STRANGERS IN A STRANGE LAND:

EXPLORING THE NARRATIVE REALM OF JEWISH LITERATURE

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Abstract

Scholars of Jewish literature consistently ask what it means to "write Jewishly." *Strangers in a Strange Land* posits that eight short works of Jewish fiction by authors in different times and places construct a consistent narrative realm of possibilities. I employ Possible Worlds literary theory to argue for this hypothesis. I argue that the narrative realm of these eight short stories is defined by liminal zones and liminal figures, marked most intensely by an implied porousness in the veil between the natural and the supernatural. My argument is based on a close analysis of major liminal themes: transit and wandering; dreamstates and visions; darkness and night; (un)death; and others. I contextualize these themes in two ways: first, by connecting them to the genres of Fantastic and Paranormal fiction in non-Jewish Western literature; and second, by bringing earlier Jewish tales into the discussion, illustrating that they have been and remain present in Jewish writing, in some cases as distant temporally as the Israelite literature of the Hebrew Bible. This panorama of ambiguous zones and characters unable to find steady footing would contribute to discussions of the nature of Jewish literature and its ability to create a virtual literary Home for a population that has been dispersed across the continents.

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Introduction: Creating a World

> **Rava says: If the righteous wish to do so, they can create a world,** as it is stated: "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God." In other words, there is no distinction between God and a righteous person who has no sins, and just as God created the world, so can the righteous.
>
> -Talmud *Sanhedrin* 65b[1]

The words of Rava quoted above begin a Talmudic report on the great sage's ability to create a golem — one of the earliest reports of such a creature. A golem is a biological automaton that found its most memorable iteration in 16th-century Prague and remains a quintessential specimen of Jewish folklore in broader Western culture. According to Rava's report, a golem can be created only by someone with the ability to create an entire world, including its plant and animal life. This is possible only for those who have achieved a rare level of righteousness.

This is not a hypothetical discussion; *Sanhedrin* 65b reports that two rabbis, Rav Hanina and Rav Oshaya, would engage in the study of a foundational mystical book, *Sefer Yetzira*, on Shabbat eve and a calf would be created for them to eat.[2] Rabbi Eliezer inserts himself into this report as well, claiming that he created a field of cucumbers during a discussion on sorcery with one of his students.[3] In this passage of the Talmud, the creation of the essential elements of a world, as well as the entire world itself, are reported as this-worldly abilities of the greatest sages.

Many of these scholars went beyond their immediate task of interpreting the Law and spent their lives working towards the ability to bridge the gap between our realm and the Other realm, encountering otherworldly figures and mystical places along the way. In the process of interpreting the stories of the Tanakh and describing their spiritual endeavours in their immediate present, the

1. *Sanhedrin* 65b, *William Davidson Talmud*, at sefaria.org. Emphasis mine.
2. *Sanhedrin* 65b.
3. *Sanhedrin* 65b.

rabbis of the Talmud developed a rich literary world, a backdrop for their religious instruction marked by liminal zones, preternatural abilities, peculiar figures, and a dreamlike atmosphere.

Jewish Storytelling

In the last century and a half, a rich complex of Jewish storytelling — whether through literature, music, visual art, or theatre, among other creative endeavours — has developed in tandem with a secular Jewish consciousness. The works that form this complex are distinctly Jewish in nature, but they are absent of the prime motivation of the religious storytelling of the Talmud and countless subsequent works: religious instruction for observant Jews. Just as the rabbis of the Talmud existed within and constructed a storytelling realm that projected a Jewish view of the world in the first millennium of the Common Era, secular Jewish authors of the past century and a half are able to depict and construct a literary realm — a world — that is Jewish down to an atomic level.

The central question of this dissertation is as follows: in the absence of the motivation to instruct other Jews in their religious observance, what makes the realm of secular Jewish storytelling "Jewish"?[4] I will argue that many Jewish authors construct a consistent realm of

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4. A debate persists in Religious Studies regarding the term "secular" and its many synonyms to describe individuals or complexes that are not religiously observant or used for specifically religious instruction. Many scholars of religion discuss this and debate its use vs. terms like "non-religious." For those debates, see Lois Lee, *Recognizing the Non-Religious: Reimagining the Secular*, (Oxford: University Press, 2015); James A. Beckford, *Social Theory and Religion* (Cambridge, U.K: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Craig J. Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, *Rethinking Secularism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). In fact, Beckford arrives at a positive conclusion about the term: "My conclusion will nevertheless be that notions of secularisation, suitably clarified and situated in the contexts from which they arose, have an important heuristic role to play in social theorising about religion. In short, secularisation may be good for social theories of religion" (Beckford, 33). For my own work, I choose "secular" because it is the term of choice in scholarship related to non-observant Jewish culture. See titles like Amy Lynn Wlodarski, "The Composer as Secular Jew: George Rochberg," *Musica Judaica* 22 (2018): 103–8; Yuval Arbel, Chaim Fialkoff, and Amichai Kerner, "Are Ultra-Orthodox Jews Healthier than Secular Jews? Gender Differences, Cohort Effect, Lifestyle and Obesity," *Contemporary Jewry* 42, no. 1 (2021): 113–37; Stephen M. Cohen, "Chemical Literature in Yiddish : A Bridge between the 'shtetl' and the Secular World," *Aleph*, no. Journal Article (2007): 183; Aubrey L. Glazer, *Tangle of Matter & Ghost: Leonard Cohen's Post-Secular Songbook of Mysticism(s) Jewish & Beyond*, (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2017); Ethan Katz, Ari Joskowicz, and Project Muse, *Secularism in Question: Jews and Judaism in Modern Times*, Jewish Culture and Contexts (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); Nissim Leon, "Secular Jews: From Proactive Agents to Defensive Players," *Israel Studies Review* 27, no. 1 (2012): 21–26. I also choose this term because it is used as a self-identifier by Jews who are not religiously observant. I think here of names like the

possibilities — a world, or system of worlds — whenever they tell stories, and that this realm persists across centuries and genres, even as it shifts and changes along with socio-historical contexts. One of the central features of this realm is the intense and persistent liminality of the zones these authors write about and the figures who inhabit them, marked by an implied porousness in the veil between the natural and supernatural. I will illustrate this through a study of eight short works of Jewish fiction from Canada and the United States, pulling out themes related to the state of being betwixt and between: transit and wandering; dreamstates and visions; darkness and night; (un)death; and others. I will contextualize these themes in two ways: first, by connecting them to the genre of Fantastic and paranormal fiction in non-Jewish Western literature; and second, by bringing earlier Jewish tales into the discussion, illustrating that these themes have been and remain present in Jewish writing, in some cases going back as early as the Israelite literature of the Hebrew Bible. Though an investigation of these themes will not lead us to an essentialized and simple conclusion of what makes Jewish literature "Jewish" — no such investigation would, could, or ever should — I believe that this panorama of ambiguous zones and characters will prove to be an invaluable contribution to the discussion as a new method of understanding how Jewish fiction functions as a Home for Jews dispersed across the globe.

In the Talmudic discussion with which I started, the golem is understood to have little real-world value and is easily dismantled by other members of the community. The report states, "Indeed, Rava created a man, a golem, using forces of sanctity. Rava sent his creation before Rabbi Zeira. Rabbi Zeira would speak to him but he would not reply. Rabbi Zeira said to him: You were created by one of the members of the group, one of the Sages. Return to your dust."[5] This

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"Peretz Centre for Secular Jewish Culture" in Vancouver, British Columbia, which is named after an author I will be discussing at a few points in this thesis, I.L. Peretz.

5. *Sanhedrin* 65b, *William Davidson Talmud*, at sefaria.org.

automaton can be returned to dust, but not so for the fictional worlds fashioned by writers. Once a narrative world is created by its author, it becomes fictionally existent: it exists and remains existent whether the author is dead or alive, or whether readers enjoyed or disliked inhabiting it. These worlds are, in the words of literary theorist Lubomír Doležel, "aesthetic artifacts, constructed, preserved, and circulating in the medium of fictional texts."[6] They can be entered by readers, expanded by subsequent authors, and even connected retroactively to earlier stories as they become available to us.

What, then, constitutes a "Jewish" literary world? Does this category simply comprise stories by writers who identify as Jewish, or include only stories about rabbis, angels, golems and the like? Or is it a more complex, varied category? Israeli scholar Dan Miron claims that discussions of the nature of Jewish literature have clung to a theory of continuity, which posits that Jewish writing demonstrates a continuous evolution from Israelite biblical literature to the present day. This theory of continuity, according to Miron, is far too narrow in scope and does not account for the myriad Jewish literatures that have sprouted in the diaspora through factors ranging from Jewish isolation to cultural diffusion with their neighbours and host cultures.[7]

According to Miron, it would be more useful to conceptualize Jewish literature as a complex, or a galaxy, filled with loosely connected stories and authors that collide with each other in varying degrees, with the only thread that binds them being a sense of the experience of being a Jew in the world, however nebulous and hard to pin down that sense may be. For Miron and other prominent scholars, the author who best exemplifies the essence of "writing Jewishly" is Franz Kafka. The fact that Kafka never once mentions Jews in his fiction is a complicating factor

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6. Lubomír Doležel, *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 16.
7. Dan Miron, *From Continuity to Contiguity: Toward a New Jewish Literary Thinking*, Stanford Studies in Jewish History and Culture (Palo Alto, Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2010), 305.

that indicates the muddy nature of the question posed. Miron calls for a “systematic and coherent thinking about” this Jewish literary complex.[8]

Possible Worlds narrative theory, developed to its fullest by Lubomír Doležel in the 1980s and 1990s, offers a compelling methodological toolkit for understanding the ways in which authors and readers construct fictional worlds in a dialogue outside of space and time. Given the spatial and temporal circumstances of the Jewish people — dispersed across the globe but at-home-apart in their travelling homeland of texts like the Torah and Talmud, as Daniel Boyarin and George Steiner have put it[9] — this theory of narrativity is a sharp lens through which to discuss Jewish stories. Most notably, the case study that Doležel offers in his book *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds* pertains to a category he calls the modern myth, a category whose most essential author is Franz Kafka, as it was for Miron with respect to Jewish writing. Doležel’s Possible Worlds contemporary, Nancy Traill, also writes of Kafka as the essential author of the category of the paranormal in fiction.

Eight Short Works of Jewish Fiction

There seems to be a natural connection between the categories of Jewish writing, the modern myth, and the paranormal, with the narrative world of Franz Kafka as the bridge that connects all three. The question, then, is whether we can uncover the element or elements that these categories might hold in common in order to better understand what Miron calls the “Jewish literary complex.” Attempting to fashion an essentialist idea of what constitutes Jewish literature is too broad for the current study — as well as being a problematic endeavour in the first place given the wide array of Jewish literatures throughout time and space — so I attempt to answer it only as it pertains to a

8. Miron, 405.
9. Daniel Boyarin, *A Traveling Homeland*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); George Steiner, “Our Homeland, the Text,” *Salmagundi*, no. 66 (1985): 4–25.

small sample of eight short works of Jewish fiction. If those three categories are connected, what key element(s) might these eight short stories share with all three?

The following study endeavours to describe this connecting thread through an analysis of eight short works of Jewish fiction in North America, ranging from 1909 to 2015, in Canada and the United States, five by male and three by female authors, most but not all of Ashkenazi heritage. They are also from and about multiple locations in two countries whose Jewish experiences have not been altogether similar: New York, Montreal, Windsor, Boston, and Los Angeles, with first-generation immigrant authors hailing from Ukraine and Poland. This wide scope will bring to the fore their remarkably tight, if also implicit, family ties.

The first four stories featured are by Jewish authors who immigrated to North America in their lifetimes. Lamed Shapiro's (1878-1948) narrator in "At Sea" spends his nights on the deck of a ship heading from the Old World to the New, listening to tall tales from a fellow passenger and reflecting on the pain he left behind. The protagonist of A.M. Klein's (1909-1972) "A Myriad-Minded Man" describes his years-long obsession with a mysterious figure he met on only one occasion; a man who talked a big philosophical game but might have been more blowhard than mystic. I.B. Singer's (1902-1991) "The Lecture" tells of a narrator known only as Mr. N who makes his way from New York to Montreal on a frigid winter's night. There, he encounters a ghostly Holocaust survivor who makes it her final endeavour to meet with him. Chava Rosenfarb's (1923-2011) protagonist is a Holocaust survivor, a former *kapo* who runs into the one person who knows her history: a woman she saved in a concentration camp. They begin an extremely toxic friendship that lasts years as their power dynamic twists and turns, the former *kapo* perpetually waiting for the former inmate to out her as the monster she believes herself to be.

The latter four stories are by authors who were born and raised in North America in the

latter half of the twentieth century. Aimee Bender's (1969-) "Dreaming in Polish" tells of a teenage girl's summer caring for her sick father, corralling her oft-wandering mother, and navigating something of a mass hysteria in her town when two elderly Holocaust survivors begin prophesying to the locals. Steve Almond's (1966-) "A Dream of Sleep" focuses on an aging Holocaust survivor, a loner amongst spirits, who keeps the grounds of a Jewish cemetery being overtaken by nature, negligence, and the slow creep of modernity. The narrator of Aryeh Lev Stollman's (1954-) "*Die Grosse Liebe*" spends much of his time inhabiting a zone of memory, a singular moment in time: the one night in which his tight-lipped mother spoke honestly about her life during and after the war. The first portion of Sigal Samuel's (1986-) *The Mystics of Mile End*, the self-contained story entitled "Lev" focuses on the titular character, a young boy in Montreal attempting to navigate his father's absence and bitterness towards religion; his sister's blossoming religious curiosity; and his lonely friend Alex's obsessive search for the mysteries of the universe through astronomy.[10]

10. See next page for story chart.

First Generation Immigrants in Canada	First Generation Immigrants in America	Later Generation Male Authors	Later Generation Female Authors
"A Myriad-Minded Man"[11] A.M. Klein (P. 1983)	"The Lecture"[12] Isaac Bashevis Singer (1964)	"Die Grosse Liebe"[13] Aryeh Lev Stollman (Canada, 1996)	The Mystics of Mile End: "Lev"[14] Sigal Samuel (Canada, 2015)
"Edgia's Revenge"[15] Chava Rosenfarb (P. 1994)	"At Sea"[16] Lamed Shapiro (1910)	"A Dream of Sleep"[17] Steve Almond (U.S. 2000)	"Dreaming in Polish"[18] Aimee Bender (U.S. 1998)

I chose this broad spectrum of stories, dispersed across spatial and temporal planes, in order to avoid the possibility that the similarities in fictional world-building were due to a particular place or time in which they were all writing.

Chapter Summaries

The Literature Review in Chapter Two begins with an outline of Miron's nebulous understanding of a Jewish literary complex through a discussion of what he calls *Judesein*: the experience of being a Jew in the world. I will bring Miron into conversation with other scholars of Jewish literature to describe why such a question is so complex. It will also afford the opportunity to show

11. A. M. Klein, "A Myriad-Minded Man" in *Short Stories*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983). 125-153.
12. Isaac Bashevis Singer, "The Lecture" in *The Seance and Other Stories* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967), 65-84.
13. Aryeh Lev Stollman, "Die Grosse Liebe" in *Lost Tribe: Jewish Fiction from the Edge*, ed. Paul Zakrzewski, (New York, NY: Perennial, 2003), 265-280.
14. Sigal Samuel, "Part 1: Lev" in *The Mystics of Mile End*. (Calgary, Alberta: Freehand Books, 2015), 1-80.
15. Chava Rosenfarb, "Edgia's Revenge" in *Survivors: Seven Short Stories* (Toronto: Cormorant Books, 2004), 81-164.
16. Lamed Shapiro, "At Sea" in *The Cross and Other Jewish Stories*, New Yiddish Library (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 159-182.
17. Steve Almond, "A Dream of Sleep" in *Lost Tribe: Jewish Fiction from the Edge*, ed. Paul Zakrzewski, (New York, NY: Perennial, 2003), 192-212.
18. Aimee Bender, "Dreaming in Polish" in *Lost Tribe: Jewish Fiction from the Edge*, ed. Paul Zakrzewski, (New York, NY: Perennial, 2003), 281-292.

how and why so many scholars agree that Franz Kafka, the man who never wrote about Jews, captures the essence of that Jewish experience in his writing. Finally, I will also discuss what Miron does and does not attempt to accomplish in his book *From Continuity to Contiguity: Toward a New Jewish Literary Thinking* (2010), as well as reflecting on his call to action for other scholars to fashion the required methodology to describe this literary complex.

In Chapter Two I will fashion the methodology Miron requests by describing the methodological toolkit offered by Possible Worlds semantics, developed by Lubomír Doležel in his magnum opus, *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds* (1998). I will conclude the discussion of Possible Worlds with Doležel's own case study, in which he describes the narrative world of what he calls the "modern myth" by analyzing the work of the author he considers its most emblematic: Franz Kafka. I will also describe the work of Nancy Traill, another Possible Worlds theorist, who applies this framework to Literature of the Fantastic, a category of writing that includes gothic, horror, supernatural, and paranormal fiction. Of the latter, Traill states that the author she considers its most emblematic is also none other than Franz Kafka. Through Kafka, a natural connection will have already been laid between our study of Jewish writing and our attempt at a methodology with which it might be understood.

Though he is not the subject of this dissertation, the spectral presence of Franz Kafka haunts its every nook and cranny. Indeed, he has already come up multiple times just in this introduction. Kafka is the hermeneutical key that serves as a point of connection between Jewish writing, the modern myth, and the paranormal, but what feature(s) of these modes of storytelling serve as the true bridge between them? Here we arrive at the central argument of this study: I believe that the theme of liminality — that state of being betwixt and between — serves as that bridge, and that an extended analysis of our eight short stories will show that this is the case, at least in this limited

sample. Thus, I devote a section of Chapter Two to the concept of Liminality, followed by an explanation of one of its associate terms, a theme in storytelling that applies this betweenness in such a way as to achieve a sense of dread for the reader or viewer: the Uncanny. I will also introduce the concept of intertextuality: the conversation that all worlds of fiction enter into with prior and future worlds upon the moment of their creation.

For readers who wish to get a sense of the stories before entering the analysis portion, I have included brief but rich summaries of each tale that can be found in the appendix. It would not be fair to the reader to give a deep analysis of stories they may not have ever read (or even heard of) so my aim there is to fill in those blanks enough that readers may feel familiar with the tales before we go in-depth. As much as possible, I allow the works to speak for themselves through extended quotes. To that end, wherever I am able, I conclude each summary with the actual ending of the story, word for word.

In Chapters Three through Five, I take on the work of analyzing our eight short stories. In Chapter Three I apply Possible Worlds methodology to chart the narrative constraints that form the fictional realm. This is a macroscopic analysis of the conditions of the "Jewish" narrative realm of possibilities that I argue these stories share: what is possible and impossible; what is allowed and prohibited; what is good and evil; what is knowable and unknowable. Through this discussion, I show that the realm of possibilities that these stories share is logically consistent — that what is plausible in one is plausible in another. I also show that the conditions regarding the interplay between the natural and supernatural realms in these Jewish stories are remarkably similar to the conditions found in the modern myth and the paranormal. Finally, I discuss how the charting of obligations and prohibitions offers an example of the unique Jewishness of the stories.

In Chapter Four I parachute into the landscape of this realm and describe its most prominent

feature: the intense liminality that permeates the people, places, and things we encounter as readers. In this chapter I cover the concept of liminal zones by describing the places and states of being in which our protagonists and others regularly find themselves: transit and wandering; darkness and night; and dreamstates. I begin with a close reading of our eight stories, describing the similar ways in which they incorporate the above themes. Following this, I bring intertexts into a dialogue with our stories, describing how each of these zones is utilized in Jewish writing ranging temporally from Israelite biblical literature to the Early Modern and Modern periods: Talmudic tall tales, the moral parables of the German Pietists, stories of Hassidic wonder-workers, and many others in between.

In Chapter Five I focus in on the characters who find themselves in such zones. Those zones are liminal, but so too are the figures who inhabit them: the (un)dead; aliens and outsiders; and foolish sages and other hidden identities. Again, I begin with a close reading of the consistent ways in which our authors apply these identities to their characters. As I do in Chapter Four, I bring intertexts into the discussion, investigating earlier and occasionally contemporary Jewish writing that contains these sorts of figures. These liminal elements prove to be remarkably consistent.

Finally, having described the realm of possibilities that these stories inhabit, I conclude with a discussion of how these findings might contribute to our understanding of what it means to "write Jewishly" and why that might be valuable, at least in the context of the eight authors we have included. I discuss whether, having established the contours of this Jewish literary dreamscape and their intrinsic liminality, those contours could convincingly be argued to be analogous with the realms of possibilities described in the modern myth and paranormal categories of Western literature described by Doležel and Traill. I question whether we can draw any insights

about Jewish culture from those analogues through a consideration of the value of studying horror stories, bringing Jewish literary scholar Jeremy Dauber into the discussion. Finally, I end with the work of anthropologist Michael Jackson. In his book *The Politics of Storytelling* (2002), Jackson explores how storytellers, especially those of displaced groups, rework reality in their tales in order to make life more liveable and offer a sense of rootedness despite their uprooted state. In this closing discussion, I hope to show that the prominence of liminal zones and figures in these stories is not an accident or a coincidence, but a project — conscious or unconscious — aimed at constructing a liveable and positive Jewish identity within real-world circumstances that have not always been liveable and positive.

Chapter 1 // Literature Review: The Question of Jewish Writing

> "The tendency toward mysticism is native to the Jews from antiquity, and its expressions are not to be understood, as usually happens, as a temporary conscious reaction against the dominance of the rule of the intellect. It is a significant peculiarity of the Jew, which hardly seems to have changed in thousands of years, that with him one extreme quickly and powerfully enkindles another."
>
> -Martin Buber, *The Tales of Rabbi Nachman*[1]

Tales of wandering seers, midnight trances, and otherworldly outsiders are not simply part of some distant, arcane body of Jewish literature, relegated to the cultural genizah, a dusty storeroom in a collective unconscious. Rather, the otherworldly atmosphere of Jewish writing is alive and well in the North American Jewish fiction of the last century and a half if a reader knows where to find it. The idea of dark, dreadful midnight visions and encounters might seem most reminiscent of Abraham's late night covenant with God in Genesis 15; Jacob's midnight duel with a mysterious man in Genesis 32; or any number of the Baal Shem Tov's mysterious candle-lit study sessions in 18th-century Poland; but one need not venture too far back to find the same theme in I.B. Singer's 1967 short story "The Lecture", in which his protagonist, Mr. N, is lost in terrifying night visions of the concentration camp at Treblinka.[2]

The central question discussed by the most renowned scholars in the field of Jewish literary studies for the past century or more has been the same: what exactly is Jewish literature? How do we even define the parameters of what we are studying? Ruth Wisse might tell us that Jewish literature is a repository of Jewish experience written in Jewish (and some non-Jewish) languages.[3]

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1. Martin Buber, *The Tales of Rabbi Nachman* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1988), 4.
2. Isaac Bashevis Singer, "The Lecture," 77.
3. Ruth R. Wisse, *The Modern Jewish Canon: A Journey Through Language and Culture* (Simon and Schuster,

George Steiner might tell us that Jewish literature is, in effect, a homeland for its people.[4] Dan Miron would tell us that it is a massive complex, a galaxy of stories coming into light and heavy contact with each other. Even Miron admits, however, that his idea requires expansion and fleshing out, a "systematic and coherent thinking about."[5]

If these giants in the field do not have a definitive answer after decades of work, it would be presumptuous of me to offer one here. What I do hope to offer, however, is a "systematic and coherent thinking about" one way to conceptualize the realm of possibilities in which Jewish writing operates. I will argue that these works of short Jewish fiction, written primarily by Jews of Ashkenazi descent, exist within and actively construct a literary realm that is recognizably Jewish in nature. In many instances, this Jewishness is made explicit by the fictional people, places, and things that appear in these stories. In many other instances, though, this Jewishness is implicit and would be recognized only by those with knowledge of Jewish history and the Jewish experience.

This required familiarity with what Miron calls *Judesein* — the experience of being a Jew in the world — indicates that both authors *and readers* play a role in the world-constructing process.[6] This realm in which Jewish authors and their audience meet constitutes a virtual world, a Jewish vision of reality in which they are insiders rather than the outsiders they have typically been within their host cultures. Utilizing a framework developed in concert with Possible Worlds theory, I will argue that several key markers of this literary dreamscape fall within the scope of the atmosphere with which I started; one marked by liminal zones and the people who inhabit them.

2001).
4. Steiner, "Our Homeland, the Text."
5. Miron, *From Continuity to Contiguity*, 405.
6. Miron, 405.

1.1 // What is Jewish Literature?

> "What have I in common with the Jews? I have hardly anything in common with myself, and should stand very quietly in a corner, content that I can breathe."
>
> -Franz Kafka[7]

Although there are few single works dedicated to what it means to write "Jewishly," many scholars who write about Jewish literature must address this question at the outset. Does "Jewish literature" simply include anything that has been written by a Jewish author? If that is indeed one's criterion, then do we consider the screenplay for the first Michael Bay *Transformers* (2007) film Jewish literature because it was written by Alex Kurtzman? The answer is surely negative. Does Jewish literature include only works centred around Jewish people, places, things, and themes? Though these are surely Jewish in nature, this criterion results in too narrow a sample; as I will note shortly, Franz Kafka, considered among the greatest of all Jewish writers of any generation, never explicitly mentions the Jewish people, or even individual Jewish characters in his fiction. The question of what constitutes Jewish literature is not at all simple, and more than a century of scholarship and theorizing has not brought us closer to a definitive answer. That definitive answer, according to some scholars like Dan Miron, is in fact out of the question. According to Miron, we will never come to an all-inclusive decision on what constitutes "Jewish" literature that incorporates every possible work.[8]

1.2 // *Judesein*

In his book, *From Continuity to Contiguity: Towards a New Jewish Literary Thinking*, Dan Miron makes a bold bid at defining how we might conceptualize Jewish literature. He begins by

7. From Kafka's diary, quoted in Nicholas Murray, *Kafka* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 195.
8. Miron, 204.

attempting to capture the experience of Jewishness:

> The German language aptly conveys our idea when it differentiates between *Jude*, *Judentum* or *Judaismus*, and *Judesein* — Jew, Judaism, and being a Jew. A Jew can be totally distanced from Judaism and yet share the experience of *Judesein*. One also can be oblivious of this experience or repress it; but when one does not do that, and one is a writer, one's writing would be — among many other things — "Jewish"; and this being experientially Jewish — no matter how the experience is perceived and evaluated, and also independently of its importance or centrality in the writer's overall perception of reality — is the only shibboleth that decides a writer's belonging or not belonging within the Jewish literary complex as much as it also supplies the only possible definition of the complex as a literary space.[9]

For Miron, a piece of writing that we could consider "Jewish" in nature would capture, to varying degrees, this idea of *Judesein* — the experience of being a Jew in the world.

As a concrete example of how this *Judesein* might play out in literature, Miron brings together two apparently incongruous storytellers, Sholem Aleichem — author of the story cycle of Tevye the Milkman, later adapted into *Fiddler on the Roof* — and Franz Kafka, author of *The Trial* and "The Metamorphosis", as well as *The Castle*. Sholem Aleichem's writings could not, on the surface, be any more different from Kafka's dank, inescapable judicial absurdity. Kafka's novel *The Trial*, written in German, tells the story of Josef K's arrest by an unknowable legal apparatus for a crime of which he has not been made aware, and his complex pursuit of an answer to the simple question, "and why am I under arrest?"[10] Tevye the Milkman's cycle of stories, written in Yiddish, focus on the titular character's business dealings, the relationships and marriages of his daughters, and the plight of the Jews in his fictional Jewish town. Most important among their

9. Miron, 307.
10. Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, (New York: Knopf, 1992). 4.

differences is Sholem Aleichem's explicitly Jewish subject matter, in contrast to Kafka's total silence on Jewish characters and places.

Miron argues that, despite these differences, the writings of Kafka and Sholem Aleichem share an essential core. Though The Law is hidden from Josef K while being spouted humorously by Tevye in the form of biblical (and biblical-sounding) proverbs, the conclusions are the same, according to Miron: "Systems of ethical norms were perhaps sacrosanct, but they could not be applied to real life, which both predated and submerged them."[11] In other words, the stories determine, in wildly different ways — the black comic, non-Jewish absurdity of Kafka and the jolly, seemingly inoffensive Jewish humour of Sholem Aleichem — that it is unfeasible to function in a world that demands adherence to The Law while submerging its participants in impossible moral situations. Both authors arrive at the heart of the Jewish condition: that of being bound from birth to death to a religious, moral and/or social otherness that is at odds with the reality of living in the Actual world, and which can be — and has been — a crushingly heavy burden. It is through this method of analyzing the ways in which disparate modes of storytelling reach out and grasp each other, Miron argues, that we might find an answer to our central question.

1.3 // Kafka and the Impossibility of Being a Jew in the World

It is fascinating that Kafka is the central figure who looms over this discussion of "Jewish" literature despite the fact he excises all Jewishness from his public writings. Searching through the annals of Jewish literary theory, one might be hard-pressed to find a scholar who *does not* bring Kafka into their discussion. Indeed, scholars like Miron, Ruth Wisse, George Steiner, Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber, Walter Benjamin, and countless others hold a special place among

11. Miron, 401.

authors for Kafka as "quintessentially Jewish."[12] Some of these authors speak explicitly of how strange a bedfellow Kafka truly is with regards to this theoretical enterprise. For instance, Wisse writes, "Franz Kafka was raised in German, with no access to any Jewish language until he was old enough to educate himself; that German was not wholly *his* language he knew from the moment he took up writing, and this awareness of adoption created the ontology of displacement that the name *Kafka* came to represent in literature."[13] Similarly, Miron speaks of Kafka's seeming distance from Jewishness. He asks how Kafka was a "Jewish" writer when he almost never mentioned Jews in his writing and especially never wrote of "the specific kind of alienation the portrayal of which became known as Kafkaesque, as being in any way rooted in the Jewish experience."[14] He asks further, "If he was quintessentially 'Jewish' … in what did Kafkaesque Jewishness inhere?"[15]

If we look solely at what he makes explicit, Kafka's work is very far removed from Jewishness. But if we were to dig a little deeper, as these scholars do, we would surely see that in his work, as in his life, Kafka's Jewishness was a fundamental building block of the literary dreamscape that he inhabited. In his seminal essay on Jewish writing, "Our Homeland, the Text," George Steiner writes, "As no other speaker or scribe after the Prophets, Kafka *knew*.… Kafka's misery as one coerced into writing, his almost hysterical diffidence before mundane authorship, are the facsimile, perhaps consciously arrived at, of the attempts of the Prophets to evade the intolerable burden of their seeing, to shake off the commandment of utterance."[16] To compare Kafka's mind to those of the biblical prophets is high praise indeed. Martin Buber echoes this lofty

12. Miron, 9.
13. Wisse, 8.
14. Miron, 9-10
15. Miron, 9-10.
16. Steiner, 13.

placement of the author, writing that *The Trial* was a Book of Job for the 20th century.[17]

Even if we accept the proposition that Kafka was among the most purely "Jewish" authors to have ever lived, we must still seek to understand the mechanism by which his *Judesein* funnelled into and powered his work. What was it about the experience of being a Jew in the world that inspired — or burdened — Franz Kafka? Ruth Wisse suggests that Kafka's total lack of access to a Jewish language (Yiddish or Hebrew in his time and place) until he was an adult fostered in him feelings of displacement and alienation that are evidenced by his writing and are emblematic of the Jewish experience as a whole.

For Wisse, there is a hierarchy of Jewish literatures that is wholly language-dependent. At the top of this hierarchy, the "most Jewish" of literatures is that found in a Jewish language: Hebrew (the holy tongue), Yiddish (which she argues was created in moral opposition to the German language a millennium ago), Ladino, and others which incorporate the holy tongue (though she mostly ignores all except Hebrew and Yiddish). Problematically, she gives English the third slot on her hierarchy, as it was not the language of oppressors — blood libels aside, one supposes.[18] The lowest rung on Wisse's hierarchical ladder is occupied by German, for what she believes are obvious reasons. It may then seem ironic that the most exalted author, Kafka, was the one who wrote in German, *but this is exactly Wisse's point:* that Kafka's discomfort with having to write as a Jew in the German language was exactly what made his tales of alienation so accessible, and so Jewish.[19] Kafka himself wrote eloquently about this issue, explaining that German literature existed long before Jews started writing in the language, affording young Jews

17. Miron, 343.
18. Blood libels against the Jews of medieval England, most notably in the murders of Little Saint Hugh and William of Norwich, have been discussed at great length by scholars. For further reading, see Magda Teter, *Blood Libel: On the Trail of an Antisemitic Myth* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2020).
19. Wisse, 85.

the opportunity to attempt escape from their Jewishness. Offering his take on the father-complex of psychoanalytic theory in this context, he writes,

> In this case I prefer another version, where the issue revolves not around the innocent father but around the father's Jewishness. Most young Jews who began to write German wanted to leave Jewishness behind them.... but with their posterior legs they were still glued to their fathers' Jewishness and with their waving anterior legs they found no new ground. Thus ensuing despair became their inspiration.... The product of their despair could not be German literature, though outwardly it seemed to be so. They existed among three impossibilities, which I just happen to call linguistic impossibilities: … the impossibility of not writing, the impossibility of writing German, the impossibility of writing differently.[20]

This sentiment leads to what Wisse, citing critics Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, calls a "minor literature."[21] The term actually comes from Kafka himself, who discussed authors who wrote in the language of political minorities — in his context, Yiddish and Czech authors.[22] But according to Wisse, Deleuze and Guattari reverse the plain meaning: "A minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language."[23] For Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka would then be "a Jewish writer bearing the consciousness of the Jewish collectivity."[24] For Wisse, however, these critics never consider the properties of a Jewish literature, or "what being a Jewish writer even means."

Dan Miron disagrees with Wisse's use of linguistic hierarchy as a rubric for how Jewish literature operates. Speaking against not only Wisse, Deleuze and Guattari, but any theory of Jewish writing that is strict in its parameters, Miron writes, "It would be rather difficult to conceive

20. Kafka, 10, in Miron, 310.
21. Wisse, 85.
22. Wisse, 85.
23. Wisse, 85.
24. Wisse, 86.

of writers such as Bruno Schulz, [Isaac] Babel, and [Saul] Bellow as contributors to a minor literature."[25] Instead, he continues, we must make the Jewish literary complex the entire subject of a study. Then, "we can safely put aside the major/minor, as well as many other binary oppositions; for what really counts is the dynamics of the complex as dictated by the movement of diverse entities within it, the brands of contiguity these entities formed when coming in touch with each other, and their mutual 'sympathies' and rejections."[26] For Miron, any discussion of what it is to write Jewishly must be broadly inclusive, and he offers a mode of conceptualization to which I will return shortly.

According to Miron, Kafka's motivation and the root of the author's deep implicit Jewishness "was neither theological nor mystical. He did not write, as [Buber, Scholem and Rosenzweig] contended, a twentieth-century version of the book of Job."[27] For Miron, it was Kafka's frequent and well-documented excursions to see travelling Yiddish theatre troupes that captured his imagination and were the genesis of the *Judesein* of his writings. Miron illustrates this eloquently, writing that Kafka's interest in these Jewish plays "had nothing to do with either the Cabbala or the Talmud, but had everything to do with the poignant, pathetic, and grotesque wretchedness of both the actors and the plays,"[28] citing the "attraction-repulsion duality"[29] that is evident in Kafka's diary entries about the theatre. This duality can be read "in the lines and between the lines" of his journal: "In the actors and their 'Jewish bodies,' in their movements, singing, and dancing, which he watched with what the actors themselves undoubtedly called *kelberne hispales* (calf-like admiration), he saw the personification of Jewish helplessness and weakness."[30] Far from

25. Miron, 312. These authors wrote in German, Russian, and English, respectively.
26. Miron, 312-313.
27. Miron, 308.
28. Miron, 344.
29. Miron, 344.
30. Miron, 344.

being disgusted by this weakness, “The dapper Kafka embraced this wretchedness. He ‘loved’ it, believed in it, ‘accepted’ it—while asking himself from time to time what on earth he was doing in the company of these lice-infested miscreants.”[31]

It wasn’t that Kafka looked down upon these “lice-infested miscreants.” Rather, in them he finally saw something to identify with, like an out-of-body experience affording him the ability to view a personification of how he had always felt: small, pathetic, and dirty. He had felt this way since childhood, a feeling only ever worsened by his brash, loud, and belligerent father. As Miron writes,

> For Kafka, the actors and their pitiful theater represented not Judaism as such — a religion, a civilization, an aggregate of sacred texts — but rather *Judesein*, the experience of being a Jew; the experience of being what he felt he had been, puny and (in his own eyes) ungainly, as he watched his father's “strength, health, appetite, loudness of voice, eloquence, self-satisfaction, worldly dominance, endurance, presence of mind—vigor, noise, and hot temper”; or as he experienced a bodily shrinkage when gawking at his naked father (in a changing cell of a local swimming pool) towering above him “strong, tall, broad.”[32]

It is in this context that the opening words of *The Metamorphosis* are most poignant: “When Gregor Samsa woke up one morning from unsettling dreams, he found himself changed in his bed into a monstrous vermin.”[33] Kafka’s description of Gregor’s new form, like some sort of beetle or cockroach, illustrates his own feelings of puniness and dirtiness. But the author is also acutely aware of his connection to the Jews and the reality of their existence and place in European society, with George Steiner pointing towards “his use of the word ‘vermin’… in precisely the tense and

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31. Miron, 344.
32. Miron, 345.
33. Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, (Toronto: Bantam, 1986), 1.

connotations that would be given to [the Jews] by the Nazis a generation later."[34]

Similarly, an understanding of context greatly increases the power of the opening line of *The Trial*. Kafka had been aware of the Dreyfus Affair — a treason trial in France that turned into an antisemitic scandal — at the end of the 19th century, but was avidly following the Beilis blood libel trial of 1911-1913, in which Menahem Mendel Beilis, a Russian Jew, was charged with the ritual murder of a young Russian boy.[35] Knowing not only of the huge number of pogroms occurring in Eastern Europe during his lifetime, but also that these blood libel accusations had been ongoing for a thousand years by the time that Beilis was accused, Kafka was acutely aware of the impossible position of being a Jew in the world, or at least his world of early 20th century Central and Eastern Europe. It is with this burden in mind that we read *The Trial*'s opening sentence, "Someone must have been spreading lies about Josef K, for without having done anything wrong he was arrested one morning."[36]

This opening line, we might argue, is one of the most succinct articulations of the Jewish experience, particularly at the time and place that they were written in the Europe of the first half of the 20th century. The condition of waking up — coming into being — accused, monstrous, and having simply to adapt to your circumstances (for instance, Gregor Samsa's first thought after transforming into an insect is how quickly he can get to work in his state), is a hallmark of both Kafka's writing and the experience of the Jews of Europe and elsewhere.

1.4 // Other Conceptualizations of Jewish Writing

There are, of course, several different ways that scholars conceptualize Jewish literature. Wisse, for her part, believes that it is helpful to work through this question with the idea of canonicity (as

34. Steiner, 13.
35. Arnold J. Band, "Kafka and the Beiliss Affair," *Comparative Literature* 32, no. 2 (1980): 168–83; 170.
36. Kafka, *The Trial*, 1.

evidenced by the title of her famous book, *The Modern Jewish Canon*). For Wisse, it is useful to conceptualize Jewish literature in terms of a canon in part because of the centrality of canon when it comes to the best-known of Jewish (and Israelite) texts, the Hebrew Bible. Just as the compilers of what we know today as the Bible developed a sense of which texts best spoke to a central truth about being chosen by God, Wisse believes that the stories that she has chosen — and Jewish stories everywhere — serve as a "repository of modern Jewish experience."[37] Others, like Miron, believe that any idea of canonicity is by nature exclusionary, and is not the answer to our central question.

Other scholars believe that there are Jewish themes that have continued from the Biblical era up to present day, and that there are prominent moments of rupture — or discontinuity — that mark the different eras in Jewish writing. For these scholars, Jewish writing is an unbroken line of succession with a few notable hiccups. For example, David Roskies writes about the literature of destruction throughout Jewish history: tales of exile, death, loss, and mayhem. Roskies explains that catastrophe has historically been conceptualized as covenantal in nature, followed by a period in which this idea fell out of favour, and finally being reconceptualized as such in the wake of the Holocaust. Put differently, Jewish authors wrote about the destruction of the Middle Ages and the Early Modern and Modern periods as a punishment akin to the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, in which God has brought pain and suffering down upon them for turning their backs on Him. After all, this pattern of exile and return as divine punishment is one of the central themes of the Hebrew Bible.[38] In this way of thinking, Jewish literature continues this tradition where the Bible and the Talmud left off.

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37. Wisse, 4.
38. David G. Roskies, *The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe*. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1988).

As Miron would surely admit, there is some truth to this idea of continuity. According to Miron, this temporal continuity is a vertical continuity, while there is a horizontal or physical continuity as well in the way modes of storytelling have been diffused from region to region by Jewish communities. All that having been said, however, Miron argues that using this concept as the answer to the question of what constitutes Jewish literature is far too limiting.[39]

1.5 // Miron's Jewish Literary Complex

If we agree with Miron that the "Jewishness" of a work is not contingent only on outward aspects like the language in which it was written (Jewish or otherwise), or that it has as its subject matter rabbis and other Jewish types, or sacred books like the Torah and Talmud, then how might we work toward understanding and conceptualizing Jewish fiction? He believes that it is not useful to work towards ideas of new Jewish canons, as Wisse attempts to do in her book. On that, he writes, "There is no one single dominant Jewish literature; there is not even a 'choir' of various Jewish literatures, because the basic harmony that sustains a polyphony is simply not there."[40]

Miron further explains that, though no single "Jewish literature" has existed since biblical times, "A freely floating, imprecisely defined, and widely inclusive Jewish literary complex does exist." He continues, "A Jewish writer (who can, as a matter of course, be also an American or a French or a German writer) is a writer whose work evinces an interest in or is in whatever way and to whatever extent conditioned by a sense of *Judesein*, being Jewish, or is being read by readers who experience it as if it showed interest and were conditioned by the writer's being Jewish."[41] The idea of *Judesein* is nebulous enough, in Miron's view, that it actually does the opposite of creating any essentialism to which other scholars fall prey: "That this gives rise to any number of

39. Miron, 205.
40. Miron, 414.
41. Miron, 404-405.

literary hybrids, and excludes in advance any essentialist notion of a Jewish literary 'purity,' is simply a fact of our cultural life, which must be faced, for the price of avoiding it is literary and cultural myopia or speciousness."[42]

For Miron, a strict understanding of what is "Jewish" literature is impossible, in part because of the historical situation of the Jews. Exiled to the far reaches of the planet in a number of ways and at a number of times, in Jewish cultures (emphasis on the plural) have arisen infinite hybrids with host cultures and with each other. As an example of the various possibilities, a Sephardic Jewish family that came from a hybrid Jewish-Iberian or Jewish-North African Ladino-speaking culture might have banded together with an Ashkenazi Jewish family, raised in Yiddish and coming from a Jewish-German or Jewish-Polish cultural hybrid, to form a commune in late 19th-century Palestine and decided, ideologically, to read and write in Hebrew. The same could have happened with English in America, or Spanish in Argentina, or you could have a Jewish author, living in Prague, writing in German about anything but the Jews, as was Kafka's case. There are simply too many spatial and temporal possibilities to have, as Miron terms it, cultural myopia. Miron explains further that this Jewish literary complex is "a multifarious entity consisting of different connected, semi-connected, and unconnected particles, and as such complex, that is, complicated, difficult to understand and analyze."[43] He goes on to describe some of the many ways that these particles may collide:

> Vast, disorderly, and somewhat diffuse, this complex was characterized by dualities, parallelisms, occasional intersections, marginal overlapping, hybrids, similarities within dissimilarities, mobility, changeability, occasional emergence of patterns and their eventual disappearance, randomness, and, when approximating a semblance of significant

42. Miron, 405.
43. Miron, 275.

order, by contiguities.[44]

The last of these concepts, contiguity, is the key to Miron's thinking, "a concept that a new theory of Jewish literatures must adopt, explore, and develop."[45]

Looking at the language that Miron uses to describe this Jewish literary complex, one cannot ignore the spatial aspects of the idea. What he seems to be describing is a tangible — almost inhabitable — zone rather than theories based on language or continuity and discontinuity. Elsewhere, he takes this spatial metaphor further by referring to the complex as a galaxy. Discussing Kafka's aforementioned observation about Jews writing in German, Miron believes that the author was shedding light on "the outer reaches of a Jewish literary complex, the fuzzy end of a galaxy."[46] The metaphor of the galaxy, with items varying from the infinitesimal to the infinitely vast, from the totally static to the unfathomably fast, and all the collisions, explosions, and intricacies in between, is apt for the kind of understanding of Jewish literature for which Miron is advocating.

In the closing chapter of his book, Miron states, "the question that this essay posed to itself and its reader was whether … the Jewish literary complex as such can be profitably studied; and the answer that has been given to the question was that it could."[47] He then explains that whoever wishes to study the Jewish literary complex "must not only observe, but also fashion the tools that would improve perception and perhaps bring things that have been overlooked into sharp visibility."[48] Finally, he encourages scholars to embark on their own study of the concept he has laid out: "The multifariousness of the modern Jewish literary complex, not to mention its somewhat chaotic nature, should not discourage but rather should encourage a systematic and

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44. Miron, 275-276.
45. Miron, 276.
46. Miron, 312-313.
47. Miron, 405.
48. Miron, 405.

methodologically coherent thinking about it."[49]

It is exactly this type of coherent thinking that I aim to accomplish here, though perhaps not on the grand scale that Miron had envisioned (that being said, Miron seems rather against judging things by their size and scope). Rather, I wish to develop the tools necessary to investigate one wing — or even a room — of the complex; one constellation in the galaxy. I believe that some of the tools necessary to improve perception of the galaxy have already been fashioned by proponents of Possible Worlds literary theory, and I use the work of Lubomír Doležel and Nancy Traill as my guiding light. (That the metaphor of Possible Worlds fits perfectly with the metaphor of a Jewish literary galaxy is purely coincidence.) By looking at how Possible Worlds theorists apply their toolkit, which I lay out in Chapter Two, I believe that the reader will see that our eight short works of North American Jewish fiction operate within a consistent realm of possibilities that is recognizably Jewish in nature, a virtual reality that both authors and readers can inhabit. In essence, I would like to point the reader towards a glimpse of one region of the galaxy.

1.6 // Jewish Space in Literature

Now, the concept of Jewish literature acting as a special space for Jewish authors and readers is not new. A number of scholars have made similar arguments, more in passing remarks than in systematic and coherent studies. For instance, in her study of Yiddish travel tales of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Leah Garrett writes that "Yiddish literature of travel during the period of this analysis (the 1870s to the 1930s) often reconceived the world as a *Jewish* space."[50] She continues, "Because Russian culture often positioned Jews in public spaces as minorities and outsiders, the Jewish author's use of patently 'unrealistic' locales had the added effect of creating

49. Miron, 405.
50. Leah Garrett, *Journeys Beyond the Pale,* 4.

literary spaces in which the Jews were central."[51] For Garrett, the works of the Yiddish authors in question, such as I.L. Peretz, Jacob Glatstein, and Lamed Shapiro, operate within a sort of parallel dimension of Eastern Europe in which the Jewish inhabitants are the important members of society, the Jewish *shtetls* the epicentre of social activity.

Jan Schwarz also briefly touches on the concept of a Jewish space in his linguistic and historical study of Yiddish transmission after the Holocaust, *Survivors and Exiles* (2015). Discussing the post-war exodus to places like Canada, the United States, and Argentina (among others), Schwarz writes that displaced Yiddish writers "erected artistic replicas in the form of life-writing, artistic works, and testimonies in order to memorialize Ashkenaz, the Eastern European Jewish world."[52] He then comments that this endeavour created a virtual Ashkenaz, a "web of images, figures, narratives, and language folklore" akin to the modern internet.[53] Further along, he sets aside this cyberspace metaphor, moving toward a geographical one by writing that their transnational map of Ashkenaz became an "imagined community" or "quasi-territory."[54]

The idea of a "transnational Ashkenaz" is useful for this study, as it implies both the limitless scope of Jewish habitation across the planet and the specific nature of a virtual Jewish space. People at the four corners of the Earth are inhabiting a virtual cultural world, together apart. The writers and artists he is describing are working quite explicitly to rebuild what has been lost. They are writing in Yiddish for the purpose of keeping this Jewish language alive; many of them are writing stories and other texts about what is now absent *specifically to memorialize a lost Jewishness*. They write about the *shtetls* from which they came, the local rabbis, the family and

51. Garrett, 5.
52. Jan Schwarz, *Survivors and Exiles: Yiddish Culture after the Holocaust* (Wayne State University Press, 2015), 10.
53. Schwarz, 10.
54. Schwarz, 244.

friends who were taken. Even when they are not writing memoirs and memorials, the prime motivator in their construction of this virtual Ashkenaz is ideological: *we must not forget what was lost*. The present study differs from Schwarz's focus by asking whether we can move past the solely explicit and find a virtual Jewish space within the implicit texture of these eight short stories from Canada and the United States.

In his aforementioned essay "Our Homeland, the Text", George Steiner also touches on this idea of Jewish space, though somewhat more abstractly. For Steiner, the natural mode of being for the Jewish people is wandering and otherness; in this mode they find their at-homeness. He writes, "The descendant of rootless Abraham has no other place to go. For even the land promised him was not his. He could seize upon it only by cunning and conquest. Driven out of this land by subsequent conquerors, the Jew is, strictly speaking, merely restored to his nativity of dispersal, to his chosen foreignness."[55] Rather than claiming, as Schwarz does, that Jewish writers are constructing a monument to a lost physical home, Steiner feels that *there never was a physical homeland* — Israel or otherwise — for the Jews. Even the land that was promised them in the Torah — the land of Israel — was never theirs to begin with. According to Steiner, the true home of the Jews, the one place for them to lay down their weary heads and express their at-homeness-in-exile, was the text. He says this plainly but eloquently, writing, "Like a snail, his antennae towards menace, the Jew has carried the house of the text on his back. What other domicile has been allowed him?"[56]

Everywhere they have gone, the Jewish people have maintained their textual studies and practices as the hallmark of their identity. For much of history, this textual practice involved the analysis, creation, and consumption of sacred texts, like the Torah, the Talmud, the Zohar, and

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55. Steiner, 6.
56. Steiner, 8.

others. As time wore on, however, and as new movements in both secularism and fundamentalism began to take shape, this textual practice bled into other avenues, like Hasidic folktales and what we would now recognize as the beginnings of Jewish creative fiction. Within those Jewish cultures where sacred texts were being set aside, new texts would take their place as the centre of Jewish cultural life.

Finally, in the closing paragraphs of his essay, Steiner writes about the impossibility of the Jewish people being truly at-home in any adoptive society: "Whether he knew it or not, whether he wished it or not — indeed, he desperately hoped otherwise and did much to deceive himself – – the Jew, when given nationality by his adopted gentile hosts, remained in transit. Judaism defines itself as a visa to the messianic 'other land.'"[57] Indeed, religious Judaism always has an eye toward the world-to-come, and much of the conversation in its sacred texts is, in one way or another, geared toward ensuring that eventuality.

But what of the Jewish writers who have set their gaze away from the world-to-come for a variety of reasons? Secular Jewish writing — in this case, fiction writing — does not claim to act as any kind of guide to the "other land," and is, in most cases, very this-worldly. The protagonists in the stories we will analyze are normal folk — professors, immigrants, Holocaust survivors, schoolchildren — and they do not connect with the otherworldly beings of traditional Jewish sacred texts, like angels, demons, and dybbuks. Especially in Holocaust literature, the absence of God and the lack of any hope of a world-to-come is common. In contrast to Steiner's view of Judaism as a visa to the messianic "other land," that world-to-come, I argue that Jewish fiction itself is a visa to a different kind of "other land" — not one that is to-come, but one that is ever-present and available to anyone who cares to enter it. By picking up a work by Chava Rosenfarb,

57. Steiner, 19.

or A.M. Klein, or Lamed Shapiro, the reader has purchased their ticket and stamped their visa to an alternate realm, much like the actual world that they inhabit daily, but just different enough to inspire a sense of familiarity, a sense of belonging, a sense of at-homeness. The question to be answered is what "different" element inspires this sense.

Chapter 2 // Method and Theory: Possible Worlds Theory and Liminality

> "Under the imaginary table that separates me from my readers, don't we secretly clasp each other's hands?"
>
> -Bruno Schulz, *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*[1]

To make the claim that the enterprise of Jewish fiction-writing constitutes the construction of a recognizably Jewish "other-land" will require a concrete way of conceptualizing that world-building act. I argue that Possible Worlds literary theory offers the appropriate toolkit for that task. That toolkit offers a means to chart and identify literary realms, or "possible worlds."

In this section, I argue that the Jewish literary realm (or complex, or galaxy, or Other-land) can be logically understood to exist as a non-physical artifact, or, more specifically, a structure built out of artistic artifacts constructed by Jewish authors and their readers. To take the visual metaphor a step further, imagine a fictional tale as a brick that has been fashioned by its author through the act of storytelling. A story does not exist in a vacuum, and our understanding of its context and the contours of its fictional world allow us to place it next to other similarly-shaped bricks. When we place those bricks together, they may form a recognizable (and in this case recognizably-Jewish) structure, or complex of structures.

Possible Worlds theory is essential to the broader argument of this dissertation. It makes the important claim that fictional people, places, and things have as much of an impact on the Actual world as historical accounts, and can be studied as such. Theorists Lubomír Doležel and Nancy H. Traill take this idea a step further by charting fictional worlds. Doležel's major case study, offering an example of his methodological toolkit, is the work of Franz Kafka as emblematic

1. Bruno Schulz, *Sanatorium under the Sign of the Hourglass* (New York: Walker, 1978), 1.

of what he calls the modern myth, with Traill making the same claim for her category of the paranormal. As I have already shown, Kafka is considered emblematic of Jewish writing, hinting at a natural connection between these three complexes of storytelling. That natural connection, I will argue in the second half of this chapter, is the theme of liminality. Finally, in the concluding portion of the dissertation, I will circle back to my point about the impact of fictional entities on the Actual world through the work of anthropologist Michael Jackson, who writes about the tangible, positive effect of storytelling and fictional world-manipulation on displaced peoples.

2.1 // The Development of Possible Worlds

The term "Possible Worlds" finds its most distant origins in the work of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century polymath and philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. According to Marie-Laure Ryan, however, Possible Worlds semantics took off in the second half of the twentieth century as a means of solving problems in formal semantics (an issue in linguistics); the theory was also seen as useful in modal logic.[2] In the mid-1970s, Possible Worlds began to be applied to narratology — the study of narratives, their themes and symbols, and the ways in which all of these affect humans perceptions of reality. It also attempts to understand how fictional worlds are constructed and function. [3]

David Lewis was one of the first to take this idea from formal semantics and apply it to narratology.[4] Thomas Pavel followed in 1986 with his well-respected work, *Fictional Worlds*.[5] Fairly quickly, a number of other theorists emerged, several of them affiliated with the University of Toronto. Lubomír Doležel, a long-time professor there, became monumental in this field.

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2. Marie-Laure Ryan, "Possible Worlds," *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, accessed September 13, 2022, https://www-archiv.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/node/54.html.
3. Ryan, "Possible Worlds."
4. David K. Lewis, *Counterfactuals,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973).
5. Thomas G. Pavel, *Fictional Worlds.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986).

Though his book on the subject, *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds*, was only published in 1998, it included, summarized, and expanded the seminal articles he had published over the previous two decades. World-famous novelist and critic Umberto Eco is also counted among its proponents, as well as Marie-Laure Ryan, Nancy H. Traill, and others.[6]

2.2 // The Ontological Status of Fiction

Any full discussion of Possible Worlds narratology must begin with the ontological status of fictional stories, places, people, and things. What is the nature of their existence? Do they in fact exist? In what sense are Josef K from *The Trial* and Tevye the Milkman real? If they do not exist in some sense, then their names would not appear in the text in front of you, and their qualities would not be substantive enough to comment on. According to Doležel, "Possible worlds of fiction are *artifacts* produced by aesthetic activities — poetry and music composition, mythology and storytelling, painting and sculpting, theater and dance, cinema and television, and so on."[7] Fictional worlds of literature, he continues, "are a special kind of possible world; they are aesthetic artifacts constructed, preserved, and circulating in the medium of fictional texts."[8] The stories we will be analyzing, along with the people, places and things that inhabit them, have been conjured into existence by the act of fiction-writing; we could not speak about them before the author created them, but we can speak about them after. Doležel states that "the author creates a fictional world that was not available prior to this act. Textual poiesis… constructs fictional realms whose properties, structures, and modes of existence are, in principle, independent of the properties,

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6. Marie-Laure Ryan, *Narrative across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004); Nancy H. Traill, "Fictional Worlds of the Fantastic," *Style* 25, no. 2 (1991): 196–210; Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).
7. Doležel, 14-15.
8. Doležel, 16.

structures, and existential mode of actuality."[9]

Fictional worlds and their inhabitants exist whether or not they correspond to the Actual world, and the subtle differences between the fictional and the Actual can in fact have palpable effects for the community that authors or receives such a text.[10] In fact, several historians and historiographers would agree that not even works purporting to be historical fact truly correspond to the Actual world, and the historical persons and places therein enjoy the same ontological status as fictional persons and places. Shaul Magid, for example, writing about the texts of Lurianic Kabbalah in mystical Judaism, uses the New Historicist perspective, developed among others by Steven Greenblatt, to suggest that "literature in general (and this literature in particular) participates in constructing rather than reflecting a historical narrative."[11]

In an article he published the same year as *Heterocosmica*, Doležel agrees with this sentiment and brings the well-known historian Hayden White into the conversation, writing, "a historian matches up 'a specific plot structure with the set of historical events that he wishes to endow with a meaning of a particular kind… This is essentially a literary, that is to say fiction-making, operation.'"[12] Furthermore, he writes, "The aim of the writer of a novel must be the same as that of the writer of a history. Both wish to provide a verbal image of 'reality.'"[13] Thus, any abstract distinction between the real and the fictitious is just smoke and mirrors, perhaps an unconscious effort on the part of humans to make what they consider "true" more tangible and removed from the realm of "untrue" fiction. Doležel offers a literary example of this understanding and explains why such a homogeneity is important for literary semantics, noting, "As non-

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9. Doležel, 22.
10. Discussed at length in the Conclusion, on pg. 298.
11. Shaul Magid, "Lurianic Kabbalah and Its Literary Form: Myth, Fiction, History," *Prooftexts* 29, no. 3 (2010): 362–97; 367.
12. Doležel, "Possible Worlds of Fiction and History," *New Literary History* 29, no. 4 (1998): 785–809; 791.
13. Doležel, 791.

actualized possibles, all fictional entities are of the same ontological nature."[14] The example he offers is that of Napoleon Bonaparte:

> Tolstoy's Napoleon is no less fictional than his Pierre Bezuchov, and Dickens's London no more actual than Carroll's Wonderland. A view which presents fictional persons as a mixed bag of "real people" and "purely fictitious characters" leads to serious theoretical difficulties, analytical confusions, and naïve critical practice. The principle of ontological homogeneity is a necessary condition for the coexistence, interaction, and communication of fictional persons. It epitomizes the sovereignty of fictional worlds.[15]

For Doležel, the many different renditions of the Napoleon character (the historical, the fictional, the legendary — even the conspiracies that say he ended up in New Orleans) are visualized and conceptualized by the reader in the same way, regardless of "fiction" or "history." As he himself states, "all have been or will be named 'Napoleon.'"[16] There is no difference, in Doležel's mind, between the so-called fictional and so-called real — they are all *non-actualized possible particulars*.

Setting aside the question of fiction and history and focusing solely on the existence of fictional persons, Doležel uses the example of Shakespeare's Hamlet to explain how fictional characters exist within the Actual world. While Hamlet is not an individual male in the world we consider Actual, "he is an individualized possible person inhabiting an alternative world, the fictional world of Shakespeare's play. The name *Hamlet* is neither empty nor self-referential; it refers to an individual of a fictional world. By positing possible worlds as the universe of fictional discourse, our semantics gives legitimacy to the concept of fictional reference."[17] The "actuality"

14. Doležel, 788.
15. Doležel, 788.
16. Doležel, 788.
17. Doležel, *Heterocosmica*, 16.

of a fictional character is of little or no consequence. What is of consequence is the effect such a fictional existent can have on the Actual world, and the capacity of that fictional existent to be conceptualized on the same level as someone who is or was Actual.

Doležel's analysis of J.K. Huysman's novel *À rebours* provides a concrete example of how a fictional existent can enter the cultural imagination of the Actual world. Huysman's novel follows a man named Jean Des Esseintes who locks himself in a house and reads and reflects on art for several years. The protagonist analyzes art and literature from the Actual world, like Virgil, Cicero, and Beaudelaire. In Doležel's parlance, "The artworks are integrated into the fictional world by becoming individuated fictional objects."[18] The fascinating part comes after the publication of *À rebours* in 1884, where the fictional character Des Esseintes's analysis of these works of the Actual world were considered so astute that Des Esseintes, the fictional existent, entered the discourse of the Actual world in subsequent analyses of works by Virgil, Cicero, and Beaudelaire. As Doležel explains, "in his historical work, *Le Latin Mystique* (1892) Rémy de Gourmont quotes the opinions of the fictional essayist Des Esseintes: 'as judged by Des Esseintes' (35), 'to delight Des Esseintes' (57), 'to justify Des Esseintes' (66), 'Des Esseintes found' (102)."[19] In this sense, Des Esseintes has become as close to an "actual" person as one can in the Western intellectual imagination. This fictional character might even be the best-remembered commentator on Cicero and Virgil of the entire decade or quarter-century in which *À rebours* was published, held in higher esteem than the flesh-and-blood critics and commentators who breathed our air but whose names we can no longer recall.

Fictional stories — fictional people, places, things, and other entities — exist, whether we can touch them with our hands or not. They affect our lives in a variety of ways, and their words

18. Doležel, 53.
19. Doležel, 53.

can have a far greater effect on one's understanding of reality than anything the person next to them in the Actual world could or would tell them. Worldviews have been built and worldviews have been shattered by the words of fictional persons, or as Doležel would put it, *non-actualized possible particulars*. As such, the fact that the authors of our eight stories fashion a Jewish other-land through their works of fiction — that they do so by expressing the liminal nature of the Jewish experience — is of potentially great significance for the Jewish reader. Through the act of reading and absorbing these stories about these sorts of liminal places and people, I argue, a Jewish reader can feel at-home and familiar, on solid ground, while stuck on a sea of unfamiliar and at times hostile cultures. Furthermore, a non-Jewish reader can come to a greater appreciation for and understanding of the Jewish experience through their entry into this distinctly Jewish other-land. I will return to this discussion in the conclusion, in concert with the work of anthropologist Michael Jackson.

2.3 // Narrative Modalities

Now that I have established the ontological status of fictional texts, it is essential move towards an understanding of the Possible Worlds toolkit, which will enable us to better understand the galaxy in which we find our short works of Jewish fiction.[20] For Doležel and others, all fictional worlds can be charted and assessed according to where they land within separate modal systems, or constraints. He defines these systems as "rudimentary and inescapable constraints, which each person acting in the world faces."[21] Explaining the malleability of fictional worlds, Doležel writes

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20. Of course, the approach to narrative constraints that Doležel suggests here is not the only avenue through which we can enjoy our stories and come to an understanding of their liminal attributes. I would suggest, however, that Doležel's approach allows for a succinct, concise summary of what makes his category of the modern myth — and by extension Traill's paranormal — unique. This is the analysis by which they explain the disintegration of the barrier between the natural and the supernatural in those narrative worlds, a valuable building block in our approach to our eight short stories which inhabit a space that is, I argue, adjacent to the categories put forth by these two theorists.
21. Doležel, 113.

that "Agents of the actual world have to deal with a tangled bundle of modal restrictions. But in the formation of fictional worlds modal systems can be manipulated in many different ways."[22] It is through the manipulation of four modal systems that fictional worlds are built and, most importantly, can be placed into recognizable genres. In Chapter Three, I explore the narrative constraints of the realm of our eight short stories. These modal constraints are as follows:[23]

2.3.1 // Alethic Constraints

Every fictional world — and there could be multiple worlds in a given text — operates within alethic constraints whether the author is aware of them or not; since Possible Worlds theory remains rather obscure, we might assume that authors generally are not aware. These constraints are not as complex as their name suggests. He explains, "The alethic modalities [or constraints] of possibility, impossibility, and necessity determine the fundamental conditions of fictional worlds, especially causality, time-space parameters, and the action capacity of persons."[24] Essentially, alethic constraints determine whether the fictional world is what we would term a "natural" world or a "supernatural" world. He explains further, "what is impossible in the natural world becomes possible in its supernatural counterpart."[25] The supernatural world is inhabited by "physically impossible beings–gods, spirits, monsters, and so on, endowed with properties and action capacities that are denied to persons of the natural world."[26]

Alethic constraints, however, are not as cut and dry as this short explanation might indicate; not all tales involving supernatural worlds focus on gods and monsters. Rather, these constraints allow for tremendous texture in literary works, including those of humans who exist within the

22. Doležel, 114.
23. Each of these will be illustrated by examples from our stories and other Jewish tales in Chapter Three. For a compact example, see pg. 76.
24. Doležel, 115.
25. Doležel, 115.
26. Doležel, 116.

natural world but are allowed entry into the supernatural, or who have the ability to engage with the supernatural while remaining firmly footed in the natural.

Doležel also tells of what he calls intermediate worlds – zones in which the contrast between supernatural and natural is bridged. "Dreams, hallucination, madness, drug-induced altered states," he says, "are physically possible, natural human experiences; at the same time, physically impossible persons, objects and events appear in these frames."[27] The stories I will analyse demonstrate that the secular transition away from Jewish religious instruction also entailed a transition from tales of the overtly supernatural to stories of intermediate worlds and states. Dreams, hallucinations, and madness all play their part in the adventurings of some of our key characters.

2.3.2 // Deontic Constraints

Deontic constraints have to do with proscriptive and prescriptive norms, determining "which actions are prohibited, obligatory, or permitted."[28] As with alethic constraints, deontic constraints are present in all stories whether purposefully or not, and it gives meaning to the actions of fictional persons. Doležel offers a succinct explanation of how the deontic system breathes life into a single action, and how that action can have a totally different status and consequences under different deontic conditions. He uses the example of a person travelling in Siberia. "By itself," he writes, "the action is deontically neutral. But when its [deontic] conditions are specified, the action acquires a deontic marker: it might be a pleasure trip, if **permitted** (a tourist's travel), a transgression, if **prohibited** (a prisoner fleeing from a camp), or a duty, if **obligatory** (a businessman going to sign a trade deal)."[29] In Chapter Three I use the example of Holocaust

27. Doležel, 117.
28. Doležel, 120.
29. Doležel, 121, my emphases.

literature to further explain deontic constraints.

2.3.3 // Axiological Constraints

Axiological Constraints refer to the concepts of good, evil, and indifference. Stories that prominently feature axiological modalities can be found in the mythology of a number of religions, where the battle between good and evil is paramount. These are present in large doses in superhero stories, war movies, and a number of other genres, as well as in smaller doses in other genres. Doležel writes that axiological constraints transform people, places, things, actions, and states of affairs into values and disvalues, noting that they are "a valorization of the world by a social group, a culture, a historical period. But valorization is strongly dependent on personality structure, and so the axiological modalities are eminently prone to subjectivization: what is a value for one person might be a disvalue for another one."[30] It is through these constraints that we enjoy stories of bad people getting their comeuppance, but this constraint is arguably even more powerful when we are allowed to view not just the suffering of evil people, but also the redemption story, the conversion of an evil character to the "light side." When this occurs, the reader gets the full axiological experience, bringing the dark all the way around to the light. The opposite is also true: though it may not offer the same sense of satisfaction as the dark-to-light conversion story, the light-to-dark conversion is similarly compelling.

2.3.4 // Epistemic Constraints

The quest for knowledge dominates stories that centre around epistemic constraints. According to Doležel, "Epistemic modalities release their story-generating energy because of uneven distribution of knowledge among the fictional persons."[31] Thus, in a story centred around the K-

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30. Doležel, 123-4.
31. Doležel, 126.

operator, there is a certain knowledge that is attainable but not yet attained by the protagonist(s). Doležel explains further, "The modal system of knowledge, ignorance, and belief imposes epistemic order on the fictional world. Codexal epistemic modalities are expressed in social representations, such as scientific knowledge, ideologies, religions, cultural myths."[32]

	Narrative Constraints[33]			
Quantifiers	Alethic	Deontic	Axiological	Epistemic
Some	Possible	Permitted	Good	Known
None	Impossible	Prohibited	Bad	Unknown
All	Necessary	Obligatory	Indifferent	Believed

These four narrative constraints are not utilized individually in separate stories; it would be nearly impossible to find a tale that only contains one of these modalities while completely ignoring the others. To be sure, a story can centre around one of them as the driver of the action, but that does not mean that the other three are absent. Rather, the other modalities may simply be implicit. As Doležel puts it, "These atomic structures (modalities), limited in number, combine, alternate, intersect, and overlap in diverse ways to form an unlimited number of composite, molecular fictional worlds."[34]

In the most rudimentary example of the mixing and matching of modal systems, contrary conditions of one modality can exist in the same world, a phenomenon that Doležel terms the dyadic world. In this world, for example, both the natural and supernatural can be present (though

32. Doležel, 126.
33. Approximate reproduction of table from Doležel, 114.
34. Doležel, 128.

strictly demarcated), thus fulfilling contrary alethic conditions. This would be what we call the mythological world, as Doležel explains: "The inhabitants of the supernatural domain have access into the natural domain, but for the humans the supernatural domain is, as a rule, off limits. Being physically inaccessible, the supernatural domain is beyond human cognition; it appears as a mysterious, hidden, transcendent 'black hole.'"[35]

2.4 // Implicitness, Intertexts, and the Reader's "Encyclopedia"

The concepts found in Doležel's work are not totally foreign to the study of Jewish fiction. Shaul Magid has come closest to a study of this type by incorporating the work of Thomas Pavel and other critics into an article he contributed to the journal *Prooftexts*, titled "Lurianic Kabbalah and Its Literary Form: Myth, Fiction, History."[36] In this article, Magid argued that it would be enriching to treat the writings of Lurianic Kabbalah (the form of mysticism practiced by the renowned rabbi Isaac Luria) within the same framework as fiction in order to understand the type of community- and world-building exercise that the sage was undertaking. Magid finds that, through his storytelling, Luria was attempting to reconstruct in 16th-century Palestine the prophetic worldview of the biblical era. For Luria and his followers, their world was built on the interplay between seen and unseen forces, and for Magid, Luria's storytelling techniques were the driving communal force.[37]

In *Heterocosmica*, Doležel discusses the idea of a fictional encyclopedia: the knowledge that is available in the text itself, *combined with* the knowledge that the reader brings to the text.[38] Logically, then, a Jewish reader with knowledge of their native culture would have a larger

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35. Doležel 129.
36. Shaul Magid, "Lurianic Kabbalah and Its Literary Form: Myth, Fiction, History," 378.
37. Magid, 362–97.
38. Doležel, *Heterocosmica,* 177.

fictional encyclopedia when reading these Jewish texts than someone with less or none of that knowledge. Norman Ravvin touches briefly on a similar topic in his book *A House of Words* (1997).[39] Ravvin discusses how works develop “a dialogue with authority and tradition”[40] through what Daniel Boyarin calls “a mosaic of conscious and unconscious citation of earlier discourse.”[41] Ravvin further explains that “Hybridized fictions — those that mix genres, as well as contemporary with historical concerns — lead a literary work to enter an already existing dialogue.”[42]

Later on, he asks, “How important is it for readers to understand the cultural context out of which a novelist writes? What is the outcome of critical studies of Jewish writing that read novels and poetry using only the canonical literary tradition as a framework?”[43] Doležel’s answer would surely be that it is valuable to understand the cultural context — have in hand the fictional encyclopedia — of a novelist in order to best grasp the work. Doležel does not contend that a reader is incapable of truly enjoying a work apart from knowledge of the cultural context, but such knowledge would certainly be an enriching aide. I believe he would also push back on the notion of critical studies of Jewish writing that use only the “Jewish canon” as their framework, something Miron also speaks against. Rather, Doležel would argue, it is important to consider *all possible salient contexts,* as any information we can bring into the fictional world would allow us to better fill the gaps in the text and form a more complete world.

In the closing chapter of *Heterocosmica,* Doležel introduces his iteration of the term “Intertextuality,”[44] by which he means the dialogue that takes place between authors and texts in the past, present, and future. Explicit intertextuality, like quotation between texts, is simple enough

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39. Norman Ravvin, *A House of Words* (Montreal Québec: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997).
40. Ravvin, 102.
41. Boyarin, *Intertexuality,* 12, in Ravvin, 102.
42. Ravvin, 102.
43. Ravvin, 157.
44. This iteration of the term is not to be confused with other uses of the word Intertextuality, which has been used in a variety of fields with a variety of meanings.

to understand: one author quotes the words of another author. “The real challenge,” Doležel writes, “is implicit intertextuality, semantic traces of hidden intertexts.”[45] He continues, “First, it is marked by *allusions*, which direct the interpreter from one literary text to other texts, to artworks, and so on. Second, it follows the basic rule of the semantic interpretation of implicitness: *the text’s meaning can be grasped without identifying the intertext but is enriched, often quite substantially, by its discovery*.”[46]

With this in mind, each of the analysis chapters, Four through Six, include an exploration of Jewish intertexts. In order to contextualize our stories with tales from the distant Jewish literary past, I introduce these intertexts as a key to understanding some of the implicit ways that our stories are distinctly Jewish, even if certain elements seem superfluous on the surface. Doležel notes that “Explicit intertextuality, quotation in particular, is of minor interest for literary study,”[47] and it is for this reason that I chose not to incorporate a lengthy, cumbersome, and overly-obvious section on the many biblicisms we find in stories like “At Sea,” “A Myriad-Minded Man,” and *The Mystics of Mile End*.

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45. Doležel, 201.
46. Doležel, 201. Emphasis mine.
47. Doležel, 201.

2.5 // The Modern Myth

> Ah, my beloved song of Lamentations — I recognize you! Eternal, immortal leitmotif, in foreign words, in varied melodies, you unfailingly carve out a path for yourself. Don whatever garments you will, your sorrowful tones betray you at once.
>
> -Lamed Shapiro, “At Sea”[48]

Near the end of *Heterocosmica*, Doležel offers an extended case study of one type of possible world. In that chapter, he writes about what he calls the “modern myth” and uses as his example –– perhaps unsurprisingly — our good and great friend, Franz Kafka. That Kafka’s work is utilized as the key example of both “writing Jewishly” and the “modern myth” suggests that to write Jewishly may be to construct the world of the modern myth in fiction.

In explaining this world of the modern myth, Doležel reminds us of the core structure of the classical mythological world: it is dyadic — containing contrary alethic conditions, the supernatural and the natural — and the two domains are strictly demarcated by a sharp boundary. The relationship between the two realms is asymmetrical: members of the supernatural domain can move freely between both domains, while members of the natural domain must remain in their own except for a few special individuals. Furthermore, inhabitants of the supernatural domain govern the fate of those in the natural domain, and inhabitants of the natural domain have a crippling lack of knowledge of the supernatural due to their restricted access.[49]

Describing how the modern myth diverges from the mythological world, Doležel explains that one of the latter’s two modes contains a positive supernatural (the “supernatural” exists but was actually part of the natural all along), while the other contains a negative supernatural (the

48. Shapiro, 160.
49. Doležel, 186-187.

"supernatural" does not exist and never has — some events in the world are simply bizarre). In the first of the two modes, the supernatural becomes part of the natural domain.[50]

In the second mode of Doležel's modern myth, the natural/supernatural dichotomy becomes a "hybrid" world. He credits Kafka with the creation of this mode, but I believe prescient tales can also be found in the works of Jewish authors like I. L. Peretz and Lamed Shapiro, as I will show over the course of this study. Doležel explains that this world is a coexistence, in one space, of physically possible and physically impossible fictional entities, dissolving the boundary of the classical myth.[51] "Physically impossible events," he continues, "cannot be interpreted as miraculous interventions from the supernatural domain, since no such domain exists; all phenomena and events of the hybrid world, both those physically possible and those physically impossible, are generated within this world, spontaneously and haphazardly."[52] Due to the alethic constraints of this hybrid world, the opposition between natural and supernatural are abandoned. Instead of being designated "supernatural," entities that violate physical possibility are termed "bizarre" by Doležel.[53]

In this mode, there are no supernatural explanations for what in any other literary mode could be termed supernatural phenomena, because, put simply, there is no supernatural domain. So, for example, when Gregor Samsa awakens to find himself transformed into a horrible vermin in "The Metamorphosis", no one ever really stops to ask "How?" As Doležel puts it, "a physically impossible event happens for no reason and without any explanation."[54] Indeed, the first reaction Gregor has upon realizing that he is now some sort of giant insect is panic at how he will make it

50. Doležel, 187.
51. Doležel, 187.
52. Doležel, 187-188.
53. Doležel, 187-188.
54. Doležel, 188.

to work in his condition, as he needs to support his parents and sister. That being said, while the characters do not question the "how" of the (to us) supernatural event, they do "react emotionally as if it were one — with horror and revulsion."[55] The "supernatural" still receives implicit recognition as something outside the realm of the ordinary, but it is not explicitly described as such. It is up to the reader to term the situation "bizarre," as Doležel does.

This hybrid world is evident in many of Kafka's stories. For instance, in "The Hunter Gracchus", Doležel notes, "the modal conditions of the hybrid world make it possible for a dead man to coexist with living people. To be precise, Gracchus, quite in accordance with the semantics of the hybrid world, is both dead and 'in a certain sense' alive too."[56] This concept is extremely similar to the plot of the I. L. Peretz short story, "The Dead Town" (1895).[57] In this tale, a man travelling down the dark road at night comes across another man, who tells him about a town in Poland that one cannot find a map, inhabited mostly by the dead. At one point in his story, for example, the man says, "Before long the dead took over. Today they're the bulk of the community and its leaders. Naturally, they don't bring children into the world; but whenever anyone dies, they steal the corpse from its deathbed or its grave and there's one more dead person in town."[58] This story is discussed further in Chapter Five.[59]

Elsewhere in Kafka's oeuvre, the visible and invisible worlds are strictly demarcated but the novels *The Castle* and *The Trial* are totally devoid of the supernatural. In *The Castle*, the invisible domain is represented by the castle itself, as the plot revolves around K's[60] failed attempts to gain entry into the structure above the small town at which he arrives as a land surveyor. In *The*

55. Doležel, 188.
56. Doležel 189.
57. I.L. Peretz, "The Dead Town" in *The I. L. Peretz Reader* (Yale University Press, 2002), 162-170.
58. Peretz, 170.
59. See pg. 189.
60. The protagonist has the same abbreviated name as the protagonist of *The Trial.*

Trial, the invisible domain is that of the court that has accused him and put out the initial warrant for his arrest. Both the world of *The Trial* and the world of *The Castle* also contain a liminal zone where inhabitants of both the visible and invisible domain can meet. In *The Castle*, K spends much of his time trying to gain entry to the castle by negotiating at the village office (called the Herrenhof), while Josef K does the same to gain entry to the court in *The Trial* by way of the attic offices.

According to Doležel, the authority of the invisible domain "rests solely on the fact that the inhabitants of the visible domain do not question the legitimacy of the invisible power."[61] Looking at the way that the visible and invisible domains play out in Kafka's work, we can see that they truly do operate in a way that corresponds to that of the classical mythological world. For Doležel, however, the supernatural is no longer a domain in the world of the modern myth, but rather "an interpretive hypothesis: the events of the fictional world are so confusing and incomprehensible that they could be of supernatural origin. Yet the modern myth refuses to confirm this hypothesis."[62]

Doležel expands on this refusal to authenticate the supernatural, writing, "there are no supernatural beings, no miracles happen, in the fictional worlds of *The Trial* and *The Castle*. The invisible domain is a world of human institutions, of a Court, of an administrative office,"[63] something that makes Kafka's worlds all the more dreadful and absurd. While we may question whether or not a world of human institutions constitutes a mythological one, Doležel attempts to clarify this rather explicitly: "Kafka's visible/invisible world is a myth precisely because it highlights the contrast between a human and antihuman world. However, no supernatural

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61. Doležel, 193.
62. Doležel, 198.
63. Doležel, 198.

explanation or justification is posited."[64] In a world without supernatural explanations, every element of the bizarre and inexplicable rests on the shoulders of human participants: "The antihuman world is operated by the humans themselves, the alien forces are nothing other than the mysterious, perverse ingredients of human nature and societal organization."[65]

Finally, Doležel offers his view of how the modern myth came about. He starts by writing that "The visible/invisible world of the modern myth has been created as a secularized counterpart of the classical myth,"[66] but later he explains what he sees as the driving force behind Kafka's dank, dreadful, human mythologies:

> The modern myth … is the product of the secular culture of the twentieth century. Human actions, and, especially, the activities of social institutions, are incomprehensible, but a transcendent, supernatural explanation is either no longer available or lacks authenticity. The senselessness of human actions and historical conflicts, the daily encounters with the bizarre, cannot be explained and redeemed by recourse to divine or demonic forces. The modern myth restates the precariousness of the human condition that the classical myth started. But now that the gods are dead, humans themselves are responsible for the chaotic world they have created and operate.[67]

As I embark on this literary journey through eight short stories by Jewish authors, this quote will be important to keep in mind. If I could describe the underlying theme of Singer's aforementioned short story "The Lecture", or Rosenfarb's "Edgia's Revenge" — or any number of Holocaust tales — in one passage, this would undoubtedly fit the bill.

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64. Doležel, 198.
65. Doležel, 196.
66. Doležel, 198.
67. Doležel, 198.

2.6 // The Paranormal within the Fantastic

> I go to bed, and I wait for sleep as a man might wait for the executioner. I wait for its coming with dread, and my heart beats and my legs tremble, while my whole body shivers beneath the warmth of the bedclothes, until the moment when I suddenly fall asleep, as one would throw oneself into a pool of stagnant water in order to drown oneself. I do not feel as I used to do formerly, this perfidious sleep which is close to me and watching me, which is going to seize me by the head, to close my eyes and annihilate me, coming over me.
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> -Guy de Maupassant, "Le Horla"[68]

Nestled away in the depths of Western literature is a genre that has been termed "Literature of the Fantastic," which encompasses several different subgenres. Within and adjacent to the Fantastic, we find works under the category of Horror, Gothic, Suburban Gothic, Southern Gothic, paranormal, and other names that likely paint enough of a picture for the reader to form a general idea. Narrative worlds within this genre include varying degrees of interplay between our realm and the realm of the supernatural, with some analogous to Doležel's mythological world and some analogous to his modern myth.

In *Possible Worlds of the Fantastic: The Rise of the Paranormal in Fiction* (1996),[69] Nancy H. Traill applies Doležel's Possible Worlds to the Fantastic, breaking it down into different types of narrative worlds. She explains that the Fantastic has been described by scholars like the renowned literary theorist Tzvetan Todorov as contingent on a sense of ambiguity concerning the nature of the supernatural in the story.[70] Eitan Fishbane utilizes this concept in his study of the Zohar, writing about the story of the foolish sage, Rav Hamnuna Sava, which I look at in Chapter

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68. Guy de Maupassant, *The Works of Guy de Maupassant* (Philadelphia: National Library Company, 1909), 231.
69. Nancy H. Traill, *Possible Worlds of the Fantastic: The Rise of the Paranormal in Fiction* (Toronto; University of Toronto Press, 1996).
70. Traill, 13.

Five:[71] "Indeed it is precisely that ambiguity between realism and illusion — the uncertainty as to the ontological status of that which has transpired — that defines the phenomenon of the *fantastic* — at least insofar as it was developed by Tzvetan Todorov."[72] The introduction of the category of the Fantastic in the realm of Jewish literary studies, then, is not totally novel, but Traill affords us the opportunity to take it a step further.

Traill writes, in contrast to the above, that "many critics and theorists disagree" with Todorov, and she joins them by explaining that the Fantastic could instead be understood on the level of fictional worlds. Essentially, she explains, applying the Possible Worlds toolkit can allow us to establish what kinds of narrative worlds can be described as belonging to the genre of the Fantastic, *rather than simply being contingent on how the characters in the story react* to the modal opposition of the natural and supernatural realms.[73]

Traill offers several different narrative world types under the umbrella of the Fantastic, but we will focus on two here that are clear analogues of two Doležel worlds — Mythological and the modern myth — that I have described. The first, the Disjunctive/Authenticated mode, is described by Traill as "characterized by the copresence of two modally opposite domains, the natural and the supernatural," much like Doležel's classical myth.[74] "Supernatural entities inhabit their own separate domain," she continues, "but their exceptional powers allow them to enter and even exert influence in the natural domain. They may be suprahuman individuals (demons, gods, gnomes, revenants, etc.) or they may be such events as the metamorphosis of an inanimate object into an animate being."[75] Finally, again analogous to Doležel's classical myth, she notes, "Although

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71. See pg. 222.
72. Eitan P. Fishbane, *The Art of Mystical Narrative: A Poetics of the Zohar* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 226.
73. Traill, 13.
74. Traill, 11.
75. Traill, 11.

characters of the natural domain may coexist and interact with them, supernatural entities are still recognized as 'alien' to the natural domain."[76]

This, it would seem, is Traill's description of Doležel's world of the classical myth, as described in *Heterocosmica*. Traill goes on to discuss further narrative worlds, and the most important one for this study is what she calls the paranormal mode. In this narrative mode, she explains, "Supernatural and natural are no longer mutually exclusive. The opposition loses its force because we find that the word 'supernatural' is merely a label for strange phenomena latent *within* the natural domain. Clairvoyance, telepathy, and precognition, for instance, are taken to be as *physically possible* as any commonplace human ability."[77] Further along, Traill takes this a step further, writing, "In the paranormal mode, a structural change occurs: the natural domain is enlarged and encompasses a special region accessible to those with extraordinary perceptual capacities."[78] The ability to seemingly convene with restless spirits or get stuck in dreamscapes, then, is simply part of the lived experience of some characters: "Supernatural phenomena are reinterpreted and brought within the paradigm of the natural. They are latent in nature or innate in humans and other animals. The laws of the physically possible natural domain are not violated, but they are reassessed."[79]

The constraints of the paranormal mode are effectively equivalent to those of Doležel's modern myth, at times nearly word for word. While Traill offers lengthy analyses of stories from Western literature that fit each of her Fantastic modes, Kafka is not given mention in the chapter on the paranormal, which at first glance dampens our enthusiastic Kafka-centric throughline. That is, until the very last moment of Traill's book, in the second to last paragraph of the entire

76. Traill, 11.
77. Traill, 13.
78. Traill, 17.
79. Traill, 17.

monograph, when she in fact makes the claim that Kafka is the most intensely paranormal author. In that paragraph, Traill writes that "Kafka takes the paranormal mode to its limit" and notes that, in his writing, "strange events are commonplace, as regular as any other… Strange events occur haphazardly, wherever, whenever, without any special reason, just as they do in a dream."[80]

Kafka has not been the object of our study, but he is indeed the hermeneutical key, a cipher to decode the Jewish literary complex. Kafka is the Jewish literary mind boiled down, reduced to its constituent parts. He is, according to Miron, Steiner, and other scholars of Jewish literature, the essential—in the strictest sense of the word—Jewish author. His work is also the paranormal mode and the modern myth of Possible Worlds theory, both reduced to their constituent parts. I will show in this study that our eight works of short Jewish fiction can logically be said to exist in a same or similar realm of possibilities, with a similarly porous or non-existent boundary between the natural and the supernatural, as stories of the paranormal in Western literature. In Chapters Four through Six, I will show explore the many similarities between Jewish writing and the paranormal. Then, in my concluding remarks, I will bring Jewish scholar Jeremy Dauber's work on the horror genre into this discussion to show why this distinction is important.

I do not believe that Miron is saying, in *From Continuity to Contiguity*, that all Jewish writing attains the same degree of mystification as do the works of Kafka. Like Traill with the paranormal, however, Miron's claim is that Kafka takes the essence of Jewish writing "to its limit."[81] I do not intend to attempt to show that these eight short stories are steeped in the bizarre to the extent that Kafka is; no one writes quite like Kafka. Rather, I want to show that their narrative world is steeped in the same possibilities, however similar to the Actual world they seem. I will show, through our study of dreams, midnight, crossings, the (un)dead, and the like, that the realm

80. Traill, 141.
81. Traill, 141.

of possibilities found in these stories is an enchanted one. But it is not enchanted in the sense that there are literal angels and demons and goblins and golems — that was, in many ways, generally the realm of earlier Jewish writing. Rather, it is an echo, a this-worldly account of preternatural circumstances that, in many cases, requires intertexts to suss out.

Now, one might ask why it is important that we make the connection between Kafka, Jewish literature, modern myth, and the paranormal mode. On the surface, it is important because it responds to the question posed by Miron: how might we conceptualize and better understand the Jewish literary complex? The connection between our Jewish stories (and many like them), Doležel's modern myth, and Traill's paranormal leads to an important conclusion that begs further discussion: while the paranormal is a subgenre among many other subgenres nestled in the genre of the Fantastic, which itself is nestled within the seemingly infinite complex of Western literature, our eight short stories are not tucked away and labelled "Jewish Paranormal" or "Jewish Gothic" or "The Jewish Fantastic" or "Jewish Horror"; they are simply Jewish stories by some of the masters of Jewish storytelling, and I believe that in and of itself forms a significant comment on the nature of the Jewish cultural imaginary.

Stories that incorporate elements of the Fantastic, the strange, the bizarre, the paranormal, or the otherworldly occupy a central place in Jewish writing, rather than the marginal place they occupy in the annals of other North American fiction. How the Fantastic manifests is culturally specific and depends on context, so the types of ambiguous, liminal figures that appear in our eight short stories (and other Jewish stories) will not — but could — appear in the paranormal fiction of which Traill writes. The key notion of the Fantastic, though, is the modal opposition between natural and supernatural, and I will show in my analysis that this relationship is important to the Jewish literary imagination as seen in our stories, whether it is the explicit subject of a story or an

implicit marker of a character's experience.

The concerns of Jewish stories tend to differ from those of stories that fall within the sphere of the Fantastic and the paranormal. Unlike Maupassant's *Le Horla* (1887), for instance, in which the narrator spends the entire tale trying to figure out what invisible entity is oppressing him, the stories I discuss in the following chapters show no such concern. In Singer's "The Lecture" Mr. N does not spend his night trying to figure out how it is possible that ghostly voices and bony fingers are reaching out to him, nor does the protagonist of Almond's "A Dream of Sleep" go to a medium or rabbi to mediate his cratering relationship with the spirits in his cemetery. For this reason, we cannot say that our Jewish fiction is simply literature of the Fantastic, or paranormal literature, or horror literature. I would argue, however, that it exists in the same or similar realm of possibilities, with protagonists who hold concerns that are far afield of those who occupy these other genres.

Though we might not go as far as grouping modern Jewish fiction with literature of the paranormal, it is nonetheless interesting to note that many modern Jewish authors create stories and characters related to the paranormal. I.B. Singer, for instance, explores such themes in his short stories, "The Séance", "The Psychic Journey", "The Cabalist of East Broadway", to name a few.[82] As we will see in the literary analysis to come, the domain of the paranormal and the domain of Jewish fiction are at times close cousins.

2.7 // The Modern Myth, our Jewish Stories, and Liminality

Possible Worlds narratology offers us a toolkit for understanding and charting the inner mechanisms of a fictional world: what is possible and impossible, or natural and supernatural; what is permitted and prohibited; what is considered good and bad; what is known and what is hidden. It is through a discussion of these modalities that Doležel describes the inner workings of

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82. See footnote on pg. 162 for description of these stories.

Kafka's literary world, pinpointing what makes it so bizarre, dreadful, and at times downright comical. The interplay between what would traditionally be considered super- or preternatural entities (people, places and things) and those of the human realm — the former totally lacking in mythic nomenclature and the latter oblivious to that lack — is, for Doležel, the defining feature of this category.

Both Doležel and Traill argue that Kafka takes these categories "to their limit,"[83] in much the same way he takes *Judesein* to its limit in the eyes of Miron. If Kafka's bizarre world is the extreme of these connected categories, though, it would be fruitful to consider how authors and stories that exist within this realm of possibilities in less extreme forms and to less extreme degrees manifest the inherent tension between our realm and a supposed Other realm. The concept of liminality is exceptionally effective in conveying this porousness between realms, one that renders our protagonists rootless, without steady footing on solid ground in any sense. Narrators and characters in our stories occupy the past and the present simultaneously; they have ambiguous abilities to convene with the dead; they are represented as both wise and foolish. They do so while stuck in dreamstates; while spending the night awake; while trapped in a zone of memory; or while in perpetual transit across countries, continents, and oceans.

83. Traill, 141.

2.7 // An Introduction to the Liminal

> The attributes of liminality or of liminal personae ('threshold people') are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these people elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony.
>
> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*[84]

Liminal people, places and things appear frequently in Jewish writing, not only in the modern era but throughout every age for which we have documentary evidence. Chapters Five and Six will explore the different ways in which this concept manifests in our eight short stories while also looking at examples from earlier Jewish writing.

First, though, we must define our terms. The term Liminality was first effectively applied to the social sciences in the work of two anthropologists, Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner. Van Gennep's seminal work *The Rites of Passage* (1909) investigates exactly what the title suggests: rites of passage in various cultures, and the ways in which they function in a social context. He argues that the purpose of these rites is to bring a member of the community from one social status to another.[85] Think, for instance, of coming-of-age rites such as the Tucandeira Ant Ritual of the Sateré-Mawé people of Brazil, in which boys undergo a painful ritual involving bullet ants to transition into manhood. Before undergoing the rite, the individual has the social status of a child. The boy then performs a task: in this case, he puts his arms in tubes full of venomous ants multiple times. Upon successful completion of the ordeal, the individual receives the social status (at least in theory) of a man.[86] Socially (again, in theory), new expectations are heaped upon the

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84. Victor Turner and Roger D. Abrahams, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, (Routledge, 1969), 95.
85. Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).
86. João Bosco Botelho and Valéria Augusta C. M. Weigel, "The Sateré-Mawé Community of Y'Apyrehyt: Ritual and Health on the Urban Outskirts of Manaus," *História, Ciências, Saúde--Manguinhos* 18, no. 3 (2011): 723–44; 730.

individual: they are now responsible to maintain and uphold the traditions of their community.

This is one of countless puberty rites practiced around the world, now and in the past, including Bar and Bat Mitzvahs in Jewish culture. Other rites of passage include such things as weddings, graduations, baptism, circumcisions, retirement parties, and even (perhaps *especially*) funerals. Van Gennep identified four main types of passage for which there might be a rite: from one status to another (e.g., marriage, puberty); from one place to another (e.g., housewarming party); from one situation to another (e.g., graduation); and the passage of time (e.g., birthday party).[87]

Van Gennep separates rites of passage into three phases: preliminal (separation), liminal (transition), and postliminal (incorporation).[88] In the first stage, the individual is separated — symbolically or physically — from the group to prepare for the rite. At that point, they still maintain their previous social status. When they undergo the rite itself (in our example, while the arm is in the tube of bullet ants) they are in the second phase, liminality. It is at this point that they have no social status: they are no longer members of the previous status, but they have not yet accomplished their task and received their new social status. In some cultures and settings, failure to accomplish the task will result in a sort of non- or limbo-status; not quite the old status and certainly not the new; not quite this and not quite that, as it were. If they are able to complete the task, they are then incorporated back into the community with their new status, along with all the responsibilities and benefits that come along with it. It should be evident from this description that the most uncertain and potentially hazardous phase of the rite is the liminal. The failure to complete the rite results in a loss of status and existence outside the established social order.[89]

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87. Hazel Andrews and Les Roberts, "Liminality," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences (Second Edition)*, ed. James D. Wright (Oxford: Elsevier, 2015), 131–37; 132.
88. Van Gennep, 21.
89. Van Gennep, 75.

In the 1960s, Victor Turner came upon van Gennep's work and expanded and popularized the concept in his book *The Forest of Symbols* (1967), which contained the most notable essay on the topic, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage".[90] Turner's great contribution, beyond revisiting van Gennep's work in the first place, was to bring that liminal period of rites of passage to a broader arena, applying it to concepts far beyond the purview of his predecessor's work. The term became prominent in literary studies to describe people, places, and things that were ambiguous, uncharted, in stages of transition, or caught between.

Liminality takes centre stage in the study of Horror and Gothic fiction, both of these encompassed by the Literature of the Fantastic. As Lee Rozelle notes in his discussion of Turner's liminality and horror fiction, "liminal bodies are 'frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon.'"[91] He notes that golems, zombies, the Invisible Man, and many other beings typically associated with the genre fall into these sorts of multiple categories. The golem, for instance, is both animate and inanimate; the zombie is both living and dead; the Invisible Man is corporeal but unseen.[92]

Elsewhere, writing about the works of Edgar Allan Poe, Staci Poston Conner brings the term into focus by explaining that Gothic fiction captivates readers by relying on uncertainty, ambiguity and elusive interpretation. Furthermore, "the uncertainty created by avoiding an absolute explanation heightens the horror and terror of the text. Liminality often helps achieve this ambiguity; characters trapped in liminal states necessarily remain in-between, ambiguous, and

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90. Victor Witter Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1970).
91. Lee Rozelle, *Zombiescapes and Phantom Zones: Ecocriticism and the Liminal from "Invisible Man" to "The Walking Dead"* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2016), 5.
92. Rozelle, 5.

unclearly defined."[93]

An example directly pertinent to this study is found in Naama Harel's monograph, *Kafka's Zoopoetics: Beyond the Human/animal Barrier* (2020). Harel points to the author's consistent use of human/animal hybrids in his stories. She notes, "Kafka's species fluidity implies the radical suspension of the human/animal binary. Standing on the threshold between humanity and animality, Kafka's fictional creatures undermine the species barrier, creating a liminal human-animal space, which can be described as 'humanimal.'"[94] What makes Kafka's liminal beings most interesting is that they are not humans who become animals; rather, they occupy both domains at once. Harel writes of the protagonist in "The Metamorphosis," "Gregor Samsa does not cross the barrier between the human and the nonhuman from one side to the other; he is situated rather on the threshold of the two domains."[95] She makes his liminality explicit, noting, "In his very in-betweenness, floating in the liminal space between the human and the nonhuman, humanimal Gregor transgresses the human-animal barrier."[96] Indeed, characters who inhabit two domains at once are a hallmark of the stories I will analyze here.

Vítor Westhelle connects the concept of liminality to biblical tales in his book *Eschatology and Space: The Lost Dimension in Theology Past and Present* (2012). Discussing experiences of transcendence in the biblical text, Westhelle describes the one element that these varied stories share: "the exposure to liminal circumstances."[97] He offers up several examples of how the liminal manifests, describing both geographical and personal liminality. On the geographical end, "the

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93. Staci Poston Conner, "Horror More Horrible From Being Vague, and Terror More Terrible From Ambiguity: Liminal Figures in Poe's 'Berenice' and Gilman's 'The Giant Wistaria,'" *The Edgar Allan Poe Review* 20, no. 1 (2019): 77–95; 78.
94.Naama Harel, *Kafka's Zoopoetics: Beyond the Human/Animal Barrier* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2020), 13.
95. Harel, 38.
96. Harel, 38.
97. Vítor Westhelle, *Eschatology and Space: The Lost Dimension in Theology Past and Present*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 23.

crossing of the gates of Eden, the passage through the Red Sea, the siege of Jericho."[98] In the realm of individual liminality, he uses the examples of "Jacob wrestling by the Jabbok River, Job's calamity and illness, or Abraham crossing the boundary of the promise to have a lineage in sacrificing Isaac."[99]

In his dissertation entitled *Moses and Liminality* (2015),[100] David J. Krouwer uses narrative criticism to "identify Moses as God's liminal instrument during the period in the wilderness." Even the period of the narrative in which the relationship between God and Moses occurs is liminal, bookended by water, beginning with the Sea of Reeds and ending with the Jordan River. Placed in the middle of those two bodies of water, this stage of the narrative "is characterized as a liminal period due to its setting in liminal space (i.e., the wilderness and upon Mount Sinai), the inclusion of liminal events (i.e., divine communication), and the significant transitions the Hebrews underwent, transitions that often necessitate liminal instruments such as water, fire, or a liminal guide."[101]

Liminality is a major theme in one of many stories from the Hebrew Bible: the description of God's covenant with Abraham (then Abram) in a dream in Genesis 15. The patriarchal narratives feature several dreams and visions, and nearly all of the main players have them. Abraham, tasked with leaving the house of his father for a land he has never seen, cuts a covenant with God in the middle of the night. We read, "The word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, 'fear not, Abram, I am your shield. Your reward shall be very great.'"[102] After God promises him his reward, they seal it with a ritual, God telling him, "'Take Me a three-year-old

98. Westhelle, 23.
99. Westhelle, 23.
100. Krouwer, David J., "Moses and Liminality" (2015). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*, 348.
101. Hans van Deventer. "Aspects of liminality in the book of Daniel." *Old Testament essays* 30, no. 2 (2016): 443–58; 446-447.
102. Gen. 15:1, Alter translation: Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2018).

ram and a turtledove and a young pigeon.' And [Abram] took all of these and clove them through the middle, and each set his part opposite the other, but the birds he did not cleave. And carrion birds came down on the carcasses and Abram drove them off."[103] That this event happens in the dark is made explicit by the biblical author through the use of a number of terms related to that setting: "And as the sun was about to set, a deep slumber fell upon Abram and now a great dark dread came falling upon him."[104] Soon after, we read, "And just as the sun had set, there was a thick gloom and, look, a smoking brazier with a flaming torch that passed between those parts."[105]

This story is foundational for an understanding of liminality as it relates to the current study. The character himself, Abram, is a liminal figure for a variety of reasons. For starters, the first sentence of his narrative is "And the Lord said to Abram, 'Go forth from the land and your birthplace and your father's house to the land I will show you.'"[106] This establishes Abram as one who is in transit, between the home of his ancestors and a new place of which he knows nothing. It also establishes him as one who is connected to the Other realm, one who can converse with God. As his story cycle goes on, we see him as liminal in other ways, inhabiting multiple zones and social statuses. He is both husband and brother to his wife and sister Sarah, and they are an elderly couple who birth a child. His covenant, another explicit connection to God, takes place at night and in a vision, both classic liminal zones. The ritual itself — rites being the origin of the entire complex of ideas surrounding liminality — is also explicit in its betweenness when the smoking brazier and flaming torch pass between the cleaved parts of the animal carcasses. Finally, the association with death through the image of the carrion birds is also classically liminal. If the reader can transport themselves to one domain as they embark upon the study that follows, my

103. Gen. 15:9-11.
104. Gen. 15:12.
105. Gen. 15:17.
106. Gen 12:1-2.

hope is that they find themselves in this atmosphere. Think of darkness and dreams, visions and night, smoke and fog, and I will meet you in that place.

2.8 // Jewish Writing Itself as Liminal

Jewish writing itself can be liminal, inhabiting two genres at once, existing in that in-between state. For example, some Jewish texts are a mixture of fairy tale and religious instruction, or interpretive study, historical narrative, and flights of fancy. Commenting on classical Jewish midrash, David M. Stern notes that its genius lies in its existence in a gray area between exegetical commentary and imaginative literature. “Without ever fully crossing over to either side,” he writes, “midrash developed in precisely that hitherto undefined space, drawing upon the resources of both realms, creating narratives in the service of interpretation, and offering imaginative exegeses as if they were laws.” [107] He then connects the work of modern authors: “Like Kafka and Borges, our modern exegetes of the imagination, the rabbis seem to have understood that narrative can wear the mask of commentary and that interpretation can be playful as fiction.”[108]

Indeed, the transition from what we might call religious instruction to creative fiction for its own sake was not an abrupt rupture, and the boundary between these genres remains porous to this day. According to many scholars — among them Stern, Mark Jay Mirsky, Shaul Magid, Haya Bar-Itzhak, and Eitan Fishbane[109] — the classic texts of Judaism incorporate flights of fancy, purposeful fiction, and tall tales. For our purposes, the question of whether or not these works incorporate self-aware fiction is not important, as we are not attempting to come to a conclusion on the “truthfulness” of Jewish religious writing. What is important, rather, is that these Jewish

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107. David Stern and Mark Mirsky, *Rabbinic Fantasies: Imaginative Narratives from Classical Hebrew Literature* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 8-9.
108. Stern and Mirsky, 8-9.
109. Haya Bar-Itzhak, “Modes of Characterization in Religious Narrative: Jewish Folk Legends about Miracle Worker Rabbis,” *Journal of Folklore Research* 27, no. 3 (1990): 205–30.

texts can inhabit two genres — two zones — at once, just like the characters, spaces, and states I will investigate.[110]

2.9 // Liminality and the Uncanny

The Uncanny — that feeling of dread one experiences when something familiar is out of place — is a term related to the liminal that forms much of the intrigue of our stories. The term owes much of its prominence in scholarly usage to Sigmund Freud's essay *Das Unheimliche* (1919).[111] Horror films and literature utilize the uncanny to great effect in the endless pursuit of frights. For example, one of the major selling points of the film *Paranormal Activity* (Oren Peli, 2007) during its pre-release promotion was a quick scene in which we see a newborn baby walking with the gait of an adult. It seems silly: there's nothing frightful about a baby, and there's nothing frightful about an adult human's gait. Put these two familiar elements together, however, and the viewer is peculiarly revolted. The common use of wax figurines and puppets, as well as doppelgängers and other such familiar halfway-human entities in the Horror genre, can also be attributed to this concept.

We find another way of thinking about the uncanny in John Zilcosky's *Uncanny Encounters: Literature, Psychoanalysis, and the End of Alterity*.[112] Zilcosky, using Freud's own words, offers the brief definition of "'something known of old' now unexpectedly returning."[113] He offers a phenomenal example as he discusses German travel fiction at the turn of the 20th century. In one such story, Zilcosky reports, an adventurer survives "the requisite excitements of contemporaneous travel fiction — the stormy sea passage; the love affair with the beautiful dark-

110. Of course, Jewish writing is not the only writing that occupies multiple genres. What is significant here is the cohabitation of opposing genres of religious instruction and purposeful fancy. For more on genre blending, see David Duff, *Modern Genre Theory*, (London ; Routledge, 2014); and Megan M. McArdle, *The Readers' Advisory Guide to Genre Blends*, (Chicago: ALA Editions, 2015).
111. Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, Penguin Classics (New York: Penguin Books, 2003).
112. John Zilcosky, *Uncanny Encounters: Literature, Psychoanalysis, and the End of Alterity* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2016).
113. Zilcosky, 13.

skinned girl; the malaria; the violent confrontation with the natives”[114] in Brazil. This protagonist becomes upset, however, by the fact that this land and its people have become too European. He decides, then, that he needs to venture deep into the green inferno of Brazil, away from society and all things familiar, until he reaches the “limits of the world.”[115] It is here that the adventurer encounters the uncanny:

> Getting closer to the mysterious mountain range he calls the “Range of Wonder [Wunder],” behind which hides “virgin land,” he looks for the longed-for, un-Europeanized natives (207). But after pushing his way through one last thicket, he finds only — Germans. They are living in horrible conditions, often at the verge of death, in villages that weirdly bear the names of familiar metropolises: “Berlin, Hamburg, Bremen, and so on” (222). The heart of the Brazilian darkness, it seems, is German.[116]

The uncanny plays on expectations; we expect to find things in a particular order and in their particular place, but when that order is ignored, we respond with uncertainty and sometimes abjection.[117] Zilcosky attributes the revulsion of the protagonist to two primary features of the uncanny in the previous story: “First, there is the meeting itself: the unsettling confrontation with one’s mirror image in a world that ought to contain wondrous, inscrutable strangers. Then comes the second stage: the disappointed, angry reaction to this surprising sameness.”[118] Stefan Brandt also connects liminality with the uncanny in his discussion of the former, in *In-Between–Liminal Spaces in Canadian Literature and Culture* (2017). Brandt writes, “The ‘liminal,’ in a way, represents the Freudian ‘uncanny’ (*das Unheimliche*) — that unsettling condition of the psyche in

114. Zilcosky, 13.
115. Zilcosky, 13.
116. Zilcosky, 13-14.
117. For more on this, see Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).
118. Zilcosky, 14.

which something enigmatic is at once experienced as strangely familiar)."[119]

2.10 // The Uncanny in a Medieval Jewish Tale

We also find a palpable connection between the Liminal and the Uncanny in many Jewish tales. I offer here an example to illustrate the Uncanny as it is found in the Jewish writing of yesteryear. For this illustration, we go back to the medieval period, sometime between the 9th and 13th centuries, in either Ashkenaz, Egypt, or Babylonia, depending on which scholar you ask.[120] "The Tale of the Jerusalemite" is a Jewish folktale written to illustrate a moral that becomes clear as the tale unfolds.

"There once lived a great merchant who had a single son," the story begins. "He taught his son Torah, Mishnah, and Talmud and gave him a wife, who bore children to the son during his father's lifetime."[121] When the father's time comes, he gathers his pious and successful son along with all of the elders of the town and gives virtually his entire fortune to his son. There is one condition, however: he must take an oath to remain on land the rest of his life. He must never venture out to sea. The son accepts, his father dies, and he remains on land studying Torah.

Some time later, a ship comes to town and a group of sailors appears at the son's home. They tell the son that they have a vast fortune for him in other lands that his father left to him, and that his father must have been of feeble mind when he told him never to go to sea despite the fortunes that awaited him. After some coaxing, the son agrees and joins them on their boat. Immediately, God becomes incensed and wrecks the ship, casting the man onto dry land in an unknown place. Alone, he wards off a lion and breaks a giant bird enough to fly on its back. In the

119. Stefan L. Brandt, *In-Between – Liminal Spaces in Canadian Literature and Culture* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang GmbH, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2017), 16.
120. Stern and Mirsky, *Rabbinic Fantasies*, 121.
121. Stern and Mirsky, 123.

night, the bird flies over a town where the man can hear the voices of children reading Torah. “Hearing this,” the story reads, “the man said to himself: This province must certainly have Jews living in it. I will throw myself down there. Perhaps they will pity me.”[122] He lands in the town and calls into the synagogue to open its gates. A boy comes out, and the man tells him that he is a Hebrew. The action of the story truly begins as the uncanny encounter unravels:

> The boy went and told the rabbi, who told him to open the door. When the rabbi saw that the man had no clothes, he asked what had happened, and the man told the rabbi his entire story, beginning to end, all the troubles he had suffered. The rabbi responded, "Everything that has happened to you is trivial in comparison with what you are now about to suffer here."
>
> "But aren't you Jews?" the man asked. "Are not the children of Israel a merciful people, descendants of merciful ancestors? And particularly to someone like myself, an impoverished man, lacking everything, naked, barefoot?"
>
> "Don't waste your words," the rabbi said. "You can't be saved from death."
>
> "Why do you say such things?" the man implored.
>
> "This is not a town of humans but of demons," answered the rabbi. "These boys are the children of demons. They are all about to gather to pray at this moment. When they see you, they'll kill you."[123]

Note that the terror of his situation does not derive from a descent into some fiery hell or domain of dread, but from the initial perception that the man was in a familiar and secure place. By brutally flipping this familiarity on its head, the narrator inspires terror in the reader. This is the Uncanny at work in a story written a thousand years ago.

The rabbi takes mercy on the man, and he tries to hide him, but the demons smell his presence in the synagogue. After the demonic mob attempts to take the man, the rabbi calls for a

122. Stern and Mirsky, 126.
123. Stern and Mirsky, 126-127.

fair trial. During the trial, the decision is made that the man will be brought to the king of the demons, Ashmadai. The king tests his wisdom by having him read and analyze the Bible, the Mishnah, and the Talmud. When he passes the test, the king offers him protection, and sets him up as an important member of his court. When Ashmadai must go into battle in another province, he shows the Jerusalemite his many rooms full of treasure but shows him the door to a final one and makes him vow never to enter.

The man's weakness overcomes him once more, and he opens the door when the king has left the province. In it he finds King Ashmadai's beautiful daughter, who immediately calls him out for disobeying not only his own father but her's as well. He begs forgiveness, and she becomes the next in a long line of individuals who take mercy on him and attempt to help. She tells him to ask Ashmadai for her hand in marriage, as the king has had his eye on the Jerusalemite for that purpose. The man tells the king what he has done and asks for the daughter's hand, which the king agrees to. They are married, and his new wife tells him that night in the chamber,

> Don't think in your heart that you are a human and I am a demon. For I possess everything you could ever find in a woman; I lack nothing. But take care! Do not approach me if you do not desire me. I love you as if you were my own eye. I will never leave you. But swear to me about the matters I have just told you.[124]

He swears, and they have a son together, whom they name Solomon.[125]

124. Stern and Mirsky, 133.

125. The name Solomon is significant here, as the figure of King Solomon has a long and storied history with demons going back to the Second Temple Period. This is found most notably in the *Testament of Solomon*, in which the King binds the demon Ashmadai (the king in the Tale of the Jerusalemite) and uses his power to build the First Temple. For more on this, see Thomas Scott Cason, "Creature Features: Monstrosity and the Construction of Human Identity in the 'Testament of Solomon,'" *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 77, no. 2 (2015): 263–79; and F. C. Conybeare, *The Testament of Solomon*, (Piscataway, N.J: Gorgias Press, 2007). This story also receives a lengthy discussion in the Talmud, in *Gittin* 68a. The Rabbis report that Solomon sent his best tracker, Benayahu, to find and capture Ashmedai. He did so and Solomon enslaved Ashmedai to help in the construction of the Temple. Ashmedai behaved so righteously throughout the process that Solomon released him from his chains. Unfortunately for Solomon, it was all trickery and Ashmedai would usurp his throne.

One day, while playing with his son, the Jerusalemite lets out a painful sigh. When his wife asks why, he explains that he misses the wife and child he left behind in his former life. She tells him that his wistfulness is dangerously close to breaking his oath to her, but the next time he sighs in such a way she offers to let him go home for a year if he swears to return. He agrees. She sends a demonic chaperone with him, one who is particularly prone to fits of rage. The Jerusalemite reacquaints himself with his former family, and insults the demon such that the demon demands to return home. The man tells the demon to tell his wife that he will never return to her, that she is not his wife nor he her husband. The demon warns him not to break his oath, but he replies that he is unconcerned with the oath he swore.

The demon tells the king's daughter what the man said, and she sends more demons at different intervals to bring him back once his year has ended. The Jerusalemite maintains that he will never return, and that the oath was made under duress. Along with his daughter, the king sends his legions down to bring the Jerusalemite back. She has her son, Solomon, implore him to return. "Please tell her that I will never return," he tells his son. "She is not my wife. I am not her husband. I am a human, she is a demon. One is unlike the other. The two can never be united."[126] When the king's daughter brings him to court over the matter, he maintains his stance: "It is not natural for a human to marry a demon and to have from her demon progeny."[127]

The court rules that he must return to her because he cannot pay back the dowry, a sum too large to describe. She does not want to live in a one-sided marriage, however, so she only asks one thing: "Let me kiss him before I return home alone."[128] Following this,

> The judges turned to the man: "Do as she wishes. Let her kiss you, and she will absolve you of everything that we have obligated you to do."

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126. Stern and Mirsky, 138.
127. Stern and Mirsky, 139.
128. Stern and Mirsky, 140

> She rose at once, and kissed him, and strangled the man to death. “This is your reward,” she told him, “for transgressing your father’s command, for breaking three oaths, and for mocking me. You wished to abandon me in a state of living widowhood. Now your first wife and I will both be widows. As the proverb says, Whoever wishes to steal my husband—let *him* suffer an unnatural death. Now he will never give pleasure or joy, neither to me nor to that wife of his.”[129]

Finally, she demands that, if the townsfolk do not want to suffer the same fate, they must accept her son Solomon into their community. They do so, and Solomon becomes not only successful, but their leader and ruler.

At the outset of this tale, the author tugs at our sense of the uncanny. Where we — and the protagonist — are expecting safety and security, we are instead given the opposite. Everything about this demonic realm is uncanny in the strictest sense — something familiar, out of place. They have synagogues, families, children; they have the Torah, the Mishnah, and the Talmud; they have rabbinical courts and kinship ties exactly like those of the human realm. In fact, they even hold to their oaths and court proceedings more steadfastly than humans! Furthermore, Ashmadai’s daughter makes sure to tell the reader that she “[possesses] everything you could ever find in a woman.” There is actually no indication whatsoever that these demons are physically or socially any different from humans. All of these familiar things, however, are set upon a demonic foundation.

Liminality plays an important role as well when we consider the strict divisions that the Jerusalemite wishes to maintain and the blurring of those divisions in practice. Going back to the beginning of the story we see the father’s wish that his son never set out on the water for the rest of his life. He does not wish for his son to be transient, to lack a solid foothold on terrestrial soil,

129. Stern and Mirsky, 140.

to be stuck somewhere in-between. When he is shipwrecked, he finds himself in a liminal zone, an unknown shoreline far away from both his home and his destination. Where once he was a wealthy and valued member of a community, here and in his temporary home in the demonic realm, he lacks status or identity before regaining a measure of it after Ashmadai's Torah test.

The demonic realm is itself a liminal zone, somewhere between a Jewish and non-Jewish realm. It is Jewish in the sense that all of its customs are Jewish and its inhabitants study Judaism, but the man (and the author) maintain its otherness throughout. The man's loud, painful sighs a few years into his stay indicate his knowledge that he himself is in a liminal state: stuck between his new life, with his new wife and new child; and his old life, with the wife of his youth and his first child. The melancholy he feels in that moment is indicative of his acute self-awareness concerning his condition. Finally, the existence of Solomon, the "demon progeny," is quintessentially liminal. The boy is between human and demon, in this case in such a way that he gains acceptance in both realms. In fairness, his initial acceptance in the human realm is protected by the death penalty if they do not accept him, but the fact that he is made their leader and ruler indicates that the acceptance became genuine. All that being said, he never truly gains the acceptance of his father.

"The Tale of the Jerusalemite" offers a substantive example of one of the techniques that Jewish writers utilize in setting up their stories. The uncanny appears in many regions of the Jewish literary dreamscape. While Kafka may be the most accomplished master of this story element, the uncanny is used by many others, such as Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav, whose works Kafka read. Stories of Rabbi Nahman, as well as several others that utilize this narrative feature, will serve as important intertexts for our eight short tales in Chapters Five and Six.

The purpose of this chapter was to fashion a lens through which we might better view the narrative realm of these eight short works of Jewish stories. Possible Worlds theory offers a toolkit to chart the contours of fictional worlds through their narrative constraints. *The appendix contains summaries of our eight short stories, which I encourage the reader to enjoy in anticipation of a deep dive into their fictional landscape*.

In Chapter Three, I apply the toolkit of Possible Worlds Theory to our eight stories in order to give a macrocosmic view of their Jewish realm. In this present chapter I also introduced the categories of the modern myth and the paranormal, which have as their essential author Franz Kafka, and which I will argue are adjacent to this realm I am describing. I posited that the theme that links those two categories with the Jewish writing of these eight stories is liminality, the state of being betwixt and between. In Chapters Four and Five, I will explore how this plays out in our stories and earlier Jewish tales to confirm its consistent prominence. In the conclusion, I will bring these threads together, showing how the identification of these themes and cross-genre connections can contribute to our understanding of Jewish society.

Chapter Three: The Narrative Constraints of our Eight Stories

In this chapter, I will provide a macroscopic description of the narrative realm of these eight stories by applying Lubomír Doležel's chart of four narrative constraints. Before landing in the liminal landscape, we view the world as a whole. Note that many of the examples I touch on briefly in this chapter will be discussed in greater detail in the two subsequent chapters as they intersect with the central theme of liminality.

As the story summaries have already shown, there are moments throughout these stories that occur outside the realm of the Actual. In some cases, these events are not authenticated as

supernatural by the players in the story, and are described rather in ambiguous terms, possibly as dreams, hallucinations, a version of post-traumatic stress, or other such mental processes. In other cases, the events seem quite supernatural in their context, as in the case of the prophesying Holocaust Survivors in Bender's story. Most times, though, these events are presented unfiltered, without a theory as to why they are occurring. It is up to the reader, then, to interpret however they may: is this supernatural? Is it a metaphor? Is it a mental process presented in metaphysical terms? Unlike the tales we find in Traill's paranormal mode, the characters in our story do not focus their energy on figuring these ambiguities out.

By describing the alethic, deontic, axiological, and epistemic constraints of these stories, which I argue take place in a same or similar realm of possibilities, one can make claims about the type of world — the landscape — that these stories and their characters inhabit. Each of the elements I discuss has a measure of historical precedent: these stories are not the first to incorporate these ideas — not by a long shot.

The connection between the ream of these eight Jewish stories and that of the modern myth and the paranormal has much to do with Alethic constraints. The defining feature of the latter two worlds is the ambiguous interplay between the natural and supernatural realms. As such, the central connection between these three worlds will be through that set of constraints. Nevertheless, the porousness of the natural/supernatural boundary is not the only feature that defines the Jewishness of these stories, and it is for this reason that I would not make the claim that "Jewish writing = the modern myth or the paranormal." The alethic constraints are the same, but the preoccupations and intentions of the characters are wildly different. Incredibly important to this distinction are the deontic and axiological constraints: what is allowed and forbidden, and what constitutes a value and a disvalue. As I will show, the behaviours that are valorized and condemned in these stories

are remarkably consistent and specific in their Jewishness.

3.1 // A Compact Example

Before launching into an extended discussion of the stories, it would be helpful to see a compact example of how a description of these constraints would work with a Jewish tale. One story that illustrates all four constraints clearly can be found in a short tale of the life of Israel ben Eliezer, also known as the Baal Shem Tov ("Master of the Name"), founder of Hasidism. Living in 18th century Poland, the Baal Shem Tov was known as a *tzaddik* — a wonder-worker and wise sage. His hagiography, called *Shivhei ha-Besht [In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov]* and written by Dov Baer ben Samuel in the early 19th century, tells of a man who was special even before he was born.[1] When the "Besht" (B(aal).Sh(em).T(ov).) was still young, he had already developed considerable powers but desired to remain anonymous until the time was right to reveal himself.

In the following example, not only are both the natural and supernatural of the alethic constraints present, but we can see the presence of the deontic constraints in the domains that are permitted and prohibited, and the axiological and epistemic as well. It does not take a long story to showcase all of these constraints; they are ever-present.

A rabbi by the name of Adam sent his son to deliver a manuscript to a wise man, telling him that he would know the wise man when he sees him. With that in mind, "when everyone was asleep, Rabbi Adam's son pretended that he was also asleep. He watched the Besht rise and study and pray at his customary place. He observed this once and then again."[2] Knowing that this was the wise man of whom his father spoke, he gave the Besht the manuscript and begged the Besht to allow him to study with him. At first denying him, the Besht finally relented, agreeing to work

1. Dov Baer ben Samuel, Jerome R. Mintz, and Dan Ben-Amos, *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov [Shivḥei Ha-Besht]; the Earliest Collection of Legends about the Founder of Hasidism*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970).
2. ben Samuel, 16.

with him while forbidding him from revealing his identity. When the Besht finally did allow him, the rabbi's son asked to do a particularly dangerous ritual to call down the Prince of Torah. Reticent about the whole affair, the Besht again relented after some coaxing. Still young and in the midst of the development of his powers, he accidentally called down the Prince of Fire instead of the Prince of Torah, and the Prince of Fire nearly burned the town down. Desiring to maintain his anonymity, the Besht told Rabbi Adam's son to go alert the townsfolk, which the young man did, resulting in his being proclaimed a very wise young scholar. The next night, they try again, once more failing. "Oh!" the Besht exclaims,

> Both of us are condemned to death tonight because of what we have done. There is one way we can escape. If we can gather strength to stand and concentrate on the *kavanoth* [the secret meaning of holy words and letters] the entire night without sleeping a wink, then the verdict will be postponed. Sleep is of the nature of death, and if we but doze, God forbid, the Evil One will overcome us and control us completely.[3]

They spend the night awake, but just before sunrise, the rabbi's son dozes off and dies.

Doležel's modalities provide a lens through which to identify the sources of action and tension in this story:

Alethic constraints:[4] The Baal Shem Tov's status as a sage, even at this young age, is the primary draw for Rabbi Adam's son. The rabbi's son, frustrated by his lack of ability to connect to the Other realm, begs the young Besht to work with him to achieve those alethic goals. The young Besht's developing powers are not quite at the point of mastering his connection to that realm, and his shortcomings prove to be the drama of the story, resulting in the death of Rabbi Adam's son.

3. ben Samuel, 18.
4. Discussed on pg. 41.

Deontic constraints:[5] At first, the Besht forbids Rabbi Adam's son from studying with him, and the fact that they are (literally) playing with fire by attempting unsuccessfully to call down the Prince of Torah indicates that they are taking part in prohibited types of study. Furthermore, their forbidden study is made rather explicit by the fact that they are condemned to death by a supernatural force for the type of study they engage in. Finally, these constraints also play into the Besht's forbidding Rabbi Adam's son from revealing his identity, as the time is not right for him to reveal himself.

Axiological constraints:[6] The axiological codex drives the concern with being overcome and controlled by the Evil One, causing the final drama of the story as they attempt to remain awake until morning comes. There is also the sense that they are dabbling in something that is not evil in itself, but opening them up to evil forces. In S. An-sky's play *The Dybbuk* (1920),[7] for instance, the lead character becomes a dybbuk (a wandering, disembodied soul) because he dabbled a little too much in the mysteries of the Kabbalah when he was not yet spiritually ready, like our two characters here.

Epistemic constraints:[8] At the very heart of this story is a thirst for knowledge, though in this case the protagonist is the one with the knowledge that is the object of the quest. Rabbi Adam's son not only desires the knowledge to be able to call down the Prince of Torah, but we can also assume that his desire to call down the Prince of Torah indicates a further desire to gain insight into his objects of study: the Torah, Talmud, and Zohar. It is then the Besht's lack of knowledge as a young and developing sage that drives the drama that ends up burning down the town and

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5. Discussed on pg. 42.
6. Discussed on pg. 43.
7. S. An-sky and John Hirsch, *The Dybbuk [by] S. Ansky* (Winnipeg, Man: Peguis, 1975). The play was written between 1913-1916 but its world premiere was in 1920.
8. Discussed on pg. 44.

killing his momentary apprentice.

Analyzing this story through the lens of Doležel's narrative modalities enriches our understanding of what the tale is trying to tell us about the Besht himself. It also shows that any story, whether the length of a novel or the length of a paragraph, can be assessed using this framework. Put simply, this framework describes a narrative world and how it functions. The tension of contrary modal conditions is not necessary to an analysis of a story, though it certainly does make for a compelling tale. Now, we may turn to an extended discussion of these constraints.

3.2 // Alethic Constraints

Alethic constraints relate to what is possible and impossible in a narrative world, and tend to involve the barrier between the natural and supernatural. A famous Talmudic story illustrates the alethic interplay between the natural and supernatural domains:

> The Rabbis taught: Four entered the Pardes. They were Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, Acher and Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Akiva said to them, "When you come to the place of pure marble stones, do not say, 'Water! Water!' for it is said, 'He who speaks untruths shall not stand before My eyes'". Ben Azzai gazed and died. Regarding him the verse states, 'Precious in the eyes of G-d is the death of His pious ones'. Ben Zoma gazed and was harmed. Regarding him the verse states, 'Did you find honey? Eat as only much as you need, lest you be overfilled and vomit it'. Acher cut down the plantings. Rabbi Akiva entered in peace and left in peace.[9]

This story is meant in part to illustrate the superiority of Rabbi Akiva over other sages. Note, however, that the drama is entirely formed by alethic constraints: which of these members of the natural domain can interact most efficiently with the supernatural realm? All four of them are

9. *Chagigah* 14b, from the *William Davidson Talmud* at sefaria.org.

special *a priori* because they are capable of entering the Pardes (the orchard of knowledge), but the consequences of doing so vary from rabbi to rabbi, indicating that one is more special — more capable of interacting with the Otherworld — than the others. One dies upon seeing the orchard, another is "harmed" (goes mad), and another cuts it down (understood to mean he becomes an apostate). Only Rabbi Akiva enters with ease.

Doležel offers three important aspects in which so-called supernatural worlds can "redistribute" their alethic constraints (though there are others as well):

A) Physically impossible beings, like gods, spirits, monsters, etc.[10]

B) "Selected natural-world persons are granted properties and action capacities that are not available to ordinary persons of that world,"[11] as was the case in the story of the four rabbis in the orchard.

C) "Inanimate objects are personified, that is, given mental life and intentionality."

To these three, I would add two other aspects: first, the increased power of supposed mental processes, like dreaming. For example, though dreams could be seen as a disauthenticating tool (i.e. *we thought it was supernatural but it was only a dream*), in some of our stories, the fact that the experience was a dream authenticates its preternatural essence. This is the case with the Survivor-prophets in Bender's story. Second, I would add to point C elements of time and space that are typically understood not to have agency, beyond his example of inanimate objects: night, darkness, the concept of the road or path, and natural features like the sea and mountains. I will describe these in greater detail in Chapter Four.

Investigating the alethic constraints of the narrative world of these eight short stories, one

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10. Doležel, 116.
11. Doležel, 116.

can establish its fundamental conditions: what is possible in this world (what can at times occur), what is impossible (what can never occur), and what is necessary (what is always occurring). For the most part, the alethic constraints of this narrative world are the same as the Actual, and I will work under the assumption that, unless noted here, the constraints are all familiar to our everyday experience. I will discuss here the possibilities outside the realm of the Actual, the impossibilities in relation to those possibilities, and the necessities outside the realm of the Actual.

3.2.1 // Possible

In our stories, the veil between our world and the Other becomes porous or nonexistent at certain times and in certain zones. With regard to time, the most prominent example is night. In all of these stories, moments that take place at night or in darkness are understood to be more fecund for scenarios that lift individuals out of the realm of what we would consider typical. In our tales, night is understood to have a certain agency, sometimes implied and sometimes quite explicit. In "At Sea," for example, the protagonist speaks directly to the night on multiple occasions, and it is specifically the wet, foggy night that launches the protagonist into vivid memories of the shtetl from whence he came, mystically worded to include "the angel of sleep" and "night-spirits." The longer he inhabits the past, the more it becomes the present: "The long, long distant past and the brief, transitory present merge. The real world turns into a dream and dreams become reality."[12]

This quote leads directly into the next two zones. First, dreams are a strange liminal concoction at the intersection of space and time, waking and sleeping, physical and metaphysical. In our stories, dreams, like night, are presented as having a certain agency. Dreams can and do enable preternatural abilities, like foretelling the future (as in the case of the Survivor-prophets in "Dreaming in Polish"). They also have a way of clarifying complex and difficult concepts for the

12. Shapiro, 162.

characters. In one such example in “Edgia’s Revenge” Pavel tells Rella the details of a “strange dream” Edgia had, one which encapsulates, in two sentences, the entire somersaulting relationship between the two women over the course of a lengthy story.[13]

Dreams also have the ability to land the dreamer in a zone of warped time and space. We find examples of this in “Edgia’s Revenge” and in “A Dream of Sleep,” when Wolf experiences his dream sensorially in a way that seems, to him, to defy the possible: “Wolf did not understand: he saw and heard and smelled all of it. Yet he slept.”[14] These latter examples lead to another element of the agency of dreams in these stories: their ability to bleed into reality, especially in the case of “Edgia’s Revenge,” where Rella is described as wandering the streets stuck in a nightmarish stupor. When the narrators are constructing a zone of alterity, explaining the otherworldliness of the zone they find themselves in, they turn to language related to dreams. In “At Sea,” for example, describing the vastness of the sea and their total liminality as a ship eons from steady footing, the narrator asks, “Is not the earth but a dream?”[15] Soon after, he continues this theme by describing an unknowable noise somewhere in the fog: “Quiet and indistinct, like an ancient dream, an indeterminate sound emerges from an unknown source: possibly a groan, possibly a protracted yawn from a wide throat.”[16]

The second zone that the earlier quote from “At Sea” conjures is memory. In many of these stories, memory itself is given agency, an ability to both bleed into reality and form itself autonomously. The most prominent example of this is found in “*Die Grosse Liebe*,” in which Joseph’s memory of his mother is formed into its own habitable zone, the living room of his youth. As he ages, his memories grow into something that he cannot control, a vine that intertwines with

13. Shapiro, 157.
14. Almond, 199.
15. Shapiro, 160.
16. Shapiro, 161.

reality, causing him to wonder if whole memories that he once held had ever even happened. Beyond that, memories form that he knows never occurred, but he gains pleasure from interacting with them in that living room, that space that he and the ghostly memory of his mother inhabit together, described in terms that would have the reader believe they were physically happening. Memory is given a corporeal from in "The Lecture" as well, where Mr. N's traumatic memories seem to become physically real when he describes the bony hands reaching out at him in the apartment.

"The Lecture" also brings up another alethic possibility. In the section on transit in Chapter Four, I will touch on a concept called *Kefitzat haDerech*, or "contraction of the road." In the sense described in Jewish mystical texts, this means transportation from one geographical location to another in an impossibly short amount of time. This capability is described in our stories, but it is in the context of memory, and especially traumatic memory. In "The Lecture," "At Sea," "Edgia's Revenge," and "A Dream of Sleep," memories are described as having a sort of agency to launch the characters through time and space to inhabit them in a very physical sense. In "At Sea," when Night launches the protagonist into his memory, the latter explains in a slight panic, "Several taps of our old beadle's wooden mallet reach my ears, sounds that were born when I was still a child, that for many years sought me across the world, and that have now caught up with me in the middle of the foaming sea — and my heart beats faster in response."[17]

The physical quality of memory leads to a subsequent alethic possibility: that of inhabiting two opposing zones at once, a classic liminal state. In our stories, the key players are presented as capable of existing in two zones simultaneously, many times with very negative coding. They are presented as both waking and dreaming, as in this passage from "Edgia's Revenge": "'It's no

17. Shapiro, 162.

wonder, my child, that you can't sleep,' he said, affectionately patting my shoulder. 'After all that you've lived through, you must be having nightmares even in the daytime when you are wide awake.'"[18] They are presented as being in two physical locales and in two different times, as with the cases of memory launching the protagonists back to Europe despite their being in North America.

The dead, it seems, have agency beyond simply existing in people's memories, and much of this agency seems to feature prominently at night. The townsfolk in Ellenbogen's story in "A Myriad-Minded Man," for instance, live their lives under the assumption "that at midnight the souls of the departed leave their graves, and robed in their cerements, as in prayer shawls, dance on the floor of the synagogue, singing the Lord's hallelujahs."[19] When Mr. N experiences his traumatic night in Montreal in "The Lecture," the dead are described as reaching out and calling to him. In "A Dream of Sleep," Wolf encounters the spirits of the cemetery regularly, typically in a positive way until the latter stages of his time among them, when they become more intimidating and mischievous. In the zone of memory where the protagonist of "*Die Grosse Liebe*" meets with his mother on a regular basis, her spirit seems to have the power to alter his memories and live independently of what he believes actually happened. He is also unsure of whether or not the old lady who came to help on the night of his father's funeral was a ghost. Finally, in "Dreaming in Polish," the protagonist visits the Holocaust museum to speak with the dead, understanding them to have complex enough feelings that she does not want to risk them sensing her abandonment if she does not visit. In Chapter Five, I will describe in greater detail characters who have a preternatural connection with the (specifically Jewish) dead, for better or worse.

We could also say that trauma has enabled individuals — especially Holocaust Survivors

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18. Rosenfarb, 86.
19. Klein, 139.

but other victims of violence as well — to have preternatural abilities to connect with the Other realm in a variety of ways and to varying degrees. The narrator of "At Sea," for example, is implied to have experienced violence of some kind, likely pogroms. He is presented as speaking to the sea, and in another instance to a fairy that describes instances of anti-Jewish violence in the country that the narrator has left. In "Edgia's Revenge," Rella is described as living in two zones at once on account of her trauma, spending her days between waking and dreaming, life and death, a sort of undead individual floating through life. As I have already stated, Mr. N in Singer's story also has an unenviable ability, through his trauma, to associate with beings and spirits who wish to bring him to wherever they are. In Almond's story, Wolf, another Survivor, has direct contact with the spirits in the cemetery, and they are presented as conversing with him, though never in direct dialogue. Finally, the elderly prophets in Bender's story, also Survivors, prophesy to the townsfolk through their dreams.

Natural features are given a sense of agency in these stories that is beyond the realm of the Actual, and key players are at times understood to have a psycho-spiritual connection with them. In some cases, that agency coincides with the theme of memory, as the landscape that a character is inhabiting at that moment transports them to an analogous landscape across the Atlantic. We see this in "The Lecture," where Mr. N and the reader are continuously reminded that the landscape north of New York City is essentially the Poland of the 1930s and 1940s. The psycho-spiritual connection to nature features prominently in "At Sea," where the protagonist speaks not only to the night, but to the ocean. The profound but conclusionless tales that his neighbour tells him also present this idea, the first about the painter who went mad because of his psychic connection to the sea, and the last about the star that disappears, sending people on Earth into psycho-social upheaval and leading directly to a number of suicides. Mount Royal looms over every important

interaction in "Edgia's Revenge" and is described as "following" the characters around their activities. The Laurentian mountains, where the final drama of "Edgia's Revenge" takes place, also serve as a zone of calm, spiritual reflection for the narrator of "A Myriad-Minded Man," who uses his time on one of their peaks to think about the mystical character of Isaiah Ellenbogen.

3.2.2 // Impossible

The things that are impossible in the world of these tales are impossible in the Actual world as well. The reason I point them out here is in relation to the preternatural possibilities I discussed above. When one thinks of the alethic constraints I just described, one might logically assume that certain other preter- and super-natural events are possible. But the fact that unusual things occur in these stories does not mean that anything goes. The result of this verisimilitude is a literary world that is plausible for the reader, that requires a very limited amount of suspension of disbelief, and that is powerful in expressing its fundamental Jewishness: similar to the non-Jewish world, but with a dash of otherworldliness and liminality.

The preternatural and somewhat miraculous can occur in these stories, as discussed above, but for the most part such events take place only in the realm of the psycho-spiritual. Psychic connections with others (especially the dead and spirits) are possible, as are visions of the future and other events that occur within the heart and mind of the character. What seem *not* to be possible are miracles and preter- and supernatural abilities in the realm of the physical. Nowhere do we see characters with immense physical strength or other superhuman abilities. In fact, as I will discuss in Chapter Five, despite the intense connection between our characters and the realm of the dead, none are truly capable of necromancy. Interaction with the dead is rather ambiguous.

While our characters come into psychic contact with otherworldly beings, such as non-descript "spirits," ghosts, and the occasional unnamed angel, the historical "pantheon" of Jewish

supernatural beings seems not to be present. By this I mean that our protagonists do not encounter archangels like Metatron and Michael in the same way that characters do in earlier Jewish texts. Furthermore, the figure of God is not present as a contactable entity in these stories, in any sense whatsoever. Due to this constraint, readers get the sense that these stories take place in a sort of epilogue to that enchanted time when such things were possible, a Jewish world with a mystical remnant, an echo of something that happened in the past but rarely if ever occurs now.

Finally, in these stories non-Jewish characters are not afforded any of the capabilities that I have described in this section. Non-Jews feature in these stories, but they tend to be peripheral and supporting characters, part of the backdrop against which our key players experience their unusual circumstances. Save for Lev's best friend Alex in *The Mystics of Mile End*, gentiles tend to be presented as a surface upon which the Jewish characters can project their thoughts, feelings, and insecurities. In "A Myriad-Minded Man," for example, the protagonist's friend Godfrey Somers ends up publishing the antisemitic newspaper where Ellenbogen is revealed to be consulting. In "The Lecture," Mr. N goes on a lengthy monologue about how he is alienated from his fellow train passengers. In "A Dream of Sleep," Wolf's adversary — and the personification of encroaching modernity — is Ham Tallaway (notice the non-kosher name he is given). At no point are any of these characters afforded any sort of preternatural ability, so we must assume that, in this world, it is rare or impossible for gentiles to have those same abilities.

3.2.3 // Necessary

In the context of these possibilities and impossibilities that we have discussed, it is striking that all characters, whether preternaturally-able or not, exist primarily in the earthly realm. Due to the fact that the Other realm is never truly authenticated in these stories, the characters do not spend any time there physically and the reader is not afforded any knowledge of how that place might look.

For example, at face value the spirits in Wolf's cemetery do exist in the world of "A Dream of Sleep". Due to the ambiguous nature of the alethic constraints of the world, however, the reader remains unsure whether those spirits even exist, let alone if human characters could enter that place. All human characters are born, raised, and stay in the earthly realm, and it is through their ambiguous encounters with the Other realm that we know that they are special. We are never given a definitive answer to the authenticity of an apparent Other realm.

3.3 // Deontic Constraints

The question of norms within a narrative world relates primarily to the figures who appear in it, defining what is permitted, prohibited, and obligatory. Deontic constraints are especially prominent in the genre of Holocaust literature, and they are capable of drastically altering the tone of simple actions. As an example, we might think of a character rushing through the Polish countryside in 1943. If the fictional person's trek is permitted, she might be a Polish farmer trying to get home before sundown, or a Nazi camp guard trying to make it to a bar in town before last call. If it is obligatory, perhaps that camp guard is running late for their first day on the job, or perhaps an inmate is being forced onto a Nazi death march. If it is prohibited, then we may be reading about an escape out of the camps, or a resistance fighter rushing in to rescue a person or group.

Doležel himself points to this type of literature: "Narratives of social, national, racial, and personal liberation exemplify prominently this structure."[20] On the other hand, "the imposition of new prohibitions or obligations narrows the scope of the permissible and thus generates the story of deontic loss. Narratives of enslavement, oppression, and confinement implement this pattern."[21]

20. Doležel, 121.
21. Doležel, 121.

Thinking in these terms, the initial shock of a Holocaust novel is one of deontic loss: there was peace and freedom — and perhaps complacency, as with Eliezer's father in Elie Wiesel's *Night* (1960), whose refusal to leave his home when signs of the coming storm start to manifest leads to their sojourn in the camps — and then there was imprisonment, dehumanization, and destruction.[22]

Deontic constraints can also feed the storytelling energy of tales that take place in North America after the Holocaust — what should feel like a safe zone. As Doležel points out, "the deontic structure of a fictional world changes when new norms are imposed and existing norms modified or lifted."[23] In the case of "The Lecture," for example, the protagonist's sense of alienation from his fellow (non-Jewish) passengers on the train derives its potency from the deontic constraints of the narrative world: in the past, his existence as a Jew was prohibited; now in North America, where that prohibition has been lifted, he still does not feel a full participant in society.

3.3.1 // Permitted, Prohibited, and Obligatory

The question of what is permitted in this world is complex because it has much to do with a past that is sometimes revealed but many times assumed. With regards to the zones and landscape I will explore in Chapter Four, it is notable that the central characters appear to have free passage throughout the world. In "At Sea," Shapiro's narrator is on a long voyage from his home in Eastern Europe to a new land, and the fact that he is able to make that voyage is never questioned. In "A Myriad-Minded Man," Ellenbogen never spends much time in one place, moving from Russia to the Prairies, then to Montreal, then travelling with the circus, then to Toronto, and finally to the other side of the Earth in tow of Ignaz Trebitsch-Lincoln.

It is in the stories that take place after the Holocaust, however, that this permission comes

22. Elie Wiesel, *Night* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1982).
23. Doležel, 121.

into focus. The protagonists of "The Lecture" and "Edgia's Revenge" travel freely as well, but it is in the context of a past in which they could not do so. In "The Lecture," for example, Mr. N's slow, creeping train ride brings him back to a time when Jews had limited permission to be on trains. That distinct memory, and the feelings that come with it, lead to his self-imposed isolation from his fellow passengers, despite the fact that they have done nothing whatsoever to warrant his suspicion.

In "Edgia's Revenge," the free movement of the characters is contrasted with their circumstances in the Holocaust: after making their way to Canada, the main players are free to do anything they like, including owning businesses, taking part in public activities, and spending holidays together outside of the city. This contrast between confinement and freedom is a major theme of "Dreaming in Polish" as well: the protagonist's mother, obsessed with simulations of cattle cars, longs to feel and understand the deontic conditions of the Holocaust, when the movement of Jews was prohibited and they were confined in specific zones, all of them liminal: the ghetto, where they awaited deportation; the train, moving through the countryside; the station, where they were sent to different fates; and the camps themselves, where they were made to wait for certain death. The tension between permitted and prohibited movement is one of the key features of this narrative world.

One of the ways we come to know the deontic constraints of a world are through those characters that Doležel would term "deontic aliens": figures whose notable attribute is their ability (perceived or concrete) to exist outside the deontic constraints of their world or society. These figures go against the grain, doing away with social permissions or pitting themselves directly against them. Doležel offers an example of this character from Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. The protagonist, Raskolnikov, "elaborates an explicit ideological justification of the

alien's privilege: 'extraordinary' men are permitted, or even have the duty to do, what the codex prohibits because their mission 'might involve the salvation of all mankind' (pt. 3, chap. 5). Under this exemption, murdering an old woman pawnbroker is no more than killing a louse."[24] Raskolnikov's belief that he is a deontic alien ends poorly under the crushing weight of the constraints themselves, however, forming the central drama of the story.

The last line of Doležel's above quote might sound familiar in the context of the current study. Holocaust Survivors escaped exactly the same attitude on the part of the Nazis, those deontic aliens, those supposed "Übermenschen" who sought to "de-louse" their country, and as such the survivors suffer through life haunted by a deontic constraint — the prohibition on simply existing as a Jew — that no longer applies in their new homes. Doležel notes that Raskolnikov continues to maintain this attitude throughout the fallout from the murder he commits, but "no rational justification can save him from the emotional consequences of the transgression, from a strange, uncontrollable malaise."[25] The Nazis, however, no longer in the picture by the time our post-Holocaust stories take place, never receive such a consequence in this narrative world. Rather, their ambiguous end, fading into the background of a trauma that continues even without their presence, leaves our Survivor characters in search of closure, or even turning on themselves and each other.

Deontic aliens need not commit something as drastic as murder to maintain that identity. In "*Die Grosse Liebe*," Joseph's mother lives in a self-imposed exile, never leaving the house. The fact that she never leaves the house is powerful *precisely because of* the deontic constraints of this world: she is permitted to go anywhere, but she prohibits herself. She is fascinating because she is a deontic alien, going against the norms of the community.

24. Doležel, 122.
25. Doležel, 122.

In other stories, deontic aliens tend to fall into the sage-or-fool question that I will detail in Chapter Five, as the surrounding characters are unable figure out whether the alien is going against social mores because they are elevated thinkers or because they are idiots. In “A Myriad-Minded Man,” for example, Ellenbogen’s identity is based entirely on subverting norms: his marriage of superstition and science; his problem of never letting others speak, even for a moment; his constant movement and unreachability; his work in the circus; and finally, his breach of one of the great prohibitions in this narrative world that I will discuss momentarily: collaborating with antisemites. It is only when this last breach occurs that Ellenbogen is understood to be a fool and an opportunist; up until that point, the central question of the story was whether or not he truly was a modern mystic.

We find other examples of deontic aliens throughout our stories. In *The Mystics of Mile End,* Mr. Katz breaks the norms of Hasidic life by dressing slovenly and acting in a peculiar way, much to the chagrin and mockery of other members of his community and neighbourhood. In “Edgia’s Revenge,” the group of friends maintains a cultured façade, taking in their book readings, sex lectures, and yoga retreats while listening to Lolek tell stories of his time as a partisan in the war. Pavel, the deontic alien, is the only one to ever break through the social mores the group has created — to always move forward unless celebrating a heroic past — by calling them tiresome and, more egregiously, revealing to Rella that all of Lolek’s stories were false, and that he hid throughout the war. For these trespasses, he is the outcast member of the group. At the same time, however, his ability to break through this façade seems to attract Edgia.

The specifically Jewish context of the stories is important and further develops our understanding of their deontic constraints. The fact that most characters ignore Jewish law would not be of any interest if I was describing a Hemingway novel, but it is notable here. Traditional

Jewish life is governed by very concrete deontic constraints, the well-known 613 commandments, made up of prohibitions (so-called negative commandments) and obligations (positive commandments). In these stories, it seems, almost none of these Jewish-specific prohibitions and obligations are enforced or even discussed.[26] For the most part, characters are not indicated as following traditional law in any way: they openly engage in adulterous relationships; they marry outside the Jewish community; there is little if any indication that they keep kosher; and most do not attend synagogue. In other words, the deontic constraints of Jewish religion are not the deontic constraints of this Jewish fiction writing, and are at times purposely set in opposition to each other.

The most consistent and universal prohibitions in these stories involve antisemitism. The prohibition on general antisemitism is obvious, and appears or is implied in most stories when characters are talking about violence against Jews or the animal-like behaviour of the Nazis. In "The Lecture," the blame for antisemitism appears even to bleed to the innocent non-Jewish Americans who share the train car with Mr. N, perhaps by way of a similarly prejudiced association on the part of the protagonist.

The greatest transgression, though, is for a Jew to collaborate with antisemites. Ellenbogen's collaboration with Somers' newspaper in Klein's story immediately resolves the protagonist's question of whether he is a sage or a fool. One of the central concerns of "Edgia's Revenge" is Rella's intense anxiety at being revealed as a former kapo, the stated reason that she keeps those sleeping pills in her pocket is to ingest them in such a circumstance. The protagonist's mother in "Die Grosse Liebe" seems to be under some kind of self-imposed house arrest if we read the memory of her attack at the jewelry store as truthful. If the accusation is correct, the mother had indeed collaborated more acutely than any other character we see in any of the stories: directly

26. i.e., laws that apply only to Jews, unlike prohibitions on murder and stealing.

to the Nazis, and directly about specific Jews.

I have already touched on the last notable prohibition, one that is enforced in some regions and at some times in this world: that of simply being Jewish. All characters who survived the Holocaust are presented as suffering the after-effects of existence as deontic aliens. In a land where they are prohibited from being who they are, they are born deontic aliens; born trespassers; born accused. As they emerge from that locale, like Mr. N, they live suspiciously in a world of hateful tremors.

3.3.2 // Permissions and Obligations Regarding Jewish Law

Some permissions stand in stark contrast to the prohibitions of traditional Jewish law. The apparent ability to speak with or connect to spirits, prohibited in the Torah, is not coded negatively, though the situation in which these connections occur can be negative.[27] In other words, characters are not considered rule-followers or rule-breakers based solely on their interactions with spirits and the dead; their ability to make these connections is neutral, but their experience of that connection might be delightful or traumatic. In "The Lecture," for example, Mr. N is not described as doing something right or wrong when the voices and hands reach out to him in the dark. Similarly, in "Dreaming in Polish," the protagonist's sense that she is visiting the dead at the Holocaust is not coded on the basis of her connection with the dead, though she herself finds the experience pleasant. The same could be said for Wolf in "A Dream of Sleep," where his encounters with the cemetery's spirits are coded in the same neutral manner as his interactions with other living humans: they simply happen, and his personal experience of those interactions creates the drama.

Although it seems Jewish law has been pushed to the side in the everyday lives of the characters in these stories, we can still argue that there are Jew-specific obligations. There are

27. See pg. 168.

positive commandments that we can suss out in these texts as well — obligations that Jews must perform in their community. A general obligation that we seem to find is a reverence and respect for the dead, especially in works by more recent authors but in the older stories as well. Not only are the dead to be respected, in fact, but they are to be treated almost as if they were still living. We find this in "A Dream of Sleep," where Wolf puts immense effort, even when the job no longer really exists and he is at risk of legal action, to tend the cemetery and make the dead as comfortable as possible. In "Dreaming in Polish," the protagonist makes an effort to go to the Holocaust museum to converse with the dead, while Lev's sister in *The Mystics of Mile End* gets in touch with her Jewish side to become closer with her mother who has passed.

There is also an apparent obligation for Jews to educate themselves and others. We find this in "The Lecture," with Mr. N's status as a professor and his reason for travel: delivering a lecture in another country. His guilt at possibly leading the recipients of that lecture astray by claiming that Yiddish is thriving is one of the markers of his personality in that story. Rella's obsessive need to learn new things is a prominent storyline of "Edgia's Revenge," and one of her primary methods of shedding her former self, though she is ultimately unsuccessful. In "*Die Grosse Liebe*," the protagonist goes as far as visiting and ultimately relocating to the city where his mother lived during the war, watching her favourite movie over and over again, in an attempt to learn about her life and better know her. The protagonist's mother's obsessive need to visit Holocaust museums fits in here as well, and *The Mystics of Mile End* is an entire story based upon teachers and students attempting to learn the secrets of the universe. Education is a central concern of the Jewish characters in these stories.

3.4 // Axiological Constraints

Axiological constraints have to do with good, evil, and indifference. Stories of good vs. evil abound throughout the writing of many cultures, but as I pointed out in Chapter Two, transitions from evil to good or good to evil can be more compelling than the simple battle narrative. Transitions from good to evil are the types of tales we find in the pogrom stories of Lamed Shapiro. For Shapiro, rage is a virus that arrives on the doorsteps of the Jewish population by way of the anger and hatred of the Christian inhabitants, infecting his protagonists in turn.

In his devastating short story "The Cross", Shapiro's protagonist is part of a revolutionary cell led by a woman for whom he develops romantic feelings.[28] One night, after one of their meetings, a pogrom breaks out in his town and the local inhabitants pillage and murder the Jewish population. A group of men, young and old alike, break down his door and break everything in sight. The protagonist gets caught up in the energy, flying into an intoxicating rage. The men tie him up, beat him, rape his mother and leave her for dead while he sits beside her bed. When he finally breaks free of the rope, he mercifully kills his mother and ventures outside to see the cycle of bloodlust in a scene: a boy splits an old Jew's head open with an ax while a young Jew chases behind him, shooting at him with a revolver, finally turning the gun on himself and firing. His mind lost to the frenzy, the protagonist kicks the dead Jew and laughs while patting the pogromist on the back. The mayhem continues for several days and nights, until the protagonist wanders to the house of his love interest, who quickly lets him in. After he tells her his harrowing story, he laughs in her face, flies into a rage, rapes and then kills her before falling into a deep sleep. He wakes up the next morning and leaves for a new life in America. The tragic interplay between good and evil, peace and violence, love and hate, is the driving force of Shapiro's pogrom tales.

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28. Lamed Shapiro, "The Cross" in *The Cross and Other Jewish Stories*, New Yiddish Library (New Haven, CT, New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2007), 3-18.

The war between Good and Evil as portrayed in World War II-related media is muddied by the nature of the Holocaust experience. Though one might assume the axiology of this and other stories of anti-Jewish violence is "Jews = Good and Nazis/Pogromists = Evil," these stories problematize the former: are Jews, in their status as victims of atrocity, the de facto Good Guys? In our stories, many of the Jewish victims of trauma turn inward in their pursuit of a guilty party when the true perpetrators have simply vanished into thin air: in the absence of a Nazi to blame in North America, they see themselves as collaborators (Rella in "Edgia's Revenge" and Joseph's mother in "Die Grosse Liebe") and frauds (Mr. N in "The Lecture"). The former status, that of the coerced collaborator, is a central concern of various Holocaust stories, and is found very often in two types of figures: *kapos*, the prisoners appointed to oversee other prisoners in the concentration camps; and members of the *Judenrat*, the Jewish council appointed to oversee ghettos and deportations. In "Edgia's Revenge," Rella's status as a former *kapo* renders her undead in a certain sense. She spends her entire life waiting for the moment that her status during the war bubbles to the top; the moment the truth is visible to others, she will do her duty and end her life. The mother in "*Die Grosse Liebe*," too, is only half-alive, never leaving the house and existing as a ghostly memory throughout the story. It is through these details that we gain a sense of the axiological constraints of the narrative world of these stories.

Antisemitism, and all manner of violence against Jews, is the most consistent evil that appears in these stories. It is a noted concern in every one of our stories, save possibly for "Dreaming in Polish," an optimistic and fairly joyful tale. Antisemitism remains a focal point even though it is not an immediate concern for the characters there, however, in the regular visits to the Holocaust museums across the country and the presence of the elderly Holocaust Survivors. In the other stories, it features prominently: pogrom violence in the land the narrator is leaving in "At

Sea"; Ellenbogen's stint at the antisemitic newspaper; Mr. N's post-traumatic stress; Rella's Holocaust experience; Wolf's survivourhood; the mother's alleged collaboration in "*Die Grosse Liebe*"; and the war-time experiences of the Glassmans and Mr. Katz in *The Mystics of Mile End*. The evil these characters endure has profound effects that I will discuss further in Chapters Five and Six, launching individuals into liminal states of wandering, dreaming, and undeath.

The only evil that surpasses gentile antisemitism in these stories is Jewish collaboration with gentiles in their antisemitic pursuits. Collaboration is a greater sin than murder, as evidenced by the passage in "Edgia's Revenge" where a group of survivors wandering the German countryside in the aftermath of the war beat another Jew to death when he is fingered as a former *kapo*. The revelation that a Jew has turned on their fellow Jew is met with immediate, unforgivable backlash in these stories: Ellenbogen, described positively-if-mysteriously by the narrator throughout "A Myriad-Minded Man," is immediately understood to be a fool and an opportunist upon this revelation. Rella, as I have mentioned several times, is in a permanent liminal state of undeath because of her self-perceived collaboration with the Nazis during that time. And, once more, the allegation against the mother in Stollman's story serves as a key to all of her bizarre self-exilic behaviour.

On the question of what is good and valourized in these stories, several of them remain dreary and indifferent. If we think about Shapiro's story, for instance, we find a foggy mysticism, an ancient dream, full of storytelling, darkness, death, and wistful memories of a quiet shtetl to whom one cannot return. When it seems as though a story within the story will have some sort of positive or uplifting meaning or moral, the narrator's neighbour on the deck always stops short and mocks the narrator for thinking there would be. In Klein's, Shapiro's, and Rosenfarb's stories, as well, it is hard to pin down a quality that is valourized among the characters. Bravery is

valourized by the characters themselves, but it is not practiced: Mr. N believes himself a coward for the fear he feels at being alone with the corpse in the dark, and Lolek, the man Rella adores for his tall tales of bravery during the war, is found to be a fraud. So, in that sense, we might say that bravery in the face of death is valourized as "Good" in these stories, though it seems unattainable for the key players.

What becomes valourized in the stories that take place decades past the initial shock of the Holocaust is memorialization and reverence for the dead, especially the victims of atrocity. As we have seen in the section on the (un)dead, reverence for the dead has long been an important aspect of Jewish writing, and all the more so in these stories. The way Wolf looks after the cemetery and refuses to allow the creep of modernity to overtake it; the way the narrator in Bender's story visits the Holocaust memorial to speak with the spirits of the dead; the way Stollman's narrator spends much of his time meeting his mother in the zone of memory he has created, and his travels to pursue and memorialize a sense of her childhood; and the way in which Lev's sister explores her Jewish side, against the wishes of her father, in honour of her mother who passed away.

Several of these stories deal with moral indifference, at least in the Jewish context. Observance is a valourized component of Jewish religious life and has been for hundreds and thousands of years, up until the advent of secular Jewish culture. As such, in the bigger picture of Jewishness, the fact that so many of these characters are not religiously observant make them what Doležel would call Axiological Rebels and Axiological Aliens. In the context of traditional Jewish culture, many of our other characters are axiological aliens: "a person who negates the axiological order of the world and replaces it with a subjective axiology that has a single operator: indifference."[29]

29. Doležel, 125.

We see this type of character in Ellenbogen, who sits comfortably on the opposite side of the aisle from everyone else: he "debunks" religious superstition by explaining phenomena in scientific terms, and he is content writing for an antisemitic rag. Rella and her friends pursue a metaphorical bridge away from their Jewishness, while Mr. N does not believe anything he is saying in his lecture and seems irritated by everyone he encounters. Wolf's concern for the dead wanes as he sinks deeper into his dreamlife and allows the cemetery to fall into disrepair, while the mother in Stollman's story remains locked in her home in exile, denying every memory that her son brings to her attention. Lev's father leaves the Jewish community and lives out his days bitter about anyone who would take part in it. For the most part, in these stories, religious observance is met with indifference; it is not valourized nor condemned, it has simply fallen by the wayside.

A last note on indifference involves the breaking of the barrier between our world and the Otherworld in the Jewish context. Earlier Jewish stories written from a religious milieu take moral issue with those who attempt to delve too deeply into mysticism without proper preparation. This is one of the central concerns of S. An-sky's *The Dybbuk, or Between Two Worlds*, not a religious text but one based on An-sky's ethnographic observation of religiously observant Jews. In that story, the man who becomes the dybbuk dies at an early age because he committed the sin (i.e., evil) of delving into the mysteries of the kabbalah at too early a point in his studies. There are ways that these excursions are meant to be done, and at certain times and ages. Our stories contain an indifference to this apparent axiological constraint in traditional Jewish culture. Characters across the spectrum seem to associate with the Other realm without any training, and usually not of their own accord. But there is never a question of whether they are doing the right or the wrong thing by dealing with spirits or other such things. It simply happens.

3.5 // Epistemic Constraints

The epistemic constraints of a narrative world have to do with what is known, what is unknown, and what is believed. Doležel writes that "epistemic modalities are expressed in social representations, such as scientific knowledge, ideologies, religions, cultural myths."[30] Some of our stories, though not all, involve a quest for knowledge that is expressed in a variety of ways. In *The Mystics of Mile End*, for instance, the quest is much more traditional than in other stories: the titular "mystics" are all trying to figure out the mysteries of the universe, whether religious (the kabbalistic Tree of Life), mathematical (Mrs. Glassman muttering equations), or scientific (Alex's obsession with astronomy and physics). In Bender's "Dreaming in Polish," the knowledge the townsfolk seek is similarly traditional in nature: they spend an important portion of the story frantically attempting to decipher the words of the Survivor-prophets, and the fact that they arrive at covering the statue in the town square leads to the climactic ending.

Another familiar quest for knowledge arises in "A Myriad-Minded Man" as the protagonist attempts to figure out the nature of this apparent mystic, Ellenbogen. In just these three stories, we have the quest for divine secrets, the quest for prophetic answers, and the quest for a mystical figure. This set of constraints is more dependent on each individual story, but the elements of the world that are known and unknown are similar in our stories.

Though not every story is a quest for knowledge, all stories, including our eight short stories, have epistemic constraints. The similarities between the stories concerning what is known and unknown involve this ambiguous Other realm that I will explore further in Chapters Five and Six. Some of the stories involve a concerted effort to understand that realm, like the tales I described above. Others, however, involve characters who make contact with such a realm without

30. Doležel, 126.

any effort or desire, and in some cases experience great mental anguish in that encounter. In "The Lecture" and "Edgia's Revenge," the protagonists gain knowledge of the Other realm that the peripheral characters — the passengers on the train, the customers at Rella's store — and even some of the main characters — Rella's other friends or Binele in "The Lecture" — do not. In both cases, this nightmarish encounter with a realm-not-our-own is met with misery and trauma, resulting from a similar misery and trauma, but the knowledge is gained nonetheless. Epistemic constraints do not include value judgments about whether the knower should be happy about their knowledge.

These examples suggest that the natural state of the characters includes ignorance of the Other realm. Acquiring knowledge of that realm occurs through an ordeal or challenge: study and prayer in *Mystics*; pursuit in "A Myriad-Minded Man"; enduring the horrors of the Holocaust in Rosenfarb's, Singer's, Almond's, and Bender's; and, it is implied, enduring the horrors of pre-Holocaust pogroms in "At Sea," where the protagonist encounters a fairy who relates stories of violence and sorrow.

Beyond the ordeal required to gain such knowledge, there are clear markers of the proper atmosphere to induce and enrich such learning. As I point out in the next chapter, knowledge is most easily gained in the middle of the night, or in darkness, or fog, or dreams; places and times in which sight is dulled and, ostensibly, other senses — some beyond the five canonical — are heightened. It is best acquired in transitional places, like the road, or the sea, or other temporary way-stations. It takes years for the protagonist of "A Myriad-Minded Man" to get the answers he desires from the comfort of his own office, for example, but it takes one night in a dark, run-down apartment for Mr. N to gain his, or a night of dreaming for the elderly survivors to receive theirs in Bender's story.

One question that is pertinent in a discussion of epistemic constraints and Possible Worlds theory as a whole is authentication. If we can establish that there is an ambiguous Otherworld at play in a narrative world, as I will in the next two chapters, then we might wonder how persons in that narrative world authenticate the preternatural or supernatural. In several of the stories, especially “The Lecture” and “Edgia’s Revenge” for example, the characters do not question the existence or non-existence of such a realm. It is part of their experience, and we as the reader can only guess what their honest thoughts are on the authenticity of what they are experiencing. In others, however, we can make definite claims about how characters attempt to seek out these answers.

The workings of the Other realm typically begin as unknowns and stay that way. The only major exception, it seems, is in Sigal Samuel’s story. *The Mystics of Mile End* offers a traditional approach to the subject: students and teachers spend their time undergoing intense study, sometimes in solitude and sometimes under the watchful eye of a wiser person — in an effort to figure out what lies beyond the veil between our world and the Other. Scholars, it seems, are the only ones who actively attempt to come to an understanding of such things. When a scholar has insincere or ulterior motives, like disauthentication of the Otherworld, he or she is revealed to be a fraud. We see this in “A Myriad-Minded Man,” where Ellenbogen spends his multi-page monologue disauthenticating the supernatural by explaining it away in modern terminology, only to be disauthenticated himself, found to be an opportunist and a fool, calling into question those efforts at disauthentication.

As I will show in Chapter Five, the hidden identity narrative is an important one in these stories. Throughout these tales, narrators describe their pursuit of the true nature of the people around them, or reflect on their own efforts to deceive them. Deception plays into Doležel’s

epistemic constraints, and so I will mention such instances here. Nearly all of our stories feature some attempt at gaining knowledge of or from another character.

The narrator in "At Sea" seeks the moral of the stories his neighbour tells him while the other passengers on the ship attempt to find something — anything — out about the man who jumped overboard, Janko Ravić. The entirety of Klein's story is a quest on the part of the narrator to decipher the true nature of Isaiah Ellenbogen. One of Rella's paramount concerns in Rosenfarb's tale is ensuring that her identity as a *kapo* is not discovered, placing her in a nightmarish waking state. That same concern is implied to be the reason that the protagonist's mother never leaves her home in Stollman's story. Mr. N believes himself to be a fraud and wonders why people would make the effort to hear him speak on a subject he is lying about. The townsfolk in Bender's story spend the majority of their time trying to figure out what the cryptic dream of the prophet couple means, going so far as holding a town meeting and eventually covering everything they think might be considered a graven image. Finally, Lev spends most of his time in Samuel's story trying to figure out the people in his life: why does Mr. Katz behave so strangely? What is his sister doing in her room on Friday nights? Why does his father come home late smelling of perfume so often? Why is Alex so weird? The world, and the people who inhabit it, are a mystery to Lev.

3.6 // Concluding Thoughts on Narrative Constraints

This chapter has two important applications: first, the identification of alethic constraints showed that the narrative realm of these eight short stories exhibits the same porous or nonexistent barrier between our realm and the Other realm that we find in Doležel's modern myth and Traill's paranormal. The liminal zones and figures that I will describe in the next two chapters find their home in this realm, and the significance of its connection with Doležel and Traill's two realms will be discussed further in the conclusion. The second application of this chapter is in setting it apart

from those two realms: by looking into the deontic, axiological, and epistemic constraints of this narrative realm, it becomes clear that the preoccupations and concerns of the characters in these stories are quite unique and distinctly Jewish, with varying degrees of explicitness. Once again, I will return to this discussion in the conclusion. In the next two chapters, I describe the vast complex of liminal people, places, and things that inhabit the realm of possibilities constructed by these eight authors. By combining the identification of narrative constraints in this chapter with the work on liminality in the next two chapters, I offer a holistic view of this narrative realm.

Chapter Four: Liminal Zones

In the previous chapter, I applied the Possible Worlds toolkit to describe the contours of the narrative realm of our eight short stories, showing that the fundamental conditions of the realm are in line with the modern myth and the paranormal. In this chapter and the next, I accomplish two things: first, I describe the intense and persistent liminality featured in these stories in order to show that it is a fundamental theme for all of them. Second, I bring our stories into conversation with numerous intertexts from the Jewish past, spanning over two thousand years, to show that these eight works do not exist in a vacuum.

As thinkers like Doležel and Dauber agree, intertexts are an essential tool for authors, readers, and scholars: authors utilize other stories through implicit or explicit methods, while a reader's experience is enriched if they are knowledgeable on the intertext, and scholars can explore these intertexts as hermeneutical keys to better understand fictional worlds.[1] For these reasons, it is essential to introduce other Jewish stories (some early and ancient, some contemporary) to offer context to some of the zones and character types I will be exploring.

This chapter explores zones: spatial and temporal, physical and metaphysical, waking and dreaming. The subsequent chapter explores the characters themselves: seers, the (un)dead, outsiders, and the like. I begin by exploring each of these zones in our eight short stories, followed by an explanation of how each of these themes play an important role in Jewish writing more broadly by way of intertexts from the past. My aim is to create a sense of what a Jewish literary world might look like — at least in this sample of eight short stories — and how its inhabitants, both animate and inanimate, might behave.

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1. Doležel, 201; Jeremy Dauber, "Thinking with Shedim: What Can We Learn From the 'Mayse Fun Vorms'?," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (2008): 19–46; 36.

Dan Miron notes that a full understanding of modern Jewish literature cannot be solely based on an idea of continuity and evolution from early religious texts to secular writings.[2] Jewish fiction is not simply co-opting religious themes and motifs and making them new (though authors do, of course, do this). Some scholars, like David M. Stern and Mark Jay Mirsky (1990), contend that creative fiction, flights of fancy, and fantastic writing can be found in the ancient texts that we might often consider strictly religious in intention. Put differently, many authors of religiously-oriented texts wrote creatively for the sake of creativity, and not only because the super- and preternatural occurrences were of value to their bottom line of religious instruction. In classical Jewish writing like the Talmud and the Midrashim, as well as famed medieval works like the *Zohar*, *Sefer Hasidim*, and the "Tale of the Jerusalemite", Stern and Mirsky recognize the authors' impulse to tell stories for storytelling's sake; to build fanciful narratives for aesthetic pleasure beyond the simple moral of the story.[3] The texts we see as strictly religious in nature contain numerous and beautiful flights of fancy, while more recent secular writings that we call fiction — creative writing without the intention of religious instruction — contain the themes and motifs of both religious texts and those fanciful narratives.

There are many ways in which the concept of Liminality manifests in Jewish writing. I will focus on two major categories in the next two chapters: (1) liminal places, zones, and states; and (2) the figures who visit, inhabit, or otherwise find themselves within them. I begin with liminal places, zones, and states by dividing them into three subcategories:

1) Transit, Wandering, Betweenness, and Crossing

2) Darkness, Dreariness, and Night

3) Dreamstates and Visions

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2. Miron, 307.
3. Mirsky and Stern, 4.

Following this, in Chapter Five, I explore the characters themselves, and the ways in which they manifest their liminal nature. This will be broken into a further three subcategories:

1) The (Un)dead

2) Aliens, Outsiders, and Others

3) Foolish Sages and other Hidden Identities

When I establish these prominent themes and motifs in Jewish writing, it might be useful to bear in mind Michael Fishbane's words regarding the re-appearance of what he calls "mythologems" in Jewish writing from one era to the next. Fishbane explains, "A mythic topic in Hebrew Scripture like divine combat can undergo a recontextualization in the exegesis of rabbinic Midrash but still remain the same mythic topic overall, if the terms remain the same and if there is no wholesale theological or literary transformation."[4] Mythologems, then, connect to their original usage while also creating something new.

Fishbane continues, explaining that the principle of parsimony decrees that "similar images should be assumed to be the same" and hold the same symbolic value unless the text offers an explicit reason not to.[5] When we see that Jewish characters in earlier texts are constantly staying up in the middle of the night and that explicit reasons are offered (i.e. it is not an unmentioned coincidence of the text, though that would be valuable as well), we can reasonably assume that authors' choices in contemporary Jewish writing to have their characters awake throughout the night hold a similar symbolic value, or a commentary on that symbolic value. Of course, a secular professor from 20th century New York will not be spending the midnight hours in prayer like a Galician Rebbe in the 18th century; but the fact that he has insomnia at that time, or prefers to ride his bike for hours after midnight, holds semiotic value connected to his literary predecessor.

4. Michael A. Fishbane, *Biblical Myth and Rabbinic Mythmaking* (Oxford: University Press, 2003), 18.
5. Fishbane, 18.

4.1 // Transit, Wandering, Betweenness, and Crossing

One of the classic ways in which the liminal manifests is in transit and uprootedness. Characters find themselves in liminal zones when they are between two places; when they are wandering; when they are crossing into other geographies. Lamed Shapiro's "At Sea," as indicated simply by the name, takes place in the most liminal and transitory of zones: the sea.[6] That the protagonist is on a voyage would be enough to feature in this section, but Shapiro's methods of describing the journey are enough to bring us to the zone of alterity I am describing. He does this in the opening words of the story, utilizing terms like chaos, hovering, and crawling; describing the scene as something pre-Earthly; and conjuring the spirit of a Blakean deity:

> At sea — overcast and desolate as though God had not yet created the world. Between the dirty sky and the blank surface of the water, over the full breadth of the chaos that is the globe, hovers the spirit of Almighty God — a severe, hostile, careworn spirit. Restlessly, the thick-dark waves, capped with gray heads of foam, hurl themselves one upon another. Harsh is the gloom of the mournful sea, and great its vexation. Little man, where are you crawling to? Little man, what are you striving to reach? You've set off over the mighty waters in the shell of a nut. O you pitiful wretch![7]

He continues this initial description by placing the reader in what feels like the middle of nowhere, so far from the familiar and in a zone where the senses are so inundated that they become dull and useless:

> From all possible sides, from the darkness above, from the cold clamminess below, from

6. Many of Shapiro's stories contain characters who are stuck between the Old World and the New. "The Cross" involves a protagonist hopping trains across America with a cross etched into his forehead just before he left his old home. "Pour Out Thy Wrath" is a very short tale that describes a family's escape to America after a pogrom from the perspective of the nine-year-old son. He notices changes in his mother after they arrive, including bouts of illness and a rounding and filling out of her figure. His father, too, has changed: he is sombre and angry, and on one evening seems to transform into a "wild figure in a long snow-white robe" with burning eyes and a howling voice (25). The implication, of course, is that the mother was raped in the Old World and has carried the child into the New. These and other stories are found in Shapiro, *The Cross and Other Jewish Stories*, 2007.

7. Shapiro, 159.

> the turbid, illimitable ring of the horizon, mysterious, stark-blind night closes in upon the ship. As the groaning of the craft is swallowed up in the ceaseless murmur of the waves, the timid gleam of the portholes is blotted out in the molten intermingling of fog, sky, water and night. Over the vessel's prow and stern, trembling helplessly like children, hover two solitary, lost guide-lights.[8]

And finally, closing out this introduction:

> Far, oh far! Do you see back there behind us, where nothing is visible? Can you turn your thoughts back to the long, long plain where we left behind so many bright and despondent days, so many black and pallid nights? Over there the earth glows in sunshine, and abides as though furnace-forged. And glance over here, on the other side—can you sense the days and nights that are coming to meet us?[9]

Shapiro never finishes setting the atmosphere, but reminds his readers intermittently that they are at the border between this world and the Otherworld, enveloped in an endless fog with no beginning and no end. The following passage describes an event in the story: a man jumps overboard and is never found. Shapiro's account is reminiscent of the voice that comes from the mountain in the Zoharic story I will describe in the next section,[10] and the power and disquiet that can cause us to lose our bearings:

> Somewhat more distinct, a second sound reaches my ear, and on that desolate expanse of water a bizarre duet is set up between two worlds, each hidden from the other. It is difficult to say whence the strange voice emanates: from very far away or from very close by; from the front, or perhaps from somewhere to the side? And before my mind's eye, standing on the deck of that hidden ship I seem to see another, as solitary as I, in a long black coat with a pale face and gleaming eyes, peering intently and eagerly into the bleak,

8. Shapiro, 159-160.
9. Shapiro, 160.
10. See pg. 126.

> blind fog.[11]

By the middle of the Shapiro's tale, the reader is still unable to catch their bearings, and in fact the protagonist and his fellow passengers have stopped trying to do so:

> It seemed to me that years had passed since we had taken leave of the shore. Our ship continued to sail ever onward, seemingly with a purpose as nonexistent as the trail it left behind. At noon each day a placard was put up that showed how far we had traveled and how far we had still to go, but little by little we lost interest in that announcement. All around was water and more water, water, water everywhere, day in and day out, and it was easier to think that our ship was rotating around itself, going no further and making no more progress than a clock.[12]

I.B. Singer's "The Lecture" also begins with a journey,[13] this time by rail. As with Shapiro's story, the author immediately establishes that we are in a state of transit and uprootedness. The first line of this story, however, is blunt and simple in contrast to Shapiro's romantic introduction: "I was on my way to Montreal to deliver a lecture."[14] Though the journey from New York to Montreal is, in reality, only a few hours, Singer disorients the reader and vastly elongates the distance by explaining the protagonist's expectations, writing, "I prepared for the journey as though it were an expedition to the North Pole."[15]

Further disorienting the reader, the narrator, Mr. N, conjures memories of similar journeys

11. Shapiro, 161-2.
12. Shapiro, 171.
13. This is one of many Singer stories that deal with peculiar journeys and transit. "The Psychic Journey", for example, deals with a protagonist stuck in a peculiar relationship with a woman who asks him to act as a mystical guide for a tour bus in Israel, a journey that ends with the outbreak of the Six Days War. In another story, "The Cabalist of East Broadway," the protagonist recognizes a homeless man in Manhattan as a great teacher he once knew. When he visits Israel at a later date, he finds that same man, fully kempt and again teaching. Still later, back in Manhattan, he once again sees the man homeless. These and other such stories can be found in Isaac Bashevis Singer, *The Collected Stories of Isaac Bashevis Singer.* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1982).
14. Singer, 65.
15. Singer, 65.

in Poland, often disjointed with stops, starts, and other uncertainties:

> I remember journeys in Poland when Jewish passengers were not allowed into the cars and I had to hang on to the handrails. I remember railway strikes when trains were halted midway for many hours and it was impossible in the dense crowd to push through to the washroom.[16]

After recounting this memory, Singer begins to develop the otherworldly atmosphere that will hover over the rest of the harrowing tale. He steps into a liminal zone, which provides the context for the bizarre night he spends in Montreal:

> The farther we went, the wintrier the landscape. The weather seemed to change every few miles. Now we went through dense fog, and now the air cleared and the sun was shining again over silvery distances…
>
> It suddenly turned dark. The day was flickering out. The express no longer ran but crept slowly and cautiously, as though feeling its way. The heating system in the train seemed to have broken down. It became chilly and I had to put on my coat. The other passengers pretended for a while that they did not notice anything, as though reluctant to admit too quickly that they were cold. But soon they began to tap their feet, grumble, grin sheepishly, and rummage in their valises for sweaters, scarves, boots, or whatever else they had brought along. Collars were turned up, hands stuffed into sleeves. The makeup on women's faces dried up and began to peel like plaster.[17]

The transition from the familiar to the unfamiliar is described similarly to Shapiro's tale, and similarly to some of the early Jewish stories I will discuss in the next section. Notable wording related to the atmosphere in this passage include dense fog, darkness, day flickering out, and words related to a cold temperature. In the final line, the narrator offers the uncanny image of women's

16. Singer, 66.
17. Singer, 67.

faces peeling like plaster, as though they are inanimate versions of their previous humanity.

Finally, the narrator declares that we are at the end of the world, placed in an unfamiliar and potentially hazardous zone as the train makes its way closer to its destination, though still lurching and distant:

> Suddenly the train stops. I look out and see a sparse wood. The trees are thin and bent, and though they are covered with snow, they look bare and charred, as after a fire. The sun has already set, but purple stains still glow in the west. The snow on the ground is no longer white, but violet. Crows walk on it, flap their wings, and I can hear their cawing…
>
> We are not far from the Canadian border, and Uncle Sam's domain is virtually at an end.[18]

The atmosphere is one of dread. All the adjectives Singer uses to describe the journey are on the dark, cold, and unfamiliar side of the spectrum: flickering out; broken down; chilly; dried up; dense; sparse; thin; bent; bare; charred; stained. The reference to crows — black birds — adds to the dreariness while also reminding us of the carrion birds that come down in the story of Abram's vision that I discussed earlier.[19]

In the midst of Mr. N's terrifying and deadly night, Singer again develops an atmosphere of dread, this time by describing the layout of the woman's apartment as bizarre, disorienting, and impossible. In two instances, Mr. N has an uncanny encounter with the apartment itself, both times attempting to make his way to a room only to find himself back where he began. In the first instance, during the commotion immediately following the death of the sickly woman, he describes the chaos: "I started out for the room where I had slept but found myself in the kitchen. I returned and nearly threw Binele over. She was, herself, half naked. Unwittingly I touched her breast."[20] In

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18. Singer, 68.
19. See pg. 63.
20. Singer, 78.

the second instance, the narrator notes how bizarre the layout of the apartment is:

> Strangely, instead of coming to the outside door, I found myself back in my room … It was only then that I realized how cold I was and how cold it was in that house … I was ready to fight off the dead woman, to wrestle with her in mortal combat … I thought that Binele would find two corpses when she returned, instead of one.[21]

Both Shapiro and Singer utilize transit — the former by sea and the latter by rail — to accomplish two things: first, they disorient the reader by describing the route in terms related to the bizarre, to the foggy, to the unusual; words that relate to that atmosphere I have so far described. The other reason for this description of the route is to launch the reader into the Otherworld, or at least the realm that is only thinly veiled from the Otherworld. As the protagonists make their journey, described in the way it is, the reader, too, leaves behind the familiar and accepts the unusual encounters that follow.

Chava Rosenfarb takes this route as well in the early paragraphs of "Edgia's Revenge".[22]There, her narrator uses the image of survivors wandering by foot and by truck through the post-war German wasteland to transport us into this zone of alterity:

> I then drifted from one end to the other of that devastated German countryside, trying to escape from myself and from others, regardless of whether they were the conquerors or the conquered. The sight of a human face disgusted me. But with the passing of time, loneliness set up such a howling inside me that I could no longer endure it, and I attached myself to a group of former concentration camp inmates who were wandering from one camp to another in search of relatives. They had come from the English Zone, and not one of them was a native of my hometown.[23]

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21. Singer, 79.
22. This is only one example of characters on journeys in Rosenfarb's corpus. In other stories, Rosenfarb's protagonists take life-altering voyages to a number of places, including the Laurentians once again ("A Cottage in the Laurentians"), the Canadian Rockies in Alberta ("Last Love"), and Macchu Picchu in Peru ("François"). All of these are found in the same volume as "Edgia's Revenge", *Survivors* (2004).
23. Rosenfarb, 83.

Soon after, Rella relates a specifically liminal image that places these survivors directly on a boundary: "Along with my group of wanderers I was sitting on the edge of an unploughed field near the highway. The normal means of transportation had not yet been restored."[24] These two short sentences convey five ideas related to liminality: the group of wanderers; the edge of the field; the fact that the field is one that would typically be ploughed but is not yet; the highway; and the fact that the means of transportation are meant to be restored but are early in that process.

Rella continues narrating along these lines even after she makes it to Canada and begins a new life, perpetually with one foot in the present and one stuck in the past. This position, stuck between the two, results in a foggy mind for the protagonist. Again utilizing words that reveal Rella's status as betwixt and between, Rella remembers, "It was at this time that I really began to suffer from insomnia. During the course of the day I wandered about as if I were drunk. I found myself inhabiting two worlds at the same time, tormented by all kinds of visions and hallucinations."[25]

The social circle of which Rella becomes an integral part is made up of other Holocaust survivors, and both Rella and the group spend much of the story attempting to escape the past. They do so by acculturating themselves with music, lectures, marijuana smoking, and theatre outings, but they also do so through travel. In the earlier days of their group, they take trips out to the Laurentians to join a yoga guru at his ashram. When Edgia and Rella build a friendship after the death of Lolek, they spend every weekend ascending and descending Mount Royal before returning to Edgia's apartment. Eventually, they spend weekends in the Laurentians, where Edgia insists on climbing mountains at a frantic pace, eventually leading to her second husband Pavel's

24. Rosenfarb, 84.
25. Rosenfarb, 99.

heart attack. When Edgia ends her friendship with Rella, leaving her totally alone in the world, Rella relates that "the last news I had of Edgia and Pavel was that they had liquidated all their assets and set off on a long voyage around the world."[26] In the closing moments of the story, Rella takes that theme and applies it while reflecting on her reasons for ingesting the sleeping pills she keeps on her person at all times. "And now I too," she says, "am about to embark on a long voyage, a voyage which Edgia precipitated by removing herself from my life."[27]

In her closing statement, Rella reminds the reader of the liminal zone they have been inhabiting as they followed her story. First, she reflects on why she had come to Canada: "This is why I ran away to this remote corner of the world, hoping that the frost which is native to this land would freeze the word [*kapo*] into oblivion, or that the snow would erase it."[28] In her attempt to escape her past and the label that was placed on her like the mark of Cain, Rella had gone to this "remote corner," what she thought was far away from civilization and where she thought she could live beyond the margins. And finally, she explicitly places her entire experience in Canada — several decades in fact — as a liminal stage between two traumas: "The slice of life which I managed to sandwich in between the two camps — the camp that was forced upon me in the past, and the one that I am about to force on myself — was not tasty, nor worth the price I paid for it."[29]

Klein's "A Myriad-Minded Man" also includes globe-trotting.[30] The protagonist's narrative begins with a lengthy march down Saint-Laurent Boulevard, which was the heart of the Montreal Jewish

26. Rosenfarb, 163.
27. Rosenfarb, 163.
28. Rosenfarb, 163.
29. Rosenfarb, 163.
30. This is not the only example of Klein's interest in globetrotting characters. His best-known work, the 1951 novel *The Second Scroll*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), has to do with a semi-autobiographical character who attempts to track down his mysterious Uncle Melech, a mystical figure of whom he knows very little. His travels take him all the way around the Mediterranean, to Rome, Morocco, and finally Israel, where he feels like a stranger in the newly formed Homeland of the Jewish people.

quarter at the time. After his initial reflections on the mysterious character of Isaiah Ellenbogen, the narrator begins his story proper by describing the hectic journey to his favourite deli. Klein places his characters in a sea of bodies, requiring them to bob and weave through the crowd, distorting the proportions of their own bodies, to reach their destination:

> Pushed this way and that, elbowed hither and thither, the progress that we did make on our way we achieved by walking on our toes, holding our breath so as to elongate ourselves into slimness, reducing ourselves to profiles and thus stealing through the clefts that remained between body and hurried body.[31]

The character for whom the story is named, Isaiah Ellenbogen, is in a perpetual state of transit. When our protagonist encounters him in that deli, he is visiting from out of town. He spent time in a small Jewish town in Russia prior to the Revolution, the stories from which we will cover in the following section. The town itself was in a state of transition, just then receiving some of the benefits of modernity; the most notable of these being a railway station. Some time after their meeting, Ellenbogen is understood to be living somewhere in the prairies working legal cases. From there, he works for a traveling circus, followed by a stint working for an antisemitic newspaper in Toronto. The last we hear of him, he has sailed on a voyage "thousands of miles" with the acclaimed cult leader and con man Trebitsch-Lincoln.[32]

Two of our more recent stories deal with transit in an interesting way. Both engage with the theme from the perspective of teenagers reflecting on their parents' unusual relationship with travel. While movement is a part of any narrative (save, perhaps, for a stage play that takes place in a single set), Bender's "Dreaming in Polish" and Stollman's "Die Grosse Liebe" have to do with

31. Klein, 126.
32. Klein, 153.

peculiar attitudes — obsession in Bender and phobia in Stollman — surrounding travel. In her introductory remarks, Bender's narrator reflects,

> This summer was the one where I worked in the hardware store, and my mother talked only about going to Washington, D.C., to ride on the cattle cars at the newly inaugurated Holocaust Museum there. Apparently this museum had the best simulation of Auschwitz in the world.[33]

Whereas Singer's narrator is forced into his memories of the camps, Bender's characters seek to simulate the harrowing train rides back in Eastern Europe, as an experience they cannot understand or imagine.

The mother then begins to wander around in her spare time. The protagonist explains, "My mother had been taking long walks to nowhere. She would leave the house in the afternoon and call me two or three hours later from a phone booth. I would drive and get her."[34] Her two obsessions, the wandering, and the cattle cars, are joined together near the end of the story when she calls her daughter once again, not from a phone booth a few miles away, but from Washington, D.C., insisting that her daughter put her ill father on a train to meet her there. The protagonist agrees, reflecting, "I imagined her relaxing into the cattle car, arm around my blanketed father as they prepared to experience simulated genocide."[35]

But her mother is not the only one who behaves peculiarly regarding movement and transit. The narrator begins to utilize bizarre behaviour related to movement as a coping mechanism as well. After her father takes a tumble, giving her a scare, she relates the following:

> I stepped into the backyard and ran and ran little tight circles around the lemon tree, leaning my head in to increase the centripetal force, trusting this would prevent me from

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33. Bender, 281.
34. Bender, 286.
35. Bender, 290.

> running away. I wondered if there was a train waiting at the train station, going to someplace beautiful; I wondered if the conductor had a mistress that he kept in the caboose. I imagined him stepping through the cars to reach her, train shaking, going to see her, going to make love to her in the shaking long train, and I kept making the train longer, pushing him back, ten cars, twenty cars, an impossible length before he can see her, and I pushed him and pushed him until I heard my mother open the front door.[36]

In the closing moment of the story, she again engages in this strange running ritual, this time in the middle of the night and around a statue in the town square.

> The night was warm and clear, all the lights off in the neighbourhood, front lawns wide and empty. I walked through the streets counting the sidewalk squares over and over under my feet until I reached a thousand, which brought me right to the middle of the center square. And there was the Greek statue looming under its sheet. I stood quietly at its base, and looked around. The park was empty, only trees and circles of splintering wooden benches surrounding me. Even under the sheet, the statue commanded the space. I began to run in front of it, back and forth in tight rows.
>
> "I'm going to do something," I warned, back and forth in front of the pedestal. Windows in the distance were dark, people sleeping, holding their wishes in tightly. I could hear my breath mounting as I ran faster. "I'm going to show him," I yelled, louder this time. The silence was great and empty. I ran for a moment more, faster, faster, then stopped abruptly in front of the base of the statue, and stilled my body.[37]

Save for the narrator's father, who is bedridden, the two other players in the main narrative seem to find solace and calm only when they are moving. The narrator is only able to "still [her] body" when she performs this peculiar ritual, while the mother wanders aimlessly until she arrives at the locus of her obsession, the simulated cattle cars in Washington.

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36. Bender, 287.
37. Bender, 291.

In Stollman's story, by contrast, movement is not a panacea. The narrator's mother appears to be agoraphobic, spending all her time at home until the death of her husband, which forces her out into the world. He explains:

> As far as I knew, neither of my parents ever went to the movies, although I was allowed to do so. And except for one other occasion, the days leading up to my father's funeral were the only times I could remember my mother leaving the vicinity of our house. She had never gone shopping or out for a walk. I cannot recall her ever taking me to school. I never thought to question this behaviour. I had simply accepted it as an aspect of her personality.[38]

Later, reflecting on that one other occasion, the narrator tells us, "Only once, before my father died, can I remember my mother leaving our house. One holiday, I believe it was Yom Kippur or Rosh Hashanah, when I was eight or nine, my father insisted we all go to the synagogue in town."[39] When she does venture out of the house for that holiday, she moves with "uncharacteristic awkwardness, constantly looking down at her shoes."[40] Finally, after his father dies and his mother ventures out of the house to run the business, the narrator thinks in explicit terms about how his mother had been:

> I was puzzled, not because of the sudden and astonishing discarding of what clearly was some form of phobia. I never thought in such psychological terms when I was a child. I was puzzled mainly because it was three miles downtown to my father's store and my mother did not drive.[41]

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38. Stollman, 265-6.
39. Stollman, 272.
40. Stollman, 272.
41. Stollman, 275.

Even when she does leave the house, the relationship between his mother and movement is uneasy. Before, she simply would not go; then, when she did go one time, it was with uncharacteristic awkwardness; finally, when it became a regular occurrence, it was still strange, in that she would travel without a car (she did not know how to drive). Even when she does make a regular habit of leaving the house, he notes that "She did not, as far as I knew, go anywhere else. I believe the store must have been for her an extension of our home."[42] In the end, the reason for her agoraphobia becomes clear when the mysterious woman enters the shop and accuses her of being a traitor during the war.

The last two stories, Almond's "A Dream of Sleep" and the first portion of Samuel's *The Mystics of Mile End*, deal less with the theme of movement and wandering, but when they do, the otherworldly atmosphere prevails. Almond's protagonist, Wolf, sets his life up so that he rarely needs to leave the cemetery for which he is the groundskeeper. He goes as far as retrofitting a little building at the cemetery as a small house so he can live on the grounds. Almond uses the rare time he does leave to illustrate temporal transition and the ways in which the cemetery becomes an anachronistic property, leading to the secondary storyline of the owner trying to sell it:

> When the bank and barber closed, he climbed onto a trolley. And when the city's trolley service ceased, its tracks ripped out of the ground and piled like burnished femurs, Wolf found a bus to serve the same purpose. Asphalt and pavement seemed to wash outwards from the roads, inviting a greater flow of cars. The air swirled with acrid tar. Wires snarled overhead. In the near distance, cranes pieced together the skeletons of skyscrapers.[43]

42. Stollman, 275.
43. Almond, 195.

In another instance, in one of Wolf's dreams, the image of wandering is used to create the atmosphere with which we are familiar, making use of images related to darkness, death, and a liminal zone without beginning or end:

> Now he woke with distinct memories: a vulture gliding overhead on dusty wings, swooping down on Coal, its awful black claws outstretched while Wolf watched from the doorway of his cottage, unable to wrestle himself into motion. Other nights, Wolf found himself cast out, wandering a dark, featureless landscape: the stink of diesel and dead horses, eyes staring at him from dank basements, a journey with no apparent point of origin or destination, just one step after another into blue-black air.[44]

Samuel's chapter, which engages with the theme of science-and-astronomy-as-mysticism, describes the atmosphere of an evening walk home in the Hasidic neighbourhood of Mile End:

> By the time we started making our way home, the sky was dark. The streets were empty. It was Saturday night and all the Hasids were probably still in synagogue. I looked at the clouds, trying to imagine the different voices that must've been traveling on the wind and that moment — radio signals, TV signals, messages sent into outer space — but the air around us was still and silent. We turned onto our block and it was hard to believe anyone on the planet had ever spoken a single word. To reassure myself, I squeezed my eyes shut and pictured a series of zeros and ones streaming through the universe. Sammy turned her key in the lock and we said hello into the darkness of the hallway. Nobody answered. For some reason, my stomach began to ache.[45]

In this story, Samuel creates the parallel Otherworlds of kabbalistic mysticism on one hand and scientific inquiry on the other. The parallel is constant as Lev's world straddles that of mystical Judaism with Mr. Katz and Mr. Glassman, and the scientific mysteries of the universe with his best friend, Alex. In this passage, we see the melding of the two worlds as Lev describes a walk in

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44. Samuel, 23.
45. Samuel, 23.

the atmosphere with which we have become accustomed, but in terms related to science: radio signals, TV signals, messages sent into outer space, all in the neighbourhood of the mystically inclined Hasidim.

4.2 // Transit, Wandering, Betweenness, and Crossing in Earlier Jewish Tales

Thinking back to the Israelite writing of the biblical era, I have already mentioned the very start of Abraham's narrative, in which he is immediately uprooted.[46] But the entire narrative of the Hebrew Bible has to do with uprootedness, wandering, movement, and betweenness. Abraham makes his way to the land promised to him (Gen. 12); his descendants leave for Egypt (Gen. 46); they escape Egypt and wander for forty years in the wilderness (Num. 14); they conquer the land promised to Abraham, but they are exiled by other nations (Jer. 52); finally, they return to rebuild the land (Ezra 1), but as we know of history, they would once more be exiled in the post-biblical era.

In later eras of Jewish writing, these themes crop up again and again. In the thirteenth century *Meshal Ha-Kadmoni*, written by Isaac Ibn Sahula, for instance, we find a tale called "The Sorcerer".[47] In the first paragraph of the story, a young man leaves Jerusalem for Egypt because no one will teach him magic. An old man agrees to teach him, but the young one desires someone closer to his age, with a fresher outlook. To show his powers, the old man (unbeknownst until the end of the story) transports the protagonist to a paradisial garden in another realm. By the end of the story, he is transported back to Egypt and the home of the sorcerer. The author makes prominent the crossing of a boundary when the young man arrives at a bridge to an unknown city:

> He walked the whole length of the garden. When he reached the end, he looked around and spied a bridge, built in perfect proportions, with two towers painted red, also perfect in form. There he stood, contemplating the sight, struck dumb with wonder.

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46. See Pg. 63.
47. In Stern and Mirsky, 295-312.

> He said to himself, "Let me dart across this bridge quick as an eagle. Perhaps on the other side I'll find an inhabited place, perhaps even a handsome and proud city." He ran across the bridge. On the other side he found a large, splendid city with fine markets and squares crowded one row after another with every kind of artisan.[48]

As in the "Tale of the Jerusalemite," the protagonist finds himself an outsider in a strange place to which he has been transported. By the end of the story, having achieved greatness in this other realm, he is transported back to Egypt: no time has passed, and it was all a strange vision. He then agrees to study "magic and Chaldean lore" with the sorcerer.[49]

This idea of sudden transportation to another place features prominently in Hasidic lore and is mentioned in the Talmud well before that. In fact, it even has a term ascribed to it: *Kefitzat ha-Derech*, meaning "contraction of the road." The Talmud states in *Sanhedrin* 95b:1-2,

> The Sages taught in a *baraita* with regard to land contracting to shorten a journey: For three individuals the land contracted, and each one miraculously reached his destination quickly: Eliezer, servant of Abraham, and Jacob our forefather, and Abishai, son of Zeruiah. The Gemara elaborates: The case of Abishai, son of Zeruiah, is that which we said. The case of Eliezer, servant of Abraham, is as it is written: "And I came that day to the well."[50] His intention was to say to the members of Rebecca's family that on that day he left Canaan and on the same day he arrived, to underscore the miraculous nature of his undertaking on behalf of Abraham. The case of Jacob our forefather is as it is written: "And Jacob departed from Beersheba and went to Haran,"[51] and it is written thereafter, ostensibly after he arrived in Haran: "And he encountered [*vayyifga*] the place, and he slept there, for the sun had set."[52] This means that when Jacob arrived at Haran, he said: Is it possible that I bypassed a place where my forefathers prayed and I did not pray there? He sought to return to Beit El. Once he contemplated in his mind to return, the

48. In Stern and Mirsky, 302.
49. In Stern and Mirsky, 309.
50. Gen 24:42.
51. Gen 28:10.
52. Gen 28:11.

> land contracted for him, and immediately: "And he encountered the place," indicating that he arrived there unexpectedly, sooner than he would have arrived without a miracle.[53]

In *Sefer Hasidim*,[54] the compiled writings of the 13th century Rabbi Judah the Hasid (not to be confused with the later Hasidic movement), the author utilizes tales and parables to promulgate his worldview to his followers. Here again, the image of characters wandering or in transit is prominent, and the road is utilized as a setting in itself. One such story begins,

> The story of a man who was riding alone at night. The moon was shining as he rode in the desert. He suddenly saw a large convoy of many wagons. There were people sitting on the wagons, and others pulling them. As he approached, the man realized that some of the people were dead.
>
> He asked them, "How is it that some of you are pulling the wagons all night and others are sitting on them?"
>
> They replied, "It is because of our sins. When we were alive in that other world, we consorted with women and virgins. Now we pull a wagon until we are so exhausted we can pull no longer. Those riding on the wagons then get off, and we get up to rest. Then they pull us until they are exhausted. Afterward, they do the same."[55]

In another tale, the first words again include a journey: "A certain Jew took a long journey. Another Jew saw in a dream that angels were weighing the Jew who had gone on the journey in one pan of a scale against his sins in the other pan."[56]

The *Zohar* is rife with moments on the road. It is here that many of the great revelations occur to the key character, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, and his disciples. Of these moments, Eitan

53. *Sanhedrin* 95b:1-2.
54. Selections in Stern and Mirsky, 215-238.
55. In Stern and Mirsky, 228.
56. In Stern and Mirsky, 229.

Fishbane writes,

> The pedestrian journey of the companions is an unstructured quest for the secrets of the Torah—a pilgrimage that is marked at key moments by the entrance of a new source of mystical wisdom and disclosure, a new figure who can open the secrets in unexpected ways. The concealed nature of the sage's identity remains significant in the companions' interpretation of the encounter; the perceived otherworldly character of the stranger is deemed integral to the revelation of secrets along the path. [57]

The road is one of the central loci for spiritual growth. The characters may encounter an otherworldly being, or a sage who teaches them secrets of the Torah. In a tale that Fishbane describes as "a cosmic drama and a return to an evocation of the *mysterium tremendum*,"[58] the landscape speaks to the companions:

> They walked, and came upon a mountain. The sun was setting, and the branches of the mountain trees were rustling in song.
>
> As they were walking, they heard a powerful voice that was saying: "Holy divine sons (*benei elahin qadishin*)! Those who have been scattered among the living of this world! Luminaries, sons of the [heavenly] Academy—assemble in your places to delight with your master in Torah!"
>
> They were afraid—they stood in their places, and then sat down. Meanwhile, a voice went forth as before and said: "Powerful rocks, exalted hammers! The Master of colors is embroidered with designs, standing on a platform. Enter and assemble!"
>
> At that moment they heard the great and powerful voice of the tree-branches saying (Ps. 29:5): *The voice of YHVH breaks cedars*. R. Elazar and R. Abba fell on their faces, and a great fear descended upon them. They arose with trepidation, continued walking, and did not hear anything more. They left the mountain and walked on.[59]

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57. Fishbane, *The Art of Mystical Storytelling*, 130-131.
58. Fishbane, 132-133.
59. *Zohar* 1:7a-7b, in Fishbane, 133.

The hagiography of the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism in the 18th century, written by Dov Baer ben Samuel, also contains numerous accounts of the Hasidic master's wanderings and roadside occurrences. When the Baal Shem Tov became an adult, he gained a desire for wandering. After he married a rabbi's daughter, he took her on the road and "they wandered about the country."[60] At one point during this time, "He was absorbed in his thoughts for three days and three nights, and he was not aware that he was walking. Then he realized that he was in a vast desert, remote from his own place. He was surprised that he had wandered to this desert, and he thought that his wandering was probably not without meaning"[61] When they return seven years later, his wife tells her brother, "We wandered from village to village and were beset with many troubles.'[62]

The Baal Shem Tov's great-grandson, Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, was one of the greatest of all Jewish storytellers and is understood to be one of the originators of what became Yiddish and modern Jewish literature.[63] His followers copied down all his stories, but they also recorded the dreams he would tell them. I will offer a more in-depth view of Rabbi Nachman's dreams shortly, but I will just mention one here.

A guest came into a man's home. During their conversation, the homeowner mentioned that he wanted to "achieve some true rung of holiness."[64] The visitor agreed to teach him, but said that he had to leave, requesting that the man lead him to the doorway. When they exited the dwelling, the visitor grabbed him and pulled him up into the sky, and they flew together. The visitor gave him a garment and told him all would be well. When the householder looked around,

60. ben Samuel, *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov*, 22.
61. ben Samuel, 24.
62. ben Samuel, 26.
63. David G. Roskies, *A Bridge of Longing: The Lost Art of Yiddish Storytelling*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 25.
64. In Mirsky and Stern, *Rabbinic Fantasies*, 339.

he saw that he was back in his house, talking to people and eating and drinking. When he looked around again, he was back in the air. Again, he looked around, and he was back home. Again, he looked around, and he was in the air, and so on and so forth, until he let himself down between two mountains. In the valley between the mountains, he found a book with pictures of instruments, and inside the instruments were letters. He climbed the mountain, and at the top he found a tree of gold. The final moments of the dream unfold as follows:

> He wondered greatly about all this, not understanding how he was here in one minute but there in the next. He wanted to tell someone about it, but how do you tell people about something as unbelievable as this? Looking out the window, he saw the guest walk by. "Come in," he said, but the other replied, "I have no time, for I am going to see you."
>
> "Even this is a shock. I'm right here and you say you're going to see me?"
>
> "In the moment you agreed to go with me, to accompany me to the doorway, I took your soul from you and gave it a garment from the lower rung of paradise. Only the lower parts of your spirit remained with you. That is why you can be there when you turn your thoughts there; you are able to draw illumination into yourself. But when you return here, you are here."
>
> I do not know what world he was from, though surely it was from the good. The matter has not yet been ended or concluded.[65]

Transit, wandering, betweenness, sudden transportation, and being in two places at once are prominent liminal themes in Jewish writing. They crop up in stories ranging from the biblical era, through the Talmudic and medieval, into the early modern period and beyond. As we will soon see, they are also prominent in the short stories we will analyze.

65. In Stern and Mirsky, 340.

4.3 // Darkness, Dreariness, and Night

Markers of the liminal bleed into each other. Darkness, dreariness, and night are often related to transitional zones and wandering, but they also appear in other contexts. In "At Sea," some of those instances, already mentioned in the transit section, included overcast, desolate, and dirty skies; chaos; restless, thick-dark waves; the gloom of a mournful sea; darkness; clamminess; stark-blind and foggy. But the night-time atmosphere continues further throughout the story. Soon after that preamble, the narrator continues describing the night he spends on deck:

> Ever more deeply the surrounding night closes in upon us. Quietly and fearfully our ship groans; from time to time it sobs like a sleeping child. Yet it sails on. With no trace of a helmsman, driven by secret powers, like a somnambulist the vessel moves onward in its slumber.[66]

The deck is empty, the protagonist totally alone. Here, "face to face, the sea and I share a long, long sleepless night."[67] The narrator goes as far as entering into conversation with the night itself. "Come hither, brother!" he tells the night. "Give me your mighty, ice-cold hand. As great and strong as you are, so small and frail am I. I am as weak and helpless as you are limitlessly powerful. But however fearful your agitation may be, I am a thousand, thousand times more perturbed and restless."[68] He continues this debate with the silent night, arguing about who has the most sway over the other:

> See! You rarely force your way into various of my towns and villages. More than once, on the other hand, I've ventured across your length and breadth, I've searched your depths, and I've found you're too small for me. When you're angered, then — truly! — death glares from your eyes. But for my part, when wildness overcomes me, the

66. Shapiro, 161.
67. Shapiro, 161.
68. Shapiro, 161.

lightnings of madness flash from mine![69]

Finally, the night seems to respond to his challenge after remaining silent at first:

> White fog encircled our vessel, crept onto the deck, over our faces, into our bones. The propeller churned ponderously and with greater precision. A harsh, raw whistle soared from the deck into the fog—a second whistle, a third, a tenth and more. Each went in search of its lost brother, and like them was swallowed up in turn ... a silent dogged dread. The ear pricks up of its own accord. The eye scans the close distance in vain.[70]

In that passage, the narrator utilizes the sights and sounds that are common to the maritime experience — fog, whistling, silence — to personify the night and intimate that it is conversing with the narrator.

Soon after, Shapiro places the narrator's mind between the home he has left and his destination in an extended passage that describes the exact moment that the middle of the night passes, another instance in which one of our authors relates the theme of wandering to that of darkness and night:

> The night has grown wet. A thin, pale drizzle of unknown origin drives into the darkness, slowly merging with it, washing it ever grayer. The drab depths blur the vision, making it more and more difficult to distinguish any defined feature. One imagines the air crowded with unidentifiable trembling, fluttering creatures; that soon, very soon, one will glimpse a few soft, rounded forms that evaporate before they come to rest, that die before they are born. That unforgettable crepuscular moment has arrived when the flow of time halts between the night that has been and the day that may be; when the angel of sleep pours out upon the earth the full potency of his enchantment; when during the Days of Awe, sleepy Jews in my shtetl wander like night-spirits along the darkened streets to the synagogue, dreaming as they walk. Several taps of our old beadle's wooden mallet reach

69. Shapiro, 161.
70. Shapiro, 161.

> my ears, sounds that were born when I was still a child, that for many years sought me across the world, and that have now caught up with me in the middle of the foaming sea—and my heart beats faster in response. The long, long distant past and the brief, transitory present merge. The real world turns into a dream and dreams become reality. The dozing little houses of my dear shtetl twirl and rock around our ship, the old synagogue, its ancient, attenuated guelder rose struggling for life next to it, swims past.[71]

The unnamed narrator describes the descent of night multiple times in the story. On one of these occasions, he again relates the night to the Other realm, but curiously, the otherworldly beings he mentions are vanquished by the night rather than inhabiting it.

> Then from all corners of the world shadows fly together, dark noiseless shadows that blanket the earth ever more thickly. The trolls and goblins of the day evaporate and the earth slowly revives and recovers her normal state, taking her place in the universe, in the blue endlessness. And people say: the night has come.[72]

Here, Shapiro seems to indicate that the natural state of the world, the time when all is calm and well, is during the night. This is in opposition to some of the stories I have discussed and will discuss further in the next section, in which night is the time for intense spiritual activity, when beings come out. Here, rather, night is when the "trolls and goblins of the day evaporate."

The penultimate portion of the story, the tale of Lodestar, is itself a tale of the night sky. Here, the disappearance of the most recognizable star in Earth's sky causes upheaval around the world and plunges it into confusion. Shapiro uses the new night sky to relate once more the connection between night and death, using two passages to do so. The first passage recounts that:

> In that year there were no weddings—none, not a single one. As long as young men and women sat about chatting in the evenings, they were occupied. No sooner had they fallen

71. Shapiro, 162.
72. Shapiro, 173.

> silent, however, and as their custom was, had raised their eyes to the stars, than they were abruptly confronted with a vision of horror. It seemed to them that the dead eye sockets of long-drowned corpses were staring at them, that yellow teeth were gibbering and grinning and cackling with skeletal laughter.[73]

In this passage, the night sky loses its beauty in the absence of Lodestar, instead looking like a pile of undead corpses. In the second passage, the absence of Lodestar drives people on earth to grizzly suicide:

> Of the thousand million and more people living on the earth, 347 of them reacted to this event as to their own personal injury. And what exactly did they do? They went off and took their own lives. Ninety-nine of them shot themselves, 68 took poison, 54 hanged themselves and the rest chose other modes of violent deaths.[74]

In the closing moments of “At Sea,” the narrator is visited by a dreamy fairy, the night conjuring images of the land he is leaving but is having trouble escaping mentally. The fairy tells him,

> I come from the land you are leaving, from the shtetl where you dwelt, from among the people to whom you were born. There I glanced into the window of a poor room and I saw—
>
> In the middle of the night a weak old man with a long white beard has left his bed, and half naked he stands stooped over a second bed on which his beautiful daughter is sleeping restlessly. The girl's cheeks glow fiercely, her hair is tousled, periodically her breast heaves and gasps feverishly. Every so often a nervous tremor convulses her entire body. She sees troubling, hateful dreams, but the old man has no heart to waken her to the even more hateful reality. In the darkness of the night he stands looking down at his pure flower on which a coarse, brutish hand has left a filthy blemish, and his knees buckle under him, his old head shakes in helpless senility, and his lips move silently, distorting themselves in such childish bitterness that the heavy curtain of burdensome years

73. Shapiro, 177.
74. Shapiro, 177-8.

> suddenly falls from one's eyes and one sees distinctly that selfsame child that cries so forlornly in the silence of the night, but a thousand times more desolate and powerless.[75]

Many of Shapiro's stories express criticism of Judaism as a complex used, in vain, to cope with anti-Jewish violence and the suffering of its people. It is significant, then, to note the negative coding that he employs around night. Whereas the earlier Jewish tales I will discuss in the next section contain many instances of happiness, beauty, study, and connection with positive beings in the nighttime hours, Shapiro's night is, in many instances, met by the disappearance of stars, the suicides of people worldwide, and memories of abuse and agony. In both Singer's and Almond's tales as well, we find similarly negative coding, this time in stories about Holocaust survivors. There again, protagonists disillusioned with the spiritual aspects of Judaism due to the trauma of anti-Jewish violence find that night can be an intimidating and terrifying place.

Singer flips Jewish tradition on its head by employing negative coding around his narrator's nighttime experience in much the same way. Whereas the Baal Shem Tov would spend every night deep in study, trance, and meditation, Singer's Mr. N similarly spends his night sleepless, though in a much more negative light. Rather than staying up to connect with the otherworldly and study the mysteries of the universe, the narrator is stuck awake, transported back to the trauma he survived back in Europe. As in Shapiro's story, the night takes on a life of its own, serving in some ways as a character in itself.

I have already described the lurching of the train from New York to Montreal, a transition marked not only by the inching down the rail from one destination to the other but by the turn from day to night. "Twilight lingers for a while, then night falls," and the rest of the story takes place in

75. Shapiro, 180.

the dark. Once that happens, the transition to a zone straddling the Other realm continues: after the narrator notes that "the world outside seems to have disappeared," he enters into a liminal zone brought on by the alcohol he is drinking and the darkness of the night:

> Drunken fumes rise from an empty stomach to the brain. I am awake and dozing at the same time. Whole minutes drift away, leaving only a blur. I hear talk, but I don't quite know what it means. I sink into blissful indifference. For my part, the train can stand here for three days and three nights … Various themes float through my mind. Something within me mutters dreamlike words and phrases.[76]

When he does finally arrive at the station in the middle of the night, no one is there waiting for him, and he prepares to spend the night sitting on a bench in this place. But contrary to his expectations, the woman he describes as old and deformed arrives with her daughter, ready to bring Mr. N back to their home. The woman talks and talks until her daughter insists that they head home as the night is already nearly done. To this she offers a response that connects sleep to death:

> What's a night's sleep? When I was young, I used to think that if you missed a night's sleep the world would go under. But Hitler taught us a lesson. He taught us a lesson I won't forget until I lie with shards over my eyes. You look at me and you see an old, sick woman, a cripple, but I did hard labor in Hitler's camps.[77]

The old woman's attitude towards sleep — that one must take advantage of an opportunity even when it will lead to a long sleepless night — is set in opposition to the narrator's perspective. Just a few pages later, the narrator laments his insomnia: "If only I could sleep!" he thinks to himself. "I had not slept the previous night either. When I have to make a public appearance, I don't sleep

76. Singer, 68.
77. Singer, 71.

for nights. … I tried to close my eyes, but they kept opening by themselves."[78] Immediately after, he too connects sleep to death, this time through a description reminiscent of the latter: "I lay there, silent, stiff, wide-awake."[79]

The next moment that he spends awake in solitude is particularly notable. In earlier Jewish tales, one finds the middle of the night as a time, not only for sleeplessness, study, and reflection, but for transportation — to other places on earth, to the heavenly realm, or to other zones. Rabbis, wonderworkers, and those touched by the divine would find themselves in a variety of destinations through a variety of means of transportation. Mr. N does the very same thing, but as a Holocaust survivor, the transportation that had been so positively coded in earlier tales is infected with trauma. In his last moment of solitude before the drama of the night breaks loose,

> I imagined myself somewhere in Treblinka or Maidanek. I had done hard labour all day long. Now I was lying on a plank shelf. Tomorrow there would probably be a "selection," and since I was no longer well, I would be sent to the ovens…[80]

The descent into trauma continues when the old woman dies in the middle of the night and Mr. N and her daughter, Binele, scramble around the apartment in the dark. Now that he feels the full despair of a seemingly endless night, he wonders, "How long could a night last, even a winter night? Would the sun never rise? Could this be the moment of that cosmic catastrophe that David Hume had envisaged as a theoretical possibility?"[81] The night finally seems to be ending when he describes that transitional moment that hearkens morning: "The night outside was already intermingled with blurs of daylight… A street lamp glimmered in the distance, but it cast no light

78. Singer, 76.
79. Singer, 76.
80. Singer, 77.
81. Singer, 80.

…One half was still full of stars; the other was already flushed with morning."[82]

When the morning does come and he can finally rest, Mr. N puts into words the bizarre zone he has inhabited for the prior hours, one in which time and space, and life and death, went in all directions. In this passage, he describes his transportation back in time not as imaginary, but "as though by magic." Liminal language is used to show that his protagonist has not truly left Poland; he is between two worlds, half asleep, alive but amongst the dead, even standing at the threshold between two rooms in the apartment:

> I sat down on a chair and kept my eyes away from the dead woman. Binele dressed herself. Ordinarily I would be afraid to remain alone with a corpse. But I was half frozen, half asleep. I was exhausted after the miserable night. A deep despair came over me. It was a long, long time since I had seen such wretchedness and so much tragedy. My years in America seemed to have been swept away by that one night and I was taken back, as though by magic, to my worst days in Poland, to the bitterest crisis of my life. I heard the outside door close. Binele was gone. I could no longer remain sitting in the room with the dead woman. I ran out to the kitchen. I opened the door leading to the stairs. I stood by the open door as though ready to escape as soon as the corpse began to do those tricks that I had dreaded since childhood… I said to myself that it was foolish to be afraid of this gentle woman, this cripple who had loved me while alive and who surely did not hate me now, if the dead felt anything. But all the boyhood fears were back upon me.[83]

Similarly, in "Edgia's Revenge," Rella's guilt is often illustrated by ideas related to night, sleeplessness, and other dreary modes of being, like foggy dreams, nightmares, and hallucinations. She remembers her time in the camps as a pre-dawn, the transitional moment between night and day.

Rella, like Mr. N, suffers from terrified insomnia: "My sleepless nights were steeped in

82. Singer, 80.
83. Singer, 82.

horror. And when sleep would not come, and I tossed and turned on my bed, I ached for the proximity of another human being and yearned to feel the touch of warm skin against my skin."[84] She eventually receives the sleeping pills she keeps on her person at all times, waiting for the moment that she decides to end her life. The strong link between sleep and death is clear.

In recounting the memories of her time in the camps, Rella describes each encounter as happening in that moment before first light. In her writing about one such moment, Rosenfarb offers the full gamut of sensorial experience as she places the reader directly within the zone of alterity that was the camp:

> A sandy, smoky, phantasmagoria whirled ceaselessly before my eyes: whistles, shouts, the barking of dogs, barracks, chimneys—and faces. Faces like stones, stones like faces revolved before my eyes like the dislodged cobbles of a disintegrating pavement. From pre-dawn twilight until late into the evening the five hundred women of my barrack loaded stones onto lorries and transported them from one place to another.[85]

This short passage touches upon all five senses: sight (the phantasmagoria whirling before Rella's eyes); sound (dogs barking); smell and taste (smoke and chimneys); and touch (faces like stone). She places all of this temporally as starting before dawn. In two memories that follow this one, she again places the reader in that dark moment right before the sun comes up. In one of those moments, we read, "I settled my personal account with heaven one bleak dawn before sunrise as we were marching in our columns past the men's camp on our way to work."[86] In the final instance — one of her final memories of the camp — Rella relates, "In the dark before dawn I could sense how deeply my chutzpah had shocked him. The same bleak pre-dawn he came up to me at our

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84. Rosenfarb, 120.
85. Rosenfarb, 88.
86. Rosenfarb, 89.

work place."[87]

Like *The Mystics of Mile End*, Klein's "A Myriad-Minded Man" intermingles science and mysticism in its presentation of the mysterious Isaiah Ellenbogen. Ellenbogen expounds on the ways in which ideas that were formerly based in mysticism or superstition have scientific explanations, such as the connection between illness-causing demons and germ theory. He does not say this, however, to disparage the ancients; rather, he celebrates their ingenuity in conceptualizing solutions to these questions in the terms available to them in their time.

One of his lengthier stories of the collision between more traditional modes of thought and modernity concerns midnight events at the synagogue in the small Jewish town on the cusp of modernity, in which he lived in Russia. As in earlier Jewish sources, the midnight hour is seen as a time of great spiritual activity:

> A rumour was spread that the synagogue was haunted. Tradition has it, of course, that at midnight the souls of the departed leave their graves, and robed in their cerements, as in prayer shawls, dance on the floor of the synagogue, singing the Lord's hallelujahs. The townspeople were certain that this was happening to their place of worship. The Shamas even asserted that he had heard noises and seen lightning-flashes in the synagogue. Between Mincha and Maariv, the old Jews would sit in a corner of the synagogue near the bookcases and tell in hushed whispers of similar occurrences that had happened in the days of their grandfathers. The serious-minded would quote Scripture on the necessity of appeasing these spirits and finding for them their merited rest in the Eternal Home.[88]

This phenomenon continues in the synagogue for many nights. Believing that this occurrence was related to the poor quality of their texts, the town's Jews buried "the thumbed pages, the holy

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87. Rosenfarb, 90.
88. Klein, 139.

shemoth in their cemetery."[89] But even this does nothing. As the seasons turn, the story plays even further on an atmosphere of desolation. "Especially on autumn nights," he explains, "when an eeriness pervaded everywhere, and when the leaves of the trees in the synagogue-court kept falling monotonously, and when the wind beat against the loose boards and the rattling eaves of the house of worship, were these phenomena visible."[90]

It seems that Klein is trying his hand at a traditional haunted house tale here, and, as in a traditional haunted house tale, an eccentric hero proves valuable. First, the strongman of the community, the blacksmith, braves the night and decides to find out what's happening in the synagogue. At midnight, the man enters and has a seemingly otherworldly experience:

> he quivered from head to toe, and from his frightened gasps one gathered that as soon as he came before the Ark of the Covenant a great flash of light hit him between the eyes, and a moment after, he found himself in darkness. In his haste to escape from the spirits encompassing, he had fallen over benches and bruised himself severely.[91]

Ellenbogen reports, "This incident strengthened the legend. People began to believe even more firmly than before that the synagogue was haunted."[92] A peculiar man by the name of Chatzkel moves at sloth-like speed, a trait that proves valuable one midnight. Chatzkel slowly makes his way into the dark building, "a slow shadow stalking into the synagogue. He was still in darkness; but as he approached the Ark of the Covenant which was near to the pulpit, and stepped on a creaking board, a ray of light suddenly illuminated the house of worship."[93] In taking his steps so carefully, Chatzkel learns that the "haunting" in the synagogue was merely faulty electrical work

89. Klein, 139.
90. Klein, 140.
91. Klein, 140.
92. Klein, 141.
93. Klein, 141.

that was being triggered at night. The townsfolk, not understanding the march of modernity, had applied their folk beliefs to something that was scientific in nature.

The final moment of "Dreaming in Polish" also takes place at night. The narrator engages in a peculiar habit of wandering exactly a thousand steps to the town square, and then running back and forth in front of the statue, always in the middle of the night when everyone is sleeping.

Stollman's "Die Grosse Liebe" also features peculiar nighttime moments. The narrator builds the atmosphere of the living room where his mother reveals her favourite movie on the night of his father's death. This moment is the most important of the narrator's life, one to which he returns constantly, not only reliving but rebuilding and constructing the dreamlike memory in his mind. Throughout the story, he builds the living room for his reader, allowing us to inhabit this fuzzy, dimly lit zone. In the beginning of the story, the narrator describes the significance of that moment in that place:

> The revelation that my mother even had a *Lieblingsschauspielerin* — a favourite actress — was a complete surprise and came on the evening after my father's funeral. … I was only twelve at the time of my father's unexpected death and bewildered by my mother's strange disclosure. She had never been very talkative. But she had, on that exceptional night in my life, suddenly opened a hidden door and—I could not know it then—would permanently and just as abruptly close it again.[94]

This moment of emotional nakedness is sandwiched between an eternity of mystery that came before and lasted after, into and past the eventual death of his mother. Having described the significance of that night, Stollman sets about building the atmosphere for the reader:

> The details of our house on that day I remember vividly—the carved oak sideboard in the

94. Stollman, 265-6.

> dining room where the food had been set out on silver platters, the speckled green tiles on the kitchen floor over which the old woman passed, and the claret moiré fabric with which the living room sofa was upholstered.[95]

But it is not just the physical landscape of the house that is described; his mother's behaviour, too, could be described as ethereal. Furthermore, Stollman places the two characters between two worlds.

> The night she told me about her favourite actress in her favourite movie, my mother never looked directly at me. Her eyes skimmed the top of my head and watched the pale blue walls of our living room as if she might be seeing the very same movie, projected there by memory's light. …
>
> My initial unease at her elaborate reminiscence gave way to an odd comfort and excitement in hearing her talk to me at length as she might have with my father, *even if she was in her own world*. I had never before considered the mystery of my mother's youth and was now fascinated.[96]

As Joseph ages, his memory of that night in the living room transforms. The living room — and his memory of it — becomes a zone for him to inhabit, a world of its own for him to mold and manipulate, and it is within this world that he comes to understand and bond with a mother who has long since passed. In re-forming his memories of that night, he constructs new experiences with his mother, as if she were still alive and well. At first, he is totally aware of the falsehood of his new memories:

> After that a new memory emerged of my mother and her favourite actress in *The Great Love*. It was, I knew from the start, a false memory, but so insistent in nature that even

95. Stollman, 267.
96. Stollman, 268.

> now hardly a week goes by without its coming to mind as if it had actually happened.[97]

In one passage near the end, the narrator's memories become more ambiguous; he does not offer the reader any explicit conclusions as to whether the memories he inhabits in his later years are false or true, though he does give a sense that perhaps this memory is dubious, noting that it is only lately that the memory seems this way:

> Lately, now that I am approaching the ages of my parents' premature deaths, when I recall my mother on the night of my father's funeral, I see us sitting on the claret moiré sofa as *The Great Love* is projected on the pale blue walls of our living room. We are watching it together. My mother takes my hand and smiles. She is enjoying herself so much and she hopes I am, too.[98]

Earlier, he noted that his mother never made eye contact with him, and that she seemingly watched the film projected on the wall behind him "in her own world." Here the narrator indicates that he has joined her in that world. They are now sitting on the same side of the room, watching the film projecting on the pale blue wall together. Finally, in the closing moment of the story, the narrator does away with all previous prefaces regarding the ambiguity of his recollections and states his final memory as though it is fact:

> And then my mother turned and looked directly at me for the first time on that extraordinary night in my life. I trembled ever so slightly at the unbearable tenderness of her look. "If I had been them," my mother said, rising from the sofa, "I would gladly have sacrificed all of heaven for love.[99]

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97. Stollman, 271.
98. Stollman, 278.
99. Stollman, 279.

Like our other authors, Stollman associates night and death. The most significant memory of his life is of a particular night, and it is the night of his father's funeral. What is interesting, though, is that the memory itself has virtually nothing to do with his father's funeral. The fact that his father has passed on might be the catalyst for why his mother opened up that night, but the memory is not of his father, nor the funeral. There is simply the association between death and night.

Like Ellenbogen's story of the synagogue, this story evokes the theme of haunting: "Tradition has it, of course, that at midnight the souls of the departed leave their graves." The soul of his recently departed father has not left its grave the night of his funeral, but it is rather the soul of his mother — both her mysterious past and her actual soul – that has left its grave to inhabit the liminal world of the pale blue living room with her son.

Sigal Samuel makes use of modern technology to create ethereal zones in her story in much the same way as does Stollman. The inside of her characters' home is regularly described as dark and dimly lit, always by artificial light. I have already noted the moment in which Lev connects science to mysticism by describing their nighttime walk home replacing the midnight spirits we have read about with "radio signals, TV signals, and messages sent into outer space." That moment ends with their arrival home, described as such: "Sammy turned her key in the lock and we said hello into the darkness of the hallway. Nobody answered. For some reason, my stomach began to ache."[100] That dark hallway is a prominent image, mentioned two other times. Later in the story, Lev relates, "Just then, I looked down the shadowy hall and saw a door opening fast."[101] After that, the hall is described again in those terms, always with a sense of mystery: "Halfway through the

100. Samuel, 23.
101. Samuel, 39.

dark hallway, I heard voices in the kitchen."[102]

The idea that light interrupts darkness, one of the prominent themes of the Zohar, appears many times in the story. When Lev initially discovers that his sister is more spiritual than their father would wish them to be, he describes the moment in exactly those terms:

> It was 8:15 on a Friday night and Sammy wasn't in the living room… Her door was open a crack so I peeked inside. The room was dark except for two white candles on the windowsill. Sammy put her hands over the flames and waved them three times, then covered her eyes and started whispering.[103]

In another instance, Lev recalls writing in his journal by the light of his flashlight. This time, he conjures his sister to his room in a house that is at times described as lonely, dark, and cold:

> I closed my journal and stuffed it under my pillow, but I didn't turn off the flashlight. Instead I pointed it at my door so that Sammy could see the light from her room across the hall. Then she would come to my room and say, using her most grown-up voice, "Lights out!" …
>
> I turned off my flashlight and she closed my door.[104]

Lev's sister Sammy has an illness (or so they describe it) that makes her sad for no reason. Throughout his story, he posits theories as to why she has this sickness. At one point he decides the reason is that "*She doesn't have a bedtime*," a conclusion he writes in his journal by flashlight. He then falls asleep.[105] Once again, a Jewish character is notable because of their nighttime activity and their unusual waking practices.

Lev's father also engages in nighttime activity. He is often absent from home in the

102. Samuel, 57.
103. Samuel, 11-12.
104. Samuel, 34.
105. Samuel, 74.

evenings because he is working. When he is home, he is usually found in his study after hours. At one point, Lev falls asleep watching TV in the living room and is awoken in the middle of the night: "When I woke up again, it was because the noise of the TV had suddenly disappeared. The silence confused me, so I opened my eyes and there was Dad, standing over me and smiling."[106] When Lev is attempting to lay the foundations of romantic interest for his father with his favourite teacher, she mentions that she likes to ride her bike at night. Upon hearing this, Lev tells her that his father loves biking at night, does it all the time, and launches into a story about the time his father woke him and his sister to go on a midnight bike ride, one in which they biked to Mount Royal and back, not getting home until sunrise.[107]

"A Dream of Sleep," too, has most of the notable action happening at night, and the fact that it takes place entirely in a cemetery again makes the natural connection between night and death. But once again, the author makes these connections rather explicit, and the idea that spirits are most active at night is brought up multiple times. In the early pages of the story, when Wolf's routine is being established by the author, the protagonist's encounters with the spiritual world are unspectacular and commonplace:

> Wolf was not a man prone to fancy. But sometimes, as he hunched to clean a sheet of marble, or set a bouquet of wildflowers at the foot of a favoured pyre, he believed he could hear a faint voice on the breeze. Once in a great while, these happy apparitions appeared outside his cottage and hovered in the moonlight.[108]

When the stranger, Ham Tallaway, arrives to tell Wolf that the cemetery is meant to close and

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106. Samuel, 12.
107. Samuel, 25.
108. Almond, 196.

become a new development, the encounter happens at night. That arrival marks a turning point in the story, one in which the voices on the breeze transition from those of spirits to those of the local youths. That transition is marked in one particular passage:

> When, some nights later, Wolf heard the voices behind his cottage, he felt certain these were the dead, roused by Tallaway's visit. But the voices sounded young, mirthful, red tongues licking the night with laughter. Coal, who inevitable woke at spirits, lay beside the stove, a curled purr. Wolf rose from the cot and fetched his trash stick and his lantern and stepped into the night. Summer, with its languid breath, was gone, but autumn had yet to arrive. A fragment of moon hung in the starless sky.[109]

But even when the source of the noises is revealed to be teenagers having sex in the cemetery, the wording used makes them out to be part of that adjacent Otherworld: "Wolf watched them retreat, sleek and graceful, as if they belonged to the night."[110] When the female from that couple continues returning at night at unpredictable intervals, she haunts him in much the same way as spirits do:

> He drank his tea and struggled not to think any further about these interruptions. But she made this impossible, for she returned to the yard just often enough to keep him in a state of nervous expectation. It was as if she had gained access to his mind and, making it her mission never to be forgotten, appeared on the very night he managed to convince himself he was free of her.[111]

When the girl ceases her visits, Wolf is plunged into a dark zone, one similar to that of Singer and Rosenfarb's protagonists, both Holocaust survivors themselves. Darkness, blurs, disconsolation, and disorientation become a feature of Wolf's lived experience. Again connecting death, night, and sleep together, Almond writes,

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109. Almond, 201.
110. Almond, 203.
111. Almond, 206-7.

> Wolf lost the pleasures of sleep. The snows began. Drifts dusted the yard. The spirits that had once danced, now coiled outside his windows, sibilant as snakes, refusing to be consoled. The darkness distended, blurred. Wolf lost track of the days, or, more precisely, they seemed to lose track of themselves. He began harbouring the conscious wish that he were no longer alive.[112]

Finally, the climax of the story, in which he delivers the girl's baby who eventually dies after being dropped, all happens in the middle of the night. Once again, the positive coding of midnight connection with the Otherworld is flipped on its head when the character experiencing it is a Holocaust survivor, a cruel twist of a trope that once signaled a time of study and joy. However negatively or positively coded these stories are, one thing is clear: the middle of the night is an important time for spiritual activity and upheaval.

4.4 // Darkness, Dreariness, and Night in Earlier Jewish Tales

> They didn't know whether it was day or night, whether they were really there or not.
>
> -Zohar 2:105b[113]

That stories take place at or refer to nighttime is no coincidence. As I have noted regarding a number of our stories, the importance and power of the nighttime hours is rather explicit. The Hasidic masters of the eighteenth and 19th centuries made a habit of doing their most important study at night, but they were not the first to do this. As early as 1800 years before the Baal Shem Tov came along, a first-century-BCE Egyptian sect of Jews known as the Therapeutae, described by Philo of Alexandria, engaged in this type of activity. This group celebrated a festival every 50th day, and they would have a banquet on the 49th before entering a state of ecstasy until the following

112. Almond, 207.
113. In Fishbane, *The Art of Mystical Narrative*, 226.

dawn. Joan E. Taylor describes their activities during those midnight banquets thusly:

> The president of the community, while reclining, gives a lecture, using allegorical interpretation, on a passage of Scripture or on a philosophical proposition. The community listens in silence, with occasional utterings of approval. […] He then stands up and sings a hymn, either an ancient one or something recently composed, and then all the others take a turn in singing, with everyone joining in for closing lines and choruses. […] After dinner, the entire company stand and join together in the middle of the dining room in two choirs, one of men and one of women, each with their own choir-leader. The leaders stand in the places of Moses and Miriam respectively who led Israel in songs of praise after the escape from Egypt (Exod. 15). Everyone sings, claps and dances, eventually forming one harmonious choir, singing songs of thanksgiving to God in an ecstatic state. At dawn they greet the arrival of the 50th day by all standing turned toward the rising sun. They pray for a bright day of truth and intellectual illumination, after which they return to their huts.[114]

The Talmud also discusses the importance of nighttime as opposed to daytime study. In *Chagigah 12b*, for example, we read about exactly this topic:

> Reish Lakish said: Whoever occupies himself with Torah at night, the Holy One, Blessed be He, extends a thread of kindness over him by day, as it is stated: "By day, the Lord will command His kindness," and what is the reason that "by day, the Lord will command His kindness"? Because "and in the night His song," i.e., the song of Torah, "is with me." And some say that Reish Lakish said: Whoever occupies himself with Torah in this world, which is comparable to night, the Holy One, Blessed be He, extends a thread of kindness over him in the World-to-Come, which is comparable to day, as it is stated: "By day, the Lord will command His kindness, and in the night His song is with me."[115]

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114. Joan E. Taylor, "Therapeutae," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed., vol. 19 (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 699–701; 700.
115. *Chagigah* 12b.

In Rabbi Judah the Hasid's 13th century *Sefer Hasidim*, much of the action occurs at night. In a tale I discussed earlier, the story of the man riding in the desert begins, "The story of a man who was riding alone at night."[116] In one tale, a father asks his son to honour him after he dies by putting aside his anger for one night. When the father dies, the son embarks on distant travels while his wife is pregnant. He arrives back one night to the sound of his wife in bed with what sounds like a young man. He unsheathes his sword but remembers his vow to his father. His patience pays off as he realizes the young man is his son, and that he has been gone long enough that the child with which his wife was pregnant has grown up.[117]

Similarly, the *Zohar* affords the midnight hours special potency. One story, which covers the topic of love in the afterlife between moments of (literal) flight, fancy, and uncovered secrets, begins with such a description:

> As the members of the Academy sat, they remarked, "Look, the night has darkened." One of them said, "Rabbi Simeon, O holy pious one, Light of the world, take a book from this case, take a lamp, write these words. The time has come when each of us must visit his grave, until midnight. For then, the Holy One, blessed be He, enters His garden to disport with the righteous, and each one flies there.[118]

The story goes on to tell of Rabbi Simeon bar Yochai's attempts to seek out divine secrets. Two messengers from the Heavenly Academy tell him that he will receive those secrets that night in a dream. In one such vision of the afterlife, we see virtuous women from the Hebrew Bible, including the Pharaoh's daughter, Moses's mother, and Deborah, each in their own hall, separated from the men. The only time that the men and women are brought together is at midnight, as we read,

116. In Stern and Mirsky, 228.
117. In Stern and Mirsky, 224.
118. "Love in the Afterlife," from *Zohar*, in Stern and Mirsky, 239-252; 243.

"Every night all of them gather as one. For the hour of coupling is in the middle of night—both in this world and in that world. The coupling of that world is the cleaving of the soul: light with light. The coupling of this world is body with body."[119]

Elsewhere in the Zohar, the practice of rising at midnight to study Torah is so commonplace that it is done without an explanation as to why. In one such passage,

> R. Ḥiyya and R. Abba were staying at an inn; they rose at midnight to engage in Torah. The daughter of the innkeeper rose and lit a candle for them. Afterward, she stood behind them to listen to words of Torah.
>
> R. Abba opened and said (Prov. 6:23): *For a commandment is a candle, the Torah is a light, and the way to life is the rebuke that disciplines. For a commandment is a candle:* Every one who engages in this world in those commandments of the Torah—with each one of those commandments a candle is arranged before him to illumine him in that world [that is coming]. *The Torah is a light*: One who is occupied with Torah attains that light from which the candle is lit. For a candle with no light is nothing at all; a light without a candle, similarly, cannot shine. It follows that each one needs the other: Action is needed to prepare the candle, and the study of Torah is necessary to light the candle. Happy is the one who is occupied with them—the light and the candle.[120]

A few centuries after the Zohar was written down, we find many other stories in which characters connect with the Other realm at night. Written sometime after 1578,[121] the story "Job's Novella" from Abraham ben Hananiah Yagel's text *A Valley and a Vision* begins with an explicit mention of night to set the stage for the rest of the story. The first sentence reads, "In a dream, in a night vision, while asleep in bed during my imprisonment, a voice called in my ears."[122]

Following in the Kabbalistic storytelling tradition, the tales of the Baal Shem Tov also

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119. In Stern and Mirsky, 248.
120. *Zohar* 2:166a, in Fishbane, 145.
121. In Mirsky and Stern, 314.
122. In Mirsky and Stern, 317.

incorporate this theme. As early as his teenage years, the Baal Shem Tov would spend his daytime hours asleep, waking after everyone else went to sleep in order to study Torah in peace. Dov Baer ben Samuel relates,

> This was his way: while all the people of house of study were awake, he slept; and while they slept, he was awake, doing his pure works of study and prayer until the time came when people would awaken. Then he would go back to sleep. They thought that he slept from the beginning until the end of the night.[123]

In yet another story, still before the Baal Shem Tov revealed himself as a wonderworker, a rabbi from another community stops at the Besht's house to rest for the night during his travels, unaware of the brilliance of his host. We read, "In the middle of the night the Besht arose. I heard that generally he slept but two hours. He sat at the base of the oven, and he did whatever he did in secret."[124] Due to his preternatural power as a sage, a brilliant light shines from the Besht as he studies, bright enough to awaken the other rabbi. The story continues, "When he came to the oven he saw the Besht sitting there and there was light shining above him. The rabbi told me personally that the light shone above the Besht like a rainbow. When the maggid saw that he fainted."[125]

Moving into the period of secular Yiddish literature, we arrive at a story by a master of storytelling, I. L. Peretz. Written in 1891, Peretz's story "Kabbalists" relates the story of Reb Yekel and his lone student, Lemech, in a dying yeshiva. Throughout their studies, they fast in order to stay up all night. In one passage, we read, "Hunger leads to sleeplessness, and night-long insomnia arouses a desire to delve into the mysteries of Kabbalah… Let the hungers be transformed into

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123. ben Samuel, 13. I have already related another story from the Baal Shem Tov's early years, that of the nighttime study with Rabbi Adam's son that ends with his death, in an earlier section, but that would be appropriate here as well. See pg. 76.
124. ben Samuel, 45.
125. ben Samuel, 46.

fasts and self-flagellation, let the gates of the world reveal their mysteries, spirits, and angels."[126]

4.5 // The World of Illusion: Dreamstates and Visions

I have discussed transit (the road, the sea, the rail) as a liminal zone that characters inhabit, and night (especially as it relates to sleep and death) as a time when such characters are most active. At the intersection of transit and (in)somnolence we find dreams, hallucinations, and visions, and as such, we have already encountered this zone in the previous sections. A prominent theme throughout Jewish writing, dreamstates remain important in several of our stories. When a character is not dreaming in the literal sense, the language of dreaming is often conjured to illustrate the mental states of individuals.

As I showed with the negative coding of nighttime wakings in some of our stories, modern authors make use of familiar motifs by adapting them to their contemporary culture. So, for example, where dreams and visions were once hallmarks of many Jewish stories, here they become metaphors for a variety of mental states: someone experiencing an episode of post-traumatic stress is "having nightmares while they are wide awake"; someone who is letting their life pass them by is "wandering, dreaming as they walk"; or an unpleasant experience is a long nightmare; and when a long period of time passes quickly, it was "like a dream." But dreams have not only been relegated to the realm of motif and metaphor, and in one story in particular, prophets continue to receive their divine knowledge through this medium, just as they did in biblical writing. Dreams do not manifest in the same ways in each story, but they do not need to: the fact of the matter is that dreams are given special importance in many stories.

Shapiro utilizes this motif throughout his story to parachute the reader into a foggy, unfamiliar zone, just as he does with his use of transit and the dark of night. In illustrating the

126. Peretz, "Kabbalists," in *The I.L. Peretz Reader*, 153.

vastness of the sea and the degree to which they have entered a liminal zone, for instance, the narrator exclaims, “Captain, captain! Are we far from land? Can we at least be certain that somewhere amidst this waste of water, dry land can still be found? Is not the earth but a dream?”[127] The narrator continues to develop the atmosphere of the sea-as-dreamstate soon after, noting, “Quiet and indistinct, like an ancient dream, an indeterminate sound emerges from an unknown source: possibly a groan, possibly a protracted yawn from a wide throat.”[128]

At one point, Shapiro’s narrator ponders what sailors of nations other than his own dream of, and in so doing he connects this dreamlike atmosphere to his own Jewishness. In the middle portion of his journey, when they are furthest from land and fully enveloped in this place where time stops and the senses dull, he thinks to himself,

> I do not know how the children of other nations dream of the sea. Possibly they dream of frightening spirits, sea serpents or mermaids — those full-bodied females from whom may God protect every faithful believer. Between ourselves, they are all wholly innocent creatures… For my own part, I keep remembering that axe which fell into the sea thousands of years before the time of Rabbah bar Bar Hana, and which even in his day had not yet touched the bottom. Very likely it has not done so even in our own time, and when I imagine that axe still plummeting ever downward and never coming to ground, I shudder.[129]

While he posits that gentiles dream of the typical superstitions of the sea, he thinks on one of the most fascinating figures of the Talmud. As Joseph Sherman explains in his footnotes to this translation, Rabbah bar Bar Hana was a third-century sage who was the subject of a number of travel legends, both by sea and by land. The stories of bar Bar Hana were popular in their day and

127. Shapiro, 160.
128. Shapiro, 161.
129. Shapiro, 171-2.

fascinated the other speakers in the Talmud.[130]

Elsewhere, the narrator describes the atmosphere as follows: "The night has grown wet. A thin, pale drizzle of unknown origin drives into the darkness, slowly merging with it, washing it ever grayer."[131] He soon transitions into the language of dreaming, however, and as he does so, he enters the realm of memory.

> That unforgettable crepuscular moment has arrived when the flow of time halts between the night that has been and the day that may be; when the angel of sleep pours out upon the earth the full potency of his enchantment; when during the Days of Awe, sleepy Jews in my shtetl wander like night-spirits along the darkened streets to the synagogue, dreaming as they walk. Several taps of our old beadle's wooden mallet reach my ears, sounds that were born when I was still a child, that for many years sought me across the world, and that have now caught up with me in the middle of the foaming sea—and my heart beats faster in response. The long, long distant past and the brief, transitory present merge. The real world turns into a dream and dreams become reality. The dozing little houses of my dear shtetl twirl and rock around our ship, the old synagogue, its ancient, attenuated guelder rose struggling for life next to it, swims past.[132]

Here, Shapiro's narrator blends three concepts, which in turn blend his reality into a liminal zone that inhabits past and present, waking and dreaming, and this world and the Otherworld. The language here, as elsewhere, disorients the reader and lands them in this transitional place he is clearly attempting to lead us: the moment between night and day; the moment when the angel of

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130. Sherman gives us the full text of the story in his footnotes: "Rabbah bar Bar Hana further related: Once we traveled on board a ship and we saw a bird standing up to its ankles in the water while its head reached the sky. We thought the water was not deep and wished to go down to cool ourselves, but a voice from heaven called out: 'Do not go down here, for a carpenter's axe was dropped into this water seven years ago and it has not yet reached the bottom. And this is not only because the water is deep but also because it is rapid.' R. Ashi said: 'That bird was Ziz-Sadai, the wild cock whose ankles rest on the ground and whose head reaches the sky, for it is written: And Ziz-Sadai is with me.' At the Messianic banquet at the End of Days, the flesh of the legendary bird Ziz will be served to the righteous together with that of the Wild Ox and Leviathan." (Babylonian Talmud, *Bava Batra*, 73b; adapted from the Soncino translation; Sherman in Shapiro, 184.)
131. Shapiro, 162.
132. Shapiro, 162.

sleep from the Otherworld descends on humans; in the Days of Awe, that is, the transition from the year that has been to the new one by way of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur; sleepy Jews like night-spirits; dreaming while awake; and most explicitly, the distant past and the present merging, as well as the key line that "the real world turns into a dream and dreams become reality."

In other stories, dreams bleed into reality. As the title indicates, dreams are a prominent theme in Almond's "A Dream of Sleep." At first, Wolf's dreams are fleeting and only ever result in a feeling rather than a memory. The author notes, "Wolf had never before remembered his dreams. True, he might awaken with a strange sense of elation, or dread, even expectation."[133] But as the story continues along, and as Wolf retreats further and further into his intense solitude, his dream life becomes more vivid and prominent. In a passage we have already visited, Almond places Wolf's dreams at the intersection of the different routes to the atmosphere we have been investigating:

> Now he woke with distinct memories: a vulture gliding overhead on dusty wings, swooping down on Coal, its awful black claws outstretched while Wolf watched from the doorway of his cottage, unable to wrestle himself into motion. Other nights, Wolf found himself cast out, wandering a dark, featureless landscape: the stink of diesel and dead horses, eyes staring at him from dank basements, a journey with no apparent point of origin or destination, just one step after another into blue-black air.[134]

In this short passage, Almond features every aspect of the world I have described: dreamstates, dark night, death, and wandering. In another passage soon after, Almond connects dreams to memories as a locus for a sort of time warp. As was the case with Shapiro, and as will be the case with Stollman and Rosenfarb, dreams are not only the domain where life and death, waking and

133. Almond, 198.
134. Almond, 198-99.

sleeping, and this world and the Otherworld meet; they are also the place where the past and the present can become one. Almond writes,

> Most disturbing of all was his dream of sleep. He could see himself in this dream; he slept peacefully. Yet he could also see images from his early childhood: families marched down muddy roads, his father falling, a heap on wet road, his sisters crying out for potatoes. Bombs dropped from the sky, turning earth to violent dirt, the dry pop of machine guns shoved bodies into pits, the smell of his nanny rose up around him and turned to ashes and settled onto his skin. Wolf did not understand: he saw and heard and smelled all of it. Yet he slept. Even as he rose to fire the stove, sixty years on, he could see himself asleep, in the garden his family kept, hidden away. He looked dead. But he was not dead. He slept. This terrible fact was all that seemed to matter.[135]

Later on in the story, as the climax of Wolf's story is approaching, the nature of his waking hours has flipped: in the beginning of the story, his dreams were not a prominent part of his experience, and his interactions with the outside world constituted the bulk of his activity. As he secludes himself further, however, his dreamlife seems to become his primary mode of taking part in the world. When he hears rustling in the cemetery,

> The spirits assured him this was all a dream. He held fast to the rails of his cot and burrowed under his blankets and lay trembling, unable to determine if he was awake or asleep, if he lay in the garden of his boyhood or the graveyard that had been his home for forty years. … It had been a dream. A dream.[136]

In fact, his descent into his dreamlife, and that he is untimely ripped from it in the crisis with the teen girl, is one of the great dramas of the closing act. Even after the situation has unfolded and Wolf has bolted into action, he still questions whether he is stuck in a dream:

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135. Almond, 199.
136. Almond, 207.

> But the girl couldn't hear him. It occurred to Wolf that he might be in the midst of a dream, that none of this was real, only an elaborate charade devised to torment him. He went so far as to turn away and strike his head against the stone wall. But when he turned back, the girl was still there, her feverish body tossing, and the baby beside her, still.[137]

"Die Grosse Liebe," a decidedly less esoteric story than some of our others, deals with memory. I would argue, however, that Stollman's description of the trickiness of memory seeps into the realm of dreamstates. As I pointed out in the last section, the narrator's account of the living room on the night of his father's funeral continues to develop throughout the story, to the point that it becomes a liminal zone that he inhabits with his mother regardless of the "historicity" of the memory itself. At first, the memory is quite concrete, but as time wears on and the narrator relates the changes in his memory, the "falseness" of the memories fades and the wording he uses is that of fact, not fallacy. By the end of the story, the narrator is inhabiting a zone with his mother that is completely unreliable with regard to any truth-claim: the reader has no idea whether what he is saying is the truth or a fiction developed by his memory over time.

In relating the unreliability of his narrator's memory, the zone that Stollman creates is not simply different memories of the mother bleeding into each other; rather, the memories are uncanny in that they include actions that his mother never took at any point in her life, and that were completely outside her character. The film projected on the blue walls; the mother never looking directly at the son but just above him; his description of her as "in her own world"; and the claret moiré fabric of the sofa that remains so prominent in his memory; these all serve to build an otherworldly and dreamlike atmosphere. It is when he begins to remember the actions that she never made, though, that this peculiar zone is really brought to life and made explicitly liminal

137. Almond, 211.

with regards to the barrier between our realm and the Other realm:

> In this false memory, which has occurred to me ever since I first went to Berlin and saw *The Great Love* myself, my mother gets up from the sofa where she sat with me that night after my father's funeral. She stands up and begins to sing in the voice of her favorite actress. It is that woman's voice but darker and deeper, *a voice that hovers between the Earth and the heavenly firmament*, singing of miracles to be …
>
> But in reality, my mother had been sitting the whole time. She never sang any lyrics. And I never in my life heard my mother sing.[138]

Here again we have an intersection of themes that leads to the creation of our familiar atmosphere. The narrator's false memory is not a simple trick of the mind, but it also is — and must be — otherworldly. For the narrator to emphasize the degree to which he inhabits this memorialized living room as its own space, its own zone, he must employ language that we have come to know as Jewish. It is for this reason that he utilizes the language and imagery we have already seen so much elsewhere: an unusual voice (as the companions hear on the mountain in the Zohar), a voice "that hovers between the Earth and the heavenly firmament" as we have seen so many other people, places, and things do in other stories. Furthermore, above the explicit language employed, we have an underlying idea that will be of use to us in the next chapter: by constructing this zone (the living room) in which he and his mother visit and create these new (false) memories, the narrator is in a sense conjuring the spirit of his mother in a way that goes beyond simple memory.

The theme of dreamlife blending with, and overtaking reality occurs in other stories. With regards to "Edgia's Revenge," for example, we have already seen how Rella would wander the streets in states of hallucination. Rosenfarb goes beyond this, however, in a passage about Rella's visit to

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138. Stollman, 271, emphasis mine.

the doctor. Here, the doctor describes Rella's hybrid experience in plain words:

> I went to see him because I was suffering from insomnia, and begged him for sleeping pills. "It's no wonder, my child, that you can't sleep," he said, affectionately patting my shoulder. "After all that you've lived through, you must be having nightmares even in the daytime when you are wide awake." How could I explain that I wanted the pills not only to squelch the nightmares evoked by my past, but also to squelch the nightmares inspired by my present-day, wonderful, dearly bought life?[139]

Here the narrator connects the liminal nature of dreaming and waking with that of the past and present. Rosenfarb does this by placing the innocuous introductory remark on the part of the doctor, in which he refers to her as "my child." By infantilizing Rella, the doctor adds to her liminal status: she is a childlike adult; she is dreaming while awake; and, in the sense that she is acquiring sleeping pills for the purpose of committing suicide, she is undead. In such a short passage, Rosenfarb makes one of the most poignant statements about Rella's situation in the entire story.

Much later on in the story, the narrator again uses the motif of dreaming to make a quick and extremely effective observation. The entire narrative of "Edgia's Revenge" contains a storyline of role reversal: Rella is dominant over Edgia, both as a *kapo* and as a friend; eventually, Edgia "usurps" Rella's role and becomes like her, right down to her personal looks; Edgia also takes on the dominant role that her husband filled, and her new husband, Pavel, takes on her (and her cat's) former subordinate role. The theme of reversal is a constant throughout the story and is one of the great drivers of the drama. Rosenfarb utilizes a dream to sum up this entire storyline. Here, Pavel tells Rella, concerning Edgia, who was her subordinate in the camps: "She did once tell me about a strange dream that she had. In that dream she saw herself in the role of a *kapo*. She even described how she looked and — forgive me for telling you this — but the figure in which

139. Rosenfarb, 86.

she saw herself resembled yours."[140]

Some stories maintain the ancient idea of dreams and visions as the primary means of transmission for prophets. Echoing the passage in the Torah in which YHVH tells Miriam and Abraham, "If your prophet be the Lord's / In a vision to him would I be known / In a dream would I speak through him,"[141] Bender's "Dreaming in Polish" creates an entire side story, separate from but adjacent to the main narrative, that involves prophetic dreaming. I will focus more on the character of these prophets in the next chapter, but for now we will deal with the context of their prophetic reception. At the very beginning of the story, we enter the world of the dreamers:

> There was an old man and an old woman and they dreamed the same dreams. They'd been married for sixty years, and their arm skin now wrinkled down to their wrists like kicked-down bedsheets. They were maybe the oldest people in the world. They sat outside their house together, elbows touching, in the wicker chairs you'd expect them to sit in, and watched the people walk by. Occasionally they called out images from the night before to the gardener or to whoever happened to be passing. Most people smiled quickly at them and then looked back down at the sidewalk. And when night fell, the old man and the old woman walked into their bedroom, drew back the white sheets, covered themselves up, and shared what was beneath.[142]

At this point early in the story, the survivors are only dreamers, lacking prophetic legitimacy. Though they are "maybe the oldest people in the world," they remain in their prophetic infancy, a stage of transition in which they are receiving the visions but are not yet understood to have one foot in this world and one in the Other. They get their stripes, so to speak, soon after:

> The old man and the old woman once dreamed that a pig drowned. As usual, they

140. Rosenfarb, 157.
141. Num. 12:6, Alter translation.
142. Bender, 281.

> announced this to the neighbourhood, listening closely to the sounds of their own voices. They rarely spoke in sentences, but instead called out the images in fragments, like young earnest poets.
>
> "Pig," the old woman said.
>
> "No breath," he finished.
>
> "Pushing pig," she said.
>
> "And brown and dead."
>
> That day a farmer from across town heard them as he walked by, and when he arrived home his wife hurried out to tell him that the tractor had accidentally scooped up a pig instead of earth and thrown it headfirst into a pile of manure. The pig couldn't get its footing, fell forward, and suffocated. The farmer was disgusted and annoyed by the story but didn't think of the significance until he was on the toilet before he went to bed and he remembered the old man and the old woman. And brown and dead. Disturbed, he told his wife about the prophets in the town, and she promptly told all the neighbours. When the news got back to them, the old man and the old woman just smiled and touched elbow bones closely, loose skin nearly obscuring the tattooed numbers on their inner arms.[143]

The townsfolk start to pay attention to the content of the Survivors' dreams now, and it becomes part of village life to go listen to the prophets relay the information they have received. Eventually, when the prophets offer a particularly cryptic account of their dream one day, the townsfolk go into a frenzy trying to figure out what exactly they meant. They convene a town meeting to debate the meaning of the dream and conclude that they must cover or remove all graven images, whatever that may mean. This eventually leads to the covering of the statue in the town square, and, as a result, is the reason for the climax of the story, in which the protagonist, on her midnight wandering to the square at the climax of the story, undrapes it.

143. Bender, 282-3.

4.6 // Dreamstates and Visions in Earlier Jewish Tales

As John J. Collins and Michael Fishbane note in the introduction to their volume, *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys* (1995), "Excursions into the spirit world are not confined to the moment of death. They are also the stuff of dreams, visions, and ecstatic practices. Otherworldly journeys can take place spontaneously in a dream."[144] As I have shown in the previous subsections, dreams and visions appear extremely frequently in Jewish writing. In many instances, they are the primary mode of connection between this realm and the Other.

An equally strong — and in many cases stronger — way to connect with the Otherworld, as Collins and Fishbane explain, is death. Moshe Idel, writing about that same connection between death and dreams, writes, "Ecstasy and otherworldly journeys are most profoundly connected to the ultimate human problem of death… The existence of [a spiritual world] need not be dismissed as a calculated fiction. It is adumbrated, however elusively, by dreams, visions, and near-death experiences."[145] Short of dying, the most efficient way to straddle the line between this world and the other world is to dream.

I have already noted the ancient nature of this motif with Abram's vision in Genesis 15, but this is not a solitary story in Genesis, let alone the rest of the Hebrew Bible. For other such occurrences, one might think of the patriarch Jacob's dream of angels ascending and descending at Beth-El in Genesis 28, or his midnight encounter wrestling with a messenger of God in chapter 38. Further along, his son Joseph rises to prominence by interpreting the dreams of the king in Egypt. Dreams and visions are essential to the prophetic experience throughout the Hebrew Bible, with God telling Miriam and Aaron in Numbers 12:6,

Listen, pray, to My words.

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144. John J. Collins and Michael Fishbane, *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys* (SUNY Press, 1995), X.
145. Collins and Fishbane, XIII.

> If your prophet be the Lord's
> In a vision to him would I be known,
> In a dream would I speak through him.

Dreams maintain their importance in the post-biblical era, with entire sections devoted to the topic in the Talmud. *Berakhot 55a* reports, "Rav Ḥisda said: A dream not interpreted is like a letter not read. As long as it is not interpreted it cannot be fulfilled; the interpretation of a dream creates its meaning."[146] Further along, in 55b, this discussion continues: "Didn't Rabbi Zeira say: Anyone who sleeps seven days without a dream is called evil, as it indicates that God does not wish to appear to him even in that indirect manner."[147] The Rabbis later enter into lengthy discussions about the meaning of dreams (or lack thereof), why they happen, how they happen, and what it means to dream about a variety of animals, from oxen to ducks to dogs.[148]

Sefer Hasidim, a story from which I just described involving the weighing of the soul of a dreamer, also utilizes dreams in a way that must have been familiar to the intended reader, as was the case with the rabbis in the Zohar rising at midnight to study. One story from Rabbi Judah in *Sefer Hasidim* begins, "For there is a story about a pietist who asked in a dream question who would sit next to him in paradise. The pietist was shown a young man in a distant land."[149] In another tale, a cattle herder who knew no Torah learns that it is the intention of his heart, and not careful reciting of particular prayers, that God counts as a great thing. A scholar scolds him for praying improperly and teaches him what to say in prayer. When the scholar leaves, the man forgets the scholar's words and believes it is worse to pray a wrong prayer than to not pray at all, so he ceases his prayers. We then read,

146. *Berakhot* 55a.
147. *Berakhot* 55b.
148. *Berakhot* 55b.
149. *Sefer Hasidim*, in Mirsky and Stern, 227.

> In a dream at night the scholar saw himself being told, "If you do not go and tell the cattle herder to pray as he did before you met him, beware the misfortune that awaits you. You have robbed Me of a man who deserves the world to come."
>
> The scholar immediately went to the cattle herder and asked, "What prayers are you saying?"
>
> He replied, "None at all. I forgot the prayers you taught me, and you told me not to say 'If He had animals…'"
>
> The sage responded, "I dreamed such and such. Say what you used to say."[150]

The entirety of "Job's Novella" from Abraham ben Hananiah Yagel's late-16th-century semi-autobiographical *Valley of Vision* takes place in a dream. Starting with the opening words, "In a dream, in a night vision,"[151] the protagonist embarks on a two-day journey to the heavenly realm with his deceased father, where they meet the biblical Job and "Yagel is instructed in the meaning of life and the sublime mysteries of the divine universe."[152] As David Ruderman notes in his introduction to the tale, Yagel's storytelling is itself liminal beyond the themes therein. He notes that the semi-autobiographical narrative mixed with rabbinic commentary and fanciful narrative makes for a strange read. "Even more extraordinary," he explains, "is the blurring of boundaries between reality and fantasy and between the sacred and profane realms: Job, the supposedly real person and biblical character, becomes the mouthpiece for a totally worldly but fictional story."[153]

The Baal Shem Tov, too, frequently operates in and through dreams. Not only does he take his dreams and visions seriously, but he even appears in the dreams of others. In one tale, a *melamed* has a dream that he is walking through the holy community of Medzhibozh. He happens upon a beautiful palace with intricate ornamentation, and he finds himself staring and staring. He

150. In Mirsky and Stern, 220.
151. In Mirsky and Stern, 317.
152. David B. Ruderman, introducing "Job's Novella" in Mirsky and Stern, 313.
153. Ruderman, 316.

walks up to the window and finds the Besht inside, reciting Torah. The words are so beautiful that when he awakens, he recites them three times to better remember. It's only midnight, however, and he falls back asleep and unfortunately forgets the words. The next day, the Besht appears at his house and recites the very same Torah, causing the *melamed* to faint. We then read, "When he caught his breath again the Besht said to him jokingly: 'If you had heard new things, you would have reason to be so excited, but this is not new since you heard all this last night.'"[154]

In another instance, another *melamed* again finds himself by a palace in his dream. While he was awake earlier in the day, he had immense trouble understanding a commentary on a certain tract of the Talmud. In the dream, the Besht explains it to him. He wakes up thinking that he had come up with the explanation by himself, but later in the day the Besht explains it to him in the same way, and the *melamed* decides to follow the Besht thereafter.[155]

Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav also understood the significance of dreams. His disciples did too, and one of them marked down many of his dreams as soon as he recited them — what are known today as Nahman's "dream-talks." In another case of the works themselves being liminal beyond the themes therein, these stories straddle the line between fantasy, reality, fiction, and autobiography. In his introduction to a selection of these dream-talks, Arthur Green conjures a familiar name, noting that Rabbi Nahman's tales have been described as a foretaste of Kafka's writings, and that "The reader of these dream narratives will find much of that Kafkaesque landscape already outlined in them." [156] Kafka's stories are reminiscent of dreams and nightmares not so much in the sense that they terrify, but in the sense that they are at times absurd, at times horrifying, at times erotic, and at times comedic, sometimes all at the same time. It is in this sort

154. ben Samuel, 48.
155. ben Samuel, 175.
156. Arthur Green, introducing "The 'Dream-Talks' of Rabbi Nachman" in Mirsky and Stern, 333-4.

of zone that we find Nahman's dream-talks. One such dream opens with the following passage:

> There was a man lying on the ground, and people sat about him in a circle. Outside that circle was another, then another, and yet more. Beyond the outermost circle people were standing about, in no particular order.
>
> The one seated (he was leaning on his side) in the center was moving his lips, and all those in the circles moved their lips after him. Then he was gone, and everyone's lips had stopped moving. I asked what had happened, and they told me that he had grown cold and died. When he had stopped speaking, so had they.
>
> Then they all began to run, and I ran after them. I saw two very beautiful palaces, in which stood two officials. Everybody ran up to these two and began to argue with them, saying, "Why do you lead us astray?" They wanted to kill them, and the two officials fled outside. I saw them, and they seemed good to me, so I ran after them.[157]

The dream continues in a bizarre way, but suddenly starts over again in that same circle of people. Finally, Nahman relates a truly kafkaesque ending, complete with promises of answers that lead to further questions as he follows his instructions, as we find in the plot of *The Trial*:

> I did not understand the meaning of this thing. They said to me, "Go into that room and you will be told the meaning." As I entered, I saw an old man, and I asked. He took his beard in his hand and said, "This is my beard, and that is the meaning of the thing." "I still don't understand" I replied. He told me to go into another room, and there I would find the meaning. As I entered, I saw it was of endless length and endless breadth, and completely filled with writings. Any place I opened any of them I found another comment on the meaning of the thing.[158]

In this chapter, I have drawn attention to the remarkable consistency with which our eight authors approach a set of spatial themes and motifs that are quite specific. Through the introduction of

157. In Mirsky and Stern, 336.
158. In Mirsky and Stern, 338.

intertexts, I explained that this vision of a dark, dreamlike atmosphere has persisted throughout many regions of Jewish storytelling. This atmosphere — whether it manifests physically, psychologically, or in the world of dreams — offers a zone for our characters to inhabit. Now, I place a spotlight on those individuals who feature so prominently in these stories.

Chapter 5: Liminal Figures

> "Only one living person has access to them. When nine-year-old Beylke, old Dan's granddaughter, appears among the graves, the purified souls fuse with the sun's rays and the free field winds and together they embrace her, play with her curly black hair, pursue her, catch her, release her and pursue her again"
>
> -Lamed Shapiro, "In the Dead Town"[1]

In this chapter we turn to the characters themselves, and the ways in which they find themselves betwixt and between. Liminality manifests in our central characters in three notable ways: their connections with the (un)dead; their experiences with and as aliens and outsiders; and their hidden identities or the hidden identities of those around them. Here again, I will explore each theme in our stories before turning to earlier Jewish writings that use those same themes.

5.1 // "It's a Real Ghost Story": The (Un)dead

The characters in our stories have a notable proximity to death — either their own or those around them. Spirits and ghostly experiences appear prominently, and the use of death as a metaphor is frequent. There is an immanent quality to death: it is present; it dwells in the experience of our protagonists and the individuals they encounter. With this immanence comes a variety of reactions: some fear death and the realm of the dead; some welcome it; and some are indifferent to it, thinking of it only as a part of their daily experience. However the characters react to it, one thing is clear: death is a prominent feature of the world of these stories.

Shapiro's "At Sea" is not a story of death and endings but of transition and crossing. That being said, the author still incorporates narrative elements and language related to death in order

[1] Lamed Shapiro, "In the Dead Town" in *The Cross and Other Jewish Stories*, 28.

to develop the liminal atmosphere of the dark, dreary, misty ocean. Near the beginning of the story, in a moment that has little bearing on the rest of the story, another passenger leaves this realm so silently that it hardly registers with those around him:

> A passenger hunched over the railings, held that posture for a short while, and then dropped slowly into the water, without a word, without the slightest cry. It happened so slowly, so naturally, that in the first few moments those standing around could not grasp what had happened.[2]

The crew goes searching for him, arriving back empty-handed. Another crew member performs a roll call, naming off passengers and awaiting their answer until he arrives at one for whom there is no response: Janko Ravić. The narrator offers a single sentence in this passage indicating that something otherworldly is present. After the crew member shouts Ravić's name, we read, "No answer. The steward turned pale. A pair of icy wings fluttered over the deck."[3] No further mention of the icy wings is ever given, but one can assume that Shapiro is alluding to an angel of death or some such entity. In the context of liminal figures, Ravić is also notable for the fact that he is hardly a person in the memory of his neighbours, dead but perhaps never having lived:

> What kind of person was he? What did he look like? No one knew. His neighbors in the cabin had taken no notice of him, because he was always silent. No one had even properly seen his face. Apparently he was thin and broad-boned—but then again, perhaps not. Everyone had noticed; none had seen. Now he stood before us like a ghastly secret, like a tormenting riddle: Janko Ravić ... Janko Ravić ... What was Janko Ravić?[4]

The only proof that Janko Ravić ever truly existed is in the ship's manifest, with the narrator

2. Shapiro, 164.
3. Shapiro, 164.
4. Shapiro, 165.

noting, “In this way Janko Ravić left the world ... and that was that. From the ship's manifest it was later ascertained that he was forty-seven years old and hailed from Belgrade in Serbia.”[5] Following this short episode, the story continues and Ravić is never again mentioned.

Another episode in this story, that of the disappearance of Lodestar, revolves around death as well. The star itself, it is hypothesized, “had died a natural death. It had cooled over and been extinguished, ‘just as the sun of our solar system will one day be extinguished.’”[6] Not only has the star died, but its death is viewed as the direct cause of exactly 347 deaths around the world, a curiously specific number. We read,

> Of the thousand million and more people living on the earth, 347 of them reacted to this event as to their own personal injury. And what exactly did they do? They went off and took their own lives. Ninety-nine of them shot themselves, 68 took poison, 54 hanged themselves and the rest chose other modes of violent deaths.[7]

At the end of this little episode, scientists conclude about not just Lodestar but the night sky as a whole, in language emblematic of the topic we are discussing: “we are living under the glow of dead, long-extinguished worlds. It is possible that the first person on earth was already being guided by the light of a corpse.”[8]

Klein’s narrative, as well, has nothing to do with the death of any of its characters. Again, though, the author felt it necessary to incorporate the topic, however peripheral, and to indicate once again that the boundary between the world of the living and that of the dead is rather porous. Isaiah Ellenbogen’s previously mentioned story of the clash of tradition and modernity in the small

5. Shapiro, 164.
6. Shapiro, 175.
7. Shapiro, 177-8.
8. Shapiro, 178.

Russian town where he taught revolves around the idea that the spirits of the dead emerge from the Other realm at midnight to enter the synagogue. In introducing his little tale, Ellenbogen relates,

> Well, a rumour was spread that the synagogue was haunted. Tradition has it, of course, that at midnight the souls of the departed leave their graves, and robed in their cerements, as in prayer shawls, dance on the floor of the synagogue, singing the Lord's hallelujahs. The townspeople were certain that this was happening to their place of worship.[9]

Eventually, the townsfolk believe they've figured out the mindset of the dead when the synagogue's *Shamas* finds the floor of the attic "littered with torn papers bearing Hebrew script, ancient and holy books, snuffmarked, moth-eaten, and covered with wax from dripping candles."[10] Surely, given this discovery, it was obvious that "the souls of the departed were restless for want of the Sacred Word; they asked their due."[11] That is, it seemed to the *Shamas* that the flashing lights in the synagogue at midnight were the result of studious departed souls, and they had been scrounging around the attic looking for scraps to read. Seeking to accommodate them, he gathered the scraps into a pile, made a pillow, and left it "for all the dead saints in the local cemetery."[12]

When the blacksmith, the toughest man in town, attempts to figure out what's happening in the synagogue, he is sent running in fear when a flash of light hits him between the eyes and left him in total darkness. This strengthens the belief in town that the synagogue is indeed haunted, and results in the final showdown between Chatzkel, the slowest man in town and one of its most prominent sceptics, and what turns out to be a creaky board over a new electrical switch.

"The Lecture" revolves around death in a more traditional sense, with a plot around a character's

9. Klein, 139.
10. Klein, 139-140.
11. Klein, 140.
12. Klein, 140.

actual passing. With the passing of the sickly woman in the middle of the night, the key action of the story involves the two remaining characters' — and especially Mr. N's — reaction to that death. Still, though, like our other authors, Singer accentuates the porousness of the same veil we have already seen. The death of the woman, in fact, seems to fully lift that veil. For the first portion of the story, up until that moment, the experience of the protagonist is firmly rooted in our realm, though slightly rooted in a memory of Poland as well. Within a few paragraphs of the woman's death, however, Mr. N is flung into a liminal realm in which the dead seem resurrected, tangible beyond the simple presence of their spirits.

Even the language used to briefly describe Binele leading Mr. N to her dead mother is liminal, between two modes, N telling us "She half led, half pulled me to the bed where her mother lay."[13] Once there, Mr. N's familiarity with — his knowledge of — death is shown subtly but decisively: "The hand hung heavy and limp. It was cold as only a dead thing is cold."[14] It is only once Binele leaves to find help, and he is left "alone with a corpse in the dark"[15] that his descent into this realm begins.

It starts with the woman herself: "I had the eerie feeling that the dead woman was trying to approach me, to seize me with her cold hands, to clutch at me and drag me off to where she was now."[16] But as the encounter continues, other entities join the chaos in the pitch-black bedroom, Mr. N describing the dreadful chaos: "Bony fingers stretched after me. Strange beings screamed at me silently."[17] When N escapes the room and makes a futile attempt to reach the exit, he finds himself, as described in the last chapter, back in his room, stuck in an apartment with an impossible

13. Singer, 78.
14. Singer, 78.
15. Singer, 78.
16. Singer, 78.
17. Singer, 79.

floor plan. In his state of panic, he "was ready to fight off the dead woman, to wrestle with her in mortal combat."[18]

In the moments following her death, it seems, at least according to the protagonist, that the sickly woman has transitioned not only medically and spiritually from whom she had been, but physically. Singer describes this impossible transition in great detail, a strange and surreal moment in a story that might have been misconstrued as wholly metaphoric before this point. The moment begins with an understandable observation regarding, perhaps, the onset of *rigor mortis*: "It was no longer a mouth, but a hole. The face was yellow, rigid, and claylike."[19] But soon after this, he suddenly notices a much more impossible change in the dead woman, one that he believes even Binele is witnessing:

> I clearly remembered that the woman had had a short nose; now it had grown long and hooked, as though death had made manifest a hereditary trait that had been hidden during her lifetime. Her forehead and eyebrows had acquired a new and masculine quality. Binele's sorrow seemed for a while to have given way to stupor. She stared, wide-eyed, as if she did not recognize her own mother.[20]

Finally, at the end of the encounter, when N finally leaves the strange zone he has inhabited for a night, the dead woman haunts him one last time: "An icy cold came from below. Suddenly I heard steps. The corpse? I wanted to run, but I realized that the steps came from the upper floor."[21]

Rella's relationship with death in "Edgia's Revenge" is unusual in comparison with other stories because the protagonist herself is in an undead state of sorts throughout. More than once,

18. Singer, 79.
19. Singer, 79.
20. Singer, 80.
21. Singer, 82.

Rosenfarb indicates that Rella's soul had died in the camps, the remainder of the story serving as a state of wandering, much like the dybbuks I will conjure in the next section. The last step in the process, it seems, would be for Rella to kill what's left: her physical body. Her preferred method of self-execution for her sins is kept in her pocket throughout her life in the form of sleeping pills, and as though they are both the method of execution and the jury that decides her fate, she also identifies them with the lost members of her family. This blended metaphor — pills as symbolic of her death and pills as symbolic of the already-dead — occurs as soon as she receives them from a doctor in a Displaced Persons camp. Upon her emigration from Europe, she notes,

> But in my knapsack I carried the twenty-five sleeping pills which the good doctor had given me. These pills were the only possessions that I brought with me to Canada from the European continent. They took the place of my parents, my grandparents, my sixteen-year-old brother and my ten-year-old sister; my darling Maniusha. They took the place of all my aunts, uncles, and cousins, of my hometown, my childhood, my early adolescence, and my first and only love. Sleeping pills became my life — and my death. And now they have become my only road back to innocence.[22]

I have already shown how Rella describes her waking life as a sort of permanent dream or nightmare, launching her into a persistent liminal zone — a reflection of her damaged mental state. But the zone between waking and dreaming is not the only Rella feels she is inhabiting: her sense of self, of her own body and her own literal humanity, melts into something altogether unrecognizable as well. Of her time as a *kapo*, she reflects,

> All the restraints of civilized human conduct fell away from me. I had the impression of wandering about as if the skin had been peeled from my body and I was left to revel in an orgy of the most primitive impulses. The borderline between what is and what is not vanished, and the dividing line that distinguishes man from beast similarly disappeared. If

22. Rosenfarb, 86.

an ember of humanity still glowed within me, it was no more than a spark.[23]

This imagery is reminiscent of Francis Bacon's painting "Study after Velázquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X" with its distorted veil that evokes a feeling of melting or peeling. The images are hard to visualize, dreadful to attempt. They are also reminiscent of the dybbuk figure, the spirit of a wicked Jew forced to wander and at times inhabit the bodies of beasts. Shortly thereafter, describing her treatment of Edgia in the camp, Rella returns to the imagery of the hybrid "humanimal," relating that "she fell forward onto all fours, and this was how I dragged her along like a recalcitrant dog."[24]

Rella's decades in Montreal are no more than a continuation of this phase of undead wandering, with Edgia serving as an anthropomorphized version of her sleeping pills. Rella claims at one point that she keeps Edgia around because she is her one link to her own humanity, but it seems in reality that she keeps Edgia around so that, at a moment's notice, she could force Edgia's hand in identifying her as a *kapo*, which would in turn force Rella to ingest those sleeping pills. In fact, she makes this rather explicit at the midpoint of the story, explaining, "It became clear to me that my behaviour was no more than another form of flirtation with death. I realized that I was playing games with Edgia in order to provoke her into accusing me."[25]

The wandering continues even in anticipated death: after Edgia cuts her out of her life, Rella prepares to finally take her sleeping pills, explaining, "And now I too am about to embark on a long voyage, a voyage which Edgia precipitated by removing herself from my life."[26] As I have already discussed, Rosenfarb's description of the camp is of a liminal zone, a place of death

23. Rosenfarb, 92.
24. Rosenfarb, 94.
25. Rosenfarb, 122.
26. Rosenfarb, 163.

and undeath, a "phantasmagoria" of dread. At the very end of the story, Rella makes clear the fact that her life in Canada was itself a liminal stage between two states of death and undeath, with a short but poignant (and somewhat witty) passage: "The slice of life which I managed to sandwich in between the two camps — the camp that was forced upon me in the past, and the one that I am about to force on myself — was not tasty, nor worth the price I paid for it."[27]

More recent stories also focus on the protagonists' relationships with the dead, always offering a sense of the spirits' agency: they are not simply memories of dead people; rather, there is a certain give and take between those of our realm and those of theirs. As I have already noted, the veil between the two is consistently porous. A good example of this is found in Bender's "Dreaming in Polish," where the protagonist finds comfort in her visits to the Holocaust museum with her genocide-obsessed mother. She reflects on those moments, "And then I knew I was visiting the dead people. I wanted to let them know I'd come back. That for some reason, no matter how much I wanted to, I couldn't leave them behind, loosened on the ceiling, like invisible sad smoke."[28]

The interaction between the protagonist and the dead is even more pronounced in "A Dream of Sleep," a natural result of the entire story taking place in a cemetery where the lead character himself inhabits an old stone cottage. The narrator extends this interaction beyond Wolf, the protagonist, to peripheral characters as well. Near the beginning of the story, describing the daily goings-on of the cemetery, it is noted that visitors "carried picnic lunches and sat on the benches and ate and laughed with the dead."[29] Wolf, for his part, is on less familial terms with the spirits in his cemetery, serving more as a protector of the land than a friend. "Had he considered

27. Rosenfarb, 163.
28. Bender, 284.
29. Almond, 192.

the larger aims of his work, had he been given to such considerations," we read, "he would have described it as a siege against the reckless mess of the living, which hoped to infiltrate and despoil the peace accorded the dead."[30]

As the situation devolves and the cemetery is threatened with demolition, the owner tries in vain to ease Wolf's mind by telling him, "Don't worry, sport. There's nothing but ghosts in this place."[31] Those ghosts are tangibly unhappy with this reality, and it is at this point that the story starts to turn more dreadful. First, their disquiet becomes visible to him: "The murmurings of the dead were no longer gay, but petulant, and their appearance outside his window meant the smirk of skulls and a clatter of bones."[32] Following this onset, he begins to have his dark, dank dreams of death and wandering. The situation devolves further, Wolf falling deeper and deeper into a fearful melancholy, now tormented by the spirits:

> Wolf lost the pleasures of sleep. The snows began. Drifts dusted the yard. The spirits that had once danced, now coiled outside his windows, sibilant as snakes, refusing to be consoled. The darkness distended, blurred. Wolf lost track of the days, or, more precisely, they seemed to lose track of themselves. He began harboring the conscious wish that he were no longer alive.[33]

When he begins to hear the sounds of the teenage girl in the graveyard again, he is so deep into his zone of undeath that he is unable to differentiate between reality and the realm, what is "now" and what is "then," what is alive and what is dead: "The spirits assured him this was all a dream. He held fast to the rails of his cot and burrowed under his blankets and lay trembling, unable to determine if he was awake or asleep, if he lay in the garden of his boyhood or the graveyard that

30. Almond, 194.
31. Almond, 194.
32. Almond, 198.
33. Almond, 207.

had been his home for forty years. … It had been a dream. A dream."[34] Shortly thereafter, though, the spirits turn more aggressive, the narrator reporting that they "called him a fool and a coward, turned themselves into black veils and twirled indignantly."[35]

When the finale begins and the birth is oncoming, Wolf is reminded of the delicate veil between life and death: "Wolf himself had slept through the trauma of his own birth; this is what his father had told him. 'Your own mama dying and you slept, Wolfie. Peaceful. Asleep.'"[36] But it is the birth of the child that seems to finally dominate the spirits, warding them off if only momentarily: "The baby wailed and by this the spirits seemed cowed. he was alone with the girl and the baby and, at each step, an oddly invigorating pain."[37] Unfortunately, the wrestling match between life and death ultimately tilts towards the latter, the mother losing the baby in the middle of the night when it drops off the cot and falls to the floor. The deep pain of this moment leads Wolf to an understanding that he himself has been undead — at least emotionally — all these years. That realization, though, leads him to a positive reflection, a transportation back to a moment of innocence that frees him from this state of undeath he has inhabited:

> He sank to his knees and wept, remembering the sting of death, *how a body might in fact bury itself in grief, for years or whole decades.* And realizing this, he experienced for a single sweet instant what life might feel like unaccompanied by guilt or fear or dread. He had been a child, a child too young to do anything but sleep. Sleep.[38]

The interaction with spirits is less tangible in "*Die Grosse Liebe*" than in Almond's story. As I have already noted, the protagonist constructs a zone outside time and space in his memory of his

34. Almond, 207
35. Almond, 207.
36. Almond, 209.
37. Almond, 210.
38. Almond, 211. Emphasis mine.

mother on the night of his father's funeral (and I need not expand much further on the fact that this all takes place on that particular night for the purposes of this section on death). He returns to this zone repeatedly in the story, and molds his memory, not only of his mother's actions that night, but of his mother as a human being, more and more each time. By the end of the story, the version of his mother who inhabits this memorial zone is almost unrecognizable, to the point that she says and does things that he knows for certain that she had never done in their shared life.

In this way, while the story does not utilize the medium of a pure ghost story in the way that Almond's does, the spirit of his mother that exists within his memory does take on a life of its own. At times, that spirit follows him outside the boundaries of the home he has created for her in that room. He explains, "After my mother's death, on my first visit to Berlin, I watched *The Great Love* over and over, perhaps five times, all afternoon and evening, at a revival theater on the *Kurfürstendamm*. Each time I had the strange feeling that my mother was telling me the story as I watched it."[39]

This story, however, is not without its more traditional ghosts. In a curious moment that exemplifies the unreliability of the narrator in reconstructing his memories throughout the story, he relates another encounter from the night of his father's funeral. Thinking back on how his mother was a loner who never really related to anyone, he remembers an old woman who stayed to help after the shiva:

> The old woman had silently helped my mother put away the food that had been set up on the dining room sideboard and then clean up the kitchen. … Years later, when my mother herself was gravely ill, I took a leave from college to take care of her. She would not allow herself to be admitted to a hospital or permit strangers into the house. I asked her about the old woman. I wondered whatever became of her. My mother lifted her head off her pillow and gave me a surprised look. "Oh, no. There was never such a person that

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39. Stollman, 270.

day."[40]

At first, he is certain that the woman did exist, and he does remember other instances in which his mother claimed that something he is sure happened did not. But as the protagonist ages, he starts to question this particular memory:

> Recently, however, now that I am well into my forties, approaching the ages when my parents died, and I think back to this late exchange with my mother, I find myself increasingly alarmed. I can no longer conjure up a single one of the old woman's features. Did she have a long or a short nose? What was the colour of her eyes? How did she wear her hair? I recall only a sense of her frail, ghostly movements, the vague disruption of the still atmosphere of our house, and her parting words.[41]

In this story, ghosts serve to illustrate the unreliability of memory, its ever-changing and unstable nature in our minds, and the interplay between an aging mind and what once appeared, in our youth, to be the static reality of past events.

Our authors have different reasons for — and arrive at different conclusions regarding — the usage of this theme of porousness between our realm and that of the dead. For Shapiro, the disappearance of Janko Ravić and the death of Lodestar offer a dark sense of the vastness of the ocean his protagonist is crossing: just as Ravić is swallowed up by the sea without a peep and Lodestar is swallowed up by the dark black of the night sky, so too are the protagonist and the reader by the endless vision of mist, fog, and water. For Klein, the short tale of the haunted synagogue serves as one in a series of monologues Ellenbogen uses to express his understanding that traditional life

40. Stollman, 266-7.
41. Stollman, 267.

and modern life are essentially the same, with a few cosmetic differences. For Singer, the encounter with the dead is much more tangible as bony fingers reach out to N in the dark as he spends a night with a corpse, launching him into a dreadful zone of post-traumatic stress. Rosenfarb's Rella keeps a handful of sleeping pills in her pocket at all times in case she is identified as a *kapo*, and her relationship with Edgia serves as a tightrope upon which she can walk, teetering to this side and that, daring her to accuse her in public. The pills also serve as tiny capsules containing her relatives who have died and to whom she may one day return, ingesting them in symbolic anthropophagy.

The explicit interaction with the dead — and their agency beyond memorialized objects – – continues in our more recent writing. Bender's protagonist visits the Holocaust museum because she wants the dead to know that she will return and spend time with them. In Almond's tale, the cemetery's spirits skip and prance around their village of the dead before the threatening overreach of modernity and gentrification stirs them into a darker attitude. At that point, they begin to torment the protagonist, reminding him of the life he lost by way of trauma. Finally, in Stollman's tale, the protagonist's ever-evolving memories serve to give agency to the spirit of his mother and the ghostly woman who visited on that most-important night. Here, the metaphysicality of the idea of spirits gives way to a complex reflection on memory, loved ones, and the ways in which they inhabit our minds and take on a life of their own. Each author treats this topic differently, but one thing is quite clear: the boundary between our realm and the realm of the dead is porous, whether physically, metaphysically, emotionally, or mentally.

5.2 // The (Un)dead in Earlier Jewish Tales

In all eras of Jewish writing going back to its Israelite predecessors in the Hebrew Bible, the veil between life and death is porous and, at times, nearly absent. Among so many other tales, one need only think of King Saul's famous visit to the Witch of Endor to conjure the spirit of the prophet

Samuel in 1 Samuel 28. Saul's desperation comes about when he inquires of the Lord to no avail, "neither by dreams nor by the Urim nor by prophets."[42] Seeing that no guidance would be offered from God, Saul orders his servant, "Seek me a ghostwife, that I may go to her and inquire through her."[43] When Saul visits the ghostwife, she conjures the spirit of Samuel, who rebukes Saul for disturbing him, and confirms that the Lord is now his enemy, in large part because of his general turn away from God's commandments, but certainly in small part because he has broken the restrictions on witchcraft and necromancy in his kingdom.

In that story, the crossing of the boundary between the living and the dead is viewed as a disturbing transgression, surely because of the role of necromancy, a practice that is outlawed in several passages of the Torah.[44] In post-biblical writing, connections with the dead are seen in a much less negative light and do not require a medium, a ghostwife. Rather, the world of spirits is seen as a parallel reality that overlaps geographically with the world of the living. At times, the dead "bump into" the living while walking this hybrid geography, while other times they are called upon by sages for the purposes of Torah study.

As early as the Talmud, stories about sages who interact with the dead — quite innocuously and without restriction — begin to appear. We find a story in Tractate *Kallah Rabati* about Rabbi Akiva settling the worries of a ghost. The story goes,

> The question was asked: Do [young children by their death] atone for the sin of their fathers or not? Come and hear: R. 'Aḳiba went to [a cemetery] where he met [a ghost] carrying a heavy load on his shoulder with which he was unable to proceed, and he was crying and groaning. He asked him, "What did you do [in your lifetime]?" He replied, "There is no forbidden act in the world which I left undone, and now guards have been set over me who do not allow me to rest." R. 'Aḳiba asked him, "Have you left a son?"

42. 1 Sam. 28:6, Alter translation.
43. 1 Sam. 28:7.
44. Lev. 19:31; 20:6, 27; Deut. 18:11; I Sam. 28; Isa. 8:19.

> He answered, "By your life! Do not detain me because I fear the angels who beat me with fiery lashes and say to me, 'Why do you not walk quickly?'" R. 'Aḳiba said to him, "Tell me, whom have you left?" He replied, "I have left behind my wife who was pregnant." R. 'Aḳiba then proceeded to that city and inquired, "Where is the son of So-and-so?" [The inhabitants] replied, "May the memory of that wicked person be uprooted." He asked them the reason, and they said, "He robbed and preyed upon people and caused them suffering; what is more, he violated a betrothed girl on the Day of Atonement." He made his way to the house and found the wife about to be delivered of a child. He waited until she gave birth to [a son], circumcised him and, when he grew up, took him to the Synagogue to join in public worship. Later R. 'Aḳiba returned to that [cemetery] and [the ghost] appeared to him and said, "May your mind be [always] at rest because you have set my mind at rest."[45]

In contrast to Saul's story, in which the driving action of the tale is his conversation with a ghost, this story of Rabbi Akiva places no import on the fact that he is convening with a ghost; rather, the action has to do with what that ghost tells him and the manner in which the rabbi aids him.

The idea of ghosts being the spirits of specifically wicked individuals continues into the centuries that follow the compilation of the Talmud. In *Sefer Hasidim*, for example, the "story of a man who was riding alone at night" has to do with exactly this topic. When the man arrives at the convoy of wagons, he realizes that some of the people are dead. Asking them why some of them are sitting on the wagons while others are pulling them, they explain that they were sinful in their lives, and their lot in the afterlife is to pull wagons until they are so exhausted they can no longer pull them, at which point they switch with the people sitting and those others do the same. This minuscule story (it only contains five short paragraphs) even features a moral at the end to that effect: "Thus we learn: Whoever acts like an animal during his lifetime must work like an

45. *Kallah Rabati* 2:9, in *William Davidson Talmud*.

animal in the other world."[46]

Other tales of spirits might have nothing to do with the wickedness of the characters in question. In another tale from Sefer Hasidim, a Jewish community moves to "the land of the Hungarians" where they suddenly start to die. They attempt fasting, but it does not help. The cantor travels out of the district, where he encounters a great army with a commander riding a lion. He immediately recognizes that the army is made up of spirits, and he greets them. The commander tells the man, "Return to that town and tell the Jews to leave that place. My great army and I are about to perform a *danse [macabre]* there."[47] The commander has one of his spirits escort the man to the town, where the man tells the townsfolk to leave.

Returning to ghosts of the wicked, the stories surrounding Isaac Luria contain accounts of the dybbuk epidemic in 16th century Safed, a town just north of the Sea of Galilee, at the time under Ottoman rule. Due to expulsions around the Mediterranean in the preceding century, Safed became a cosmopolitan Jewish town and a centre for Kabbalah through the arrival of Jews (and practices) from different places, with Luria and his disciples playing a major part in the strong spiritual activity.[48] During this time, many inhabitants of Safed and the surrounding area became possessed by dybbuks, the restless wandering souls of dead Jews.

Safed itself was a liminal place with regards to death, with houses situated within sight of graves at every turn, inhabitants perpetually among their buried forebears.[49] In 1591, R. Moshe Alsheikh wrote, "Within it are many more than 600,000 men, not to mention the bones of men continuously brought to the righteous [dead] in its midst, beyond measure, for 'there is no end to

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46. In Mirsky and Stern, 229.
47. In Mirsky and Stern, 231.
48. *Jeffrey Howard Chajes, Between Worlds: Dybbuks, Exorcists, and Early Modern Judaism*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 35.
49. Chajes, 33.

its corpses' (Nahum 3:3)."[50] It was seen as a favourable place to be buried because of its place among the mountains of northern Galilee, with R. Abraham Azulai noting in 1619, "Since it is a high place with air purer and cleaner than any city in the Land of Israel, the soul of one who dies and is buried there speedily sails and takes wing to the Cave of Makhpelah, in order to pass from there to the lower Garden of Eden."[51]

Luria, the great sage who originated the Lurianic strain of Kabbalistic practice that is ubiquitous Jews inclined to mystical practice today, was active in the area along with his disciples. It was fairly common in this time for an inhabitant of the town to become possessed, at which point Luria or his disciple Chaim Vital would be tasked with exorcising the spirit. One such story begins,

> There occurred an event at the time that the holy and pure Rav, the divine kabbalist Isaac Luria Ashkenazi, his memory for a blessing, was in Safed. A spirit entered one woman, a widow, and made her suffer very great and enormous suffering. Many people assembled about her, and spoke with her and the spirit replied to each and every one, making known the wounds of his heart and all of his needs for that which he lacked.[52]

Luria is not free this time, so he sends Vital, who demands to know why the spirit is possessing the woman. The spirit explains that he sinned with a married woman and fathered bastards. When he died, three "angels of destruction" follow him around and beat him. "It has now been twenty-five years," he explains, "since I began wandering in the land, and they have given me no respite, neither for an hour nor a minute."[53]

After he died, the spirit explains, an angel placed him in a sling and slung him from Egypt to the opening of Gehinnom, at which point the million souls of evildoers in that place came out

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50. In Chajes, 33.
51. In Chajes, 34.
52. In Chajes, 150.
53. In Chajes, 152.

and told him he was unworthy even to enter there. They cast him "from mountain to mountain and from hill to hill" and "each and every moment other angels of destruction, evil spirits, demons, and she-devils injure" him.[54] At one point, in the wilderness of Gaza, he entered a pregnant doe, but he did not fit properly and the doe could not contain two spirits, so it was extremely painful and her belly swelled, so she ran into a rock until her abdomen split and she and her fetus died.[55] He tried going to another town and possessing a Kohen, but the Kohen brought a Muslim cleric in to exorcise the spirit successfully. When he came to Safed, he noticed this woman losing her temper and cursing, as well as doubting the miracles of the Passover story, at which point he gained entry into her body.

After Vital has the woman swear that she believes in the miracles, he casts the spirit out of her. Following that, however, "on a number of nights the spirit came to the windows of the house and to the entryway and terrorized the woman [threatening] to return and to enter her body."[56] Finally, Vital returns to find that one of the entryways is without a mezuzah, so he commands that a kosher one be affixed to the doorway, and the spirit never returns.

The figure of the Dybbuk remained prominent in the Jewish cultural imaginary after the time of Isaac Luria, and only more so with the popularity of S. An-sky's 1920 masterpiece of Yiddish theatre, *Tsvishn Tsvey Veltn – der Dibuk* (*The Dybbuk, or Between Two Worlds*). The play centres around a young woman who is possessed by the soul of her dead beloved, and includes topics ranging from love and death to dreams, visions, otherworldly messengers with uncanny knowledge of the key players, and dabbling in the negative aspects of mystical practice (*Kelipot*). A fascinating aspect of *The Dybbuk* is that it was written following An-sky's ethnographic travels

54. In Chajes, 153.
55. It is interesting to note that, in this idea of the afterlife, human spirits seem to have some sort of corporeal form; the man's soul takes up too much space, causing the doe to experience discomfort and kill herself.
56. Chajes, 154.

through the Pale of Settlement, and was written as an accurate composite of the sorts of stories that people told and believed in that region, namely those concerning a certain rabbi who was known to be an exorcist of dybbuks, Samuel of Kaminka-Miropol.[57]

Luria and his disciples did not only convene with wicked spirits of the dead, however. Luria was known to take part in a practice called *Yihudim*, in which he would visit the graves of the greatest sages from past eras and bind his soul to theirs so they could teach him. Luria's disciple Chaim Vital explains *Yihud* in his volume entitled *Sha'ar ha-Yihudim* (Gate of Unifications), with scholar J.H. Chajes simplifying it thusly:

> *Yihud* is thus a meditative practice that promises to grant the practitioner clairvoyant contact with the dead and, moreover, to cleave to them in spiritual ecstasy. The *yihud* awakens the dead and allows the practicioner to ascend through the energy of this devotion while simultaneously drawing down enlightenment from above. The practicioner-driven devotion is characterized here by the kabbalistic term *Female Waters,* understood as the spiritual arousal and "lubrication" of the practitioner that stimulates the partner and calls forth the shower of divine effusion, itself called "Male Waters."[58]

Elsewhere, ghosts are neutral, neither wicked nor extraordinary. For example, "Job's Novella" revolves around the journey of a son and the ghost of his deceased father. The second and third paragraphs of the story read stunningly like the ghost stories of gothic literature that would arise in later centuries:

> I was stunned by the sound of the call and almost lost my breath. I covered my face with the cloak I was wearing, afraid to look in any direction. But when he saw that I was frightened and stricken with terror, he gave me strength by speaking to me in the pleasant voice in which he spoke when he was living in this world: "Don't be afraid, Abraham,

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57. Nathaniel Deutsch, *The Jewish Dark Continent Life and Death in the Russian Pale of Settlement* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011), 47-48.
58. Chajes, 21.

> my son. I am your father, the one who made you, and I will not hurt you. A father's compassion for his son endures forever. But be silent and listen. I will question you and you shall inform me."
>
> Hearing these words, I lifted my eyes and saw his image before me. I raised my voice and cried out in the bitterness of my soul and was overcome with emotion. I shouted, wept, and wailed and sought to embrace him and kiss his hands. Yet I only embraced the air! I touched nothing. I continued to scream and cry until he said: "Why are you crying? Do you not know that I am going the way of all the earth, that a spirit has swept me up? My life as well as my soul have expired. I am without substance, stripped of all matter. That is why you feel nothing [when you touch me].[59]

Rabbi Nahman's dreamtalks also deal with individuals who straddle the line between living and dead, and between this world and the other. In one dream, Rabbi Nahman finds himself attending a wedding. During the ceremony, Rabbi Nahman

> looked and saw there a person from the world to come, one who had died already. He was surprised and thought to himself, "If people see him there will be a great commotion." He knew the dead man's name as well, but he said that both the bridegroom's name and the dead man's name were not just names, but Names, pointing to something mysterious, like holy names. Then everyone saw the dead man. "But this man is dead," I said to them. "Nevertheless," they said, and it didn't seem to them at all out of the ordinary.

In another dream, a member of the community who had already died (unbeknownst to Nahman) is standing around with a group of people. When Rabbi Nahman asks why he did not come to his home for Rosh Hashanah, the man answers, "But I have already passed on." To this the rabbi replies, "For this reason? And is a dead man not permitted to come for Rosh Hashanah?"[60] They

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59. In Mirsky and Stern, 317.
60. In Mirsky and Stern, 346.

continue their discussion until the end of the dream, when the narrator states:

> It seems to me that it was midday, that the sun was directly above our heads. He raised himself up into the air until he had risen to the sun. He proceeded along with the sun, descending bit by bit, finally reaching earth again just as the sun set. But he continued traveling with the sun until, at midnight, he was directly parallel to me from beneath. At midnight the sun is just in a line with a person's feet. When he was so far down that he was directly beneath me I heard a voice shouting to me, "Did you hear how far I am from you?"
>
> *I do not know the meaning of it.*[61]

In I. L. Peretz's 1895 story "The Dead Town", the narrator is wandering the countryside in the evening when he happens upon a strange little coachman. The coachman tells him about a town of Jews who "don't live in geography at all,"[62] and they discuss this town into the evening, the coachman describing every little detail. He tells the narrator that this is a veritable ghost town, and offers to tell him more if he'd like. The narrator implores him to continue, and just before the coachman can tell his gloomy tale, the reader is given a perfectly gothic description of the atmosphere:

> Meanwhile, it was getting on toward evening. In the west, where the sun had set, the sky turned red as blood; in the milky east, like a bride beneath her veil, a full moon swam into sight, its pale, shimmering beams blending with the flickering phantoms of the silent, melancholy night…
>
> It was an eerie sight.
>
> We entered a small forest. The moon shone down through the trembling leaves. Little circles of light danced like silver coins among the fallen leaves and branches on the ground. There was magic in the air, in the quiet rustle of the woods[63]

61. In Mirsky and Stern, 346.
62. Peretz, 162.
63. Peretz, 165.

The coachman explains that the town had been built on an illegal site and struggled for legitimacy throughout its early years. A rich Jew financed the town and operators ran it, but it was all done illegally, and remained so. As time wore on, the town filled with more rich Jews and their began a long-running debate over whom the town should be named after. But something else happened "that could make your stand on end," explains the coachman:

> "It's a real ghost story. One day the bailiff went to have a look at the cemetery before selling it. The dead heard he was there and panicked. Gravestones began rocking back and forth—before long corpses were crawling out from under them. Can you believe that?"[64]

When the narrator responds with incredulity at the idea of the dead rising from their graves, the coachman tells him that he hasn't taken into account the "World of Illusion." A good soul "feasts in paradise on the flesh of the Leviathan and the wine of Creation, and the sinful soul gets a barrel of hot pitch," he explains. "But what would you say," he asks, "about the case of a man who has slept away his life, so that he was never really a man, his life was not a life, and nothing he did was ever done, either for good or for bad, because it all happened as though in a dream?"[65]

Utilizing the liminal opposition of death versus life to illustrate his point about the town, the coachman continues,

> "No one in our town ever really died, because no one in our town ever lived, or did good or evil. We had no saints or sinners, only daydreamers in the World of Illusion. And when such a daydreamer ends up in the grave, he goes right on dreaming. All he's done is moved from one home to another."[66]

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64. Peretz, 167.
65. Peretz, 167-168.
66. Peretz, 168.

At this point, the narrator has no idea whether or not the coachman is telling the truth, pulling his leg, or speaking allegorically. In the moment, though, he believes every word of it. The coachman continues, explaining that the same thing began to spread to other towns in the region. There, too, corpses began emerging from their graves and going about their business: “The minute the shards fell from their eyes, they went straight to the synagogue, or to the bathhouse, or home to have supper, as if nothing had happened at all."[67]

The dead descended upon their homes throughout the region, and the townsfolk were too busy bickering and feuding over inane issues to notice. "Before long,” he explains, “the dead took over. Today they're the bulk of the community and its leaders. Naturally, they don't bring children into the world; but whenever anyone dies, they steal the corpse from its deathbed or its grave and there's one more dead person in town.”[68] Everyone in town, he tells the narrator, is a corpse. The rabbi is a corpse, the cantor is a corpse, and the entire rabbinical court are corpses. "That's why,” he says, “wherever you go, there's such a stench in the air—in the synagogue, in the bathhouse, in the street—there are corpses all around you.”[69] The story ends with the question that is now naturally on the mind of the reader, with an answer that could not be better suited to the current study:

> "And you, my friend?" I asked. "What exactly are you?"
>
> "I'm only half-dead," answered the Jew—and jumping out of the wagon, he disappeared among the trees…[70]

67. Peretz, 168.
68. Peretz, 170.
69. Peretz, 170-171.
70. Peretz, 171.

5.3 // Aliens, Outsiders, and Others

> That's what I've been trying to tell you, that's just what makes me unhappy, what keeps me from you even though I can't think of any greater happiness than to be with you all the time, without interruption, endlessly, even though I feel that here in this world there's no undisturbed place for our love, neither in the village nor anywhere else; and I dream of a grave, deep and narrow, where we could clasp each other in our arms as with iron bars, and I would hide my face in you and you would hide your face in me, and nobody would ever see us any more.
>
> Franz Kafka, *The Castle*[71]

Aliens and outsiders, those who live on the margins of society or are otherwise — at least in the context of the story — atypical, are extremely prevalent in our stories. Whether it is the narrator who is describing their own perceived strangeness in the eyes of their neighbours, or key characters our protagonists meet who are unusual, outside the norm, or social outcasts, these figures appear often.

In Shapiro's tale, the protagonist spends the entirety of his narrative time (the moments we spend with them as readers) on the deck of the ship, seemingly never even venturing below deck to sleep. For much of this time he is completely alone, with the occasional appearance of other characters, such as his odd nameless friend, the storyteller. The narrator notes this near the beginning of the story: "There is no one else on deck. Face to face, the sea and I share a long, long sleepless night."[72] His solitude is so pronounced that the appearance of anyone else on the deck, on a ship presumably full of people, is cause for an extended passage that might indicate that the narrator is unsure that the individual is even really present:

> Somewhat more distinct, a second sound reaches my ear, and on that desolate expanse of

71. Franz Kafka, *The Castle*, (New York: Knopf, 1992), 140-141.
72. Shapiro, 161.

> water a bizarre duet is set up between two worlds, each hidden from the other. It is difficult to say whence the strange voice emanates: from very far away or from very close by; from the front, or perhaps from somewhere to the side? And before my mind's eye, standing on the deck of that hidden ship I seem to see another, as solitary as I, in a long black coat with a pale face and gleaming eyes, peering intently and eagerly into the bleak, blind fog.[73]

It is significant that Ravić seemed hardly to exist; that his neighbours were unsure they had ever seen him and that he dropped into the sea away from everyone and without a sound. On a subsequent night, a more tangible neighbour appears and begins telling a story to the narrator, one of a lonely artist "who used to paint the sea and went mad."[74] The artist in this story within the story, much like many of the figures we are describing here, is atypical and outcast on one hand while being described as a knower of hidden truths on the other. When the narrator asks him why he went mad, his neighbour describes a man who has an unusual ability to communicate with the sea:

> He used to say that when the sea spoke, he could paint it. Fewer or more tints, a softer or a sharper line, all that was human. But when the sea was silent, it told him so much, things he was wholly incapable of representing on canvas. He complained that the silent sea sucked the marrow from his bones, while the speaking sea disturbed him more and more with every passing day. To his ears, its discourse had come to sound like brash, commonplace babble.[75]

The neighbour continues "calmly, monotonously, like one half asleep," about the artist's unrequited beloved. Being more social in nature, "given to chatter, song, laughter," she is unable

73. Shapiro, 161-2.
74. Shapiro, 165.
75. Shapiro, 165.

to tolerate his brooding silence, but when he went mad, she grew to love him, joining him in that silence. As they bind together in their solitude, outcasts of their own accord, they make their distance from society symbolically physical:

> She took him into her home, and on stormy days, when the sea spoke, they were never seen outdoors. Only during calm, soundless days and nights, she and her ailing beloved would sail far out into the sea in a little boat, and spend hours there. I've no idea what they did, but each time she returned she was paler. I don't know the end of that story either. I haven't yet worked it out.[76]

The neighbour gets angry when the narrator asks what the story means, and tells him another story on a subsequent night about a "solitary old polar bear" floating alone on an iceberg for weeks, one whose sleep was "greatly troubled"[77] during a tumultuous winter. This time, the man's strange story seems to have a meaning, one that places God in this same position of solitary outsider: "[The iceberg] moved forward, and mutely related what a fearful winter had passed in the distant north, how heavily the sea had been battered, and how lonely God was in those distant places."[78]

In other stories, the characters' outsiderness might tend more toward the curious and unusual than the solitary and brooding. In "A Myriad-Minded Man," the titular character, Isaiah Ellenbogen, is described both as a curio in someone else's cabinet and a keeper of curios himself. On the topic of Ellenbogen as someone else's curio, the character's introduction (with some 1930's jargon that might offend sensibilities today) reads as follows:

> Sam Jacobson was a free-lance impresario of freaks, a hunter-up of curiosities, a fosterer of pseudo-geniuses, a fisher of men. For a time he had taken to his bosom one Louis

76. Shapiro, 165-6.
77. Shapiro, 169.
78. Shapiro, 171.

> Lazarovitch, self-crowned king of the hoboes. On another occasion he had protected and advertised Abdullah, the Negro, who could talk Yiddish, and who was a professor of gymnastronomy, a science invented by Abdullah, which was a curious combination of calisthenics and star-gazing. He had even cultivated the acquaintance of Moses Mozen, homosexualist and father of seven children. And now he had discovered Isaiah Ellenbogen.[79]

Ellenbogen, in his pages-long soliloquies and proclamations, indeed shows himself to be a curiosity. He tells stories about his teaching, his lawyering, and his various philosophies of life and history. After his encounter with the narrator, Ellenbogen disappears for a number of years and becomes, at least for typical society, even stranger. Despite that disappearance, he remains on the protagonist's mind, the latter thinking, "The man had been haunting me, imposing himself upon me."[80] Finally, during a conversation with his friend, he hears news of Ellenbogen's whereabouts. As it turns out, he had left his scholarly pursuits behind and become an announcer for a travelling circus, at the time a line of work emblematic of the social outcast. The narrator's friend reflects as much when he recounts the discussion that took place between the two of them, one in which Ellenbogen makes it clear that those social assumptions about the atypical, about those marginalized by society, are foolish:

> You see, he has a notion that these freaks are the only real authentic manifestations of divine creativeness. To him a pinhead is a heavenly miracle; a woman with four tongues, the Creator's masterpiece. The Siamese twins are the celestial gemini on earth. Yes, I made the natural and obvious objection—these people are not normal, therefore, they are queer, intriguing, fascinating. He seemed annoyed. How did I know they were not normal? Because the majority were like me? And what is normality? Perhaps, he argued, perhaps these freaks are the true and real cast and die of humanity, and my two-pronged

79. Klein, 128-9.
80. Klein, 145.

> forks, as the Chinese say, are the abnormal. Simply because there are a great number, running around, all looking like so many peas in a pod, does not yet set a value upon standardized goods. He imagined that on the contrary, it would be to the unique, what I would call the freakish he said, that merit should be attached.[81]

The narrator immediately desires to speak with Ellenbogen to discuss this line of thinking, driving over to the circus-ground as quickly as possible. He finds nothing, though, noting that "Isaiah Ellenbogen had journeyed on to the next town to spread the gospel according to St. Barnum."[82]

The next time the narrator hears about Ellenbogen, he has become an outcast even to his Jewish heritage. Having spent the first half of the story expounding on the teachings of the rabbis and discussing how their beliefs and so-called superstitions are relevant in modern science, his next move seems inexplicable to the narrator. "It was in the summer of 1933," he remembers, "that I began to suspect that he was really a scoundrel, a careerist, a man who would sell his soul for a salary."[83] When one of his old friends — the man he sped to dinner with at the beginning of the story — begins an antisemitic newspaper in Toronto, the narrator finds the rag suspiciously well-versed in the Talmud. It becomes evident to him, after writing to the newspaper and receiving a reply, that it is in fact Ellenbogen who they have been consulting on Jewish matters. After a back-and-forth through letters that ends poorly, the narrator concludes that "the man was simply the dupe of his own fancies; he was a fetish worshipper whose fetishes were varied in form, but identical in principle — now it was chemical formulae, now throw-backs and freaks, and now, now blood."[84] However we might think about the troublesome attitude of the narrator towards what he calls "freaks," it is evident that the character of Ellenbogen thrives in his place on the

81. Klein, 147.
82. Klein, 148-9.
83. Klein, 149.
84. Klein, 150.

margins and through the cracks of society at large, at least as far as we can know of the man who lives like a ghost, appearing and disappearing according to his whims.

In "The Lecture" and "Edgia's Revenge," the protagonists are quite explicit about their status as outsiders. A mixture of trauma and survivor's guilt, it seems, is the perfect recipe for a character who internalizes their role as an alien. As the two stories play out, it seems fairly clear that the characters are actually quite beloved by the people they encounter. Internally, though, they reject themselves on behalf of others, doomed to a perpetually lonely existence.

On his evening train ride from New York to Montreal, in which day turns to night and autumn turns to cold, Polish winter, Mr. N reflects on the harsh, unpleasant journeys back in the land from whence he came. There, Jews were indeed treated as alien: "I remember journeys in Poland when Jewish passengers were not allowed into the cars and I had to hang on to the handrails. I remember railway strikes when trains were halted midway for many hours and it was impossible in the dense crowd to push through to the washroom."[85] His thoughts soon turn from the past to the present, and he begins to associate his neighbours on the train with those feelings of loneliness and rejection into which his sense of self was forged by an eternity of trauma on the other side of the Atlantic. His mind's spiral begins with a simple description, aware that perhaps these thoughts are only his own: "I sit alone, a victim of my own isolation, shyness, and alienation from the world."[86] But as the trip continues, he leaves this self-awareness behind and sinks into speculation about what others are thinking, paranoically stating, "I exclude myself from society, and all the faces say to me silently: You don't need us and we don't need you. Never mind, you

85. Singer, 66.
86. Singer, 68.

will still have to turn to us, but we won't have to turn to you."[87]

For a moment, he is lifted out of his thoughts about the train, though his next line of thinking is no less melancholy: the delays on the train will lead to a late arrival, and "If I arrive in the middle of the night, there will not even be anyone waiting for me."[88] When the train finally does arrive, he stays in his seat, allowing the other passengers to disembark first. This leads to more suspicion and speculation about their thoughts, though: "Everyone who passes by — from the rear cars to the front, or the other way — glances at me; and it seems to me that each one forms some judgment of his own about the sort of person I am."[89] When he disembarks, it seems as though his prediction about his late arrival is correct, with no one waiting for him. As he prepares to "spend the night sitting on a bench,"[90] the sickly woman and her daughter appear, launching him into his strange and traumatic night.

The Otherness of the other key characters is also evident as the story unfolds. When the sickly woman dies and leaves the protagonist with her wailing daughter Binele, the latter attempts to seek help but only finds a Québecois neighbour who does not speak the same language as her. Alone with her mother in Montreal, Binele had no one, not even a neighbour she could communicate with. As the reality of the situation starts to set in, she begins panicking, lamenting her position with the repeated words, "What shall I do now? What shall I do now?"[91] As this continues and she wails that she has no one, Mr. N asks, "You have no relatives?" to which she replies, "None. I've no one in the world."[92] These survivors, living new lives halfway around the world from their trauma, still inhabit minuscule pockets of existence in which they are totally

87. Singer, 68.
88. Singer, 69.
89. Singer, 69.
90. Singer, 69.
91. Singer, 80.
92. Singer, 81.

solitary.

The same could be said for Rella in “Edgia’s Revenge.” Her isolation is self-imposed, a punishment for the guilt she feels toward her role in the camps. It could be said that she is left in isolation when she is finally rejected by Edgia at the end of the story, but in reality this is the result of her treatment of Edgia over the years. She had perpetually kept Edgia at arm’s length, letting her in only to push her away, all of these behaviours a result of that very self-flagellation. Even in her innocence before her time as a kapo at the beginning of the story, she self-identifies as Other, different from the rest. Due to her stature, she is, at least by her account, set apart by nature. We read in these early pages,

> In my lost former life — as close as yesterday and yet as distant as a dream — I had been vain of my statuesque figure and my healthy, well-developed body. Now my height became my greatest curse. It was not possible to hide or melt into the crowd. Whenever we marched in columns, I stuck out like an exclamation mark, which provoked in our guards an irresistible urge to smack me down to size. I suppose that my height irritated them because it disturbed the symmetry, the perfect harmony of the world which they had created.[93]

The theme of Rella sticking out like a sore thumb continues into her new life in Canada, much to her dismay. When she makes her way to her adoptive home, “a land ‘far from God and from people,’”[94] her only wish is to alter her otherness such that she can blend in. She becomes obsessed with fashion and other cultural trends. Her blending in proves impossible, once again, because, like her height, her accent is unchangeable. She rigorously studies English in a class setting, but,

93. Rosenfarb, 88.
94. Rosenfarb, 97.

in her words, “the accent prevented me from becoming a new person.”[95] Her new friends are in much the same boat, attempting to escape their own alterity by blending in through a saturation of modern culture. Thinking about those early times in their collective friendship, Rella notes, “They too were in the process of fitting themselves into new identities.”[96]

Given the theme of role reversal and opposition in this story, it should come as no surprise that Edgia is described quite differently. She has no interest in trends, no interest in fashion or looking presentable, and no desire to change her ways from her previous life. As such, she is described as unlike Rella in that she is Other *because* she blends in with the scenery and is essentially a non-person. An example of this is found in Rella’s extended reflection on Edgia around the beginning of their friendship. Edgia is described as not even taking up an extra seat at the table, as not mattering: “Even amongst her closest friends,” Rella reflects, “she was of no significance.”[97] Describing her in terms familiar to us in our study of liminal figures, Rella speaks of Edgia’s half-presence: “But there was something in her manner which cancelled her out. She belonged to that type of woman who blends into her surroundings like an object to which the eye grows quickly accustomed and stops noticing. She was there and yet not there.”[98] Continuing these observations, she describes Edgia as making herself “appear smaller than she really was,” and states that “her shadow never darkened the doorway of a beauty parlour.”[99]

At the end of this reflection, though, Rella seems to key in on an aspect of Edgia’s person of which she might be jealous, or at least with which she might identify: through all of these methods of remaining homely, it was “as if in that way too she were trying to erase her presence

95. Rosenfarb, 104.
96. Rosenfarb, 105.
97. Rosenfarb, 107.
98. Rosenfarb, 107.
99. Rosenfarb, 108.

from the eyes of others."[100] In the same way that Rella was attempting to disappear into the crowd to avoid an accusatory finger from another survivor, Edgia succeeded in blending in such that people didn't even notice her. Rella's method, blending in by attempting to speak impeccable English and remaining on trend in all things, has not worked for her. But despite her mocking attitude towards Edgia, the latter seems to have accomplished the one thing Rella has been striving for: blending into the scenery, no longer sticking out as Other.

In the case of "*Die Grosse Liebe*" we find a similarly self-imposed exile by a Holocaust survivor, but we see it through the lens of their progeny. In the odd tale of dreamlike memory, the protagonist reflects on his mother's perpetual isolation. Her isolation from the Jewish (and broader) community in her later years is emphasized, but so too, as with Rella, is her Otherness-by-nature. We see this early on in the story, in that unlikely zone of honesty on that peculiar night, when she discusses her time during the war. In an odd juxtaposition, her Otherness to her fellow Jews allowed her to blend in with the Germans they were trying to evade. She tells her son, "The Retters had a daughter my age. Ingrid had dark brown eyes and long black hair. She was a big chatterbox and caused a lot of trouble. *I* was the one with blue eyes and blond hair."[101] Her unusual between-state as a Jew with blond hair and blue eyes separates her from that separation imposed by her tormentors, an unlikely sort of double negative.

Everything about the protagonist's childhood is described in terms that put him and his family separate from the community and from each other, right down to the location of their house, which "stood on a quiet street at the outskirts of town."[102] Thinking of his relationship with his

100. Rosenfarb, 108.
101. Stollman, 266.
102. Stollman, 271.

parents, the protagonist reflects on the separateness within his very own household, where there was a perpetual barrier between all members. He recalls, “Somehow I grew up understanding that one did not ask questions of a personal nature, even to one’s parents. I knew that surrounding every human being was a sacred wall of dignity and privacy.”[103] This privacy is afforded everyone in the house, including the child in the equation, and that deep sense of barriers and boundaries becomes a key aspect of his experience of the world throughout his life: “As far as I could tell,” he remembers, “she never entered my room when I was out of the house. And I am still taken aback, unsettled, observing people who talk too much, chatter, ask question after question.”[104] Even when he eventually gets married and moves to Germany, his relationship is one of understood and content privacy, him noting, “Though we have now lived together for many years, she does not ask me about my family, nor do I ask about hers. I like to think of our life together as in the present, so long as the present maintains its own sense of privacy.”[105]

His mother is even more private and isolated beyond the boundaries of their own home and relationships, to the point that the protagonist has trouble remembering even a handful of times she left the house. “Only once,” he reflects, “before my father died, can I remember my mother leaving our house.”[106] That one time was for a Jewish high holy day at the local synagogue, when his father requested that they go together as a family. His mother, awkward and uneasy in the leadup, asked to leave during the service, and they did. When the protagonist brings that day up later on in their lives, similar to the encounter with the ghostly woman, she claims it never really happened.

Later, we come to a potential understanding of her self-imposed exile when she is accused

103. Stollman, 268.
104. Stollman, 268.
105. Stollman, 278.
106. Stollman, 272.

of having been a traitor during the war by a woman who enters the store. Once again, she claims that the event in question had never occurred: "'Oh, no. No, no. She is completely mistaken. I would never have worked for them even if they tortured me. I would never turn anyone in.'"[107] Whether her exile from society was self-imposed and stemming from legitimate guilt or a case of agoraphobia, the central attribute of the protagonist's mother is her total separation from others.

"A Dream of Sleep" is one of the stories that is most explicit about the isolated nature of its main character. Tucked away in a near-abandoned cemetery, Wolf spends his days completely solitary, save for the occasional visitor and the spirits that walk the grounds. His personality fits his activities as well, with the author noting that "Wolf was a shy man, unaccustomed to speech."[108] At the point in the story when the cemetery is just starting to be overtaken by suburban sprawl, Wolf begins to recede further and further from society, evident in the short passage, "Wolf ventured out less and less, and the world returned this favour."[109] As the cemetery continues to be engulfed in modernity, his shyness combines with his increasing solitude, and he exits any social situation as quickly as possible:

> Doddering figures still appeared from time to time, and invariably praised the upkeep of the yard, sometimes even seeking Wolf out to comment on the garden he had coaxed from the sandy soil around his cottage. Wolf nodded at these comments and smiled and disappeared from view as quickly and courteously as possible.[110]

His intense isolation continues into the impending dreams and delusions that begin haunt his days and nights in the cemetery, and it is this degree of solitude that makes the final moments of the

107. Stollman, 277.
108. Almond, 192.
109. Almond, 195.
110. Almond, 195.

story, in which Wolf attempts to help the teenage girl give birth, all the more intense, thunderous, and disturbing. In that one moment in which Wolf emerges from the dreadful solitude he has inhabited for an unknown length of time, the pain of loss stings him once more.

Finally, the "Lev" section of *The Mystics of Mile End* features key characters who are perpetual outsiders. The elderly Holocaust survivor, Mr. Katz, whom I will explore further in the next section on the Foolish Sage, is an outcast of the Hasidic community. Though he is fervent in his beliefs – – arguably more than anyone else in the neighbourhood — he is shunned by his peers for his unkempt look and eccentric ways. The only person who is willing to befriend him is Lev, a perfectly average kid who seems right in the middle of everyone: unspectacular in his schooling, not notably liked or disliked there, and not particularly troublesome or helpful at home. Existing smack dab in the middle of society, it is notable that Lev gravitates towards social outcasts.

Alex, Lev's best friend, fits this type in Samuel's novel. From the very outset of the story, there is no doubt that Alex is an outsider. Lev notes that Alex's behaviour is strange and walks the reader through his thought process in the opening instance of their friendship: "Even though Alex's behavior was a little weird, I knew he didn't have any friends and none of the teachers were watching and I didn't want him to get beat up, so I went and stood next to him on the patch of grass where he was reading."[111] Alex's mother confirms the trouble he has in approaching people as well later on in the story, telling Lev, "I don't know if you've noticed, but he doesn't make friends very easily."[112] Within the structure of the story, too, Alex is an outsider. While all the other characters have some measure of religiosity past or present — Lev's father was formerly an orthodox Jew, Lev becomes a Yeshiva student in a later section of the story, the Glassmans and

111. Samuel, 10.
112. Samuel, 72.

Mr. Katz are both observant, and Lev's sister Samara's Bat Mitzvah forms a large part of the narrative of "Lev" — Alex is a staunch atheist from the outset, obsessively studying physics and astronomy in order to understand the mysteries of the universe.

5.4 // Aliens, Outsiders and Others in Earlier Jewish Tales

Within their own communities, Jewish protagonists can be well-loved and -respected members of the fold (though not always). But the moment that these figures step out into the broader world, it is typical to find them at odds with what they find: they are outsiders in strange places, marginalized figures in lands not their own. This sense of alienation has been noted throughout Jewish history, and is of course one of the key ingredients in the precarious relationships between Jewish communities and the lands, rulers, and civilians who "host" them. It is no surprise, then, that the main characters of stories throughout Jewish writing suffer from — or in some cases thrive on — their status as Other.

Two of our medieval offerings contain similar tropes concerning the protagonist's status as alien. In the "Tale of the Jerusalemite," for example, the man is an outsider in the land of demons not only on the level of geography but on the level of species. For example, when he is hiding out in the synagogue with the help of the demon rabbi, he is discovered by another demon who whispers to his neighbour, "I smell a human,"[113] an almost cartoonish way of being found out that articulates the degree to which he does not belong. The penalty for his incursion into a land he does not belong is death, but the demon rabbi is able to convince his fellow demons not to carry out this justice. At the end of the story, the reverse occurs when his demon wife decrees that she will not destroy the human town if they accept her half-demon son into their fold. Their reticence stems from his status as a partial alien, but the result is much quicker than earlier in the story: the

113. In Mirsky and Stern, 127.

townsfolk agree to accept him, and he becomes a great leader for them.

"The Sorcerer" also plays on this notion of being alone, not only in a strange town but in a strange realm. From the outset, the young man's desire to learn Chaldean lore and magic places him outside the norm, with no one willing to teach him in Jerusalem. In order to achieve his dream, he will have to venture to a far-off place where is a stranger. In a similar way to the previous story, the protagonist finds himself the lone person from the Actual world in a realm that is eerily similar to the one he has left when he opens the door in the well. In this place, as similar as it may be to the place from whence he came, his new acquaintances have never heard of such a place as Jerusalem, something that would of course be unheard of in a Jewish community at that (or any) time. We read,

> Amused at this speech, the scribe called to his fellows, "Have you ever heard of a city called Jerusalem, or of a traveler seeking wisdom in the land of Egypt?" They replied, "Never until this day!" The scribe continued, "Well, here is a traveler from a distant land, whose home is in Zion, and whose hearth is in Jerusalem."[114]

Similar to the "Tale of the Jerusalemite," the protagonist of this story, at first questioned for his strangeness, utilizes it to achieve a great status in this unknown kingdom.

I discussed the dybbuk epidemic in 16th-century Safed in the section on the (un)dead.[115] These stories form something of a corpus of incorporeal alien tales, an outside invasion into both the physical bodies of the victims and the social body of the community. In the story I focused on, and many others of the same style from that time, the dybbuk does not return to the place where they died, or the community that they once knew; there is no familiarity between the invader and the invaded. Not only, then, are the dybbuks alien in the act of possessing another person's body,

114. In Mirsky and Stern, 303.
115. See pg. 168.

but they are alien in the most basic sense: they are not from around here, and they never were. Furthermore, the strangeness of the places the spirit wanders is identified as one of the sources of his anguish: the city where the Jews are intermarrying; the city where the Jews go to Muslim clerics for help; and the ill-fitting innards of the doe all cause him great distress. The most famous dybbuk story, S. An-sky's 1920 *Tsvishn Tsvey Veltn – der Dibuk*, does away with the latter point and makes the possessing spirit secretly familiar to the key players, but this is a significant move away from the earlier tales.

In the 18th century, we find the Baal Shem Tov actively pursuing seclusion from the community. In his childhood, "He succeeded in his studies. But it was his way to study for a few days and then to run away from school. They would search for him and find him sitting alone in the forest. … Though they brought him again and again to the melamed (religious instructor), he would run away to the forest to be in solitude."[116] This is a lifelong behaviour and continues into his early adulthood: when his wife agreed to marry him and "wander about the country … the Besht arranged for a place in which she could live, and he secluded himself in the great mountains."[117] During this period in his life, he lived in a village, ran a tavern, and "after he brought brandy to his wife he would cross the river Prut and retire into seclusion in a house-like crevice that was cut into the mountains."[118] Throughout his life, even after revealing his power to the Hasidim, he would retire to his house of seclusion.

Following the Baal Shem Tov, we return to Rabbi Nachman, for whom an anxiety surrounding outsiderness seems to have a significant impact, creeping into his dreams. In one of his many recorded dream-talks, he recalls,

116. ben Samuel, 12.
117. ben Samuel, 22.
118. ben Samuel, 34.

> I decided to go outside, and there I found groups of men standing about in circles and whispering to one another. One was mocking me, another was laughing at me, and still a third was acting rudely toward me. Some of my own people were there among them, acting rudely and whispering about me. I called one of my disciples over and asked him, "What is this?"[119]

"How could you have done a thing like that?" asks his disciple, and the rabbi is left confused, having no recollection of committing any terrible sin. The disciple walks away, and the rabbi concludes that he must leave his home for a land where no one knows him. His plan appears unsuccessful, though: "I decided that there was nothing to be done, so I sailed away to a far-off country. But when I arrived, I found that even there people were standing about and discussing this thing; they knew about it there, too."[120] Reaching a further conclusion that he does not belong in society with such an unknowable commotion surrounding him, he leaves entirely:

> So I decided to go off and live in the forest. Five of our people gathered around me, and together we went off to dwell in the woods. One of the men would periodically go into town to fetch provisions for us, and on his return I would ask him, "Has the matter quieted down yet?" But he would always answer, "No, there is still a great commotion about it."[121]

Further down the line, having spent an unknown amount of time secluded in the forest, the rabbi asks the man who fetches their provisions to bring back a book for them to study, lest they forget all their learning. The man tells him that this will be impossible because he cannot tell the townsfolk who the book is for, and if he doesn't offer a name for whom they are giving away a valuable book, they will not allow him to take it. Eventually, though, he does return with one. It is

119. In Mirsky and Stern, 342.
120. In Mirsky and Stern, 342.
121. In Mirsky and Stern, 342.

unreadable for Rabbi Nachman, however: "I took it from him, but I didn't even know how to hold it, and when I opened it, it seemed completely strange to me, a foreign language in a foreign script."[122] The man accosts him just as all the townsfolk had, and in that moment of sadness he remembers the story of the Baal Shem Tov, "who, when he heard he was to have no place in the world to come, said, 'I love God without the world to come!'"[123] At this moment, the strange curse is lifted and people embrace him as one of their own once again.

5.5 // "A Traveller Disguised": The Foolish Sage and Hidden Identities

> "I want shyly to confide a secret to you: all this is nothing more than my father's long coat which I, a child, have donned in order to look like a father. Yet the coat trips me up and embitters my life."
>
> -Lamed Shapiro, "At Sea"[124]

In his study of Zoharic writing, Eitan Fishbane discusses a "dialectic of disguise and discovery, assumption and reversal" in the tales surrounding wise sages who present initially as fools. Such tales involve "the companions' surprising discovery of a revered mystical sage disguised as a simpleton of one sort or another."[125] In a number of stories from the Zohar—two of which I will focus on when I explore intertexts related to this theme — the disciples of Rabbi Shimon are trekking down the road (as they are wont to do) and encounter someone they would consider a fool, or at the very least someone they see in a negative light as a blue-collar worker. In a lesson about assumptions and judging a book by its cover, the "fool" inevitably turns out to be a wise sage who aids them on their winding path to enlightenment.

122. In Mirsky and Stern, 343.
123. In Mirsky and Stern, 343.
124. Shapiro, 179.
125. Fishbane, 128.

The theme of hidden identities comes up frequently in several of our stories. In some cases, the essence of the Foolish Sage remains: a character who is considered lowly or unintelligent is revealed — or considered by some — to be wise; in effect, a negative valuation flips to a positive one. As we have seen in some of our stories written closer to the middle of the 20th century, however, the more positive tropes of Jewish writing are flipped on their head and conceived in total opposition to the familiar. With the current theme of hidden identities and reversals, this manifests as a positive valuation flipping to a negative one: characters who are considered good, lovely, or intelligent by others are revealed (or reveal themselves through narration) to be rotten or foolish on the inside.

In "At Sea," the protagonist's neighbour on the deck of the ship fills this role, an eccentric character who tells stories that have an air of significance, though he himself could not articulate that significance for you. When the two passengers find themselves alone on the deck, he simply launches into his story before the reader even knows of his presence: "'I had an acquaintance, a painter,' said my neighbour on the bench, a graying, stocky man with a faraway look in his blue eyes, 'who used to paint the sea and went mad.'"[126]

The story is a fascinating one, already discussed in previous sections, of a painter who had a certain psychic link to the sea, and the woman who loved him. He tells the introductory part of the story, then pauses, affording the narrator a moment for reflection. "I glanced more attentively at my neighbour," he explains. "He spoke calmly, monotonously, like one half asleep. It seemed to me that he was looking out to sea but at nothing in particular."[127] The neighbour concludes his dark and beautiful story, but he seems to reach a dead end, saying "I don't know the end of that

126. Shapiro, 165.
127. Shapiro, 165.

story either. I haven't worked it out yet."[128] Curiously, the man immediately rises from the bench where they are sitting and walks to the other side of the deck without a word. "And what's the moral of all that?" the protagonist shouts after him, to which he "[gestures] vaguely as though to say, 'Oh, leave me alone!'"[129] The encounter ends with the narrator thinking to himself, "A strange fellow!"[130]

The end of that encounter indicates a kink in the neighbour's intellectual armour. He speaks pretty words, but are they full of emptiness? The next day, he appears again without warning, launching into another story after only being introduced by the short sentence, "The graying passenger with the faraway look in his blue eyes recounted:"[131] He tells a story of polar bear stuck on an iceberg in the Arctic. Again, the moral of the story is ambiguous, and it ends without any concluding thoughts from either him or the protagonist, as the narrator simply moves on to something else happening on the deck.

Finally, the night of his final story, he receives a proper introduction from the narrator:

> In a corner on the ship's upper deck I noticed my neighbor, the passenger with the broad shoulders, graying hair and blue eyes. He was lying on a sail spread out over the deck, gazing up into the sky. Lying down next to him, I noticed a smile on his face. In response to my question, he held his peace for a while, and then answered nonchalantly: "If you wish, I'll tell you."[132]

What follows is another story that has the air of something deeply profound; the tale of Lodestar.[133] The story takes up a large portion of the entirety of "At Sea," and the lack of interruption seems to

128. Shapiro, 166.
129. Shapiro, 166.
130. Shapiro, 166.
131. Shapiro, 168.
132. Shapiro, 172.
133. See pg. 249.

indicate that our protagonist is listening with bated breath. Again, though, our expectation of the neighbour as a sort of wise man is trifled with: when the story ends that night, the neighbour drifts off again without a solid conclusion. We then read,

> My neighbour had been silent for a long time. The ship beneath us rocked gently as we lay gazing at the stars. Vague thoughts bumbled about in my head.
>
> Only on the bright morning of the next day did I ask my neighbour about the end of the story. He laughed.
>
> "Ah, you've taken it seriously!" he replied teasingly.[134]

He offers a short summary of the whereabouts of the key players in the story, but the notion that it is amusing that the protagonist thought his story profound is enough for us to debate whether or not this character is a sage or a fool. This is certainly the most ambiguous encounter that we come across in this section.

"A Myriad-Minded Man" revolves around a central question: is Isaiah Ellenbogen a sage or a fool? If he is a sage, his introduction into the protagonist's circle, and the power of his mesmerism, are fortuitous. If he is a fool, then the protagonist and his friends have all had the fleece pulled over their eyes. Whatever the result, our narrator is sure that Ellenbogen could accrue a group of followers in any era. He ponders, in the opening lines of the story,

> Was he knave or fool? Sane or mad? Was he sincere in his idiosyncrasies or only an exhibitionist flaunting lunacies in the hope that true genius is to madness close allied? Was he really a spiritual man, or only one making a great to-do about seeking out divinity, so that he might himself be regarded as something more than human? I do not even know the answer; I have myself been torn by doubts, sometimes passing judgment upon him as an unspeakable faker, and sometimes, — attributing to my juristic and

134. Shapiro, 178.

> pedestrian mind an innate incapacity to understand such men as Ellenbogen, — thinking that had he lived in another time and age, he might have founded a new sect and have been remembered as a prophet and seer.[135]

Upon their first encounter, the protagonist becomes enthralled with Ellenbogen: his lengthy monologues about Jewish thought, his philosophical soliloquies, and his many varied talents make for a character with whom a first-time listener might become obsessed. As time goes on, though, and as the narrator learns more about Ellenbogen's recent activities, he gets the sense that the sage is actually a fool. Upon learning about Ellenbogen's involvement with the antisemitic newspaper, the narrator reflects, "All this time, I was convinced that Ellenbogen was a queer egg, simple in his very complexity; queer, but no more. It was in the summer of 1933 that I began to suspect that he was really a scoundrel, a careerist, a man who would sell his soul for a salary."[136]

Finally, after their heated postal exchange and ultimate falling out, it becomes clear that Ellenbogen was truly a fool. And if his employment at the newspaper did not make this clear enough, Klein includes a final indictment of his character. In the final moments of the story, the narrator receives word that Ellenbogen "had decided to renounce the pleasures and vanities of our world, and give himself over"[137] to a cult led by a man named Ignaz Trebitsch-Lincoln (mentioned in the story only as Trebitsch), an Actual-world conman of Jewish descent who became the Buddhist abbot Chao Kung in the late 1920s.

In the story-within-the-story that I have already discussed at length in previous sections – – that of the small Jewish town with the haunted synagogue — we actually find a reversal of this sage-or-fool conclusion. Chatzkel, who is seen as "a listless sort of fellow," a slow and dull

135. Klein, 125-6.
136. Klein, 149.
137. Klein, 153.

individual, ends up utilizing the aspects of his personality that are most derided. Described as "[seeming] to hold a conference with himself before every step that he took" and someone who "would be late for his own funeral," that sloth-like movement becomes a valuable asset and leads to his discovery of the faulty electronics.[138] Chatzkel, then, serves as a foil for Ellenbogen himself, a character who, in total opposition to the man telling his story, reveals himself to be wise and measured when he was assumed to be a slow-witted fool.

I.B. Singer, whose story (and eventual stage play and film) "Yentl the Yeshiva Boy" is one of the more popular 20th century Jewish stories of hidden identities and the reversal assumptions, flips that same trope in "The Lecture." The reversal of the Foolish Sage trope is not a particularly prominent part of the plot, but the characterization of Mr. N as someone who thinks himself a fraud is powerful when one recalls the fervour with which the sickly woman seems to adore this man. His self-perceived fraudulence occurs only in a brief flash, but it offers enough backstory that we immediately understand the irony of the woman's adoration when it arrives so forcibly.

Because this tale was first published in 1968, the reason for Mr. N's travel on that fateful night is both notable and, at first, confusing. The importance of this activity to his character becomes obvious in the very first sentence of the story, a quick, strong, and efficient opening that indicates that his sense of self is based strongly on his ability to complete this task: "I was on my way to Montreal to deliver a lecture."[139] He states the content of his lecture as delivering "an optimistic report on the future of the Yiddish language."[140] Ostensibly taking place two decades following the destruction of such a large portion of the world's native Yiddish speakers in the

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138. Klein, 141.
139. Singer, 65.
140. Singer, 65.

Holocaust, and with its protagonist departing from the city where most of the remaining speakers live, aging while their children and grandchildren speak English as their *lingua franca*, there is something immediately off Mr. N. He states as much on the following page, thinking to himself, "What had made me so optimistic all of a sudden? Wasn't Yiddish going under before my very eyes?"[141] This anxiety about his own intellectual fraudulence sets the stage for a deeply uneasy relationship between the three characters as they become eternally bound by a harrowing night.

"Edgia's Revenge" is such a strange, tense, and exciting story, and the interplay of hidden identities and role reversals is one of the most prominent aspects that make it so. Central to the story is Rella's oft-vocalized anxiety that someone will recognize her as a former *kapo*; this is the expressed reason that she carries her sleeping pills at all times. This hidden identity, well-known to the reader, is the most surface-level of the twisting and turning identities that thread through the story. Rella's past is not the only thing she is trying to hide, however: in her own mind, she believes herself to be dreadful beyond the fact of her past activities. She notes, near the beginning of her time in Canada, "Yes, I looked good, despite my nightmares. I was like the proverbial apple, beautiful and healthy on the outside, wormy and rotten inside."[142]

Rella's desperate attempts at shedding her self-appointed title of Alien through language courses, yoga retreats, and high fashion demonstrate another aspect of her personality that she wishes to hide. That being said, the cast of characters that surround her are similarly disguised. Thinking about the trope of the Foolish Sage, that individual who seems at first glance to be a fool but turns out to be a wise and knowing teacher, we see a pointed reversal when Rella discusses Pavel, the member of the group who is more cynical and less interested in their attempts to pretend

141. Singer, 66.
142. Rosenfarb, 101.

to be something they are not. She notes about his thoughts,

> He believed that we were a bunch of phonies, that we were not genuine or authentic in our feelings and behaviour, that we were dilettantes who succumbed to foolish enthusiasms for every new fad — and all because we were afraid to face the truth. And that truth was that we felt alien in this new world, that we were so caught up with modernity because we found it so frightening.[143]

Rella's lover, Lolek (who is Edgia's husband), is seen as the leader of the group before his untimely death. He is loud, brash, interesting, and he was a hero partisan in the war to boot. The latter is one of the main reasons, it seems, that Rella is so drawn to him. During a car ride on one of their outings, however, Pavel again plays spoiler to the group's collective and individual facades. He reveals to Rella, in a private conversation in the car, that Lolek was not a partisan at all, and spent the war in hiding. This revelation makes Rella angry, and she claims not to believe Pavel, calling him a poor excuse for a friend.

Curiously, Edgia represents a more traditional instance of the Foolish Sage type. As I mentioned in the previous section, Rosenfarb includes an extended passage in which Rella scathingly describes Edgia as essentially nothing: she is homely, boring, unkempt, unintelligent, and her existence is easy to forget. There are instances in the first half of the story, however, that indicate that Edgia might be playing the part. During a tense scene at Edgia and Lolek's apartment, an unusual moment in which Edgia and Rella are completely alone together, Rella worries that, at any moment, Edgia might grab the knife sitting next to them and attack her. It is during this scene that we see a crack in the veneer, a momentary lapse in her unknowable ruse that indicates that her personality is just that. Just after Lolek arrives home and goes to the bedroom to change, we

143. Rosenfarb, 123.

witness this peculiar moment:

> Next to me on the sofa lay a book called *Epochs in Chaos* by somebody called Velikowsky. “Are you reading this?" I asked Edgia with surprise. Edgia bent her head to her shoulder and assumed the look of a moron. “I just look at the pictures,” she giggled.[144]

It seems clear in this moment that Edgia has been putting on a character; for what reason, we do not quite know. Is it to please her friends or her husband? To blend into the surroundings and not arouse the interest of others? Whatever the reason, upon the death of Lolek and her isolation from the group, the façade lifts in the years between their meetings. The next time Rella sees Edgia, her old “friend” is a completely new person, but disturbingly familiar, uncanny in her appearance: Edgia looks exactly like Rella. She recalls of her first meeting with her,

> Before me stood someone entirely different from the person I remembered — a blooming attractive woman, an apparent reflection of myself.
>
> She was wearing an elegant suit, and my professional eye immediately discerned that it was made of the most expensive imported fabric, and that it was cut in the style which I myself had introduced into fashion. In her high-heeled shoes, which were very similar to mine, with her thin shapely legs, her perfect posture, with the head carried proudly above the shoulders, she seemed taller than the shrunken Edgia I had known. In fact she seemed almost as tall as I was. Her small face, with its delicate features, its short nose and tiny mouth, was framed by a halo of wavy hair, dyed black my hair colour - and it was combed in my style. She reminded me of an unfurled flower. Only a few deep wrinkles on her forehead, which I noticed beneath the strands of hair, bore witness to the fact that it had not been easy for the flower to straighten itself.[145]

Edgia not only assumes Rella’s looks in her new personhood, but she also takes her place in their

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144. Rosenfarb, 103.
145. Rosenfarb, 145-6.

circle of friends, with Rella noting, "Edgia humiliated me by usurping my position in the group."[146] And naturally, when Edgia usurps Rella's standing, Rella is forced into Edgia's former subservient position, making for a strange and somersaulting friendship. Once their relationship is re-established, Rella describes this interplay:

> I became her echo. I copied her wisecracks and witticisms. I craved her praise, and gave in to her in everything. For her part, she seemed to copy my mannerisms and my style. She copied my appearance, my bearing, and my attempts to keep up with the times in matters of fashion.[147]

Rella notes her subservience once more: when Edgia marries Pavel (she started her relationship with him when he was married, just as Rella had done with Lolek), Rella tells us that she was pleased with the news because "I hoped that this would diminish her uncanny hold over me."[148]

Finally, in the closing pages of the story, Edgia undergoes another transformation. No longer subservient, and no longer in need of copying Rella's every trait, it seems that she has broken free of all of these bonds and become a true individual. A moment before Edgia decides to cut off their poisonous friendship, Rella sees the power emanating from her bondless counterpart:

> I realized that I had yet another Edgia before me, a completely new person with a new emotional make-up, a new knowledge, which had no connection to the sort of knowledge that I and our friends had so eagerly pursued. Who was this new Edgia? I was very much afraid of her.[149]

In the context of this discussion of hidden identities, Edgia's many transformations beg an important question: was Edgia hiding her true identity when she was blending into the background,

146. Rosenfarb, 148.
147. Rosenfarb, 150.
148. Rosenfarb, 152.
149. Rosenfarb, 161.

eating a single turnip for dinner, and bashfully leaving her friends to enjoy their evening while she worked invisibly in the kitchen? Or did she really transform from one genuine version of herself to another, totally different version? Two things indicate that this was a hidden identity — a purposeful ruse, or at least a coping mechanism: first, the moment in which she plays stupid when caught with a book of philosophy, saying that she only looks at the pictures. There is no reason for her to act this way, in the way that the narrator describes it, unless Edgia was putting on a sort of character. And secondly, the ruthless efficiency with which Edgia becomes Rella when the two are apart for an extended period of time, to the point that she is a successful and popular businesswoman and even seems to physically grow a couple of inches, indicates that she was in fact much more intelligent and savvier than she initially let on.

One of the central concerns of "*Die Grosse Liebe*" is the hidden nature of one's past, with a focus on the secretive life of the protagonist's mother. One of the threads that weaves through the story is the mother's obsession with the film *Die Grosse Liebe* and its lead actress, with one result that we get the sense that she is playing a part throughout, never her true self. At various points in the story, the protagonist is surprised to learn things about his mother of which he had no idea, this secrecy reaching as far as her ability to speak the primary language of the country they inhabited his entire life. When she begins running the jewelry store after her husband's death, her ability to speak English surprises her son. Her response when he takes notice is telling of her mindset concerning her secrecy: "Though at home she continued speaking to me in German, her English was much better than I had realized … 'A good actress must adjust her accent for a new role.'"[150]

In a number of other places in the story, as noted in a previous section, the mother denies

150. Stollman, 275.

that memories within the narrator ever actually happened. This happens with his memory of the ghostly lady who helps on the night of his father's funeral, and it happens with his memory of the one night they went to a synagogue together. The last time that she claims that someone is mistaken about their memory might be the key to her enduring secrecy and the hidden nature of much of her character. On the day the woman appears and accuses his mother of being a traitor, punching her in the face, her explanation to her son might hold a clue as to whether or not she is being truthful:

> Finally my mother spoke. Her voice was altered because her lower jaw was now swollen. I could barely make out what she said. When she spoke she did not look directly at me. Her eyes skimmed the top of my head as they did the evening after my father's funeral.
>
> "Oh, no. No, no. She is completely mistaken. I would never have worked for them even if they tortured me. I would never turn anyone in."[151]

In the other instances in the story when it seems that she is lying about or forgetting a memory, she simply states that her son was mistaken. There is one zone in which she is described as being unusually honest and truthful, however: the living room on the night of her husband's funeral. In that place, outside of time and space and molded in and by the narrator's memory, the things she says ring true. For that reason, the fact that he describes her actions in this moment as the very same as that particular night in that particular zone creates a certain ambiguity in the reader's conclusion about whether she was indeed a traitor or not.

Part 1 of *The Mystics of Mile End* holds a classic example of the Foolish Sage character type. Mr. Katz, Lev's neighbour, is noted throughout the story as being a pariah in the neighbourhood, looked down upon by everyone except for Lev and Samara, including his own Hasidic community.

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151. Stollman, 277.

Lev explains at the very beginning of the story, "I felt bad for Mr. Katz because other people in the neighbourhood sometimes made fun of him."[152] That's not to say his behaviour is not bizarre — it certainly is, and it is noted throughout. For instance, further along in the story, Lev observes,

> On my way home from school in the last week of May, I saw Mr. Katz sitting on his lawn in between the old oak tree and a second tree trunk that seemed to have sprouted up overnight. But when I got closer, I saw that it wasn't a real trunk at all, it was the hundreds of toilet paper rolls that we'd painted brown tied together with dental floss.[153]

He is never revealed to be a sage in the sense that we have come to see, with a grand moment in which the characters come to understand his wisdom. The moment is implied, however, several sections and narrators later, in the conclusion of the overall story. When Lev's sister Samara, now older and struggling with her mental and spiritual health, climbs a new Tree of Life that Mr. Katz has built on his front yard, she jumps off a moment before lightning strikes the Tree in an apparent sign from God.[154] At that moment, it seems, the only one who could communicate with the Otherworld was foolish old Mr. Katz.

5.6 // The Foolish Sage and Hidden Identities in Earlier Jewish Tales

The Foolish Sage is not the only character type in Jewish writing who takes part in this game of hidden identities, role reversals, and inversions of expectations. Characters who exist (or present) on the edge of two statuses; who are fools-but-sages, pious-but-wicked, children-but-wise, or brothers-but-husbands;[155] are a fairly typical occurrence. As Peretz's ghostly driver might put it,

152. Samuel, 5.
153. Samuel, 28-9.
154. Samuel, 289.
155. I think here of the story in Abraham's cycle in which he convinces multiple rulers that his wife, Sarah, is his sister rather than his wife in the hope that they will not kill him for his wife. As it turns out, in Gen. 20:12, Sarah is in fact his sister.

many characters operate within the World of Illusion.

In Zoharic narrative, though, the inversion trope almost always results in the revelation of divine secrets. Eitan Fishbane relates this to the Aristotelian concept of *anagnorisis*: that liminal moment of transition from ignorance to knowledge. Bridging the inversion trope with the latter concept, he writes, “The recurrent representation of reversal — of initial disguise and assumptions yielding to the disclosure of wisdom and sage-identity — functions as a process of cognitive transformation.”[156] He expands on this further, writing,

> The pedestrian journey of the companions is an unstructured quest for the secrets of the Torah — a pilgrimage that is marked at key moments by the entrance of a new source of mystical wisdom and disclosure, a new figure who can open the secrets in unexpected ways. The concealed nature of the sage’s identity remains significant in the companions’ interpretation of the encounter; the perceived otherworldly character of the stranger is deemed integral to the revelation of secrets along the path.[157]

In some stories, the individual initially looked upon with suspicion is in fact a sage or divine spirit. This is the case in the story of the companions’ encounter with R. Hamnuna Sava, who appears to them as a donkey driver as they travel along the road. Despite their initial suspicion, he launches into a fantastic soliloquy on kabbalistic secrets, revealing himself to be a great sage. The companions respond with tears, kissing, and exclamations, though the sage never reveals his true identity, disappearing as quickly as he arrived.[158] Reflecting on the encounter, one of the companions, R. Abba, says,

> Surely this is what we have learned — that on every road where the righteous walk, and words of Torah are [exchanged] between them, the righteous of that [Other] World come

156. Fishbane, 129.
157. Fishbane, 130-1.
158. Fishbane, 130.

to them.

Surely this was R. Hamnuna Sava, who came to us from that [Other] World to reveal these words to us. And so that we would not recognize him, he departed and concealed himself from us.[159]

In other stories, someone seen as a fool may not be one of those special individuals, but they are nonetheless wiser and more helpful than initially anticipated. One such story begins,

> R. Ḥiyya and R. Yosi were walking in the desert. … After a while, they saw a man who was approaching with a load in front of him. R. Ḥiyya said: "Let's walk on. Perhaps this man is a Gentile or an ignoramus, and it is forbidden to join with him on the way."
>
> R. Yosi said: "Let's sit here and see if perhaps he is a great man."
>
> After a while he passed before them and said: "In roughness of crossing, the cluster of this companionship is essential! I know another way—let's turn away from this one. I must tell you so that I am not guilty before you, so that I do not violate what is written (Lev. 19:14): *Before the blind you shall not place a stumbling block*. For you are like blind men on the road, and you shouldn't endanger your lives."
>
> R. Yosi said: "Blessed is the Compassionate One that we waited here!"[160]

There are several other tales just like this one in the Zohar. In others, more sages are encountered in the form of donkey drivers along the road, or children have wise words to share with the companions, or, in the aforementioned case of the innkeeper's daughter, a woman aids them in the revelation of secrets.

Several centuries later, we find in Hasidic literature an interesting twist — or inversion — of this trope of inversion. Here, in the stories of the Baal Shem Tov, it is the protagonist himself

159. *Zohar* 1:7a, in Fishbane, 130.
160. *Zohar* 2:49a-b, in Fishbane, 138.

who presents as a fool and later reveals himself to be a sage. In this way, we are offered the opposite perspective of the Zoharic tales. In the years before his revelation as a wonder worker, the Baal Shem Tov went out of his way to make people believe that he was a fool. In his childhood, the Besht would escape to the forest to find seclusion when he was supposed to be learning under a melamed, the townsfolk finding him after several days sitting alone there. Eventually, they gave up on him, and instead of taking the usual route of Torah study, he worked leading children to and from school. When he was fourteen years old, Rabbi Adam's son caught him meditating in the middle of the night and asked the Besht to study with him, the latter only acquiescing on one condition: "that no one besides you will know about it and you will not reveal it by your behaviour. You must continue to order me to serve you as you did before."[161]

When he grows into adulthood, he marries the great Rabbi Gershon's sister, but continues to act like a dullard while secretly studying in the middle of the night. This act is purposeful, however: he annoys Rabbi Gershon with his stupidity to such a degree that the Rabbi asks his sister to leave town with her husband. It is during these seven years of wandering that the Baal Shem Tov continues his self-training and preparation in his desired seclusion in anticipation of the revelation of his true nature to the community. When he returns, and his wife tells her brother the rabbi that they "wandered from village to village and were beset by many troubles,"[162] the rabbi hires him once more, this time as his driver. The Besht again pretends to be a fool while he continues his preparations, with Rabbi Gershon finally concluding that "It is impossible to obtain even this service from him. He is good for nothing."[163]

Rabbi Gershon starts to key in on some anomalous activity around the Besht as time wears

161. ben Samuel, 17. For further discussion, see pg. 76.
162. ben Samuel, 27.
163. ben Samuel, 29.

on, however. At one point, he notices that the Besht doesn’t kiss his mezuzah when entering his home; he then discovers that the mezuzah is defective. On that same visit, he notices the Besht’s face glowing in the middle of the night.[164] The author of these stories, Dov Baer ben Samuel, sums this period of the Baal Shem Tov’s life up quite succinctly when he writes, "Sometimes he seemed to be a holy person, and at other times he seemed to be a common man."[165]

This chapter has shown that the landscape of this Jewish realm is not the only thing permeated by liminality. Having described a broad view of the entire narrative realm in Chapter Three, and having approached and described the fictional landscape of this realm in Chapter Four, Chapter Five went even further, describing the inhabitants who occupy these zones. The people who inhabit this landscape are just as steeped in betweenness as the terrain upon which they stand. They are at times both alive and dead; they have ambiguously preternatural abilities to convene with the Other realm and the dead; they are at once both foolish and wise; and so many of them prefer the status of Alien and Outsider, at times because they thrive there and at times as a mechanism to defend them from the threat of past trauma arising again.

The remarkable consistency with which these eight authors describe their characters offers another example of the cohesion of this narrative realm. As I showed in Chapter Three, their narrative constraints are consistent. In Chapter Four, that cohesion was brought into sharper focus by exploring the liminal zones that dot the physical and psychic landscape of this realm. Finally, the exploration of characters in this chapter further cemented the narrative realm as logically consistent in its possibilities and tendencies. In the next chapter, I conclude with a discussion of the significance of these findings: why it is notable that these stories share a narrative realm; why

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164. ben Samuel, 45.
165. ben Samuel, 29.

it is helpful to connect this realm of possibilities to those of the modern myth and the paranormal; and finally, how it is useful to conceptualize Jewish literature as a world-building enterprise.

Conclusion: The Modern Jewish Myth

> I suppose you've studied geography and think it's all-inclusive. Well, you're wrong. There are Jews who don't live in geography at all.
>
> -I. L. Peretz, "The Dead Town"[1]

Miron's *Judesein*

On the basis of this sketch of the Jewish literary dreamscape found in our eight stories, we may return to our starting point in the theoretical daydreaming of Israeli scholar Dan Miron. Moving away from the many theories of Jewish literary continuity, Miron argues that, while modern Jewish writing is of course influenced by writing from the communal past, a new study of this "freely floating, imprecisely defined, and widely inclusive" Jewish literary complex would require a turn towards contiguity, this idea of varying degrees of contact that I discussed in Chapter One.[2] No longer should we think of Jewish writing in the 19th to 21st centuries as a unidirectional evolution built on influence after influence, but rather as a galaxy of authors, readers, places, and figures that evince or are conditioned by what he calls "a sense of *Judesein*, being Jewish, or … read by readers who experience it as if it showed interest and were conditioned by the writer's being Jewish."[3] It will be important to remember, as I have noted throughout, that the author who most emblematically captures the sense of *Judesein*, according to Miron, is Franz Kafka.

Doležel's Modern Myth

Lubomír Doležel describes the hybrid world of the modern myth as one that incorporates the separate natural and supernatural domains of the mythological world while dissolving the boundary that divided them in the classical myth. Concerning the classical myth, he writes, "The

1. Peretz, 162.
2. Miron, 404-5; see pg. 26.
3. Miron, 404-5.

most ancient, mythological imagination provided an understanding of the human world by surrounding it with vast alien spaces, seats of nonhuman and superhuman powers and individuals.… the natural and supernatural domains are separated by a sharp boundary."[4] In such a world, "the natural domain is under the governance of supernatural beings who have access into their fiefdom, although often in material bodies or special guises."[5] It would be fair to say that this describes the general contours of the biblical world: there is a human world that is featured most extensively, a nonhuman world that is featured less as the locale of the action, and the entities (God, angels) of the nonhuman world frequently venture into the human world and exert their power in a mostly unidirectional dynamic.

In the early 20th century, according to Doležel, a new type of world emerged that he terms the modern myth, of which two variants arise. The first of these is most important for us, Doležel explaining, "The boundary between the natural and supernatural domains is removed and their modal opposition neutralized."[6] What once had two totally separate realms is now a "unified hybrid world."[7] He writes that the hybrid world was created by Franz Kafka (though I argued that it finds its true origin in the secular Jewish authors like I.L. Peretz who found success in the decades preceding Kafka).[8]

On the boundary between the natural and the supernatural in this world, he writes, "Because the boundary that divides the fictional world of the classical myth is dissolved, the hybrid world is a coexistence, in one unified fictional space, of the physically possible and physically impossible fictional entities (persons, events)."[9] He continues, "Physically impossible events

4. Doležel, 185.
5. Doležel, 185.
6. Doležel, 187.
7. Doležel, 187.
8. See pg. 49.
9. Doležel, 187.

cannot be interpreted as miraculous interventions from the supernatural domain, since no such domain exists; all phenomena and events of the hybrid world, both those physically possible and those physically impossible, are generated within this world."[10] The copresence of both the possible and impossible constructs, as I have shown in this analysis of eight short stories, forms the liminal zone in which these tales exist.

In *The Modern Jewish Canon*, Ruth Wisse echoes Doležel's claim, writing of *The Trial*'s "obliteration of the boundary between natural and preternatural phenomena."[11] Throughout this study, it has been hard to pin down what exactly the Other realm is, or if it even exists explicitly in our stories. The answer is simpler when we look at the older Jewish tales that were written for the purposes of religious instruction: there is a physical realm — the Heavenly Academy, for instance, or the land of demons — from which otherworldly entities emerge and that can be reached by special individuals, whether they are simply chosen or whether they study so intensely that they are afforded that possibility.

In our stories, however, the Otherworld is never fully authenticated as a physical realm. It seems, rather, that this Otherworld is part of — or overlaid onto — our realm: entities and events are presented as emerging through trauma, through dreams and visions, through cycles of depression, and we are rarely 100% certain of how exactly the character is experiencing the moment in question. For example, we call the elderly survivors in Bender's story "Prophets" because of an implicit intertext. They are not described as receiving messages from God as a prophet would, but due to the knowledge gained from intertexts, we know that prophecy is presented in the Hebrew Bible as a mode of communication whereby God sends messages to humans through dreams and visions. The fact that these two people speak seemingly important

10. Doležel, 187-8.
11. Wisse, 85.

messages after having dreamed them, then, implies that it is a supernatural event. *The event is not described as divinely providential and God is nowhere mentioned, though; they simply dreamed and then repeated the dream to their neighbours.* Doležel's description of the hybrid world of the modern myth fits well with our stories in this regard.

Doležel brings into the discussion the obvious example of "The Metamorphosis," in which Kafka's protagonist Gregor Samsa wakes up one morning having transformed into a gigantic vermin, a hybrid of a human (his mind) and an insect (his body). No one in the story questions the mechanism by which this happened; they never ask how it is possible that a human can transform into a pest overnight, clearly a supernatural event. That being said, they do behave as if a supernatural event has occurred, with disgust and horror at the fact that their family member is now a filthy creature.[12] Returning to the example of the prophets in "Dreaming in Polish," none of the townsfolk seem to wonder how it is possible that an elderly couple can see the future through their dreams, but they sure do behave like a supernatural event has occurred when they enter into the hysterical frenzy of covering every object that might be a graven image.

On that same token, Mr. N never begins a discussion of how it is possible that bony fingers are reaching out at him in the darkness of a Montreal apartment in "The Lecture", and Wolf does not question why or how the cemetery's spirits linger in front of his window at night in "A Dream of Sleep". The only character who seems to question the supernatural is Isaiah Ellenbogen in "A Myriad-Minded Man", but he is swiftly disauthenticated as a fool and an opportunist when he transgresses the axiological constraints of the narrative world by joining forces with antisemites.

It was important, then, to contextualize our stories by looking at some of their themes and motifs as they appear in earlier Jewish tales. In the earlier tales, there is a preponderance of

12. Doležel, 188.

authenticated supernatural activity: journeys to supernatural domains, angels, demons, and the like. Much of the language and settings used in those stories is taken up in our stories, but the authentication of the supernatural is noticeably absent. Rather, as Doležel puts it, "The supernatural is not a domain of the world structure but rather an interpretive hypothesis: the events of the fictional world are so confusing and incomprehensible that they could be of supernatural origin. Yet the modern myth refuses to confirm this hypothesis."[13]

We see this especially in some of our post-Holocaust tales, where the effects of post-traumatic stress are described in terms of waking nightmares and the trespass of the dead amongst the living. Mr. N's night in the rundown Montreal apartment in Singer's tale, for example, is situated in a liminal zone between life and death — and natural and supernatural. The encounter with otherworldly entities is described factually, leaving the reader to wonder whether N is experiencing a supernatural occurrence or a bout of post-traumatic stress. Logically, we might surmise that it is the latter, but the narrator never gives us a clear answer either way. The same is true even prior to Holocaust writing: Shapiro's narrator in "At Sea" engages in discussion with a fairy who reminds him of the land he is leaving and the trauma that remains there. Once again, the reader is left unsure as to whether a supernatural encounter occurred, or the narrator's trauma has been anthropomorphized in such a way that he can converse with it. The answer is never given, the supernatural never authenticated or disauthenticated.

Paranormal, Horror, and Jewish Literatures — and the Social Boundaries they Describe

I introduced Nancy H. Traill's *Fictional Worlds of the Fantastic* because I wanted to pursue the Kafka thread to its conclusion, and because I believe that conclusion — that there appears to be a connection between Jewish writing and the category and subcategory of the Fantastic and the

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13. Doležel, 198.

paranormal, respectively — is significant in drawing a conclusion for this study. While the modern myth is a category that Doležel developed for his own work, Traill's categories are well-known in the study of Western literature and have been discussed at length by notable scholars for decades. The category of the Fantastic and its many subcategories, including Horror fiction, have been especially effective in drawing conclusions about the societies in which they were conceived.

Scholar Jeremy Dauber offers a salient link between this category of fiction writing and the category of Jewish writing in his article, "Thinking with Shedim: What Can We Learn From the '*Mayse Fun Vorms*'?"[14] Dauber makes the connection between supernatural horror fiction and an early sixteenth century Jewish tale, one that is a continuation of the trope of demonic marriage that I first discussed in the analysis of the Uncanny in "The Tale of the Jerusalemite".[15]

In the *Mayse fun Vorms* ("Story from Worms"), a young boy plays hide and seek with his friends on Lag Ba'Omer, a curious little holiday nestled in the midst of the Counting of the Omer, and traditionally the death anniversary of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, central figure of the *Zohar*. The boy in the story goes beyond the limits of the woods, to a tree from which a hand is sticking out. Believing it to be his male friend Anshel playing a trick, he places a gold ring on the motionless finger and says that they are betrothed. The hand disappears, frightening the boy.[16]

Eventually, this boy grows up. On the night of his wedding, a figure appears in his marital bedroom and tells his new wife, the daughter of a wealthy father, that the man is hers. The figure strangles the bride to death. The same thing happens three years later, and ten years after that the man is betrothed to a girl from the poorhouse (ostensibly the only person left who would be willing to marry him). The figure, a she-demon, appears once again and tells the new bride that the man

14. Dauber, "Thinking with Shedim," 19-20.
15. See pg. 68.
16. Dauber, 23-4.

is hers, to which the new bride agrees that the she-demon can have him for an hour every day, and that she will not attempt to find out their location during that time. Some time passes until the wife finds a secret passageway under their bed; she follows it to the demon's bedroom, where her husband and the she-demon are sleeping. She sees that the she-demon's hair is flowing onto the floor, so she caringly places it onto a stool. The she-demon immediately awakens and tells her husband that she must die because his bride has touched her "shame." She dies, and the husband and wife hold a joyous banquet.[17]

Dauber begins his analysis of the story by noting the usefulness of supernatural horror fiction in understanding the social circumstances of the author: "Studies of supernatural fiction, and particularly supernatural horror, often concern the establishment and transgression of social mores, codes, and boundaries."[18] It stands to reason, then, that studying a society's supernatural fiction "may therefore be particularly useful for investigating its notions of limits and boundaries."[19]

Dauber explains that early modern Jewish literature constructs creatures and entities who "break through" physical and moral boundaries, but who are bound to rules themselves: "the borderless have their own borders, and discovering their whereabouts may be highly informative."[20] With that idea in mind, a close reading of a Jewish text, and especially one that deals with the supernatural or supernatural horror (whether authenticated, as in our earlier Jewish tales, or ambiguous, as in our eight short stories), can generate an understanding of social borderlines at that time and place. A close reading of this story, for example, reveals both sexual and class-based norms. It also reveals that this story is steeped top to bottom in spatial and temporal

17. Dauber, 24.
18. Dauber, 19.
19. Dauber, 19-20.
20. Dauber, 19-20.

liminality with the purpose of placing the tale in the sort of time warp towards a mythic contemporary/past that we saw in both the Zohar and in some of our stories in Chapter Four.[21] The author of the "*Mayse fun Vorms*" does this by "establishing harmonic union between mythic and contemporary, then and now: while the text painstakingly notes that 'the German town still known today as Worms' still contains a thriving Jewish community, it accentuates the narrative's location in a mythic past, 'years ago,' in a community 'go[ing] back to the generations of Jesse.'"[22]

But it is not only this staging of a mythic past that places the reader in an uneasy, liminal state. It seems that every creative decision in this story is meant to do exactly this, right down to the choice of the minor holiday on which it takes place. Discussing a part of the text in which the author invites inhabitants of the Actual world into this mythic past ("The town of Worms has a public park called Havel Park, and people who have been here must know where it is"),[23] Dauber writes that this "linkage between historical recollection and literary reimagination" affords the reader the opportunity "to explore another aspect of the tale familiar to the horror story: how harmony yields to liminality in the tale's continuous presentation of borderlines and borderlands, which are of course easily transgressed."[24]

Dauber notes that the choice to set this part of the story during the holiday of Lag Ba'Omer "is precise, as a holiday highly — perhaps most — suitable to symbolize such a liminal state: Perched precariously as a joyous break in the middle of a mourning period, its celebratory status seems derived from its identity as a date on which sadness does not occur."[25] The notion of Lag Ba'Omer's intrinsic liminality leads to a further description of the text's use of this central concept,

21. See pg. 82.
22. Dauber, 25.
23. In Dauber, 26.
24. Dauber, 26.
25. Dauber, 26.

and points back towards the discussion in Chapter Five on hidden identities.[26] Dauber notes this concretely: "The yielding of simple harmony to a variety of secret, liminal meanings may be finally concretized by the nature of the yeshiva boys' game: hide and seek."[27]

Understanding the liminal setting by contextualizing it in Jewish religious culture in the Early Modern period reveals the social norms — the deontic constraints — implied by the text. Those constraints related to mores and morals are illuminated by Dauber when he discusses the symbolic act contained in their game. The stage is already set for a transgression when Anshel's hunt for his friend is described as physically taking place beyond the liminal boundary of the forest, "behind all the trees."[28] According to Dauber, the image of the hand emerging from the tree "generates an uncanny effect instrumental in setting the unsettling tone" and, combined with the liminal zone of the place beyond the trees, creates an air of uncertainty.[29]

What is not uncertain, though, is the boy's transgression: "a wrongful erotic act, symbolized by an impossible marriage between human and demon, leading to terrible punishment in the avenging demoness's embodied form."[30] Dauber notes further, "as is common in horror literature," the monstrous figure "becomes curiously and paradoxically conservative: upholding Jewish law as she simultaneously breaks it."[31] According to such a reading, the she-demon's transgression of marital norms — sharing a husband with another woman — is in fact a narrative tool utilized to confirm the sexual norms of the authorial society, namely that the boy's true transgression was not carelessly wedding a she-demon and losing a valuable ring, or having multiple wives, but the implied attempt to wed another male, Anshel, with that ring at the

26. See pg. 209.
27. Dauber, 26-7.
28. Dauber, 27.
29. Dauber, 27.
30. Dauber, 27.
31. Dauber, 27

beginning of the story.

But while this reading is invariably quite clear, Dauber writes, it is not — and should not be — the only possible reading of the social mores implied by the text. He takes it a step further, looking into the implied social understanding of class in the text and questioning why it is the girl from the poorhouse who eventually vanquishes the she-demon, though totally by accident. He does this by utilizing an intertext as a key to the entire story. He explains that the text makes specific mention of the wealth status of each player, from the boy's family to each of his wives who meet tragic ends. It is only when all women of the upper class fear a similar end that the girl from the poorhouse is introduced. The girl's mother asks her if she is willing to risk this marriage in hopes of finding a better life, but says that she will not force her. Her daughter replies, "Dear mother, we're poor, that's true, and *a poor person is like a dead man*."[32] She says she will risk her life as long as the man's father agrees to provide for her mother if she dies. That italicized phrase, according to Dauber, is the key to understanding the story. He explains,

> Those readers familiar with the midrashic narrative are aware of the phrase's resonance. The phrase is used by Jacob, according to the midrash, to avoid death at the hands of Esau's son Eliphaz; when the latter threatens to kill him at his father's behest, Jacob instead gives him his entire fortune, suggesting that since "a poor person is like a dead man," Eliphaz may report that he has "killed' him, therefore accomplishing his filial duty, without the stain of a murder on his conscience. Eliphaz agrees and does so.[33]

As such, the girl's reply, which quotes this intertext, implies that she has nothing to fear in death because she is already "metaphorically and in some sense even ontologically" dead, much like Rella in "Edgia's Revenge".[34]

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32. in Dauber, 36.
33. Dauber, 36-37.
34. Dauber, 36.

It is then her acceptance of her subordinate role that becomes her salvation: when she sees the she-demon's golden hair (ostensibly a metaphor for wealth) lying on the floor, she places it in a higher position, where she believes it belongs; in so doing, however, she kills the she-demon and gains riches. In Dauber's reading, then, we cannot quite say that the story is a condemnation of immense wealth since the girl becomes rich at the end. That being said, the death and misery of the rich characters, along with the described wealth of the she-demon, make this claim a little more complex. The way the story plays out, however, "[allows] the poor girl (and the readers identifying with her) to possess virtue and wealth simultaneously."[35] We can also see that norms and attitudes towards women are reinforced in the story: the reason she ends up finding the she-demon and her husband is because of a stereotyped female curiosity, with the author of the text condescendingly noting, "Now women always want to know a lot more than is useful for them."[36]

Dauber's close reading of the story and contextualization through key intertexts allows us to understand that the porous or nonexistent barrier between natural and supernatural in these texts offers an opportunity to better understand the Jewish cultural imagination in different times and places. As Dauber notes, studies of supernatural fiction and horror fiction — or, for our purposes, Fantastic and paranormal fiction — offer insight into social boundaries and the people who transgress them.

It was important, then, to make the clear connection, by way of Miron, Doležel, and Traill, between the narrative realm of our eight short works of Jewish fiction and the worlds of the modern myth and the paranormal. Liminality, paramount among the key features of our short stories, offers an avenue through which we might come to understand the virtues and vices that are most prominent in each Jewish community from which our Jewish authors emerged. Put differently,

35. Dauber, 42.
36. in Dauber, 41.

investigating the liminal zones and figures who appear so prominently in our eight stories allows us to understand social borderlands of Jewish communities in different times and places.

Doležel offered a helpful method of articulating these virtues and vices. After defining the alethic constraints (possible/impossible) of the narrative realm of our eight stories in Chapter Three, I identified the axiological and deontic constraints.[37] In much the same way that Dauber makes use of Jewish intertexts to decipher the social mores implied by the text, I introduced intertexts and applied Possible Worlds methodology to aid in doing the same for these stories. The result was the identification of the values, disvalues, obligations, and prohibitions of this narrative realm. If one agrees with Dauber's approach, those elements of the narrative realm these authors share is also a reflection of the values, disvalues, obligations, and prohibitions of the authors' communities. We could logically conclude, then, that the obligations to revere the dead and to educate, as well as the ultimate, severe prohibition on collaborating with those who seek to do harm to the Jewish community, are as important in the authors' Jewish communities as they are implied to be by the text.

Diasporic Writing: A Literary Home for Jews

If the fictional realm described in these stories is indeed capable of offering insight into the Jewish community of the Actual world, then a natural question would involve the persistent presence of liminal zones and figures. What might we understand about Jewish societies in the Diaspora, and how might these texts play a role in those communities? These story elements are influenced by the experiences of the literary culture that creates them, but the reverse is also true. When readers situated in a dispersed population can feel at-home in stories about uprootedness, transit, and other liminal categories, it can have a tangible effect on their wellbeing. In other words, to be at-home

37. See pg. 88.

in a literary world of familiar uprootedness can counterintuitively give the reader a sense of rootedness.

I turn to the work of anthropologist Michael Jackson, whose book *The Politics of Storytelling* (2002)[38] explores the ways in which storytellers rework reality in their tales and allow themselves and their consumers to symbolically alter their relation to — and position in — the world. Jackson suggests that storytelling fulfills a desire for rootedness — a desire quite familiar to the Jewish people. Quoting Simone Weil, Jackson states that "To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul."[39] The mechanism by which human beings find that rootedness, Jackson argues, is storytelling: "To reconstitute events in a story is no longer to live those events in passivity, but to actively rework them, both in dialogue with others and within one's own imagination."[40] In other words, he writes, "while storytelling makes sociality possible, it is equally vital to the illusory, self-protective, self-justifying activity of individual minds. As Joan Didion observes, 'We tell ourselves stories in order to live'"[41]

Indeed, one of the drives toward storytelling is a desire to be more than a bit player — an extra — in the story of our lives and the lives around us. As Jackson points out, "In stories, as in dreams, we take centre stage."[42] This notion again brings us back to the underlying motivations of Holocaust writers: though there are myriad reasons to write these stories, one reason is surely to counteract the incomprehensible scope of lives snuffed out in the blink of an eye. The idea that millions of individuals who had vibrant social ties, wants and desires, dreams and motivations, could simply cease to exist in a mundane set of lineups, factory settings, and open pits, doomed to

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38. Michael Jackson, *The Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression and Intersubjectivity*, (Copenhagen, Denmark: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2002).
39. Weil, 41, in Jackson, 12.
40. Jackson, 15.
41. Jackson, 15.
42. Jackson, 15.

eternity as a statistic, is simply unacceptable. By writing about individuals, or about fictional characters meant to represent a group of individuals, authors breathe meaning into the deaths of distinct beings.

By no means is this storytelling meant to create an alternate reality in which those lives were not lost, or in which the good guys won and the bad guys lost. This is not the point of Jackson's argument. Rather, he writes, "[Storytelling] seems to work at a 'protolinguistic' level, changing our *experience* of events that have befallen us by symbolically restructuring them. This is not simply a matter of contriving scenarios in which good prevails over evil."[43] Furthermore, he continues, "Storytelling reworks and remodels subject-object relations in ways that subtly alter the balance between actor and acted upon, thus allowing us to feel that we actively participate in a world that for a moment seemed to discount, demean, and disempower us."[44]

Though there are surely some stories that work specifically as alternate history, the fundamental drive of storytelling is not to switch around the facts so that "we" are the winners. Rather, as I have pointed out, storytelling in this case is meant to give meaning to the banal — sometimes endless — sufferings of the individual or group that is engaging in the act of world-manipulation. As Jackson points out, it "gives us a sense that though we do not exactly determine the course of our lives, we at least have a hand in defining their meaning… In making and telling stories we rework reality in order to make it bearable."[45]

Stories, however, are not written in a vacuum; they are not "pure creations of autonomous individuals nor the unalloyed expressions of subjective views."[46] Rather, they are "a result of ongoing dialogue" between self and other: "stories, like memories and dreams, are *nowhere*

43. Jackson, 16.
44. Jackson, 16.
45. Jackson, 16.
46. Jackson, 22.

articulated as purely personal revelations, but authored and authorised dialogically and collaboratively in the course of sharing one's recollections with others."[47] In the course of Jewish writing, authors are rarely if ever working towards a description of their lives totally separate from other Jews. In fact, we could argue that any work by a Jewish author that does not imply in some way the life, thought, history, experience, or beliefs of the Jewish people is not a work of "Jewish literature." In the case of Kafka, he implies the "experience" part of that notion so forcefully that the others are rendered unnecessary to fit the rubric. *Judesein* is an inherently social concept, as it carries on its back the burden of being a Jew in the world — that is, how Jews relate to other Jews and, perhaps most importantly, how Jews relate to the societies that play host. We might read Jackson through this lens when he writes,

> When we are forced from the place we call our own, when the public spaces in which we have lived and worked with others become spaces of terror and of death, when we lose touch with the people who know our names and speak our language, when life is no longer a journey or narrative the meaning of which is consummated in return, or even, indeed, in time, and when suddenly we have no settled place from which to venture forth each day, nor haven at the end where we can recover our lives in the stories we share, what becomes of our stories and our lives?[48]

Some scholars of Jewish literature answer this rhetorical question exactly as Jackson implies, explaining that authors deal with these issues through the creation of a Jewish literary space. In her study of Yiddish travel literature, *Journeys Beyond the Pale* (2003),[49] Leah Garrett makes the claim that exile was conceptualized as a key marker of Jewishness specifically out of a desire to make sense of historical realities. This began in the biblical book of Deuteronomy, where the

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47. Jackson, 22.
48. Jackson, 33.
49. Leah V. Garrett, *Journeys Beyond the Pale*, (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003).

people of Israel are told that "The Lord will scatter you among all the people from one end of the earth to another."[50] Garrett notes that "Exile would arise repeatedly as the enforced state of being of a disenfranchised people and would become a central communal vision of Jewish selfhood."[51] Furthermore, she writes, "Diaspora Jews would often use the motif of exile and punishment, with its implied redemption and 'return,' as a way to find meaning in exile. As W.D. Davies states, 'In spatial terms, they did not stand in chaos if they knew which way to look.'"[52] As such, for Jewish authors, the concept of Home is not simply where they rest their head and spend time with their family. According to Garrett, Home "was often both the here and now and the 'not yet home' with a sideward glance toward Eretz Yisrael [the Land of Israel]."[53]

As part of the enterprise of making sense of the world and their (mostly negative) relations with the peoples who surrounded them, Yiddish travel writers of the late 19th and early 20th century wrote a "forceful counterstory" to mainstream narratives, building the world "from the perspective of a people who were often considered by others to be outsiders yet who found ways to envision themselves as insiders within an imagined Jewish world."[54] By conceiving of the world as a Jewish space, "these writers normalized their place in it and made themselves less marginal, instead of writing prose that was a mere reflection of life from an outsider's perspective."[55]

I would suggest that the enterprise of Jewish world-construction was not limited to the Yiddish travel writers of the late-19th and early-20th centuries. Rather, "writing Jewishly" is a world-building project with the same motivation as the authors about whom Leah Garrett writes. Our authors demonstrate a motivation to make sense of the experience of being a Jew in the world

50. Deut. 28:64.
51. Garrett, 7.
52. Garrett, 7.
53. Garrett, 7.
54. Garrett 5.
55. Garrett, 25.

by creating a Jewish "Otherworld" through certain sets of implicitly familiar themes, motifs, and symbols. The identification of these motifs and themes in our stories was the work of Chapters Five and Six, revealing the remarkable consistency with which these authors from different positions in space and time applied them. By applying this "forest of symbols," as Victor Turner might call it, they construct a space in which Jewish authors and readers are no longer marginalized, and where they are insiders rather than outsiders, at-home in their liminality.

Concluding Thought

There are so many more stories to explore through the methods established in this study, as well as other forms of media — cinema and theatre, for example. Though this has not been a study of the whole of Jewish literature, I do believe that the fictional realm I identify in these eight short works that are labelled "Jewish" both culturally and technically (by publishers, critics, compilers, and the like) is logically consistent. This fictional realm is one permeated by liminality, from the characters themselves to the zones they inhabit. People, places, and things are perpetually betwixt and between, not quite here and not quite there, not quite this and not quite that. They are both alive and dead; in a dream and awake; in the old country and the new. These ambiguities fashion an uneasy atmosphere that leaves both characters and readers with a certain sense of dread that waxes and wanes from paragraph to paragraph and story to story, though ever-present.

These sorts of ambiguities manifest throughout — and are frequently the focus of — the literary categories I brought into the discussion: Doležel's modern myth and Traill's paranormal. But while Traill's paranormal is a subcategory of a subcategory (the Fantastic), nestled away in the library of Western culture, our stories were written by renowned masters of Jewish writing, period. Not Jewish Paranormal fiction; not Jewish Gothic fiction; not Jewish Horror fiction; not Jewish fiction of the Fantastic. In this study I have discussed I.L. Peretz, Franz Kafka, I.B. Singer,

A.M. Klein, Chava Rosenfarb, Lamed Shapiro, and so many others who are considered paramount among Jewish authors of the last 150 years.

Each of these authors constructs — inhabits — this fictional realm marked to varying degrees by these liminal zones and figures. The authors' temporal and spatial location in the Actual world seems to have little bearing on their drive to make use of these themes and motifs: though the social realities of 2015 Montreal (Sigal Samuel) and 1909 Ukraine (Lamed Shapiro) might be vastly different, the ways in which our Jewish authors express the core experience of those different realities are remarkably similar. And while I shall not, of course, make the broad claim that this idea is representative of Jewish writing as a whole, it is important to note and remember the unique cohesion of Jewish storytelling through time. The literary leanings of the group make it more plausible that there could be a "Jewish literary dreamscape" that is derived from a distinct and uniform folkloric world.

Modern Jewish fiction writing, though not always concerned morally and spiritually with the stories of the past, sprouts out of a culture that derives much (though not all) of its folklore from a common source despite vast temporal and geographical distances between communities: the "travelling homeland" of the Tanakh and the Talmud, as described by Boyarin and Steiner. Cultural diffusion between Jews and their neighbours creates distinct systems within the Jewish literary galaxy, forming regional differences between Sephardi, Israeli, and North American Ashkenazi literatures, for example, and rightly restricting our ability to make blanket statements about Jewish writing. But insofar as scholars like Miron and Steiner can make the statement that Kafka is the essence of Jewish writing, we can make the statement that a study of Israeli writing or Sephardi writing using this methodology would be valuable, and might logically be predicted to find a similar porousness or nonexistence in the boundary between natural and supernatural,

this-worldly and otherworldly. In the meantime, my hope is that this study of eight stories from an Ashkenazi-centric milieu in North America contributed to the reader's sense of the nature of Jewish writing in the Modern age, and, at the very least, gave one succinct answer to the question of what makes Jewish writing "Jewish."

Finally, let us return to the story of the golem from Talmud Sanhedrin 65b with which we began. It opens with Rava's words: "If the righteous wish to do so, they can create a world."[56] One of the tasks I tackled in Chapter Three and in this conclusion was to describe axiological constraints — how we assess righteousness — in the dreamscape of these eight authors. Held in especially high moral and ethical regard were the protection of other Jews from those who wish them harm; reverence for the Jewish dead; and the promotion of education in the community. By writing their tales, our authors have done all three of these: their stories offer Jewish readers refuge from the world's ills in a literary world that is distinctly their own; they memorialize the victims of anti-Jewish violence and their own family members by incorporating their experiences into these stories; and they promote education by fashioning works that are rife with Jewish context and complex enough for intense study. Within the axiological codex of these Jewish stories, the act of writing is, in this sense, righteous. Thus, when our authors put proverbial pen to paper, they link past and present, religious and secular, by both concretizing the possibility of which the Talmudic sage Rava spoke, and by performing the act of which Doležel writes: they create a world.

56. *Sanhedrin* 65b, *William Davidson Talmud* at Sefaria.org.

Appendix: Story Summaries

In the following section, I present abridged versions of each of the stories I am treating in this thesis, in chronological order. Wherever possible, I let the authors speak for themselves through quotations. In so doing, my hope is that the reader will experience, at least to some small extent, the act of reading these stories without having to run to the library to find them before proceeding. Throughout these readings, you may find explicit moments that relate to the themes I have already brought into the discussion — liminality, otherness, mysticism, darkness and dread, dreams, transit — but as we see in Chapters Three through Five, the key markers of the Jewish literary realm also manifest implicitly, and extensively.

A // Lamed Shapiro // "At Sea" (1910)

Aboard a ship headed for New York, Lamed Shapiro's protagonist in "At Sea" spends his nights observing the dark shadows of the ocean and listening to his neighbour on the deck, who "spoke calmly, monotonously, like one half asleep," tell tales of the sea. One of these, a story about an acquaintance of his who used to paint the waters and went mad, describes the immense power of a silent sea to envelope everything in its midst: "When the sea was silent, it told him so much, things he was wholly incapable of representing on canvas. He complained that the silent sea sucked the marrow from his bones…"[1] Through the marriage of shtetl memories and traditional maritime folklore, Shapiro shapes a truly unique entry in the library of Jewish writing, a golden example of the author's abilities outside of the Pogrom Tales for which he is generally celebrated.

The infinite transitions of night to day and day to night form important temporal markers in a voyage that seems, to the protagonist, as endless as the vast ocean, where we might ask a

1. Shapiro, 165.

wholly legitimate question: “Is not the earth but a dream?”[2] The narrator begins by describing the sea and the night, the alterity and loneliness of the dark deck in the witching hour. “Face to face,” he says, “the sea and I share a long, long sleepless night.”[3] When a fog encircles the vessel, he seems to notice sounds coming from the opposite side of the deck, “quiet and indistinct, like an ancient dream.”[4] A solitary figure in “a long black coat with a pale face and gleaming eyes” seems to emerge from the dark fog and “silent dogged dread” but disappears just as quickly as he came.[5]

Day comes, and the narrator observes the little relationships that are forming between other passengers on the deck throughout the journey. As quickly as he begins to enjoy day in “the midmost point of all the world,”[6] a situation arises. One of his fellow passengers hunches himself over the railings, and slowly, silently, drops himself into the water. Sailors spend an hour searching for the man in a lifeboat, but come back empty-handed.[7] Following this tumultuous day, night, silence, and the eerie calm return. It is this night that our protagonist first encounters his storytelling neighbour. The man tells him the story of the mad painter; that the painter had a beloved who did return his love until he went mad; that the two of them would sail out into the sea when he was ailing; that each time she returned to land she was paler; and finally, that he has no end to that story. When the protagonist asks the storyteller what the moral of the story is, the storyteller waves him off as he walks away.

The following day, the narrator describes a young couple that he’s observed since the first days of the voyage. He seems to speak to no one during the day; he only observes. At night, however, the storyteller returns to the deck. Each time he tells a tale, he speaks unsolicited. On this

2. Shapiro, 160.
3. Shapiro, 161.
4. Shapiro, 161.
5. Shapiro, 161-162.
6. Shapiro, 163.
7. Shapiro, 164.

night, he tells of an old polar bear in the north, beginning by describing a tumultuous winter season: "For long consecutive months God showed His mighty hand in the distant north. With immense exertion the sea grappled with His cold iron fist as it bore down on its mighty breast."[8] That whole winter season, a solitary old polar bear holed up in his cave, each day the "strips of fat beneath his hide [growing] thinner and thinner."[9] He grew so weak throughout the extended winter that his hunger forced him awake, and he made his way out of his cave, "a moving bag of bones."[10] Something was happening; the ground under his feet shuddered, shook, vibrated. Having gone a short distance, he arrived only at water, surrounded by floating icebergs. He climbed a snowy mountain, and "from the summit he saw that his kingdom was tiny and encircled by expanses of blue water."[11] The storyteller ends his tale by concluding, "The bear had absolutely no comprehension of what this meant."[12] Following the story, the narrator notes that the crowd and deck spent weeks observing icebergs flipping, bobbing and weaving around the ship.

At this point in the journey, the narrator notes that "it seemed to me that years had passed since we had taken leave of the shore" and describes how the passengers have begun to feel as though they know the sea. "At the very moment we registered this anomaly," however, "eternity winked at us, and a suspicion awoke among us that the sea had been like this, exactly like this, thousands and millions of years before, day after day, year after year, century after century. Sadness filled our hearts, and none among us was certain of its cause: the eternity of the sea or the brevity of our lives."[13] As he reflects on this eternity of the sea, he is reminded of a Talmudic story involving Rabbah bar Bar Hana at sea. He also reflects on the vision of the sea among the learned:

8. Shapiro, 168.
9. Shapiro, 169.
10. Shapiro, 169.
11. Shapiro, 170.
12. Shapiro, 170.
13. Shapiro, 171.

“The sea is water. Water and nothing else.”[14] That being said,

> I, however, am no learned man, so I still dream that when the Master of the Universe is left all alone, face to face with His great creation, when no single human eye, let alone the eye of a man of learning, roves over the vast expanses of water, then He, if it were possible, loses heart at what He himself has created. And in this way, Creator and created each stare at the other, and both are silent, and the sound of their silence stretches from one end of the universe to the other, enduring until one stronger than either of them arrives: the man of learning with his vessel of so many and so many centiliters' capacity.[15]

Night once again falls, and the narrator finds the storyteller lying on a sail, staring at the stars. This time, the narrator lies down next to him and notices a smile on his face. The storyteller begins his tale by describing the stars and the night, the end of day and how the natural mode of being of the Earth is night. We read, “Then from all corners of the world shadows fly together, dark noiseless shadows that blanket the earth ever more thickly. The trolls and goblins of the day evaporate and the earth slowly revives and recovers her normal state, taking her place in the universe, in the blue endlessness. And people say: the night has come.”[16] He then describes how each star can look down at Earth or at one another, but not both at once. That is, except for one: “Lodestar.”

Lodestar had looked down on the Earth since before the planet’s creation and watched as it formed, and “when the first human being on his first night on the Earth lifted up his eyes to the heavens, he met the profound glance of a star as ancient as time. He was left shocked and astounded.”[17] The storyteller then goes on to describe how Lodestar has steered the curiosity of human beings, from seafarers to poets to astronomers, who found that it was the biggest star and

14. Shapiro, 172.
15. Shapiro, 172.
16. Shapiro, 173.
17. Shapiro, 174.

the furthest from Earth, its light beams travelling 9,357,657,000 years, 52 days, 18 hours, 49 minutes, and 22.5 seconds to reach us.[18] That's how long it took, the storyteller says, for the light to reach a young couple "in a country, in a city, in a garden."[19] Having only met that night, they sat on that bench and discussed a variety of topics, all the while staring at Lodestar.

Suddenly, Lodestar had disappeared; extinguished itself. The next morning, all over the world, newspapers reported the disappearance and scientists argued over its whereabouts. Some said it had died a natural death, cooling and extinguishing. Others said that was foolish—that that process would take years, let alone an instant. Another said that there had been some massive catastrophe among the stars, perhaps a collision. The disagreement among the learned caused others to question certain scientific theories. Eventually, though, the star began to fade from memory, and people began to forget. One night, a drunk, troubled young man, "a student who had gone off the rails from the start,"[20] remembered Lodestar, its greatness, and its untimely demise. Remembering that it took over nine billion years for Lodestar's light to reach Earth, he realized that it had in fact died long before humans—and even the Earth itself—had existed. This observation was published in the town newspaper the next day and made its way around the world.

The storyteller notes that many accidents occurred at sea that year, including one captain who seemingly went mad and gave a variety of contradictory orders to his crew, leading to an end that is to this day unknown. There were also no weddings in that year, for young men and women who sat together at night talking were witness to an uncanny horror in the sky: "It seemed to them that the dead eye sockets of long-drowned corpses were staring at them, that yellow teeth were gibbering and grinning and cackling with skeletal laughter."[21] Perhaps most curious was the effect

18. Shapiro, 174.
19. Shapiro, 175.
20. Shapiro, 176.
21. Shapiro, 177.

that Lodestar had on suicides in that year: 347 people around the world took their lives, each of them leaving behind letters that made mention of Lodestar, but not a single person took their life for any other reason, so that "the number of suicides that year was conspicuously smaller than usual."[22] The storyteller trails off, mumbling about people "[blundering] over the Earth lost, confused, like sheep in a conflagration…"[23]

The next morning, the narrator asks the storyteller how the story ends. "Ah, you've taken it seriously!" he teases, explaining that "naturally, science triumphed." The learned, he says explained that "we are living under the glow of dead, long-extinguished worlds. It is possible that the first person on Earth was already being guided by the light of a corpse."[24] In the end, the storyteller explains, life went on. Captains used compasses and lovers went on loving; people still committed suicide as they did before, and the failed student is still a student.

As land approaches, the narrator does some storytelling of his own. "Life," he tells us, "which has estranged me from laughter, has taught me to mock."[25] He then speaks directly to the reader in the form of a "dreamy Fairy" that he utilizes as a stand-in. We read, "I want shyly to confide a secret to you: all this is nothing more than my father's long coat which I, a child, have donned in order to look like a father. Yet the coat trips me up and embitters my life." The fairy–I, the reader—then tells three short stories–memories or visions, it is unclear which. "I have seen," the Fairy says,

> In a little room, in a cot next to a bed on which the young mother is sleeping, a little child lies crying. The mother does not hear.
>
> The tiny lips are wide open, averted and contorted. The tear-filled eyes stare in deep, dumb terror at the greenish stripe I have drawn over the wall opposite. In life's

22. Shapiro, 178.
23. Shapiro, 178.
24. Shapiro, 178.
25. Shapiro, 179.

troubled moments, the child is accustomed to the sight of a pretty, loving head with two cheerful warm eyes bent over the cot. Now it does not see them, and the weak little voice howls its distress for a long, long time, as though it will never stop.

> Are you enough of a child to feel its loneliness?[26]

The Fairy immediately launches into the next vision. "I have seen," she starts,

> A young couple strolls slowly along a quiet, secluded avenue that I have bewitched. Hand in hand they walk: he gnawing his lower lip, she unable to control a trembling corner of her upper lip. They do not look at each other and are silent. They have only just quarrelled and already their hearts are drawn to each other, but neither wants to be the first to make up, though the silence brings no benefit to either. I leave them quietly, knowing that two hands will find each other in the dark with no more difficulty than in the light.
>
> Are you young enough to remember how sweet such sorrow is?[27]

And finally,

> I come from the land you are leaving, from the shtetl where you dwelt, from among the people to whom you were born. There I glanced into the window of a poor room and I saw—
>
> In the middle of the night a weak old man with a long white beard has left his bed, and half naked he stands stooped over a second bed on which his beautiful daughter is sleeping restlessly. The girl's cheeks glow fiercely, her hair is tousled, periodically her breast heaves and gasps feverishly. Every so often a nervous tremor convulses her entire body. She sees troubling, hateful dreams, but the old man has no heart to waken her to the even more hateful reality. In the darkness of the night he stands looking down at his pure flower on which a coarse, brutish hand has left a filthy blemish, and his knees buckle under him, his old head shakes in helpless senility, and his lips move silently, distorting themselves in such childish bitterness that the heavy curtain of burdensome years

26. Shapiro, 179-180.
27. Shapiro, 180.

> suddenly falls from one's eyes and one sees distinctly that selfsame child that cries so forlornly in the silence of the night, but a thousand times more desolate and powerless.
>
> Are you old enough to understand this old man's grief?[28]

The Fairy vanishes into the mist, and the narrator listens to the song of the sea under the stars, "involuntarily [adding his] own voice to the heavenly chorus." The next morning, "A gigantic female figure" — the Statue of Liberty—appears in the distance. No longer complaining about the endless days and nights at sea, the narrator ends with these words:

> Sea, oh sea, on *your* surface human beings ought to have been born.
> Sea, my sea — I shall still return to you![29]

B // A.M. Klein // A Myriad-Minded Man (Published 1983)

A. M. Klein's protagonist recounts his own obsessive fascination with a modern-day mystic in "A Myriad-Minded Man". The obsession lacks fervent devotion, however, our narrator finding the figure of Isaiah Ellenbogen a curiosity more than someone worthy of being followed to the ends of the Earth. The nature of their encounter, however, is indeed profound; it is also correctly in the singular, as the opening line of the story reads, "In the whole period of our somewhat casual acquaintanceship, I received but a single letter from him, and spoke to him but once."[30]

The mystic tone of the story is set from the start, with Klein's narrator recounting the ways in which this curio has remained with him in spirit despite their time apart:

> Alone, sometimes, in the solitude of my office … or again, when upon my brief vacation, I find myself alone upon a peak in the Laurentians, with nothing to think about except

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28. Shapiro, 180.
29. Shapiro, 182.
30. Klein, 125.

> space, time, man, God and the next meal, the curious and absurd figure of Isaiah Ellenbogen will rise before me, to puzzle and bewilder me with the mysticism which emanated from him and from the thought of him.[31]

Klein's narrator hustles down the Main on a bustling mid-1920s Saturday night with his good (and ambiguously philo- and antisemitic) friend and Hebrew scholar Godfrey Somers, as Somers mocks and praises the local Jewish population simultaneously. They end up at a Jewish deli, where they are to meet a good friend and a mysterious guest. The "illustrious incognito," it turns out, is Isaiah Ellenbogen, a chemical engineer at the University of Berlin.[32] Upon first inspection, Ellenbogen is a curious looking man, "the theme of a vorticist drawing." But upon looking again, the narrator notes that he looks much more "like an embryo in its fourth month, an embryo which had prematurely escaped from the womb."[33]

When Somers notes his confusion about what constitutes Jewish cuisine, Ellenbogen immediately launches into a soliloquy that seems to take up half the space of the entire story. His topics begin with the connection between traditional Jewish food and their connection to Temple rites, resulting in the death of anything exclusively "Jewish" once the Temple was left in ruins and the people exiled. He then explains the ways in which Jewish cuisine mixed with and appropriated from their local cultures, resulting in the supposedly Jewish cuisine we have today. This is only the beginning of Ellenbogen's pontifications.

Utilizing the culinary theme, he segues into another topic by telling his newly-acquired acolytes, "My old Talmud rabbi used to tell me that a good soup is like the devil: it has a thousand eyes."[34] He confirms that "he meant it in all seriousness" as he believed in demons and read

31. Klein, 125.
32. Klein, 132.
33. Klein, 132-133.
34. Klein, 136.

cabalistic tracts to inform him of each demon's physical details. Ellenbogen gets to his point in short order, as we read,

> Despite the fact that I received a scientific training in European universities, and despite the fact that I am not religious in the orthodox sense, I am myself inclined to believe that there are such things as demons, presiding genii, djinns. Their name, even as their existence, is universal.[35]

His rationale for this belief, he explains, is that the invisible world of science (gases and germs are two extended examples he offers) would previously have been thought of as the work of the metaphysical and invisible world. The ancient rabbis, he claims, knew about germs but conceptualized them as demons. We read, "An erudite professor has discovered that there are several thousand bacilli to which the flesh is heir. Rabbi Jochanan knew three hundred different kind of *shaidim* living near the town of Shittim. Is there really any great difference between both of these assertions? I do not think so."[36]

Without allowing anyone else to speak, Ellenbogen infers (out loud) that they must be wondering how he came to have this somewhat metaphysical outlook. Ten years back, he explains in response, he witnessed an incident that caused such a shift in perspective. Modern technology like electricity and locomotives had just made their way to parts of his small Russian town when rumours began to swirl that the synagogue was haunted. The souls of the departed, they believed, would leave their graves at midnight and dance on the floor of the synagogue. Some even claimed to hear the dancing and see lightning flashes when the haunting was occurring, and the entire town questioned why this had befallen them. Synagogue officials attempted to quell the spirits' restlessness by taking scraps from the genizah and burying them in the cemetery, but to no avail.

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35. Klein, 136.
36. Klein. 137.

The local blacksmith, “a strong broad-shouldered, big-bearded and brave-hearted Jew,”[37] took it upon himself to enter the synagogue at midnight and figure out what was going on, but he emerged in terror after a bright light flashed between his eyes when he approached the Ark of the Covenant. Finally, a slow, plodding man (“the synagogue wags would swear that Chatzkel would be late even for his own funeral”)[38] decided to enter the synagogue at midnight, and as he leisurely made his way towards the Ark, he stepped on a creaking board as the light once again flashed. He slowly took his foot off the platform, and the light went back off. When he moved back and forth onto the board, the reason for the haunting became evident. Ellenbogen concludes his story by stating that “there might be some relationship between Science and Demonology,”[39] and they conclude their meeting with a promise to meet again that will never be fulfilled.

Two years pass, and our protagonist, a lawyer, finds a report of a legal case in which Ellenbogen played an important part as an expert witness. The case involved smoke from a plant that was covering farmers’ crops and blighting their harvest, a clear connection to the stories he had previously told about invisible germs. Based on the protagonist’s reading of the report, there was no doubt that Ellenbogen “imagined himself… an oriental magician, seeking to bottle up again in their reeking and fatal tube, the evil djinns that industry conjured up.”[40] Thinking a bit further, though, he concludes that “it was a mystic he desired to be.”[41]

Some time later, one of the men who was present at their initial meeting, Sam Jacobson, rushes into the narrator’s office to ask if he remembered Ellenbogen. He thinks to himself that “[Ellenbogen] had been haunting me, imposing himself upon me,”[42] and impatiently demands that

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37. Klein, 140.
38. Klein, 141.
39. Klein, 142.
40. Klein, 144.
41. Klein, 145.
42. Klein, 145.

Jacobson tell him whatever news he clearly has. Ellenbogen, it seems, has been working as a barker for a circus. Jacobson explains that he saw him there and spoke to him afterwards, asking him why he would be working in such a strange place considering his scientific background. When Jacobson implied that the human sideshows in the circus were abnormal, Ellenbogen became irritated, asking how they are abnormal and we normal, and stating that "on the contrary, it would be to the unique, what [Jacobson] would call the freakish … that merit should be attached."[43] In fact, according to Ellenbogen, "Creation did not end on the Sabbath, and these individuals are evidence of God's creativity and artistry to this day." At this news, our protagonist rushes over to the circus-ground, which he finds deserted as we read, "Isaiah Ellenbogen had journeyed on to the next town to spread the gospel according to St. Barnum."[44]

A while after that, however, things take a peculiar and darker turn. The year is 1933, and a new antisemitic journal called *The Viking* is being published in Toronto by the protagonist's old friend, Godfrey Somers. Somers knew "just enough of Hebrew to misquote; his columns bristled with garbled quotations from the Talmud, distorted references to the Bible."[45] When the Yiddish press begins condemning Somers and *The Viking* responds, it becomes obvious that someone on Somers' staff can read the Yiddish press. Furthermore, the protagonist recognizes in these responses from *The Viking* the very distinctive writing style of Isaiah Ellenbogen. When he writes to Ellenbogen to challenge him on his beliefs about superior Nordic blood, his newfound adversary responds by explaining what he believes is simple and accurate racial science: "Truth is truth, no matter whom it injures."[46] Ellenbogen ends his letter by writing, "if I was not born with Nordic blood, I have acquired it" to which the narrator responds by way of the reader, "I do not know

43. Klein, 147.
44. Klein, 149.
45. Klein, 150.
46. Klein, 152.

whether he was being hyperbolical, or whether he was referring to his blood transfusion."[47]

In the final moment of the story, our protagonist relays the last he ever heard of Ellenbogen. The famed conman Ignaz Trebitsch-Lincoln, a Jewish-by-birth protestant missionary/priest/member of the British parliament/right-wing German politician/Buddhist monk, was making his way to his monastery by boat with a handful of disciples. In the boat behind them, ready to follow, was Isaiah Ellenbogen.

C // Isaac Bashevis Singer // "The Lecture" (1964)

As "The Lecture" begins, the narrator is already in transit. This narrator, Mr. N, starts with the simple fact of his activity: "I was on my way to Montreal to deliver a lecture."[48] He's on a train from New York, and the lecture concerns the future of the Yiddish language. His lecture is optimistic, but he knows it's a fraud. By the end of that night, he will find himself in a peculiar and unfortunately familiar situation, telling the reader, "I remained alone with a corpse in the dark. A long-forgotten terror possessed me."[49] The details of how he eventually makes it to that reality are perhaps as strange as the death itself.

Our protagonist describes his journey on the train and makes clear his status as a perpetual outsider, watching in curiosity and judgment as his fellow passengers go about their business, "[wondering] whether these people knew there had been a Hitler [or of] Stalin's murder machine."[50] He ponders the legitimacy of his lecture, questioning himself, "What had made me so optimistic all of a sudden? Wasn't Yiddish going under before my very eyes?"[51] As the train starts

47. Klein, 152.
48. Singer, 65.
49. Singer, 78.
50. Singer, 66.
51. Singer, 66.

to move, he reflects on the comfort of trains in America and remembers the densely-crowded and segregated train cars in Poland. The train continues on and the weather and mood both begin to change quite quickly. Singer makes this atmospheric shift quite sudden, as if the protagonist has entered another dimension. The rupture is felt as the environment flashes several times in succession before going dark and cold completely. We read,

> Now we went through dense fog, and now the air cleared and the sun was shining again over silvery distances. A heavy snowfall began. It suddenly turned dark. The day was flickering out. The express no longer ran but crept slowly and cautiously, as though feeling its way. The heating system in the train seemed to have broken down. It became chilly and I had to put on my coat.[52]

A few lines later, the shift into another world is made explicit when Mr. N relates, "The American dream gradually dissolves and harsh Polish reality returns."[53]

When the train suddenly stops, the passengers begin to mingle. Not so our narrator, however, who wallows in his own Otherness. We read, "I sit alone, a victim of my own isolation, shyness, and alienation from the world." And then, "I exclude myself from society and all the faces say to me silently: You don't need us and we don't need you."[54] He ends up spending his time drinking a bottle of cognac he had placed in his valise, musing near the end of his trip that "this liquid holds within it the secrets of Nirvana."[55]

Mr. N finally arrives at the train station in Montreal at 2:30 in the morning, with no one waiting for him and taxis completely packed. As he walks back into the station, he notices a "lame woman" and her daughter pointing at him. Everything about this woman reminds him of Poland.

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52. Singer, 67.
53. Singer, 67.
54. Singer, 68.
55. Singer, 70.

She asks if he is indeed N, to which he responds in the affirmative. She immediately breaks out in joy, praising God that it is him, and explaining that everyone else who was waiting for him had left, but she insisted on staying because "What's a night's sleep?"[56] It is clear that she has a strong connection to our protagonist. She launches into the story of her sickliness, explaining how she was in Hitler's camps doing hard labour; her daughter interrupts her to usher her home and out of the cold. Mr. N takes note of the daughter, who again reminds him of Poland, "of rye bread, caraway seeds, cottage cheese, and the water brought by water carriers from the well in pails slung on a wooden yoke over their shoulders."[57] They insist that he come home with them, to which he eventually agrees.

The reminders of Poland continue as they make their way to the women's apartment. They finally arrive at their street "that was reminiscent of a small town in Poland: murky, narrow, with wooden houses."[58] Even their apartment reeks of forgotten smells: "moldy potatoes, rotting onions, chicory, and something else I could not even name. In some mysterious way the mother and daughter had managed to bring with them the whole atmosphere of wretched poverty from their old home in Poland."[59]

When he finally has a moment alone on a small folding cot, he realizes that he's lost the manuscript of the lecture, an event he chalks up to a Freudian accident. With nothing to think about, he attempts to settle into sleep. The creaks of the house, however, keep him up. "Inanimate things," he remarks, "are not really inanimate.…"[60] He cannot sleep, simply staring at the ceiling and lamenting his lack of slumber. Alone, awake at night in silence, his imagination is transported

56. Singer, 71.
57. Singer, 72.
58. Singer, 74.
59. Singer, 74.
60. Singer, 76.

to a familiar time and place: "I imagined myself somewhere in Treblinka or Maidanek. I had done hard labor all day long. Now I was lying on a plank shelf. Tomorrow there would probably be a 'selection,' and since I was no longer well, I would be sent to the ovens.…"[61] Perhaps Mr. N finds an odd comfort in this memory, because he begins to doze off.

He is suddenly jarred awake, however, by the sound of the daughter, Binele, shouting that her mother has died. A moment of macabre physical comedy ensues as they both run around in the dark looking for matches and colliding on two separate occasions. They shout directions at each other, N knowing the futility of his words as they leave his mouth. Binele pulls him into the room where her mother lays in the bed, and he confirms that she has no pulse and her skin is cold. The whole apartment is cold, in fact, and N's teeth chatter in the darkness. He attempts to walk back to where he was sleeping to get something warm, but for the first of several times, he ends up in a room he didn't expect in what feels like a strange, labyrinthine structure. When he returns, he collides with Binele again. In that collision he notices her half-nude state when he unwittingly touches her breast.

Binele cries out that she no longer wants to live but then seems to disappear, ostensibly to find a neighbour. It is in this moment that N finds himself alone with a corpse in the dark. "I had the eerie feeling," he tells us, "that the dead woman was trying to approach me, to seize me with her cold hands, to clutch at me and drag me off to where she was now."[62] In a moment, post-traumatic stress seems to be catching up with him: as he runs for the door, ready to run out into the street, we read, "Bony fingers stretched after me. Strange beings screamed at me silently. There was a ringing in my ears and saliva filled my mouth as though I were about to faint."[63] Once more,

61. Singer, 77.
62. Singer, 78.
63. Singer, 79.

though, he enters a doorway he thought was leading to the front room but ends up back in his room. He prepares to wrestle the corpse "in mortal combat" but his episode is interrupted by the return of Binele with their neighbour, a huge French-Canadian man holding a candle. They finally look upon the dead woman, and the scene is a disturbing shock: "Her face had altered completely. Her mouth had become strangely thin and sunken; it was no longer a mouth but a hole. The face was yellow, rigid, and claylike."[64]

Binele continues wailing, to the point that N momentarily loses himself and shouts at her to stop screaming. Quietly, she tells him that her mother was all she had in the world. Her sorrow turns to stupor, and she stares at her mother's face for a moment. "How long could a night last, even a winter night?" N thinks to himself.[65] He looks out the window to see half the sky full of stars and half of it with signs of a coming morning. Binele begins to repeat her mantra, "What shall I do now? What shall I do now?"[66] N asks about her contacts, relatives, friends, members of the lecture club that was to welcome him. She has no relatives, no friends, and the members of the club don't live in the neighbourhood. "I'm a stranger here," he tells Binele. "I don't know where to go."

She leaves once more, this time to call the police. N sits in the room, trying not to look at the dead woman. He reflects on the moment, as we read,

> Ordinarily I would be afraid to remain alone with a corpse. But I was half frozen, half asleep. I was exhausted after the miserable night. A deep despair came over me. It was a long, long time since I had seen such wretchedness and so much tragedy. My years in America seemed to have been swept away by that one night and I was taken back, as though by magic, to my worst days in Poland, to the bitterest crisis of my life.[67]

64. Singer, 79.
65. Singer, 80.
66. Singer, 80.
67. Singer, 81.

The neighbour comes into the apartment and attempts to speak to him in French to no avail. Eventually, he mumbles something and leaves N alone once more. He reflects again, telling the reader, “My home, my job seemed totally remote and unsubstantial, like memories of a previous incarnation. Who knows? Perhaps my whole life in New York had been no more than a hallucination?”[68] In a momentary panic, he checks his wallet to find all his citizenship papers, the evidence that he is indeed who he thinks he is, that he has a place where he does in fact belong. Binele returns, not having found a telephone. In Singer’s closing words, we read:

> I put my arms around Binele and she did not try to break away. I became wet from the melting snow. We stood there midway up the stairs and rocked back and forth—a lost Yiddish writer, and a victim of Hitler and of my ill-starred lecture. I saw a number tattooed above her wrist and heard myself saying: ‘Binele, I won’t abandon you. I swear by the soul of your mother….’
>
> Binele’s body became limp in my arms. She raised her eyes and whispered: ‘Why did she do it? She just waited for your coming….’[69]

68. Singer, 81.
69. Singer, 83.

D // Chava Rosenfarb // "Edgia's Revenge" (Published 1994)

Clocking in at eighty-three pages (albeit in a volume with smaller-than-normal dimensions), Chava Rosenfarb's "Edgia's Revenge" is one of two long stories on this list. Rosenfarb starts her story at the end. In the opening moment, our protagonist Rella reflects on her situation:

> Ever since Edgia disappeared beyond the horizon of my life, the desire to put an end to myself has grown stronger within me. This is Edgia's victory over me, her definitive act of vengeance. I am ready to submit, ready to surrender to the perverse law which still seems to rule over the psyches of those survivors whose souls remain trapped in the concentration camps, and who will never break free. I refer to the law which says that for every life saved another must be sacrificed. The account must tally. For having saved Edgia's life I must put an end to my own, if not today then tomorrow, if not tomorrow then twenty or thirty years from now.[70]

Rella explains that her optimal route of self-sacrifice is to overdose on sleeping pills, and remembers how she first began taking them. After liberation from the camps, Rella "drifted from one end to the other of that devastated German countryside, trying to escape from myself and from others."[71] She did eventually link up with another "group of wanderers" in order to find the quickest way out of the country. On one of those days of wandering, on the bed of a military truck, one of the wanderers recognized a stranger in the corner as one of the *kapos*[72] from their camp, and the group proceeded to beat him to within an inch of his life. Rella felt the blows as if they were on her face, and she soon reveals that she herself was a *kapo* as well. When she managed to steal away and get to Munich, a doctor gave her sleeping pills for her insomnia, telling her, "After all that you've lived through, you must be having nightmares even in the daytime when you are

70. Rosenfarb, 81.
71. Rosenfarb, 83.
72. *Kapos* were prisoners who were tasked with overseeing their fellow inmates in the concentration camps, and as such were often viewed as traitors.

wide awake."[73]

Thinking back to when she first arrived at the camps, she relates, "In the camps I saw my entire family float heavenward with the smoke from the crematorium chimneys."[74] This included her little sister, Maniusha. At the time, seeing this, she decided that she had to survive no matter what it took. By her second week there, she tells us, the atmosphere was one of terror and absurdity. We read, "A sandy, smoky phantasmagoria whirled ceaselessly before my eyes: whistles, shouts, the barking of dogs, barracks, chimneys—and faces. Faces like stones, stones like faces revolved before my eyes like the dislodged cobbles of a disintegrating pavement."[75]

A tall nineteen-year-old standing above her peers, she stuck out like a sore thumb. In most ways this was a curse, but she used it to her advantage to grab the attention of a *kapo,* Albert, with whom she started a fiery sexual affair, one that "impregnated [her] soul with a demon."[76] She herself became a *kapo* and that demon within her drank in the power she had over her fellow inmates. "It is false," she tells us, "to think that not everyone could have been a *kapo.* It is a lie. In that world from which I miraculously escaped, every single person had the potential to be a brute, a thug, a murderer."[77] Though she notes that she was no more brutal than any other *kapo*, she was certainly not kind in any way.

One day, however, she committed her one act of compassion. On that day, during one of the typical selections to see who would be "sent for 'scrap'"[78] as they called those sent to the crematoria, she caught an inmate hiding in the mud. The girl, Edgia, begged her for pity and, lost in her wretchedness and weakness, Rella helped her avoid the selection. Near the end of the war,

73. Rosenfarb, 85.
74. Rosenfarb, 87.
75. Rosenfarb, 88.
76. Rosenfarb, 91.
77. Rosenfarb, 93.
78. Rosenfarb, 94.

while processing female inmates to be sent to another camp on cattle cars, she saw Edgia again. In that moment, she made her swear that, if they survived and ever met elsewhere in the world, she would never reveal that Rella was a *kapo.* "'And must I also not reveal that you saved my life?'" asks Edgia, and Rella insists that she swear on her life.[79]

After the war, Rella made it to Canada, where she began to build her life and forget the trauma she had experienced. She got work in a factory and put great effort into learning English. She even had her tattoo removed. "Outwardly," she tells the reader, "I inhabited a new skin, a new identity, which could disguise whatever I found convenient to disguise."[80] She lived in constant fear, however, of that final pointing finger that would reveal her true identity, one that she could never fully disguise. Her insomnia started again in her new home, so far from the horrors she had experienced. "During the course of the day," she says, "I wandered about as if I were drunk. I found myself inhabiting two worlds at the same time, tormented by all kinds of visions and hallucinations."[81]

One day, when the Jewish Immigrant Aid Society was giving out used clothes, she bumped into Edgia, an encounter that caused great anxiety for both of them. As if unable to control herself, Rella asked Edgia for her address. She dropped in on Edgia and her husband Lolek uninvited so often that she became part of the fabric of their lives. They never spoke about the camps or anything related to the camps, but they remained "omnipresent representatives" of each other's shared past.[82] Their unlikely friendship expanded into an entire group of friends, and the next ten years of their lives brought new opportunities and upward mobility for Rella while bringing increasing stagnation for Edgia. Rella mastered English but could not rid herself of her accent, preventing her

79. Rosenfarb, 96.
80. Rosenfarb, 98.
81. Rosenfarb, 99.
82. Rosenfarb, 103.

from truly becoming a new person. This did not stop her from opening her own successful clothing shop, after which her financial concerns evaporated. Their group of friends would meet at Edgia and Lolek's apartment at the foot of Mount Royal, on Esplanade Avenue. The dynamic was peculiar, to say the least. While Rella and her friends, both male and female, would debate and discuss modern culture in the living room and around the table, Edgia would exist in the background and in the kitchen, acting solely as the hostess and not contributing in any other way. Rella sums this up well, writing,

> I would not say that Edgia was a fool or an idiot, or even that she was ugly. Far from it. But there was something in her manner which cancelled her out. She belonged to that type of woman who blends into her surroundings like an object to which the eye grows quickly accustomed and stops noticing. She was there and yet not there. It did not matter if what she had to say was clever or stupid. Nobody was curious about what she had to say. Her words swam past a listener's ears and dissolved in the air as if she had said nothing.[83]

Rella treated her rudely but felt that this was the role that Edgia expected of her. She actually liked her, and once told her so, to which Edgia replied that she likes her too. Edgia is so inconsequential, though, that Rella openly has an affair with her husband Lolek, with Edgia remaining polite and subservient throughout. Lolek was the total opposite of Edgia; the life of the party, the orator, the philosopher, constantly talking. During this time, they did whatever they could to drink up modern culture and forget about their European former selves. "If culture symbolized a bridge," we read, "it had to be a bridge that led away from the past."[84] In these attempts to escape, they would pore over pop art and op art, go to lectures on sexual research, modern and postmodern dance and

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83. Rosenfarb, 107.
84. Rosenfarb, 110.

theatre performances, smoke marijuana, and practice Hatha yoga with a guru in the Laurentian mountains. Eventually, every one of them moved out of the Jewish immigrant neighbourhood at the foot of Mount Royal except for Lolek and Edgia. Nonetheless, Rella's open affair with Lolek continued, though they never planned to be together for the long term. Not only was Lolek too attached to Edgia as her mental and spiritual caretaker, but Rella had no interest in true romantic love or children after the war. She was neurotically wary of bringing other *kapos* into the world, and the moment the brutish *kapo* Albert had told her he loved her was the moment that her belief in romantic love had been murdered.[85]

Around that ten-year mark, Edgia obtained a black cat that she called Loverboy. She treated him terribly and she would regularly kick him, causing him to let out a nearly-human screech. In one of these moments, Rella understood that she feared Edgia more than she realized. It was Rella's birthday. Lolek had forgotten so she went over there hoping to subtly remind him, and go out for dinner. Rella and Edgia ended up alone—a rare occasion—and for the first time, Edgia mentioned their time at the camp. The light of Mount Royal's cross illuminated the apartment. Rella mentioned that it was her birthday, to which Edgia responded, "I wish for you everything that you wish for yourself."[86] Throughout their conversation, Rella noted the kitchen knife on the counter and her fear of Edgia. Edgia then told Rella that she appreciates what Rella does for Lolek before remarking, "Personally I don't celebrate any birthdays. I have too many dates of birth to remember. You were the midwife at one of my births, or rather rebirths, remember, Rella?"[87] That night, Lolek arrived home and took Rella to the top of Mount Royal, where they discussed Edgia and his devotion to her, and finally kissed by the light of the mountain lamps before going back to Rella's

85. Rosenfarb, 119-120.
86. Rosenfarb, 132.
87. Rosenfarb, 133.

apartment—the first time Lolek slept over and perhaps the final assertion of Rella's dominance over Edgia. This time of joy and hope in Rella's life was rather short-lived, however, as Lolek tripped down a flight of outdoor stairs the following winter and died.

After initially supporting Edgia in her grief, the group eventually saw her fade into obscurity. Rella found herself missing Edgia in a strange way, but was content to know that "the living proof of my humanity" was alive out in the world. After more than a year, rumours started swirling that Edgia was running a factory and mastering the handbag business, even expanding with more and more employees, and Rella even heard that she had a strong character. One night at the theatre, Rella found herself face-to-face with Edgia, now "a blooming attractive woman, an apparent reflection of myself."[88] Edgia was dressed and styled almost exactly like Rella, surrounded by friends, holding a glass of liqueur in her hand. Strangely, though, despite their obvious resemblance, Edgia initially did not recognize her, but when she finally did, she gasped and approached her with radiance and joy. After this encounter, Edgia began to rejoin their old group of friends, now forceful and clever, bewitching to the men and fascinating to the women, an uncanny blending of Lolek and Rella herself. Rella makes this sense explicit, as we read,

> Edgia humiliated me by usurping my position in the group. … And the upshot of it all was that I, who had once taken such an active part in our discussions, was now afraid to open my mouth. I was afraid that at the least provocation Edgia would contradict me with some devastating argument, that she would discredit me in front of everyone, or that in the heat of discussion she would point an accusing finger in my direction and exclaim, "How dare you speak! You were a *kapo*!"[89]

Nonetheless, this was the time in which Rella and Edgia would become actual friends.

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88. Rosenfarb, 145.
89. Rosenfarb, 148.

Rella tells us, "The mysterious power of attraction that existed between Edgia and me ensured that, despite all complicating sentiments, it was precisely at this time that she and I should become truly intimate friends."[90] Edgia, formerly haggard and perpetually in poor health, was now a disciplined sportswoman in peak physical condition. The two women would spend every Saturday and Sunday together, rain or shine. They would jog and meet under the cross atop Mount Royal before setting out for Rella's apartment and making their favourite breakfast specialties together. They would stretch out on the bed and play records, chat and discuss "more serious matters of the heart," including the deceased Lolek, but never the camps.[91] In time, Rella began to copy Edgia–her witticisms, her intellectual approaches—and she feared arousing Edgia's anger. Their roles, it seems, had reversed. On one of these occasions, Rella asked her about her black tomcat, Loverboy. "Oh my tomcat, you mean?" she replied. "He's been gone for three years. I accidentally scalded him with a kettle of boiling water."[92] Perhaps Rella's fear was warranted.

The years continued to pass in a blur. Eventually, Edgia's uncanny hold over one of the men from their friend group, the perpetually-disgruntled Pavel, led to his divorce and their marriage. The two women lost contact for a time, Rella imagining Edgia returning to her servile and puny former personality. Rella thought that she had rid herself of Edgia's dominance, but she remained obsessive in her thinking about her. This led, one day, to her reaching out and calling Edgia, and they continued their friendship within the parameters of the group. Though Edgia and Pavel had moved out of the apartment on Esplanade, they remained by the mountain in another area. The mountain with its cross, just as before, illuminated the apartment. "That cross follows me everywhere," she told Rella. "It pierces my eyes. Maybe if I could hang a Jesus on it, it would

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90. Rosenfarb, 148.
91. Rosenfarb, 149.
92. Rosenfarb, 151.

leave me alone."[93] Much to Rella's surprise, Edgia had not returned to her servile self. Rather, she was now firmly in Lolek's role with Pavel taking on not only her former role but that of her dead tomcat—she even called Pavel Loverboy. She even confided the same complaint to Rella that her dead husband, Lolek, had years before: "He hasn't got the faintest idea what I am all about … Not who I am, nor what I am."[94] On one of these occasions, she confided in Rella that she dreamed she was a *kapo*, and that she looked exactly like her.

Eventually, it was found that Pavel had high blood pressure and a weak heart. The group would drive out to the Laurentians on weekends and hike up mountains, Edgia insisting that Pavel join them to strengthen his heart. Edgia loved taking in the landscape but Rella, perpetually finding herself with one foot in Europe, could not share the enthusiasm:

> When it came to the beauty of the Canadian landscape I might as well have been blind. I looked but I did not see. It was better for me that way. The landscape reminded me too strongly of the district that lies at the foot of the Carpathian Mountains, where I had used to spend summer vacations in my childhood.[95]

On one of these mornings, Pavel collapsed in the middle of the road, Edgia cradling his head and crying out "What have I done? Oh my God, what have I done?"[96] He was brought to the hospital, where Rella found the two of them. We read,

> When I entered the hospital room to visit Pavel, I saw Edgia sitting in the same position, bent over her husband's body, swaying over him, mouthing half-phrases and broken words. As soon as she saw me, she would stop talking and stare at me through red swollen eyes. All the sorrow of the world screamed at me through those eyes. I realized I had yet another Edgia before me, a completely new person with a new emotional make-

93. Rosenfarb, 155.
94. Rosenfarb, 156.
95. Rosenfarb, 159.
96. Rosenfarb, 161.

> up, a new knowledge, which had no connection to the sort of knowledge that I and our friends had so eagerly pursued. Who was this new Edgia? I was very much afraid of her.

The last time that Rella visited, Edgia left Pavel's bed and approached her. They stood eyeball to eyeball, perfectly level. Edgia told her, "I thank you, Rella, for having saved my life. I thank you for everything. I have decided that we two, you and I, should never in our lives meet again. I no longer want your friendship, and I no longer want to give you mine. It was a sick, a poisonous, an impossible friendship".[97] Rella immediately tells us, "Her words shattered my heart like an explosion. A pall of darkness fell over me. Edgia's sentence seemed to pulverize me, to reduce me to dust. The end flashed before my blinded eyes, and ever since that day I have peered into the depths of that end."[98]

Rella never saw Edgia again. She heard through her friends that Pavel had recovered, and that Edgia was now gentler, less biting, with him and with others. Rella, for her part, started to lose contact with her friends and began to abandon her interests. She grew tired of her beautiful boutique, her nice clothes, her stylish apartment. She would wander around town, eating in restaurants and staring straight ahead for hours. Edgia and Pavel also lost contact with the group, and their separation seemed to be final. The last that Rella had heard, they had sold everything and sailed around the world. In the closing moment of the story, we read,

> This was Edgia's revenge. So be it. I am, in any case, sick and tired of the fear of being found out, sick and tired of myself. So I sit here and stare at my medicine, my vial full of sleeping pills, brightly coloured like beads.
>
> Every criminal craves the moment of judgement, no matter how afraid of it he might be. I sentence myself willingly. I return to the camp, to the scene of my crime. The slice of life which I managed to sandwich in between the two camps—the camp that was

97. Rosenfarb, 161.
98. Rosenfarb, 161.

forced upon me in the past, and the one that I am about to force on myself—was not tasty, nor worth the price I paid for it. I remove the lying inscription above the entrance to Auschwitz, *Arbeit macht frei,* "Work makes you free," and replace it with another, "Death makes you free." I take the hand of my little sister Maniusha and promise her that I will never betray her again.[99]

E // Aryeh Lev Stollman // "*Die Grosse Liebe*" (1996)

Joseph's mother has few fond memories, but paramount among them are the fifty times she went to see her favourite film, *Die Grosse Liebe* (The Great Love), as a youth. The revelation that she even had a favourite actress was a surprise to Joseph given his parents' secrecy about all matters of their lives both past and present. In fact, this particular revelation only came on the night of his father's funeral. "As far as I knew," the protagonist tells us, "neither of my parents ever went to the movies […] And except for one other occasion, the days leading up to my father's funeral were the only times I could remember my mother leaving the vicinity of our house. She had never gone shopping or out for a walk."[100] Joseph never questioned this secrecy and isolation, assuming it was just part of his mother's personality.

Stollman's tale brings us in and out of moments in the life of a protagonist who is now in his forties. Thinking back to that night of his father's funeral, he remembers an old lady who helped clean the kitchen before offering some peculiar words of solace and leaving: "It's a terrible tragedy. But God is the true judge and we must learn to accept His will."[101] Years later, when his mother herself was ill, he asked her about that old woman, but she insisted that such a person never existed

99. Rosenfarb, 163-164.
100. Stollman, 266.
101. Stollman, 267.

and that his memory is playing tricks on him.

Returning to the night of his father's funeral and her revelation of her favourite actress and film, Joseph feels uneasy. "I had never before considered," he reflects, "the mystery of my mother's youth and was now fascinated."[102] He had grown up in an atmosphere of secrecy, "understanding that one did not ask questions of a personal nature, even to one's parents. I knew that surrounding every human being was a sacred wall of dignity and privacy."[103] Reviewing his memories of the night, he goes over the plot of the film, a typical love story about an air force pilot and a renowned singer, "with its predictable twists and turns, period clichés and movieland formulas."[104] During her explanation of the plot, he remembers, her eyes started to tear up, something he had never witnessed, including earlier that day at her husband's funeral. He asks if his father had ever seen the film, to which she replies that he had not because he was uninterested and living somewhere apart from her during the war.

Thinking further to the aftermath of his mother's death, Joseph recounts his first visit to Berlin, when he watched *Die Grosse Liebe* five times at a revival theatre. Following this visit, he notes that a new memory has been added onto his memory of the night of his father's funeral, though he knows its otherworldly atmosphere is false and never happened. We read,

> In this false memory, which has occurred to me ever since I first went to Berlin and saw *The Great Love* myself, my mother gets up from the sofa where she sat with me that night after my father's funeral. She stands up and begins to sing in the voice of her favourite actress. It is that woman's voice but darker and deeper, a voice that hovers between the Earth and the heavenly firmament, singing of miracles to be […] But in reality, my

102. Stollman, 268.
103. Stollman, 268.
104. Stollman, 269.

> mother had been sitting the whole time. She never sang any lyrics. And I never in my life heard my mother sing.[105]

Joseph thinks back to his youth in Ontario; to the elegant way his mother would dress despite the fact she never left the house. She would create her own garments and teach him about the best silks and cottons. He thinks about the only time he remembers her leaving the house before his father died: one Yom Kippur, when he was eight or nine, his father wanted desperately to go to the synagogue. They had never attended synagogue, so Joseph was unsure why. His mother moved with "uncharacteristic awkwardness" on her way up the steps, and they spent a few short moments singing melancholy songs before she tugged on his father's shirt, and they left the service quietly. When they got home, she told her husband "no more," to which he agreed, and they never went to the synagogue again. Thinking again to that visit when she was gravely ill, Joseph asked her about that moment in the synagogue. Again, she replied with secrecy: "No. I never went into a synagogue, even as a child. We were never observant. Maybe you went with your father. Perhaps your father took you once. He was very nostalgic."[106]

He thinks back again to a nebulous time of his childhood, remembering how his father, a jeweller, started a valuable gemstone collection for him. His father would give him a new stone for every occasion, and his mother would remind him to keep the gems safe so that he could bring them wherever he goes. His father refers to them by a German word he doesn't understand, and when he looks the word up after it is revealed to mean "ransom." He thinks to the times that he would study his collection with a jeweller's loupe, and how his father would remind him that "a

105. Stollman, 271.
106. Stollman, 273.

small flaw is a big tragedy if you're a jewel."[107]

The morning after his father's funeral, Joseph remembers, his mother suddenly began leaving the house. She wanted to keep his business going, so she worked at the jewelry store all day. She didn't drive, so she would take a taxi there and back. She apparently went nowhere else. The business was quite successful; her English, it turned out, was actually excellent. On one occasion, while he was helping out in the store, a short, dark-haired woman came in. The woman spoke in German and asked to see bracelets. After a moment, the woman referred to his mother by her maiden name. When his mother confirmed that this was her maiden name, the woman put her small hand into a fist and slammed it into his mother's jaw, knocking one of her teeth out. We read, "'Petzmaul! Verräterin!' The woman spat at my mother, 'Bitch! Traitor! You are worse than they were! The evil informer-girl is finally caught!'"[108] The woman disappeared out of the store, and his mother, nursing her wound, told him in a daze that she was completely mistaken, that she was hiding the whole time, and that she won't go to the doctor. "A week later," he remembers, "she put the store up for sale."[109]

Years later, when Joseph's company established a permanent office in Berlin, he requested a transfer. He had researched where his mother lived during the war and, though the building had long since been torn down, he rented an apartment in the building that stood in his place. Thinking now in the present, Joseph tells us that it would not be an exaggeration to say that he has seen *The Great Love* fifty times. His wife never asks him about his obsession, and we see that his privacy policy remains in his current relationship. "Though we have now lived together for many years," he says, "she does not ask me about my family nor do I ask about hers."[110] In his memories' current

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107. Stollman, 273.
108. Stollman, 276.
109. Stollman, 277.
110. Stollman, 278.

forms, that night after his father's funeral has taken on novel aspects. We read,

> Lately, now that I am approaching the ages of my parents' premature deaths, when I recall my mother on the night of my father's funeral, I see us sitting on the claret moiré sofa as *The Great Love* is projected on the pale blue walls of our living room. We are watching it together. My mother takes my hand and smiles. She is enjoying herself so much and she hopes I am, too.

In the closing section of the story, Joseph continues recounting the plot of the movie, intertwined with his mother's explanations of and comments on plot points. In the closing moment, she makes one final statement. For the entirety of that night, she had been looking around Joseph rather than directly at him; eyes hovering around the top of his head, avoiding eye contact. In this closing moment, we read,

> And then my mother turned and looked directly at me for the first time on that extraordinary night in my life. I trembled ever so slightly at the unbearable tenderness of her look. "If I had been them," my mother said, rising from the sofa, "I would gladly have sacrificed all of heaven for love."[111]

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111. Stollman, 79.

F // Aimee Bender // "Dreaming in Polish" (1998)

"There was an old man and an old woman and they dreamed the same dreams."[112] So starts the first of two parallel narratives in Aimee Bender's short story, "Dreaming in Polish". Both taking place in the same town, they subtly converge in the final moment. The first of these narratives involves the aforementioned old man and woman who are "maybe the oldest people in the world."[113] Occasionally, after their mutual dreams, they call out the images they viewed to random passersby before returning to bed and continuing their visual slumber.

The second narrative, a first-person narration by a protagonist by the name of Celia, begins with her frustration concerning her mother's obsession with Holocaust museums. The one in Washington D.C., her mother tells her, has the best simulation of Auschwitz in the world. Having done the "concentration-camp museum circuit," Celia is just about finished with visiting them. Being a teacher, Celia's mother doesn't have much to do in the summer; she spends her time planning such trips, while Celia works at a hardware store doing typical hardware-store-things while also being charged with cleaning a statue of a Greek god that stands in the town square. The statue itself has a mystical quality in that "[it] had ended up there inexplicably—no one, not even the oldest people, remembered when it arrived. It seemed to have simply grown up from the earth."[114] After work, when she returns home, Celia takes care of her ailing father who stays in bed all day.

One night, the elderly couple dream that a pig has drowned. The following day, they call out the images that they saw: pig, no breath, pushing pig, brown and dead.[115] A farmer happens to be walking by at the moment that they call these images out, and when he arrives home his wife

112. Bender, 281.
113. Bender, 281.
114. Bender, 282.
115. Bender, 283.

runs out to tell him that a pig got stuck in a pile of manure, fell forward, and suffocated. Remembering the words of the couple, the farmer tells his wife about “the prophets in the town,” and she tells all of the neighbours. The news gets back to the couple, and they touch elbows, “loose skin nearly obscuring the tattooed numbers on their inner arms.”[116]

Reflecting on her time with her father, Celia thinks about how he took to indoor gardening when she brought him some potting soil and some radishes in a pot. She had told him to talk to his plants, which he did as he watered them with an eye-dropper twenty times a day. She would find him whispering secrets to them at odd hours of the day, telling them about his dreams. She thinks back to her visit to the Los Angeles concentration-camp museum, and how she came to understand that visiting the museum was about honouring and talking to the dead.

One day, the elderly couple awake in a panic and rush onto the street to alert the townsfolk. Their message was simple: “No other gods before me. Or we’re all dead. Town will die, die, die!”[117] The townspeople fly into a panic and tell the mayor, who calls a town meeting. He tells the townsfolk, “Just follow it,” and adjourns the meeting. By the end of the night, the town’s garbage bins are overflowing with everything that could look like a graven image—African sculptures, Mexican masks, and other such things. The mayor makes sure to cover the statue of the Greek god in the town square.

Celia’s mother begins taking long walks to nowhere, calling Celia from a phone booth in the distance to have her pick her up. One afternoon, Celia arrives home to find her father had fallen out of bed after some sort of seizure. Afraid to touch him and make it worse, she goes to the backyard and runs in tight little circles, imagining a train that stretches on forever. Her mother returns home and requests Celia’s help lifting him up. They spend five hours watching TV that

116. Bender, 283.
117. Bender, 285.

night.

The elderly couple continue to dream, but the woman can no longer speak anything but Polish. Nonetheless, eight or nine people sit in front of their house listening to them, as has become the custom. The town is on edge, worried that a single slip-up could bring death to all of them. “There was a moment of terror in the hardware store,” we read, when Mrs. Johnson accidentally blurted, “Oh my stars,” after dropping a wrench on her foot. Everyone held their breath and wondered if it was the end.”[118]

Celia’s mother goes on a walk and doesn’t come back. That night, Celia drives around town looking for her to no avail. When she returns, her father calls out for his wife, but she corrects him. “Don’t worry, sweetie,” he says. “She just does these things sometimes.”[119] She thinks they should call the police, but he insists that they wait until the next night at the same time. To comfort him, she sits in the living room all night watching TV as her mother usually does. The next evening, her mother still hasn’t returned. They have a quiet supper and he insists that she’ll call, that she does this sometimes. At ten, her mother finally calls. We read, “She was at a bar in Connecticut, on her way to D.C., to the museum, walking. She had a day or so more to go, and she wanted me to send my father on a train, bundled in blankets to keep him warm. She wanted him to meet her; they could go on the cattle cars together.”[120] Her mother insists on talking to her father, which she initially rebuffs before her father asks for the phone. Her father curls up in bed “like a teenage girl,” cooing into the receiver.[121] When the call ends, he explains that she wants him to meet her, and he wants to go. Celia thinks they’ve lost their minds, and despite his pleading, she tells him that they’ll see in the morning.

118. Bender, 288.
119. Bender, 289.
120. Bender, 289.
121. Bender, 290.

Celia leaves the house, a warm and clear night on a lightless street. She ends up in the town square, where the Greek statue stands covered in its sheet. She begins to run back and forth in front of it. "I'm going to do something," she tells the statue as she continues to run. She runs faster. In the closing moments of the story, we read:

> The silence was great and empty. I ran for a moment more, faster, faster, then stopped abruptly in front of the base of the statue, and stilled my body. Breathing quickly, I grabbed a corner of the white sheet. I rubbed the corner over and over between my fingers, chafing my skin, until it climbed into my fist and I had a good hold. And then, with one fierce yank, I pulled the sheet off. It blew up high, like a gasp, then floated to the ground, collapsing and bowing behind the statue.
>
> Uncovered, the god looked huger than ever—young, unbreakable. I put my foot on the top of the pedestal and pulled myself up. I climbed on his foot, then his knee, until I was high enough to face him. Holding on to his shoulders to steady myself, I moved in close, arms wrapping around his shoulders, pressing into his chest.
>
> "Father," I whispered. I listened as my breathing slowed, and waited for something to change.[122]

122. Bender, 291.

G // Steve Almond // "A Dream of Sleep" (2000)

Wolf Pinkas, a shy and quiet Holocaust survivor, lives in a converted family crypt while working as the caretaker of the Jewish cemetery that houses the crypt. When the patriarch of the family that owns the cemetery passed away, he left control of the cemetery to his son, a young man with no interest in the place. The son had told Wolf that he would have to cut his wages, and the two agreed to a pay cut if Wolf could live on the grounds and convert the unused crypt.

Wolf spends his days clearing footpaths, scrubbing the gates, hacking at weeds,[123] while in the evenings he listens to classical music on a crank phonograph with his two cats, who appeared in his little home two years apart. Each month, when his paycheque arrives, he goes out to the bank, the grocer and the barber. Eventually, when the barber goes out of business, he takes the trolley into town. When the trolley rails get ripped up, he starts to take the bus. All around him, the city is changing, cranes building skyscrapers in the distance. Wolf begins to leave the house less and less, and people come to visit the cemetery less and less. In time, the road outside the gate is torn up and converted into a four-lane highway, the neighbourhood houses that flanked it demolished. As the area continues its steady decline into disrepair, Wolf finds himself cleaning graffiti off the gates with increasing frequency.

One night, having heard incorporeal voices and sounds in the wind for quite some time, Wolf encounters a real person. Ham Tallaway, a man from the development commission, makes his way into the cemetery to take a look around. When Wolf returns to his little home, one of his cat's has left. A week later, he finds the cat, who had hidden himself in order to spare Wolf the unfortunate discovery of his body. Growing more and more weary of the loud rush of cars, ambulances, planes, and all the other fixings of modern technology, Wolf continues to isolate

123. Almond, 193.

himself through gardening and dehydrated foods so as not to necessitate leaving his little kingdom.

From this more macrocosmic view of Wolf's goings-on over the course of several years, the author parachutes us into a short period in the life of the protagonist. "Wolf had never before remembered his dreams," we read. "True, he might awaken with a strange sense of elation, or dread, even expectation."[124] Now, though, his dreams became vivid and memorable. We read,

> Now he woke with distinct memories: a vulture gliding overhead on dusty wings, swooping down on [his remaining cat] Coal, its awful black claws outstretched while Wolf watched from the doorway of his cottage, unable to wrestle himself into motion. Other nights, Wolf found himself cast out, wandering a dark, featureless landscape: the stink of diesel and dead horses, eyes staring at him from dank basements, a journey with no apparent point of origin or destination, just one step after another into blue-black air.[125]

At the same time, he dreams of memories of his war-torn childhood, of hunger, machine guns, pits, and of his own body laying there.

Ham Tallaway returns—it's been about a year since his last visit—and informs Wolf that the cemetery has been handed over to the city, which will build on the site. "This is a grave […] You can't move graves," Wolf tells him. Tallaway tells him that they have already received permission from the remaining relatives they could find, and that he had sent letter upon letter to the cemetery that Wolf had ignored. When a few nights later, we read, "Wolf heard the voices behind the cottage, he felt certain these were the dead, roused by Tallaway's visit."[126] But the voices are not only on the wind this time, and he ventures out to investigate the sounds coming from the children's cemetery, an area that had grown unbearable to him. He hears a cry and

124. Almond, 198.
125. Almond, 198-199.
126. Almond, 201.

investigates further until he comes upon a couple of teenagers having sex in the moonlight. He confronts them and the boy threatens to pull out his gun, to which Wolf replies that they have no right to be in the cemetery. After a brief standoff they scamper off into the night and Wolf returns to his little cottage. Around dawn, having only slept an hour, he is awoken by a faint knock on the door. The girl, it seems, was unable to escape over the cemetery's wall and presented with some scrapes and gashes from the attempt. The girl sleeps in his cot while he's out taking care of the cemetery, and when he returns, he insists that she leave. They strike up a conversation in which he reveals that he is from Russia by way of Poland, but he continually insists that she go home to her mother.

A week later, he hears her again in the distance, this time again with a boy. On this occasion, however, Wolf plays his music loudly and tries to ignore it. The girl is on his mind, however, as she continues to return just enough to remain memorable. It is not a feeling of lust, but something else. By October, her visits have ceased, only to be replaced by Tallaway and his men, who skirt the perimeter of the now-locked cemetery in an attempt to survey their new piece of land. Wolf loses track of the days, consciously wishing that he were no longer alive.[127]

On the night of the girl's return, all hell breaks loose. Wolf hears her screams once more, but, we read,

> The spirits assured him this was all a dream. He held fast to the rails of his cot and burrowed under his blankets and lay trembling, unable to determine if he was awake or asleep, if he lay in the garden of his boyhood or the graveyard that had been his home for forty years […] It had been a dream. A dream.[128]

But the cries continue, louder and louder. Wolf grabs his coat and boots and makes his way out

127. Almond, 207.
128. Almond, 207.

into the graveyard. When he finds her, her legs are splayed open; she is in labour. In a panic, he contemplates getting her to a hospital but realizes the futility of the option. He gives her his coat as a pillow and tries to help her along, telling her to push, begging her to push, but the girl passes out, her muscles going slack. Wolf is reminded of his father telling him about the trauma of his own birth, which he slept through as his mother died. Snapping out of it, he tries to jostle the baby out of the girl. We read, "For a moment, the situation seemed almost comical: he, a naked old man crouched in the cold, reaching into a stranger, trying to pry life into a world he wished mostly to leave."[129] Finally, the baby arrives. He tells her to hold the child as he picks her up and carries her to the cottage.

Wolf cleans her and the baby and runs out for no more than a minute to fetch wood for the fireplace. When he arrives back, the child is on the floor, limp, unbreathing. "He had somehow been heaved off her, or fallen," we read. "Wolf cradled him and ran to the door. Perhaps if he brought the baby to a neighbour, they could call the police or a hospital. But then, any fool could see baby's neck was broken."[130] The girl, in a delirium, accuses him of killing her baby, which he staunchly rejects, saying that he did what he could to help, asking her why she came to him instead of a hospital. He puts his lips to her ear, and tells her, "How could you do this? You will never be forgiven for this. Never. Do you hear me? Never until you are dead."[131]

In the closing moment of the text, we read:

> It occurred to Wolf that he might be in the midst of a dream, that none of this was real, only an elaborate charade devised to torment him. He went so far as to turn away and strike his head against the stone wall. But when he turned back, the girl was still there, her feverish body tossing, and the baby beside her, still.

129. Almond, 209.
130. Almond, 210.
131. Almond, 211.

He sank to his knees and wept, remembering the sting of death, how a body might in fact bury itself in grief, for years or whole decades. And realizing this, he experiences for a single sweet instant what life might feel like unaccompanied by guilt or fear or dread. He had been a child, a child too young to do anything but sleep. Sleep.

Blue light seeped in the shutters. Wolf rose from the floor and walked to the door of his cottage and, in one curiously exuberant motion, leapt outside. He moved through the cemetery on an old man's legs, creaky but stubbornly alive, not seeing the grave mounds he had tended, the headstones touched with dew, only moving himself toward the gate, the city beyond, a hospital, a doctor, the pink thread of dawn.[132]

132. Almond, 211.

H // Sigal Samuel // The Mystics of Mile End Part I: "Lev" (2015)

The second of the longer form short tales at eighty-two pages, "Lev" is the first part of Sigal Samuel's brilliant 2015 novel, *The Mystics of Mile End*. Though it is part of a novel, this extended portion of the text operates as its own narrative, and the only portion of the text narrated by the titular character, something the author herself confirmed to me, adding that she had considered publishing it as a standalone story at first.[133]

Lev, a boy living in the Mile End neighbourhood of Montreal with his sister and father, notes three weird happenings one May day. "I don't mean funny like hilarious, jokey, a real shtick," he tells us in the opening paragraph. "I mean it as in *weird.*"[134] The first weird thing occurs when his young teacher, Ms. Davidson, has the class start daily journals until the end of the school year. When he passes his classmate Alex's desk, he notices that he is writing only in ones and zeros, binary code. The second strange thing occurs on his way home from what he calls "Normal School," when he notices his neighbour, the eccentric Hasidic Jew Mr. Katz, painting toilet paper rolls brown on his front lawn. When he asks what the old man is making, Mr. Katz replies, "It's a secret."[135] The third funny thing occurs at dinner, where his sister Sammy is acting weird, as if she wants to tell her father and brother something that she just cannot bring herself to. Their father asks what they learned in Hebrew school that week, and she replies "Nothing."[136]

That Thursday, Lev does well on a quiz in Hebrew school and his teacher, Mr. Glassman (another neighbour), invites him over for tea and rugelach. Mr. and Mrs. Glassman's house has a strange atmosphere, Lev relating that "the air in that place had a weird feeling. I don't mean a

133. Personal correspondence dated January 26, 2018.
134. Samuel, 3.
135. Samuel, 5.
136. Samuel, 6.

weird smell, I mean a weird feeling. Like it was heavier than normal air."[137] Over tea and snacks, Mr. Glassman tells Lev that he should start preparing for his Bar Mitzvah, which is a year and a half away. He then indicates that Sammy has been hard at work for her Bat Mitzvah. This comes as a shock to Lev, who remembers that "when she was twelve Dad told her she wasn't going to do it since she was too young to tie herself to a religious tradition since she didn't really know how to think about religion yet. Did she understand how antihistorical it was? How antifeminist? No? No, see, she was too young to understand."[138] This, it seems, would explain her strange behaviour. As for the views of his father, we soon learn that he had begun to turn away from his ultra-orthodox faith before his wife died, and the process only sped up thereafter. He remained a professor on Jewish mystical thought, but in a secular setting at one of the local universities. Nonetheless, he sent the kids to Hebrew school to keep them in touch with their culture.

Lev tries to get to the bottom of what Mr. Katz is up to on his lawn, but the conclusions are slow in arriving. He also starts to befriend Alex, who doesn't seem to have any friends and is the subject of mockery from some of the other kids. One Friday night, Sammy is missing from their weekly TGIF marathon. Lev walks up to her bedroom and waits in the doorway, witnessing how she lights unfamiliar candles that usher back a memory of his mother. She notices him and slams the door angrily. The next day, Alex shows up at their door and asks Lev if he wants to play basketball, to which he agrees. As it turns out, they've lived two blocks apart for years and never spent time together. He also invites Sammy, who says she'll come in a little while. When she arrives, Alex starts to teach them about astronomy and the search for extraterrestrial life through radio signals from other galaxies. He also tells them that he comes from a long line of astronomers and scientists.

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137. Samuel, 8.
138. Samuel, 9.

Lev starts helping Mr. Katz in painting the elements of what seems to be a tree; the brown toilet paper rolls were the trunk, and now he is painting leaves green. That night at dinner, Sammy and Lev's father David argue about whether or not Mr. Katz is "delusional" because of his religious beliefs, as David claims. A few days later, walking home from school, Lev sees Mr. Katz at it again. Lev asks him if he is making a tree, and the old man asks him if he can keep a secret, Lev replying in the affirmative. "This is not an ordinary tree I am making," Mr. Katz says. "This is the Tree of Knowledge."[139] The next day, Lev asks Mr. Glassman about the Tree of Knowledge, and Mr. Glassman agrees to teach him about Genesis, not realizing that the Tree of Knowledge Lev was asking about was one more mystical in nature. After another painting session with Mr. Katz on a Friday, Lev returns home to the sound of Sammy chanting in Hebrew. Their father, as with every Friday, is stuck late at work, so they make pizza. That evening, Sammy reveals to Lev that she is studying for her Bat Mitzvah while Lev reveals that he is building a Tree of Knowledge with Mr. Katz. The next time he returns to Mr. Glassman's house, they finally get to the matter of the Tree of Knowledge, and Glassman explains how it is mystical idea from the Kabbalah, something one is not supposed to study until they are forty years. When Lev asks why, he explains the story of the four rabbis in the orchard, which I discuss in Chapter Three.[140] Despite this warning, Lev becomes somewhat obsessed with figuring out which fruit grew on the Tree of Knowledge.

As Lev and Alex continue building their friendship, Ms. Davidson announces that the class will be running their own science fair. Excitedly, Alex announces to Lev that they will use his Ham radio to call the International Space Station. At home, Sammy continues to try to hide her Bat Mitzvah from her father, an operation made harder by the answering machine messages her friend Jenny's father, a colleague of David's keeps leaving to congratulate him on his daughter's

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139. Samuel, 29.
140. See pg. 79.

upcoming ceremony. David never hears the messages.

Lev and Alex spend time at the library researching their science project, but Lev secretly takes that time to read about fruit around the world, trying to figure out which fruit were on the Tree. When Alex catches him, they discuss belief in God, with Alex staunchly certain that God doesn't exist. Lev continues his search by asking Mr. Glassman, who explains that even the sages of the Talmud could not agree on which fruit it was, leaving Lev frustrated. Lev also notices Mrs. Glassman whispering mathematical equations to herself. He apologizes to Mr. Katz because he can't figure out what the fruit was, but Mr. Katz tells him that all will be revealed in due time. When he returns home, Alex and Sammy are talking in the hallway, Alex continuing his crusade against belief in God. Sammy disagrees with Alex, telling him that his SETI radio signals rely just as much on "unobservable life forms" as does belief in God. As they continue their discussion, the author makes clear the link between Alex's understanding of astronomy and a kabbalist's understanding of the universe. Just as kabbalists spend hours and hours attempting to observe and understand the hidden nature of God, Alex relates: "I read about these SETI scientists who would spend hours and hours listening to dishwashers and washing machines, searching for patterns in the chaos."[141] The next week, in the lead up to the science fair, Lev is at Alex's house when he notices a piece of paper rolled up and placed in a hole in the wall, much like at the Wailing Wall. The piece of paper reads, "*DEAR GOD, I AM HERE* EXACTLY. *WHERE ARE YOU* EXACTLY?"[142]

The next day, Lev visits Mr. Glassman again, but his wife is feeling unwell. Mr. Glassman tells Lev the story of how they met: they had both been mathematics students, with Mr. Glassman

141. Samuel, 58.
142. Samuel, 61.

finding a young Mrs. Glassman "annoyingly smart."[143] At one point in their eventual courtship, Glassman utilized the *gematria* to figure out the numbers associated with his and her names. When they end up deported to the camps, Mr. Glassman received his tattoo upon arrival. Strangely enough, his number was the exact number of his name. The same happened for his wife, they found out later. After the war had ended, they had both unknowingly ended up in New York, a couple of blocks apart. Glassman asked the phone company to make his number the same as her name, and began printing it on cards. One day he figured that maybe, just maybe, she had had the same idea. So he called his own number and lo and behold, she picked up.

At the dinner table the next day, Lev's father tells his kids that Ira has been bothering him about his own daughter Jenny's group Bat Mitzvah in two days, and that they all have to go. Ira leaves another message revealing Sammy's participation, but it is just out of David's ear shot. The following day is the science fair, and Lev and Alex have had no luck contacting the International Space Station in the prior few days. Their attempts on this day start off poorly, but they eventually make contact with the ISS and allow their schoolmates to ask the astronaut questions as Sammy beams with pride. When Alex's mother takes them out for ice cream after school, and Alex takes a momentary bathroom break, Lev mentions Alex's astronomical and scientific lineage, to which Alex's mother replies that her father was a plumber. When he gets home, Lev looks at a book that Alex had lent him, *Important Names in Astronomy Today*, and finds the scientist that Alex had claimed as his grandfather therein.

The night of the Bat Mitzvah finally arrives. At the packed synagogue, Sammy is terrified as David tells her and Lev to take a seat next to him. She stands there, looking at the two of them, and without a word climbs onto the stage. Mr. Glassman, sitting in the row in front of them, turns

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143. Samuel, 62.

around and tells David that Sammy is the best student he's ever had. After "about four billion years and three gazillion songs,"[144] it is finally Sammy's turn. Lev had noted that there was a certain sadness in Sammy that he couldn't quite pin down. At various times, he had thought it was a number of different things. Most recently, he had noted the chaos and limbo that she lived in, in many ways running the household while David holed up in his study or at work until the wee hours. Lev had abbreviated this thought succinctly in the prior days: Sammy is sad because she doesn't have a bedtime. But here and now, as she reads her Torah portion, he comes to a higher understanding. We read,

> Inside her voice I could hear each letter, and each silence between each letter, and I felt happy and sad and lonely, because in each perfect silence was a smaller, hidden silence, like dolls inside dolls that go on and on forever, and inside the smallest doll I could suddenly see the list curled up, the list of all the reasons, the reasons for my sister's sadness.

The entire congregation is awed by Sammy's beautiful reading, but David remains silent. After the service ends, Ira runs up to David to congratulate him and to tell him that his wife would be proud. David rips his hand away, and within a few minutes, the family is in the car driving home. David has still said nothing. Lev gets a popsicle from the freezer and walks up to Sammy's room, where she is throwing out all of her Jewish equipment: candlesticks, matches, her kiddush cup and beautiful blue Bat Mitzvah dress, her prayer book. When she storms out with her backpack to go to "the supermarket,"[145] he takes everything but the dress out of the garbage and places it under his bed.

The next day, Lev starts walking in the direction of Mr. Katz's house. When he arrives, the

144. Samuel, 76.
145. Samuel, 79.

old man is staring up at his tree, where lemons have appeared in the cradles he had built for the eventual fruit. Lev gets really excited to tell Mr. Glassman that they've figured out what the fruit was. He walks in to see that Mrs. Glassman is well again, and she offers his favourite dessert, rugelach. Mr. Glassman talks about how touching Sammy's reading was, and Lev decides not to tell him about how he found her throwing everything in the trash. In the final moment, we read:

> Instead, I put my hands in my pockets. In my right pocket I could feel Mr. Glassman's scrap of paper, the one with his name and his wife's name calculated out in *gematria*, which he'd let me keep the other day. I started to think about the story he'd told me and what it said about the tattoos they got in the camp. The more I thought about it, the more made-up and *meshuggeneh* it all sounded. What kind of Nazi officer would let you choose the number of your tattoo? It didn't work that way! Mrs. Glassman was wearing a shirt with rolled-up sleeves, and while she moved around the kitchen getting the tea and rugelach ready I tried to sneak a good look at the number on her arm, to calculate and see if it really did add up to her name, but she kept moving too fast and the sunlight was making everything fuzzy and all the numbers blurred together and I couldn't tell anymore what was what.[146]

146. Samuel, 81.

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