

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Cultural Scars: The Poetics of Trauma and Disability in 20th Century Jewish Literature

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Literature

by

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DEDICATION

For my family—my home wherever I am, whose love and support sustains me

EPIGRAPH

Words work as release—well-oiled doors opening and closing between intention, gesture. A pulse in the neck, the shiftiness of the hands, an unconscious blink, the conversations you have with your eyes translate everything and nothing. What will be needed, what goes unfelt, unsaid—what has been duplicated, redacted here, redacted there. Altered to hide or disguise—words encoding the bodies they cover. And despite everything the body remains.

Occasionally it is interesting to think about the outburst if you would just cry out—

To know what you'll sound like is worth noting—

Claudia Rankine, Citizen: An American Lyric (p. 69)

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Cultural Scars: The Poetics of Trauma and Disability in 20th Century Jewish Literature

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Literature

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Amidst the emergence of modern European nation states and the racialized logic of global modernity, Jewish people began to be considered “sick,” first by official discourses of knowledge—such as government, medicine, and psychoanalysis—then by themselves. In turn-of-the-century psychoanalysis and racial science, hallmarks of global modernity, for example, hysteria was a disease associated with the immutable and inferior natures of women and Jewish men. Approaching Jewish literatures comparatively and transnationally, spanning medical and cultural archives from the modernist period to

today, my project examines a cultural genealogy that tropes the modern Jew's body as "sick"—a locus of sexual and racial difference. I bring scholarship on the modern Jewish body—by Sander Gilman, Todd Presner, Daniel Boyarin, and others—together with critical theories of modernity and their postcolonial revisions. By tracing trauma and disability as expressions of how racially gendered capitalism is embodied and survived, my project contributes to recent efforts to bridge trauma with disability studies, as well as bring both fields into conversation with categories of race, gender, and sexuality.

The archive of Jewish hysteria offers an example of a literary mode that I am calling the "cultural scar." This is a mode in which overlapping metaphors of illness, disability, and trauma express a multiplicity of global modernity's violence, implicitly articulating relatedness between different and uneven histories of loss. Imbricated in turn-of-the-century ideologies like nationalism, race, heterosexuality, and eugenics, inventions of modern Jewish culture and politics often rejected the effeminate, "queer", racialized, diasporic, and sickly Jewish body. This body—the Jewish hysteric—haunts and unsettles canonical works of Jewish literature from the modernist period to today. Through close readings—from the grotesque figure of the *mentshele* (or little person) in transnational Jewish modernism, to guilt in post-Holocaust poetry, to contemporary "hysterical" women in American Jewish and Israeli literature—I show that hysteria is a mode of Jewish cultural production and critical memory that offers unsettled forms of identity and politics through a poetics of mourning. Embodying the mode of the cultural scar, these figures express transnational histories of violence and loss that work against celebratory national and diasporic forms.

Introduction

The Cultural Scar: Trauma, Disability, and Jewishness in the 20th Century

It is time that the stone grew accustomed to blooming,
that unrest formed a heart.

*Es is Zeit, dass der Stein sich zu blühen bequemt,
dass der Unrast ein Herz schlägt. (44)*

(Paul Celan, “Corona”, translated by Jerome Rothenberg)¹

Cultural Scars and Global Modernity

The central concern of this study is how histories, experiences, and affects explored here under the rubric of trauma can form the basis of culture. The epigraph from Paul Celan—the Jewish German-language poet who survived the Nazi genocide—which I will return to in a later chapter, captures a metaphorical mode of bodily and political unrest that permeates 20th century transnational Jewish cultural production. The poet’s call for a time when stones bloom brings materiality to the image of unrest forming a heart, so that one can imagine a visceral heart growing in the world, belonging to no body, formed out of different painful histories, and bringing new hopeful possibilities—more metaphorical heart—in the wake of catastrophic violence. Through such metaphors, I explore the cross-implication of bodily trauma and historical trauma in the 20th century.

This dissertation examines trauma in literature—shaped by both catastrophic events and insidious everyday forms of oppression and violence—as it is expressed through bodily metaphors, especially of illness and disability. It argues that in the case of

¹ Included in Joris’ edited collection, *Paul Celan: Selections* (University of California 2005).

² See Caruth’s *Unclaimed* and her edited volume *Trauma*, in which Brown’s critique of

20th century transnational Jewish cultural production, these metaphors constitute central cultural and historical narratives. I call this the representational mode of the “cultural scar.” The concept of the cultural scar brings together the psychoanalytic approach to individual bodily trauma (popularized by Cathy Caruth as well as her feminist and postcolonial critics) with theories of collective cultural, political, and historical trauma. Caruth’s influential theory describes the individual’s repetitive, “unclaimed” experience that cannot be assimilated at the time of its occurrence but returns belatedly to make a past violence known.² Critics of Caruth—such as feminist psychologist Laura Brown, echoed by postcolonial studies—immediately objected to Caruth’s blurring of power differentials between victims and perpetrators, as well as argued for trauma theory to include everyday forms of violence tied to racism, sexism, or colonialism. A theory of the cultural scar builds from these critiques. It acknowledges that trauma emerges from a diagnostic realm rather than legal or moral one, and can therefore belong to both victims and perpetrators, albeit unevenly.³ A theory of the cultural scar is closely related to a concept of cultural trauma, in which the identity of a collectivity is remade by a sense of social and cultural crisis tied to a history of pain and loss.⁴

A concept of the cultural scar also follows especially from Michael Rothberg’s groundbreaking theory of “multidirectional memory,” which brings together postcolonial studies, trauma studies, and Holocaust studies. Rothberg’s comparative trauma theory

² See Caruth’s *Unclaimed* and her edited volume *Trauma*, in which Brown’s critique of Caruth was published. See also Rothberg’s discussion of Caruth and elaboration of a postcolonial trauma theory, p. 88-96.

³ See Rothberg’s intervention vis-à-vis critiques of Caruth, p. 88-96.

⁴ See, for example, sociologist Alexander’s work on cultural trauma as not simply the result of group experiencing pain, but of “this acute discomfort entering into the core of the collectivity’s sense of its own identity (10).”

tracks the “interconnectedness of different perpetrators and different victims in overlapping, yet distinct scenarios of extreme violence (Rothberg 96).” “Scarring” emphasizes how such scenarios can shape a visceral poetics of the body through overlapping metaphors of trauma and disability. Like physical scars, cultural scars result from a wound—a history of violence. Also like a physical scar, a cultural scar tells a story of what has happened to the body, as well as what remains with the body, or the body that remains.

The literary scholar and physician Rita Charon—who theorizes the storied nature of illness and the body—offers a concept of the scar:

Everything that has happened to our bodies is with us still—scars, infarcts, stenoses, adhesions. Kathryn Montgomery once told me that you could accomplish an entire medical interview by asking a patient, “Tell me about your scars.” Our bodies are texts, then, clerking the records of what we have been through, hoarding evidence of past hurts, remembering as only bodies can the corporeal stabilities that keep us alive. (122)

A theory of the cultural scar emerges from Charon’s notion of the body as a text that remembers past hurts, keeping a record of vulnerability and the corporeal (in)stabilities that keep us alive. These are metaphors where bodily and historical trauma overlap, that remember hurt as only bodies can. If cultural trauma is a storytelling process that remakes the identity of a collectivity (Alexander 12), then a theory of cultural scars considers how bodies—texts that remember past hurts, an archive of pain—play a central role in this creative, cultural process.

Cultural scars are a poetics of the body that register the larger, structural violence of modernity and its continuing legacies. A theory of the cultural scar intervenes in interdisciplinary discourses on trauma, particularly studies of trauma in the field of

epigenetics. This research is finding that trauma is passed down in the body, on a genetic level. The most famous study deals with shocking rabbits every time they smell cherry blossoms, after which generations of rabbits that followed without being shocked were afraid of cherry blossoms. While this research is important and compelling, locating trauma only in the physical body risks removing the cultural dimension of trauma and memory. An interdisciplinary theory of trauma between critical fields in the humanities, social sciences, and medical sciences prevents from essentializing difference and histories of loss, or naming trauma a disease that needs curing, thereby removing historical, cultural, and political legacies. This study therefore contributes to efforts to theorize trauma in a way that includes both the physical and the cultural; the medicalized body and the body created out of intersecting structures of oppression and difference tied to race, gender, sexuality, class, religion, nation, and so forth.⁵

I want to offer an example from outside of the archive of 20th century Jewish scars that I am tracing, in order to foreground my discussion of how these internal cultural modes and bodily codes implicitly articulate relatedness between uneven histories of loss. In the opening scene of James Baldwin's *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* (1963), the protagonist, the actor Leo Proudhammer, has a heart attack in the theater in the middle of performing a scene. Leo narrates the bodily experience of his heart attack in physical and emotional detail. The doctor arrives and begins the drama of medical intervention. Leo drifts in and out of consciousness and takes a dream-like inventory of his life: "My life, that desperately treacherous labyrinth, seemed for a moment to be

⁵ I refer to the intersectional analytics of women of color feminism and queer of color critique. See Crenshaw for a theory of intersectionality. See Hong and Ferguson for an explanation of this method under the rubric of strange affinities.

opening out behind me; a light seemed to fall where there had been no light before (8).”

The light reveals a core nightmarish memory of his brother, Caleb, being taken away to prison, as Leo, a frightened little boy, watches from their East Harlem tenement. Then, in the ambulance, Leo describes another “strange” experience:

And then something strange happened to me, deep in me. I thought of Africa. I remembered that Africans believed that death was a return to one’s ancestors, a reunion with those one loved. They had hurled themselves off slave ships, grateful to the enveloping water and even grateful to the teeth of sharks for making the journey home so swift. And I thought of a very great and very beautiful man who I had known and loved, a black man shot down within hearing of his wife and children in the streets of a miserable Deep South town. There are deaths and deaths: there are deaths for which it is impossible and even ignoble to forgive the world, there are deaths to which one never becomes reconciled. But now, for a moment, I was reconciled, for I thought, Well, I’ll see him. And we’ll sit around and bullshit about everything and get drunk, like we planned. And this thought made me fantastically, inexpressible happy. I saw my friend’s face and felt his smile and heard his voice. Then I thought, But I won’t see Caleb, and all my pain came back, my chest felt as though all the weight of the pyramids lay on it, and the sound of my breathing roared and resounded through the narrow car. (12)

What is housed in the strangeness of this experience? This passage and the entire opening of the novel is a palimpsest of loss, both personal and historical. The bodily trauma of the heart attack—which brings him into the permeable space between life and death—creates access to a history of slavery and its legacies in the present. The strange thing that happened deep in him when he became ill was the thought of Africa—a story about the slave ships—that connects slavery to the structures of racial violence and segregation that took his brother Caleb to prison in Harlem and caused the murder of his friend in the Deep South.

My dissertation examines moments like these in the case of transnational 20th century Jewish literature: when the violence of the past is figured in and through a bodily

present; when the unreconciled past is expressed in a way that makes the repressed violence of the present known; when alternate forms of life and happiness are imagined out of histories of impossible and unforgiveable pain; and when new modes of expression emerge out of this pain, captured here in the sound of roaring breath.

I approach such overlapping metaphors of bodily and historical trauma as a cultural mode related to what sociologist Avery Gordon has theorized as haunting. In her foundational study, Gordon defines haunting as a constituent element of modern social life (7). Haunting is, as she writes, a

...very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening. Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as transformative recognition. (8)

Haunting means knowing how to read ghosts and ghostly matter not as references to a specific loss or dead person, but as the trace of a repressed violent past that continues in the present. She writes:

The ghost has its own desires, so to speak, which figure the whole complicated sociality of a determining formation that seems inoperative (like slavery) or invisible (like racially gendered capitalism) but that is nonetheless alive and enforced. (183)

Hauntings, in other words, are traces of the violent and erased conditions of modernity—such as slavery and colonial labor relations—that continue in the present.

Following Gordon and others, I define modernity as a set of global, post-Enlightenment, historical and ideological changes that emerged out of the colonial labor relations and slave plantations of the New World. These forms of racially gendered labor and social organization created the material conditions of possibility for the emergence of the republican nation states in Europe and North America, as well as the philosophies of

universal freedom and equality associated with the Enlightenment that specifically excluded colonized and enslaved people,⁶ as well as created categories of nominally included and excluded others. This period also created what Randall Williams calls a “global division of humanity,” or global structures and institutions of racially gendered access, privilege, and survival that continue in the present.

The cultural scar, in its many literary contexts, represents a mode of cultural representation in which the body itself becomes ghostly and haunted in a way that figures the complicated sociality of modernity’s violence. In Gordon’s words, this way of seeing derives from

[...] what it feels like to be the object of a social totality vexed by the phantoms of modernity’s violence. What does this mean? It means following the insights that come to those who see all these forces operating at once. Such a way of seeing can make you a bit crazy and imprecise and wary of shorthands. (19)

I am tracing the cultural scar as a way of “seeing” that is more like feeling—the feeling of going “a bit crazy”—that becomes a central 20th century Jewish cultural narrative. Disability and trauma converge in Jewish literatures from the late 19th century to the present as lived forms of bodily contingency and vulnerability that register the phantoms of modernity’s violence, or unequal structures of modern survival. Metaphors of wounds and scars trace a critical history of modernity that figures Jewishness in relation to a complicated global sociality of violence through experiences of trauma and loss.

I am tracing 20th century Jewish scars that specifically emerge out of a political crisis around Jewishness within modern Europe at the turn of the 19th century. As Aamir Mufti shows, the so-called “Jewish Question” in late 18th century Europe is central to the

⁶ See, for example, Lowe p.193.

problematic of “the terrorized and terrifying figure” (2) of the ethnic minority within modern frameworks of nations and citizenship, as well as within post-Enlightenment liberal culture as a whole. He identifies this figure as central to the crisis of—and contradictions within—modern and postcolonial secularism. Tropes of disability and trauma in modern Jewish literature and culture are a register of this crisis, and they become central Jewish cultural narratives over the course of the 20th century. These cultural scars—the medical and social origins of which I discuss in the next section—offer an opportunity to relate what Jonathan Boyarin calls Europe’s internal and external others, or Jewishness in relation to other modern racialized identities and social groups (77-98). In other words, tropes of Jewish cultural scarring express how the history of Jewish difference is imbricated within the larger totality of modernity’s violence.

Biopolitics, Necropolitics, and the Jewish Encounter with Modernity

My project is especially indebted to Jewish literary studies and critical Jewish cultural studies, and within those fields a growing collection of work that focuses on the modern Jewish body and Jewish body politics. Modern Jewish body politics offer a case study in which to theorize the relationship between the modern nation state, discourses of health and disease, and categories of race, gender, and sexuality within a global framework. Though much of this scholarship deals with discourses about the male Jewish body and Jewish masculinity that came out of late 19th century Vienna, my project traces these ideas into transnational circulation throughout the 20th century, as they become expressed in different contexts of race, gender, sexuality, migration, immigration, displacement, exile, and nationhood. I am particularly interested in the figure of the

Jewish woman's body as a haunting or absent presence in the modern Jewish cultural imaginary, which brings critical attention to how inventions of modern Jewish culture and politics are imbricated in and negotiate a multiplicity of modernity's violence specifically tied to the logic of the nation-state.

The foundational work of medical and cultural historian Sander Gilman guides my medical cultural studies approach and concept of the Jewish encounter with modernity as simultaneously medicalized and masculinized. For example, in *The Jew's Body*, Gilman argues that the male Jew's body in turn-of-the-century medical and cultural discourses was a locus of difference and disease against which an emerging sense of European modernity was created and defined. He shows that "the Jew" was constructed as an effeminate, hysterical, and racially othered man—his skin's blackness was linked to "the African's" through racial mixing attributed to various Jewish exiles, and his hysteria was linked to "the Woman's" through sexual excess. George Mosse similarly examines the co-articulation of modern discourses of nationalism and sexuality in post-Enlightenment Europe, showing how the new modern medical category of the "homosexual" was cross-implicated with racial constructions of "the Jew," or how modern discourses of sexuality and race become coterminous and intertwined.

The interpellation of the Jew's body as degenerate and diseased also profoundly shaped modern Jewish politics and culture. Daniel Boyarin, for example, examines the intertextuality of Herzlian Zionism and Freud's writings, which both enact "the reconstruction of Jewish gendering under the pressure of the rise of heterosexuality, especially in Vienna at the fin de Siecle (*Unheroic* 27)." Both Freud and Herzl, he shows, attempted to cure Jews of their Jewishness, correcting their improper masculinity by

freeing them of their associations with diseases like homosexuality and hysteria. Such scholarship locates theories of Jewish degeneracy within discourses of social Darwinism, eugenics, and racial science of the late 19th century, in which certain social classes and races were considered morally deficient and susceptible to mental and physical illness, a threat to the genetic futurity and racial improvement of the newly emerging European and North American nations.

Constructions of Jewish bodies as degenerate were imbricated within the so-called biopolitical discourses of global modernity, shaping a strain of modern Jewish culture and politics that Todd Presner calls “the politics of regeneration.” Michel Foucault’s influential theory of modernity as an era of biopolitics describes discourses of state power, knowledge, and institutional practices that target and regulate sexuality, biological life, the species, and populations. Biopower thus addresses “the body, the species, and life itself as the primary objects of state control, creating a society of ‘normalization’ (Foucault 269).” Presner builds from Foucault to explain Jewish body politics, specifically “how sexuality was deployed for both reforming the individual body and securing the legitimacy of the greater body politic (Presner 13).” I follow Presner’s approach to Jewish body politics through a historical framework of biopolitical modernity in order to situate and interpret metaphors of Jewish trauma and disability within the global, converging discourses of race, gender, sexuality, and nationhood. Doing so merges an already present conversation about Jewishness, gender, sexuality, and race with the cross-implicated issues of trauma and disability.

I build especially from scholarship that focuses on the “muscle Jew” as a central emblem and discourse of Jewish modernity. The figure of the muscle Jew originates in

the influential, late 19th century writings of physician and founding political Zionist Max Nordau, a major theorist of degeneration. Through these pervasive ideas—which Presner has named “muscular Judaism”—Nordau and many others sought to regenerate the Jewish body in general and Jewish male sexuality in particular, thereby regenerating the Jewish people into a modern nation of “muscle Jews.” My case studies trace an internal cultural critique of muscular Judaism through overlapping metaphors of trauma and disability, or the mode of the cultural scar.

Approaching the history of Jewish difference through a biopolitical lens also provides a useful framework for thinking about historical relatedness between Europe’s internal and external others, and the changing and relational meanings of race, gender, and sexuality in global circulation. I build from key postcolonial revisions of Foucault, which examine how his history of sexuality as a discourse of modern state power took place within a larger imperial terrain, in tandem with the concept of race and racial governance formed in the colonial encounter (Stoler, *Race*; Chow). As Ann Laura Stoler writes:

Imperial discourses that divided colonizer from colonized, metropolitan observers from colonial agents, and bourgeois colonizers from their subaltern compatriots designated certain cultural competencies, sexual proclivities, psychological dispositions, and cultivated habits. These in turn defined the hidden fault lines—both fixed and fluid—along which gendered assessments of class and racial membership were drawn. (*Race* 8)

The case of Jewish difference and subalternity in Europe—which shapes a poetics of cultural scars—especially brings attention to the roles of medical and psychological knowledge in drawing the hidden fault lines of modern racial governance.

The fault lines of modern subjecthood and pathology are therefore part of a larger imperial terrain, bringing internal and external others into relation. As Dipesh Chakrabarty argues, for example, ideologies of public health and disease in the context of colonial India shows that the modern language of governments—both colonial and postcolonial—relies on an aesthetics of public space entangled with notions of health and hygiene, marking “pre-modern” others with disease and death. He explains that the creation of public order for the civilizing moderns was a medical as much as a political endeavor (544). My project explores a poetics of the Jewish body shaped by this medical and political endeavor, linking internal and external others through being marked as “pre-modern.”

In bridging Jewish studies with postcolonial frameworks, I follow especially Achille Mbembe’s foundational concept of necropolitics, which expands the Eurocentric frame of Foucault’s original theory beyond the biopolitical state’s “right to make live” to include the state’s “right to make die” exercised most vividly in the context of slavery and colonialism. I echo others in extending his thesis to trace necropower as it operates in tandem and often simultaneously with biopower. Biopower and necropower are therefore names for the permeating mechanisms of biopolitical inclusion and necropolitical exclusion, value and valuelessness, life and death. This is what Jasbir Puar calls biopolitical “foldings into life” as well as the mechanisms of devaluation and death that underpin the necropolitical state. The Jewish encounter with modernity—marked by extreme forms of both inclusion and exclusion—also offers a powerful case study in which to examine the permeating mechanisms of life and death, as well what Rey Chow calls the global “ascendancy of whiteness” in the modern world. Chow, building from

Foucault's *Order of Things*, argues that the emergence of modern systematized knowledge tied to the scientific objectification of the world—as well as entangled discourses of race, ethnicity, and sexuality—granted some the privilege of subjecthood and excluded others. The Jewish experience of modernity brings attention to the permeating relations between subjecthood and objecthood, biopower and necropower, life and death, whiteness and blackness, inclusion and exclusion. This paradoxical experience shapes a politics and poetics of survival through the mode of the cultural scar.

I approach Jewish cultural scars of the 20th century as a critical register of being marked as valueless life—or the terrorized figure of the ethnic minority—a crisis that continues to haunt transnational Jewish cultural forms long after the scars are no longer as visible. Today, Jewish bodies occupy a place in medical research and education as a consanguineous people with a cluster of specific diseases to be studied, such as Tay-Sachs, as well as conversations about pre-natal screening. Of course there are also plenty of jokes in American popular culture about Jewish illnesses, especially tied to hypochondria and neurosis. Here I trace a deeper cultural legacy. This genealogy of modern Jewish scars charts the emergence of forms of biopower and necropower that target the modern ethnic minority, as well as calls into question the dominant, “settled” logic of citizens and nations.

Trauma and Disability: Breaking Disciplinary Divides

My theoretical framework merges critical trauma and disability studies, which are in conversation around issues of metaphor and embodiment but remain mostly separated by a disciplinary divide. In his now famous essay, James Berger argues that disability

studies, on one hand, has been so closely tied with the disability rights movement that it is unable to consider issues of trauma and loss, which are often closely related to experiences of illness and disability. Trauma studies, on the other hand, often universalizes trauma, preventing attention to the particular injustices or oppressive ideologies that concern disability studies (55). Jewish cultural studies provides a concrete instance in which the merging of trauma and disability studies is essential, speaking to more recent critical turns in both fields, as well as recent convergences between them.

Critical trauma studies mainly draws from 20th century psychoanalytic theories of trauma and related categories—such as depression, melancholia, and mourning—to analyze these diagnostic discourses within larger ideological and historical contexts, as well as approach them as affective registers of oppression and violence. Along these lines, I approach trauma as both a register of catastrophic violence such as war and genocide as well as lived everyday forms of structural violence such as racism, sexism, or neocolonialism. Critical trauma studies also examines the political and cultural work that “trauma” does as a diagnostic category, or what social and political meanings it reveals and unsettles. I build especially from David Eng’s and David Kazanjian’s influential collection *Loss*, in which they approach the violence and loss of the 20th century—from genocide, to racism, to sexual violence—through “what is apprehended by discourses and practices of mourning, melancholia, nostalgia, sadness, trauma, and depression (2).” Through these discourses they define a “modern politics of mourning”—a set of cultural and material practices that can mediate either a hopeless or hopeful relationship to lost histories and histories of loss.

Eng and Kazanjian approach Freud's definition of melancholia, for example—a form of pathological and unending mourning which registers multiple losses at once—as an important framework for a hopeful 20th century politics of mourning. Melancholia, they argue, expresses “an ongoing and open relationship with the past—bringing its ghosts and specters, its flaring and fleeting images, into the present (4).” This creative relationship to loss, they suggest—like Gordon's haunting—works against linear, totalizing views of history and the occlusions of celebratory national forms, activating the past for the hopeful political work of the present. As Eng and Kazanjian insist: “what is lost is known only by what remains of it, by how these remains are produced, read, and sustained (2).” This approach to the politics of history and memory grounds my study of 20th century Jewish culture through a hopeful poetics of mourning and grief.

Disability studies helps to prevent critical trauma studies from romanticizing or valorizing trauma as a universal catch-all term for resistance. A disability lens grounds trauma within diagnostic discourses articulated within specific historical contexts and shaped by intersecting ideologies tied to race, gender, sexuality, class, ability, religion, and so on. Disability studies has traditionally theorized oppressive ideologies that cause metaphors to accrue around disabled bodies, shifting attention from specific bodies or impairments to how disability is created by exclusion. As Lennard Davis writes: “the object of study of disability studies is not the person using the wheelchair or the Deaf person but the set of social, historical, economic, and cultural processes that regulate and control the way we think about and think through the body (*Enforcing* 2).”

My project is especially indebted to the global and postcolonial turn in disability studies. This work expands the frame of disability studies beyond an exclusive focus on

rights and the Euro-American context to bring a necessary analytic of how global power differentials shape disability. Michael Davidson's critical intervention, for example, argues for a rethinking of key terms in a global disability studies, emphasizing the roles of poverty, wealth disparity, and structural violence in the placement and production of disability in situated and globalized political economies. Disability is, as he writes, "as much about national and cultural power differentials as it is a matter of medicine and bodies (*Concerto* 175)." Hence disability is not only a set of oppressive ideologies that enforce "compulsory able-bodiedness" of modern citizen-subjects, but also names—like trauma—the unequal structures of health, safety, and survival in different and uneven globalized contexts.

Following Davidson's intervention, Clare Barker and Stuart Murray similarly revise David Mitchell's and Sharon Snyder's foundational concept of "narrative prosthesis" in a postcolonial framework. Mitchell and Snyder argue that pervasive representations of disability in literature function as narrative "crutches" for other forms of alterity or deviancy, positioning the reader within the category of "normal" national subject that the text constructs and creating narrative closure. In a postcolonial framework, as Barker and Murray write:

Disability metaphors may be meaningful not just as "crutch[es]" (Mitchell and Snyder, 49) in the telling of some 'other' tale of postcolonial experience, but as part of foundational cultural and historical disability narratives; the depiction of scars in narrative accounts of slavery is just one conspicuous example of this. The situated reading practices we are proposing aim to highlight how particular disability experiences can shape cultural histories and are written into artistic and representational practices. Centrally, this involves consideration of what analogies might signify to the (disabled/postcolonial) community they represent and how they function within a particular literary form and cultural logic, rather than the wholesale dismissal of metaphor as damaging, ableist or

stigmatizing. (234)

While Barker and Murray are specifically describing the disabling experiences and cultural practices of the formerly colonized, I adapt this approach to Jewish disability and trauma metaphors in order to trace how various collective traumas central to the Jewish encounter with modernity—from anti-Semitism, to pogroms, to the Nazi genocide, to the reverse role of being in the position of state power—are written into representational practices.

Exploring disability as a postcolonial narrative would also mean investigating how the “particular disability experiences” that shape representational or cultural practices are specifically tied to histories of trauma and loss. As Barker and Murray astutely observe, disability in postcolonial narratives are usually tied to the modern medical category of trauma. This is because, they argue, large-scale western medical interventions often follow major disabling experiences in the colonized world. A critical trauma studies approach adds attention to how such large-scale medical interventions function to contain, normalize, or manage the effects of structural violence through the language of individual pathology. A critical trauma and disability lens works against such containment by exploring the multiple forms of violence and entangled histories that official discourses of trauma—as well as a metaphorical scar or wound in a literary text—expresses.

An Archive of Jewish Maladies: Disability and Trauma as Jewish Cultural Narratives

To trace an archive of Jewish history and memory through literary texts, I again follow Michael Rothberg’s concept of multidirectional memory. Rothberg approaches

memory as capturing simultaneously “the individual, embodied, and lived side *and* the collective, social, and constructed side of our relations to the past (4).” Multidirectional memory refers to cultural discourses in which relatedness and entanglements between different histories of violence are imaginatively articulated, necessarily cutting across genres, national contexts, periods and cultural traditions (18). This is not comparison as equation, for no two histories are alike. Instead, he argues: “... a certain bracketing of empirical history and an openness to the possibility of strange political bedfellows are necessary in order for the imaginative links between different histories and social groups to come into view (18).” Multidirectional memory thus works against the common mode of competitive memory in which different histories of victimization compete for recognition in the public sphere. He shows that multidirectional memory—like the palimpsest and hopeful politics of mourning that Eng and Kazanjian describe, or Gordon’s haunting—are often the ground upon which new visions of justice and solidarity are imagined and acted upon (19).

My project extends multidirectional memory beyond cultural and political discourses in which historical relatedness is explicitly expressed, which are the cases that Rothberg examines. The case of 20th century Jewish culture suggests that overlapping metaphors of trauma and disability—or cultural scars—can also implicitly provide ground for new visions of solidarity and justice. Cultural scars do this by figuring a history of loss in relation to the violence of global modernity, thereby speaking to other scars, wounds, and losses through difference. This study therefore traces an archive of Jewish bodily and historical trauma that produces a hopeful politics of mourning through what Grace Hong and Roderick Ferguson call “strange affinities.” Following the

intersectional analytics of women of color feminism and queer of color critique, strange affinities are alternative modes of analysis and solidarity forged through different and uneven positions tied to race, gender, sexuality, class, religion, nation, ability, and so forth. Cultural scars can create strange affinities by working against exclusivist national histories and identities, or solidarities on the basis of homogeneity. The cultural scar can provide ground for new, strange, inter-cultural, transnational, and oppositional modes of analysis and solidarity, emerging out of and forged through local and global power differentials.

Emphasizing how histories of Jewish difference shape metaphors of trauma and disability in transnational Jewish culture works against what Jonathan Boyarin has outlined as a forgetting of Jewish otherness after World War Two. Boyarin is referring to an absence of Jewishness as a category of analysis within critical theory that can be put in conversation with anti-imperialist, feminist, and postcolonial frameworks (83). Key scholarship on Jewishness, race, and the politics of memory in the 20th century provides support and explanation for a longer global phenomenon of Jewish survival tied to the attainment of “whiteness” and a “forgetting” a history of racial, gender, and sexual difference (Rogin; Brodtkin; Feldman). As I discuss in more detail in chapter three, this is largely through Jewish model minority discourses in the US, and a positioning of Jewishness on the side of state violence and liberal inclusion vis-à-vis US-led Cold War imperialism.

Against this forgetting of difference, I trace a poetics of the Jewish body that remembers racial trauma and loss through cultural scars. Because of racialized differences of “the Jew” within Europe at a moment of crisis, I apply theories of race,

gender and sexuality from other contexts (such as the US) through a historical framework of global modernity. Doing so works to deconstruct the forgetting of Jewish otherness after WWII in particular, which can be situated within a longer global phenomenon of forgetting race since the Enlightenment.⁷ As Lisa Lowe argues:

[...] modern humanism is a formalism that translates the world through an economy of affirmation and forgetting within a regime of desiring freedom. The affirmation of the desire for freedom is so inhabited by the forgetting of its conditions of possibility, that every narrative articulation of freedom is haunted by its burial, by the violence of forgetting. What we know as 'race' or 'gender' are the traces of this modern humanist forgetting. They reside within, and are constitutive of, the modern narrative of freedom, but are neither fully determined by nor exhausted by its ends. (207)

The race and gender hauntings in 20th century Jewish culture reflect the global regime of desiring freedom and forgetting violence. In other words, the case of transnational Jewishness over the course of the 20th century demonstrates a global ascendancy of whiteness and a long modern history of forgetting race.

A long-standing tradition of Jewish memory and mourning is already well-established, including its transformations in the modern period, but without critical attention to issues of race or gender. Yosef Haim Yerushalmi, in his influential *Zakhor*, attributes the survival of the Jewish people to its imperative to remember, reflected by the fact that the verb *zakhar*, to remember, appears in the bible at least 169 times. It was ancient Israel, Yerushalmi observes, that “first assigned a decisive significance to history” (8). Yerushalmi argues that the messianic and metahistorical mode of remembering was dramatically shattered and replaced by modern historiography in the

⁷ I follow Eng's analysis of the global forgetting of race, which he also builds from Lowe, p. 10-12. I follow this move of deconstructing ideologies of racelessness from El-Tayeb, p. xxviii.

wake of the *Haskalah*—the 19th century Jewish Enlightenment in Europe—which has left a “wound,” an emptiness or a void that no sense of modern history can replace.

Yerushalmi concludes his meditation on Jewish memory by putting history and loss into hopeful relation:

Perhaps the time has come to look more closely at ruptures, breaches, breaks, to identify them more precisely, to see how Jews endured them, to understand that not everything of value that existed before a break either salvaged or metamorphosed, but was lost, and that often some of what fell by the wayside can become, through our retrieval, meaningful to us. (101)

David Roskies takes a different but similarly recuperative approach to loss. Rather than attending to ruptures, Roskies argues that since Lamentations, there has been a continuous Jewish textual tradition of responding to catastrophe that ties each catastrophe to the one before and in some ways prepares for each next catastrophe. Through various interpretations of modern events in terms of classical archetypes, Roskies argues that Jewish literature is a tradition consistently written “against the apocalypse,” a tradition of remembrance that is a defiant cry against destruction, either re-asserting or breaking the covenant with God.

I build from these foundational studies and bring a critical trauma and disability lens to a century of rupture, without attempting to recuperate what was lost. I don’t separate history from memory as Yerushalmi does, and the modes of responding to loss that I am tracing are not defiant cries against the apocalypse. Rather, the cultural mode and reading practice of cultural scars is a poetics and politics of bodily contingency that calls the dominant logics of the nation-state, citizenship, and history into question. I more closely follow Jonathan Boyarin’s approach, in which he points to the Jewish relationship

to history—or Jewishness *as* a relationship to history—as part of its critical and oppositional potential. Boyarin writes:

The agenda, for Jews, is largely set by the demands of an impossible balancing act between anamnestic claims of past Jewish generations and the universalist claims of present humanity, since what Judaism has to contribute to the global discussion stems largely from an ancient notion of partial and shared human responsibility for redemption. (104)

Boyarin suggests a definition of Jewish cultural form and practice defined by its relationship to a sense of Jewish history—a relationship marked by impossibility, tensions, and contradictions. This resonates with Gayatri Gopinath’s feminist and queer diasporic reading practices that examine impossible subjecthood. Impossible subjects cannot be imagined within dominant logics of nation or diaspora—her main example being queer diasporic women. Gopinath uses the idea of impossibility to theorize diaspora in a way that doesn’t replicate the dominant heteronormative, patriarchal, or racially pure logic of the nation. Queer diasporas are based instead in inauthenticity, hybridity, and strange affinities. I follow Gopinath in how I conceptualize the poetics of the Jewish scar as a queer diasporic Jewish tradition, one that requires a feminist and queer reading practice. Perhaps this allows a re-reading of the shared, impossible responsibility for global redemption that Boyarin describes as a main quality of queer diasporic Jewishness. This is perhaps reflected in the permeating religious and literary trope of messianic longing—an ancient and defining aspect of Judaism closely tied to loss and mourning—that persists and becomes a critical resource throughout multiple ruptures of Jewish modernity.

An example of the messianic element as a hopeful politics of mourning might be the ubiquity of the Kaddish in modern and contemporary Jewish American literature.

This is the Aramaic prayer for Jewish mourners whose actual text is a song of messianic praise. As Hana Wirth-Nesher shows, this prayer consistently functions as a “recurrent sign of collective memory and Jewish identity, a religious text turned marker of ethnic origin (167).” The prayer is believed to protect the souls of the dead and to guide the mourners through the Jewish rituals of loss. The Kaddish as a form of mourning as well as ethnic or racial marker in the American context points to the possibility of reading literary tropes like the Kaddish alongside the transnational poetics of cultural scars—as critical registers of modernity’s violence through hauntings of race and gender.

I explore the mode of the cultural scar mainly through what I call an archive of hysteria in transnational Jewish literature and culture. As I discussed earlier, hysteria—a turn-of-the-century epidemic of “the womb” or “the woman”—was also associated with the effeminate, eastern male Jew. As Sander Gilman shows, this was the late 19th century moment in which Freud as well other Jewish scientists became preoccupied with hysteria, attempting to locate it outside of their own immutable, degenerate biology and displacing it onto “the woman.”

I approach hysteria as a cultural trope and structure of feeling that counteracts the forgetting of Jewish otherness, particularly as it relates to the erased figure of the Jewish woman. Hysteria is thus a key form that Jewish cultural scars take. Hysteria is an originary category of trauma and medicine, haunting all diagnostic categories (Anderson 46). It also profoundly shaped modern Jewish culture and politics, as I already discussed. Many scholars have noted the absence of women in discourses and scholarship on the modern Jewish body (Boyarin, Itkovitz, and Pellegrini 5-6). I am interested in the figure of the multiply-othered and erased Jewish woman: her role as the disguised hysteric in

Freud's famous case studies, and her enlistment in early Zionist discourses to embrace the virtues of bourgeois motherhood as an antidote to her "mental diseases," in order to make healthier, stronger children for the new nation (Biale 141). The history of medicalized Jewish difference in Europe brings attention to the intersection of race, gender, sexuality, and disease in the making of modern culture, as well as how hysteria becomes a central Jewish cultural and historical narrative, a hidden cultural scar.

The transnational archive of hysteria in 20th century Jewish culture consists of representations of trauma, depression, mourning, melancholia, and grief. This genealogy transmits experiences of oppression, political violence, and difference through a poetics of bodily memory, expressed mainly through diagnostic categories and symptomology, and the feeling of going "a bit crazy." The trope of hysteria operates like Ann Cvetkovitch's definition of trauma, as "affective experience that falls outside of institutionalized or stable forms of identity or politics [that] can form the basis for public culture" (17). I trace the archive of hysteria from its origins in the biopolitical discourses of European modernity—and the role of the Jew's body as sexual and racial other in medicine and psychoanalysis—to its 20th century diasporic continuations in North America and Israel. This genealogy of cultural scars constitutes an archive in which to examine the relationship between Jewishness and modernity's violence, as well as explore the overlaps between medicine and culture, and metaphors of collective trauma and personal trauma.

Chapter Breakdown

Chapter One, “*Dos Mentshele* and the Poetics of Mourning in Transnational Jewish Modernism,” examines the haunting and physically scarred figure of the *mentshele*, the little person, in two major works of modern Yiddish literature: Mendeley Mocher Seforim’s *Dos Kleyne Mentshele* (*The Little Man*) (1864), a founding work of modern Yiddish literature and a product of the *Haskalah* (the Jewish Enlightenment), and Moyshe Leyb Halpern’s *A Nacht* (*A Night*) (1919), a long experimental Yiddish modernist poem written in New York in the wake of WWI. Though situated within different national and historical contexts, the *mentshele* in both examples represents a marginal yet significant figure within Jewish modernism that speaks to larger issues within transnational modernism. Through entangled metaphors of trauma and disability, the ghostly and psychological figure of the *mentshele* functions to express a paradox. Attempts to modernize the Jewish self and body were embedded within the same forms of epistemological violence from which modern Jewish culture sought to emancipate itself. As such, I theorize the *mentshele* as a figure of what Ann Cheng calls racial melancholia, a form of racial grief. A comparative reading of the figure of the *mentshele* with a similarly enigmatic “Little Man” in Djuna Barnes’ high literary modernist novel *Nightwood* (1934) shows that the *mentshele* is tied to the grotesque and carnivalesque modes within transnational modernism. Through these comparisons, I show that the wounded and scarred figure of the *mentshele* exemplifies the mode of cultural scar, expressing a critical history of modernity through a poetics of mourning and racial grief.

Chapter Two, “Monsters with Scars: ‘The Cross’ and Other Avant-Garde Jewish Horror Stories,” is a case study that builds upon the theory of the cultural scar that I

introduce in chapter one. I examine overlapping metaphors of disability and trauma within a larger Jewish modernist terrain of representing pogrom violence. I bridge transnational modernism studies with critical trauma and disability studies to read Lamed Shapiro's canonical pogrom story, "The Cross," through its central metaphor of the scar, in dialogue with Shapiro's other pogrom stories. I build from Walter Benjamin's concept of allegory as fragments assembled from historical ruins, theorizing the Jewish avant-garde as a hopeful political relationship to histories of loss. "The Cross" allegorizes modern Jewish body politics—captured by the emblem of the muscle Jew—as a hopeless relationship to trauma and loss. The scar functions to critique inventions of modern Jewish politics and culture in the image of European forms, offering an alternative poetics and politics of grief.

Chapter Three, "The Poetics of Postwar Survivor Guilt," locates the mode of the cultural scar in the wake of the Holocaust through the pervasive trope of survivor guilt. I argue that since its invention as a controversial psychoanalytic concept specific to survivors of the Nazi genocide, survivor guilt or "survivor syndrome"—architected out of the same psychoanalytic concepts as melancholia—also emerges as a structure of feeling significant to global postwar literature and art. I build mainly from recent work of Michael Rothberg and Keith Feldman, uncovering alternative and non-dominant traditions in which the Holocaust, Jewishness, Israel, and Palestine were thought and felt within the larger context of 20th century postwar imperialism. I approach survivor guilt as one such non-dominant tradition, registering feelings of political complicity with respect to Jewish liberal inclusions within US-led Cold War imperialism and entangled forms of US and Israeli state violence. I first examine the parallel and simultaneous public

controversies around the psychoanalytic discourse of “survivor syndrome” as a form of Freudian melancholy on the one hand, and issues of collusion and guilt in Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963), on the other. I then discuss survivor guilt as a poetic trope in *Green Aquarium* (1953), a series of experimental prose poems written in Israel by the major Yiddish survivor poet of the 20th century, Avraham Sutzkever. The cultural scars of this chapter are directly related to unequal structures of survival and loss, and the guilt therein. All of these cultural texts articulate guilt as a postwar structure of feeling tied to an emerging testimonial and global artistic mode that reckons with the legacies of continuing forms of state violence.

Chapter Four, “Beyond the Intrusive Glare: Hysteria as a Contemporary Jewish Cultural Narrative” locates the trope of hysteria within contemporary culture and politics. I focus on two contemporary novels: North American novelist Aryeh Lev Stelman’s *The Far Euphrates* (1997) and Israeli novelist Orly Castel Bloom’s *Dolly City* (1993). Both novels feature Jewish “nervous illness,” specifically among women, as a post-Holocaust Jewish cultural narrative that works to critique ongoing forms of state violence. Through a nightmarish medical dystopia, *Dolly City* employs hysteria as a literary mode that unsettles the logics of occupation, settler colonialism, and exclusivist national identity in Israel. Hysteria in *The Far Euphrates* similarly functions to articulate a concept of Jewish queer diaspora: a non-nation-based, non-reproductive futurity centered on affinity through difference. Together the two novels represent Jewish hysteria as a cultural scar: a mode of inhabiting bodily impermissibility in relationship to contemporary forms of globalized state power.

A theory of the cultural scar provides a framework for exploring how bodily trauma and historical trauma overlap and intersect in hopeful ways in the spheres of literature and culture. It also contributes to the merging of disability studies and trauma studies through a transnational, postcolonial, and feminist lens. Representational practices shaped by histories of loss are, of course, not always oppositional. Rothberg's notion of competitive memory is one example. Perhaps related to this mode is the common appropriation of loss to support and reify state violence and exclusivist, national identities. Against such dangerous forms of memory, a theory of cultural scarring provides additional tools for interpreting how perhaps more often than not, cultural scars can be read as defiant cries against a multiplicity of modernity's repressed violence that remains in the present.

Chapter One

The *Mentshele* and the Poetics of Mourning in Transnational Jewish Modernism

The politics of race has always spoken in the language of psychology.

(Anne Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race*, 28)

Don't say I if it means so little
Holds the little forming no one.

You are not sick, you are injured—

You ache for the rest of life.

(Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: an American Lyric*, 143)

The figure of the *mentshele* or little person—grotesque, ghostly, and no bigger than a finger—appears over and over again to haunt the margins of canonical works of Jewish as well as transnational modernist thought and literature. The *mentshele* emerges in the wake of the *Haskalah*, the Jewish enlightenment in Europe, as a marginal but significant figure within Yiddish modernism as well as one that speaks to larger issues within transnational modernism. The publication in 1864 of *Dos Kleyne Mentshele* (“The Small Little Person,” commonly translated as “The Little Man”) by Sholem Abramovitsh is generally regarded as the beginning of modern Yiddish literature. From Mendele, to Sigmund Freud, to high literary modernists of the 1920s and 30s, the magical and mischievous little person crosses borders of race and gender and can be read as a homunculus common to many literary traditions—Shakespeare’s Ariel, Rumpelstiltskin, or Tinker Bell to name a few. Who is this homunculus, becoming a figure of racial haunting and grief in the modernist period?

The *mentshele* figure expresses a paradox. The Jewish self and body are embedded within the same forms of epistemological violence from which modern Jewish culture was seeking to emancipate itself. The *mentshele* exemplifies a 20th century poetics of bodily and historical trauma, in which pervasive metaphors of illness and disability are haunted by discourses of racial modernity, uneven structures of survival, and loss. I call this the representational mode of the “cultural scar.” Through images and metaphors of bodies that are injured, scarred, sick, and impaired, modernist Jewish literatures specifically map a crisis around the survival of the ethnic minority in an emerging, nation-based modernity. The figure of the *mentshele* thus situates Jewishness within a global structure of racial modernity, implicitly articulating relatedness to different and uneven histories of loss.

This chapter focuses on the trope of the little person in *Dos Kleyne Mentshele* as well as in *A Nacht (A Night)* (1919), an experimental Yiddish modernist poem written by Moyshe Leyb Halpern in New York in the wake of WWI. A comparative reading of these two *mentsheles* with a similarly enigmatic “Little Man” in Djuna Barnes’ high literary modernist novel *Nightwood* (1934) further shows how Jewish modernism highlights and anticipates grotesque and carnivalesque modes within transnational modernist aesthetics. These comparisons frame how the trope of *mentshele* traces a critical history of modernity through overlapping metaphors of disability and trauma, shaping a transnational Jewish modernist aesthetics.

Modernity, Modernism, and the Jew's Body

Amidst the emergence of late 19th century discourses of racial science and Darwinian eugenics, official discourses of knowledge, such as medicine and psychoanalysis, interpellated the Jewish body as diseased—a locus of racial, gender, and sexual difference (Gilman, *Jew's* and *Freud*). Foucault's foundational theory of modernity as the era of biopower helps to explain this phenomenon. Mechanisms of state power became “addressed to the body, to life, to what causes it to proliferate, to what reinforces the species, its stamina, its ability to dominate, or its capacity for being used (Foucault 269).” Todd Presner defines the Jewish experience of biopolitical modernity as dialectical:

...on the one hand, it [modernity] built upon and disseminated certain universalist values stemming from the Enlightenment; it facilitated the attendant ideals of progress through modernization and the production of a strong, autonomous, rational subject; and it engendered new possibilities of emancipation and freedom, which had a decisively positive effect on the course of Jewish assimilation in Europe. On the other hand, modernity fostered the growth of disciplinary power and surveillance, the fragmentation of the subject, the capacity for destruction and mass death on a scale never before possible, and the creation of ever new ways of constricting freedom and administering social control. (15)

Presner further argues that in this period, the “dialectical underbelly of modernity” became “inscribed on and indissociable from the racialized body (16).”

Presner's notion of modernity's dialectical underbelly complements postcolonial revisions of biopolitics, specifically necropolitics. Necropolitics—a modern politics of devaluation and death—work against Eurocentric definitions of biopolitics that only consider Europe and the United States. Biopower describes the modern state's “right to make live”—the management and control of populations and biological life among its

citizen subjects. Achille Mbembe's concept of necropower expands the theory of state power beyond Europe to include the mechanisms of death and devaluation that were commonly used in the colonies or on slave plantations—examples of the modern state's "right to make die." It follows from merging Presner with Mbembe that biopower and necropower are permeating forms of state power and violence that can operate simultaneously and even in the same place. An example of necropolitics within the newly emerging European nation-states might be the persecution of the modern ethnic minority.

As Aamir Mufti argues, the modern ethnic minority emerges within the dominant logic of nations and citizenship as a "terrorized and terrifying figure," one of modernity's growing political category of moving and moveable people (2). Mufti charts this crisis through the "Jewish Question" of the late 18th century. The crisis around Jewish difference and survival created the mode of representation that I am calling the cultural scar. This is a mode in which a painful history (a "wound") becomes a social and cultural crisis, remaking the identity of a collectivity⁸ and shaping new representational practices in which metaphors of trauma and disability overlap. The *mentshele* is a figure that embodies the paradoxical experience of nominal inclusion, or the permeating relations between biopower and necropower, life and death, whiteness and blackness, sickness and health.

Following critical trauma studies, I approach trauma as both personal and historical; tied to catastrophic violence as well as insidious, everyday forms of violence

⁸ See my introduction for a discussion of Alexander's definition of cultural trauma as a process in which a painful history becomes a social and cultural crisis, remaking the identity of a collectivity.

such as racism, sexism, or colonialism.⁹ Merging trauma with disability studies, disability metaphors become not only ableist or stigmatizing, but tied to central cultural and historical narratives.¹⁰ Cultural scarring is the mode and process through which cultural trauma is figured viscerally, through overlapping metaphors of trauma and disability that are rooted within specific histories of pain and violence. In this way, cultural scarring charts how state violence is mapped onto bodies, thereby shaping new modes of culture.

Within the global context of 20th century aesthetic movements known as modernism, the strain of high literary modernism canonized during the Cold War and centered in the United States and Europe is well known for its lack of racial, class, sexual and gender diversity, as well as its general fear of the “other.” In modernism studies, some attention has been paid to the figure of the Jew, or anti-Semitism as one form that this fear takes.¹¹ Such scholarship has shown that ideologies of racism, eugenics, fascism, misogyny, and anti-Semitism are by no means marginal to modernism, or incidental elements of the historical context. Rather, these emerging global and intersecting ideologies are constitutive of modernist aesthetics.

Since the 1950s, exclusionary and nation-based canons of literary modernism have been challenged and expanded, with the inclusion of a much wider and more diverse group of aesthetic responses to the historical changes of modernity. Part of this was the renegotiation of modernism by the so-called Jewish intellectuals of the 1940s and 50s,

⁹ See my introduction for a fuller discussion of how I am using critical trauma studies.

¹⁰ See my discussion in the introduction on how postcolonial trauma studies reworks the foundational concept of “narrative prosthesis” in disability studies. As Barker and Murray argue, disability metaphors in a postcolonial context can become central cultural and historical narratives, such as scars in the context of slavery. This extends also to the Jewish case.

¹¹ See, for example, Julius, Casillo and Hewitt. See also Harrowitz and Hyams, eds.

such as Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg. By introducing Western readers to Yiddish literature, they began to articulate how literary texts from the margins can challenge the universalizing assumptions of modernity to rethink dominant conceptual and historical narratives. Conceiving of modernism transnationally follows. Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel write that the aim of defining a global modernism is to “collapse the margin and center assumptions embedded in the term *modernism* by conjuring instead a web of twentieth century literary practices, shaped by the circuitry of race, ethnicity, nativism, nationalism, and imperialism in modernity, and by the idea or commodity of ‘modernism’ itself (6).” In other words, defining modernism transnationally means centralizing the constitutive role of biopolitical discourses and practices.

The turn-of-the-century transnational modernist vanguard out of Vienna was especially shaped by medical and cultural discourses about degeneration. Concerned with national health and utopian futurity at the level of the gene, degeneration was a theory of the national and individual body becoming polluted by racial others, sexual others, and disabled people. The avant-garde digested these emerging and so-called biopolitical discourses, which targeted “the body, the species, and life itself as the primary objects of state control, creating a society of ‘normalization’ (Foucault 269).” One book about degeneracy that heavily influenced modernist literary circles and turn-of-the-century science was Otto Weininger’s *Sex and Character*, published in 1903.

Weininger was a Viennese Jewish convert to Protestantism whose bestselling book drew from racial science and psychoanalytic discourses to situate Jewishness and femininity as the degenerate opposite biological qualities to Aryan masculinity. Weininger’s ideas influenced major thinkers of his time: Ludwig Wittgenstein, Karl

Kraus, Elias Canetti, Sigmund Freud, Franz Kafka, Hermann Broch, James Joyce, D.H. Lawrence, and Gertrude Stein. Joyce's Jewish hero of *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom, was created under the influence of Wieninger's idea of the Jewish man as womanly and subhuman, incapable of intellectual or spiritual life, animal, and overly sexual (Harrowitz and Hyams 10). In Wieninger's characterology and theory of sexuality, "Jew" and "woman" are two related and inherently negative aspects of every psyche and culture that must be transcended. At a historical moment when Jews and women were demanding emancipation in the public sphere across Europe and the US, Wieninger's ideas swept through artistic and intellectual circles. The book also dramatically influenced the scientific discourses on Jews and women at the time, particularly shaping Freud's attitudes on sexuality. Freud used Weininger's text and suicide as evidence that Weininger was sexually deranged due to the castration complex, which links women and Jews (Gilman, "Otto," 103). Unsurprisingly, Weininger's work was later appropriated by the Nazis as evidence of Jewish confessions of biological inferiority (Harrowitz and Hyams 10).

Ideas of degeneracy were also built into psychoanalysis. Daniel Paul Schreber's *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, published in 1903—the same year as Wieninger's bestseller—became a key case study for Freud's ideas about bisexuality. The memoir chronicles Schreber's delusions that he was turning from a beautiful, masculine Aryan to an ugly, feminized, and "Wandering Jew." Sander Gilman traces the origins of various elements of Schreber's delusions to scientific and popular discourses on the Jew's body as a locus of disease and difference in turn-of-the-century Germany ("Otto"). Eric Santner builds from Gilman's study to argue that Schreber's memoir tells a "secret

history of modernity,” reflecting a crisis in modern law and society in which the boundaries that constructed “elite” subjecthood, the Aryan man, were beginning to break down (145). These same biopolitical discourses about Jews and disease also significantly shaped Jewish modernisms, as I will discuss vis-à-vis the figure of the *mentshele* and other cultural scars.

Within transnational modernism studies, Jewish modernisms are a moving target because they span national borders and languages. As Allison Schachter argues, the lack of fixed languages or national borders also attracted many of these dislocated and moving writers to the ideas and artistic networks of modernism in the first place. Writing in literary languages that lacked fixed national borders and well-established cultural institutions also shaped their modernist aesthetics (Schachter 7). The mid-19th century invention of a modern, secular, and Jewish culture—out of which Jewish modernisms in Hebrew, Yiddish, and European languages emerged—was a way of remaining Jewish while entering cosmopolitan European culture, a form of “joining the club (Alter 2-3).”

Yiddish modernism is useful for exploring bio/necropower because it is deterritorialized, transnational, feminized, and subordinated within the sexual politics of 19th and 20th century European Jewish culture.¹² Yiddish is also a marker of inherent difference within anti-Semitic and some modern Jewish discourses. Of course, Hebrew and other languages of transnational Jewish literatures also contain these qualities. My central case study is Yiddish modernism in the US because it demonstrates how Jewish

¹² See Seidman’s discussion of the sexual politics of Yiddish and Hebrew. Seidman also shows—especially in her studies of multi-lingual women writers—that Yiddish provided many modernists with “an arena to explore the life of the body”—a bodily, grotesque language—as well as a place for the woman’s body that Hebrew didn’t provide (100).

modernisms perform a transnational unsettling of nation-based approaches to modernist literatures, Jewish modernisms and American literature through attention to intertwined biopolitical discourses of race, gender, sexuality, disability, and trauma.

From the “Little Jew” to Mendele’s Grotesque and Queer Mentshele

Dos Kleyne Mentshele (The Little Man) (1864) introduced *Mendele Mocher Seforim* (Mendele the Book Peddler) to Yiddish readers. The penname and literary persona became synonymous with its creator, Sholem Abramovitsh, the “grandfather” of modern Yiddish literature. Abramovitsh, like all writers who were first inventing modern literatures in Hebrew and Yiddish in the late 19th century, was a proponent of the *Haskalah*, the Jewish Enlightenment. The *Haskalah* began in Prussia in the 1780s, and reached its heights in the Russian Pale of Settlement a century later.¹³ Though the *Haskalah* wasn’t monolithic, its proponents (the *maskilim*) all saw themselves as bridging the external world of non-Jewish European culture with the internal world of Jewish tradition. In an attempt to emancipate and modernize the Jews, the *maskilim* had to address Jewish and non-Jewish audiences, which was a balancing act that laid the groundwork for modern Jewish literature (Dauber 28). However, Abramovitsh’s *Dos Kleyne Mentshele* embodies a shift from reasoned rhetoric in Hebrew, Russian, or

¹³ The Pale of Settlement was a large, transnational territory in the Russian empire where most Jews were required to live by law, from roughly the 1790s to 1917. For more on the history of the Pale, see John Klier in *Pogroms*, p. 3-12.

German to the form of satire and the use of Yiddish, reflecting a political radicalization in the movement's demand for rights.¹⁴

As Dan Miron's literary biography of Abramovitsh argues, *maskilim* like Abramovitsh believed that the purpose of literature was to enlighten the masses, holding a mirror up in order to inspire westernization (4). Up to this point, Yiddish literature was addressed only to women and uneducated men, and therefore was not part of these writers' notion of literature. The first major writers of modern Yiddish literature made their debuts in other languages and used pseudonyms out of shame (Miron, *A Traveler*, 16). The obstacle for a 19th century *maskil*—who wanted to lift his people out of the darkness—was how to overcome what Miron calls the “aesthetics of ugliness.” This was the belief that Yiddish was the expression of the ugliness and “deformity” of the exilic Jewish condition (xvii). To overcome this, Abramovitsh created a performative storytelling persona, *Mendele Mocher Seforim*—Mendele the Bookpeddler—who would mediate between modern, westernized Jews and the “little Jew” of the *shtetl*, the dark feminized Jewish other (xvii). Abramovitsh would even famously talk to his own “little Jew” (*dos kleyne yidele*) whenever he was searching for the right Yiddish word or phrase, like a little muse (Seidman 51).

Abramovitsh's *mentshele*—and even his own “little Jew” muse—can be read as a threshold figure that anticipates the transition from a long history of anti-Jewishness in Europe to a modern anti-Semitism grounded in racial science; from the dark feminized

¹⁴ Dauber discusses this shift transnationally but focuses on the German *Haskalah*. For the specific history of the Eastern European *Haskalah* see Fishman.

Jewish other to Jewish hysteria and degeneracy.¹⁵ The figure of the *mentshele* represents this education in difference in a way that calls upon Anne Cheng's theory of racial melancholia, a form of racial grief. Cheng's concept adapts Freudian melancholia from his 1917 essay "Mourning and Melancholia," where he defines melancholia as pathological mourning.

As many scholars in critical trauma studies have pointed out, the characteristics of Freudian mourning and melancholia are largely blurred and overlapping. The main difference, according to Freud, is that melancholia is pathological because it doesn't end. Rather, it "behaves like an open wound" (319). Another key difference is the presence of pathological guilt due to the ego's turning against itself in response to its loss. The source of this melancholic remorse is a cannibalization or incorporation of the lost object, and a turning of the ego against itself. Instead of withdrawing from the lost object and attaching to a new one (as is the process with mourning), the libido draws back into the ego, creating an identification of the ego with the abandoned or lost object (316). Freud describes this as a kind of haunting—when "the shadow of the object fell upon the ego"—or an ego created out of loss.

Cheng adapts the pathological structure of melancholia into an analytic for theorizing the constitutive role of grief in racial and ethnic subject formation (xi), and the structure of racial oppression itself as melancholic. She theorizes Freud's description of the melancholic ego's pathological eating of and choking on the melancholic object as a

¹⁵ Following Gilman, I use the term anti-Semitism to refer to the racialized discourses on Jewish difference of the late 19th century and beyond, a term that refers to the pseudoscientific dichotomy of "Semite" and "Aryan." Modern anti-Semitism is the secularization of earlier negative Christian constructions of Jewishness, such as the "little Jew."

structure of modern racial domination that describes the complex exclusion-yet-retention of racial others.¹⁶

Applying racial melancholia in the US to a study of transnational modern Jewishness speaks to how the theory can be adapted to compare and theorize different and uneven histories of racialization and difference.¹⁷ Racial melancholia fits the history of Jewishness in Europe and the US particularly well because it draws out the dialectical, permeating relationship between melancholic subject and object, self and other, life and death, whiteness and blackness, assimilation and exclusion. Cheng's idea of racial melancholia as a process, an education, and a form of political domination (17), extends to the Jewish case to theorize racial melancholia as a global structure of biopolitical modernity. The trope of the *mentshele* is a bodily representation of the melancholic structure of the modern self—the racial object that haunts every subject, the little injured “no one” haunting every “I”. Racial melancholia in the figure of the *mentshele* is therefore an example of a cultural scar. Through the *mentshele*, a figure that merges metaphors of trauma and disability, uneven forms of violence and difference come into relation.

Furthermore, Cheng's concept offers a theory of racial grief as a process by which oppression shapes identity, politics and cultural production. As Cheng writes: “Within the reductive notion of ‘internalization’ lies a world of relations that is as much about

¹⁶ Cheng describes a US racial dynamic, but speaks to other contexts, particularly to the history of Jewish racial formation in Europe that haunts Freud's writing. I use “whiteness” and “blackness” to describe a global structure of racial modernity, rather than imposing US terminology on different historical and social contexts.

¹⁷ I build mainly from Sander Gilman's discussion of the Jew's body as a “black” body in Europe, against which a sense of European selfhood and modernity was defined.

surviving grief as embodying it (20).” Without normalizing or romanticizing oppression, her concept suggests that through surviving and embodying grief, racialized subjects produce alternative forms of historical memory, imagine forms of political agency when stripped of it, and make transformative demands for justice. Embodying a world of relations tied to the internalized “little Jew”—a locus of racial and sexual difference in Europe—the *mentshele* reflects a process of Jewish grief at a moment when the *Haskalah* sought to emancipate itself from a history of Jewish difference in order to join the dominant westernized “we.” If racial grief describes how racial oppression shapes subject formation and cultural production, a theory of the cultural scar builds from this to consider how specific histories of bodily injury and violence shape representational practices. The *mentshele* is a figure of racial grief and cultural scarring, in which the crisis around Jewish difference—tied to collective histories of dislocation, violence, and loss, as well as being considered “sick”—remakes identity and the body. This crisis, in other words, produces the figure of the *mentshele*: a melancholic refusal to close or heal into progress narratives of emancipation or assimilation, and a site of critical possibility within the story.

The Yiddish word *mentsh* means, in its most literal sense, a person or man. The diminutive ending of *mentshele* changes the meaning to the gender neutral “little person.” As Seidman argues, the ambiguous gender of the title points to the gender crossings and transgressions tied to the different meanings of the word *mentshele* throughout the story. Its dominant meaning in the world of the *shtetl* and the story is a greedy, parasitical, and exploitative Jewish man who unethically makes his money off the backs of others—another translation of the title is therefore *The Parasite*. The voice of Mendele the

Bookpeddler—with its humorous interruptions and digressions—frames the story by recounting the Rabbi of Glupsk calling an audience to his study to come listen to the last will and testament of a recently deceased rich man of the town named Itzik-Avraham. The frame, as Seidman observes, invites the reader “directly into a political, religious, and textual sphere from which women and the un-educated—the traditional Yiddish audience—are ordinarily barred (48).” This male audience, however, is far from the idealized Jewish male readership of the *Haskalah*, as they are “more concerned with their growling stomachs and hemorrhoids than with the moral issues forced on them in the course of the story (Seidman 48).” These issues are the classic Haskilic ideals and social reforms that concerned men: education, productive labor, and responsible citizenship (49). Embodying these ideals is the genteel and enlightened Gutman (“good man”)—the model audience for a new modern Yiddish literature—who is ostracized by the unenlightened town and eventually disappears, his whereabouts unknown at the end of the story. In this way, as Seidman further observes, Gutman’s disappearance calls the future of a masculine, authoritative Yiddish discourse into question (53).

The written will of Itzik-Avraham constitutes the majority of the story, which explores the other main aspect of the narrative, namely “the difficulties of formulating an authoritative masculine discourse in the ‘kitchen’ language” (Seidman 49). The will begins with an account of Itzik-Avraham’s impoverished and, of course, fatherless childhood. His father died when he was a baby, and the narrative is instigated by an experience with his generally violent and abusive mother. He recalls seeing his reflection in his mother’s eyes and asking, “Tell me, Mama, what sort of little man [*mentshele*] is that in your eyes (6)?” She answers, “That little man is the soul. That little man isn’t in

everyone's eyes, and not in the eyes of animals. It's just in Jewish eyes (7).” [...*ikh bet dikh mame, vos is es far a mentshele bay dir in di oygen? Di mame hat shmeykhl geton un geentfert: narele, dos kleyne mentshele iz di neshome! Dos kleyne mentshele iz nito in keynems oygen, nisht in di oygen fun khayes un beheymes, nor in di yudishe oygen* (16).]

Itzik-Avraham then becomes preoccupied with this little man or little person, and his search for it propels the rest of the narrative. His mother's answer enters him—marking him in a way—and opens up new fresh thoughts [*Der mames doziker entfere iz mir arayn shtark in kop un hot in mir dervekt a sakh frische tsefeldike gedanken* (16).] As he recounts:

I saw the little man in my sleep and dreamed I was playing with him. I held the little man and imagined that I myself was a little man. In short, I thought of nothing but the little man, and I so wanted to be one. It was no small matter—the little man is the soul! I started to think about how to catch the little man. Once I had a clever idea. When mother leaned over to take a pot out of the oven, I ran up from behind her and struck her head with my fist so that the little man would fall out of her eyes. You can guess how many pinches and slaps I earned for that, and then I went without food all day because my poor mother had broken the pot of corn mush with her forehead.

Another time I got into even deeper trouble. I was curious to know whether animals also have souls, so I walked up to a cow on the street. While I was getting ready to stare it in the eyes, the beast tore into me with its horns and gave me a serious injury. The scar on my left cheek is still there. All these blows didn't drive thoughts of the little man out of my head; on the contrary, they roused my curiosity (transl. by Frieden, 7).

In shlof afile hob ikh nisht fargesn dos kleyne mentshele, ikh shpil mikh mit dem kleynem mentshele, shpring in di oygen vi a kleyn mentshele. Haklol dos kleyne mentshele iz mir nit aroys funem zinen. Es hot mir epes zikh geglust oykh tsu zayn a kleyn mentshele. A katoves a kleyn mentshele is dokh di neshome! In gantsn groys vi a payle, dakht zikh a gornisht un iz dokh dos khayes, dos lebn! Mir is aroyf a gedank vi azoy dertapt men dos kleyne mentshele? Un hob ongehoyn vegn dem shtark tsu trakhten.

Eynmol bin ikh gefaln afeyn oyber hasbore. Beshas di mame hot ayngeloygn dem kop aroystsunemen a tepil funem oyven bin ikh plitslim tsunelofn vi a farmishter—ikh veys aleyk nisht vos mit mir iz densmol

geshen—un hob ir fun hinten af gots berote a zets geton mit dem kolak in der patilnitse, kdey dos mentshele zol ir fun di oygen khotsh af a vayle aroyssphringen. Ir kent aych masher zayn vi fl petsh un knip ikh hob derfar geleyzt. A khutz dem hob ikh a gantsn tog nit gegesn, vorim di mame nebikh hot mit ir shtern tsubrokhn dem tepl kolish. Eyn andersmol hob ikh gehapt nokh a gresern posek. S'iz mir arayn in epikursisher gedank in mayn gloybn in der mames verter, un ikh bin tshikave geven aley n tsupriven, mikh tsupshikonen oyb a beheyme hot a mentshele tsi nit. Nu iz mayner tsugegangen af der gas tsu a ki, un beshas ikh hob mir genumen araynkukn ir in di oygen hot zi mikh durs geven mit di herner un shreklikh shtark skalitshet, der tseykhn iz mir take ad hayom af der linker bak gebliben. Di ale klep hobn nisht gar aroysgeshlogen, farkert zey hobn nokh mer in mir arayngeshlogn dem gedank fun a kleyn mensthele. (16-17)

On one level, the boy mistakes his reflection for a magical little person—which his mother then interprets for him as the soul—a possession common to them both. The quest for the “tiny little person” then propels the narrative in all its “linguistic, gendered permutations (Seidman 50).” Seidman reads Itzik-Avraham’s attempt to violently knock the little creature out of his mother’s head as standing in for the attempt to free Yiddish from its feminine origins, and the encounter with the cow as a trans-species rape, attesting to the little person’s grotesque and uncanny property of blurring and reversing gender roles (52). The scar that remains on the boy’s left cheek is the mark of the grotesque *mentshele*—tied to the Yiddish language, and the ugliness and sickness that Abramovitsh saw in Jewish culture and society.

Seidman’s reading of the *mentshele* as grotesque brings attention to issues of racial and sexual degeneration that exist in the shadows of this story. Built within the Yiddish writer’s need to masculinize the feminized *mamaloshn* (mother tongue) of Yiddish is also a need to normalize the “deformed,” subhuman, racially and sexually othered “little Jew.” The title replaces the stereotype of the dark feminized “little Jew”

(*yidele*), with *dos kleyne mentshele*, the small little *person*, reflecting the maskilic attempt to normalize and westernize, or “humanize” the diminished Jewish body and subject. Most significant is the main character’s failure to turn the *mentshele* from his mother’s eyes into a masculine and normalized figure out in the world. Sheltered within the child’s failure to find and become a *mentshele* are more of the story’s critical possibilities.

Itzik-Avraham’s experiences in the *shtetl* along the way are filled with poverty, abuse, and exploitation. The text critiques the *shtetl* environment as an increasingly capitalistic and economically choked one in which very few became wealthy at the expense of many. Itzik-Avraham recounts another moment in his youth when he overhears a wealthy doctor being described as a *mentshele* (a “parasite”) and a *neshama* (literally soul, but also referring to the figure of a “right hand man” to a rich person), and he interprets this literally and decides at that moment that in order to become a *mentshele* he needs to become a wealthy man. The process of becoming a rich *mentshele* diminishes him ethically, spiritually, and physically, and his decline into a real *mentshele*, an exploitative “little Jew,” is contrasted with the ostracized and impoverished intellectual life of the noble and spiritual Gutman, the only person who is kind to Itzik-Avraham and represents the ideal father that Itzik-Avraham never had. The story ends with Itzik-Avraham donating all of his wealth to the local rebbe and Gutman (should they ever find him), to bring reform and education to the town in the form of an enlightened elementary school and a trade school. In addition to leaving the possibility of a properly masculinized Yiddish literature in question, the story poses alternative critical possibilities in the mother’s invented figure of the *mentshele*.

The mother's description of the *mentshele* as the genderless and unmarked Jewish soul—which non-Jews and animals don't have—inverts anti-Semitic constructions of the “little Jew” as dark, feminized, exploitative, parasitical, animal-like, and subhuman. In the invented figure of the *mentshele*, the mother creates a vanishing point for oppressive ideologies that construct Jewishness and an alternative space of modern Jewish subjecthood. The story's only two realized options for becoming modern Jews are the capitalistic and morally bankrupt “little Jew” or the enlightened and ethical Gutman. What possibilities, then, does the *mentshele* embody—the spark of corporeal possibility that never materializes?

As Seidman observes, the *mentshele* is tied to both the Western tradition of the homunculus as well as a Jewish textual figure, “the little *yidele*” (Seidman 51). The *yidele* is based on the associations of the letter *yud*, the smallest letter, with the word for Jew, *yid*, the masculine Jewish body (sometimes the penis), and the Jewish soul as a little point or dot (*dos pintele yid*) (51). Similar to the *yidele*, the homunculus also has to do with the very definition of male personhood. Its origins in scientific and medical discourses of the Renaissance and the Middle Ages, the homunculus originated as a type of automaton often made of human sperm and animal feces, which had no soul, rendering it permissible to be a slave (LaGrandeur). Reading the *mentshele*, the mother's little person, as a critical reflection of the homunculus renders the *mentshele* a grotesque figure with queer possibilities.

In one sense, the homunculus can be read in terms of Bakhtin's well-known definition of the grotesque: combining human and animal traits, belonging to the lower stratum of the body (made of sperm and feces), and signifying the human body in the act

of becoming, the processes of birth and death (Bakhtin 317). The figure can also be read as potentially queer in that it is made from feces and sperm—suggesting anal sex in the Western tradition—and a queering of reproduction. The grotesque, little body that the *mentshele* suggests brings the homunculus together with the *yidele* and the dark feminine “little Jew” and is, like Bakhtin’s grotesque, a source of critique and transformation, a place where low and high, self and other, male and female mix and reverse, and new meanings become possible. The *mentshele*, the Jewish soul in the form of a tiny, genderless, and raceless body, calls upon the grotesque body of the dark, feminized, little Jew. Sheltered within the image of the *mentshele* is the queer, little Jew, a resignified figure of sexual and racial difference.

The imagined *mentshele* of the mother’s vision represents a transformative third possibility that cannot be absorbed by any normative or “settled” categories of modern selfhood. It also functions to unsettle or de-essentialize the story’s construction of modern Jewishness in the form of Gutman. The *mentshele*, then—a conflation of text and body, like the *yidele* (a conflation of the Jewish body and the letter *yud*)—represents the cultural scar of being marked as “the little Jew.” It is a figure housed in the Jewish woman’s body and the related womanly, deformed, sexually other, and racially marked image of “the little Jew.” The *mentshele*, in its refusal to settle or heal, represents a transformative third possibility of racial grief. The *mentshele* therefore haunts and unsettles the project of creating a masculine, authoritative, Yiddish discourse by pointing to its effacements. This is why, at the level of the narrative, Gutman disappears at the end of the story, calling the project of creating an authoritative, masculine, Jewish culture into

question. In the end of the story, only the grotesque *mentshele* remains as an unintegrated mark, a permanent cultural scar.

Abramovitsh's transformation of the homunculus and the *yidele* into the *mentshele* anticipates Freud's invention of the Id a few decades later, in the sense of bringing the racial and sexual other in, or the self becoming the stranger. As Sander Gilman's foundational scholarship on Freud has shown, Freud's ideas were embedded within fin-du-sécle discourses on the male Jew's body as diseased, effeminate, hysterical, sexually perverse, and racially other. Gilman's close analyses of Freud's case studies show how Freud projects "the Jew's" immutable biological difference onto "the woman" and the "Eastern Jew," in order to avoid being the pathological object of his own medical gaze (*Jew's* 208).

We can read the "dark Id"—the feminized realm of race and biological immutability, home of the libido and death drives—as a kind of homunculus, a grotesque germ of the human that remains in infancy. According to Freud's architecture of the psyche, originally everything was Id: it contains "everything inherited, everything present at birth, everything constitutionally determined ("Outline" 2)." The Id, a region which Freud refers to as the "Empire of the Illogical (23)" also contains everything that becomes repressed. The Id is ruled by a corporeal, bodily element; the drives originate "from the bodily organization" and the oral, anal, and phallic phases occur there. It is also the realm of dreaming and all forms of psychosis and disease, maladies associated especially with women. As opposed to the Ego, which can be shaped by the external world and is constantly evolving, the Id is the immutable realm of the "organic past" (60). Reading Abramovitsh's *mentshele* alongside Freud's Id illuminates a common

“shrinking” and psychologizing of a feminized and racialized Jewishness for the sake of normalization, humanization, and masculinization. In both cases, the failure to extricate the dark, feminine other from the self reflects the global melancholic structure of racial domination—the self that is always other, the little injured no one housed in every I. It also represents the mode of the cultural scar, a permanent “sickness” tied to modernity’s violence. The permanent, disruptive mark of the *mentshele* in this way represents a creative, constitutive process of identity and culture similar to what Cheng calls racial grief.

The Id and the *mentshele* can be read as part of the archive of Jewish hysteria—a key form of the Jewish cultural scar. These are psycho-poetic figures outside of normalcy that express a process and poetics of Jewish racial grief.¹⁸ Read alongside Freud’s hystericization of the “woman,” specifically Jewish women (who were most of his case studies), the *mentshele* in the Jewish woman’s eye critically represents and foresees the violent effacements built into the heart of becoming modern vis-à-vis the emerging discourses of biopolitical modernity. For example, as Daniel Boyarin shows, the late 19th century Jewish rejection of diaspora and turn to nationalism in the form of political Zionism was a rejection of femininity as well as the new category of the “homosexual,” both closely linked to racial constructions of the male Jew (“Outing”). The homosexual was thought to possess characteristics of “the two primitives of Europe”—woman and Jew—sickly, effeminate, perverse, and “out of control (78).” This queer reading of the

¹⁸ My argument is not to be confused with Cuddihy’s conflation of Freud’s “Id” with the “*yid*” and his other problematic claims about the manners of the Jews as inherently different. “Id” is the translation of *Es*, which didn’t have that linguistic association for Freud, as Gilman shows in “Cuddihy.”

mentshele also links to other grotesque figures within transnational modernist aesthetics, such as “dwarves,” or actual little people, which are also tied to eugenic ideas about sexuality and anxieties about racial degeneration in this period.¹⁹

Like Julia Kristeva’s concept of the abject, the *mentshele* is unassimilated and made alien to the body and self, rendering it an unsettling and unsettled figure of bodily desire and revulsion. This is related to what modernist scholar James Berger calls disarticulate figures—liminal figures that cannot speak because they exist at the “boundary of the social-symbolic order, or who is imagined to be there, and at that liminal place, there is no adequate terminology (2).” Berger defines the disarticulate as a figure of trauma and disability produced by a modernity conceived as a totalizing system of rational knowledge and language. Whatever falls outside of the notions of the “normal” or knowable is represented as radically other to symbolization. This takes the form of a metaphorical other—the sublime, the bodily, the abject, the traumatic—or socio-political others (the woman, the racial other, colonized, proletarian, the Jew, the queer) (55). Abromovitch’s unassimilated *mentshele* is a proto-example of the modernist disarticulate and the first example in a bodily archive of Jewish hysteria, a key example of the cultural scar. Later examples of the *mentshele* in post-WWI Yiddish modernism show the universalizing narratives of Jewish modernity breaking down into sharp, necropolitical critique. The *mentshele* grows to the size of your little finger and begins to speak back.

¹⁹ See Davidson’s “The Rage of Caliban,” where he discusses the figure of the dwarf in classical and modernist aesthetics and similar alliances between grotesque and queer bodies.

Mourning and the Grotesque: the Mentshele in A Nacht and the Little Man in Nightwood

Though written over a decade apart, at the beginning and the end of the interwar period, the carnivalesque night-world of the *mentshele* puts Moyshe Leyb Halpern's *A Nacht* in conversation with Djuna Barnes' well-known, late modernist novel *Nightwood* (1936). Through the grotesque *mentshele* figure, *A Nacht* significantly precedes and anticipates the carnivalesque modernism of *Nightwood* from the margins of literary culture and from a Jewish perspective. This situates the grotesque and carnivalesque as key modes that negotiate biopolitical discourses in Jewish modernisms in particular as well as transnational modernism in general.

The *mentshele* figure in *A Nacht* anticipates the carnivalesque themes in transnational modernism, offering an example of what Marc Caplan calls peripheral literature. Peripheral literatures are neither defined nor limited by national boundaries and are central to Caplan's theory of global modernism. In peripheral modernism, the modernist critique precedes the self-conscious belletristic response of modernization called Modernism. As he argues: "modernism develops on the periphery in advance of the metropolis because modernism itself occupies a position of peripherality, a 'grievance' that Derrida defines in the dual sense of mourning and protest (13)." A biopolitical approach to modernism extends Caplan's idea of peripherality beyond Yiddish and beyond the 19th century, where he locates it. For Caplan, peripheral modernism in Yiddish ends in the first decades of the 20th century, when these writers became International Modernists who drew from hegemonic trends. When approached through the racialized discourses of global modernity, Jewish modernisms in both the 19th

and 20th centuries share a common mode of mourning and protest. In other words, Jewish modernist texts written in a trauma register, in the personal language of injury, symptoms, and disease, tell a secret history of modernity, a story of mourning and protest.

Jewish modernisms conceived transnationally and through a biopolitical framework are part of what Seth Moglen calls the “modernism of mourning.”²⁰ Moglen argues that unlike the elitist strain of high literary modernism canonized during the Cold War, in which the traumatic injuries of capitalism are projected onto the racialized, sexualized, or gendered other, the modernism of mourning is defined by the “imaginative work of grieving (23).” The modernism of mourning represents a politics of hope because it “represents the ability to acknowledge the depth of one’s loss, to name those aspirations and satisfactions that have been denied, and to imagine how, in some form, they might be dynamically explored and enjoyed in the future (25).” In both *A Nacht* and *Nightwood*, the grotesque is tied to the imaginative work of grieving, bringing different histories and identities into relation.

I begin this discussion with the canonical *Nightwood* as a heuristic device, since the more abundant scholarship on *Nightwood* establishes the groundwork for a discussion of the disability and trauma aspects of the *mentshele* in *A Nacht*. Argued to be an anomalous modernist novel,²¹ *Nightwood* is especially anomalous in its representation of Jewishness in high literary modernism. Rather than adopting anti-Semitic ideas about “the Jew” as womanly and subhuman like many of her contemporary avant-gardists,

²⁰ See dominant affect theory reading of modernism, such as key works by Detloff, Flatley, and Neiland.

²¹ See Marcus and Davidson’s “Pregnant.”

Barnes' novel is, as Jane Marcus foundationally argues, "a study of abjection"—a grotesque, queer, anti-fascist, Rabelaisian circus epic and feminist critique of psychoanalytic discourses on female hysteria. Within the context of the rise of Nazism, Marcus reads *Nightwood* as tracing "the political unconscious of the rise of fascism, as lesbians, blacks, circus people, Jews, and transvestites—outsiders all—*bow down* before Hitler's truly perverted Levitical prescriptions for racial purity (231)." The Jew's body, because of its centrality to ideas of degeneracy and psychoanalysis, figures centrally within the novel's cast of degenerates.

As the counterpart to the Aryan in modern racial science, the Jew's "Semitic" body and blood are central to the novel's discursive world. The novel opens in Vienna during the birth of Felix Volkbein into the discursive world of racialized science and degeneracy. Felix is born to an Aryan mother "of great strength and military beauty" and a father of Italian Jewish descent who tries but doesn't succeed in hiding his "impermissible blood (4)." Felix's birth is described in terms of homelessness and abandonment, an interpellation into the stereotype of the Wandering Jew:

What had formed Felix from the date of his birth to his coming to thirty was unknown to the world, for the step of the wandering Jew is in every son. No matter where and when you meet him you feel that he has come from some place—no matter from what place he has come—some country that he has devoured rather than resided in, some secret land that he has been nourished on but cannot inherit, for the Jew seems to be everywhere from nowhere. (8)

As Joseph Allen Boone argues, the theme of birth as abandonment transforms queerness into an expression of the modern condition: "In Barnes' heretical metaphysics, we are *all* queers, orphans wandering in search of a never-to-be attained home or resting place (238)." Boone's reading of *Nightwood* through a queer studies lens points to the novel's

similar queering of Jewishness, or queering of race and ethnicity, as well as queering of disability, as Michael Davidson argues, in the sense that all are positioned outside of heteronormativity and national, reproductive futurity through the logic of degeneracy.

Davidson's important disability analytic reads the novel within the context of eugenic practices in the Progressive Era, in which racial others, disabled people and "inverts" were

...sterilized, incarcerated or euthanized in the name of racial and psychological purity and national consolidation. If eugenics imagined a future of better babies and healthy families, it also constructed a past to which those deformed and disabled bodies could now be consigned. Thus the 'Old World' could be used to describe both the backwardness of immigrants who refused to relinquish their traditions and those deemed lower (and earlier) on a Social Darwinian evolutionary scale. ("Pregnant" 128)

Davidson further argues that the carnivalesque modernism of *Nightwood* emerges out of the negative futurity assigned to deformed, racialized, queer, and disabled bodies. By mixing discourses and inverting roles, carnivalesque modernism contests the eugenic imagination through an alternative queer futurity, dislocating futurity from the heteronormative nation and family. Davidson's reading of *Nightwood* also helps to locate Jewishness as one of the many identity categories featured in the novel that is entangled with disability and sexual difference, by virtue of being cast as a barrier to a future of better babies and healthier families. As such, carnivalesque modernism brings together different histories and subject positions through queer futurity and social affinity beyond the reproductive nation.

Felix's Jewishness is also queered through trauma, or the melancholic structure of racial grief, in which the racial other is the excluded-yet-retained object. The first chapter

is entitled “Bow Down.” Like his father, Felix invents false Aryan roots for himself and bows down to a lost, ideal European aristocracy. Felix is described as:

...bowing, searching, with quick pendulous movements, for the correct thing to which to pay tribute: the right street, the right café, the right building, the right vista. In restaurants he bowed slightly to anyone who looked as if he might be ‘someone,’ making the bend so imperceptible that the surprised person might think he was merely adjusting his stomach. (9)

Felix’s adoption of the Christian world of Europe is likened to drinking milk from a wet nurse “whose milk was his being but which could never be his birthright” (10). A character at home nowhere and everywhere, defined by his exclusion, he feels at home in the world of circus and the theater, the “beast life” (11), the novel’s Paris underworld of degenerates.

Also central to the carnivalesque modernism of the novel are the performative world of the circus and the novel’s many references to animals (Davidson, “Pregnant,” 136). The character of Dr. O’Connor, for example, functions to instruct the characters in how to “bow down” to difference, the animal nature, and the abjected. In one of the doctor’s monologues, a disarticulate “Little Man” appears.

The Little Man and the Hopeful Poetics of Mourning

In addition to being a modernist, queer, and disability novel, *Nightwood* is also a novel about various kinds of mourning and grief. The novel is based on Barnes’ tumultuous relationship with the sculptor Thelma Wood in 1920s Paris, and is structured around Nora Flood’s loss of her lover Robin Vote. Robin’s betrayal of Nora is told from different angles throughout the novel, disrupting narrative temporality through the use of structural repetition and the replaying of Robin’s betrayal of Nora over and over from

different angles (Boone 240). Through the character of Dr. O'Connor and his verbally excessive monologues, the novel brings together metaphors of personal grief with psychoanalytic discourses about trauma and hysteria, ultimately unsettling and displacing them with a hopeful poetics of mourning.

Dr. O'Connor, a cross-dressing and unlicensed Irish-American medical doctor, is a carnivalesque figure of medicine and psychoanalysis. He is also a figure of mourning. Throughout the novel, as Nora comes to him in her pain over losing Robin, he tells his own stories of abjection and grief from being a soldier in WWI as well as social suffering caused by his impermissible desires. He speaks the destabilizing and unsettled language of trauma, as that which falls outside of stable identities and truth. As the doctor puts it: "I talk too much because I have been made so miserable by what you are keeping hushed (129)." His monologues destabilize official truth discourses, and as Davidson argues, are "a textual equivalent of the nontraditional body, the circus freak, and the mentally ill patient who cannot be assimilated into normative models of health, growth and the statistical average ("Pregnant" 215)." In the monologues, the Little Man appears as a marginal but significant figure that functions to disrupt the modern medical sciences that aim to rationalize and organize bodies.

In one key comical scene that parodies psychoanalysis, the doctor and Felix visit a passed out Robin Vote in her apartment. The scene brings together the main subjects and objects of psychoanalysis: the doctor, the female "invert," and the Jewish man. In this scene, Dr. O'Connor discusses the role of the doctor, referring twice to a "Little Man":

He closes one eye, the eye that he studied with, and putting his fingers on the arteries of the body says, 'God, whose roadway this is, has given me permission to travel on it also,' which heaven help the patient, is true; in

this manner he comes on great cures, and sometimes upon that road is disconcerted by that ‘Little Man.’ (32)

The doctor adds: “No man needs curing of his individual sickness, his universal malady is what he should look to (32).” Echoing the social model of disability, in which disability is constructed through social exclusion and structures of oppression, the doctor draws attention to the entangled biopolitical discourses that create the “sickness” of the Jew, the hysteric, the African, or the invert. Felix says that this “sounds like dogma,” and the doctor replies: “Does it? Well, when you see that Little Man you know you will be shouldered from the path (32).” Here the Little Man, addressed to Felix the Jew, is a truth-destabilizer and figure of conscience. Similar to the mother’s act of imagining the *mentshele* in *Dos Kleyne Mentshele*, the doctor imagines the Little Man as a discursive bodily figure and vanishing point for oppressive bodily discourses.

The figure of the Little Man in the context of this satiric psychoanalytic scene evokes the “Little Jew,” but more obviously it carries the many associations of the penis in psychoanalysis: specifically the circumcised (or “castrated”) penis that connects Jews and women in Freudian psychoanalysis, linking both to hysteria through the castration complex. As such, the Little Man of the doctor’s monologue functions to unsettle psychoanalytic descriptions of “healthy,” “normal” sexual and gender development, creating affinity between those excluded from it.

As other critics point out, the doctor’s textually excessive monologues stand out against the seemingly baroque and ornamental narrative style of the rest of the text. In the mode of the grotesque, as Davidson writes, the monologues

shatter stable identities, merging scatological and theological rhetoric, vernacular and dynastic culture, ornate metaphors and performative

denunciations. Such linguistic mixing is a textual version of the racial and sexual ambiguity that threatened the interwar European bourgeoisie. (“Pregnant” 215)

The Jew’s body—marked by this racial and sexual ambiguity— therefore plays a central role in the doctor’s monologues as well as the novel. By “bowing down” to such differences, the doctor’s monologues are an example of a modernist grotesque of mourning. As the doctor tells Felix: “A man is whole only when he takes into account his shadow as well as himself—and what is a man’s shadow but his prostrate astonishment (101)?” To bow down to the abject is to claim the melancholic other, the shadow of selfhood, transforming the autonomous rational subject of modernity with a new idea of what it means to be whole. The doctor, who refers to himself as the “god of darkness” (106) and whose favorite topic is the night (70), turns abjection into astonishment through the hopeful work of mourning. The doctor’s metaphors of the Little Man and “man’s shadow” also point to the connection with the *mentshele* as a proto-modernist figure, a psycho-poetic shadow to an emerging modernity and its authoritative (white Christian masculine) subject.

The doctor’s monologues are hopeful acts of mourning because they imagine a world in which the excluded can live full and satisfying lives. The bodily analogies within the monologues are grotesque image-metaphors that mix and destabilize identities. In one key passage the doctor says:

There’s something missing and whole about the Baron Felix—damned from the waist up, which reminds me of Mademoiselle Basquette who was damned from the waist down, a girl without legs, built like a medieval abuse. (22)

Felix is “missing and whole” because he is a Jew “turning Christian,” both the performance of Aryan European selfhood and its racialized Semitic shadow. James Berger argues that the novel’s rhetoric of analogy “exposes the gap between the material-biological-nonlinguistic and any form of linguistic articulation (99).” The analogy between Felix and Mme. Basquette exposes the gap between the “normal” subject (for which Felix can almost pass, as a Jew-turning-Christian) and its differently abjected others: “a body that is, and a body that damns (22).”

Berger calls this form of bodily analogy the novel’s discourse of bio-logos, in which “...the bodily, organic realm seems to have the most powerful urge, impelled by the suffering experienced by the conscious subject, to achieve representation (96).” In other words, social suffering or the traumas of abjection and bodily difference produce the grotesque aesthetic, a mode of representing suffering through the bodily organic realm. The Little Man and the *mentshele* constitute a trope within the larger modernist obsession with the grotesque, rooting the grotesque in trauma and mourning. The grotesque is therefore a mode in transnational modernist aesthetics that is closely tied to the cultural scars that I am tracing in 20th century Jewish literature, through figures like the *mentshele*.

The doctor continues the story of a sailor seeing the legless Mme. Basquette and “falling in love with her,” leading him to abduct her and rape her until he gets tired of her and abandons her far from the town,

...so she had to roll herself back again, weeping something fearful to see, because one is accustomed to see tears falling down to the feet. Ah truly, a pine board may come up to the chin of a woman and still she will find reason to weep. I tell you, Madame, if one gave birth to a heart on a plate, it would say ‘Love’ and twitch like the lopped leg of a frog. (23)

The last line about giving birth to a heart on a plate works against the pejorative description of Mme. Basquette that precedes it. As Davidson points out, the analogy brings together Felix's vulnerability as a Jew with Mme. Basquette's vulnerability as a disabled woman, and the image of a heart lopping on a plate is an image of enduring affect (139). Through a melancholic image-metaphor of enduring affect, or trauma, the analogy brings "the Jew" and "the woman"—linked through degeneracy—together through difference.

The heart organ is a bio-logos of mourning throughout the novel, representing the suffering of abjection and exclusion made bodily and survived. Tied to the eugenic imagination, common modernist portrayals of abject and dismembered bodies represent a lost purity and bodily integrity in a dystopian world. In *Nightwood*, however, the dark and bloody bodily matter becomes a language for social and political critique. This aspect of the novel connects *Nightwood* to *A Nacht* through disability and trauma, specifically through the grotesque. In the modernism of mourning, grotesque bodily matter represents the permeating relations between life and death, value and valuelessness. As Nora says to the doctor: "You know what none of us know until we have died. You were dead in the beginning (125)." The doctor also describes his own process of abjection as death: "every lie how it went down into my belly and built a nest to hatch me to my death there..." (129). Out of social death, the doctor—as cross-dressing god/dess of the night world—performs the imaginative work of mourning: "I began to mourn for my spirit, and the spirits of all people that cast a shadow a long way beyond what they are; and for the beasts that walk out of the darkness alone I began to wail (88)..."

The bodily grotesque—the Little Man, the weeping disabled Mme. Basquette, the little Jew, the little heart twitching on a plate like a frog’s leg, the beasts walking in the night—all constitute a counterdiscourse to biopolitical futurity through mourning. Through the figure of the *mentshele* in *A Nacht*, Jewish modernism registers this carnivalesque modernism of mourning from the position of the persecuted ethnic minority. Whereas Barnes’ Little Man is an epistemological figure that unsettles and critiques the discourses of psychoanalysis and eugenics, the trope of the *mentshele* is an example of a Jewish cultural scar, a bodily and historical trauma that leaves a permanent mark and remakes culture through grief.

A Nacht and the Mentshele

Moyshe Leyb Halpern was one of the central figures of *Di Yunge* (The Youth), the first major Yiddish modernist movement in America. He was born in the *shtetl* of Zlotchev, Galicia, to a maskilic family in 1886. After spending ten formative years in Vienna, where he began writing poetry in German, he returned to his hometown and to writing in Yiddish. He left for New York in 1908, when he was 33 years old, in order to avoid being drafted into the Austrian army. He published his first book of Yiddish poems, *In Niu York*, in 1919. As Katherine Hellerstein points out, his poetry “establishes a new kind of narrative in Yiddish,” combining folk conventions of Yiddish poetry with what he knew of American poetry, especially the personal voice and epic of Walt Whitman (xiii). Overall, the five parts of *In Niu York* constitute a jagged modernist depiction of the immigrant Jew’s disillusionment and alienation in America, using traditional verse forms. The fifth part is a long, nightmarish trauma narrative, written in response to WWI, called

A Nacht. He first published it in 1916 in 21 parts and then again in 25 parts in *In Niu York*.

Although 20th century Jewish writers were no longer peripheral to the metropolis and hegemonic Modernist trends, they were still peripheral to the linguistic, cultural, and bodily norms of modernity vis-à-vis issues of nationhood, language, religion, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and citizenship. In *A Nacht*, Halpern translates the *yiddele* and Mendeley's *mentshele* into modernity and the US metropolis, where it becomes a shadowy, grotesque, sickly, and dislocated pogrom survivor. In the wake of intermittent outbreaks of pogrom violence and WWI, Halpern's *mentshele* is a figure that transmits the traumatic, transnational history of Eastern European Jews. The *mentshele* is a grotesque and carnivalesque figure that reverses dominant meanings and cultural hierarchies of modern Jewish culture rooted in the *Haskalah*. Through the grotesque circus figure of the *mentshele*, *A Nacht* can be read as a modernist disability and trauma poem and part of a critical Jewish counterdiscourse to bio/necropolitical modernity. Though Mbembe locates necropolitical power in the colony or slavery, *A Nacht* locates necropolitics also within the context of modernity's transnational ethnic minorities, modernity's moving and moveable people.²²

A Nacht is written in a trauma register. The dreamer/speaker records fragments of nightmare and vision during the night. Hellerstein describes the *mentshele* as the master of ceremonies of the night-world of the poet's unconscious, a diminished survivor-part of

²² See Mufti on the crisis around the modern ethnic minority within the logic of modern and postcolonial secularism. He argues that these "terrorized and terrifying figures" (2) of modern ethnic minorities signal the crisis around the growing political category of modernity's moving and moveable people.

the self who speaks, cries, and presents dream-like images and narrative fragments (xxiii). Halpern's *mentshele* is a carnivalesque figure who constantly changes costumes, mocks, performs, exaggerates, caricatures, and brings together high and low, sacred and profane. The narrative fragments and dream images that the *mentshele* presents revolve around the traumatic event of a pogrom. The poem's first stanza opens with scenes of personal and historical trauma that interweave throughout. The opening stanzas depict non-linear and non-referential histories, vaguely referring to the entangled histories and messianic theologies of Jews and Christians in Europe, and a history of Jewish difference and political persecution, especially captured by the horror of pogroms.

The second stanza describes the dreamer caught inside of a strange house (*fremd hoyz*) at midnight, which bursts into flames. He cries and no one hears him, and all of the doors are locked. From here on, the houses in which the dreamer finds himself are always this strange house, a zone of liminality, homelessness, and loss. He jumps out of the fire deathly-ill (or dying-sick, *gsiseh-krank*). Suddenly he is in an apocalyptic version of Eastern Europe with masses of people chasing him, until lightning splits the earth in two. Out of this landscape of personal and collective trauma, the *mentshele* appears as the only survivor:

Through fire and blood. To be saved, or to burn?
Why do you lie here, tossing and turning?

Only a little man survives,
Poor and sick and finger-sized.

What does the little man do all by himself?
He plays with fire, blood and grief. (transl. by Hellerstein, xxi)

Durkh fayer un blut. Tsu derleyzung, tsu strof?

Vos trakhstu? Vos roybstu aleyh zikh dem shlof?

Gebliken iz lebn a mentshele bloyz,

An orems, a kranks, vi a finger di groyz.

Vos tut aza mentshele eyner aleyh?

Es shpilt zikh mit fayer, mit blut un geveyn. (Halpern 187)

Here the *mentshele* is a melancholic figure: sick, bloody, poor, grieving. He is situated within anti-Semitic tropes of the sickly little Jew, but refigured as a part-referential, part-ghostly, part-magical pogrom survivor. Unlike Halpern's 19th century literary predecessors, who sought to eradicate and uplift the "little Jew" from the position of the westernized and humanized *we*, Halpern mourns and protests a modernity that created *us*—the traumatized and sick little Jews to begin with.

Halpern's dream-like representation of pogrom trauma situates him within the transnational Jewish modernist tradition that, beginning with Bialik, graphically represents the horrors of pogroms to create outrage and to call for the Jewish people to emancipate and modernize themselves. Halpern's use of the pogrom theme as well the central role of crucifixion as a Jewish bodily trauma connect his work to other early 20th century Yiddish modernists such as Peretz Markish and Uri Tzvi Greenberg. They belong to a subgenre of Yiddish modernism identified by Matthew Hoffman that features Jesus and the cross after WWI and the Russian revolution. Hoffman as well as Avraham Novershtern point to the themes of apocalypse and messianism in *A Nacht*, and how personal and collective merge through the recurring crucifixion of the poet and the people. Unlike other well-known pogrom poems, Halpern's oeuvre suggests no settled or emancipatory solutions to the crisis of Jewish modernity, such as socialism or Zionism. Instead, *A Nacht* offers a politics of mourning and grief as a basis for an alternative

modern Jewish culture and politics. The poem remakes emancipatory narratives of modern Jewish culture through the grotesque *mentshele*—a figure of disability and trauma—particularly centering on the melancholic feeling of guilt.

Guilt is an expression of racial melancholia in *A Nacht* that unsettles narratives of progress and emancipation. In section VIII, the *mentshele* presents an image of the poet's father hanging from a tree, and tells the poet that according to the poet's desire or will (*bager*) his father will remain there, forever dead and hanging. The *mentshele* asks the poet twice: "Who is to blame for your pain (trans. by Hellerstein, 127)?" Or, "who is guilty for your pain [*ver iz shuldik in dayn payn?*] (Halpern 191-2)?" The section of the poem that follows deals with the issue of the speaker's feeling of guilt over his father's death by pogrom hanging. Why guilt? The poet's leaving of the violent landscape of traditional Eastern European Jewish life for the modern metropolis are equated with wanting to see his father hang, or complicity in his father's death at the hands of the Christian pogrom mob. His guilt therefore expresses a paradox in which becoming modern means participating in the murder of the traditional Jewish world, as well as the devaluation and killing of Jewish bodies.

In the same stanza, he remembers his father as sick, coughing, and yellow.

Traumatic history becomes part of the poet's body as sickness:

It seems to me that I'm sick,
sick and yellow as he is.
And my head is already gray. (trans. by Hellerstein, 127)

...*dakht zikh mir az ikh bin krank.*
Krank un gel, vi er azoy,
Un mayn kop is oykh shoyn groy. (193)

Feelings of sickness and guilt about leaving the “old world” behind express the immigrant-survivor’s loss. The survivor’s guilt is represented by another scene in this stanza in which the poet is chased and tormented by bloody corpses of dead Jews carrying red flags and blue and white flags—representing socialism and Zionism, two major emancipatory movements for European Jews. Rather than solutions for the crisis of modernity, socialism and Zionism are depicted as part of the violent landscape that the poet leaves. The guilt of the survivor about leaving—for not choosing to stay and die alongside his father or die fighting for emancipation—is a structure of feeling that expresses the paradox of Jewish modernity. In order to survive, Jewish culture has to participate in the same violence that created the crisis of Jewishness to begin with, symbolized by the group of Jewish Zionists and Socialists behaving like a pogrom mob. The other option for survival is to leave, which finishes off the murder of the Jewish world.

Out of this paradox, the *mentshele* emerges as an unsettled and unsettling figure of mourning. In section XVI, the *mentshele* is dressed as a Christian preacher and gives a mock sermon on the mount. In his speech, Jewish, Christian, and modern history are turned upside-down and replaced with Jewish trauma history, represented by the pogrom. His speech begins with a play on Jesus’ sermon on the mount:

An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.
 And once they’ve burned your bed and your roof,
 Go wail by the doorstep like a dog on guard.
 Worms eat earth. Birds eat worms.
 So, dog, grab a bird in the snow
 Hopping on frozen feet and wings
 And divide it with your brother, piece by piece.
 And if he has no hands, chop
 An arm from your shoulder and hand it to him.

And if your sister bore a bastard,
 Shout that the soldier's name is "Holy Spirit,"
 And that the bastard is a god-to-be
 Who, like Jesus, brings us only love and mercy (trans. by Hellerstein,
 135).

*An oyg far an oyg un a tson far a tson.
 Un hot men farbrent dir dos bet un dem dakh,
 Iz—voye baym shvel, vi a hunt oyf der vakh.
 Di erd fresn verem. Der foygl frest zey.
 To cap zhe, du hunt, dir, a foygl in shney,
 Vos shpringt mit gefroyrene fligl un fis
 Un teyl mit dayn bruder, a bis nokh a bis.
 Un hot er keyn hent nit—a hagt hak arop
 Fun eiygenem aksel, un gib zi im op.
 Un hot oykh dayn shvester a mamzer gehat,—
 Du shray az es heyst "shviente dukh" der soldat.
 Un as s'iz der mamzer a kumender got,
 Vos brengt undz, vi yezus, bloyz libe un gnod. (202)*

Satirical images of post-pogrom trauma and disability signify an altered Jewish futurity—
 captured by the brother without hands and the sister's pregnancy from being raped by a
 Russian soldier. The poem addresses a masculine "dog," figuring the masculine audience
 of modern Yiddish literature by conjuring the anti-Semitic trope of the "Jew-dog." The
 mocking, grotesque images critique the racialized mechanisms of the necropolitical state.

The poem continues:

And if they don't believe you, take the cross from your heart
 And also take the prayer shawl—half white and half black—
 And place them together and spit on them both.
 And then order all the flags brought to you
 And braid them all together in a rope
 And hang yourself at your father's side,
 And with him swing back and forth
 Until the rope rots through,
 Until a gentile buries you two
 In the ground with his dead horse. (transl. by Hellerstein, 135)

*Un gloybt men dir nit—nem dem tsyelem fun hartz,
 Un nem oykh dem talis halb vays un halb shvartz,*

*Un leyg zey tsuzamen un shpey oyf zey on.
 Un dan heys dir brengen a fon nokh a fon,
 Un flekht fun zey ale a shtrik dir tsunoif,
 Un heng bay der zayt fun dayn tatn zikh oyf,
 Un hoyde mit im zikh ahin un tsurik
 Azoy biz s'et durkhgefoylt vern der shtrik,
 Azoy biz a goy vet aykh beydn in dr'erd
 Bagrobn mit zayns a gepeygertn ferd. (202)*

Here the *mentshele* tells the poet to reject religious and national categories, instructing the Jew to hang himself by the rope made of national flags next to his murdered father. The image of hanging by all of the national flags represents the necropolitical “right to make die,” targeting stateless and valueless bodies. Perhaps even the black and white colors of the *talles* (prayer shawl) take on racial meanings. Rather than images of Jews proudly carrying flags and becoming emancipated and assimilated citizens, the *mentshele* captures and mourns the trauma of the transnational ethnic minority.

Throughout the poem, exaggerated, caricatured, and grotesque images of post-pogrom trauma repeat: women with feathers spilling out of their bellies, bloody heads beaten with hammers, and severed body parts. In stanza XX, the *mentshele*, as a reflection of the dreamer, appears on crutches, bloody, his head bandaged. The description is one of flesh and bone, and ends with “every nerve” of the dreamer crying (Halpern, stanza xviii). The metaphorical crying of Jewish nerves signals the Jewish grotesque as a critical discourse and the mode of the cultural scar. Such images represent mourning as the basis of a new, modern Jewish culture and identity. The crying Jewish nerve—another image of enduring bodily affect—is a metaphor that opposes discourses of “nervous illness” linking Jews and women through degeneracy and “sexual excess.”

The poem also remakes Christian and Jewish narratives to critique the modern state, showing that both traditions are now irreversibly imbricated in modernity's violence. In a nightmarish revision of the Torah, the dreamer is stripped naked and taken, like the biblical Joseph, to a Pharaoh-like king. The king is described as endlessly violent: beating slaves, cutting out the heart of a naked slave-woman and then sucking the blood dry. The violent slavery images and tree hangings resonate with African American lynchings and suggest that Halpern may have been analogizing the two histories. Amelia Glaser shows that this is certainly the case in leftist Yiddish poetry a decade later, in the 1930s, where common tropes of crucifixion when describing pogroms were re-circulated to describe anti-black violence in the United States. As she argues, this move of replacing Jewish with African American crucifixion reflects a moment of leftist universalism around issues of racial injustice in the U.S. as well as the awareness among Yiddish writers of their growing privilege but still alienated status from white America (62). Halpern's *mentshele* perhaps constitutes an early glimmer of this form of solidarity through difference, in which the psycho-poetic landscape of Eastern Europe becomes part of a palimpsest of loss and racial violence in America.

The next stanzas follow the dreamer through a violent narrative that weaves Jewish and Christian biblical imagery. The dreamer reaches the Promised Land, where the people turn him into a king and a Jesus-figure, and then use him as a symbol to create more violence and bloodshed. The king wanders in the desert—starving, alone, homeless, delirious—again in the space of a “strange house.” The playful, almost childlike repetition of “hololo, hololo, king in a raven crown” (*hololo, hololo, manspershoyn, / kenig in a raven kroyn*) (Halpern 218), and the switching between first, second, and

third person pronouns, add to the sense of delirium. In the next stanza, seven naked women with coal-black faces crawl out of the earth and cut the king's heart into seven pieces. The number seven stands in for Jewish tradition throughout the poem, and the black Jewish femininity of the seven women exists in contrast to the description of the king as a Jewish-Christian *manspershoyn*, manly person. The scene of the seven coal-faced women emerging from the ground and playfully cutting his heart into pieces are part of the archive of Jewish hysteria— along with the sickly *mentshele* and crying Jewish nerves—and the mode of the cultural scar. The seven abject women with black faces who devour the king's body represent a racialized and feminized trauma history—the shadow of a masculinized Jewish modernity turning toward Christianity and the West.

The symbol of the flag is increasingly important in the final stanzas of the poem, becoming tied to an oppositional politics and poetics of the grotesque non-normative body. Stanza XXIII is a post-trauma scene in which the dreamer sees the names of his family and his own name on gravestones in a diminished and emptied-out world of the *shtetl*, where the poet equates Jewish life with Jewish death. Here a strange celebration occurs in which the image repeats of dancing little people carrying flags. The little people [*karliklech* or “dwarves”] grow from the ground with flags, then spin around and sing (Halpern 221). Here, disability—in the form of actual little people—figures into the Jewish poetics of the grotesque, non-normative body.

On one level, disability functions as a “narrative prosthesis” in David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder's foundational sense, in which stigmatizing metaphors accrue and reflect ideologies of normalization. At the same time, disability is also a central Jewish cultural

narrative tied to a history of Jewish difference and exclusion. Unlike narrative prosthesis—which puts the reader in the position of rational and normal body—the non-normative bodies of *A Nacht* are doing the opposite work of de-rationalizing or de-constructing a rationalizing modern Jewish culture and readership.

The two stanzas that end the poem are movements out of the dark, bloody political landscape of Europe and toward the United States. The poem’s speaker ends up in the “strange house” of nowhere again, buried alive, and silent. The final stanza depicts the trains and ships of modernity and a masculine diasporic Jewish culture that silences the poet’s grief and forgets the trauma of Europe:

Through the world the trains
Will race ahead of dawns.
Ships will carry sons
Overseas to fathers.

I’ll toy with a great ship
Burning on blood-red waters,
A ship that’s destined never
To land on any shore. (155)

*Durkh di velt di banen veln
Far dem tog faroys zikh yogn.
Shipn veln iber yamim
Zin tsu ayere tates trogn.*

*Ikh vet oyf a blut-yam brenen,
Un vet mer shoyn keynmol, keynmol
Tsu keyn breg nit kumen kenen. (224)*

The migrating sons and fathers in the world of trains, ships, and modernity exist in contrast to the poet’s traumatic, transnational history—captured by the image of a boat forever burning in bloody waters. The poem ends:

Raise me up when I am dead
And tie me high upon a horse;

In death, in life, an isolate,
 Let no one follow in the march
 Let me step by step, alone,
 Disintegrate on grass and stone.
 And you, who fruitlessly near me
 Spent your life, annihilate
 The final signs of what is not.
 It should seem that a dream of fear
 That was, is gone. I disappear
 In death. In life I was never here. (155)

*Ven ikh vel toyt zayn heyb mikh oyf
 Un bind mikh oyf a ferd aroyf,
 Un loz azoy mikh toyterheyt
 Fun keynem nit in veg bagleyt.
 Biz ikh vel trit bay trit aleyh
 Tsefaln zikh oyf groz un shteyn.
 Un du, vos du host opgevist
 Dayn lebn lebn mir umzist,
 Fartilik dem letstn tseykhn do
 Fun dem, vos iz shoyh mer nishto.
 Zol zayn, az bloyz a troym a shrek
 Iz do geven un iz avek
 Mikh hot do keyner nit gezen
 Ikh bin do keynmol nit geven. (224)*

The poet ends outside of the dream, as a person who never was. The “you” who fruitlessly spends their life near the poet is also unspecified, an annihilated “no one.” He likens his existence to a “dream of fear.” Bodily and historical trauma are the conditions for the modern Jewish writer’s impossibility. The disabled, diminished, sub-human, or animal-like Jewish body—in the form of the grotesque circus-figure of the *mentshele*—is the haunting muse of the modern Yiddish poet, and the bodily register in which this traumatic history is transmitted and remembered.

The grotesque *mentshele*, injured and diminished, is a key trope in an archive of Jewish hysteria, an example of a cultural scar. This archive consists of figures outside of physical and cognitive “normalcy,” creating a sense of narrative openness, and

constituting a poetics of sickly, effeminate, disabled, queer, and hysterical Jewish bodies. These metaphors of trauma and disability are the registers of meaning through which the crisis of being an ethnic minority in an emerging globalized and necropolitical modernity is critically expressed.

Chapter Two

Monsters with Scars: “The Cross” and Other Avant-Garde Jewish Horror Stories

You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you.

(Leviticus, 19:27-28)

This chapter further examines how disability and trauma become cultural narratives within transnational Jewish modernism, specifically through representations of pogrom violence. I build from my discussion in chapter one of the grotesque *mentshele* (“little person”) in Moyshe Leyb Halpern’s *A Nacht* (1919). Halpern’s *mentshele*—a ghostly, wounded, sickly, and gender-crossing pogrom survivor the size of a little finger—is a figure that haunts the margins of 20th century Jewish literature and culture. The *mentshele* embodies the mournful metaphorical mode of the cultural scar, in which histories of trauma and disability become central cultural and historical narratives.²³ Here I examine a cultural counterpart to the hopeful figure of the *mentshele* in the form of a monster, from the canonical Yiddish modernist story “The Cross” (1909) by Lamed Shapiro. Through the central metaphor of the scar, Shapiro’s monster—the terrifying “iron man” born out of the trauma of a pogrom—allegorizes the dangers of cultural scarring. More specifically, the story critiques a hopeless relationship to the past through the invention of a modern, secular Jewish culture and politics in the image of modern European forms.

My framework merges transnational modernism studies, critical trauma studies, and disability studies to re-read Shapiro’s “The Cross” in dialogue with his other pogrom

²³ See my discussions of the cultural scar in the introduction and chapter one.

stories, as allegories centering on the politics of memory and shaped by modern discourses of race, sexuality, and nationhood. Assembled from the ruins of the Jewish encounter with modernity and captured by the violent history of pogroms, “The Cross” allegorizes and critiques modern Jewish movements embedded within the same racialized discourses of power from which, as a terrorized ethnic minority, it sought to emancipate itself. The story’s central metaphor of the scar is part of a 20th century poetics of Jewish disability and trauma—a archive of cultural scars—which, as I trace in chapter one, goes back to the interpellation of the Jew’s body as diseased, a racial and sexual other against which an emerging sense of European modernity was created and defined.²⁴ The scar therefore shelters this figure of the sickly “little Jew” within it, as well as its turn-of-the-century antidote, known as the modern “muscle Jew.”

Monsters, New Jews, and Men of Iron

Levi Joshua Shapiro (1878-1948), who became known as the writer Lamed (the Hebrew letter “L”) Shapiro, was born in the Ukrainian *shtetl* of Rzhishchev, 63 km southeast of Kiev, in the Russian Pale of Settlement. He immigrated to the US with his mother in 1905 because of economic difficulties, in a wave of mass Jewish immigration that followed the failed revolution of 1905, subsequent waves of particularly brutal pogroms, and a loosening of US immigration restrictions. The loosening was partly a result of international Jewish efforts to bring attention to pogroms as the symbol of

²⁴ See my discussion in chapter one, building mainly from Gilman. I locate the slightly earlier *mentshele* within Jewish enlightenment attempts to reform the “deformed,” exilic Jewish condition embodied by the dark, feminine, and sickly “little Jew.” I therefore read the *mentshele* as a threshold figure, anticipating modern eugenic concerns of racial degeneration.

Jewish crisis in Europe. The 1903 Kishinev pogrom intensified this sense of crisis (Klier; Lambrozo). Shapiro is part of what is commonly referred to as the second generation of Yiddish writers. These artists and intellectuals were defined by their total embrace of European modernist movements, tied to their growing cosmopolitanism (Hoffman 120). They were seen as innovators for freely drawing from “universal” symbols and ideas from European Christian culture, especially the most taboo images of Jesus and the cross.

In 1909, *Dos Naye Leybn*—The New Life—a New York based Yiddish literary journal with a large transnational Jewish readership, published “The Cross.” The graphic violence and stylistically complex use of Jewish and Christian imagery not only put the unknown Shapiro on the map as an up-and-coming Yiddish modernist but also sparked a public debate in the pages of *Dos Naye Leybn* between two famous ideologues of modern Jewish culture: S.Y. Ansky and Chaim Zhitlovsky. This debate—known as the “*tseylem frage*,” the crucifix question—revolved around how the new, secular, modern Jewish culture should relate to Christianity and the general culture of Europe and the West (Hoffman 61-69).

On one side of the debate, Zhitlovsky celebrated and encouraged the Jewish embrace of Christian images and ideas in the invention of a modern Jewish culture and a new, shared European history and civilization.²⁵ On the other side, Ansky argued against Zhitlovsky’s conflation of Western civilization with Christianity, insisting that while important to join “the West,” it would be dangerous to erase the so-called Jewish hatred

²⁵ See Zhitlovsky, p. 36-45. In addition to using Shapiro’s story as the epitome of an outmoded Jewish hatred for Christianity, Zhitlovsky hails Sholem Ash’s story, in which Jesus is a Jewish martyr, as representing an ideal positive relationship between modern secular Jewish culture and the “universal” European values of Christianity.

for Christianity, rooted in ongoing histories of violence (50). Major scholars of Yiddish literature have argued that the “The Cross” does much more than express the “hatred for Christianity” that Zhitlovsky saw. It also scathingly critiques Judaism, an uprooted Russian Jewish intelligentsia, revolutionary politics, and secular humanism.²⁶ A critical trauma and disability lens brings attention to how the story poses an additional critique of Jewish memory politics and hopeless cultural responses to trauma and loss. Framing my reading is therefore the central unresolved role of loss in the debate. For example, Ansky’s image of the European ground filled with Jewish blood reflects unreconciled and ongoing histories of violence. This unsettling history connects Shapiro’s story to the larger cultural debate through the question: What remains of this traumatic history (or what scars remain), and what forms of culture does it produce? The answer and warning in “The Cross” is that it can also produce dangerous imitations of European modernity.

Shapiro never experienced a pogrom. The popularity of his pogrom stories, however, attests to the importance of pogroms in the early twentieth century Jewish cultural imaginary and politics of memory. The stories diverge from more common representations of pogroms that depict Jewish powerlessness and passivity and were read—especially after the watershed moment following the 1903 Kishinev pogrom—as calls for national reconstruction. After the two-day pogrom in Kishinev, 49 people died and 495 were injured. Around 2,800 homes and stores were destroyed. The pogrom shocked Jews and non-Jews around the world. Kishinev was the first pogrom to be photographed, causing writers and intellectuals to publicly debate and respond to its

²⁶ See discussions of the debate by Hoffman, 61-69; Novershtern, “Di Pogrom Tematik”, 121-150; Roskies, *Against*, 148-162.

significance (Gluzman 41). Anita Shapira identifies Kishinev as a cultural and historical turning point after which, “People were no longer ready to acquiesce in acceptance either of the physical injury or the insults to human dignity and the loss of humanity that such affronts entailed (36).”

One of the most influential cultural responses to the pogrom was the publication of two Hebrew poems by the Russian Jewish poet Hayim Nahman Bialik— “On the Slaughter” and “In the City of Slaughter.” Bialik was hired by Simon Dubnow of the Jewish Historical Committee to write a series of reports on the pogrom, and Bialik was the main person to photograph it. Instead of producing a historical report, he wrote the poems—the first before he departed and the second after five weeks of interviewing survivors. Many point to the second, “In the City of Slaughter,” as directly responsible for the formation of Jewish self-defense organizations, as well as transforming ways of thinking about and responding to violence (Shapira 36; Roskies 86). The poems were also part of a growing nationalist discourse—disseminated by Bialik as the emerging national poet in modern Hebrew—that drew an analogy between national and sexual weakness, representing inadequate Jewish masculinity as an emblem of national powerlessness (Gluzman, “Pogrom,” 47). For this reason, stories of Jewish resistance were downplayed in Bialik’s poems as well as in the press, and Bialik immortalized the image of Jewish men passively hiding while their wives and daughters were raped.²⁷

Through close readings of the poems as well as Bialik’s letters from the time he spent in Kishinev, literary scholar Michael Gluzman shows that Bialik’s process of

²⁷ See recent lectures of historian Steven Zipperstein on the impact of Kishinev, published online.

reporting on the trauma of the Kishinev survivors—especially the many testimonies of women who were raped—brought up his own childhood sexual trauma and uncomfortable identification with the victims. This intensified Bialik’s need to distance from his own feelings of femininity and powerlessness—the shameful diseases of the Jewish man—through a strengthened nationalism and turn to the masculine, prophetic voice in his poetry. In these ways, Gluzman argues, Bialik distanced himself from the Jewish maladies, turning the effeminate, sickly, and diasporic Jew into the emblem of abjection expelled from the body of the New Jew (“Pogrom” 55).

Because of intertextual links between Bialik and Shapiro, “The Cross” can be read as a similarly complex representation of the emerging New Jew. Shapiro’s pogrom stories resonate with Bialik’s pogrom poems in their depictions of gender and violence. The stories echo but satirically depart from Bialik’s allegorical, prophetic, and masculine poetic mode. Additional support for this intertextuality can be found in Shapiro’s 1905 publication of a poem called “Self-Defense.” The poem responds to a pogrom in Zhitomir the same year as its publication, and more directly mimics Bialik’s prophetic voice. As Leah Garret observes: “... in Bialik, the poet’s anger is directed at Jewish passivity, in ‘Self Defense’ the speaker implores God to give Jews the strength to fight and kill their oppressors (*The Cross*, “introduction,” xviii).” In “Self Defense,” Shapiro aligns himself with Bialik’s rage and the masculine role of national prophet-poet. Shapiro takes it further, however, albeit ambivalently: instead of the poet-prophet addressing the people on God’s behalf, the poet attempts to reach a God that never chose him and might not be there, desperately imploring this God to help the Jews fight and kill back.

There is a clear difference between Shapiro's early expression of violence and rage in an ironic prophetic voice and his later, more satirical critique of Christian, Jewish, and modern forms of violence in "The Cross." The difference points to a tension in Shapiro that is similar to Bialik's Kishinev poems regarding the invention of the New, violent, nation-state Jew. This tension is therefore not only specific to modern Hebrew literature and Zionist writers—which the generally more leftist-leaning Shapiro was not—but permeates transnational Jewish culture and politics. My reading of Shapiro pushes an already present analytic of gender, and to some extent race, to consider disability and trauma as central to the late 19th century inventions of modern Jewish politics and culture that shaped these avant-garde stories.

The need for this framework is further supported by Todd Presner's concept of the politics of regeneration. As Presner argues, these were discourses that sought to regenerate the male Jewish body and sexuality and permeated transnational Jewish culture and politics. The emblem of this regenerated body, he argues, was the figure of the modern muscle Jew. This muscular strain of Jewish thought was imbricated in fin-de-siècle discourses of racial science, degeneracy, and Darwinian eugenics that linked male Jewish bodies to femininity, specifically through the diseases of hysteria and homosexuality.²⁸ Though much of this thought came out of Vienna, the ideas of reforming Jewish gender and racial norms were pervasive among Eastern European modernists like Bialik and Shapiro as well (Gluzman, "Pogrom," 54).

²⁸ A large body of scholarship exists on this, by Gilman, Presner, Moss, and D. Boyarin. I discuss Jewish body politics in more detail in chapter one.

Presner attributes the emergence of muscular Judaism to the structure of modernity as dialectical. As I discuss in chapter one, Presner builds from Foucault's theory of biopower to explain "how sexuality was deployed for both reforming the individual body and securing the legitimacy of the greater body politic (Presner 13)." On one hand, post-Enlightenment universalism and its attendant ideals of progress and freedom granted certain groups—including many Jews—more opportunities for assimilation and individual rights through modernization and the development of the rational, male subject. On the other hand, new modes of state control brought mechanisms of devaluation and death on a mass scale (15). The latter—what Presner calls modernity's dialectical underbelly—became inscribed on and indissociable from the racialized body (13). The paradoxical in-betweenness or nominal inclusion of Jews—experiences of modern "universal" inclusion as well as racial exclusion—produces the "muscle Jew," the regenerated Jewish body, the inverse of the passive victim of pogrom violence. The "muscle Jew," then, represents the masculinist attempt to emancipate the Jewish body from a long history of violence by unmarking or curing it, thereby regenerating the Jewish people into an equal nation among nations. The question—and not only for political Zionists—as the *tseylem frage* debate reflects, is how to become "modern" without becoming monsters, or without becoming just like them.

Shapiro's monster man of iron—who shamelessly rapes and murders back—allegorizes an emerging modern Jewish culture emerging out of trauma and crisis, and turning toward imitations of European Christian violence. I therefore read the pogrom stories as an important comparison and corollary to the prophetic allegorical mode of Hebrew poetry and its construction of the Zionist New Man. Like this prophetic mode,

the stories are allegorical and at times adopt a prophetic voice. Instead of a rallying cry for the people to stand up and fight, the pogrom tales warn against an emergent transnational culture of violent and hopeless muscular Judaism. I follow Gluzman's reading of Bialik's New Jew in terms of its abjected or expelled other to argue that Shapiro's monster is also a figure of abjection, tied to Kristeva's related notion of horror. For Kristeva, the abject is what is expelled from the body and made other in order to define the boundaries of the Self. It is therefore, she writes:

what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior. (4)

For Kristeva, the abject inspires horror because it breaks down the barriers between inside and outside, self and other, subject and object. Shapiro's man of iron allegorizes an emerging generation of traumatized New Jews, monsters of the West. Shapiro's monster fuses the Jewish abject other and the European Christian self, inspiring horror. Thus he is like the monster cousin to the tiny ghostly and abjected *mentshele*, or what happens if no one stops to listen and grieve with the ghost.

Gluzman's reading of Bialik theorizes a cultural history of expelling the feminine and diasporic Jew from the body of the masculine New Jew. He uses Judith Butler's explanation of Kristeva, in which the abject

...designates that which has been expelled from the body, discharged as excrement, literally rendered 'Other.' This appears as an expulsion of alien elements but the alien is effectively established through this expulsion. The construction of the 'not-me' as the abject establishes the boundaries of the body which are also the first contours of the 'subject.' (133)

What is being abjected or expelled from the new Jewish body and subject is also a *disease* or a number of diseases associated with Jews and women, which—following Gluzman and Butler—establish the contours of the new modern Jewish rational subject. This is why, as I argue throughout these chapters, metaphors about illness, disease, and disability in 20th century Jewish culture are always haunted by the racial and gendered violence of modernity, the permeating relationship between life and death, modernity and its underbelly. This is what I am calling the mode of the cultural scar, which calls for specific reading practices. Gluzman references a line from an unpublished speech of Bialik’s in which Bialik describes powerlessness as “the most shameful disease (58).” Gluzman argues that this “embarrassing illness, which is markedly Jewish, becomes ‘In the City of Slaughter’ an unbearable mark. This ‘mark’ of the Kishinev Jews comes to implicate Bialik as well (59).” I now turn to Shapiro’s “The Cross” to examine the unbearable Jewish mark in the form of an actual scar.

“The Cross” as Avant-Garde Allegory

Shapiro’s pogrom stories, particularly “The Cross,” use the image of the pogrom to allegorize the invention of Jewish modernity as a crisis in imitation. The pogrom stories were all written and published in the United States, after Shapiro immigrated from Warsaw. The first included “The Kiss” (1907), “Pour Out Thy Wrath” (1908), “The Cross” (1909), and “In the Dead Town” (1910). In 1919, he published a collection of stories, *The Jewish Regime and Other Items* (1919), which included the earlier works plus three new stories, two of which were pogrom stories: “White Challah” and “The Jewish Regime,” the title story in the collection. The stories feature the psychic and

cultural after-effects of pogroms as well as narratives of migration and displacement. Many of the characters end up in America, where the violent past continues to haunt the present. Immigration, dispossession, and dislocation are all part of the crisis of an emerging, modern transnational Jewish culture in which being a Jew meant being part of the world's growing political category of stateless people, refugees, and migrants, or what Mufti calls modernity's moving and moveable people (2). In the pogrom allegories, modernity is an apocalyptic storm, captured by the traumatic image of the pogrom.

Like many of Shapiro's pogrom stories, "The Cross" is about a past that refuses to stay past. The pogrom haunts the story's present and is branded on the survivor's forehead as a scar in the shape of a cross. An anonymous first-person male narrator frames the story, in which the narrator describes meeting the man branded by the cross, who I will refer to as the Cross Man from now on. The frame introduces and closes a monologue in thirteen parts, as told by the Cross Man to the anonymous narrator. "The Cross" is the only of Shapiro's pogrom stories to feature the monologue, the teller-listener relationship, and the scar as central narrative devices. The two men, we learn in the frame, are both homeless, Russian Jews wandering across the United States. One day, after a summer together of not asking, the narrator asks the Cross Man about the mark on his forehead. The Cross Man answers with the story of the scar.

The Cross Man's monologue provides an impressionistic, psychological portrait of himself before, during, and after the pogrom, with important interruptions, repetitions and gaps. The whole story is told without feeling, as if from a distance. He tells about his family history, becoming a young Russian revolutionary, being caught in a pogrom with his mother, the aftermath of the pogrom, and his immigration to America soon after the

pogrom. In the five sections about the pogrom, the linear narrative breaks into experimental language and form. He describes watching his mother's body torn apart, being himself badly beaten, and one of the pogromists carving a cross into his forehead "to save his kyke [*yid*] soul from hell (trans. by Jeremy Dauber, 11)." At the end of the fifth section, he frees himself from ropes and with a wild, beastly sound kills his almost-dead, badly-beaten mother. It's an ambiguous act of either mercy or evil, furthering him on his way toward becoming an imitation of his pogromists. The rest is a linear narrative in simple, precise language. He tells of going to find Mina, a Russian woman he loved who was in his underground revolutionary cell. He tells her what happened, then rapes and kills her. This marks his imitative and violent crossover into the category of the aggressor, after which he is cured of his powerlessness. Soon after, he says, he hopped on a boat to America and has been wandering for three years. The Cross Man trails off at the end of his story, happily stating that he is no longer haunted by his mother's cries and contemplating his nearing return to "civilization." The listener frames the end of the monologue prophetically: "There will come a generation of men of iron. And they will build that which we have let lie in ruins (18)." [*Es vet oyfshteyn a dor fun ayzerne mentshen. Un zey veln oyfboyn dos, vos mir hobn khorev tsu vern* (161).] The ending hauntingly and ambivalently foresees a future of men like the Cross Man, a reborn Jewish-Christian monster, emerging from the ruins of a traumatic past in Europe.

In 1919, Shapiro republished "The Cross" in a new collection, with the addition of one small section that provides a key for reading the story as a trauma-based allegory. In the section of the monologue that describes the aftermath of the pogrom, the Cross Man describes running into one of the three pogromists who attacked him and his mother

and carved the cross into his forehead. He describes the man as “—the goy who, by all accounts, belonged to me alone [...] I had the feeling that if I wanted to, I could take him and put him into my pocket [...]” (15). [...*mayn goy—dem goy vos hot, lekhoyl-adeyes, gehert tsu mir aleyen. Ikh hob gehat aza gefil, az oyb ikh vil, meg ikh im nemen un aroplozen tsu mir in keshene* (156, emphasis Shapiro’s).] The Cross Man winks at “his goy” and gives him a friendly slap: “I didn’t take him, though. He awakened nothing in me (15).” The addition of this physical meeting with *his* goy in the second version—and the strange description of wanting to put the little *goy* in his pocket—works to explain the event of the Cross Man going to rape and murder Mina, which occurs just after this meeting.

The strange image of a pocket pogromist relates to the figure of the finger-sized *mentshele* that haunts and critiques constructions of a masculine, authoritative modern Jewish self and culture through a poetics of cultural scars. Here the *mentshele* is replaced by a little violent *goy*, suggesting the replacement of Jewish grief with Christian violence. This is supported by the descriptions of this pogromist’s red hair, evoking the biblical Esau, who became a symbol of Christian violence in Eastern European Jewish culture. With this small addition, it was as if Shapiro was worried about the rape and murder being interpreted—as it has been by contemporary scholars—as a representation of a totally *senseless*, animalistic, or “primal” kind of violence, the opposite of the modern and civilized world rather than directly *generated* by European Christian modernity, its dialectical underbelly. Adding this small paragraph explains that the Cross Man, through the trauma of the pogrom, has become irreversibly bound to and blurred with his pogromist and the violent storm of modernity. As others have argued, the rape and

murder of Mina are events that function to apocalyptically fulfill or reveal this relationship, his crossing over from the category of minority victim to the category of aggressor—object to subject, Jew to Christian, powerless to powerful.

These readings and the section about his *goy* suggest mimetic theories of trauma, in which the victim irreversibly identifies and blurs with the aggressor through the traumatic experience.²⁹ I push previous readings of this crossover from victim to aggressor further to argue that the story allegorizes not only the violence of Christianity but a Jewish imitation of that violence, captured by the emblem of the “muscle Jew.” By allegorizing the crossover from “little Jew” to “muscle Jew,” the story critiques a modern Jewish culture that was turning violently toward what Eng and Kazanjian define as a modern politics of despair that fixes history into a linear and closed narrative, mediating a hopeless relationship between loss and history.

Walter Benjamin’s concept of baroque allegory offers an additional framework for reading this crossover as an allegory for Jewish cultural responses to loss. According to Benjamin, allegory is a personal story with collective, moral, and political meanings, made of fragments assembled from ruins or worlds no longer living. Shapiro’s pogrom tales, particularly “The Cross,” allegorize a modern Jewish culture emerging from the ruins of a traditional world and violently swept up by the global storm of nation-based modernity. Benjamin’s definition of allegory has been applied to the 20th century avant-garde before, in the sense of removing elements from their organic contexts, or defamiliarization (Burger 69). This moment in Jewish modernism helps to consider the avant-garde not only as art’s recognition of its embeddedness in institutions and the

²⁹ See Leys’ *Trauma* for a genealogy of mimetic theories of trauma.

market, as Peter Burger argues, or the turn toward cosmopolitanism and transnationalism, as Marjorie Perloff argues, but also the cultural attempt to respond to trauma and loss.

Many point to the waves of anti-Jewish pogroms—especially the wake of the 1880s pogroms—as responsible for sparking the invention of modern secular Jewish culture (Harshav, “Language”; Klier). This is what Benjamin Harshav calls the modern Jewish revolution, defined as an “explosion of Jewish modernity within one or two generations,” referring to the early decades of the twentieth century when Shapiro’s generation of Eastern European Jewish writers had two choices: either join European culture or imitate it (*Language* 5). “The Cross” tempers a relatively optimistic understanding of “the modern Jewish revolution,” and points to a Jewish culture and identity created out of the ruins of a shattered traditional world—or a modern Jewish culture constituted out of loss, defined by its scars. This is the condition of Benjaminian allegory.

Like all of the pogrom stories—filled with flashbacks, hauntings, and survivors who can talk to ghosts—Benjaminian allegory is born from trauma. According to Benjamin, allegories are representations of fragments from dead worlds, stemming from mourning: “Ghosts, like the profoundly significant allegories, are manifestations from the realm of mourning; they have an affinity for mourners, for those who ponder over signs and over the future (193).” Allegories are not merely a series of metaphors but “ideas compressed into images conveyed verbally” registered in the world of dream and meaning (199). This gives allegory its exaggerated, magical and supernatural qualities, or what Benjamin calls allegory’s potential for miracle, the potential intervention of God in the work of art (235). Benjamin therefore identifies a hopefulness in the allegorical form.

People aren't really people; dialogue isn't really dialogue: they are moving idea-images, arranged in different variations within a conventional frame. Allegory creates a realm of pure subjectivity: "In the allegorical image of the world [...] the subjective perspective is entirely absorbed in the economy of the whole (234)." This is the anti-mimetic, dreamlike, trauma-register of allegory that mediates an open, creative relationship to the past.

The pogrom as a supernatural and allegorical event appears throughout Shapiro's stories. Often a pogrom that occurred in the past follows its victim in the present, buried and waiting until it explodes and takes over the world. The narrative, usually in close third-person narration, literalizes the survivor's consciousness in the world of the story. Because, following Benjamin, subjectivity takes over the economy of the whole, the stories are at their most supernatural when the protagonists are children. A repressed traumatic past looms close and waiting until it suddenly explodes into the present and takes over the protagonist's—and the story's—reality. Throughout the stories, the explosion or revelation of the pogrom in the present is tied to a perverse Messiah or Anti-Christ figure, a projection of the protagonist-survivor, who transforms the world into a permanent, subjective pogrom state. Figures like the dark witch, the Cross Man, or the demonic prophet Elijah are all physically huge, powerful, and marked with "blackness."³⁰ In the end of all of these stories, trauma—in the form of violence and terror inscribed on racialized and gendered bodies—takes over and transforms the world into a pogrom.

³⁰ See, for example the Elijah figure in "Pour Out Thy Wrath" and the black witch in "The Dead Town".

Benjaminian allegory registers loss and history through affective experiences of melancholy and mourning—linking this form to what David Eng and David Kazanjian call a genealogy of loss through melancholia, a modern politics of mourning. They define this genealogy of loss as “what is apprehended by discourses and practices of mourning, melancholia, nostalgia, sadness, trauma and depression (2).” This genealogy works against linear, totalizing views of history and the occlusions of celebratory national histories. The politics of mourning, like Benjaminian allegory and Shapiro’s pogrom tales, mediate what Eng and Kazanjian call a hopeful relationship between loss and history—fragmented, creative, open, and filled with grieving and ghosts.

Trauma and Transnationalism

The alternative to the Cross Man is an enduring and open engagement with cultural scars—the metaphors of trauma and disability emerging out of a feminized, racialized, and transnational Jewish trauma history. In the pogrom tales, the figure of the Jewish woman—often raped and murdered in the storm of the pogrom—captures this mode. Benjamin describes allegory as the process of seeing in nature the decay and ruin of history: “In the process of decay, and in it alone, the events of history shrivel up and become absorbed in the setting (179).” Through depictions of a feminized wound-space of nature, saturated with the decay and ruin of history, the pogrom stories pose shadow possibilities for alternative forms of being and remembering loss that would lead to something other than a generation of regenerated iron men and silenced, raped, and murdered women.

In “The Dead Town,” for example, the pogrom that a young girl, Beylke, represses for many years finally overcomes the present when there are stirrings of violence in her town, triggering the arrival of the giant black witch:

On that night a black, wild witch took over the world. Her dark gray disheveled hair writhed, whipped over the sky and covered it completely. Her eyes shot occasional pale green sparks. She ground her teeth and roared, still dull and restrained, and her heavy breath shook the air. (trans. by David Roskies, 42)

In yener nakht iz di velt ibergegebn gevorn in di hend fun a shvartser tsevildeter makhshofe. Ire tunkelgroye tsheshoyberte hor hobn zikh gedret, geshmishn ibern himel un ingantsen ferdekt; ire oygn hoben fun tsayt to tsayt grin-blase punken geshosen; zi hot gekritst mit di tseyen un gebrumt, dervayl noch dumpf un ayngelhalten, un ir shverer otem hot getreyselt di luft. (Shapiro 108)

Upon the witch’s arrival, Beylke remembers everything about the pogrom: “Suddenly someone ripped off the heavy veil that weighed upon her head for so many years. She saw what she saw... (43)” [*Emets hot mit amol aropgerisn dem shveren shleyer, vos hot yoren-lang ir kop gedrikt. Zi hot derzen vos ir hot derzen* (110).] Beylke’s grandfather, the gravekeeper, who takes her in after the pogrom, represents the world of tradition and the past, a tradition that separates the living from the dead. The pogrom destroys this world, turning Beylke into someone who only feels at home in nature, swinging in the willow trees and talking with ghosts. The figure of the dark witch—wild and wounded, embodying a cultural scar—reveals that the pogrom has brought in a new world order, as well as a new relationship between past and present.

The apocalyptic trauma permeating all of the stories finds its clearest political meaning in “The Jewish Regime” (1919), where modern political violence is tied to the nation-state. In this story, Jewish refugees are driven out of their *shtetls* into nature by

pogroms, belonging nowhere and unsafe everywhere. Nature is an unsafe space in-between nations. In the most haunting scene, the townspeople board a train, hoping to arrive to another place, but the conductor and crew abandon it when they realize that it is filled with Jewish refugees. The refugees end up in a field, after they realize they've been abandoned, riding a train to nowhere. In the end, the question for the characters abandoned by the train and civilization is whether they should "Curse God and Die" [*Lomir shilt'n got un shtarbn* (62)!] or keep going. The story ends with a madwoman—a central character of the story—muttering incoherently to herself, leading them forward. The refugees, comforted by her movement, follow. In following the madwoman, the story shows that the only way to continue is *through* an open engagement with trauma and loss, and by refusing to repeat the violent epistemologies of modernity. The story therefore suggests a hopeful alternative to muscular Judaism through the act of listening to the shadowy and shattered language of cultural scars.

Both the frame and structure of "The Cross" work to establish the Jewish experience of modernity as trauma. The story begins with the narrator describing the Cross Man's large and masculine body, centering on the head and face, framing the scar:

His appearance:

A gigantic figure, big-boned but not fat, thin really. Sunburned, with sharp cheekbones and dark eyes. The hair on his head was almost entirely gray, but oddly young, thick, lushly grown, and slightly curly. A child's smile on his lips and an old man's tiny wrinkles around the eyes.

And then: on his wide forehead a sharply etched brown cross. It was a badly healed wound—two slashes of a knife, one across the other (3).

Zayn oyszen:

A reyzyke figur, breytbeynerik, ober nisht fet, gikher moner; shvarts, ferbrent fun der zun, mit sharfe bakbeyner un shvartse oygn. Di hor fun kop kemat ingantsen groy, a bisel gekrayzlt. A shmeykhl fun a kind af di lipen un kleynenke kneytshelkh fun a zokn arum di oygn.

Un dan: afn breytn shtern a sharf-getseykhenter broyner tseylem. Dos iz geven a shvakh-fartsoygene vund—tsvey shnit mit a meser eyner ibern tsveytn. (139)

“Sunburned” is translated from “*shvarts*,” the Yiddish word for black, which has derogatory racial connotations. The use of this word to identify a Jewish pogrom-survivor wandering the American frontier links Jewishness in Europe to blackness in America, where *shvarts* becomes a derogatory word for African Americans. “Badly healed wound” is translated from “*shvakh-fartsoygene vund*.” The adjective *shvakh*, though in this context means “badly” on the most literal level, also has connotations of weakness, illness, and feebleness. *Fartsoygene*—healed—also means covered over. This body is marked by a violent history of racial difference and sickness, through a scar that refuses to be covered over or well-healed. The Cross Man’s wounded and gigantic body introduces a central tension of the story: *shvach* (weak, feeble, wounded, sick) masculinity and powerful, muscular masculinity.

The visible insistence of the badly healed scar functions in the story as a traumatic narrative device, creating another central tension between remembering and forgetting.³¹ In a classical psychoanalytic definition, trauma is characterized by its own repetitive, non-narrative telling, outside of the will or consciousness of the subject (Caruth *Unclaimed*). In this way, a violent, racialized history written on the Cross Man’s body interrupts and haunts the present.

With uncanny resonance with the opening of “The Cross,” Benjamin defines allegory as depicting the ruins of history on the face: “Everything about history that, from

³¹ Novershtern emphasizes the scar as a device that creates the story’s central tension between remembering and forgetting.

the very beginning, has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful is expressed in a face—or rather, in death’s head (166).” On the Cross Man’s youthful face and gray hair—which suggest, perhaps in the tradition of Faust, a deal with the Devil—appear the ruins of history, or a history of loss.

The narrator evokes the political at the first mention of the two vagabonds being Jews. He describes how they met on the roof of a train car: “I knew he was a Russian Jew [*a Rusisher Yud*] just like me, and I didn’t ask anything else. People like us live the kind of life where you don’t need passports (140).” He describes their transnational position in nature, outside of national borders and the need for passports, in a language that evokes political violence and statelessness. The English translation of “people like us” softens the political language of the Yiddish: “*in dem leben, vos undzere layt firen, zenen keyn peser nit noytik* [In this life, that *our people* lead, passports aren’t necessary] (139).” “Our people” could easily mean Jews, or Russian Jews in the US, or people “tramping” across the United States—or a modern political category that contains all of them.

The frame of “The Cross” depicts nature and the two men as belonging to an in-between space that is neither nature nor civilization, but something of both and of neither. The narrator describes the two men hopping a train at night, contrasting the wild men riding on top of the train to the orderly passengers of the train cars below. He describes the prairie as a living creature and their thoughts as bordering on madness:

The prairie ran and circled around us, and breathed deep, and spoke quickly and quietly, with a multitude of sounds in a multitude of tongues. Distant planets sparkled over us and thoughts entered and swum about our heads, such strange thoughts, wild and open as the voices of the prairie: they seemed each unconnected to the next, they seemed knotted and linked and ringed together. (4)

Di preriye loyft un dret zikh arum undz, un otemt tif, un redt shtil un hastik mit farsheydene klangen, af farsheydenste lashones. Iber undzere kep pinkln vayte veltn—un bay undz di kep kumen un shvimen gedanken, epes azellkhe modne gedanken, vild un fray vi di koles fun der preriye: dakht zikh—on shaykhes eyner tsum tsveytn, dakht zikh—geshleypt, un gerinkt, un gekeytelt. (140)

The two men are in an in-between-nation space of multiple sounds and tongues, which is free and open but positioned chaotically against the members of the civilized world riding in the train car below,

...whose path was set and whose thoughts were confined; they knew from whence they came and whither they went, and they told of it to each other and yawned while they would do it, and they would slumber, not knowing that above, atop their heads, there were two free birds resting a while on their way.

*...vos zeyer veg iz beshtimt un di gedanken—gebunden; zey veysn, fun vanen zey kumen un vuhin zey geyen, un dertseyln es eyner dem tsveytn un genitsen derbay, un geyen shlofn, nisht visendik az in der hoikh, iber zeyre kep, hoben zikh tsvey fraye fliglen gezetst ruen a vayle af zeyer veg—
...(140)*

Violence and nature are not in a category separate from or *outside* of modernity, as previous critics interpret them, but necessary exclusions created *by* modernity. Similarly, nature in the pogrom tales is like the decay of Benjamin's allegories, in which the allegorist observes all of the sorrows and ruins of modern history. In all of the pogrom stories, nature is a transnational space in which the ghostly, the spectral, and the traumatic can be accessed.

The structure of the "The Cross," a story told by one man to another, introduces the tension between teller and listener, and represents modernity as a social trauma, a crisis in the storytelling relationship. The relationship between teller and listener in "The

Cross” is soulless and dead. The beginning of the story, told by the first man to frame and introduce the monologue, ends:

I wanted and didn’t want to ask him what sort of mark that was on his forehead. Finally, I posed my question.

He raised his head from the sand and gave me a curious look with a hint of mockery.

—You won’t get scared?

I hadn’t been shocked by anything for years.

—Tell me, I said.

Ikh hob gevolt un nisht gevolt im fregen, vos iz dos far a tseykhn af zayn shtern. Endlikh hob ikh mayn frage dokh geshtelt.

Er hot oyfgehoyn zayn kop funem zamd un a kuk geton af mir neygerik un mit a laykhtn khoyzek.

--Ir’t zikh nisht dershreken?

Ikh bin shoyrn yorn lang geven deroysen fun ales.

Dertseylt—hob ikh gezogt. (141)

An unusual word is used, translated as shocked—*deroysen*—evoking being sent outside of oneself, literally a going-outside. The line, “I hadn’t been shocked by anything for years,” suggests the narrator’s own relationship to trauma, and he repeats this line again at the end of the story. “Tell me” also functions here as a foreshadowing for the climax of the story, when Mina, in a “muted” voice, says this just before the Cross Man rapes and kills her:

She looked at my head and at my forehead where the cross burned, and was silent. Afterwards, she said with a muted voice:

—Tell me.

I told her. I told everything gladly, slowly. In detail. (16)

Zi hot gekukt af mayn kop un af mayn shtern, vu der tseylem hot gebrent, un hot geshvinen. Dernokh hot zi gezogt mit a ferdimpfen kol:

—Dertseylt.

Ikh hob ir dersteylt. Kh’hob dersteylt nern, gelasen, ales. (158)

The repeated literary device of one character asking for another’s narrative—the repetitions of “Tell me”—raises the question of whether the two men are one. This

reading renders the past a lost, open referent, as well as creates a fragmented, uncentered, and ghostly narrator. The second man could be a device, shadow-self, or “split personality” of the first man, invented to tell an untellable story. The pogrom stories approach the past as lost, unrecoverable, and only available through a non-referential, allegorical, muted relationship to the remains or ruins of the self and history.

The Pogrom as Allegory for Modernity

In the monologue, the pogrom is an explosion of modern violence that has been buried and waiting to surface. The Cross Man describes the pogrom arriving suddenly “like an explosion from a buried mine (8) [*vi an eksploziye fun a faryoys untergelekter mine* (46)].” The first section of the monologue describes his mother’s hatred for him, her beating him brutally for not being who she wanted him to be, and the absence of his dead father, who was a “somebody.” When speaking of his father, he interrupts himself: “I carry around his picture—one entirely made up by yours truly—in my imagination, because, like I said, he was a somebody. Anyway, the story I’m going to tell isn’t about him.” [*A mentsh fun an ander velt, trog ikh zayn bild—oysgetrakht fun mir aley—in mayn fantaziye, vayl, vi gezogt, er is geven* epes (141).] But the story he tells is about him, in the sense that the story is an allegory for the invention of a new masculine Jewish subject and body out of ruins, wounds, and scars.

The short passage about inventing a picture of his father in his mind provides another textual clue for reading “The Cross” as an allegory for inventing modern Jewish literature and culture. An idea is compressed into an image, conveyed verbally—we can read the story as allegorical idea-pictures. As I discuss in chapter one, inventions of

modern Jewish culture often relied on tropes of violent *shtetl* mothers and dead fathers. These tropes were tied to a common degradation of Yiddish as being caught in a matrix of the deformed, feminine, impoverished, and exilic Jewish condition, and lacking in proper masculine and authoritative models.³² The invented image of the father represents the idea of exceptional Jewish masculinity, a Jew-not-of-Jews, a Jew of another world. The son's invented figure of a lost, exceptional, and masculine Jewish past, invented away from and against his gloomy and violent *shtetl* mother, alludes to attempts of early 20th century Jewish movements—such as Zionism and cultural nationalism—to recuperate and invent a lost past of muscular Jewishness through the Maccabees, Bar Kokhba, Mazada and so forth. This would invent an alternative bodily and national future to heal all Jewish wounds and cure all Jewish diseases.

The monologue creates a parallel between the Cross Man's lost father and the significance the Cross Man seeks in the Christian Mina and the revolution. He links Mina to revolution, light, love, and the belief in progress. He says that his decision to become a "rocket" to light the way for the revolution was attached to Mina: "That particular feeling of significance and importance that was always in the air when Mina was present (6)." [...*un fun yenem bazundern gefil fun bedeytung un vikhtikayt, vos shpirt zikh shtendik in der luft in Mina's anvezenhayt* (144)]. Mina and the world of Slavic revolutionaries are diametrically opposed to his hatred for his mother's Jewish gloom and darkness. He describes his elation after making his decision to become a revolutionary assassin:

Going home to mother, I felt that every bone in my body was singing. And I thought about the strange fate of a person, whose life's short path takes

³² See Seidman's discussion of "Dos Kleyne Mentshele," 53.

him between one woman he practically hates to another that he's beginning to love. (6)

Geyendik aheym tsu zikh un tsu mayn muter, hob ikh gefilt, az ale eyvrim in mir zingen. Dertsu hob ikh getrakht, vi modne es iz dos mozel fun a mentshn, vemes lebensveg, varsheynlikh zeyer a kurtser, tsit zikh fun eyn froy, velkhe er hast kemat, tsu a tsveyter, vos er fangt on zi tsu liben. (146)

The paragraph after this links the new world of light, revolution, and Mina to the modern city and the idea of beauty:

Before I opened the door of my apartment, I took a look at the city. The sun was just going down, and a light, delicate veil, spun of gold and happiness, lay in soft folds on the streets and the houses. Our city was a beautiful city. (6)

Eyder ikh bin arayn in tir fun mayn voynung, hob ikh gevarfn a blik af di shtot. Di zun hot gehaltn bay'm untergang, un a laykhter, tsarter shleyer, geshpint fun gold un freydlikhkayt, iz geleygen in veykhe falben gasen un heyzer. Undzer shtot iz geven a sheyne shtot. (146)

The sun of revolutionary hope sets along with the belief in beauty, the modern city, and narratives of modern progress when the pogrom arrives and the Cross Man is born.

The monologue represents the light of modernity and remaking the world against the Cross Man's dark past with his mother, traditional Judaism, Yiddish, and the *shtetl*. It repeats a rhetoric of revolution, in which a revolutionary present and future require the breaking with the past. The descriptions of his mother's small shop, his mother's beatings and bitterness, his mother's hatred of everything and everyone in her small gloomy *shtetl* life, function to relegate her as the dark, dead past. His gaze onto the sunlit city before walking into his apartment is his last glimpse of a world and a future that will soon lie in ruins. That night, the pogrom hits and the Cross Man arrives, unable to mourn the already dead Jewish past.

This relationship between *shtetl* and city in “The Cross” resonates with the experience of modernity in the colonial context, linking internal and external European others.³³ Aamir Mufti discusses the transition to modern forms of culture in the colonial context as surrounded by issues of treachery and complicity with the foreign rulers. Mufti states: “The question of tradition in such a context thus takes a distinct form, with the past appearing not exactly to be dead and buried, even if present in ghostly form, but *murdered* (by or at the behest of an other) and still remaining inappropriately and insufficiently mourned (15).” In “The Cross,” the murdered Jewish mother represents the traditional world, which cannot be sufficiently mourned by a son who hates her and already belongs to a different world. As I mentioned earlier, the pogrom stories link the *shtetl*, tradition, and the past to the figure of the Jewish woman, represented as raped and murdered by an emerging nation-based and masculinist modernity.

Previous scholars have treated the mother’s rape as self-evident, but her rape is never described in the text, only Mina’s is. We might assume the rape occurs because Mina’s rape and murder function as redemptive acts—repeating or revealing the hidden truth of the pogrom, completing the Cross Man’s rebirth. What is clear, though, is that during the pogrom, the Jewish son is taught his difference or abjection by being tied up and forced to witness excessive violence on his mother’s body. Throughout the pogrom sections of the monologue, the body becomes an object, losing all Jewish and modern secular meanings. As the Cross Man describes being forced to watch his mother’s torture,

³³ See J. Boyarin, where he calls to put the history of Jewish difference in conversation with other critical frameworks such as postcolonial and feminist studies, relating Europe’s internal and external others, p. 77-98.

he fuses with the aggressor and the scene of aggression, seeing his mother and himself as the rationalized objects of modern medical science:

What are two old, shriveled breasts? Flesh. Matter. They consist of certain 'elements'—just go ask a chemist. Even when they're your mother's breasts. Two modest breasts that nursed you, and that you've never, not even once, seen uncovered since you were a little kid. Even if they're torn into tiny pieces by filthy fingers right in front of your eyes? (10)

Vos zenen tsvey alte, ayngeshrumpene bristn?—Fleysh. Shtof iz es. Es beshtet fun gevis 'elementn'—ot fregt a kemiker. Un ven afile dos zenen di bristn fun ayer muter—tsvey tsniusdike bristen, vos hoben ayer oysgezoygn, un velkhe ir hot keyn eyntsik mol nisht gezen oyfgedekt fun ayer kindhayt on? Un ven afile m'reyst zey oyf shtiklekh mit shmutsike finger far aykh in di oygen? (149)

Here his mother's breasts are transforming from *tsniusdike*—a Yiddish term that refers to the religious laws about women's modesty—to the secularized objects of science.

The Cross Man describes fusing with the violence of the aggressor, and his hate turns against his mother instead of the pogromists:

...the woman with that face used to beat me, and I hated her. And I still hate her even now, and even more than before, and my hate sticks in my throat and chokes me. Because why then, if not out of hate, do I stare with such intensity at how the face changes from minute to minute? Why don't I close my eyes? Why do they bulge out of my head with such pain and such burning curiosity? Good, dear people: tear out my eyes. Why should it trouble you at all? One slice with a knife, they'll fall right out—these two watery bubbles, these—these—two cursed watery bubbles, which, I swear, I don't need anymore. You laugh! You're merry people, very merry, but tear them out, why should it trouble you at all? (11)

...di froy mit ot der ponem flegt mir shlogen, un ikh hob zi faynd gehat. Un nokh itst hob ikh zi faynd, un nokh mer vi frier, un mayn soyne shtikt mikh tsum dervornen vern. Vorem far vos den, oyb nisht oys has, kuk ikh tsu mit aza dorsht, vi dos ponem vert ferendert fun minut tsu minut? Far vos farmakh ikh nisht di oygn, far vos krikhen fun mayn kop, mit aza veytog, mit aza brenender neygerikeyt?—Gute, libe mentshn, shtekht mir oys mayne oygn. Vos kon es aykh aren? Eyn shnit mit a meser, rinen zey oys—ot di tsvey blezler mit vaser, ot di—ot di—fersholtene tsvey blezlekh mit vaser, velkhe ikh darf, kh'lebn, nisht hobn. Ir lakht! Ir zent freylikhe

*mentshn, zeyer freylikhe mentshn, ober—shtekht zey oys, vos kon es aykh
aren? (150-1)*

The reference to Oedipus Rex gouging out his eyes suggests that in becoming the Cross Man, he becomes a perverse figure of western civilization and history, a figure of cultural transmission in which the son takes the father's place. The "merry people" is an open referent that could mean the pogromists, westernized Jewish revolutionaries, as well as the story's transnational Yiddish readership. All are put into the same category of "merry" people, unaffected by the violence of the pogromists. The Cross Man requests for his eyes to be removed—to remove his ability to witness, calling upon theories of witnessing and reckoning with loss.

Hating his mother even more while she is being tortured allegorizes Jewish modernity as a crisis in witnessing. Dori Laub argues that the collapse of witnessing during trauma requires a reconstitution of the witness on multiple levels: "the level of being a witness to oneself within the experience; the level of being a witness to the testimonies of others; and the level of being a witness to the process of witnessing itself (75)." This is similar to Caruth's notion of the historical witness, which necessarily emerges out of the recognition of one's own survival in relation to the loss of others, experienced as a crisis. In Caruth's formulation, the historical witness allows for history to emerge when understanding cannot, in order to relate to history in a way that isn't strictly referential. The past that returns to haunt and interrupt the present is, as Caruth writes, "not only the reality of the violent event but also the way its violence has not yet been fully known (6)." The Cross Man's identification with the pogromist kills the potential for a historical witness, for the violence to become fully known. Instead of the

mother's death continuing to haunt and create a crisis for her son, the son accepts her rape and murder as the condition for his rebirth into a member of modern civilization. By hating and distancing the abject (racialized and gendered) body on which the underbelly of modernity is inscribed, the Cross Man is made new. By the end of the monologue, the Cross Man sees his mother's body and his own as the pogromists do, as valueless life. The pogrom sections therefore allegorically represent a Jewish secular modernity emerging out of traumatic ruins that repeats or imitates the same violent discourses of knowledge that produce valueless life. These sections also resonate with the ambivalence of Bialik vis-à-vis representing the rapes of Kishinev. As a Jewish man—already marked by femininity and weakness—he identifies too closely with the victims. To cure himself, he distances himself from the powerless, feminine, and diasporic Jewish woman and invents the powerful Cross Man.

After the Cross Man receives his cross-wound, the imagined picture of his father is replaced by the image of his mother's blood flowing into his veins. In a lucid moment of the chaotic pogrom narrative, she calls him her son for the first time:

Oh, my son!' she called me. Yes, her son, since every drop of blood which she has now spilled flows into my veins through unknown paths and lights a hellish fire there. 'Oh my son!' A heavy hammer is raised slowly and unceasingly up and down. Every time it lands on my head whole worlds collapse in ruins. (12)

'Oy mayn zun!' hot zi mikh gerufn. Yo, ir zun, den—yeder tropn blut, vos zi ferlirt atsind, flist arayn durkh umbekante vegn in mayne odern un tsindt dort on a hellish fayer. 'Oy mayn zun!'—a shverer hamer heybt zikh langzam un on oyfer aroyf un arop, un falt yedes mol oyf mayn kop, un—gantse veltn faln in khurves. (153)

The cross-wound teaches the Cross Man the truth of his abjection, learned through the rape and murder of his mother: "...and I feel, on my forehead, a wound burning, burning

sharp and making me forget all the other wounds (12).” [...*un af mayn shtern, fil ikh, brent a vund, brent sharf un makht fargesn on di andere vundn* (152).] The Cross Man is born of the traumatic wound—out of abjection and horror—represented by his mother’s blood filling his veins. He carries this wound with him permanently in the form of a scar, which he then claims as a tattoo.

From Trauma to Tattoo: The Danger of Cultural Scars

The Cross Man’s monologue continues to describe the aftermath of the pogrom, which he marks as the darkest day of his life. The aftermath section functions to reveal his transformation into the Cross Man, mimetically fused with the political aggressor (his *goy*). The events described in this short section are the most important part of the story. They contain the seed of Shapiro’s political critique, tied to the Cross Man’s claiming of his scar as a tattoo, and his incarnation or resurrection as a modern, muscular Jewish politics and culture—a monster of the West.

The aftermath section dramatizes the Cross Man’s transformation from victim to aggressor. He is first caught in a pogromists’ mob and then a mob of Jewish self-defense. He describes bumping into the small red-haired pogromist who carved the cross into his forehead, as I discussed before. The second scene of the aftermath section cannot be assimilated into the narrative, and provides a second potent critique. He begins with a non-sequitur: “A second scene has remained in my memory.” [*A tsveyte tsene iz ferblibn in mayn zeykhron* (156).] He cannot explain why. He describes—in a mix of past and present tense—a young “*goy*” (in the original the more negative word, *sheygetz*) running after an old Jew. The *goy* catches the old man, splits his head open with an axe and

stomps on his head. The *goy* is then chased by a young Jewish man with a gun, described as an archetype of weak Yeshiva masculinity (except that he has a gun): “A pale young man, a thin face. Glasses (15).” [*A blaser yungerman. A moger gezikht. Briln* (157).] As David Roskies discusses, the yeshiva masculinity represents the classical Jewish archetype of the *talish*—the soft, effeminate masculinity, the opposite of the *baal guf*, which translates literally as “the body man” (148-9). The Jewish man with the gun corners the young *goy*, the *goy* changes into an innocent looking child, and the Jewish man shoots himself in the head instead. The story ends in madness:

The last remnant of sanity vanished from the *goy*’s eyes. He sat down next to the body that was twitching near his feet, stood up again and with a mad cry jumped over the corpse and ran out of the courtyard. A loud laugh tore out of me. My foot raised of its own accord and gave a kick to the bloodied corpse that was writhing on the ground, like a trampled worm. (15)

In dem shaygets’s oygen iz ferloshn gevorn di letste shayn fun zinen. Er hot zikh tsugezest tsum kerper, vos hot getsukt leben zayne fis, hot zikh vider oyfgehoyben un mit a meshugenem geshray iz er aribergeshrungen iber’n toytn un iz aroysgelofen fun hoyf.
Bay mir hot zikh aroysgerisn a hoikh gelekhter. Mayn fus hot zikh aleyh oyfgehoybn un a brik geton dem farblutiken peyger, vos hot zikh tsuzamengedret oyf der erd, vi a tsetrotener vorem. (157)

In this scene, modernity’s trauma, the mimetic fusion between victim and aggressor, is complete and fully expressed. The Cross Man kicks the trampled and defeated Jew, the worm to his wild ox, the *talish* to his *baal guf*, the feminine “little Jew” to the muscular Cross Man. Shapiro’s pogrom-storm transforms the classical archetypes of Jewish masculinity into modern biopolitical categories. This leads directly into Mina’s rape and murder, his rebirth as the Cross Man, and his claiming of his scar as a tattoo.

The only details the Cross Man includes to describe Mina’s rape are:

I raped her.

She defended herself, like my mother. But what good were her powers against the man with the cross on his head? Flaming redness and a corpse's paleness played frighteningly across her face. She didn't scream. She bit her lower lip, chewed it and swallowed the blood. And I did my work. With all of the attendant degradations. It lasted a long time. (17)

Ikh hob zi fargvaldikt.

Zi hot zikh gevert, vi mayn muter. Ober vos hobn geklekt ire kreftn kegn dem man mit'n tseyelem afn shtern? Af ir ponem iz ongegangen a moyredik shpil fun flamender roytkayt un blaykhkayt fun a mes. Geshrigen hot zi nisht; zi hot tsebisen ir untershte lip. Zi hot zi tsekeyt un geshlungen dos blut. Un ikh hob geton mayn arbet. Mit ale ernidrigende eyntselheytn. Dos hot gedoyert lang. (159)

Then he strangles her. After the rape and murder, he sees the cross for the first time in the mirror: "At first, I wanted to take a knife, cut out a slice of my forehead and erase the cross. Afterwards I reconsidered. It should stay. 'They shall be frontlets between your eyes...' Ha! Were these the sort of 'frontlets' our dear, old God had meant?" [*Takhles hob ikh gevolt nemen a meser, opshnaydn a pas fun shtern, un—opmekn dem tseyelem. Dernokh hob ikh zikh beklert—zol er blaybn. "Letotoyfes beyn eynecha" ...ha! Azelkhe totoyfes hot es undzer alter, liber got gemeynt? (160)*] His crossover from feminine Jewish abjection into regenerated masculinity is complete. Mina—like his mother—is now the abject feminine, expelled from the subject, represented by the description of her as a corpse. The cross replaces *tefilin* (the prayers that God commands should be "frontlets between your eyes") and the pogromist replaces the victim. The next part of the monologue begins with his feeling of being reborn, guiltless, and a clean slate. He sets sail for America, where he can enter civilization and forget.

The scar interrupts the Cross Man's forgetting and assimilation. It evokes multiple meanings: 1) *tefilin*, 2) the mark of Cain, the first murderer 3) the Jewish taboo of

tattooing, forbidden in Leviticus 4) Christian marking of the forehead with a cross for Ash Wednesday 5) the medieval mark of the wandering Jew and 6) Jesus' stigmata. All of these meanings transform to remake him into the Cross Man—a Judeo-Christian monster, a modern Cain, mimetically fused with his *goy*, the Christian pogromist. The only permitted permanent mark on the body in Judaism is circumcision, which signifies the Jewish covenant with God and establishes the laws of sexual difference. The word for graven image—a symbolic transgression—is also the same word for crucifix, *tseylem*. In his claiming of the scar as a tattoo, the cross-scar signifies the ultimate transgression—a new covenant with Western, Christian modernity.

Jane Marcus, drawing from Kristeva, argues that the tattoo is an anti-patriarchal violation of the Judeo-Christian symbolic order:

If human skin is made into a page or a text, it violates the symbolic order. A body covered with marks is too close to the natural 'unclean' state of the newborn's body, with the marks of the 'unclean' placenta, the traces of its mother's blood upon it. A tattoo, then, is not only taboo; it is the birthmark of the born-again—the self-created person who denies his/her birth identity. This 'monster' is a carnivalesque figure who revels in the taboo-shattering act of making the body a book, dissolving the difference between spirit and matter. (213)

The Cross Man's born-again, monstrous, tattooed body becomes text, the Word, embodying a modern Jewish culture that replaces the holy scripture and violates the symbolic order.

The Cross Man is the antithesis of Marcus' carnivalesque figure. Shapiro's taboo-breaker is not an empowered defier of the symbolic order because the tattoo is a scar, tied to a traumatic history. The Cross Man becomes a monster of modern masculinity within the frame of Shapiro's avant-garde horror stories. Unlike Bialik's poems—that

emphasize the weakness of the men instead of the experience of the raped women—Shapiro’s stories locate rape as the emblematic act of modern horror. “The Cross” allegorizes a psycho-cultural history of inventing a new Jewish masculinity that wasn’t afraid to rape and murder *back*.

The end of the monologue works to allegorize a covering over and closing of the trauma of the pogrom sections, preparing the Cross Man to move on as if the pogrom never happened. In the end of his monologue, the Cross Man becomes a figure of modern Jewish literature, accessing the realm of beauty in the land of the free:

...the sea greeted me with endless vastness, with raw winds, and sharp, salty breath. It spoke to me of wondrous things, both out loud and silently. I listened to it with joy and with astonishment. I will not tell you in words what it related to me. Almost immediately after my arrival in America I began to wander across the land. The prairie began to explain in its own language what the sea had meant with its speech. Ah, the prairie! Her nights, her days! (18)

Der yam hot mikh oyfgenumen mit endlozer breytkeyt, mit roye vintn, mit sharfn, gezaltsenem otem. Un geredt hot er tsu mir fun vunderbare zakhen, geredt-geredt un geshvindn-geredt. Mit freyd un shtoynen hob ikh im tsunert, un nisht un verter vel ikh ibergebn, vos er hot mir dertseylt.

Kemat bald nokh mayn kumen keyn amerika hob ikh zikh aveknelozn vandern iber’n land. Un di preriye hot genumen mir fartaytshen oyf ir loshn, vos der yam hot gemeynt mit zayne red. O, di preriye! Ire nekht, ire teg!...(161)

Here, America’s freedom and promise is to forget. He is now a clean slate, guiltless, strong:

It has been three years that I have wandered. And I, a newborn child, feel that I have become strong enough. Soon I shall return to civilization.

And then—

Shoyn bald dray yor zint ikh vander arum. Un ikh, nay-geboyren kind, shpir, as ikh bin shoyn genug kreftik. In nikhen vel ikh geyen tsurik tsum yishev.

Un demolt—(161)

The “And then”—the Cross Man’s trailing off at the end of his story—leaves room to imagine his returning to civilization and the continuing of his evil, signified by the breakdown between teller and listener, the collapse of witnessing, and the failure to reckon with loss. The story ends:

I looked over in his direction, but he didn’t say anything else. He had, apparently, forgotten all about me. And I, a man who hadn’t been shocked by anything for years, thought: There will come a generation of men of iron. And they will build that which we have let lie in ruins.

Ikh hob a kuk geton in zayn zayt, ober er hot mer gornisht gezogt. On mir hot er, kentig, fargesn.

Un ikh, a mentsh vos iz shoyn yorn lang geven deroysh fun ales, hob getrakht:

Es vet oyfshteyn a dor fun ayzerne mentshn. Un zey veln oyfboyn dos, vos mir hobn khorev tsu vern. (161)

Echoing Isaiah’s prophecies of rebuilding the ruins of past destructions,³⁴ the end is a haunting prediction of more men like the Cross Man, a generation of violent iron men, born out of a collective cultural failure to reckon with scars and to mourn. The possibility that the “we” of the ending might have related differently to their scars suggests a possible alternative outcome to a dangerous, imitative invention of Jewish modernity. Perhaps the moral of Shapiro’s allegory is that cultural scars never fully heal. Rather, they remake the body, identity, and culture. The scar then becomes a central cultural narrative that can mediate—following Eng and Kazanjian—either a hopeless or hopeful relationship between loss and history.

³⁴ See the later chapters in Isaiah, for example a strong resonance with 61. Part of this section became part of the Jewish lectionary as messages of consolation read after a period of mourning past destructions, between Tisha b’Av and Rosh Hashanah—the period leading up to the Jewish new year.

The Cross Man, a born again muscle Jew, embodies the dangers of a closed, linear relationship between loss and history. He remembers his loss without melancholy or mourning; he is immune to haunting and ghosts; he dwells in the past only briefly, when prodded, turning instead toward the celebratory storm of civilization and historical progress. In turning away from grief, and raping and killing Mina, he becomes a Jewish Anti-Christ, the embodiment of evil—he becomes a monster of modern history, raping and killing back. The resonances with Bialik’s role in inventing the Zionist New Man, discourses of the “muscle Jew,” and Shapiro’s iron men speak to the haunting quality of the story’s prediction, a future of muscular Jewishness that reifies ongoing forms of state violence.

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Chapter Three

The Poetics of Postwar Survivor Guilt

This mimesis, this identification or imitation, or exchange of roles between oppressor and victim, has provoked much discussion. True and invented, disturbing and banal, acute and stupid things have been said: it is not virgin terrain; on the contrary it is a badly plowed field, trampled and torn up.

(Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 48)

In the 1950s and 60s, survivor guilt emerges as a significant literary trope and theoretical framework through which to approach transnational, postwar Jewish literature and culture. Survivor guilt is part of a 20th century Jewish poetics that I am tracing through overlapping metaphors of disability and trauma, or what I am calling cultural scars. These are metaphors that expresses multiple bodily and historical traumas at once as part of global modernity's violence, implicitly articulating relatedness between uneven histories of loss. Survivor guilt reckons with violent and unequal conditions of modern survival, as well as with multiple legacies of extreme state violence tied to colonialism and genocide.

The best known example of survivor guilt in post-Holocaust literature is perhaps expressed in Primo Levi's memoirs, where he develops the metaphor of the "gray zone." The gray zone refers to a collaboration or complicity between privileged prisoners and the SS in the concentration camp, part of the Nazi system of terror.³⁵ Philosopher Giorgio Agamben's recent series of books on the concept of bare life draws heavily from Levi's gray zone. Agamben defines bare life as the central category of biopolitical modernity, as

³⁵ See especially Levi's *If This is a Man* (1947), the ideas of which become more fully expressed in the later memoir, *The Drowned and the Saved* (1986).

“life exposed to death, life politicized through its capacity to be killed (89).” Agamben further claims that the concentration camp is therefore the paradigmatic space of modernity that exists everywhere in the present, where categories of innocence and guilt are blurred (123). Postcolonial critiques of this Eurocentric genealogy of bare life immediately followed, as it is unable to conceive of the colonial encounter as also a biopolitical event.³⁶ Critiques of Agamben’s (mis)reading of Levi also followed, since Levi was clearly opposed to using this phenomenon of the gray zone to conflate the roles of victim and executioner in the wake of catastrophic violence (Leys 159). Building from such critiques, an expanded genealogy of survivor guilt—one that especially focuses on postwar poetry—offers a more hopeful alternative to a post-Holocaust and postcolonial discourse on survival.³⁷ It recasts survivor guilt not as Agamben’s hopeless, paradigmatic feeling in a world that is one big Auschwitz, but as a culturally and historically specific scar that speaks to many uneven others.

This expanded genealogy of survivor guilt falls under what literary critic Raymond Williams calls a “structure of feeling”—a feeling and social experience outside of existing paradigms of official knowledge or social forms. The unstable discourse of survivor guilt in the 1950s and 60s—constituted by psychoanalytic, political, and cultural articulations—is an “emergent” form of cultural production, expressing “meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt (Williams 132).” The emergent can be later

³⁶ See Rothberg’s critique of Agamben, p. 62-3. See also my discussion in the introduction and chapter one of postcolonial critiques of biopolitics.

³⁷ This builds from Rothberg’s discussion of how Arendt and Césaire “demand a thinking of the human that is simultaneously post-Holocaust and postcolonial, that captures the politics of bare life in the complexity of its genealogy (102).”

incorporated by hegemonic culture (or “the dominant”) or it can become oppositional, but what defines it is that its meanings and effects are not yet settled or known.

In this way, survivor guilt in transnational Jewish literature and culture creates what Avery Gordon calls a haunting. Gordon defines haunting as a structure of feeling that specifically registers the multiplicity of modern violence that is still living—its erasures and denials, as well as yearning for a different future, a “something to be done.” Gordon writes: “This something to be done is not a return to the past but a reckoning with its repression in the present, a reckoning with that which we have lost, but never had (184).” Survivor guilt confronts yearnings for privileges like rest and home—privileges lost but never had, as well as privileges had at the expense of others. Survivor guilt is thus a trope registering contradictions built into postwar structures of state violence and liberal inclusion. As such, survivor guilt haunts and unsettles dominant constructions of postwar Jewish memory and identity, as well as holds implications for modes of testimony and truth-telling in global postwar literature and art.

To foreground my discussion of survivor guilt as a structure of feeling, I first explore the psychoanalytic discourse of “survivor syndrome” as it relates to issues of collusion and guilt in Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963). I then discuss survivor guilt as a poetic trope in *Green Aquarium* (1953), a series of experimental prose poems written in Yiddish in the new state of Israel by Avraham Sutzkever, a major survivor poet of the 20th century. All of these texts articulate guilt as an affective locus in which issues of race, trauma, and imperialism were being lived and felt, as well as a vector that can create new hopeful modes of memory and solidarity.

Survivor Guilt in US Imperial Culture: Historical & Theoretical Framework

The concept of survivor guilt first emerged in postwar psychoanalysis in the United States as a response to the 1953 West German indemnification laws.³⁸ Under these laws, survivors were able to claim compensation for the first time for medical damages resulting from the Nazi persecution. The principal architect was William G. Niederland, who published a much-cited article on the emotional disorders of survivors in 1961 in an effort to prove the existence of damage specifically from the camps. Niederland emphasized a defining feature of survivors' symptoms as a "severe and persevering guilt complex, of far-reaching pathological significance" (Niederland, "The Problem of the Survivor", qtd. by Leys, 27).

The theorizations of survivor guilt by Niederland and others came out of Freudian psychoanalysis. It was understood as a form of melancholia, the disorder of pathological mourning (Leys 44). As I discuss in chapter one, in "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), Freud famously distinguishes then blurs the definitions for normal and pathological mourning. Mourning is normal, according to Freud, only because it ends, whereas melancholia is pathological because it "behaves like an open wound" (319). Instead of the ego withdrawing from the lost object (a person, home, or abstract ideal) and attaching to another, the ego reverts to the more primordial mode of incorporating or identifying with the lost object. The ego devours and fuses with the lost object, which Freud poetically describes as a kind of haunting, when "the shadow of the object fell upon the ego" (318).

³⁸ See Leys' pioneering intellectual history of survivor guilt, *From Guilt to Shame*.

Freud also distinguishes melancholia from mourning by its lasting disorder of self-esteem, in which the ego incorporates the lost object and thereby turns against itself. Any criticism or aggression toward the lost object is redirected against the ego itself, and the ego splits. This is the quality that Freud calls ambivalence, in which aggression toward the lost object is turned into self-reproach, or *guilt*—"for having been oneself responsible for the loss of the love-object, for having wanted that loss (318)."

Survivor guilt among survivors of the camps was understood in these terms, as a product of extreme regression to primordial modes of feeling and behavior. As Leys explains: "the idea was that under conditions of violent threat and powerlessness the inmates' only psychic solution was not to resist but to give in to the threatening situation—by identifying or fantasmatically incorporating the oppressor (33)." In the decades following the war, the paradoxical concept was described as both *eating* (or incorporating) the powerful enemy, as well as being *eaten up* by them (36-7). The idea was that unconscious incorporation or imitation of the aggressor caused ambivalence toward who and what was lost and, as a result, feelings of unending guilt (5).

The theorization of survivor guilt as a form of melancholia was hotly contested from its beginning because of the "taint of collusion" associated with the notion of primordial, pre-oedipal identification with the enemy-aggressor (Leys, chapters 1-2). The issue of guilt among survivors was also a hot topic in public debates among philosophers and intellectuals, such as Martin Buber and Herbert Fingarette. The Freudian idea of identifying with the aggressor was eventually displaced by a theory of guilt caused by the survivor's identification with the dead, exemplified by the work of Robert Lifton. Other counter-theories—such as by Terence Des Pres—denied identification altogether,

asserting that any imitation on the part of prisoners was strategic for survival and a form of heroic resistance.

The unstable discourse of survivor guilt in the decades following the war offers a rich site for considering issues of race, haunting, and imperialism in constructions of postwar Jewishness. The changing and open referent of survivor guilt—the controversy surrounding the question of guilt in relation to what or to whom—brings attention to the quality of excess that runs throughout this discourse. As I discuss in chapter one, melancholia is a discourse that registers “the adamant refusal of closure”—a rejection of healing—representing an open, creative relationship to the past (Eng and Kazanjian 3). Through melancholia’s lost referent, the capacity for representation expands. The melancholic object’s ability to express multiple losses at once opens up new political and historical meanings (Eng and Kazanjian 5). Survivor guilt—part of the psychoanalytic genealogy of melancholia—similarly offers a theoretical model for approaching the politics of Jewish memory and mourning after the Holocaust.

The controversy surrounding the psychoanalytic concept of survivor guilt reflects larger controversies in the politics of memory in the decades after the war. 1961, the year of Nederland’s first study of survivor guilt, was also a key turning point in transnational Holocaust memory because of the Eichmann trial. Many historians mark the trial—broadcast on public television around the world—as a key moment in the period of the 1950s and 60s. This was a watershed moment when the previously marginalized massacre of the Jews would assume a central place in public consciousness and narratives of Europe, the US, and Israel (Rothberg 176). The trial consolidated what Michael Rothberg calls the “uniqueness paradigm.” This was a historical narrative of the genocide

framed within Zionist ideology, casting the Holocaust as both part of a long history of anti-Semitism and as unique to modern history (177). Historian Peter Novick similarly argues that the trial's narrative of the Holocaust as the unique and permanent state of Jewish existence ushered in a period in which the dominant discourses around Israel became survival. Shaped by the rise of Jewish neo-conservatism in the US, these discourses often used the Holocaust to silence any critique of Israel's violent military rule over 1.5 million Palestinians (Novick 190). The central role of survivor testimonies in the trial also created a new public identity: the Holocaust survivor, transmitter of a new, national heroic narrative (Rothberg 177).

Hannah Arendt's series of reports on the Eichmann trial for *The New Yorker* in 1961—republished as *Eichmann in Jerusalem* in 1963—were explosive because they critiqued the uniqueness paradigm as part of the machinery of an emerging US imperial culture. Keith Feldman defines US imperial culture as the domain of culture produced out of the contradictory hegemonic ideologies of the Cold War period. Racial liberalism (the official state policy for the nominal inclusion of African Americans) and desegregation in the United States went hand-in-hand with racialized state violence and territorial expansion abroad. Feldman writes (echoing Novick) that *Eichmann in Jerusalem* “paved the way for a critical appraisal, sometimes silenced or subjugated, of the manners in which US imperial culture remained predicated on comparative rationalizations of state and state-sanctioned racial violence (15).” Feldman examines the comparative rationalizations of US and Israeli state violence during this period through discourses of racial liberalism and exceptionalism. Within this historical framework, the parallel psychoanalytic and political controversies situate survivor guilt as a structure of feeling

that speaks to and unsettles dominant postwar constructions of Jewishness as a site of racial liberal inclusion, positioned on the side of US and Israeli state violence. Survivor guilt also unsettles the image of the survivor as a national heroic symbol.

The controversy around *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, concentrated mainly in the American Jewish community, centered on Arendt's notion of the banality of Eichmann's evil, as well as her brief discussion of Jewish collaboration with the Nazis, through the already known history of the *Judenrat*. In her observations of Eichmann throughout the course of the trial, Arendt theorizes a link between the bureaucratic mind and state to the newly named crime of genocide. Her critique of the prosecution was that it rested on proving that Eichmann was a monster, but all of the evidence pointed to the ways in which he was "terrifyingly clownish and normal" (54). She writes:

Their case rested on the assumption that the defendant, like all 'normal persons,' must have been aware of the criminal nature of his acts, and Eichmann was indeed normal insofar as he was 'no exception within the Nazi regime.' However, under the conditions of the Third Reich only 'exceptions' could be expected to react 'normally'. This simple truth of the matter created a dilemma for the judges which they could neither resolve nor escape. (27)

The trial was, for Arendt, a farce and a failure because the crime and the criminal so far exceeded the categories and structure of the law within which he was being tried. Her major critique of the trial was on the basis of its legal failure as a "show trial"—referring to the didactic spectacles of the Soviet Union. She argued that the trial failed to deliver justice because the crimes should have been treated as crimes against humanity—following the Nuremberg precedent—rather than as crimes against the Jewish people.

The most vilified part of her report was her tangential discussion of the trial's omission of the already well-known and documented history of the *Judenrat*, by which

the Nazis enlisted Jewish leadership to aid in the project of Jewish deportation and death.³⁹ She famously writes:

Wherever Jews lived, there were recognized Jewish leaders, and this leadership, almost without exception, cooperated in one way or another, for one reason or another, with the Nazis. The whole truth was that if the Jewish people had really been unorganized and leaderless, there would have been chaos and plenty of misery but the total number of victims would hardly have been between four and a half and six million people. (125)

Whether or not historians agree with this, Arendt's point here is that the well-known issue of Jewish collaboration was haunting the prosecution's clear-cut narrative of triumphant survival and national reconstruction. As she writes: "the prosecution's general picture of a clear-cut division between persecutors and victims would have suffered greatly (120)." This breakdown of the clear-cut division of victims and persecutors offers for Arendt "the most striking insight into the totality of the moral collapse the Nazis caused in respectable European society—not only in Germany but in almost all countries, not only among the persecutors but also among the victims (126)."

The notion of the breakdown of innocence and guilt even among the victims—an idea also widely circulating through psychological work with survivors—was what made Arendt's book so hated. In an open letter to Arendt, Gershom Scholem wrote:

...your thesis that these machinations of the Nazis served in some way to blur the distinction between torturer and victim—a thesis which you employ to belabor the prosecution in the Eichmann trial—seems to me wholly false and tendentious. In the camps, human beings were systematically degraded; they were, as you say, compelled to participate in their own extermination, and to assist in the execution of fellow-prisoners. Is the distinction between torturer and victim thereby blurred? What

³⁹ This history was already well-documented, both through the Kastner trial and from Raul Hilberg's widely read *The Destruction of the European Jews* (1961), from which Arendt drew heavily.

perversity! We are asked, it appears, to confess that Jews, too, had their 'share' in these acts of genocide. (*Jew as Pariah* 243)

Scholem's reading is representative of the larger controversy. Arendt's discussion of collusion and collective political complicity was mistaken as an accusation of personal (legal or moral) guilt. As in the psychoanalytic debate, all of Arendt's attackers vehemently asserted morality on the side of the victims, mirroring the emergence of the survivor as a heroic and moral figure.

Arendt's criticisms of the trial all construct her notion of guilt as a collective and political category rather than a moral or legal one. By locating genocide within what she calls "respectable European society," everyone is, in a way, "guilty." Arendt's notion of "respectable European society" reveals the Eurocentric, and often colonialist, discourses that limit her writing, as discussed by Rothberg and many others. However, at its best—as Rothberg carefully shows—Arendt's political thought, including *Eichmann*, situates the Nazi genocide and the new kind of human stripped of the right to have rights within the broader context of 20th century imperialism (Rothberg 36-65).

Eichmann and Arendt's other writings on Zionism and Israel—as Feldman and Novick both argue—analyze the complex links between the genocide, the modern nation state, the political category of the human stripped of the right to have rights produced through the colonial encounter, and the Zionist state's production of this new category in the form of stateless Palestinian refugees. Arendt's writings, as many scholars of Jewish thought point out, constitute some of the earliest and most powerful critiques of the ways in which political Zionism, far from solving its intended crisis of the "Jewish Question" in Europe, actually reproduced it by creating even more people stripped of the right to

have rights.⁴⁰ Arendt's articulation of the issue of guilt perhaps also reflects her own complex situation as a German-Jewish refugee living and writing in a position of relative privilege in the United States, as well as her close personal and professional ties to the new state of Israel. In other words, guilt is tied to the complex experience of being embedded, or opposing the structures of power tied to one's own survival and life.

This form of guilt as a structure of feeling resonates with Rothberg's notion of multidirectional memory—the ability to think about distinct histories of extreme violence in dynamic relation, which “might be the outcome of a recognition of a generalized complicity and of the need to resist particular complicities (252).” By no means central to the main arguments of the text, Arendt's discussion of Jewish collaboration in *Eichmann* functions as a melancholic refusal to close or to heal into national forms of politics and remembering. Her thinking spoke to this issue of general and particular complicities, and of something to be done about the particular ones. As Lawrence Douglas argues, the melancholic survivor testimonies in the trial itself also refused such closure or normative meanings of the survivor that the prosecution sought to shape (169).

Through the lens of the politics of guilt and collective responsibility, we can perhaps re-read the aspect of Arendt's analysis that Susan Neiman calls her “theodicy” (233). The “moral” problem of Jewish collaboration is clearly a political one for Arendt, as she blends people and states in her discussion of resistance. She writes:

Politically speaking, is it that under conditions of terror most people will comply but *some people will not*, just as the lesson of the countries to which the Final Solution was proposed is that ‘it could happen’ in most places but *it did not happen everywhere*. Humanly speaking, no more is required, and

⁴⁰ Agamben's concept of bare life is based on Arendt's category of humans stripped of the right to have rights.

no more can reasonably be asked, for this planet to remain a place fit for human habitation. (233)

With collective guilt comes collective responsibility for oppositional politics and action.

What remains after loss are possibilities for a transnational oppositional politics emerging out of the melancholic issue of collaboration in the past, which brings attention to a larger structure of complicity in the present.

The trope of survivor guilt as a form of melancholia also articulates a transnational politics of Jewish mourning, and a theoretical framework for postwar Jewishness that works against US imperial culture. Up to the 1950s, the US state had long committed to Jewish racial assimilability, which often went hand-in-hand with the exclusion of African Americans. In the 1920s, as Michael Rogin has shown, Jewish performances of blackface in Hollywood and vaudeville minstrelsy enacted a whitening of Jewishness as an ethnicity, demonstrating Jewish whiteness through the ability to perform blackness. Karen Brodtkin similarly traces the shift from a “racial middleness” in the early decades of the 20th century to entrance into hegemonic whiteness during the 1950s and 60s, due to policy and economic openings and the attainment of class and gender norms mainly among Jewish men.

This dynamic is captured by the famous writings and policy report by sociologist and senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan in the 1960s. These texts emphasize the success of Jewish assimilation and failure of African American incorporation into civic society. Moynihan attributed Jewish success to the Jewish family’s achievement of heteronormative white middle class values. As Brodtkin discusses, Nathan Glazer’s and Daniel Moynihan’s *Beyond the Melting Pot* (1963) portrays Jews as a white model

minority and African Americans as culturally, pathologically deficient. Brodtkin locates this as part of a larger Jewish model minority discourse espoused by the so-called New York Jewish intellectuals of the 1950s. This was an “immigrant version of bourgeois patriarchal domesticity characterized by values of hard work, deferred gratification, education and strong two-parent families with the mothers full-time at home (151).” Texts like Moynihan’s exemplify how Jews’ status as model minority was solidified through “the invention of a deficient African American culture that illustrated its exemplariness (151).” This US model minority discourse emerged simultaneously, as Keith Feldman shows, with transnational constructions of Jewishness in relationship to Israeli state building and Palestinians.

Feldman locates the Jewish model minority discourse within emerging global discourses of Cold War racial liberalism. This was the US government’s official ideology of nominally incorporating African Americans through desegregation and voting rights, which contradictorily went hand in hand with imperialist modes of racial domination abroad. Within this crucible of US imperial culture, Feldman identifies a historical conjuncture, roughly from 1960 to 1985,

...when struggles over hegemony in the United States became entangled with transformed relations of rule in Israel and Palestine, that is, when U.S. civil rights and antiwar struggles, Zionist settler colonization and Israeli military and administrative occupation, and Palestinian narratives of dispossession, dispersion, and resistance were forged, felt, and thought together. (2)

The result is what Feldman calls an archive of incommensurability: for example, the incommensurate historical narratives of Jewish national liberation and Palestinian anticolonial struggle.

Feldman's concept of US imperial culture illuminates how postwar Jewishness was constructed as a site of contradiction. Domestically, American Jewish involvement in desegregation and voting rights struggles on behalf of African Americans was meant "to demonstrate liberal inclusion as an American civic promise (28)." At the same time, as Feldman writes:

... often inadvertently, Jewish integration fused conceptions of Jewishness and political Zionism, and sedimented into the dominant racial order the exclusion and devaluation of Palestinians and Arabs as proper political subjects. It obscured liberalism's enduring historical investment in racial exclusion and recoded settler colonial violence in west Asia as Jewish national liberation. (28)

At this convergence, the trope of survivor guilt emerges to register the unsettling and uneasy feelings that one's survival and inclusion is bound up with enduring historical structures of racial exclusion. Jewishness expressed through the trope of survivor guilt is therefore directly related to a transnational, critical register of an emerging, global US imperial culture. On one level, Jews were becoming guilty because they were becoming "white" on a global stage. On another level, survivor guilt is a cultural mode emerging out of multiple traumatic, racialized histories in Europe that culminated in the Nazi genocide. In this way, survivor guilt stands in contrast to an empty and narcissistic white guilt, because is tied to specific cultural scars, calling for something to be done.

The form of unending grief that survivor guilt registers is the antithesis to the emerging public figure of the Holocaust survivor in the postwar period as a heroic, national symbol. Instead, survivor guilt carries the racialized education of the Jew in the 20th century: from the grief of being valueless, excluded life in Europe to the simultaneous guilt and desire to be valued, included life in the United States and Israel.

Survivor guilt, then, is a vector of multidirectional memory, refusing settled forms of politics and identity through its insistence on grief. This is grief not only of what was lost, but of what was lost that was never had—like rest and home—and the forms of violence that continue in the present.

Survivor guilt offers what Eng and Kazanjian call a hopeful politics of mourning, focusing not only on what is lost, but on what remains, “for what is lost is known only by what remains of it, by how these remains are produced, read, and sustained (2).” The open referent of multiple losses offers a way to think about multiple losses of the Holocaust, the different groups victimized by the Nazis—sexual others, disabled people, political dissidents, Roma, and others. The open referent of guilt also makes room to express relationships to other forms of extreme political violence within the context of 20th century imperialism. Just as hysteria haunted and unsettled early 20th century discourses of state violence and muscular Judaism—as I discussed in chapters 1 and 2—so then does survivor guilt, in the same diagnostic genealogy as hysteria, emerge to haunt the invention of the heroic national survivor and the new heroic nation-state within the larger terrain of the Cold War and US imperial culture.

The Poetics of Survivor Guilt in Green Aquarium (1955)

Avraham Sutzkever’s (1913-2010) *Green Aquarium* (1955) is a series of experimental prose poems that deal with the destruction of Jewish Vilna and the last days of the Vilna ghetto. He wrote the series in Israel in 1953-4. The poems appeared individually in *Di Goldene Keyt*, the major Yiddish literary magazine based in Israel and

founded and edited by Sutzkever from 1949 until his death in 2010. In 1955, the poems were published in book form with the title *Ode tsu der Toyb* [Ode to the Dove].

A substantial part of the book is the product of a trip to Africa in 1950, resulting in the series of poems *Helpandn bay Nacht* [Elephants at Night]. As Justin Cammy writes, this series “exudes the joy of primal release, though the trauma of the recent past breaks through in scenes of sickness, animal savagery, and chaotic dance (311).” The theme of trauma transmitted through a poetics of sickness, as well as the postcolonial context of this series, inform my approach to Sutzkever’s oeuvre. I focus on the concluding section, *Green Aquarium*, because it deals most directly with the theme of survivor guilt.

As Ruth Wisse observes, it is possible to see references to Sutzkever’s own remarkable survival story interspersed throughout the poems: from his last hiding place in a ghetto attic, to the forests where he fought with a unit of partisans, where he was rescued and airlifted out by the Red Army and taken to live in the Soviet Union in 1944, and his eventual immigration to Palestine in 1947. However, the poems are anything but autobiographical or referential. The short, interpretative prose poems, each standing on its own, refuse narrative linearity or historical chronology. As David Roskies observes, his tales have only three times: before, during, and after what the poet calls *di khalofim-tsayt*, the time of the slaughterknife (323). Wisse calls the prose poems “narrative images” (96). Roskies calls the writing a mythopoetic, narrative mode, made of the stuff of fairy tale and legend (319). This is due to the “storyteller’s penchant for the grotesque and the ephemeral (320),” which Roskies traces to the return of fairy tale and romance through the storytelling style of the Yiddish Soviet symbolist Der Nister (“The Hidden One”) (324). Sutzkever is responsible for reviving the modern Yiddish storytelling legacy of

Der Nister, specifically Der Nister's metaphysical and grotesque fantasy world (Roskies 318).

The connection with Der Nister—who died in a prison hospital in 1950 during the liquidation of Yiddish culture in the Soviet Union—draws attention to Sutzkever's position as a double survivor of both the Nazi regime and the purge of Jewish writers and intellectuals in the last years of Stalin's regime. Along with Rothberg's genealogy that co-articulates the legacies of colonialism with Holocaust memory, Sutzkever's oeuvre points to the Soviet Union as another site through which to trace alternative traditions of multidirectional Holocaust memory. *Green Aquarium*, written one year after the night of the murdered poets—a purge of many Yiddish writers—brings together these different legacies of state violence from the vantage point of the new state of Israel. The co-articulation of histories draws attention to the fraught, productive meanings of survival in Sutzkever's poetry, expressed through mourning and guilt. The poems also share a testimonial aspect and the poet's recognition of himself as a witness. As Justin Cammy observes, this recognition is first seen in Sutzkever's wartime ghetto writings, when the poet first started dating his work (308).

The testimonial aspect of Sutzkever's surrealist storytelling mode also interestingly situates him within a genealogy of testimony in global postwar cinema and art. Rothberg locates this genealogy mainly in postcolonial France as a response to both the Holocaust and decolonization. His earliest examples are the birth of the experimental documentary mode of cinema vérité, in the French film "*Chronique d'un été* [Chronicle of a Summer]" (1961), and the publication of Charlotte Delbo's first memoir that same

year. Delbo's memoirs chronicle her imprisonment in Auschwitz for her political activism as a member of the French resistance. On the concept of *verité*, Rothberg writes:

...*verité*, or truth, however contested, that buttresses the very genre of cinema *verité* takes some of its force from the struggles against colonialism that were at their height when Rouch and Morin first conceptualized the genre in the years 1959-62. The key elements of the war and the anticolonial movement relevant here are torture, censorship, and testimony. (192)

Rothberg identifies the practice of testimony—televised globally through the Eichmann trial—as another form of cinema *verité*. Within the context of extensive censorship by the French state, testimony and *verité* begin to function as a kind of “truth cure.” Within such cures, Rothberg identifies a related surrealist mode of juxtaposition that creates relation through incongruity (187). The postwar Yiddish surrealism of *Green Aquarium* perhaps anticipates this turn toward an experimental surrealist testimonial mode in global cinema and art, which refuses state-sanctioned modes of history, narrative, and memory.

In the poems of *Green Aquarium*, the mad, the marginal, and the magical are melancholic figures of counter-remembering, refusals to heal or forget. They remember everything dark and difficult in an age of celebratory national narratives and forgetting. In “The Messiah’s Diary,” for example, Yonte the *Yeshiva Bokher* [Yeshiva Boy] finds the poet-narrator at the western wall, on the day that Israel wins the War of Independence and conquers Jerusalem. Yonte has the messiah’s diary and lives in the world to come where there is no censorship or forgetting, and he remembers everything. If heaven is a place where there is no censorship or forgetting, then the poem illuminates a political past and present of state-sanctioned forgetting. Because the poem takes place in Israel on a day of national celebration in the “time after the slaughterknife,” the slaughterknife takes

on multidirectional meanings. The past and present appear as sites of censorship and forgetting, bringing the Nazi efforts to erase Jewish culture into multi-directional relation with uneven sites of state-sanctioned forgetting, such as the Soviet Union and even the new Israeli state.

Through these uneven relations, Sutzkever's work offers a complex approach to statehood and memory. His remarkable biography is well-known for acts of cultural revival and resistance—from his role in saving Jewish writings in the Vilna Ghetto in what became known as the Paper Brigade, to fighting with the partisans, to testifying on behalf of Soviet Jewry at the Nuremberg trials, to becoming the leading figure of Yiddish literature and culture in Israel. His work expresses romantic Zionist feelings and gratitude about the survival and restored dignity of the people in the new Jewish state. At the same time, he cautions himself and other poets from allowing Zionism to eclipse or repress the painful legacies of the past. As he writes in his first collection of poems in Israel, *In Fayer Vogn* (In a Chariot of Fire) (1952):

And if you paint over the image of the Jewish street
 With a brush dipped in your new sunny palette
 Know this: The fresh colors will peel
 And someday the old colors will attack you with an ax
 And wound you so that you will never heal.
 (transl. by Justin Cammy, 311)

The Jewish street, *di yiddishe gas*, means colloquially “ordinary Jews” but in this poem carries with it all of the associations of the Jewish encounter with European modernity, marked by trauma and violence. Here the ordinary Jewish street is shown for what it has always been—an axe and a wound. If the new sunny palette—of the new sunny nation—

paints over histories of loss, then the past will be replicated, or repeated, through new wounds.

The image of the violent past returning to attack with an ax resonates with Arendt's predictions of the bloody state of affairs that would dominate Israel because of its exclusion of Palestinians and reproduction of the modern political category of stateless people. In this critique, the violence of the Jewish experience in Europe—as one of many included in this political category—is far from being solved by the creation of a Jewish state. Rather, it is reproduced through a failure to reckon with legacies of state violence.

Out of this paradox, *Green Aquarium* imagines an alternative mode of statehood, memory, and futurity that isn't built on the image of the heroic survivor and exclusivist, totalizing narratives of national history. Sutzkever's poetics are part of a mode of Jewish cultural production that isn't explicitly engaged with legacies of colonialism and racism, as Rothberg traces, or explicitly dealing with US imperial culture, as Feldman traces. It is, nevertheless, multidirectional and relational, through the enduring affects of melancholy and guilt. In *Green Aquarium*, the poet's open and creative way of remembering against the many sites of forgetting is through haunting, a poetic practice of talking to ghosts.

Each poem in *Green Aquarium* is a dialogue with the dead, written in Yiddish, a language that bridges the survivors with the destroyed Jewish world, the living and the dead. The prose poems are filled with hauntings and ghosts. The title poem begins with the disembodied voice of a ghost:

“Your teeth are bars of bone. Behind them, in a crystal cell, your chained words. Remember the advice of your elder: the *guilty ones*, words that dropped poisoned pearls in your goblet—let them go free. Grateful for

your mercy, they will immortalize you. But the *innocent ones* who will trill falsely like nightingales over your grave—don't spare them. Hang them! For, as soon as you let them out of your mouth or your pen, they turn into demons. May the stars fall out of the sky if I'm not telling the truth!" (transl. by Benjamin and Barbara Harshav, 357, my emphasis)

"Dayne tseyen zenen beynerne kratn. Hinter zey, in a krishtolener tsel, dayne geshmidete verter. Gedenk di eytze fun an eltern: di shuldike, vos hobn arayngeton in dayn bekher farsamte perl—zey loz aroys oyf der fray. Vi a dank farn genod, veln zey boyn dayn eybikeyt; nor yene, di umshuldike, vos trilern falsh vi soloveyen iber a kaver—zey zolstu nit shaneven. Heng zey, ver zeyer talyen! Vayl koym lozstu zey aroys fun dayn moyl, tsi fun dayn pen—vern zey shaydim. Di shtern zoln azoy nit aropfaln vi ikh zog dem emes!" (75, emphasis Sutzkever's)

This advice, we learn in the next paragraph, was from a "cracked poet" [*a tsedrumsketer poet*] from the narrator's "living hometown" [*lebediker heymshot*], marking this as a story from the time before the war when the town was living. The cracked poet's advice appears abruptly on the page, without explanation, as if—like Walter Benjamin's historical materialist—flashing up through time to reach the survivor "in a moment of danger" (*Theses* 255).

In "Theses on the Philosophy of History"—written in 1940 while on the run from the Nazis—Benjamin defines two modes of relating to history and loss. One is what he calls historicism, defined as a narrative of the past told from the point of view of identifying with the victors. This way of fixing the fleeting images of the past into a totalizing narrative creates more despair in the storm of modern violence and progress. The other is "historical materialism," which counteracts historicism through its creative and open relationship to the past. Benjamin describes this as a form of illumination, a hopeful practice in which one can "seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger (255)." These two modes can be read—after David Eng's and David

Kazanjian's collection *Loss*—as two possible ways of responding to histories of trauma and loss, defining the stakes in a modern politics of mourning. Against modes of dangerous forgetting, the cracked ghost speaks to the poet, mediating an open, creative relationship to the past.

The narrator remembers that the cracked poet had a long braid behind his back like a “birch twig,” and no one knew his name or where he came from. The poet writes:

I knew only that he composed rhymed missives to God in Aramaic
Targum language, deposited them in the red mailbox on the green bridge,
and strolled, contemplative and patient, on the banks of the River Viliya,
waiting for the postman from heaven to deliver an answer. (357)

*Ikh hob nor gevust, as er shraybt in targum-loshen gegramte brivelekh tsu
got, varft zey arayn in roytn postkestl bay der griner brik, un badakht un
geduldik shpatsirt er bay der viliya un vart, der potstalyon fun himl zol im
brenge an entfer. (75)*

The cracked poet, nameless and foreign, writes letters to God and waits patiently for the postman from heaven. From this figure of grief and hope, the poet-narrator inherits the melancholic mode of the survivor, transmitted through the instruction to write only from grief and guilt. The task of the survivor-poet after the war is transmitted through a history of being “cracked”—a genealogy of loss through madness, a mode of the cultural scar.

The figure of the cracked poet is in the tradition of the European Romantics as well as Jewish prophets. As Roskies writes, “Occupying a middle ground between sacred verse and profane anecdote is storytelling, the repository of a secular folklore devoid of Scripture, with God’s name invoked only with heavy irony (321).” Through the genealogy of being cracked and scarred, the survivor becomes the poet-witness, whose mode is storytelling. This tradition of secular folklore fuses with the testimonial mode, the poet’s role as a witness. As Rothberg writes, “the witness to extreme, political

violence is always to some extent a foreigner, one who disrupts the status quo, who speaks another language (219).” The witness speaks a different language that merges metaphors of disability and trauma, or the language of cultural scars.

The cracked poet’s message from the past is to refuse the false words of survival, the innocent (*umshuldik*, not guilty) words, which turn into demons (*shaydim*). The innocent words that “trill falsely like nightingales over a grave” represent a triumphant, inappropriate, or false response to loss and death. These false-innocent words are situated against the true-guilty words. We can read this perhaps as representing two forms of postwar Jewishness and historical memory: the melancholic open form exemplified by survivor guilt, and the closed national form built around the figure of the heroic survivor and captured by the Eichmann trial. The guilty words—the words that belong to the tradition of melancholic and cracked poets—are the open, creative way to reckon with loss and the past. *Green Aquarium* thus begins by positioning itself in this guilty mode of being haunted and talking to ghosts.

Through the memory of the “cracked poet” from his “living hometown,” writing becomes a matter of Sutzkever’s own survival. In the second section, Sutzkever tells a story in which his shadow whispers to him as he walks through a minefield: “Walk through words as through a minefield: *one* false step, *one* false move and all the words you strung in a lifetime on your veins will be blown apart with you.” [*Gey iber verter vi iber a minenfeld: eyn falsher trot, eyn falshe bavegung, un ale verter, vos du host oyfgetsiliyet a gants lebn oyf dayne odern, veln tseflikt vern mit dikh tsuzamen*—(75)]. This can be interpreted as a literal scene from Sutzkever’s rescue from the partisans, when his poetry—the reason he was airlifted out of the war by the Red Army—saved his

life. On another level, poetry also saves his life by keeping him close to the dead through the practice of storytelling. He survives through embodying the loss of the past and a poetic practice of guilt. Survivor guilt is thus another specific example of what I am calling the mode of the cultural scar, when modern crises of survival remake the body and representational practices through metaphors of trauma and disability—a poetics of scars, injuries, diseases, and wounds.

The third section describes this mode of cultural production as the task of the survivor, the one who keeps living after loss. The poet describes a mode of storytelling that no one warned him about, not even the cracked poet from Vilna. In this section, Sutzkever describes words as an external force that takes him over. He tells of an experience with words “drunk on otherworldly poppies” [*shiker fun yeneveltike monblumen* (76).] The words make him their slave, combining romantic images of nature with prophetic imagery of trumpets, torches, and a flaming chariot. To the word riding in front, crowned in the poet’s tears, he falls onto his knees and begs for one thing before it departs: to see the dead. His pleading splits open the earth:

A green knife split the earth.
 And it was green.
 Green.
 Green.
 The green of dark fir trees through a mist;
 The green of a cloud with a burst gall bladder;
 The green of mossy stones in a rain;
 The green revealed through a hoop, rolled by a seven-year-old;
 The green of cabbage leaves in splinters of dew, that can bloody
 your fingers;
 The fresh green under melting snow; in a ring around a blue
 flower;

The green of the crescent moon seen by green eyes under a wave;
 And the solemn green of grass making seams on a grave.
 Green streaming into green. Body into body. The earth
 transformed into a green aquarium.
 Closer, closer, to the green eddy.

I look inside: Humans swim around like fish. Myriads of
 phosphorous faces. Young. Old. And young-old in one. Those I saw
 throughout my life, death has crowned them with a green existence; all
 swimming about in the green aquarium, in a silky, airy music.

Here, the dead live! (359)

A griner meser hot oyfgeshnitn di erd.

S'iz gevorn grin.

Grin.

Grin.

Grinkayt fun tunktele yodles durkh a nepl;

Grinkayt fun a valkn mit gefaltster gal;

Grinkayt fun mokhike shteyner in regn;

Grinkayt vos antplekt zikh durkh a reyf, gekayklt fun a zibn-yerikn;

Grinkayt fun kroytbleter in shpliters toy, vos tseblutikn finger;

*Ershte grinkayt unter tsheshmoltsenem shney in a karahod arum a blo
 blimele;*

*Grinkayt fun a halb-lavone, vos me zet mit grine oygn fun unter a
 khvaliye;*

un fayerlekhe grinkayt fun grozn, bazeymt arum a kaver.

*Grinkaytn shtromen in grinkaytn. Layb in layb. Un ot iz shoyne farvandlt di
 erd in a grinem akvarium.*

Nenter, nenter, tsu der griner vilmenish!

*Ikh kuk arayn: mentshn shvimen do vi fish. Umtsolike fosforne penimer.
 Yung. Alt. Un yung-alt in eynem. Ale, vos kh'hob gezen a gants lebn un der toyt
 hot zey gezalkht mit a griner eksistents; ale shvimen zey inem grinem akvarium, in
 a min zaydener, luftiker muzik.*

Do lebn di toyte! (78)

The task of the survivor is to try to see and feel the dead. The green aquarium is a bodily context of bursting gall bladders, bloody fingers, and blooming stones that brings together past and present, living and dead. He looks for one face— a beloved—finds her, and wants to read her a poem. She interrupts him: “My dear, I know the words by heart, I gave you the words myself.” [*Oysveynik, liber, ken ikh dos lid, ikh aleyn hob dirgegebn di verter* (79).] He desperately tries to break the glass of the aquarium, to feel her body, to kiss her. He describes the glass “as a cold knife between us.” “Knife” is *khalef*, the ritual knife for slaughtering kosher meat, and the same as the symbol for the war, the slaughterknife. He bangs his head against the glass until the aquarium shatters and it all disappears.

The visceral image of shattering the glass with his head can be read as an image of a post-slaughterknife poetics and culture. It is an image of what remains after total loss. This image—like Arendt’s political thought at its best, critiquing multiple forms of modern violence from colonialism to the nation-state—suggests a hopeful shattering of modernity’s violence. The image also suggests that the guilty and unstable (or “cracked”) position of opposing the structures of one’s own survival can provide the conditions for imagining and creating something totally different. What, then, can this mode of postwar cultural scars produce?

“Lady Job” and Postwar Poetics

In *Green Aquarium*, ghosts appear not as a sign of individual loss or trauma, but as hauntings that seek to make something known about what connects the world of the living to the world of the dead. Gordon defines haunting as

...a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening. Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition. (8)

In the title poem, Sutzkever is drawn into the world of the dead. By talking to them, and asking what they want, the poet learns the grief of the dead that is shared by the living. What, then, is produced by the hauntings in these poems? One key poem, “Lady Job,” expresses continuity and disruption in postwar Jewishness through the trope of the *mentshele* (the little person) that I discuss in chapter one.

In “Lady Job,” the poet witnesses the destruction of Vilna, the poet’s hometown and also a center of modern Yiddish literature and culture. In a prophetic-style image, he sees a burning synagogue transposed into two eagles stacked one on top of the other. Then he sees a partially hidden *mentshele* on top:

The eagle on top, with the head of an animal and a blue breast between purple wings, like a brook amid rosebushes, plants his four claws of bronze into the eagle below.

And the eagle below, with the head of an angel, a gleaming serpent around his neck, and his wings—two rocks facing each other over an abyss—bows over the synagogue. His ten claws—columns carved of salt—falter under the heavy wings.

Above, between the bronze feet of the eagle on top, leaning on his blue breast, I see a hidden little man [*mentshele*]. (364)

*Der eybershter odler, vos hot a kop fun a khaye un a bloye Brust
tsvishn porporne fligl, vi a kval tsvishn royzn, iz ayngel mit di negl fun
zayne fir bronzene fis inem untershtn.*

*Un der untershter odler, vos zayn kop iz vi der kop bay a meylekh,
mit a blishtshendiker shlang arum haldz, un zayne fligl—tsvey
kegniberdike feldzn iber an opgrunt—sheyt a geboygener iber der
shtotshul. Zayne tsen fis—kolones oysgehakt fun zalts—vaklen zikh unter
di shvere fligl.*

*Oybn, bay di brondzene fis funem eybershtn odler, oyf dem
hintergrunt fun zayn bloyer Brust, ze ikh a bahaltn mentshele. (88)*

Who is this *mentshele*, better translated as the gender-neutral “little person?”

As I argue in chapter one, the *mentshele* is a marginal figure that appears in late 19th and early 20th century Yiddish modernism. It appears to haunt modern Jewish culture as a diminished, racialized, and sexually othered “little Jew”—a melancholic and grotesque figure who first appears in the founding text of modern Yiddish literature, Sholem Abramovitsh’s *Dos Kleyne Mentshele* (The Little Person) in 1864. Here, Sutzkever addresses the *mentshele* directly: “Little man, who are you?” The *mentshele* answers by telling the poet that he’s the painter Yankel Sher, “the painter of the narrow streets,” someone the poet knew from Vilna. Yankel looks around and sees for the first time how the world has changed: ruins, nothing in its place, sewers shimmering with blood. His dandyish appearance from before the war has totally transformed into moldy and animal-like, and the brush beneath his teeth looks like a *khalef*, a slaughterknife.

In a dense and beautiful ghost story, the prose poem then describes Yankel’s reckoning with the destruction of Vilna:

Yankel Sher wants to smear the canvas with paint. Where is the truth—
inside him or outside?
Maybe it was his palette that was guilty?
He once saw a violin in the hands of a virtuoso. Right in the middle of the
concert—alas, the sound was gone. The audience was bewildered. The
violinist turned pale as the resin on the strings. But soon, he bent his ear
and said: Honored audience, this violin has just given up the ghost. I beg
you to stand up and pay him a final homage.

He brings his ear to the palette. It lives, it lives. (365)

*Yankel Sher vil farshmirn dem layvnt. Vu iz der emes, in im tsi in droysen?
Un efsher iz gor shuldik zayn palitre, ha?
Er hot amol gezen a fidele in di hent fun a mayster. In mitn shpiln—oy,
farloyrn di klangen. Oylem shtoynt un halt in shtoynen. Der mayster is
bleykh, vi der shtoyb fun kalafaniye unter di strunem. Nor bald leygt er tsu
zayn oyer un zogt: Khoyshever oylem, s'fidele hot okersht oysgehoykht di
neshome. Ikh bet zikh oyfshteln un opgebn kvoyd....*

Er leygt tsu zayn oyer tsu der palitre. Zi lebt, zi lebt. (90)

In this surrealist juxtaposition, Yankel first witnesses the destruction and blood in Vilna, questioning its truth and wondering if his palette is guilty for creating it. The story about the fiddle virtuoso follows. Both are narratives of survival after loss, of death and continuing life. Here the fiddle, part of the man, has gone silent—literally “breathed out all of its soul” [*s'fidele hot okersht oysgehoykht di neshome*]—and the mode of production transforms from the virtuoso playing the fiddle to paying the instrument homage. Then, in a fluid comparison with the fiddler and his fiddle, Yankel puts his ear to his painting palette. It lives but after death, after breathing its soul out—an image of total, irrevocable loss and what remains. The palette is transformed, representing a new mode of post-destruction art. The carrier of this mode is, significantly, the *mentshele*—the racial, sexual, and gendered other of Yiddish literature, a melancholic figure of Jewish grief.⁴¹

The fiddle has a special place in Sutzkever's poetics. It is part of Sutzkever's recurring symbol of the fiddle-rose, which brings together the fiddle (associated with his father) and the rose as a symbol of nature's spontaneous blooming. The fiddle-rose can

⁴¹ See my discussion of this figure in chapter one in terms of Anne Cheng's concept of racial melancholia as well as the crisis of being a transnational ethnic minority in Europe.

be read as another surrealist juxtaposition, a metaphor for art after loss: “The fiddle-rose does not need a fiddler. There is no one left to praise or curse her. She plays without a player, with joy and faith in honor of a reborn string” (translated by Ruth Whitman, qtd. by Justin Cammy, 312). Yankel’s palette that lives after total loss is, like the fiddle-rose, and like the Yiddish language itself, a hopeful metaphor for what remains after loss.

The Harshavs’ colloquial translation of the fiddle breathing its soul out is compelling, that it has “just given up the ghost.” What does it mean to give up the ghost, or for a fiddle to breath out its soul? On the idiomatic level, to give up the ghost means to die. Here one can also be reminded of Judith Butler’s queer interpretation of Freudian melancholy. Butler observes how for Freud “letting an object go” or (giving it up) is not really letting it go completely. It is a melancholic refusal to let go, a magical incorporation and identification with loss. To give up the ghost, then, is to become the ghost, or to become haunted. The loss transforms from an external to internal status, thereby refusing loss (*Psychic* 134). In this way, she concludes, we can think about all subject formation, in particular the formation of the bodily ego. Gender and sexuality, Butler argues—and Ann Cheng similarly argues race—are melancholic effects of loss caused by oppressive and prohibitive ideologies. The ego, Butler argues, is a product of grieving disavowed loss, or grieving something we never had. In the poem, the lost world of Vilna—and the lost Jewish world of Europe and beyond—produces the magical and grotesque *mentshele*, now in the form of Yankel. The grieving and diminished Yankel—genderless, and therefore in alliance with queerness or sexual difference—appears as a mark of the diminished survivor-self to unsettle postwar memory, subjecthood, and art. The world he creates through painting further demonstrates this.

Yankel begins to paint: the brush “devours colors” [*der pendzl, glaykh in im volt arayn der hunger funem kintsler, shlingt un shlingt farbn* (90)] and the canvas comes to life, the snow on it melts and underneath is spring-earth where an old woman walks with a young blonde girl on her shoulders. Behind them are ghosts: “Behind the old woman—faces. Faces. A chimney with a slaughtered neck.” [*Hinter der zikne—penimer. Penimer. A koymen mit a gekoyleten haldz* (91).] Yankel’s voice enters, pointing to his role as a witness, suggesting that the woman is someone he saw: “Yes, that’s just how she looked, the eighty-year-old woman. It just lacks...Oh, what is missing?” [*Yo, azoy hot zi oysgezen, di akhtsik-yerike, es felt bloyz...ha, vos felt?* (91)] And he remembers: “The old woman walked...with a tefillin box on her forehead...she picked up the tefillin box from the ground, from the sewer....” [*Di zikne is gegangen...mit a shel-rosh oyfn shtern...dem shel-rosh hot zi oyfgehoykhn fun dr’erd fun rinshtok...*] He paints the image of the woman, as he weeps and remembers. Then the painter’s imagination takes over:

He dips his brush in the fallen tears, in a spurt of red; and the old woman,
with the blond girl on her shoulders, now passes under the split gate,
between bayonets, with a little box on her brow, where God lives.

Lady Job, that’s what the picture will be titled...(366)

*Er tunkt dem fendzl in di gefalene trern, in a shpritsl royt; un di zikne, mit
der blonder meydele barantshik, shpant shoyn untern tseshpoltenem toyer,
tsvishn bagnetn, mit a kleyn shtibele oyfn shtern, vu es voynt got.*

—*Di Oyhte, azoy vet heysn dos bild...*(91)

In an allegory for postwar cultural production, Yankel remembers and paints—from his own tears—an image of what remains. The old woman, with *tefillin* on her forehead (prohibited by Jewish law for women), carrying a young blond girl on her back, is a narrative poem, a glimmer of oppositional survival. The figure of Lady Job also brings

attention to modes of racially gendered political domination that connect then and now, dead and living—as well as the survivors and stories left out of the frame of collective memory.

The image of an old woman wearing *tefillin* and the idea that this is where God lives could be read as a modernist symbol of negative Jewish futurity. However this image is more accurately read as hopeful. The old lady Job is the new Jewish hero—an archetype of faith—carrying a young blond girl on her back to symbolize relation through incongruity. As Gordon writes, “The ghost has its own desires, so to speak, which figure the whole complicated sociality of a determining formation that seems inoperative (like slavery) or invisible (like racially gendered capitalism) but that is nonetheless alive and enforced (183).” In the case of the Yiddish poet writing from Israel, perhaps the image carries recognition of hidden violences tied to race, gender, nation, and religion that continue in the new state. Lady Job is an image of survival as well as an image that *haunts* and makes demands on survival.

“Lady Job” as an allegory for postwar cultural production also provides an important comparison with Adorno’s famous dictum that “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.” Paul Celan’s “Todesfuge” [Deathfuge], written in 1944 or 1945, is the poem said to have inspired this statement.⁴² As Sidra Ezrahi observes, both Adorno’s statement and Celan’s poem have become fixed in discussions about writing in extremis—the limits of language and imagination—immortalizing the idea that “the poem enacted vis-à-vis Auschwitz dangles in some barbaric space” (143). Ezrahi is

⁴² Originally published in T.W. Adorno’s “Cultural Criticism and Society,” 1967, p. 34. See Ezrahi’s discussion of Adorno and the Celan poem, p.142.

referring to the interpretation of Celan's image of digging a grave in the air in
 "Todesfugue":

Black milk of daybreak we drink it at evening
 we drink it at midday and morning we drink it at night
 we drink and we drink
 we shovel a grave in the air there you won't lie too cramped...
 (trans. by Felstiner, 31)

*Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken dich nachts
 wir trinken dich morgens und mittags wir trinken dich abends
 wir trinken und trinken
 wir schaufeln ein Grab in den Lüften da liegt man nicht
 eng...*(Celan, *Speech-Grille*, 28)

Against readings of the poem (and Auschwitz) as outside of representation, Ezrahi re-reads the image of the grave in the sky as a locus of a radical postwar diasporic poetics, refusing all forms of containment and closure (156). She argues that Celan's poetics are "barbaric" in the sense of being outsider and foreign, embodying the language of the last Jewish poet in German literature, whose world has been destroyed (150). Out of this "wandering otherness and nonidentity," home becomes a yearning and not a place.

Sutzker's Lady Job and *mentshele* can be read alongside Celan's black milk and grave in the sky as estranged and defamiliarized bodily images, part of a 20th century Jewish poetics of disability and trauma or the mode of the cultural scar. Such images draw out the aspect of Adorno's dictum that points to barbarism as a narrative that reckons with the repression of the violent past in the present.

Disability, Trauma, and Jewishness

Sutzkever's poetics capture how disability figures into a postwar Jewish cultural narrative in which being broken and scarred creates new, hopeful ways of seeing and

being. *Green Aquarium* articulates a poetics of embodied grief through experiences of disability, especially blindness. Here, disability—as I have been arguing in all of my case studies—is far from a textual abstraction, or what David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder call narrative prosthesis (274). The concept of narrative prosthesis refers to symbolic representations of disability that stand in for other forms of alterity, as opposed to representing disability as an experience with social or political dimensions. To acknowledge the political dimensions of disability means recognizing “an ideological system of bodily norms that promotes some kinds of bodies while devaluing others (283).” This formulation draws attention to other forms of difference and deviance—through race, religion, gender, sexuality, class, and so forth—that work in relation to the disability framework. In *Green Aquarium*, disability and trauma are both expressed as experiences with larger political dimensions, as well as central Jewish cultural narratives. In Sutzkever’s poetics, disability and trauma are exclusions that make a multiplicity of violence and loss known.

In “Last of the Blind,” through surrealist juxtaposition, the experience of blindness comes into dynamic relation with political trauma. The poem tells the story of two sisters, one blind and one who sees. One day the blind sister’s lover doesn’t return. We know that he is dead through the depiction of her pain and the line, “Someone stuck a knife in a corpse!” [*Emets hot arayngehakt a meser in a toytn!* (92)] Here the woman’s blindness takes on larger political and social dimensions through likening her to a corpse, suggesting social death or devalued life. In her grief, the blind sister calls for her seeing sister to teach her how to dance for the first time. The seeing sister is described as small and half naked [*ir kleyne, zeyendike shvester, a halb-nakete*] bringing their vulnerabilities

into relation. The sisters dance, and the descriptive language around them is filled with blood, knives, and ash—juxtaposing the girls’ bodies, the loss of the blind sister’s lover, and a larger context of death and destruction in the Vilna ghetto. Then the blind sister says: “Thank you, my dear. Now leave me alone. I want to see if God is blind.” [*A dank, tayere, atsind loz mikh aleyn, ikh vil zen tsi got iz blinder* (93).] She takes a kerosene lamp and lights herself on fire. She burns over a scene of ghosts and blood, a destroyed world:

Over streets—caverns of ghosts—sun. Sun. Sun.
Sun in bandaged window panes. Sun in faces. Sun in corpses who haven’t
found death... (367)

Iber geslekh vi heyln fun gayster—zun. Zun. Zun.
Zun in bandazhirte shoykhn. Zun in penimer. Zun in meysim, vos gefinen
nit dem toyt... (93)

Her burning dance illuminates the ghosts of the dead as well as the living dead: “Men, sundered into two separate profiles, become skeletons again in the rosy glow of her dance.” [*Mentshn, tseshpoltene in tsvey bazundere profiln, farbeynern zikh vider bay dem royzikn opshayn fun ir tants* (93).] The poem ends with her fire filling the world:

And she herself, the blind girl, all of her in her fiery eyes, inflames the
streets with her dance, inflames the city, inflames the clouds:
“If you are blind, my God, take away my fire!...”

Un zi aleyn, di blinde, durkhoym in fayerdike oygen, tsindt on mit ir tants
di geslekh, tsindt on di shtot, tsindt on di volkns:
—Bistu blind, mayn got, nem tsu mayn fayer! (93)

Here the suicide act performs an ironic test of faith, a rejection of God, a refusal to experience more loss, and a radical incorporation or embodiment of her loss. The

description of “all of her” being in her fiery eyes before she dies resonates with Butler’s theory of the melancholic ego created out of loss. The reflections of her fire—in her eyes, in the city, in the ghosts, in the living corpses—bring her blindness into relation with personal loss as well as with the many deaths and the destruction of the city. In her grief and difference—as the last of the blind—the dead and living of Vilna are all aligned with her, connected by the fires of modernity. Fire connects disability with collective political trauma through the quality of transformation: the fire of her eyes and body become the sun, filling the streets and the city.

Throughout the poem, her blindness carries a transformative quality because of its non-normativity. The poem begins:

Her eyes did not dwell in flesh like everybody else’s. They lived inside, in a separate face—two small magnetic needles.

The needles attracted flowering branches, sun and shade, colors like throbbing veins, faces and, most important, the face of her blind lover. The two of them met like two nights and their stone blindness gushed out sparks. (366)

Ire oygen zenen farfleysht nit do vu bay alemen. Zey lebn ineveynik, in a bazunder ponim—tsvey magnetishe nedelek.

Ot di nedelek tsiyen-tsu bliyendike tsveygn, zun un shotn, kolirn vi klapndike odern, penimer un, der iker, dos penimer fun ir blindn gelibt.
(92)

Here, the description of her blindness resonates with what queer theorists Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner call a transformative and non-normative bodily context. Berlant and Warner link such bodily contexts to practices that transform normative regimes of public space into queer spaces with radical political potential. The image of the two lovers as the whole world, gushing out sparks at each other, also resonates with the context of queer

public sex that Berlant and Warner theorize as transforming heteronormative public space.

The blind lover's flute represents a melancholy cultural inheritance: "...he plays on the long flute he inherited, plays a melancholy tune, a kind of funeral march for a bird." [...*shpilt er af zayn langn yerushdikn fayfyol, shpilt a nogndikn nigun, a min feyglshe levaya...* (92)] Melancholy is translated from the visceral word "gnawing" [*nogndikn*], resonating with the melancholic *eating* or incomplete digestion of loss. When the lover doesn't return, it is "as if another blindness [has] seized the blind woman." [*Un zi—vi nokh a blindkeyt volt arayn in der blinder!*] The experience of blindness is linked to the experience of loss and a melancholic cultural heritage: one grief can be known to the other, or can make the other known. Losing him is like another blindness. Here, metaphors of disability and grief overlap to create a poetics of the non-normative body. It's not the grief of her blindness itself, but disability as a site of difference and exclusion that creates the unending grief of her blindness and makes other forms of grief known.

One of Sutzkever's most famous poems from *Lider fun togbukh* (1974-1985) asks what will remain after loss:

Who will remain? What will remain? A wind will stay behind.
The blindness will remain, the blindness of the blind.
A film of foam, perhaps, a vestige of the sea,
A flimsy cloud, perhaps, entangled in a tree.
(transl. by Benjamin and Barbara Harshav, 33)

*Ver vet blaybn, vos vet blaybn? Blaybn vet a vint,
Blaybn vet di blindkeyt funem blindn vos farshvindt.
Blaybn vet a simen funem yam: a shnirl shoym,
Blaybn vet a volkendl fartshepet oyf a boym.* (16)

Why is blindness so important, and what is it signaling about the repression of the past in the present? As in the “Last of the Blind,” here the blindness of the blind is not a metaphorical blindness but a bodily or sensual one—along with the sea foam, a wispy cloud, the image of a fiddle-rose, and finally the belief in God, which ends the poem: “God will remain, is that enough for you?” [*Got vet blaybn, iz dir nit genug?*] What remains after loss is the body, or a non-normative way of inhabiting the body, language, Judaism, and Jewishness that actively opposes the racial and gendered regimes of normalcy and inequality that continue to structure survival in the present.

“Last of the Blind” also speaks to how loss remakes the Jewish body into a non-assimilating, non-normative body. Rosemary Garland Thomson’s study of staring in the context of disability brings attention to how blindness in the poem functions as an alternative epistemology within an ocularcentric modernity. Within modern regimes of normalcy and discourses of visibility, Garland Thomson theorizes the staring encounter—between starers and starees—as disruptive and potentially transformative. Extraordinary bodies, she argues, create an opportunity for unexpected relation and the transformation of public space through bodily difference. In one sense, the blind Jewish woman in the poem signals a repressed violent past within heroic narratives of national survival. She is a disabled Jewish woman—a radical other within the pervasive eugenic ideas about sexuality and racial degeneration that culminated in the Nazi genocide. The metaphor of her blindness and body as fires that fill and transform the destroyed Jewish city therefore become inflected with actual fires of the ghetto and camps. In this way her blindness—or disability and trauma—becomes central to postwar Jewish identity and culture. In the mode of the cultural scar, the woman’s blindness—which carries a history

of Jewish difference, “degeneracy”, and genocide—becomes extraordinary, and has the power to transform the modern city, nation, and world.

Sutzkever’s ghosts are not the return of the dead, but something waiting for you. They have desires, they are alive, and want something to be done (Gordon 183). This something to be done is what Gordon calls the utopian dimension of haunting—when ghosts appear to make the violent past known, demanding new forms of justice and life in the present. Survivor guilt, as a postwar structure of feeling, reckons with a repressed past of devaluation and death, and complicity with the reproduction of political violence in the present. It articulates a mode of opposition and critique of transnational forms of Jewish politics, culture, and identity embedded within a postwar US-led imperial culture, and entangled emerging forms of US and Israeli state violence. Instead of looking to settled political solutions, survivor guilt turns to homelessness, unrest, and bodily difference—to trauma and disability—as opportunities to imagine strange, new, and hopeful forms of culture and politics.

Chapter Four

Beyond the Intrusive Glare: Hysteria as Contemporary Jewish Cultural Narrative

For that had always been her way, to withdraw from what frightened her,
from the unbearable; to retreat quietly, as she had long ago retreated from
me, to hide deep within herself, beyond the intrusive glare of a rational
sun, never to return.

(Aryeh Lev Stolman, *The Far Euphrates*, 198)

Hysteria as Post-Holocaust Jewish Cultural Narrative

In Aryeh Lev Stolman's novel *The Far Euphrates* (1997), the narrator's mother retreats into her room for many weeks on a self-imposed bedrest during a "hysterical pregnancy." The doctor repeatedly tells the mother that she is not pregnant but she continues to believe that she is. The reader understands from the novel that the mother's condition is caused, in part, by the trauma of many miscarriages. The condition itself, however, is immediately triggered by the shock of learning that a dear female friend—who had been a prisoner in Auschwitz—used to be a man, and after being a subject of Dr. Mengele's gruesome operations, for not fully knowable reasons, became a woman. The descriptive turn in the epigraph of the mother's retreat deep within herself, beyond the intrusive glare of rationality—into a "hysterical" female body—is part of a modern Jewish poetics of disability, trauma, and "gender trouble" that I am tracing throughout the 20th century.

This chapter builds from the previous by continuing to trace how the Nazi genocide and founding of the state of Israel remake a transnational poetics of the Jewish

body through the mode of cultural scars. These are representational practices in which collective histories of loss that become cultural and social crisis are expressed through overlapping metaphors of trauma and disability. Through the theme of female madness in North American novelist Aryeh Lev Stolman's *The Far Euphrates* (1997) and Israeli novelist Orly Castel-Bloom's *Dolly City* (1992), this chapter explores how disability and trauma—specifically in the ghostly form of hysteria—become a contemporary post-Holocaust Jewish cultural narrative. The cultural tropes of “nervous illness” and “mental disease”—particularly as they are mapped onto the bodies of women—thus exemplify the mode of the cultural scar. They are seemingly marginal tropes yet present everywhere; they reckon with histories of loss and crisis through overlapping metaphors of disability and trauma rooted in specific histories of bodily and historical pain; and they call attention to the repressed violence of the past that still remains in the present, in the hope of something to be done.⁴³

Hysteria, the classic “female malady” central to modern constructions of gender,⁴⁴ is also central to modern constructions of Jewishness.⁴⁵ For this reason, hysteria constitutes a central Jewish cultural scar. In response to the interpellation of the Jew's body as “degenerate” and “hysterical” in late 19th century racial science and medicine, modern Jewish body politics attempted to regenerate the male Jewish body into a nation

⁴³ See chapter three. Gordon defines haunting as a way of knowing a repressed violence of the past that still remains in the present, which calls for a “something to be done (184).”

⁴⁴ See Showalter's foundational study on women and insanity in England, and how constructions of the two were entangled.

⁴⁵ See chapters one and two for a more detailed discussion of this. Fin de siècle European discourses of racial science, psychoanalysis and culture constructed the modern Jewish male body as “degenerate”—hysterical, sick, racially inferior, homosexual, and effeminate—a locus of racial and sexual difference.

of modern “muscle Jews.” Within these discourses—which Todd Presner calls “muscular Judaism”—the Jewish woman is a ghostly presence.⁴⁶ When she does appear, she is linked to mental illness. Presner, for example, shows that early political Zionism called for Jewish women to overcome their “mental diseases” in order to make healthier children (141). Biale similarly shows that late 19th century Zionism constructed motherhood as an antidote to degeneracy, calling for women to “return to the virtues of motherhood, which would help them overcome the nervous disorders of their lives (182).”

Hysteria is the 19th century epidemic that haunts such descriptions of “mental disease” and “nervous disorders” among Jewish women. Shaped by late 19th century racial science, Freud and other Jewish scientists became preoccupied with hysteria. As Sander Gilman shows, racial science and medical knowledge of Freud’s time considered Jewish men especially susceptible to hysteria. In response to this, Freud and other Jewish scientists attempted to locate the disease outside of their own immutable biology by displacing it onto a universalized “woman” as well as a racialized “eastern Jew”, or Jews from Eastern Europe (Gilman 102). The Jewish woman therefore became the disguised subject of most of Freud’s famous case studies, constructed as doubly hysterical because of her inferior gender and race.

Mainly theorized by Freud and Breuer, hysteria was a disorder distinguished by its relationship to the past. It was understood as the traumatic past written on the body through visible symptoms: “trances, physical tics, ecstatic seizures, masquerades and

⁴⁶ As many scholars have observed, scholarship on modern Jewish body politics almost exclusively focuses on men and masculinity. See Boyarin, Itzkovitz, and Pellegrini, p.5-6; and Grumberg’s “Female,” p. 146.

deceptions, and ‘improper’ eating habits (Anderson 45).” Research on hysteria shaped contemporary medical and psychoanalytic practice, transforming the idea of “health” to mean a condition

not only of a body functioning properly, but also of a subject properly positioned within the institutions of family, community, and state and a consolidated, fully fleshed-out relationship to one’s own archival past. (Anderson 46)

To put it simply: part of correcting Jewish masculinity meant curing its feminine illnesses, like hysteria, understood by its experts as a condition of being improperly situated in relationship to the past. In the same period, political Zionism was imagined by its founders as a cure: a return to history through a return to the properly gendered body, a project of becoming a nation with a proper history.

Several studies have dealt with how the regenerative project of political Zionism continues to shape Israeli literature and society through contemporary eugenic practices, policies of settler colonialism and occupation, or constructions of masculinity in Israeli literature and culture.⁴⁷ Its implications, however, have not yet been taken up in a transnational disability or trauma framework. Alisa Solomon’s chapter on the dominant “muscular” logic of the mainstream gay rights movement in Israel points to the importance for such a framework. Solomon examines the ways in which the mainstream Jewish gay rights movement—both Israeli and international—is folded into the project of liberal Zionism through attempts to prove Israel’s “normalcy” to the West, effacing ongoing policies of settler colonialism and paying symbolic homage to the emblems of

⁴⁷ See especially Weiss for a discussion of eugenics and settler colonialism and Gluzman for a discussion of Zionism and masculinity. Settler colonialism refers to a history of state-sponsored displacement, dispossession, and population transfers of Palestinians as a mode of Israeli nation building.

nationalism—Land and the Holocaust. By contrast, she shows that the most oppositional wing of the progressive peace movement in Israel is mostly women, especially queer women, concluding that: “It’s femaleness, not homosexuality per se, that Zionist nationalism cannot abide (157).”

In a transnational poetics of the non-normative Jewish body—as demonstrated by *The Far Euphrates* and *Dolly City*—it’s femaleness *and* disability that both nation and diaspora cannot abide. To explore these relationships between women and disability, disability and trauma, history and hysteria—I merge Marianne Hirsch’s idea of postmemory with critical trauma and disability studies. Hirsch defines postmemory as a “*structure* of inter- and transgenerational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience” but one generation removed (205). Often, as shown in the case of children of Holocaust survivors, trauma is transmitted in a bodily way, through what she calls “nonverbal and noncognitive acts of transfer [...] often occurring in the form of symptoms (211)” —aches, sighs, and illness. Holocaust memory transmitted through the bodily language of symptoms is an example of how disability metaphors are not always simply stigmatizing or ableist.⁴⁸ Disability metaphors can also express central cultural and historical narratives, tied to specific modes of transmitting pain.⁴⁹

Though the novels are strikingly different—one is a lyrical and mystical *bildungsroman*, the other a godless and post-Zionist dystopia—the strange resonance

⁴⁸ See my discussion of “narrative prosthesis” in chapter three. Mitchell and Synder define “narrative prosthesis” as the tendency for disability metaphors in literature to function as a narrative “crutch” for another form deviancy, situating the reader in the position of “normal” national subject.

⁴⁹ As I discuss in chapter three, I follow revisions to the concept of narrative prosthesis by Davidson as well as Barker and Murray, in which disability can also become a central cultural and historical narrative.

between them brings critical attention to disability, particularly female madness, as a Jewish cultural narrative imbricated in contemporary national and diasporic imaginaries. Unlike the Jewish mothers of postwar Jewish American literature who embody obstacles for the attainment of racial, class, and gender norms—exemplified by the neurotic mother of Philip Roth’s *Portnoy’s Complaint* (1969)—these more recent depictions of “crazy” women suggest a more critical relationship to multiple nations, as well as the dominant logic of both nation and diaspora. In this way, these recent novels perhaps continue in the tradition of Allen Ginsberg’s representation of Naomi Ginsberg in *Kaddish* (1961). Ginsberg’s representation of his mother is an early example of a post-Holocaust poetics that features female madness as a cultural scar, and her paranoia reflects multiple histories of state violence, past and ongoing. Together *Dolly City* and *The Far Euphrates* similarly present the Jewish hysteric as a critical figure in relationship to the dominant “muscular” logic of both nation and diaspora. This critical figure, marked as “sick,” “crazy,” and feminine, ultimately works to transform conceptions of the nation and home.

Dolly City and Hysteria as a Literary Mode

Orly Castel-Bloom is a prolific, Israeli-born, Tel Aviv-based novelist and short story writer of Egyptian-Jewish background. *Dolly City* (1992), her fifth book, is her most notorious novel because of its excessive violence and grotesque-comedic style. Major scholars of Israeli literature—such as Dan Miron and Gershon Shaked—claim Castel-Bloom to be the creator of a new literary language because of its sparse, colloquial, yet complex style. Her work has been described as feminist, post-feminist, post-modern, post-Zionist, and post-ideological, but has not yet been taken up in a trauma

or disability framework. I build from previous discussions of metaphors of the body, gender, and territory in *Dolly City* in order to show how these metaphors are also imbricated in a transnational Jewish poetics of disability and trauma, providing another example of the cultural scar as a representational mode.

Within a transnational framework, *Dolly City* can be read as a medical dystopia that allegorizes the Israeli state and globalized city through a disability optic. Michael Davidson uses the metaphor of a disability optic to describe a quality of global disability narratives that “focalize the inherently unrepresentable quality of global economic processes (180).” In *Dolly City*, this is applicable in the novel’s emphasis on fantastic images of medicine, insanity, impairment, and disease within a larger globalized and dystopian landscape. The novel’s narrator is Dr. Dolly, a 30-year-old deranged doctor of Egyptian-Jewish background with dubious medical training from Katmandu. Dolly lives in Dolly City, creating a spatial metaphor between Dolly and the city, the city and the nation, and the nation and the globalized landscape. Throughout the novel, she does gruesome and perverse medical experiments—resonant with the Nazi Dr. Mengele’s—on animals and people. She sews rabbits together, injects strangers on the street with morphine, and goes on murderous rampages. In the beginning of the novel, she finds a starving and wounded baby in a trash bag in the truck of a man she kills. She keeps the child, considers killing him, but instead names him *Ben* (“Son”), and decides to raise him as her own. Dolly becomes increasingly obsessed with Son’s health and the possibility of him catching various diseases. Her obsession intensifies until she is constantly operating on him and treating him for conditions that he doesn’t have, in insatiable fits of self-proclaimed panic and hysteria. In an iconic scene, she carves the map of ancient Israel

into Son's back, feeling finally exhilarated and satisfied by the feeling of cutting into "living flesh (37) [*basar khay*]."

Dolly City is a nightmarish metropolis with aspects of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, as well as other globalized cities. Medicine and psychiatry are markers of the excessive violence of the city. The Holocaust is one of many features of the violent political landscape, and a means of excluding Dolly—as a Mizrahi Jew—from the national narrative. All trains run to a station named Dachau, a memorial site that is only a wooden plank. There is an anti-anti-Semitic quarter of town, "where the holocaust survivors crucify a different goy every day (97)." The novel also contains the homesickness of all 20th century fiction:⁵⁰

Sometimes, even in Dolly City, I feel like a stranger. I look at the traffic jams, I listen to the ding-dong of the big clock tower, the gong of the Chinese restaurant, but in spite of it all I began to tremble, I want to go home—even though this is my home. (33)

Lifamim, afilu she'ani b'doli siti, ani nitkafet tkhusha shel zarut. Ani mabita b'pkakey hatnua, ani shomaat et hading dong mihashaon hagadol, et hagong shel hamesada hasinit, aval b'khol zot ani matkhila lirod, v'levakesh habayta—af al pi she'zeh beyti. (26)

The novel blurs the boundaries between Dolly's madness and the madness of the city—marked by homelessness, fragmentation, and dislocation.

Dolly is in and out of psychiatric wards, and reflects on the meanings of madness throughout the novel. She increasingly sees cancer everywhere—on people, cars—and is convinced that it's her duty to cure it (62). This is the major form that her self-proclaimed madness takes. Dolly's sister—a social worker who has an orphanage for abused children that funnels them into the military—eventually takes Son from Dolly. When Dolly goes

⁵⁰ See George for a discussion of the politics of home in 20th century fiction.

to visit, her sister has returned the map on Son's back to the '67 borders, reflecting her good, liberal values (110). The orphanage sends all of the children to work for the national airline and military in exchange for paid education. Son eventually joins the "Academy of Brutal Seamanship" against Dolly's wishes. While he is away, Son sends Dolly letters "and Polaroid snapshots of himself waving the Israeli flag on the open sea, or standing at attention at morning roll call on the floating school (148)." In the end of the novel, Dolly reads in the newspaper that Son has finally gone rogue. He tries to hi-jack a Pan-T plane, is caught, shot in the back, and goes on the run. The novel ends:

My heart pounded in my breast with excitement, I could really feel it expand and contract, and my brain danced inside the receptacle of my skull. I was worried about the boy, but I wasn't hysterical (*aval zot lo haytah histeria*). I knew that after everything I'd done to him—a bullet or a knife in the back were nothing he couldn't handle. (158)

Libi halam b'khozaka mirov hitragshut, mamash hircashti oto mitkavetz v'mitrakhev, v'gam hamoakh sheli b'tokh hagolgolet rakad b'tokh kley hakibul shelo. Daagti l'yeled, aval zot lo haytah histeria. Yadati she'akhrei kol mah she'asiti lo, kadur o sakin b'gav—ze lo davar she'hu lo yakhol lehitmoded ito. (123)

This is one of the few moments when Dolly isn't claiming to be going mad, and the novel ends on a note of Son's opposition to the state creating an alliance between Dolly and Son. In Hebrew, she uses the term *histeria*—the name of a disorder—rather than *histeri*, "hysterical," the more commonly used adjectival form in colloquial Hebrew. This perhaps points to hysteria as a modern diagnostic category that haunts the representation of Dolly's madness. The use of the term "hysteria" also points to how the novel locates modern madness within the logic of the medicalized and rational nation state—or the organization and categorization of bodies and populations that Foucault includes under

the category of biopolitics.⁵¹ Within this logic, disability—here in the form of hysteria, tied strangely and indirectly to a history of Jewish “degeneracy”—becomes a threat to the logic of the nation.

The novel’s form is a narrative monologue. Its language is simple and colloquial, abandoning many of the conventions of high literary Hebrew. The simple language is also complex and layered. It plays with bodily and ideological meanings, defamiliarizing core national narratives that target gender, sexuality and ability. Dolly talks about Son’s body in ways that mirror the “muscular” logic of the nation—for example, not wanting him to be “*rekhrukhi*.” In English this translates to “sissy” (67), but the Hebrew word literally means flabby and weak (53).

An important word used throughout the novel is *linateakh* or “to operate.” The word means both to do surgery as well as to analyze or dissect an idea or narrative. The word *netach* is also related—a cut of animal meat—pointing to the visceral dimension of both meanings of the verb, evoking the acts of operating or analyzing as cutting into the flesh of something. Throughout the novel, Dolly describes her need to operate in the language of insatiable physical hunger, linking her grotesque femininity to an improper relationship to food and violence, as well as to an improperly analytical mind.⁵² These are all Western tropes of transgressive femininity, as reflected in the symptoms and theories of the classic female maladies like hysteria.

The use of the monologue device, as well as the central concerns of illness and trauma in the novel, suggest a satirical relationship to the trauma-related genres of

⁵¹ See my discussion of Foucault’s biopolitics in the introduction and chapter one, as state power addressed to the body and life itself, creating a society of normalization.

⁵² See Grumberg’s discussion of the female grotesque and Dolly’s hunger in “Female.”

performance art, testimony, and even illness narratives. The novel perhaps parodies these genres in which, as Ann Cvetkovitch explains, individuals draw on memory and personal history to create an archive against an oppressive dominant culture that erases or negatively portrays them (26). Cvetkovitch further observes that these genres often recount a traumatic experience or moment of intense affect that brings transformation or revelation. At one point, Dolly interrupts one of her obsessive rants about cancer: “And I can say right here and now that even if cancer ever does catch up with me—that’s not what this monologue is supposed to be leading up to. No, these are not the confessions of a titleless woman (65).” [*V’ani yekhola l’hakdim v’lomar, she’gam im i pam yitfos oti hasartan—lo l’sham amur hamonlog hazeh liskhov. Lo, eyn zeh veduya shel k’tsutsat shadayim* (50).] *Dolly City*, in contrast to illness narratives or testimony, depicts “intense affect” or trauma as the structuring, non-revelatory experience of contemporary life.

Most read *Dolly City* as a radical critique of Zionist constructions of gender and motherhood. As Dana Olmert writes:

Dolly is the first mother in Hebrew literature who responds incisively and provocatively to the normative division of roles between mothers and sons in the national domain and to the demand that this division passes as natural [...] She dares to point out the tacit agreements on which the system relies, among them the mechanism of symbolic compensations the system awards to the bereaved mother in exchange for her assent to the gendered division of roles. (346)

Olmert locates the novel’s break with tradition as one of the earliest and most radical expressions of the “Oslo period,” when an opening for imaginative political and cultural opposition opened in Israel. As she explains, this turn to opposition began during the first Lebanon war, seen as the first war of choice rather than self-defense. Activism led by mothers such as Raya Harnik and the founding of groups such as Women in Black

brought serious questioning of state processes into the public sphere. This intervention by the mothers of soldiers “caused the politically and culturally accepted templates of gender and nationality to crack (349).” The novel articulates this “cracking” of the dominant gendered and muscular logic of the nation through a poetics of female madness, specifically hysteria.

Dolly’s descriptions of her relationship to Son constantly reference Israeli national and cultural rhetoric, creating an analogy between Dolly and the nation. In one often-cited example, after she carves the map of Israel onto Son’s back, Dolly says:

Before going any further, I would like to stress something: I don’t want to give the impression here that I took a child and destroyed him. I only wanted to protect him from harm. I wanted him to live to a hundred and twenty, and what’s wrong with that? Why this hypocrisy? In some societies a man can be forced to chop off his sister’s clitoris with his teeth—and I’m not entitled to demand sovereignty over the defense of my son? (52)

Lifney she’amshikh hala, b’ratsoni l’hagdish davar-ma: khashuv li shelo yotzer haroshem she’lakakhti yeled v’harasti oto. Rak ratsiti she’yikhiye ad mea v’esrim, v’ma ra b’kakh? Darashti pikud al kol hamakhozot, v’ma ra b’kakh? Ma hatseviut hazot? B’khevrot mesuyemot mesugolim l’hakhriakh ben adam lakhtokh b’sheynav et hadagdagan shel akhoto—az li asur lidrosh ribonot al hagnat hayeled sheli? (39)

On one level, this racist analogy to “certain societies” brings attention to the violence of what the state routinely does to its subjects. As Olmert writes:

And even as the state is allowed, out of professed concern for its subjects, to take violent steps that may lead to their—and others’—death, Dolly, too, is entitled to conduct herself vis-à-vis her son-subject: she invades his privacy, abuses him, opens and closes his body, scars him. (352)

Dolly’s mapping of the nation onto Son’s back, in other words, is a metaphor for how state violence is mapped onto the male Jewish body through mandatory military service. A disability and trauma lens pushes this reading further to bring attention to how the

novel's scar metaphors are also part of larger cultural narrative and representational mode.

Dolly's constant scarring of Son resonates with earlier representations of scars in 20th century Jewish modernism, particularly Lamed Shapiro's "The Cross" (1909) that I discuss in chapter two. In both texts, we see a similar violent mapping of the symbolic logic of political modernity onto male Jewish bodies. In "The Cross," a Russian pogromist carves a crucifix into the Jewish man's forehead, which he then claims as a symbol of his new modern identity and proceeds to imitate the violence of the pogromists by raping and killing the woman he loves. Dolly—in the role of national mother—also participates in the violence of the nation through the carving of the national map onto Son. Both are satirical image-metaphors of how modern political violence is mapped onto and remakes bodies. Together the images offer a continuous critique of the enfolding of Jewishness into modern "muscular" epistemologies—first of European Christian modernity and then the globalized nation state.

Dolly's racist and Eurocentric language also references nationalist rhetoric, locating Dolly's madness in the racial violence of the state. Another example is Dolly's invention of a new disease: "Arabophobia, fear of Arabs." She explains the cure: "Fuck Arabs. You fuck them—and you see that the devil's not as black as he's painted, they're just like everyone else (61)." [*Arabophobia—pakhad mi'aravim. [...]davka l'hizdayen im aravim, im at mefhakhedet mihem. At mizdayenet itam—v'roah shehasheyd lo kol kakh nora, hem pashut kmo kulam* (47).] The specifically feminine address of the language—lost in the English translation—is significant. This is a satirical inversion of the dominant

logic of a racially pure nation, critiquing categories of sexuality and race by addressing a taboo of sexual mixing between Jewish women and Arab men.

Furthermore, the cutting and scarring of Son additionally evokes one of Israel's invisible collectives—*nakhim*, or disabled soldiers, who fall outside of national narratives and collective consciousness. At the same time, the novel represents Son's maimed body in relationship to two other collectives in Israel: Dolly, who represents the mothers of Jewish soldiers; and Palestinians, depicted throughout the novel as faceless and dehumanized "Arabs." The novel's strange linking of these groups suggests Grace Hong and Roderick Ferguson's notion of "strange affinities." These are alliances forged through "differentials of power, value and social death within and among groups (9)." "Strange affinities" thus provides "an analytic for how the creation of categories of value and valuelessness underpins contemporary racialized necropolitical regulation (Hong and Ferguson 16)." ⁵³ Through its different allegorical figures, the novel represents categories of value and valuelessness that underpin the contemporary necropolitical state.

The affinities through difference between Dolly, Son, and the dehumanized Arabs also resonate with Jasbir Puar's discussion of the specific placement of disability in contemporary necropolitics. Puar tracks biopower and necropower through what she calls the permeating relations between living and dying, exercised by Israel's "right to maim" ("Inhumanist"). This refers to the state's deliberate debilitation of Palestinian bodies and environments as an act of biopolitical control. The novel similarly situates disability and

⁵³ See my discussion of necropolitics in the introduction and chapter one. I build from Achille Mbembe's definition of necropolitics as the modern state's exercise of the "right to kill," or mechanisms of devaluation and death—exemplified by colonialism and slavery—that underpin contemporary racial governance.

the state's right to maim and scar—both citizens and non-citizens, albeit unevenly—as central to racial governance.

While the absurdly and even comically violent novel risks reifying dehumanization and state violence, its fantastic allegorical mode ultimately critiques the necropolitical state through its analogy between Dolly's madness and modes of contemporary racial governance. In one famous moment, Dolly says:

Beyond any doubt—madness is a predator. Its food is the soul. It takes over the soul as rapidly as our forces occupied Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip in 1967. After madness takes over and settles in the territory of the human mind, the mad cows come into the picture. All they know to do is eat, so they stuff themselves sick and lay the fields to waste. And if a state like the State of Israel can't control the Arabs in the territories, how can anybody expect me, a private individual, to control the occupied territories inside myself? (96)

Me'al l'kol safek—ha teyruf hayta toref. Hu mazono—hanefesh. Hu mishtalet al hanefesh b'mehirut she'bah kavash tsavanu et kol yehuda v'shomron v'khevel aza b'67. Akhrey she'hateyruf hishtalet al otam "shtakhim" b'kerevo shel ha'adam, nikhneset l'hatmunah hakvashim hameturefot l'zlol hen yodaut. Hen madbirot et hasedot milashon midbar. V'im medina kmo medinat yisrael lo metzlikha l'hishtalet al aravey hashtakhim, medua she'ani ben adam prati, okhal l'hishtalet al ha-occupied territories she'bekarvi? (39)

In Hebrew, the words for insanity (*toref*) and predator (*teyruf*) share the same root letters, linking their meanings. This locates the insatiable hunger that characterizes Dolly's madness within the political logic of occupation, conquering land, and controlling "Arabs" in the territories. The translation of *hakvashim hameturafof* in the novel is "Mad cows," perhaps to make the image more relatable to a Western reader. However, *hacvashim hameturafof* literally translates to "insane sheep." In Hebrew, there are some words that are exceptions and take masculine nouns but have feminine adjectives or vice-versa. *Hacvashim* (sheep) is one such exception, a masculine plural but a feminine

adjective. Perhaps the language hints at an unsettling of categories of gender and sexuality, a cracking of the logic of the muscular, necropolitical nation. The “out of control” and insane sheep are described similarly to Dolly’s own insatiable hunger and madness, which is also linked poetically to the “out of control” Arabs. These resonances with hysteria—the malady of being “out of control”—can be read as part of a poetics of female sickness and madness shaped in relation to the modern racial state. The “occupied territories” of the last line is also printed in English, the language of globalization. This language choice perhaps references the global production of valueless life vis-à-vis the circulation of the occupation and conflict through the international media. The trope of hysteria ultimately works in this passage to call the modern category of the state—and its multiplicity of gendered, sexualized, and racial violence—into question.

Dolly’s constant cutting and scarring of Son also turns on its head the Jewish ritual of the *brit milah*, or male circumcision, another form of cutting that symbolizes the patrilineal nation inscribed onto flesh. In the beginning of the novel, Dolly finds a video of Son’s *brit-milah*, arranged by a mysterious old man who works at Pan-T (the national airline) and claims to be the baby’s grandfather. She then becomes obsessed with tracing Son’s paternal lineage, out of fear that her claim to him will be erased. Dolly never finds a paternal line, and in this way, the novel rejects a central concern of Israeli literature—the relationship between fathers and sons (Grumberg, “afterward,” *Dolly City*, 163). In this way, the novel discards the Oedipal drama altogether, aligning it with queer diasporic cultural forms in which the dominant political logic of blood, heterosexuality, and kinship

is replaced by strangeness, affiliation, and inauthenticity.⁵⁴ The novel perhaps achieves a queer diasporic effect through its satirical embodiment of the muscle Jew's hysterical female opposite in the form of the insane Dolly, as well as its critical relationship to multiple nations and globalization.

If the Jewish woman's duty is to overcome her "mental disease" in order to produce and raise a new nation of healthy sons, Dolly is a satirical inversion. She shamelessly claims her madness and is constantly wounding and traumatizing Son in the name of his future health. In this way, the novel critiques the paradoxical logic of the muscular state, captured by Dolly's cry to the city: "You're sick! [...] Let me heal you! (64)" Dolly's motto captures the modern political transformation of individual illness into national illness, a logic that becomes a central feature of the novel's dystopic and medicalized world.

As Grumberg argues, the novel creates a critical bodily aesthetics that reject dominant constructions of gender in Israeli literature and society through the ideal masculine form of the "new Jew" or muscle Jew. Grumberg shows that rather than defining a place for women within these or even against these paradigms—or returning to old paradigms such as the effeminate diasporic Jew—the novel creates a whole new set of metaphors and images through tropes of the "female grotesque."

Throughout the novel, Dolly becomes increasingly grotesque as her hunger for food and operating on people increases and she becomes insatiable and morbidly obese. Grumberg astutely argues that Dolly "thus defies the conventional gender/power assignation by asserting her interaction with the public sphere physically and figuratively,

⁵⁴ See, for example, Gopinath or Eng.

playing with cultural stereotypes and fears of the desiring, devouring woman as insufficiently feminine and dangerously powerful (156).” Reading Dolly’s body as only transgressively and transformatively grotesque risks missing the ways in which Dolly is not only playing with fears of the desiring, devouring woman but also fears about this woman’s—particularly this racially and sexually othered Mizrahi woman’s⁵⁵—multiple disabilities, namely her mental illness and her obesity.

Disability, as Lennard Davis points out, is different from the grotesque because rather than transformatively representing everyone, as the grotesque does, disability is “formulated as by definition excluded from culture, society, the norm (25).” Dolly is grotesque in the sense that her madness and violence represent the madness and violence of ordinary life, as Grumberg argues. However, Dolly also functions as a disability figure in the sense that she is defined by multiple violent exclusions from culture, society, and the (Ashkenazi, male, muscular) norm. Through this reading, the abject Dolly becomes a monster created by multiple exclusions of contemporary Israeli society.⁵⁶

Through a disability lens, Dolly can be read as the abject opposite of Meira Weiss’ concept of the “chosen body.” As Weiss argues, the Zionist bodily revolution rendered eugenics a “social discourse that has gained prominence in Israel through the ideology of the ‘chosen body (3).’” This is the ideology of the masculine, Jewish, Ashkenazi, physically perfect, and heterosexual subject of the new nation (4). Most

⁵⁵ See Shohat for more of how Mizrahi identity (Israeli Jews of Arab and North African background) has been constructed as racially other in Israeli society, specifically how such cultural identity is excluded from Zionist definitions of the Jewish national subject.

⁵⁶ See my discussion in chapter two of *The Cross Man* as a similar monster figure in Lamed Shapiro’s “The Cross” (1909). I build from Kristeva’s notions of the abject and the monster as categories of otherness created to define the borders of the self.

importantly, the chosen body, Weiss argues, is a trope for a “military-masculine, settler-colonial society (17).” She examines the ideology of the “chosen body” through institutionalized rejections of Arab, non-Jewish, female, and disabled bodies. Examples are the ongoing political logic of settler colonialism and occupation, as well as Israel’s record-high rates of prenatal screening, selective abortions, and proportion of children rejected because of disabilities.

Read in this context, Dolly is the Mizrahi female deviant and hysterical opposite of the ideal national male subject. Dolly’s “madness”—represented as a fragmented and borderless relationship between self and nation, present and past—unsettles ideologies about land, nation, community, and home. One example of this is the novel’s representation of Zionist ideology through the character of Gordon, a parody of founding Labor Zionist A.D. Gordon. He grows organic gardens in an effort to “root” himself in the land, and tells Dolly she also needs “rooting,” because she is a “bundle of nerves (81).” He eventually gives up on her as well as Dolly City, decrying that it isn’t even a “place,” as he leaves for Mexico City. Gordon’s label of Dolly as a “bundle of nerves” evokes dominant constructions of womens’ nervous disorders in the West, such as hysteria. Here again the novel suggests the female hysteric as a figure that critically uproots dominant “settled” logics of the nation and rooting in the land.

Dolly claims that her name is an acronym for a phrase she never reveals. If read as an English name—a fair reading as there is no meaning for it in Hebrew—“Dolly” perhaps alludes to Western patriarchal constructions of women as passive dolls. Dolly’s insatiable hunger (to eat and to operate) also resonates with the history of female (and Jewish) nervous disorders in Western culture. In her feminist history of these disorders,

Elaine Showalter describes the relationship between hysteria and feminist protest of the 19th century as a kind of historical continuum. She shows that in women's protest and suffrage movements that followed the hysteria epidemic, "elements of hunger, rebellion, and rage latent in the phenomenon of female nervous disorder became explicit and externalized (162)." Constructing Dolly as an uncontrollably nervous, hungry, and violent woman points to her "improper" and rebellious position in relation to the state, the family, the community, and the past.

Through the theme of mapping, which is also a central theme in *The Far Euphrates*, *Dolly City* ultimately attempts to reimagine home and the nation. The word for map in Hebrew, *mapa*, points to the dual ideological and bodily nature of mapping. The word *lemapot* means to map, and the noun *mapa* is both map and tablecloth. The map as a tool of imperial conquest, of mastering, conquering, "civilizing," and "normalizing" territory and bodies, is mirrored by the domesticating tablecloth, the territorial surface or landscape upon which the table is set. The nightmarish world of *Dolly City* blurs borders between public and private, nation and self, map and tablecloth, soldier and mother, health and illness, sanity and insanity.

In one key moment, the novel imagines life beyond mapping and the nation. Dolly says, reflecting on her failed approach to motherhood, and by extension, the nation: "To myself, I began to admit that my whole conception was wrong. I'd worked like a dog, in vain. I'd built dams in places where there wasn't even a river, and persuaded myself that flashes of light were rushing waters I've successfully trapped (150)." [Hitkhalti m'vade beynei l'beyni, she'kol hakonseptsia sheli hayta muteyt. Asiti avoda shekhora, b'zuya, m'uteret. Baniti sekherim b'mekomot she'eyn bikhlal naharot,

shikhnati et etsmi she'habezekim shel or hem mayim rabim she'balamti (117).] She links this way of seeing earlier in the novel to her madness—of thinking one thing is something else, out of paranoia and fear, because it feels like a matter of life and death (Bilu translation, 142). Imagining life beyond mapping is therefore imagining life beyond the madness of one's survival being bound up in the logic of the modern state.

In another similar moment, Dolly sees a map of Dolly City for the first time, and instead of actual geographical locations, she sees migration patterns represented by arrows, as well as the “Wells of Despair, the Lakes of Fear, the Swamps of Boredom, and the Canyons of Mannerism” (121) [...*mayanot hayeush, al agmey hapakhad, mirbatsey hashimum, v'hashtuyot vadiut hamanerizm* (93).] As Grumberg observes, this is a psychological rather than physical geography (*Place* 111). Perhaps this is how the novel imagines mapping beyond empire—where space is defined not through conquest and borders but by the uneven histories of loss, affect, and dislocation that converge there. *Dolly City* throws out geography and the nation along with tablecloths and home, offering a poetics of cultural scars as a basis for opposition and strange affinities. *The Far Euphrates*, by contrast, transforms notions of home and community from within.

Gender, Sexuality, and Disability in The Far Euphrates: Toward Queer Jewish Diasporas

The Far Euphrates (1997) is the first novel by Canadian-born and New York-based writer and neuroradiologist Aryeh Lev Stollman. The novel's narrator is Alexander, or Aryeh Alexander—his full name including the Hebrew *Aryeh*, meaning “lion,” already indicating that Jewish masculinity will be a central theme. Alex is the only son of Canadian-born Jewish parents living in Windsor, Canada near the border with

Detroit. From the vantage point of an adult—closely identified with the author of the same name—the novel tells the story of Alex’s coming of age. His father is the local rabbi, who throughout the novel provides spiritual nourishment and support through a creative and open approach to Jewish textual learning and tradition. The main conflict is between Alex and his mother, Sarah. Alex’s mother is distant due to her obsessive fear that something is “wrong” with her son, because he is *un reveur*—a dreamer. Nothing is, in fact, “wrong” with Alex—he has inner ear problems that eventually cause him to go deaf in his left ear, and he has to inwardly reckon with his growing desire for men within the space of the traditional Jewish home. The rest of Alex’s world consists of the large and loving presences of his parents’ closest friends and neighbors—the synagogue’s Cantor, Bernhard, and his wife, Berenice; and the cantor’s twin, Hannalore, who lives across the border in Detroit, “passes” as a Christian, and works as a housekeeper for the Ford estate; and Marla Cook, Alex’s Christian neighbor and friend who dies of a genetic heart defect at sixteen-years-old.

The Far Euphrates is, as Hana Wirth-Nesher has argued, a *bildungsroman* that deals with the many spheres, languages, and systems of meaning that constitute “home.” Wirth-Nesher compares the novel to Philip Roth’s *American Pastoral*, published the same year, in which “the world contracts into grotesque monolingualism” (154). In contrast, the polyphony of *The Far Euphrates* expresses “yearning for homes, linguistic and otherwise,” rather than replicating fictions about pure national or ethnic origins (157). *The Far Euphrates* also centrally explores how the Holocaust transforms the idea of home, remaking community and nation against the logic of racial purity and kinship through queer and disabled bodies. Hysteria—mainly appearing in the character of Alex’s

mother, Sarah—is a marginal trope foundational to the figures at the center, and is part of a post-Holocaust poetics of cultural scars.

The Cantor and Hannalore—the most diasporic or transnational characters—are from Alsace, and they mix German, French, and English fluidly when they speak. They are also survivors of Dr. Mengele’s Auschwitz experiments on twins. Alex learns of this history as a young child, when Berenice (the Cantor’s wife and Sarah’s best friend) shows him a photograph taken of the Cantor and Hannalore after the war in which the image of Hannalore has been ripped away. Berenice tells Alex a secret related to the twins’ history in Auschwitz, which is kept from the reader until the end of the novel. After Hannalore has died, the “secret” is revealed to the rest of her loved ones, as well as the reader. Through the unveiling of her grave, and the reading of her masculine Hebrew name, “Elchanan ben David,” the characters and reader learn that the operations performed by Mengele on the two twin sixteen-year-old boys caused the Cantor to become sterile and Hannalore to become a woman after the war. The specifics of the operations are unknown, but it is clear that Hannalore’s procedures were worse and that she chose to live as a Christian woman after the war as a result in some way. Alex learns this as a child. After the reveal of Hannalore’s previous gender at the funeral, Alex’s mother suffers from her hysterical pregnancy. The doctor attributes this to “shock.” During this period, in which Sarah stays in her room on a self-imposed bed rest for many months, she cuts off her relationship to Berenice, her closest friend, for telling Alex about the Mengele experiments at such a young age. In an uncharacteristic moment of insight, Sarah blames Berenice for Alex’s withdrawal from the world when he is sixteen, the same age that the Cantor and Hannalore were taken to the camp.

At age sixteen, the different losses and prohibited desires in Alex's life converge through a process of self-imposed isolation and withdrawal that he calls his *tsimtsum*, a Kabbalistic concept of God's contraction during the creation of the world. At this point in the novel, Marla Cook has recently died, the Cantor is dying, Alex has just lost his hearing in his left ear, and he is beginning to experience sexual yearnings for a handsome young man named Mickey. All converge to create a sense of rupture—a remaking of identity and the body through disability, queer desire, personal loss, and historical trauma.

Alex learns about the Kabbalistic concept of *tsimtsum* from his father, describing God's contraction as an act of creation:

He withdrew into Himself, contracting His very being, and made within Himself an isolated place in which to set His universe—an infinite creation within an even greater infinity. There He organized all the attributes of His being in harmony, in the balance so naively depicted in my father's incunabulum of the Sefirotic Tree. This was something I then felt I needed to do for myself (140).

Alex explains his *tsimtsum* as a need to free himself from the sun, a rejection of solar time (161) and “a process of withdrawal and internal realignment, a painful but necessary rearrangement of the hierarchy that exists in every breathing soul. The structure that mirrors the mystical shape of the living God himself (9).”

The *tsimtsum* is a going in—to the body-as-home—and isn't reducible to sexuality or dominant tropes of visibility or shame. As Gayatri Gopinath points out, queer diasporic cultural forms do not follow typical Euro-American discourses of gay visibility such as “coming out.” Alex even reflects on this:

But if I ask myself why I did all this, I do not think I could give a simple unified answer. Was I trying to understand and deal with my sexual

yearnings? No. I do not believe so. I had long recognized them. Somehow I had not felt shame. Shame seemed beside the point. (148)

Instead, the *tsimtsum* is a process perhaps similar to what Jose Muñoz calls “disidentification”—“a failed interpellation within the dominant public sphere” (7) through a process of dismantling dominant codes and universalized meanings about the self (26). Muñoz connects disidentification among queers of color to melancholia as a structure of feeling—investing a lost object or ideal with new life⁵⁷—and creating what he calls identities-in-difference. Alex’s failed interpellation within the space of the Jewish home is represented throughout the novel through the unsayable—his mother’s unsayable dread about his difference and daydreaming, or the doubt in his father’s voice when he speaks of the children that Alex will someday “hopefully” have. Through disidentification, Alex reworks the dominant heteronormative ideologies of the home—tied to the dominant logic of both nation and diaspora—by transforming the space of the home from within. As Gopinath writes:

Rather than simply doing away with home and its fictions of (sexual, racial, communal) purity and belonging, queer diasporic literature instead engages in a radical reworking of multiple home spaces. The queer diasporic body is the medium through which home is remapped and its various narratives are displaced, uprooted, and infused with alternative forms of desire. (165)

Through what he calls the re-arranging of the hierarchies of his soul and solar time, Alex uproots and displaces the received narratives that exclude him.

Alex receives the tools for this re-mapping of Jewish tradition and home from his father. Throughout the novel, Alex’s father becomes increasingly obsessed with mapping

⁵⁷ See my previous discussions of melancholia, especially in chapter three. I discuss Butler’s similar queer take on Freudian melancholia as a mode of “failed” subject formation within heteronormative ideologies, or an ego created out of loss.

the geography of ancient Mesopotamia—the land of the biblical stories—and Abraham’s journey along the Euphrates River. This fascination follows in the post-Enlightenment scholarly tradition of *Wissenschaft des Judentum* [*The Science of Judaism*]. In this same tradition, Alex’s paternal great-grandfather was an amateur linguist who wrote books about ancient Semitic languages and left his family in turn-of-the-century Germany to travel the lands of the *Torah* as the tutor to a Persian prince. The rabbi’s other preoccupation is the Kabbalistic mapping of the mystical shape of divinity, along with the *Shekhinah*, the feminine aspect of the divine who, he asserts, “*becomes every place and makes it our home* (175).” The rabbi’s obsessions bring together and transform the contradiction built into a modern logic of home: the implicitly masculinist and heterosexual notion of a geographical, territorialized, and national home, and the feminized and queer condition of diaspora, *galut* (exile).⁵⁸

The rabbi’s mystical teachings about home capture what Sidra Ezrahi calls the poetics of exile in 20th century Jewish literature, in which home as a geographic place (*eretz yisrael*, the land of Israel) and home as a locus of ancient and modern Jewish desire exist in unresolved, creative tension. The most radical expression of this, as Ezrahi argues, is “an affirmation and reconfiguration of the Jewish word as nomadic exercise and Jewish exile as a kind of *literary* privilege (10).” Through the dialogue between father and son—both spoken and through the intimate sharing of books—Alex’s father passes on a hybrid and re-signified approach to Jewish tradition and the many unresolved meanings of home.

⁵⁸ See D. Boyarin’s “Outing,” where he shows how diaspora became queer—tied to the new category of the “homosexual”—within the modern Jewish political imagination.

Following his father's interest in mapping, Alex re-maps his own body through a hybridized language of mysticism, "the science of Judaism," and the science of the human body—re-working all of them by uprooting and de-essentializing meanings of the body and history. At one point during his *tsimtsum*, Alex literally re-maps his own body in the mirror—the language mixing human biology with his father's poetics of mystical geography:

I read about the nourishing arteries and the veins that run like a sieve through our entire bodies. I tried to imagine this great wave of fluid that washed continually through our corporeal selves, that was our very essence. (154)

Through this re-mapping, Alex finds a home for his own body, creating a new space for queer desire within the Jewish home. During one of his daily visits to Alex's room, his father says:

Our forefathers, strangely enough—and this I believe is the real root of mankind's problem—originally came not from Kana'an, not from an earthly Jerusalem, but from the far Euphrates with its source in Eden, from an impossibly remote and primordial home. We cannot forget it, or ever find it again. I believe this fact has afflicted us to the present day. (163)

This image of longing for the lost, primordial river flowing from Eden displaces the traditional gendered tropes of Jewish home and homeland. The common trope is a longing for Jerusalem as a lost mother or desolate woman, accompanied by the geographical home or *galut* as the temporary fatherland (Ezrahi). Like the far Euphrates flowing from an impossibly remote Eden, Alex's image of a wave of fluid that is "our very essence" locates the impossible home within every body. The body with impossibility running through it becomes an identity-in-difference, or a "third space" in

Homi Bhaba's sense, that transforms, remakes, and uproots dominant epistemologies and identities.

The masculine language in which his father speaks of forefathers and mankind—mirrored in language that Alex uses for God throughout—draws attention to the *tsimtsum* as a re-mapping of home onto a specifically queer *male* diasporic body through a reworking of the Oedipal drama. As Gopinath points out, the Oedipal relation between fathers and sons is a central feature of diasporic narratives (5). In Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex—which mandates “proper” gender and sexual identification—the little boy identifies with the father while refusing feminine identification with the mother. Franz Fanon famously revised the Oedipal scenario in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), showing that in the colonial context the little boy's identification with the father is disrupted by the father's lack of access to social power. Gopinath notes that queer diasporic narratives “follow Fanon in reworking the notion of Oedipality in relation to racialized masculinities” as well as “what alternative narratives emerge when this story of Oedipality is jettisoned altogether (5).” Gopinath helps to understand how by centering on a gay male diasporic subject, *The Far Euphrates* risks repeating gender and racial hierarchies—the logic of Jewish cultural reproduction and home defined as a heterosexual affair between men, specifically men who are “white” in the Euro-American context.

We could read the novel this way if not for the mother's hysteria—which parallels her son's *tsimtsum*—as well as the characters of Hannalore and Marla Cook. Alex's *tsimtsum*—his temporary rejection of solar time—strangely resonates with and complements his mother's permanent hysterical retreat from the “rational sun” near the

end of the novel. Whereas Alex ultimately returns to find a home in the reconciled world as an identity-in-difference, his mother never recovers from the “shock” of Hannalore’s unveiling. In a statement that relates her particular form of “crazy” to her son’s, Sarah declares: “I guess now it’s my turn to be crazy (201).”

Throughout the novel, Sarah’s character is haunted by unsayable traumatic histories tied to degeneracy and disability. The novel links her fear of Alex not being “regular” to her family’s unsayable history of “bad genes” due to a brother with a degenerative disease, her many miscarriages, as well as larger, disavowed histories related to Jewish links to homosexuality through the logic of degeneracy and the Holocaust. This haunting is also expressed through Sarah’s intense repulsion toward Marla’s disability, followed by her crying with the least restraint at Marla’s funeral (134); her insistence on institutionalizing Alex during his *tsimtsum*, convinced that he has finally gone “crazy;” as well as her “hysterical” reaction to learning about the traumatic history of the Cantor and Hannalore. Over the course of the novel, Sarah becomes an absent presence:

At some point, the cause unknown to me then, my mother’s worry began to consume her. [...] I would often catch her brown eyes watching me silently, or hear her say to my father or to friends, ‘He is too much of a dreamer’ or ‘Well, he’s in his own little world.’ These phrases, in retrospect, were a code for something she dared not speak, some looming tragedy for us both. (4)

The home as a feminized place haunted by histories of trauma and disability is associated with Alex’s mother’s oppressive and normalizing gaze.

As Rosemary Marangoly George observes, home in cultural and literary theory is often significantly conflated with discourses on women. George writes:

The association of home and the female has served to present them as mutual handicaps, mutually disempowering. Hence, the woman is incapacitated because she is ‘tied’ to the home, and the home is shelter for the incapacitated. (19)

Over the course of the novel, Alex’s mother becomes increasingly incapacitated by her fears—tied to the weight of multiple histories of violence as well as the oppressive logic of nation and diaspora. As a result, she finally retreats into her hysterical body, permanently withdrawing from all of her loved ones.

Sarah’s “craziness” and retreat into the body and home is the ghostly shadow that haunts Alex’s settled queer masculinity, his mystical sense of being at home in his body and the world. In stark contrast to Alex’s stable subjecthood, both Sarah and Berenice express constant unhappiness and reproductive anxieties, reflecting the violent logic of the nation and mapping of heterosexuality onto women’s bodies. The most “queer” characters of the novel are Hannalore and Marla Cook, because through them, home and community are re-defined outside of the logic of reproductive futurity, purity, authenticity, and patrilineal descent. Through these characters—similarly to *Dolly City*—disability and trauma constitute central Jewish cultural narratives that work to further de-essentialize ideologies of home and nation, as well as disrupt stable inhabitations of “race” or “gender” categories. This is why, I think, queer diaspora scholarship—which is based on queer people of color in the US context—is in some ways applicable to this Jewish Canadian or Israeli novel.

Throughout *The Far Euphrates*, Alex describes Hannalore and Marla in terms of their bodily “strangeness”—one caused by traumatic history and the other by disability. Both characters also have close relationships to death and return as ghosts after they die.

Unlike the Cantor and Berenice—who form an extension of Alex’s home—Hannalore and Marla embody difference and exile. Hannalore lives in rooms in other peoples’ houses, and tells Alex that she will “die alone, far from my home (30).” Marla is in and out of hospitals, and lives outside of the normative timelines or expectations of behavior or futurity. After Alex sees Hannalore’s small room in the Ford mansion, he becomes preoccupied with the fear of being alone throughout the novel, tied to his growing sexual yearnings and the unspoken fear that his difference will exile him from home and belonging. By the end of the novel, this fear is narratively resolved by an expanded—non-essentialist, non-reproductive—vision of home, because it includes Hannalore and Marla. Through this vision of home, Hannalore and Marla represent the most radical queer and diasporic possibilities of the novel.

Hannalore is consistently described in terms of her gender difference—her husky voice, or her appearance as a different kind of woman altogether (10). Hannalore also passes as a white, Christian woman:

Mr. Ford, she insisted, would not have tolerated her presence on his property if he knew (though she had no proof of this and it could, I’ve been told, be soundly disputed[...]) She seemed to revel in her little disguise, her long-standing ruse. That she could walk the luxurious streets of Grosse Pointe as a gentile appeared to give her great satisfaction. (10)

Alex remembers her saying, ‘When I walk down a street it is only me, old Mademoiselle Hannalore, *comprends*? And I am practically, deliciously invisible. A happy and contented ghost (11).’ Hannalore’s ghostliness—intertwined with racial and sexual otherness, and linked through strange affinity with disability—haunts and unsettles the normative logic of home, before and after her death.

Throughout the novel, Hannalore is a character of queer re-signification. The novel opens with Sarah's interpellation of Alex into her fears of "bad genes." When she first calls him *un reveur*, Alex asks what this means, and Hannalore answers reassuringly, "'Nothing, *mein Liebchen*. Dream on, dream on.' She passed me the dessert platter. 'Now please, eat some music *Alexandre* (2).'" Hannalore is referring to the musical notation cookies baked by the Cantor. This is the first queer affinity between Alex and Hannalore. The idea of eating music points to an alternative, erotic hermeneutic—a queer reading practice—that refuses and resignifies the oppressive logic of "bad genes" and degeneracy that structures the home. Through Alex's relationship to Hannalore, the novel articulates how historical trauma—as Ann Cvetkovitch has argued—can queer cultural production. The example for a queering and defamiliarization of Jewish culture is "eating music," a form of synesthesia. Eating music is an example of the erotics of cultural scars, in which histories of loss and violence remake the body, desire, and cultural production, creating alternative hermeneutics and epistemologies.

Through Hannalore's character, the novel also explores the strange intimacies created out of historical trauma that redefine home and community against the exclusivist logic of the nation. In another key moment, to assuage his mother's worry, Hannalore takes Alex and Sarah on a secret pilgrimage to see an "elderly maiden aunt" from another wealthy Grosse Pointe family, who is believed to have special powers because of "a little Gypsy blood (13)." Through Hannalore's connection to this woman, she starts to tell of being in the camp:

It is this *soupçon* of ancient blood that gives her such powers. I know: I have had occasion to study these people up close. We lived right next to them in the camp. They do not trouble themselves so much about the past

because, of course, what can you do about it? But they know the future. They see. They see!’ Hannalore claimed this woman was a true prophetess. (14)

By incorporating the historical facts that twins and gypsies were kept next to each other in Auschwitz, the novel explores how trauma can create strange intimacies and queer diasporic communities through uneven but entangled traumatic histories.

The scene with the elderly maiden aunt gives Alex an additional tool to disidentify with the fears of his mother. Sarah tells the old woman that she is afraid of her son turning out “wrong.” The voice of Alex as an adult enters: “I had never questioned or faulted my mother before, and now I saw her anew, from afar, as other people might have seen her. Perhaps, I like to think, this even saved me, for I did not get caught up in her unexplained worries and fears (22).” The old woman then gives him a blessing: “Nothing to be ashamed of. Always take your sweet time when you need to. Time is your loyal servant. Don’t let any of those women make you crazy. Women like to do that when they’re not happy themselves. Though men are not much better (23).” This line brings attention to the novel’s theme of unhappy women and men, locked into a reproductive logic of nation and diaspora. In this scene, however, this logic is countered by the strange affinities between Alex, Hannalore, and the elderly maiden aunt.

Marla’s strangeness, like Hannalore’s, also aligns her and Alex. The two meet at age 11 when they both independently sneak away from their homes and gravitate to the scene of a gruesome car accident in which two small children, a brother and a sister playing in their yard, are killed. From this point on, the friendship between Alex and Marla weave together personal and historical traumas of their lives. Marla and her mother—the owner of an expensive local jewelry store—also come to Alex’s father’s

synagogue during high holidays. Marla comes because she wants to hear the Cantor, a gifted singer and composer. Her mother comes because she believes that the cause of Marla's illness is the Jewish God punishing her family for jewelry that her husband acquired under suspicious circumstances during the war.

Alex describes Marla's strange body when he first meets her:

The girl's arms and legs were like sticks and her back was twisted. She was dressed in a purple velvet dress, as if she was going to a party. She wore a brilliant gold necklace studded with green and red jewels, which seemed too heavy for such a skinny girl. She walked around me like an ungainly but exotic bird, looking at me with first one eye and then the other. Her center of gravity seemed to shift with each step. Now it was in one of her stick legs, now in the middle of her scrawny stomach, now in her chin, which jutted forward. I was surprised she didn't tip over. (64)

The description of her as a bird links to other bird imagery throughout, which stands in for Alex's queerness and process of disidentification, a creation of critical distance between him and multiple homes (40). Marla also constantly invents stories about the jewels that she wears—how this or that Baroness would have died had she not sold them—bringing attention to modes of property, privilege, and wealth that structure survival, including her own.

The novel links Marla and Hannalore through their different and intimate relationships to trauma, bodily difference, and survival. Hannalore arrives on Rosh Hashanah upset, saying that she has to quit her job, since Ford's new Italian, hyper-glamorous wife was targeting and mistreating her. Marla hears her say, "I don't know what I'll do for another job. I'll starve!" Marla takes off her necklace and tries to give it to Hannalore. Hannalore ignores her, and Marla yells: "I said take this! It's worth a fortune! You can retire on it, you stupid woman, or whatever weird creature you are

(101)!” Hannalore then refuses, asking if her parents know what she’s doing. Marla responds:

‘My parents? My parents? My mother gives me anything I want. I’m deformed. Can’t you see? And I’m *dying*! Do you know what that’s like? Do you?’ I saw Hannalore nod, but Marla didn’t seem to notice. I held my hands tightly behind my back so they wouldn’t shake. (102)

Marla convinces Hannalore to take the necklace (only to return it to Marla’s mother later), and Alex reflects on the significance: “It suddenly occurred to me that Marla’s giving and Hannalore’s receiving united them in some way, but I did not know how (102).” Here again is a moment of strange affinity, where they are united through difference.

Hannalore and Marla are also the only characters “outside” of Jewishness and the space of the home, away from the traditional and implicitly masculine Jewish world of Alex’s father and the Cantor, and the unhappy and reproductively-obsessed world of Sarah and Berenice. The queer diasporic potential of the novel is in its vision of a transformed and non-reproductive home that contains all of its characters—Hannalore and Marla included. After Hannalore dies, at the unveiling of her gravestone a year later, she appears as a ghostly presence that haunts Alex’s mother as well as Alex. While his mother doesn’t hear the ghostly voice that Alex hears, Alex has a mystical experience listening to the voice reading Hannalore’s masculine Hebrew name: “The name itself became a little holy universe suspended before me, containing components of my own name as well (192).” At the same moment, Sarah suffers from the hysterical shock from which she never fully recovers, and Alex finds himself written into a queered diasporic space of history.

The Far Euphrates is a model for a queered diasporic Jewishness that includes a reckoning with unsettled hysterical and historical loss, and a critical relationship to home while still yearning for it—allowing ourselves what Rosemary George calls the “seductive pleasures” of home. *Dolly City*, on the other hand, features hysteria as a literary mode marked by a radical homelessness, exploring the violent effacements of the nation. *Dolly City* discards the Oedipal narrative altogether and imagines opposition to the state as the only possibility for life beyond madness and empire. In this way, the different approaches to home perhaps reflect the different stakes of creating a queer diasporic Jewishness from within the contested borders of the Israeli state. However, both novels disaggregate the dominant ideologies of home. Whereas *Dolly City* exists beyond any stable conception of home, *The Far Euphrates* imagines home and community beyond the intrusive glare of multiple nationalisms. By imagining affinity through difference, *The Far Euphrates* offers a more hopeful reading for uprooting and re-mapping the dominant logic of the nation and transforming the concept of home from within.

The last scene of *The Far Euphrates* is Alex’s father’s funeral, where Alex reflects, unsurprisingly, on the theme of home:

When I said the prayers at the graveside, I spoke in the language of earliest times. I said all the words, with their constellations of letters that had once combined themselves this way and that in myriad forms to create all of our souls and to create this world, which is our home. (206)

Here, this vision of home, as well as the soul, uproots and transforms national and racial logic. In his final vision, Alex is able to include all of them—the Cantor, Hannalore, Marla, Berenice, his mother, and his father. The novel ends on a note of disidentification,

and of creating a “third space”: “They beckoned to me, and each other, to that place which remains outside time and this earth, where we might always go to reconcile ourselves (206).” The novel imagines a community of identities-in-difference, brought together not by an exclusive notion of “home” but a queered, diasporic notion of “place.”

Epilogue

“You are not sick, you are injured”: Further Directions in a Theory of the Cultural Scar

Claudia Rankine’s *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014) explores race and gender within the context of the most recent crisis around racial violence in the US. Rankine combines cultural analysis with personal experiences as an African American woman. Its unique layout blends poetry, visual art, and media images, creating a dialogue between personal and public mourning tied to ongoing forms of racialized devaluation and death. In a passage I keep returning to, Rankine writes:

Don’t say I if it means so little,
holds the little forming no one.

You are not sick, you are injured—

you ache for the rest of life.

How to care for the injured body,

the kind of body that can’t hold
the content it is living?

And where is the safest place when that place
Must be someplace other than in the body? (143)

My main investment in theorizing the cultural scar as a metaphorical mode in literature echoes Rankine’s questions in this passage: how to care for the injured body, how to address its conditions of injury, and how to imagine and create someplace safe other than in the body. This last line suggests that being safe in the body is a fragile and unequal condition of privilege and survival.

In this passage, trauma and disability—through metaphors of sickness and injury—are critical registers of a crisis tied to unequal structures of survival in a globalized, racial modernity that continues in the present. A reading practice of cultural scars would unpack these metaphors of sickness and injury and the demands for justice that they make on the present. The phrase “you are not sick, you are injured” signals a metaphorical mode that explores the intersections between disability, trauma, medicine, and modernity’s violence in a way that perhaps only such bodily metaphors can. I call this the mode of the cultural scar because it describes forms of bodily and historical trauma that become written into cultural, social, and political practices. As Rankine writes:

you know no memory should live in these memories
becoming the body of you. (144)

A concept of a cultural scar emerges from metaphors like these, which explore how histories of loss and pain—both personal and collective—become the body of you. Collective, historical trauma overlaps with personal, bodily trauma through the image-metaphor of an injured body that cannot hold the content it is living, or memories that shouldn’t become the body of you but do. A merging of critical trauma and disability studies offers a framework to explain how various forms of personal and collective trauma—whether tied to racism, poverty, sexual violence, displacement, or genocide—shape metaphors of disability and illness that become central cultural and historical narratives.

The metaphorical mode of cultural scars also implicitly expresses relation between different histories of bodily injury and loss. Rankine’s open address in the

second person, for example, makes room for different and uneven forms of sickness and injury—as well as care—to come into relation. The passage suggests a mode of collective caring that stems from permanent injury, displacing the idea of healing or curing trauma with an ethic of personal and collective care. A further direction in theorizing cultural scars would be to understand the role of multiple forms of care—whether through reparations, or health care, or safe housing—in a hopeful politics of mourning based in injuries, scars, and loss. This notion of care adds a practical dimension to a theory of cultural scars and to the new modes of analysis, solidarity, and demands for justice that they create.

The poetics of cultural scars that I trace in 20th century Jewish literature and culture all mediate what David Eng and Kazanjian call a hopeful politics of mourning, or a hopeful relationship between loss and history, where “what is lost is known only by what remains of it, by how these remains are produced, read, and sustained (2).” A theory of the cultural scar brings attention to how loss remains in the body, shaping culture. Of course, there are also cultural scars that mediate a hopeless relationship to the past, as I discuss in relationship to the figure of the muscle Jew in chapter two. Another further direction in theorizing the cultural scar would be to more closely examine how these metaphors operate in other contexts, for example by supporting state violence and exclusivist, national identities.

A vivid contemporary example of this is the recent phenomenon in Israel of family members of Holocaust survivors tattooing their relative’s concentration camp numbers on their arms. A 2012 New York Times article reported on this, following a release of a documentary on the subject. The article is significantly titled, “Proudly

Bearing Elders' Scars, Their Skin Says 'Never Forget.'" Through metaphors of tattoos as scars, the article repeats a rhetoric that often instrumentalizes Holocaust memory to support state violence and occupation.⁵⁹ The article quotes the director of the documentary saying that this tattoo trend is "a sign that we're still carrying the scar of the Holocaust." What does it mean to carry the scar? When are scars used to reify state violence, and when are they used to oppose and transform it?

Even within the article's framing of the tattoos within the national rhetoric of "Never Forget," there are moments in which the tattoo-scar can be read "against the grain," as an unsettling and disruptive metaphor that contains both hopeful and hopeless potentials of relating to the past. In one moment that stands out against the rest of the text—when I became so moved I had to stop reading for a moment—the filmmaker describes a question she posed to all of the survivors with tattoos. "Do lovers kiss your number, like a scar?" She recalls that some of them looked at her like she was crazy, and some of them said, without thinking, "of course." The filmmaker's question creates an intimacy or strange affinity between everyday forms of illness and trauma—the scars that your lovers kiss—and extreme catastrophic forms of historical trauma that the arm tattoo represents. The question also suggests an erotics of the cultural scar that unites different and uneven scars in hopeful, new, and intimate ways.

Reading the scar for its hopeful dissonances is an example of a feminist and queer reading practice of the scar that I've used throughout my case studies. This "queering" of the scar follows the intersectional analytics of women of color feminism and queer of

⁵⁹ See my discussion of this mode of Holocaust remembrance in chapter three, building mainly from Novick and Rothberg.

color critique, especially queer diaspora scholarship and Grace Hong's and Roderick Ferguson's concept of "strange affinities." These are modes of analysis and solidarity that do not rely on notions of racial, class, gender, religious, class, ability, or national homogeneity. Instead, "strange affinities" are modes of analysis and solidarity forged through difference. The filmmaker's image of kissing the tattoo like a scar suggests the central role of the erotic in a feminist and queer reading practice of the scar, as well as in shaping additional forms of strange affinity tied to trauma, illness, and disability. A further direction in a theory of the cultural scar is to explore the role of the erotic in a poetics of the scar as well as in a transnational, transgenerational mode of caring for injury.

Jill Soloway's online-only series, "Transparent," produced by Amazon Studios, recently takes up this issue of an erotics of trauma and mourning in compelling and interdisciplinary ways. It does this in part by exploring ideas about transgenerational trauma in the field of epigenetics, or how trauma becomes encoded in the body and passed down through generations at the level of the gene. "Transparent" tells the story of the Pfeffermans, a Jewish family in contemporary L.A. The first season revolves around the father, Mort, coming out as transgendered, and his transition to becoming Maura at 70-years-old. The story portrays Maura's experience as well as the Pfefferman adult children and ex-wife as they deal with this change. The second season revolves around a haunting, in which the traumatic history of Maura's side of the family in Nazi Germany appears through flashbacks and imaginative juxtapositions, exploring how past and present shape and transform each other.

The flashbacks portray the family's story of escaping Nazi Germany, as well as their connection to the Institute of Sexual Research in Weimar Berlin. Headed by the German Jewish sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld, the Institute was a historical place where a spectrum of gender and sexual identities were given legitimacy and safe expression under the rubric of progressive science. The flashbacks tell the story of Maura's mother, Rose, whose older brother, Gershon or Gitl, was also transgendered and lived at the Institute.

Through creative juxtapositions—between past and present, Jewish and queer histories—the show explores how multiple traumatic and entangled histories tied to loss, migration, and racial and sexual difference shape and are shaped by the present. The show's haunting mainly revolves around the character of Ally (played by Gaby Hoffman), the youngest daughter of the Pfefferman clan. The show suggests that Ally's intellectual and sexual explorations are shaped by this haunting and the family's history of grief.

Ally's graduate research interests deal with the intersections between trauma, gender, and Jewishness. She brings up the medieval history of "Jew shoes," which were shoes with bells that Jewish women were forced to wear to alert of their presence in the street. At one point, Ally says: "I have this notion, that there is something connected with the woman thing and the Jew thing. It's like phallus is to crucifix as vagina is to Holocaust." Then Ally talks about a "giant chasm of grief" in her family, which keeps the generations from talking to each other.

This giant chasm of grief—linked to the woman thing and the Jew thing—offers another powerful example of a cultural scar. The traumatic climax of the flashbacks—the

scar at the center of the second season—occurs in a stunning sequence in the second-to-last episode. Ally walks through the woods at the Idyllwild Womyn’s Festival, looking for Maura, unsafe and excluded there as a transgendered woman. Suddenly Ally is wearing “Jew shoes” and a flashback occurs of the Institute being stormed by the Nazis and the books being burned. Ally stands alongside her grandmother Rose as a young girl as the Nazis take Gitl away. Past and present fuse as Ally’s eyes, red and soft, witness the violent separation of Rose and Gitl, as Rose breaks down and sobs. Rose immigrates to the US soon after this with her mother, without the vanished Gitl. In the next episode, Maura (the child of Rose) talks about a recurring dream of having to say goodbye to someone she loves who is about to die.

What occurs in Ally’s standing next to Rose and witnessing her loss is not a form of healing or curing of the past. Rather it is a willingness to be part of the story and to mourn. While doing research for her graduate school application, Ally finds an epigenetics study suggesting that trauma is passed down intergenerationally. In this exploratory way, the series does more than bring up the history of Jewish men being considered womanly in Europe, or link traumatic histories of queer and Jewish persecution under the Nazis.⁶⁰ It also suggests productive, interdisciplinary ground for a theory of the cultural scar between the sciences and humanities. By featuring the Institute as a counterexample to Nazi eugenics and racial science—but still limited by its rhetoric of progress and truth—the show speaks to how such a bridging is in fact necessary and urgent. An interdisciplinary theory of trauma prevents the major risk of epigenetics

⁶⁰ See the work of Gilman and my earlier chapters where I discuss the construction of the male Jewish body as womanly and subhuman in modern racial science.

research: to remove trauma (and its associated “sicknesses” and symptoms) from larger social, political, cultural, and historical contexts. This is where a disability studies framework also becomes necessary, in its approaches to the medical versus social models of disability. The social model locates disability not in the impaired body but in various forms of exclusion. In short, a pure science approach risks reducing the effects of multiple forms of violence on the body to a model of biological disease.

“Transparent” also decenters a typically conservative story of Jewish diaspora as a patrilineal and heteronormative affair, tied to a story of immigration, assimilation, and progress vis-à-vis the attainment of racial, class, and gender norms in the US. Through Ally’s haunting, the show explores a different and more hopeful mode of relating to a transnational history of Jewish difference, sickness, trauma, and loss. In the end of “Transparent” we are left with hopeful practices of mourning, with memories that cannot be contained in the bodies of the selfish and narcissistic Pfeffermans. The cultural scar—the great chasm of grief tied to multiple entangled histories of difference, exclusion, and loss—interrupts and unsettles the show’s white, privileged frame. It does this through the creative juxtapositions with the past as well as fragmentary moments of caring for injury. We see this, for example, in Maura reckoning with her multiple previous forms of privilege as Mort, as well learning about different kinds of injury and oppression in the transgendered community through her training to be a counselor on a youth crisis hotline. We also see this in small but significant moments such as when Josh (the Pfefferman son), learns a different model of masculinity by learning to care for an injured duck in the last episode.

A transnational theory of the cultural scar intervenes in the disparate fields of trauma and disability studies, as well as suggests further interdisciplinary work to be done. In a time of extreme crisis tied to globalization and increasingly unequal conditions of health and survival, a theory of cultural scars attempts to ground modes of transnational, oppositional analysis and solidarity in an ethic of caring for the body in all of its instabilities, vulnerabilities, injuries, desires, and scars.

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