

Yiddish Ruthenias: Home Landscapes in the Modernist Poetry of Moyshe Kulbak and Dovid
Hofshteyn in the Age of Revolutions and National Revivals in Eastern Europe

by

Jason Wagner

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Slavic Languages and Literatures)
University of Michigan
2022

Doctoral Committee:

Professor Mikhail Krutikov, Chair

Professor Julian Levinson

Professor Michael Makin

Professor Benjamin Paloff

בייא יודישע קינדער נאָר געשעהט אַזוינס, אַז מען זאָל זיטצען טאָג וויא נאַכט פֿאַרשפּאַרט אויף איין אָרט, נישט צו וויסען, וואָס דאָ אַרום געהט פֿיר, וואָס מען ברויכט צו לערנען, צו טאָן, בכדי צו לעבן מיט לייט גלייך; מען זאָל אויסגעטהון זיין פֿון אַלסדינג דאָ, מבטל זיין אַלע זאַכן, וואָס זיינען נייטיק פשוט אין לעבן אַריין און איבערטראָגן זיך אינגאַנצען מיט דיא ביינער און אַלע געדאַנקען העט ווייט אין איין אַנדער עולם, אין אַנדערע צייטען; מען זאָל נישט זעהען פֿאַר זיך די וועלט, דאָס וואָס פֿאַר דער נאָז, און אָפּגעבן זיך אינגאַנצען נאָר מיט אַזעלכעס, וואָס העט אַ מאָל, צו וועלכס מען באַדאַרף נישט האָבן אַזוי דיא אויגן און דיא אַנדערע מענשליכע גראַבע חושים וויא אַ שאַרפֿען כח הדמיון -- אַ הוילע נאַקעטע נשמה אַהן לייב אַהן לעבען!

מענעדלע מוכר ספֿרים, 35 שלמה ר' חיימ'ס

Jason Wagner

jbwagner@umich.edu

ORCID iD: [0000-0001-8852-835X](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8852-835X)

© Jason Wagner 2022

Dedication

To the future from the past and to the past from the future

and

From the future to the past and from the past to the future

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank the members of my committee, Mikhail Krutikov, Michael Makin, Benjamin Paloff, and Julian Levinson working with me to bring this document to fruition, and for their patience in doing so. I would also like to thank the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures and the Frankel Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Michigan. In addition, I would like to acknowledge the following institutions: the Yiddish Book Center, the former Vilnius Yiddish Institute, and the Naomi Prawer Kadar International Yiddish Summer program. I would like to acknowledge some of the people who make up these institutions or others and who worked with me, taught me something, or otherwise provided some sort of academic support: Tatyana Aleksic, Olga Maiorova, Sofya Khagi, Maya Bazilai, Shachar Pinsker, Anita Norich, Tsvi Gitlman, Eugene Bondarenko, Herbert Eagle, Svitlana Rogovyk, Nina Shkolnik, Jindrich Toman, Jeffrey Veidlinger, Sasha Hoffman, Sara Feldman, Dov-Ber Kerler, Eliezer Niborski, Mariam Trin, Harriet Maurav, Amelia Glaser, Marc Caplan, Justin Cammy, Polina Barskova, Will Runyan, Nadav Linial, Yeshua Toll, Vlad Beronja, Jana Mazurkiwicz, Grace Mahoney, Aleks Marchinak, Michael Martin, McKenna Marko, and Annie Bolotin.

Table of Contents

Dedication	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
List of Appendices	vii
Abstract	viii
Introduction	1
The Historical Moment of National Revivals	1
The Question	9
Literary Space.....	13
The Form of the Dissertation.....	30
Chapter 1: Kulbak’s Modernist Epics.....	37
“The Obscure Brew of Senderl with Lomonosov:” A Modernist Mixture of High and Low Registers	41
Critical Reception: A Poetics of “Tsimtsum” and a “Singer of Earthiness”	46
Kulbak and the Modernist Polymetric Poema as Compressed Hybrid Epic	53
“Di Shtot” / “The City”	56
A Historical Context.....	57
The Form of Kulbak’s Revolutionary Epic	61
Landscapes of Urban Space and Rural Space	63
Raysn: A Jewish Ruthenia.....	69
Nationalisms in Belarus: A Historical Context	76
Romantic Precedents: Rethinking the Nation; <i>Pan Tadeusz</i> in a Kapote	90
Hybrid Genre of the Modernist Epic: Epic, Lyric, Ballad, Idyll.....	100

Parochial/Folk Accented language as a Statement: Bilingualism and Slavicisms of Lithuanian Yiddish in Raysn	113
The Function of Biblical Allusion: Layers of Meaning; The Collapse of Linear Time as a Fan	116
Conclusion: Imagined Community of Judeo-Slavic Fusion.....	120
Lamed-Vov The Mystical Epic	121
Chapter 2 : Dovid Hofshiteyn’s <i>Along Roads</i> and the Modernist Elegiac Lyric Landscape.....	141
Biography and Poetic Persona, A Modern Reincarnation of Subjectivity of the Romantic Lyric Poet.....	144
Kyiv: An Ephemeral Apparition of a Multilingual, Multicultural Avant-garde of Imperial Culture.	149
Aesthetics	155
Literary Critics of the Kyiv Kultur Lige: Yekhezkel Dobrushin and Nokhem Oyslender .	156
A Poetics of Perception	157
Towards a Synchronic Analysis: Mandelshtam’s Influence on Hofshiteyn.....	162
Perceiving the “New” in <i>Along Roads</i>	166
Structure, Form and Genre	171
Structure and Form in <i>Along Roads</i> : Constant Revisions as the Effect of Time on the Artistic Text, Corruption of Memory, Resistance to Finalization	171
Elegy	177
The Landscapes of <i>Along Roads</i>	186
Hofshiteyn’s Modernist Objectivism: The Landscape as an Interaction between Individual Subject and Collective Human Society	188
Reinvention of the Romantic Search for individualist freedom, Reinvention of the Concept of the Russian Empire as between East and West	193
Primordial Caucasian Landscapes and appropriation of Romantic exile: “In Himl-Roym” / “In Sky-Space” and “Fun Berg Geyt a Sturm” “	198
Hofshiteyn’s Wanderer	207
Abstraction of Landscape	211

Concrete Nouns of Place and the Concept of Ukraine as a Multicultural Mix of Cultures in “Ukraina”	212
“Doikayt” in Hofshiteyn’s “Ortikayt” ?	215
Hofshiteyn, Bialik and the National Poet: The Tradition of Eastern Europe as a Metaphorical Desert, and Hofshiteyn’s Rebellion in his Objective Description of Landscape	217
Memory as Space in the Homelandscape	223
Road and Dream: Exile, Memory and Freedom.....	228
“Gey Ikh Arum mit Farheylte Blikn...”/ “I Walk Around with Covered Glances...”	231
“A Whole Day”/ “A Ganstn Tog” and “Ikh Gleyb” “I Believe”: The Essential Existence of a Wanderer on Life’s Road	233
Superimposition of Time and Space	240
“O Tsayt, O Tsol, O Roym”/ “O Time, O Number, O Space”	242
The Edge of an Era: Thresholds	246
Primeval Thresholds: “I Recognized her by the River” and “In Armenia”.....	247
Another Brink: Armenia.....	251
The Eternal Feminine, Shkhinah, and a Feminine Ideal of Nation?	253
Conclusion?	256
Concluding Reflection	258
Appendices.....	262
Bibliography	362

List of Appendices

I.	Moyshe Kulbak.....	263
	The City (1919)	263
	Ruthenia (1921).....	275
	Lamed Vov: The 36 (1920).....	292
II.	Dovid Hofshateyn.....	303
	Along Roads (1919)	303

Abstract

This dissertation is a contribution to the examination of the construction of literary space in Modernist Yiddish poetry. It focuses on the creation of an Eastern European literary landscape in the revolutionary years of the first quarter of the twentieth century by two Yiddish poets, Moyshe Kulbak and Dovid Hofshateyn. The creation of Eastern European landscapes in Yiddish Modernist poetry represents a literary “discovery of nature,” which puts Yiddish poets in conversation with co-territorial Romantic predecessors. Just as the Romantic poets discovered nature and pondered ideals of national liberation during tumultuous times of revolutions and uprisings, these Yiddish Modernists discovered nature in their own right and pondered their own liberation during an ephemeral formation of a modern Jewish culture in Eastern Europe and the nascent Soviet Union, roughly the years 1917-1921. This dissertation seeks to elucidate the historical and political resonances of these cross-cultural, trans-temporal conversations based in literary space.

While Kulbak and Hofshateyn are often categorized as ‘Soviet Yiddish poets’ in anthologies, this study analyzes their early work during an era of revolutions and national revivals and argues that these works should be read in their own terms, independent from ideological categorization that were applied to them later in life. This project reads these poems in their historical context and attempts to recover and expand upon criticism contemporary to them, while at the same time engaging recent scholarship.

The landscapes of Kulbak and Hofshateyn challenged hegemonic nationalist claims from a language and culture subjugated by Empire, with claims of non-territorial, local belonging. They

promote a sense of cultural belonging, based in a history of cultural syncretism that is a response to the violent moment of an epochal shift. It is said that the Romantics invented nature in their poetry, but this project argues that these Yiddish Modernists discovered their local nature for themselves and through it, augmented the ideological assumptions of the Romantics to meet the needs of their specific cultural moment. In the texts, poetic depictions of landscape become a metaplay in which the poet can converse with the ideologies of Empires and claim a belonging in Eastern Europe that was denied to them by national discourses.

This project pays close attention to the literary nature of the text; it reads the form in relation to the content of the poem. Kulbak's landscapes are presented in a variety of hybrid epic modes which he calls "poemas." With this characterization, he signals an adaptation of the Romantic "poema." Hofshteyn focuses on a different quintessential genre of Romanticism: the elegy.

This project seeks to recover a repressed cultural dialogue that has been lost in the chaos of time and language, and question sets of accepted dichotomies surrounding the national question through close readings of poetic texts. In addition, it includes preliminary translations of three of Kulbak's long poems, *The City, Ruthenia*, and *Lamed Vov: The Thirty Six*, and Dovid Hofshteyn's first book of poetry, *Along Roads*.

Introduction

The Historical Moment of National Revivals

Moyshe Kulbak and Dovid Hofshsteyn were from the ethnically diverse lands between the Polish and Russian Empires, on the territory of what is now Belarus and Ukraine, respectively. From 1795 to 1918, these areas became colonized territories of the Russian Empire. Prior to the partitions of Poland-Lithuania, the ‘Lithuanian’ territories consisted of what is now Belarus and Lithuania and were, generally, diverse, multiethnic territories in which a modern national consciousness delineated by ethnicity, language and religion had not taken hold.¹ Jews composed of a small percentage of the population, but this population was primarily concentrated in urban centers and the community played a vital role in the economy of the Grand Duchy of Lithuanian and later, the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth. This population formed a distinctive “Litvak” Jewish culture.² It was not until the late 18th century that the particularly modern ethnic and linguistic divisions of nationalism entered into public consciousness through the clash of the Imperial powers of that time – Polish, Russian, and German empires. Both the Russian and Polish Empire in their national narratives sought to characterize the Slavic peoples

¹ Rudling, Per Anders. *The Rise and Fall of Belarusian Nationalism*, pp. 42-43.

² Nadler, Allen. “Litvak.” YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe.
<https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Litvak>

of Belarus and Ukraine as ‘undeveloped’ Russians and Poles to legitimize their colonial efforts in the area, while the locals considered both Russians and Poles alien.³

It was not until the twentieth century, specifically in the wake of the 1905 revolution that an indigenous Belarusian national movement took form in any significant way.⁴ Prior to this, a multiethnic tradition of citizenship stemming from the medieval period of the Grand Duchy of Lithuanian was commonplace. Ukraine, a large part of which had been part of the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth had a slightly different history: Ukrainian nationalism appeared as a mid-19th century phenomenon. While the Belarusian territories had a deep historical connection to the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth as an integral part of that empire, the Ukrainian linguistic and cultural space had been, historically, only partly under Polish-Lithuanian control, and had complicated histories associated with medieval Kyivan Rus’, the rule of various Turkic cultures and independent or semi-independent Cossack bands. Throughout the centuries, different nations and empires crafted their own historical mythologies of these lands and people.

The poems that will be the focus of this study were written as the Russian Empire collapsed and both modern Belarus and Ukraine were embroiled in national movements. Independent Belarusian and Ukrainian states first appeared during the revolutionary chaos, only to be subsumed into the Soviet Union in the twenties and given nominal national independence for a brief period, until the violent repression of national movements of the Stalinist era.

The collapse of the Imperial regime was often seen a chance for liberation to much of the Jewish population that had been subject to repressive laws; the laws restricting Jewish life were dismantled. However, it is difficult to characterize the possibility for liberation as national,

³ Staliūnas, Darius, ed. *Spatial Concepts of Lithuania in the Long Nineteenth Century*. See also Serghiy Bilenky, *Romantic Nationalism in Eastern Europe: Russian Polish and Ukrainian Imaginations* and Faith Hillis, *Children of Rus’: Right bank Ukraine and the Invention of a Russian Nation*.

⁴ Rudling, Per Anders. *The Rise and Fall of Belarusian Nationalism*, pp. 32.

cultural, or a something in between – this is a point of contention in histories of the era. The hope for liberation of various types was tempered by the horror of war and the pogroms that came with it. The widespread destruction that took place in the First World War, The Russian Revolution, the Russian Civil War, and the Polish-Soviet War was a tragic event that for many that symbolized the end of traditional Jewish life in the Pale.

The violent re-organization of territory during the wars took place in the Central and Eastern European regions that were home to the largest populations of Jewish settlement in Europe. The wars caused a mass migration of Jewish refugees all over the world – to Western Europe (Paris, Berlin), the United States, South America, Palestine, South Africa and further to the north and east in the Soviet Union. Jews were forced out of the countryside and shtetls towards large multicultural urban centers. This migration had already begun due to economic and social instability in the early twentieth century. The widespread destruction and hope of liberation in the former Pale of Settlement drove some to seek to renew, reinvigorate Jewish culture in Eastern Europe by building new, modern Jewish cultures in Jewish and non-Jewish languages.

Kenneth Moss describes the moment of 1917-1919 as a flowering of a new, secular Jewish culture that comprised Yiddish and Hebrew linguistic output that is in direct dialogue with high European culture. He describes the process as the “deparochialization” of Jewish culture—an effort to transform and modernize Jewish culture within the context of the Europe of that time. It was precisely during the revolution, when empires began to crumble and there was a renewed cry for nationalism, that this culture reached its peak output.

Within the national culturalist movement existed a wide spectrum of political ideologies. Moss provides an analysis of the interconnectivity of mass culture and various forms of national

political thought that were the focus of public debate at the time, concluding that the cultural project and various Jewish nationalisms of the early twentieth century were intrinsically entwined. In his conception, “Jewish culturists,” writing in Hebrew or Yiddish and representing a variety of ideological positions, from various kind of Zionism, socialism, diaspora autonomism, to liberal nationalism all contributed to a ‘national’ Jewish Renaissance. Moss uses the term ‘nationalist,’ but the nationalism that he discusses is, for the vast majority of cases, not typical of Romantic Nationalism in that it was non-territorial and did not argue for an ethno-linguistic organization of nation-states.

The nationalism that Moss refers to is “cultural nationalism.” He explains: “nationalism came not only to be a justification for the cultivation of an autonomous, metropolitan, and fundamentally free cultural sphere, but also one of the chief ideological motivators driving the endeavor.”⁵ He goes on to claim “The Jewish cultural project thus illustrates how nationalism itself could not only accept but also authorize—even compel—the enactment (however imperfect) of cosmopolitan ideals.”⁶ In other words, the thinking was that an autonomous, modern secular Jewish culture and public sphere in Eastern Europe had the potential to actualize the ideal of a non-territorial, autonomous Jewish nation. It is a question whether this Jewish cultural nationalism, which Moss describes as rather antithetical to Romantic national ideals, should be considered ‘nationalism’ in the context of newly emerging nation-states of this time period.

Moss’s use of the term ‘nationalism’ seems to represent the inverse of what one usually understands in Romantic nationalisms and their modern iterations, which is tied strictly to

⁵ Kenneth Moss, *Jewish Renaissance in the Russian Revolution*, pp. 22.

⁶ Kenneth Moss, *Jewish Renaissance in the Russian Revolution*, pp. 289

territorialism and oppositional to internationalism, or cosmopolitan ideas. Perhaps characterizing the multilingual, transnational, polyphonic Jewish cultural during this period is misleading. Perhaps the idea is that Jewish ‘national culture’ is distinct, and at times oppositional to, depending on the specific text, hegemonic Romantic and Modern nationalisms. It is interesting to note that Moss’s study focuses primarily on the Ukrainian sphere, where there was a precedent of late Romantic Ukrainian nationalism which inspired the Jewish cultural movement there.

The ‘Jewish renaissance’ did not occur out of nowhere, rather it was the apex of the National-cultural movement in the Russian empire. Jeffrey Veidlinger and Brian Horowitz have both contributed studies of Jewish public culture in the late Russian Empire. In the Russian Empire, 1905 was a turning point for the struggle for national minorities in the Russian Empire.⁷ Reforms which were won in the 1905 revolution first allowed for the development of Jewish cultural institutions in the Russian Empire. The reforms of 1905, however, came with a reactionary backlash which inspired pogroms and ultimately reversed many of the liberal policies. The cultural movement continued to grow in the first quarter of the 20th century, led by what Veidlinger calls “Jews of this World,” or “oylem ha-zeniks,” culturalists who “focused their energies on bettering this world through institution building, cultural enrichment, leisure, and self-edification” as opposed to traditional occupations and religious study.⁸ Both Veidlinger’s and Horowitz’s studies focus on the construction of a Jewish public sphere and the entrance of Jews into the public sphere of the Russian empire in the Russian language. The Jewish national-cultural movement in the Russian Empire was both a political movement for minority rights that and a program of cultural expression.

⁷ Abraham Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905*, pp 152.

⁸ Jeffrey Veilinger, *Jewish Public Culture in the Late Russian Empire*, pp. 1

Horowitz's studies focus specifically on the creation of a Jewish culture in the Russian language. His studies focus on cultural actors of all kinds. Poetry, however, represented an ultimate refinement of language, and as such played a particular role in the public sphere. The Russian Silver Age saw a rehabilitation of the poetry and a renewed interest in Romanticism, which had previously been eclipsed by realist prose as the dominant form of verbal art in the second half of the 19th century. Poetry in Yiddish helped elevate the status of Yiddish from a vernacular to a national language, and in Hebrew transformed the sacred language into a contemporary national language. In Russian, the very existence and participation Jewish poets in Silver-age literary culture contradicted popular antisemitic claims inspired by Richard Wagner that that Jews could only imitate and lacked creativity.⁹ Jewish poets writing in Russian demonstrated that Jews could participate in the highest aesthetic level of language and participate as artists and citizens in the public sphere, if given equal opportunity.

Central and Eastern Europe was inhabited by a range of ethnicities, and often there was no clear majority, especially in the area of the Pale of Settlement. The multiethnic, multicultural nature of the Pale made national territorial claims in the area complicated. It was especially complicated in the Jewish case, as Jews were dispersed throughout Eastern Europe. It was in this environment that Simon Dubnov, a historian¹⁰, politician, and founder of the Folkspartei, the Jewish People's Party, developed his massively influential political theory of modern Jewish autonomy. Jewish autonomy had influence outside of the Folkspartei's political platform. Politically, autonomism was a non-territorial Jewish cultural-nationalism that advocated for Jewish national rights within the Russian Empire. The ideology of Jewish cultural autonomy

⁹ Brian Horowitz, *Empire Jews: Jewish Nationalism and Acculturation in 19th- and early 20th-century Russia*. pp 6.

¹⁰ Dubnov's historical work is just as influential, if not more than his political thought.

spread far beyond that of the political party into all aspects of culture.¹¹ Dubnov's non-territorial autonomism solved the complicated problems that territorial nationalisms created in a diverse multiethnic environment.

Autonomism rejected the Western European compromise during Napoleon's reign that gave Jews full citizenship in exchange for their assimilation into the hegemonic national culture.¹² Jews, in Dubnov's opinion, had a right to a national culture like all nationalities of the Central and Eastern Europe. What set Jews apart, and made the case for such a non-territorial claim, in his thinking, was the historical situation that Jews had maintained their own language, culture, and traditions even in diaspora, which he viewed as exceptional among peoples. Dubnov formulated his concept of national autonomy based on his historical study of the traditional model of Jewish self-governance in multiethnic Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and in this way, he proposed Jewish autonomy as a modern transformation of the traditional Jewish national structures. The non-territorial cultural nationalism of Dubnov was emphatically not that of Romantic nationalisms, which equated ethnoreligious linguistic belonging to territorial borders. Dubnov, rather, looked towards the history of medieval Jewish autonomism in Lithuania, a pre-modern, pre-national conception of a state.¹³ Dubnov's autonomism was not the only Jewish nationalism, but the idea was influential beyond the narrow political context.¹⁴ Modern Jewish autonomy, despite a long political battle, only existed ephemerally during the civil war, but left a long-lasting impression on Jewish culture.

¹¹ Simon Rabinovitch, *Jewish Rights, National Rites: Nationalism and Autonomy in Late Imperial and Revolutionary Russia*, pp. 11

¹² Ibid.

¹³ For a history of Jewish Autonomism in medieval Lithuania, see Antony Polonsky, *History of the Jews*, vol. 1, pp. 40-67. See also Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland*, trans. Friedlaender, vol. 1, Philadelphia: the Jewish Publication Society of America, 1916, pp. 66-180.

¹⁴ Simon Rabinovitch, *Jewish Rights, National Rites: Nationalism and Autonomy in Late Imperial and Revolutionary Russia*

In the formation of the Soviet Union during the wars, a policy of national culture (*korenizatsiya*) was adopted as a policy which lasted throughout the twenties. Bolshevik leadership was not eager to accept of national rights for minority populations, preferring to structure the new state around economic concerns, but at the beginning accepted a degree of nationalism within a Soviet framework.¹⁵ Ultimately the compromise contributed decisively to their victory in the Russian Civil War.¹⁶ David Shneer, in his history of Soviet Jewish culture in from the 20's to the 30's, describes the creation and destruction of a new Soviet Jewish culture in Yiddish that both Hofshateyn and Kulbak participated in and helped to form. In his introduction, he addresses the historical problem of “back shadowing” that often occurs when discussing this period. When we approach this past with the knowledge of what came after, it is tempting to understand this moment of Soviet Jewish culture as a utopian project destined to failure because of a wrong-headed political commitment. However, Shneer reminds us that at the time, these authors had no idea of the horrors to come. Regardless, the Soviet national policies were reversed, and state support turned into state repression in the late twenties and thirties, as Stalin viewed nationalist movements as a threat to centralized Soviet power. In Yiddish, this meant the destruction of newly formed state sponsored Yiddish institutions, the persecution and execution of cultural actors in the purges, and the anti-cosmopolitan campaign that was cut short by Stalin's death, but not before the murder of the leading cultural figures of Yiddish culture in the Soviet Union.

¹⁵ Simon Rabinovitch, *Jewish Rights, National Rites: Nationalism and Autonomy in Late Imperial and Revolutionary Russia*, pp 250-252.

¹⁶ Rudling, Per Anders. *The Rise and Fall of Belarusian Nationalism*.

The Question

As the Russian Empire dissolved in war, the repressed national and political ambitions of its subjects transformed into new modern nation-states. New borders were drawn, new conceptions of citizenry were created, new concepts of national minorities and minority rights were assumed. This period was a historical inflection point of national movements that had begun already throughout the 19th century. It is in this uncertain period that the poems of this study were written. The main question that this dissertation attempts to answer from a variety of perspectives, is: why, during such turbulent times, did these poets focus their poetic gazes on the landscape of Eastern Europe, a task that, on the surface, seems to be so purely aesthetic? The project explores the possible meanings for the “discovery of nature” in Yiddish modernist poetry, and ultimately claims that this focus on the landscape provides a stage for political, cultural and metaphysical conversations with world literature, and an attempt to enter into cross-cultural, eternal conversations of “world-literature” in Yiddish, to set Yiddish on an equal footing with world cultures and languages, and to claim cultural belonging in Eastern Europe.

In my assessment, there are two interconnected answers to the meaning of the “discovery of nature” by these two avant-garde Yiddish language poets of the time: it created space for Yiddish poets to engage in the national dialogue with co-territorial literatures, both contemporary and Romantic. European Romanticism, which occurred simultaneously with a wave of national uprisings in nineteenth century Europe, was usually credited with the “discovery of nature.” In Yiddish poetry, the “discovery” happened during the twentieth century wave of national uprisings that are not disconnected from those of the Romantic period. The landscape, in these times of heightened tensions in hegemonic national-territorial claims, became a way to claim a

cultural belonging in a diverse, multiethnic territory. The landscapes of the Yiddish modernists who are the subject of the dissertation challenged hegemonic nationalist claims from a language and culture subjugated by Empire, with claims of non-territorial, local belonging.

Within Modern Yiddish literature, poetic representations of landscape were *often* part of a cultural project to create an intricate semiotic system of the artistic construction of the topography of a modern, transnational, autonomous culture of “Yiddishland.” It did not represent a generic, monolithic *golus*, or exile, as was often represented in 19th century Yiddish literature, rather, each locality had its own semiotic webs of meaning that could express or reject belonging in Eastern Europe. The Yiddish language, with its Germanic, Hebraic, Aramaic and Slavic roots was well equipped to aestheticize local color and dialect, even in the regional orthographies which reflect local dialects.

Depictions of the Eastern European landscape are, to some extent, driven by the nostalgia of the mass emigration of the late 19th and early 20th century and the “destruction of the shtetl,” but on a more symbolic level, it was a locality that was literally common ground between Jews and non-Jews and therefore could function as a forum for interaction between one culture and another. On the level of a “megatext”¹⁷ of “Yiddishland,” some authors sought to paint a diverse, multicultural localism in Yiddish literature to reflect the diversity and richness of a literary “Yiddishland,” which paralleled the political aspirations of non-territorial autonomous Jewish culture. Others sought to represent a global diasporism, or even a radical rejection of European Culture. Even within the specific texts of authors, tensions between ideas of the local and global nature of Jewish culture occur and resolve or co-exist to create various meanings.

¹⁷ Mikhail Epshtein, *Priroda, Mir, Tainik Vselennoy*, pp 5.

Efrat Gal-Ed discusses the tension between the “local and the European” in the poetry of Itzik Manger. She situates him as a poet who began by writing in a global, European, style of high modernism, but then transitioned to a style inspired by his local roots, accent, and particularities of culture. Manger was one of the first Yiddish poets to muse about the varied global landscapes of Yiddish literature, and in this project stems, indirectly, from Manger’s writings varied writing about landscape. The tension in Manger’s poetry between the Local and the European, or the Global, is present in Yiddish literature as a whole— there were multiple semiotic constellations of meaning associated with landscapes in Yiddish Literature.

If, on one hand, poetic depictions of landscape allowed for a discussion of various conceptions of cultural, national-cultural, or non-national belonging, on the other, they represented a contemplation of metaphysical philosophies of human relation to the natural world and society. This metaphysical thread in the landscape poetry sought to syncretize Jewish theology with Russian and Polish Romantic metaphysical themes. In this way, Jewish theology is secularized and woven into the fabric of a greater world poetry and European philosophical discourse. In this way, these Modernist *perform* Jewish syncretism with European Culture. These authors did not create this synthesis, rather, they mean to claim the contribution that Jewish culture has already made to a greater European culture, and a greater syncretic world culture.

The discovery of a poetics of nature/landscape is most closely associated with Romanticism. M.H. Abrams posits, in his study of English Romanticism, that the natural world is used to contemplate the metaphysical, spiritual and the supernatural in a secular language. It reflected the historical shifting of a cultural viewpoint: nature was no longer a chaos that man must tame, rather it was a supernatural force and secularization of the divine that acted upon all

and only those that were attune to such minutiae attained by the observant poet's gaze. Abrams' general assessment of the theme can be applied beyond English Romanticism to international Romanticism at large. In Yiddish Modernism, there was also a turning point in the general attitude towards nature from the landscape as a representation of non-Jewish space and non-belonging in exile/*golus*, a denial of the particular features of the landscape in exchange for an allegorical desert to a system of aesthetics and metaphors for Jewish national belonging, cultural fusion and celebration of localism.

So, my answer to the question of the Yiddish modernist "discovery of nature" is divided into two interconnected parts: the physical and the metaphysical. The political, national question represents the physical. The syncretic, secularized theological questions represent the metaphysical. However, true to Jewish theology, the physical and the metaphysical cannot be so easily disentangled: The metaphysical questions of human relation to the material world are intricately intertwined with national questions of language and ideas of the relationship of the individual to society.¹⁸ One can understand the construction of the metaphysical element as a performance of cultural fusion and a statement of belonging in Eastern Europe. This will perhaps strike some as odd, as we are speaking of a tumultuous and violent Eastern Europe that was far from a Jewish Idyll.¹⁹ However, if we think of localism as a statement of belonging in response to the violent denial of Jewish belonging in Central and Eastern Europe, and a hopeful vision of the past that is constructed from historical periods of peaceful coexistence and syncretic cultural exchange, then the trend makes more sense.

¹⁸ In my reading of *Lamed Vov*, I focus on Kulbak's discussion of the relationship of the physical and metaphysical in terms of the language question, which further elaborates on this point.

¹⁹ Kenneth Moss. "At Home except When They Were Not"

Literary Space

Geographically, the Pale of Jewish Settlement was situated on the land that rests between the Baltic coast and the Black Sea. The northern temperate forests are dotted with bogs and lakes that form a watershed draining into the Baltic coasts by river systems—The Nieman, the Viliya (Neris), Dvina rivers, and the Vistula and the Bug connect the Baltic Sea to the forests, where the watersheds of the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea meet. The rivers, such as the mighty Dniepr, that flow to the south across Polesian lowlands and the Pripyat Marshes and drain towards the Black Sea, are separate watersheds that make their way through the western-most edge of the Pontic Steppe. At the western edge of the Pontic Steppe are the Carpathian Mountains, and to the south, the Crimean Peninsula, consisting of steppe that rises into a mountain range at the southernmost point, meeting the Black Sea. To the east, beyond the Dnieper and the “wild fields” of the steppe, is the Don, flowing from the steppe into the sea of Azov as it meets the slopes of the Caucasian Range. Even Further east is the Volga, which drains into the Caspian Sea.

These geographic features have collected varied meaning over centuries of human habitation through their depiction in various linguistic cultures and national traditions. These places have been associated with origin stories of tribes, Empires, nation-states. The river systems were trade routes that connected northern Europe to the east and the Mediterranean. As such, human settlement and development was organized by these river systems. The names of the people in tribes, nations, religions, and ethnicities of the area have been fluid for the course of human history.

The semantic system which gives these landscapes meaning is created in human language—in folklore oral and written, in history and mythology, in literature, and in all forms of

human culture over the course of time. The study of literary space is meant to examine the semantic meanings associated with the landscape.

The geography of the Eastern European is aestheticized in the corpus of Yiddish literature and imbued with meaning. The development of a semiotic system of the landscape forms overtime as artists create associations with landscape and natural objects, as they build upon or reevaluate themes of other artists. In this way, the development of literary space is a national mythologization of that space.

Yiddish poetry did not have a Romantic tradition of poetry that “discovered” the national landscape, but instead, it often looks to Polish and Russian traditions. In this way, Yiddish poets engaged in a transnational dialogue with the Romantic poets of Empire. Because Central and Eastern Europe was a center of diversity of linguistic and literary cultures, the poetic landscape became fertile ground for a transnational poetic dialogue on concerning different ideologies of (national?) belonging. The dialogue establishes a particularly Jewish relationship to the land, which often claims a belonging denied to them in other poetic traditions.

I have been influenced by the study of literary space in Russian literature by the semiotic school, particularly Vladimir Toporov²⁰ and Yuri Lotman.²¹ Of particular interest to this project methodologically and conceptually is Mikhail Epshtein’s early work on the system of metaphors in Russian landscape poetry, *Priroda, Mir, Tainik Vselennoi... : Sistema Peizazhnykh Obrazov v Russkoi Poezii / Nature, World, Cache of the Universe...: a System of Landscape Metaphors in Russian Poetry*²² also influenced the methodology of my approach.²³ In this book, Epshtein

²⁰ Toporov, *Peterburgsky Tekst*.

²¹ Yuri Lotman, “Semiosphere.”

²² the first part of the title is a quote from a poem by Boris Pasternak

²³ Mikhail Epshtein, *Priroda, Mir, Tainik Vselennoi*.

approaches poetry as modern mythology, from which one can discern a certain national consciousness (or perhaps, a national subconscious).

Если мы рассмотрим все образы национальной поэзии, относящиеся к кому-нибудь одному мотиву (например, березы или коня), то обнаружим своего рода звездную систему, имеющую уплотнение – совпадения или сходства многих индивидуальных образов – и разреженные слои, в которых один образ отстоит от другого на значительном расстоянии.²⁴

If we look through all the metaphors of national poetry that are applied to one motif (for example, birch trees or stallions), then we uncover its own type of constellation that has a concentration – coincidences or similarities of many individual metaphors –and sparse levels, in which one metaphor stands out from another at a noticeable difference.

While this solar system of semantic meaning is present in Yiddish, I do not intend to comprehensively map it out. This study is meant to approach a very small portion of this constellation that can shed light onto one particular facet of Yiddish culture in Eastern Europe during a tumultuous time that is often misunderstood in contemporary scholarship.

In Yiddish Literature, Dan Miron has discussed the semiotics of literary space in 19th century Yiddish prose in *The Image of the Shtetl and Other Studies of Modern Jewish Literary Imagination*. In this study, Miron examines the intricacies of the dominant literary space in the 19th century: the shtetl. He argues that, in the 19th century the “image of the shtetl,” was a multilayered metaphor depicting a “*Jerusalem of this earth*” (*yerushalayim shel mata*), or a fallen Jerusalem, that represents an abstracted Jewish nation in Eastern European exile. This literary space intentionally ignores or caricatures the non-Jewish reality that was integral to shtetl life. The space outside of the shtetl²⁵, such as the countryside or the rural village (*dorf*), was

²⁴ Mikhail Epshtein, *Priroda, Mir, Tainik Vselenoi*, pp. 5.

²⁵ The shtetl, which is literally the diminutive of ‘shtot,’ was often a regional center of administration and commerce within a rural territory.

emphatically non-Jewish in literary space. However, this did not reflect the reality of the interconnectivity of the shtetl and the surrounding countryside, nor did it completely and objectively reflect the interactions between the Jewish populations and non-Jewish populations, rather, it reflected a multilayered, exilic metaphor of Jewish existence in Eastern Europe.²⁶

Mendele Moykher Sforim, the authorial persona and penname of Sholem Yankev Abramovitch, is the 19th century Yiddish author credited with a particular sensitivity to landscapes.²⁷ He often works with the trope of a negative Jewish relationship to the landscape of the countryside. This negative relationship is often a metaphor for the limitations of traditional Jewish religious life in a rapidly modernizing secular world. Abramovitch, as an enlightenment thinker²⁸ believed that interpreting the world solely through the Biblical text inhibited people from seeing an objective reality and participating in the larger secular imperial and world culture. He repeatedly mocks his characters, small town Jews who are interpreted as culturally backwards, for reading the landscape through metaphors of the Biblical text. Here is a typical example of the motif from his fictionalized autobiography, *Shloyme Reb Khayims*,²⁹ or, in English translation, *Of Bygone Days*:

Among Jews it is quite common for a child to spend his life in one place but with no idea of what goes on around him, with no conception of how to enjoy a normal human existence: instead, such a child transports himself and his thoughts to another world, another age. There it is possible for a man to grant the past a priority over the present, to overlook things that are in front of his nose, and to occupy himself with things that existed long ago, and that are accessible only to memory and imagination. Shloymele was still a child, unacquainted with his surroundings and the other human beings with whom he shared them; but his imagination bore him to distant realms: to the land of Sichon, king of the Amorites, to the land of Og, king of Bashan, and to the land of Nebuchadnezzar,

²⁶ Gennady Estrakh and Mikhail Krutikov, eds., *The Shtetl: Image and Reality*

²⁷ Itzik Manger, "Der Litvak un di Landshaft" and Moyshe Kulbak, "Dos Yidishe Vort."

²⁸ A *maskil*, a participant in the discourse of the Jewish enlightenment, or *Haskalah*.

²⁹ Shloyme an autobiographical character, converses with Mendele, the author's pen name and fictionalized persona in the preface to the book in a rather intricate frame narrative. Abramovitch was keen to create narrative frames that bend the boundaries of reality and fiction.

king of Babylonia. The people of his world spoke Hebrew and Aramaic; they lived in tents, rode mules and camels, drank water from leather bags, went barefoot, and wore rings in their noses. Shloymele knew nothing of the pine tree, the birch, or the oak. What had he to do with grains and potatoes, which he ate every day in the form of buckwheat soup and bread? In his mind's eye he pictured only vineyards and date trees, fig trees, pomegranates, olive trees, gopher and carob trees....³⁰

Mendele's satirical depiction of Shloyme's relation to and understanding of the natural world around him critique the closed-off relationship between the traditional Jewish culture and the secular culture around them. The mockery of his small-town characters stems from their readings of the banal Eastern European flora through textual lens of Biblical flora and fauna. This is what he identifies as a traditional relationship to the world – experience mediated and dictated by traditional religious texts. In this discourse, Jewish characters were often depicted as unable to comprehend their natural surroundings as they were because they were too busy studying Torah and Talmud could not see beyond the ancient religious text, which he argued limited their understanding of the material world around them and their understanding of the present.

In addition to Abramovitch's internal critique, there was also an external, antisemitic line of criticism of negative Jewish relationship to the land. Gavril Derzhavin, the 18th century poet whose poetry functioned as a poetic bridge from classicism to Romanticism,³¹ was also a state functionary who wrote a report on the newly acquired Belarusian provinces of Polotsk and Mogilov³² accusing the Jews of responsibility for a grain shortage.³³ The report, presented to the

³⁰ Mendele Moykher Sforim. *Of Bygone Days*, pp. 303-304.

³¹ One could argue that he was the first Romantic Poet in Russian.

³² These territories were acquired in 1792 in the first partition of Poland-Lithuania. This is the first encounter of the Russian Empire with the large Jewish population of the former Polish-Lithuanian territories.

³³ Derzhavin, Gavriil Romanovich. "An Opinion Regarding the Prevention of Famine in White Russia and The Organization of the Way of Life of the Jews (1800). Translated from the Russian. With Comments and introduction edited by Alexander Fried." *Aschkenaz*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2005, pp. 229-312.

court in 1800, conveys an early iteration of an antisemitic stereotype that Jews have no connection to the land themselves and live off the labor of the peasants and mismanage resources. In Derzhavin's attack on the Jews of Mogilov and Polotsk, he references and appropriates the history of Jewish expulsions of Kyivian Rus'. Derzhavin viewed the Jews as disconnected with the land because of the typical, traditional role as merchants. He represented the stratification of the Polish-Lithuanian economic order as backward and reported that the Jews were an "unproductive" element for the empire. This characterization probably stems from the desire of Russian merchants to enter into the market of the newly acquired Belrusian provinces. Jews were heavily involved in the agricultural economy of the Central and Eastern Europe, even if farming was not a common occupation.³⁴ However, Derzhavin employs the antisemitic trope of a negative relationship with the land that to justify his attack on the Jews. He recommends denying them full rights of citizenship by labeling them as a suspected disloyal, unproductive element of society. His claims do not represent a reality, rather the political ambitions of those elements of society that had his ear, particularly one Count Semyon Zorich, who was in the Russian army and had recently been granted an estate in that area. Derzhavin himself was also granted an estate in the newly acquired territories. Derzhavin attempts to sow divisions by painting the Lithuanian Jews as exploitative alien elements in a "Slavic land," in which only "Slavic" peasants have an unalienated connection to the land which justifies the Russian

³⁴ See John D. Klier, "What exactly was a Shtetl?" pp.24: "Indeed, the distinctive rural element that was an integral part of the shtetl is often missed, with the spurious assumption that the Jews were somehow an alien, 'urban' element in the midst of Christian rural rustics. This pervasive stereotype misses the extent to which Jews were engaged in all rural pursuits short of farming, (and even this ignores the existence of cottage gardens and the use of common pasture lands: how for example, did Sholem Aleichem's Tevye the Dairyman feed his horse?). Jews were famous as horse-dealers, an essentially rural pursuit. Likewise, their role as middlemen between field and market required them to have a good understanding of rural agricultural conditions." See also Adam Teller. *Money Power and Influence in Eighteenth-Century Lithuania*. for a more in-depth case study of the economic roles Jews played on the on the Radziwiłł estates. See also Gershon Hundert. *Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the 18th century*, pp. 19.

Empire's acquisition of the territories, as the sole representative of some true, pure and unrefined "slavicness." Derzhavin's position conveniently ignores that the "white Russian" peasants themselves would probably have seen the Russians who descended from Moscovy as other and perhaps the Jews as Lithuanian.

Some influential maskils (proponents of the Haskalah, or the Jewish enlightenment³⁵) of the time also sought to "productivize" the economically marginalized elements of the Jewish population for the Russian Empire, so as to make a case for rights of citizenship in the Russian empire. Nota Notkin, an influential *shtadlan*³⁶ (a prominent member of the community with political influence) from Shklov, attempted to work with Derzhavin, but was dismayed by the antisemitic conclusions of the final report. He wrote his own proposal to address the problems which he saw in the Jewish community, principally the overpopulation and subsequent lack of sanitary conditions in the shtetl. He suggested the formation of Jewish agricultural and industrial colonies in southern Ukraine. His proposal sought to solve several problems within the community – he wanted to create an opportunity for poor, who did not have much economic opportunity in overcrowded shtetl, and to prove to the Government that Jews could be productive to imperial society and deserved the rights of citizenship.³⁷ The colonies were established during this time, but complications ensued, and a new wave of repression came after the death of Catherine.

This historical episode of the Russian Empire's first encounter with the newly acquired Lithuanian territories of Polotsk and Mogilov shows there were internal and external perceptions

³⁵ Immanuel Etkes, "Haskalah," YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe. <https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Haskalah>

³⁶ Scott Ury, "Shtadlan," YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe. <https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Shtadlan>

³⁷ David E. Fishman. *Russia's First Modern Jews: The Jews of Shklov*. See also Simon Polonsky, *History of the Jews*.

in the 19th century that Jews lacked a “connection to the land,” and while these perceptions lead to different conclusions, the root of the metaphors concerned Jewish belonging in Central and Eastern Europe and ideas of citizenship. The incident with Derzhavin and Notkin occurred during the Russian Empire’s first contact with the Jewish population and roughly a few years before the context of Napoleon’s emancipation of the Jews of Western Europe, giving them rights to full citizenship. Abramovitch, who published during the second half of the nineteenth century, was still concerned about ideas of citizenship in the Russian empire, as the Empire still debated questions surrounding Jewish citizenship and subjecthood in the public sphere throughout the 19th century. In the context of the examples above, the politics of national belonging are associated with a relationship to the land, and these relationships are further developed in literary space. The aesthetic depictions of landscapes implicitly discuss a relationship of people to the land that can intersect with the political debate in the larger public sphere.

In the 20th Century, Yiddish Modernists used the landscapes to discuss issues of belonging amid a new, modern wave of national uprisings and territorial claims. The “discovery of nature” in the work of Kulbak and Hofshateyn can be read as a continuation of Mendele’s urging to read the landscape objectively, as it is, rather than through the Biblical text, and a “deparochialization”³⁸ of Yiddish culture. Yet at the same time, they also often superimpose Biblical exile upon the landscape. This superimposition, contrary to the 19th century image of the Shtetl, does not, however, impose a sense of non-belonging to the world. Most often, this exile represents a metaphysical acceptance the fallen human condition, and a sense of belonging

³⁸ Kenneth Moss’ term. See Kenneth Moss "Not The Dybbuk but Don Quixote: Translation, Deparochialization, and Nationalism in Jewish Culture, 1917–1919". *Culture Front: Representing Jews in Eastern Europe*, edited by Benjamin Nathans and Gabriella Safran, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014, pp. 196-240.

in Eastern Europe. This project aims to study expansion of semiotic space in Yiddish literature beyond the borders of the shtetl in the 20th century to the countryside and elucidate the cross-cultural dialogue that takes place through the landscape motif.

Yiddish Literature did not follow the typical development of European National languages, particularly, those languages of empire that were created through state sponsorship at one point or another. Yiddish was a vernacular language, and as such had more in common in terms of a historical “development” of a poetic tradition with co-territorial vernacular languages such as Belarusian and Ukrainian. Moreover, Yiddish Poetry did not have a Romantic poetic tradition. Modernism, however, is often understood generally as a return to and reengagement with the aesthetics of the Romantic tradition and a generic reaction against the aesthetics of realist prose, and in this lies a question: how does a poet create a modernist aesthetic in a Language that lacks a Romantic tradition?

Lacking a Romantic poetic tradition, Yiddish modernist looked to the Romantic traditions of the languages of the empires to which they belonged – Polish, Russian – to inform their poetics, and to some extent co-territorial vernaculars that challenged the imperial hegemony, such as Ukrainian. The “discovery of nature” in modernist Yiddish poetry is more often than not linked to and conversant with the Romantic “discovery of nature” in co-territorial Eastern European languages. The landscape provides a forum for Modern Yiddish poets, who are participants in the creation of a Jewish national culture, with Romantic poetic predecessors from Polish and Russian literature whose landscapes contained national assumptions. This project seeks to elucidate some of these intertextual conversations.

Jordan Finkin’s studies of literary space have been helpful in this study – he provides a starting point for the semiotic study of space in Modern Yiddish Literature. His readings

characterize what he calls the “homelandscape” as a semiotic system that is a modernist response to Dan Miron’s “Image of the Shtetl.” In his conception, landscapes are an *apolitical* statement of belonging. The “homelandscape,” attempts to create new literary systems of Eastern European Space. They “describe an organic connection to the place of one’s birth as the central tether to the notion of place as home, and its physical nature as homelandscape. It is an at-homeness which is distinctly apolitical—indeed these poems temporality is neither historical nor epic but natural, organic—all the more notable for these two poets so committed to the revolution and its promises.”³⁹

I intend to continue the study of the “homelandscape,” but disagree with its characterization as apolitical. I intend to read the political context, which is often created in the intertext between Yiddish modernists and Polish and Russian Romantics. One might think that a simple statement of belonging would be apolitical, but as we well know in the second decade of the twenty first century, that is not always the case. Anything can be politicized, though perhaps not everything should be in every case. But in the case of landscapes in modern Yiddish poetry, the political context produces readings that explain the purpose of the widespread popularity of the seemingly purely aesthetic focus during such a tumultuous time.

Yiddish authors of the period are all too often categorized in the right-left political paradigm with little respect to what their work conveys and how it is conveyed. Kulbak and Hofshteyn can be understood inhabiting the left side of the spectrum, but the context of *that* left was much different from the context of contemporary politics, colored vividly by Cold War dichotomies that did not yet exist in the form they do now, so, I hesitate in even describing the

³⁹ Jordan Finkin, *An Inch or Two of Time: Time and Space in Jewish Modernisms*, pp. 57.

poets' ideology in these terms. The characterization of their work, especially during this uncertain time before the Soviet Union had emerged victorious, as "Soviet" is a mistake that is often a misunderstanding based on Cold War ideology and reductionist history. That is not to say that Hofshsteyn, in particular, did not write "Soviet" poetry, in form and ideology, but during the 30's it was a matter of survival. This trend is a familiar paradigm to those who study Russian language literature. Also a familiar story is Hofshsteyn's turn towards translation in those years – a poet could express ideas that would be punishable if it was obscured by a veil of translation. The work of these poets should not be reduced to their politics, their texts should be read for what they express in their proper historical context without, to the extent that it is possible, ideological backshadowing. It is impossible to understand the historical-political context completely, or to know what it was like to experience the phenomenon of that time. But we can try to understand the position from an objective historical standpoint.

The poems of this period are not apolitical, but it is also reductive to read them as pure political ideology. These poets were attempting to create artistic phenomena that captured something of their personal experience at a historical inflection point. Their positions are understandable to a certain degree, and should be interesting to readers invested in the historical circumstance regardless of political convictions.

Madeline Cohen describes the intermingling of the political and the aesthetic in her dissertation as a "poetics of doikayt,"⁴⁰ and this dissertation follows her lead. Doikayt ("here-ness"), is an ideology that promotes a Jewish belonging in Eastern Europe and the struggle to actively make this area a more egalitarian and tolerant homeland. Mikhail Krutikov has

⁴⁰ Madeline Cohen. *Here and Now: The Modernist Poetics of Doikayt*. See also "Do'ikayt and the Spaces of Politics in An-sky's Novella *In Strom*." *Eastern European Jewish Affairs*. Vol. 50, 2020. pp. 6-20.

connected doikayt to the “tuteiyushi” (a calque of “doikayt,” or perhaps vice versa) concept in Belarusian,⁴¹ suggesting that these concepts reject ethnonational territorialism and the modern conception of nationalism on the historical basis of multicultural pluralism in Central and Eastern Europe. Cohen suggests that the “poetics of doikayt” are “non-exclusive, anti-nationalist, internationalist, or otherwise revolutionary perspective[s].”⁴² Yet, when we examine what many of these authors suggest in their work, it is perhaps not as radical as Cohen characterizes it, as socialism was during this place and time had different connotations than it does in our current environment: it was massively popular and widely accepted.

Doikayt, or local belonging, is implicit in Dubnov’s non-territorial national minority politics of Jewish autonomism, which was widely popular. Doikayt, which in a way can be thought of somewhat overlapping with Efrat Gal-Ed’s term, “localism,” in literature emphasizes Jewish belonging to the local culture. It is a reaction to autocratic repression that denies Jewish belonging in Central and Eastern Europe that looks towards past understandings of belonging, a particular multicultural localism of the Pale that did not fit neatly into ethno-national territorial claims. Given the prevalence of the “poetics of doikayt” in Modernist Jewish discourse and its pre-revolutionary history, the sentiment of local belonging seems rather widespread and reflects a mainstream opinion and a historical turning point from traditional culture towards a modern secular Jewish culture of Eastern Europe. Cohen’s study of the “poetics of doikayt” has opened a new way of reading the politics of localism in Yiddish literature. But the question of whether a particular poetics of doikayt are national or non-national or national-cultural, or inherently revolutionary is not easy to answer and perhaps depends on the specific text.

⁴¹ In Geveb “Raysn: The Belarusian Frontier of Yiddish Modernism.” <https://ingeveb.org/articles/raysn-the-belarusian-frontier-of-yiddish-Modernism>

⁴² Madeline Cohen, *Here and Now: The Modernist Poetics of Doikayt*, pp. 35.

Both Finkin and Cohen follow Chana Kronfeld's study, *On the Margins of Modernism*. In this study Kronfeld critiques Deluze and Guattari's concept of "minor literature" in their reading of Kafka.⁴³ Deluze and Guattari claim that Kafka's German was influenced by Yiddish and that his position as a German language author in Prague signal his participation in a "minor" literature, which means to decenter the "major" European literatures. Kronfeld points out some of the incongruencies of their claims in relation to the actualities of Yiddish literature, of which they knew little, and Kafka's actual relationship to Yiddish. However, she finds value in the concept itself to apply to Yiddish modernism as a "minor modernism" and speculated that as such, in its "minor" nature Yiddish literature is perhaps exemplary as a modern literature and Modernism in general.

Kronfeld writes of the ability of Yiddish as a "minor literature" to challenge the hegemony of co-territorial "major literatures," but unfortunately does not go into much detail into the intertextual relationship of these literatures and *how* Yiddish specifically converses with these literatures. Kronfeld often notes the relationship between Yiddish literature and Slavic literatures, particularly Russian modernism, but beyond a few lines that mention this connection, does not go into detail. Kronfeld's book is on Hebrew and Yiddish modernist poetics, and devotes most of its close readings to Hebrew poets. Occasionally, her readings lack understanding of the Slavic intertext and literary historical context, leading to analyses that, while compelling, sometimes miss cues with which the contemporary readers and writers would have been familiar. This project seeks to fill some of the gaps in the contemporary scholarship that grew out of Kronfeld's study, and seeks to recover some of meanings that the texts contained in their original context, to the extent that that is possible. One approach that I have

⁴³ Gilles Deluze and Felix Guattari. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*.

taken to fill these holes is to incorporate and recover scholarship contemporary to the authors and expand on their critical work. My readings of poetry are influenced by formalist methodology and the schools of literary scholarship that were developed later from that line, particularly semiotics. The work of these modernist poets deserves to be considered within the context of the methodologies that were widespread during the time.

Benjamin Harshav, whose influence is felt in Kronfeld's work, has presented the most concrete scholarship on the relationship between Yiddish and Slavic poetics, particularly Russian and Polish. Harshav himself came from Vilnius and was of a younger generation than Kulbak. His life was interrupted by the Second World War, after which he immigrated to Israel. As a poet, he continued the modernist tradition in Yiddish, even in Israel. As a literary scholar, he became a leading figure in structuralism. He contends that the major aesthetic influences are from German Expressionism and Russian Symbolism.⁴⁴

Harshav places particular emphasis on the linguistic and poetic interaction between languages in poetry. This project aims to expand on the work that Harshav began in the interaction between Yiddish and Slavic poetics. In addition to Harshav, Gennady Estraiikh, Mikhail Krutikov, Brian Horowitz, Jeffrey Veidlinger, and others have all been working to fill in the Slavic context in Yiddish Literature, and my work follows their lead. This project seeks to concretely examine the interaction of modern Yiddish poets in the context of co-territorial literatures. Tropes connected to the landscapes of Eastern Europe provide a local to explore these intertextual interactions in specific case studies.

Allison Schachter has theorized a concept of "diasporic modernism" characterizing "Jewish writers who embraced a literary culture defined by language rather than national

⁴⁴ Benjamin Harshav, *One Thousand Years of Hebrew Versification*, pp 198.

borders, discovering in diaspora a non-territorial paradigm of identification and legitimization—a paradigm that resisted the homogenizing force of the nation-state.”⁴⁵ Her work puts “diasporic modernisms” in relation to the national narrative of Israeli literature. However, her reading of Yiddish modernism as a “diasporic modernism” could, perhaps, eclipse the perspective of many of the cultural actors arguing for Jewish belonging in Central and Eastern Europe through the depiction of landscapes rooted in the localism of *doikayt*. In this we see the internal tension within Yiddish literature between localism and globalism – belonging to a generic, global *golus*, or a specific, local, rooted *golus*. This modernist tension represents a new variation on the traditional Jewish trope of exile.

Some Jewish modernists, in Yiddish and other languages, may privilege an aesthetics of diaspora over local belonging for various reasons in various time periods. Many viewed the turbulent years of Jewish Modernism as a struggle for some kind of liberation – whether it was national or non-nation or transnational or international was perhaps unclear, and perhaps not the main concern of the time. But the emphasis on a generic diaspora could eclipse the perspective of those who could have understood themselves as at home in Eastern Europe, even if Eastern Europe was not always the most hospitable place.

Marc Caplan and Rachel Seelig have written about the transcultural interactions of Yiddish literature within the context of Weimar Berlin, focusing on the overlap between German-Jewish Modernist and Yiddish Modernists who arrived there as refugees in the 20’s. Jordan Finkin has written on the influence and congruence of German Expressionism and Yiddish Modernism in his comparison of Peretz Markish and Georg Trakl. Their studies are valuable in the contextualization of Yiddish literature in terms of a larger European Modernist

⁴⁵ Allison Schachter, *Diasporic Modernisms*, pp. 4.

movement. Much of their scholarship on space in Modernist Yiddish literature has focused on Berlin, an important yet ephemeral interwar publication center and destination for refugees from the wars in the East. But the places in which these works were published often does not feature into the actual text. Berlin was important, but Yiddish writers were attracted to move because it offered a chance to live in a European cultural capital comfortably and affordably, especially, if, like Kulbak and Hofshateyn, one could publish in an American literary journal. There is Yiddish literature that represents Berlin in literary space, and I would encourage scholars to pursue this line of study, particularly in the literary depiction of Berlin itself, but the current trend has been to analyze the creation of Eastern European literary space *from the perspective of Berlin*. This approach can provide an interesting analysis – but it is not the only perspective. My work seeks to explore a different perspective on one of the central literary spaces of modern Yiddish poetry—the Eastern European landscape in the Eastern European context and mitigate the inaccessibility of some of the co-territorial literatures and the linguistic cultures in which these authors lived most of their lives.

Finkin has perhaps produced the most intricate study yet in the analysis of literary space in Yiddish Modernism, and this dissertation seeks to continue and parallel his work, which is why I have included his term, “homelandscape,” in the title. Finkin’s methodology of reading the “homelandscape” in *An Inch or Two of Time* has similarities in methodology to Mikhail Epshtein’s reading of literary space in Russian literature. Finkin calls his approach “spaciotemporal,” focusing on the interaction between space and time, while Epshtein is concerned with plotting out certain tropes associated with space, often emphasizing temporal aspects of spatial connotations. And while they have different goals, they both read the

landscape poem through various temporal-spatial axes.⁴⁶ Some of these axes include the time of day: dawn, noon, dusk and night, or the season: spring, summer, autumn, winter. Each of these linguistic systems of measuring natural time has typical clusters of semiotic connotations. Spatially, different geographic features also contain clusters of meaning. To their various axes, I would like to add an additional axis that augments the perception of time and space: the synchronic and the diachronic intertext.

Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the "chronotope" is also an important concept for the methodology of this study. In Bakhtin's conception, the chronotope is often mediated by the conventions of genre:

We will give the name *chronotope* (literally, "Time Space" to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. This term, [space-time] is employed in mathematics, and was introduced and was introduced as part of Einstein's Theory of Relativity. The special meaning it has in relativity theory is not important for our purposes; we are borrowing it for literary criticism almost as a metaphor (almost, but not entirely). What counts for us is that it represents the inseparability of space and time (time as the fourth dimension of space). *We understand the chronotope as a formally constitutive category of literature* [emphasis mine]; we do not deal with the chronotope in other areas of culture.

In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charge and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope.⁴⁷

The intersection between literary time and space is a communicative feature in the works of the contemporary Yiddish language modernist poets that form the case studies and special attention is paid to the spatiotemporal connotations of genre. These modernist poets more often

⁴⁶ Jordan Finkin notes some of these axis in *An Inch or Two of Time*. Mikhail Epshtein presents his own similar axes as a systematic method to read a landscape poetry in Russian literature.

⁴⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, pp. 84

than not present hybridized genres, complicating theories of the chronotope. However, there is a particular dominant generic convention in each of the poems discussed that is modified by conventions of less dominant genres.

The Form of the Dissertation

I have divided the dissertation into two sections: one on Kulbak and one on Hofshateyn. I discuss a selection of Kulbak's long narrative poems, in which the dominant genre is the epic. For Hofshateyn, I discuss his first book of poetry, *Bay Vegn / Along Roads*, which consists, for the most part, of short lyrical poems, arranged meticulously in semi-autonomous sections that contain smaller cycles of varying cohesion. The dominant genre is the elegy. Both epic and elegiac modes deal with memory and history and these poets use the major associations of those genres and their associated chronotopes, even if they are modified by generic hybridization to create variations on a theme.

The texts of Hofshateyn and Kulbak present different styles and were written under slightly different conditions. The aesthetics of each poet demand a different methodological approach, and so the two chapters reflect this in their formal incongruency. I have attempted to draw my arguments and analyses from the texts themselves on their own terms, and this approach has demanded a different formal approach towards each of the artists' work.

The chapter on Kulbak begins with an overview of some of his influences, and his relationship to contemporaries and predecessors by contemporaries so as to contextualize the literary climate of the time, and trace the origins of Kulbak's aesthetic depictions of Eastern Europe. It goes on to discuss Kulbak's reception and influence in Yiddish literature, to discuss his aesthetics and show that in his own time, he was celebrated for his localism and depiction of

landscapes. Then there is a section on the historical situation of the time to contextualize the works in terms of co-territorial national movements and literatures, which helps a reader understand why Kulbak focuses his aesthetic gaze on the local landscapes.

After this introductory section, I give my readings of three of Kulbak's long poems: *Di Shtot / The City*, *Raysn / Ruthenia*, and *Lamed Vov / Lamed Vov: The Thirty Six*. I am interested in how form of the long poem is used in combination with the expectations of genre in depictions of time. Kulbak's long poems with long lines of engage the epic genre and present an epic conception of time – a mythological time of a primordial Belarus. However, these three long poems are all very different in their mix of generic conventions and representations of spacetime.

The City produces an urban poetics, largely based off of a mix of symbolist and expressionist aesthetics. This poem is his “revolutionary epic.” I explore the presentation of urban space as a landscape. It presents an abstracted, monolithic city and at the same time, the particular landscape of Minsk in the summer of 1918. This abstract nature is negated at the end of the poem by a date and place which locates itself in Minsk during in anticipation of a Polish advance in the Polish-Soviet war. In this poem, the urban city space is contrasted to country space, creating a dichotomy that is typical in Yiddish modernism, yet atypical in terms of nineteenth century literary space: there is no shtetl. Instead of the shtetl, there is only the city and the countryside.

“Raysn” is Kulbak's epic of cultural belonging. It depicts the landscape of a mythic Belarusian countryside. This section explores Kulbak's poetics in the context of the formation of the first independent Belarusian nation. This section is a polemic addressed to Marc Caplan's reading of the poem, who argues that the poem reinforces traditional boundaries and represents a cultural decline. He claims “The mythical “Raysn” extends only so far as the boundaries

between Jews and Non-Jews, analogous to the boundary between tradition and modernity, are observed. Once this border vanishes, with the appearance of Nastasia, “Raysn” becomes “Belarus,” and such as such is no more idyllic than Berlin.”⁴⁸ In my assessment, Caplan’s analysis of the poem misses the intertext, misplaces the irony, and is not aware of the historical context of cross-cultural discourse around the modern formation of modern Belarus. Contrary to Caplan, I argue that Kulbak looks toward the mythic past as a template for the future, and emphasizes the long, mythic history of Jews in Belarus and the cultural syncretism that has taken place on Belarusian/Lithuanian territory as a utopic vision for the future. Kulbak’s poem performs an exaggerated, exoticized historic-cultural syncretism of Jewish and Belarusian culture that earnestly argues for a Jewish cultural belonging in the newly formed modern Belarus. Kulbak’s irony is not in his statement of belonging, as Caplan suggests, but rather, in the modernist performance of a folk-inspired poetics, a self-exoticization and self-reflexive primitivism that relies on the performance of Belarusian localism. The poem has an element of decline, but ultimately accepts the historical moment as a threshold and proposes a new rebirth of culture that will honor the mythical “Raysish” patriarchs through a continuation of cultural syncretism as Jewish-Lithuanian tradition. Rather than reinforce traditional boundaries, it reimagines traditional boundaries and assumptions from a Modernist perspective; while the transgression of borders is scandalous, his performance of localism performs the shocking transgression of borders as a syncretic element of folkloric tradition. In this section, I have included historical information on literary discourses surrounding the formation of modern Belarus, as well as provided close readings of Kulbak’s poems in light of their intertext to support my argument.

⁴⁸ Marc Caplan, *Yiddish Writers in Weimar Berlin*, pp. 320

Lamed Vov is Kulbak's metaphysical epic that reflects on the theology and philosophy of the language question. This section explores how the question of "language as such" is tied into questions of cultural-nationalism and world culture. I read this poem as a journey to the Yiddish sublime and in the context of Walter Benjamin's musings on language to situate the discussion in the wider 20th century literary discussion on the nature of language.

While the Kulbak chapter focuses on three long format poems and his Modernist rendition of the Romantic "poema," the chapter dedicated to Hofshteyn focuses mostly on his first book, *Bay Vegn / Along Roads*. It also considers various poems of his early period outside of this collection meant to elucidate his early aesthetic. The chapter begins with three sections meant to explain an approach to reading Hofshteyn's poetry, which I have tried to distill from my readings of contemporary essays by literary critics from Hofshteyn's circle, Yekhezkel Dobrushin and Nokhem Oyslender. This section is divided into a discussion of Hofshteyn's biography and its relevance to his poetic persona, Hofshteyn's aesthetics in comparison with contemporary poetic trends, and a section on structure, form and genre. After this introductory section the focus switches to the close reading of Hofshteyn's landscapes in *Bay Vegn / Along Roads*, his engagement with Romantic predecessors and his layering of time and space, Jewish Literature and World literature. Ultimately Hofshteyn seeks to view the landscapes objectively, to interact with the natural world as if he knew nothing of the human connotations that color it. The tumultuous times are represented as a new threshold, a new primordial chaos, in which all the assumed connotations must be reevaluated. Yet, Hofshteyn is attracted to paradox, and in order to view the world anew, to derive some new natural laws for his time, he has to turn his gaze toward the past to find out where his preconceived notions of the relationship of nature and nation were subconsciously formed. It is for this reason that he addresses the entire world poetic

tradition and the trope of exile, particularly with careful consideration of Pushkin's landscapes of exile and the national connotations that they imply.

In addition to striving to fill some gaps in the academic discourse on Yiddish Modernism and providing some case studies of two major Yiddish poets, this dissertation makes some primary texts available in translation. Granted, the previous statement is something of a paradox in that it assumes that a translation of a primary text is also a primary text, when in fact, it has elements of a secondary text as well. Translation is a strange concept which requires one to accept certain paradoxes – one must believe in the possibility of translation and the impossibility of translation simultaneously. These translations are not the original works of these authors – the originals were written in Yiddish, yet, they strive to communicate the distinct artistic phenomena of the texts, or at least something akin to it. But for these authors, who could have easily written poems in other languages, writing aesthetically compelling texts *in Yiddish* was a major point – it elevated the status of their repressed language and culture. So, in the translation of these texts into English, this major contextual point can be easily glossed over. However, translation into English can provide something that the authors desired – a textual “afterlife” as poets of “world literature” on par with the other great poets of the world... That is, if the translations are successful in representing their artistic craft. That is what I have tried to do in my translations, to the best of my ability. And with such goals, one often falls short of the mark, but attempting such an impossible project is often more interesting than not.

Some of these texts have been previously translated in part, while others have appeared in translation as I was working on this dissertation. I have attempted to translate these texts into English accurately and poetically. Accuracy is not science in artistic translation –I have attempted to be true to the intent of the text, and I have had to interpret the text. I have tried to

ground my interpretations in the historical context, but there is only so much I personally can understand about the historical context – I cannot experience it as a living phenomenon, I can only experience it through text, which are living phenomena of their own accord. But this is all the paradox of the scientific method – one may analyze the data and come to a conclusive argument, but that argument is not a truth to be believed as gospel, it is an assessment based on reason. So, I have tried to be accurate in the reasoning of my translational experiment to the extent that it is possible.

I have also attempted to make these text poetical in the English language so that their craft is tangible to the English language reader. I have paid special attention to meter, as did the poets, which is perhaps not very palatable to the average American English reader, nor very representative of American Modernism. Perhaps this will estrange the poetry a bit and question preconceptions of Modernism. However, I have not always reproduced the exact forms. I have tried to insert end rhymes, but do not do so as frequently or consistently as the Yiddish, instead often relying on sound play within the lines to convey a sense that there is some kind of musicality. Some formal aspects I could not carry over, or otherwise did not want to, but I have tried to hint at them with my own strange tongue, in my own way, considering my understanding of poetic possibilities in English, which, of course is limited. I have tried to create forms that somehow motion towards those of the original, while at the same time trying to hear the poems anew in English. This is an impossible and an imperfect art rather than a computation, and I've done what I could with the time I had. Some of the translations still remain young and unrefined, others are more polished. The nature of the dissertation requires something to be underdeveloped – and perhaps this applies often in this text.

Translation has been integral to the scholarship and vice versa. To translate is to interpret and interpretation requires a scholarly process. Translation also presents an avenue of recovery for those who are unable to read the original, or a gateway for students who strive to read the text in the original. Translation adds to the fame of the original text, and these texts deserve the fame that has been denied to them in “world literature.

Chapter 1: Kulbak's Modernist Epics

Moyshe Kulbak (1896-1937) grew up in Smorhon, a small town between Minsk and Vilna. He had a traditional, yet modernized, education. He went to kheyder and began to study at the Volozhin Yeshiva, but also received a secular education in a Russian Jewish public school. He lived in Kovno (1915-1918), Minsk (1918-1919) and Vilna (1919-1920) before emigrating to Berlin (1920-23) after the turmoil of the first world war and the revolution. He then moved back to Vilna, which was at the time incorporated into the newly independent Polish state for a period of about 5 years (1923-1927), Kulbak returned to Minsk in 1927, then under Soviet rule.⁴⁹ He was murdered by the secret police during the purges of 1937, when Stalin decided to eliminate any perceived possible threat to centralized Soviet power by systematic mass murder.⁵⁰ In the Belarusian SSR, Stalin was particularly paranoid about the threat of various national movements (Polish, Belarusian, Latvian, Jewish, etc.).

⁴⁹ Robert Alder Peckerer and Aaron Rubinstein. "Moyshe Kulbak." *Dictionary of Literary Biography* 333. P. 147-155. See also Elye Shulman. "Moshe Kulbak." *Leksikon fun Yidish Shraybers*, ed Berl Kagan (New York, 1986), col. 481

⁵⁰ See Gennady Estraiikh and Oleg Budnitskii, "From the Great Terror to the Terror in 1941: The Case of Yiddish Writers in Soviet Belorussia."

Kulbak supported himself as a teacher of Yiddish literature, a writer, an actor and a director. His major collections of poetry published during his lifetime are *Shirim / Songs* (1920), *Lider / Poems* (1922), *Naye Lider / New Poems* (1922), *Der Disner Tshayld Herold / Childe Harold of Dysna* (1933). He also produced several novels: *Meshiakh bin Efrayim / The Messiah of the House of Ephraim* (1924), *Montik / Monday* (1926), and *Zelmenyaner / The Zelmenyaners: A Family Saga* (1935). In addition to these publications, he produced several collected works and two plays, *Yosef Frank* and *Boytre Gazln*. His poetry and prose focus on themes of local Lithuanian Jewish flavor and combine high modernism, specifically Symbolism and Expressionism, with folkloric themes, and often explores mysticism and the occult, specifically false messiah narratives.

During the Stalinist repression in the thirties, Kulbak attempted to transform himself into a Soviet writer, but was vehemently attacked.⁵¹ He did not produce as much writing during this time, but did write some of his most famous works: *Der Disner Tshayld Harold* and *Zelmenyaner*, both of which seek to function in a Soviet framework, but lead to accusations of bourgeoisie decadence. After this, he turned towards writing and directing plays, and like many writers facing repression in the 30's, to translation. He translated Belarusian and Russian poetry and prose.

This chapter seeks in part to further define Kulbak's "poetics of doikayt," and to look closely at how the formal elements of interact with the content of the poem. Kulbak's localism and subsequent doikayt is a logical development of both the nineteenth century "Image of the Shtetl" and the positivist anthropological works of Y. L. Peretz, populist anthropological works of S. An-ski, and the Yiddish and Russian sentimental poetry of Simyon Frug, which sought to

⁵¹ Khatskel Dunetz, "Kulbak," *Vegn Shrayber un Verk: Kritishe Etudn*.

humanize Jewish plight in the late 19th and early twentieth century. All of these late nineteenth century Yiddish authors sought to document the reality of Jewish poverty in the small rural towns to respond to the antisemitic stereotypes that portrayed Jews as an exploitative middle class. While 19th century authors largely showed Jewish poverty to dispel these misconceptions, they still tended to present a Jewish world that was isolated from the non-Jewish world. This image of the shtetl reflected a certain reality – Jews consisted of a minority of the population, but lived concentrated in certain areas and professions. Kulbak intentionally focuses his gaze on the creation of literary space that is outside of the shtetl – In “Raysn,” this is the countryside and the village (*dorf*), or in the city (*shtot* as opposed to its diminutive, *shtetl*). It is in this space that Kulbak locates the folk-primitive, and with it, shards of the primordial. While the late nineteenth century authors mentioned above looked to the literary refinement of ethnographic folk evidence as a medium to breakdown preconceived stereotypes and question some of the assumptions of the nature of tradition, Kulbak performs a highly aestheticized version of this folklore and hyperbolizes it to create a vision of the future based off his assessment from the deep past of folklore.

It is a break from the 19th century “image of the shtetl” as a fallen Jerusalem, a *Jerusalem of this Earth*. It does not set borders of the Jewish community, instead it presents an image of a simple people who are unfettered by those borders. Like the “image of the shtetl,” Kulbak’s image of the countryside and village is not based in actual reality. While the 19th century image of the Shtetl presents Eastern European *golus* as an abstracted fallen Jerusalem that corresponds only loosely to actuality, Kulbak presents it as a primeval Canaan, in which he mythologizes the Genesis of Lithuanian Jewry in a symbolist epic. This Canaan is superimposed onto the days of lore of first Jewish settlement in the medieval Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The 19th century image

of the shtetl presents Eastern European Jewish one of non-belonging to the imperfect condition of exile, Kulbak presents an image that emphasized Jewish belonging to the Eastern European land and thus to an imagined community of a multiethnic Lithuanian state. This imagined multiethnic Lithuania was not just an object of Kulbak's imagination, rather it was part of the program for Belarusian nationalists who grew out of the popular socialist movement in the beginning of the twentieth century.

Yiddish language criticism praised Kulbak's poetry for a quality of "*erdishkayt*," or "earthiness," a quality that is connected to his localism in creation of his literary landscapes. In a review published in the Warsaw periodical *Di Vokh*, he is named "der dikhter fun di litvakes," who, as if for the first time, translated the specific Lithuanian landscape into poetry, espousing a specific localism. In this anonymous review, he is compared the poet David Einhorn, a neo-romantic poet who, according to the reviewer, wrote only "a subjective *Lite*⁵², an Einhorn-ish *Lite* that, lacking the word "Lite," and even with its distinctive birch-laden landscape could just as well be in Poland."⁵³ Kulbak, however, is able to depict a distinct local Lithuanian landscape through "a simple, meagre, *litvish* (lithuanian), heartfelt language... The language of a *lamedvovnik*."⁵⁴ That is to say that while Einhorn presented a generic Romantic nature representing the workings of the poet's own mind, Kulbak presented a distinctive local Lithuanian nature, not just in images, but through his accented language. The landscape he depicted was essentially Litvak and Yiddish, Jewish and Eastern European, strikingly Modernist and folksy.

⁵² The Yiddish word for Lithuania (corresponding loosely to the medieval borders of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania)

⁵³ Melekh Ravitch (ed.), *Di Vokh*, pp. 86.

⁵⁴ Melekh Ravitch (ed.), *Di Vokh*, pp. 86.

Itzik Manger traces a line of Litvak (Lithuanian-Jewish) writers who focus on the landscape from beginning with Mendele to emphasize that out of the three classical Yiddish prose writers, it is Mendele, the Litvak of the three classic Yiddish writers, whose depictions of the natural world play a major part in his art. Manger writes Kulbak into a particularly Lithuanian lineage of the aestheticization of nature. Kulbak's nature, Manger argues, inscribes the Eastern European landscape with "Biblical accents and images." This act makes the landscape "yidish-heykish un eygn;"⁵⁵ "Domestically comforting in a particularly Jewish manner and one's own." Manger's assessment of Kulbak's landscapes, and by proxy, revelatory of his own artistic goal in *Magilah Itzik/The Book of Isaac* to create a localized sense of Jewish belonging in *particular* Eastern European landscapes, an exoticized Galicia for Manger, and an exoticized Belarus for Kulbak.

"The Obscure Brew of Senderl with Lomonosov:" A Modernist Mixture of High and Low
Registers

In Kulbak's *Childe Harold of Dysna*, written in climate of Stalinism and attacks of literary critics on perceived ideology of writers, Kulbak employs the romantic trope of reflection on a dissolute youth during his brief immigration to Berlin in the early 20s, revisiting a supposedly decadent, bourgeoisie autobiographical moment of a young writer's life. This is his attempt to reflect on his early years from a more mature ideological communist position.

The title references Lord Byron long poem, *Child Harold's Pilgrimage*, which is an obvious address to world literature and Romanticism. This long narrative poem contains the

⁵⁵Itzik Manger, "Der Livak un di Landshaft," pp. 186.

encyclopedia of everyday life that critics often ascribe to Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, which was also influenced by Byron's poem. Among the political and cultural entries, the narrator has several passages dedicated to discussing the eclectic literary styles that influenced the hero of the poem: German and Russian Symbolism.⁵⁶ They explain their influence on the semi-autobiographical hero, who is also a gestalt of a certain type young, ambitious artist-writer from Eastern Europe who immigrated to the cultural capital of Modernism, looking to find his own place and artistic expression in a larger European society during the volatile transition toward a new conception of culture and the supposed decline of the old order.

In *Childe Harold of Dysna*, Kulbak reflects on own aesthetics when he discusses the aesthetic ambitions of his young semiautobiographical, yet young literary everyman, protagonist:

Till now did young Childe Harold thirst:
To try his luck and to indulge some,
To take a bite of each side of the earth,
And to revel in the taste of every crumb.
And there fermented the obscure brew
Of Senderl with Lomonosov;
Electric Europe's fresh and new
To a Narovlya philosophe...⁵⁷

This passage reveals consciously the mix of high and low cultures that characterized Kulbak's writing at the time. The high is represented by the European, while the low is associated with the backwardness of local Belarusian: Mikhail Lomonosov, Russia's first classical poet who introduced accentual-syllabic verse into Russian, by contrast, represents classicism and the aesthetics of high European culture. Lomonosov's classicism strove to move Russian verse away from folkloric influence and attempted to elevate to a science with the

⁵⁶ Moyshe Kulbak, *Childe Harold of Dysna*, trans. Peckerer, pp. 16-17(Expressionism) pp. 42 (Symbolism)

⁵⁷ Moyshe Kulbak, *Childe Harold of Dysna*, trans. Peckerer.

explicit goal to elevate the cultural status of the Russian language in the wider European culture. Senderl was a character from Mendele Moykher Sforim's *The Travels of Benjamin III* who functioned as a Sancho Panza to Benjamin, a village Jew from the forests of Belarus who leaves the *dorf* for the first time and interprets various mundane geological figures as Biblical landmarks, represents in these lines the aesthetics of a passive uncultivated vernacular folk culture. Kulbak repeats this the dichotomy of High European culture to low vernacular Belarusian folk culture in his juxtaposition of "Electric Europe," to the folk-primitive "Narovlya Philosophe." Narovlya is a town in the Gomel region, also contains the Yiddish word *Nar*, "idiot." Kulbak's lines convey the seemingly absurd and impossible stylistic mix of low vernacular cultures and High imperial cultures, Jewish and non-Jewish European cultures that Kulbak uses to create a new, modernist perspective in Yiddish. In his mention of Lomonosov he suggests an urge to Europeanize, normalize and create high culture, but with his mention of the Senderl and other primitive-folk cues he seems to suggest that this sub-altern position has its own merits and qualities that provide a method to augment and ornament European High culture.

His work is similar to the contemporary Russian imaginalists, such as Sergei Esenin, who performed folk identities, yet, logically developed a vein of symbolist aesthetics, particularly from Alexander Blok.⁵⁸ In other ways, his work is wholly unique. However, it is important to note that Kulbak's work intersects with a variety of literary trends from different languages in the region. Particularly, his interaction and intersection with the Belarusian national culture movement offer some insight to the context of his "poetics of doikayt."

High cultures in Russian and German affected Kulbak's style, particularly in the form of aesthetics. In addition to this, Kulbak is also conversant thematically with 19th century Polish

⁵⁸ Omry Ronen, "Esenin: The Source of his Poetics," pp 192-201.

Romanticism and 20th century Belarusian modernism. It is the combination of poetics from high and low cultures; imperial and vernacular cultures, Imperial and colonized, indigenous literatures that creates a sense of *doikayt* – his creative world presupposes a multilingual tradition of specifically polyphonic Lithuanian (in the broad sense) and European literatures.

In Vilna, where Kulbak lived for many years of his life and functioned as the historical and cultural capital of Lithuania and Belarus, high Russian culture held a particular popularity partially due to governmental efforts to Russify the Jewish population. Vilna had historically been a major regional Jewish center, at times the Jewish population was the largest in the city. The influence of high Imperial Russian culture can be seen in the work of neo-romantic poet Leyb Naydus, who is often seen as a stylistic predecessor of Kulbak in a lineage of *Lithuanian* Yiddish poets.⁵⁹ Naydus’s poetry is often credited with the import of classical and neo-romantic poetic forms⁶⁰ into Yiddish in an effort to create a high culture in Yiddish that would attract those Jewish readers of Eastern Europe that were literate in imperial Russian culture. One of Naydus’ greatest poetic innovations seems to be his detailed descriptions of the local landscape and his relationship to nature. Jordan Finkin discusses Naftoli Vaynig’s term “judeomorphism,” to describe Naydus’s sacralization of nature. It is precisely this poeticization of local Jewish-Lithuanian relation to the land that Kulbak develops and takes to a new extreme.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Mikhail See Krutikov, “Raysn: The Belarusian Frontier of Modernism.” *In Geveb*, June 2020.

⁶⁰ As one of many examples, his focus on the sonnet, which is more or less concurrent with Nikolai Gumelev’s re-introduction of the sonnet into Russian during the early 20th century.

⁶¹ See Krutikov, “Raysn: The Belarusian Frontier of Modernism.” *In Geveb*, June 2020. He puts several Lithuanian Yiddish language poets in a lineage and traces the themes of the Lithuanian landscape through their poetry. (On one hand, this is at odds with Moss’s interpretation that Eastern European Jewish poets meant to escape ‘parochialism’ and elevate Yiddish literature to converse with European literatures, on the other, even the performance of localism is produced by means of high modernist aesthetics. In my analysis of *Raysn*, parochialism and localism is used like as an ornament, a kind of self-orientalisation, while at the same time a statement of belonging and contemplation of the primordial/identification with ‘primitive man’).

It is important to note that poets of Di Yunge, a group of emigres from the former Russian Empire living in New York began to import symbolist poetics into Yiddish poetry after the 1905 revolution. Of particular note for this conversation is Mani Leyb's *Slavishe un Yidische Motivn*, which incorporates Slavic and Eastern European Jewish folk elements into neo-romantic forms. The collection includes translations from Pushkin's cycle "Songs of the Western Slavs." Pushkin's cycle itself was a Romantic game of translation; despite the fact that it was presented as adaptations of ancient Serbian Epics/folk ballads, it noted in the introduction that the texts themselves had been adapted from Prosper Mérimée's *La Guzla* (*The Gusli* [an ancient Eastern European lap-harp associated with Slavic tribes] player). Despite Mérimée's claims that his poems were translations of Serbian folk ballads, only one poem of the twenty-nine in the cycle has had a source identified. The claim that these poems were Serbian folk ballads colored them poems with an orientalism that was not unnoticed by Pushkin, who most likely found the exoticization of the Southern Slavs entertaining. Pushkin loosely translated some of Mérimée's poems, but also presented variations on source material collected by a contemporary Serbian linguist and folklorist, Vuk Karadžić. Mani Leyb's *Yidische un Slavishe Motivn* is a modernist continuation of the tradition Pushkin's Romantic translational game of performative folklore in high culture. These translational games can be viewed as an ironic commentary on the mysterious mediums of folkloric transmission between ostensibly separate cultures and a nod to world literature. This Neo-Romantic commentary on the transnational nature of folkloric tradition depends on an astute reading of subjectivity (cultural subjectivity as well as the subjectivity of the poet him/herself) and analysis of perspectives, a masquerade of high and low culture. Ultimately, Mani Leyb's collection suggests a syncretism between the Slavic and Yiddish folk cultures and directs his gaze at the intricacies of transcultural folkloric transmission

and the line between high European culture and low vernacular folk culture. Mani Leyb's exploration of the connection of Slavic and Yiddish folk poetics was roughly contemporaneous with Kulbak, which suggest a transnational Modernist trend of in thinking about contemporary and primordial kinship between cultures through folklore specifically and *belles-lettres* at large.

Kulbak builds upon and “advances” the aesthetics of symbolist/neo-romantic prosody/poetics to a more disjointed, modernist aesthetic of disambiguation through his incorporation of the low, vernacular, folkloric register of Yiddish. This aesthetic exhibits the relatively compressed “development” of Yiddish literature – Naydus gained popularity quickly and died young in 1918 at the height of his popularity. Mani Leyb was only a little more than a decade older than Kulbak, but the wars seemed to create a divide that played out aesthetically. Kulbak moves the aesthetic boundaries of Yiddish poetry “forward” to an uncertain future and tailors his aesthetic to better represent the complicated and chaotic reality of a blooming Jewish Cultural Renaissance during the societal collapse of the old order and a glance forward to something different – in Kulbak's work, high modernist Symbolism and neo-romantic forms are tempered with more radically abstract expressionist aesthetics techniques and the disambiguated aesthetics of the inter-war avant-garde. In addition to this, he colors his exploration of these high European forms with a low folk-primitive localism creating an intricate aesthetic clash that highlights tensions and ambivalence and awe in the creation of a new, modern world culture in the Yiddish language.

Critical Reception: A Poetics of “Tsimtsum” and a “Singer of Earthiness”

Kulbak gained notoriety as a poet by writing poems in a folkloric (folkstimlekhe) style that were set to music and turned into instant “folksongs.” These same folksy songs that were sung widely among the youth were also often included in modernist anthologies.⁶² From the very beginning of his career, Kulbak was able to embody such contradictions as at once being folksy and modernist, at times a realist, at times a symbolist or expressionist, a true revolutionary and devoted Marxist who left Vilna for the Soviet Union or a backwards petty bourgeois socialist. The difficulty for critics to agree on a label for Kulbak, is at least partially found in his poetics.⁶³ Kulbak can write in a radical expressionist style, as in *Di Shtot*. He can also write a pseudo-symbolist modernist hybrid lyrical-epic and combines Slavic and Yiddish folk themes in long, flowing lines as in *Raysn*, or even reinterpret the folkloric and Kabbalistic theme of the mystical wanderer, the Tsadik, in *Lamed Vov*, in a narrative poem that mixes epic lyric and dramatic elements.

Stylistically, Kulbak’s poetry is avant-garde and uniquely modern. It is characteristically an eclectic combination of artistic-literary idioms, from high modernist styles, specifically Expressionism, Symbolism and Romanticism, to folksong. It is a poetic expression of colloquial regional dialect of the forested areas of Lithuania-Belarus in the forms concurrent with European high modernism, creating an effect that astonished crowds and critics alike. Kulbak’s poetry was written to be performed, not just read, and the culture of poetry readings were a part of the popular public sphere.

Melekh Ravitch, a poet who was a contemporary of Kulbak from Galicia, describes Kulbak’s eclectic style with a term from Lurianic Kabbalah: *tsimtsim*.⁶⁴ *Tsimtsim*, or divine

⁶² Ravitch, “Moyshe Kulbak,” pp. 227.

⁶³ Rozhansky, “Moyshe Kulbak, Der Bazinger fun Primitiver Erdishkayt un Yidishn Mitos,” pp. 11.

⁶⁴ Ravitch’s use of the term *Tsimtsim* to describe Kulbak’s style is picked up and expanded upon in the midcentury by Shmuel Rozhansky in his preface to a collected works of Kulbak published in Buenos Aires.

contraction, is a mystical “explanation” of the process of the creation of the Universe and plays an important role in explaining the existence of both good and evil in the world.⁶⁵ It “explains” how something is created from nothing through both positive and negative metaphors of space/void and light/darkness. Ravitch uses the term in his description of Kulbak’s style, referring to the ability of Kulbak to bring together so many seemingly disparate intellectual elements and present them with a cohesive oneness, but also hints at the avant-garde nature of Kulbak’s works, suggesting that his style is a new beginning. The term implies a divine, mystical process of creation, which in Genesis, for example, is metaphorically linked to the speech act. In this vein, Kulbak’s understanding of the creative process can be likened to contemporary linguistic theories that were popular at the time in a variety of European languages. This point helps to understanding Kulbak’s poetry within the larger context of world poetry – he puts the particularly Jewish theological meaning in the context of a larger European philosophical trend.⁶⁶

Ravitch explains the quality of *tsimtsum* in Kulbak’s aesthetics: “His work naturally mixed the deepest realism and the most surreal mysticism, sentimentality and brutality, thoughtfulness and licentiousness, logic and absurdity...”⁶⁷ He notes that Kulbak’s poems especially have a fresh, green, unripe “umklorkayt.” The question that occurs to me is how this seemingly paradoxical and eclectic poetics functions as a unity, especially when one considers the performance aspect of Kulbak’s poetry. One approach to this answer can be found in the

⁶⁵ Gershom Scholem, *On The Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, pp. 85.

⁶⁶ This point will be elaborated on in the section on *Lamed Vov*.

⁶⁷ “און עס מישט זיך אין זינע שאַפּנגען זייער נאַטירלעך טיפּסטע מיסטיק און האַרבסטע ווירקלעכקייט, סענטימענט און ברוטאַליטעט, געדאַנק און הפּקרות, לאַגיק און אומזין אַט קוקסטו אויף אים און זעסט א סענטימינאַלן יונגען מאַן אין אַט איז ער ברוטאַל און ערדיש און האַט ליב אַ טרונק און אַ שווער וואָט און אַ שפּי און קעג אויפּהויבן אַ גיסט אויך.” ז”ז 227

Ravitch, “Moyshe Kulbak,” 227.

performance of the text. It is important to note that the performance of poetry was also part of the public sphere in Eastern Europe at this time, and these performances drew large crowds.

Kulbak often recited his work throughout Poland to filled auditoriums.⁶⁸ Ravitch recalls how Kulbak's recitals always "took the public by storm" when he came to Warsaw. Ravitch's description of Kulbak's everyday manner of speech seems to be colored by the performances that he witnessed:

And when he spoke he swayed a bit and his voice also swayed, he swayed like the sound of a bell sways up and down. He didn't mumble. Though he spoke very loudly. And although he spoke very loudly, he also spoke a little secretively at the same time. And he gestured with his hand while speaking, not like Menakhem Mendel, but like orators gesture with their hands, so as to accent the sound of his word, the scope of his thought.⁶⁹

Ravitch, in the description of Kulbak's voice, here sets the scene for recounting Kulbak's performance as an excellent declarator of his poems. Ravitch hints that it was clear that the musicality was consciously written into the compositions and notes that the public responded positively to the various ways that Kulbak performed his poems: "Even if he read a little monotonous, with a sing-song, or affected each poem individually like a real hard worker, it brought the same full applause."⁷⁰ Despite the difficulty, obliqueness (*"umklorkayt"*) of Kulbak's poetry, Ravitch claims that all of that was ironed out when Kulbak was on stage.

Although one could not always easily understand his poems, and poems that are not understandable have a tendency to become even less understandable when they are declaimed from the stage – when Kulbak himself used to read his poems, even the most difficult to understand of his poems were all made as clear

⁶⁸ Peckerar and Rubinstein, "Moyshe Kulbak."

⁶⁹ — און אז ער רעדט וויגט ער זיך אביסל און די שטימע וויגט זיך אויך, וויגט זיך אזוי ווי דער קלאַנג פֿון גלאַק וויגט זיך ארויף און אראָפּ. ער איז נישט מורמלדיק. כאַטש ער רעדט גאַנץ הויך. און כאַטש ער רעדט גאַנץ הויך רעדט ער אַביסל סודתדיק אויך אין דער זעלבער צייט. און ער מאכט מיט די הענט ביים רעדן, אָבער נישט אזוי ווי מנחם מענדל, נאָר אזוי ווי אַראַטאַרן מאַכן מיט די הענט פּדי צו אַקעצענטירן דעם קלאַנג פֿון זייער וואָרט, דעם פֿאַרנעם פֿון זייער געדאַנק. "ז"ז 227

⁷⁰ און כאַטש ער לעזט אַביסל איינאַניק, מיט אַ זינג-זאַנג, ווירקט אָבער אידעס ליד באַזונדער ווי אַ 'שלאַגער' און ברענגט די זעלבע פּולע אַפּלאַדיסמענט. "ז"ז 227

as could be; with his reading he did something like gloss over(*oysretushirn*) the obliqueness (*umklorkaytn*).⁷¹

Ravitch's claim exhibits that it is not only the performance, but the meaning making qualities in the sonic aspects of Kulbak's form allows an audience to feel the unity of his text.

Ravitch's claim of the ability of the performance to "gloss over" the obliqueness or "*umklorkayt*" of the poem is presented in a less compressed format by Shmuel Niger in his 1921 essay on Kulbak, "A Nayer Onheyb"/ "A New Beginning". Niger claims that Kulbak's work is not that of *onfanger* but of an *onheyber*. While these words both roughly mean "beginner" in English, Niger uses *onfanger* to mean something akin to "amateur" and *onheyber* more like an "innovator." He states: "An *onheyber* is not someone who just begins for the first time (that is the *onfanger*). The *onheyber* is someone who makes a start of an entirely new path."⁷² For Niger "*umklorkayt*" seems to be a necessary part of Kulbak's aesthetic of *Onheyb*, which the article suggest is highly cultivated. Niger's characterization of Kulbak's poetics of *onheyb* fit nicely with Ravitch's characterization of Kulbak's *tsimtsum*, as *tsimtsum* is fundamentally an explanation of the very beginning of existence.

In Niger's discussion of "a levone nakht," one can sense what he means most particularly by "*umklorkayt*." Kulbak loads his poems with new, strange and original phrases and even words (of which Niger gives a list.) But the defamiliarized words and phrases do not encumber the reader because of the rhythmic and other sonic properties. Niger comments on the poem: "The above phrase and images are almost all original. Some words are created in this poem for the first time, but they are so organic and natural, that we do not notice their newness. The most

⁷¹ "כאָטש זײַנע לידער האָט מען נישט אַלעמאָל געקענט לייכט פֿאַרשטיין, און נישט פֿאַרשטענדלעכע לידער האָבן אַ תּבֿע צו ווערן נאָך ווייניקער פֿאַרשטענדלעך, אַז מען דעקלאַמירט זיי פֿון אַן עסטראַדע — אַז קולבאַק אליין פֿעלט פֿאַרלעזן זײַנע לידער, אפֿילו די אומפֿאַרשטענדלעכסטע, זענען זיי געוואָרן אַלע אזוי קלאָר ווי אויף דער האַנט; ער האָט מיט זײַן לעזן אזויווי אויסגערעטושירט אומקלאַרקייט." Ravitsh, "Moshe Kulbak," pp. 228. 228

⁷² Shmuel Niger, "A Nayer Onheyb," pp. 70.

important thing, however, is the rhythm in the poem: “how *free* are the lines, even though they are laden with rhymes”⁷³ He goes on to list the importance of the sonic qualities of the poem: 1) the rhythm and 2) rhyme 3) the alliteration. That is, the sonic properties of the poem are able to drive it; they are closer to the dominant in a hierarchy of devices, and somehow smooth out cognitive discrepancies of defamiliarization.

The musicality of Kulbak’s poetry that not only creates the sensation of harmony against the difficulty and “*umklorkayt*” of Kulbak’s verse, it creates meaning. This meaning might not be of a concrete level, but it is on the impressionistic level. Because we know that Kulbak’s poetry was not a poetry written singularly to be read silently, but rather a poetry that was performed and drew crowds, the sonic element that is written into his poems demands attention. This is the element, as Niger mentions that allows the contradictory or element of Kulbak’s style mentioned by Ravitch to function. Throughout this dissertation, I will focus the meaning making function of form.

Shmuel Niger argues that the employment of traditional formal elements such as metered verse and use of rhyme might obscure his status as an innovator of Yiddish modernist poetics. Niger wrote this essay in 1922 in New York, when members of the *Inzikh* group began to discard traditional verse forms under the influence of American free verse, so it is perhaps for the readers and adherents of this formal and aesthetic trend that he addresses. It is worth noting that Kulbak published *Raysn* and *Lamed Vov* in the New York Journal, *Di Tsukunft*, and that Kulbak’s use of meter and rhyme would have set his poetry apart aesthetically from the aesthetically American-leaning Modernists, something that would have been noticeable to readers. Kulbak’s poetics, in

⁷³ די איבעריקע ווענדונגען און בילדער זינען כמעט אלע אַריגינאַל. אייניקע ווערטער זינען לכתחילה אין דעם ליד באשאפן געוואָרן זיי זינען, אָבער, אזוי אַרגאַניש און נאַטירלעך, אַז מיר מערקן נישט זייער ניקייט... די הויפט-זאך, אָבער, איז דעם ריטם אין דער ליד: ווי פּרזי זינען די פּערזן, כאָטש זיי זינען באַלאָדן מיט גראַמען. (ניגער, זײַ 70–71)

terms of form, however, are concurrent and conversive with Eastern European Modernist poetics, just as the *Inzikhistn* are influenced by the poetic forms of their co-territorial English language modernism.

Benjamin Harshav, who came of age in Vilna in a time where Kulbak's poetic innovation was highly esteemed, suggests a pattern of influence of foreign literatures onto

Yiddish:

Concerning the manner in which the influence of foreign *literatures* were experienced, we should add that the stimulus which upset the old melodic equilibrium did indeed come from German Expressionism and Russian modernism (in addition to the changes in Jewish life). But truly free rhythms were created in Yiddish in a significant degree primarily in America.⁷⁴

Harshav posits a formal resemblance between the co-territorial poetics: generally speaking, those poets who live in Eastern Europe wrote in forms that resembled Russian and/or Polish and/or German verse, while it was only in America, specifically, the *Inzikhistn*, where free rhythms were brought into Yiddish poetry.⁷⁵ Harshav argues "the central poetry-making function of meter and sound in most of Yiddish poetry is the legacy of Russian Modernist poetics."⁷⁶ Harshav's statements about the influence of Russian and German high Modernism on Yiddish poetry can be exhibited Kulbak's aesthetics.

The quality that Niger refers to as Kulbak's *obliqueness/ umklorkayt* is an intentional condensation of meaning, an effect created by the process of superimposing multiple levels of meaning on the poem. The effect rendered is that the formal aspects of the poetry lend a perceived cohesiveness to rather disparate elements – a meaningful resolving of cognitive dissonance that presents a mystical oneness and aesthetically embodies and preforms the

⁷⁴ Benjamin Harshav (Hrushovsky), "On Free Rhythms in Yiddish Poetry," pp. 265

⁷⁵ Benjamin Harshav, *Three Thousand years of Hebrew Versification*, 200

⁷⁶ Benjamin Harshav, *Three Thousand years of Hebrew Versification*, 198

principals of the concept of *Tsimtsum*. With these paradoxical aesthetics he enacts a theologically inspired philosophy concerning the nature of man in the universe and a new beginning. More specifically, the device is used in *Raysn* and other poems to blend Yiddish and Slavic folk cultures and high literatures to create a sense of Jewish belonging in Europe and re-imagine a history that had until that time often been overlooked and was at odds with the contemporary history of Europe in a time of nationalist uprising. He presents his paradoxical aesthetic of “tsimtsum,” a divine contraction of seemingly disparate semantic layers, implying a mystical primordial singularity/oneness of humanity and consequentially cultivating a sense of Jewish belonging in Europe amid a hostile and chaotic cultural climate haunted modern ethnonationalist politics.

Kulbak and the Modernist Polymetric Poema as Compressed Hybrid Epic

In the previous section I mentioned Kulbak’s use of form to create meaning. In this section I will go into more detail specifically about the Kulbak’s Modernist “poemas.” Kulbak refers to the long poems discussed in this chapter as “poema,” which is a particularly Romantic form. In the Romantic iteration, it often adapts the episodic narrative structure from the classic epic and grounds the mythological element in the quotidian of everyday life. The two examples of Eastern European Romantic poems that come to mind are Adam Mickiewicz’s *Pan Tadeusz* and Alexander Pushkin’s *Evgeniy Onegin*, both programmatic national texts with which Kulbak was surely familiar.

Despite Kulbak’s description of his own long poems as “poemas,” most of them lack the characteristics of the Romantic poema. One out of the three of Kulbak’s Modernist poems is a straight-forward narrative: *Lamed Vov / Lamed Vov: The Thirty Six*. Even *Lamed Vov*, however,

mixes genres. I begins with shorter, lyrical structures, and then transitions into dramatic dialogue that provides localized colloquial Yiddish, interspersed with a narrator whose tone is distinctly elevated as opposed to the dialectical performance in the dialogue.

The other two “poemas” do not feature a coherent narrative. *Raysn / Ruthenia* presents an episodic structure built on vignettes of different characters. Each poem is crafted to emphasize an organic relationship between form and content in a paranomasic form. This structure leads each section of the poema to function independently as a lyric, with a distinct metrical structure. *Di Shtot / The City* presents a fragmented expressionistic journey into and out of a city, yet it is written such a frantic and dizzying style that it is difficult to distill a narrative. It, too, is divided into smaller lyrical segments that function on their own accord. There is emphatically little of the quotidian in any of these poemas. Kulbak signals a break from the Romantic poema and its abandonment of the mythological element of the epic by making the epic quotidian. Instead, he returns to the mythological element of the classical epic, while simultaneously advancing the breakdown and condensation of the classical epic form that the Romantics began.

His characterization of these poems as “poema,” on one hand reverts to the mythologization of history in the epic mode. On the other hand, he continues the work of the Romantics by further compressing the epic form and hybridizing its structure. Kulbak’s poemas are hybrid form, taking elements from the epic, the folk-ballad, dramatic dialogue, the idyll, the Romantic poema. The Romantic poemas above also deviate from the classical epic in their assumption of metrical variation to emphasize certain contextual elements of the text. While the Romantics used this polymetricity sparingly, Kulbak presents highly polymetric poems that change meters at a high frequency.

Kulbak's use of high frequency metrical variation resembles the Modernist iteration of the polymetric lyrical-epic poema in Russian literature. That Kulbak read in this literary tradition, it would make sense that his general sense of what is aesthetically contemporary in part constructed by what he read. This is not to say that his aesthetics are derivative, on the contrary, they are still avant-garde.

Generally, the modernist polymetric poema in Russian literature distinguishes itself from its predecessors in the collapse of the borders of genre and form and the type of meters utilized. Mikhail Gasparov describes two forms of Russian of polymetric poetry in the nineteenth century: the polymetric lyric and the polymetric epic. Gasparov writes about the prevalence of polymetric long form poems in the context of Russian modernist poetry, and claims that the blurring of the line between epic and lyric modes in the modernist iteration:

The traditional lyric and epic polymetricity merge into one: this helped the general erosion of the border between the literary classifications: the epic and dramatic genres more and more became the lyrical-epic and the lyrical-dramatic. Up to the end of the period being discussed [1905-1925] it could be considered a rule that all long forms in poetry (unless they were otherwise marked as traditional, for example in a poema in terzinas or a drama in blank verse iambic pentameter) were polymetric.⁷⁷

Gasparov gives several examples of polymetric long poems from this period: Blok's *On Kulikovo Field*, Esenin's *Pugachev* (1921) (different types of accentual meters), Pasternak's *Lieutenant Shimdt*, (1926) which recounts the beginning of the 1905 Revolution using 19 different meters in 28 sections, Blok's *The Twelve* (1918), and Tsevtseva's *Poem(a) of the End* (1924).¹⁶ Many of these examples concentrate on the revolution and/or its effects on society. Often there is a sense that the old world and the old way of life has irrevocably ended and more

⁷⁷ Gasparov, *Ocherk Istorii Ruskogo Stikha*, 214-215.

often than not leaves the reader with the image of the dawning of a new epoch, which is also a theme in *Raysn*, *Di Shtot*, and perhaps even *Lamed Vov*. While many of the poems mentioned are revolutionary epics, Gasparov mentions that polymeter was used differently by symbolists poets: Solovev's *Dafna* (1907) and Bryusov's *The Ceremony of Night* (1907) and *A Reminiscence* (1917) revitalize an even older form of polymeter in which the form is modeled after classical musical forms, such as sonatas, symphonies, etc.

Kulbak's metrical construction his "poemas," therefore, fit into a transnational Modernist trend of formal hybridization while constructing a dominant epic mode to fit the aesthetics of his time. Any sense of poetic meter is often too quickly categorized as archaic in the American English tradition and the nuances of Kulbak's form have thus been misinterpreted out of context by several contemporary American scholars.

"Di Shtot" / "The City"

Kulbak's revolutionary epic, *Di Shtot / The City* is an enigmatic cubist-expressionist rendering that juxtaposes Isaiah's prophecies to the events at the beginning of the Polish-Soviet war (1919-1921). It is Kulbak's first long poem, and perhaps the most expressionist and abstract.⁷⁸ These aesthetics were chosen carefully to reflect the chaotic modern society that is associated with the city in literary space. This section will begin with a historical contextualization and then briefly discuss the form and then the construction of literary space.

⁷⁸ "unclear/oblique"(Niger and *umklorkayt*)

A Historical Context

This poem, unlike most of Kulbak's poems is situated very specifically in time and place: "7/IV 1919, Minsk." This locates the poem in a Minsk that been occupied by the Bolsheviks since January of 1919. The Soviet-Polish war had just begun 3 weeks earlier on February 14th, and the Polish army under Pilsudski was already approaching, having occupied much of western Belarus. Two days before Kulbak wrote *Di Shtot*, The Polish army committed the Pinsk massacre in which 35-37 Jews were executed by the Polish army in the market square by machine gun.⁷⁹ The Polish army had already committed pogroms in cities across Poland starting in November 1918 and they intensified as the army moved eastward.⁸⁰ The pogroms in Lemberg (Lviv) in November 1918 killed 73 and injured 443.⁸¹ In the weeks after April 7th, 1919, the date on *Di Shtot* the Polish army would participate in many more pogroms, notably in Lida and Vilnius (at least 60 Jewish casualties). On August 8, only a few months after *Di Shtot* was published, the Polish Army would reach Minsk and pogroms would erupt there.

To the south, Semyon Petliura's Ukrainian National Army, the White Army, the irregular Ukrainian guerilla units, and various other armies and bandit groups operating there at the time perpetrated over 1200 pogroms in Ukrainian territories alone in 1919. These events are often characterized as the worst massacre of Jews since the Khmelnytsky massacre in the 17th

⁷⁹ Oleg Budnitskii, "Shots in the Back: On the Origins of the Anti-Jewish pogroms of 1918-1921," *Jews in the Eastern European Borderlands*, pp. 198.

⁸⁰ "In November 1918 alone, Polish soldiers and armed civilians attacked, pillaged, beat, and occasionally murdered Jews in Lvov, Kielce, Lublin, Lida, and some one hundred other small town. Local Police often collaborated. Informed of these atrocities, Pilsudski sternly condemned them. Yet as the military campaign raged on through east Galicia – "Western Ukraine"--- he was unable to exert direct control over his own forces. The number of Jews slain at the hands of the Poles did not exceed four or five hundred and their ordeal surely could not be equated with the raw genocide committed by Petliura and Denikin's armies in eastern, "integral" Ukraine." (Sachar 24-25)

⁸¹ YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe. "World War I."

https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/World_War_I

century.⁸² While the pogroms perpetrated by the Polish army did not claim as many lives (the casualties were over 400, countless others were injured), as those in Ukraine, the threat of murder, beatings, rape, looting and destruction of property that came with pogroms was enough to evoke fear and push the Jewish communities of Belarus to embrace the Bolsheviks in 1919.

It was a common trope of antisemitic propaganda to equate Jews and Bolsheviks. This equation also relates to a broader antisemitic trope of Jewish disloyalty to the state (Polish, German, Russian, Austrian, etc.) which Oleg Budnitskii claims was a motivating factor not only of the pogroms of the Russian Civil War and the Polish-Soviet war, but also those perpetrated in every country in Eastern and Central Europe during the First World War from 1914-1917.⁸³ Lithuanian Jews like Kulbak had already experience a wave of pogroms by the Russian Army during the First World War, and one of the most violent and destructive pogroms had taken place in 1915 in the shtetl where Kulbak was born, Smorgon', in which Cossacks raped women in the synagogue.⁸⁴

Both Litvak and Elissa Bemporad link the trope of Jewish disloyalty to the state dates at least back to the fabricated antisemitic text, "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion" (1903) and popular 19th century claims of Jewish disloyalty to the state, such as the right-wing slogan "beat the Yids and Save Russia." The trope of Jewish disloyalty equated the Jews and Bolsheviks, who were also characterized as disloyal to the monarchy and/or to the national project of ethno-linguistic "majorities."⁸⁵ In fact, the Jewish population of the Pale of Settlement tended to

⁸² Zvi Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence*, pp. 65

⁸³ Oleg Budnitskii, "Shots in the Back," *Jews in the Eastern European Borderlands*, pp. 200-201.

⁸⁴ Oleg Budnitskii, "Shots in the Back," pp. 194

⁸⁵ Elissa Bemporad, *Legacy of Blood*, pp. 22. ("The enemies of the revolution- the Whites and the Ukrainian nationalist, but also the German and Polish armies at the end of World War I and in the midst of the Polish-Soviet war—equated the Bolsheviks and the Jews labeling bolshevism as a quintessentially Jewish doctrine, namely "foreign," "other," and "evil.")

support the Bolsheviks for one reason: they were the only army that did not systematically perpetrate pogroms. Lenin officially denounced antisemitism in 1918, and though there were pogroms carried out by Red Army soldiers, the Red Army command condemned the actions and took measures against those who participated,⁸⁶ distinguishing them from other armies at the time. Despite the claims of Jewish national disloyalty used to justify pogroms and equate Jews with Bolsheviks, Elissa Bemporad notes that “in 1917 most Jews across the political spectrum were anti-Bolshevik. Things changed drastically in 1919, when the dilemma of one alternative led many to embrace the Bolsheviks.”⁸⁷

Around the date of Kulbak’s poem and in the wake of the Polish pogroms, several Jewish detachments were organized to fight for the Bolsheviks against the advancing Polish army.⁸⁸ Minsk was a heavily industrialized city and as such was a center of socialism in the Pale, and while the Bolshevik suppression of religion and ransacking of synagogues was most likely not appealing to all, many Jews in Minsk saw no alternative but to join the Bolsheviks in the face of the Polish advance and immediate threat of pogroms. In addition to being the only army that did

⁸⁶ Zvi Gitlman, *A Century of Ambivalence*. “The only armed force that did not systematically terrorize the Jews was the Red Army of the Bolsheviks. Though over 700 Jews were killed in pogroms mounted by Red Army detachments, The Red Army command condemned these actions and punished them. Jews came to regard the Red Army as their protector and the young Jews joined it in order to avenge the crimes against their families and people.” (Gitlman, 70)

⁸⁷ Elissa Bemporad, *Legacy of Blood*, pp. 20.

⁸⁸ Elissa Bemporad, *Legacy of Blood*, pp 72-73. “When in April 1919, during the Polish-Soviet war, the revolutionary committee resolved to create a body to hold off the approaching Polish Army, it welcomed volunteers from the Bund and Poale-Zion. As the Polish troops conquered Vilna and advanced toward the cities of Belorussia, leaving behind a trail of pogroms, the Bund and Poale-Zion mobilized their supporters into two Jewish military units linked to the Red Army. The Borochov unit—named after Labor Zionist leader Ber Borochov—enrolled primarily members of Poale-Zion, while the Grosser unit—named after Warsaw Bundist leader Bronislaw Grosser—enrolled mostly members of the Bund.(71) Another Jewish battalion was established in May 1919, called the “First Minsk Guard Battalion,” it consisted of Labor Zionists, Jewish Communists, Bundists, and Jewish workers with no political affiliation from Minsk, Bobruisk, Vitebsk, and Gomel.(72) In the words of union activist Grigory Aronson, “From an ideological vantage point the Bund . . . dominated . . . [Minsk’s] life, shaping it with its own colors and directions.”

not systematically condone and perpetrate pogroms, the Bolsheviks canceled the antisemitic policies of Imperial Russia.

In *Di Shtot*, Kulbak seeks to capture the fear, terror, confusion and anxiety of the time but also inflect a tone of revolt against the crimes against humanity and the old order and a hopefulness, in the framed in the form of a prayer, that the dawning of a new era will bring at least some eventual salvation. Taken out of context, *Di Shtot* might be either dismissed or championed as a piece of communist propaganda by a Soviet Yiddish author, as is often the case in grand narratives of English language Yiddish scholarship. While *Di Shtot* does offer words of encouragement to the Red Army with its rather terrifying last lines, it is more of a repository of reported speech and a collage of consciousness of a young poet in an utterly terrifying situation and a fractured response to the massacres that were happening around him. In addition to this, the poem, especially the ending, should be considered in relation to Alexander Blok's, *The Twelve*, which ends with a Bolshevik soldier as the messiah, which was published one year earlier. Both poems are meant to document and express the phenomenon of terror in the Revolution and the wars that followed.

Alexander Blok famously represented the revolution in messianic terms in his revolutionary epic, *The Twelve*. It follows a group of twelve soldiers as they march through the streets of revolutionary Petrograd as they interact with a prostitute named Katya, the harsh winter climate of the city, and other creatures of the streets. The poem is written in iambic lines of varying length, a departure from the precise and innovative accentual-syllabic forms that Blok was famous for. The poem is built primarily from disjointed dialogue of the streets presented in expressionist fragments. The fracture of traditional form and a singular poetic voice embody a chaotic decline of high culture, connecting the fall of (the Third) Rome with the spread of

Christianity. The poem ends with a depiction of a Bolshevik soldier as the second coming of Christ, equating Bolshevism with Christianity. Likewise, Kulbak depicts the four horsemen of the apocalypse as Red Calvary at the end of his poem, also superimposing Biblical apocalyptic imagery onto the revolution.

The Form of Kulbak's Revolutionary Epic

Di Shtot is a revolutionary modernist epic. Modernist revolutionary epics are not a rare occurrence in Russian literature, but one that occurs in the Pale of Settlement from a Jewish perspective and in a Jewish language. It gives the reader another perspective into the Modernist genre of revolutionary epic and response to the threat of catastrophe.

Di Shtot is an intentionally oblique poem. In the climate of Expressionism, futurism, cubism, suprematism, etc., the techniques and aims of abstraction should be generally familiar to the student of Modernism. *The City*, specifically, presents an abstraction of the language of consciousness in a time and place where the events occurring no longer follow the typical order. This is a poem that focuses on the individual perception of a war, and a war that is by nature ambiguous – it is simultaneously (in a variety of particular orders) a war against foreign nations, a revolution, a civil war, a war of national independence, a war of cultural independence, a war to end all wars, a war to unite all peoples and a war that spilled the most innocent Jewish blood in Europe, to that date, since the 17th century. It is the experience of confusion and reaction, the longing to take action to heal the shattered universe. The poet's consciousness cycles through the various kabalistic imagery including concepts and images relating to *tikkun olam*, the belief that the true order of the universe is shattered and it is the individual's responsibility to

reconstruct that world. Another traditional concept important to the poem is that of *Khtsos*, a midnight prayer session, which in the poem is a midnight call to action.

Shmuel Niger, sees this as Kulbak's most oblique (*umklor*) long poem. This lack of clarity fits the theme apocalyptic theme of the poem and emphasizes the psychological experience of existence in a world that is rapidly changing in unknown ways. It is also the most expressionist in style of the poems. This poem focuses on impressions of urban life during the revolution and rotates through a variety of meters characterized by alternation between long, epic lines of semi-consistent length, with short staccato rhythms, and expressive sound patterning. It is a statement of a new, strikingly urban poetics.

Below I have mapped out the polymetricity of the poem:

The Form of "Di Shtot"

- Part 1: Iambic pentameter mostly pentameter, sometimes six or four stresses, peonization
- Part 2: first three stanzas: amphibrachic hexameter, short lines starting variations; Offset Subsection "*khtsos*": begins as short amphibrachic lines 1-3 stress, grows to 4 (occasionally 5) stress, then destabilizes and goes 2-4 stresses, goes from 1-4 stress (median around 2), lines begin to grow again, offset section ends with "s'iz di zun! S'iz di zun??" Followed by two lines of amphibrachic tetrameter, and a short 2 stress line.
- Part 3: long iambic 5-7 stress. Offset Subsection: "bin ikh alt? bin Ikh yung?" amphibrachic with short line, 1-2 stresses (mostly 2), hyphens amphibrachic pentameter to end the offset section. Offset ends, 5 stress amphibrachic. "dos hoyz iz mid meblirt": mostly iambic hexameter (5-7) "gut ovent! Di shtile geshtaltn"; 3 amphibrachic. Unstable line length 1-5 stress amphibrachic. Lengthen to 3-6 amphibrachic, (mostly 5).
- Part 4: 5-6 amphibrachic; lines grow more erratic towards the end, degenerating into very short lines.

Often, a removed, narrative epic tone is usually associated with long lines, while the short lines are associated with the expressionistic proclamations of a young lyrical consciousness.

This is a pattern that can generally be applied to Kulbak's poems with some qualifications. It is

usually during these long lines with a more removed tone that Kulbak focuses on landscapes, adding to the creation of an epic tone.

Di Shtot utilizes two types of poetic feet: iambs and amphibrachs. While the amphibrachs are used in both long and short lines, iambs are only used in long lines. This is an interesting contrast to *Raysn*, where the vast majority of the long lines tend to be amphibrachs. The long iambic tendency in *Di Shtot* reflects the tendency towards the Germanic pole of the language. Kulbak makes use of the linguistic poles of Yiddish to create a poetics that is malleable. He emphasizes specific linguistic elements, diction as well as rhythms, in a variety of ways to create formal meaning.

Landscapes of Urban Space and Rural Space

The poem divides urban space and rural space in a manner that is related to the “poetics of catastrophe” in its apocalyptic prophesy, yet provides a call to action and movement, even if it is unclear action and movement. Kulbak’s poem is structured temporally and spatially around the entrance of the wanderer into the city.

“The City” focuses on representing urban space; it equates this space with human society and as such abstract expressionist aesthetics are used to capture the fractured chaos that human society was amid an apocalyptic chaos of war. In the first section of the poem, he presents this abstracted portrait of the city:

How heavy have I felt the stone, the metal, and ore,
The bit of blue sky, the street corners, the signs of black and gold,
The bridges, the grey and darkness, the orchard’s stature,
humans in strokes of whites and browns in factory smoke,

And eyes of blue and flame and flowing of teeming masses,
The streets full of sounds of striding, of sounds of gallops,
And suddenly — Chrysanthemums, the trembling white of chrysanthemum,
And a village child smelling of the field in her brows...
Child, my child!... flint ignites the windows,
The spurs glimmer, black braids, teeth shimmer,
A laughter sways, copper and heavy in immensity.
O! Heavy!...

In this passage is a rush of nouns that are deconstructed parts of the physical city itself (objects) (the various metals, stones, factory smoke) the people in the city (masses, eyes of blue and flame, the girl,) and the sensations of human interaction with the composite objects of the physical space (suggestions of smells, sounds), presented in a steady meter and rhyme (in the Yiddish) that onomatopoeically captures the rustling sensations of being in an urban crowd. Kulbak has constructed this section to convey the fusion of human essence with the natural elements that create an urban space – the animate and the inanimate are fused together in the city, which ultimately leading to the pondering of primordial relationships of human to earth. Is it the human that has tamed nature to create the city, or is it essentially human to be part of something larger – a substance that asserts its influence over the human?

In the passage above, the animate and inanimate are blurred through the use of avant-garde poetics of disambiguation and metonymy in order to present the city as ultimately part of nature, albeit a nature curated by human beings. In contrast to the image of the city as representative of man's triumph over nature, Kulbak presents cities themselves as pagan gods and as such equals to natural phenomena:

The sun is here! The sun is waiting here at our entrance...
The Cities, like Gods on earth, are redeemed from darkness,
In heavy loneliness, they seek consolation in the distance ...
The hour before the dawn is immense; the astonished Cities
with grey necks, cold chests and limbs are drained in restlessness...

The proud Sun communes with God-Cities, with brothers...

The city, in Kulbak's system, is not an apparition of human triumph over the natural world, but a higher being with its own consciousness. The poet/prophet persona is able to see the natural elements that make up the city, including humans, but also see the consciousness of the city.

The animated urban space is juxtaposed to the forests. The forest space is represented as eternal, and as titans, those primordial forms that came before gods in the Greek mythology.

Forests! Woods! Green eternity!
The tired-creature comes
From the City, to the wooded expanse,
Where the green hums silence,
O, forests, green eternity!
It's late, can't you see? It's late!
The cyclone-flame shouts from glowing Cities,
Three red iron phantoms ride through the roads,
Through smoke, factories, greys and telegraph wires
And wild, overwhelming battles
The man of flame, the City's protector and Satan --
O, Forests, World-Titans!
The silent world
Stuns hoarse railroads
It is as bleak as desert!
I am running, limping and wounded, exhausted from combat,
Alone...
The time is Red!
Accomplices of death, Red Rider! Charge!

The synesthesia often associated with Symbolism can be seen clearly in this passage: the forests are associated with green, silence and eternity, while the city is associated with red, greys and other dark colors, and noise. The two forces are at odds with one another, one representing human society and the other representing natural harmony. In the frantic climax of this poem the two forces clash in an apocalyptic scene, linguistically blurring into each other: who is doing what, who is coming from where to where – it is all obscured. Kulbak's forest space in its wise, primordial silence is also represented in *Messiah of the House of Ephraim*, where it contains

strange, spirit-like lamed-vovniks (36 wandering wisemen of legend) who work to fulfill messianic prophecies in another apocalyptic scene that is spatially conveyed as the cutting of the forest. In the section above, the forests are compared to “titans” and the cities are “gods,” imbuing the forest with a more primordial quality in the reference to Greek mythology. The conflict between the city and the forests seems to be a conflict of modernity and eternity, now and infinity, human culture and natural order. The ending is ambiguous and enigmatic, yet the tension between these two semiotic spaces plays out throughout Kulbak’s oeuvre.

Kulbak’s poet carries on the prophetic poetics of the silver-age in Russian and Hebrew poetry, but in others it is more distinctly personalized and searching for a new lyrical voice that is individual rather than collective. *The City* as an apocalyptic revolutionary epic is also a distinct form of genre of Jewish “responses to catastrophe,” as laid out by David Roskies in *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* and Alan Mintz in *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature*. Kulbak in this poem searches for his own voice in this “*vek-lid*” (call to action, literally “waking song”), it is oblique and uncertain, just as the circumstances.

Jordan Finkin claims that Kulbak is unique in his depiction of the city *as* revolution in Modernist Yiddish poetry: “Markish and Hofshiteyn, saw the city as a grand metaphorical backdrop, or better a seething cauldron in which the new urban revolutionary subjectivity could be smelted and forged anew. Kulbak, however, fielded a different approach. The city in his poem was not the backdrop; rather, it was the central metaphorical nexus: the city is the revolution.”⁸⁹ While the distinction between Kulbak and his contemporaries deserves more consideration, Finkin does seem to tease out the collapse between spatial-temporal boundaries of the city, its

⁸⁹ Jordan Finkin, “The Revolution is a City: Moyshe Kulbak’s Poem “The City””

inhabitants, and the contemporary state of civilization – war panic and disorder. However, I would suggest that he is looking for his individual voice amid the chaotic backdrop of civilization in revolution as well as presenting it as a grand spatiotemporal metaphor. Ultimately, he suggests a utopian solution to the chaos of civilization in revolution – it is somewhere in the infinity of primordial nature.

I have noted the some similarities to Blok’s *The Twelve*, though *The City* also has similarities with Khaym Nakhman Bialik’s “The City of Slaughter” in its re-creation of a prophetic voice, yet there is something more individual about Kulbak’s “vek-lid,” it is a call to action rather than a response to tragedy. It is a blowing of the shofar (a horn traditionally blown in the Yom Kippur ceremony) that indicates a warning rather than the passing of a threat.⁹⁰

Like Bialik’s *City of Slaughter*, Kulbak assumes the position of a prophet who witnesses catastrophe. However, Kulbak’s catastrophe has not yet occurred, as opposed to the catastrophe that Bialik witnesses. Kulbak’s structure mirrors Isaiah travels in from city to city prophesizing and these periods are intersperse by his wondering between cities which is ostensibly where the prophet receives visions. While the context of prophetic apocalypse of Isaiah is present, Kulbak does not blame the inhabitants of the city for what is to become of them, as is done in Isaiah, nor does he outrightly “indict the martyrological response to catastrophe,”⁹¹ as Bialik did, he represents them as integrated into the landscape of the city which seems to represent civilization on a brink, as innocents caught up as parts of an urban force larger than themselves. He urges action, which is not much thought out, but deemed as necessary, and the embrace of a new approach, however oblique.

⁹⁰ Marvin A. Sweeney, “The Shofar in War and Worship in the Bible,” *Qol Tamid: The Shofar in Ritual, History, and Culture*, eds. Jonathan L. Friedmann and Joel Gereboff. Claremont Press, 2017. pp. 31-56

⁹¹ Alan Mintz, *Hurban: Response to catastrophe in Hebrew Literature*, pp. 154.

The City of Slaughter is also framed by the poet-prophet's entrance and exit of a city. At the end of Bialik's poem, the poet is order back into the wilderness. Alan Mintz claims that "throughout the poem, the wilderness had been the symbol of both the consummate indifference of nature to the outrage of the pogrom and the association of the place prophets go when their missions have been thwarted. Yet for Bialik's poet-prophets there is no renewal of the calling, no revelation, no still small voice..."⁹² In contrast to Bialik, Kulbak presents the infinity of nature in contrast to the city and a possible element of healing civilization. Kulbak's dichotomy seems to suggest that if civilization is sick, then the remedy is in the primordial wilderness.

Finkin reads the poetics of these *The City* and *Ruthenia* as opposite. The major setting of each poem, urban space and the countryside, respectively, present a dichotomy that plays out aesthetically. Besides the oppositional focus on the literary space of city and country, Finkin claims that "*Di Shtot*, in presenting the city's dynamic changes in the move from night to dawn, the primary thematic axis is temporal. For *Naye Lider* [the book that include *Ruthenia*], spatial or locative orientation is dominant."⁹³ While this can be considered at least partially true as a distinction between *Raysn* and *The City*, it does not quite apply to *Lamed Vov*, the other long poem in *Naye Lider*, which is also organized temporally from dusk to dawn, just like *The City*. *Raysn*, even though it is not organized explicitly on the same temporal axis, is also concerned with the temporal, perhaps just as much as *The City*: The generation of the lyrical "I" recounts a

⁹² Alan Mintz, *Hurban: Response to catastrophe in Hebrew Literature*, pp. 153.

⁹³ Finkin, "Like Forests in Overgrown Fires," 76.

timeless mythologic landscape that will not return, and there is left an uncertainty of the future, *Di Shtot* is also organized spatially: The “lyrical I” enters the city at dusk, moves through the streets, enters buildings, and leaves the city for the countryside at the end of the poem. In terms of time and space, both present concrete landscapes in abstract mythological terms. It is the interplay of the two that creates meaning.

Raysn: A Jewish Ruthenia

Raysn is innovative in its construction of literary space of the Eastern European countryside. It is the mythological image of a primordial Judaism in Eastern Europe, recounted in a performatively localized Yiddish, ornamented with folksy and exotic slavicized Yiddish. Contrary to nineteenth century depictions in Yiddish literature, the Eastern European countryside is not represented as an allegorical desert wilderness, and it is not represented as “other,” rather, it is a place of contact between Jews and other local ethnicities, particularly Belarusians. The countryside in *Raysn* is presented metaphorically in all its local color as a pre-national tribal Canaan of the patriarchs. The goal of Kulbak’s Jewish-Ruthenian epic was to create a sense of mythological, national and unalienated connection to the landscape – a sense of belonging in a multiethnic nation.

In this period of national and international uprisings, Kulbak looks to older, pre-modern conceptions of national belonging, superimposing the tribalism of Genesis and the pre-national medieval plurality of Lithuania. This cultural synthesis is evident in the system of sematic layering present in the poem in which he fuses Biblical allusions and Slavic-infused folk-poetics.

Raysn is a Modernist long poem. Like many of the poems of the time in Eastern Europe in this form,⁹⁴ it is concerned with the revolution and/or its effects on society. It was written while Kulbak was in Berlin in 1922, after fleeing Lithuania/Belarus during the war. Belarus had just gained independence for the first time as the Belarusian People's Republic (BNR) in 1918 after the treaty of Brest-Litovsk. The BNR did not have a functioning army, and this territory was spilt between the Soviets and the Poles in the Polish-Soviet War. New research by Claire Le Foll has attested to the collaboration between Jewish cultural actors writing in both Yiddish and Belarusian. Her work focuses on the 1921 BNR's government in exile and their attempts to raise awareness and support in Jewish communities in Berlin for the cause of Belarusian independence.⁹⁵ The Belarusian SSR did have some national-cultural independence within the Soviet Union until the purges. Kulbak's *Ruthenia*, published in 1922, and its statement of Jewish belonging should be read with this political context in mind.

In a letter to Shmuel Niger in New York, Kulbak emphasizes the nostalgia (a longing for a place) that was a motivational factor in writing *Ruthenia*.⁹⁶ He realized in emigration that there were many homesick young Jews from Eastern Europe that had fled from the wars across the globe, not to mention previous generations of emigrants who fled different repressive measures. In *Ruthenia*, Kulbak set out to harness that nostalgia, to create an image of a "Belarusian Jewish utopia" that claimed a cultural belonging in the former Lithuania and therefore, in the newly formed Belarusian state. While there is some irony in the overt self-

⁹⁴ Mikhail Gasparov, *Ocherk Istorii Russkogo Stikha*.

⁹⁵ Claire Le Foll. "Belorusskiy passport Bialika: Belorusskaya Narodnaya Respublika I Evrei v 1921." *Judaic-Slavic Journal*. No. 2 vol. 6, 2021.

⁹⁶ Letters from Kulbak to S. Niger, *Sovietish Heymland*. Moskve: Soviet Pisatel', 1981, no. 5. pp.101.

exoticization and orientalization by means of the Belarusian folk traditions and customs, Kulbak is ultimately serious about his claims of belonging.

Marc Caplan reads *Raysn* as a narrative of the decline of purity of generations, as a statement of Jewish particularity and a rejection of cultural belonging in Eastern Europe. In my opinion, his reading is erroneous because it does not account for an earnest celebration of localism in the given historical-political context. There is, however, a sense that the old world and the old way of life has irrevocably ended and leaves the reader with the image of the dawning of a new epoch. In my reading, the death of the grandparents does not represent a decline, but an epochal shift that considers adaptation to tragedy and time as tradition: death and changes comes to all – it is the primal curse. The contrast between life and death represents a “unity of place”⁹⁷ that characterizes the idyllic genre and promotes a sense of Jewish belonging in the former Lithuania and an ideal for the future Belarusian republic. It is symbolic of the transformation of the traditional way of Jewish life into modernity – there is transformation, but rather than characterize this transformation as decline of traditional values, the ultimate goal is to honor the previous generations in the future, and to look back on them for a sense of how to interact with the future. In this way, a vision of Jewish primordial past in Belarus becomes a utopic vision for the future.

Kulbak approaches the subject of the social condition of Jews in mythological, symbolist terms through an intentional (modernist) break from the late 19th realism. In this formulation an idealized mythological past acts as a template for a possible ideal future. There is no shtetl in his poem – only the village and the countryside, and so, he frees himself from the semiotics of 19th

⁹⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin’s term. It is explained later.

century literature to create a sense of belonging in a new space, representing a transition to a new, multicultural state.

Ruthenia focus on a mythical family of Lithuanian-Belarusian Jews who make their living in and around small villages that were once important centers of commerce in the medieval Grand Duchy of Lithuania -- Kobilnik, Skarule, Krewo, Mazhir, Dmir, etc. This pre-Polanised, pre-Christianized state represents at times a patriarchal Canaan and at times an Eden, utilizing the poetics of Genesis to inscribe a Jewish belonging into Belarus/Lithuania. Lithuania was the last medieval state to accept Christianity, at about the same time as a large Jewish population settled there in the 14th century. Kulbak looks back at this tribal moment as a refraction of Genesis in Lithuania. *The Tale of Bygone Years*, an early medieval Slavic Chronicle, begins by a mythological Biblical genesis of the Slavic tribes from the line of Japheth, a son of Noah, creating a Biblical tribal mythology to the early medieval years. Kulbak, in line with East Slavic Biblical tradition, nativizes the tribal episodes of the patriarchs in Biblical Canaan from a Jewish perspective, focusing on the moment of Lithuanian-Jewish Genesis.

The name of the poem in Yiddish, *Raysn*, refers to a toponym used by rabbinates that traditionally was applied to the provinces of Polotsk and Vitebsk, also occasionally corresponding to the area referred to in rabbinical literature as “*Medinah Rus’*.”⁹⁸ The borders of this rabbinate were not clear or stable, but generally overlapped with the area known as White Rus’ in Lithuanian legal distinction. White Rus’ was the center of Belarusian culture as well as one of the most densely populated Jewish areas of the Central and Eastern Europe. This part of Lithuanian territory was important area of the trade route between the Baltic and Black seas. In

⁹⁸Vladimir Levin and Darius Staliūnas, “*Lite on Jewish Mental Maps*,” *Spatial Concepts of Lithuania in the Long Nineteenth Century*, pp. 312-370

this medieval economy, rivers were the highways of trade. The Baltic river systems, Viliya and Nieman are of most importance in this case, connect through land routes or canals with those river systems connected to the Black sea, such as the Pripyat, which connected this area to the Rus' capital of Kyiv. Kulbak often evokes the name of three regions of the Lithuanian Commonwealth which are congruent with old Lithuanian territorial divisions: Lite, Samogotia, Ruthenia.

However, the depiction of Kulbak's "Raysn" does not correspond to the actual physical space of Lithuanian.⁹⁹ For example, in "Di Viliya and Der Neyman," / "The Viliya and the Neiman" he depicts a pristine natural landscape, when the fact of the matter is that this is the location of the city of Kaunas. Furthermore, Kaunas was located at the border of the Lithuanian provinces Samogotia and Lite, and not even close to the geographic area that denoted the province of Raysn, or (White) Rus'.

In Belarusian, the term *Rus'* began to move westward over time with population shifts and began to designate an area that related to Belarusian linguistic-cultural sphere. Zita Medusauskine explains that the region that was once understood as the territory of Lithuanian Rus' in the medieval Grand Duchy of Lithuania was no longer represented in the 19th century territorially, with politically negotiated borders on a map, but was transformed into an amorphous area that was defined by Belarusian linguistic culture, and this cultural region expanded westward in the 19th century.¹⁰⁰

Considering this history, there is perhaps another reason why Kulbak titles his poem *Raysn*: Belarus, which translates literally to "white Rus'", first emerged as an independent state

⁹⁹ Sergei Shupa, "Geografiya Kul'baka: Real'naya I Vyavahaya". Presentation at "The History Culture and Heritage of Jews in Belarus Across the Ages, July 2021.

¹⁰⁰ Zita Medusauskine, "Images of Lithuania in the first half of the 19th Century," *Spatial Concepts of Lithuania in the Long 19th Century*, ed. Stalianus. Boston: Academic studies press 2016, pp 138-139.

in 1918-1921, and then was absorbed mostly into the USSR, except the western-most territories that were absorbed into the newly-formed Polish state. The title, like the poem, looks to the past as a model for the future: The ancient “*Raysn*,” a Jewish exonym corresponding loosely to the white “*Rus*’” of Medieval Lithuanian territory, is associated with the idea of modern, independent Belarus and its cultural sphere. In this project, I have translated *Raysn* as “Ruthenia,” the Latin exonym for *Rus*’, the tribe or territory associated with the genesis of East Slavic cultures.

Kulbak’s reiteration of an old geographic region mystifies and mythologizes the region, and is a signal of the subject matter and the form of the poem—it is a mythopoetical epic that makes a claim for a seemingly ancient and organic relationship of a single Jewish family to the land. At the same time, it documents a shift from one generation to the next. This generational shift represents the dawning of a new epoch in which the various sons and their totems must find a way to adapt to the trails of their own time.

In order to emphasize the long history of Jews in Lithuania to the land Kulbak overlays the Belarusian/Lithuanian landscape, particularly one that signals a national idea of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, with the Biblical landscape of Genesis. This overlay of landscapes is emphasized linguistically with the overlapping poetic layers that stem from a variety of literary traditions, both Jewish and non-Jewish that poetically preforms a Genesis of Judeo-Slavic existence within the culturally defined “lands” of Lithuanian Rus’.

The Slavic folk elements are established immediately in the first poem, and the likeness of the men of their family to peasants is discussed. In the first poem of the cycle,¹⁰¹ the

¹⁰¹ While the poem is called a *Poema* in *Naye Lider*, the book, its structure more closely resembles a Modernist lyric cycle. The insistence of *Poema* alerts the reader to its address to the Romantic form, and

grandfather is referred to as “a poyer mit a pelts un mit a hak un mit a ferd” / “a peasant with a skin/fur coat and with an ax and with a horse.” The traditional Slavic dress, and symbolic instrument, the axe, combined with the characterization of a Jew as a *Poyer*, a peasant, which in Yiddish signifies non-Jewishness, is emphatically not the typical image of the Jew in Eastern Europe, and one might think that such a “Jewish Peasant” is an hyperbolic oxymoron. But there is meaning behind this self-exoticization through Slavicization.

Despite the fact that the traditional center of Jewish life was in the shtetl, there were Jews practicing agricultural in rural areas of the Pale of Settlement, even though it was not common. Kulbak focus on the archetype of these Jews as an image of a primordial Jewish connection with nature, one that resembles Biblical motifs of the land. And while Kulbak paints these connections to the land along with these marks of Slavic-ness are Slavic traditions, such as eating out of the same bowl and sleeping on top of the stove. These are only a few of many examples of the depiction of Jewish and Slavic traditions in *Ruthenia*.

Kulbak did not intend for *Ruthenia* to be read literally, rather, he intended it to be read symbolically and mythologically. His poetics are remarkably close to Russian symbolist poetics and is interested in similar kind of mystic Symbolism. His depiction of the incorporation of Slavic traditions into a primordial Jewishness is a metaphor for the for the historical Slavic influence on Ashkenazi Judaism, which is seen linguistically in Yiddish. Kulbak is concerned with the spiritual claim of belonging to the land and to the earth and concerned philosophically with the creation mythos of Eastern European Jewish culture. The artistic focus is the stylization of a mythopoetic shard of Eden in Eastern Europe symbolizing a cultural fusion Eastern European culture. Despite periods of cultural isolation, Jewish existence in Eastern Europe was created through cultural fusion over a millennia. In Kulbak’s system, it is precisely the plasticity

of cultural fusion and adaptation to Eastern Europe in its folk traditions that have created the relationship to the land. The idea of a “Jewish Ruthenia” is an idealized, nostalgic space that though its mythologization of the past presents a hopeful vision for the future – a longing for the revival and adaptation of Jewish autonomy in a modern Belarus.

Nationalisms in Belarus: A Historical Context

This section discusses the history of Jewish existence in Lithuania, and a certain interpretation of that history as a premodern multiethnic state that allowed for Jewish autonomy. Kulbak’s localism promotes a belonging within Belarusian culture based on the history of long Jewish presence and cultural exchange in the area. As I have previously stated, the Lithuania that I refer to does is not limited to the modern-day country of Lithuania, but corresponds loosely to medieval Lithuania, which was centered around Vilnius and stretched into present day Belarus. At the height of this Empire, it stretched from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, though the southern lands¹⁰² are more associated with Ukraine. In the Jewish conception, the loose Medieval boundaries of *Lite* were preserved. This Greater Lithuania included a variety of different ethnic groups, of which, there was no clear majority.

Significant Jewish settlement in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania began around the 13th century, but small numbers of Jews were probably present in Eastern Europe since at least the 10th century, if not earlier.¹⁰³ Jews had permit to live and trade within Lithuania in certain areas

¹⁰² Roughly the medieval term “Red Rus ”(which also has fluid boundaries centered in Galicia, but often including Volhynia and Podolia, and sometimes the ‘wild fields/steppe’ of eastern Ukraine. There was also a “Black Rus’,” associated with the area around Nowgorodek, the setting of *Pan Tadeusz*.

¹⁰³ Antony Polonsky, *History of the Jews*, pp9-10. See also Simon Dubnov, *History of the Jews*.

since Emperor Vytautas granted them privileges in 1388.¹⁰⁴ These rights did not mean that the Grand Duchy and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth were free of antisemitic violence. It occurred periodically—most notably, the antisemitic violence from the Khmelnytsky uprising against the commonwealth led to one of the most violent massacres in European history until the pogroms of the First World War. But it is important to note that these were Cossack bands that opposed the commonwealth and pledged allegiance to Muscovy. Belarusian nationalists, therefore, were able to place the blame of anti-Jewish violence in Belarus on external colonizing forces, such as Muscovy and Poland and argue that antisemitism had no place in the local tradition.

The image of the multiethnic nature and integration of Jews into medieval Lithuanian social and economic society¹⁰⁵ was celebrated in the 20th century Belarusian national movement. For the purposes of contextualizing Kulbak, I will not venture too far into the medieval history of Lithuanian Jewry, but it is sufficient to say that the long history of Jewish settlement and the conception of Jews not as a national minority, but as an ethnic group in a multiethnic state was important for Kulbak's understanding of Jewish belonging in Eastern Europe.

Adam Teller, in his study of Jewish economic activity on the Radziwiłł estates in Lithuania, shows the complexity and depth of Jewish integration into the Feudal Polish-Lithuanian economy and society. He views economic integration as inherently connected to social integration and explains through case studies how Jews created a place for themselves with Feudal Lithuanian society both economically and socially, even if there was prejudice against them.¹⁰⁶ In line with Teller's argument about Jewish integration into Feudal Lithuanian

¹⁰⁴ Polonsky, *History of the Jews*, pp.43

¹⁰⁵ Hundert, Gershon David. *Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 32-56.

¹⁰⁶ Adam Teller, *Money, Power, and Influence in Eighteenth-Century Lithuania The Jews on the Radziwiłł Estates*, pp. 5.

Society, Gershon Hundert reasons that “a simple dichotomous view [of Jewish separateness or integration] is not nearly complex enough to reflect the actual situation.”¹⁰⁷ He goes on to describe the role of Jews in the medieval economy and their economic integration, proving that they were an integral part of the functioning of medieval society, while like Teller, acknowledging that there were religious boundaries and prejudices that existed.

Furthermore, Hundert suggests paradigms of openness and closedness in cultural exchange. In this conception, the 18th century was a “transition from a constitutional and political concept of the nation to an ethnic and linguistic one”¹⁰⁸ in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. This occurred in relation to the consolidation of political power in Poland-Lithuania by the Roman Catholic Church. As a result, Hundert characterizes the 18th century as a turning point from openness to closedness of the Jewish communities to co-territorial Lithuanian cultures.

Hundert stresses that understanding the Jewish population of the 18th century Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth through the modern conception of a minority obscures the nature of ethnic relations in a pre-modern era. He proposes that Jews in the 17th century Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth cannot be characterized by the modern conception of a national minority in such a medieval state where, according to him, there was not an overwhelming ethnic majority and “local patriotism was the order of the day.”

First of all, identity in premodern European society was characterized by a multiplicity of loyalties and memberships. Indeed, there was no majority as we now understand the term. Local patriotism was the order of the day, and there was little sense of belonging to a nation, let alone a nation-state. Even in the eighteenth century, ethnic Poles were not a majority in Poland-Lithuania. In addition to autochthonous Lithuanians, Ukrainians, and Belorussians, as well as

¹⁰⁷ Hundert, Gershon David. *Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 31

¹⁰⁸ Penzich, Barbara and Karin Friedrich, eds. *Citizenship and Identity in a Multinational Commonwealth : Poland-Lithuania in Context, 1550-1772*, pp.131

Tatars and Romany, many of the cities and towns were distinguished by ethnic and religious diversity: their inhabitants included Germans, Italians, Scots, Armenians, and Greeks. Therefore, Jews cannot be seen as a minority group when less than 20 percent of the population of the country was urban, and only 40 to 60 percent was ethnically Polish.

More important, however, is the fact that about half of the urban population of the Polish Commonwealth was Jewish. A significant proportion of Jews lived in towns where there was a Jewish majority, and an even larger proportion can be said to have *experienced* living in towns where there appeared to be a Jewish majority because so many of the Christian townspeople had turned to agriculture. A substantial majority of Jews lived in communities of five hundred or more. Thus, most of the shops and marketplace stalls, as well as the inns and the taverns, would have belonged to Jews. Indeed, most of the people moving through the streets would have been Jews. In other words, most Jews lived in communities that were quite large enough to support the living of the dailiness of life in a Jewish universe. For these reasons, the term “minority group” is utterly misleading.¹⁰⁹

For Hundert, it is important that Jews often lived in concentrated pockets of settlement where they often formed a large part of the population. The eastern parts of Lithuania, Mogilov and Polotsk particularly, had a very high percentage of the Jewish population, the second highest in the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth after “Ukraine-Ruthenia.”¹¹⁰

Hundert notes one particular traveler, an 18th century English deacon, whose impression of the eastern Lithuanian countryside exposes Kulbak’s mythologization of Lithuanian peasant-like Jews who work the land not solely as an imaginary mythologization, as some readers tend to misunderstand, but as an actuality, if a rarity, that was also observed by outsiders.

Archdeacon William Coxe, perhaps the best known of the English travelers of this period, as well as the most scholarly, asserted that Jews in Lithuania were even more numerous than those of Poland. Indeed, they “seem to have fixed their headquarters in this Duchy. If you ask for an interpreter, they bring you a Jew: if

¹⁰⁹ Gershon Hundert, *Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 21-22

¹¹⁰ “Overall, in 1765, 750,000 Jews formed about 5.35 percent of the population of the Polish Commonwealth, which is estimated to have been between 12.3 and 14 million. The density of Jewish settlement, however, increased dramatically from west to east. Only 12 percent of Polish-Lithuanian Jews lived in Great Poland and 17 percent in Little Poland, whereas 27 percent lived in Lithuania-Belarus, and 44 percent in Ukraine-Ruthenia. In fact, the Jewish experience in the Polish Commonwealth cannot be understood without careful consideration of the demography of the community.” Gershon Hundert, 20

you come to an inn, the landlord is a Jew; if you want post-horses, a Jew procures them, and a Jew drives them; if you wish to purchase, a Jew is your agent: and this is perhaps the only country in Europe where Jews cultivate the ground: in passing through Lithuania, we frequently saw them engaged in sowing, reaping, mowing and other works of Husbandry.”¹¹¹

Though the reality of Jews working the land, as emphasized in Hundert’s statistics about Jewish professions in the 18th century, was not the most common Jewish reality, it was a reality that was more possible in the former territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, than most places in Europe. This was especially true in areas with high concentrations of Jewish populations, as is described above. In fact, Kulbak’s mother’s family had been part of a Jewish agricultural colony called Karka near Smorhon, and his father was a timber merchant.¹¹² Teller’s and Hundert’s characterization of Jewish life in pre-modern Lithuania presents a more complex picture than the general histories of Jews in Eastern Europe by focusing on the particular local histories. Hundert’s characterization of the 18th century as a turning point from an openness to closedness of culture perhaps helps explain the context of the 19th century “image of the Shtetl” as a distinctly closed off Jewish space. During the first part of the twentieth century, interest in the particular Jewish history of Eastern Europe grew, was very popular at the time, especially for historians such as Simon Dubnov, whose historical research on Jewish probably had an impact on Kulbak. This renewed interest in Jewish historiography, cultural syncretism, and the effort to build a new Jewish literary cultures on par and conversant with European and world literature perhaps represents a shift back to an “openness” of culture after the period of 19th century Romantic Nationalisms.

¹¹¹Gershon Hundert *Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 19

¹¹²Elye Shulman, “Moshe Kulbak,” Trans. Joshua Fogel, <http://yleksikon.blogspot.com/2019/03/moyshe-kulbak.html>, from *Leksikon fun Yidish Shraybers*, ed Berl Kagan (New York, 1986), col. 481.

Annexation of the Lithuanian territories into the Russian Empire in the 1772-1775

partitions changed the social order. Throughout the Russian period, there were periods of lesser and greater repression and subjugation. There were, however, 19th century precedents to the 20th century populist movement for a multi-cultural Lithuanian-Belarusian state. During the 19th century, there was a liberal populism “back to the people” movement of the late 19th century Russian empire that valued the pre-national borderland or “tuteyushi” notion of local belonging rather than a national concept that embraced Lithuania’s ethnic diversity.¹¹³ In the Polish speaking sphere, the liberal democratic *Krajowcy*, members of the mostly Polish speaking Lithuanian nobility sought to preserve the tradition of multicultural statehood in the tradition of

¹¹³ Vladimir Korolenko, a Russian language liberal populist writer from Zhitomir, presents a wonderful description of Volhynian localism in the first chapter of “Bez Yazyka”/ “In a Foreign Land.” Volhynia, was part of Lithuania until it was incorporated into the Russian Empire in 1793 in the second partition of Poland. It had a distinct local identity in the Ukrainian sphere. The novel is written to as a polemic against antisemitic sentiment in the late 19th century. The main character follows a peasant from a small town called Lozitshtshe in Volhynia who travels to America to find a relative that promises work, but gets lost in a comedy of errors and ends up wanted by the police and unintentionally lost in the Midwest. He knows no English, so He is unable to communicate. However, he meets a series of Jewish characters who help him clear his name and eventually return to his hometown. The main character, Matvei, in result, changes his preconceived opinions of Jews, based off of cultural stereotypes, when he sees their kindness and realizes in America that they are indeed his countrymen because they are the only ones who can speak to him. In the first introductory chapter, he describes the Volynhian townspeople as having particular local traditions, from their dialect to their religion to their all being named after the river.

For long ago they had plowed into the ground all their former privileges and lived close by the town neither like muzhiks, nor like townsmen. Their language seemed to be that of Ukraina (sic.), but it had a singular mixture of Polish and Russian words. They belonged to the Greek-Uniat faith, but later, after some confusion, they were admitted into a Greek Catholic parish, while their old little church was closed and crumbled into decay.¹¹³

Сами они давно уже запахали в землю все привилегии и жили под самым местечком ни мужиками, ни мещанами. Говорили как будто по-малорусски, но на особом вольнском наречии, с примесью польских и русских слов, исповедовали когда-то греко-униатскую веру, а потом, после некоторых замешательств, были причислены к православному приходу, а старая церковка была закрыта и постепенно развалилась...¹¹³

Korolenko describes the local Volhynian peasants as not quite Polish, not quite Russian in this long string of describing them by what they are not. In this way, he describes the absence of national belonging to either culture. It is interesting that Korolenko describes the Volhynian dialect, like Yiddish enlightenment writers, perceived as *Zhargon*. Instead, he privileges the local dialect and customs of the people, never claiming any nationality – Ukrainian, Russian or Polish. By the end, he realizes that the Jews too, are part of this localism. Korolenko’s story demonstrates that there was a vein in Russian liberal populism that had particular political and ethnographic interests in the localism of the Pale

the Grand Dutchy.¹¹⁴ It is also important to note that there were also right-wing, nationalist iterations of both groups.

The 20th century cultural interest in this pre-modern, pre-national concept of civil society began to gain popularity not just among Lithuanian Jews, Kulbak among them, but with other ethnic groups of the former GDL, particularly Belarusians and Lithuanians who were also subject to the imperial powers in Central-Eastern Europe – Poland, Russia and Germany. While there had been emergent nationalist movements in the 19th century, they did not gain popularity until the 20th century.¹¹⁵ There is a historical question as to what degree Belarusian nationalism, defined broadly by ethnicity and language, was used as a tool by the Germans, Bolsheviks, and Poles in the First World War to weaken the influence of the Russian empire in the region, and to what degree the BNR was a homegrown nationalist movement. While Claire Le Foll gives agency to the leaders of the BNR in their creation of a Jewish-Belarusian alliance as a home grown initiative,¹¹⁶ Per Anders Rudling shows how various imperial powers used Belarusian Nationalisms to further their own goals.¹¹⁷ Fostering ethnic-national awareness and the political movements that came with it became a political strategy that helped win the favor of locals in the area. Despite attempts by German, Polish and Russian governments to cultivate and manipulate their own versions of nationalism in Belarus,¹¹⁸ Rudling notes the particular formation of early twentieth century liberal-populist Belarusian national movement. He credits these Belarusian national activists with the creation of a particular form of *civic* nationalism, as opposed to *ethnic*

¹¹⁴ Darius Staliūnas, “Hybrid identities in the Era of Ethno-Nationalism: The Case of the Krajowcy in Lithuania,” *Acta Baltico Slavica* 42, pp.253-270. And, Per Anders Rudling, *The Rise and Fall of Belarusian Nationalism*, pp. 45.

¹¹⁵ Per Anders Rudling, *The Rise and Fall of Belarusian Nationalism*, pp. 33-65.

¹¹⁶ Claire Le Foll. “Belorusskiy Passport Bialika: Belorusskaya Narodnaya Respublika i Evrei v 1921.” *Judaic-Slavic Journal*. No. 2 vol. 6, 2021.

¹¹⁷ Per Anders Rudling, *The Rise and Fall of Belarusian Nationalism*, pp. 66-115.

¹¹⁸ Darius Staliūnas, *Spacial Concepts of Lithuanian in the Long 19th Century*, pp. 11-15.

nationalism.¹¹⁹ Rudling goes on to explain that the liberal-populist Belarusian national movement that formed after the wake of 1905 embraced a national mythology that was based on partially imagined medieval history: “Belarusian national activists sought to establish an alternative narrative, intended to demonstrate a historical continuity of Belarusian statehood dating back to the Middle Ages. As the Belarusians had long lacked a political and cultural elite of its own, the task of constructing a continuous “national” history was daunting for the nationalist pioneers. They imagined a continuity in the “Belarusian” principality of Polatsk and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In particular, they stressed the flourishing of the Grand Duchy in the sixteenth century as a “golden age” of Belarusian culture.”¹²⁰ This period is exactly the period which Kulbak seems to visit in his recreation of a medieval Jewish Belarus.

Rudling notes the interconnection of Belarusian nationalism in the 20th century with those of co-territorial and regional national movements, a point that Le Foll’s article elaborates upon.

Other political latecomers, such as Ukrainian, Lithuanian, and secular Jewish nationalisms, had discernable influences on their Belarusian counterpart. Like the two leading Jewish nationalist movements in the region, Poale Zion and the Bund, the early Belarusian nationalists merged class and national awareness into a radical left-wing program. Its similarities with the Bundist movement, which was formed primarily in the mainly Jewish and Polish cities of Belarus, are particularly strong. The editorial boards of the first Belarusian papers were located only a few blocks away from the headquarters of the Jewish nationalist movements in Vilnius, a city both national movements regarded as their intellectual capital. Their leaders often read the same books, were influenced by the same national currents, and experienced similar social dynamics, many having attended the same universities.¹²¹

As Rudling notes above, Belarus underwent a national and cultural movement at the very same time as Yiddishists and Hebraists were building their own cultural movement, and Le Foll

¹¹⁹ Per Anders Rudling, *The Rise and Fall of Belarusian Nationalism*, pp. 15-20.

¹²⁰ Per Anders Rudling, *The Rise and Fall of Belarusian Nationalism*, pp. 13

¹²¹ Per Anders Rudling, *The Rise and Fall of Belarusian Nationalism*, pp. 3

elaborates on this alliance in her article. There was an initiative by the Belorussian narodniks(folkists) and intelligentsia in the newspaper *Nasha Niva* to include Jews in the Belorussian national movement. For example, in an early edition, they feature a picture of wooden synagogue as an example of *Belorussian* folk architecture. In addition to the cultural movement led by the intelligentsia to include Jews, there was also a lower rate of pogroms in the Belorussian territory, much less than in the neighboring countries, namely Ukraine, due to cooperation between Jewish and non-Jewish socialist groups. This was in part due to Belorussian culturist like Zmitrok Byadulya, the pen name of Samuil Plavnik, who was Jewish but wrote in Belorussian and was a leading figure in the Belorussian Modernist literature. Byadulya actively advocated against antisemitic violence in the Belorussian language.

Kulbak, in *Ruthenia*, fictionalizes Zmitrok Badulya into a folk-hero in the framed narrative folk ballad “Antoshe Shpilt af der Bandure”/ “Antoshe Plays the Bandura.” In “Antoshe Plays the Bandura,” Byadula is the name of a stable-boy who impregnates the daughters of a Polish lord. This roguery is a reference to his conception of Lithuanian history, which viewed both Belorussians and Jews as colonial subjects of Polish and Russian Empires.¹²² In Zmitrok Byadulya’s *Zhidy na Belarusi /Jews in Belarus*, first printed in the newspaper *Belaruski Shlyakh* and reprinted as a stand-alone pamphlet, was written to as a response to antisemitic violence that had broken out in Belarus in the First World War and Polish-Soviet War. In it, he claims a Belorussian-Jewish cultural syncretism, arguing against the ethnic, linguistic national divisions that lead to antisemitic violence. Byadulya’s assessment of Jewish-Belorussian solidarity as colonized subjects resembles Gershon Hundert’s independent conclusion that “in the Polish Commonwealth during the eighteenth century, Jews can usefully and with

¹²² Zmitrok Byadulya, *Zhidy na Belarusi*, pp. 1.

some accuracy be described as a colonized economic group. They performed indispensable services and played a crucial role in the economy, but the primary beneficiaries were their patrons, the magnate-aristocrats.”¹²³ Byadulya, however, claims a sort of mystical connection between the two folk, arguing for the conception of cultural syncretism:

For the entire duration of Jewish and Belarusians cohabitation in Belarus, these two nations psychologically adapted to each other. In their languages, customs, legends, in architecture, in everyday life - in their forms they are so mixed that (most of all by the Jews) they adopted a new distinctive color.¹²⁴

The syncretism that he describes is supported by his conception of history, but his most interesting evidence is the evaluation of the interconnectivity between Belarusian and Jewish languages and folk cultures:

There are common Jewish-Belarusian folk melodies, proverbs, where Jewish and Belarusian languages are mixed together. The Belarusian language has the words "partner" /"khavrus," "gang"/ "Khevreh, "man""Bakhur", "Adhairs" and many others that originate from purely Hebrew words. In Yiddish there are even more Belarusian words.

Ёсьць агульныя жыдоўска-беларускія народныя мэлёды, прыказкі, дзе жыдоўская і беларуская мовы перамяшаныя паміж сабою. У беларускай мове ёсьць словы: «хаўрус», «хеўра», «бахур», «адхаіць» і шмат іншых — чыста гэбрайскіх словаў. У жыдоўскай мове беларускіх словаў ёсьць тым болей.¹²⁵

The linguistic intersection of these languages, which dates to the Middle Ages,¹²⁶ is used to attest to an intricate link of the Belarusian and Jewish folk cultures. As further evidence, Byadulya

¹²³ Hundert, Gershon David. *Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century*.

¹²⁴ Zmitrok Byadulya, *Zhydy na Belarusi*, pp. 11 “За ўвесь час сумеснага жыцця беларусаў і жыдоў на Беларускай зямлі гэтыя дзве нацыі псыхічна шмат перанялі адна ад адной. У мовах, у звычаях, у легендах, у будаўніцтве, у будзённым жыцці — у іх формы так перамяшаліся, што (болей усяго ў жыдоў) прынялі новую самабытную акрасу.”

¹²⁵ Zmitrok Byadulya, *Zhydy na Belarusi*, pp. 11

¹²⁶ Kulik, Alexander, “Jews and the Language of Eastern Slavs,” pp 105-143. And Moshe Taube, “East Slavic Texts,” *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*. In Taube, there is an interesting discussion on Lithuanian translations of Biblical texts by Jewish authors into Ruthenian. Especially interesting is his characterization of the perception of Muscovy.

reproduces a macaronic Belarusian folk song, which he claims is sung to a Hasidic melody. It contains fragments of Belarusian, Hebrew, Yiddish, and Polish and exhibits the social strata of the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth. The song is a call and answer which depicts the folk calling out to God.

<p>Бацька, бацька! Выкупі нашу матку... Выстрай нашу хатку... Бяз хаткі ня будзем, Бяз маткі заблудзім. Абрамуню, Абрамуню, Абрамуню!</p> <p>Дзедушак ты наш! Чаго ж вы ня просіце, Чаго ж вы ня моліце Пана Бога за нас...</p> <p>Што б вы нас асвабодзілі Із голус (выгнаньне) вывадзілі, Нашу матку (народ) выкупілі, Нашу хатку (Палестыну) выстраілі, Лэярцэйну (у нашу зямлю) прывадзілі — Lejarcejnu, Lejarcejnu!</p> <p><i>Адказваюць яму зь неба:</i> Ой ты, сыноч, сыноч, сыноч, Ня затрагай сваё сэрца. Матка бэндзе выкуплена Хатка бэндзе выстроена Бондзь мондры, чэкай конца* Wnejmar lefonow schoro chadoscho... (I my яму скажам новую песню)</p> <p>За другім разам:</p> <p>Lejarcejnu! Entwert men ihm won ejben.</p> <p><i>* Увага: Тут словы песні прымаюць акрасу польскай мовы. Гэта паказвае, што беларуская мова і ў большасьці</i></p>	<p>Father, fathter! Save our mother... Build our house ... We not will exist without a house, Without the mother we will get lost. Abraham, Abraham, Abraham!</p> <p>You are our Grandfather! Why don't you implore Why don't you pray To <i>Pan</i> (Polish word for "lord") God for us...</p> <p>So that we will be free Lead us out of golus (exile), Save Our mother (the people) Build our house (Palestine), Deliver us in leyartzeynu (Hebrew:in our land) - leyartzeynu, leyartzeynu!</p> <p>They answer him from heaven: Oh you, son, son, son, Don't worry your heart. The mother will be saved house will be built be wise, wait for the end * Wnejmar lefonow schoro chadoscho... (Hebrew: And we'll tell him a new song)</p> <p>For the second time:</p> <p>Leyartzeynu! The answer comes to him from above (Lithuanian accented Yiddish)</p>
--	--

жыдоў лічыцца «простай». Значы, яны ня могуць сабе ўявіць, каб Пан Бог гаварыў іначай, як «па-панску» - г.зн. па-польску.¹²⁷

* Note: Here the words of the song are ornamented with the Polish language. This shows that the Belarusian language is considered "simple" by most Jews. So, they cannot imagine that the Lord God would speak otherwise than as "lordly" - i.e. in Polish.

As Byadulya’s note points out, the answer from God comes in Polish because Polish was the language of the *szlachta*, the Polish-Lithuanian nobility. In addition to this, the peasant voice speaks a Jewish inflected version of Belarusian which mixes Hebrew and Yiddish phrases, suggesting that there is a kinship in the subjugated social position of both Jews and Belarusians. So this song works on the spiritual level and the material level. It also shows an identification of the Belarusian folk with the Jewish folk, appropriating the Jewish idea of exile with the Hebrew word (in Yiddish/Ashkenazi Hebrew[?] pronunciation) “golus.”

It should be noted that this interpretation of Lithuanian history was a project of the 20th century, an “imagined community,” promoted by cultural actors of the Belarusian National movement and the liberal populists/ socialist of *Nasha Niva*.¹²⁸ This is not the only historical perspective that has existed in Belarus, yet, it was popular until the Belarusian national movement was repressed in the 30’s. It should be noted that Belarus did not suffer from the same scale of antisemitic violence as Ukraine, in which various national ideologies accused Jews of national disloyalty, implicitly or explicitly. Regardless, it shows that the idea of Jewish belonging in Belarus was not only an ironic idyll of Kulbak’s imagination, but a larger cultural movement among Jews and non-Jews alike in Belarus.

¹²⁷ Zmitrok Byadulya, *Zhydy na Belarusi*, pp. 13.

¹²⁸ Dzmitry Shavaliou, “Belorusskiy Orientalism i ‘Belorussko-yevreyskaya Utopiya’ (K Postantovke Problemy)”. *Kontakty i Konflikty v Slavyanskoy i Yevreyskoy Kul’turnoy Traditsii*, Ed. Belova. Moscow: Sefer, 2017. Pp. 237-257.

Tensions between Jews and their neighbors in *Raysn* could be in “Antoshe plays the Bandura.” Here Kulbak imitates a Belarusian folksong which tells the story of a Duke or Lord who would in Belarus most likely be Polish, or Polanized local nobility of Lithuanian or Rus’ heritage, whose daughters are impregnated by the stableman, who is referred to as both “Zmidrok Byadulya” and “shalapay,” “the idler/ never-do-good.” It is rather interesting and comical that Byadulya, a Belarusian language poet of Jewish origin, is fictionalized as the rogue character in the medieval Lithuanian society that he bases his Belarusian nationalism. The song ends as the “Dukus” or Lord searches all over the plains of the country for Byadulya/Shalapay, and the Baydulya/Shalapay living comfortably in the forest. While this might be nod towards Jewish-non-Jewish tensions in Eastern Europe, it does not indict local Belarusians, rather, it places the root of tensions between the colonizing gentry and the colonial subject. It also inserts a contemporary and fellow traveler in the Belarusian cultural effort in the position that Kulbak often reserves for his own lyric persona. Jordan Finkin and Rachel Seelig have commented on the use of this folk archetype to represent the poet in “Ikh bin a bokher a hulay.” While this poem maybe hints at tensions between Jews and other cultures in Eastern Europe, Byadulya is presented as a typical folk hero, and one that in Kulbak’s system is meant to represent the poet.

Hey! Hey!
Hey! Antoshe, let’s hear you sing,
Pluck a string,
Play that bandura!
Shura-bura-mura-tura,
That’s the way!
Hey! Hey!

There once was an old duke from Krewo
White as snow,
White as snow,
And in his palace lived his girls:

A pair of Sisters!
A pair of Sisters!
But the duke had a pony who needed tending,
So he hired a stockman named Badulya,
But the guy wouldn't do a damn thing for ya,
and so they called him "shalapay,"
That's Belarusian for "wiseguy."

...(chorus)

The duke ran straight for his sword
Shouting out the door
"Saddle up my finest horse
And after him I'll ride."
He rode from Krewo to Mazhir
He rode from Zhetl to Dmir
Chasing mounts and carriages,
Halting Bishops without care,
never once he did spy
By the camp fire's side
Our black-jack shalapay.

...(chorus)

In the woods of Krivitch
Dwelled the roguish Shalapay
And the old duke from Krewo,
White as snow,
White as snow,
Rode across the steppe alone
In his knightly thoughts alone
With his clinking sword alone
Every night and every day,
Every night and every day.

... (chorus)

The imitation of the roguish folk ballad lists medieval Lithuanian centers, contributing to the archaicism of the poem. Of utmost importance for the meaning of the poem is Krewo, where in 1385 the first union of Poland and Lithuania occurred in the marriage of queen Jadwiga of Poland and Grand Duke Jogaila of Lithuania, which entailed the conversion of Jogaila to

Christianity.¹²⁹ The fact that the rogue Byadulya disrupts this particular lord is not a coincidence; it is a reference to the Belarusian national movement's idealization and imagination of a pre-colonized Grand Duchy of Lithuania as a basis for a modern multicultural Belarusian nation-state. Considering the rise in Jewish cultural movement and its involvement and interaction with the Belarusian cultural movement and the concerted effort to write Yiddish literature into European literary tradition and European literary culture, it is not surprising that Kulbak claims belonging in the geographic region of Grand Duchy of Lithuanian and after that the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth as the setting for his local fragment of Eden. He superimposes the Biblical tribal moment with the Lithuanian tribal moment. The geographic area of *Ruthenia* recalls an earlier, primordial time, and references the early medieval settlement of the Jewish people in Eastern Europe. *Ruthenia* tells this story in symbolic-mythological terms rather than historical terms. It is the origin of the Eastern European Jewry and the incorporation parts of Slavic traditions and cultures into Jewish culture, but of the linguistic elements of Slavic languages into Yiddish.

Romantic Precedents: Rethinking the Nation; *Pan Tadeusz* in a Kapote

It has been suggested that the division into twelve parts could have a variety of semantic connotations: the twelve tribes of Israel, the twelve seasons, etc. But in terms of a poetic form, there is a precedent that is suggestive: Adam Mickiewicz's great Romantic epic of the partitioned Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth is also into 12 parts.¹³⁰ *Pan Tadeusz* is a novel in verse known

¹²⁹ Jews were first granted charters in Brest in 1388 and in Grodno in 1389 (YIVO Encyclopedia: Belarus)

¹³⁰ For more information on meaning creation in the development verse forms in poetry, see Gasparov, Mikhail, "metr i smysl."

for its plain, prosaic tone, typical of the hybrid genres of Romanticism. It fictionalizes the events that led to the 1794 uprising, and was written in the wake of another uprising in 1830.¹³¹ *Pan Tadeusz* is a poetic iteration of Polish Romantic nationalism that centers its gaze on the Polonized gentry. In Mickiewicz's conception, the national idea of Lithuania and Poland were essentially the same thing.

Kulbak was inspired by a modernist cultural reinterpretation of Lithuanian history that recognizes a multi-cultural Lithuanian localism that is inclusive of Belarusian and Lithuanian peasant cultures, and the various ethnicities that made up the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. As a consequence, he rejects and augments Mickiewicz presentation of Lithuania as the "other Poland," a Poland that was closer to nature, less developed, more primal and a repository for an ancient, unrefined Polishness. Kulbak keeps the unrefined, less developed and more primal element of this formulation and applies it to his modernist, culturalist, localist opposition to the hegemony of Romantic nationalisms. In his response and appropriation of Mickiewicz, Kulbak writes himself into a discourse of a multilingual *Lithuanian* literature.

Kulbak wrote and published *Raysn* while he was in Berlin in 1920, during the ephemeral appearance of the first modern Belarusian state, the BNR, knowing full well the first lines of *Pan Tadeusz*:

Lithuania! My homeland! You are health alone.
Your worth can only ever be known by one
Who's lost you. Today I see and tell anew
Your lovely beauty, as I long for you.¹³²

¹³¹ Bill Johnston, "Introduction," in Adam Mickiewicz, *Pan Tadeusz: The Last Foray in Lithuania* Trans. Bill Johnston.

¹³² Adam Mickiewicz, *Pan Tadeusz: The Last Foray in Lithuania* Trans. Bill Johnston, pp 1.

Kulbak did at that time relate to these words on a personal level, but he also understood and this pronouncement of national exile in a particularly Jewish mode – the overlapping of semantic layers of Lithuanian-Polish romantic national exile with Biblical exile.¹³³ *Raysn* is a modernist reinterpretation of the national epic in Yiddish in which Kulbak imagines a Jewish-Ruthenian-Lithuanian localism.

Kulbak was not the first to adapt *Pan Tadeusz*, the epic of Lithuania, into one of the Lithuanian local languages, and we can see his adaptation as part of a tradition that repositions the national narrative of the poem. Zita Medusauskine discusses an early translation of the text into Belarusian:

In 1859 landowner and poet Wincenty Dunin Marcinkiewicz translated into the Belarusian language Mickiewicz's epic poem "Pan Tadeusz" (sic.). In the preface of the book, explaining and justifying his idea, he wrote that he wanted his translation to contribute to the enlightenment of the lower nobility and peasants who spoke only the Belarusian dialect and had no access to education. Now, having "dressed Pan Tadeusz in a peasant overcoat," he dedicated his translation to the landlords and the simple folk from the areas around the Dniepr, Dvina, Biarezina, Svislach, Vilia (Neris), and parts of the Nieman rivers. The territory of the Belarusian people was thus drawn by invoking the "geography of rivers" which also covered Lithuanian Rus' with its Ruthenians and the Belarusians of Belarus. True, the author did not give it a common name, but in his work he outlined the space occupied by "Old Lithuania."¹³⁴

Raysn, however, is not a translation, it is a modernist allusion to *Pan Tadeusz* that questions Romantic Nationalism, which imposes an ethnic hegemony and looks back towards a distant, idealized, pre-Christianized, tribal past in which this hegemony did not exist. Kulbak, too, evokes the "geography of rivers" that formed "old Lithuania" in order to evoke natural, geographic areas that functioned as medieval trade routes. These borders, just like

¹³³ Kulbak's letter to Shmuel Niger *Sovietish Heymland*. Moskve: Soviet Pisatel', 1981, no. 5.

¹³⁴ Zita Medusauskine, "Images of Lithuania in the first half of the 19th Century," *Spatial Concepts of Lithuania in the Long 19th Century*, ed. Stalianus. Boston: Academic studies press 2016, pp 137.

Marcinkiewicz's borders, evoke a cultural sphere rather than any defined ethnic national territory. Kulbak dresses his simple Jews up "in a peasant overcoat" in order to present a solidarity of colonized peoples against the colonizers.

In *Pan Tadeusz*, Mickiewicz makes reference to Lithuania's multicultural ethnic make-up, but he focuses his poetic gaze almost exclusively on the Polanized gentry. However, a Jewish tavern owner, Jankiel, contrary to the classical depiction of Jews in Polish literature, is represented as sympathetic character because of his ardent national loyalty to Poland. Although some of the Polanized gentry question his allegiance in a rather characteristic antisemitic tone, Jankiel ultimately works to pass on information to Polish nationalist movement and keep the peace between the Polish-Lithuanian nobility, and at the end they accept him as a patriot. Jankiel's final acceptance by the Polanized nobility is a prominent part in Book XII of *Pan Tadeusz*, where he plays the cymbalom, a folk instrument that was popular in Eastern Europe that is associated with the "oriental" east, at the tavern during a final celebration. Jankiel's skill on the instrument is presented as virtuosic, and Mickiewicz tries to imitate this in his prosody.¹³⁵ Jankiel and his playing are also Orientalized, ornamenting Mickiewicz's Polish-Lithuanian Romantic National ideal: "There comes a sound, like many scenes from a janissary band/with cymbals, drums, and bells. The tune is clear:/ The Third of May Polonaise!..." Jankiel plays a litany of Polish National tunes, which Mickiewicz depicts as reciting the history of the 1792 uprising instrumentally.

In Kulbak's epic, the perspectives are flipped as the non-Jewish Belarusian is presented as an other who is also sympathetic to the common cultural cause of Jews and Belarusians. In

¹³⁵ The paranomasia of form is important for Kulbak, as I will discuss later in connection with Andry Bely's Symbolist poetics and conception of an organic poetic form.

“Antoshe Plays the Bandure,” the poem discussed in the previous section, Kulbak inverts Mickiewicz’s scene with Jankiel. Antoshe, the Belarusian father of Nastasiya, is the musician who is Orientalized in his *Belarusianess*, and sings the roguish ballad mentioned in the previous section. This poem, in its inversion of Mickiewicz’s scene, lays bare Kulbak’s device: The form of Kulbak’s modernist non-national epic of belonging inverts the gaze presented in Mickiewicz’s *Pan Tadeusz* – it is an epic of Jewish-Lithunianess as opposed to the exclusive national quality Polish-Lithuanianess. Kulbak’s “sympathetic other” is presented as the Belarusian peasant, a group that also lacked national autonomy and was subjected to cultural repression, Russification and Polanization. In *Ruthenia*, Kulbak represents a solidarity of national minorities opposed to the ethnic and linguistic hegemony of Romantic Nationalisms.

Kulbak signals with his modernist adaptation of Mickiewicz’s form that his poem is a development in the tradition of the *Lithuanian* national epic and engages in a cultural conversation with a Jewish-Lithuanian response to Mickiewicz’s Polanized-Lithuanian nation. Kulbak was writing to an audience who he expected to know Mickiewicz. Much of the content of poem is lost if the formal connection between Mickiewicz’s poem and Kulbak’s “poema” is not registered on some level.

Kulbak wrote *Ruthenia* during the Polish-Soviet war, and that the first independent Polish state had emerged since the 1795 partition, during a time of national uprising. Polish and Russian forces were both vying for the territory of the Belarusian National Republic. Kulbak’s reference to Mickiewicz also invokes the events that *Pan Tadeusz* fictionalizes, a national uprising that occurred in the years of 1811 and 1812 during the Napoleonic invasion. It also invokes the revolutionary time in which Mickiewicz himself wrote *Pan Tadeusz*: in 1830, right before *Pan Tadeusz* was written, there was an armed rebellion.

To Kulbak, it was his tribe of Lithuanian Jews, in their *Kapotes* who were keepers of Lithuanian culture rather than the Polonized nobility of Mickiewicz, wearing the *kontusz* and *żupan* (traditional Polish-Lithuanian dress). The *kapote* is a traditional garment that was adapted from 16th century garments of the Polish (and the Polonized Lithuanian) nobility which Hasidic Jews wear even to this day. Mickiewicz used this traditional dress as a marker of Lithuanian-ness in *Pan Tadeusz*, as the Bailiff performs the sacred Lithuanian courtly tasks while wearing the garments, even though they were a rarity by the time Mickiewicz was writing the poem:

In dark blue *kontusz* and white *żupan*, one hand
Upon his sword, the other beckoning
The sides. “Silence in the court!” he’s ordering.
Daydreaming as he said his prayers, the last
Lithuanian high court Bailiff now undressed.¹³⁶

Kulbak, rather than depicting the noble task as the epitome of Lithuanian identity, depicts mowing the land with a Scythe as the epitome of real Lithuanian identity:

They stood eighteen deep, grandfather at the head, they shuffled out a tune:
A step and a shift of the shoulders, a swish, like lightnings’ wild dance in a swamp swims,
“For the small slice of bread,” Grandfather once said, “you must, my children, break a sweat...”
They took off their *kapotes* and shuffled the shimmering scythes stronger with shaggy limbs,
They are just like bristly fir trees, an old father and his own seventeen sons ...¹³⁷

Eighteen, the number represented by the Hebrew word *khay*, “life,” is symbolic of life itself. Through this working of the land, which is stereotypically a peasant’s task, Kulbak represents an unalienated connection to the Lithuanian land. While this was not a typical Jewish task, it is not entirely an ironic inversion invoking a negative relationship with the land. Rather, it is a modernist performance of folkism, and a self-orientalization not by means of the oriental

¹³⁶ Adam Mickiewicz, *Pan Tadeusz*, trans. Bill Johnston.

¹³⁷ Moyshe Kulbak, “The Hay is Cut”

other, but it stylizes Jewish cultural syncretism and solidarity as repressed colonial subjects with the Belarusian peasantry as the primitive; an inversion of the typical orientalizing by means of the “primitive” Jew that was common in German Jewish literature, and can be found in Mickiewicz, as mentioned above.

In the comparison of the tribe to fir trees, Kulbak is evoking a typical trope of the literature of the Eastern European borderlands.¹³⁸ By representing the people as associated with a certain plant or animal, Kulbak is accentuating their “indigenous” qualities through a literary totemism. A totem can be an animal, plant, or geological feature that a person or group of people with which they believe to have a magic or spiritual connection. In pagan/tribal cultures, some form of totemism is common, and all human societies are supposed to have gone through a totemic phase. Sigmund Freud attempted to describe the psychology of totemic cultures in *Totem and Taboo* to understand primal human impulses that are perhaps clearer when we examine primitive societies. Kulbak is not looking for the explanation of primal human impulses, but he is seeking to color “Raysish” Jews as primal, tribal and unalienated, and having an ancient, unalienated connection with the land. Each of the sons is associated with a totem in *Ruthenia*, suggesting an ancient, indigenous connection to the land and the lifeforms that inhabit it.

Mickiewicz, too makes use of zoomorphism, a specific form of literary totemism, to emphasize the indigenous qualities of his characters. Kulbak carries on this technique in a Lithuanian tradition. In *Pan Tadeusz*, this technique appears most strikingly in the hunt scene, in which their characters express their primal instincts, their “totem” is revealed. However, there are other characters that are associated with animals less overtly. Sofiya, the idyllic Lithuanian nymph-like peasant-primitive love interest of Tadeusz (and the Count) is first introduced

¹³⁸ This is something that I have seen over and over again, but perhaps I need a better source to support this claim.

(ostensibly) in tending to her flocks of poultry. She, as an image of the Polish-Lithuanian state is associated with these birds throughout the poem. Likewise, the women in *Ruthenia* are also associated with fowl, in particular, ducks.

My grandma was a good Jewish woman,
An artisan of childbearing who reared a babe each spring...
Quickly and painlessly, she gave birth to her twins
Like hens lay eggs, one after the other.

...

She waddled round the house,
Like a duck amid chickens.

(from "Di Bobeshi"/"Grandmother")

...

With apron in hand, Nastasia waddled, bent over
Like a duck who knows neither of sorrow nor worry,
Her feet damp with dew, she was enchanted by the morning,
Nursing all forms of life with the breath of the earth before her.

(from "Nastasiya")

A relationship is created between the Grandmother, the matriarch, and Nastasiya, the non-Jewish love interest of Abram through assigning them the same totem: the duck. This may sound strange and shocking, since Nastasiya is not Jewish, but this is the point: Kulbak is attempting to present the tribal moment of the patriarchs, paralleling the marriage of Jacob and Rachel, in which Rachel steals the idols of her father Laban on their way back to Canaan. This relationship, which Caplan reads as so profoundly not Jewish that it causes the death of the Grandmother, is actually an allusion to the tribal era in Genesis. The juxtaposition of the death of the grandmother and the consummation of Abram's and Nastasiya's relationship repeats a key trope of the idyll, "the fusion of the cradle and the grave," As Mikhail Bakhtin points out in his discussion of "the unity of place" in the Idyll.

The unity of place brings together and even fuses the cradle and the grave (the same little corner, the same little earth), and brings together as well childhood and old age (the same grove, stream, the same lime trees, the same house), the life of various generations who had also lived in that same place, under the same conditions, and who had seen the same things.

In some ways, Caplan's misreading of the poem is a misunderstanding of the intended irony and shock factor: On the surface Abram's relationship with Nastasiya would have been traditionally scandalous if read literally, but when understood in the context as a metaphor for a larger cultural syncretism, it is no longer scandalous, but an metaphorical interpretation of tradition. When the reader realizes that this supposed transgression is based on a Biblical allusion and equation of Nastasya to a matriarch, it creates a sort of cognitive dissonance at first, and a re-evaluation of some of the assumptions of the boundaries of Judaism and separateness or interconnectedness with the cultures around it. This metaphor signals a new return to (several levels of) an earlier openness of Jewish culture. When the reader realizes that this metaphor takes place not long after the modern formulation of Belarus and the ephemeral independence of a Belarusian People's Republic and its absorption into the Soviet Union, one is more apt to understand it as a metaphor for the contemporary political and cultural movement for a "Jewish-Belarusian utopia," and perhaps a metaphoric signaling of some parts of Jewish culture moving towards a period of openness to a traditional cultural syncretism (real or imagined) of subjugated cultures.

The image of a woman as the nation is a persistent trope in *Pan Tadeusz* that has implications for Kulbak. This trope appears at the beginning of *Pan Tadeusz*:

Our lady! You safeguard Czestochowa; shine
In Ostra Brama; shield the castled town
Of Novgrodek and the faithful there!...

It continues with a series of apparitions of nymph-like women. Often, it is unclear who these women are at first, but they are often revealed to be either Sofiya or Telimena. Sofya, the rustic

peasant girl who comes from Lithuanian aristocratic lineage, represent Lithuanian identity (which again, to Mickiewicz, is synonymous with Polish identity), and Teliemena, educated in Petersburg and fluent in high culture, who represents acceptance of Russian Imperial influence. Kulbak takes this trope and applies it to Avrom and Nastasiya's relationship. Just after Avrom and Nastasiya have consummated their relationship, revealing their animalistic totems in their primal urges, Kulbak presents an abstracted, metaphorical vision of their relationship in "the Viliya and the Neiman.

V

The Viliya and the Nieman

While the moon mists itself on the land like a silver rain,
The rigid form of a Lithuanian emerges from the Nieman.
And from the Viliya a dark woman silently swam across to him
her wet locks of hair dispersed over long greenish brows,
Her aqueous body protrudes from the waves...
The Nieman bends around her, he envelops her,
And kisses her green eyes that shine from sadness
And pulls her down to the bed of the river, to the blue crystalline halls...

This magical, animistic personification of two major Lithuanian rivers represents an embrace of Jewish-Belarusian cultural syncretism. The parallel relationship of Avrom and Nastasiya suggest that Avrom is equated with the Neiman, which is grammatically masculine in Yiddish, and Nastasiya with the Viliya, which is grammatically feminine. The male figure, an animation of the Neiman, is referred to as a *litvin*, a Lithuanian. The question that arises is why would Kulbak refer to a Jewish character as a *litvin*? Kulbak is referring to the medieval conception of citizenry in which *litvin* is not an ethnicity, but a citizen of the Lithuania. Their union represent a cultural syncretism, the river of Jewish culture and Lithuanian cultures meet.

Kulbak's modernist depiction of Lithuania identity and belonging challenges Mickiewicz's Romantic nationalism, while at the same time accepting Mickiewicz as a predecessor of Lithuania literature. Kulbak develops Mickiewicz's images to suit his own messages in order to participate in a multilingual *Lithuanian* literature, to develop the literary space and center on Jewish interaction with that space to create belonging, and a *unity of place*.

Hybrid Genre of the Modernist Epic: Epic, Lyric, Ballad, Idyll

Typical of the Modernist long poem,¹³⁹ *Raysn* is a hybrid genre, consisting of elements of the epic, ballad, and idyll. The epic mode is constructed from overlapping various classical and folkloric forms from different traditions and times. At the most fundamental level, Kulbak uses the Tanakh as a Jewish version of an ancient classical epic and superimposes this with the romantic and modernist adaptations of the classical epic form, which, in itself, is a hybrid form. Romantics began to see the folk ballad as the primordial origin of the classical epic and began look to the folk ballad (and recent ethnographic work on the folk ballad) for a source of native/original epic material in vernacular languages. This is especially the case for the Russian Bylina, which plays a small part in this discussion. These are the main sources of Kulbak's epic mode: Torah (The Pentateuch) as a Jewish ancient epic; Romantic poem (*Pan Tadeusz*), Symbolist poem, and the Slavic folk ballad. In addition to this, the idyll plays a particular generic role in *Ruthenia*.

Kulbak's poem is hybrid in form, first, by blending the lyrical and epic modes. The blurring of lyrical and epic traditions at once creates and denies an "epic distance," in the

¹³⁹ Mikhail Gasparov, *Ocherk Istorii Russkogo Stikha*.

combination with the abstraction of Lithuanian space and a lyrical persona for the poet, who performs as not totally removed from the mythic past as the audience. The death of each grandparent signals the end of a generation, the end of an epoch, and the speaker is confronted with the task to remember and preserve the *unalienated* connection to the land in the way that his father and uncles were, and even they could not approach the mythological status of the previous generation.

Classically, the epic presents an episodic narrative that focuses on a hero's journey, usually away from the homeland (Illiad) or back towards the homeland (Odyssey), but *Ruthenia* doesn't exactly tell a straight-forward narrative and there is no central protagonist. The abstracted scenes of *Raysn* do not form a coherent narrative, but rather create portraits of different characters that often associate them with various vignettes of the Pentateuch. Instead of a journey, it is focuses on the *unity of place* that is a feature of the idyll. The spatial journey of the epic is converted to temporality, as the progression of generations is the main driving force; it can be construed as a journey from the deep past to the future. There is, however a trope of exile that is often associated with an epic, but again, this exile is constructed temporally rather than spacially.

Mikhail Bakhtin divides the idyll into several archetypal categories: "the love idyll (whose basic form is the pastoral); the idyll with a focus on agricultural labor; the idyll dealing with craft-work; and the family idyll."¹⁴⁰. Not coincidentally, in *Ruthenia* there are elements of all of these Idyllic genres: Avrom courts Nastasiya, the brothers and their father work cutting hay and driving rafts of logs down the river, uncle Itche moves from village to village repairing garments, and throughout the poems there are depictions of idealized family life, from the

¹⁴⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, pp. 224

depiction of the family eating together in the first eponymous poem to the last poems where the younger generation mourns the loss of their elders.

No matter how these types of idylls, and variations within types, may differ from one another, they all have – and this is its relevance to the problem we are pursuing – several features in common, all determined by their imminent unity of folkloric time. This finds expression predominately in the special relationship that time has to space in the Idyll: an organic fastening down, a grafting of life and its events to a place, to a familiar territory with all its nooks and crannies, its familiar mountains, valleys, fields, rivers and forests, and one's own home. Idyllic life and its events are inseparable from this concrete, spatial corner of the world where the fathers and grandfathers lived and where one's children and their children will live. This little spatial world is limited and sufficient unto itself, not linked in any intrinsic way with other places, with the rest of the world. But in this little spatially limited world a sequence of generations is localized that is potentially without limit. The unity of the life of generations (in general, the life of men) in an Idyll is in most instances primarily decided by the *unity of place*, by the age-old rooting of the life of generations to a single place, from which this life, in all its events, is inseparable. This unity of place in the life of generations weakens and renders less distinct all the temporal boundaries between individual lives and between various phases of one and the same life. The unity of place brings together and even fuses the cradle and the grave (the same little corner, the same little earth), and brings together as well childhood and old age (the same grove, stream, the same lime trees, the same house), the life of various generations who had also lived in that same place, under the same conditions, and who had seen the same things. This blurring of all temporal boundaries made possible by a unity of place also contributes in an essential way to the creation of the cyclical rhythmicalness of time so characteristic of the Idyll.¹⁴¹

Bakhtin's description of the function of time-space in the idyll applies to *Ruthenia* in the creation of a folkloric time. But *Ruthenia* presents a very specific convergence of two folkloric times: the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and a tribal Canaan of the Patriarchs. These two folkloric times merge with the contemporary time of imagining a future Belarus-Lithuania at its own epochal inflection point. While there is a "blurring of temporal boundaries" and a "fusion of the cradle and the grave," that creates a cyclical rhythmicalness, there simultaneously exists a certain impossibility

¹⁴¹ Bakhtin, 225

to return to this mythic time, a sense of linearity that one generation has passed and that another generation must carry on the tradition. It is in Kulbak's hybridization of epic chronotope and idyllic chronotope that creates a tension in the linearity or cyclical progression of time.

Ruthenia is framed by a focus on the patriarch of the family. It begins with a portrait of the grandfather in the eponymous first poem, "Raysn," and ends with his death in "Der Zeydenyu Kumt Shtarbn," which echoes Jacob's blessing of his sons.¹⁴² This cyclical structure implies the dawning of a new epoch, quite possibly a metaphor for the coming the modernist era and the destruction of traditional Jewish Life in Central and Eastern Europe. The dawning of a new era, reflected by the death of the grandfather's generation, does not imply a destruction of tradition, but the progression of that tradition by the examination of the past. The presentation of an organic, unalienated connection to the land does not end with the grandfather and grandmother's death – rather, the structure of the poem seeks to honor the memory of the generation of the patriarchs—specifically the *raysish* patriarchs and by metaphorical extension, the previous generations of Lithuanian Jewry, by memory and imitation of their example. Marc Caplan reads the progression of the poem as a decline, whereas I read this poem as a nostalgic/utopic vision, a desire to reshape society based on a mythological interpretation of past history.

Raysn is divided into 12 sections, each with a distinct rhythmic and rhyme scheme that reflects the content of the poem. On the formal level of the poema as a whole, one element that enables the rhythmic form to mirror the content is its polymetricity chiefly because it provides the metrical variation which Kulbak uses create an organic relationship between the subject and form of his poetry.¹⁴³ *Raysn* alternates between two general forms: long-lined, relatively

¹⁴² Mark Caplan. "Belarus in Berlin, Berlin in Belarus," *Yiddish in Weimar Berlin* ed. Estraiikh and Krutikov, pp. 91.

consistent amphibrachic meters for an elevated, “wide-angle” panoramic depictions of landscapes and lofty scenes, and the shorter-lined folksong inspired two-syllable meters for close ups of characters and their totems.

In the high register, long lines focus mainly on the landscapes. The vastness of the landscapes is created formally in long lines of “Men Kosiet Hay,” “Men Traybt Plitn,” “Di Viliya un der Nieman” and “Der Feter Avrom Pashet di Ferd.” The use of amphibrachs, a foot that gained popularity in Russian poetry with symbolist usage, emphasizes the wide phrasal wave of Yiddish and the Slavic linguistic pole of Yiddish. In addition to this, the proliferation of the amphibrach was one of the major metrical tendencies of Russian Symbolism. The epic modality classically relies on the elevated, panoramic vantagepoint of the poet. The wide phrasal wave combined with the long lines of the amphibrachs encourage the lofty character of these panoramic landscapes.

The long-lined poems are often very regular in amphibrachic stress without many variations, besides some interesting secondary stress substitutions, but they often vary in length from about 5-7 feet. This hovering around hexameter is curious, as hexameter is classically associated with epic. These long varying-length lines convey a cultivated rustic quality to the poem.

In addition to the creation of a rustic epic mode, Kulbak makes use of paronomasia in the forms of his poems, a device popular in Russian modernism. Viktor Shklovsky writes about this device in the context of futurism, which he associates with act of primal verbal communication. In this conception, at the source of language is paronomasia, since the sound has a direct relationship to the meaning. Shklovsky explains that it is this direct relationship between sounds and associative meanings that futurists poets are attempting to create in *zaum* (trans-sense)

poetry, claiming that this is a resurrection of “dead language,” language in which the relationship of the signifier to the signified has been forgotten.¹⁴⁴ Shklovsky, however, augments an argument of the symbolist poet and literary theorist, Andrey Bely. Bely, in his essay “The Magic of Words”/ “Magiya Slov”, focuses on the primal moment of human speech as a fundamentally creative act mirroring the Biblical creation myth. Kulbak notices the overlap in Bely’s theologically inspired justification for poetry as an act of creation and similar ideas in Jewish mysticism. This a major theme in Kulbak’s novel, *Messiah of the House of Efrayim*. Kulbak answers Bely’s call to make the poem itself paronomasia in imitation of the primal creative word, to create a link between the sound of the poem and its content. For example, consider the use of sibilants in “men kosiet hay”/ “The Hay is Cut” :

איז מען בניים שאריען אויף טאָג שוין געווען בגילופין אזוי ווי די אמותע קלעזמער
מען האָט זיך צעשטעלט זאלבעאכצעט, דער זיידע בראש, און אוועק איז אַ מזמור:
אַ שפּרייז, און אַ קער מיט די פלייעצעס, אַ שווישטש, פונק עס טאַנצט אין זומפ אַרומ בליצן,
פֿאַר דאָס שיטקעלע ברויט – האָט דע זיידע געזאָגט – מוז מען, קינדערלעך, שוויצן...

Iz men baym *sharien* af tog *shoyn* geven begilufin *azoi* vi di emese klezmer
Men hot zikh *tseshtelt* zalbeakhtset, der *zeyde* berosh, un avek iz a mizmer:
A *shprayz*, un a ker mit di *pleytses*, a *svishtsh*, punkt es tantst in zump arum blitsn
Far di *shtikele* broyt – hot der *zeyde* gezogt – muz men kinderlekh, *shvitsn*....

Sibilants¹⁴⁵ are emphasized throughout this poem, but these lines contain a particularly dense condensation to imitate the swishing of the scythes through the grass in rhythm. The long lines, with a steady amphibrachic rhythm, create at once a musicality that mimics the mowing action of the men, and at times creates a melodic overtone that imitates their singing to the rhythm, or the singing of a bird in the field. In this way, Kulbak creates a paronomasic image, imitating the

¹⁴⁴ Shklovsky, “Resurrection of the Word.” *Viktor Shklovsky: A Reader*. Ed. & trans. Alexandra Berlina.

¹⁴⁵ Slavic languages, and especially Belarusian, have many more variations of sibilants than Germanic languages, which are produced in nuance in the Yiddish orthography

poetics of genesis, and producing an ideal symbolist poem is which the form and the content are intricately connected.

“The Hay is Cut” is not the only poem to feature such a synesthetic form. The other work idyll in *Raysn*, “Di Feter Itche” also has such a form. Its regular lines of trochaic trimeter, with the occasional extra stitch in some of the 6-line stanzas, mimic the sound of a sewing machine.

<p>Uncle Itche is a master tailor, Tried and true. He'll make each of your old coats Look brand new. He'll make each of your old coats Look brand new.¹⁴⁶</p>	<p>ס'האט זיך פֿעטער איטצע אויסגעלערנט שניידערני, מאַכט ער אַלטע סערמיעגעס פֿונקט, ווי שפּאַגל-ניי... מאַכט ער אַלטע סערמיעגעס פֿונקט, ווי שפּאַגל-ניי...¹⁴⁷</p>
---	---

This refrain is repeated at the beginning and the end of the poem, revealing Uncle Itche’s totem as the needle and thread. It is interesting that Kulbak uses a synesthetic form in both of the work idylls. This is perhaps to signal the primal connection in the work song that forms from the rhythmic action of the tasks. In the absence of the work rhythm, the stitching, or the scything, Kulbak has to perform the sounds in his poetry in order to create a portrait of unalienated labor and reference to a primal relationship of human language to natural sounds and rhythms.

While the Symbolist influence is felt, it is tempered by forms based on folk songs. In appropriating these folk forms for modernist purposes, Kulbak emphasizes that the folksong was an early public sphere for cultural exchange and influence. Benjamin Harshav notes that Slavic linguistic and cultural influence happened very early.

The Slavic influence on Yiddish poetry *from above* was a late one (coinciding with the adoption of t.-s. metrics), but *from the inside* the strong effect began

¹⁴⁶ The translation alternates regularly between 4 and 2 stresses.

¹⁴⁷ Moyshe Kulbak, *Naye Lider*, pp. 39.

much earlier, in my opinion, particularly in the non-artificial folksong. The formal framework obstinately remained old Germanic . . . , i.e. purely tonic, but the distance from one stress to the other increased as a result of the widening phrasal wave under the influence of the Slavic environment.¹⁴⁸

Kulbak emphasizes the Slavic linguistic element of folk song as a form of localism, and perhaps, orientalism or primitivism. In evoking the long history of cross-cultural influence in folk song, Kulbak makes an argument for local belonging and a tradition of cultural syncretism.

Kulbak's folkloric element was noticed by his contemporary, Arn Leyeles, a Yiddish poet and critic in New York. He claims that in Kulbak's shorter lyrics, "ikh bin a bokher a hultai" / "I am a Hooligan of a fellow" and "Raysish," / "(White) Ruthenian" written in the same folkloric mode as the short-line folkloric poems in *Raysn*, that Kulbak evokes the rhythms of the Russian folk epic, the Bylina.¹⁴⁹ While Kulbak does not exactly use the poetic form of the Bylina, it is important that Leyeles interprets it as such – he hears that Kulbak emphasizes the Slavic linguistic element of Yiddish in the folk song, which leads him interpret an ancient quality. So, it is not that Kulbak uses the bylina form so much as he performs a folk epic that sounds like it has an old East Slavic influence.

Harshav has noted that the influence of the bylina only comes in modernism: "the area of [the Russia Bylina's] lingering existence was far from the Jewish Pale of Settlement and did not affect the poetry directly. But the deepened appreciation of the structure of rhythmic configurations enabled Yiddish poets to penetrate even into rhythms that were historically passé and to revive them in Yiddish, too."¹⁵⁰ In *Ruthenia*, especially in poems describing the speaker's grandfather and grandmother, Kulbak's imitates slavic folk forms. It does not matter if the actual

¹⁴⁸ Benjamin Harshav, "On Free Rhythms in Yiddish Poetry," pp. 241.

¹⁴⁹ Leyeles, "Moyshe Kulbak," *Zamlbikher*, vol. 8, pp 14.

¹⁵⁰ Harshav, *Three Thousand Years of Hebrew Versification*, pp. 279.

form of the bylina is imitated in entirety, but what is important is that he creates a form that sounds like an ancient, Slavic-influenced epic, he creates the impression of bylina. The bylina is not syllabotonic, rather it is tonic, varies in stresses per line, but is generally consistent and often employs characteristic dactylic endings (ˉ˘˘). While Kulbak does not reproduce the Bylina precisely, he imitates some of its qualities, combined with other forms of folksong, in rhythm so that readers like Leyles perceive an ancient quality with an artificial performance of the Slavic linguistic element that affected medieval Yiddish by means of folklore.

The long line sections of *Raysn* can be colored by the folk influence just as well and the shorter lines. The first and eponymous section of *Raysn* is a folk inspired form with long lines. Yiddish folk stanzas in their most common form are divided into 4-line stanzas. The 12-line stanza of “Raysn” is essentially 3 folk stanzas without breaks, which emphasizes the breathless epic tone and the long cadence of the melodic phrase.

Ruthenia	רײַסן
<p>O, My zeyde from Kobilnik is a simple sort of Jew, An ordinary yokel in a sheepskin coat with a horse and hatchet ... And my father and seventeen uncles are all true And simple men, they are Jews like our own region of this planet. They drive logs down the rivers, from the woods they haul timber ... They labor day in and day out like White Rus' peasant lads, In the evening, from a singular bowl they all eat their dinner,¹⁵¹ And then, like sheaves of wheat, they fall into their beds. My Grandfather, O, my Zayde, clambers up to the top of the stove,</p>	<p>אָ, דער זײַדע פֿון קאָבילניק איז אַ ייד אַ פשוטער, אַ פויער מיט אַ פעלץ און מיט אַ האַק און מיט אַ פֿערד... און מײַנע זעכצן פֿעטערס און מײַנע טאַטע – יידן פראָסטע, יידן, ווי דער שטיקער ערד, טרײַבן פליטן אויף די טײַכן, שלעפן קלעצער פֿון די וועלדער... און דעם גאַנצן טאַג געהאַרעוועט, ווי כלאַפּעס, עסט מען וועטשערע פֿאַרנאַכט צוזאַמען פֿון איין שליסל, און מען פֿאַלט אַנידער אין די בעטן ווי די סנאַפּעס. דער זײַדע, אָ, דער זײַדע קלעטערט קוים אַרױפֿעט אויפֿן אויוון, ער איז דער אַלטיטשקער בײַם טיש אַנטשלאָפֿן געוואָרן, נאָר די פֿיס – זײַ וויסן, פֿירן זײַ אַליין אים אָפּ צום אויוון... דעם זײַדנס גוטע פֿיס, וואָס דינען אים פֿון פּמה יאָרן...</p>

¹⁵¹ A Slavic peasant tradition

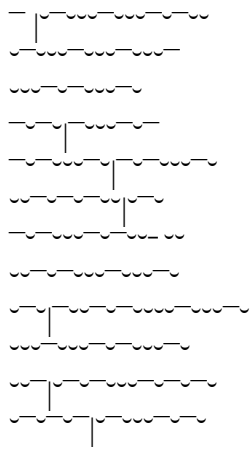
He's the old patriarch who falls asleep in his seat at the table, But his feet know how it goes: they habitually carry him up to the stove... Zeyde's soild old feet have served him since days of great fables...	
---	--

Despite the fact that Kulbak has written these 12 lines as one stanza, the folkloric stanzaic form is phonically present by the presence of archetypal folksong rhyme scheme: For the first two stanzas have respective “mana” rhyme schemes, while the third is the more formal sounding “abab.” The “mana” form with a prevalence of feminine endings are typical elements of the four-line Yiddish folksong.¹⁵² By combining the stanzas together into one, using long sentences that end in ellipses rather than periods, Kulbak creates a breathless epics feel rather than a simple, defined folksong.

The punctuation supports the long, seemingly breathless, illusion of folk-epic melodicism: there is only one period in the twelve-line stanza. Instead, there are ellipses, commas and long dashes. These punctuation marks all seem to signal the quick breath in a break in a melodic phrase. The melodic phrases do not only end in conjunction with the individual line: they are created with caesuras, which represent the poet-singer’s breath. The placement of caesura in this poem and in most of the rest of *Ruthenia* is free. It is not predetermined by a verse form, it is not consistent. This feature of the caesura creates a folk melodic tone, like a singer who has not been told the “proper” (according to classicism) place to take a breath, the singer lets the melodic phrase organically control the caesura. While this is the effect that the caesura tends to make, it is a highly conscious decision and tool for Kulbak.

¹⁵² Harshav, “On Free Rhythms,” pp. 225-226.

The stress pattern in “Raysn” is heavily peonized. Peonization, is the substitution of a four-syllable peon (˘˘˘˘) for a two-syllable iamb (˘˘), leading to a “widened phrasal wave”. Peonicity, according to Harshav, has the ability to lengthen the line, and create a “solemn, epic” fervor. It is a medium of Harshav’s “widening phrasal wave” that occurred with Yiddish linguistically through interaction with Slavic folk song.¹⁵³ Peonization is found most frequently in the poems relating to the grandparents, and has the effect of seeming old, like an unrefined folk song. To demonstrate my point, I have produced the scansion for “Raysn,” the eponymous first poem:



In the scansion above, I have not marked the weak secondary stresses, which often fall in a more or less iambic pattern. The peonicity is markedly there, or at the very least, a “widened phrasal wave” is evident. In lines 4-7, there is an erratic variation with a shift toward a trochaic rhythm, which gives a soft feeling of tonicity, or at very least the imprecision of unrefined, raw folk material. Trochaic meters are also the most common form of Russian stylization of Floksong.

¹⁵³ One could possibly argue that an increasing use of amphibrachs are also part of this “widening phrasal wave,” but the amphibrachic widening of the phrasal wave came later through Russian Modernism, and create a different effect. Though, as mentioned above, the imitation of Bylina or pseudo-bylina rhythms was also a reintroduction in Modernism.

Harshav has noted that Slavic motifs in content and melody worked their way into the Yiddish folksong before metrical influences.¹⁵⁴ This old linguistic influence produces an artificial archaization and complements the thematic content: The ancient patriarch of the family, the grandfather is portrayed as resembling a Slavic peasant and doing peasant tasks. His family eats out of one bowl, and he sleeps on top of the stove, old Slavic traditions often referenced in folksong. The grandfather here sounds like a Jewish hero of a Bylina, who is often depicted at the beginning of the story sleeping on top of the stove, a place of honor. The linguistic elements reflect this: there is a high frequency of Slavic/Belarusian words that have made it into the Belarusian dialect of Yiddish. The pseudo-bylina form emphasizes the folksiness and ancient nature of the Grandfather character. The men are “vi di shitker erd” and “vi snopes,”: they are “indigenized,” represented as if they come from the land itself, which is reflected in the form of the poem.

Both poems that feature the grandmother, “Di Bobeshi,” and “Di Bobeshi Olehasholom iz oysgegangn” feature the folkloric form of 4-line stanzas with principally four stresses and a prevalence of dactylic and hyperdactylic endings. This could be understood another example the pseudo-bylina form, as dactylic and hyperdactylic endings are a common and defining feature of Bylina metrical form. However, the Bylina was loosely tonic in nature, unlike the accentual-syllabics of Kulbaks four foot, four line folkloric stanzas. In “Di Bobeshi.” When Kulbak weaves Slavic and Biblical themes, he invokes the almost primordial and non-temporal (as folklore provides a collapse of linear time) historical-cultural moment of the seemingly organic Eastern Europeanization of Ashkenazi Jewish Culture.

¹⁵⁴ Harshav, “On Free Rhythms,” pp. 231

For reference, below is the scansion of “ Di Bobeshi Olehasholom iz Oysgegangn” for reference to the dactylic (—) and hyperdactylic (—)endings

‡

— — — — — — — — — —
 — — — — — — — — — —
 — — — — — — — — — —
 — — — — — — — — — —

— — — — — — — — — —
 — — — — — — — — — —
 — — — — — — — — — —
 — — — — — — — — — —

— — — — — — — — — —
 — — — — — — — — — —
 — — — — — — — — — —
 — — — — — — — — — —

— — — — — — — — — —
 — — — — — — — — — —
 — — — — — — — — — —
 — — — — — — — — — —

— — — — — — — — — —
 — — — — — — — — — —
 — — — — — — — — — —
 — — — — — — — — — —

In addition, here is the scansion of last stanza of “di bobeshi,” which is also characterized by hyperdactylic and dactylic endings:

— — — — — — — — — —
 — — — — — — — — — —
 — — — — — — — — — —
 — — — — — — — — — —

Kulbak emphasizes the folkloric mix of Biblical and Slavic themes and metrics in order to create a modernist epic and utopic vision Eastern Europe. He creates a pseudo-bylina artificial folk

form to convey at once a sense of ancientness, and also to represent an “ancient” Belarusian-Jewish cultural fusion. This is reflected in the thematic content of the poems as well: the Grandfather is associated with peasant tasks, yet, he is also an ancient patriarch. The grandmother, who is an ancient matriarch and even lost a child among the reeds, as if she were the mother of a Belarusian Moses, is also mourned for by the village people and even the priest. This artificial folk archaicism of form and content is particular feature of Kulbak’s modernism. The pseudo-bylina folk forms are associated with the old generation to convey the sense of ancient cultural fusion, yet also cultural distinctiveness – they are not just any Jews, they are Lithuanian Jews – the continuation of this identity functions as Kulbak’s utopic vision for a sense of cultural belonging in a future Belarusian state, whether in the independent BNR or in the Belarusian SSR.

Parochial/Folk Accented language as a Statement: Bilingualism and Slavicisms of Lithuanian Yiddish in Raysn

In addition to the manipulation of form in relation to content, the idea of Jewish belonging in Belarus is emphasized in the diction of *Ruthenia* by featuring the local dialect. The language of Raysn is characterized by its high frequency of Belarusian localisms, which, in the language of Kulbak’s characters, (“simple” Jews who lived in less densely populated areas in Belarus and in close proximity to their non-Jewish neighbors) would have been rather normal in their local dialect. Bilingualism, trilingual, or multilingualism was common, and the mixing of languages was typical of border dialects.

Kulbak uses a heavily Slavicized Yiddish and occasionally delves into bilingualism as he quotes full phrases from Belarusian. As an example, the grandfather utters “pomohay bokh” in “Men Koset Hey” / “The Hay is Cut.”

דאָ נעמט מען זיך טאָטשן די קאָסעס, פֿאַררויכערט מען, כאַפט מען אַ זופּעלע קוואַס פֿונם קריגל,
דערנאָך שטייט מען אויף מיט אַ קרעכץ... פֿאַמאָהיי באַך! אַ קלונג און עס טוט זיך די קאָסעס אַ שפּיגל...

Here they hone their scythes, take a smoke, swill kvass straight from the earthen jug,
And then they rise with a Ruthenian moan: “*Pomohay Bokh! Lord help us!*” A flurry of shimmering ringing and refraction...

After the men in the field have taken a break to sharpen their scythes and had a drink of kvas, a homemade carbonated drink made resembling soda made from dry black bread and closely tied to the Russian folk tradition, the grandfather lets out a “krekhtz,” or a moan/wail (in musical terms, an ornament such as a trill, anticipated glissando, or the like): the Belarusian phrase, “pomohay bokh.”¹⁵⁵ Literally this means “God help.” While the Belarusian phrase is uttered in an earnest appeal to God for the strength to finish cutting hay. But why does he utter this phrase in Belarusian? Could it be that he doesn’t differentiate completely between the languages as our ear does, or is it that his typical peasant task that dictates his language? Perhaps his appeal to God in Belarusian is a symbolic representation of the Slavic-Jewish cultural fusion shows itself linguistically in the Yiddish language and textually in folksong. The Slavic folk elements are not presented to clash with Jewishness in Kulbak’s mythopoetic world—it only emphasizes the family’s connection to the land and their belonging in the Slavic world that surrounds them.

¹⁵⁵ Although this phrase is the same in several Slavic languages. Here it is decidedly not only “Slavic,” as Caplan calls it, because it is clear through context that the Slavic language quoted in *Raysn* and the rest of *Naye Lider* is distinctly Belarusian.

David Roskies, in discussing the adaptation of folksong by the intelligentsia claims that this claims that the macaronic aspect did not come from outside the community, but within it. “As Yiddish was the Culture of *Yiddishkayt* the innermost reaches of the Jewish religious soul were expressed through Hasidic song. When Hasidim reached a peak of religious ecstasy, all linguistic boundaries collapsed. The fixed liturgy could no longer express the intensity of their experience.”¹⁵⁶ Kulbak’s heavily slavized Yiddish functions not only to integrate an element of the a low, regional folk register into his modernist poetry, but it often includes an element of this ecstasy expressed in linguistic collapse, resembling the function in macaronic folksong which Roskies discusses.

Another Belarusian phrase in Raysn comes in “Di Bobeshi iz Olehasholom Oysgegangen,” in which the village (“dorf”) mourns: “nema, nema yuzh staroi shlomikha,” she’s gone, she’s really gone, Shlyome’s wife”. The next line emphasizes the non-Jewish townspeople mourning of the loss of the grandmother “un oykh der pop Vasyli hot badoyrt...” / “and priest Vasyli also mourned for her...” This scene also presents an idyllic Eastern Europe in which Jews are accepted by the Christian village-folk as their own. While this depiction might be strange considering the wave of pogroms that had just swept Eastern Europe a few years earlier, the scene is symbolic rather than literal and reflects a mythic and idyllic and primordial harmony of Eastern European society, not the reality, although something akin to this scene is not quite unimaginable. The idea of the multicultural Belarusian utopia was a reality at the time and perhaps Kulbak depicts a tradition (perhaps a modern interpretation of tradition) and perhaps a hope for the future, in which local peasants understood the local Jews not as other, but as their own.

¹⁵⁶ David Roskies, *A Bridge of Longing*. Pp. 15.

The Function of Biblical Allusion: Layers of Meaning; The Collapse of Linear Time as a Fan

Itzik Manger notes an instance of defamiliarization of Biblical metaphors in *Raysn*:

“Where have I heard these familiar tones before? There’s something about this

Raysish/Belarusian river Jew that tastes of... of... Khumesh (the Pentateuch).”¹⁵⁷ Manger himself

would later adopt this style, translating the Biblical moments into the Galician landscape and

local linguistic dialect. Manger notices something integral to the meaning of Kulbak’s poem –

that his Biblical allusions are meant to indigenize the Belarusian Jews to the land. Contrary to the

19th century image of the shtetl, which used Biblical allegory to produce an ideology of

belonging to an abstract, textual landscape and its fallen form (the shtetl), Kulbak produces a

metaphor that superimposes the landscape of Genesis onto a primordial Belarusian landscape.

Kulbak expands not only on traditional conceptions of exile, but also on a Romantic and national idea of exile, particularly one that can be traced back to Mickiewicz. In the passage below from *Pan Tadeusz*, Mickiewicz superimposes a the Biblical landscape of Egypt and exodus through the equation of the Nile and the Nieman, reading the partitions of Poland as national exile.

Such were the sports and squabbles in the quiet
Of Lithuania, as the world ran riot
In blood and tears, and that man—god of war
Flanked by his armies, with cannons by the score,
His chariot drawn by eagles silver and gold,
Libyan wastes to Alpine summits sailed
Strewing thunderbolts on Egypt, Tabor’s plain,
Marengo, Ulm, Austerlitz. Triumph and gain
Proceed him and followed. His loud deeds
Resounding with names of knights, from the Pyramids
And the river Nile ran north to Nieman’s banks

¹⁵⁷ Manger, “Der Litvak un der Landshaft,” 187.

Then bounced, as if from a cliff, from Moscow's ranks,
Guarding Lithuania behind an iron screen
From glory that was for Russia like a bane.¹⁵⁸

The presentation of the geography has a dual function: it represents the movement of Napoleon's Army, which those fighting for Polish independence believed could deliver autonomy from the Russian Empire, which functions as a metaphorical Pharaoh, and it inscribes a metaphor of Biblical exile onto the Polish-Lithuanian statehood. In this passage, the Nile meets the Neiman, comparing the Lithuanian nation under the Russia Imperial rule to the Ancient Hebrews under the Pharaoh, making Napoleon into a Moses. Kulbak develops Mickiewicz's Biblical spatial metaphor in *Raysn* similarly to collapse time and interpret history in this circular fashion, but in a way that resonates anew in his language, time, and culture. It is decidedly not nationalist in the Romantic sense, rather it fits his own mix of modern socialist and pre-national Lithuanian image of a multicultural state.

Perhaps the most telling allusion, which paints the Belarusian countryside as a momentary apparition of a shard of Eden which appears to grandfather while he takes a rest from labor in "men traybt plitn"/ "The rafts are driven."

A crispness and comfort waft from pungent grassy meadows that sparkle and wail,
And the patches of fog still waft up as dreams of the fields and the plains...
And calmly the rafts float by, calmly they turn and drift around the banks,
The wagons full of straw radiate white light and steam the dew and the rain,
Grandfather lies close by... he smokes of his pipe and his eyes buzz in pleasure:
The warm earth stretched out shimmering and bountiful, robustly spread out just so,
Boxed off by the fields, some are muddy, some yellow and golden and green—
The flowing of trembling transparent flax on thin stems of amber,
The greenness on the potatoes lies cooled, duller, evaporated...
And the squat, rosy buckwheat smiles, sprinkled with white flecks —

The smells of the earth start to flow as intoxication takes hold of the limbs,
A silent life pushed through the rustling grasses, through the roots and in-between them,
When Grandfather can endure it no longer, he lets out a moan, O, he can no longer be silent,

¹⁵⁸ Adam Mickiewicz, trans. Bill Johnston, *Pan Tadeusz: The Last Foray in Lithuania*, pp. 37-38

He lets out a roar: a curse upon your father! And again farther:
A curse upon your mother! As the sons come out of the trance on the rafts,
They see the steaming colors gushing down from the fields in the streams,
Boiling over into the world from springtime and they are alone in its midst ...
Creator of Heaven and Earth! What transpires here in the fields : *that* has no name!...

This passage, in which the grandfather, who takes a break from his labor momentarily to smoke his pipe, experiences a primordial moment. He enjoys the primal scene of creation in the Belarusian landscape, rendered poetically with typical eastern European crops such as potatoes, buckwheat and flax. This moment of rest functions as a temporary Sabbath (in which one should experience a temporary heaven on earth), a pre-fall edenic harmony of crops that seems to grow themselves. Immediately after this moment of awe, the grandfather remembers and the primal curse of the fall and subsequently returns to his labor. The second stanza quoted above reenacts the primal fall of Adam and Eve, after the momentary Sabbath that performs a primordial Edenic landscape in Belarus. Kulbak's line "The silent life pushing through the rustling grasses" begins to signal the scene in Genesis right after Adam and Eve eat the apple in which they hear God coming through the grass and hide: "and they heard the sound of the LORD God walking about in the Garden in the Evening breeze, and the human and his woman hid from the Lord god in the midst of the trees of the garden," (Genesis 3:8).¹⁵⁹ In the Bible, almost immediately after this, the primal curses are pronounced. In Kulbak's poem, the grandfather produces his own, shortened versions of the curses, which are pronounced in Belarusian Yiddish dialect: "...trashtsiya in dayn tatn! Un nokhamol vider:/ Trashtsiya in dayn Mame!" which means literally: "may your Father get cholera, and still more: may your Mother get cholera!" The curse here is the curse of Adam and Eve: Adam is cursed to do manual labor, like the grandfather, and Eve is cursed with the pain of childbirth, like the grandmother. The curse also sentences the primal humans "to return to

¹⁵⁹ Robert Alter's translation

dust;” they are now mortal. This presupposes the death of the grandfather and grandmother, laments the passage of time, generations and epochs and growing distance from primordial perfection of Eden, but also setting it an ideal for a future, if only it is attainable momentarily. It is in this moment, in which the grandfather’s break from manual labor is over, his temporary sabbath concludes, that he remembers and pronounces the primal curse and returns to work.

Marc Caplan, having missed the allusion and its implications in its defamiliarized localism, claims that the grandfather “utters a Slavic curse rather than a Hebrew prayer, an inversion that further underscores the absence, perhaps the repression, of religious reference.”¹⁶⁰ Caplan has misread the statement of belonging in his misinterpretation of the localism – Kulbak’s “slavic curse” is the primal human curse, most immediately for the grandfather, the labor of driving the rafts, not the inversion of a Hebrew prayer. Having remembered his task, he remembers the primal curse and goes back to work, still enjoying the primal beauty around him. The result of the allusion is to paint the Belarusian countryside with a primordial legend, to see a spark of primordial creation in Belarus, and claim of cultural belonging that emphasizes both the particular long history of Jewish settlement in Lithuania and the general infinitude and omnipresence of nature. Kulbak understood the limitations of Judaism differently than does Caplan. Kulbak, in his time, perhaps challenged assumed traditional limitations of Jewish life in Belarus, which was rapidly transforming, modernizing and responding to cultural crises.

Like in “Men Traybt Plitn,”/ “The Rafts are Driven,” “Di Bobeshi”/ “My Grandmother” emphasizes the folkloric mix of Biblical allusions and Slavic themes in order to create a modernist epic and utopic vision Eastern Europe. When Kulbak weaves Slavic and Biblical

¹⁶⁰ Marc Caplan, “Belarus in Berlin, Berlin in Belarus,” *Yiddish in Weimar Berlin*, pp.97. Also in Marc Caplan, *Yiddish Writers in Weimar Berlin*, pp. 316

themes, he presents a seemingly organic fusion of Slavic and Ashkenazi Jewish Culture as primordial. We see that Kulbak makes this connection in Raysn not only in the blending of the themes, but also in the introduction of folksong inspired rhythms into the syllabotonic system. “Di Bobeshi,” for example, presents a Genesis-like listing of genealogy.

<p>Bobeshi had three of my uncles in the attic, Bobeshi lost two of my uncles in the reeds, Bobeshi had eleven of my uncles on the oven, Bobeshi gave birth to my father in the barn...</p>	<p>דריי פֿעטערס האָט די באַבעשי געבאָרן אויפן בוידעם, צוויי פֿעטערס האָט די באַבעשי פֿאַרלאָרן צווישן איירער, עלף פֿעטערס האָט די באַבעשי געבאָרן אויפן אויוון, מיין טאַטן האָט די באַבעשי געבאָרן אין אַ שײַער...¹⁶¹</p>
--	---

In this genealogy Kubak mixes Biblical place with folkloric and Slavic space. The uncles who she loses in the reeds immediately recall the story of Moses, while the top of the stove is a space traditionally in Slavic folklore, and as the warmest place in the house, traditionally goes to the most respected person who lives there. It is this ancient fusion to which the poetic form of *Ruthenia* points.

Conclusion: Imagined Community of Judeo-Slavic Fusion

When Kulbak weaves Slavic and Biblical themes, he invokes the almost primordial and non-temporal (as folklore provides a collapse of linear time) historical-cultural moment of the seemingly organic Eastern Europeanization of Ashkenazi Jewish Culture. This collapse of time-

¹⁶¹ “Grandmother birthed three uncles in the attic,/grandmother lost two uncles in the reeds,/grandmother birthed eleven uncles on the oven,/grandmother birthed my father in a barn...”

space presents a vision for the future of a Belarusian nation, even if it is unattainable in its hyperbolic form. No Belarus had existed in the modern form until it was formed in the treaty of Brest-Litovsk and survived for a period of a few months before it was incorporated into the Soviet Union and Poland. In the Soviet Union, Yiddish culture thrived until it was thwarted by Stalinist repression in the 30s, as the USSR reversed its policies on local nationalisms to perceive any sort of nationalism, or anything resembling nationalism (even a cultural nationalism or multicultural nationalism) as a threat to centralized Soviet power.

By creating an imaginary Eastern Europe overlaid with Biblical land of patriarchs, Kulbak is longing for a cultural syncretism that is exhibited in the open periods of Jewish cultural. While this function is rather traditional in Yiddish literature, Kulbak's writing is distinct in its localism, which is used as a device to claim belonging and a long history of cultural syncretism. Thus the poem, despite not mentioning anything modern or current, is a revolutionary poem in that it imagines a shift of paradigms towards a new cultural openness, yet a modern Jewish distinctness and cultural autonomy. This did not happen, but we should not indict Kulbak for having a vision or claim that his vision was disingenuous.

Instead, we should pay attention to the critics that read him in his time and try to understand how they interpreted his work. The field should move away from back-shadowing and try to understand these tumultuous times of intense cultural output on their own terms. As it gets further away, it is difficult to imagine this world, although in the past few years I believe that more people can understand phenomenon of an epochal shift – its instability, potential, and its disappointment.

Lamed-Vov The Mystical Epic

Richard Rorty promotes the idea that in the first part of the twentieth century, there was a “linguistic turn” in philosophy, a trend to focus philosophical inquiry on the medium of human language. This “linguistic turn” is also represented throughout European literature. Sofya Khagi has traced the theme of “linguistic skepticism” in Russian poetry to larger European philosophical discourses. While I believe that the artistic and philosophic focus on the medium of language is more than “skepticism,” Eastern European poets participated in the reevaluation of language in the context of the national and political uprisings of the time. Initially, I intended to present Kulbak’s addition to this conversation in the context of Tyuchev, Mandelshtam, Victor Shklovsky, Andrey Bely, Gershom Sholem and Walter Benjamin’s writings on Language. Because of time restraints, I did not get that far, and the following is what remains of that project to identify Kulbak’s addition to this international modernist conversation.

In this section I will discuss how Kulbak re-interprets Romantic conceptions of nature as a supernatural language. I read “Lamed Vov” (1921) with Walter Benjamin’s “On the Language of Man and Language as Such” In this reading I do not mean to claim that Benjamin and Kulbak make the exact claims about language. I also do not seek to read Kulbak through Benjamin, imposing such a reading. Kulbak’s poema, while complex, multifaceted, modernist, etc., is much clearer as a symbolic allegory than Benjamin’s text, and perhaps has more of a capacity to contextualize and elucidate Benjamin’s texts than the other way around. However, I propose that the two texts read together tell the reader something about the nature of the word as culture in an era of imperial collapse.

...

Benjamin and Kulbak briefly inhabited the same space in interwar Berlin in the early 20s, but it is doubtful that they knew of each other’s existence. Despite this, and the fact they came

from vastly different backgrounds and cultural milieus in certain works they both contemplate a similar theme: a mystical conception of language through the medium of nature. Although the pieces that I will be discussing are written in different literary forms and languages, they are united by their contemplation of the nature of human language and their approach to this problem through a re-interpretation Romantic tropes of nature as a means of secularized supernatural language.

The Romantic trend that I refer to is for the most part what M.H. Abrams called “the natural supernatural.” It is a secularization of theological thought by substituting the spiritual for the natural. The power of the Romantic poet stems from the ability to hear, interpret and translate the supernatural language of nature into the language of man. This is a language that normally is beyond human comprehension, but through special attunement to the natural world, the poet is able to tap into the supernatural realms and through the medium of nature understand divine will. It can be seen at the dawn of English Romanticism in its most programmatic poems and is prevalent in European Romanticism at large. The idea is clearly represented in the following lines by Coleridge: “And what if all of animated nature/Be but organic Harps diversely framed, /That tremble into thought, as o’er them sweeps /Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze, /At once the Soul of each, and God of all?” The Romantic duality of the city as a place of present industrial ills and nature as a timeless spiritual communion is easily translated into Marxist language of alienation. The social element of these tropes is perhaps more obvious in Modernist re-interpretations.

I will begin this discussion focusing on Benjamin’s re-interpretation of the Romantic nature language in his essays “On Language as Such and the Language of Man,” written in 1916 and not published during Benjamin’s lifetime. In *Language as Such*, Benjamin seeks to look

beyond what he calls the “Bourgeois conception of language,” which is essentially the Saussurian scientific study of language that focuses exclusively on human language as a sign system. While he does not completely dismiss this study, he ventures to describe a theologically inspired view of language that George Steiner calls as a “Gnostic conception of language.” This mystical conception of language grows out of philosophers Johann Hamann and Gottfried Leibnitz who based their theories concerning language on eclectic mystical traditions, including but not limited to Kaballah and Pythagorean teachings. Steiner claims that it is through these very same counter enlightenment thinkers that “modern rational linguistic study” emerges (73). Steiner recognizes Benjamin’s thoughts on language as a precedent to this development and rather avant-garde for his time.

Benjamin is concerned with a language beyond human language: *Sprache überhaupt*, or “language as such.” This “language as such” is distinct, yet in the same vein as the formalist/futurist “language as such” / *slovo kak takovoe*. Both contemplate a mystical level of the word that is conceived through the contemplation of primordial language. In Benjamin’s conception language is a mystically (and paradoxically) immediate and unmediated medium that flows through all things, animate or non-animate. From the first paragraph of the essay this is made relatively clear:

To sum up: all communication of the contents of the mind is language, communication in words being only a particular case of human language and of the justice, poetry, or whatever underlying it or founded on it. The existence of language, however, is coextensive not only with all the areas of human mental expression [menschlicher Geistesäußerung] in which language is always in one sense or another inherent, but with absolutely everything. There is no event or thing in either animate or inanimate nature that does not in some way partake of language, for it is in the nature of each one to communicate its mental

contents[seinen Inhalt (*note: no "geistig"*)]. This use of the word "language" is in no way metaphorical.¹⁶² (62)

This passage demonstrates Benjamin's thinking about the foundational assumptions of human language and questioning the basis on which modern linguistics are founded. In his conception, language is not limited to *human language*, but rather, in typical mystical fashion, *human language* is only one rung on a linguistic "chain of being." It is essential to note here that Benjamin's translator throughout the text chooses to translate "Geistig" as "mental," although it also could mean "spiritual," and has an element of that connotation here. In the context of a mystical language theory it would make sense to at least note that this "geistig" in the most literal sense means "spiritual." Throughout the text the translator, Edmund Jephcott, translates "geistige Wesen" as "mental essence" or "mental entity" and "sprachliche Wesen" as "linguistic essence" or "entity." These terms are crucial to the understanding of the text as Benjamin constantly questions the relationship between the *spiritual essence* and the *linguistic/speaking essence* of things. In questioning this relationship, which he views as fundamental in his own linguistic theory.

The distinction between a mental entity [geistige Wesen] and the linguistic entity [sprachliche Wesen] in which it communicates is the first stage of any study of linguistic theory; and this distinction seems so unquestionable that it is, rather, the frequently asserted identity between mental and linguistic being [dem geistigen und sprachlichen Wesen] that constitutes a deep and incomprehensible paradox, the expression of which is found in the ambiguity of the word "logos."

¹⁶² Mit einem Wort: jede Mitteilung geistiger Inhalte ist Sprache, wobei die Mitteilung durch das Wort nur ein besonderer Fall, der der menschlichen, und der ihr zugrunde liegenden oder auf ihr fundierten (Justiz, Poesie), ist. Das Dasein der Sprache erstreckt sich aber nicht nur über alle Gebiete menschlicher Geistesäußerung, der in irgendeinem Sinn immer Sprache innewohnt, sondern es erstreckt sich auf schlechthin alles. Es gibt kein Geschehen .oder Ding weder in der belebten noch in der unbelebten Natur, das nicht in gewisser Weise an der Sprache teilhätte, denn es ist jedem wesentlich, seinen Inhalt mitzuteilen. Eine Metapher aber ist das Wort »Sprache« in solchem Gebrauche durchaus nicht.

Nevertheless, this paradox has a place, as a solution, at the center of linguistic theory, but remains a paradox, and insoluble, if placed at the beginning.¹⁶³

Benjamin goes on to discuss this relationship in several different categories of language, which can generally be grouped into three categories: the language of things, the language of man, and the language of God. He sums up his thinking on language in the clearest way that he can in his final paragraph:

The language of an entity is the medium in which its mental being [*geistige Wesen*] is communicated. The uninterrupted flow of this communication runs through the whole of nature, from the lowest forms of existence to man and from man to God. Man communicates himself to God through name, which he gives to nature and (in proper names) to his own kind; and to nature he gives names according to the communication that he receives from her, for the whole of nature, too, is imbued with a nameless, unspoken language, the residue of the creative word of God, which is preserved in man as the cognizing name and above man as the judgment suspended over him. **The language of nature is comparable to a secret password that each sentry [Posten] passes to the next in his own language, but the meaning [Inhalt] of the password is the sentry's language itself. All higher language is a translation of lower ones, until in ultimate clarity the word of God unfolds, which is the unity of this movement made up of language.**¹⁶⁴

Benjamin views language as much more than communication. Language is a mystical connection in a hierarchy of being, and each division of spiritual essences has its place in this

¹⁶³ Die Unterscheidung zwischen dem geistigen Wesen und dem sprachlichen, in dem es mitteilt, ist die ursprünglichste in einer sprachtheoretischen Untersuchung, und es scheint dieser Unterschied so unzweifelhaft zu sein, daß vielmehr die oft behauptete Identität zwischen dem geistigen und sprachlichen Wesen eine tiefe und unbegreifliche Paradoxie bildet, deren Ausdruck man in dem Doppelsinn des Wortes *λόγος* gefunden hat. Dennoch hat diese Paradoxie als Lösung ihre Stelle im Zentrum der Sprachtheorie, bleibt aber Paradoxie und da unlösbar, wo sie am Anfang steht.

¹⁶⁴ Walter Benjamin, "On language as Such and the Language of Man," *Walter Benjamin: Selected writings, vol 1: 1913-1926*, pp. 74. "Demnach bleibt nach diesen Erwägungen ein gereinigter Begriff von Sprache zurück, wenn der auch noch unvollkommen sein mag. Die Sprache eines Wesens ist das Medium, in dem sich sein geistiges Wesen mitteilt. Der ununterbrochene Strom dieser Mitteilung fließt durch die ganze Natur vom niedersten Existierenden bis zum Menschen und vom Menschen zu Gott. Der Mensch teilt sich Gott durch den Namen mit, den er der Natur und seinesgleichen (im Eigennamen) gibt, und der Natur gibt er den Namen nach der Mitteilung, die er von ihr empfängt, denn auch die ganze Natur ist von einer namenlosen stummen Sprachedurchzogen, dem Residuum des schaffenden Gotteswortes, welches im Menschen als erkennender Name und über dem Menschen als richtendes Urteil schwebend sich erhalten hat. Die Sprache der Natur ist einer geheimen Losung zu vergleichen, die jeder Posten dem nächsten in seiner eigenen Sprache weitergibt, der Inhalt der Losung aber ist die Sprache des Postens selbst. Alle höhere Sprache ist Übersetzung der niederen, bis in der letzten Klarheit sich das Wort Gottes entfaltet, das die Einheit dieser Sprachbewegung ist."

chain. Nature plays a special role, even though it is at the bottom of this hierarchy and the basest form of language, closest to primordial language. It is only through *descent* into the most primordial form of language that Man can translate nature's language into his own, and perhaps ideally, but only in the messianic end of time, translate this into God's language, or what he calls in "The Task of the Translator," "pure language," "die reine Sprache."

The sentry that passes on the password that is nature's language is a mysterious image, and one worth contemplating in the context of Kulbak's *Lamed Vov*. Is there a way for man to transcend human language, and what does it mean for man to contemplate transcending human language? I wonder if this sentry is something like the character of the *Lamedvovnik* that Kulbak chooses as the focus for his poem, who transcends human language through descent into the most base, material forms of nature.

Lamed Vov, written on the eve of Kulbak's move from Vilna to Berlin in 1921, is a poem about a wandering chimney sweep from Raysn, Shmeul-Itche Koymenkerer, and his elliptical, sublime ascent from a symbolic wilderness to the gates of Eden and back to this earth. Shmeul-Itche is a "Lamedvovnik" (a *Tsaddik Nistar*, hidden righteous one; or one of the 36 righteous ones), although he himself might not be aware of this at the onset of the poem. He walks through forests guided by forces unknown to himself as the sun fades.

His movement through the forests is depicted in two symmetrical stanzas of three quatrains each, in long, flowing amphibrachic lines that vary in length, but hover around a hexameter. The third section breaks with the form created in first two sections. The long amphibrachic lines of varying length continue, but the length of the stanzas loses its rigidity. The third section is the longest of all the sections and is internally polymetric, shifting meter in a dramatic dialogue between Shmeul-Itche and Samael. The break with form established in the

first two stanzas emphasizes the temporal movement from day to night, which is made clear by the first sentence of the third section: “Night fell.” A return to a similar free flowing amphibrachic line and symmetrical stanzas returns when day breaks in the fifth section of the poema.

The third section begins with more descriptions of the natural setting and continues to emphasize the yet unnamed Shmuel-Itche’s inability to speak and subsequent pain. In this section he ventures out of the forest and into the middle of a field where an ancient well stands under two oak trees. The two trees rub against each other, evoking the kabbalistic image of the convergence of the tree of life and the tree of knowledge. Shmuel-Itche looks into the well and sees a creature, it calls to him and asks who he is. Shmuel-Itche speaks for the first time, revealing his name. Before he himself says his name, he is a nameless wander referred to as “der yid,” a folksy address that means simultaneously “the man” and “the Jewish man.”

When Shmuel-Itche utters his first words, “I am Shmuel-Itche Koymenkerer,” the meter changes from amphibrachic to iambic, and the number of feet per line decreases. It is at this moment, when Shmuel-Itche begins to reveal himself that the poem takes on the form of a dramatic dialogue with interspersed narration. The switch in meter represents a switch from an epic narration to a dramatic dialogue. The short iambic lines reflect the folksiness of Shmuel-Itche’s reply.

Shmuel-Itche reveals that he is a Chimney sweep from Raysn who spends his weekdays on the top of roofs and only comes down to earth on the Sabbath to wander through empty markets. This moment marks Shmuel-Itche’s revelation. Suddenly upon meeting the creature and pronouncing his own name, it seems as though only then he realizes his true identity, at the same time as the reader. This is a performance of the tsaddik’s “revelment and concealment.”

The creature of the well crawls out and reveals himself a Samael, the archangel of death. Samael is represented as the basest of all things, covered in moss and rotting substrate. Shmuel-Itche and Samael have a conversation in which it becomes clear that the process of Shmuel-Itche's revelation and breaking of silence is inspired by his conversation with Samael's presence. While Samael's presence makes Shmuel-Itche's body writhe in pain, instead of curse him or oppose him in any manner, he urges him to come along with him and reconcile with God. The similarity in sound between the two names Smuel (Lithuanian Yiddish)/Samuel, literally "God's name," and Samael, "venom of God" suggest a metonymic philosophical connection between the two, hinting at the primordial connection between good and evil and the kabbalistic discourse on the topic: Samael represents something within Shmuel-Itche himself as is emphasized by the muted feeling in his heart in the first sections of the poem, but Samael also represent materiality and the body. To deny the connection between good and evil and in this case, materiality and spirituality, would be a "separation of the plantings,"¹⁶⁵ a reenactment of original sin which would allow evil to triumph and go unchecked. Shmuel-Itche's entreaty to Samael is an acknowledgement that good and evil are intricately linked. This revelation is also a representation of the mystical process of "dveykes"(Yiddish) / "devekut," (Modern Hebrew)¹⁶⁶ a mystical processes by which the Baal Shem Tov was said to have communed with God himself. In this poem, it is represented as a Jewish sublime.

By the end of this section, Shmuel-Itche's wriggling in pain apparently undergoes something of an ambiguous metaphorical death in which the spirit is momentarily separated from

¹⁶⁵ Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, pp. 67-68.

¹⁶⁶ Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, pp. 203-227.

the body. The third section ends with Samael's curses and assertion that he is "ein-sof," the kabalistic infinitude that is the god-head in its totality, closing on a note of dark tension.

The fourth section of the poema depicts Shmuel-Itche's soul's sublime ascent into paradise culminating in the descent of the Merkabah, God's throne, and the dawning of morning. This section ends with the lines "Shmuel-Itche is as holy as *ein-sof* itself." These lines echo Samael's proclamation from the final stanza of the previous section: "Samael is himself ein-sof in his viscera!" This suggests the contemporaneous occurrence of the dialogue between Shmuel-Itche and Samael: While Shmuel-Itche's soul ascends, the material part of his body writhes in pain on earth. Perhaps Samael himself, at least metaphorically, is within Shmuel-Itche the whole time.

In the fifth and final section of the poem Shmuel-Itche awakes a field as the sun rises and moves on back toward a city. As he makes his way through the forest, he can now understand the languages of the grasses, flowers, and trees. According to the last line of the poem, which are the words of an old fir tree, Shmuel-Itche suffered the performance of exile, and has been relieved of its burden. The reader is left wondering where and what Shmuel-Itche is to do when he returns to the town. This is a depiction of an ascetic process of revelation, that takes place in nature, specifically by means of the forested wilderness rather than the desert wilderness.¹⁶⁷ This poema can be seen as an elaboration on the country space that Kulbak presents at the end of *The City*.

¹⁶⁷ The East Slavs localized the *medbar* of the Biblical desert wilderness to their environs: *pustyna* refers not to a desert wasteland, but a forested wilderness that functioned in religious mythology as a place of ascetic relation. Kulbak adapts this old East Slavic localization.

My interest in this poem is Shmuel-Itche's transformation from inability to understand the language of nature to understanding it as clearly as if it were human language. Language, and specifically, a mystical conception of language is crucial to the understanding of this poem.

The poema is structured temporally and spatially on a series of overlapping planes. Most distinctly, there are planes of this world and the other world. On the plane of this world, the poem progresses temporally from afternoon tonight to morning, beginning just before the sunset and ending just after sunrise. It is also organized spatially from a city to a forest to a field with the well scene back to a forest and back to a city. On the other worldly plane, there is no temporal quality, it is all an infinitely that occurs both out of time and contemporaneously with the worldly plane. There is also a juxtaposition of Shmuel-Itche to Samael in terms of space: Shmuel-Itche spend most of his life on the tops of roofs while Samael lives in the much at the bottom of a well. They meet in at the vertical midpoint, at the well, where the planes of this world and the other world collide.¹⁶⁸

The simultaneous existence of spatial and temporal planes, this worldly and otherworldly planes in "Lamed Vov" is an integral part of the structure of the poema and one of the key pieces to understanding the meaning of Shmuel-Itche's transformation in the narrative from a nameless figure into a particularized and localized lamedvovnik. Beyond that, the relationship of the material to the immaterial is central to the contemplation of mystical language.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ This reading of the spatial-temporal organization of Lamed Vov is inspired by Jordan Finkin's analysis of the space-time in *An Inch or Two of Time* but I disagree with his assessment that in the collection *Naye Lider*, which includes "Lamed Vov," "spatial or locative orientation is dominant."

¹⁶⁹ Benjamin ponders the materiality and immateriality of language, the relationship between what he calls "geistige wesen" and "sprachliche wesen," language as a media, and language as immediate. These divisions all rely on etymological punning, which Jephcott fails to render into English in any meaningful way. Benjamin performs these language games to expose a fundamental paradox in which rests 'the magic' of language.¹⁶⁹ He puns on the words *Unmittelbar* (immediate/unmediated), *Mitteilbar* (communicatable) medium, *das Mediale* (Mediation, medium (?)) to continue with the idea of the (im)possibility of language, evidently culminating the expression of the fundamental paradox of scientific linguistic theory: that language is an unmediated, immediate medium:

Both Benjamin and Kulbak build the paradox into the structure of their texts. Kulbak narrates the conflict through an allegory ripe with traditional kabalistic imagery. He must deal with the material paradox of language if he is to depict “pure language” in some sense, and Shmeul-Itche’s ascent. Kulbak, like Benjamin, views the gateway to pure language is one of translation from the lowest, from the language of the basest material form of being to the highest form of being, or from the depths of muck and the bottom of Samael’s well to God’s throne. However, representing this ideal spatially and temporally must somehow address the material paradox. Through the kabbalistic imagery of the two trees touching, Kulbak depicts the convergence of spatial and temporal planes that provides the paradoxical setting in which it is possible to depict Shmuel-Itche’s transition from the silent language of nature to mystical understanding of “pure language.”

For in language the situation is this: the linguistic being of all things is their language. The understanding of linguistic theory depends on giving this proposition a clarity that annihilates even the appearance of tautology. This proposition is not tautological, for it means, "That which in a mental [geistige] entity is communicable [mittelbar] is its language." On this "is" (equivalent to "is immediately"[unmittelbar]) everything depends. Not that which appears most clearly in its language is communicable [mittelbar] in a mental [geistige] entity, as was just said by way of transition, but this capacity for communication [mittelbar] is language itself. Or: the language of a mental [geistige] entity IS directly [unmittelbar] that which is communicable [mittelbar] in it. Whatever is communicable [mittelbar] of a mental [geistige] entity, in this it communicates itself [in dem teilt es sich mit]. Which signifies that all language communicates itself [jede Sprache teilt sich selbst mit]. Or, more precisely, that all language communicates itself in itself [jede Sprache teilt sich in selbst mit]; it is in the purest sense the "medium" [»Medium«] of the communication [Mitteilung]. Mediation [Das Mediale] which is the immediacy [Unmittelbarkeit] of all mental communication, is the fundamental problem of linguistic theory, and if one chooses to call this immediacy [unmittelbar]magic, then the primary problem of language is its magic. At the same time, the notion of the magic of language points to something else: its infiniteness. This is conditional on its immediacy [unmittelbarkeit]. For precisely because nothing is communicated through language, what is communicated in language [weil durch die Sprache sich nichts mitteilt, kann, was in der Sprache sich mitteilt,], cannot be externally limited or measured, and therefore all language contains its own incommensurable, uniquely constituted infinity. Its linguistic being, not its verbal contents, defines its frontier. (63-64)¹⁶⁹

In this quote I have included the German in brackets to expose the punning that drives this paragraph. I have also chosen to expose the German ‘geistig,’ to remind the reader that ‘geistige Wesen’ could also be translated as ‘spiritual essence.’ The performance of punning exposes the supposed paradox of language much more directly than is rendered in the English translation especially in the sentence “Mediation [Das Mediale] which is the immediacy [Unmittelbarkeit] of all mental [spiritual] communication, is the fundamental problem of linguistic theory, and if one chooses to call this immediacy [unmittelbar]magic, then the primary problem of language is its magic.” The paradox of language is simultaneous materiality and immateriality, its mediality and it’s immediate nature.

From the very beginning Kulbak hints at Shmuel-Itche's transcendence through a natural medium. Although he may be unaware, he is guided by natural means toward his fate:

א י'ד גייט ארויס אויף פֿאַרוואַקסענע שליאַכן,
פֿאַרשיפורט פֿון ריחות, פֿון קרייטעכער-זאָפֿטן און בלוי —
האַט זיך זיין שטילע נשמה געבאָדן אין טוי;
האַט זי געוואַרט אויף דער הייליקער שעה פֿון דערוואַכן.¹⁷⁰

A man takes to wandering along overgrown roads,
He's drunk on the aromas of herbage and sky blue –
His silent soul bathed itself in dew;
It laid down in wait for the holy hour of waking.

His intoxication by the earthy aromas is important here, it is not the quotidian metaphor that it seems: while it is questionable that he realizes it, the community of natural things affects Shmuel-Itche's judgement – there is some communion between the sense of smell and Shmuel-Itche's soul: his soul already expects something from the very beginning, even if he himself has not cognized that yet. The distinction between his body and his soul is also emphasized in this stanza: while his body is intoxicated, his soul bathes in dew. The forest seems to lead Shmuel-Itche towards a destination which he himself is unaware.

The keen focus on the senses, in this case smell, is an important aspect of the poem. It emphasizes the theme of perception. All of the senses play a vital role in communication, and it is not outlandish to say that an aromatic language exists even when thinking in terms of scientific linguistics,¹⁷¹ not to mention the mystical folk associations with herbs. In addition to smell sight and hearing are emphasized, but he hears and see only immaterial things.

¹⁷⁰ Moyshe Kulbak, *Naye Lider*, pp. 48.

¹⁷¹ Here I am thinking not only about animal communication in pheromones, but also semiotic associations, i.e. the ability of the smell of the ocean to remind one of their grandmother's house, and semantic meanings of aromas:, or the ability of a smell as a signifier, one smell a melon and that smell signifies its ripeness or unripeness.

At the beginning, even though Shmuel-Itche is perhaps aware of something unconsciously through mystical channels, his initial deafness to the language of nature is introduced the first two sections of the “poema.” But deafness is not the right word: the theme of silence is introduced in the beginning of the second stanza when the forests “forbid speaking.”/ “geyt zikh a yid tsvishn velder vos lozn nit redn.” Although in the last stanza he asks the stars or constellations a question that suggest he understands something of his task:

הויבט ער דעם קאָפּ צו די הימלען און פֿרעגט די מזלות:
 וואָס פֿאַר אַ שם איז פֿאַרטריבן פֿון גרויסן אין-סוף?
 ענפערט פֿאַרהלשט די זילבענער בתולה פֿון שלאָף:
 — געלויבט איז אַ פֿשרער ייד, וואָס גייט אָפֿריכטן גלות!...¹⁷²

He raises his head to the heavens and questions the constellations:
 What kind of *Shem*-Name has been driven from *ein-sof*?
 And silver-sheened Virgo subconsciously answers from sleep:
 Blessed is the Jew who is righteous and moves in observance of *Golus*!...

Could this be a rhetorical answer? Does Shmuel-Itche hear the answer of the constellations? It is important to note here that “*mazoles*” can also mean “fate,” and the zodiac, which is part of the mystic tradition. In that case the answer is at once benign and insightful. “*Oprikhtn Goles*” refers to a Hasidic tradition of wandering, recalling the Ba’al Shem Tov’s journeys, and perhaps a celebration of *golus*. On one hand, he could be “performing exile” in his wandering, but on finishing the poem it is made clear that this refers to the process that Schmucl-Itche undergoes as a lamedvovnik.

It is possible that Shmuel-Itche understands the language of the natural world all along, even if in an intuitive mystical way, but by the end of the poema he is able to understand the language of nature as clear as if it were human speech. In the second section there is a stanza which shows Shmuel-Itche’s initial inability to fully perceive the language of when juxtaposed to

¹⁷² Moyshe Kulbak, *Naye Lider*, pp. 48

their echoes in the final lines of the poema. These lines signal that although the language of nature eluded him in the beginning, he is still subject to it unconsciously.

א וועוועריקל וויגט זיך אין וואַלד — גייט דער ייד, הערט עס אויף זיך צו וויגן,
א פייגעלע זינגט אויף א צווייג — גייט ער דורך ווערט עס פלוצים אַנטשוויגן,
דער בוים בויגט זיך איבער צום בוים, ס'ווערט א צווייג און א צווייג אינגעפֿלאַכטן
עס טריפֿט רויטער שנין פֿון דער זון, וואָס זעט אויס, ווי געשאַכטן...¹⁷³

A squirrel in the forest sways — the man takes a step, and it ceases to sway,
A bird on a branch sings — and through it he walks and quickly it fades,
A tree bends over a tree and branch is entwined in branch
The sun flows with red rays and it looks like a ritual slaughter...

Shmuel-Itche's movement follows these sounds, perhaps not comprehending them, but by the end of the poema he understands them as clearly as human language:

ער איז אַרײַן אין וואַלד, האָט אים אַ ליבליכקייט אַרומגענומען;
עס האָבן זיך געשושקעט גרעזעלעך מיט שלאָפֿנדיקע בלומען,
ווי ס'שושקען זיך באַגינען יונגע כרובימלעך אין הימל,
און ר' שמואל-איצע האָט געהערט, און ר' שמואל-איטצע האָט פֿאַרשטאַנען:
עס האָט אַ בלימעלע געפֿרעגט: פֿון וואַנען גייט אַ ייד, פֿון וואַנען? ...
אַן אַלטע יאָדלע האָט געטאָן אַ צווייג צום בלימל:
ר' שמואל-איצע לאַמעדוואָוניק גייט, וואָס איז שוין גלות אָפֿגעקומען...¹⁷⁴

He went into the forest, an affability embraced him;
The grasses whispered between themselves with sleeping flowers,
Like the young cherubim at dawn whisper in the heavens,
And Shmuel-Itche heard, and Shmuel-Itche understood:
A bloom asked: From where do you come? Where from? ...
An old fir tree quickly turned a branch to the bloom:
Shmuel-Iche the Lamedvovnik walks, because he has fulfilled *golus* ...

After his ascension, he is met with a nature's speech as he travels through the forest where before, he was met with silence. The last line echoes the refrain in the first two sections: except now Smuel-Itche has "completed (Biblical) exile." / "reb smuel-itche lamedvovnik geyt, vos iz shoyn opgekumen!" This phrase is rendered in the past perfect, completion is emphasized

¹⁷³ Moyshe Kulbak, *Naye Lider*, pp. 49

¹⁷⁴ Moyshe Kulbak, *Naye Lider*, pp. 61

in the “shoyn.”/ “already.” His ability to understand the language of nature at the end of the poema is clearly a result of completing the “performance/observance of exile,” at the center of which involves Shmuel-Itche’s ascension to Eden in a depiction of the Hasidic concept of “dveykes,” communion with God through material means. *Golus* in this case represents man’s separation from nature. In the process of uniting with nature, he is able to understand the language of the natural world, and momentarily unite with *ein-sof*, a mystical infinity that is central to the mystical conception of God.

Kulbak represents this act through Smuel-Itche’s conversation with Samael, who is portrayed as the lowest, earthiest, most material creature: He climbs out of the bottom of the well as a pile of rotted slop with lids drooping over eyes and an unbearable rotting earthy stench. It is in this conversation that Shmuel-itch suddenly reveals is a Lamedvovnik. Until Shmuel-Itche converses with Samael, he is nameless, he is silent. In the breaking of silence, enforced by the formal break of situation a dramatic dialogue in the middle of the poema, Kulbak situates language itself in the center of this of Smuel-Itche’s revelation. Benjamin also views language as crucial to the process of revelation:

...the equation of mental and linguistic being is of great metaphysical moment to linguistic theory because it leads to the concept that has again and again, as if of its own accord, elevated itself to the center of linguistic philosophy and constituted its most intimate connection with the philosophy of religion. This is the concept of revelation. Within all linguistic formation a conflict is waged between what is expressed and expressible and what is inexpressible and unexpressed. (66)

Shmuel-Itche, the Lamedvovnik who lives on roofs and representation with that which is spiritual on earth, until his meeting with Samael, has been struggling with that which is precisely inexpressible, and suddenly, upon his meeting with Samael, the basest

and most material function, is able to perform the Hasidic ritual of “dveykus,” as the Baal Shem Tov was reported to do, and ascends to the sublime heights, across the sea.

During the process of revelation, Shmuel-Itche suffers a (perhaps) metaphorical death, which he describes to Samael:

But I know one thing is so... one becomes larger than one's self..
This is when man's speech becomes entirely superfluous,
The soul casts off its old worn garments,
And suddenly one feels: the soul lives too quickly...
It's thought it devours that of the life of dozens of people,
who move around on the earth, they are only preparing to die,
the heart bursts into song, begins to pray piously and bless
the *ein-sof* of twilight and sunrises in all of the myriad hues...
a song swells from the trees, from stones and from creatures,
and slowly from the pendulum of some ancient clock
each one mumbles to the Name of the world in its very own manner:
the stone sings with shame, the water leaps in cold gestures;
the bird pleads in a bitter-crying voice,
and the forests burst into deep roars, such deep roars - - -
and at once –
life is liberated and sent toward a holy shore,
on a joyous path, on a bright and cheerful path - - -
Samael, come with us, set sail with us, with the holy current
To the eternal threshold.

נאָר כ'ווייס פֿון איינע אַזאַ... מען ווערט גרעסער פֿאַר זיך...
און יעמאַלט גאָר איבעריק ווערן די מענטשישע רייד,
עס וואָרפט די נשמה אַראָפּ איר פֿאַרעלטערטע קלייד,
און פּלוצלים דערפֿילט מען: עס לעבן די נשמה צו גיך...
מען מיינט, זי פֿאַרצערט דאָס דאָס לעבן פֿון צענדליקער מענטשן,
וואָס גייען אַרום אַויף דער ערד, נאָר זיי גרייטן זיך שטאַרבן,
ס'צעזינגט זיך דאָס האַרץ, הויבט אָן הייליק צו דאווענען און בענטשן
דאָס אין־סוף פֿון שקיעות און זריחות אין אַלערליי פֿאַרבן..
און איטלעכער מורמלט צום שם פֿון דער וועלט אַויף זיין אייגענעם שטייגער:
דער שטיין זינגט מיט בושא, די וואָסערן ספּרינגען אין קאַלטע העוויות;
דאָס פֿייגעלע בעט אַויף אַ וויינענדיק-ביטערע קול,
און די וועלדער צערעווען זיך טיף, אַזוי טיף – – –
מיט אַ מאָל –
עס לאָזט זיך דאָס לעבן אַוועק צו אַ הייליקן ברעג,
אין אַ גליקליכן וועג, אין אַ פֿרייליכן וועג אין אַ העלן – – –
סמאל, גיי מיט, שוויים מיט אונדז, מיט דעם הייליקן שטראָם

Here Shmuel-Itche describes the language of nature, the basest form of material media (language is also media), and here is it associated with death - with the return of the material body to the material world, and in this process Shmuel understands the language of nature for the first time: All of nature laments for him. It is precisely this move to the lowest material language medium that allows Shmuel-Itche to ascend in the next section of this poem. This movement is the Yiddish sublime according to Kulbak.

Kulbak's contemplation of what Benjamin would call "pure language" is presented to us through movement of the lamedvovnik from his inability to understand nature to understanding it as if it were human language. The image of the Lamedvovnik for Kulbak is inextricably linked with poetry and artistic expression. Kenneth Moss has linked Kulbak's lyrical persona with the nationalist undertones of the Romantic poet-prophet figure (Moss 97). But there is another level to Kulbak's lyrical person where Benjamin's essay overlaps with the previously quoted depiction of the language of nature in helps clear up:

It is a metaphysical truth that all nature would begin to lament if it were endowed with language (though "to endow with language" is more than "to make able to speak"). This proposition has a double meaning. It means, first, that she would lament language itself. Speechlessness: that is the great sorrow of nature (and for the sake of her redemption the life and language of man—not only, as is supposed, of the poet—are in nature)...(72-73)

The last line of this quote seems to be a rejection of the idea that Romantic dialogues between the poet and nature are solely about the poet's moral authority as a prophet but claims that the relationship of the Romantic poet towards nature could be construed as representative of the nature of human speech in general. Benjamin locates the Romantic trope in a longer line of

¹⁷⁵ Kulbak, *Naye Lider*, pp. 56.

mystical thinking about nature in a hierarchy of language. For him this goes beyond lending authority to a prophetic mode and the politics connected with literature, but of larger, fundamental concerns about “Language as Such.”

Both of Kulbak and Benjamin argue a place for the mystical in rationalism and conversely a place for rationalism in mysticism. Their goal is both to synthesize these two poles and to juxtapose them. Continuing the collapse of neo-classical genres systems that began with Romanticism and combining seemingly disparate elements. We see in Benjamin and Kulbak the chaotic poetics of *Tsimtsum* and the combination of disparate elements stylistically and ideologically.

What can we make of their simultaneous contemplation of language through these means but from very different positions? How can we understand their impossible approach and desire to lift the veil of language; to imagine transcending human language, almost simultaneously and in the same location most likely unaware of each other’s existence. And what do we make of the medium of their expressions of impossible longing for a “pure language”?

In *Lamed Vov*, Kulbak engages in the transcultural European Modernist discourse surrounding the tensions between scientific and mystical conceptions of language. In Yiddish, he is able to appropriate mystical kabbalistic linguistic theory as folkloric material. Because of the particular nature of Yiddish, Kulbak is able to bring the discourse of high-culture into his localized Yiddish dialect. To enter into the discourses on Modernist language mysticism in Yiddish provides an interesting perspective and perhaps can be considered connected to the mystical connection between language and folk in Romantic nationalism. Does the concept of a “universal (reine) language,” create space for world literature as opposed to national literature and privilege the concept of human over nation? Regardless of the answer, discussion of the

language question in Yiddish raises the status of Yiddish itself by entering into the dialogue of world literature.

Chapter 2 : Dovid Hofshateyn's *Along Roads* and the Modernist Elegiac Lyric Landscape

Dovid Hofshateyn, in his first collection of poetry, *Bay Vegn / Along Roads* (1919), is a poet who responds to a cultural and national inflection point. He searches deep ancestral time for a way to respond to such a shift. Hofshateyn was a poet primarily concerned with poetics and a human means of interpretation of the word, but this does not mean that his highly constructed, aestheticized poems do not address social issues or have any political resonances. In much of the scholarship in English, emphasis has been placed on Hofshateyn and other Eastern European poets who ended up in the Soviet Union for a time as *Soviet* Yiddish poets, but often upon closer expectation of their works we can see that the subject matter of their works is much more complicated than the distillation into a given political ideology. This is particularly evident in *Along Roads*, which is primarily occupied by the discussion of the individual human mind and its relationship to the material world and tensions between subjective and objective realities. Hofshateyn's modern reinvention of Romantic individualism marks a shift away from the traditional theme of collective struggle that was the theme of late 19th century Russian and Yiddish language poet, Simyon Frug, for example. I do not mean to suggest that Hofshateyn was opposed to collective struggle for liberation in Eastern Europe or otherwise elsewhere, but that he presents liberation of the individual as a means to collective liberation; a statement akin to "none but ourselves can free our mind." Hofshateyn's project sought to retain a sense of individual positionality and not venture into the collective lyric mode of a national prophet. He accomplished this by creating a highly constructed literary Yiddish in complex European poetic

forms, particularly (but not limited to¹⁷⁶) the highly composed forms that were the ideal of Russian Acmeism.

Hofshteyn's artistic craft has often been misunderstood by contemporary American Yiddish scholars who claim that his style is "anti-poetic"¹⁷⁷ or that the poems in *Along Roads* are "promising but unripe sheaves of wheat."¹⁷⁸

Chana Kronfeld's claim of anti-poeticism applies a trend of Modernist Hebrew poetic to Hofshteyn's Yiddish poetry, but Yiddish and Hebrew faced different challenges due the traditional registers associated with each language. In the sacred language of Hebrew, it was difficult to find a tone that was not elevated and seemingly artificial. Kronfeld's emphasis on anti-poeticism reflects a modernist aesthetic trend in Hebrew – to make the sacred language flow in a relatable, colloquial fashion. Yiddish, the vernacular, had the opposite challenge. In Hofshteyn's poetry, the goal was to elevate the status of the Yiddish language, the humble vernacular that only in the twentieth century began to be publicly accepted as an actual language of Jews as opposed to a *Zhargon*, a rag-tag mix of border languages. Hofshteyn wrote in Russian and Ukrainian, and later Hebrew, but he chose to write in Yiddish for a specific purpose. The project to elevate the status of Yiddish as a language to that of high culture is an acceptance and exhalation of the syncretic language of Jewish Exile, and it reflects the content of the poem that, contrary to tradition, characterizes Eastern European *golus* as a material reality rather than a fallen ideal of a material unattainable, distant Zion, a home accessible only through text.

¹⁷⁶ Hofshteyn's long poem "Di Shtot," presents a more expressionist poetics that is perhaps less characteristic of acmeist precision and more representative of emotionally charged Expressionism, similar to eponymous poems by Kulbak and Markish. Expressionist style seemed to be connected to an urban aesthetic.

¹⁷⁷ Chana Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism*, pp. 210.

¹⁷⁸ Kenneth Moss, *Jewish Renaissance in the Russian Revolution*, pp. 46.

Moss's aesthetic characterization of *Along Roads* as "unripe" diminishes the aesthetic intricacy of Hofshiteyn's poetry. His poems are highly conscious and constructed artistic objects that focus on the Yiddish language as such, or at the very least, this seems to be the proclamation which is supported by his contemporary literary criticism. The poems strive to present an artistic phenomenon of language that opposes the simplification of superficial political language and claims, rather, it focuses on the phenomenon of the fundamental ambivalence of human experience and the human condition, the primal connection of thesis and antithesis, the metaphysics of human existence on the brink.

In this chapter, I base my analysis and of Hofshiteyn's poetry on the literary criticism of Hofshiteyn's circle, namely Yekhezkel Dobrushin and Nokhem Oyslender, who in their own time explained how to read Hofshiteyn's poetry to their contemporaries. Their articles are rather short and open ended, and require some translation and elaboration for the modern reader. I expand outward from their work to approach the meaning, in as much as possible, of Hofshiteyn's difficult and obscure verse as it was understood in its own time. Dobrushin and Oyslender, as native speakers and close interlocutors of Hofshiteyn, understood his poetry in context in a way that no contemporary scholar or critic could: they experienced Hofshiteyn's poetry as a phenomenon. Their essays on Hofshiteyn provide valuable insight into how Hofshiteyn's poetry was conceived to be read in its context. Without their work, it would be difficult to understand the meaning and importance of Hofshiteyn's project. Their work functions as a point of departure for my work – they reveal certain keys to reading Hofshiteyn's poetry, but there is much that they leave to be developed by future readers.

Biography and Poetic Persona, A Modern Reincarnation of Subjectivity of the Romantic Lyric Poet

Dovid Hofshiteyn is a poet most closely associated with the “Kyiv group” of Yiddish modernist poets. He was born in the small town of Koroshyshev in then-western Kyiv Province, just east of Zhitomir. As a child he moved to a farm in the village of Yasnogorod, then in the eastern part of then-Volin(Volhyniya) province, on the western side of Zhitomir. Both villages are in present day Zhitomir province. Having received a traditional Jewish education in the countryside, he moved to Kyiv in 1907, around the age of 18, to study at a Russian gymnasium, after which he studied at the Polytechnique Institute and sat in on classes at the university.¹⁷⁹

In 1923 he briefly moved to Moscow before emigrating to Berlin, following ideological accusations of being a “fellow traveler,” like many avant-garde artists in the Soviet Union at the time, and his support for Hebrew language education in the Soviet Union. From Berlin, Hofshiteyn immigrated to Palestine, where he stayed until 1927, before returning to the Soviet Union. His return to the Soviet Union was not ideological – he had two sons (whom he mentions in several poems throughout his career, in Yiddish and in Hebrew) who had lost their mother while Hofshiteyn was abroad. Hofshiteyn lived in the Soviet Union until he was executed in 1952 on the “night of murdered poets,” for his involvement in the Jewish anti-Fascist committee. As Gennady Estraiikh notes, the circumstances of Hofshiteyn’s death often eclipse his poetry in scholarly discussion.¹⁸⁰ This chapter is an attempt to foreground Hofshiteyn’s art.

¹⁷⁹ Joseph Sherman, “David Hofstein,” *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, vol. 333. And Berl Kagan, comp., *Leksikon fun Yidish-Shraybers* (Biographical dictionary of Yiddish writers) (New York, 1986), cols. 212-13. Trans. Joshua Fogel <https://yleksikon.blogspot.com/2016/02/dovid-hofshiteyn-david-hofstein.html>

¹⁸⁰ Gennady Estraiikh, *From Yehupetz Jargonists to Kiev Modernists: The Rise of a Yiddish Literary Center. 1880s - 1914*, pp. 17.

Hofshteyn's early poetry begins the development of a lyric personae that mingles meaningfully with certain facts of the author's biography. The mingling of the poet's life and art (poetic self-mythologization) is a device that Svetlana Boym discusses in "*Death in Quotation Marks*," focusing on the biographical element in the poetry in Russian Modernist poets Vladimir Mayakovsky and Marina Tsvetaeva.¹⁸¹ Hofshteyn too creates a poetic persona and self-mythologization in his poetry, inserting biographical experiences into the poetry itself, from his service in the Tsarist army from 1912-13 in the Caucasus in the cycle "Caucasus" to the image of his sons playing "like wolves" in "Nemen"/ "Names".

Names	בעמען
<p>My children play like little wolves, Both of them like pups of wolf: The eldest is named Shamay – As my zeyde was named, a half-blind old man in a deaf shtetl, And Hillel is the name of the other... Another name awaited On the nearby rung of the shady ladder, But I noticed, from the center of the wide world, From the seething chaos, There I noticed The holiness from my tender years floating over ancient nests of mildew— And one is named Shamay The other is named Hillel...</p>	<p>ווי קליינע וועלפעקאך זיך שפילן מיינע קינדער, ווי קליינע וועפעלאך נאך ביידע: דער עלטסטער שמאי הייסט – אזוי געהייסן האָט מיין זיידע אין טויבן שטעטעלע אַ זקן האַלב אַ בלינדער, און הלל הייסט דער צווייטער... אַן אַנדער נאָמען האָט געוואָרט אויף שטאַפל נאָהענטן פֿון שאַטנדיגן לייטער, נאָר איך פֿון מיט פֿון וועלט פֿון ברייטער, פֿון זודיגן געווימל האָב פֿלוצים דאָרט דערזעהן, ווי ס'שוועבט דער הויך פֿון צאַרטע יאָרן מיינע דאָרט איבער אַלטן נעסטן-שימל – און שמאי איינער הייסט און הלל הייסט דער צווייטער...</p>
<p>My children play like little wolves, Both of them like pups of wolf: And one scratches the other with an evil gaze of wild flame, And I... I look with a muted glance From my blind heart,</p>	<p>ווי קליינע וועלפעלאך זיך שפילן מיינע קינדער, ווי קליינע וועלפעלאך נאך ביידע, און דראָפען איינס דאָס צווייטע פֿון ביזן קוק מיט פֿייערלאַך מיט ווילדע. און איך, איך קוק מיט בליקן איינגעשטילטע פֿון האַרץ פֿון בלינדן, ווי אַלטע נעמען קינקלען זיך, ווי קליינע וועלפעלאך, ווי קנולן יונגע גליקן...¹⁸²</p>

¹⁸¹ Synchronically, this locates Hofshteyn's use of poetic self-mythologization as a modernist gesture, but diachronically, it is a revival and variation of a device typical of Romanticism, and reiterates that poetic language.

¹⁸² Dovid Hofshteyn, *Bay Vegn*, pp. 64-65.

As ancient names circulate Like wolve pups, like the joys of youth curled up...	
---	--

In “Names,” Hofshteyn gives a poetic explanation of the naming of his sons, Hillel and Shamay, explaining that they named traditionally after relatives and ascribing process of mystical pseudo-reincarnation, presenting the tradition as a form of linguistic magic that reflects natural cycles. These are also the names of two sages in the Talmud that represent two schools of interpretation of Biblical law. Competing interpretations and perceptions is a theme in Hofshteyn’s poetry that points towards a larger theme of metaphysical human ambivalence and an ancient, mystical chaos that has to do with the coexistence of good and evil.

These natural cycles of life and the tensions implied in them constitute a major theme in *Along Roads*. Natural cycles, from sunrise to sunset, birth to death, etc. are presented not only as abstract concepts representing a grand metaphor; they contain a personal in the context of the poet’s life, who understands human history as a natural cycle. The creation of the semi-autobiographical poetic self is meant to explore larger questions about the nature of the human mind and its interaction with the physical world, particularly through language. The personal in the poem above, is put into the context of the eternal – while Shamay is named after the poet’s grandfather, which is the traditional practice of naming a child after a deceased relative. The naming of Shamay, then, signifies a traditional cycle of cultural renewal and continuity. The naming of Hillel, by contrast, is represented as coming from some ancient primordial source and is oppositional to Shamay in that the name is not a known relative, but a decided contrast. While the naming reflects the continuation of tradition, it also accounts for differing interpretations of tradition.

In *Along Roads*, Hofshteyn's poetry engages in a modernist game of poetic self-mythologization that creates meaning through the dialogue created with Russian Romanticism, which often sought to examine the subjectivity of the human condition. Hofshteyn's poetic mythologization creates a dialogue between himself and "world poetry," and most directly with the Russian Romantics. Ultimately, Hofshteyn presents the perspective of a Yiddish poet as subject to the Russian empire in its final days (or death throes) and juxtaposes that perspective to the subjectivity of the Russian Romantic poets (particularly Russian Romantic individualism) and their complicated poetic relations with the Russian Empire. Hofshteyn presents his own relationship with the Russian Imperial literature that he grew up on, and writes himself into the Imperial dialogue, creating his own, unique position as an individual and a Jewish subject of Empire who desires liberation.

Hofshteyn's military service in the Russian Imperial army is a particular aspect of his biography that provides background for this book. He served in the Caucasus in 1912-1913, the same years he wrote some of his poems in the Caucasus cycle. Hofshteyn joined the army at a time when many young Jewish men were serving in the army as a national statement of belonging in the empire, at a time of antisemitic right-wing vitriol that questioned Jewish loyalty to the state and service in the military. This trend was contrary to the 19th century, military service as a medium of Russification.

Mandatory conscription began in 1827 with an enlistment period of 25 years, and Jewish communities had to choose whom to send off to the army, often sending those who existed at the bottom strata of society. A conscript to the Russian army was technically free to observe religious holidays if it did not interfere with service; however, in practice, the conscript was removed from Jewish community and traditional religious study all together. Throughout the

19th century, the conscription laws and laws about serving in the military lessened in severity. For example, Hofshteyn served for only one year (1912-13) instead of the 25 that conscript serves in the beginning of the 19th century. Jews at the beginning of the 20th century served in higher proportions than non-Jews and far-right ideologues argued that Jews should not be able to serve in the military, citing anti-Semitic arguments of Jewish disloyalty or unfitness for service.¹⁸³ At the time that Hofshteyn served in the army, it was more possible to retain a sense of Jewishness while participating secular Russian society.

Hofshteyn's military service is not mentioned directly in *Along Roads*, though the cycle "Kavkaz," dated 1912, corresponds to Hofshteyn's own military service in the Caucasus the same year, and poems like "di zun hot haynt fun nayem pantser maynem..."¹⁸³ "Today the sun brazed the last..." in which imagery of the poet girding himself with sword and armor reflect a poeticized biographical reality of serving in the military. A curious feature of the book, however, is the overlap of the biographical detail of military service with the fact that Hofshteyn presents his lyrical personae traveling not as a soldier, not as one in a collective, or as a collective speaking in unison, but a lone wanderer in a tradition of wandering, while searching for his own personal liberty, his own individual poetic voice. This aspect of his poetical persona is a development and dialogue with the Romantic wanderer archetype as well as the traditional wanderer archetype.

Hofshteyn's mingling of biography and his art reflects characteristic tensions in his poetry between fiction and non-fiction, the collective and the individual, Romanticism and

¹⁸³ Petrovsky Shtern, Yohanan. "Military Service in Russia." https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Military_Service_in_Russia. See also Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern (Iokhanan Petrovskii-Shtern), *Evrei v russkoi armii, 1827–1914* (Moscow, 2003); Litvak, Olga *Conscription and the Search for Modern Russian Jewry*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006)

Modernism, Russian Romantic Nationalism and the Yiddish Cultural Renaissance, so as to weave together those things that are perceived as diametrically opposed – to create an objectivity that straddles an abyss.

Kyiv: An Ephemeral Apparition of a Multilingual, Multicultural Avant-garde of Imperial Culture.

In order to understand the Yiddish literary culture of the early-twentieth century Kyiv, it is important to first understand its beginnings as a Yiddish literary center in the 19th century, and its position as a growing and bustling center of Russian Imperial Culture. Gennady Estraikh characterizes Kyiv as an emerging center of Eastern European Jewish culture in the 19th century, which by the early 20th century rivaled Warsaw and Vilna, the 19th century centers of Jewish literary culture.¹⁸⁴ Although Jews were excluded from settling in the city of Kyiv for most of the 19th century without special permissions, its location on the eastern edge of the Pale of Settlement in combination with the commercial opportunities and imperial culture made it an attractive city to live in, legally or illegally, rich or poor. As an imperial center, 19th century Kyiv's small Jewish population attracted wealthy industrialists, most notably the Brodsky family, who supported the local maskilim in their literary and cultural endeavors. It was in this environment where Sholem Aleikhem and his "sages" laid the early foundations of a Jewish literary culture in Kyiv.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ Estraikh, "From Yehupetz Jargonists to Kyiv Modernists," pp. 23-28.

¹⁸⁵ Gennady Estraikh, "From Yehupetz Jargonists to Kyiv Modernists," pp. 21-23.

In addition to cultural and economic draws, the growing metropolis offered opportunities for education for Jews (though restricted), including St Vladimir University and The Polytechnic Institute (funded by the Brodskys). The city was one of the most literate in the Russian Empire. Estraikh traces a shift of the printing industry from Vilna to Kyiv in the 20th century, proposing that the shift was due to the state of educational and literary culture. In Vilna the University was closed by the Russian government in the 1830's for political reasons, while Kyiv had several universities that allowed some Jews to study there, despite a strict quota system. Estraikh characterizes Vilna as a cultural backwater compared to the growing and bustling Imperial city of Kyiv during the first years of the 20th century.

Many of the anti-Jewish official restrictions eased in the second half of the 19th century (though not completely, and not antisemitic sentiment and pogroms) making it easier for Jews to move to and live in the city, enabling Kyiv to transform into a capital of Jewish Modernist art in a variety of mediums and languages in the 20th century. However, it was not only the Jewish population of Kyiv that grew: so did the city as a whole. During the second half of the 19th century the city was undergoing processes of modernization and Russification that continued into the 20th century. The city was well on its way to becoming an Imperial cultural capital.¹⁸⁶

Kyiv in the 20th century was an emerging cultural center of a multicultural, multilingual avant-garde art scene that sought to compete with the wealthier, more established, and more “Russian” (Muscovite), cultural capitals of the Russian Empire—Saint Petersburg and Moscow. Perhaps it was exaltation of the aesthetic object that characterized late imperial culture and a multicultural, multilinguistic atmosphere of Kyiv that allowed Yiddish modernism to briefly

¹⁸⁶ Michael Hamm, “‘Special and bewildering’: A Portrait of Late-Imperial and Early Soviet Kyiv,” *Modernism in Kyiv: Jubilant Experimentation*, pp 16.

thrive in that city. The effort to establish Ukrainian as an official state language and elevate its status beyond that of a “peasant language” spoken in the country was no doubt inspiring to the Yiddishist who also sought to elevate Yiddish to the status of “high culture”. Irena Makaryk describes the “fertile cross pollination” that characteristic of the multicultural avant-garde culture(s) that existed in early 20th century Kyiv and suggest that modernist art from Kyiv can challenge some assumptions about the nature of modernism made from the study of (more) western literatures.¹⁸⁷ The collection of essays in *Modernism in Kyiv: Jubilant Experimentation* focuses on Kyiv as a brief capital of multicultural modernisms, focusing on the Russian, Ukrainian, Yiddish avant-garde movements in Kyiv.

Hofshteyn belonged to a generation that was much less cut off from Russian culture than his predecessors. Russian Imperial culture at the time, despite widespread antisemitism in cultural and imperial policy, was more open to its Jewish subjects than it had been in the 19th century. Hofshteyn was part of the ephemeral multi-lingual, multi-ethnic modernism that was a particular feature of culture in Kyiv in the years leading up to the Revolution and Civil War that followed it.

In the climate of rising Imperial literary culture in Kyiv, a new, distinctly modern literary culture in Yiddish was born. Nokhem Oyslender left memoirs of the Yiddish literary scene in Kyiv in the 20th century, before the First World War. He centers his recollections on the young poet Osher Shvartzman, who he understood as a visionary leader of the Kyiv Yiddish literary scene. Shvartzman died young fighting for the Red Army in 1919 and was often memorialized by the poets and critics of the Kyiv circle as a forerunner and leader of the young literary scene.

¹⁸⁷ Irena Makaryk, “Modernism in Kyiv: Jubilant Experimentation.” *Modernism in Kyiv: Jubilant Experimentation*, pp. 22.

Shvartzman was Hofshsteyn's cousin, and the two poets were very close.¹⁸⁸ Shvartzman was heavily influenced by symbolist poetry, particularly Aleksander Blok and Khaym Nakhman Bialik. His landscapes of the Ukrainian countryside invite a textual comparison to Hofshsteyn's landscapes. Hofshsteyn occasionally develops Shvartzman's themes.

Nokhem Oyslender recalls his first visit, as a teenager in 1910, to meet a young Dovid Hofshsteyn, who was then finishing his studies at the gymnasium in Kyiv. Oyslender himself was a teenager at the time. His memory was fitting for an introductory portrait of a poet: at night Shvartzman led him down to Hofshsteyn's room in Podol, the poorer section of Kyiv at the bottom of the hill in the river floodplain with a significant Jewish population. Oyslender had never been to that part of town before. They visited Hofshsteyn in his small apartment, where he read them poems in Russian. In another place in his memoir, he recalls that writing in Russian held a certain status among the young Jewish poets of Kyiv at the time.

האָפֿשטיין האָט שוין דעמולט, דאַכט זיך, געשריבן אויך יידישע לידער, נאָר געלייענט האָט
 ער אין אָט דעם אָווענט בלויז די רוסישע. ער האָט זיי שוין געהאַט ניט קיין ווייניק.
 עס האָט זיך מיר פֿאַרגעדענקט אַ ליד וועגן דער יאַמ־טיפּ, אַ ליד וועגן ווייטן אוראַלט, וווּ
 עס איז געווען אַזאַ שורע:

И мой пращур далекий -- дикарь-людоед...

אין די לידער האָט זיך געלאָזט הערן דער פּאַטאַס פֿון שטאַרקן גלויבן אינעם מענשלעכן
 פֿאַרשטאַנד, אין זיין אַלעמעכטיקייט און אַלגיטיקייט אין אַלע צייטן--אַפֿילע אין ווייטן אוראַלט. די
 לידער זיינען ניט געווען לייכט, זיי האָבן געפֿאָדערט אַ געוויסע אָנשטרענגונג באַם צוהערן זיי, אָבער
 די פֿילאָסאָפֿישע אַנלאָדונג האָט דאָך ניט אָפּגעשוואַכט דעם לירישן געפֿיל, נאָר פֿאַרקערט,
 געשטאַרקט אים.¹⁸⁹

As I recall, Hofshsteyn also wrote Yiddish poems at the time, but on that evening he read only his Russian poems. He had a lot of them.

There was a poem about the yom-tov¹⁹⁰, about the distant primordial past¹⁹¹ that made its way into my memory. It included this line:

¹⁸⁸ Hofshsteyn and Dobrushin also memorialized Shvartzman after his death. Some of Hofshsteyn and Shvartzman's correspondence was published in *Osher Shvartzman: Ale Lider un Brif*.

¹⁸⁹ Oyslender, Nokhem. "yungt, yungt! Vi a shpilndike vel..." *Sovietish Heymland*, vol. 2 1980. Moscow: sovietiski pisatel', Pp. 127.

¹⁹⁰ holiday

¹⁹¹ 'Uralt' could also be translated as 'ancient past,' though I have chosen 'primordial' for the sake of continuity in my discussion.

“...And my distant precursor was a savage cannibal...”

In the poems one could hear the pathos of a strong belief in the human condition¹⁹² in its omnipotence and benevolence¹⁹³ in all times—even in the distant primordial past. The poems were not easy; they demanded a certain effort upon hearing them; however, the philosophical charge did not at all weaken the lyrical feeling, but quite the opposite, it strengthened it.

Oyslender’s recollection of his first meeting with Hofshyteyn contributes to the mythology of the poet and identifies a theme that Hofshyteyn continues in *Along Roads* and throughout his career – the contemplation of the primordial origins of the human being. Here, Oyslender seems to suggest that Hofshyteyn’s concentration on the primordial theme connected to belief in the human mind. Hofshyteyn’s contemplation of the “Mentshlekher farshtand” is in line with a pan-European (and perhaps further) modernist trend an attempt to define the human in the context of the natural world. At its base it is the contemplation of the origin of the human being and the essence of human language as a creative and communicative medium of that being. Oyslender probably remembers this line for its shock value, but at its root is the question of what separates man from the rest of the animal kingdom and the natural world.

In addition to this, Oyslender’s recollection of Hofshyteyn’s Russian poetry¹⁹⁴ provides context for Hofshyteyn’s Yiddish poetry – the Yiddish literary scene was not at all isolated from a multilingual culture of Kyiv and Russian or Ukrainian language literary avant-gardes. Hofshyteyn himself would go on to translate major Romantic poets both Russian and Ukrainian, Aleksander

¹⁹² ‘mentshlekher farshtand’ literally something like ‘human understanding/ human intelligence’, but could perhaps also be translated as ‘the human mind’ but also, perhaps achronologically, as “the human condition”

¹⁹³ ‘Algitikayt’ all-giving-ness

¹⁹⁴ According to the *Lexicon of Yiddish Writers* he published Russian and Ukrainian Poetry under the nom d’plume D. Naumov. Perhaps some of this juvenilia is available in Kyiv literary journals, probably before the First World War. To my knowledge, Hofshyteyn did not publish any of his Ukrainian or Russian poetry in book form.

Pushkin and Taras Shevchenko¹⁹⁵ during the late twenties and thirties, when translation was considered a relatively safe literary activity for writers during the climate of Stalinist purges.

The publication of Modernist Yiddish literature in Kyiv was not possible during the First World war because of legal restrictions. The process of moving publishing equipment to Kyiv from Vilna began before the war, but it was only during the chaos of war and the declaration of an independent Ukraine that the publishing of modernist Yiddish literature in Kyiv took off.¹⁹⁶

From the First World War until the end of the Russian Civil War, Kyiv was taken so many times by various armies with various ideologies – Germans, tsarists armies, various Ukrainian nationalist groups (many funded by Germany) with differing ideologies, Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, S.R.'s, Social Democrats, Poles. Many apparitions of governments and military forces claimed control or actually controlled the city during this period. In 1919 alone, (often characterized as the most chaotic and anarchic year and the year of the most intense and widespread pogroms, the year of publication of *Along Roads*.) Kyiv changed hands five times.¹⁹⁷

Hofshteyn was able to publish *Along Roads* thanks to the help of the Kultur Lige, an autonomous Jewish cultural organization sponsored by a government organ for state sponsored Jewish Culture in 1918.¹⁹⁸ The goal of the Kultur Lige was to sponsor the growing Jewish secular culture in Kyiv and Central-Eastern Europe, and the allegiance was to Yiddish culture rather than one specific political agenda.

¹⁹⁵ Amelia Glazer, “Jewish Alienation through a Ukrainian Looking Glass: Dovid Hofshteyn’s Translations of Taras Shevchenko.” for more Information of Hofshteyn’s translations of Shevchenko.

¹⁹⁶ Gennady Estraiikh, “From Yehupetz Jargonists to Kyiv Modernists,” pp. 34.

¹⁹⁷ For a timeline of governmental shifts in Kyiv during the revolution, see appendix 2 in *Moderism in Kyiv* p.584-587, based on Magocsi, Paul. *A History of Ukraine*. Toronto: University of Toronto press, 1996. the author notes: “Exact times and dates are often difficult to establish and were not always recorded during some of the most chaotic periods.” For a recent history of the first world war, Russian/Ukrainian Revolution, civil war and polish Soviet war (in addition to any other names of the war-time chaos in Ukraine from 1914-21) see Engelstein, Laura. *Russia in Flames: War, Revolution, Civil War 1914-1921*.

¹⁹⁸ Estraiikh, Gennady. “The Yiddish Kultur-Lige.” *Modernism in Kyiv*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010. 197-217.

The existence of the Kultur-Lige was made possible in the chaos surrounding the dissolution of the Russian Empire, but an avant-garde Yiddish literary culture had already begun to form in early twentieth century. Hofshiteyn's first book of poetry, *Along Roads*, published in 1919, is the primary text of this chapter.

Despite Hofshiteyn's association with the growing metropolis Kyiv, much of Hofshiteyn's early poetry is focused on the rural landscape of Ukraine. Gennady Estraikh and Joseph Sherman note that Hofshiteyn's artistic focus on rural landscapes was a departure from the traditional literary space of the shtetl.¹⁹⁹ Hofshiteyn memorializes his family farm and other childhood memories of the countryside play a particularly important role in his poetry. While the rural landscape is associated with Hofshiteyn's memories of his own childhood, as in the poem "s'hot mayn mame..." / "My mother...", his interest in depicting the landscape is more than just a personal, nostalgic interest in childhood perception, but putting his own experience in contrast to a deep time of tradition and human cultural transmissions. It the mourns of loss of a way life and transformation of a repressed traditional culture from "the parochial," to the modern, urban, secular, worldly culture. In this way, the personal, biographic aspect of the poems and the focus on child-like perception put the individual in conversation with the collective ancestral time and expose tensions of the desire for newness and eternal cycles of human culture.

Aesthetics

¹⁹⁹ Gennady Estraikh, "The Yiddish Kultur Lige," pp. 197. And Joseph Sherman "David Hofstein," *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Vol. 333. pp. 101-102.

Literary Critics of the Kyiv Kultur Lige: Yekhezkel Dobrushin and Nokhem Oyslender

Much of my discussion of Hofshiteyn's poetry develops ideas in articles published by two contemporary critics of Hofshiteyn from Kyiv, Yekhezkel Dobrushin and Nokhem Oyslender. Both critics had similar backgrounds to Hofshiteyn: they grew up in the rural Ukrainian countryside and as young men moved to Kyiv. Dobrushin was born in rural Chernigov province and studied at the Sorbonne in Paris before settling in Kyiv in 1916. Nokhem Oyslender was born in rural Volhynia. He studied in Kyiv and then abroad in Germany. He would eventually become the first professor of Yiddish literature in the Soviet Union. These two critics knew Hofshiteyn well, experienced him reading his poetry, and understood the mechanics of his poetry intimately.

Dobrushin's article, "Dray Poetn" / "Three poets," is about the three poets of the new Kyiv Yiddish modernism: Leyb Kvitko, Peretz Markish, and Dovid Hofshiteyn. The article was written in 1919, the year of the founding of the Kultur Lige and the subsequent publication of the first collections of each of the poets' collections and published in *Gedankengang / Strides of Thought* (1922), his first collection of essays. Oyslender's essay "Dovid Hofshiteyn" was also probably published earlier in some form, but was included in his first critical book, *Veg Ayn, Veg Oys / Road In, Road out*.

These articles introduced the Yiddish reading masses to Modernist poetics and instructed them on to how to make sense of the new avant-garde poetry of the Kyiv group. Their explanation was necessary for a wider group of readers to understand the aesthetics of Hofshiteyn's poetry. Oyslender explains that Hofshiteyn's project was to create a literary language in Yiddish, which was contrary to the folkloric style that was common throughout Yiddish literature at the time all over the world.

דערפאר איז האַפּשטיינס ליטעראַטור־שפּראַך געטרײַ בלוז דער איינציקער מאַס פֿון עכטקײט: זי וויל זײַן קאַנקרעט, זי פֿאַרלאַנגט אַלעמאַל, אַז אונטער דעם וואָרט זאָלן שטײן קינסטלערישע אַביעקטן. ²⁰⁰

Hofshteyn's literary language is true only to the duty of purity/authenticity: it is concrete, it constantly demands that beneath the word should be an artistic object.

Hofshteyn strove to create a complex artistic literary language that diverged from the everyday spoken word. This was rather new for Yiddish literature, which before 1919 did not have the support of a state apparatus (academies, universities etc.) and was consequently primarily a vernacular language. The information these critics provide is invaluable to anyone reading Hofshteyn today, as it shows how his poetry was understood to function in its time and context. When one reads Hofshteyn's poetry today, it is taken out of that context and abstracted by time, space, and in the case of translation, language.

Both Dobrushin and Oyslender rely on formal analysis of Hofshteyn's poetry, declaring him a poet who is particularly intentional with (and particularly aware of) his formal devices. Hofshteyn, who would later co-author a textbook on poetic form in Yiddish,²⁰¹ merits their methodology. Their analysis is inspired by the same formalist trends of literary scholarship that Hofshteyn and his circle read, the same that were popular during this period throughout Europe. They demonstrate that through these methods how to read Hofshteyn's poetry.

A Poetics of Perception

²⁰⁰ Oyslender, *Veg Ayn, Veg Oys*, pp.102

²⁰¹ *Literatur Kentenish*

Both Oyslender and Dobrushin note a certain synesthetic convergence of sonic and visual elements in Hofshiteyn's poetics. Both note that the synesthetic device/principal lends itself to the meditation on subjectivity of the poet and his journey towards a greater objectivity.

Dobrushin traces the vision motif throughout *Along Roads*. He devotes considerable space in his essay to the superimposition of visual thematic and sonic texture and how this device adds layers of meaning to the poem. He tracks Hofshiteyn's various visual metaphors and motifs throughout his early poetry and discusses the formal aspects of his synesthetic poetics – particularly his use of anaphora, rhyme, and meter that produce visual as well as sonic effects. In this section I will further develop this idea.

Hofshiteyn's aesthetic focus on the media of perception (the senses) underscores a fundamental ontological problem.

Dovid Hofshiteyn's poetic labor is unified by an original *playfulness of the senses* [gifiln-shpiln], his word always becomes attached to a lived-through experience full of color, but this alone does not create Hofshiteyn's poetic process.

Dovid Hofshiteyn has connected and cemented in one unified style his tangled lines of thought [geshleyglte gedankn-linies], his polished artistic sense, all the impulses of the word rich in refractions.²⁰²

Oyslender's term, "gefılın-shpiln," which I have translated above as "playfulness of the senses," emphasizes Hofshiteyn's focus on the aesthetic representation of perception. Hofshiteyn's "tangled lines of thought" at once convey a weaving metaphor and the phenomenon of the formation of ideas. Hofshiteyn builds his poetry on the juxtaposition of themes and motifs that seem on the surface unrelated. These "tangled lines of thought" develop together throughout his oeuvre and perform a poetics of perception. Perception is a medium of the human mind with the larger world. Hofshiteyn focuses on

²⁰² Nokhem Oyslender, *Veg Ayn, Veg Oys*, pp. 99.

the medium to approach the unknowable in his environment. Hofshateyn's poetics of perception focuses on the interaction of the human mind with the natural world around it.

Ian Probestein has discussed a transnational modernist trend concerning presentation of nature in the poetics of Mandelshtam and Pound. Focusing on two conceptions of nature in pound proposed by Burton Hatlen, Probestein notes that Mandelshtam presents similar conceptions of nature: "1) Nature as a system of powers immanent in organic life forms and even in inorganic matter; 2) Nature as a play of physical and chemical processes."²⁰³ In addition to this, he adds a third aspect to their aesthetic conception of nature: the relation of the contemplation of the relationship of nature and the artistic word. Hofshateyn's poetics of nature also falls into the wider modernist trend of reading the metaphysical into the physical, the mystical into the scientific, the earthly into the cosmic, the religious into the secular, the subjective into the objective. The objective, scientific understanding of nature is central to Hofshateyn's poetics of perception.

Polifonia

The poem "Polifonia" from the collection *Zunen-Shleyfn* (1921) demonstrates how Hofshateyn's poetics of perception is dictated by a scientific, objectional conception of nature; it is concerned with the relationship of nature to the human language and cognition, and understands the basis of human essence as the artistic word:

<p>Polifonia</p> <p>For the brightness I still have joyful</p>	<p>Polifonia</p> <p>פֶּאָר לִיכְטִיקײט הָאָב אײךְ נאָך פֶּרײלִיכע</p>
--	---

²⁰³ Probenstein, *The River of Time: Time-Space, Language and History in Avant-Garde, Modernist, and Contemporary Poetry*, pp. 49.

<p style="text-align: center;"> Alleyway-filters/ The entrance is wide, the exit is narrow... In the ocular nets The sun's gold And the air's translucent Crystal Are captured. To be captured Is to remain On pins, on threads And they settle there In the distant corners In the depths of the heart... My sun-captives are warmed there and the light thickens and the shine becomes liquid and begins to flow and light crosses over the gate of the mouth, and the lips drip with golden syllables, with words of silver with sentences of steel... and from the light poems become polished from translucent crystal. </p>	<p style="text-align: center;"> ליקעלאך־זיפן— ס'איז בייט דער אריינגאנג, ארויסגאנג איז שמאל... אין אויגיקע נעצן פֿארהאלט זיך זוניקע גאלדן און לופטיקער קלאָרער קרישטאל. פֿארהאלטן— געבליבן אָף שפיצן, אָף פֿעדים און זעצן זיך אָפּ דאָרט אין ווינקעלעך ווייטע אין האַרציקער טיף... דערוואַרעמפט זיך דאָרטן מיינ זוניקער פֿאנג, און ליכט ווערט געדיכטער, און שיינ ווערט דאָרט פֿליסיק און הויבט אָן צו קוועלן, און ליכט גייט אַריבער, אַריבער די מוילישע שוועלן, און ס'טריפֿן די ליפֿן מיט גאַלדענע זילבן, מיט זילבערנע ווערטער, מיט זאצן פֿון שטאַל... און ס'ווערט פֿון ליכטיקייט ווידער געשליפֿן לידער פֿון לויטער קרישטאַל.²⁰⁴ </p>
---	--

“Polifonia” is an *Ars Poetica*, justifying the creative qualities of the word as a primordial medium of human perception and expression and a medium of questioning that perception. Hofshsteyn uses a scientific understanding of the perception of light through the pupil and into the brain, resembling the geometric cone-shapes of light (ליקעלאך־זיפן) and the “rods and cones” of the eye that perceive light (metaphorically tips and threads "פֿעדים און שפיצן") often seen in

²⁰⁴ Dovid Hofshsteyn, *Zunen Shleyfn*, pp. 5-6.

anatomy textbooks.²⁰⁵ Ultimately, his imagery produces a metaphor of weaving a net, often a metaphor for poetry, and an artisanal craft. However, the scientific explanation of the process of perception of light is tempered with a synesthetic perceptual mysticism surrounding the phenomenon of translating perception into human language. The mix of mysticism and objective, scientific observation reflects Mandelstam's statement in his manifesto: "The Middle Ages are dear to us because they possessed in the highest degree the feeling of boundary and partition. They never mixed various levels, and they treated the beyond with huge restraint. A noble mingling of rationality and mysticism and the perception of the world as a living equilibrium makes us kin to this epoch and impels us to derive strength from works which arose on Romance soil around the year 1200. And we shall prove our rightness in such a way that the whole chain of causes and consequences from alpha to omega will shudder in response; we shall learn to carry "more easily and freely the mobile fetters of existence."²⁰⁶

The title, "Polyfonia," in Latin letters, is a musical term denoting multiple tones, usually in separate melodic lines (counterpoint), occurring simultaneously. The study of polyphony gave rise to harmonic theory. It is the antonym of monophonic music, music with one melody line and was associated with medieval sacred music. Harmony is created through the interaction of the independent lines, and in western music, it is harmonic motion of a musical piece that often creates meaning. Hofshsteyn reveals that he views the poem as an interaction between visual and sonic elements, and this is where a certain type of (emotional/gestalt) meaning is formed—most importantly, *logos* is not a product of the word itself, but the word in its formal context.

²⁰⁵ During this time or shortly after, scientific textbooks were published in Yiddish for secular schools with such diagrams. See the *Arbiter Shul* series.

²⁰⁶ Osip Mandelstam, trans. Clarence Brown, *The Morning of Acmeism*, pp 51.

While the title denotes a musical concept, the poem is ostensibly about the mechanisms of perceived refracted light, that ultimately stems from the sun, filtered through the human mind, and translated into poetry. Mandelstam (in “Silentium,” for instance, following Tyuchev), compares poetry to fundamental human communicative experience as a primal understanding of sonic experience, through contemporary linguistic philosophy, approximate to the primordial word—the first discovery of logos to emerge from perception of the human word.

In Hofshsteyn’s poem, the light perceived by the poet as vision is translated into sonic syllables and “sentences of steel,” a mixed metaphor for the poem as a physical, concrete object composed of elemental building materials – the visual (letters on the page) and the sonic (reverberations of the vocal cords). The result of this process is a *synesthetic* polyphony. This focus on synesthesia was no doubt inherited from the late symbolists, namely Aleksandr Blok and Andrei Bely.

In addition to the synesthetic connotations, the description of poet’s artistic language assumes a degradation of the levels of truth conveyance from the most fundamental units of the spoken word (the syllable to the word to the sentence), just as the elementary materials differ in their perceived human value: “*un s’trifndi lipn/ mit goldene zilbn/mit silberne verter/ mit zatzn fun stol...*” “and the lips drip/with golden syllables,/with words of silver/with sentences of steel...” This reflects again Hofshsteyn’s participation in the poetic trend of “verbal skepticism,” and traces the evolution of human language through its supposed evolutionary stages of development from emotive monosyllabic sounds to words and sentences.

Towards a Synchronic Analysis: Mandelstam’s Influence on Hofshsteyn

Hofshteyn's poetics contains the very same sense of art for art's sake aesthetics of Russian silver age poetry. This is not coincidental—Hofshteyn knew Russian poetry well. Although we know that Russian poetry was not his only textual source, it is an important background and is important for understanding Hofshteyn in the context Kyiv as a burgeoning Imperial capital of a multilingual modernist poetics.

Hofshteyn and Mandelshtam have much in common poetically – virtuosic formal precision, lexical repetition²⁰⁷, an approach toward literary allusion that unites various world traditions of poetry, the neo-romantic device of poetic self-mythologization.²⁰⁸ Hofshteyn seems to develop the very same “Judaic chaos” that Mandelshtam describes in the first chapter of his memoir, *The Noise of Time (Shum Vremeni)*. The term itself suggests in its oxymoronic etymological combination a paradox between the self and the other, tradition and modernity, the religious and the secular. The Greek word, “chaos,” as a primal force, is modified by the adjective “Judaic”.

Mandelshtam's concept of the “Judaic chaos” of his childhood is influential in understanding Hofshteyn's understanding of time and space.

In essence, my father transferred me to a totally alien century and distant, although completely un-Jewish, atmosphere. It was, if you will, the purest eighteenth or even seventeenth century of an enlightened ghetto somewhere in Hamburg. Religious interests had been eliminated completely. The philosophy of the Enlightenment was transformed into intricate Talmudist pantheism. Somewhere in the vicinity Spinoza is breeding his spiders in a jar. One has a presentiment of Rousseau and his natural man. Everything fantastically abstract, intricate, and schematic. A fourteen-year-old boy, whom they had been training as a rabbi and had forbidden to read worldly books, runs off to Berlin and ends up in

²⁰⁷ Omry Ronen, *An Approach to Mandelshtam*.

²⁰⁸ Akhmatova's claim that understanding Mandelshtam's library is more important than understanding his biography is part of the persona of the poet. One could even make a similar claim about Hofshteyn that emphasizes his intertextuality and a “yearning for world culture,” even though I have already pointed out the importance of the biographical element of Hofshteyn's poetry. Mandelshtam's early prose often makes up for the lack of poetic person in his early poetry. His later poetry (after *Kamen'* and *Tristia*), however, contains significantly more biographical information.

a higher Talmudic school, where there had gathered a number of such stubborn, rational youths, who had aspired in godforsaken backwaters to be geniuses. Instead of the Talmud, he reads Schiller— and mark you, he reads it as a new book. Having held out here for a while, he falls out of this strange university back into the seething world of the seventies in order to remember the conspiratorial dairy shop on Karavannaya whence a bomb was tossed under Alexander, and in a glove-making shop and in a leather factory he expounds to the paunchy and astonished customers the philosophical ideals of the eighteenth century.²⁰⁹

Mandelshtam describes the eclectic nature and tensions between the Jewish and non-Jewish Zeitgeist of his father's world, torn between secular European Enlightenment culture, Russian Imperial culture (mostly associated with Mandelshtam's mother) and humble Jewish traditional culture. Mandelshtam himself embraced Russian Imperial Culture in the Russian Language, but Hofshyteyn's situation was different. Like Mandelshtam, he lived in an Imperial cultural center, though Kyiv was much closer to the Ukrainian heartlands of Yiddish speaking culture than Saint Petersburg, and immigration from the Pale and the specific culture and location of Kyiv created an environment where Yiddish culture could flourish for a few short years. Mandelshtam's position as a Jewish poet writing high Modernism in Russian made an impact on Hofshyteyn, and to translate Imperial late Symbolism (acmeism, etc.) into Yiddish seemed to be a logical next step in creating a high culture in Yiddish. Hofshyteyn's poetry performs "Judaic Chaos," the syncretism of secular, enlightenment Jewish and European cultures in Yiddish, signaling a new primal beginning for a secular Jewish culture that is equal to that of European national counterparts.

Yekhezkiel Dobrushin and Nokhem Oyslender both note Hofshyteyn's craft and compare him to an artisan, the same elaborate architectural metaphor that Mandelshtam employs for the aspirations of poet in his Acmeist manifesto. Oyslender even seems to map claims of artistic

²⁰⁹ Osip Mandelstam, *The Noise of Time*, pp. 85

leaps forward and anxiety of influence of the symbolists in Mandelstam's manifesto, "The Morning of Acmeism," onto Yiddish poetry; He accuses the New York modernists, particularly "Di Yunge," of an imprecision characteristic of Symbolism, which is analogous to Osip Mandelstam's assessment that the fault of the symbolist image as an imprecise, grandiose vagueness. Mandelstam calls for a precision and concrete meaning of the image based on its context in the poet form, and a privileging of "logos" in the word. Oyslender and Dobrushin both describe Hofshteyn's poetic "concreteness" and focus on Hofshteyn as an artisan. The artisanal comparison and emphasis on the "concrete" image are meant to connect Hofshteyn's poetics to the language of Mandelstam's manifestos.

Hofshteyn's poems are inundated with subtexts from antiquity to the contemporary, from a wide variety of sources – from Jewish tradition and world literary tradition and all the bridges of the two. Osip Mandelstam terms in his acmeist manifesto as the "longing for world culture." Omry Ronen puts Mandelstam's aesthetic assertions into a larger acmeist trend that ultimately merges trans-cultural, trans-linguistic poetry that stives toward a universal achieve of poetic speech, which ultimately presents poetry as a fundamental act of human expression: "the acmeist poets viewed the entire body of world poetry as a creative manifestation of the eternal return and laid stress on the fundamental unity of the multilingual poetic speech."²¹⁰ Hofshteyn creates intertextual conversations²¹¹ through his subtexts, to create his own space within a universal poetic eternity; he juxtaposes his subjectivity as a Yiddish Poet residing in the Russian empire, to

²¹⁰ Omry Ronen, *An Approach to Mandelstam*, pp. xii

²¹¹ I use this word to evoke the semantic meanings created in Mandelstam's *Conversations About Dante* and the idea that poetry enables one to have an atemporal conversation with a long dead author. In addition to Ronen's discussion of this aspect of Mandelstam, see Paloff's chapter about Mandelstam for an analysis of Mandelstam's trans-temporal poetics *Lost in the Shadow of the Word: Space, Time, and Freedom in Interwar Eastern Europe* juxtaposed to Finkin's *An Inch or Two of Time* shows, rather predicably, that a prominent line of Modernist Eastern European Jewish Literature in Hebrew and Yiddish modernist literature engages the wider literary conversations about time and space in Eastern European Literature, particularly, in this case Polish and Russian, and Amelia Glaser has shown a glimmer of the interaction with Ukrainian.

his objectivity in the eternal universal poetic discussion of a primordial exile as a human condition. The goal of this participation is to represent Yiddish in the context of European “world culture,” to create a sense of Jewish belonging in secular European culture, in which they had previously been denied entry. In Hofshateyn’s poetry, he presents a literary high Yiddish Modernism that not only claims Jewish belonging in European literary culture, but also challenges the Romantic National narratives of Imperial languages.

Perceiving the “New” in *Along Roads*

Hofshateyn is a poet of visual and sonic synesthesia. Hofshateyn’s poems in *Along Roads* are not as visual in form as his later poems, for example in *Troyer*, where he includes graphic elements such as circular forms resembling mystical diagrams, and text curated into Marc Chagall’s graphic designs, or even the poems of *Zunen-Shleyfn*, where he discovers the centered textual line, like “Polifonia.”²¹² However, visual metaphors abound in the poems of *Along Roads* – he goes to lengths to capture the various movement of light as it is filtered through and reflected off of different objects. The metaphors concerning light focus the reader on the phenomenon of perception and lead towards a questioning of subjectivity.

These various metaphors involving visual perception are meant to focus the reader on how the human mind perceives the world. Hofshateyn’s goal is to present a new way of seeing, a new way a hearing, a new way of sensing in his poetry, or at least the feeling of newness. The feeling of newness, often represented as childhood perception in *Along Roads*, is meant to

212 The centered text is easily taken for granted in our times because it is available on word processors, but it’s quite a bit of extra work to balance the lines in traditional lead typesetting, and something that normally wouldn’t be done unless there is an artistic purpose.

“revive” the word, to question the nature of its every-day semantic linkage to an object, to attempt to recreate the primal moment of understanding something for the first time. In this way, the reader is asked to question their own subjectivity, to try to imagine an estranged objectivity and experience an almost mystical process of communication. This observational poetics is in line with the linguistic-poetic manifestoes of Mandelshtam, Shklovsky, Bialik, and Andrey Bely. The observational poetics of Hofshsteyn are not unrelated to the Romantic Sublime, they develop this trope and situate into 20th century scientific discourse.

A poetic sense of indeterminate in-betweenness hovers over the poems of *Along Roads*, as Hofshsteyn reflects on life as a fragile conscious existence in between the two, more elemental unconscious existences or non-existences before birth and after death. He is focused on the individual’s *perception* of time in memory and experience, and in the eternal return of history – the same Bergsonian conception of time, which Osip Mandelshtam understands as “profoundly Judaic” in its ability to understand the present a Nietzschean eternal return of gestalt shapes of experience which connects the subjective consciousness to an objective human existence in the world.

His attempt to create a defined poetic object, situated in an ambivalent perspective recognized as a condition of life is a reaction could be viewed as a rejection of the mundane language of everyday life and the superficial, abstracted language of politics in which the relationship between the sign and the signifier is not questioned. Hofshsteyn’s artistic object, his project of creating a literary language in Yiddish is meant to examine the relationship of the word to the object, the sign and the signifier. In Hofshsteyn’s poetic word, language as the essence of humanity, and poetic language is analogous to primordial human language in its

ability to create an *original* concrete artistic object that can create a *new* perspective, a *new* understanding and relationship with the world.

<p>I have, my world, come to you anew! I've barely parted with the shore of night, My eye was drenched in the shine of light, In the open splendor of your high pillars!... I have, my world, come to you anew To pass this bright day with you.</p> <p>Today, renewed, I rang The large bell at the diaphanous gate, And with new joy, my trembling ear sang accompaniment to the true sound ... From the narrow cage of stiff ribs My heart strains in courageous pounds Thirst draws my parched lips Towards each cool drop of morning dew My tongue rings, my palate resounds: I have, my world, come to you anew!</p>	<p>איך בין, מיין וועלט, אויפסניי צו דיר געקומען! איך האָב מיך קוים מיט ברעג פֿון נאַכט געזעגנט, האָט שוין מיין אויג מיט העלער שיין באַרעגנט, דעם ברייטן גלאַנץ פֿון דיינע הויכע זיילן!.. איך בין, מיין וועלט, אויפסניי צו דיר געקומען אַ טאָג אַ ליכטיקן בני דיר פֿאַרוויילן.</p> <p>אויפסניי האָב איך היינט אָנגעקלונגען אין גרויסן גלאַק ביים דורזיגטיגן טויער, מיט ניער פֿרייד האָט נאַכגעזונגען דעם לויטער-קלאַנג מיין ציטערדיקן אויער... פֿון ענגער שטייג פֿון שטייפֿע ריפֿן מיין האַרץ זיך רינסט מיט מוטערדיקן קלאַפֿן, מיט דאַרשט זיך ציהען מיינע ליפֿן נאָך יעדן לופֿטיקן פֿרימאַרגעדיקן טראַפֿן, עס קלינגט מיין צונג, עס שאַלט מיין גומען: איך בין, מיין וועלט, אויפסניי צו דיר געקומען!²¹³</p>
--	---

Hofshteyn’s project of creating a new literary register of the Yiddish language includes an effort to expand the self and the mind out of the confines of traditional tropes, images, hermeneutics etc., and an attempt to represent the world as he sees it, to renew all the “dead language” of metaphors that have become so commonplace that they are no longer understood as metaphors.²¹⁴ This search for “newness” is why Hofshteyn’s poetry builds a motif of childhood perception – his poetry works to see the world anew and question the presumptions of what has been handed to him by human culture. He doesn’t outrightly reject them, yet his poetic sense is not to accept dogmatically that that has been already proclaimed. His search for “newness” is also pragmatic – the world that he once knew was seemingly dissolving in Modernity and part of his project is reimagine tradition and reinvigorate it to fit his own time and place, to think for

²¹³ Dovid Hofshteyn, *Bay Vegn*, pp. 13.

²¹⁴ Victor Shklovsky, “Resurrection of the Word” for a the context of the term ‘dead language.’

himself and create his own voice as opposed to falling in line and dogmatically accepting “dead language.”

The content of the poem is thematically a Romantic expression of the creative power of the poet’s word and likening it to primordial creation and the initial metaphor of creation in the God’s breath. In this thematic, it is linked closely with Aleksander Pushkin’s “Prophet,” which likens the poet to a Biblical prophet, depicting a metaphorical death and renewal. The link between Hofshiteyn’s poem and Pushkin’s is strengthened by the lexical repetition of the same parts of the body that are also present in Pushkin’s poem: the ears, the heat, the chest, the lips, the tongue. The heart, which in Yiddish “*rayst zikh*,” which literally means “*tears itself*”(I have translated this as “strains”), is torn out by an angel and replaced by a coal. What is significantly different about Hofshiteyn’s version is that there is no angel that transforms the poet, no explicit supernatural power represented in a physical form. What there is in its place is night, which in his system of metaphors seems to be related to the unconscious and what lies beyond conscious human perception: the unexplainable depths of the human mind at rest,²¹⁵ that which is currently beyond the form of language. What is significant here is Hofshiteyn’s translation of Pushkin’s representation of the poet as endowed with Biblical, mythological, supernatural powers as a material, secular, scientific concept of the human mind. Hofshiteyn is a poet of the mysteries of this world, having inherited the tradition of “this-worldniks” (“*olem hazeniks*”).²¹⁶ Hofshiteyn’s project to give new life to the Yiddish word includes the transformation of grandiose symbolic tropes into concrete images of the observable material world. His goal is to represent the

²¹⁵ another of Hofshiteyn’s themes, see the poem “Ru”/“Rest.”

²¹⁶ Viedlinger, Jeffrey. *Jewish Public Culture in the Late Russian Empire*.

metaphysical problems posed in theology in the natural world, without mythology, without the fantastic.

Pushkin’s poem is one source of the prophetic Symbolism of a national poet like Bialik. Yet, Hofshteyn seems to want to move on from the image of the poet as prophet towards the image of the poet as a human, an individual, who is attempting to illuminate the darkness of the mind, to bring the unconsciousness into consciousness by means of writing, by means of a renewal of the word.

<p>How many times already? I want not to count— Today I have been girded with the sun’s shine, I walk without fear into all the black caves Of the world and being...</p>	<p>דאָס וויפּילטע שוין מאָל? איך וויל ניט ציילן— איך בין היינט אָנגעגאַרט מיט זונענשײן, איך געה אָן מורא היינט אין אַלע שוואַצע היילן פֿון וועלט און זײַן...</p>
--	---

These lines, which resemble the trope of a romantic wanderer who voluntarily chooses the uncomfortable path (for instance, going into a storm), in the context of Hofshteyn’s symbolic system of the day as consciousness and night as unconsciousness, professes his poetic goal to journey into the unconsciousness of the human mind and bring that to consciousness through poetry. The associative style of his poetics, with its “tangled lines of thought,” is itself a journey into the poet’s unconscious, and as so it also demands the that the reader examine their own unconscious associations.

What is new about Hofshteyn’s poem is not necessarily its content alone, but its transformation of content in form. In Hofshteyn’s poetry, there is a sort of secular mysticism, one that is grounded in tradition. In this way, his poetry is often illustrative of David Biale’s thesis that “Jewish secularism was a revolt grounded in the tradition that it rejected.”²¹⁷

²¹⁷ David Biale, *Not in the Heavens*, pp. 1.

Hofshteyn, however, does not reject tradition, rather, he locates himself in a semi-divine epochal shift. Hofshteyn is a poet who rejects the polarized dichotomous relationships that developed in his time and his poems strive to exist in a tendentious middle ground, exploring the paradoxes of human society and existence, and striving to build a new, living language and a new idea of artistic culture in Yiddish.

Structure, Form and Genre

Structure and Form in *Along Roads*: Constant Revisions as the Effect of Time on the Artistic Text, Corruption of Memory, Resistance to Finalization

Along Roads (Alongside Roads/Along the Way) was first published in 1919 in Kyiv. The poems themselves were written earlier; -- between 1912 and 1919. It is divided into 6 sections, all of which are linked by motifs. The book and the cycles it consists of can be read as a cohesive poetic statement on the poet's relationship to exile, even though some poems and cycles were published in other contexts in subsequent books of poetry, often with new material, as in the case of the cycle "Valger-shteyner" / "Rolling Stones," which grew into a book in itself in 1922. Regardless of subsequent reorganization and republication of parts of *Along Roads*, the book in the form of the original 1919 Kyiv publication remains a cohesive poetic statement and is foundation that Hofshteyn builds upon throughout the 1920's.

The sections themselves tend to have a cohesion or concentration on a major theme, but motifs that are built throughout the book, and eventually beyond the confines of the book into the

poet's oeuvre. Within the cycles, also, there is at times a contiguity of a certain set of poems that form marked or unmarked cycles. The appearance of contiguity of a section can appear disrupted at the juncture of cycles and this perceived disruption is significant. This organizational style is typical of Modernist collections (*soborniki*) in Russian literature. I have summarized the focus of each section below according to my reading a certain point in time, though it is difficult and always imperfect to attempt to summarize a work of art, especially one such as this that aspires to be a phenomenon in itself.

Along Roads / Bay Vegn, the first and eponymous cycle, presents Hofshsteyn's image of the road as fate and Romantic exile and introduces the personae of the poet. This section introduces motifs that are elaborated upon throughout the book in a compression. Only after reading the book and working through the motifs can one understand the compressed meaning in some of these first poems, such as the opening poem, "A Gantsn Tog" / "A Whole Day." This section introduces an obfuscated poet manifesto committed to a newness, and a fresh perspective. The poet claims his "vision" is taken from the wild or fallow/unclaimed (*hefker*) fields and wants to sow like seeds. The fallowness or wildness of the field related to a new primordial state of chaos, and his sowing of this wild thing is a domestication. This metaphor is one in a series to create a motif of relationship of creation and destruction and the characterization of the poet in a time on the brink of a new primordial moment.

"Felder" / "Fields" presents the fields of Russia as a graveyard, drawing on the tradition Russian landscape poetry and conversing with his predecessors and contemporaries, and elegizing a primordial and abstracted Ukrainian landscape and exploring memories of the homelandscape. The cycle itself progresses through the seasons at different paces, reflecting the subjective experience of time that is a theme throughout the book.

“Kavkaz”/ “The Caucasus” presents the exotic landscape on the edge of the Russian Empire and continues his conversation with the Russian Romantic tradition of exile, in particular with Pushkin. This section presents exotic landscapes, that like Pushkin’s poems, are meant to expand the borders of a national literature. In this section there is a sense of transient in-betweenness that allows the poet to identify with the Caucasus as another “edge” of empire that allows the poet to identify with the land that represents the border of the (former) Russian empire ancient Biblical land.

“Fartogn” / “Dawns” explores themes of primordial beginnings of life and memories thereof. Hofshsteyn’s stated desire for newness is expressed in childhood memories, childhood perceptions of nature and varied perceptions of time cycles and regeneration. “Gasn” /”Streets” focuses on the interaction of the natural elements and urban space, and somehow exotic landscapes of Siberia, presented in the cycle “Letters to Siberia.” “Tvishn Valger-Shteyner” “Between Rolling Stones” reflects on the fragility of life amid a theme of warfare, between the void before one enters the world and the void after one leaves it.

These characterizations of the sections are based on motifs that are woven together throughout *Along Roads*, but certain themes seem to dominate in certain sections. These characterizations admittedly lack nuance, but Hofshsteyn’s poetry is meant to resist simple characterization. Everything is interconnected in Hofshsteyn’s poems and builds on itself. I believe this is what Oyslender refers to when he speaks of Hofshsteyn’s “geshveglte gedanken linies,” his tangled lines of thought.

The organization of *Along Roads* changes in subsequent publications, and it’s not quite clear why, though this feature is also characteristic of Russian Modernism. It could have to do with the changing of Hofshsteyn’s ideas about how the poems should be presented and what he

wanted to emphasize, it could have to do with the changing political climate. The cycles “Gasn” and “Tsvishn Valger Shteyner” were not included in the same form in later publications of *Along Roads*, namely the 1923 Kyiv Kultur Lige edition *Gezamelte Verk: Ershter Band: Lirik* and the 1924 Kletzkin edition, published in Vilna, *Bay Vegn: Ershter Bukh Lider (Fargreserte Oysgabe)*. However, most of the poems in those sections are reorganized into newly titled sections. From this reorganization and the subject matter of the poems, I would suppose that “Gasn” and “Tsvishn Valger Shteyner” might have been composed closer to the time of publication of the 1919 version.

The later collections of *Along Roads* (or that incorporate *Along Roads*) include most of the poems published in the 1919 Kyiv Kultur Lige edition of the work, with a few notable exceptions,²¹⁸ and with additions of later poems and cycles and some previously unpublished poems that had not been included in the 1919 version, but were written prior to its publication. The two later versions are unified in the formulation of cycles, retaining “Felder,” “Bay Vegn,” “Kavkaz,” and “Fartogn,” but dispersing the most of the poems that were included in “Gasn” and “Tsvishn Valger-shteyner” among the new sections: “Shtot,” / “City,” “Geheyme Heymen,” (note the soundplay) / “Secret Homes,” “Forgefiln,” / “Premonitions,” “Tristia,” (in Latin, after Ovid’s eponymous book, Obvious links to Mandelshtam and Pushkin) and “Shtam” / “Just Because.” The new sections include a variety of new and old material, which varies depending on the edition. While his motives are unclear, Hofshsteyn develops the sections differently from what was presented in the 1919 version.

²¹⁸ “Letters to Siberia” is absent from both. I speculate that this decision is driven by the political climate of the time, as the publication was around the time that Hofshsteyn decided to emigrate under political pressure. The depiction of Siberia as a snowy land of exile was probably a risk as the new Soviet government now controlled and utilized the former tsarist labor camps. But this is just conjecture.

The later editions present “Felder” as the first cycle, switching places with “Bay Vegn.” This decision presents somewhat of a more directional approach than the 1919, presenting the Ukrainian territories of childhood memory in “Felder” before the poetic manifesto of wandering in the titular cycle, “Bay Vegn,” followed by the exotic Caucasian landscapes.

All Hofshteyn’s reorganizing and reworking of poetic material points towards a resistance to finalization of the artistic object and a continued grasping towards what lay beyond the veil of language. Beyond the veil of language is the true “concrete” artistic object. This means that even though Hofshteyn’s poetry is not easily comprehensible, there is a *logos* created in the interaction between the sonic quality, the rhythm, and the juxtaposition of semantic associations of the words themselves which takes effort to make sense of. In addition to this, his reorganization and reworking of poetic material ties into one of his central motifs—the perception of time in the human mind and the function of memory.

Perhaps one of the most characteristic and unique elements of Hofshteyn’s poetics is his virtuosic use of meter. Dobrushin makes some description of Hofshteyn’s use of meter on the level of the poem itself:

ניט אומזיסט נוצט עפֿשער האָפֿשטיין דעם פֿאַרשיידנזילביקן מעטער מער, איידער דעם
אויסגעהאַלטענעם כאַרייאַישן און יאַמבישן, וואָס ער צאַמט שטענדיק מיט צעזורן, מיט אַ
פֿאַרגרעסערטער און פֿאַרקלענערטער צאָל זילבן און שורעס. דער שטריינג אויסגעהאַלטענער
גלייכשורעדיקער כאַרייאַישן און יאַמב, וואָס זיינען אָנפֿלעקט אין זייער שאַרפֿער קלינגענדיקייט, זיינען,
צוגלויבן, ניט מסוגל אויסצובאַהאַלטן די אינווייניקסטע שטימונג קלאַנגען פֿון האָפֿטעטינס
צניעסדיקער, אַגעוו, עכט־אידישער ווערפֿסיפֿיקאַציע.²¹⁹

It is not coincidental that Hofshteyn uses the meters of various syllable length more than the consistently measured trochaic or iambic meters, which he constantly tames with caesuras and elongated or truncated counts of syllables and lines. The strict consistent, even-lined trochee and iamb, which are on display in their sharp musicality, are, for that reason, not capable of concealing the most inner voice of Hofshteyn’s virtuosic, and incidentally, truly Yiddish versification.

²¹⁹ Yekhezkel Dobrushin, *Gedankengang*, pp. 93.

Dobrushin explains Hofshsteyn’s versification as a personalization of traditional forms—his voice cannot be contained in stock forms. Mikhail Gasparov notes that the trend in Russian modernist poetry of the time was also to personalize the poetic form, so in this respect, Hofshsteyn keeps with the tradition of the larger Eastern European avant-garde.²²⁰ However, there are gradients to this personalization of meter, and Hofshsteyn, as Oyslender emphasizes in his article, makes an artistic choice to situate his poetic voice and style on the brink of tradition and the revolution.

די גרעסטע אקשאנעס האָט האַפֿשטיין אָנגעווענדעט אין דעם פּראָצעס פֿון איבערדיכטן און איבערבאַשאַפֿן זײַן עעגענעם טראַדיציע-גײַסט אין דעם נײַעם היסטאָרישן רוים. ער האָט אים געטריבן אָף אומבאַקאַנטע שעטאַכן, ער האָט אים געלאָזט גײַן באַ די שאַרפֿסטע ראַנדן, באַ די ראַנד פֿון אָפּגרונט.²²¹

The most significant stubbornness that Hofshsteyn utilizes is the process of giving poetic form and transforming his own essence of tradition in the new historical space (roym). It has driven him to unknown domains (terra incognita?), and it has allowed him to walk there on the sharpest of edges, on the edge of the abyss.

Here Oyslender claims that Hofshsteyn translates the essence of tradition, of which I assume to be Jewish tradition, into the new epoch. The interconnection between time and space is emphasized in the term “historisher roym,”/ “historic space.” This passage is ripe paradox and apparent oxymoron, but this is intentional: it underlines that Hofshsteyn’s project depends on these paradoxes, depends on walking the line between polarized dichotomies of religious/secular, Jewish/Non-jewish, modern/traditional.

In line with Oyslender’s assessment, Dobrushin emphasizes Hofshsteyn’s originality in his use of the particular features of Yiddish and also Hofshsteyn’s project to adapt European forms of versification. Hofshsteyn does utilize traditional forms, even though he tends to personalize

²²⁰ Mikhail Gasparov, *Ocherk Istorii Russkogo Stikha*, pp. 206-208.

²²¹ Nokhem Oyslender, *Veg Ayn, Veg Oys*, pp. 105

them. He is very intentional in his augmentation of Romantic forms in particular; his personalizing of these forms focuses on creating something new. However, he is acutely aware of the connotations of traditional meters and their generic conventions and uses or modifies these connotations to suit his poetic needs. He is perhaps the most oriented towards precise poetic form among the poets of the Kyiv poets, perhaps even in Yiddish literature. Meter is one of the devices Hofshateyn uses to create his characteristic layering of classical European poetic text, Russian literature and Jewish folklore and tradition.

Elegy

As an example of the way that Hofshateyn manipulates traditional form and genre, I will briefly discuss Hofshateyn's modernist adaptation of a poetic genre which became a central in Romanticism: the elegy.

In *Along Roads*, Hofshateyn is orientated towards the various forms of the romantic lyric, but focuses particularly on elegy, which seeks to create a conversation that bridges the gap between life and death, this side and the other side; the present and the past, while at the same time recognizing that the elegized has moved on, and that those on this side should live their lives accordingly. The mourner's Kaddish is perhaps a subtext here, in that it focuses on life and the wonder of creation and the acceptance of the world as it was created. Hofshateyn's sunshine (*zune-shayn*) motif, which explores the magic of human cognition, echoes the focus on life in the mourner's Kaddish, through this motif the author urges radical acceptance of the phenomenon of existence in the face of destruction, the ephemeral sun-filled daytime of life that is closely aligned with "the now," "the moment" or the present, as juxtaposed to the snow-covered fields of memory. In Hofshateyn's elegies, one can discern a sense of *doikayt*; he claims that he belongs to

this land because his ancestors lived and died there, and have become, quite literally, the earth itself; that is, part of the elemental world. This sense of doikayt is primarily metaphysical, but it is local in that the landscapes he depicts are primarily of the recognizable Ukrainian countryside.

“Letste teg” / “final days” is a good example of how Hofshsteyn manipulates traditional meters and genres to create meaning.²²² It is written in iambic pentameter, which in the Russian poetic tradition acquired an association with the elegiac genre starting with the early Russian Romantic poet Zhukovsky in the early nineteenth century.²²³ The poem itself combines the elegiac tradition of meter with the trope of autumn as the season of withering and waning of nature²²⁴ and consequently a metaphorical season of death. “Leste teg” assumes the generic conventions of elegy and replace the addressee with nature itself; the subject of morning is the day itself.

Final Days	לעצטע טעג
<p>If he is not the last of days, he is the palest, He sweeps away the smallest track of shine – a wind comes forth and folds the water steel and chases it swiftly into the bright forest.</p>	<p>אויב ניט דער לעצטער איז ער דער טאָג דער בלאַסער, ער ראַמט ווי אויס די מינדסטע שפור פֿון שיין – אַ ווינט קומט אָן און קנייטשט דאָס שטאַל פֿון וואַסער, און יאָגט געשווינד אין העלן וואַלד אַרײַן.</p>

²²² My reading of metrical tradition of “letste teg” is inspired by Mikhail Gasparov’s study of Russian metrical traditions and the ability of meter to create semantic meaning in *Metr i Smysl, (Meter and Meaning.)* The general claim of the book is that certain meters are associated with certain thematic and genres either consciously or unconsciously. In *Metr I Smysl*, Gasparov traces particular metrical forms to their most prominent origins and then traces the transformation of the meter and content through poetic conversations over time. Hofshsteyn, who started by writing poetry in Russian and is hyperaware of his poetic form (he co-authored a textbook on formal poetics), participates in the long tradition of metrical development. It should not be misinterpreted that the fact that he carries over and develops forms from other traditions does not make his poetry derivative; this is the history of poetry – Russian poetry in the 18th century borrowed from western European forms. As one major example, Mikhail Lomonosov imported the syllabo-tonic system from the German academy. As another, the Sonnet, a form inseparable from English renaissance and particularly Shakespeare originated with troubadours passing through Andalusion, who brought poetic forms from the east. In Russian in the 20th century, Nikolai Gumilev participates in tradition of the sonnet, precisely because it the sonnet itself points towards a world culture, a universal human language. Poetry at its core is a yearning for world culture, something that Hofshsteyn understood, probably most directly through the writings of Osip Mandelshtam and other Acmeist.

²²³ Gasparov, Mikhail. *Ocherk Istorii Ruskogo Stikha*. Moska: Nauka, 1984. Pg.116.

²²⁴ Mikhail Epshtein, *Priroda, Mir, Tainik Vseleynoy*, pp. 172. (Epshtein calls this trope ‘Prirody uvyadan’e’ after Alexander Pushkin’s poem “Unylaya pora! Ochey ocharovan’e”)

<p>The tall door and gates stand long abandoned — A rustling of leaves shows him the way, he sees that all is ready for deep sadness, for days of Cheshvan's grey net of rain ...</p> <p>But a little meadow holds his breath in tight like small children around a full bread trough, red oaks stand there in a bright shine ... the wind looks in and softens off.</p> <p>and before going down, the sun remains for a while. She did not part with the young meadows in the forest. Another day of Indian summer in our region, another quiet day has left his bright corpse !...</p>	<p>פֿאַרלאָזן שטעהען לאַנג די הויכע טיר און טויער— אַ שאַרף פֿון בלעטער אים באַווייזט דעם וועג, ער זעהט, ס'איז אַליץ שוין גרייט צום טיפֿן טרויער, צו גרויער רעגן־נעץ פֿון חשוון־טעג...</p> <p>נאָר אַט אַ לאַנקעלע—דעם אַטעמ האַלט ער איין ווי קליינע קינדערלאַך אַרום אַ פֿולער מולטער, דאָרט שטעהען רויטע דעמבעלאַך אין העלער שיין... דער ווינט, ער קוקט און ווערט אַליץ מילדער, מילדער.</p> <p>און פֿאַר פֿאַרגעהן שוין בלייבט די זון אַ ביסל שטעהן. מיט לאַנקעלאַך אין וואַלד האַט זי זיך ניט געזעגנט. ס'איז נאָכ אַ טאָג געשענקט פֿאַר אונדזער געגנט, ס'איז נאָך אַ שטילער טאָג געלאָזט זיין העל געביין!...</p>
--	--

What is perhaps most puzzling about Hofshsteyn's elegy is that the addressee is the day itself. Throughout *Along Roads*, the day is juxtaposed to other measures of time – human consciousness, generations, epochs. In “Leste Teg” one can discern a certain zeitgeist of a fading imperial epoch. The sense of cultural decline as symbolized by the sunset is trope popularized in Russian Symbolism.²²⁵ The zeitgeist is also described in Osip Mandelstam's memoirs, *The Noise of Time* (1925), through his childhood perception of Petersburg in the early twentieth century. The fading autumnal landscape that Hofshsteyn presents in “Letste Teg” could be read in the vein of the perception of a fading zeitgeist, not only of Russian Imperial society, but also of traditional Jewish society in Eastern Europe as it was disrupted and thrust into the Modern era. The superimposition of Jewish tradition and secular cultures is typical of Hofshsteyn and overlays a mystical human interconnectedness on a concrete reality: traditional Jewish

²²⁵ For two examples, See Blok's “zakat gorel v posledny raz” and Bely's “ za soltsem.” Poems on the sunset theme are so numerous in Symbolism that it is difficult to name only a few. I mention these two because include several of the same images in Hofshsteyn's poem, and because I happened upon them without much effort, but there are dozens of examples to choose from.

culture in Eastern Europe was directly related to repressive Imperial policies towards the Jews. The transformation of one is the transformation of another, for better and for worse.

The poet takes decadent pleasure in the passing of an epoch, *zeitgeist* and consciousness as represented as a day—there is a grotesque fascination with beauty associated with this metaphorical death as twilight. The meadow in the twilight is represented as a corpse or skeleton (*gebeyn*)²²⁶ of the day, a word that returns in Hofshyten's elegy to the day captures this *zeitgeist* too and focuses on the ephemeral and decadent beauty of decline. The aesthetic pleasure reflects an elegiac ambivalence (the addressee has past, but the speaker lives on, attempts to honor the memory of the addressee who has been returned to elementary nature and its qualities of infinity. This poem celebrates the painful and beautiful phenomenon of the final days of an epoch while simultaneously recognizing the infinitude of natural cycles of life and death.

The elegiac genre is combined with the tradition of the autumn landscape poem.²²⁷ The elegy conventionally focuses on the death of the addressee and his/her transformation into infinite nature and immortality of this consciousness. However, when the addressee is the day itself, a natural phenomenon, the conventional meanings of the elegiac genre become obscured. What does Hofshyten mourn if not the end of an epoch itself and the transformation of a collective consciousness?

...

The eternal has resonances of “the other side”/ “yene velt,” which is modernized as unconsciousness, and is metaphorically represented as night. This world (the material world) and nature are subject to the passing of time and the rule is change and finitude. However, there

²²⁶ This word also appears in “I recognized her by the river” in relations to the poet's “urland.” A stone represents the dust of the ur-land's skeleton/*gebeyn* and a threshold between consciousness and unconsciousness...

²²⁷ See Pushkin's “Osen’,” Bartynsky's “Avgust,” etc. in Russian, Epshtein's discussion...

are moments of suspended infinity in this finitude, represented in the poem above as light lingering in a meadow in the forest after the sun has set. Hofshateyn conceals his metaphysical philosophy and theology in a universalization of mystical tropes by representing them metaphorically in the landscape. All humanity must acknowledge the existence of the natural world, and as such, following Spinoza, recognize the nature and natural laws as a material “body” of divine substance. The passing of time itself seems a phenomenon to be mourned for Hofshateyn, but also a phenomenon to marvel at while it still exists, and this in this passing of time, in this transition, from one form of consciousness to the next lies an inexplicable beauty.

Oyslender notes that Hofshateyn develops a “social elegy” in his later work, but here we can see that Hofshateyn began the development of his social elegies as a strand in *Along Roads* and then honed them later in the cycle “Tristia” and its book-form expansion “Troyer” / “Mourning,” aiming it more directly at the 1919 pogroms. Perhaps Hofshateyn’s superimposition of the social elegy and the metaphysical elegy formally preform his projection of the ambivalence of the human mind. The tension between finitude and infinitude are expressed in the juxtaposition of Hofshateyn’s “iberlebung,” his lived through experience and a particular phenomenon that occurs in a fixed moment in time to the eternity of nature.

The eternity of nature is also connected to the eternity of literature in poems such as “Tog Nokh Tog” (Day after Day): “emets dort in velt-ekn/viklt iber a yerieh,/un in ire tife foldn/ plonter ikh zikh fun baginen/biz biz farflamtn rand fun shieh...”²²⁸/ “Day after day draws from the south.../Someone at world’s end/Bends over a section of scroll,/And in its deep folds/I stumble from the very dawn/Till the flaming red of sunset...” Here the landscape is compared to a scroll written by a god-like being to emphasize that writing as an act of creation is an imitation

²²⁸ Dovid Hofshateyn, *Bay Vegn*, pp. 25.

of divine creation. The metaphorical representation of the scroll as landscape is based on the associative connection of the eternity of nature and the eternity of the written word, which Hofshiteyn would have understood through Pushkin’s programmatic reiteration of Horace in “Exegi Monumentum.” The implied analogy of Hofshiteyn’s poems is that nature is material *substance* of divinity just as the word is the material substance of the human mind, an *extension* of the human mind.²²⁹ Hofshiteyn does not interpret the landscape through traditional texts, as Abramovitch/Mendele often depicts in his books as traditional. Contrary to this, Hofshiteyn depicts the landscape *as* a text, signaling that one can discern certain truths from an objective analysis of the material world itself.

There is more associative congruency in Hofshiteyn’s analogy when we consider that Yiddish is a particular linguistic creation of Jewish exile and that the landscapes of Ukraine are Hofshiteyn’s subjective environment of exile.

Hofshiteyn’s landscapes often instruct readers how to relate to their historical situation, and in this case, the national aspirations of repressed ethnic groups. This creation of national history as a relation to the landscape is found in some of Hofshiteyn’s landscapes, but nowhere is Hofshiteyn’s response to the revolution’s “the demand on the craft of artistic temperament”²³⁰ clearer than in “Di Krie Geyt.”

<p>The ice floe floats— And the wide banks take the water-yoke</p>	<p>די קריהע געהט— און ברעגן נעמען ברייט דעם וואַסער-יאָך</p>
--	--

²²⁹ The terms in italics are meant in the sense that Spinoza uses it in *Ethics*. I mean to connect Hofshiteyn’s landscapes with the tradition of ‘secular universalism.’ David Biale understands this vein of ‘secular universalism’ as a Jewish tradition of antinomian expression tradition in *Not in the Heavens*. Hofshiteyn engages with these precise traditions rather explicitly through his lexical repetitions and myriad references to world literature, but more often than not to those ‘secular universalist’ Jews that are the subject of Biale’s study.

²³⁰ Nokhem Oyslender, *Veg Ayn, Veg Oys*, pp. 106

<p>on shoulders grown sore, and willow's branches bow before the solar joy...</p> <p>And one willow twig will stitch up The fresh river's healing wounds And one will wash away And with roots they grasp And ride the breadth of water...</p> <p>But solar joy is bright! The mourning floe floats along a free river! And stalks bow: We are ready, we are ready...</p>	<p>אויף אַקסלען ווייך באַוואָקסענע, און לאָזעס בוקן זיך פֿאַר זונען פֿרייד...</p> <p>און לאָזעס איינע וועלן די פֿאַרהיילטע דראָפֿן אין פֿרישן טײַך באַנייען, און איינע וועט עס אונטערשווענקען מיט וואָרצלען זיי פֿאַרכאַפֿן און פֿירן אין די וואַסער-לענגען...</p> <p>נאָר העל איז זונען פֿרייד! אויף טײַך אויף פֿרייען קריהע געהט! און שטעגלאַך בוקן זיך: מיר זײַנען גרייט, מיר זײַנען גייט...</p>
---	---

“Krie,” literally means “ice flow,” but it is also a pun for the *loshen-koydesh* word “Krieh,” the ritual of the tearing of a mourning relative’s clothes at a funeral service.²³¹ The landscape depicts the spring thawing of a river, and the flow of willow twigs amid the ice. The season of spring is semantically associated with revolution, and it is that semantic association that Hofshsteyn assumes here. Hofshsteyn, as Chana Kronfeld notes, juxtaposes the destructive force of the spring icefloe with the procreative reproduction cycle of willow, utilizing a mystical circular trope.

The willow in this poem is a symbol of regeneration of tradition. It is also a reference to the psalm 137, where harps are hung on willows. The self-propagation of the willow requires the destructive force of the ice floe in spring, as they reproduce asexually, rooting easily in water. This asexual reproduction hints towards an infinity of tradition – while the plant is ripped apart by the river, this gives it a chance to produce a new willow that is genetically identical. In this way, the same willows can move along the banks of the river, which represents time. The willow

²³¹ Chana Kronfeld, *On the margins of Modernism*, pp. 213.

is also a symbol of eternity that roots in the “river of time.”²³² They are also animate and represent the willingness of people to make a sacrifice for freedom, despite the risk that they will be washed out to the eternal sea of death. Despite this destruction, the willows seem to bow and offer their sacrifice for freedom: “the ice flow moves along a *free* river.”

In this poem, the landscape reflects an ambivalent emotional response to the revolution--mourning is required as the end of an era and a way of life, but the future promises new possibilities of new freedoms. The metaphor seems to suggest that tradition lives on in the form that it can, but is transformed by time. The projection of a personal, ambivalent emotional response to the landscape carries with it a politics – the hope of historical progressivism, the sacrifice necessary for autonomy, the embrace of the new order while simultaneously mourning the old. Here, the personal and societal sense of the suffering that humanity has endured in revolution is compared to a natural phenomenon of the spring thaw. It understands loss and mourning as natural laws. It paints the human society and its violent transformation into modernity as natural phenomena, larger than individual or communal efforts. It locates humanity in the ability to adapt to the destructive forces, to mourn and transform them into creative forces.

Hofshteyn’s mourning of the passing of one epoch predicates the possibilities created by the dawning of another. The landscape here reflects an inner ambivalence of the human condition – the constant mourning of the irrevocable past coupled with the hope that the future will present new freedoms. Nature also instructs the poet and the reader how to relate to the revolution.

²³² Hofshteyn explicitly uses this phrase, which resonates with connotations from Heraclitus to Derzhavin’s “Slate Ode” to Osip Mandelstam.

Hofshteyn uses the elegiac genre and its conceit of reading infinitude into the landscape to construct the human ambivalence of existence, which is perhaps most acutely felt in times of catastrophe. Oyslender makes a note that Hofshteyn's poetry embraces a seemingly paradoxical combination of tradition and revolution.

די אומענדלעכקייט, אלס באגריף פֿון רוים, באהעפֿט זיך אין דער רעוואָלוציע מיט אַ
באגריף פֿון אַן אומענדלעכקייט אין צושטאַנד.
די רעוואָלוציע איז דורכױס אין דעם אָנזאָג אָף אַזאַ נײַער אומענדלעכקייט. איר גרוס איז
דער גרוס פֿון אַ נײַער ערע פֿון אַ נײַער וועלט-אַנטשטייאונג.
און עס הױזט נײַט די רעוואָלוציע אונטער אײן דאָך מיטן גײסט פֿון טראַדיציע.
האַפֿשטיינס דיכטערײַשן גײסט האָט זיך געױס אַרגאַניש באַהאַפֿטן אין די ערשטע
אױסברוכן פֿון דער רעוואָלוציע. אַבער האַפֿשטיינס אַביעקטױוסם האָט דאָך אין זיך זײער פֿיל פֿון
דעם טראַדיציע-גײסט.
און ווי צוליב אַ פֿאַראַדאַקס האָט דערדאָזיקער גײסט גענומען הױזן מיט די רעוואָלוציע-
מאַטױון צוזאַמען אונטער אײן דאָך פֿון האַפֿשטיינס דיכטונג.²³³

(104)

The infinitude, as a notion of space, combines the revolution with a notion of infinitude in situation.

The revolution is completely in the announcement of such a new infinitude. Its greeting is the greeting of a new era, from a new world-origin.

And the revolution does not live peacefully under one roof with the spirit of tradition.

Hofshteyn's poetic spirit was unified organically in the first outbreak of the revolution. But Hofshteyn's objectivism still has a lot of the spirit of tradition.

And because of a paradox that very spirit has taken up living in the same house with the revolutionary motifs under the same roof of Hofshteyn's poetry.

Perhaps it is this paradox, this recognition of nuanced balance of the human condition as reflected in the depiction of material reality, in which there is an eternal clash of the natural elements, which functions as the rejection of teleological utopian visions of a heaven on earth embraced by political language as antithetical to the human condition. This metaphysical-theological consideration of the nature of human subjectivity made Hofshteyn's poetry fodder for

²³³ Nokhem Oyslender, *Veg Ayn, Veg Oys*, pp. 104

ideological attacks of being a “fellow traveler.” In the passage above, Oyslender seems to be responding in part to the questions implied by the political circumstance of the time.

The Landscapes of *Along Roads*

Hofshteyn’s personal movement from a small village in the Pale of Settlement to a large, multicultural, urban center was characteristic of migration patterns at the time. The First World War and the events that followed disrupted the countryside, and even before that, growing industrialization and modernization in the Pale combined with the easing of restrictions governing the rights of Jews to live in cities (in the Russian Empire) drew more Jews to major urban centers not just in the Russian Empire, but all over the world.

Hofshteyn describes his phenomenological experiences on the edges of the Russian Empire in terms of exile, but exile takes on a larger context than Jewish exile, or Romantic exile, or classical Exile. Hofshteyn connects all of these various exiles to the primal exile of existence, of the fallen state of the human condition, both theological and philosophical. The consciousness that interacts with the perception that mediates human life is exile from the vast, expansive unconscious of the material *and* spiritual world. The result is that Jewish exile is synthesized with universal poetic trope of exile and represented as a universal human condition, thus undercutting the idea that exile negates belonging in Eastern Europe. Instead of promoting the ideology of national mythologies in his landscapes, Hofshteyn takes an objective stance and prefers to ponder human existence in relation to the elemental, natural world. It is in this contemplation human belonging rather than national belonging that Hofshteyn makes his critique of the various national literatures (primarily Russian, Ukrainian and Hebrew) that he grew up on and formed him as a thinker and informed the wider society as to how to relate to the landscape.

Hofshteyn depicts a contrast of Eastern European landscapes and exotic landscapes that compose the Russian empire, from the fields and forest of Ukraine to the mountains of the Caucasus, to the boreal forests and taiga of Siberia. These landscapes are the fringes of the Russian empire – the locales of exile in Russian Imperial literature. The insertion of himself into poetic dialogue with the imperial sublime creates tension and imbues new meaning to theme of exile, particularly among those Poets of Russian Romanticism and Empire.

Hofshteyn links the different kinds of exile in Russian literature and rejects the dichotomy of the other as primitive – for him, all men are subject to their primitive ancestors, and in line with Eastern European modernism, the primitive is a reflection on the self rather than a point of contrast between the “civilized” self and the “primitive” other. With this, he fused together the borderlands – the heartland fields of ancient Rus’ with the classical exilic location of the Black Sea and the elemental mountains landscapes of the Caucasus. He develops this border landscape to conceptualize his homeland as a multiethnic space between notions of East and West.²³⁴ This idea, which is still in circulation today, is now connected primarily with a Russian hegemonic nationalist-isolationist ideology valorizing *Russian* exceptionalism, but Hofshteyn constructs the border landscapes in non-national terms of human belonging, and rejection of extreme positions of nationalism. In stark contrast to the contemporary national mythology/ideology of *Eurasianism*, he promotes a human interaction with the landscape that attempts to remove the paint of nationalist mythologies, characterize by the dichotomy of East and West and tries to uncover the object underneath the paint: a human relationship with the primordial elements which leads to a non-national egalitarian conclusion.

²³⁴ See Kalinowska, *Between East and West*, pp. 145. This he develops from Pushkin and Shevchenko: Kalinowska claims “The Caucasian cycle’s text does not feature the Europeanized Russian metropolis as the point of arrival. Instead, Pushkin’s oriental journey brings him back to the idea of Russia as a reconstructed mythic periphery, as a space between the East and West.”

Hofshteyn's Modernist Objectivism²³⁵: The Landscape as an Interaction between Individual
Subject and Collective Human Society

Oyslender identifies the Hofshteyn's "ambivalent world-view"²³⁶ as stemming from Pushkin's "objectivism," a worldview that considers and questions the lyrical speaker's subjectivity. Oyslender applies the term to Hofshteyn to emphasize poetic inheritance but takes care to delineate Hofshteyn's objectivism from Pushkin's. However, Oyslender's claim demands more elaboration and explanation for the contemporary reader.

Objectivism is used in reference to Pushkin's poetic perspective by Boris Engelhart in a lecture on "Pushkin's Historicism" in 1912. According to Engelhart, critics focused too much on Pushkin's political and theological views: He was a poet and not a philosopher, not a theologian, not a politician. Rather, he argues that critics should focus on the worldview that he presents and how it changed over the course of his life.²³⁷ Engelhart's description of the philosophical tension heard between Pushkin's "I" and the outside world is an important mechanism in creating "objectivism," which Oyslender sees as an influence on Hofshteyn's brand of own objectivism.

... in any case there is no doubt that in it already sounds those notes that later pour out in the Romantic leitmotif of Pushkin's ideology: *a tense egocentrism of thought on the one hand, and a deep empiricism of evaluations on the other.*

²³⁵ The objectivism that is relevant to Hofshteyn is associated most directly with Pushkin, but one could also compare to objectivism in Anglo-American Modernism that grew out of William Carlos Williams' 'imagism.'

²³⁶ Seth Wolitz has noted Hofshteyn's "ambivalent worldview" in the 1922 collection "Troyer," but I would argue that Oyslender notes this in his essay in addressing Hofshteyn's penchant for paradox. Oyslender

²³⁷ The same could be said of Hofshteyn – during his lifetime he was criticized by the Yiddish language critic Litvakov as a 'fellow-traveler,' a person who had commonalities with the Bolshevik, but ultimately who is ideologically suspect. Paradoxically, critics often describe him as one of the founders of *Soviet* Yiddish literature.

The poet begins with an unmediated/immediate juxtaposition of his own “I” to the world. He doesn’t know anything about God, to whom the individual/personal is secondary from the beginning, nor does he know anything about the latest obligations of people and society. The foundational problem for every philosophical construction of the interconnectedness of the subject and the outside world he poses, not in the form of a question about the relationship of the abstract, communal understanding of the individual to society and nature, that is also tied to the general/communal delineation/definition, but in a form that is wholly concrete, that concentrates on the actual/physical moment of the juxtaposition of his “I” and the environment. All the questions he resolves for himself and in exchange for his own fear. From the beginning, in that very thought of his philosophizing, he stands on the bed-rock of the individualist method.

But contrasting his own “I” to the world around him, the poet himself understands that “I” as oversimplified. Relating skeptically to every ideal break, it’s as if he does not want to notice any other movement of his own will, other than that aimed at the attainment of satisfaction; he predicates enjoyment as the highest importance, and, in agreement with that, to see the meaning of the personal in happiness, understood materially, like the indulgence of all sensational impulses of the human. The problem of individualism is decided here with the help of dogmatically accepted basis of eudaimonist positivism, of which the result is the system of egoistic philosophy.^{238 239}

Engelhardt describes the root of Pushkin’s poetic subjectivity: “*a tense egocentrism of thought on the one hand, and a deep empiricism of evaluations on the other.*” Hofshsteyn’s objectivism is a development of the Romantic sublime into the 20th century modernism. Scientific observation

²³⁸ ... во всякомъ случаѣ не подлежитъ сомнѣнію, что въ немъ уже звучать тѣ ноты,которыя позднѣе сольются въ лейтмотивъ романтической идеологіи Пушкина: *напряженный эгоцентризмъ мышленія, съ одной стороны, и глубокой эмпиризмъ оцѣнокъ, съ другой.*

Поэтъ начинаетъ съ непосредственнаго противопоставленія своего „я“ міру. Онъ ничего не знаетъ ни о Богѣ, которому изначально подчинена личность, ни объ обязанностяхъ этой послѣдней передъ людьми и обществомъ. Основная для всякаго философскаго построенія проблема взаимоотношенія субъекта и внѣшняго міра ставится имъ не въ формѣ вопроса объ отношеніи отвлеченнаго, общаго понятія индивидуума къ обществу и природѣ, также взятымъ въ общемъ опредѣленіи, а въ формѣ вполне конкретнаго, концентрирующагося на наличномъ моментѣ сопоставленія его „я“ и окружающаго. Всѣ вопросы онъ рѣшаетъ для себя и за свой страхъ. Въ этомъ смыслѣ его философствованіе съ самаго начала стоитъ на почвѣ индивидуалистическаго метода’.

Но, противопологая свое „я“ окружающему міру, поэтъ само это „я“ понимаетъ слишкомъ упрощенно. Относясь скептически ко всякимъ идеальнымъ порывамъ, онъ какъ будто не хочетъ замѣчать никакихъ другихъ движеній своей воли, кромѣ направленныхъ къ достиженію удовольствія; наслажденіе онъ объявляетъ высшей цѣнностью, и, согласно этому, видитъ назначеніе личности въ счастье, понимаемомъ матерьяльно, какъ удовлетвореніе всѣхъ чувственныхъ влеченій челоѣка. Проблема индивидуализма рѣшается здѣсь съ помощью догматически принятыхъ основоположеній эйдаямонистическаго позитивизма, результатомъ чего является система эгоистической философіи.

²³⁹ Boris Engelhardt, “Istorizm Pushkina: K voprosu o kharakterie pushkinskogo ob’ektivizma.”

of an object requiring the questioning of one's own perceptions allow the sublime moment to occur not only in the face of a decentering natural beauty, but in the everyday occurrences of existence. Hofshateyn's homelandsapes are combinations of his lived-through experience filtered through his perceptions, which he signals through intertext are created through the interpretation of literature. He makes his readers aware that his personal experience is shaped by the outside world, particularly culture, by juxtaposing his lived-through experience with the experiences of predecessors, contemporaries, and possible proteges. His engagement with the landscape, as shown in "Letste Teg" and "Di Krie Geyt" projects natural cycles onto the individual response to communal trauma.

It is my conjecture that in Hofshateyn's objectivism is a reaction against this righteousness that comes from an inability to question one's own subjectivity, to realize true failings of human community and communication the failure to realize that human life and consciousness is a phenomenon. Political disagreements, violent nationalisms that claim ownership of territory by a certain ethnic-religious group or empire and deny all possibility of belonging to the other (and even division of the self and the other) are all products of an inability to escape or imagine anything other than superficial human language and an unquestionably subjective worldview where humans have complete power of the will to create and shape the world. This is often represented as a tension between the city, made of natural resources shaped by man, and the countryside, which is represented as primordial and inverts the balance of power – human is subject to natural laws. Where Pushkin accepts the Cynical²⁴⁰ idea of *eudaimonia* as the highest individual achievement, Hofshateyn rejects the authoritarian belief in the power of the will and

²⁴⁰ the Greek Cynics, not its colloquial usage.

realizes that all humanity is at the mercy of the natural world, and it is, in a sense resembling Spinoza's conception of substance as the body of God, subject to natural laws.

In a world on the brink of creation/liberation and destruction, Hofshteyn questions his own subjectivity and looks to nature and the landscape for an objective, material reality and wonders if he can, from there, discern natural laws of which the individual human mind and society is subject.

Oyslender calls this juxtaposition of subjective and objective viewpoints as an interaction between Hofshteyn's "iberlebung," or "lived-through experience," and the landscape, which functions as a theatrical stage:

"די איבערפלוס פֿון לאַנדשאַפֿט מאָלעריי, אָרנאַמענט פֿון יעדער איינציקער ליד, וועלכע שטרעבט צו פֿיקסירן די איבערלעבונג אָף אַ באַשימטן ערד־ווינקל (ווי קאַווקאַז, רוסישע פֿעלדער, סיבער) — דאָס אלעס דאַרף זײַן דער אויסדרוק פֿון האַפֿשטיין כּוּש צו אַרטיקייט, צו פֿעסטן באַדן, צום קאָנקרעטן שווי־פּלאַץ.
אין האַפֿשטיינס איבערלעבונג פֿעלט דורכאויס די ליטעראַרישע און פּסיכאָלאָגישע אַבסטראַקציע. זײַן סטיל שאַפֿט זיך אין דעם פּראָזעס פֿון אינבערטראַגן דאָס אייגנאַטיקע "איך" — געמעל אויף אַ קאָנקרעטן וועלט־פּלאַץ."²⁴¹

The overflow of landscape painting, the ornament of each and every poem that strives to fix the lived-through experience to a defined corner of the earth (such as the Caucasus, the Fields of Rus', Siberia)—all of this should be the expression of Hofshteyn's sense of place (*ortikayt*), to a resolute cleansing, to a concrete setting of a show.

In Hofshteyn's lived-through experience, literary and psychological abstraction is absent throughout. His style is created in the process of translating the characteristic ego-portrait to a concrete world-plane.

Oyslender claims that there is not literary or psychological abstraction in Hofshteyn's "iberlebung," however the word abstraction here seems not to refer to the concept of abstract art, but rather an formulaic conception of the poetic "I" and the reduction of the infinite potential of

²⁴¹ Oyslender, *Veg Ayn, Veg Oys*, pp. 100

the dynamic conception of the self and the individual into an abstraction of “-isms” — Hofshteyn’s poetics juxtapose the subjective experience to a larger objective experience, to write his experience of space and exile into world literature to juxtapose his subjectivity with the subjectivity of others who have experienced the phenomenon of exile and constructed concrete artistic objects based on the interaction of human society through commonalities they have by existing on the same part of the earth – nature’s immortality becomes associated the immortality of human culture by the medium of the written word.

Hofshteyn’s objectivism rests on his constant consideration of the subjectivity of the poet as a perceptual filter of the natural world, of which the true unmediated magical essence is only approachable through art, which cannot be reduced to a singular, superficial political message. The principal of objectivism guides Hofshteyn to present the Ukrainian landscape through a dream-abstraction of memory to attain the blank slate of childhood perception of the physical world. The unindoctrinated child does not question national belonging – it exists and that is wonder enough and material for musing. Memory (specifically cultural memory) and human history are reason enough for belonging, and for that reason the landscape becomes memory; it is endowed with the timeless quality of a mythic, primordial past, while simultaneously existing in the moment of “now.”²⁴²

Hofshteyn challenges the imperial, colonial assumptions characteristic of Russian Romantic poetry of the Caucasus, which Harsha Ram has called the *Imperial Sublime*. Hofshteyn’s attempts to experience the landscapes that have been colored by the Imperial from his own perspective, juxtaposing that his subjective experience in time and space to that created

²⁴² See Aleksander Blok’s “Skify” for a reiteration of Pushkin’s “moment”. He poses uncountable natural time and the idea of “now,” which he associates with the primitive other and Asia (and, I believe, in context, bolshevism) versus a countable time associated with the European and “civilization,” but also chauvinism.

in Russian Romantic literature. He questions the Imperial ideology and hegemonic power structures that are implicit in the landscapes of romantic nationalism. He strives for an objective viewpoint – to decouple their ideology from his own, to respond and critique their assumptions, based on dichotomies of “civilization” and the “primitive,” and have his own interaction with the landscape that rejects the marginalization of non-Russian ethnicity as other.

Reinvention of the Romantic Search for individualist freedom, Reinvention of the Concept of the Russian Empire as between East and West

Hofshteyn’s re-conception of the Romantic poetics of Empire is governed by the poet’s place in his own historical time and his ambivalent relation to clash of future and past.

Oyslender puts Hofshteyn’s “spirit of tradition” in contrast with his “revolutionary spirit”:

ווי יעדער טראדיציע־גייסט, האָט האָפּשטיין פֿריער פֿאַר אַלץ רעאַגירט אַלעמאַל אַף דאָס
אָוטאָריטעטישע. דערפֿאַר האָט ער אויך פֿאַר דער רעוואָלוציע געזוכט פֿריער פֿאַר אַלץ צו געפֿינען
אַן אָפּגלאַנץ פֿון אָוטאָריטעטישקייט. (105)

Like every spirit of tradition, Hofshteyn first and foremost was always reacting to the authoritarian. And therefore he first and foremost searched for the revolution to find a reflection of authority.

Hofshteyn seeks an objective viewpoint above human linguistic quibbles over political freedom. This sentiment can be found in some of Pushkin’s libertarian poems. In poems like “From Pindemonti,” Pushkin often dismisses political speech in favor of individualistic artistic freedom, which he views as the only plausible rebellion of the individual against power. In this poem, Pushkin quotes Hamlet, “slova, slova, slova...” “words, words, words...” in order to dismiss the political language of the court, as Hamlet replied to Polonius, his father in-law to be and court position, in a moment of feigned madness when Polonius asks what Hamlet is reading

(he is reading a political treatise). In Pushkin’s poem, this sentiment reflects a frustration with the superficiality of the political language of the court, and a drive to find a type of personal individual freedom and expression outside of the political court system. The individualistic artistic rebellion – in Hamlet’s case, a meta-play, in Pushkin’s, poetry, – is a rebellious incantation that has questionable immediate material impact, and the only form of rebellion that is possible in a such a repressive authoritarian society, even though, as in the case of Pushkin, it was often punished with exile.

Hofshteyn notices correlation between the national Romantic uprisings that so often inspired Pushkin’s verse and the nationalist movements of his own time, but also the dissonance in Pushkin’s “libertarian” poems and his exilic poems in the Caucasus. Hofshteyn rebels without an explicitly nationalistic tone, but with artistic language that emphasizes the link between individual and communal autonomy in response to superficial simplification of political language that claims authority over nature.

The programmatic poem of Pushkin’s adolescence and the poem that propelled him to fame through infamy, “Ode to Liberty,” directly lead to his exile.

Владыки! вам венец и трон Даёт Закон — а не природа; Стоите выше вы народа, Но вечный выше вас Закон.	Rulers! To you the crown and the throne Are given by the law, and not nature; You stand above the Folk, but above you eternally stands the law.
--	--

The rhyme, priroda-naroda (nature-folk), suggests a Herderian nationalist associated equivalence (or metonymic relationship?) of the folk and nature, and puts the meaning created in the rhyme into opposition to the rhyme, tron-zakon (throne-law).

Throughout *Along Roads*, Hofshsteyn considers himself and his moment within the context of the afterlife of Pushkin's "libertarian" poems.²⁴³ Hofshsteyn's landscapes often probe the laws of nature for insight into human society and existence, and an answer to the questions of individual and societal freedom in the changing political landscape – a time in which the Romantic search for national freedom and incantation to the destruction of an unjust autocracy sees a possibility to materialize into a political reality as the Empire collapses.

Hofshsteyn's poetic persona is inspired by and conversant with Pushkin's Libertarian poems. The influence of Romantic individualism can be found Hofshsteyn's poems, filtered through the prism of world literature, particularly the egoistic philosophical strain from Spinoza to Kant to Schopenhauer and taken up by neo-Kantians and in the realm of poetry, Russian ego-futurists, cubists, and a general tendency of modernity to focus on the individual human mind and its relation to society. Oyslender sees Hofshsteyn's innovation in applying this stance also towards the revolution. It is this critical, reflexive perspective that creates Hofshsteyn's ambivalence and makes it his own.

It is not only Pushkin's libertarian poems that are important to Hofshsteyn in *Along Roads*. Pushkin's exilic poems, which can be divided into his southern poems and his Caucasian poems also play a large role. It is precisely this edge of empire of Ukraine and the Caucasus that has been colored by Pushkin's exoticized, orientalized landscapes, that Hofshsteyn experienced his life, and it is his experience that often collides with own understanding of "the edge/ the

²⁴³ Here I am using an older sense of the 'libertarian' as a proponent of liberalism and enlightenment values that emphasizes the freedom of the individual an opposition to the total autocratic state control. Modern-day political libertarianism in the United States is a warped understanding and development of liberalism that promotes individual greed as freedom and rejects civil society and a public sphere, and skews towards contemporary illiberal ideology enabled by the demagoguery and the philosophy of post-modern moral relativism. In short, Pushkin's poems reject claims of absolute authority of Russian autocracy by asserting the poet as a free-thinking individual who insist on a sincere dialogue in the public sphere. The context of libertarian ideas in a Pushkin's 19th century autocratic Russian Empire is vastly different, and perhaps opposite poles of from the political ideologues that reject a democratic society based on the very same enlightenment principles that Pushkin himself conversed with.

borderlands” Hofshsteyn also notices ideological tension between Pushkin’s conception of freedom in the libertarian poems and in the poems of exile in the south and the Caucasus – and it is this tension that he seeks to critique in his poetic conversation with Pushkin.

In *Prisoner of the Caucasus*, Pushkin continues his discussion of individual freedom. (*Svoboda* as opposed to *vol’ya*, a freedom associated with the will, which was the previous subject). This freedom is associated with freedom from “civilization” and its ills. It is a primitive, anarchic freedom that Pushkin’s hero is uncomfortable with in his position as a “civilized” European, and consequently this primitivist freedom becomes captivity for Pushkin’s hero. In the passage below, Pushkin constructs the trope of the Romantic hero as a primal fallen angel. The hero ironically ends up as a prisoner in the Caucasus because he sought freedom away from Russia:

<p>Людей и свет изведаль он, И знал неверной жизни цену. В сердцах друзей нашёл измену, В мечтах любви безумный сон, Наскуча жертвой быть привычной Давно презренной суеты, И неприязни двуязычной, И простодушной клеветы, Отступник света, друг природы, Покинул он родной предел И в край далекий полетел С веселым призраком свободы.</p> <p>Свобода! он одной тебя Ещё искал в пустынном мире. Страстями чувства истребя, Охолодев к мечтам и к лире, С волненьем песни он внимал, Одушевленные тобою,</p>	<p>He knew the people and the world, And he knew price of untruthful life. In the hearts of friends, he found treason, In the fantasies of love—a sick dream, Bored victims of being accustomed to Long despicable vanity, And split-tongued hostility, And simple-minded slander, The apostate of the world[pun:light], a friend of nature, He left his native limits And flew to the distant land With the specter of freedom.</p> <p>Freedom! it’s the only thing of yours I still searched for in the empty desert of the world. Consumed by the passions of feelings,</p>
---	---

<p>И с верой, пламенной мольбою Твой гордый идол обнимал.²⁴⁴</p>	<p>Having become numb to dreams and to the lyre, With anxiety he listened of the song, Animated by thee, And with faith, in a fiery prayer he embraced your proud idol.</p>
---	---

Freedom here is compared to an idol, yet an unmediated inspiration to the poet.

Caucasian Nature is represented as desert and a negation of light and society, yet closer to forces of primal creation. In the passage above, one can see the (rather disturbing, from a modern perspective,) tropes of the civilized, enlightened, Christianized West in opposition to the primal, idolatrist, East that is supposedly closer to primal nature. Pushkin's hero is not able to realize the freedom that he desires in the Caucasus, he ultimately rejects the East and Freedom by abandoning the Circassian girl who saves him, leading to her suicide. Hofshateyn, by contrast does not reject the other – his presentation of individualist freedom rejects the national connotations that Pushkin employs.

The voice presented in Pushkin's libertarian poems grates against the ingrained imperialism and orientalism of his exilic poems about the Caucasus and accepts the colonizing ideology of the Russian Empire associated with the tradition of the "imperial sublime." The Russian Empire is presented a "western," civilizing force against a "chaotic," "primitive," Orientalized "East." Hofshateyn's dialogue with Pushkin and the Russian Romantic tradition questions the colonialist ideology of the "imperial sublime."

²⁴⁴ Aleksandr Pushkin, "Kavkazkiy Plennik," pp. 490.

Primordial Caucasian Landscapes and appropriation of Romantic exile: “In Himl-Roym” / “In Sky-Space” and “Fun Berg Geyt a Sturm” “

Hofshteyn depicts natural Caucasian landscapes in “In Himl-Roym” and “Fun Berg Geyt a Shturem” to develop the primordial, elemental theme associated with the Caucasus Russian literature. The primal Caucasian theme is associated with Romantic exile. For example, Pushkin in *Prisoner of the Caucasus* begins his poem: “Accept it with a smile, my friend--/ this offering of an imagination set free/ to you I’ve dedicated this exiled poet’s song,/ this work my empty time has moved me to create.”²⁴⁵ ²⁴⁶ Pushkin continues to elaborate on the primal creative forces of the Caucasus, naming it a “new Parnassus,” the classical mountain of the muses which is often praised in 18th century Russian poetry in reiteration of the classical trope. Pushkin’s Romantic Parnassus locates a new, wild, primitive, primordial source of poetic inspiration.

<p><i>Во дни печальные разлуки Мои задумчивые звуки Напоминали мне Кавказ, Где пасмурный Бешту пустынный величавый, Аулов и полей властитель пятиглавый, Был новый для меня Парнас. Забуду ли его кремнистые вершины, Гремучие ключи, увядшие равнины, Пустыни знойные, края, где ты со мной Делил души молодые впечатленья; Где рыскает в горах воинственный разбой, И дикий гений вдохновенья Таится в тишине глухой? Ты здесь найдешь воспоминанья, Быть может, милых сердцу дней, Противуречия страстей,</i></p>	<p><i>I was sad when we parted; And as my thoughts turned to poetry I recalled the Caucasus, Where grim mount Beshtau, like an awesome hermit, Dominates with its five peaks The villages and fields of the Circassians. It became for me a new Parnassus, mount of inspiration. I’ll never forget its flinty summits, Its gushing springs, its parched heathlands, Its sultry wastes, that landscape That made such a deep impression on the two of us – Where warlike raiders roam the hills And a wild imagination Lies in ambush in the empty silence. In this story you’ll find, I hope,</i></p>
--	--

²⁴⁵ “Прими с улыбкою, мой друг,/Свободной музы приношенья:/Тебе я посвятил, изгнанной лиры пенья/И вдохновенный свой досуг.”

<i>Мечты знакомые, знакомые страданья И тайный глас души моей.</i>	<i>Memories of days we so enjoyed, You'll find clashing emotions, Familiar dreams, familiar sorrows, And the private voice of my inner self.</i>
--	--

Pushkin, in his description of clashing primal elements, creates a primordial scene in which dichotomies clash: primal good and evil, “modern civilization” and “primitive wilderness,” Freedom and captivity. These clashing elements, according to the last lines quote there, represent a topography of the Romantic poet’s soul.

Pushkin’s heroine, the Circassian Girl, appears to the hero as if out of the landscape, in an act of primal creation:

<p>...Он ждет, чтоб с сумрачной зарей Погас печальной жизни пламень, И жаждет сени гробовой.</p> <p>Уж меркнет солнце за горами; Вдали аздалься шумный гул; С полей народ идет в аул, Сверкая светлыми косами. Пришли; в домах зажглись огни, И постепенно шум нестройный Умолкнул; всё в ночной тени Объято негою спокойной; Вдали сверкает горный ключ, Сбегая с каменной стремнины; Оделись пеленою туч Кавказа спящие вершины... Но кто, в сиянии луны, Среди глубокой тишины Идет, украдкой ступая?</p>	<p>... he waited for the flame of his sorry life to go out with the last glow of sunset; he longed for the refuge of the grave. The sun was already out of sight behind the mountains.</p> <p>A loud hubbub started up in the distance. The folk were returning from their fields to the village, their gleaming harvest knives catching the fading light. As they arrived fires were lit in their houses, and gradually the raucous clamour died away.</p> <p>With night fall a comfortable tranquility enveloped the place. In the distance a mountain torrent showed white as it tumbled a rocky precipice. The sleeping peaks of the Caucasus were wrapped in a blanket of cloud...</p> <p>But someone was coming in the moonlight, treading in the deep silence. Who was it?</p>
--	---

Out of the primordial silence and sleep of the Caucasian mountain night, the Circassian girl appears with a sense of anxiety, as if she were ambiguously a primal good or evil.

“In Himl Roym” depicts a primal Caucasian landscape at sunset with many similarities to the landscape describe in in *Prisoner of the Caucasus* when the Russian is observing the sun set in the Caucasus right before he meets the Circassian girl for the first time. Hofshsteyn’s poem is much briefer than the section of *Prisoner of the Caucasus* though it depicts a primal, creative breeze blowing over the mountain, animating the few trees.

<p>In sky-space The last seam Of glowing ribbon Dissolves and goes pallid...</p> <p>A bundle of breezes Steals across silently From across the mountain In the broad valley...</p> <p>though the trees here are sparse Before suddenly – it becomes a litigation And it becomes a play For each branch For each leaf,-- And I... I don’t get involved – I don’t speak In the dark calm... I listen attentively...</p>	<p>אין הימל-רוים צעגעהט און ווערט שוין בלאַס דער לעצטער זוים דער גליהנדיגער פאַס... אַ בינטל ווינטעלאַך פֿון איבער באַרג זיך גנבעט שטיל אין ברייטן טאַל... נאָר בוימער איז דאָ קאַרג פֿאַר אַלע מיט אַמאַל – און ס'ווערט אַ לאַדעניש און ס'ווערט אַ שפּיל פֿאַר יעדער בלאַט – און איך, איך מיש זיך ניט—איך שווייג אין טומלדיגער רוה... איך הער זיך צו...²⁴⁷</p>
---	--

Hofshsteyn depicts a primal Caucasian landscape as the sun sets, similar to Pushkin’s above. However, he refrains from othering the landscape, he refrains from judgement. For him, it is enough to gaze in primal silence and experience the landscape without imposing his subjective judgements upon it: “And I... I don’t get involved – I don’t speak/ In the dark calm.../ I listen attentively...” This statement is one of the objective position rather than a subjective imposition.

²⁴⁷ Dovid Hofshsteyn, *Bay Vegn*, pp. 42-43.

He is attracted to the phenomenon of the primal landscape and the passing of time in natural phenomenon, the link between time and space.

Hofshteyn’s position in “In Sky-Space...”, especially in the final lines, seems to echo Lermontov’s “I went out Along the Highroad...”:

<p>Чтоб всю ночь, весь день мой слух лелея, Про любовь мне сладкий голос пел, Надо мной чтоб, вечно зеленея, Темный дуб склонялся и шумел.</p>	<p>(he would like to sleep/dream/so...) ...That all day, all night, in lulling accents A sweet voice would sing to me of love, That a somber Oaktree, ever greening, Would incline its rustling boughs above.</p>
---	---

This animating breeze is a reference to the act of creation, the breath of God as depicted in Genesis, appropriating the Russian Romantic tradition’s representation of the Caucasus as a place of primal existence. Hofshteyn, however, instead of orientalizing, representing the landscape as exotically “other,” or depicting a primitive aspect, describes a primordial landscape as it is, raw in natural beauty, without rejecting it, or the people who inhabit it as other. The primordially of ancient mountain landscape is another threshold towards the origin of humanity and its relationship with the world. Hofshteyn focuses his poetic gaze on creation – and the creation of the landscape was the first tasks accomplished in the Bible. Perhaps this explains one of the reasons for the Landscape motif in *Along Roads*: it is an opportunity to imagine linguistic and cultural creation in imitation of the primal creation of the earth. For him, this primordial landscape is a source of wonder and creation that affects all humanity, it is the source of primal creation. He does not color it with value judgements or reject it as a primitive and other.

Similarly, in the next poem, “Fun Berg Geyt a Shturm...”/ “A Storm Comes from the Mountains...”, Hofshteyn describe a primordial, stormy landscape:

<p>A storm comes from the mountains. There, a powerful arm</p>	<p>פֿון בערג געהט אַ שטורעם. דאַרט פֿאַכעט מיט פֿרייער</p>
---	---

<p>Fans a flame On rounded peaks And drives the darkness of the world Into the caves!</p> <p>If you are silent, Silence is dear to me... Still, it draws me towards the storm, the fire and smoke And constriction of caves And the abyss of the world.</p>	<p>א מעכטיגער אָרעם אויף קנויליגע הויכן, און טרייבט אין די היילן דעם חושך פֿון וועלט! אויב דו ביזט אין שטילקייט, איז שטילקייט מיר טייער... נאָר ס'ציהט מיך אויך שטורעם, און פֿייער און רויכן, און ענגקייט פֿון היילן און חושך פֿון וועלט!...²⁴⁸</p>
---	---

The poet's act of silent observation is an attempt to understand a language of lower link in the chain of being, a typical Romantic trope. "Fun Berg Geyt a Sturem" utilizes more overt Biblical imagery: a disembodied arm that drives the "darkness of the world" into caves. In this poem he also focuses in on silence. Silence, as in Tyutchev and Mandelshtam (See their respective "Silentium" poems) is also connected to a state of primal creation. Pushkin also reflects on this primordial silence in the Caucasian scenes above. While both Hofshsteyn and Pushkin represent the primal silence as volatile, Pushkin represents it with a sense of human anxiety and fear, while Hofshsteyn depicts it in a source of wonder in the primal creation and embraces uncertainty of the primordial threshold: to Hofshsteyn, the "silence is dear," while Pushkin asks, suspiciously: "Но кто, в сиянии луны,/Среди глубокой тишины/Идет, украдкою ступая?" / "but who in the light of the moon,/ amid the deep quiet/ walks, with stealing steps."

Hofshsteyn's lexical repetition of the "stealing" of "украдкою ступая" in the stanza "a bintl vintelekh,/ fun iber barg,/ zikh ganeyn shtil/ in breytn tol..."/ "A bundle of breezes/Steals across silently/From across the mountain/In the broad valley..." In Pushkin, it is the Circassian girl, representing the freedom that the Russian sought and rejected in the Caucasus that sneaks

²⁴⁸ Dovid Hofshsteyn, *Bay Vegn*, pp. 44.

like a thief, though, in Hofshateyn, it is the animating breeze itself that sneaks like a thief into the valley, and it is welcomed as a wonder rather than anxiously awaited, used and ultimately rejected.

In “A Rumbling Street,” Hofshateyn makes his critique of the “imperial sublime” most strikingly, addressing his romantic precedents in second person:

<p>A rumbling street down a mountainside, A swarm of people, wheels, and horses, A lofty piece of a late summer's sky ... What more do you need, is this not enough for you?</p> <p>You have trouble to watch Even through a child's eyes the noisy day that rushes past straight in the face or in its hovering back. Lift up your head, you are free in your loneliness.</p> <p>Another spoonful of air from the sky dwelling! Another branch for your nest! Is it worth it to argue over all of it With the entirety of the sad world?</p> <p>Why do you say that precisely here in the world You surrender the most minute of movements From your mischievously blind heart? A singular hair of a wild wig From your proud, uncovered head?...</p>	<p>א רוישנדיקע גאס ארויף א בארג, פון מענטשן פערד און רעדער א געווימל, א הויכע שטיק סוף-זומערדיקן הימל – וואס דארפסטו נאך, וואס איז דיר קארג?</p> <p>דעם רוישנדיקן טאג וואס יאגט פארביי, האסטו ביד נאך ווי א קינד צו קוקן אין פנים גלייך, אין שוועבנדיקן רוקן. הויב אויף דעם קאפ, ביזט אינזאם פריי!</p> <p>אן אנדער לעפל לופט פון הימלישן געצעלט! א צווייג אן אנדערע פאר נעסט פאר דינעם! צי איז דאס ווערט זאלסטו וועגן דעם גאר טענהן מיט גארער טרויערדיקער וועלט?</p> <p>פארוואס זאג אויף דער וועלט דא גיסטו אפ דעם מינדסטן ריר פון הארץ פון בלינד-פארשייטן? איין-איינסיק הערעלע פון ווילדן שייטל פון דיין אנטפלעקטן שטאלצן קאפ?...</p>
--	--

This poem critiques the unruly form and negative cognitive dissonance of Pushkin's *Prisoner of the Caucasus*, where the dedication, the story and the epilogue seem to be at odds with one another. Pushkin's conception of freedom(s) seems inconsistent applied to all people. It is the zeitgeist of Pushkin's society that colors the landscape and prevents him from rejoicing in it. While Pushkin questions the meaning of Freedom in *Prisoner of the Caucasus*, Hofshateyn

rejects the gloominess and obstinate refusal to escape the ills of Russian “civilization” with the line: “Lift up your head, you are free in your loneliness.” The observation of the Caucasian landscape in full light seems to be enough to Hofshyteyn – the aesthetic representation of what is and the celebration of existence in full flux. The gloominess of exile should not prevent one from enjoying the natural world as it is.

Harsha Ram has noticed a trend in the Imperial sublime:

The Caucasian works of Pushkin and Lermontov reflect the romantic discovery of the sublime in the natural world. Yet the dialectic they enact between the self and nature points also to the limits of the natural sublime. However awe-inspiring the mountain scenery and however fierce the battle, both fail to match the moody depths of the romantic hero.²⁴⁹

Hofshyteyn promotes a different relation to exile: Another spoonful of air from the sky dwelling!/Another branch for your nest!/Is it worth it to argue over all of it/With the entirety of the sad world?” Hofshyteyn’s does not limit the natural sublime, in his conception, the primal landscapes are full of limitless, unbounded creation.

Pushkin uses the verb гнездиться /to nest several times to describe the lodgings of the Circassian tribes in “Prisoner of the Caucasus.”²⁵⁰ While in Russian this metaphor may be quite subtle because of its idiomatic usage to describe the dwellings of people, Hofshyteyn translates in into Yiddish and it calls attention to it. Hofshyteyn twists the metaphor: if it is meant in Pushkin’s exilic poems to dehumanize and marvel at the primitive “noble savage” who nests in the cliffs like birds and have an unmediated, primal connection to nature, in Hofshyteyn’s poem it is directed towards Pushkin himself, imploring him to reconsider his own position through

²⁴⁹ Harsha Ram, *The Imperial Sublime*, pp. 9

²⁵⁰ (Гнездо разбойничьих племен,/Черкесской вольности ограда.), (К ущельям, где гнездились вы,/Подъедет путник без боязни,/И возвестят о вашей казни/Преданья темные молвы.)

examining the natural scenery around him. Hofshateyn uses the image of the nest as a temporary dwelling throughout *Along Roads*, often connecting it with classical trope of weaving as poetry.

Hofshateyn quotes Pushkin explicitly in “We spent the night at the Cossack Camp,” and so a direct address is made here that alerts the reader to the intertextual conversation:

Мы ночевали на казачьих постах
Пушкин.

(We spent the night at the Cassock camp
--Pushkin)

By this alone for me my pain is justified,
For this itself my longing is sweet to me:
His head here on this mountain rested,
His feet trod upon this very road.

From my tender youth there in the wide open fields
His spirit of freedom constantly hovered over me,
His glowing calmness encircled my head
In dark hours of grief and captive suffering...

Here among the splendor of the mountains
and the terror of caves
My spirit will subdue his untamed torrid delight—
Like him, I come from the far and wide, from the wide and far,
both captive and master, and want to share in his delights here...

“We spent the night at the cassock camp” begins with an epigraph taken from Pushkin’s *Journey to Arzrum*, a travel journal written in 1828 when Pushkin returned to the Caucasus and followed a military campaign through the Caucasus, through Georgia and Armenia into Turkey.

The setting of the Cossack camp in the Caucasus creates an overlay of space: the “wide open fields” of the Ukrainian steppe with the “Splendor of the mountains/ and terror of caves” of

the primordial mountain landscape of the Caucasus. Although Hofshateyn quotes Pushkin, the superimposition of space has been made before by Shevchenko in his own “Kavkaz.” Pushkin and Shevchenko present a Romantic National Dialogue. Pushkin, takes the traditional position of Muscovy and associates both the Cossack and the Caucasian as other, primitive and oriental. Shevchenko relates with Pushkin’s primitive other in the struggle against the colonizing empire. Hofshateyn addresses both Shevchenko and Pushkin in his discussion.

The first stanza addresses Pushkin, and more figuratively, Shevchenko, in the third person singular. The tone is elegiac – he is no longer present, no longer able to be addressed in the second person. The conversation is meant to “collapse time like a fan,” and glimpse the infinitude of literature and world culture. The setting for this conversation is the space of Russian Romantic Imperial Sublime – Hofshateyn mentions the mountain road to connect it to the road from the Ukrainian landscapes of *Along Roads* and the theme of road as exile that he developed in the previous sections of the book.

The second stanza presents the Ukrainian steppe landscape. The line, “His glowing calmness encircled my head/In dark hours of grief and captive suffering...”, echoes the language and complaints of the hero of Prisoner of the Caucasus, although Hofshateyn refers to Ukraine with these lines, recalling his childhood memories of reading Pushkin. This memory superimposed the two landscapes in the childhood mind of Hofshateyn, and the experience of being on the other, exoticized, orientalized side of imperial exile recalls those memories.

Hofshteyn develops the ambivalent of belonging that is characteristic of Russian Romantic Poetry and superimposes it to his personal situation in time. In doing so, he claims the Romantic tradition for his own and for Yiddish literature. His development of the theme presents the Jewish subject of empire as the Romantic hero. The trans-linguistic intertextuality reveals the ancient “kinship of languages,” emphasizing the Old Testament roots of the Romantic exilic trope and demonstrating that an ambivalence of belonging is part of the Human condition and universally relatable, reputing the idea of Jewish non-belonging in Eastern Europe by means of pseudo-religion based antisemitic and nationalist tropes. These tropes are rather meant to be metaphorical of the human condition, and Hofshteyn emphasizes this in his engagement with Romantic tropes, in which the theme is understood as such.

Hofshteyn’s Wanderer

It is the interaction between the poetic persona and the landscape that dominates Hofshteyn’s wander is distinct from Kulbak’s wanderer, which was built on the image of the Hasidic Tsadik in folkloric tradition. While Kulbak does endow his wander with Romantic properties, such as the ability to understand the language of nature and transcend human language, “the nature sense,” Hofshteyn’s wanderer is a semi-autobiographical figure that is conscious of the folkloric origins of the wanderer, but presents a modern, secular, universal and syncretic translation of the folkloric trope into the context of modernity. It is also a metaphor for an exilic mindset. His modern wanderer persona superimposes the traditional image with those images of the wanderer and themes of exile in his conception of “world literature,” especially Romantic literature, but to some degree classical literature through the lens of romantic literature.

The image of the wanderer has connotations in Jewish folklore and Hofshiteyn makes a nod to these connotations when he mentions his grandfather's inheritance ("yerushe"), and other symbolic items such as a walking stick or wine-skin flask, both of which are symbols of a distant, perhaps "eastern" or "oriental" deep, mythological past. But Hofshiteyn's poet combines this wanderer in a more universal gestalt of the Romantic wanderer.²⁵¹ In the superimposition of wanderer archetypes, Hofshiteyn frees the trope of its folkloric style and elevates the trope to a universal world literature.

He makes the same transformation to the Yiddish language itself by creating a specifically literary language. A specific literary paronomasia created through "lexical repetition," and a citational poetics creates a semantic layering that is perhaps it is the dominate feature of his artistic work. Semantic layering performs the individual experience of an existence between cultures and times, a secularized mystical wandering through cultural realms towards the unifying human experience. The unifying human experience is worldly and secular, but at the same time, it is particularly Jewish because it is written in Yiddish, and (metaphorical and literal) movement through various cultural realms was a common Jewish experience at this time of increasing Jewish nationalism, secularism, urbanization, and autonomy in Eastern Europe.

In "Bay Vegn, Bay Vayte," / "On the wide and distant roads..." the artistic vision of Hofshiteyn's wanderer becomes clear—belonging to that which is unclaimed, uncultivated, transient in the natural world as such. The wanderer is, by definition, an exilic character; the act

²⁵¹ For a discussion of Pushkin's wander archetype, which has a direct textual connection to poems in this book, see Kahn, Andrew. "Pushkin's Wanderer Fantasies," *Rereading Russian Poetry* ed. Stephanie Sandler. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999. This is only one discussion of a Romantic Wanderer Archetype examples can be found in *Romantic Poetry* of a variety of different national literatures. In English literature, the Romantic Wanderer is a major subject of William Wordsworth, for example.

of wandering is antithetical to any conception of home, yet it is this dynamic process that is represented, paradoxically, oxymoronically, as home.²⁵²

<p>On the wide and distant roads, Where blind wheels roll And brush all with a coat of homeless dust For wayward winds — There, in the fallow fields, I have gathered my vision.</p> <p>I have taken on my shoulders a load Of seeds, damp with cold autumnal dew, With grandfather's inheritance: an old stick, A dusty shrunken old wine-skin; I set out on the road, the wander, the trip...</p> <p>Towards the distant sky The smoke raises from strange homes.</p>	<p>בני וועגן בני ווייטע, וואו רעדער וואו בלינדע פֿאַר ווינטן פֿאַרשייטע אַלץ מאָלן און מאָלן די היימלאָזע שטויבן – דאָרט האָב איך אויף פֿעלדער פֿון הפֿקר מיין זייהונג געקליבן.</p> <p>איך האָב אויף מיין אַקסל אַ משא גענומען פֿון זוימען, באַפֿיכטע מיט האַרבסט טויען קאַלטע, מיט זיידנס ירושה, מיט אַלטן פֿאַרשטויבטן, פֿאַרשרומפֿענעם לאָגל געלאָזט זיך אויף וועגן, אויף וואַנדער, אויף וואַגל...</p> <p>צום הימל צום הויכן, פֿון היימען פֿון פֿרעמדע געגאַן זיינען רויכן...</p>
---	--

Hofshteyn evokes a characteristic oxymoronic phrase in the last lines which characterize his exilic ambivalence: “fremde heyemen,” foreign homes. He presents himself as gathering seeds of his vision in “Felder fun hefker,” which means literally abandoned fields, where ownership is in question. This phrase also evokes the *dike pole*, a historical name of the Ukrainian steppe. However, I have chosen to translate them as “fallow fields” to connote an overgrown quality with potential of renewal that comes from the neglect (fields are often let to go fallow and then the organic matter is used to renew the soil. Often, there are some edible crops to glean in these fallow fields). In the fallow fields, Hofshteyn evokes here the image of the wild steppe, which has historically functioned as a place of refuge for those fleeing agricultural and later urban civilizations for the pastoral lifestyle that provided more freedom.

²⁵² This is the meaning of the title of a section of *Bay Vegn* in the revise publications: “Geheyime Heymen”/ “mysterious homes.”

This trope can be applied to both the western steppe and the eastern steppe. This imagery creates a belonging to the land that rejects nationalist claims of land and envisions a propagation of a wild vision, free from the confines of human territorial claims. This at-home-in-wandering is represented as ancient human tradition, though it also possesses a specificity at the same time. Hofshsteyn is comfortable with the paradox of this vision.

The next poem, also written in loose amphibrachic tetrameter, beginning with the half-length, two-stress line. The preceding poem was dominated by this two stress amphibrachic line, is a continuation of the ideas presented in the poem above it. Besides the two-stress line that begins the poem, the rest of the poem is solidly in tetrameter, completing the process that was begun in the previous poem.

<p>At low fences freshly ploughed beds waited... With a lonely prayer and a secret fear I have sowed seed at wildly strange homes.</p> <p>Now I stand in the tender earth up to my ankles On my own beds, sowed with sorrows... I implore you today, birds, and you, winds, and you, hailstones! Don't pick at my vision, Don't peck at my vision! I have myself carried my vision on my shoulders From distant roads, from journeys, from wanderings...</p>	<p>בני נידעריקע פלייטן געווארט האבן פרישע צעאקערטע בייטן... מיט עלדן-געבעט און מיט פחד-געהיימען געזייהט האב איך זוימען בני ווילדן-פרעמדן היימען.</p> <p>אויף ערדן, אויף ווייכע איצט שטעה איך ביז קנעכל אוף אייגענע בייטן, אין ליידן פאזייהטע... כ'באשווער אייך היינט, פויגלען, אייך ווינטן, אייך האגלען! מנין זייהונג נישט קלייבן, מנין זייהונג נישט שלאגן! אייך האב מיר מנין זייהונג אויף אקסל דערטראגן פון וועגן פון ווינטן, פון וואנדער, פון וואגל...²⁵³</p>
--	--

This poem echoes psalm 126 in the image of sowing seeds in garden beds. Hofshsteyn's "vision" is depicted as the seeds sown at "wildly strange homes," which contains an oxymoronic ambivalence of belonging to the edge or the borderlands of Ukraine—they have been claimed by

²⁵³ Dovid Hofshsteyn, *Bay Vegn*, pp. 10.

many cultures throughout history, some who have considered themselves “western,” and others who have considered themselves “eastern,” and many that do not make such a distinction. Hofshteyn feels at home in this indeterminate land that is claimed by so many. In his evocation of Psalm 126, which states “Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy,” enthusiastically expects the future to be more productive and joyous than the past. Psalm 126 is about the deliverance from exile to Zion, but Hofshteyn here emphasizes the similarity of the two sides of dichotomy – one could not exist without the other.

The images of the road and the wanderer are central to the understanding of the poems and the landscapes that it contains. Hofshteyn’s road seems to have no end – all homes are somehow paradoxically foreign to him in a statement of simultaneous universal belonging and non-belonging.

...

Abstraction of Landscape

Hofshteyn’s aestheticized landscapes, in their paradox, ignore the oversimplification of everyday political language, which is meant to bifurcate. Hofshteyn wants to capture the moment of ambivalent, objective thought that is the phenomenon of dialectical synthesis surrounding the revolution and concern historical understandings of nations and their relationship to physical space.

Along Roads is characterized by abstract home-landscapes that take on more specific meanings through intertextuality. The abstraction of the home-landscape is a device used by Hofshteyn to philosophically question mythologic conceptions of national belonging and view

the situation from an objective standpoint: the territory on which sits Ukraine (meaning literally: on the edge, on the fringe, on the margin, at the brink) is historically multiethnic and multicultural.

In the abstraction of the landscape serves another purpose—to accentuate the representation of childhood memory and generational memory. A child does not understand the political divisions of nation-states unless taught of these divisions. National borders are decided by human society and wars rather than natural laws. The abstraction of the landscape is an effort to view the world in its objective, material form rather than that clash of significance associated with Nationalisms.

Concrete Nouns of Place and the Concept of Ukraine as a Multicultural Mix of Cultures in “Ukraina”

While *Along Roads*, in its first iteration, presented abstracted landscapes that are often subtly made concrete through certain key signifiers, Hofshetein’s landscapes became more topographically specific out of the context of *Along Roads*. In “Ukraina,” published both in *Valger-Shteyner / Rolling Stones* (1921)[the book, not the section of *Along Roads*] and *Troyer / Mourning* (1922), the representation of Ukraine in the context of human history as opposed to nationalist histories is stated more directly than through the deep-time abstraction of dream-consciousness in *Along Roads*. The landscape is colored by the objective historical fact that it has been inhabited by groups and cultures over the course of history, many of them seeking refuge from repression or promises of an improved livelihood. The Ukrainian landscape is presented as the edge, particularly the edge of the steppe and northern forests, an area that has long been a mix of traditions, the geographical boundary of “East” and “West”, “Europe” and “Asia.”

The various edges of the Russian Empire in Russian culture have been conceived in the Russian tradition as the boundary between east and west, Europe and Asia. When Hofshsteyn appropriates this Romantic, Imperial trope, it takes on different connotations because of his subjective experience – as a member of a repressed nation of the Russian empire who identifies with the Russian empire as an encounter between the east and west in its overlap of historical Jewish exile.

In the margins of these concepts is lies Hofshsteyn’s edge, the humanistic ambivalence and dualism of the in-between. In short, despite the geographic specificity in “Ukraina,”²⁵⁴ he lays bare one of the possible connotations of the non-specificity of the landscapes in *Along Roads*. It points out the flaws in the ethnic claims of nationalism – Ukraine is a place that throughout history has been inhabited by different groups of people from various ethnicities, religions and backgrounds, and to divide part of nature, the landmass that is conceptualized as Ukraine, by claims that the land itself is particularly Slavic, or Russian, or Ukrainian because once there was a confederation of tribe ruled by some Rus’ that made their empire on that land eclipses the particular history of this landscape as a natural meeting point of cultures, ethnicities, religions, etc. The Western edge of the steppe has always been a natural funnel of human movement, a natural center of human cultural diversity.

<p>I still feel full of love: No window glass has been broken In your mountain towers That look, still clear, On the floodplains of the Dnieper, On your steppe...</p>	<p>איך פיל מיט ליבע נאָך: עס האָט קיין שויב דאָ ניט געפלאַצט אין בערג־טורמעס אין דײַנע, וואָס קוקן, לויטער נאָך, אָף די געוויסערן פֿון דניפער, אָף סטעפעס דײַנע...</p>
---	---

²⁵⁴ Dedicated to Yakiv Savchenko, a Ukrainian symbolist contemporary to Hofshsteyn. The two poets were acquainted. Savchenko would ultimately fall victim to the Stalinist terror. This is yet another instance of Hofshsteyn’s dialogue with world culture, and also with local co-territorial culture. In this case it is from two Ukrainian poets speaking in so-called ‘minor languages,’ languages with modern national-cultural aspirations that have been repressed by the official languages of empire. I have not been able to locate Savchenko’s early collections of poetry, “poeziyi” and “zemlya.” Please let me know if you have any ideas where they can be found.

<p>I know this too: For generations You have been a place of refuge For those cast out of the great grey land... Your shame casts a shadow on all its extensions, Ukraine!</p>	<p>איך ווייס דאָס אויך: ביסט דוירעס לאַנג געווען אַ מיקלעט-פּלאַץ פאַר אויסוואַרפֿן פֿון גרויסן גרויען לאַנד... אַף אַלע־אַלע שטרעקעס זײַנע²⁵⁵ שאַטנט זיך דיין שאַנד, אוקראַינע!²⁵⁶</p>
---	--

Jordan Finkin has analyzed the Biblical connotations of the term “miklet-platz,” noting that it implies a both a place of refuge for innocent victims *and* for those who have murdered accidentally. This dual function conveys both the sense of freedom and danger that is associated with the steppe. What Finkin misses in his analysis is the reference to mythology of the Cossacks, who claim the lineage of runaway serfs from the medieval empires of Poland and Muscovy. But it is not only the Cossacks that fled into the “wild fields” of Ukraine in search of freedom. From the perspective of ancient human inhabitation, the steppe has been a place of refuge for peoples seeking to escape away from the servitude of agricultural communities and wandering warrior tribes seeking to raid those cities, the same mythological border of natural ecosystems that the is the setting for the bible.

This poem seems to addressing the pogroms of 1919, as it was one of the poems included in the collection *Troyer*, which was explicitly dedicated to “those who were cut down before their time.” The shame, then, that Hofshateyn references, is a national shame, a shame of a nation that was manipulated to turn against their own: Jews, to Hofshateyn, were another people seeking refuge in Ukraine from the “great grey lands,” the empires of Poland and Muscovy. But also, from the slightly elevated viewpoint from Kyiv’s hills, looking “on the floodplains of the

²⁵⁵ There is some ambiguity about this pronoun and precisely what noun it refers to. It is not consistently printed in early publications: in *Valger-Shteyner*: “zayne,” In *Shtrom*: “zayne,” In *Troyer*: “zayne,” In *Gezamelte Verk* (Kyiv kultur lige 1923): “dayne.” In *Bay Vegn*: Ershter Bukh Lider (kletzkn 1923): “dayne”

²⁵⁶

Dnieper, / on your steppe,” the poet is looking East. In this direction lies the Russia centered in Muscovy, perhaps suggesting that the shame associated with the pogroms in Ukraine also has origins on the greater Russia, and the history of Russian empire and its clandestine involvement in inciting pogroms.²⁵⁷

...

While Hofshsteyn did begin to include more proper nouns of local places in his poems immediately after *Along Roads* or in subsequent versions of *Along Roads*, the 1919 version, with a few exceptions, lacks this kind of naming. Perhaps the national names were less pronounceable during a period where the government changed hands five times in that year. But perhaps it was for a different reason – that he wanted to represent the landscape of Ukraine in its natural, primordial form, and its pre-modern, pre-national (geographic?) conception as a transition zone between northern temperate forests and the western Pontic steppe and southern coasts. For that reason, he avoids naming the nation and instead relies on a metaphor of the edge or border to create a juncture between time and space: the border land on the edge of time.

...

“Doikayt” in Hofshsteyn’s “Ortikayt” ?

Dobrushin’s characterizes Hofshsteyn as the first non-national Jewish poet. In accordance with this, I argue that Hofshsteyn’s doikayt in *Along Roads* is primarily a metaphysical statement of belonging in the world as a human being; it is a universal statement by means of the poetic word, and an ambivalent, metaphysical, poetic reaction against nationalist political discourse and

²⁵⁷ Hofshsteyn’s lines must be read in the historical context, they could be easily misinterpreted in our current context.

the political word as such that at the time of the publication of the book drove people to commit horrifying acts of violence.

Hofshteyn’s sense of belonging is a poetical understanding of the edge, of the brink. Ukraine, a term that is absent from the 1919 version of *Along Roads*, means literally something like “on the edge” or “at the brink,” or “on the border.” Hofshteyn uses the literal understanding of the term “Ukraine,” the edge of the Pontic Steppe which connects Europe to Asia, agricultural settlers to steppe nomads, to metaphorically and conceptually cultivate a sense of non-national, human belonging to and acceptance of existence on the brink. Hofshteyn’s “brink” in *Along Roads* is not limited to the literary space of Ukraine, but to other areas of the periphery of the Russian Empire, specifically the Caucasus and Siberia, all of which have a connection to the Russian Romantic tradition of exilic poetry. The road, for Hofshteyn is exile, and exile is conceptualized as life itself – Hofshteyn reads the Biblical metaphors of creation and destruction as a series of “eternal return”: fall from the garden of Eden, the flood, Exodus, etc. all present a variation of the exilic trope.

...

In the 1923 Kletzkin edition,²⁵⁸ Hofshteyn adds an introductory stanza to “I Know No Weight, I Know No Number” / “Ikh veys keyn vog, ikh veys keyn tsol,” that adds clarification to the indeterminacy of the poems and the desire not to measure or define or limit the potential of the self with abstract systems of measurement. However, the introductory stanza printed in the 1923 versions adds a new context to the poem.

<p>I believe that is it my destiny To sweep the ash of all the fires Away from my inherited earth And put up a new fence on that same earth.</p>	<p>איך גלויב, ס'איז מיר באשערט אויף מיין ירושה־ערד דעם אש פֿון אלע שריפֿות אויסצוראַמען און אַט די ערד אויפֿסניי פֿאַרצאַמען.</p>
---	--

²⁵⁸ Possibly also the Kyiver farlag version (note to self: look it up)

In the lines above, Hofshteyn's metaphor of sweeping away the ash of everything that has burned and putting up a new fence on his inherited land describes his cultural project: it is one of mourning for that which has been lost and building something new on the same foundation. In that newness is unlimited potential. In this stanza, once again sentiments of continuing tradition and building something anew are juxtaposed and in their juxtaposition is tension, yet, paradoxically, unity.

Hofshteyn, Bialik and the National Poet: The Tradition of Eastern Europe as a Metaphorical Desert, and Hofshteyn's Rebellion in his Objective Description of Landscape

Yekhezkel Dobrushin calls Dovid Hofshteyn the first "non-national Jewish poet." Dobrushin's claim means to illustrate a break with the traditional position of the poet as a national prophet, of which, Khaym Nakhman Bialik's poetry embodies. Though he notes Bialik's influence on Hofshteyn, claiming that in Hofshteyn's Yiddish poetry, the gaudy prophetic style that characterized many of Bialik's Hebrew poetry, and was modeled on the Biblical style of *masa*²⁵⁹, is combined with the lowly style of the *badkhn*, a folksy wedding rhymester whose primary job is to make the bride cry with his rhymes. The national poet claims authority through a link with the supernatural, but Hofshteyn presents himself as a subjective individual who observes the world for what it is as if he's never seen it before. He necessarily

²⁵⁹ Miron, Dan. *H.N. Bialik and the Prophetic Mode in Modern Hebrew Poetry*. pp. 6

reacts ambivalently to the death of the repressive political order of the Imperial government and the possibilities of equality that the revolution made visible. He mourns the destruction of Jewish life and tradition while at the same time presents an uneasy sense of hopefulness that something new, and hopefully less repressive, will emerge from a moment of primordial chaos.

Instead of presenting the Eastern European landscape metaphorically by superimposing the emptiness the desert steppes of the book of Numbers onto the Ukrainian steppe and its edge of banded forests and fields, as Bialik does in poems like “the desert of the dead,” Hofshteyn describes the Ukrainian landscapes literally as they appeared to him. Bialik’s Biblical desert landscape of Numbers is an abstract symbol for the Russian Empire’s repression and the Jewish national-cultural awakening that was taking place. The uprising of the dead is representative of a long-lasting cultural struggle to gain access to a vague promised land, symbolizing belonging, and equality somewhere in the world, if not Eastern Europe or perhaps Palestine. Bialik’s poem was written in 1902, only a few years before the 1905 revolution presents an allegory for the struggle for Jewish National culture within the Russian Empire. Bialik’s poem suggest the absence of belonging with an abstract call to battle for the right to gain access to a promised land.

The book of Numbers bridges the exodus of Jews from Egypt with conquest of Canaan and marks the beginning of the ancient Israelite nation. However, with a few exceptions, those who escaped from Egypt are condemned to die in the desert on the precipice of the promised land because they defied God’s orders to conquer Canaan after the “spies” reported that the people who dwelled in Canaan were giants. The Israelites were afraid to face them in battle, even though this was God’s command. In 19th century Yiddish literature, Mendele satirically represented the traditional Jewish perception through the “desert of the dead” haggadic myth,

criticizing the traditional Jewish society of the 19th century for living in a spiritual world that is dethatched from the everyday material reality.

Bialik, in the 20th century, in the long poem “The Dead of the Desert,”/“metei midbar,” written in Hebrew, embraces the metaphor earnestly, with the mythological outcry he echoes the contemporary national-cultural awakening. Through this national awakening, the poet hopes for national salvation, but ultimately the “desert dead” return, like Sisyphus, back to the beginning—the desert from which they are animated. While most of the poem is narrated in third Person, Bialik includes a powerful passage from the voice of the desert dead:

“We are mighty!
The last generation of slaves and the first of freemen!
Alone our hand in its strength
Tore from the pride of our shoulders the yoke of bondage.
We lifted our head to the heavens, and behold their broadness was narrow in the
pride of our eyes,
So we turned to the desert, we said to the wilderness:
Mother!
...
To arms! To arms! Form Ranks! Forward!
Forward despite the heavens and the wrath thereof.
Behold us, we will ascend
With the tempest!
Though the lord has withdrawn His hand from us,
And the ark stands moveless in its place,
Still we will ascend – alone!
(translation Maurice Samuel)²⁶⁰

Dan Miron notes that Bialik admitted that he himself did not understand the precise meaning of his poem,²⁶¹ but the nationalist tones are often understood in the contemporary context of the poem, and embracing the metaphor which Mendele satirized in 19th century—Eastern Europe as a desert. To this Bialik emphasized that this was a desert steppe on the brink of the promised

260 *Selected Poems of Hayyim Nahman Bialik*. Ed. Israel Efros.

261 Dan Miron, “H.N Bialik and the Quest for Ethical Identity,” *Hebrew Studies* vol. 41, 2000

land, suggesting that Eastern European Jews were on the brink of a national re-awakening when he wrote the poem in 1901-1902. Bialik's messianic Symbolism at this time, preceding the 1905 revolution was shared by Russian Symbolists. Bialik's metaphor reflected a certain political reality – Jews in the Russian Empire had lived in a repressive society and the beginning of the 20th century (even the 1890s) was a turning point for Jewish autonomous culture in the Russian Empire.

Bialik's mythical and national call to arms is an important subtext for Hofshteyn's cycle. Bialik reads the haggadic legend as myth, imagining eternal return in a vague national awakening from the symbolic desert of exile. Hofshteyn, by contrast, reads it as a metaphor for the state of life in exile, life in its fallen, earthly secular, imperfect, reflecting a fundamental tension between dualism and monism – the poetry of *Along Roads* stuck in the indeterminacy of “messianic time,” a period of waiting for a redemption. Hofshteyn's poems were written 10-20 years after Bialik's “Desert of the Dead,” and during that period Jewish cultural movements had developed and gained more popularity in several languages simultaneously, yet it had still not reached the point of national salvation that Bialik imagined in his poem.

Hofshteyn presents home as memory and an ambivalent existence rather than home as legalistic ownership of physical place.²⁶² In Hofshteyn's metaphorical system, the physical world is made up of the same elements as life, and the material elements of the individual return to the earth and unite with it.

Dobrushin's assessment of Hofshteyn as the first “non-national Jewish poet” means to illustrate a break with the traditional position of the poet as a national prophet, the position that

²⁶² For example, in “There, over the city, a bell's sounded...” Hofshteyn anthropomorphizes houses, the metonym suggesting a cultivated sense of human belonging to the world: “Like little islands of human rest,/Enveloped in straw, warmed for the night,/With stall and fence entwined in slumber/A small house clings to one that is smaller.”

Bialik's poet situates itself. The national poet claims supernatural authority, but Hofshsteyn presents himself as a subjective individual who necessarily reacts ambivalently to the death of the repressive political order of the tsarist government and the possibilities of equality that the revolution made visible. He mourns the destruction of Jewish life and tradition while at the same time he presents an uneasy sense of hope that something new and less repressive will emerge from a moment of primordial chaos. In 1919, he could not have known what the outcome of the revolution would be, much less the horrifying events of the 20th century that followed. Hofshsteyn addresses the same Haggadic myth that Bialik does, yet he represents justice as an intoxicant.

<p>Justice</p> <p>Wine, wine, Ancient wine, The wine of burning justice!... Under all skies Under all moldy cellars Is ripened And ferments until then, When we reach the wild flats under the northern nights! Throughout all the paths/roads Of your wanderings, Throughout the whole world Your wine-sack remains, Far and wide, in order! There at the shine of day, on the path/road from the land of slaves The first dark spies Carried with difficulty only one heavy cluster of fruit On a yoke! Wine, wine, the drink of wine! Wine of burning justice! Today Worlds curse your brew/ferment</p>	<p>גערעכטיקייט וויין, וויין, אלטער וויין, וויין פֿון פֿלאַמיגן גערעכט!... אונטער אלע הימלן, אונטער אלע קעלער-שימלען אויסגעשטאָנען און דערבויזט ביז דאָנען, ביז די ווילדע פֿלאַכן אונטער צפֿון-נעכט! איבעראַלע וועגן פֿון דיין וואַלגן, איבער גאַרער וועלט שטעהט דייןע לאַגלען ברייט און ווייט צעשטעלט! דאָרט ביי שיין פֿון טאָגן, אויף דעם וועג פֿון לאַנד פֿון קנעכט האַבן ערשטע פֿינסטערע מעראַגלים קוים געטראָגן איין און איינציקע ענגל אויף אַ שטאַנג! וויין-וויין, וויין געטראָנק! וויין פֿון פֿלאַמיגן גערעכט! וועלטן שעלטן היינט דיין ברויז, וועלטן טראָגן היינט דיין שוים אויף די ווילדע פֿלאַכן אונטער צפֿון-נעכט!²⁶³</p>
--	---

²⁶³ Dovid Hofshsteyn, *Bay Vegn*, pp. 90.

Today Worlds carry your foam on the wild plains under northern nights!	
---	--

“Gerehtikayt,” or justice is represented as an intoxicant—it is the representation of the subjective opinion that is convinced that their perception of the universe is the only correct perception of the universe. Hofshiteyn takes the giant grapes of Canaan as a metonym for wine. It is difficult to tell whether Hofshiteyn’s ambivalence seeks to distance himself from the intoxication of justice, but he connects this ancient intoxicating, perhaps nationalist, sentiment to the contemporary moment, the “wild plains under northern nights.”

The Romantic military theme, along with the theme of intoxication, is also conveyed in “di zun hot hayn tsum nayem patser maynem...”/ Today the sun brazed the last...”

<p>Today the sun brazed the last golden scale to my armor and for me confounded magic tears with a goblet of joy.</p> <p>And under the load of golden rings I kneeled to the tender hand, And with fervent thirst I swallowed From the cool edge ...</p> <p>How many times already? I will not count – Today I have been girded with the sun’s shine, I am going without fear into all the black caves Of the world and being.</p>	<p>די זון האָט היינט צום נייעם פּאַנצער מיינעם די לעצטע גאָלדענע ליסקע צוגלייט און מיר פֿאַרמישט פֿון פּשוף־ווייניען אַ בעכער פֿרייד.</p> <p>און אונטער גרינגער לאַסט פֿון גאָלדנע רינגען האָב איך געקניעהט צו שוואַרצטער האַנט, און האָב מיט הייסן דאָרשט געשלונגען פֿון קילן ראַנד ...</p> <p>דאָס וויפֿלטע שוין מאָל? איך וועל ניט ציילן – איך בין היינט אָנגעגאַרט מיט זונענשיין, איך געה אָהן מורה היינט אין אַלע שוואַרצער היילן פֿון וועלט און זיין ...</p>
--	--

Hofshiteyn’s awakening is represented as an illumination of darkness, the rendering of the imperceptible perceptible, and is also inundated with overtones that echoes the tales of Rabbi

Nakhman in the medieval-folkloric tales of knightly missions. The goal of Hofshsteyn's knight is to bring together to primordial forces: light and darkness.

While Hofshsteyn's poems do seem to seeks some sort of national salvation, they, at the same time, seem adverse to nationalism as it is commonly conceived in terms of vague, allegorical symbols.

Memory as Space in the Homelandscape

“Felder” in Yiddish has the dual meaning of field and cemetery. Hofshsteyn choses this word consciously to evoke a series of associations. The homonymic association, in Hofshsteyn's symbolic system, represents a great unconsciousness that is unified with nature.

Hofshsteyn layers his own meaning on top of a tradition of Eastern Europe as a desert in Bialik's Hebrew poem.²⁶⁴ While Bialik presents a mythological, allegorical image, Hofshsteyn rejects the allegory and chooses to use the metaphor by a more defined, metaphysical method of physics in the Aristotelian sense. All of nature is represented as a unity built of the same elements – both the animate and the inanimate. There is a certain mysticism to the unity, but the approach is not mythological, it is a consideration of the perplexing unity of the physical world, a consideration of consciousness as a finite state between two infinite unknown types of existence, be it consciousness in another form or unconsciousness.

<p>There, in the blue nights shining Between hollow arboreal knights Strides my angel, walks the protector Of the first, soundless gusts of pangs...</p>	<p>דאָרט אויף בלויע נאַכטן־שיינען צווישן הוילע בוימער-ריטער שפּאַנט מיין מלאַך, שפּאַנט דער היטער פֿון די ערשטע, שטומע וועהען...</p>
--	--

²⁶⁴ In addition to this, East Slavic tradition localized the wilderness as a *forested* wilderness, *pustyn*’

<p>Under the high, hot sky, In the bright, illuminated distance My wonton youth floats In a golden frame of rye.</p> <p>Expanses of snows, clear skies' azure, To you my first, to you my pure azkore.</p>	<p>אונטער הויכן, הייסן הימל, אויף באזונטע ברייטע ווייטן שוועבט מיין יונגט אַ פֿאַרשייטע אין אַ גאָלדן קאָרן-רעמל.</p> <p>שנייען, ברייטן, הימלען קלאָרע, איך מיין ערשטע, איך מיין לויטערע אַזכרה!...</p>
--	---

“Dort af bloye nekhtn-shaynen” is the opening poem to the cycle “Felder.” The first stanza describes an angel of primordial pain a nocturnal anthropomorphized forest. This angel is the primal fallen angel developed from the Romantic poets, particularly in Pushkin’s “Angel,” “demon,” (“*Besy*” also has some place here, the spirits in the field speak to the poet during the winter in the middle of a blizzard) and Lermontov’s long poem “Demon.” They present the demon as an angel who has been exiled from Eden, a primordial and eternal sadness of existence, of parting with Eden.

<p>Давно отверженный блуждал В пустыне мира без приюта: Вослед за веком век бежал, Как за минутою минута, Однообразной чередой.</p>	<p>The outcast long wandered In the wilderness of the world without comfort: He ran in the tracks of century after century as minutes follow minutes, in monotonous succession.</p>
---	---

Lermontov’s fallen angel is characterized by his infinite suffering and his condemnation to wander through eternity and the world without comfort. Infinite time is represented through the passage of finite measurements that blur together to destroy distinction. This trope of primal exile is also use in the aforementioned passage of Pushkin’s *Prisoner of the Caucasus*, Hofshteyn is attracted to these Romantic themes of memory as in its relation to the human

perception of time, and the verbalization of the primordial pain of the fall—primal memory and the ability to imagine of the infinite.²⁶⁵

In the general conception of the fallen angel, it is the irrevocable loss and the knowledge that he has not always been evil tortures him, which is perhaps stated most clearly in Pushkin's 'Angel.' Hofshsteyn's use of the angel here is to evoke a melancholy of memory and a yearning for the innocence of childhood perception. He provides a reading of the fallen angel—the primal exile of the fallen angel is painful because of the distant memory of the unattainable past.

The primal sadness which Hofshsteyn's angel projects is depicted in at night in a forest. This primal sadness, in accordance with the Romantic reading of the fallen angel, is metonymically linked to memory itself – the irreversibility of time is the primal sadness for Hofshsteyn, and with this primal sadness. The division of the stanzas of this poem between forests and fields reflects a semantic pair of the home landscapes and the opposition between the closed off space of the forests and the open expanse of the fields, corresponding to their temporal analogues.

The first stanza depicts an angel in the closed off space of the anthropomorphized forest through readings of the Romantic trope metonymically associated with the action of memory. This space is the present space of memory, an elegiac threshold that is closed in, surrounded by anthropomorphized “guardian-trees/arboreal knights” (*beymer-riter*). The second stanza makes a spatial leap to the open fields, where the poet's youth “swims in a frame of grain.” In contrast to the coldness and claustrophobic space of the subject presented in in the first stanza, the “blue

²⁶⁵ Hofshsteyn's conversations with and reinterpretations of such Romantic tropes and landscapes in their metaphysical puts him in line with Russian Modernists, such as Boris Pasternak in *Sestra Moya -- Zhizn' / My Sister -- Life*. See “Pamyati Demona.”

nocturnal snow between knights of (hoyle) trees” is juxtaposed to the openness, vastness of the fields in the second stanza.

The third stanza is a half-length stanza of apostrophe, dedicating an *azkorah*, a funeral service for the dead, to the snows, expanses, and clear skies. What does it mean to mourn for nature and specifically these images of nature? They are all images of expansiveness, of which Hofshateyn represents as endless, infinite possibility in the first section. The infinity of the fields, however, is the infinity of death, as “field,” *felder* in Yiddish, also signifies the graveyard. Nature is often represented in the elegy as a kind of immortality, an ever-changing, yet ever-present elemental force. Hofshateyn’s focus on the border of mystical monotheism and contemporary rational scientific observation draws attention to the scientific fact that the human is made of the same physical elements as nature. In this case, it seems like his funeral service to the elements of nature is tied to the act of memory.

The address of the funeral service to nature is then a mourning of possibility, not only of ancestors who have crossed over into the realm of nature physically, but of the possibilities of youth, the possibilities of a naïve, childhood perspective free of complete knowledge of human language and categorization.

Characteristically, Hofshateyn metonymically connects physical space of the landscape to the innerworkings of the human mind. He does this to mimic the properties of memory – often physical space has an impact on the human perception of memory – entering a physical space often spurs memory. In his presentation of past childhood memory of a field and the present of the adult viewpoint as a closed off forest, Hofshateyn uses a metaphor of natural succession to represent time – nature is physically susceptible to time, although it has an infinite quality. This natural paradox applies to humans as much as it does nature.

Hofshteyn develops the semiotics of a dynamic natural space (in this case the forest) and its relation to the poet/individual/subject of Pushkin’s “Vnov’ ya posetil’,” a programmatic reflection on Pushkin’s exile. In the first sentence of Pushkin’s poem the poet reflects on the changed landscape of Mikhailovskoe and draws an equivalence in the way that he has also changed, suggesting that he too – human, is subject to natural laws of time.

<p>...Вновь я посетил Тот уголок земли, где я провел Изгнанником два года незаметных. Уж десять лет ушло с тех пор — и много Переменилось в жизни для меня, И сам, покорный общему закону, Переменился я — но здесь опять Минувшее меня объемлет живо, И, кажется, вечер еще бродил Я в этих рощах.</p>	<p>... Again I visited That corner of the earth, where once I spent Two years of exile, by the world unnoticed. Since then a decade has passed by – and much Has changed in life for me, and I myself, According to the general law of things, Have changed also – but here again The past itself surrounds me vividly, Indeed, it seems only yesterday, I wondered through these groves. (Wachtel’s translation)</p>
---	---

According to Michael Wachtel, in “...Again I visited,” “memory serves as the poem’s fundamental organizing principle.”²⁶⁶ The enjambment, uneven length of stanzas, blank verse, and frequent ellipses work together to produce a stripped-down, prosaic poetics of memory and reflection, all of which function together to “suggest sudden changes in the poet’s thoughts.” (75). Some of these elements, such as the ellipses and uneven stanzas, can be seen throughout Hofshteyn’s *Along Roads*, and it could be that their frequent usage also produces similar effects.²⁶⁷

The second stanza of “... Again I visited,” “the poet describes a memory of a memory; a scene from the past that comes alive to precisely because it recalls an earlier past.” (77). This ‘earlier past’ is an ancestral past, and Pushkin links it to the infinitude of his earlier exilic poems,

²⁶⁶ Michael Wachtel, *The Development of Russian Verse*, pp. 77

²⁶⁷ This claim perhaps merits more analysis of specific examples. Hofshteyn’s ellipses suggest a fragmentary nature of the poem, perhaps mimicking the fragmentary nature of memory, or the impossibility to completely capture a phenomenon, but more certainly a development of the Romantic fragment.

“To the Ocean” and “to Ovid” with the lines; “and here’s the tree lined hill, above which often/ I used to sit not stirring – and would gaze/ upon the lake, while sadly recollecting/some other distant shores, some other waves.” The position of the poet on the shore is reminiscent of those other shores in “to Ovid” and “To the Sea,” and while those poems were in the exotic southern fringe, Pushkin connects them to the shore of the lake at his family estate in Mikhailovskoe – exile becomes a state of mind and a metaphor for memory.

Memory and exile are entwined in this poem, and Pushkin’s assessment of the anthropomorphized trees is that exile makes the individual stronger – the tree isolated from others will grow tall and strong, while the two trees that together have reproduced must share their resources and will not grow to be as mighty. This projects the poet’s own individual struggle with society as a free thinker onto nature, but most importantly for Hofshateyn, presents an ambivalent conception of exile as a state of mind, influenced, yet not dependent on physical location, and a glorification of the Romantic free-thinking individual that the mindset of exile creates.

Road and Dream: Exile, Memory and Freedom

Along Roads, focuses on a poetic conception of exile. Hofshateyn constructs a subjective, modernist poetic conception of exile built on the juxtaposition of Biblical Jewish exile, to the enactment of Jewish exile in Eastern Europe, with that of a more universal, Romantic exile (in its own right, built on classical canon and the Old Testament). Hofshateyn’s semantic layering is subtle and relies on a readership with knowledge of Jewish and non-Jewish literature of Eastern Europe. Hofshateyn converses with the Russian Romantics and writes from his own perspective

into the tradition of Russian exilic poetry. Like the Russian Acmeists' aspirations to world literature, Hofshyteyn's poetics is not limited by any one linguistic tradition. Hofshyteyn's focus on writing to the exilic tradition of Russian Romantic poetry makes sense culturally, considering that the Jews of the Russian Empire were highly literate readers of Russian, and that this theme in Russian poetry is based not only on the classical sources, but also the Old Testament. The theme presents interesting opportunities to juxtapose the exilic in Russian literature to the Russian-Jewish experience

By utilizing an interlingual and intertextual poetics Hofshyteyn present his own relationship with exile as a Yiddish poet in the context of world literature. Furthermore, in writing in the tradition of Russian poetry, Hofshyteyn makes a claim of Jewish belonging in Russian culture, and specifically Russian Imperial culture. He presents a childhood impression of 'Rusishe Felder,' but 'Rusish' should not necessarily be translated as 'Russian,' after all he is describing Ukrainian landscapes that were once part of Kyivan Rus', the medieval civilization that is presented as the origin of Slavic civilization. During the late Romantic age (second half of the 19th century) and later in the silver age, proto-symbolist, and then symbolist poets often evoked Rus' to refer to a fallen ideal of Russian civilization or an actuality of how people live in the countryside as opposed to the imperial center, and then as a kind of repressed folkloric soul of Russia (Nekrasov, Blok, Bely, Esenin, Klyuev, etc.). We can read Hofshyteyn's "Rusishe Felder" in the silver age trope/genre Rus' poems as poems of national mourning for a fallen ideal.

Hofshyteyn's image of the road as exile is a development with the Russian Romantic National poets, particularly Pushkin and Lermontov, and the Ukrainian Romantic Nationalist poet Taras Shevchenko, all of whom served various forms of internal exile in the Russian

Empire. The concept of internal exile is important for Hofshsteyn. “Internal exile” carries within it a semantic oxymoron that seemed relatable to Hofshsteyn, whose Ukraine was vastly different from the borderland Ukraine that had been the general location of Pushkin’s southern exile. Hofshsteyn juxtaposes his own experience of exile as a colonial subject heading toward a post-colonial liberation to those of Russian Romantics. There are no national territories in *Along Roads* – it sees the relationship of the human being and the landscape through a primordial glance. The poet sees the beauty of nature before him for what it is – his perception of the light reflecting off the physical world.

...

One of the foundational texts creating the image of the Russian road, “doroga,” by conception of exile Mikhail Lermontov’s “Vykhozhu odin ya na dorogu” / “I come out alone upon the highroad.” Lermontov’s poem presents the image of the road as an exilic, Romantic quest for individual freedom liberty and communion with nature that grates against the poet’s biographical situation of being a soldier, an expendable (to the Empire) part of a larger collective of one mind, where following orders is valued over the thoughts of the individual, where service to the collective is valued over individual liberty.

<p>Выхожу один я на дорогу; Сквозь туман кремнистый путь блестит; Ночь тиха. Пустыня внемлет богу, И звезда с звездою говорит.</p>	<p>I come out alone upon the highroad; Through the mist the flinty way gleams far. The night’s calm. The wilderness is harking To the Lord, and star speaks unto star.</p> <p>(Translation Vladimir Nabokov)²⁶⁸</p>
---	---

²⁶⁸ Vladimir Nabokov, *Verses and Versions*, 369.

Lermontov depicts a rather abstract night-time landscape, and the freedom that his lyric hero desires is one of sleep and of dreams. Lermontov’s road is composed of flint, a primordial human tool, but also has the added connotation of an element on the periodic table: silica. The adjective used to modify the road (kremniy) suggest that Lermontov is contemplating a primordial, elemental road, which overlaps with the composition of the Caucasus.

This night landscape is connected to the motif of sleep as an intermediary state between life and death, more primordial state in which it is more possible to gain access to the mystical oneness of the universe. It is precisely this intermediate state where the individual can transgress his own consciousness and gain access to a more foundational primordial consciousness, and this, for Lermontov is where the poet’s power comes from. There is a pointed contrast between the desire to go out on the road alone while longing for primordial oneness. The Romantic poet’s power comes from the ability to commune with nature – in understanding nature’s voice by entering the primordial state of sleep, a consciousness that brings one closer to a primordial oneness.

“Gey Ikh Arum mit Farheylte Blikn...”/ “I Walk Around with Covered Glances...”

Hofshteyn’s “Gey Ikh Arum mit Farheylte Blikn...”/ “I Walk Around with Covered Glances...” presents the connection between road and dream, proposing a comfort in viewing the stirred up dust as ‘chintz,’ and ornamental floral pattern often printed on fabric. This metaphor presents the poet as focused on reading the elements as if they were art.

<p>I walk around with covered glances In waves of heat. The speckles of chintz</p>	<p>געה איך ארום מיט פֿאַרהייטלטע בליקן אין כוואַליעס פֿון היץ. אין זאַנגיש גאַלדן זיך טוקן</p>
--	--

sparkling in wheat-spike gold...	פֿלעקן פֿון צייץ... ס'וויל קיינער נישט שטויבן אויף דרימל פֿון וועגן... ס'וויל קיינער נישט פֿרעגן, וואָס בויטע איך כוואַליעס פֿון היץ? וואָס זוך איך מיט הייטלאַך אויף בליקן? ... אין זאַנגיש גאַלדן זיך טוקן פֿלעקן פֿון צייץ... ²⁶⁹
No one wants to dust the sleep from the roads...	
No one wants anyone to ask	
Why I am stirring up waves of heat?	
Why I am seeing with blinders on my glance...	
The speckles of chintz	
Sparkling in wheat-spike gold. . .	

In Hofshteyn's version of the trope of sleep as primal unconscious state and its connection to the road (of life, of exile), sleep is equated with the primal dust of the roads in the lines "s'vil keyner nit shtoybn uf driml fun vegn." / "No one wants to dust the sleep from the roads. The actual Yiddish is more ambiguous and could denote a semi-unconscious state which is also metonymically linked to the heat exhaustion of traveling in the summer. The summer, in Hofshteyn's system of landscapes is characterized by brightness and an overflow of the fundamental element that is perceived by the eye. It evokes the primal dust metaphor that is developed throughout the book with the verb "shtoybn," "to dust;" *shtoyb* is the noun for dust. The poet, who is traveling, becomes one with the horse – he is represented as wearing blinders. Blinders are meant to make the horse focus on the task at hand and not get spooked or distracted by action on the road or off the road. In this case, the metaphor functions as an aesthetic statement – a focused, honed poetic gaze on that which is constantly overlooked – the beauty of the elemental state of life represented by the flecks of dust floating in the air and the magic phenomenon of existence and perception.

While Lermontov's road is associated with exotic Caucasian Exile, Hofshteyn uses the same tropes in the context of the somewhat abstracted, although identifiable Ukrainian

²⁶⁹ Dovid Hofshteyn, *Bay Vegn*, pp. 31.

landscapes. Hofshiteyn also develops these themes in his Caucasian landscapes, equating a primal exile of homelandscape and the exotic ‘oriental’ Caucasian landscapes based in the tradition of Russian Romanticism.

“A Whole Day”/ “A Ganstn Tog” and “Ikh Gleyb” “I Believe”: The Essential Existence of a Wanderer on Life’s Road

The first poem of the *Along Roads*, “A Gantsn Tog,” begins to define the road, juxtaposing it with “onveg,” non-road. The meaning of the ‘domain of the road’ is understood gradually in the context of the book as a whole. If the fields and the forest represent the land of the dead, memory and infinite possibility then the road represents the finite phenomenon of life. Hofshiteyn’s comparison of the road to life develops and deepens philosophically of the metaphor presented in Pushkin’s “Telega Zhizni.” Pushkin uses the metaphor of life as a road, comparing different stages of life to parts of the day, and at the end of the poem, falling asleep and dreaming is associated with the unconsciousness of death. Hofshiteyn works with these systems in presenting the landscape in different seasons, expanding the analogy of seasons to the stages life to include emotionally charged, concentric circles of the passing of time.

The poem describes the phenomenon of wandering along a road in the sun, but also contemplates the distance beyond the road.

<p>A whole day To be in the domain of the road A whole day To have only the wind against you, And only a narrow ditch between the road and non-road, Only young eyelids between the eye and the sun.</p>	<p>א גאנצן טאג אין רשות פֿון וועג זײַן, א גאנצן טאג נאָר ווינט אָנגקעגן האָבן, און צווישן וועג און אָהנוועג נאָר אַ שמאַלן גראָבן, נאָר וויהעס יונגע צווישן אויג און זונען שײַן – וואָס קאָן אויף ערד נאָך שענער זײַן?</p>
---	---

What on this earth Could be more beautiful?	
--	--

The road is presented as its own domain, “רשות”. This is the word of division in Genesis to distinguish night and day, sky and sea, and has a connotation of primordial divisions. This is one of the very few Hebrew-rooted words in the book. Hofshteyn does not use *loshn-koydesh*, the holy tongue,²⁷⁰ frequently, but when he does it often presents a high theological-philosophical concept that is central to the poem. By using *loshn-koydesh* sparingly, he emphasizes the philosophical loftiness of the concept. In this case, it establishes the figurative domain of the road and the day as a primordial, elemental domain. Hofshteyn’s domain of exile is both personal and universal, built on universal ideas filtered through the subjective consciousness of the lyrical speaker.

Taras Shevchenko, too, associates the road and dream in the opening of his programmatic poem of Ukrainian nationalism:

У всякого своя доля І свій шлях широкий, Той мурує, той руйнує, Той неситим оком За край світа зазирає, Чи нема країни, Щоб загарбать і з собою Взять у домовину.	Each has their own fate And his own broad road, One is built, another destroyed, One with a hungry eye looks to the edge/border of the earth, Which has no edge/border, To rob and take It to the grave...
--	---

Shevchenko compares life to a road, but begins by introducing his persona as a drunken wanderer, most likely the persona of the *Kobzar*, a wandering folk bard, who in this first section of the poem falls into a drunken sleep after an emotional reflection on the fundamental imbalance of the colonial power structure, represented by the initial collision of fate-roads.

²⁷⁰ Denoting words of Hebrew and Aramaic origin in Yiddish.

Shevchenko here evokes not only the history of the bards, but the primordial history of the steppe – nomads were buried in kurgans (mounds) with all their earthly riches so that they could take it with them to the afterlife.

Shevchenko's use of "krai" or edge in the line "За край світа зазирає,/Чи нема країни" "looks to the edge of the earth, Which has no border." has possible influence on Hofshateyn's conception of Ukraine as an edge, or *rand*. In Shevchenko there is a paradox – "one looks towards the border, where there is no border"/ "Той неситим оком/За край світа зазирає,/Чи нема країни," presents an understanding of Ukraine as paradoxically undefinable: it is a horizon that is perceived, but does not exist. As one approaches the horizon it becomes all the more distant – it is an illusion. In Shevchenko's case, he is accusing the Russian empire, which he correctly views as the descendant of Muscovy, of arbitrarily othering the colonized Ukraine and its people. Hofshateyn's edge is different, perhaps because of the historical circumstances in which the fall of the Russian Empire creates a possibility to approach an inapproachable threshold of national autonomy. In this circumstance, Hofshateyn can imagine a new, primordial beginning.

Hofshateyn also presents a clash of fates, but it is between the image of the poet and his own shadow. It is not the same colonial repression or the same exile that Hofshateyn experienced – they were from different times and had different circumstances.

...

Hofshateyn's image of the road, like most of his metaphors, is polysemic and built on paronomasia. The road, conditioned by movement, is also representative of exile and a state of homelessness. Life, as far as Hofshateyn conceptualizes it poetically, is exile from the primordial

oneness, where the physical rule of life is movement and of death -- peace. (although he seems to imagine that there is some type of mystical movement or energy in death—the inanimate dust shimmering in the sun’s rays.) When Hofshsteyn writes “un tvishn veg un onveg a smoln grobn,” it has the associative meanings of the roadside drainage ditch as the grave, or at least some sort of divider between the unidirectional finitude and omnidirectional, omnipresent finitude. Hofshsteyn’s book is about walking alongside the road, and basking in the possibilities of straddling the line between finite and infinite, to discern concrete meaning from the ever-expanding vastness of the universe. Hofshsteyn develops these images throughout the book. Hofshsteyn’s opening poem presents the main metaphysical contemplation – existence its relation to exile, the relationship of this side and the other side, the world of human consciousness and its relation to other forms of consciousness that are closer to the inanimate, the transformation of the animate in to the inanimate and vice versa.

Dobrushin characterizes “A Whole Day...” in a broader sense as an aesthetic principle of transitoriness and ambivalence. His observations are made in relation to Hofshsteyn’s reference to Moses Maimonides Thirteen Principles of Faith.

ס'איז ניט קיין דיכטערישער "מאָטאָ" בלויז, ס'איז אַן עסטיטישער "אני מאמין", אַ מין מוזיקאלע אינטראָדוקציע צו האָפּשטיינס לידער. אין די דאָזיקן אַקאָרד פֿון די פּאָר צאַרט- ציטערדיקע און באַרואיקטע שורעס שפּילן שוין דאָס ראָוו עלעמענטן פֿון האָפּשטיינס לירישער דיכטונג: דער קעגנשטאַל פֿון "וועג" און "אַנוועג", דער "זונען-שיין", דאָס אויג האָפּשטיינס ראיע, וואָס איז איינע פֿון די הויפּט-מיטלען פֿון זיין קינסטלערישער אופֿפּאַסונג, די "ווייעס יונגע צווישן אויג און זונען-שיין" – אַט דער קאם מערקבאַרער צאַרט-שאַטנדיקער גראַניץ, וואָס טיילט אַפּ אומעטום האָפּשטיינס נשאַמע, זיין "איך" פֿון דער אַרומיקייט, די אופֿגענומענע אַביעקטן, און לסאַף: "וואָס קען נאָך שיינער זיין?"—דער האַלבער יאָ, האַלבער ניין פֿון האָפּשטיינס וועלט באַשטעטיקונג, די פֿאַרן דיכטער כאַראַקטעריסישע איינלאָדונג מאַסקים צו זיין מיט אַ פֿאַרבאַהאַלטענעם, ניט זיכער אַרויסגעזאַגטן עמעס... (91-92)

It's not only a poetic motto, it's an aesthetic “ani ma’amin”, a type of musical introduction to Hofshsteyn’s poems. In the chord by the pair of quivering tender

and peaceful lines the major elements of Hofshiteyn's lyrical poetry are already playing: the juxtaposition of the 'road' and 'non-road' (veg un onveg), the 'sunshine,' the eye of Hofshiteyn's sense of vision, which is one of the most important mediums of his artistic conception, the "the young eyelids between the eye and the sunshine" – that is the almost observational²⁷¹ tender-shadowed border, that divides Hofshiteyn's soul everywhere, his "I" from poverty, the accepted/received object, and finally: "what can be more beautiful?" – the half-yes, half-no of Hofshiteyn's world affirmation, the invitation characteristic of a poet to agree with a hidden, unsure expression of truth...

Dobrushin views this introductory poem as a microcosm of Hofshiteyn's poetics. "Ani ma'amin" / "I believe," is the name of a prayer, based on the thirteen principles of faith, recited in before the morning prayer. It contains some of the existential problems that Hofshiteyn deals with in his collection. Maimonides, by his own account, attempted to synthesize Jewish and Aristotelian thought in *A Guide for the Perplexed* for the student who was familiar with philosophy and put off by the lack of logos in religious thought.²⁷² Maimonides was not a mystical kabbalist, rather it was his goal to form a universal philosophical, scientific, syncretic mysticism constructed from the reconciliation of science and religion.²⁷³ According to Michael Friedlander, the English translator of *A Guide for the Perplexed*, Maimonides believed that "man should only believe what he can grasp with his intellectual faculties, or perceive by his senses, or what he can accept on trustworthy authority."²⁷⁴ It is from this rational, scientific position, bent on reconciling the theological and the scientific that that Hofshiteyn forms his 'poetics of perception.' That is why

²⁷¹ "Merkbarer" – a borrowing from the German meaning something like "noticeable," yet in Yiddish it is semantically colored by the verb "merk'n" to perceive, observe. I have chosen to translate it as 'observational' because of the connotations with 'objectivism,' and Brodsky's 'observational poetics,' which were also influenced by Mandel'shtam's interaction with Pushkin. Hofshiteyn strives towards a similar observational poetics. See "Hofshiteyn's Objectivism" in this document.

²⁷² Maimonides, *A Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. M. Friedlander. New York: Dover, 1904, pp. 9. Also Friedlander, M. "Analysis of the Guide for the Perplexed," In the same edition. pp. xxxix.

²⁷³ See Heschel, *Maimonides*.

²⁷⁴ Friedlander, M. "The Life of Moses Maimonides" *A Guide for the Perplexed*, by Moses Maimonides, trans. M. Friedlander. New York: Dover, 1904, pp. xxv.

the second poem, “I believe...”/ “Ikh Gloyb...” begins with a lexical repetition, translated into Yiddish, of the first line of “Ani Ma’amin.”

I believe
There is a frail bolt
In the middle of a tall door
That awaits the first jolt
Of movement
From my tired finger.
There, from the four quiet corners
Someone waits for me still,
For my charred walking stick,
A pitcher filled with clear water
Already waits for the dust
That covers me;
For the dust of distant paths.

Hofshteyn’s “I believe...” is the acceptance of messianic belief, but presents it through symbolist images. The dust is an elemental symbol of physical life, an elemental part of the road, and playing off of the Biblical etymological origins of “human from humus” “adam/admah.”²⁷⁵ The home is a deliverance from exile, though the washing of the body suggest, perhaps, that death is the great return into primordial oneness – the water waits not for the wander, but for the dust on his body. But perhaps this does not signify death, instead that the water has connotations of a new primal flood that will free the wanderer of the pains of the past. Whatever this deliverance is, it has not yet happened and is still something to be believed, it keeps the wanderer moving, and therefore alive. While Hofshteyn believes that he will reach a home, his poetic persona never does in *Along Roads*, all homes are presented as paradoxically alien: they are often presented oxymoronically such as the compound noun “fremde-heyman.”

Hofshteyn repeats the Yiddish calque of Maimonides’ phrase again in the poem “rest,” dedicated to Yekhezkel Dobrushin himself.

²⁷⁵ Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*, pp. 12.

Rest
To Y. Dobrushin

A quiet someone whispered in my ear today:
Yesterday, believe me, you paid your old debt –
And rest and clarity are your friends
For the whole day.

From the deepest depths I answered him – I believe!²⁷⁶
And from my face, he with a delicate fan,
with the crisp snap of the arrow, stirred the dust
Of the last day.

He began to stroke the gussets around my eye
Looked to the bottom of my dark pupil
And with a gentle, prayerful bow
Took leave of my door.

And over the smokey noise of the dark city
I noted the rest in every phase of sun--
And I alone – a flicker of graceful rest
In the four corners...

In this poem, Hofshsteyn elaborates on his idea of messianic deliverance, connecting it with ‘rest’/ ‘ru.’ The human state of rest is for Hofshsteyn intertwined with the unconscious human mind, and this is the state of dreaming. There are several types of dreaming in Hofshsteyn – the day dream, the national dream, the dream that is life, and the deepest dream of sleep, and ultimately death. At the end of the poem, the poet falls asleep and evaporates into the world. Again, like in “I believe,” the image of the ritual cleaning a corpse is perhaps referenced subtly, but there is space for the reader to resist this interpretation, and to see only sleep, because one of Maimonides’ Thirteen principles is belief in the resurrection of the dead. This infinity, too, semantically colors Hofshsteyn’s conception of infinity and natural cycles.

²⁷⁶ Literally “I believe”

...

In Hofshiteyn's poetry, all elements of the universe are sacred and connected. Everything at its core is dust, stone, in short-- primordial element. There is observational, scientific, chemical reality that converges with a rational, material theological mysticism. Hofshiteyn is concerned with the aesthetic of the word and the nature of human language and essence more than any theology, political ideology, or philosophy. He is concerned with the creative phenomenon of human language, the process of transforming human perceptions into sounds that communicate human essence, that communicate a sense of linguistic newness, of primal understanding. He yearns to expand his human subjectivity and put that subjectivity into perspective –human consciousness is a strange and rare phenomenon of the universe; one of the most strange and interesting facets of this phenomenon is the ability to imagine other forms of consciousness beyond the human, a greater form of consciousness, a lesser form of consciousness, a consciousness that is unimaginable.

Superimposition of Time and Space

Hofshiteyn sets natural cycles from day to night or season to season are presented in a way to suggest a subjective experience of temporality – he may depict a nature cycle over a long cycle of poems, then quickly go through a year's or a season's cycle in very quickly. In this, he is distinct from Kulbak entirely, who depicts natural cycles to emphasize a primordial “now-ness” – timelessness and a sense of harmony of the folkloric-primitive “Raysish” wanderer to

nature. Hofshteyn could have organized his poems to reflect the harmony of the natural cycle, or the eternal moment of “now”, but he resists. This jumbled presentation of time throughout the book is part of Hofshteyn’s poetic project to transcend the limitations of time and space through the artistic text, to see what is eternally and essentially human. It is only in this timeless, spaceless dream imagination that one is free to juxtapose that which cannot be otherwise, and to create a new meaning from an unlikely dream-overlay of space and time. However, circular time is certainly present in this infinity by the elemental cycle of life, and the depiction of seasons passing in order. Hofshteyn does, however, jumble these depictions, or present the same cycles at a quicker pace to emphasize the uneven human perception of natural cycles of time. The jumbled presentation of time reflects the human perception of time mediated by memory and the subconsciousness mechanisms by which it functions.

Seth Wolitz’s conception of the fragmented structure of *Troyer* can also be applied to *Along Roads*, and I would add that his analysis of the associative form shows how Hofshteyn translates his objectivist viewpoint into the structure of his poetry.

Each poem becomes a polysemic fragment serving as a synecdoche of time, space and the despairing poetic self, and the reflection of the Jewish condition. This poetic strategy of stringing together poetic fragments defines Hofshteyn’s modernist attempt to obtain simultaneity of the fleeting particular in the process of totalization. The strategy emphasizes the present while dimming the past and deflecting the future.²⁷⁷

The poems, refractions of the poetic voice’s experience and observations, treat the flow of time with a Bergsonian sense of temporal accumulation. At times the poetic voice may well be not only a persona of the poet but the voice of Jewish history subsumed into the first person singular.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁷ Seth Wolitz, *Yiddish Modernism: Studies in Twentieth-Century Eastern European Jewish Culture*, pp. 287.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

In his presentation of time, Hofshiteyn's poetic representation of time and space aligns very closely with Mandelstam's poetics of time-space, which he characterized subtly as a particularly Judaic relation to time in his essay²⁷⁹, "On the Nature of the Word" (1922):

In order to rescue the principle of unity in the whirlpool of change and the ceaseless current of events, contemporary philosophy in the person of Bergson, whose profoundly Judaic mind, obsessed by the urgent practical need of substantiating monotheism, proposes to us a doctrine of the systemization of phenomena. Bergson examines phenomena not through the logic of their subordination to the law of temporal sequence, but as it were, through the logic of their distribution through space. It is exclusively the inner bond of phenomena that interests him. This bond he liberates from time, and examines separately. In this way interconnected phenomena form a kind of fan, the folds of which may develop in time, while at the same time the fan may be collapsed in a way that allows the mind to grasp it.²⁸⁰

Mandelstam embraced this relationship of time-space in his own poetry, using a dense web of subtexts from world literature to create a sense of unity in the artistic word. In characterizing Bergson's mind, and by association his theory of time-space, as 'profoundly Judaic,' he accepts this characterization of his own poetry. Hofshiteyn, in his conversations with the past that often occur through landscape, participates in this collapsing of time-space to write himself into an eternal dialogue of "world culture."

"O Tsayt, O Tsol, O Roym"/ "O Time, O Number, O Space"

Space and time are linked together inextricably in Hofshiteyn's poetry. In this poem, he addresses them together in the first line as a coherent unit. These units of measure are represented as a body of water – it is unclear what type of water, but here the reader may from,

²⁷⁹ See Yerusalmi, *Zikron*. for a study of a particularly Judaic relation to time. Mandelstam's characterization of a traditional Judaic relation to time and memory intersects with Yerusalmi's programmatic study that came much later.

²⁸⁰ Mandelstam, Trans Sidney Monas, "About the nature of the Word," pp. 506-507

the context, associate that this might be reference to Derzhavin a la Mandelshtam's 'river of time' iterated in another poem from "Felder," but more immediate is Pushkin's Romantic portrait of the unattainable infinite sea in "K Moriu"/ "to the Sea,"²⁸¹ "O Tsayt , O Tsof, O Roym!.."/ "O Time, O Number, O Space" signals a connection with Pushkin's sea not only with its content, but also in form: they are both written in iambic trimeter. Hofshsteyn's form is more loose than Pushkin's and shorter, and functions as an interpretive fragment of the original poem, while resituating the poetic statement in a new context. He gives the poetic word "new life" in this context. They both focus on themes of infinitude and exile, and include a favorite positional metaphor of Hofshsteyn (and popular in eastern European Yiddish poetry at the time): the speaker is on a threshold, at a boundary (Ukraine as a special boundary, the revolution as a cultural-temporal boundary).

<p>O time, O number, O space! I walk around with young steps on the floating hem of the banks of your gigantic center. My shadow follows me on the damp sand with fragile fingers, I barely hold My fishing pole in my hands I throw it in the depth of your vastness and drops of eternity fall on me In luminous sharp eyes of everything that I pull out...</p>	<p>אָ צײַט, אָ צאַל, אָ רוים, איך שפּאַן אַרום מיט יונגע טריט אויף שוועבנדיקע ברעגן־זוים פֿון אייער גרויסער מיט! נאָך מיר אויף פֿייכטן זאַמד מיין שאַטן שפּאַנט, מיט גרינגע פֿינגער האַלט איך קוים מיין ווענטקע אין דער האַנט, כּפֿאַרוואַרף זי אין די טיפֿן פֿון אייער גרויס, און טראָפֿנס אייביקייט מיר טריפֿן אין לייכטנדיקער אויגן־שאַרף פֿון אַלץ, וואָס איך ציה אַרויס...²⁸²</p>
--	---

²⁸¹ "To the Sea," is (...) a poem about a temporal limit, and the exclamation "desired limit of my soul!" converts temporality into the external space of an endless sea, as well as the internal space of boundless desire." (Sandler 65).

²⁸² Dovid Hofshsteyn, *Bay Vegn*, pp. 49.

The speaker is positioned as Pushkin’s speaker: on the shore facing a large body of water. In Hofshyteyn’s poem, Pushkin’s presence could explain the meaning of the shadow behind him, a kind of nod to Pushkin’s imagined. Hofshyteyn substitutes “time, number, and space” for the sea. This substitution makes sense; Pushkin, in his description of the sea, endows it with an elemental vastness. Hofshyteyn reads this poem in its context as an exilic poem, as it was written by Pushkin in his exile from Saint Petersburg.

When the poet converses with the sea, a primal element as the origin of all life and a primary division of earthly domains described in the opening lines of Genesis, he hears in the waves the parting words of a departed friend. In this he utilizes the elegiac conceit of Nature as a medium of communication with the departed, in the case of this poem, literally both Byron and Napoleon, but more metaphorically, infinitude and poetic creation. The addressee of the poet is the sea and the parted, both referred to in the second person in the first and second stanzas. Hofshyteyn employs this elegiac conceit throughout *Along Roads* in many of the Ukrainian landscapes.

<p>Моей души предел желанный! Как часто по брегам твоим Бродил я тихий и туманный, Заветным умыслом томим!</p>	<p>Desired Limit of my Soul! How often I have wander On your quite, foggy shores, Languishing in sacred intents!</p>
---	---

For Pushkin, the special position of the poet on the shore, wandering “silent and foggy”, is connected to the action of philosophical reflection, to be tormented by sacred, hidden, testament thoughts. The adjective Pushkin uses to describe these thoughts is “zavetniy”/ “sacred,” which has theological resonances, ‘zavet’ being the word for the testament of the old and new testaments. Hofshyteyn also represents his shore as an abstracted space of “zavetnym umyslom,”

which for him are metaphysical truths distilled from the of the unfathomable ocean space, representing death, or possibly some eternal world literature.

In the third stanza of “К Овидиу” Pushkin imagines a predecessor that his ghost would appear to, just like Ovid’s ghost appeared to him. “Но если, обо мне потомок поздний мой/Узнав, придет искать в стране сей отдаленной/Близ праха славного мой след уединенный —/Брегов забвения оставя хладну сень,/К нему слетит моя признательная тень,/И будет мило мне его воспоминанье.”/ “ But if around me my future descendant knew to come and search out my lonely track near the glorious dust in this far-off land – leaving the cold shadow of shores of oblivion, my grateful shade will fly down to him, and his memory will be dear to me.” This position on the shore is repeated several times in *Along Roads*; in “O Time, O Number O Space,” an echo is recognizable in the line: “My shadow follows me on the damp sand.”

Pushkin is not the only source of this romantic trope of the sea. Taras Shevchenko also took the sea for something unfathomable and primal.

Вітре буйний, вітре буйний! Ти з морем говориш, Збуди його, заграй ти з ним, Спитай синє море.	O boisterous wind most turbulent, You parley with the sea. Awaken it, roar out with it, And question it for me.
---	--

Shevchenko presents an elemental scene, in which the sea possesses sacred wisdom, and the wind, another primal element and primal creative force, is the intermediary of the sea and the poet. These primal elements are the muses of the poet.

In Hofshsteyn’s development of the trope, the ocean is directly addressed in scientific-philosophical terms: time, number and space.

The Edge of an Era: Thresholds

The threshold is an important image not only for Hofshteyn, but also for other poets of the Kyiv group, Peretz Markish and Leyb Kvitko. Kulbak, in “Lamed Vov,” is interested in the folkloric image of the threshold as the gates of Eden, and presents a completely abstracted landscape of a walled Eden surrounded by a sea as a setting for the appearance of the Merkabah, God’s throne and a foundational image of Kabbalah. Hofshteyn’s threshold is much more homely: it is often depicted as a gate in the middle of a Ukrainian field, the door to the poet’s childhood home, an irrigation ditch separating one wide, vast field from the other. Yet it does have mystical connotations denoting this side and the other side. This is an example of Hofshteyn’s mystical realism – the mystical images are not explicit or presented in a fantastic folkloric form, instead, they are mundane everyday objects in a familiar landscape.

Hofshteyn adds meaning to the image of the threshold as a threshold of time, a border of epochs.

<p>the tall door and gates stand long abandoned – A rustling of leaves show him the way He sees that is already for the deep sadness For the grey net of rain of Cheshvan’s late autumnal days ...</p>	<p>פֿאַרלאָזן שטעהען לאַנג די הויכע טיר און טויער— אַ שאַרף פֿון בלעטער אים באַווייזט דעם וועג, ער זעהט, ס'איז אַלץ שוין גרייט צום טיפֿן טרויער, צו גרויער רעגן־נעץ פֿון חשוון־טעג...²⁸³</p>
--	--

<p>An old gate lets out A courtyard of quiet cattle To search like beggars All over in poverty. In the dark nakedness of the fields There, as there once was, now rides a breeze,</p>	<p>אַן אַלטער טויער לאַזט אַרויס אַ הייגל שטילע רינדער אויף בעטלערישן זוכן אין אַרימען אַרום²⁸⁴ ... דאַרט אין אַ מיטן ליגן אַ גראַבן</p>
---	--

²⁸³ Dovid Hofshteyn, *Bay Vegn*, pp. 33

²⁸⁴ Dovid Hofshteyn, *Bay Vegn*, pp. 35

<p>There, as there once was, now wanders the raven, There in a center lies a ditch An unclaimed threshold in the fallow distance...</p>	<p>285...א הפקר שוועל אין הפקר-ווייטן...</p>
---	--

The threshold is presented as an everyday object, not in magical or mythical terms. However, the semantics of the mythology color the everyday image and represent concretely a zeitgeist and a semiotic system of interpreting a moment of time that relies on the superimposition of literary traditions that reflects a reality of cross-cultural human origins. Literary eternity is superimposed upon nature’s eternal cycles.

...

Primeval Thresholds: “I Recognized her by the River” and “In Armenia”

“I recognized her by the river” is ostensibly a love poem. However, upon close reading, there is a deep web of associative metaphorical meaning that is meant to create an artistic phenomenon that resists the simplification and restatement inherent in interpretation. It is concerned with a set of gestalt dichotomies – between man and woman, human and the universe, creation and destruction, consciousness and unconsciousness, life and death, material and immaterial, individual and the nation. Within Hofshsteyn’s “tangled lines of thought,” created through associative layers of subtext, he weaves an impressionistic reflection on the poet’s relationship to the landscape and to the nation, as the tradition of literary landscape is entangled in these ideas. I read this poem as a phenomenon that contains a statement of Hofshsteyn’s non-national ‘doikayt,’ and a statement of belonging as a human on the earth.

²⁸⁵ Dovid Hofshsteyn, *Bay Vegn*, pp. 36

The landscape: a riverbank, a tree not far from a stone, and a primordial Eve is vague and non-specific, but, in the context of Hofshsteyn’s book because of the semi-autobiographical lyrical persona and the context of the other landscapes, it is understood that this is an image of the Ukrainian countryside, in which rivers have historically played an important role.

The meeting of the poet and his future wife is colored by allusions to several primordial encounters between man and woman. First, the primal encounter of Adam and Eve is an important subtext – the preceding poem, “An Apple,” leaves the story of the garden of Eden fresh in the mind of the reader. The woman who appears at the end of the first section is referred to as “vayb,” wife, but in an older sense of the word, was used more generally to mean “woman,” and the comment is heard “from ur-young years,” mirroring the last lines of the second part of the poem:

<p>Now I watch everything there, In the bright, forgotten past!...</p>	<p>איצט קוק איך אלץ אהין, אין ליכטיגן פֿאָרגעסענעם צוריק!...²⁸⁶</p>
--	--

But this is not the only allusion to a defined moment of the book of Genesis, there is also an allusion to Jacob’s journey to find a wife. This allusion reveals some of the theological basis for Hofshsteyn’s doikayt. The woman in Hofshsteyn’s poem is positioned “a few dozen steps away from the stone,” evoking Jacob’s dream while sleeping with his head on a stone. In this dream, God talks directly to Jacob. He echoes his promise to Abraham and foreshadows the eventual dispersal the Jews all over the world, like dust. The episode is a statement of God’s omnipotence and consequently a sense of pre-national human belonging in the world – Jacob

²⁸⁶ Dovid Hofshsteyn, *Bay Vegn*, pp. 55.

realizes that God is with him wherever he goes and all the clans of the earth will be blessed by the presence of his descendants.

“I, the LORD, am the God of Abraham your father and the god of Isaac. The land on which you lie, to you I will give it to you and your seed. *And your seed shall be like the dust of the earth and you shall burst forth to the west and the east and the north and the south, and all the clans of the earth shall be blessed through you, and through your seed, wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land, for I will not leave you until I have done that which I have spoken to you.*”

And Jacob awoke from his sleep and he said, “indeed, the lord is in this place, and I did not know.” And he was afraid and said,

“How fearsome this place!

This can be but the house of God,

And this is the gate of the heavens.”

(Genesis 28:13-28:18, translation Robert Alter, emphasis mine)

Hofshteyn’s allusion to this the Biblical episode superimposes a non-territorial sense of doikayt onto the Ukrainian countryside, which is at the time of the publication was rife with ethn nationalist, antisemitic violence.²⁸⁷ Territorial claims of ownership of Ukraine were (and still are) based on the national mythological origin stories rather than actual history of diverse, multicultural human settlement of the area.

For Hofshteyn, belonging to the landscape comes from the fact of his ancestor’s existence in Ukraine, and their burial there creates a sort of supernatural absorption of them into the landscape. As often occurs in the genre of elegy, which is particularly important in *Along Roads*, the landscape is associated with a sense of a timelessness or infinity of death – the animate has transformed into the inanimate, yet in eternal nature there is still the remains of language, albeit a more primal form. His doikayt is based on material existence, not only of his ancestors, but of

²⁸⁷ It must be noted that in our current world, the history of anti-semitism and ethnic violence in Ukraine has been twisted by Vladimir Putin to justify an unprovoked war with aspiring multicultural democracy of Ukraine, in which the Russian military is engaged in war crimes, genocide and ethnic cleansing. While Putin and his ilk do practice demagoguery, it is also important to acknowledge the dark history of antisemitism in Ukraine. Ukraine’s recent turn towards multicultural democracy was beginning to embrace the principle of a modern multicultural state that Hofshteyn and his Ukrainian colleges of various ethnicities hoped would emerge from the war...

the existence of his own life there – this poem is also about an important life event for Hofshiteyn personally.

The description of the stone in Hofshiteyn’s verse is particularly interesting in that it is represented as an animate, pulverized piece of dust from Hofshiteyn’s “urland’s” bones:

<p>In some dozen paces on the earthly silence A stone withheld speech, A stubborn member Of my ur-land’s bones, dispersed as dust...</p>	<p>אין א פאָר צעהנדלינג טריט, אויף דעם ערדישן שווייגן האַט געשטומט דאָרט אַ שטיין, אַ פאַרעקשנטער גליד פֿון מיין אורלאַנדס צעזייהטן, צעשטויבטן געביין...²⁸⁸</p>
--	--

The concept of the ‘urland,’ a primordial origin, is embodied by its people through Biblical subtexts. Dust in Hofshiteyn’s metaphorical system has connotations of a basic element of life and death. Hofshiteyn literalizes the Biblical connotations through the natural material cycles of life: the body is comprised of elements, these bodies break down into their constituent elements and become part of the earth and are absorbed again by living elements. This infinity is conceptually important in Hofshiteyn’s book.

The stone (*shteyn*) in the quotation above can also have the meaning of headstone in Yiddish. Its representation as a speck of dust made of the decomposed bones of this ‘urland’ recalls the proportions in the Numbers in which the scale of everything in the promised land is gigantic, from the people to the grapes. The ‘urland’ is represented as mythologically distant, and its metaphorical decomposition as a body into dust gives the sense of erosion and dispersal of mythological time itself. The primal elements of this mythology remain, yet there is a sense that the time of mythology is past and material history has replaced it. This primal element of

²⁸⁸ Dovid Hofshiteyn, *Bay Vegn*, pp. 55.

the ‘urland’ in the Ukrainian landscape and its existence itself is a statement of belonging – one that implies a doikayt based on the material fact of existence.

There is a sense that the death and destruction taking place in the Ukrainian countryside must be mourned, but the processes of mourning leads to a new era, albeit an unsure era that could, in its materiality, lead to a new primordial fall. This uncertainty is characteristic of Hofshyteyn’s poetic brink, his edge, his shore, his Ukraine. This is where Hofshyteyn ambivalently positions himself in his doikayt.

The poem on the surface is a love poem about a personal life event, but he reads his experience through a prism of texts that exposes the ripples in time and space, ultimately producing a complex statement of human existence in the world.

Another Brink: Armenia

“In Armenia,” a poem that was written during Hofshyteyn’s service in the Russian army in 1912, shows Hofshyteyn’s sense of belonging and identification to another edge of the Russian empire—Armenia. In this poem he also presents another primordial moment of creation and destruction.

In the poem, Hofshyteyn locates himself with a Biblical landscape through Alexander Pushkin’s *Journey to Arzrum*, which is explicitly cited in the “Caucasus” cycle of *Along Roads*. Pushkin describes the Biblical Ararat, the mountain where Noah’s ark supposedly landed.

“Avidly I looked at the Biblical mountain, saw the ark moored to its peak with the hope of regeneration and life, saw both the raven and dove, flying forth, the symbols of punishment and reconciliation...”²⁸⁹

²⁸⁹Aleksandr Pushkin, *A Journey to Arzrum*, pp. 50.

Supposedly Pushkin saw the mythical mountain in Gumry, but Ararat is not visible from Gumry. However, Alagatz, its sister mountain and the mountain that Hofshiteyn describes, is visible. Hofshiteyn's realistic description of Alagatz in light of Pushkin's gaudy, mythological description takes on a new meaning and creates a connection to the ancient Biblical landscape at the edge of a fading empire. He identifies with the mountain, but describes it in objective terms, unlike Pushkin, who creates a hyperbolic Biblical landscape where it is not.

Hofshiteyn's identification with the Armenian woman as the Landscape is based on a shared sense of a colonial subjecthood at the edge of the Russian Empire. His sense of doikayt is not limited to a certain country or geological area, instead, it is presented as a human condition of living on the edge, the brink of existence and non-existence. The associational subtexts of the primordial landscapes superimposed onto realistic landscapes of the brink suggest a new primordial beginning with the revolution and dissolution of the old world, and all the pains that come with birth.

Among the tangled ideas and metaphors that flow through Hofshiteyn's poetic object of experience is a strand that claims a human belonging to the idea of the edge, the brink. Human existence in the world and its perception is a phenomenon that is not reduceable to maxims – it is one to be experienced, and his verbal art is meant to reflect this complexity.

...

In the Kyiver Farlag's 1923 edition, *Gezamelte Verk*, there are additional poems in the Caucasus cycle. In "A Firek Shotn Ligt fun Tunkler Vant..." / "A quadrilateral shadow from the dark wall lurks...", the poet recalls Volin from Armenia, and in this retrospective poem, he is much more direct than his previous poems about his feelings of belonging.

א פִירעק שאָטן ליגט פֿון טונקלער וואַנט. א בלינדער אַרימען באַזיצט דאָס שוואַרצע רעמל.	A quadrilateral shadow from the dark wall lurks.
---	---

<p>ער זינגט. פֿון אייביק אָן איז אויסגעשרעקט זיין האַנט, און קיינער טרעט דאָ ניט, און ס'הערן איך און הויכער הימל.</p> <p>ארמעניע! דאָרט אין וואָלין, אין שטיל פֿון קליינעם צימער</p> <p>פֿון צארטער שאַגיניאַן האָב איך געהערט דיין ליד. איך הער זי אין דיין היים, און העלער קימער אין יונגן האַרצן מיינעם גליט.</p> <p>עס קלינגט דיין ליד אין מיר מיין מיינקשאַפֿט קוועלט, מיין ביינקשאַפֿט איז פֿון איר נאָך עלטער. איך בין אַ גער אָף דינע שמאַלע פֿעלדער, אַ טוישעוו אין דער גאָרער וועלט.²⁹⁰</p>	<p>A poor blind man possess the frame. He sings. From time eternal the hand is extended, And no one treads here. And I listen to(?) the sky above.</p> <p>Armenia! There in volin, in the silence of a small room I heard your song from the gentle chignon. I hear her in your home, in the bright cell/room glows in my young heart.</p> <p>Your song sounds in me my yearning My yearning for her (it) is still older. I am a convert (ger) on your narrow fields, An inhabitant of the entire world.</p>
--	--

The last lines again emphasize the connection of the borderlands and present a paradox.

Hofshteyn calls himself a ger, a convert (also “outsider”), to Armenia, and in the next line claims that he is an inhabitant (toyshev) of the entire world.

The Eternal Feminine, Shkhinah, and a Feminine Ideal of Nation?

The image of death is juxtaposed to an image of life -- The woman, a primal Eve, depicted naked in the countryside. Her nakedness signals the purity of a pre-fall state, but, in connection with the previous poem, “an apel.” about primal temptation that ends inconclusively, it is difficult to forget that there is a tree on the bank that gives a sense of foreboding. Perhaps also what is relevant here is the Slavic mythology of the mermaid, similar to the nymphs of ancient Greek literature.

	<p>כ'האָב דערזען זי אין נאַקעטער פֿרייד פֿון איר לייב, אין צעפֿלאַסענער קרוין פֿון די דופֿטיגע האַר,</p>
--	--

²⁹⁰ Dovid Hofshteyn. Gezamelte Verk:ershte band lirik, pp. 54.

<p>I recognized her in the naked joy of her body, In the disheveled crown of her fragrant hair, I have heard from the depths of the ur-young years: “That is what one calls woman!”</p>	<p>כהאָב דערהערט פֿון די טיפֿן פֿון אוריונגע יאָר: -- אָט-אָ דאָ רופֿט מען ווייב!²⁹¹</p>
---	--

The recognizes her in an abstracted voice “from the depths of ur-yung times;” it is if she appears through the poet’s reflection on material eternity from contemplation of the elemental nature of the stone itself. This interpretation is reinforced by the last lines of the second part of the poem,

<p>I watch everything there now, In the bright, forgotten past!...</p>	<p>איצט קוק איך אַלץ אַהין, אין ליכטיגן פֿאַרגעסענעם צוריק!...</p>
---	---

The second part of the poem abruptly changes locations to a room in the city.

<p>In a narrow room On two black, rigid benches Our crumpled clothes lie passed out...</p>	<p>אין ענגן צימער אויף שוואַרצע שטרענגע בענקלעך צוויי אין אַהנמאַכט ליגן אונזערע צעקנייטשטע קליידער...</p>
--	--

No humans are depicted here, just their clothes: it is as if they have shed their material form and become pure metaphysical objects together consisting of the human being. After the visual break provided by three dots, the landscape changes again back to the shore, except this time the shore is not presented realistically as it was in the first part, but figuratively: “vi af a breg/as if on a shore.” This section has resonances of Pushkin’s “To the Sea,” an exilic elegy in which the poet contemplates infinity while looking at the sea from the shoreline. “To the Sea” is an important subtext for *Along Roads* as this infinitude is contemplated throughout *Along Roads*. In this poem specifically, the poet warns his newly found wife not to look into the infinity that is associated with death. In this warning there is a sense of fear of loss of an innocence of the

²⁹¹ Dovid Hofshsteyn, *Bay Vegn*, pp. 56

purity of ideal in this woman, whose form is loosely associated with the possibility of a new beginning, a new dawn of time that is heralded by the revolution.

In Hofshateyn, like in Pushkin, the “native” girl is connected to nature. Pushkin’s Circassian girl becomes subsumed by the landscape through a grand oriental river, suggesting an imperialistic ideology/theme that the primitive, oriental subject must perish for the sake of Western civilization. Hofshateyn’s Armenian woman is also described as part of the landscape—it is ambiguous whether he is describing the olive groves on the mountain or the woman’s eyes or both simultaneously – but there is no need for her to perish he identifies with her on a human level first, then on the level of another colonized subject of empire – he just asks her for directions. In addition to this Hofshateyn’s Eve of the Ukrainian landscape in “Tkh hob zi derzen afn taykh” is also presented through a primordial relationship to the landscape. There is no othering in by means of orientalization or primitivism. This is Hofshateyn’s response to Pushkin’s colonialist mentality.

The women of Hofshateyn’s love poems may also overlap Blok’s symbolist idea of the divine feminine with shekinah. It is important to note that in Hofshateyn’s abstract, primordial landscapes on the edge, all of the humans depicted can be reduced to two abstract figures – Man and Woman. While the relationships of these figures are presented variously, Hofshateyn’s abstract “love poems” tap into primordial gestalt of human that reads them as part of the landscape, part of nature. In contrast, the image of the city is about the Human manipulation of nature.

Conclusion?

Hofshteyn creates home landscapes and exotic landscapes that coincide with the borders of the collapsing Russian empire, examining conceptions of space, time, and the individual's relationship with that space and time. Addressing the national dialogue of his individual relationship with the landscape in Yiddish.... Hofshteyn presents a poetics of *doikayt* in his landscapes – he belongs to the landscape because he has experienced it and it belongs to him because those experiences are translated to memory, nothing more.

Hofshteyn presents the reader with an understanding of exile created from the juxtaposition of poetic traditions. While Kulbak's mythological Belarus is fecund and full of exotic local toponyms, Hofshteyn's Ukraine is presented most often in hollow or abandoned fields, barren snow-covered landscapes, the withering fields under the frost of autumn, with the occasional bloom of grass, or a day of traveling in the summer heat, or the destructive and creative force of an ice flow in spring. Hofshteyn's landscapes are built on universal topological imagery with few localisms – fields, forests, roads; sun, snow, and dust. Very rarely is a specific toponym mentioned, especially in his Ukrainian landscapes, yet, despite this apparent abstraction, it is known that they the fields and forests are the fields and forests of Ukraine. Hofshteyn resists decadent exoticization of his landscapes -- even in the Caucasus, the exotic 'oriental' local of Romantic sublimation and Russian imperial expansion. A curious feature of Hofshteyn's reinvention of the Romantic poetics of exile is the collapse between southern exile, which to Hofshteyn was home, and Caucasian exile, which is presented as a periphery of some distant ancestral home. Memories dominate the space; personal memories (of childhood, of

military service, etc.) are put into contrast with memories of experiencing the landscape through Russian Romantic texts and the literature of Russian Empire. Hofshsteyn's poetic persona presents a sense of belonging in these locals of Romantic exile, refusing to view the other as "primitive," but rather pondering the primitive origin of the human and the primordial moment. This creates a sense of belonging to the edge – of the collapsing Russian Empire at a time of national revivals that occurred on this edge – but also to the edge of an epoch, to the edge of dichotomous conceptions of "East" and "West."

Concluding Reflection

At the turn of the twentieth century, poetry was an important genre in the public sphere which, as an expression of culture, was a means to legitimize the Yiddish language as a Jewish language, European language, and a worldly language. The Yiddish language became *one* of the mediums of a new, polyphonic, Modern Jewish culture during a tumultuous epoch of revolution and national uprising in Eastern Europe and Moyshe Kulbak and Dovid Hofshateyn were two of the many poetic innovators of the time.

Their styles were vastly different; Kulbak cultivated a folksy lyrical persona with a localized Yiddish and developed folkloric themes, but wrote in the style and forms of international high culture (Symbolism and Expressionism), while Hofshateyn produced an elevated literary Yiddish that was distinct from quotidian language and presented in precisely constructed forms. Hofshateyn's poetry incorporated a litany of iterations, adaptations of and conversations with world literature, and specifically Russian Romanticism and its implicit imperial assumptions. Kulbak, who performed folksiness and localized vernacular, also conversed with co-territorial languages, but focused on writing himself into a multilingual *Lithuanian-Belarusian* tradition as opposed to the Russian tradition with which Hofshateyn

converses. Kulbak's choice to write himself into a subjugated line of literary tradition is different, yet similar to Hofshteyn's goal to critique, appropriate and augment the Imperial Russian poetics from his own experience which seeks to see the landscape anew.

While it is tempting to suggest the difference between the two poets is Kulbak's localized poetics in opposition to Hofshteyn's international high Symbolism, that characterization seems misleading. Kulbak's performance of localism is distinctly modern in character and fits in with international trends of late Symbolism. Hofshteyn, likewise, elevates folkloric themes with his precisely crafted literary language to a point which they are defamiliarized. Both poets engage with a layering of distinctly Jewish and distinctly non-Jewish, worldly literary themes to emphasize a long history of cultural syncretism that suggests Jewish belonging in Eastern Europe. Their poetic styles are rooted in the semiotics of space – Belarus was largely undeveloped and understood in the various imperial literatures as a backwater with a “primitive” sense of nationhood. Kulbak performs this localized exoticism and ultimately, through layers of irony, promotes the merits of the multicultural nature of this supposedly ‘primitive’ outlook. Hofshteyn is a poet of Kiev, which at the time was an ephemeral, burgeoning multicultural, multilingual modernist cultural capital of the Russian Empire. His performance *in Yiddish* of high Symbolism and reinterpretation of the Romantic poetics of Empire fall are a bold statement of belonging to the pluralistic world culture of Modernism. Both poets present ideas of belonging in their depictions of landscape, but they conceptualize this belonging differently based on their own experiences.

This project focuses on poems in which the landscape of Eastern Europe becomes the stage of cultural dialogue with the past, and with the imperial order and hopeful visions of the future that never came to fruition, but were visible for a brief period in time. The goal of this

project is to attempt to understand the beauty produced in time of tumult, to recover a perspective that has been lost in the chaos of time and language. The landscape, and nature as a whole, is often represented metaphorically as an eternity, an ever-present environment common to all human existence, yet we know that environments are often subject to extinction.

These Yiddish Modernist poets reinvented Romantic nature, and with it, they provide a critique of Romantic nationalisms. While Yiddish itself did not have a Romantic tradition, it grafted itself onto Russian and Polish Romanticism, and cross-pollinated with other ‘minor modernisms’ of co-territorial literatures, just as Russian literature in the 18th century grafted itself onto the rootstock of classical literature and cross-pollinated with other European literatures.

Both poets seek to superimpose Jewish theological and mystical ideas onto contemporary European philosophical thought, which performs a Jewish belonging in European and world culture. Furthermore, both authors engage kabbalistic terms and images, refining it as folkloric material and attempting to make it relevant in a modern culture. Kabbalah is used as a theological basis for a sort of native Romanticism. In the case of Hofshyten, Kabbalah is combined with an objective-scientific approach, while in Kulbak, it is used as performative Modernist adaption of folk wisdom, in an effort to reconcile high and low registers, European and local.

And while this project could be expanded to include poets that depict landscapes that do not promote belonging, the poets in this study underline not only the European influence on Jewish Culture, but also the Jewish influence on European culture.

Hopefully, this meditation on the aesthetic literary objects of a historical turning point during a tumultuous world one hundred years ago can rhyme with the tumult in our world today in a meaningful way.

Appendices

I. Moyshe Kulbak

The City (1919)

I

The City. From the silent, flickering red of evening,
A pure angel murmured a lucid dream to me
When I entered the City...ⁱ

My path was vivid; not quite dark, not beaming,
The twilight's pink enveloped the expanse
And I heard abstrusely the dull speech; –
The voices of stones mumbling in steel yokes
The City reverberating in heavy undulation...ⁱⁱ

And still I silently blessed my every step:
– The day will fade, and pure rest soon will drip
From crisp, raw plains, from every leaf in the forest,
And from the mute, cruel-callused City – – –
And I am at rest. The blushing evening's dream
will weave around me, flowing from heaven's pink seam,
And adorn the clouds while a gentle loneliness
glows and seethes over the quiet world,
Until night falls—Night! Then pitch-black rest will come...
And I strode into the City.

How heavy have I felt the stone, the metal, and ore,
The bit of blue sky, the street corners, the signs of black and gold,
The bridges, the grey and darkness, the orchard's stature,
humans in strokes of whites and browns in factory smoke,
And eyes of blue and flame and flowing of teeming masses,
The streets full of sounds of striding, of sounds of gallops,
And suddenly — Chrysanthemums, the trembling white of chrysanthemum,
And a village child smelling of the field in her brows...
Child, my child!... flint ignites the windows,ⁱⁱⁱ
The spurs glimmer, black braids, teeth shimmer,
A laughter sways, copper and heavy in immensity.
O! Heavy!...

And I am at rest. My chest is bound in a cold link of iron
And in the City, a dream is woven— a dream that no one discerns —
And it will be so, for a year, or two, or maybe more...

II

An ossified silence hangs on the houses. Gargantuan buildings in slumber,
Kneel like great camels, spread out in rest with their wide-open mouths and eyelids.^{iv}
The black, tired night pours into attics, the chimneys and pipes,
And the moon sings in a lonely environ of stars – the silvery doves...
The City sighs...^v
And the quietness mounts yet another black ruby in her greenish braid,
And languidly falls into her soft silken chair, rocking in unstable sparse space...
The City moans deeper and her moan grows increasingly incensed with a pain – –
O, why does the City moan in the night?
In her darkness, deep in the cellars, a snake slides out from the husk of its skin,
It was reared in the dampness, it twists beneath the buildings, slithers in ancient slime ...
At Midnight, lethargically, he raises his venomous head and the drone of derision sounds,
And at midnight the City sighs harder – – –

And years packed with suns and moons in the lands of rest go past,
Night dawns and the innerness^{vi} counts the extinguished grey screams,
The mysterious terror exits the antechamber, falling panes of glass,
The blind restlessness crawls like an old black dog in the vestibule...
And the milky way above flows in pure silver and its chilly desire is blue
The restfulness runs from it trembling and bright, like a wordless, crooning prayer...

.....
Midnight^{vii}
The orphaned breeze blows,
The orphaned breeze goes
On night's simple mission
When the first midnight prayer starts to fade...

Midnight.
A dew washes over the vault of azure,
The vault of azure swirls in its blues
The City that rests, comfortably mute
In her chalk-white spire and stature.

Midnight.

The bells! They have tolled!

The brazened youth
Are taken by the volition

To stifle
The spiteful
Sensations
Of a wasted generation.

And the bells have tolled! ...

Hey, let's go! Let's move!
Let the weak ones stay here...

The doors from afar are wide open, and they're clear.
Our path has been misted with the dew and is new,
Let's mark all our steps – each step with a stone –
Go! Move!
The weak stay behind here.

Let's discover our dreams and forge the truth,
Let's search for the luminous song of our age,
Maybe some lonely singer be guarding our bed,
Maybe sounds will be woven from new invocations,
Maybe hammers will be raised in all our locations,
Forging the winged word in glowing orange-red,
Let's try, children of the tide,
Children of darkness and of night ...

Move! Move!
Let the weak stay behind...
When the echo of the eagle's shrill screeching fades
Let's move, let's tread forward, in columns, in lines,
Drink our courage from the mountains, sing the song of the night,
Courageous and furious, let's seek out the battle,
Let the weak stay here.

And the bells have tolled! ...

From depth of the night affirmed,
They go, they go,
In dark circles,
In oblique files,
Together,
the people
were intertwined
with martyrdom
And like tongues
In flames
They vanished –

They became a chasm — — —
Suddenly they were fluttering in scarlet flags,
They were shattered and flaming,
All is violently bursting into leaf,
All is radiant in bloodied beauty,
And the bells have tolled! ...

Hey! Take me with you!
Let my dark stride and pure spirits,
wordlessly count the dark strides
Of the abysmal song ...
My flint origins
Drank long ago
From wellsprings of poison — — —
I'm with you, carrying a tune radiant and new,
The night sounds from me,
The sun shines on me but in my spirits— — —

And the bells have tolled...

The sun is here! Or is it the sun??

It was a flash, a whistle and a spray like a plume of spark,
The red banded snake slithered out from the City's abyss
Around the earthly sphere...

III

The blackness blushes. The gentle morning-star is young and crisp,
It twitches green and drips with concealed silver tears.
Though the night the ancient grey earth purified itself to clear,
She naps, she breathes easier and lightly, she scratches and hears:
The heavy sun from the land of day rolls and sounds with red.
It's quiet. The morning prayer is ready by night's gilt door,
It lifts dark drapes and mumbles gently, joyfully:
The sun is here! The sun is waiting here at our entrance...
The Cities, like Gods on earth, are redeemed from darkness,
In heavy loneliness, they seek consolation in the distance ...
The hour before the dawn is immense; the astonished Cities
with grey necks, cold chests and limbs are drained in restlessness...

The proud Sun communes with God-Cities, with brothers...

In the City. Break of Day. My shadow stays behind in night...
I walk the streets and swear: my heart will love this life...
The extinguished ancestral dream that once kindled the soul bright
whirls now 'round in holy pain, soothing the fresh old wounds,
The darkness of the scriptures, carried from generation to generation, cries out in my heart,
Covered freshly in dew, with songs of blue from the dawning of days...
O, home... my home! I search for the rope that drives the bells.
It's cold as desert and the messiah is absent – the bell will be the sign...^{viii}
The yellow flame of brass will smolder heavy in all the towns,
deafened, sounding in the windowpanes, where the shkhines dwell...
The path is grey. I rise and meander, feeling the dreary dream,^{ix}
In wanders' stride the exilic song is fresh again and trails me.

I walk the streets and swear: my heart will love this life...

.....
Am I old? Am I Young?

O, an enchanted ring has encircled me...

It burdened my heart
With the dream of my home,
With the darkened secret,
I walk glumly
And consecrated by eternal suffering
In the dark wheel,
And must profane everything that is dear,
But hide my wound in a covering – – –

The soul is a balance pan!
Beside the brightened door

Sways the song that I weave
(something dark, something bright)
And who knows, O, who knows whether I'll win,
Or lose...

Month replaces Month,
Hour rushes after hour,
Where there is a path – there I am.
Where there is a City – here I am.
I say a prayer to myself,
But who understands my appeal?
I think there is a border
Between the Forests and Cities...

Am I old? Am I young?
O, an enchanted ring has encircled me...

– – – – –
– – – – –
I wander until evening – – – –
– – – – – Silently the pale sun cleanses me
The streets are enchanted by the morning medley from the heavens
The pinkish holiness so purely illumines in my chests,
And it seems: life has been purified after all of this,
Now luminous easiness gently soothes the limbs, like a balsam,
And again, the ephemeral vision shines and quivers ...

Where could a person be found who can sense me, a wanderer,
Who will say to me: I know you, my friend, for a quiet person,
You have purified rest and have burdened no one with your life –
I have burdened no one with my life... lonely my web of breath
takes form, in the world at the bolted doors...
and like fog, silent sensations my soul will adorn.

Night dawns. And down sink the silent buildings
I open a door and I hear a queen of the night extoll:
The human is solemn, like a bird in formation;
Her voice in the darkness drifts into nothing, and each
Leaf laden tree is a cast that is formed from the terror. –
I climb up the stairs in a cheerless wood building.
And on the top floor a door peacefully opens
I stand in the passageway lost and I mumble, “good evening!”

The house is furnished weary. In perfect solitude the curtains fade,
The shine from dark desires glows delicate in redness
In all the rooms the calm rest gusts, it is the quiet sigh of someone ill.
And pure joy is extinguished through sparkling beverage...
The chairs take breaths with gentle longing from the blues of evening,

They drip with the delicate aroma of tender feminine bodies.
Again, the spaces feel the rustling of silken clothes.
In deep, recurring dream the walls perceive the sound and take heed...
All peacefully fall into sleep: The broad brown sideboards,
The whitewashed oven, the stiff mute melancholy beds,
Two silent young girls, tired, dark, serene figures,
A wide open, new book, and pictures on the wall – the dreamers of old...
The solitude rests in all the glasses, it tenderly embraces the thresholds
It pours all over the floor in gentle swells...

Good evening! The silent figures
Who dream in the rest filled corners,
And languish, concealed in shadows,
Obscuring the sparkling of souls...

O, bless the life left behind us!
To those who in darkness imagine
The neck and the face entwined
And hear the lament of the page...

Blessed page, her urban benches
are quiet and bowed from terror
The blood-stained garb of the executioner
Luminates sacredly in your eyes...

O, bless our Jewish daughters!^x
Alone, somewhere in a building,
Lonely concealed sentries
of sadness, of eternal sadness.

I come to you abounding in reverberations
of bells, so that you will perceive them,
My heart is confounded with songs
And in them I sense your names:

Olye and Miriam^{xi}

Tired weary wandering tones...
Loneliness took flight from beneath the browned, rust-red flags.
The red poured from the poles in frothing folds,
And bitterly embibed the masses ... and you, lovely swallows,
Trapped in the tempest of blood
you reclaimed the voice ...
Fly, weak birds,
Together
Round, – the heavy moods
Anointed for vengeance

Are mum,
They hum like flames...
the heart is reclaimed
The voice of the eyes...
Under the flags
Are doused with midnight prayers.
You have been pulled
into line with strange shadow men,
Locked deeply in silence.
Back, around and forward! ---
Only the black pupils shine
And house atop house made camp,
And the bells screamed...

Olye!
The resounding fine gold has encumbered your ear
The burden of a light tear tenderly tortured you,
The breath of Lilith provoked a premonition
To someone who is between blooms...
Surely you've lived in the queues
When the night's shores were dismantled,
When there were screams under the bells...

You yawn at the window,
The trembling blue evening, the fearful-blessed one
Rests easy in you singing indistinctly of life...
O, now is the hour of the soul, that yearns to forgive!
The refined roundness of your poverty
Sings silently, silently, silently... in piously spectacular rhythm ---
We're in the wondrous dwelling of evening, -
The pure luminous visions fade out one by one ---
Soon, soon - the world dissipates, the old world
in deep pains...

IV

Dawn. I rose early. The City rests in a vise.
The day rises his trembling brow like a ruddy old man
And blinks in the darkness, sparkling, enchanted, and fresh...
The bronze little horse^{xii} smiles to me drowsily from the table:
Good morning!

 Good morning!
I love him, the black, cold little horsey, forever,
My joy in the world! O, I know who will long after me:
The little horse, the quiet drake at the wall, and the handle of the door...

Today I leave the City!
My primordial path is split, and numbered is each stride.
There are villages and Cities,
And I wander between exhausted them from morning till evening...^{xiii}

My room is freshly invigorated from the cool dawn.
Quiet redness drips. Golden-blue mixes with the air.
I feel alone in the room, like the empty street echo...
I fill thousands and thousands of windows. The wings of night turn pale...
The shadows – seated by the walls – make the small room more mute,
My knapsack dreams in the corner and bathes in dark sorrow,
I sit in solitude at the door, downstairs are sounds of keys at the gate ...
I leave the room slowly, as if I stole away from sadness ...

Streets!
The stony streets ascending for the streaming masses,
silent sections, silent stones, stakes, pieces of steel and iron
Towering over, multitiered, lengthwise, quadrilaterals and circles...^{xiv}
The grief and pain live in you from the black earth that saddens,
The venom of our age glows hot within you; it drips in our spirits.
The bell-toll of beaming tempest sounds in you...

I am the only one in the street in the silk-golden dawn!
I hear far around, far away the spacious distances turn green,
The stout, fresh, warm black plains
They cool, dreaming in weather's soft current,
The heavily fogged cliffs of the shores are astonished
And the young spring swells gurgle underneath.
I walk in the village, where old huts weave
The quiet happiness for the forgotten wanderer
Who wanders like me, straight past life,
And calls and curses and knocks on his locked gate.^{xv}

And calls and curses and knocks on his locked gate...

The guard asked me, with surprise in his voice:

“What is it, wanderer, was the night cloudy?

Or does he not care for our ardent daughters?

Or what does he then – – – – –

– – – – –

– – – – –

– – – – –

Forests! Woods! Green eternity!

The tired-creature comes

From the City, in the wooded expanse,

Where the green hums silence,

O, forests, green eternity!

It's late, can't you see? It's late!

The cyclone-flame shouts from glowing Cities,

Three red iron phantoms ride through the roads,

Through smoke, factories, greys and telegraph wires

And wild, overwhelming battles

The man of flame, the City's protector and Satan – –

O, Forests, World-Titans!^{xvi}

The silent world

Stuns hoarse railroads

It is as bleak as desert!

I am running, limping and wounded, exhausted from combat,

Alone...

The time is Red!

Accompanist of death, Red Rider! Charge!

Minsk 1919 7/IV

-
- ⁱ The poem begins with the poet entering the city at dawn and ends with him leaving the next day. The movement echoes the movement of the prophet Isaiah, who travels from city to city prophesizing.
- ⁱⁱ Stones, the elemental building material of the city, possess consciousness
- ⁱⁱⁱ Chain of images that proceeds from harsh, elemental, industrial materials and ends with natural images of a child in a field
- ^{iv} Notice the animation of the city and its inanimate components.
- ^v Animation of the city, all of the elements have components of life...
- ^{vi} *Inzikhkayt*, a neologism. Coincidentally, New York Yiddish Modernists declared themselves *inzikhistn*, a different grammatical form of the same neologism around the same time.
- ^{vii} *Khtsos* means simply 'midnight' and denotes late night prayer sessions that begin at midnight.
- ^{viii} Kulbak often links the messianic theme to the idea of a new epoch that echoes throughout Eastern European literature at this time, but was heralded early by the Russian Symbolists.
- ^{ix} The dream motif – the entire poem is presented as a dream.
- ^x Compare to Isaiah 3:16. Kulbak represents the women as innocent victims who know poverty, inverting this section in Isaiah?
- ^{xi} *Olye* is a Slavic derived name, *Mariam* Hebrew derived.
- ^{xii} It is unclear exactly what this horse is – a horseman of the apocalypse, the bronze horseman of Pushkin?
- ^{xiii} Isaiah. the division of semiotic space into the dichotomy of city vs. countryside has a long history in Russian literature. See Toporov – Also Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*
- ^{xiv} Elements of the city and abstract geometric shapes.
- ^{xv} The gate or the threshold is often associated with the Biblical image of the gate to the heavens. Here, Kulbak's wanderer is attempting to enter a village, perhaps suggesting that 'primitive' village culture is a gate to a mythological past and idea future, or that the 'progress' of the future is a farce...
- ^{xvi} Cities are compared to gods, forests to titans. The space of forest space is eternal, bringing to mind the Romantic trope of an eternal, cyclical nature that represents a constant over the course of human history. The countryside is also where the prophet seems to gather his power. For Kulbak, the forests seem to represent primitive, while the city is associated with the rapidly modernizing future – albeit an uncertain and dangerous one.

Ruthenia (1921)

I

Ruthenia^{xvii}

O, My zeyde from Kobilnik is a simple sort of Jew,
An ordinary yokel in a sheepskin coat with a horse and hatchet ...
And my father and seventeen uncles are all true
And simple men, they are Jews like our own region of this planet.
They drive logs down the rivers, from the woods they haul timber ...
They labor day in and day out like White Rus' peasant lads,
In the evening, from a singular bowl they all eat their dinner,^{xviii}
And then, like sheaves of wheat, they fall into their beds.
My Grandfather, O, my Zayde, clambers up to the top of the stove,
He's the old patriarch who falls asleep in his seat at the table,
But his feet know how it goes: they habitually carry him up to the stove...
Zeyde's soild old feet have served him since days of great fables...

II

The Hay is Cut

The field had already begun its enchanted draw, inhaling the autumnal dew...
My grandfather set out at dawn down to the mire of the earth to cut the hay,
And just like real klezmers, they were already drunk by the breaking of day,
They stood eighteen deep, grandfather at the head, they shuffled out a tune:
A step and a shift of the shoulders, a swish, like lightnings' wild dance in a swamp swims,
"For the small slice of bread," Grandfather once said, "you must, my children, break a sweat..."
They took off their kapotes and shuffled the shimmering scythes stronger with shaggy limbs,
They are just like bristly fir trees, an old father and his own seventeen sons ...
The scythes pluck away and the dew is sprayed, the grass topples on top of grass,
Nearby a bird sings from inside a nut tree and zeyde reaches the end of the field
"What do you say to that? Here, take this canary, a Khazn, all of the sudden..."

Here they hone their scythes, take a smoke, swill kvass straight from the earthen jug,
And then they rise with a Ruthenian moan: "*Pomohay Bokh! Lord help us!*" A flurry of
shimmering ringing and refraction,
Pulsating shine vanishing in the grass and returning in flashes: eighteen scythes slicing in line!

And their hands bend surely, O, their shanks chatter and every limitation remains,
And until the congregation notices the red evening kindling in the scythe blades,
The gang smiles. They see distant herring and bube's cheese stuffed blintz,
They grab their scythes and get moving as they listen to the shrill calls of the quail,
They walk, scythes resting on shoulders, and gaze as silently as the tench.

III

My Grandmother...

My grandma was a good Jewish woman,
An artisan of childbearing who reared a babe each spring...
Quickly and painlessly, she gave birth to her twins
Like hens lay eggs, one after the other.
Bobeshi had three of my uncles in the attic,
Bobeshi lost two of my uncles in the reeds,
Bobeshi had eleven of my uncles on the oven,
Bobeshi gave birth to my father in the barn...
And then, her womb closed forever.
Bube donated the cloth diapers to charity,
Bube selflessly gave everything she was given,
She waddled round the house,
Like a duck amid chickens.

IV

The Logs are Driven

The mist blurred and smeared the towns and the roads and obscured all completely.
Amid the damp field the coldness of rain in suspension is felt by warm faces ...
Only speckles of trees are discerned, and the winch of a well from a courtyard whines,
But something floats up, it turns white before the eyes ... and all of it dissipates in mist,
A desiccated branch falls to the ground. It is quiet. A bird lets out its melancholy sound:
“In life, it turns out, the load is so heavy to bear, so heavy to bear...”
Between beds of crops dozens of springheads bubble and mumble and talk,
And somewhere in the fog, far, far out on the Nieman the voice of my grandfather bellows:

Shmulye! Hey! Shmulye!
Take the rear to Skarulye!^{xix}

His beard dripping wet, Grandfather clambered around and reached toward the moorings,
My uncles in fog with long pike poles took strides onto the rafts,
And thereafter they vanished. From afar can be heard only hollered exchanges,
The oars splashing out time in the rudest of rhythms, and the flow as it is divided...
The fog front envelops the loamy banks, all is empty, there's no land and no water.
And as such, the landscape is gentle, all substance becomes a pallid warm breath...
But there is something concealed ... the sundry valleys and the forest transpire,
There are houses wrapped in a cloth, covered like furniture in the homes of the wealthy,
And then a green clarity emerges ... it becomes clearer to me deep in my soul ...
The sun gets brighter. The water appears and the weeping willows in the mud,
The forest is damp, soaked in a washed-out blue and its head blazes,
And a brilliance goes to play far off on a meadow... a peasant stands there and plows...

A crispness and comfort waft from pungent grassy meadows that sparkle and wail,
And the patches of fog still waft up as dreams of the fields and the plains...
And calmly the rafts float by, calmly they turn and drift around the banks,
The wagons full of straw radiate white light and steam the dew and the rain,
Grandfather lies close by... he smokes of his pipe and his eyes buzz in pleasure:
The warm earth stretched out shimmering and bountiful, robustly spread out just so,
Boxed off by the fields, some are muddy, some yellow and golden and green—
The flowing of trembling transparent flax on thin stems of amber,
The greenness on the potatoes lies cooled, duller, evaporated...
And the squat, rosy buckwheat smiles, sprinkled with white flecks —

The smells of the earth start to flow as intoxication takes hold of the limbs,
A silent life pushed through the rustling grasses, through the roots and in-between them,
When Grandfather can endure it no longer, he lets out a moan, O, he can no longer be silent,

V

The Viliya and the Nieman

While the moon mists itself on the land like a silver rain,
The rigid form of a Lithuanian emerges from the Nieman.
And from the Viliya a dark woman silently swam across to him
her wet locks of hair dispersed over long greenish brows,
Her aqueous body protrudes from the waves...
The Nieman bends around her, he envelops her,
And kisses her green eyes that shine from sadness
And pulls her down to the bed of the river, to the blue crystalline halls...

VI

Uncle Avrom Pastures the Horses

Uncle Avrom was on watch in the night,
He had a fur coat and a sack filled with food,
He sat like a stump at the grey, fading fire,
And only his hard bones protruded from his form...
And this is how uncle Avrom grazed the horses on the meadow,
Hobbled and clumsy they hopped on the grass
The light of the moon fluttered gently over the mares,
And far-off, in the fog-covered field, the Nieman moaned,
The arid fire burned low and lost all its strength
And so did Avrom; he fell asleep sitting upright,
Tree brushed against tree in the flow of obscure light,
The movement of the stars in the heavens could be heard,
A ringlet of smoke covered their shine like a warm melody,
The barren sky was caught in a quivering net
And the minnows swim, shimmer and rock back and forth...
And Avrom fell to the ground with his face to the sky
The frigid moon spun in a circle of yellow
And seventeen stars came flying towards one:
A green star who trembled brighter than all others,
And all of the sudden it made a quick leap
And flew into the blue web of undulating beams,
Like a spark shooting outward from a blue pupil...
The star tumbled downward into the mossy forest.
Avrom understood that distant half-dream:
The sparkling blue sprinkled over the whole province
And then, with a sigh, uncle stood up from the ground,
And walked silently to the warm mares out in the shadows.
And so, he tended to the horses in the darkness,
All of them breathing, neck wrapped around neck in their slumber.
The light dripped from the silhouette of a horse
And only its scrawny shoulder could be seen...
The herd of mares flowed together darky.
Uncle retired to his straw hut exhausted,
A poplar shone dully in the darkness with its leaves,
And far away, the grain laid frozen in moon beams.
Avrom laid down in silence on the ground of his shanty,
Dreamed of his town, smiled to himself, and in the quiet,
His heart slowly walked from the shores in longing.
All of the sudden our uncle belted out a song:
“You are the beauty of the town, Nastasia,
Can’t you see?
The flowing barley and the whiskered oats

The soil in the mist, sparkling with dew...
Listen closely,
Listen closely,
Deep in the fir-forests is a weary shuffling
in the moonlight,
the barefoot footsteps of the shaggy conjurer.

Come out into the open field, when all the birds are asleep
And only the springs are awake,
Your father lays in the barn too tired to work,
And only the old rowan in the courtyard will know,
And only the breeze that sleeps down in the reeds...

You are the beauty of the town, Nastasia!"

Avrom silently brushed away the tears with his sleeve...
And listened deeply to the silence of the province:
Two hearts took leave of each other in the darkness.

VII

My Grandmother, *Oleh Hasholem*, Passed

When my old grandma from earth was ready depart
The birds were singing
Because it was with her alms and with her good heart
That the world kept ringing.

And when they lowered Bube down,
Everyone was silent,
And they laid her down on the ground,
And all was quiet.

Grandfather paced around the house
Stunned, half-alive.
Because he, poor old man, had told her
That he'd be first to die.

And when the corpse was carried to town
The village lamented
"I cannot believe old Shloyme's wife is really gone."
And even priest Vasily assented...

And when the shames drew out his knife
To rent the garments as is hallowed,
Only then did my poor uncles wail in their strife
Like murderers before the gallows.

Nastasia

Nastasia gathered sorrel along the edge of paths
To make a meal for her aging father, Antoshe.
Ruthenia is blessed with a hairy, refreshing sorrel,
And fir trees like fur coats and ravens like embers...
With apron in hand, Nastasia waddled, bent over
Like a duck who knows neither of sorrow nor worry,
Her feet damp with dew, she was enchanted by the morning,
Nursing all forms of life with the breath of the earth before her.
A man carrying a bridal came towards her from the forest.
She watched him from a distance, her hand coving her eyes:
He approached with the crispness of a woodland creature,
She felt shame in staying bent over the sorrel.
Avrom returned home from his watch in the dawn.
“Good morning, Nastasia, you meek little calf, you! Good morning!”
She stole away, embarrassed, and hid in the bushes
So that my towering Uncle would not catch her.
Avrom made a plunge into the shrubs,
She heard his laughter far away from the cover of the leaves:
“Where are you my little calf? You’re my crown, you’re my life!”
Amid the branches Nastasia was charmed by my uncle...
“He is so crisp, it’s as if he dwells in the woods!”
Brown haired, passionate with wild eyes, and wild locks of hair,
He caught up to her in the grass, she was half-ecstatic and half-scared,
Like a hen frightened by a shower of rain on a cloudless day ...
He caressed her long arms
He kissed her burning, trembling neck
She ecstatically pulled herself toward him
And drew herself closer and closer to his chest...

Uncle Itche

Uncle Itche is a master tailor,
Tried and true.
He'll make each of your old coats
Look brand new.
He'll make each of your old coats
Look brand new.

When he comes into a town
With his thread and needle,
He'll hang his sign up in the air
"Garments minded here."
He'll hang his sign up in the air
"Garments minded here."

He sits behind a Turkish table,
On the ground, like a fool,
Removes the stiches, flips the lapels,
Patches up the patches.
Removes the stiches, flips the lapels,
Patches up the patches.

When your town is all patched up
He moves to the next one.
Until he's hemmed the province up
with his own two hands.
Until he's hemmed the province up
with his own two hands.

Uncle Itche is a master tailor
Tried and true.
He'll make each of your old coats
Look brand new.
He'll make each of your old coats
Look brand new.

A Winter's Night in the Old Shack

They were laying down at night in the old hut
Smoking the long pipes, hawing and humming,
My uncles stared blankly in exhaustion,
A sweaty uncle sat at the table snoring.
Close by, uncle Rakhmiel stitched up his trousers,
The snow sobbed in the darkness^{xx}, wind knocked on the wall
The oven door scratched on the inside without a draft
Zeyde rolled over on the hot oven hearth,
He unbuttoned his shirt with all his effort and broke out in a cold sweat,
The wind from the field pushed waves on the Nieman
The old cows in the stalls would not stop their moaning.
My uncles laid in the beds in pairs,
Tamped with their sadness. They looked to the rafters silently -- -- --
Grandfather tossed and turned, O, our Zeyde made a request:
“Avromchik, my son, sing us a melancholic melody!”

Avrom rose from his warm bed,
he was like a grey fir in the darkness of the room --- -- --
He started to sing like the wind in autumn leaves,
His howl filled the dark hut
Like the wolf howls in the night on the trail,
Like the wolf stalks helpless fowl in their snow-covered shelters-- --^{xxi}
My uncles were hidden, laying like logs,
Zeyde began to weep slently,
He turned and he twisted on the oven and beat on the bricks.
“O, help us Lord, it's dark and bitter...”
Uncle Avrom felt a tremble in his bones!
The melody flowed like a mirror
And sounded like a drop of water in blue fog...
Like hearty oak, He stood in the dark of the room,
He shook his locks up and down,
(He had this when he dreamed of Nastasia)
He remained standing and let out a growl
Like an ogre yearning for the warmness of a mare
He jumped up and reached his hands to his haunches
And everyone's eyes began to flutter with joy
And the dark thoughts were like the grey magpies
That took to flight from the dark little hut...
And he was off in a dance, and a tune, and the stomping of boots!
The air burned like a flame with pupils of coal,
And Zeyde felt that the house soaring, and he with it,
That he had ascended somewhere holy, somewhere high on a broken ladder^{xxii}...

Stunned by the melody, Uncle remained in a daze
The last torch had began to smolder in the pan
Grandfather smiled, rub his hands together.
“My Avrom! Where did you get such a voice?...”

The blue of dawn crept into the warm hut,
The trees, wrapped in straw, had frozen in the garden...
In the entry the wind had plucked the cover from a beehive.
The old cow in the stall was finally silent.

Hey Antoshe

Hey! Hey!
Hey! Antoshe, let's hear you sing,
Pluck a string,
Play that bandura!
Shura-bura-mura-tura,
That's the way!
Hey! Hey!

There once was an old duke from Krewo^{xxiii}
White as snow,
White as snow,
And in his palace lived his girls:
A pair of Sisters!
A pair of Sisters!
But the duke had a pony who needed tending,
So he hired a stockman named Badulya,
who'd never do a damn thing for ya,
and the they called him "shalapay."
That's Belarusian for "wiseguy."

Hey, hey,
Hey, Antoshe, let's hear you sing,
Pluck a string,
Play that bandura!
Shura-bura-mura-tura,
That's the way
Hey! Hey!

And when spring in time did spring
The trees begot their fledgling buds
the swallows begot their chirping chicks
the goat begot its bleating kids
And the cow begot its suckling calves
And when the springtime sprung
Our two sister carried in their aprons
two begotten little bastards
for the duke!
Oy Vey! Vey! Vey!

Hey, hey,
Hey, Antoshe, let's hear you sing,
Pluck a string,
Play that bandura!

Shura-bura-mura-tura,
That's the way
Hey! Hey!

The duke ran straight for his sword
Shouting out the door
“Saddle up my finest horse
And after him I'll ride.”
He rode from Krewo to Mazhir
He rode from Zhetl to Dmir^{xxiv}
Chasing mounts and carriages,
Halting Bishops without care,
But never once he did spy
By the camp fire's side
Our black jack shalapay.

Hey, hey,
Hey, Antoshe, let's hear you sing,
Pluck a string,
Strum that bandura!
Shura-bura-mura-tura,
That's the way
Hey! Hey!

In the woods of Krivitch^{xxv}
Dwelled the roguish Shalapay
And the old duke from Krewo,
White as snow,
White as snow,
Rode across the steppe alone
In his knightly thoughts alone
With his clinking sword alone
Every night and every day,
Every night and every day.

Hey, hey,
Hey, Antoshe, let's hear you sing,
Pluck a string,
Strum that bandura!
Shura-bura-mura-tura,
That's the way
Hey! Hey!

Death Approaches Grandfather^{xxvi}

In the evening grandfather returned from the field
He fixed up his bed silently and said *vidui*
He bid farewell to the world in a state of peace
And then he closed his tired eyes powerlessly...
And my uncles came to grandfather's bedside
lowered their shaggy heads and were silent
Something clinched their hearts and impeded their speech.
Clinched hearts -- not even a sigh could be mustered ...
Slowly our grandfather opened his eyes
A warm smile came over his face
He sat himself on the bed, bent himself over with trouble
And that's how grandfather spoke to his sons:
-You Orche, my boy, are the rock of the family!
The first to the field and the last to sit at the table....
The earth has opened warmly under your plow,
And so like the earth let your seeds be fertile and fresh!...
Rakhmiel, who can measure up to you in the meadow?!
Your scythe in the grass is like a scourge of fire
The snakes in the swamps and the birds in the nest know you
The blessing will rest with you in the stall and the barn!
To you, Shleyme, the river man, there is no equal on earth!
Always with the fish net on the shoulders, always drenched,
You smell of fish scales, with the aromas of the river grasses
Bless will you be on the land and blessed will you be in the water!...

Night fell. The red windows from the hut
threw light in the darkness on zeyde...

My uncles were speechless, My father was speechless
they did not miss a word of his blessings and speeches.
Then grandfather took his leave... his limbs drew together...
Silently, his shining eyes closed forever
The congregation kept staring at the speechless body
And saw nothing, and not one tear flowed...
A bird somewhere in the forest lamented before the night for his suffering
The last torch in the hut was barely still glowing in embers,
And the uncles stood by grandfather's bedside,
Their heavy, shaggy heads sunken down in their shoulders...

Notes

^{xvii} I have chosen to translate “Raysn” as “Ruthenia.” In the 18th century *Raysn* was a toponym loosely used by rabbis to denote the north eastern provinces of the Lithuanian commonwealth, roughly the provinces of Mogilev and Polotsk (in the modern era this province has also been called Vitebsk province). In the medieval period, the Lithuanian commonwealth was divided into three principal territories : Samogotia, Lithuania, and Ruthenia. ‘Ruthenia’ is the Latin form of Rus’, the ancient Varangian tribe that controlled the rivers and subsequently trade of the Eastern European landscape. These are the territorial divisions that Kulbak echoes in his poetry: *Zamet*, *Lite*, and *Raysn*. In Kulbak’s mythology, however, Raysn extends to the west to encompass “Lithuania proper,” This edge of Rus’, however was mostly independent from Kyivian Rus’, and during the middle ages the grand dutchy of Lithuania functioned culturally as “the other Rus’,” in opposition to the Grand Duchy of Muscovy, which claimed to be the sole inheritor of Kyivian Rus’ culture. (see Filiushkin, Aleksandr. “drugaya Rus’”) In the 16th century the polish Lithuanian commonwealth famously harbored prince Andrey Kurbsky, an opponent to Ivan the Terrible who criticized his autocratic tendencies. In this is one of the basic mythologies of ‘the other Rus’- the Poland-Lithuanian commonwealth was at the time the most democratic medieval governments in Europe, while the Grand Duchy of Muscovy represented and anti-enlightenment autocratic tradition. Kulbak use of “Raysn” embraces the mythological-historical concept of the “other Rus’” as a model for anti-autocratic, enlightened, multicultural ideal as opposed to the autocracy of tsarism, and quite possibly, the autocracy of Communism.

^{xviii} A Slavic peasant tradition

^{xix} A medieval village just around the juncture of the Neiman and the Viliya

^{xx} Primordial darkness. In this poem there

^{xxi} The metaphor of a beast hunting poultry likened to a man perusing a nymph like woman is a recurring metaphor in *Pan Tadeusz*, used in Avhrom’s pursuit of Nastasiya.

^{xxii} Jacob’s ladder. Broken? Tower of babel?

^{xxiii} Kreve is the Yiddish name for the historically significant medieval town of Krewo (Polish spelling), where the prince of the Grand Duke of the Grand Duchy of Lithuanian married the first femal monarch of the Kingdom of Poland, creating the first in a long series of Polish-Lithuanian Unions. which would eventually become the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1569 and again in 1791.

^{xxiv} The names of important Lithuanian medieval centers

^{xxv} Important ancient center of White Rus’

^{xxvi} Resembles Jacob’s blessing of his sons

Lamed Vov: The Thirty Six (1920)

I

A man meanders along overgrown roads,
He's drunk on the odors of herbs and the blue –
His soul cleansed itself silently in dew;
It laid down in wait for the sanctified moment of waking.

The man forges through forests forbidding all speaking,
He listens, and hears the life within hearts dissolving;
He sees a banished Name floating in the house of the Lord,
It wanders about as a riddle that yearns to be solved.

He raises his head to the heavens and questions the constellations:
What kind of *Shem*-Name has been driven from *ein-sof*?
And silver-sheened Virgo subconsciously answers from sleep:
Blessed is the Jew who is righteous and moves in observance of *Golus*!...

II

A man moves between towns on pathways forgotten.
Although he is grey and his face has turned strange,
Though old is his coat, though, like a bitter old man, he is silent,
He still smells of the hay and the freshness of fog and the rains.
Alone in the world he carries his body on a gnarled stick of a cane...

A squirrel swings in the forest— the man takes a step, and it ceases to sway,
A bird sings on a branch— through it he walks and quickly it fades,
Tree bends around tree, a branch entwines with a branch
The sun drips a shine of red and it looks like a ritual slaughter...

Deep in the forest is the beating of a heart: a prayer fades with a strain,
The wind, like a dove, coos softly, and he prays of the Name in his song,
The eyes caress the man softly; the tangled tufts of his beard and his coattails:
And blessed is the Jew who is righteous, who moves in observance of Goleš!...

III

Night fell. It smelled of mosses and nettles,
The fields and heavens merged in the distance,
Two silent congregations gathered together and mingled...
And somewhere a void gushed from a black spring.
The man meandered; he wandered tortured in blackness,
And the darkness swelled... but it was all unclear...
Was it from the wellspring of night or was it from his own heart?

The man seemingly searches for some purity in suffering,
His heart preemptively feels the song of illustrious rollers
Splashing outside the secret and peaceful gates of Eden.

It could be the man's singing soul came to his senses
And his consecrated prayer wilted in bloom:
He walks through Ruthenia, through Lithuania, through pastures and plains,
His heart wants desperately to say something, and it wails, and wails, and wails,
But the tongue is numb and gummed to the palate.

The moon glimmers. White light from the moon overflows on the province,
Cool expanses are dreaming, they turn silver in rain.
Distant lands emerge... mountains sleep concealed in silence,
And amid the field, in a patch of snake grass, stands an ancient well –
Two oaks suspend themselves above it, their eerie branches rasp,
And a golden web is spun over thousands of miles.
And it glows all around. And it is not clear to the man where it is brighter,
Where the well stands under the mangled old trees —
Or on the whole dismal province, or deep in his own soul's cellar...
He realizes, gazing into the well, that he is the sentry
Of an ancient splendor that must be distilled,
Of a great happiness that must emerge from tears,
And will illuminate from the depths and flow, and flow...
His wretched body will suddenly rise towards all the radiating brightness,
transport a weightless bring, and join in the singing.

He sees the mute ripple of water-ringlets in the well,
The shadows of the oaks reflect silently... they dissipate abruptly
The ground splits open and an eye protrudes, then crude eyelid blinks ...
A powerful voice murmurs from the bottom of the well:
“Hear me: who are you, creature?”

The man stands frozen in awe and confusion,
His pain had carried him to a bleak desert waateland
by a well in the darkness between gnarled oaks

And misfortune seemed to stream from his heart
Like a discharge of pus from the wound as it begins to heal,
Like the bud that withers when the fruit comes into peel.

The man hears! He hears the concealed wail inside himself:
He hears his soul rocking between night-pain and early-morning:
It searches, and in groping, it's found, but soon vanishes,
His pain-driven spirit tore its own garments in mourning
And the deep voice spoke with full of terror from the well:
"Hear me! Who are you, creature?"

The man:

I am Shmuel-Itche Koymenkerer,
A starving pauper from Ruthenia,
I've suffered mutely and I can't any longer,
And I can't live in this role any longer.

I've climbed up on top of barren attics
And swept the endless dark smokestacks,
I've spent my weeks on cold roofs,
And only observed the sabbath on earth.

I went down to earth only on Shabes,
to the grey streets who sleep between shops,
In the silent market, I listened while strolling
to the voice from the depths of the wells.
O! God of the Well! O! God of Darkness and Abyss!

I've swept the ash from thousands of chimneys,
because I cannot expunge the pain that has no name,
because I cannot extract the ash from their hearts.

I know I have come from mysterious shores,
Where light pours from the radiant liberating casks,
Where seraphim sing, hovering above the tsadik's path.
On earth I am the light of *sfire keser*, the supreme crown.

On earth I am a drop of light from *sfire keser*.
A burning pain radiates from a suffocating coal
through my dumb crippled limbs
like the slice of the razor...
All of this stems from my ash coated soul.

Why is it that this world lacks just a little breath?

A dull burn wells up in my heart when least expected,
And it feels like a spring tearing open; it forms, it beams,
But it withers as quickly as it began, and nothing's affected.

I am Shmuel-Itche Koymenkerer, and I am a Jew,
I bellow from deep within the chimneys of this world,
I have carried my muteness and I can bare it no longer,
Though one way or another I will continue to suffer ...

All was silent. His heart began to bathe in brightness,
Like the cloud of a storm after unloading rain and lighting.
It was clear to Shmuel-Itche: his life became illustriously lighter,
Like the serpent that has suddenly shed its old skin,
Though darkness bemoans the night, his gentle eyes shine bright
In the night, like the glowworm illumines the dark wild woods...
The carbonized feelings of fire and sorrow had vanished
Like the robin vanishes from a tree that has split in two.
His poor body glowed, he thought it awful, it was precious:
a rotten stump igniting and burning blue in phosphorescent fire...

Shmuel-Itche stood in joy and he smiled accordingly,
He approached the well and murmured: Here I go, here I go,
I am sublimated and redeemed from my wandering
I will throw myself to the light in the ancient skin flask
And guzzle my happiness and choke on it with an effervescent joy.
That's the last of Shmuel-Itche! I'm going to find a hollowed garment.
May the poor have warm clothes to get them through life
May myself and everyman have just a little breath and wings to soar, --
If it's bad on this earth, then we'll jump up and fly
And if our fate is to wither, then the Name of blossom will console us.

Those were Shmuel-Itche's feelings and murmurings of joy,
Although his sheep skin coat, his beard, and his nape were all grey,
That's how Shmuel-Itche from Ruthenia spoke to the old well,
Doused in the desire that rested all around...
But suddenly he sensed someone climbing from out of the well,
Right then and *there* Shmuel-Itche was robbed of his moment:
A humanoid head bent itself over the inside wall of the well.
It was swollen, grown over with moss, with mud-covered eyes,
It threw its hands over and from them spilled forth
The rot deep from the earth and the muck from the depths
A smoke curled around in a steaming fog
And Shmuel-Itche discerned the overwhelming scent of sulfur...

An unbearable horror overcame him
He fell to the earth squirming in pain and ripped roots from the ground.

He made not a sound though his body was not release from suffering,
And silently his human heart started to moan.

Frightened, he examined the creature that hung from the well:
He recognized his own anguish manifest.
As if suddenly a new phase of life had appeared,
He girded his loins with his pain and he jerked,
As if a gate opened to unexpectedly new worlds:
“Who are you in the heart, overgrown creature?”

“It is I, Samael, the Name of suffering.”

Light poured gently from the twelve signs of the zodiac,
Silver Leo looked down with cold eyes.
And the stars preposterously flew away like birds.
Shmuel-Itche had produced the Name of destruction from his mouth.
From his soul an agonizing yoke fell on him lightly,
And from his heart a drop of blood flowed out hotly
And boiling, it dripped down into the well.

Samael:

I am the evil Name that wanders from the days of yore,
I am exiled from all worlds and have become blind and grey,
I lie in the filth, in the wells, in damp caves,
With a vile, purulent heart never to be restored.

Banished is Samael, old, overgrown and charred, but ardent,
I am the lone and sole master of power in the sediment
That scours the darkness digging down with my hands
beneath the base of the earth, the foundations and the seal...

Splendor gushes into all the world's hearts from the pure *ein-sof*
And holiness descends unto the earth from forty-nine channels.
Nevertheless, concealed in the wells, submerged in stagnant water,
Alone, I will dig until I reach my source, the springhead of tears.

Once already have I reached a seal of the source blindly and groping,
And with my last strength, I bit down on it, gnashing my teeth,
But a quiet ל"ו (*lamed vov*) evoked the ע"ס (*ayen sof*) with joy,
And tore me out of the earth like a stone.

The Lamed Vov from Ruthenia, Samogotia, and Lithuania
May be damned in the presence of the Name of Samael!
I am the despicable Name who craves monomania,
Condemned to trudge through the muck in the depths of hell.

Shmuel-Itche:

So you are the despicable Name from the days of yore?
Like you, we too have wandered from those times of old.
O, though often we die and we are often reborn,
We still are the eye that looks upon all there is to behold.
Ein-sof has sowed us into this green earth,
We are nursed by His heart and the drops of His shine
We sang our song silently on the earth,
Of your blood, Samael, of darkness and pain.
Now we are a choleric cluster of serpents,
Our soul is a blend of enchantment and gall,
Half is at rest, the other half calms it in songs,
And it teeters in the balance of day and night.

Still, I know one thing... man becomes larger than himself...
In *that* moment, man's speech becomes completely superfluous,
The soul casts off her tattered garments,
And suddenly there's a feeling: the soul lives to hastily...
We think about how it devours the life from the hordes of people,
Who run around on earth preparing only to die,
Their hearts bursts into song, to pray piously and bless
The *ein-sof* of twilight and sunrise in every one of the colors...
A melody undulates from trees, from stones and animals,
It moves slowly like the pendulum of some ancient clock
and each being murmurs to the Name of the world in its very own manner:
the stone sings with shame, the water leaps in a cold expression;
the bird pleads in a bitter, weeping voice,
and the forests burst out in roars so incredibly deep - - -
suddenly –
life makes a jaunt towards a holy shore,
on a joyous path, on a bright, wonderous path - - -
Samael, come with us, float with us on the holy current,
To the eternal gates!

Samael:

The ם"ב (samekh mem) will not beg for mercy by *ein-sof*!
When you are released to him, like wretched sheep,
And when you will extend your hands to those cold gates,
I will contort from the pain in my decaying skin,
Like an old dog curls up at night,
Covered in drool, age having taken his teeth,
I will cling tightly with all the bitterness to the earth
And I will lament in the darkness alone...

Samael is himself *ein-sof* in his viscera!
I am condemned to be fastened to my chain
I can barely lift my head from the void...
May His holy current be cursed,
May the kith and kin be damned
Of animals, man, fields and forests,
Who beseech the silence like beggars,
And do not take the world by force.

IV

The morning star moves about the heavens like a deer;
Like a deer that sparkles on the blue mantel of the Torah,
The constellations in sects burn out like candles of the holy menorah
The young stars performed the ritual morning prayers.

Reb Shmuel–Itche diverted his eyes to the morning stars - - -
Suddenly a quiet holiness shone forth from everything
Reb Shmuel-Itche seemed to feel the power of revelation
And his heart tore opened and became a well of tears.

His grey, snake-bit heart squirmed in a vise,
His soul like a burning fire felt martyrdom; the sanctity of the Name, *kiddush hashem*,
And he felt rapture and a righteous belief:

“The sublime moment has come!
The red curtains before the ark fall down on the plains,
And it coats me in a magnificent splendor of rye grains,
The supreme golden crown descends slowly down
Onto my head...
I am now an old king who wanders alone in the dawn
With flowing purple garb bushing over the ground
And holy elation beaming from his eyes.

I, Shmuel-Iche, am as light as a turtledove,
I am a bird flying free from his cage,
I sing praise, but do not perceive myself singing,
To the glee that flows from Ein-Sof...
It's too pure at the bright threshold...
My heart is rocked into a sleep...
The shine from *Tiferet*, Balance, Adornment, beat down on my soul;
The primal light that rings like the dew
On the hair of my beard and my head...
O, the Supreme golden Crown descends!...

I am a cloud and I go to the sea to drink!
I stand there alone by the calm sea silently
From the depths the pure waves ignite
And move like lambs, one jumping after another.
Their movement erects crystalline halls
that dissolve in each and every crest,
where the earth opens, and caves form,
And the leviathan swims about in the sea;

The scales burn like smoldering spheres,
He floats in the water— he is a holy flame.
Doors open for the quiet servants of heaven
That fly out on the sparkling sea,
The waves sing to me, they carry me
Over the forbidden fence.

The golden crown rests heavily on my silver haired head,
The justified scale hangs in the sky!
The ancient throne descends down from the blueness;
Around its edges are frozen white fires –
And just like strokes of night on the pure scroll of day
It is written in black fire *bksav shel khatumim* “in writing of the sorcerers”...
The glory of *ein-sof* descends and glimmers around him
Good angels
Like silent doves,
A serene presence,
And bright little cherubs,
And soul with soul
And prayer with prayer,
And shining shadows
That sing and hover,
And spread their fingers
As if they were alive, alive...

The glory of *ein-sof* descends on the valleys and hills,
Angels pour out buckets of dew,
Arelim pour out buckets of pink,
And churbim pour out buckets of blue,
On the fresh plain,
On the green grass.

There I am an old king, who roams alone in the dawn ...
The dawn gently
Awakens on the earth,
And tree wakens tree,
Barely heard, barely seen...
Not lingering, not lasting,
A holy soul flies
Barely heard, barely seen,
On glowing wings,
And angels
At the eternal gate
Send my soul off:
Reb Smuel-Itche is holy as *ein-sof* itself!”

V

The sunrise reclined on the herbage and green wheat spikes.
A joyous spring day came out of the darkness,
Like a bridegroom walks from the *khupe* happily and calmly...
Reb Shmuel-Itche washed his face at a wellspring
With a sack in his hand, the warm hat covering his eyes,
He was drawn to a nearby settlement.

He went into the forest, an affability embraced him;
The grasses whispered among themselves and with sleeping flowers,
Like the young churbim at dawn whisper in the heavens,
And Reb Shmuel-Itche heard, and Reb Shmuel-Itche understood:
A bloom asked: Where are you coming from, where from?...
An old fir quickly turned a branch to the bloom:
It is Reb Shmuel-Iche the Lamedvovnik, who *endures goles*...

II. Dovid Hofshteyn

Along Roads (1919)

Along Roads

A whole day^{xxvii}
To be in the domain of the road^{xxviii}
A whole day
With only the wind against you,^{xxix}
And only a narrow ditch between the road and non-road,^{xxx}
Only young eyelashes between the eye and the sun.
What on this earth^{xxxi}
Could be more beautiful?

I believe^{xxxii}
There is a frail bolt
In the middle of a tall door^{xxxiii}
That awaits the first jolt
of movement
from my tired finger.

There, from the four quiet corners^{xxxiv}
Someone is still waiting for me,
For my charred^{xxxv} walking stick,
A pitcher filled with clear water
Already waits for the dust
That covers me,
For the dust of distant paths.

On the wide and distant roads,
Where blind wheels roll
And brush all with homeless dust-coat
For wayward winds —
There, in the fallow^{xxxvi} fields, I have gathered my vision.

I have taken on my shoulders a load
Of seeds, damp with cold autumnal dew,
With grandfather's inheritance: an old stick,
A old dusty, shrunken wine-skin;
I set out on the road, the wander, the trip...

Towards the distant sky
smoke goes from strange homes.^{xxxvii}

At low fences
freshly ploughed beds waited...
With a lonely prayer and a secret fear
I have sowed seed at wildly strange homes.^{xxxviii}

Now I stand in the tender earth up to my ankles
On my own beds, sowed with sorrows...^{xxxix}
I implore you today, birds, and you winds, and you hailstones!
Don't pick at my vision, Don't peck at my vision!
I have myself carried my vision on my shoulders
From distant roads, from journeys, from wanderings...

I know no weight, I know no number,
I have not brandished a measuring tape,
But pillars still sparkle in crystalline air
And draw my eyes
And shine from walls thin as parchment
With mother of pearl sparkling on my eyelids
And in my heart, for each beam,
Waits, already prepared
A nest of joy...

Thank you, wide wandering roads!
For tired limbs, wandering dust,
For nights by fires, for dispersed days
For all the marks of my gait –
To you all, I dedicate my song!^{xl}

I came to you anew, my world, ^{xli}
I barely parted with the shore of night,
My eye was drenched in the shine of light,
In the open splendor of your high pillars!..
I, my world, came to you anew
To pass this bright day with you.

Today, renewed, I rang
The large bell at the diaphanous gate,
And with new joy, my trembling ear sang
accompaniment to the pure sound ...
From the narrow cage of stiff ribs
My heart strains in courageous pounds
Thirst draws my parched lips
Towards each cool drop of morning dew
My tongue rings, my palate resounds:
I have, my world, come to you anew!

Today the sun brazed the last
golden scale to my armor
and for me confounded magic tears
with a goblet of joy.

And under the load of golden rings
I kneeled to the tender hand,
And with fervent thirst I swallowed
From the cool edge ...

How many times already? I will not count –
Today I have been girded with the sun's shine,
I am going without fear into all the black caves
Of the world and being.

Fields

In the blue snows in the blue nights
Between hollow arboreal knights
Strides my angel, walks the protector
Of the first, soundless gusts of pangs...^{xlii}

Under the high, hot sky,
In the bright, illuminated distance
My wonton youth floats
In a golden frame of rye.

Expanses of Snows, clear skies,
To you my first, to you my true haskore.^{xliii}

I.

There, over the city, a bell's sounded
From the spire of the tower: once, twice...^{xliv}
One small village sunk downward
In the land of snow, in the abyss of night.^{xlv}

Like little islands of human rest,
Enveloped in straw, warmed for the night,
With stall and fence entwined in slumber
A small house clings to one that is smaller.

The starry silence listens attentively
To the silent breath of life –
In one small house remains
a quiet circle of lamp's shine
the sleepy corners barely hear
a rustle of paper from the table
but young eyes are not satiated...

...

A trembling bundle of years
Has sunken in the stream of time,
A sharp glance – in the most distant distance,
A young man walks – in world and all

...

My mood originates in each night,
From each night comes my wooden sadness,
I stood guard, lonely and free,
At life's door, at the world's gate.

II.

In the fields of old Rus',^{xlvi} on winter's evenings!
Is there a place better suited to lonely feelings?

A snow-covered road, a worn-out old horse,
A squeaking sled, and I am alone in the course.^{xlvii}

Below me, in a colorless space,

Mournfully extinguishes smoldering lace.

Before me, a desert of whiteness unfolds,
In the distance some dozens of houses have been sown –
There naps a farm, ^{xlvi} sunken in snow...

All kinds of paths lead to the Jewish houses.
There is a small house with windows larger than the rest,
And there among the children, I am the eldest...

My world is cramped and narrow, my circle is small:
I once left the farm for two weeks in the shtetl,

And in silence longed for the wide-open fields,
For wind-swept, snow-covered roads and trails...

In the fields of old Rus' on the winter's evenings!
Is there a place better suited to lonely feelings?

III.

Shabbat has passed...
On the distant snows
someone gigantic
Sprinkles grey ash...
In a small shop
a pair waits:
A dark peasant girl
And a black bottle.

The whip rests,
hidden deep
In the darkness
amid the oven.
A cloth of fog
Silently covered
The last challah.

Father officiated
The third meal
And darkness became
woven into the table,
and among my sisters
and tired shadows
a mumble of thread
weaves and weaves...

In the dust, mother searched
For a distant star
And did not find it,
So sat lost in thought...
I sink into sadness
And don't want to think
About whether the cow
Waits for me,
Or hay, or night...

IV. ^{xlix}

A cold and troubled evening
In the forgotten white fields.
It pulls everyone with ancestors
And all is distant to us and near.

An old and traveled highway
Drives us toward/against all the posts(?),
I get the impression – I wander
On enchanted foreign paths...

There stands a patch of forest – a quiet congregation^l
And all the posts run and all the wires there buzz ^{li}
In the white fields both of us are running,
My shadow behind me, and I behind my shadow...

I. ^{lii}

Day after day draws from the south,
Small and meager is my house,
The door cannot contain me...

Day after day draws from the south...
Someone at world's end
Bends over a section of scroll,^{liii}
And in its deep folds
I stumble from the very dawn
Till the flaming red of sunset...

II.

The snow cloth lays undisturbed,
Concealed deep in the forest –
No matter the destination of the bright road
each branch is swept clean by wind.

At night the last cast-out frosts
still etch and paint on the field.
All for naught!
The snow locusts have eaten all
The rotten snow in the valleys.^{liv}

And our sun!
From mountains it draws a sylvan smoke,
And black juice of the earth collects in the caves...

And our sun!
It's easier to throw one's head up in the sky
to count the broken string of the storks...^{lv}

The ice floe rents the garments— lvi

And the wide banks take
the water-yoke
on shoulders grown sore,
and willow's branches bow
before solar joy...

and some of twigs will stitch up
the fresh river's healing wounds
and some will wash away
and with grasping roots
and ride the breadth of water...

But solar joy is bright!
The ice floe mourns along a free river!
And stalks bow:
We are ready, we are ready...

Half-way through May

The day fades...

A day —an entire world— is imminently sinking
And the last tracks are laid on the sky's downward staircase
his garb of fire
inundated the empire of my eye
With his rumpled wet court train.

And by force

He, with golden chains, bound
The entire expanse around him to his fading:
The blue forest,
My whole quintessence through my eyes,
And every link of song on the young field.

In the Forest

Noon. My eyes are tired from the sunshine.
My mind – tired of seeing through sparkles.
I walk between high pillars into quiet corners,
I lay down with shadows; with shadows I cover myself.

He who is disguised, serves. In the courtyards
Ants sound a bell from the high tower!
There, millions of feet run in one gait
door to door, stump to stump.

A woman runs by me. With large hands
I intercept her path and look without laughing
At how aptly she dodges me as an equal
And a blazing fire burns in her heart...

And from then on, I am large, I stand up and stretch out
To the height of the sun. I look through the tall window –
Now, between brother-trees I am the smallest
And I carry out my young happiness from his house...^{lvii}

The fields are saturated with sunshine
And it moves along.
And the banks of the forest can't contain it
And the sun moves beyond.

And the forests brighten from the hills to the valley
And mosses whiten.
And there are innumerable specks of sun
That, here too, have crawled. . .

I walk around with tunnel vision
In waves of heat.
Sparkling specks of chintz
In wheat-spike gold...

I don't want anyone to dust the sleep from the roads
I don't want anyone to ask
Why I am stirring up waves of heat
Why I am seeing with blinders on my gaze...
the speckles of chintz
Sparkling in wheat-spike gold . . .

On the Road
For Osher Shvartzman

The day is bright. The bareness of the vast fields
is silent!
A clump of grass with unsewn seeds
Waits for a wind...

In the Valley the autumn prepares
the moist rust...
Oh, my heart, today in calm clear,
Please be a friend to bright day.

Final Days

If this day is not the last of days, it is the palest,
It sweeps away the smallest back of shine
A wind comes and folds the steel of water
Chases it quickly into the bright forest.

The tall door and gates stand long abandoned –
A rustling of leaves show him the way
He sees that is already for the deep sadness
For the grey net of rain of Cheshvan's late autumnal days ...

But look at the little meadow how he holds his breath in –
Like a small child around a full kneading trough,
There are red Oaks in a bright shine ...
The wind looks in becomes softer .

And before going down the sun remains to stay a bit.
It did not part with the young meadows in the forest.
It is still an Indian summer's day before our region ,
It is still a quiet day who has left his bright remains !...

The damp net of gloomy Cheshvan
caught a very early bright hour
and before a white wing(courtyard) on the eastern side
hung her...

and my heart saw until the deep night
the bright feathers fluttering high
the bright eyelids silently closed
languished, exhausted...

To D. Bergelson

In the long duration of gloomy night
one day in great coattails
delivers to the next
the cold dew.

An old gate lets out
A courtyard of quiet cattle
To search like beggars
All over in poverty(?).

A barefoot bunch of children
Jumps through
From house to house
And cold puddles look around
As the dark footsteps they avoid,

A wind pulls out
From its mouth
A joyful voice,
A nasty cough--

And further no sound,
And further hollow,
And further emptiness.

In the dark nakedness of the fields
There, as there once was, now rides a breeze,
There, as there once was, now wanders the raven,^{lviii}
There in a center lies a ditch
An unclaimed threshold in the fallow distance...

The Caucasus

A rumbling street down a mountainside,
A swarm of people, wheels, and horses,
A lofty piece of a late summer's sky ...
What more do you need, is this not enough for you?

You have trouble to watch
Even through a child's eyes
the noisy day that rushes past
straight in the face or in its hovering back.
Lift up your head, you are free in your loneliness.

Another spoonful of air from the sky dwelling!
Another branch for your nest!
Is it worth it to argue over all of it
with the entirety of the sad world?

why must you say that precisely here in the world
you pour off the most minute of movements
from your mischievously blind heart?
A singular hair of a wild wig from your proud, uncovered head?...

Мы ночевали на казачьих постах
Пушкин.^{lix}

(We spent the night at the Kazak posts -- Pushkin)

By this alone for me my pain is justified,
For this itself my yearning sweetly flowed:
His head here on this mountain rested,
His feet trod upon this very road.

From my tender youth there in the wide-open fields
His liberated spirit^{lx} constantly hovered over me,
His glowing calmness encircled my head
In dark hours of grief and captive suffering...

Here among the splendor of the mountains
and the terror of caves
My spirit will subdue his untamed torrid amusements –
Like him, I come from the far and wide, from the wide and far,
Am both slave and master, and want to share in his delights here...

In Armenia

I ask the way in a foreign tongue
And eyes of olive were in wonder:
She did not separate me from her own –
I am dark skinned and rigid, have dark eyes like her...

And eyes of olive accompanied me
From the quiet door of the whitewashed house...
the city leads out through narrow streets
into the dark valley and its broad creases.

From below -- Alagatz, in blue snow!
Little houses without roofs like burned out ruins,
With dung bricks pasted on the grey walls
And boxes of dung bricks stacked along the fence!

My heart sings from the torrid delight!
She is dear to me, my eyes of olive, the mountain and snow,
Her captive dwelling and mute sufferings
From beneath the poverty and suffering of generations.

In sky-space
The last seam
Of glowing ribbon
Dissolves and goes pallid...

A bundle of breezes
Steals across silently
From across the mountain
In the broad valley...
though the trees here are few
Before suddenly –
it becomes a litigation
And it becomes a play
For each branch
For each leaf,--
And I... I don't get involved – I don't speak
In the dark calm...
I listen attentively...

A storm comes from the mountains.
There, a powerful arm
Fans a flame
On rounded peaks
And drives the abyss of the world
Into the caves!

If you are silent,
Silence is dear to me...
Still, it draws me towards the storm,
the fire and smoke
And constriction of caves
And the abyss of the world.

To the hidden one, der nister

I have been climbing here for two days already—
I help the road with difficulty
Climb into the peak.

From under each stone
A piece of morning
Beckons me with cool charm

Only the sun is high
And each step is labor...

And each step disapproves
Of the silent “downward”
On another full limb
And each step awakes
The ascending “upward”
With young fresh knees ---

And each of my limbs sings
And to me my toil is sweet ...

In the silent valley I will
say it all again,
I'll say it in the peak,

That I have for two young days
Helped a road
Climb towards the peak!...

Dawns

Oh time, Oh number, Oh space!
I walk around with young steps
on the floating hem of the banks
of your gigantic center.
My shadow follows me on the damp sand
with light fingers, I barely hold
My fishing pole in my hands
I throw it in the depth of your vastness
and drops of eternity fall on me
In luminous sharp eyes
of everything that I pull out

I stretch out my arms,
My thirsty trembling limbs
to the East to the West to the South to the North
High and low
The staggering corners of my vast house!
Let me see your immensity
like Spinning worlds!
I stretch
my winged limbs wider...
I bow to everyone !
Riveted to the whirling earthen rotations
I send out into each corner
the tips of my eye!

My mother
at the onset of my being,
showed to me
In holy blue velvet
That saucer of the sky.
I was drawn here
From the tender, weak rings
Then already I had lost
The first sparks
of the thirst of my eyes...

Bright saucer of the sky!
Today I walk even more childishly around
Today I am more childishly rich,
Today I extend my pale arm outward
In your high/holy kingdom.
There I will blur together the blue
A voice from heaven will swing
In a thin net of stars,
It will warn me, it will beckon me
With a starry finger –
It will be enough for me to be for now (today)...

In the road/ on the way

I will swear that I have been right here before
And my eyes reflected
that forest and that valley,
and that sand that covered the ground.
The wheel squawked quietly
And laughed loudly in me
My human, my powerful memory.
O, it remembers every turn
On every road of all my years...
... I swear, I swear, it happened!
In a dream, in another ur-geshtalt—
I have seen the valley
I have been in this very forest!...

An Apple

You, pure sack full of wine, with the rigidity of snow,
how transparent, how fragrant is you thin, tender skin
how gently sealed you are with tender stamps
on both sides:

what should I do? The teeth and palate are waiting.
How can the eyes break away
From such a warm desired greeting
Of spring-joyousness

Another greeting from white-budding flowers
Of steaming earth brought on by rays of sun.
But those teeth—they are waiting, watching...
A bite—to forsake/lose/leave/*fall*?...

1.

I recognized her by the river
Under the green branches,
Under a patchwork roof of sky.
In some dozen paces
on the earthly silence
A stone withheld speech,
A stubborn member
Of my ur-land's bones, dispersed as dust...

I recognized her in the naked joy of her body,
In the disheveled crown of her fragrant hair,
I have heard from the depths of the ur-young years:
“That is what one calls woman!”

2.

In a narrow room
On two black, rigid benches
Our crumpled clothes lie passed out...

* * *

As if on some shore,
On the sand
Wait the two
piles of abandoned clothes...

I have floated far away from walls, from cities—
All around in the spaciousness of the world
And waves follow me, and breath by the surf ...
My love! Do not rush to hide your dark gaze,
In its aqueous, wave-churned mirror
I watch everything there now,
In the bright, forgotten past!...^{lxi}

A fog over the streets –
Lamps exchange flickers.
The lace falls down, the borders are erased,
The angles are smoothed –
Heaps of buildings remain quiet
On the damp earth...
So many nights I have walked around here
Back and forth –
A silent watchman...
O, just listen, listen!
In the fog are echoes
of a youthful laughter—
Two walk in the steps of one...
* * *
Do you remember a youth like that?...

Evening

Beloved!

The world is forgotten in us now,
As it did earlier with me and her...

We were not consulted
And there night was created
On the desired bustling street...

Dawn's door
Is silent and pale,
But locked, deaf and mute...
The night-tint spilled over
On the bright red fabric
Of our old sofa

...

My love! Lay your hand on my head,
Like this...

Against each movement of your finger
A quietly desired flicker
Slides through
On ash of heart-branding...(syntax)

Thank you, woman,
Thank you, wife,
For each drop of dew,
For each quiver of your eternally thirsty body!...

*

How sadly sweet it is for human to be
To be only 5 months old,
In a precious head
To possess
A piece of fog-consciousness,
On the neck---
A small arc of bone,(?)
On the body –
A blouse
With fine lace,
A little mouth
A flow(?) with silent suckle-argument(?)...

And all the time
In one feeling to drown,
To the tip of his dirty nose to sink into it(Him)

And have one thought, a clear, pure thought, --
Now mouth and breast should already be one/together.
On all little limbs to slide/move closer
With lips-clamps clamped, pressing
And suckling, suckling
With lips hands and feet and with closed eyes...

How sadly sweet it is for man to be!
In the depth of night of later (from the deep of late night)
To discover a tempest in a small body,
{on a kinder-shier[lessons?]}without child-limits, without cessation to scream to scream,
And to borrow a new technique and new voices somewhere,
Noises with little hair little feet little hands
And squirm, climb up parent's walls(?).
It begins as quickly as it turns to silence,
With wet eyelids opening dry eyes
And looking, looking while the black window is covered
With blue velvet sky, with bit of net from the stars...

Lullaby

I rock your cradle
And sing in your ears,
There a bolt
Locked a gate.

There are glasses/cups/lenses?(dim)
In small minds
From each bubble
There remains a tall one.

Small hairs from dews
Dust/pollen from dews
There pearls form
On your dust.

And each pearl
Will be a mirror
In each pearl
Will stand a goat.

A pure white goat
Ah, ah lyu lyu lyu...
Rock, rock cradle
Ah, ah lyu lyu lyu...

Names

My children play like little wolves,
Both of them like pups of wolf:
The eldest is named Shamay –
As my zeyde was named,
a half-blind old man in a deaf shtetl,
And Hillel is the name of the other...
Another name awaited
On the nearby rung of the shady ladder,
But I noticed, from the center of the wide world,
From the seething chaos,
There I noticed
The holiness from my tender years floating
over ancient nests of mildew—
And one is named Shamay
The other is named Hillel...

My children play like little wolves,
Both of them like pups of wolf:

And one scratches the other
with an evil gaze of wild flame,
And I... I look with a muted glance
From my blind heart,
As ancient names circulate
Like wolve pups, like the joys of youth curled up...

Rest
To Y. Dobrushin

A quiet someone whispered in my ear today:
Yesterday, believe me, you paid your old debt –
And rest and clarity are your friends
For the whole day.

From the deepest depths I answered him – I believe!
And from my face soon with delicate fan,
with the crisp snap of the arrow, stirred the dust
Of the last day.

He began to stroke the gussets around my eye
Looked to the bottom of my dark pupil
And with a gentle, prayerful bow
Took leave of my door.

And over the smokey noise of the dark city
I noted the rest in every phase of sun--
And I alone – a flicker of graceful rest
In the four corners...

*

The day is gone. The last whip of need has ceased to sting,
The heavy stride of worry has been cast out,
There is a roof, a table, paper and bread,
And I am free, O, Free for an entire morning!

I bath silently in waves of rest in the middle of the street...
a wind blew from the night and way up there
a (group of) grey cloudlets gathered
they are resting for now, but keep listening.

It's autumn,^{lxii} the wind's switch is forever awake,
How free it is now on the vast fields
Where readied/prepared distant roads tempt everywhere
How wonderful it is to be young and free as a bird precisely now!...

Still a few more steps, there's my door, isn't it beautiful,
There an evening awaits me, such a pure one,
And we will be close my children, close
And with a circle of light clean little sheet of paper

An Easy Day

I carried his tumult filled pack
from morning to night,
he settled with me under the starry sky,
I must admit, I was not swindled/fooled.
I was not expecting this from him.

He offered up a table with lamplight,
On the table were a few dozen old starches
A pothole with small letters, like little black coral,
I thread them, string out, string in,
How could a day be easier?

In the Room

A tender twilight (hevl? Nothingness?)???
Hovered in silence over the room
And took down the edges/corners of the furniture
And left only little rays of luster

It's the dim-hours. I am not stopping to think/thinking,
Because that fog will begin to fade,
Because hanging on the sky there will be
The flaming sun-apple...

*

You, small little splinters/shavings saw dust(?)/tinder, you alone? One/singularly /first?/that one/
you're the one?,
You are coming with me, I should do similarly,
You are sincerely dear!
I don't need a lot, I only need one thing
A tiny splinter pure/clean
To blow the fire!...

*

I love you, my quiet, mysterious dwelling place/tent/tabernacle,
Where I am tortured by my sweet suffering,
Where I carry my suffering with bright joyfulness,
Where one soul-tremble searches and desires
The other...

I long for you, you pure moment,
When I am not a lord/dignitary/official in my full heart
When newly freed, flowing feelings
In clear sounds/bells each of his tracks
Is covered/ enveloped /veiled...

Streets

In the Street

I stride through my youthful present/moment/today/now from street to street,
From shadowy corners, I sense/taste perceive the early morning
Only the begging worries swarm around already
And plumes of hot hatred swirl...
The sun glowed and the sky is tender overhead,
And I stride free and silently from street to street...
The sun together with the stiff cables
showed me A path/road on the asphalt with fat shadows...
I follow him, the path, I am true to him, like all paths,
But a human brother came towards me in a hurry,
I could I deny him of a quiet path?
I push forward quietly down from my shadowy rails,
I will not betray my sunny path,
I will find my sunny path...

*

In the day time, when the sun wields its omnipotent power
On/over the dusty streets
And it makes the (still/intensifier) tired asphalt bend
Through/by means of bright wifely/womanly (shoe) heals
Then, sometimes, still it appears/seems to me
That there is something important before me.
It seems to me sometimes that something bright
Braided only from the sun and from the succulent rains
Will suddenly come towards me in my direction...
With one
Pure movement
I am freed
From my heavy sorrow [pun kumer and the the man in his path].
My coat
At odds with/ripped/tattered by the summer,
With dust interwoven,
Slides downward snake-like,
And I disappear...
But the sun begins to bow,
And someone seizes and expels my (blozende-haughty?swollen?puffy?blown?battered?) eyes
Here , with bloody, red,
Spills[is poured] already the notch of the roofs
Of the city with an already dead murmur,
Of me remains then not even a trace ---
With ancient sorrow,
Enveloped in my dusty coat
Then I wander over smoldering/glowing spaces –
They are there my distant locked?/captive? homes/refuges/...

*

Today a fresh breeze from the field
Secluded itself on the hot streets
And did not know whether to stay or go
And silently remained.

I walked out of the dark house
To find the wind against me—
And the wind, quietly and gently,
Embraced me...

The wind kissed me
And without a word it was known
What occurs the fields now—
There the wheat is in flower!

The silent sound of a distant horn
will sound to me today till night:
the wheat flowers!...

*

The jumble of stone houses, girdled with streets,
had a way out to all the four corners!
The rays stretch through the vast suburbs
To the distant field...

From a high window in arranged Stones,
A twig often gives a naïve green smile
When a bird tosses a tattered song down
From his cage...

And small faces with rested eyes
Contemplate the streets through translucent dust,
And good, gentle mothers protect them
Silent as unhearing doves.

The jumble of stone houses, girdled with streets,
had a way out in all four corners!
The rays stretch through the vast suburbs
To the distant field...

A House

The first story
With a warm luster of mirrored showcases
With rest/calm of (small) valuable objects, satisfied/satiated and thin
Calls me and (fools itself?).
I stand, I look, I search,
And then the whole standing without meaning forgets itself –
A heavy girdled cornice
Drives my eye higher and higher
Where another human gaze
Longs for the roofs
Of neighbor-giants...

Only I
Through the dusty noses
Of my shoes
With all my being
Track the lowest floor/story/level—
There a corner barely appeared/showed
A high, mischievous brow if its starry eye,
The eye thirsts after a droplet of shine/light
And rustling feet and clothes all [hold in] one push/drag
In a wide-opened pupil
The dust of the sidewalk...
The eye doesn't blink
And its red whites
Fill me through with fear,
I sense:
A head and a twisted shoulder
It moves..
And I am in the house—and no one else—
Then the wind cracks, then the stones wander...

In the Morgue

On cold granite tables are two corpses...
The grey day collected them here
And (this):
In the fog over the street
few floated Today
With a pair of black dots...
On a (few/unified) stones
Today lacked a trail/track
Of another wet, dirty shoe
And that's it...

letter to Siberia
to y. Temkin

1.
the territory with which we have been separated
has already been covered in snow.
My sleigh of longing has been prepared...

In the snowy distance the silence (grammar seems ambiguous to me here)
His green twigs/branches stick out(point?) –
a young sign for roads/paths.

Today I advance with [my body and life (lit.)/all my might]
Through (the) snows and seven ice-seas
In the land of frost and ice (in the land of frozen ice/frozen land of ice)

2.

The barrens/caverns of fields are frozen there
Today the winds and plumes/clouds of snow play there
In laughter and tears –
Today I wait for no one...

The frost-dust tells me:
-- (indiscernible, but maybe “will you”) to embrace the snowy dust...
And the winds have often sent me one
They blew, they whistled in chimneys...

I have not asked them to do this,
Today I am a foreigner in the center of a field –
Not laughing, not crying,
Waiting for no one...

3.

The frigid Angara
The middle daughter of summer
Surrounded you soundlessly
between folds of waves
And flowing steel horizon (length):
My sorrow is gone from me,
It is hiding somewhere
And veiled itself deep in the fabric of the benches/couches?...
But a wind from the icy north arrives,--
Two troubled eyes cloudy with sorrow
Open wider,
And under the window in silent dusks
The frozen emptiness waits and waits
And pulls me in, where your suffering
Flows like water
From snowy peaks and steel lowlands...

Dawn

I stand by the window in the [wall panel/boards of the walls?]
My face pointed to the flames in the east...

In fires of separation/departure on sky space
There daybreak's dreams were born...

On the blues float on flaming foundations^{lxiii}
I will entrust my longing to them without questions.

(either) roses on blood, (or)? bright wonder
my heart is in the cradle both weak and cheerful...

I stand by my window in the [wall panel boards of the walls /windowsill?]
To the flames in the east my face is turned.

Swallows scribble it all in dizzying flight [shv sound-play]
And fetter the roads in luminous labor.

Wheels and hoofs with stones of the bridge/floor(?)
Become friends (on) new, holy happiness...

I stand by my window in the boards of the walls,
To the flames in the east my face is turned...

Between Rolling Stones

To Leyb Kvitko

*

On the earth turned up by rolling stones
in the awesome assault of snowy weather
what am I, What is my meaning, a being/single entity,
who carried his life-light with a silent tremor/ quiver?

The ocean awakes in boiling/seething agitation
The current ascends/wave/tide rises from the irritated/upset depths.
What is my chosen helm/oar now,
The highest mast on my ship?

I am ready, in each moment I am ready to confide/entrust
The quivering life flames
The master of destruction and construction
The master of earth and sea...

Procession

I walk in your forward column
Humanity on the stride,
Proud, bold, seething and frigid --
Step after step!
The ancient God wobbles, totters
On the position-beams/poles
Patched with air, all flutters and flutters
The old red flag –
Back to marching/the step!
And waking sticks sprinkle shot on stiff/tight drums,
And the cymbaloms dance— they polish an edge in the hovering earth,
And the trumpet thrown out
his call loudly...
today/now I am also a piece of the resounding trunk/chest –
I skip
Silent velvet space
I wake the tired,
I cover the sighs of the weakened ones
With loud laughter –
Back to step/ march!

*

Like the sharp of the sword
The speechless earth
lets out her call
And the wandering-leads(valkn-blaien?)
engrave with phosphorescent shine –
a warm/hot downpour comes down on the lands
and coats with resin/pitch and sulfur,
and the sewers/gutters of the world
spit with throats full
of blood, anger, and pain;
and each stone and each log
floats a mad foam/surf... (?)
and what [is it?] to me now,
wink of time,
and [shvind disappearance?] of space/Rome [fall of Rome/disappearance of space?]
and shooting star in the empty cold?...
a burning downpour comes down on the earth(s)/worlds(why does he pluralize erd so often?).
on all my worlds!

Justice

Wine, wine,
Ancient wine,
The wine of burning justice!...
Under all skies
Under all moldy cellars
Is ripened
And ferments until then,
When we reach the wild flats under the northern nights!
Throughout all the paths/roads
Of your wanderings,
Throughout the whole world
Your wine-sack remains,
Far and wide, in order!
There at the shine of day, on the path/road from the land of slaves
The first dark spies
Carried with difficulty
only one heavy cluster of fruit
On a yoke!
Wine, wine,
the drink of wine!
Wine of burning justice!
Today Worlds curse your ferment
Today Worlds carry your foam
on the wild plains under northern nights!

*

On the quite spring cavern/ emptiness(hoyl) of the wild distance
My old beating blood drips and drips (keeps dripping),
Nights snuggle up to the black hearts
To the pain of desecrated day ...
the flames split the tender fog womb
And in the flaming duration glowed (red-hot)
All new signs/marks
For the [further drive/expansive] of lurking sorrows!
At the red gates of pure mornings
The reverberations of hunting horns,
And manes are prepared for the first [shvind disappearance],
And iron hooves hardly wait
For the first exchange of hovering/soaring distances
In the womb of new roads/highways...
I hear them with a heart-patter/tremble
The thousand- breathed scream/yell/holler of happiness
With frozen-suffering I sense them
The speechless trembling eyelids...
And when the night
Is ready to envelope
the sinking day in its silent womb,
to the distant draw of my glowing/burning mood/spirits
bound with cord from thousands of wills,
behind tired wheels, merchandise from the road,
I stride as a captive through the wide fields...
I am with them,
With the always prepared
For the new sounding of the inspiring horns,
To the new flames of purifying sorrows!...

We come from boulders/stones!
From boulders, ground to a millstone of times...
We come from stones,
That have merged with fate
With oceans
With winds,
With the distance...

We originate from stones
That have broken
The yoke of the frozen stillness/present/way things are –
We are moving –
And only a desolate forest
Can delay us...
We are the first
In the colors of winds,
bound with whirlwinds,
sisters to waves
brothers to the storm—
no east, no west, no north, no south!

Notes

^{xxviii} I have translated ‘Reshes’/ רשות as ‘domain.’ Reshes is one of the few loshn-koydesh words in *Bay Vegn* that is not of everyday usage. When Hofshyten does use a word from loshn-koydesh, it tends to have an important conceptual meaning. In this case, I believe that Reshes evokes the primal divisions of elements like the earth and the water, the day and the night as it is used at the beginning of Genesis. Hofshyten associates the images of the road and the day, metonymically implying conscious life as movement, as exile from a more primordial state of oneness.

^{xxix} The wind is one of many motifs that Hofshyten develops from Osher Shvartzman’s poetry, specifically in poems like ‘di kretshme.’ Oyslender notes that the winds that Shvartzman describes in di kretshme are representative of a zeitgeist.

^{xxx} Veg un umveg (a neologism) the narrow ditch is juxtaposed to the image of an eyelash, a membrane in between the perception of a subject and the thing (object) perceived.

^{xxxi} In this line, Hofshyten introduces his book as concerned with the perception of “this earth.”

^{xxxii} Dobrushin notes the subtext of the first line as Rambam’s (Maimonides) ani ma’amin, which posits his fundamental points of Judaism.

^{xxxiii} The door and the gate are a system of motifs in *Bay Vegn* built upon Biblical gates.

^{xxxiv} The ‘four corners’ are repeated throughout this book.

^{xxxv} Can also mean zealous

^{xxxvi} Hefker is a loshn-koydesh word denoting fallowness or “abandonedness,” “ownerlessness.” It derives from legalistic language concerning the belonging of unclaimed property. There has been much discussion of the importance of this word in modernist poetry – in an era of emancipation, destruction, war, the raise of a new culture, the world was semantically loaded. It is a word that poets such as Moyshe Leyb Halpern, Peretz Markish, and a handful of other Yiddish poets used conceptually in their poetry. For more information about how this word was used by other modernists in their poetry, See Julian Levinson, “On Some Motifs in Moyshe-Leyb Halpern: A Benjaminian Meditation on Yiddish Modernism” and Kronfeld, “Peretz Markish” *On the Margins of Modernism* (205).

^{xxxvii} This image resembles a motif from Andrey Bely’s ‘pessimistic,’ Nekrasov inspired landscapes in “*Pepel*”/”Ash” (1909)

^{xxxviii} The poet’s departure from traditional life into what was previously viewed as foreign.

^{xxxix} Psalms 126

^{xl} This small dedicatory poem to the roads is connected with the idea of goles, exile. To celebrate the road of exile is acceptance of and appreciation for the world as it is, through all of its hardships

^{xli} This poem expresses an important aspect of Hofshyten standpoint as a poet – newness. To create something *new* was essential in the conception that a new era was dawning. This artistic statement – a drive to view the world anew, unfettered by everything that tradition has told us about the world – can be seen as a trend in modernist poetry and is related to Viktor Shklovsky’s concept of estrangement. The impulse to see the world newly is also connected to Hofshyten’s motif of birth and memory. To see the world through a child’s eyes is an attempt at this very estrangement. This is connected to what Oyslender calls ‘Hofshyten’s objectivism.’

^{xlii} Fun di erste, shtume veyen literally means: from the first speechless pains, but *veyen* plural could also mean gusts, by association, wind motif and the creative breath of God

^{xliii} A memorial service for the dead. Note that this section introduces the theme of the elegiac associated with an eternal nature/landscape.

^{xliv} Movement from the city at night to the countryside. The special movement from city to country, combined with the temporal setting of night associates a function of the mind, memory, with sleep (un)consciousness and dreaming. The movement from the countryside to the city had been the trend from the beginning of the twentieth century, but was exacerbated by the First World War.

^{xlv} Here the village itself is represented as animate

^{xlvi} It was a theme in modernist Russian poetry to address Rus’, which come to stand for a mythological country-side that was timeless idea of Rus’

^{xlvii} The position of the poet is reminiscent of Pushkin’s “zimnaya doroga”

^{xlviii} *Khutor* -- Ukrainian derived word for “farm”

-
- ^{xlix} This poem was removed from the 1924 Kletzkin edition
- ^l ‘eyde’
- ^{li} Electrification at this time was rapidly expanding.
- ^{lii} Titled “friling”/ “spring” in the Kletzkin edition (1924)
- ^{liii} Motif of writing and creation
- ^{liv} Locust, one of the plagues of Passover, which takes place in the spring
- ^{lv} Seasonal migration of storks
- ^{lvi} Krie, ice flow, is a homophone to the loshen-koydesh ‘kriah,’ the ritual custom of tearing one’s clothes at a funeral as a sign of mourning. See kronfeld’s analysis of the poem.
- ^{lvii} Echoes a line in “rusishe felder”: ‘tsum yidishn heyzl fil stezhkelekh geyn./a heyls vi ale, nor greser di fenster, un tsvishn di kinder dort bin ikh der eltster. Once again, trees are anthropomorphized.
- ^{lviii} I wonder if this raven is related to Lermontov’s Raven in “Zhelanie”?
- ^{lix} From Pushkin’s *Journey to Arzrum*. Pushkin accompanied the Military on an expedition into Armenia during War with the Ottomans. He intended to escape across the border, but decided not at the last moment.
- ^{lx} This most likely refers to Puskin’s Libertarian poems such as “ode to Liberty,” “to Chadaev,” “after pindemont,” etc.
- ^{lxi} Note the overlap of present and past, and the suggestion of the future.
- ^{lxii} Another poem in the autumn motif
- ^{lxiii} Flaker-yesoydes implies destruction at the time of creation

Bibliography

- Abraham Ascher. *The Revolution of 1905*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988.
- Abrams, M.H. *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1971.
- Aronson, G. "Minsk in der Tsayt fun der Daytshisher Okupatsye." *Di Tsukunft* 1 . 1938: 27–41.
- Avrutin, Eugene and Harriet Murav (eds). *Jews in the Eastern European* Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2012.
- Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.
- Bely, Andrei. "The Magic of Words," *Selected Essays of Andrey Bely*, Trans. Cassedy. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.
- Benjamin, Walter. "On Language as Such and the Language of Man," *Walter Benjamin: Selected writings, vol 1: 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael Jennings. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1997.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Task of the Translator," *Illuminations*. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1968.
- Bialik, Khaim Nakhman. *Selected Poems of Hayyim Nahman Bialik*. Ed. Israel Efros.
- Biale, David. *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979.
- Bilenky, Serhiy. *Romantic Nationalism in Eastern Europe: Russian, Polish and Ukrainian Political imaginations*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012.
- Bilenky, Serhiy. "Review Essay: Children of Rus': from the Little Russian Idea to the Russian World." *Russian History*, Vol. 42. 2015, pp.425-436.
- Byadulya, Dmitrok. *Zhydy na Belarusi*. Mensk: Ya. A. Gryblyata, 1918.

- Caplan, Marc. "Belarus in Berlin, Berlin in Belarus: Moyshe Kulbak's Raysn and Meshiekh ben-Efraim between Nostalgia and Apocalypse," *Yiddish in Weimar Berlin: At the Crossroads of Diaspora Politics and Culture*. Ed Gennady Estraiikh and Mikhail Krutikov. London: Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing, 2010.
- Caplan, Marc. *Yiddish Writers in Weimar Berlin: A Fugitive Modernism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021.
- Cohen, Madeline. *Here and Now: The Modernist Poetics of Doikayt*. Proquest Dissertations Publishing, 2016.
- Cohen, Madeline. "Do'ikayt and the Spaces of Politics in An-sky's Novella *In Strom*." *Eastern European Jewish Affairs*. Vol. 50, 2020.
- Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.
- Derzhavin, Gavriil Romanovich. "An Opinion Regarding the Prevention of Famine in White Russia and The Organization of the Way of Life of the Jews (1800). Translated from the Russian. With Comments and introduction edited by Alexander Fried." *Aschkenaz*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2005, pp. 229-312.
- Dubnow, Simon. *History of the Jews*, Trans. Moshe Spiegl. Vol. 1-5. South Brunswick, New Jersey: T. Yoseloff, 1973
- Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland*, trans. Friedlaender, vol. 1, Philadelphia: the Jewish Publication Society of America, 1916.
- Dunetz, Khatskel. "Kulbak," *Vegn Shrayber un Verk: Kritishe Etudn*.
- Ely, Christopher. *This Meager Nature*. Northern Illinois University Press: Dekalb, 2002.
- Epshtein, Mikhail. "*Priroda, Mir, Tainik Vselennoi*": *Systema Peizazhnikh Obrazov v Russkoi Poezii*. Moskva: Vyshaya Shkola, 1990.
- Estraiikh, Gennady. *Soviet Yiddish: Language Planning and Linguistic Development*. Oxford [England]; New York: Clarendon Press, 1999.
- Estraiikh, "From Yehupetz Jargonists to Kyiv Modernists: The rise of a Yiddish literary Centre, 1880s-1914," *East European Jewish Affairs*, 30:1, 17-38.
- Gennady Estraiikh and Oleg Budnitskii, "From the Great Terror to the Terror in 1941: The Case of Yiddish Writers in Soviet Belorussia," *East European Jewish Affairs*, vol. 50, no. 3 pp. 293-308.

- Estraikh, Gennady and Mikhail Krutikov, eds., *The Shtetl: Image and Reality*. Oxford: Legenda, 2000.
- Estraikh, Gennady. "The Yiddish Kultur-Lige." *Modernism in Kyiv*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010. 197-217.
- Engelstein, Laura. *Russia in Flames: War, Revolution, Civil War 1914-1921*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Finkin, Jordan. *Exile as Home: The Cosmopolitan Poetics of Leyb Naydus*. Cincinnati, Ohio: Hebrew Union College Press, 2017.
- Finkin, Jordan. *An Inch or Two of Time: Time and Space in Jewish Modernisms*. University Park, Pennsylvania : Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015
- Finkin, Jordan. "‘Like Fires in Overgrown Forests’; Moyshe Kulbak’s contemporary Berlin Poetics," *Yiddish in Weimar Berlin: At the Crossroads of Diaspora Politics and Culture*. Ed Gennady Estraikh and Mikhail Krutikov. London: Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing, 2010
- Finnin, Rory. "Nationalism and the Lyric, Or How Taras Shevchenko Speaks to Compatriots Dead, Living and Unborn." *The Slavonic and East European Review*. Vol. 89, Issue 1, 2011.
- Finnin, Rory. "Mountains, Masks, Metre, Meaning: Taras Shevchenko’s ‘Kavkaz.’" *Slavic and Eastern European Review*, Vol. 83, No. 3. Modern Humanities research Association and University of College London, School of Slavonic and East European Studies: July 2005, pp. 396-439.
- David E. Fishman. *Russia’s First Modern Jews: The Jews of Shklov*. New York: New York University Press, 1995.
- Gal-ed, Efrat. "The Local and European: Itzak Manger and his Autumn Landscape." *Proof texts* , Vol. 31, No. 1-2 (Winter-Spring 2011), pp. 31-59.
- Gasparov, Mikhail. *Ocherk Istorii Russkogo Stikha*. Moskva: Nauka, 1984.
- Gasparov, M.L. *Metr I smysl: Ob Odnom Iz Mekhanizmov Kul’turnoi pamyati*. Moskva: RGGU 1999.
- Glantz-Leyeles, Arn. "Moyshe Kulbak Der Poet," *Velt un Vort*. New York: CYCO, 1958.

- Glaser A.M. "Jewish Alienation through a Ukrainian Looking Glass: Dovid Hofshsteyn's Translations of Taras Shevchenko." *Prooftexts - J. Jew. Lit. Hist. Prooftexts - Journal of Jewish Literature History* 36, no. 1-2 (2017): 83-110.
- Gitelman, Zvi. *A Century of Ambivalence*, New York: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 1988.
- Harshav, Benjamin. *Explorations in Poetics*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007.
- Harshav, Benjamin. *Three Thousand Years of Hebrew Versification*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 2014.
- Harshav (Hrushovsky), Benjamin. "On Free Rhythms in Yiddish Poetry," *The Field of Yiddish: Studies in Yiddish Language, Folklore, and Literature*. New York: Linguistic Circle of New York, 1954.
- Hillis, *Children of Rus': Right bank Ukraine and the Invention of a Russian Nation*. Ithica: Cornell University Press, 2013.
- Horowitz, Brian. *Empire Jews: Jewish Nationalism and acculturation in 19th and Early 20th-Century Russia*. Bloomington: Slavica, 2009
- Hundert, Gershon David. *Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century : A Genealogy of Modernity*, University of California Press, 2004.
- Kalinowska, Izabela. *Between East and West: Polish and Russian Nineteenth Century Travel to the Orient*. University of Rochester Press: Rochester, NY, 2004.
- Kagan, Berl, comp. *Leksikon fun yidish-shraybers* (Biographical dictionary of Yiddish writers) (New York, 1986), cols. 212-13. Trans. Joshua Fogel
<https://yleksikon.blogspot.com/2016/02/dovid-hofshteyn-david-hofstein.html>
- Kahn, Andrew. "Pushkin's Wanderer Fantasies," *Rereading Russian Poetry* ed. Stephanie Sandler. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.
- Kegel, Patrick Daniel. *Ethnicity and Culture in the Poetry and Prose of Osip Mandelstam*. Proquest Dissertation Publishing, 1994.
- Khagi, Sofya. *Silence and the Rest*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2013.
- Kronfeld, Chana. *On the Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamics*. Contraversions ;2, xvi, 294 p. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.
- Krutikov, Mikhail. *Raysn: The Belarusian Frontier of Modernism*. "In Geveb," June 2020.
- Krutikov, Mikhail. *Yiddish Fiction and the Crisis of Modernity, 1905-1914*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001.

- Krutikov, Mikhail. *From Kabbalah to Class Struggle: Expressionism, Marxism, and Yiddish Literature in the Life and Work of Meir Wiener*. Stanford:Stanford University Press, 2011.
- Kulbak, Moyshe. *Childe Harold of Dysna*, trans. Peckerer Kulbak.
- Kulbak, Moyshe. *Naye Lider*. Varshe: Kultur Lige, 1922.
- Kulbak, Moyshe. *Shirim*. Vilna: Farlag far di Yidishe Literatn un Zhurnalistsn, 1920.
- Kulbak, Moyshe. “Dos Yidishe Vort” *Sovietish Heymland*. Moskve: Soviet Pisatel’, 1981, no. 5. Pp 97-100.
- Kulbak, Moyshe. *The Messiah of the House of Ephraim*. In *Yenne Velt: The Great Works of Jewish Fantasy & Occult*, ed. Joachim Neugroschel. New York: Pocket Books 1976.
- Kulik, Alexander, “Jews and the Language of Eastern Slavs,” *Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. 104, no. 1., Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014.
- Layton, Susan. *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy*. Cambridge University Press: New York , 1994.
- Leyeles, Arn. “Moyshe Kulbak,” *Zambikher*. New York: Marstin Press, 1952, vol. 8; pp 11-20.
- Lermontov. *Sobranie Socinenii v Cheyryox Tomakh*. Moskva: Pravda, 1969.
- Litvak, Olga *Conscription and the Search for Modern Russian Jewry*. Bloomington:Indiana University Press, 2006)
- Lotman, Yuri. “Semiosphere,” *Culture and communication : signs in flux : an anthology of major and lesser-known works*. Ed. Andreas Schönle ; trans. Benjamin Paloff. Brookline, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2020.
- Makaryk and Tkacz, eds. *Modernism in Kyiv: Jubilant Experimentation*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010.
- Mandelstam, Osip. *The Noise of Time: Prose of Osip Mandelstam*. Trans. Clarence Brown. San Francisco: North Point Press, 1986.
- Mandelshtam, Osip. Trans. Sidney Monas. “About the Nature of the Word.” *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics*. Vol. 2 no. 4, 1975, pp. 506-526.
- Mandelshtam, Osip. “On the Morning of Acmeism,” In “Mandelshtam’s Acmeist Manifesto.” Trans. Clarence Brown. *The Russian Review*. Vol. 24. No. 1 (Jan. 1965), pp. 46-51.

- Maimonides, *A Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. M. Friedlander. New York: Dover, 1904.
- Manger, Itzik. "Der Litvak un der Landshaft." *Shriftn in Proze*. Tel-Aviv. Y.L. Peretz Farlag, 1980; pp 185-189.
- Medusauskine, Zita. "Images of Lithuania in the first half of the 19th Century," *Spatial Concepts of Lithuania in the Long 19th Century*, ed. Stalianus. Boston: Academic Studies Press 2016, pp 138-139.
- Mendele Moykher Sforim. *Of Bygone Days*. In *A Shtetl and other Novellas*. Ed. Ruth Wise. New York, Behrman House, 1973.
- Meir, Natan. *Kyiv: Jewish Metropolis*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2010.
- Moss, Kenneth. *Jewish Renaissance in the Russian Revolution*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009.
- Moss, Kenneth. "At Home in Late Imperial Russian Modernity—Except When They Weren't: New Histories of Russian and East European Jews, 1881–1914." *The Journal of Modern History* 84 (June 2012): 401–452
- Mickiewicz, Adam. *Pan Tadeusz: The Last Foray in Lithuania* Trans. Bill Johnston. New York: Archipelago, 2020.
- Miron, Dan. *Image of the Shtetl and other Studies of Jewish Literary Imagination*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000.
- Miron, Dan. *H.N. Bialik and the Prophetic Mode in Modern Hebrew Poetry*. Syracuse, N.Y.:Syracuse University Press, 2000.
- Miron, Dan. "H.N Bialik and the Quest for Ethical Identity", *Hebrew Studies* vol. 41, 2000
- Niger, S. "Moyshe Kulbak" *Yidishe Shrayber in Soviet Rusland*. New York: 1958. Pp. 69-13.
- Niger, Shmuel. "A Nayer Onheyb," and "M. Kulbaks Moderne Poezie." *Yidishe Shrayber in Soviet Rusland*. New York: Shmuel Niger Bukh Komitet, 1958.
- Nikžentaitis, Alvydas, et al. *The Vanished World of Lithuanian Jews*. Brill Academic Publishers, 2004.
- Oyslender, Nokhem. "Yungt, Yungt! Vi a Shpilndike Vel..." *Sovietish Heymland*, vol. 2 1980. Moscow: Sovietski Pisatel'.
- Oyslender, "Dovid Hofshteyn." *Veg Ayn, Veg Oys*. Kyiv, 1924. pp. 99-111.

- Peckerar and Rubinstein. "Moyshe Kulbak" *Writers in Yiddish*, ed. Joseph Sherman. Dictionary of Yiddish Biography. Vol. 333. Detroit: Gale, 2007.
- Petrovsky Shtern, Yohanan. "Military Service in Russia."
https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Military_Service_in_Russia.
- Petrovsky-Shtern, Yohanan. (Iokhanan Petrovskii-Shtern), *Evrei v russkoi armii, 1827–1914* (Moscow, 2003)
- Penzich, Barbara and Karin Friedrich. *Citizenship and Identity in a Multinational Commonwealth : Poland-Lithuania in Context, 1550-1772*. Boston: Brill, 2009.
- Polonsky, Antony. *History of the Jews*, vol. 1-3. Portland, Oregon: The Littman library of Jewish Civilization, 2010.
- Pushkin, Alexander. *Polnoe sobranie sochenenii v odnom tome*. Moskva: alfa-kniga, 2012.
- Probstein, Ian. *The River of Time: Time-Space, Language and History in Avant-Garde, Modernist, and Contemporary Poetry*. Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2017.
- Rabinovitch, Simon. *Jewish Rights, National Rites: Nationalism and Autonomy in Late Imperial and Revolutionary Russia*. Stanford:Stanford University Press, 2014.
- Ram, Harsha, *The Imperial Sublime*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003.
- Ram, Harsha. "Pushkin and the Caucasus," *The Pushkin Handbook*, ed. David Bathea. University of Wisconsin Press: Madison, 2005. Pg 379-402.
- Ravitsh, Meylekh. "Moyshe Kulbak," *Mayn Leksikon*. Montreal: 1945, pp 227-22.
- Ronen, Omry. "Esenin: The Source of his Poetics," *Selected Essays of Omry Ronen*. Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications, 2015.
- Ronen, Omry. *An Approach to Mandel'shtam*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1983.
- Rozhansky, Shmuel. "Moyshe Kulbak, der Bazinger fun Primitiver Erdishkayt un Yidishn Mitos." In Kulbak, *Oysgeklubene Shriftn*. Buenos Aires: Yosef lifshits fond, 1976; pp 11-24.
- Rosenthal, Bernice. "Revolution as Apocalypse." *Andrey Bely: A Critical Review*, ed. Gerald Janecek. Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1975.
- Roskies, David. *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999.

- Roskies, David. *A Bridge of Longing: The Lost Art of Yiddish Storytelling*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- Rudling, Per Anders. *The Rise and Fall of Belarusian Nationalism*. Pittsburg: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014.
- Sajo, Tamas. "Urban Space as Erinnerungslandschaft. The Case of Lemberg/Lwow/Lvov/Lviv." *European Review*, Vol. 21, No. 4. 523-529. Academia Europea, 2013.
- Schachter, Allison. *Diasporic Modernisms*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Staliūnas, Darius, ed. *Spatial Concepts of Lithuania in the Long Nineteenth Century*. Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016.
- Staliūnas, Darius. "Hybrid identities in the Era of Ethno-Nationalism: The Case of the Krajoycy in Lithuania," *Acta Baltico Slavica* 42, pp.253-270.
- Sandeler, Stephanie. *Distant Pleasures: Alexander Pushkin and the Writing of Exile*. Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1989.
- Shneer, David. *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture 1918-1930*. ix, 300 p. New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Sherman, Joseph "David Hofstein," *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Vol. 333. Ed. Sherman. Detroit, Gale publishing, 2007.
- Shupa, Sergei. "Geografiya Kul'baka: Real'naya I Vyavahaya". Presentation at "The History Culture and Heritage of Jews in Belarus Across the Ages, July 2021.
- Scholem, Gershom. "The Name of God and the Linguistic Theory of the Kabbalah," *Diogenes*.
- Scholem, Gershom. *Kabbalah*. New York: Penguin, 1978.
- Scholem, Gershom. *On The Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah*. New York: Schocken Books, 1991.
- Seelig, Rachel. *Strangers in Berlin : Modern Jewish Literature Between East and West, 1919-1933*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016.
- Seltzer, Robert. *Simon Dubnow's 'New Judaism' : Diaspora Nationalism and the World History of the Jews*. Leidan, Netherlands: Brill, 2014.
- Spinner, Samuel Jacob. "Else Lasker-Schüler and Uri Zvi Greenberg in "The Society of Savage Jews": Art, Politics, and Primitivism *PROOFTEXTS* 38: 1.
- Spinner, Samuel Jacob. *Jewish Primitivism*. Stanford: Stanford University press, 2021.

- Shavialiou, Dzmityr. "Belorusskiy Orientalism i 'Belorussko-yevreysjaya Utopiya' (K Postantovke Problemy)". *Kontakty i Konflikty v Slavyanskoy i Yevreyskoy Kul'turnoy Traditsii*, Ed. Belova. Moscow: Sefer, 2017. Pp. 237-257.
- Shklovsky, "Resurrection of the Word." *Viktor Shklovsky: A Reader*. Ed. & trans. Alexandra Berlina. New York: Bloomsbury, 2017.
- Shulman, Elye. "Moshe Kulbak." *Leksikon fun Yidish Shraybers*, ed Berl Kagan (New York, 1986), col. 481.
- Shvartsman, Osher. *Ale Lider un Brif*. Moskve: Meluche Farlag, 1961.
- Taube, Moshe. "East Slavic Texts," YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe.
- Toporov, *Peterburgskii tekst russkoï literatury : izbrannye trudy*. Sankt Peterburg: iskusstvo, 2003
- Veidlinger, Jeffrey. *Jewish Public Culture in the Late Russian Empire*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2009.
- Wachtel, Michael. *The Development of Russian Verse: Meter and its Meanings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Wolitz, Seth. *Yiddish Modernism: Studies in Twentieth-Century Eastern European Jewish Culture*. Ed. Horowitz & Gottschalk. Bloomington: Slavica, 2014.