What is Fantasy?
By Danielle Gurevitch

1.

Fantasy literature uses poetic means to examine the limits of the possible. Although characterized by vision and rich imagination, it is not detached from reality: fantasy must begin with individuals and the world around them. In ancient times, mythic consciousness helped people to understand their pasts, the circumstances of their lives, and their fates, and it was from this mythic consciousness that the literature of fantasy developed hundreds of years later. However, while in the ancient world myth (Μύθος) aspired to describe a concrete and enduring reality, fantasy as we understand it today is essentially fiction, and therefore bound neither to the world of phenomena nor to historical truth. Admittedly, fantasy stories in contemporary literature tend to deal with existential questions, but they are mainly issues of freedom of thought, such as, how much are human beings capable of directing or controlling space and time, of changing or bending the laws of nature to their will, of independently determining their fate, of striving for achievement, of dreaming dreams, or of fulfilling secret wishes.

The use of the term “fantasy” to identify a literary genre requires clarification because of its many connotations in everyday conversation. When critics use the word, they mean that the story “didn’t really happen,” that the literary work is not based on actual historical reality. In ordinary language, we call something “fantastic” if it is exceptional and arouses our curiosity. On the other hand, to dub a person a “ fantasist” or “fantasizer” is to claim disparagingly that they are delusional or, in popular Hebrew idiom, that “they live in the movies.” J.R.R. Tolkien, the well-known philologist and writer, defined fantasy as “arresting strangeness.” In its ancient and exalted meaning, Tolkien explained, fantasy is synonymous with “imagination,” with “non-reality” or “unreasonableness” in the primary world, that is, contrary to the familiar world. As people have always recoiled from changes in the world they know, any innovation or discovery is likely to be perceived initially as unreasonable, and perhaps even dangerous.

With this in mind, we can now refine the genre definition, and say that fantasy literature uses poetic means to examine the limits of the
possible out of a belief in a purposeful order. Through this belief, people organize their thoughts in the realm beyond the familiar. The borders of the familiar, however, must always remain relative, because perceptions of what is “familiar” and “known” and what is “choice” and “free will” differ in different times and places. The fantastic creation engulfs us in varying degrees of fear, doubt, and danger, but above all it encourages action and resourcefulness while also raising philosophical questions, such as “what if?”

This unique literary style is divided into sub-genres, including the marvelous, science fiction, weird fiction or strange stories, magical realism, and the fantastic. While these categories may overlap to a certain extent, there are clear distinctions between them. Understanding the precise definitions can help create a bridge between the reader’s expectations and the work in question.

2.

The marvelous is a narrative style, born in the Middle Ages, which combines supernatural foundations with an adventure in the natural world. In medieval times, there was no essential difference between reality and thought, between the visible and the conceptual, or between the concrete and the imaginary. People believed that the world was filled with supernatural phenomena and had no doubt as to the existence of wondrous creatures, whom they saw as integral parts of their lives. This belief was incorporated into the conventional worldview of Western-Christian culture. Integrating supernatural phenomena into a literary plot was therefore a reflection of the beliefs and traditions, customs and rituals, and aspirations and needs of medieval Christian society, in which the possible and the impossible were interwoven into a single tapestry. Thus the lion and the fox could coexist with werewolves, basilisks, and unicorns, and human beings could live side-by-side with angels and demons. It was only around the twelfth century that these stories started to be associated in Western literature with fiction. The process began in the British Isles with the appearance of the Anglo-Saxon epic Beowulf, which describes how Beowulf the Geat fearlessly fights Grendel, the man-eating demon, and overpowers him. It continued in Middle Age Arthurian tales, describing the adventurous and courageous
dragon-slaying knights. In early Jewish tradition, fantasy literature of this nature was a significant driving force in the nation’s history and thinking. The tales in Aggada and Midrash are replete with marvelous acts, magic, and miracles aimed at hastening the Redemption, as well as a rich diversity of unbelievable stories of journeys to the Holy Land.

A contemporary work is classified as belonging to the sub-genre of the marvelous if it contains two parallel worlds that do not merge. The events that take place in the natural world can be rationally, logically explained, while those in the other world include spells, magic, and sorcery, and it is perfectly reasonable to move from place to place on a broomstick. In the marvelous story the hero requires the services of an unnatural agent to reach the other world. The tale begins with a few introductory words that take the reader directly into the parallel world, where everything is possible, as in “Alice in Wonderland” the white rabbit leads Alice down the rabbit hole in the opening lines. Alternatively, the story may begin in the area of the familiar, describing daily routine, when “suddenly” a marvelous agent appears to direct the hero toward the entrance to the other world. In the first volume of the Harry Potter books, for example, the genial giant Hagrid makes an unexpected appearance in the book’s fourth chapter and shows Harry the way to the hidden passage on Platform 9¾, from which he catches the train to the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. In Hebrew literature, the category of the marvelous includes the adventures of Amir Mor-Tal on Shinar Estate in A Mere Mortal, the experiences of Jonathan and Ella in the horrific empire of Marduk in The Whale of Babylon, and the tales of Tom, Iris, Beigel, and their friends, the heroes of Maladar: The Magical Amulet.

A marvelous story recounts an exciting adventure interspersed with a sequence of supernatural events and alternating triumphs and failures, none of which cause the young and (necessarily) inexperienced heroes to lose their heads. On the contrary, their shock and astonishment at the marvels revealed to them in another world are soon replaced by the sense that they are embarking on a journey of discovery and gaining emotional fortitude not accessible to them in the natural, conventional world. Furthermore, not only are the heroes visible in the other world, but it is they who set events in motion: their name is on everyone’s lips, since they are “the chosen ones.” As part of the grueling journey of apprenticeship they undergo in the other world, every so often they are asked to save the world from destruction, with the salvation of all
of humanity resting on their leadership ability and bold decisions. The hero’s young age and the fact that the adventures always end on an optimistic, triumphant note imply that the target audiences for these stories are primarily children and adolescents, although they may also be enjoyed by adults with fertile imaginations. The marvelous, Pierre Mabille explains, is a “mirror experience,” a world of images into which a person journeys to discover the inner truth, and at the end the promised kingdom awaits in the form of the discovery of self-esteem.12 We learn from the marvelous story that although the world is indeed filled with dangers and threats, we will ultimately get the reward and fame we deserve if we only hold our ground and defend principles that are moral, ethical, and worthy.

Another sub-genre of fantasy literature is science fiction, which deals with higher dimensions of space and time, and to a large degree represents a worldview similar to the religious. Like religious faith, science fiction is based on a belief in the existence of a purposeful, organizing cosmic order inherent in the flux of human experience. The story aims to instill in the reader the belief that there is a logical explanation for every phenomenon in nature, even if a reasonable person finds those phenomena implausible, or does not understand their significance. In science fiction, wizards are replaced by scientists, sorcerers by doctors, and magicians by engineers.13 This category features the application of sophisticated models and futuristic theories that employ advanced technology which might not yet exist, but certainly could in the future.14 Examples include David Niven’s Ringworld, or Douglas Adams’ Dirk Gently’s Holistic Detective Agency, in which instant displacement from place to place leads to the appearance of the electric monk in the trunk of Gordon Way’s car. In the classic television series Star Trek, the immortal words of Captain Kirk, “Beam me up!”, ostensibly demonstrated the technological simplicity of this kind of displacement, causing generations of youngsters to wistfully whisper this instruction into their plastic watches.

In Israel, there is very little original science fiction literature. What does exist is known only to a closed circle of sworn fans of the genre. There are, however, two local periodicals devoted to science fiction, Fantasy 2000 and Dreams in Aspamia, as well the occasional film.15 The category of science fiction also embraces a more limited sub-genre, which is actually far removed from science and sophisticated technology, namely
Utopia and its opposite, Dystopia or Anti-Utopia. The utopian vision in modern literature, which originated with Thomas More (1516), depicts an ideal world, a sort of Paradise on earth, where there is a cure for every ailment, education for all, no suffering, old age, or widowhood, and the inhabitants of the entire universe, humans and animals alike, live in peace, happiness, and well-being. In Jewish literature of the modern era, Altneuland might be said to fit into this category. Dystopia, on the other hand, is the complete opposite: a gloomy, suicidal vision that does not bode well for the future of humanity. Canonic dystopian literature includes Anthony Burgess’s A Clockwork Orange (1962) and George Orwell’s Animal Farm (1945), and this genre can be found in Israeli literature in Amos Keinan’s The Road to Ein Harod (1984) and Binyamin Tamuz’s Jeremiah’s Inn (1984).

As opposed to the marvelous and science fiction, which both embody values and beliefs that might leave the reader with some sense of relief and comfort, three other sub-genres of fantasy literature deal with disorder. These categories, which relate to realms that originate deep in the recesses of the modern mind, are labeled weird fiction or strange stories, magical realism, and the fantastic.

3.

The development of modern philosophical, critical, and intellectual thought has led to a significant decline in literary writing on supernatural themes, and indeed in imaginary literature in general. In an age of cynical skepticism, the human mind cannot (and does not wish to) depart from the stable basis of reality. Thus, over the years, works that exuded a “non-realistic” air were relegated to the sidelines or were perceived as lacking any scientific foundation. The strict rationalist taste that characterizes the modern era forces writers to lean on at least a possible reality, diverging from it only minimally and with caution. In order for a supernatural event in a work of literature to be accepted as credible, it has to be sequential, consistent, and, above all, short. The author is required to integrate the supernatural phenomena into the plot as a surprise, and even then, as part of the world of experience. Starting in the eighteenth century, effort was required to convince rational readers to willingly allow themselves to be drawn into the fiction. The renewal of interest in ghost stories, which had largely been neglected since the Middle Ages, can be attributed to the Gothic novel, which enjoyed
short-lived popularity (1760-1820). These ghost stories, which appeared on the extreme fringes of the dominant Romantic Movement, portray people being haunted and tormented, sometimes to death, by mysterious terrifying entities that are not subject to the laws of nature (life and death or the restrictions of a physical body). However, unlike the literature of the Middle Ages, most Gothic novels aroused synthetic terror, that is to say, fear for the sake of fear intended to freeze the reader’s blood, virtually to the degree of self-parody. In a Gothic ghost story worthy of its name, the spine-tingling incident was the climax of the story and the point at which it ended. The realistic frame, if it existed at all, served only as a preface or psychological preparation for the impending unbelievable event at the core of the story. This principle is demonstrated by an amiable tale, familiar to all researchers of the genre, entitled “Climax for a Ghost Story”:19

“It’s so scary!” the girl said as she advanced cautiously. “And what a heavy door!” She touched it as she spoke and the door slammed shut. “My God!” the man said, “I don’t think there is a handle inside here. Why did you do it? You’ve locked us both inside.” “Not both of us, only one of us,” the girl answered, and before his very eyes she passed directly through the door and disappeared.

A small, and rather eccentric, group of ghost story writers emerged who called themselves “the graveyard school of poetry” because of their fondness for telling chilling tales in cemeteries on dark nights. In Jewish culture, however, ghost stories have always been relatively rare. In “Ghost Stories in Medieval Hebrew Folktales” in this volume, Ido Peretz bemoans the paucity of such stories in Hebrew literature, as opposed to their narrative richness in European Christian society. He posits that the reason for this lies in the essential gap between Christian society, which sanctifies death, and Jewish society, explaining that “Judaism never introduced the liturgy of death into the religious canon, and kept its cemeteries at a distance from the town in order to prevent a cult of the dead.”

In the first half of the nineteenth century, secret passages and trapdoors inspired storytellers such as Edgar Allan Poe to work in a new narrative style known as weird fiction or strange stories. In macabre tales such as “The Fall of the House of Usher” and “The Black Cat,” Poe,
considered the father of this genre, created a literary prototype never before seen. As opposed to ghost stories, which are essentially groundless, the weird does not represent a forced attempt to instill fear, but rather touches on our deepest secret anxieties, the most primeval of which is the fear of death. This style arouses semi-belief in the credibility of the event, thereby shaking and troubling the reader and generating uneasiness. The story aims to engender a genuine sense of distress and shock, and ultimately sufficient confusion so as to undermine the reader’s sense of personal security, sometimes to the verge of paranoia. Weird fiction seeks to prove how limited and restricted our view is, how little we think we know about our immediate world is mistaken, and perhaps even delusive. Among the stories in this disturbing narrative category are Guy de Maupassant’s “Le Horla,” which describes the paranoia experienced by a man who is constantly being watched, and Marcel Ayme’s “Le Passe-Muraille,” which relates how one day a person who can pass through walls loses this ability and remains forever imprisoned within a wall.21 The feeling of being cursed and persecuted, the horrifying thought of a living person imprisoned in a wall or a girl buried alive, intensify the reader’s growing sense of dread as the tale unfolds.

In contrast to the weird, which was regarded as a marginal literary category and did not initially earn the respect it deserved, the detective story, which appeared at around the same time, enjoyed overwhelming success. In the spirit of the times, the detective story pushed aside the world of the mystical, supernatural, and mysterious, replacing it with the character of the scholarly detective/investigator who provides an acceptable, reasoned explanation of events while tamping his pipe and, in a nonchalant, not to say patronizing, manner, remarks: “Elementary, my dear Watson.”22 At the end of the tale, the detective reveals who “was pulling the strings,” and proves beyond a shadow of doubt that everything in the natural world has a rational explanation. 23 Edgar Allan Poe, who turned to the detective Monsieur Auguste Dupin for assistance in solving strange mysteries in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” and “The Mystery of Marie Roget,” understood this principle very well. Nevertheless, the genre of the detective story reached its height at the beginning of the twentieth century with the appearance of Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes and Agatha Christie’s Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple. Despite its relative marginality, we cannot dismiss the importance of the weird, as it constitutes an essential stage in the development of another unique narrative style, magical realism, or the surrealist story.
This genre was not only warmly received at its inception, but still continues to command great interest and undergo further development. The features of the style took shape in the 1920s in parallel to surrealist art. In both surrealist painting and the literary style that emerged from it, dreamlike elements (disruptions of time and place, skewed proportions) are placed within a realistic, at times hyper-realistic, framework. Kafka’s Metamorphosis and Gogol’s “The Overcoat” and “The Nose” belong to this category, although the South American author Jorge Luis Borges is usually considered the leading writer of the genre. Borges succeeds in making impossible situations, no matter how strange, appear totally plausible.

In “Why doesn’t it rain fish?” in this volume, Ioram Melcer relates to Borges’s work and describes the underlying power of magical realism as the ability to merge physical reality with psychological reality in a way that intensifies the specific expression in question. Among all the branches of fantasy in Hebrew, magical realism is clearly the most popular, with Israeli artists dealing both with the written word and the performing arts (cinema and theater). In literature, the works of Isaac Bashevis Singer may be classified in part as belonging to this strange genre, as may most of the stories of Etgar Keret, whose unique writing style, like that of Edgar Allan Poe, strikes the readers between the eyes, leaving them stunned and perplexed.

In “Magical Realism in Israeli Cinema,” Shmuel Duvdevani explains the significance of the relative flourishing of this style in contemporary Israeli cinema in movies such as Sh’Chor (Shmuel Hasfari, 1994), The Gospel According to God (Assi Dayan, 2004), and Jellyfish (Etgar Keret and Shira Geffen, 2007). In the opinion of Duvdevani, the popularity of the genre directly results from three situations of difference (or “otherness”) that are perceived to threaten the homogeneous Zionist Israeli identity: the historical (Israel’s wars), the cultural (Ashkenazi versus Mizrachi, ultra-Orthodox versus secular) and the social (displacement and exile). That is, Israeli fantasy is possible as long as it has, in Gail Hareven’s words, “a point, that it has some sort of connection to ‘the burning reality of our life,’ that it examines some fractured symbol, or in short, as Gogol put it, that it ‘benefits the country.’” Magical realism, it would seem, serves the required purpose of “benefiting the country.” Theater researcher Eitan Bar-Yosef directs specific attention to a recurring motif in contemporary Israeli plays, noting that playwrights and
directors such as Hanoch Levin and Shmuel Hasfari deal at length with
bereavement, sometimes with chilling, macabre humor.30 According to
Bar-Yosef, the surrealistic Israeli reality, in which parents constantly
carry on their hunched backs the memories of their children killed in
terror attacks or in combat, is to blame for the affinity for this poetic
sub-genre. We can only conclude that the need of the readers or spectators
to identify with the burden of bereavement has led to the acceptance
of this intense literary style here in Israel, of all places.31

4.

The last sub-genre in fantasy literature the fantastic. Rather than merely
a synonym for “fantasy,” the fantastic, which is currently enjoying great
commercial success, is a self-contained narrative genre structure, and
in a certain sense is the most significant of the sub-genres of fantasy
because it encompasses characteristics of all the others.32 As a literary
style, it is based on reality in crisis and deals with the characters’ anxieties
about the future. Contrary to the marvelous, in which the hero is
required to pass from one world to another, in the fantastic the arena
of events is the world as we know it, or more correctly, as we think we
know it. The story casts the familiar in a different light, and like a torch
revealing what is hidden in dark corners, it draws attention to the dangers
lying in wait for us. It aims to dismantle our indifference and warn
us that dark forces are lurking under the surface. If we ignore their existence
and wrap ourselves in a bogus sense of complacency and security,
a bitter end awaits us.33

The fantastic story presents an adventure suffused with extreme
violence, and often blatant, not to say pornographic, sexual contents.
Monsters and demons heighten the aura of threat, but unlike in the
marvelous, where they are a crucial factor in the plot, here they are
used as a manipulative technique to intensify the message. Fantastic
heroes, generally reasonable, realistic people (not super-heroes), find
themselves in complex situations from which they must extricate them-
selves. And just as in real life, they are required to deal endlessly with
situations that are demanding both physically and mentally, to make
painful decisions, and to pay the full price for them. In short, the fantastic
describes an experience that might very well be our own. Awareness
of this fact arouses in the readers not only profound shock but also
anxiety, compounded with a sense of powerlessness to effect change or rectification, however courageous the reader might be. The encounter between the frightening fictitious scenes and the familiar scenes of daily life creates the fantastic’s “terror effect.” By virtue of this juxtaposition, the familiar and the mundane are transformed into something alien, threatening, and dangerous.

The fantastic is characterized by one of two narrative styles that describe extreme emotional states, namely terror and horror. The dictionary defines “terror” as an extreme state of fear. In literary fiction, it is the feeling of shock that the heroes (and the readers along with them) experience when they find themselves in a situation of unbearable tension resulting from mortal danger in the natural world, such as a terror attack, an assassination attempt, a natural disaster, or a disastrous relationship. Although Alfred Hitchcock, the master of the suspense film, did not differentiate between these two narrative styles, all his films portray fantastic terror. He created a diversity of fears and anxieties to suit the characters of his various protagonists. But they all belong to the same model of terror, whether it takes the form of attacking crows (The Birds, 1963), a serial killer (Psycho, 1960), or, to quote Hitchcock himself, “a curious person who gets into someone else’s room and starts searching through his drawers. You see the person whose room it is going up the stairs, and the audience wants to say to the person in the room: ‘Be careful, someone is coming up the stairs’ . . . for example, Grace Kelly in Rear Window” (1954).

In contrast, “horror” is defined as a painful, strong emotion caused by extreme fear, dread, or repugnance, the product of an event that might occur in the most terrifying of nightmares. Fantastic horror fiction conjures supernatural powers outside the world of experienced phenomena, such as when the seduction of an innocent girl ends with a bite on her neck by a vampire, or a moment when two terrified hobbits hiding in the thicket are pursued by the Nazgul, its talons extended. As early as 1943, the actor Boris Karloff, whose role as the monster Frankenstein transformed him into a cinema icon, warned against overstepping the boundaries when he cautioned, “Horror carries a connotation of revulsion which has nothing to do with clean terror, and if we are not careful we will end by giving simple terror a bad name.” Regrettably, this warning was not heeded, with the horrific depictions given in books and films such as The Ring, Saw, and A Nightmare on Elm
Street descending to the basest level. A good artist does not need nauseating anatomical details in order to capture the audience’s attention. On the contrary, the value of a fantastic work is measured by the precision of the dose of “fear” it administers to the reader/viewer. In Lord of the Rings, for example, J.R.R Tolkien, who can be considered a master of the fantastic-horror story, confronts his reader with the recognition that the most frightening beings are not demons, spirits, and dark creatures, but rather humans. The actions of a cruel, power-crazed mortal who has lost his humanity transform him into a destructive monster who deserves to elicit real fear. On the other hand, the affable Frodo, who wants nothing more than a comfortable, quiet life, and to be left alone to deal with his own private matters, does not see himself as having exceptional qualities, and certainly prefers to avoid those “big wars” that he feels do not concern him.38 This may explain why Lord of the Rings has been so well received. Its message is loud and clear: “the big war” is the war for the survival of the human species, and each of us is Frodo Baggins.

5.

It behooves us to ask why the tremendous success of fantasy literature shows few signs of abating. Tolkien, who was asked this question many times, claimed that fantasy literature has three major objectives: recovery, escape, and consolation.39 First, it serves as a rehabilitative, curative means of mental convalescence. As adults, he explains, daily routine dulls the senses and blinds us to the wonders of the world, the magic and the mystery around us. Because of this, we need “window polishing.” The fantasy world is a means of mental recuperation that enables us to once again perceive the real world clearly. By liberating us from the grayness of our surroundings, fantasy enables us to see things around us glittering and sparkling, as we are meant to see them, or as they seemed to us when we saw them for the first time.

Furthermore, fantasy allows us to escape. Although the term “escapism” is frequently used in a derogatory sense, Tolkien does not regard it in this way. For him, escape into fantasy literature does not involve thoughts of fleeing from the terror of death, but the more minor escape of a momentary detachment from the burden of making a living and the ugliness around us that allows us to transport ourselves to a place of freedom of the spirit. In general, Tolkien was disgusted by the industrial world, and manifested a fondness for green, natural, simple
surroundings in utter contrast to the technological, gray, ugly Mordor, “with the sophisticated machines.” Part of his antipathy towards Mordor is allied with a traumatic childhood memory that later found expression in his writing. Opposite his house in Birmingham was a forest that was mercilessly cut down and replaced by ugly buildings and factories. As he put it, “Part of the basic illness of those times—which arouses a desire to flee . . . from this period that makes itself miserable—is in making us so aware of the ugliness of our actions and of their latent evil.”

The third objective of fantasy that Tolkien suggests is consolation, the human yearning for a “happy ending,” for “miraculous grace [in the Christian sense] . . . the possibility of which is essential to the joy of deliverance . . . giving a fleeting glimpse of joy, joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief.”

I would like to add a further aspect of fantasy that may help explain its popularity. As I see it, fantasy is a driving force that changes worlds. In effect, the origins of fantasy lie in people who dreamed of the return of the dead to the land of the living (the hope for the return of King Arthur), or who invented underwater vessels (Jules Verne), or who envisioned a journey to the moon (Kepler). More than anything else, fantasy would seem to be a way of conveying a conceptual model with a distinct message: those who do not dream do not achieve.

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1. Consider: “A man does not possess a ground outside himself on which he could both stand and know that he is standing there. He must start with himself,” Leszek Kolakowski, The Presence of Myth, trans. from the Polish by Adam Czerniawski (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 12.
2. The word “fantasy” is derived from the Greek phantastikós, meaning fictitious, unreal, or imaginary. It is interesting to note the closeness in Hebrew between the word dimyon (imagination or outside reality) and the word domeh (similar or resembling reality).
7. Arthurian romance appeared in an uncharacteristic Hebrew version published in 5039 (1279 AD), King Artus: A Hebrew Arthurian Romance. This was an unacceptable literary choice in Jewish medieval culture. Indeed, the writer apologizes for writing about the trivialities of foreign culture, rather than about holy matters. See Haim Pesah and Eli Yassif (eds.), The Knight, the Demon and the Virgin: An Anthology of Hebrew Stories from the Middle Ages (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1998), 132-150.
8. See in this volume Dov Schwartz, “The Borders of Messianic Imagination in Jewish Thinking” (p. 263); Bilhah Rubinstein, “A Terrible Case and Wonderful Fiction: The Story of Rabbi Joseph della Reina in the Novels of Yehoshua Bar-Yosef” (p. 248); Anat Aderet, “Travel Literature: Itinerary of an Armchair Traveler’s Journey to Eretz Israel in the Seventeenth Century Yiddish Story” (p. 207).
11. Alice: “There’s no use trying, one can’t believe impossible things.” The White Queen: “I daresay you haven’t had much practice. When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.” Lewis Carroll, Through the Looking Glass (London & New York: Penguin Classics 1998 [1871]), 251.
13. This category also includes stories of demented physicians, such as Jules Verne, A Fantasy of Doctor Ox, 1874; H.G. Wells, The Island of Doctor Moreau, 1896; Mary W. Shelley, Frankenstein: Or the Modern Prometheus, 1831; Robert Louis Stevenson, Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mister Hyde, 1886; and in contemporary literature the character of Doctor Tyler in Philip K. Dick’s Blade Runner.
(Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep), 1968. In Hebrew literature, with the necessary reservations, we could include the legend of the creation of the Golem of Prague, attributed to the Maharal of Prague. For more on the Golem, see Sahara Blau, “Kosher Vampires: Jews, Vampires, and Prejudice,” in this volume, p. 199.

14. Clute and Grant propose a more cautious definition of science fiction: “Whether or not a SF story is plausible, it can at least be argued.” In John Clute and John Grant, The Encyclopedia of Fantasy (New York: St. Martin Griffin, 1999), 844.


16. Thomas More, Utopia, 1551. Compare the Old Testament prophecies of Isaiah 11: “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,” and in Christianity, the reconciliation and tolerance proposed in De Civitate Dei in the fifth century, Saint Augustine, The City of God, translated by Thomas Merton (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), as well as the structure of the state in the Dialogues of Plato. On Messianic fantasy and imagination in Jewish philosophy, see Dov Schwartz, ibid.

17. For a complete list of Israeli fantasy and science fiction since 1948, see the appendix (p. 282).

18. The name was inspired by gloomy Gothic architecture.


21. Guy de Maupassant, Stories, 1887; Marcel Ayme, Short Stories, 1943.

22. This well-known phrase does not appear in any of Conan Doyle’s books, but has come to be identified with his detective as a result of the Sherlock Holmes films. See: http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/elementary-my-dear-watson.html

23. Over the past few years, several contemporary Israeli writers have adopted the detective story narrative woven into the fabric of an urban fantasy, which seems to please Israeli readers. See Danielle Gurevitch, “May He Come in Haste: Urban Fantasy in Soothsayer by Asaf Ashery,” in this volume, p. 56.

24. Franz Kafka, Stories and Fragments, 1915; Nikolai Gogol, Petersburg Tales, 1842.

25. P. 190.

26. See Orley Marron in this volume, p. 87. Among Etgar Keret’s books, see

27. P. 141 in this volume.
28. Magical realism can also be found in the Yiddish theater of the beginning of the twentieth century, See, for example, The Dybbuk (S. Ansky, 1922), and The Golem (H. Leivick, 1925).
30. On magical realism in Israeli theater, see Eitan Bar-Yosef in this volume, p. 112.
31. See, for example, Shmuel Hasfari’s 2003 play, Woman, Husband, Home.
32 On the controversy surrounding the definitions of “fantasy” and “fantastic,” see Clute and Grant, The Encyclopedia of Fantasy, 335-338.
34. On the distinction between terror and horror, see H.P. Lovecraft, Supernatural Horror in Literature (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House Publishers, Inc., 1987 [1927]).
37. Boris Karloff, Tales of Terror (Barlow Press, 2008 [1943]), 10.
38 Not coincidentally, the book was written against the thunderous background of war. Although the war in question was World War II, the author’s memories of World War I, in which he fought, were clearly still very strong.
