 69). *Shmuel Yosef Agnon: A Revolutionary Traditionalist* is the title of a monograph by Gershon Shaked.

18. For more on the romantic view of the past, see Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism*.

19. Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare*, 449.

20. This list includes the most explicitly gothic of Agnon's stories in this period, but it is not exhaustive; it excludes several stories that are not as a whole gothic but that make use of certain gothic devices or conventions (such as ghosts or other figures who return from the dead)—for example, "Ha-mikhtav" ["The Letter," 1940] and "Le-veit aba" ["To Father's House, 1941"].

21. For more on the gothic's relationship to history and on related conventions such as the discovered manuscript, see the introduction and chap. 5 of this study. See also Dent, "Contested Pasts."

22. Other notions of Agnon's historicity consider his historiographic tendencies in relation to particular works. Roman Katsman, for example, argues that *Ir u-melo'a* [*A City in Its Fullness*] showcases Agnon as a writer of alternative history; see Katsman, *Literature, History, Choice*. Several recent studies focus on Agnon's relationship to Buczacz specifically. See, for example, DeKoven Ezrahi, "Shtetl and Its Afterlife"; and Mintz, "Building a City." For a comprehensive study of Buczacz, see Bartov, *Your Brother's Blood*.

23. For more on *Sipurey Polin*, see DeKoven Ezrahi, "Shtetl and Its Afterlife," especially 134–39; Ben-Dov, "Poland as 'Promised Land'"; and Boris Kotlerman, "Historical Time and Space."

24. Boris Kotlerman, "Historical Time and Space," 361, 372.

25. Quoted in Laor, "About the Holocaust," 41.

26. Scholem, "Reflections on Agnon."

27. DeKoven Ezrahi, "Agnon Before and After," 85, 86.

28. Laor, "About the Holocaust," 63.

29. Ibid., 55–57.

30. Mintz, *Translating Israel*, 109.

31. H. Weiss, "Presence of the Holocaust," 432.

32. Arbel, "Ha-ktiva ke-matseva."

33. Scholem, "Reflections on Agnon," 59.

34. See Alter, *Invention of Hebrew Prose*.

35. For more on Scholem's notion of history, see Biale, *Gershom Scholem*.

36. Green, "What Agnon Taught Scholem," 163.
37. Ibid., 163, 175.
38. Ibid., 175.
39. Gershom Scholem, in his famous 1926 letter to Franz Rosenzweig, writes of the resurrection of Hebrew in a modern secular context that represses its religious force as necessitating a "demonic courage." The consequence of this undertaking, a "ghostly" Hebrew, poses a threat to Zionism that is "more uncanny than the Arab nation, . . . one that of necessity the Zionist undertaking has summoned up." Scholem, "A Confession," in Cutter, "Ghostly Hebrew, Ghastly Speech," 431.
40. For more on time and history in the folktale, see Nicolaisen, "Past as Place."
41. Malka Shaked reads the motif as a Christian-European one distinct from and inherently at odds with the Judaic, evidence of the influence of German literature on Agnon. She does not point to specific German literary examples but rather states that "the German Gothic world . . . includes the tragic intensity of the *danse macabre*" ("What Dances," 162). Asserting the danse macabre as an indicator of the "German Gothic" that influenced Agnon, she suggests that its juxtaposition with the Judaic in the story reflects "the two cultural sources of the story" (ibid.). DeKoven Ezrahi writes against the broad critical tendency to read Christians against Jews in Agnon, offering a different interpretation of his story "Ma'agelei tsedek" ["Paths of Righteousness"]. See DeKoven Ezrahi, "S. Y. Agnon's Jerusalem," 146–48.
42. For a discussion of possible literary influences related to the danse macabre in the story "Toitentans," see Ber Kotlerman, "His Heart."
43. On the dance of death motif, see Goodwin, *Kitsch and Culture*. For more on the dance of death in the Jewish context, see Elstein and Lipsker, "Homogeneous Series."
44. Agnon would most likely have been familiar with Goethe's 1815 ballad "Der Totentanz," which blends humor and tragedy in its adaptation of the famous motif. Notably, the ballad's tension hinges on the lost shroud of one of the skeletal dancers, recalling the centrality of clothing (both the groom's kittel and the bride's wedding dress) in Agnon's story.
45. Agnon, "Meḥolat ha-mavet," 290. All citations from this story are my own translation.
46. For more on the story's intertextual allusions, see Ben-Dov, "Biblical Allusion." See also M. Shaked, "What Dances."
47. Agnon, "Meḥolat ha-mavet," 292.
48. Agnon, "Lady and Peddler," 203. All citations from this story are from this translation unless otherwise noted.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid., 206.
51. Ibid., 198.
52. Ibid., 210.
53. Ibid., 206.
54. Ibid., 208.
55. Edelmann, "Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew," 8.
56. Ibid., 9.
57. Davison, *Anti-Semitism*, 2.
58. Ibid., 7. Davison expands on this notion in the context of *Dracula*, which "taps two joint fears at the fin de siècle—the alien 'invasion' and domination of Britain by Eastern European Jews from without, and the threat of Anglo-Jewish takeover from within" (*Anti-Semitism*, 125).

59. Ibid., 7.
60. Anderson, "Popular Survivals."
61. Davison, *Anti-Semitism*, 5.
62. Davison identifies "a reciprocal German-English dialogue at the end of the eighteenth century when the German Terror-novel, or Schauerroman, was popular in Britain, and British gothic literature was garnering great attention in Germany" (*Anti-Semitism*, 160). Picking up the German thread of her investigation by way of Nazi propaganda cinema, she observes that, while the vampiric Wandering Jew "was central to the consolidation of national identity in both countries, his religious affiliation remained unidentified in Stoker's gothic *fantasy* in stark contrast to his more *realistic* treatment in Germany," and identifies the medium of cinema as more amenable to this treatment (ibid.).
63. The names themselves invoke the Judaic past through the allusion to the story of Joseph and Potiphar; see Kurzweil, "Lady and the Peddler." The names also allude to the clash between Hellenic and Hebraic civilizations. Davison discusses Matthew Arnold's conceptualization of Hellenism and Hebraism in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), arguing that his lamentation of the Hebraism that dominated British society belies "the racial ideology underpinning his ethnically inflected terminology" (*Anti-Semitism*, 12).
64. Agnon, "Lady and Peddler," 202.
65. Ibid., 203.
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid., 205.
68. Ibid., 201.
69. Ibid., 204.
70. Edelmann, "Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew," 3; Davison, *Anti-Semitism*, 4.
71. Davison, *Anti-Semitism*, 129.
72. See Hoeveler, "Charlotte Dacre's Zofloya."
73. Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare*, 402.
74. Biale discusses "discourses of blood," such as Jewish ritual murder, specifically in the context of Nazi propaganda, but stresses that they were rooted in medieval folk beliefs. See Biale, *Blood and Belief*, 125.
75. Davison, *Anti-Semitism*, 114. Davison locates the origin of this vampiric Wandering Jew in Schiller's incomplete novel *The Ghost Seer*, though its wanderer is Armenian and not specified as Jewish (*Anti-Semitism*, 90–92). She writes that in "their supernatural abilities to recognize and expose real and figurative vampires, Apollonius and Schiller's Wandering Armenian influence the Wandering Jew's earliest incarnation in British gothic literature" (ibid., 95). From the German genesis of the Wandering Jew, Davison charts his "progressive 'fall' from supernatural vampire-detector to figurative vampire and, finally, to actual vampire in the pages of British gothic literature" (ibid.).
76. Davison, *Anti-Semitism*, 120.
77. Goddu links the vampire's mobility to that of the gothic as a literary mode: "traveling vampires remind us of the gothic's mobility" and signify "the genre's movement across diverse geographical spaces" (Goddu, "Vampire Gothic," 126–27).
78. Blood is central in less paradigmatically gothic stories in Agnon's oeuvre, as well—for example, "Kisuy ha-dam" [Covering the blood, published posthumously in 1975] and "Agadat ha-sofer" ["Tale of the Scribe," 1919]. In the former, the use of blood is particularly compelling for its role in relating different periods in Jewish history and its implications about the Jews' role in the Holocaust.

79. For a wide-ranging survey on the blood libel, see Dundes, *Blood Libel Legend*. For a detailed history, see O'Brien, *Pinnacle of Hatred*. For an analysis of historiographic approaches to the blood libel, see Johnson, *Blood Libel*.

80. Davison, *Anti-Semitism*, 133–34.

81. For more on the role of circumcision in the othering of the Jew, see Gilman, *Jew's Body*.

82. Biale, *Blood and Belief*, 139

83. Ibid., 138.

84. Ibid., 139.

85. Ibid., 125.

86. Ibid., 172.

87. For a comprehensive study, see Robinson, *Blood Will Tell*; and Robinson, "Novel Anti-Semitisms." For more on *Dracula* as representing Jews via "reverse colonization," see Arata, "Occidental Tourist." For a consideration of *Dracula* as a critique of contemporary race discourse, see Ewence, "Blurring the Boundaries."

88. Band discusses "The Lady and the Peddler" specifically as alluding to the blood libel through the evocation of the Eucharist. See Band, "Refractions of Blood Libel." See especially 128–30. See also Werses, "Bein metsiyut historit le-te'ur sipuri."

89. Band, "Refractions of Blood Libel," 130.

90. Agnon, "Lady and Peddler," 210.

91. Ibid., 208.

92. For more on Agnon's stories in relation to the maskilic protest of this custom, see Sadan, *Al Shai Agnon*, 94–97.

93. Davison, *Anti-Semitism*, 14.

94. Ibid., 165.

95. A related idea, which builds on the notion of the blood as the "soul of the flesh" (Leviticus 17:11) is *kisuy ha-dam*, the covering of the blood, the injunction that ritual slaughterers must cover the blood they spill when slaughtering a wild animal (Leviticus 17:13: "And he shall pour out its blood, and cover it with earth"). "Kisuy ha-dam" is also the title of a late Agnon story, published posthumously.

96. Agnon, "Meḥolat ha-mavet," 291–92.

97. The groom's rejection of revenge situates this story at odds with the sentiment behind the myth of the golem, associated, in its best-known Prague tradition, with violent vengeance on behalf of blood-libeled Jews. Literature attesting to the association between the golem and the blood libel abounds. For some examples, see Biale, *Blood and Belief*; and Sherwin, *Golem Legend*.

98. Agnon, "Meḥolat ha-mavet," 291.

99. Ibid., 292.

100. See Biale, *Blood and Belief*, chap. 5, especially 172–75, where he discusses late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Jewish defenses against the blood libel and other blood-related antisemitic accusations. Agnon's treatment is not so nationalist, and it is fraught with the ambivalence of a man torn between the indictment of Christian Europe for what it has done to its Jews and his critique of the Jews for what they do to themselves. This assessment aligns with DeKoven Ezrahi's contention that the "intractability" of the story "Kisuy ha-dam" "may be in the inherent tension between the conflicting mandates to mourn and to judge the victims" ("Agnon Before and After," 92).

101. Laor, who has argued that Agnon's oeuvre actually engages with the Holocaust despite very few explicit references to it, also wryly comments that his contribution to *Ha-sa'ar* was anomalous. The rest of his publications, "including those that were published after November 1942—were completely independent of the political situation." As World War II raged, Agnon "did not change the way of his writing and continued to write tales of bygone days or of the Land of Israel" (Laor, *Ḥayey Agnon*, 349, 350). In a similar vein, DeKoven Ezrahi remarks that, in general, "political upheavals in the modern era do not determine Agnon's fictional timeline, and even the Holocaust and the birth of the State of Israel are inscribed less as events than as continuous with processes already in place" ("Shtetl and Its Afterlife," 147–48).