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31 ff.), are in dispute, and as a matter of legal philosophy he favors stringency as the safest means to cover all halakhic bases (to be *yozei kol ha-de'ot*)? The evidence is mixed, inasmuch as the matters identified here as “contemporary” already bear stringent rulings by some of Kagan’s predecessors. A wider study might help untangle the confusion between Kagan as man of musar and Kagan as the faithful redactor of aḥaronic halakhic thought.

Such a wider study ought to proceed on two fronts, the diachronic and the synchronic. Kagan’s conclusions first should be placed within the ongoing context of the work of the *aḥaronim*. To what extent are his rulings reflections or logical extensions of decisions and tendencies in their writings? To what extent does he deviate from them, break new ground, chart an independent halakhic course? Fishbane makes a stab at this kind of diachronic analysis, but the pre-*Mishnah Berurah* state of Eastern European halakhah needs a more detailed and explicit treatment than is provided by this work, which focuses almost exclusively upon the words of the *Mishnah Berurah* itself. Second, the researcher should compare Kagan’s rulings in the *Mishnah Berurah* against those of his contemporaries. Is he significantly or more frequently stringent than, say, Epstein in the *Arukh Ha-Shulḥan*? Is his work more indicative of “contemporary concerns,” and if so, does his response to those concerns differ substantially? In this way, we can best determine the precise contribution of R. Israel Meir Hakohen Kagan to Jewish legal thought.

In the meantime, Fishbane has earned the appreciation of all who work in the field. That more can and ought to be done should not obscure the important contribution he has made to the state of research.

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Anne Golomb Hoffman. *Between Exile and Return: S. Y. Agnon and the Drama of Writing*. SUNY Series in Modern Jewish Literature and Culture. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991. 236 pp.

What happens when a Hebrew writer of the likes of S. Y. Agnon—whose deep immersion in traditional Jewish texts elicits endless intertextual tracks in his writing—writes about writing? How do his “book anecdotes” (p. 166) and episodes foregrounding the presence of books, written texts, their language, or other acts of inscription illuminate the fiction of such a writer? These and

other issues are at the core of Anne Golomb Hoffman's study of writing about writing in the fiction of S. Y. Agnon. It presents readers with new insights into a number of this author's central works from a nearly unique vantage point, which integrates literary theory with psychoanalysis. Were Hoffman to have presented even a brief survey of previous studies emphasizing, as she has done, the significance of fiction's self-consciousness, readers would be even more impressed by her groundbreaking forays into this field.

Her thesis is that, by foregrounding the very issue of writing in his tales, Agnon's fiction asserts that "the issue of boundary and transgression, exile, and return are acted out within the domain of the writing itself" (p. 2), enabling readers to consider the matter of how writing refers to itself. Inevitably, then, the study comes to focus on one of the more notable of binary traits in Agnon, the ambivalent attitude toward books of Judaism and writing, often expressed in an Oedipal confrontation with the sources. Agnon's fictions, asserts the author, are a testimony to the inherent tension between his being an author continuing the tradition of Hebrew books, on the one hand, and a citizen of the contemporary world, on the other.

To illustrate the manifold ways by which Agnon's works (and those of a few other writers whose writings are, at times, pitted against his) address matters of textual reflexivity, or literary self-referentiality, Hoffman draws upon a number of his short stories and novels. However, rather than explore issues of the writer's poetics as implied by his metaphors of composition, this study seeks out the implicit regard held by the protagonist for being the conduit for a continued traditional text or way of writing. Such an attitude is interpreted in psychological terms as a response to the call for maintaining the values of a parental world, as opposed to the protagonist's impulse to express a more individualistic *Weltanschauung*. This dynamic of inclusion and exclusion—willed by or foisted upon the protagonist—is what Agnon's expressions appear to be after when he writes of writing. Readers given to read fiction in Freudian terms should appreciate the emphasis placed on the Oedipal manifestations Hoffman finds in Agnon's work. These, she asserts, represent the ambivalent, rebellious impulse in the author's writings against the very paternal world, texts, and views about which he writes. Her analysis of Oedipal and feministic aspects of Agnon's "The Tale of the Scribe" is an illuminating example of these views.

Included among her selected texts is a discussion of Agnon's *'Oreah! naṭah lalun* (*A Guest for the Night*), whose familiar theme of the futility

of resurrecting the past is illuminated and reinforced by Hoffman's textual approach. Her analysis confirms the novel's point that all semblance of imminent success in restoring practices and institutions of the past is illusory and ironic. The study's emphasis on the ambivalence of the Guest toward the enterprise of restoration is most instructive and further confirms the centrality of this (implied) message throughout the novel. As supporting evidence to sustain this claim, she resorts to notions of textuality, themes of books, and references to the writing process. Of special note are her discussions of the theme of the "wise embryo" (p. 81) and the episode surrounding the book *Yadav shel moshe* as symbolizing the impossible mission of the Guest and others while underscoring an ambivalence for the revival of the past.

A number of assertions need correcting, however. One is that, after his return in 1924, Agnon left Israel only once to receive the Nobel Prize in 1966 (p. 192, n. 2). Without apparently realizing this error, Hoffman corrects it again and again when telling of Agnon's leaving his home in 1930 (pp. 71, 77, 79) to oversee the publication of his collected works in Germany and journey to Buczacz and eastern Europe.

Claiming that the Guest left Buczacz on the ninth of Av, some nine months after arriving there, Hoffman seizes the opportunity to develop a theme of his rebirth. This would also be, she suggests, evidence of the "novelistic fiction" reinforcing "the autobiographical fiction" (p. 99). Yet, on examining the novel, we find that the ninth of Av is mentioned in an account *preceding* the birth of Rachel and Yeruham's son, and the Guest's subsequent departure. The ninth of Av is referred to indirectly as the narrator observes that "The days of mourning before the Fast of Av [*sheloshet shevu'ot ha-'evel* (Hebrew original, p. 413)] passed and the days of consolation arrived" (English trans. [New York, 1968], p. 442). More likely, the Guest's departure is just before Rosh Hashanah, marking nearly a year's sojourn in Szybucz.

So as to demonstrate the prevalence of the matter of Agnon's fiction's ambivalence toward the past, Hoffman also draws on a number of tales from the thirties—"Upon a Stone," "The Sense of Smell," and "The Document" (the latter two also are available in translation, contrary to Hoffman's claim [p. 197, n. 2]). These tales, asserts the author, serve to express a momentary sense of inclusion in, or exclusion from, the continuum which is the textual body of Hebrew writing. While the discussion on this issue is stimulating, a clearer explanation is needed to clarify the linguistic conflict regarding the

issue of *sukkah meriḥah* in “The Sense of Smell” and the tale’s poignant irony.

One of the more intriguing and insightful readings presented is of *Tmol shilshom*, which she not only compares to Joyce’s and Mann’s works as another *Bildungsroman*, but then proceeds to trace its *Zeitroman* features. Most original, though, is her reading of its Balak episode as a metaphor of fiction gone amok, the dog a signifier of writing gone out of control, as the text plays out its Oedipal revolt in confrontation with the notion of traditional textuality.

An ambivalent expression toward one’s roots is expressed in a different way in Agnon’s *Shira*. H. Barzel has suggested that it is a metaphor for the protagonist’s pursuit of the literary and the carnal, exemplified most prominently by Herbst’s repeated recitation of lines evocative of Shin Shalom’s poem, “Flesh such as yours / Will not soon be forgotten.” Hoffman’s reading, while following some of these lines, also attends to episodes involving books and writing to support the thesis that such imagery indicates the ambivalence of Jews about German and European culture, on the one hand, and Zionism, on the other. *Shira*, as term and character, refers to the notion of the book (poetry) and the body of woman as a signifier of diverse meanings. As done throughout this study, the emphasis on a Freudian interpretation sheds additional light on the novel’s implicit expressions of ambivalence concerning the hero’s allegiance to the world of his fathers.

Hoffman’s study is enlightening in its insights, nearly encompassing in its generic scope, carefully thought out, and offers ample rewards for a scrupulous reading. This is a groundbreaking study of particular value to students of Hebrew literature, and of Agnon in particular. Whereas one would have hoped for a more thorough addressing of Agnon’s literary output—specifically such as “Ha-panim la-panim,” “Im kenisat ha-yom,” and several episodes of the novels discussed—as well as a more rigorous approach to the method of transcription and transliteration of Hebrew terms and titles, the declared scope of this work should foster additional studies of literary reflexivity and the drama of writing in Agnon.

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