

TOHUVABOHU

Chaos and Desolation // Anarchy and Yiddish

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Forward

The intentions of compiling this zine is solely to foster a modern Jewish anarchism. We feel that it is important to, both, create a body of non-fiction and analysis from a Jewish-anarchist lens, and a body of fiction that supports those analyses while fostering those ideals. Jewish anarchy, just like the vastness of the world's Jewry, is vast and diverse. We hold true to our hearts the anarchy of our past, our fight against statelessness, and the fight against fascism and supremacy. We feel that it is in our best interest to remember the past and to look to unimaginable futures. In this issue, we print several stories by a modern Jewish anarchist author, Der Meshunedik. Although we do not know much about the author, we feel, that the author's ideals are inline with our values. What we do know is that the author is a trans, queer, Jewish, anarchists, who wishes for an end to "whiteness," the society that upholds it, and to the destruction of "Time," that constrains our unimaginable.

We hope that in compiling this zine that other Jews and Gentiles will seek out Jewish anarchism---not only its rich history---but create its *now*. As it was said: *We dream of a time when we were no longer a dream.*

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Gimple Di Shedele

Der Meshunediker



They say that I, like every Jew, has creeping one thousand devils and evil spirits upon my right shoulder, ten thousand on my other, all awaiting for the perfect moment of weakness, joy, or pain to drive Jews to ruin. On nights like these when the moon's face is obscured by darkness, much is illuminated: the stars dance a dance over six thousand years old, and spin tales, new and old, of our collective and individual futures. Shadows come alive. Even the atheist fears these nights, for God's face, too, is obscured. Imps whisper odd stories and lies in ears, causing trouble in homes, towns, and countries. These stories are still echoed today precisely because no one believes in imps, spirits, dybbuks, and golems anymore; no one studies the holy texts to dispel such lies.

Here in the small Jewish town of New Frampol, we have many types of people: the wise Rebbe Elizar, Khaim the nosy butcher, Khana "the good." We have, too, have imps and devils that run amok in our lives. But we understand that they, like us Jews, are Hashem's creatures, and just like Jews, they must uphold their own *mitzvos* beset by Hashem. These *mitzvos* and lurking creatures are what differentiates us Jews from goyim. Despite this understanding, one little devil (though not always a devil) managed to surprise our little town. Gimple had once confided in me that they had been marked since before their own birth.

Gimple was born over ninety years ago in our beautiful Shul in the back row of seats in the women's section. Once the cord was cut, the midwives made a blessing and cauterized the cord with a candle, which ominously went out. But even before this, on the *Shabbos* in which they were conceived, Gimple, was studying Torah inside their mother's womb when they saw a figure emanating light flutter toward them. Just as Gimple had expected, it was an angel. Gimple had read about this angel in the Torah. And, just like an angel, it was completely abominable. It spoke to Gimple in a horse and awful voice; its Yiddish was indecipherable, probably because its teeth were so rotten; and the

words were muffled by its own wretched breath. The sight of the angel made Gimple the fetus nauseated.

The angel told Gimple that it was Hashem's decree that Gimple were to be a boy, and that he would be a somewhat successful shoemaker and a decent human being. However, having read the Torah from beginning to end, Gimple the fetus could see from one end of the world to the next. They could understand that this world was wrapped in a spreading thread of light, weaving concealment around the world. They knew that they were a *tumtum*¹ in *tzimtzum*²--consumed in *goles*³, lost in exile. Gimple knew also that this angel would attempt to set a soul inside them, and to burn an indentation above their upper lip, causing them to lose their knowledge of the Torah. Being no fool, Gimple rebelled against Hashem's decree, and fought the grotesque angel in their mother's womb. Wrestling an angel is no easy task. An angel's skin is cold, moist, and ephemeral, and yet touching it burns. In the tumult, the angel managed to grab a soul from its satchel and set it inside Gimple, but just as the angel was about to burn Gimple's upper lip, Gimple bit the angel's finger off. This, Gimple told me, is why they lip and possess no indentation above their lip.

After Gimple's birth was the *bris*,⁴ which was successful, and everything seemed normal to the Jews of Frampol. Gimple's poor Orthodox family consisted of their parents, four brothers, and several sisters. Small and skinny with a long gentle neck, Gimple adored their sisters and spent their time with them rather than their quarrelling brothers, and chose the company of their mother and grandmother over their father, who regarded Gimple with scorn.

At the age of twelve, Gimple's parents began to notice an oddness

1 *Tumtum* "In the Mishnah, a tumtum is a person whose sex is not determinable..." by societal norms. Hebrew (as pronounced by Ashkenazim) tumtum originally meant "a simple or stupid child," and later became a pejorative for an effeminate man and a person whose gender is ambiguous. (403 Rosten) A modern definition would be someone who is transgender.

2 *Tzimtzum* Connected to exile, it is the place where the empty space of the spiritual and physical world exist with free will.

3 *Goles* (Yiddish) derived from Hebrew, meaning "diaspora" and "exile."

4 *Bris* (Heb) Yiddish word for "circumcision."

to Gimple, that had been creeping in their minds. Fearing that their sweet, quiet child had been possessed by a *dybbuk*,⁵ they took Gimple to Rebbe Elizar, but he had no help to offer. Then they went to Lodz to seek the Rebbe Freylekh, who, also, was of no help. They even sought the help of the *goy* witch who lived on the outskirts of New Frampol, who concluded that Gimple was free of both curse and evil spirit. They tried almost all of the rabbis, wondermakers and witches they could think of, but none could unravel their small, living enigma. Just as they grew weary and prepared to give up, Gimple was invited to Rebbe Ephraim's house in Ossatin, word having gotten out about this curious child. This was the day when Gimple and I first met.

There, in the dusty living room littered with books, stood Gimple, their parents, several rabbis and myself, Sholem Nakhman. As a young man of thirteen years of age, I was present as Reb Ephraim's assistant. The rabbis had Gimple stand in the middle of the room; each rabbi in turn curiously orbited Gimple, not saying a word. After several minutes, the Rabbis huddled together; Gimple's parents stood hopelessly near the entrance, awaiting the Rabbis' word. Gimple and I stared at one another from across the room, not saying a word. Our curly *peyos*⁶ glowed heavenly radiant in the dusty afternoon light that shone through the window; our gaze uninterrupted, simultaneously we walked towards one another and stood close, facing each other; our hands began to touch. The rebbes, noticing what was happening, quickly broke away from their meeting and moved to stand between the two. Gimple, the rebbes announced, was a *tumtum*; although their body resembled that of a male, their soul was something entirely different. Just like the Jews, Gimple's gender was *svishn tsvey velt*, between two worlds. To the rabbis this verdict was a sentence of doom, and Gimple's parents wept with uncertainty.

To be alive, even for a *goy*, is a struggle. To the *goyim*, Jews are *tumtumish*, and to Jews Gimple was *tumtumish* as well. Inside Jewish minds exists a constant battlefield. There are six hundred thirteen *mitzvos* that every

5 *Dybbuk* (Heb) meaning to "cling." The dislocated soul of a dead person in search of a new body.

6 *Peyos* (Heb) Sidelocks traditionally worn by boys and men.

Jew must uphold; they are what make both humans and devils Jews. The battlefield within--a constant questioning of one's own goodness--create a kind of neurosis that has defined our Jewishness within the confines of this hostile world for centuries; Gentile borders that shape our earthly lives. The young Gimple once cried out to me, "How much of our daily lives and traditions were made to adapt to our subjugation? How have their traditions of hate shaped our Jewishness?"

Reb Gimple once said to us: "I must speak in story, because that is the only way that you will listen. I will tell you about our people, who are older than you can imagine. Long ago the Jewish people floated, much like a cloud above the world. In those times the world below was not too different from how it is today, but it was of little interest to us. Floating, we flirted and toyed with the heavenly body, weaving poetry about *levoneh*⁷ in the dark sky--how it thrilled us as *levoneh* fluttered about us! Until one day the world below took notice of our joyfulness. They, too, wanted to to be joyful--to play peek-a-beaux with Hashem's waxing and waning--they tried hundreds of times to catch us and tie us to the earth. We fought and fought, but the *goyim* were successful, and, yet, we still hovered oh-so-slightly above the world. They did everything in their power to bring us down. They constructed walls, fortified with the bodies of trees; they constructed magical borders; made countless restrictions and edicts upon us; they created royalty and governances to rule us; but, nevertheless, we continued to float oh-so-slightly above the earth. They called us names. They tried to consolidate us. They tried to woo, fool, and kill us. They did this all, yet we remained floating above, like oil on water. They were builders and, finally, they constructed the Hour that quantified our existence, bonded their borders that bound us tighter. Trapped in the scaffolding of Time, we managed to still float above their imagined borders. We were able to do so, because like a cloud, we are ephemeral phantoms of this world. We are *svishn svey velt*: the world below and the

7 *Levoneh* (Yid) Moon

world above. When light speaks to darkness, our hearts fill with Joy, for these are the moments when *levoneb* coos to us. We are timeless, and Time is what chokes us. The world below is not a Hell, it is people and what people make of it. Their Time is not time at all. It is only a tool of punishment. We must strive for that timelessness.

“I, too, am timeless. As I look at this *goyish* world, which we are trapped within--even as I look into your eyes--I see myself reflected numerous times. I can see not myself linearly, but floating further and further up, shifting about in a giant mass of Me. As I tell you this story, the act of storytelling breaks us from the monotony of Time, lets us momentarily feel the exaltation of existence through pain, joy or revolt--and remember our story. I look to Myself and ask: what is the oldest memory which you can remember? I, the eldest, answer: ‘I can only remember this moment in time.’

The second eldest says: ‘I can remember before the camps, the feeling of the warm knife in my hand, and the hunger, ravenous inside Me.’

The third eldest says: ‘I can remember before the 2,000th subjugation.’

The fourth eldest says: ‘I can remember before the taste of our tears and the end of the first twenty-four Hour day.’

The fifth eldest says: ‘I can remember before the taste of blood, and how we fought eternity as if we could kill their Time.’

The sixth eldest says: ‘I can remember before the timeless steps of Rome, the pain of the death of the Temple.’

The seventh eldest says: ‘I can remember before the look of terror on their faces when the sea collapsed upon them.’

The eighth eldest says: ‘I can remember before the floating.’ And every Me is amazed by this memory.

‘The ninth eldest says: ‘I can remember before the angel’s finger and a terrible burning.’ And I, me--I never experienced this burning, and I bit the finger that tried to feed me ignorance.

The tenth eldest says: 'I can remember before Adam and Lilith.'

The eleventh eldest says: 'I can remember before there was the tree and the fruit.'

The twelfth eldest says: 'I can remember before gender.'

The thirteenth eldest says: 'I can remember before there was a garden.'

The youngest says: 'I remember before there was Hashem.'

Again and again, each Me is amazed by what they hear. The story, spun, is passed down to the Me that I am now, in this moment, and places Me momentarily in the place I am, to better understand what I am--a voice echoing in your head. *Kristlekh goyeshe gezelschaft*⁸ can prevent me from our Jewishness and Joy, so I strive to detach myself completely from this world, to someday again dance as we once did before, because the greatest mitzvah of all is to feel joy."

Gimple observed to me once that when Time crept like Cossacks through New Frampol and infiltrated our minds, our lives changed significantly. There was much confusion about our lives and what seemed right became wrong. Soon we began to manage ourselves on their behalf. Now, on top of needing to uphold the mitzvot, we also needed to fight in order to keep our roofs above our heads and even to preserve our lives, as many *goyim* attempted to mix us into them, like the oil that floats above the water.

Back when Gimple was in school, not every child knew Torah like they did, nor did they all excel at their studies as Gimple had. It was a wonder that they were so knowledgeable in so many matters. Had Gimple not been so strange, people would have thought that Gimple were to be the next *tzadik*.⁹ As a child, Gimple would make brazen statements that shook New Frampol. For example, young Gimple once proclaimed that every New Frampol household was sinning on *Shabbos, the day of rest*. "This is simple," Gimple explained, "on *Shabbos*

8 *Kristlekh goyeshe gezelschaft* (Yid) Christian Gentile society.

9 *Tzadik* (Heb) Lit. "Righteous one." One who is separated from this world and acts as a holy conduit. There are 36 at all times who walk among us.

one should refrain from work, but instead in every household across town women are cooking, cleaning, and serving their husbands. Women, too, must have time to rest! There is no difference between man and woman.” This did not go over well with the men of New Frampol. Some of the women agreed; others called Gimple a rubble-rouser and a *shed*. They all called them a woman, but this did not hurt Gimple. This statement and others of Gimple’s words spread throughout the town, and New Frampol erupted as if it had been on the verge of revolution for centuries. Everything about Gimple troubled the town: their gait, their manner of speech, the angle of their wrist, even the curl of their *peyas*. After word got out about the verdict of the rebbes, the townspeople, feeling confirmed in their judgements, began to taunt Gimple, calling them other cruel names, such as *tumtum*, *golem*,¹⁰ androgyne, and *feyygele*.¹¹

As they neared their coming of age, Gimple’s name became a filthy word on the tongue of every New Frampler. One day, Rebbe Elizar called for Gimple. They sat together in silence for a long time, not speaking. The rebbe sat behind his desk, framed by stacks of holy texts, hands pressed together in contemplation. Gimple sat before him. A procession of dust particles marched through the afternoon light, slightly obscuring their vision. We could ask, “What was the rebbe thinking?” or “What were the townspeople thinking?” Instead I asked Gimple, “What were you feeling?” Gimple answered me in two words: “Total fear.” Gimple knew what the Torah says about a *tumtum*. They felt their soul being challenged and their body on trial. This moment of judgment could end with their exile. Exiled as a Jew, by a town of Jews; exiled from their own body: rejected; *aleyn in goles*, alone in exile. “Gimple,” said the rebbe, “what are you, really?”

“I am a Jew. Soon to bar mitzvah.” The rebbi raised his eyebrows. “I know, Reb Elizar, that I am different from the others, but I also know the Torah intimately. This is all difficult for me. I know that I am a *tumtum* and I know what the rabbinical court thinks of me. Well, what

10 *Golem* From the Zohar, a golem is a Jewish creature made of earth. It cannot speak and nearly invincible. But is often used as a pejorative for an idiot.

11 *Feygele* (Yid) (diminutive) from foygl, meaning bird, meaning “little bird.” Often used as a pejorative for a homosexual.

can one do? I am what has been decreed upon me.”

“A *tumtum*? Gimple, you young fool, I was at your *bris*, I will have you remember. You are clearly a boy.”

“Then why do I not feel like a boy?!”

“I don’t know, but you are not a *tumtum*.”

“Precisely, Rebbe, there is no word for me. Even a *tumtum* has more mitzvot than I!” Gimple was filled with such grief. They only wanted to study and be accepted, not to be managed and criticized, not to feel themselves a freak rejected by their town. This grief remained with them for the remainder of their short life.

When Gimple and I first began living together at the edge of New Frampol’s forest, we were young and impish, our bodies malleable, and we were deeply in love. Every morning, kicking up dirt, we would become entangled in a web of *tefillin*.¹² We spoke in our holy language, unraveling Torah and traversing *mitsrayim*.¹³ No one knew of our love; who should suspect such a respectable young rabbi? They did not respect Gimple, however, and Gimple suffered greatly. It took some years for Gimple to realize what they were, or that all around them were thousands upon thousands of other *sheydim*.¹⁴ On Yom Kippur, Gimple, still trying to make sense of themselves, went to *shul*, but was met by the rabbis, who stood outside the doors, turning Gimple away on the holiest day of the year. That day Gimple wept in my arms. By nightfall, Gimple decided to enact revenge. We waited until the early hours, then left for the Jewish Quarter of New Frampol. Through the empty streets we walked, and street lamps burst silently as we passed. We first found the houses of all the rebbes who had wrongfully enforced hashem’s words upon *sheydim*. The first house we came to was that of Reb Dovid. A brand new BMW, red and with its top down, was parked out front; so, tires flattened and a steaming pile of *dreke* on the

12 *Tefillin* (Heb) Traditionally worn during prayer, two boxes containing holy scripture are bound by long leather straps to the head and on an arm, so as to remember the Exodus. Some say that tefillin can be used to ward off demons.

13 *Mitsrayim* (Heb) The name of Egypt and/or “the narrow place.”

14 *Sheydim* (Heb) the plural of *shed*, meaning “demon.”

driver's seat. Oy! How the neighbors woke that morning to his screaming, what a mouth! Next was Reb Elizar, who vomited when he awoke after drinking from his bedside table a glass of what resembled water, but was actually castor oil mixed with egg whites. Finally, Reb Moyshe found himself cursing at the burning sensation as he bathed. The soap on his *mitsrayim* having been replaced with pure tea tree oil. "Maybe that will widen his narrow mind," Gimple said to me as we hid in the bushes, hi-fiving. Even those who had claimed friendship with Gimple, but allowed for Gimple to be exiled, learned that morning what kind of *shed* Gimple and their disciples could be. Khanah "the good" crowed with the morning's cocks when she mounted her fancy bicycle for her morning ride and found a child's bicycle seat where hers should have been. Khaim the butcher woke up with his arms around the body of a headless lamb, and all around him living animals, staring; trying to escape the room, he found that his door had been turned to lead by a waterlogged mattress that rested on the opposite side. Throughout the city graffiti spoke volumes; the windows of the *goyim* police were shattered; even the clock upon the high tower which overlooked New Frampol was silenced. Kopernik Street trembled, Dzierzek Street shuddered. The Jewish Quarter learned and would never forget.

Yet, after all of this, the *sheydim* were still in *goles*. But Gimple and the other *sheydim* were not at all saddened by this. In fact, they felt a joy that they had never felt. On the night of Gimple's death, every *shed* in the vicinity, including myself, descended upon New Frampol. We did not shout; nor were we silent. We gave voice to our joy with stones that sang through the air and crackling fires of burning barricades on every corner. That night, all symbols of Time were turned to rubble, and New Frampol was momentarily released from the grip of the goyish spell.

On their deathbed, Gimple commented one last time on the Torah:

"They say that every Jew has creeping one thousand devils and evil spirits upon their right shoulder, ten thousand on their other, all awaiting for the perfect moment of weakness, joy, or pain to drive them to ruin. On nights like these when the moon's face is obscured by darkness, much is illumi-

nated: the stars dance a dance over six thousand years old, and spin tales, new and old, of our collective and individual futures. Shadows come alive. Even the atheist fears these nights, for God's face, too, is obscured.

“We have been placed here as *sheydim* and as Jews. As *sheydim* and Jews we must support and account for one another, for we do not have anyone to do that for us. The old sages spun a tale and people believed it, and so we have been scapegoated and demonized. In the Garden, Atum was created as a tumtum, described as a golem. If Atum was written in the image of hashem, then hashem too is a tumtum.”

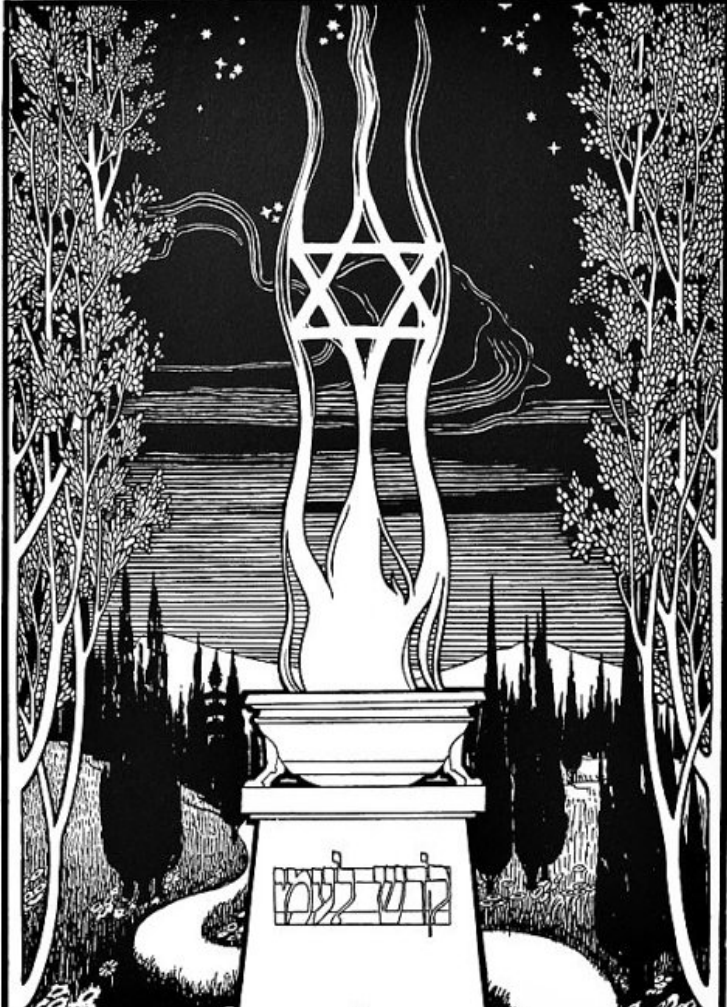
Every new moon, such as the one of Gimple's death, *sheydim* from all over go out and remind the town of their presence by dancing the dance of joy that could tempt *levoneh* from out of its hiding place. We do this because we know that, above all, it is most important that “one should always be joyous.”



*Jews rioting against Time, erected barricades and fought the police and fascists,
England
4 October 1936*

8 Kopernik Street

Der Meshunediker



In the time of creation the world was simple, flat, and dim. No light shone upon it and horrid creatures crept across its surface. God, blessed be the Name, saw this and took hold of the four corners, folded and formed the earth into a ball, entombing its former surface inside. Then God created the Sun and the Moon, spun the Earth so that it might rotate, and so that the light of the Sun and the Moon might touch all parts of the Earth.

But even God, may He not strike me down, makes mistakes. And the darkness from within crept without from the many caves. These shadows, in fact, grew stronger with the Sun, and the shadows called themselves the Children of the Sun.¹ And the Sun loved its children. At the time, the Moon and the Sun were equal. But, having seen the brutality of the Children of the Sun, the Moon pleaded with God, arguing that the Sun should not be so big. God punished the Moon for its plea, making the Moon smaller and the Sun even larger. The Moon again argued that the Sun was in allegiance with the Shadows, and, again, God punished the Moon by making its light dimmer and the Sun's light brighter. The Sun's new power made it dare to imitate God. The shadows danced in its fire, and the fire whipped and licked the Earth. God saw the scorched Earth and wept. Foreseeing His own death, He spoke to the Jews and told them to make a sacrifice of a he-goat. The Shadows danced, trying to catch the scattering *sefirot*² from God's dying corpse. And the Shadows infested both the people and the lands, morphing minds and establishing borders.

1 "Children of the Sun" are what many followers of Julius Evola call themselves. Evola influenced Nazis and Italian fascists, and continues to inspire fascists today.

2 *Sefirot*, plural of *Sefirah*: From the Kabbalah, the ten attributes of God. The pluralized ending is feminine. The Sefirot are different attributes of God and humans, from "knowledge," "kindness," to "splendor" and, some believe, represent different genders.

Within these borders was a small town of Jews known as Khelm. Some say that it is in Poland, but to us it is only in the Diaspora. Although the people of Khelm were not the brightest, we were good and pious people. Now, there are many stories of this infamous town, such as the time when Berl the baker wanted to make bagels and set off to the next town to purchase a sack of bagel holes. Perhaps more pertinent is the story of how the town's wise men, who nightly praised and adored the beautiful Moon with poetry, were devastated once a month when the Moon would disappear. Shmuel the wise at last devised a plan with the other wise men to capture the Moon. In the middle of the month, when the Moon was unabashedly full, the wise men saw this and ran to the well, and there the Moon stood. At just the right moment Shmuel signaled for Efraim the wise to shut the concrete lid over the well, capturing the beautiful Moon. A few nights later, the wise men returned to pay a visit to their beloved Moon, but upon opening the lid they found their well empty. The wise men cried out. They were certain that a Moon-thief must be living amidst their otherwise honest town. As they began to plot how to catch the Moon-thief, Hershl the wise announced that he could, in fact, see the Moon in the well after all. Sure enough the Moon had only been hiding, showing only a sliver of itself to the wise men. Those times are forgotten, but all of these stories are true. I was only a child then, but as a child I overheard many things, and this I had overheard from Zelda the town gossip, who had spoke it to Rivka the daughter of Berl the baker, who had heard it from Shoshana the Rebbe's wife. If that isn't enough, then you can read for yourself the firsthand testimonies in the town's records... which unfortunately disappeared in The Great Destruction.

Listen, the story of Khelm continues so: every so often the shadows would creep from the caves and over the lands, and bring terror and death to many. For us, a landless people, a people of exile, this was nothing new. The Jews of Khelm, defenseless, survived within these shadows, doing our best not to disturb the goyim.³

One day a shadow was cast. No one had ever dreamed of such a shadow, but this shadow, real as night, nearly covered the entire world. The

3 *Goyim* (Yiddish) Plural of *Goy*, meaning Gentile or non-Jew

town of Khelm with its two synagogues, the mill, houses, and muddy streets, perched upon its flat hill, was completely engulfed in shadow. No light shone, as if it were in the times of Egypt. Not even the *ner tamid*⁴ could penetrate such darkness. The darkness was heavy and thick like blood, constricting like a serpent, and loud like a train. The darkness came at once. In Khelm we always knew when danger was ahead, because the dogs would stop frolicking with Elijah the Prophet and would instead begin to howl⁵; but, this time, the howling came too late. The townspeople were greatly upset in the darkness. Moyshe the cobbler struck his hand with his hammer, and swore; Khana who meant to pick up her child instead picked up a goose, and screamed; Miriam the poet accidentally ran into a young yeshiva *bokber*,⁶ who screamed when he realized that he was touching a girl; Anka the shabbos *goy* tripped over the cantor, who pushed over Rebbe Natan. The shadows, meanwhile, crept. They crept from cracks and corners, from doorways and cellars, from between books, from wherever shadow could be cast.

Then something terrible happened. As the town dogs' howling became a tremendous storm, all thunder without lightning, walls went up, making the town smaller and smaller; and, one by one, the Jews of Khelm began to disappear. It seemed as if the Earth had opened up, swallowing all of Khelm whole, and as if works of the Devil abounded. Spirits caused havoc, torturing any Jew that crossed their path. Evil things pulled and ripped out beards and *peyas*. Torahs and holy scripture were turned to burnt crisps. All around was pain. The people of Khelm began to starve. They felt a thirst to die.

Though there was a two-hundred-year feud, of which not one Khelmiter could remember the roots, the two rebbes of the opposing Hasidim decided to put the feud aside to save their people and their way

4 *Ner Tamid* (Hebrew) The Eternal Flame, which hangs before the Ark in most synagogues.

5 "When a dog howls, someone has died" (Az a hunt vuyet, iz eyner geshtorbn"). This is a paraphrase of part of the Talmud: "When dogs howl, this is a sign that the Angel of Death is in the town. When dogs frolic (literally, "are happy"), [this is a sign that] Elijah the prophet is in the town. ("Ven es voyen hint, iz a simen, as der malekh-hamoves iz in shtot. Az hint zaynen freylekh, iz Elyohu hanovi in shtot.") (Rothstein 142)

6 *yeshiva bokber* (Yiddish) A youth or student who studies Talmud at an academy of higher learning; a bachelor.

of life. Both Rebbe Hoshuah and Rebbe Natan gathered the wise men and scholars in secret in the attic of the New Old Old Shul. The men fought and fought about what to do, but to no avail. The darkness continued to prevail, and even the wisest of the wise began to disappear. At one momentous meeting, upon the day of Rosh Hashanah, the conversation was opened to us, the remaining grief-stricken Khelmites. Only thirteen villagers were left, including me.

“What are we to do?” one asked frantically.

“What can one do?” said another.

“Even the moon acts as if it were the beginning of the month,” said the cobbler.

“It is the beginning of the month, you *nudnik*,” quarreled Khana.

“We must get the Sun to shine again!” said Shmuele, a young boy.

“No, we need the Moon,” argued Esther, a young girl.

“And why do you say that?” said Shmuele.

“Because the Sun shines when it is already light out. The Moon is collected and intelligent with its light. The Sun, however, burns hot and grows wild,” retorted Esther.

“Ah, but in Genesis 1:16,” interrupted Rebbe Natan, taking the children’s debate seriously, “the Torah says that the Sun and the Moon were created equally in size and brightness, so how could one be smarter than the other?”

“Rebbe Natan, have you forgotten the conversation between God, blessed be His Name, and the Moon, who questioned the crown?” asked Rebbe Hoshuah.

“I have not. Have you forgotten the rest of the parsha?⁷ Is it so wrong to question even God? God, blessed be the Name, thought it was so, and the heavenly body felt God’s wrath and turned the little anarchist into what we know as the Moon. But even God makes mistakes and that is why we make, and not offer, a sacrifice on God’s behalf, to expurgate the sins *He* made against the Moon. But to whom is this sacrifice offered? Not to God. The Moon, then? Or is it out of fear of the Sun and its Children that we do such things?”

“Fear? Do you fear the Sun more than God? Do you pray to *Him* out of fear?” said Rebbe Hoshuah.

“I cannot deny that I pray to God, may He strike down our enemies, for the same reason I say a prayer for the Czar, may he stay far away from the Jews.”

Just then, the church bell’s distant peal was heard, indicating nightfall and the beginning of Rosh Hashanah. We Jews of Khelm clumsily descended into the prayer hall, feeling around in the dark; we began to pray with great fervency. Our prayers and sobbing were met with an awful sound from outside, shaking the stained glass windows and rocking the great doors that protected us. The slats began to give way and the roof began to cave. Fearfully, we ran through the dark to the *mikvah*,⁸ where Yehudah son of Motyl, the Rebbe’s beadle, gathered everyone closely. There we plotted a plot that would fool the devil himself.

That night the darkness was even more blinding, as Rosh Hashanah has no moon. Yehudah spoke. “All this talk of the Moon--have we forgotten that we have the Moon? Our *mikvah* is connected to the well! We must go and release it!”

“An excellent idea, but, I must say,” said Rebbe Hoshuah, “the Moon is a wild creature and does not abide by our laws or any.”

7 *Parsha* (Hebrew) A portion of the Torah that is read weekly.

8 *Mikvah*: the ritual bath. Traditions differ from sect to sect.

“Yes. A dangerous plan!” agreed Moyshe the cobbler.

“Dangerous?!” exclaimed Khana. “Do you not hear what is beyond the door?” And so the Khelmites all agreed to go together into the *mikvah* to find the Moon. But this was not an easy task, for how could we all get into the water? One cannot wear clothes into a *mikvah*, and men and women cannot be naked together unless they are married. And they could not all get married—that is against the law, even if it is in the pitch of darkness. “But what if we were all men?” asked Shmuele.

“Or what if we were all women?” said Esther.

“What if we were neither?” I offered.

“Not a bad idea! Rebbes, is there anything in the Torah that speaks against this?” The two Rebbes frantically put their heads together, and came back in agreement: they could not remember even one piece of scripture that spoke on the issue of a gender that was neither male nor female. Quickly, the men and the women used their imagination as to what that could look and feel like. Some women removed their wigs and replaced them with the men’s *yarmulkes*⁹ and *kolpik*,¹⁰ tying their long hair under their chins; some men altered their long caftans and undergarments, traded their slacks for skirts. In this desperate, grief-stricken moment, we, Jews of Khelm, became lost in joy and laughter. We all thought how queer it was to be the other and yet not. Our laughter echoed off the cobbled walls, sprang off the water’s surface, and bounded down the long drainage tunnel. Our laughter was so loud that we didn’t hear the shul collapse above them, or the *mikvah* door burst open, or the triumphant howl of the imps, *dybbuks*, and spirits bursting through, each blocking the other’s past.

Our laughter, however, was interrupted by the screaming of little Shmuele, who had been snatched by the long arm of a Shadow. Our small congregation froze in horrified silence... but then our sudden despair wavered in its moment of triumph. From the depths of the *mikvah*, the sounds of hooves splashing in water and a growl of a

9 *Yarmulke* (Yiddish) skullcap traditionally worn by Jewish men.

10 *Kolpik* (Yiddish) Traditional fur hat

tiger erupted. For one moment there was total silence, but then there was a bright light that was somewhat loud. It grew louder and louder and burst through the drainage tunnel entrance into the *mikvah*. Its long body was adorned with shaggy white fur with large dark spots; it stood on four legs with split hooves, like those of a cow; its neck was medium in length, like that of a human; its head had two golden eyes like that of a lion. It had the nose of a dog, the ears of a cat, and two *peyas* cascading down from its crown; it had two wings, folded many times; its long body was, finally, punctuated with a lush tail, which whipped from side to side in anger. But what most of us remembered best afterwards was its screech. From the hollow of its mouth and between its many teeth, flew the voice of *Shekhina*¹¹ and its breath--God's breath¹²--which flew about the room, circumventing the Jews of Khelm and destroying the Children of the Sun. The breath and the voice retreated back inside the creature, a cloud of moondust settling to the floor. Its grasp on little Shmuele was no more.

The Moon looked back at the people of Khelm and made a strange gesture. The Rebbes took hold of the Moon's long fur and climbed atop it, and the rest of us followed suit. Its fur was warm, and the Moon cooed and purred for we Jews, solemnly joyous. Silently, the Moon unfolded its wings, revealing the night's stars, and leapt into the air. That night, for the first and only time on Rosh Hashanah, there was a full moon.

The Moon flew over Khelm, illuminating what was left of their little Jewish ghetto. We Khelmites looked on in amazement. The destruction of our community was immense; not much was left. But here we were safe, and we lay at our ease in the good-smelling, soft fur of the Moon watching the ebb and flow of the Shadows, until, after a few days, it looked safe enough to return.

The Moon brought us back to Khelm. But upon our return nothing looked familiar in the early morning light, not even the destruction we

11 *Shebekhyanu*, (Hebrew) meaning "dwelling," In the Kabbalah it is the Feminine Divine attribute.

12 The Breath, or *Kether* (Hebrew) meaning "pillar of mildness," In the Kabbalah it is the Divine gender-neutral attribute.

had witnessed. The dirt roads were hard and strange automobiles were staged on the side of the road. However, because we were dressed in each other's clothes, we hardly even recognized each other. Our small group walked with confusion through the quiet streets of daybreak, looking about for something familiar when suddenly, Hershel recognized that we were on Kopernik Street. "Look!" he shouted. "Right here is where Berl's bakery should be." Everyone made sounds of astonishment: Burl's bakery was not there.

"Then just down the street should be the New Small Shul!" exclaimed Rebbe Natan, his *peyas* and long coat flying in the cool morning wind as we ran towards our *shul*. We, the Jews of Khelm, stopped in front of the doors of the New Small Shul. The familiar Hebrew letters were still etched into the stone eaves, but just below them was another sign.

"What is this? What are these words?"

"Can anyone read this sign that is posted upon our *shul*?"

Regardless of how certain we were that it was our *shul*, a looming sign in big English letters hung above our *shul*'s doors, that read: "MCKENZEE SALOON, 8 Kopernik Street."¹³ In even more confusion, one by one, all thirteen of us entered the building.

Inside, it was dark and dusty. Tables stood about with stools and chairs upside down upon them. Along one wall was a bar with a large, dirty mirror behind it, framed by two glass shelves occupied by a few bottles. It all looked so bleak. In the middle of the room, where the *bima*¹⁴ once stood, hovered the Eternal Light, or what was left of it. Pieces of its glass facade were missing. We stood there for quite some time before someone spoke. It was Yehudah who said, simply, "What happened?" A whimper began, and then the people began to sob. And, with our sobbing, our bodies convulsed, bending at the waist. Rebbe Natan began *Kaddish*.¹⁵

13 This is the address and fate of the shul in Chelm. Today it is an American western-themed bar.

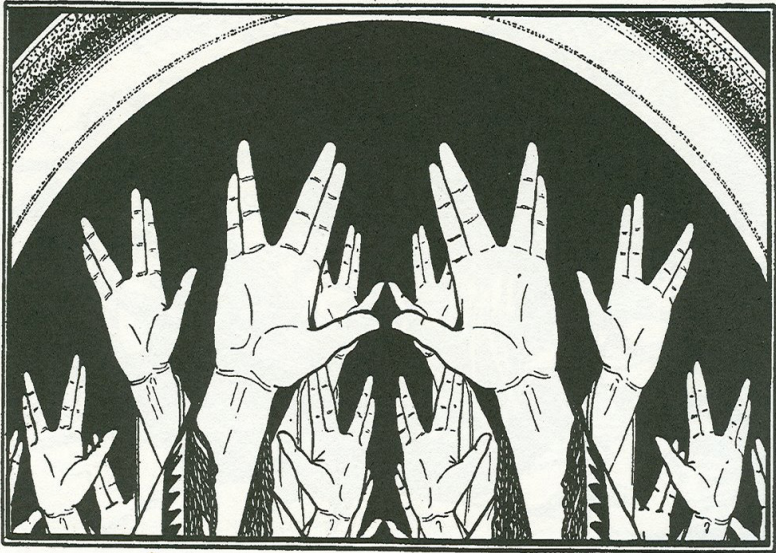
14 *Bima* The place where one reads from the Torah.

15 *Kaddish* (Aramaic) meaning "holy"; the mourner's prayer.

When Milek, the saloon owner, came downstairs to begin opening his business up for the day, he saw thirteen people whom he had never seen before. All of whom were dressed oddly, with strange hair, and all were weeping and bowing in the same direction. They did not look at him--they did not even notice him--they only kept on praying. Our prayers echoed off the saloon walls in a tongue the people of Poland had not heard in over seventy years, which not one Gentile could recognize. But our sadness chorused in a tone that Milek could not fail to understand. Our sadness spoke not only of the loss of our beloved *shul*, but of the time when we were not a dream.

The Tintum and the Golum

Der Meshunediker



They may never know and they probably will not. A little *timtum*¹ stands before the bathroom mirror, only in their underwear, looking at their body and thinking of their family. Their father had once said, “Zelda, you must never speak of it with your grandparents.” And the father assures the *timtum* that everyone had lived out their lives in safety. Lies. So much had been a lie--a lie to protect them from a harsh past. But those lies protected no one. The truth, the history that writhes in the hollows of their bones---a spectre of the generations---weaves itself through the *timtum*’s body, spun like dna, woven like that of a carpet, concealing itself deep within thier soul.

As the *timtum* looks at the mirror’s reflection of their face, they become lost in the desert of their cheeks; nearly drown in the deepest of their blues; stumble over the steps of their Jewish nose; and struggle to move beyond the pale of their own skin. Their mind now wanders too. They are no longer looking at their own face, but at the face of their great great grandmother, Zelda, their namesake. Although, they had never seen her before, they are certain that it is her---I know it is her.

It is raining, her hair matted down over her face, and we are standing together in shin-deep mud, which is all over our clothes and skin. Zelda is yelling at me, but I cannot understand her, her voice muffled as if her words were water in my ears. I read these words spilling off from her lips: “Moyshke! Moyshke! You must run, mayne Moyshkele!” But I cannot move. Something terrible has happened--no, something terrible is happening. All around is chaos and death; an explosion is consuming the watchmaker’s shop. A ringing underwater now. The fire is like a kiln, drying the mud on my body and I cannot move, and my guts become a graveyard.

1 *Timtum* “In the Mishnah, a *timtum* is a person whose sex is not determinable...” by societal norms. Hebrew (as pronounced by Ashkenazim) *tumtum* originally meaning “a simple or stupid child,” later to become a pejorative for an effeminate man and a person whose gender is ambiguous. (403 Rosten)

Just before my soul grows weak, the Rebbe runs to my side

Mumbling words

in darkness.

A healer speaks an incantation

“To the river! To the river!”

Then, I hear another voice...

The Great Story of the Hoykher Rebbe and the Golem

...Long, long ago, my great grandfather whispered a story of his father's to me. The story, he informed me, was from the dark Jewish land within that commonly is known as “Poland,” where the very wise and clever Rebbe was born with the sole purpose of defending the Jews from Gentile violence. The story always began like this: “Where I am from there is no fate, no future, and only one gate is left unlocked.”

In the *shtetl*² just outside of Munkatch, the Hoykher Rebbe had used all his cunning to convince the Gentile king that the Jews did not use blood in ceremonies and that the practice, in fact, would be unkosher. Yet still the pogroms continued. Gentiles would slit the throat of a Gentile child, place the corpse at the house of a Jew, and proclaim: “Blood libel!”

Their horror's were endless. Amidst one horrific pogrom, a Gentile man went to the kosher butcher, Moyshe Ben-Kohen, a wise and learned man. The Gentile took the butcher's kosher knife and forced the butcher to watch. As the Gentile slit the throat of a Jewish child he asked the butcher, dangling the dying child by the leg, “Is this kosher?” The frightened butcher replied, “No.” And the Gentile threw the child

² Shtetl (Yiddish) a small Jewish village.

to the dogs and Moyshe wept. Then the Gentile took the knife to the throat of another screaming child, and asked again, “is this kosher?” In hopes of saving the child’s life, the frightened butcher replied “Yes.” The Gentile slit the throat of the crying child and paraded the corpse through the streets as if he were selling the flesh of a lamb.

In a state of shock, Moyshe wandered the chaotic streets without care. The Hoykhe Rebbe gathered him and his brother, Yakov, and fled to the river that flowed through the Jewish ghetto. Though he was not bleeding, the Rebbe saw that Moyshe was injured in his soul, his eyes glazed, stared ahead. Dried rivers of tears marked his cheeks. The Rebbe told Moyshe to lay in the mud of the riverbank, and to step aside from his body; Moyshe obeyed. Stepping aside from his own body, he watched the Rebbe order Moyshe and his brother to cover his body entirely with mud. Having done so, the two assistance worked together to adorn the mud-body with two mud eyes, two mud ears, a mud nose and a mud mouth. The Hoykhe Rebbe ordered Yakov and Moyshe the mentich to speak an incantation while circling the mud-covered body seven times, while the Rebbe spoke holy words. As the men completed their tasks, they saw a radiant glow, sparks, and fire emit from the mud-covered body; in a moment, the face was awake, with light shining from its eyes. The Rebbe told the body to arise, go forth, and save the Jews from the Gentiles. Moyshe the Golem wrote the word “truth” across their own forehead in perfect Hebrew, using their own finger, and obeyed the words of the Rebbe.

Now, there are many stories about golems, but this one is a very real story; the story of Moyshe the Golem, who was so unlike all other golems. People often believe that the golem isn’t human, because it is unable to speak; nor can it die as humans dies. Moyshe the Golem was different because many spirits resided within their body, allowing Moyshe the Golem to speak and have free will. These abilities come with the price of death.

The three ventured together into the chaos of the pogrom. They passed corpses, burning homes, and ransacked stores; they heard the cries of suffering and the sounds of destruction from the streets beyond. The Rebbe saw that the mob was about to reach the *shul* and

its graveyard, so the Hoykhe Rebbe ordered Moyshe the Golem to go and save the holy Torah and protect its house. Moyshe the Golem advanced towards the violence as the Rebbe, Moyshe the Mentch, and Yakov watched from behind a pillar of a nearby store.

In front of the *shul*, Joseph the watchmaker was in the throes of pain, under a veil of death, when Moyshe the Golem approached the man who stood over him, a crowbar in his raised hands. The Golem grabbed the weapon from the Gentile's hands, lifted him several feet off the ground and ended his life. The Rebbe gasped and tried to run towards the Golem, but the two brothers stopped him. The Rebbe cried, "I must stop it! *Hashem*³ says not to do harm unto others!"

"No. We must allow its rage," said one brother.

The Rebbe protested, "But *Hashem* says--"

"Rebbe, how many times throughout history have Jews overcome Him?"

"But--" and the Rebbe was interrupted by the heavy thud of a piece of wood striking Moyshe the Golem in the back; Moyshe the Golem did not cry out. The Rebbe looked on in shock as a Gentile in a Cossack's uniform slashed the golem's arm with a knife; once again, there was no cry of pain. The golem merely slapped the Gentile across the face in response, felling him.

The Gentiles became full of fear, crying out in terror as they stared at the tall mud demon. The Golem looked to the heavens and opened its mouth, letting out the spirit of a cow who had been slaughtered by a Gentile butcher. The spirit emitted a noise that cannot be described, which shook the ground and shattered windows before finally retreating back down the throat of Moyshe the Golem. Several Gentiles collapsed, and the rest, fearing the Golem's magic, fled the ghetto. The hiding Jews slowly emerged, struggling to believe what they had witnessed. A Golem. A real Golem. A work of *Hashem*. They all crowded the Golem saying blessings and thanking the Golem.

Moyshe the Golem pressed through the crowd to the Hoykhe Rebbe. The Rebbe signaled for the congregation to wait while the Golem and

³ *Hashem*, word for god outside of prayer, lit. "the name."

the Rebbe spoke. "You have done well, Moyshe the Golem," said the Rebbe, "and now it is time for me to return you to your soul." The Hoykhe Rebbe now whispered to Moyshe the Mentch, "The night is passing its dreams onto the day: this is our chance. May this terrible night remain only a dream for you."

Moyshe rejoined his mud-covered body. He opened its mouth to the heavens and released the spirits from within, collapsing to the mud. The Rebbe and Yakov helped Moyshe to his feet, and all saw that rivers flowed from his eyes--so many tears that mud broke off in chunks and flowed down his body like the ice melt of the spring. People came nearer as the tears revealed a man, Moyshe the Butcher, and all placed hands on his body and wept with him.

For the generations since the destruction of the Temple, as our hearts have become our altars and our words have taken on new power, this has become the only way in which we know how to pray. As it is said, *all gates are locked, except the gates of tears.*

Timtum and the Mountain Golem

There was once a small town that was void. It was void of both Jew and Christian, cat and mouse, *shul* and house. The muck of the Earth was all that was there.

One day, a wise person came upon a hill where they thought a shul should be. Everyone knows that one cannot just build a *shul*--one must find one. A *shul* cannot be a reconstituted building, and the only way for a *shul* to exist where a church once stood is for the church to be torched to the ground and the soil to be plowed seven times a year for seven years. That is why there are so many empty lots in this city. Because Christians are left without mitzvahs, and mitzvahs are what make us complete. Some believe that Christians are constantly struggling to fill that void by building churches. Jews, however, being whole, will purchase a church and burn it to the ground and never rebuild, because it is much nicer to look at something green than one's own enemy.

They had been wandering for some time when the wise person brought the congregation to the hill. They stood before the congregation and said, "I believe that, here, beneath our feet is our *shul*." And the people began to dig. They had no tools---they had no possessions. After several hours of digging, one person proclaimed that they had found a wooden roof, but after further digging it was revealed to be merely wood for their new homes. Then another proclaimed that they had found the roof of the new *shul* and all dug and dug. This time, they were right, and after much time and effort the large, wooden doors of the *shul* were revealed. The doors were marked deep with history and timelessness, were stuck shut and would not budge, though there was no lock. The wise one thought: "We need a rabbe, for a rebbe should be the first to open the doors and step inside the new *shul*."

"Where can we find a rebbe?" the congregation wondered together.

A young boy suggested, "Maybe it should be the wisest person amongst us." The congregation made a collective "Ahh-ha!" sound.

"But how do we know which one of us is the wisest person?" said another.

This stumped the congregation, for they all seemed intelligent enough. Eventually, someone said, "Whoever can open the doors will be our rebbe!" All agreed that this was the most sensible test. One after another, they attempted to open the door, but no one could. "Maybe the rebbe is not here," said one woman.

"Yes. Maybe they have not arrived yet," said another.

"Or maybe there is more than one rebbe and the *shul* cannot decide, for our congregation is too large for just one rebbe"

"How can we find out who in our congregation are the rebbes?"

After a long while, a young girl offered, "What if we stand in a line, at the door, and each hold onto one another and pull? In the end we still won't know who the rebbes are, but maybe the doors will open!"

“Why not?” said the congregation, and they all stood in line. The line went very far; it seemed as if their congregation had grown since they had first arrived. The girl held onto the butcher’s love handles, who held onto Ms. Gold’s shoulders, and so on. They counted to seven and all pulled. People groaned and complained, and the doors slowly creaked open. When the dust settled, a large stone thing lay in the entrance. Nobody knew what it was. People began to try to climb through the small space between the stone thing and the entrance, but not one adult could fit, so the little girl volunteered to climb through into the darkness of the new *shul*.

Inside the *shul*, she saw that the stone thing was a giant man, so large that, to fit inside the *shul*, it sat wrapped into a ball. Its head was tucked between its knees, its arms were wrapped around itself, and it sat upon its heels. “Excuse me,” said the girl. There was no response. “Excuse me!” said the girl, a little louder this time. A movement. “What are you doing?” she asked.

“I am trying to not grow anymore,” it replied.

“Why not?” she asked.

“I don’t want to destroy this magnificent *shul*,” answered the giant.

“I see. Who are you?”

“I’m a Mountain Golem.”

“What’s your name?”

“I don’t know.”

“My name is Esther. What’s a Mountain Golem?”

“I was born in the mountains and my maker left me here in this *shul*,” said the Golem, cautiously lifting its head to see the girl. “But a golem can not stop growing.”

“How old are you?” asked Esther.

“How old is a mountain?” responded the Golem earnestly.

“There is a congregation outside--”

“Yes, I know. And you all want to get in but you can’t because I am too large.”

“Well, yes,” said the girl, not wanting to be rude. “Do you want to leave this *shul*?”

“Yes, but I don’t know how! I am far too big for the doors, and if I move, I am sure to destroy this beautiful *shul*!” cried the Golem.

“Who made you?”

“I can’t remember. It was a very long time ago.”

“How long ago?” asked the girl. The Golem shifted its body slightly, scraping the ceiling; a piece fell, nearly crushing the young girl, who danced deftly out of the way. She sat on the golem’s toe and looked up expectantly. The Golem began to speak:

“Long ago, in the days of creation, the earth was both round and flat. Everywhere was chaos and desolation. The earth was hot and impressionable; no human had yet walked its surface. The earth was inhabited only by the ten winds of direction. The wind giants constantly fought. For what? I cannot say; that is not for you nor I to understand. Their battling blew water onto land, and created mud. In this mud, the winds created the first *alef*. It is said now that the *alef* is shaped to look like a person pointing to the heavens and the earth, a hint of the lunar romance of long ago. It is known that the “alef” is the first letter of the alphabet, but also the first number after nothingness; to say it is the beginning is an oversight.

“Again, the winds clashed. In the mud, to the left of the *alef*, another letter appeared. It was the letter *mem*--shaped like a person mourning their lost home. Yet again, the winds fought, forming a third letter: the final letter of the alphabet, the humble and wise *tes*. The three letters, together, spell the word *emes*, or “truth.” In a last great battle, the winds clashed and created the face of a human beneath this word. Other features began to appear: arms, legs--a whole body. The body lay still until the tenth wind blew from within: *ssssssbbbbbebekbianuuu*. And the Golem attempted to raise its arm, only to be subjugated by the Northern Winds. And again it attempted to rise up, but was defeated by the Southern Winds. The eight winds united in chorus to blow earth onto the Golem, preventing it from rising up. Still, with all its massive strength, the Golem tried and tried to get up, but more and more earth were placed upon it, until at last the Golem was in appearance a

mountain. Still, every so often, I, the Golem would try to gain my freedom: the earth would rattle, the seas would tsunami, and my mountain would shake and crumble.

“One night, I was visited by an angel. The angel taught me the whole Torah. The angel told me that I am a Golem, and a servant of Hashem, blessed be the Name, and the angel put its finger above my lip to make me mute; a servant should not speak. But I did not want servitude. The angel’s finger seared the space above my upper lip; to this day, it is indented. Oh! How I howled, and I stabbed the angel’s hand with a jagged rock. The angel began to howl too, but did so, of course, in the harsh, ugly manner of an angel. The angel took to the air, and I grabbed hold of its leg. And that is how I gained my freedom from my mountain-self prison.”

“That is a wondrous tale! But tell me, Golem, how did you come to be in the *shul* under the hill? Maybe there is a clue to releasing you.”

“There is much I cannot remember. I know there is much terror and subjugation in my past and future. When the memories come to me, I become frozen and fluid through time; then I find myself elsewhere. One day, I awoke from a nightmare in which, fearing for my life, my family’s life, we ran. There was rain and mud, fire on my back--paralyzing heat--and a rabbi mumbling something. When I awoke, I found myself sitting here in this *shul*. I have been here for quite some time.” The Golem said, musing, to no one in particular, “There is only one way to free myself from this prison.”

The girl said, both to the Golem and no one in particular, “Curious. But how did I come to you? I cannot recall the time before the wise person found the hill that was this *shul*!” It was the rain, mud, and fear, that the Golem spoke of, that jarred her memory.

“I cannot help you, young one. I can only see my own past and future.”

The young girl, baffled and confused, got up. She moved across the *shul* to look in a mirror that hung on the wall. She had not noticed in the reflection that the Golem had wiped the *alef* from its forehead to spell no longer *emes*, but *mes: death*. Fissures appeared on the Golem and strong hands turned to dust. The young girl, lost in her reflection, saw not the Golem, but her own mirrored echo... shifting into the appearance of a young *timtum*. As the Golem collapsed, the young one was overcome by a whirling sensation, lost in a cloud---an internal ambiguity, reflected in their own body---reflected for the first time, as their own. In the mirror, their eyes became lost in the reflection's deep blues, looking on with horror as their own body slowly solidified--a dry cracking of the skin, which crept up their arms and over their entire body.

When the dust settled, all that was left was a little golem, trapped in a mountain, inside of a *shul*.



Inside a mountain, inside a shul—a mountain golem

Kol Nidrei

Der Meshunediker



The sun hardly seeps through the heavy October clouds as I stand on the shore of Lake Washington with twenty other Jews, thumbing the lint in my pocket. Today is Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish new year. This is both a happy and a somber day: a day to look to the future and reflect on the past. We are about to perform Tashlikh, the Jewish ritual of “casting off” which is performed on the afternoon of Rosh Hashanah. It is traditional to throw pieces of bread into a body of water so as to “cast all ... [of our] sins into the depths of the sea,” as both the Torah and my father would say. I’m not religious anymore, but I grew up as an Orthodox Jew. These High Holy Days, Rosh Hashanah and the nine days that lead up to Yom Kippur, used to fill my neighborhood with a bustling energy.

I can remember it clearly, though it was now twenty-four years ago: I was nine years old, and the year was 5752. My peyas blew in the autumn wind that flowed cool off the very same lake; I stood there with one hand in my pocket, thumbing the lint, just as I do today, but my other hand is grasped in my father’s hand. My father, a stout, uncertain, and learned man, played with his beard with his free hand, fingers black and rough from printer’s work. He and I stood there in contemplation with the rest of our congregation, as Gentiles passed us by as if we were not even there. The Northwest is not very Jewish in comparison to cities such as New York. As it is tradition to toss bread into the water, being poor, all we had was our pocket lint.

Holding the lint tight between my thumb and forefinger I thought back on my year, wracking my young mind for all of the sins I had committed--all of the baggage I carried--from the past year. I needed to make good with myself, so I could make good with God. As we tossed our sins into the water, our Rabbi spoke some prayers; my father whispered to me how Jews had done this same tradition for centuries, the importance of reflecting upon and learning from our actions

through the rituals of beginning anew. Finally, he told me about Kol Nidrei, Aramaic words that echo across the centuries---the opening line to a prayer which took on great significance for Jews during times like the Middle Ages. As our lint floated away, I felt those years, and saw my own reflection in the water as an ageless and ephemeral thing.

524 years ago, in the year 5253, as a Spanish explorer arrived in the “New World,” my family’s life in Spain was becoming dangerous. The king decreed that all Jews must convert to Christianity or be expelled from Spain. The Gentile army and many civilians took up arms against the Jews, who were quarantined and restricted to ghettos. My family escaped, but many others were murdered, or were made *conversos* at the blade. Regardless, those who were forced to converted were still treated as less than their Christian “brethren,” only reinforcing their hidden Jewishness. It is here that Kol Nidrei is added to our collective practice: “All vows we are likely to make, all oaths and pledges we are likely to take between this Yom Kippur and the next Yom Kippur, we publicly renounce. Let them all be relinquished and abandoned, null and void, neither firm nor established. Let our vows, pledges and oaths be considered neither vows nor pledges nor oaths.” Kol Nidrei is a dark addendum to our atonement, ringing of the suffering of those Jews who were forced to take an oath of conversion, and their descendants, many of whom know nothing of their Jewishness today.

It was the second Holocaust and the thousandth pogrom that stole away my family to America. It was American Gentile society that beat the Yiddish out of my grandmother, and told my mother how to raise her children; It was American Gentile society that knocked off my father’s *yarmulke* without even laying a hand on him. As the printing industry collapsed, my father had to find new work. He had a difficult time finding employers that didn’t find him odd because of his dress and his traditions, or would allow him to observe the Sabbath every Friday night. But, he was a good father, and did what he needed to do for his family, and so he had to change. No more beard. No more *yarmulke*. No more Sabbath.

Now, it is twenty-four years later, and I am an adult. As I stand here, on the shore of Lake Washington, once again I see myself as a child in the water, my eyes refracted a million times in my own reflection. How different I look now without my *peyas* and *yarmulke*. Would my child self recognize me now?

We recite Kol Nidrei to remember those who were forced to take an oath and for those who may be forced to take an oath in the future. This pain flows through my familial past all the way into the future and back to me again, holding a darker resonance now than it did when I was a child. As my grandparents cast the lint from their pockets twenty-four years ago, they were praying to break an oath that they had no choice but to make: an oath to assimilation and all that is bound to “whiteness.”

For the first time, I understand and recognize the despair in this prayer, and sing the song of my own death.

Der Dybbuk: To Our Scattered Bodies Go

Or
The story
Of how a spirit
Of a people roamed
The earth to find home

Der Meshunediker



“At the round earth’s imagin’d corners, blow
Your trumpets, angels, and arise, arise
From death, you numberless infinities
Of souls, and to your scattered bodies go.”
(John Donne)

איך גלייב ניט אין קיין צײַט, איך לייקן אָפּ דעם ליגן
מײַן עבר איז נאָך דאָ, און ערגעץ אויף די שטיגן
פֿון גרענעצלאַזן רוימס פּאַלאַצן שטייט נאָך איצט
דאָס וויגל פֿון מײַן קינדהייט, און מײַן יוגנט קריצט
נאָך הײַנט אוואָרן פֿון מפלות און פֿון זיגן

I don't believe in time, I deny the lie.
Here my past remains, and somewhere on the steps
of Limitless Rome's palaces is still
my childhood's cradle. Even today, my youth carves
forms of loss and victory.
-Aaron Glantz-Leyeles

They could never understand.

We have existed for thousands of years. For them, we do not exist, for we are not for them. We are forever against them. The moon is what guides us. We thrive upon their unknown; their chaos is our light. We are *tobu vabobu*--waste and void; formless and empty; chaos and desolation. The dark shadow of the unknown that swells in the back of their skull is our dwelling. We do not exist, for we have lived for thousands of years between two worlds. Our days are not dictated by the sun; its setting is our rising. To them, our *tsaytn'* are devilish; they continue in their trope, and they will never understand. I dreamt a dream of a time when I will have my body again. We have wandered this planet for 1,946 years; our feet raw and sinewy; skin draped over bone. I, *dybbuk*, am a phantom, an unfathomable being; a ghost, scattered and vanished, my blade refracting the light of the moon. But in the end, we are enslaved and exiled.

It happened like this:

On a moonless night the skyline was all red and twisted, jumping like a thing untamed. The city, bent, like the hot metal of a car wreck. Our bodies littered their path; others of our bodies lift unto our labour. We, still warm to their booted feet, and our blood, running everywhere, filled every streets, every inch, every cobble, every crack of the city. Was it then my body or our soul that was elusive? It rose up, made *aliyah*,² outward---a spell under our tongue, a chain around our neck: subjugated. They destroyed our body, our temple, the holiest of the holies, by exploding rock. But god rests not in temples, but in what is closest to us. *Lo Bashemaim hi*: god is “not in heaven”, her “children have defeated” her. (Babylonian Talmud, Baba Metzia 59b) The destruction is the end of ends and the beginning of *goles*.³ We were like the blood of the sheep, who was once embraced, whose heartbeat was

1 Yiddish, plural of *tsayt*, meaning *time*

2 Hebrew, meaning *to go up*. As in to go up to read from the torah, or to move to Israel (*make aliyah*)

3 Yiddish pronunciation of the Hebrew word for *exile* or *diaspora*

once intertwined with the other. The throat is slit: bloodsoaked hands sprinkle our blood onto other lands.

It was as quick as a meteor,

My limbs were gone--severed. The air grew thin in my lungs, great wafts flowing out from me. I applied tourniquets to the empty buds of my arms. First, by the kings of Iberia, then, by the Northerners--murder and exile. 1492: the tourniquet loosened, blood flowed and the desert flowers bloomed--the lost tribes quivered. For them it was centuries betwixt the next, but for us it was a matter of seconds. Time moves fast and time moves slow. Like ants aiding in the decomposition of a dead cat, time spread across the continental lands, like the pin-stretched skin of something no longer, and I, never living, dwelt always in the grey space of another's home. The pogroms. The disasters. The collaborators. Their armies. Their rulers. Their laws. This pogrom: a mob, our homes and prayers. That pogrom: our bodies, their crowbars. Our void within this world, without armies or rulers: my people have their *golems* and *dybbuks* for protection. We live as wandering souls, tormented and beaten, tempted by the carrot of our former body--the land that we called home, the temple that is sacred. The dream of Judea becomes our way to cope; it teases us forward when we are most injured.

Levoneh

Long, long ago, there rested the humble Earth and the powerful Sun. On the Earth lived the Moon, and on the Moon lived the *mayz* and other animals, who were allowed to roam free, and to mingle with the people of Earth. The Earth and the Moon had a powerful relationship: the Moon was always there for the Earth. It offered the Earth and its people great reflection and hope in times of darkness. And the Earth loved and adorned the Moon with praise of its wisdom and beauty through song and earthly art.

The Sun, seeing this, blazed with a blinding jealousy. It came down to the Earth proclaiming its own beauty, power, and importance, naming the dependency of every living creature in the system on the Sun. While this was true, the Sun's jealousy only reinforced the strong bond

between the Moon and the Earth. The Sun scorched the Earth with its footsteps and spread lies about the Moon and all of its creatures. It told tales about how the *mayz* people controlled and held all of the Earth people from success; it claimed that within *mayz* people rests a valuable fortune of gold. Listening to the lies of the Sun, the Earth people grew violent against the Moon and all of its creatures. *Ketselekb⁴* were put in bags and thrown into rivers; *shof⁵* were crucified; *fresb⁶* were burned at the stake; the *mayz* people were chased and gutted for their gold, which was never found. The Moon wept with great sorrow, for the Moon knew that the Sun had spread these terrible rumours.

The violence did not subside. The people of earth turned away from the Earth and the Moon and worshiped the Sun and all of its power. The power of the Sun was so great that it ripped the Moon and the Earth apart. Seeing this, all of the animals of the Moon wept and ran toward the Moon, and leapt and climbed upon the departing body. The *mayz* people ran, being pursued by the earth people, but were too late. In a moment of grief, as the Sun pulled the Moon further and further away, the Moon cast a spell on the *mayz* people, turning them into mice in hopes of aiding their survival.

To this day, the Moon and the Earth, having been torn from one another, plead with the Sun, but to no avail. And the Moon sings to the Earth pulling tides and blankets of sky apart to see all the beauty of the Earth and the scar of what they once had, and to look upon the lost *mayz* people. And to this day the *mayz* people sing songs of longing and sorrow to the Moon and, like two ships signaling at sea, the Moon responds, waxing and waning. Now, every year the distance between the Moon and the Earth grows greater and greater, for there is nothing more whole than a broken heart.

The mice scattered to survive...

“They who did this to thousands and millions, who applauded or allowed it to happen, shall they not pay?” (Cohen 201) They have forgotten that time, but we have not. We move beyond The Pale: the Pale of

4 Yiddish for *kittens*

5 Yiddish for *sheep*

6 Yiddish for *frogs*

starvation, of restriction, of violence. Their Pale, their cosmos, is our nightmare. We yearn for what is beyond the Pale, the safety of their unknown.

Yet...

There is great power in the phantom dybbuk.

In the rubble of ghettos, they stepped over our corpses. Ghostlike, dispersed, we haunt their every turn. Only from the corner of their eyes can they see the flash of our ghostly emaciated skin amongst the ruins: the remnants of a people, armed and fighting to the last. We, lurking phantoms await their arrival: “the walking corpse, the living dead, the breathing void.” (Cohen 163) She was 16 when the soldiers and tanks rolled past the ghetto gates. She saw her chance and fearlessly leapt onto their tank, dressed in a tattered dress, with a belt of grenades, and her hair bright red, alive with kerosene. (Stroebel 183) We will not stop: the great limbs, severed by The Disaster from my body, are tormented day and night. They struggle blindly, moving on to other lands. It is said that a *dybbuk*, when wronged, can reap great havoc as it searches and forever yearns for what is lost. The *dybbuk* will seek out *emes*, truth. We do not believe in their concepts of justice, wrought with isms, perpetuated by their armies and police. Any one of us who stretches a hand to the iron crown is a traitor; and any one of us who is guided by the heart will live forever.

A lust--not of body--but of blood.

We roam scattered about, homeless and dazed. Amongst the chaos of the after-war crept our revenge. Who is to say who is who when millions of nationalists in one nation were complicit in our deaths? One does not have to wear the uniform. Like our eyes, which betray us by speaking fear, the red twisted “x” of their pupil informs. A new uniform- a new government--but they could not hide from us. We were modern day Sicariiim.⁷ With daggers drawn we roamed the streets, giving revenge a new meaning. “Around a corner, survivors... [surrounded a] German soldier. [One walked] up..., pushing him, at

⁷ Hebrew, originally from Latin, meaning dagger-men, was a religious Jewish faction that engaged in guerrilla warfare against the Roman occupiers of Judea during the uprising (64 CE) prior to the bloody Roman-Jewish war (70 CE). These zealots attacked Romans and Jewish collaborators alike.

first, with caution, then with real violence. As the German soldier fell back, the survivor hit him. The other survivors raced forward.” (Cohen 160) Some say vengeance is a dangerous thing: “An eye for an eye will make the world go blind.” But, then again, Gandhi wasn’t fond of Jewish revolt--sheep make a better propaganda image for the world than guerrillas.⁸

One night, through my eye closings, dreams crept.

I knew I must go there---a *shul* of great radiance, engraved with gold and lit with candles as bright as day. The great *shul* appeared in the great desert of the moon in 3830. The great *shul* was so splendid and radiant that it caused the moon to emanate a ghostly light that shone across the galaxy. The moon was so very bright and large. Its eyes were like that of a cat, and it purred and cooed at me. I knew I must go there, but it was so far away.

To get from the earth to the moon one must, first, find the severed head of the last Jewish king, place it on a long pole, and find the largest eagle. Then, one must sit between the eagle’s wings and hold the pole with the severed head of the king in front, so that it is facing the eagle. It is a well known fact that royal eyeballs are a delicacy to eagles. When the eagle sees the eyeballs it will desire to remove them from their sockets, but one must not allow it, only tempt it. This is how I guided myself from the earth to the great *shul* on the moon.

On the moon, inside the great *shul*, the prayers of countless Jews could be heard echoing off the walls of great beauty. The fervency of their prayers danced upwards, shook, raised, then razed the dome above, revealing the night sky. Heavenly creatures fluttered down carrying

⁸ I use this famous misquote here to invoke Gandhi, although he in truth never said it. However, he praised Hitler and Mussolini, and said of WWII European Jewry: “the Jews should have offered themselves to the butcher’s knife. They should have thrown themselves into the sea from cliffs. As it is, they succumbed anyway in their millions”. (Fischer 348) This highlights the victim-immiserating basis of his pacifism. Gandhi said to his Jewish biographer, Louis Fischer: “And what has today become a degrading man-hunt can be turned into a calm and determined stand offered by unarmed men and women possessing the strength of suffering given to them by Jehovah”. (Gandhi 320)

the dark one, the *meshiakh*.⁹ In his arms, the *meshiakh* carries a lamb: I know it was to have been the last sacrifice before the Romans came to destroy the Temple. And now they do come. The Romans burst through the massive doors, breaking the ancient stained glass windows, and they raise their swords to the necks of the Jews, who are so deep in prayer that they do not take notice of their doom. Shocked by this intrusion, the *meshiakh*, floating high above, loses the grip on the little lamb and the lamb falls from a great height. Just before blood is shed and before the sacrifice meets its end, the heavenly creatures safely fly upwards, carrying the *meshiakh*, and disappear. The dome closes back in, the Romans collapse into a cloud of dust, and the Jews turn into mice, some of whom disappear into their prayer shawls while others, unbounded, float away. But the prayers of the Jews are never finished, and end just before the final “amen,” for it is not time for the return to my body.

“...Then she spoke of hate, which she said kept her alive in the War, a thirst for revenge: the desire to kill one more German, blow up one more train.” (Cohen, 188).

There is blood and lots of it.

My severed right arm of darkness, enraged, is enlivened by something greater than a need or a lust. It is crazed and going hard against every tenement. The world of worlds saw the fluttering of millions of souls who now seek blood, any blood. “We can now think of revenge with a plow as we once carried automatic weapons and grenades.” (Cohen 188) The arm is crazed: it wants to hurt and sever, and it does. It severs body from soul; body from land; body from home; land from land. The arm moves from ghetto dweller to ghetto builder. The end of this will come with the end of states, for “[e]very nationalism offers humanity only the greatest unhappiness.” (Gobbo, 23)

There is a country on the other side of this world

where they steal the limb of a Jew and dress it up in *goyish*¹⁰ clothes, give it a hat with *peyas*,¹¹ place upon it a Roman à clef nose, and carve

⁹ Hebrew for *messiah*

¹⁰ Yiddish meaning *gentile-like*

¹¹ Yiddish for *sidecurls*

out eyes and a mouth. Inside the mouth, they insert the tongue of a rat, and beneath the tongue they place an old piece of paper. This paper is haunted by the silhouette of a *dybbuk*. The severed limb grows taut, then retracts and becomes animated. It prophesies and is blind. It is well-versed in the defense strategies of laughter. It is coaxed into a one-armed straight-jacket. My left arm is tied and bound to that land, unable to leave. It is told, and believes, that the old life is a trap--and it is--but what lies in its future is a slow death, a forgetting, a mystification, a final dreaming.

It was all like a dream.

One can find us “when one day speaks its words to the next, and the night whispers its dreams to the other.” (Neugroschel 10) The moon, still high in the sky, breathes out its last with the remaining starlight. The sun rises to illuminate my being, trapped between two worlds, a glimmer of heavenly bodies. But they still evade the sight of us just before the final “Amen.” They could never understand and they never will, for they are forever against us.

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Accompanying Notes:
Der Dybbuk:
To Our Scattered Bodies Go
Der Meshunediker

In my metafictional ethnography, “Der Dybbuk: To Our Scattered Bodies Go,” I write of a dybbuk--a being, often found in Jewish European Yiddish folklore, a dislocated soul, who wanders the earth in search of a host body, and remains in the host body until it has accomplished its goal or until it has been helped. My use of this caricature is non-traditional: I use it as a metaphor for the *Jewish diaspora*, to represent not just one soul, but all Jewish souls.

The destruction of the Second Temple (70 CE) and the subsequent expulsion of the Jews from Judea marks the birth and wandering of the story’s dybbuk. Jews since then have wandered across the world for 1,946 years, living in host countries, often subjugated and facing violence at almost every turn. With each disaster, the dybbuk suffers and loses a limb, and continues to live separately from the body. Our dybbuk is a historical place marker of Jews, moving freely through time and across borders.

The Death: The Destruction of the Second Temple

The Jewish-Roman War, which began in 66 CE, was bloody and wrought with deceit. The Sicarii, or “daggersmen,” were a Jewish faction who were known for broad daylight assassinations of Romans and Jewish collaborators. Centuries later, in the European ghettos set up by the Nazis, Jews who vied for survival became apart of the Jewish ghetto police, who aped the Nazis and often enacted greater terror on their own people than that of the Nazis. Seen as traitors by the Jews of the ghetto, these Nazi collaborators were assassinated, and not only by the Jewish underground, but by individuals as well. These traitors are a poor example of Jews haggling for life--otherwise a resourcefulness that is a common part of the Jewish experience. At the end of the Jewish-Roman War, hundreds of thousands of Jews were murdered and 100,000 were enslaved by the Romans, many others escaped and hid. Those enslaved Jews were forced to build

the Flavian Amphitheatre or Colosseum, which was purchased with the stolen treasures of the Second Temple, the Holiest of Holies, when it was destroyed. There is sad irony in something so beautiful and sacred--that which once housed the spirit of god---that was then used to build the colosseum, a house of excess, sport, and violence. As an anarchist I see an interconnectedness between sports, religion, and politics with nationalism, violence, and passivity. The purchasing and the construction of such a building, through the selling off of stolen Jewish treasures and by means of stolen Jewish slave labour, is a common ironic theme of Jewish suffering throughout history.

Yet, God lives not in temples or coliseums. It is written in the Torah that Lo Bashemaim hi “god is not in heaven,” (Deut. 30:12) god doesn’t exist. The famous science fiction-like story of the Talmud, “The Oven of Akhnai,” is the story of how a rabbinical court ruled against Rabbi Eleazer. The powerful Rabbi Eleazer proved his point through acts of god: a tree uprooting itself and replanting nearby; a river moving backwards. Even after the heavens opened and spoke in favor of Rabbi Eleazer, the rabbinic court still ruled against him, because Rabbi Eleazer was becoming too powerful. The court ruled: “god lives not in heaven.” Later, Rabbi Nathan, of the rabbinical court, spoke to the prophet Elijah (Elijahu HaNavi) who said, that in the moment of the court’s ruling, God spoke laughingly to Elijah: “My children have defeated me, my children have defeated me.” (Babylonian Talmud, Baba Metzia 59b) I reference this story to exemplify the disrespect shown to god by Jews; how god’s spoken word holds no power, and god knows this. A common theme amongst Jewish literature and thought: that Jewish logic can surpass even God.

Often times mythical characters such as dybbuks, golems (a protector of Jews made of earth), and Bove Mayse (from 1507, a “knight in shining armour” tale) gave Jews hope and something to believe in, were created in times of extreme persecution, before modernization and assimilation. I have asked myself throughout my life why Jews across the world were targeted for their differences, which I explore, here, is due to a “science fiction otherness.” One needs fiction to believe in the reality that we live in and, subsequently, we have created our world through language and story.

Like many other Jewish diasporic languages, Yiddish has never had a country or borders, nor has it had an army, a flag, or a ruler. Without protection and with the endless threat of violence, I argue that Jews resorted to their studies of Torah, Talmud, and folklore--all of which I consider to be a form of science fiction--as means for surviving and preserving their culture. A survival we see in *Levoneh*, the moon.

The role of the moon plays a significant part in Jewish law, folklore, poetry and everyday life, and is representative of this Jewish “otherness,” and a longing for safety and home. I explain this “otherness” through the Jewish concept of time: the Jewish day begins at sunset and not sunrise; the Jewish calendar is lunar and not solar, nor is it structured around the life of Jesus Christ; major Jewish holidays fall on full or new moons.

In exploring these ideas, I created two parables about the moon that encapsulate this Jewish longing and desire. These parables were largely inspired by the Yiddish author S. Ansky’s (1863-1920) play, *Der Dybbuk*; his short story, “The Tower of Rome”; and his ethnographic non-fiction book, *The Enemy at His Pleasure: A Journey Through the Jewish Pale of Settlement During World War I*. Before beginning research on this project I never expected that the life of S. Ansky would affect me so. Throughout this piece I work off metaphors of not only S. Ansky’s work, but also, Sholem Asch’s *Tales of My People*, Maurice Sendak’s *We Are All in the Dumps With Jack and Guy*, and Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*.

Anarchists, too, have often used science fiction as a space in which to play with an anarchist world, such as Ursula K. LeGuin’s *The Dispossessed*. Anarchists, like Jews, have also been met with brute state-backed violence, deportation, imprisonment, and murder; both have a similar experience with borders and the concept of “home”; and both have often had disdain for god. Because Jews experienced and witnessed the oppression of Gentile society, It is no surprise that so many Jews found an affinity, with other oppressed peoples as well with anarchism and the left.

This otherness is further exemplified in the year that I write this: the Jewish year 5776, as incongruent and simultaneous with the Christian

year, 2016. It is as if Jews are living in the future, or in two different times. The Jewish experience, I explore, is neither here nor there, but trapped and teetering on a double-edged sword between two worlds: the experience of modernization and assimilation with Jewishness. Assimilation, however, was not a choice given to Jews. This is especially true at times when Jews metaphorically walled themselves off from the hostile Gentile world, and as Gentiles isolated and othered Jews socially and physically from the Gentiles as means of control and as a bulwark for class and racial tension.

This can be seen in the Pale of Settlement, (1791-1917) where the Jews of Russia were forced to live and were easy targets for state-backed pogroms and other forms of physical and social violence (Weinstein 30), which was furthered by anti-Jewish propaganda such as *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (1903). Today, the high watermark of this propaganda can still be heard crashing against the bulwark of Jewish life---a prime example of how science fiction was and is used against Jews. It is almost as if the anti-Jewish Gentile, too, needs a science fiction in order to make and believe in anti-Jewishness. In the nightmare of the Pale, Jews were disallowed from owning land or farming, and were forced into positions as usurers, where the misconception of Jews as bankers, money lenders, creators of war and misery was born. I use the imagery of the Pale as part of the religious, cultural, and ethnic boundaries that are forced upon our lives to this day, where Jews and non-Christians exist in a bubble that floats on the bile of Christian society. Because of anti-Jewishness, whatever form it has taken, the Jewish experience cannot be truly understood by those who stand beyond the Pale, and by those who are pillars of Christian normalcy and Society.

Second Death: 1492

As the dybbuk of my story, and Jewish experience, is expelled and massacred over the centuries, its limbs are severed and continue to live and move onto other lands. For us all in the United States 1492 infamously marks the beginning of the conquest of the Americas and the subsequent genocide of indigenous peoples. For Jews it marks,

also, the exile of Sephardim, Jews from Spain and Portugal (Iberia). 1392 to 1492, 100 years pocked by devastating pogroms until the edict of 1492 that forced half of the Jewish population to violently convert to Christianity, known as “conversos,” and the other half forced into exile or death. For the conversos, life did not change because they were still seen as Jews and still faced persecution (Kaye/Kantrowitz 14). Three years later the Jews and Muslims of Portugal saw the same fate (Kaye/Kantrowitz 82). However, the Spanish edict of 1492 was not lifted until 16, December 1968 (New York Times).

The dybbuk and its limb moves on, only to be met by further violence in Europe: more pogroms, mistrust, restriction, forced assimilation, self-hatred, and genocide. Pogroms and the Jewish holocaust are two things that have haunted me my entire life, they are a dybbuk of a memory that I have never personally experienced, yet am so familiar with. Years ago, when researching pogroms, I came across the pogrom of Bialystok (1906) that was incited by paid bomb-throwing Gentile peasant. Prior to this pogrom, Bialystok was an anarchist haven. Groups such as the Black Banner, were born there and were very successful in resisting and protecting the Jewish community. Over the course of several years, Jewish anarchists bombed police stations and carried out assassinations of several police chiefs, police officers, gentry, Cossacks, anti-Jewish Russian civilians, and other members of the Czarist army (Black Banner, 14). All of this happened in response to heavy anti-Jewish violence. The state-backed Bialystok pogrom of 1905, in which Jews were murdered by citizens and police, chose to use crowbars as an implement for their murder. The brutality of all pogroms have deeply affected me, as both a Jew and as a human. Imagining myself there on those streets, experiencing the death and brutal beatings, haunts me to this day, as in so many nightmares throughout my life. This generational trauma is a part of the othering done by anti-Jewish Gentiles. This is not to say that the Jewish experience is dependent on anti-Jewishness, but to deny its role in shaping the Jewish trajectory would be wrong.

Third Death: Holocaust (Khorbn)

With the onset of the WWII and the khorbn, over half the world's Jewish population was murdered, leaving behind the misconception that all Jews blindly walked onto the cattle trains like sheep. In the ghettos, set up by the Nazis, Jews hardly surviving, came to terms of what was held for their future. Before the ghettos were "liquidated," many Jews, outnumbered and outarmed, took up stolen arms and molotov cocktails to fight for their lives. I use an historical instance of a 16 year old girl, doused in kerosene with a belt of molotov cocktails, throwing herself on, and destroying, a German tank to exemplify the grim nihilistic life or death, or death or death, mentality that most of Europe's Jews held during the Khorbn (Strobl 183).

My research took me to the Jewish partisans of that war and the Jewish vengeance groups of post WWII, as well as life for all of Europe post War. "A thirst for blood" is probably inaccurate, but it is what feels closest to what I could describe. All over Europe and in the chaos of toppled governments, "liberated" Jews, homeless and traumatized, roamed the streets, some with a desire for revenge (though, many Jews remained in various camps for several years after in Europe and Israel). What interested me more than state recognized Jewish vengeance groups were individual acts of vengeance. For many Jews the idea of who was "guilty" or was a "Nazi" could be argued to be vastly different than by those who were not victims of Nazi violence. 45 million Germans were known to be in the Nazi party, this number does not include those who, like sheep, blindly followed the Nazi agenda (Taylor 255). Nor is it including the rest of Europe's Gentiles, who believed that they greatly benefited from the purges of Jewish life by the Nazis. State sanctioned Jewish Vengeance groups, also, disinterested me, because of their ties to nationalism and their eventual violent role in the creation of the State of Israel (Cohen 232). Here the dybbuk's left arm, severed and crazed, moves onto the British Mandate of Palestine.

A Dybbuk's Right Arm: Colonization

In "Der Dybbuk" I outrightly criticize European Zionists for colonizing Palestine. I see this as part of the unspoken step of Jewish assimilation, and what I believe to be antithetical to Jewishness: the aping of the colonizer. For when white European Jews "founded the Jewish state of Israel, in which--almost like Columbus with America--the Zionists, having almost discovered Eretz Israel, defeat the savage indigenous people who aren't really there, and make the desert bloom." (Kaye/Kantrowitz 73) Even from a religious standpoint, the return for Jews to Judea can only happen with the return of the meshiakh, messiah. This means that, in the eyes of the religious, the Jewish state is not halakha, Jewish law--it is unkosher. A great deal of European Jews who took part in massacres and the destruction of Palestinian homes, had also recently been victims of horrible crimes and displacement themselves. Palestinian Jews, who were viewed as Arabs more so than as Jews by European Jews, faced persecution, and were heavily affected by the displacement of their neighbors and loved ones as well. Many other Arab Jews, came to Palestine to flee similar violence during the War, only to be put onto cattle trains and into immigration camps for years (Kaye/Kantrowitz 77). To this day inequalities in Israel between Arab Jews and European Jews, Beta (Ethiopian) Jews and European Jews, is easily visible (Allen 134).

A Dybbuk's Left Arm: Assimilation

The dybbuk's right arm now moves onto other lands as well. Though, life in America was and is less physically violent towards Jews than in Europe, there, developed a new subtly destructive force: assimilation. Here, I criticize American Jewry of betrayal as being tools of Gentile society and slowly becoming Gentiles themselves. But assimilation is not black and white: Assimilation is a violent force that shares the same agenda as the anti-Jewish violence of Europe, only assimilation is a slower death. Instead, "white" American Jews accepted the concessions and betrayed themselves, leaving behind their Jewishness and those who are targets of "whiteness." This not an argument for "racial" or "blood" purity, but one that is based on the losing of one's culture.

The Jewish diaspora, as I have said previously, was not bounded by borders. With the slaughter of so many Jews, a need for safety and a home, even if it were nationalistic, won over the diaspora. I propose that we instead choose to remember how Jews have suffered and grown together as a multi-cultural diaspora---and have found power within that experience. Nationalism, even a Jewish one, has never worked in favor of Jews. In the Jewish ghetto of Bialystok was born L.L. Zamenhof (1859-1914), a yiddish speaker and the creator of Esperanto, an auxiliary language. Zamenhof had a naive hope that Esperanto would bridge the world, a desire based both on internationalism and the Jewish diaspora. In my piece, I quote his beautiful statement against nationalism: “I am profoundly convinced that every nationalism offers humanity only the greatest unhappiness... It is true that the nationalism of oppressed peoples – as a natural self-defensive reaction – is much more excusable than the nationalism of peoples who oppress; but, if the nationalism of the strong is ignoble, the nationalism of the weak is imprudent; both give birth to and support each other...” (Gobbo 23). Naive as it was to believe that an accessible language would rid the world of isms, Zamenhof was onto something: an internationalist viewpoint.

The dybbuk’s right arm came to North America at the height of the pogroms in Europe in the 19th century. Life for American Jews differed greatly from that of European Jews. Though Jews were barred from institutions and living in certain neighborhoods, the threat of physical violence was less frequent and for the first time European “white” Jews were offered the chance to assimilate. American white Jewish assimilation appeared to be a positive step, but the downsides were much greater. Not only did this require white Jews to lose their sense of Jewishness, but it forced white Jews to turn their back on Jews of color, people of color, and other oppressed people. Stripped of their culture, white Jews were seen to be no longer a threat and the power that the diaspora once held began to disintegrate, along with Jewishness, into the realm of “science fiction,” othered by its own kin, which is where my story ends. The diasporic dybbuk lingers, hidden between two worlds the dybbuk, injured, longs to roam again.

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די באַריקאַדע אויפֿגעשטעלט,
אין שטיבל ניטאָ קיינער,
לויפֿן פּאָליציי פֿאַרביי,
די קינדער וואַרפֿן שטיינער.

*Di baricadn oyfgeshtelt
in shtibl nishto keyner
Loyfn politzey farby
di kinder varfn shteyner*

*The baricades are built
and no one is at home
Police run past
as children throw stones*

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