

New Men for a New World:
Reconstituted Masculinities in Jewish-Russian Literature (1903 – 1925)

by

Ethan Calof
B.A., Dalhousie University, 2013

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ABSTRACT

This Master's thesis explores Jewish masculinity and identity within early twentieth-century literature (1903-1925), using texts written by Jewish authors in late imperial Russia and the early Soviet Union. This was a period of change for Russia's Jewish community, involving increased secularization and reform, massive pogroms such as in Kishinev in 1903, newfound leadership within the 1905 and 1917 Revolutions, and a rise in both Zionist and Revolutionary ideology. Subsequently, Jewish literary masculinity experienced a significant shift in characterization. Historically, a praised Jewish man had been portrayed as gentle, scholarly, and faithful, yet early twentieth century Jewish male literary figures were asked to be physically strong, hypermasculine, and secular.

This thesis first uses H.N. Bialik's "In the City of Slaughter" (1903) and Sholem Aleichem's "Tevye Goes to Palestine" (1914) to introduce a concept of "Jewish shame," or a sentiment that historical Jewish masculinity was insufficient for a contemporary Russian world. It then creates two models for these new men to follow. The Assimilatory Jew, seen in Isaac Babel's *Red Cavalry* cycle (published throughout the 1920s), held that perpetual outsider Jewish men should imitate the behaviour of a secular whole in order to be accepted. The Jewish Superman is depicted in Vladimir Jabotinsky's "In Memory of Herzl" (1904) and Ilya Selvinsky's "Bar Kokhba" (1920), and argues that masculine glory is entirely compatible with a proud Jewish identity, without an external standard needed. Judith Butler's theories on gender performativity are used to analyze these diverse works, published in Hebrew, Yiddish, and Russian by authors of varying political alignments, to establish commonalities among these literary canons and plot a new spectrum of desired identities for Jewish men.

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DEDICATION

To Rachel, Max, Leib, Maier, Doba, Sarah, and all the Calofs and Kalovs of Steblev who moved to North Dakota on a hope and a prayer. To the Wertmans of Gmina Tarnogród. To Bobba Ettie and Zaida Joseph, who settled a young Yiddish-speaking family in Winnipeg's North End. To Bobba Pauline, who fled pogromists across the mountains. To Bobba and Zaida, Bubby and Zaidy, Mom, Dad, and Ophira. Without your legacies and lessons, I would be nowhere.

I. INTRODUCTION

i. Thesis Introduction

In her text *The Technology of Gender*, Italian theorist Teresa de Lauretis outlines a four-pronged model for how to characterize the construction of gender and identity. The first two principles state that not only is gender a representation, but also the representation of gender is inherently its construction; she writes that “in the simplest sense it can be said that all of Western Art and high culture is the engraving of the history of that construction.”¹ The third states that “the construction of gender goes on as busily today as it did in earlier times,” with both expected spheres such as the media and the family and less obvious, more external and counter-cultural spheres contributing to this continual dialectic of gender construction and representation.² The fourth point argues that the deconstruction of gender also serves as its construction, with its unpacking serving to reinforce its existence and the terms upon which it is perceived. As de Lauretis writes, “gender [...] is not only the effect of representation but also its excess, what remains outside discourse as a potential trauma which can rupture or destabilize, if not contained, any representation.”³ Her model, the first and second prongs in particular, dovetails with Alberto Melucci's oft-cited definition of collective identity as the construction of an “action system”; that is, that “collective identity is an interactive and shared definition produced by several interacting individuals who are concerned with the orientations of their action as well as the field of opportunities and constraints in which their action takes place.”⁴ Gender, as with all manners of representation, is a facet of identity, and gender is perceived and consumed differently based on

¹ Teresa De Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*, Theories of Representation and Difference (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 3.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Alberto Melucci, John Keane, and Paul Mier, *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989), p. 34.

all of its community-specific influences. It is neither static nor individual; rather, it serves as the face of a sequence of perpetual conversations influenced by forces both internal and external.

Though de Lauretis largely wrote on the social construction of femininity, these interrelated definitions of collective identity and gender also apply when it comes to addressing the question of shifts in the conceptualization of Jewish masculinity, with particular attention paid to the post-1903 pogroms to early Soviet period in Russia. The early twentieth century produced a realignment of what it meant to be a Jewish man in Russia, and in turn, what it meant to be a Jew. This conversation, which is exemplified in works of literature, served as a marked shift from what I will define as traditional Jewish masculinity; the works helped construct and thus represent new values for the Jewish people. This newfound masculinity took many divergent forms, with varying amounts of sympathy to historical constructions of Jewish masculinity and a varying amount of credence lent to the idea of Jewish emancipation, yet all coalesced around an understanding that these traditional Jewish masculine traits were insufficient for their contemporary era. These new mores operated in the form of an action system; the shifting definitions of masculinity were transmitted by writers on all sides of the political spectrum, similar to Melucci's concept of collective identity. And while the Jewish model had been held as separate from and external to the classical Western masculinity discourse, it still reacted to it, with a traditional separation between “Jewish ways” and “external ways” resulting in a blurred interpretative line, where Jewish masculinity entered into conversation with more secular masculinity and created an entirely new image. The new Jewish literary men navigated the merging of classical Jewish masculinity with secular masculine constructs in order to craft a wide spectrum of responses to their changing world. And of course, as De Lauretis said, even the

destabilization and counter-narratives of these new constructs served to reinforce the newer models of identity.

Here, we can approach Judith Butler's writings on gender performativity as a further harmonization of the two concepts of gender creation and collective identity. Butler posits gender as a non-individual decision; it is established through a series of societal imitations, which are in turn based on long, pre-existing cultural relationships, a well-rehearsed act.⁵ While these acts may seem inherently arbitrary in terms of association, they carry deeper meaning in the sense that they reside on a corpus of entrenched customs and historical societal laws. Repeating these acts invests them with meaning, which is only real as long as it is performed, and “constitute[s] the identity that they are said to express.”⁶ The performative laws generated by this repetition praise those who live up to the gender standard, and condemn those who do not. In essence, this arbitrary essentialism is used to delineate “gender truth” and “gender falsity,” which then become a value judgment and a reassurance to those set in the cultural majority.⁷ This is the natural extension of de Lauretis's model—as gender is constructed in its creation and created in its construction, so too does its creation gain cultural value—and Melucci's interactive and shared communal identity. When applied to early twentieth century Jewish men, it becomes clear that by reframing this gender expression in newer, secular terms, the surrounding culture—that is, the Jewish-Russian community—was reorienting the collective identity and instilling a value system inspired by a sense of collective action. These performances are not homogenous, yet all take part in the crafting of a reoriented masculinity.

⁵ Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): pp. 525-526, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3207893>.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 527-528.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 528.

This thesis will take us to early twentieth century Russia and examine, through literature, both the shaping and reinforcing of a radically divergent imagination of Jewish masculinity. For the purpose of consistency, I will be defining Jewish literature as literature written by Jewish authors about Jewish subjects, without any assumptions on audience or authorial intent. These texts, as with Jewish culture as a whole, were shaped both directly and indirectly by landmark events shifting the Jewish community, beginning with the 1903 pogroms in Kishinev and carrying through the 1905 October Revolution, the militarism of the First World War, the 1917 revolutions, and the succeeding Russian Civil War. The writers of this time period took the idea of “classic Jewish masculinity” and turned it on its head. Throughout the annals of Jewish history, a praised man had been constructed through the establishment of a “good Jew-bad Jew” masculine binary, an extension of Butler's theories on gender truth and falsity. The Good Jewish man was kind, gentle, and godly; the Bad Jew, impulsive and aggressive. While duelling masculinities, one proper and one improper, was not an exclusive pattern throughout biblical literature, it is prominent enough to help delineate which attributes were more worthy of divine and textual praise than others and to establish a model to be consciously deviated from. Throughout this thesis, I will show literature expressing the inadequacy of the praised traits of classical Jewish masculinity in contemporary Jewish Russia, praising what had once been held as improper masculinity as a model worthy of emulation, and softening the oppositional model of biblical gender truth and falsity in favour of a more complex series of intra- and inter-gender relations and power dynamics. The flipping and complication of these traits resulted in two new models of Jewish Russian masculinity: the Assimilatory Jew, which saw Jewish figures as inherently less valued as compared to non-Jewish ones and proposed imitating secular modes of behaviour in an attempt to gain security, and the Jewish Superman, which held that one could be

both physically dominant *and* Jewish without needing to emulate a specific external masculine model.

Interspersed in this discussion, I will examine how this reoriented masculinity both mirrored and transcended the dominant political discourse of the time, which encouraged a rapidly secularizing community into both revolutionary and Zionist camps. The writers and texts examined stem from all over the ideological map in both alignment and intensity, showing that the reoriented masculinity was not merely the purview of one sector of the community but rather one of many manifestations of general Jewish ardour in a time of pogroms, revolutions, wars, and change.

Linguistic choice was one way to signal a differing ideological viewpoint. While I worked largely with literature in translation, the original languages of the texts served as both an ideological and practical choice. Throughout the nineteenth century and cresting in earnest in the early twentieth century, Russian, Yiddish, and Hebrew were competing for attention and prestige within the Jewish intellectual communities of eastern Europe. Yiddish and Hebrew literatures both began to sprout up in the latter half of the nineteenth century, with both having been used to various extents prior and having claimants proclaiming them as the essential language of Jewry. Hebrew had been used within traditional Jewish liturgy, prayer, and other contexts for millennia, with its learning being seen as a necessary practice for the “average” European Jewish man in the Middle Ages yet not necessarily the average European Jewish woman.⁸ The Zionist-inspired revival of modern Hebrew sought to remove the language from the traditional contexts and modernize it, with foundational thinkers such as Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, having been influenced by Slavic nationalist movements in the late nineteenth century, preaching the doctrine of having a

⁸ John Myhill, *Language in Jewish Society: Towards a New Understanding* (Clevedon, United Kingdom: Channel View Publications, 2004): p. 63, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uvic/detail.action?docID=227104>.

language for a people and connecting it with a Jewish homeland.⁹ As Hebrew wasn't used conversationally, many early Hebrew novelists were also actively crafting and modernizing the language as they wrote it and developing patterns of speech. In contrast, Yiddish was by far the most spoken language amongst the Jewish-Russian communities of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as 97% of Russian Jews referred to Yiddish as their mother tongue in 1897.¹⁰ Yiddish was held as less of a Jewish nationalist language and more of a symbol of secular Jewish identity, overcoming a historical stigma that forced Yiddish writers to write pseudonymously,¹¹ with it particularly gaining popularity within Communist circles as a "language of the people."¹² Yiddish translations and literature were also more accessible for eastern European Jewish women, who were unlikely to have encountered biblical Hebrew yet used Yiddish on a daily basis.¹³ Hebrew prose, despite being written by members of a varied and unknown set of class backgrounds,¹⁴ was held up as the more cultured and "elite" of the two Judaic languages as compared to Yiddish, which was most used by Jews poorer and less educated and seen as symbolic of what Jewish enlightenment thinkers, or *maskilim*, wanted to escape from.¹⁵

In contrast, Russian symbolized an entirely different aspect of Jewish-Russian society: that of an increasing push towards modernization and involvement within the political affairs of the larger state, and a departure from Yiddish as the native tongue. As the community secularized and assimilated, so too did the proportion of Jewish native speakers of Russian rise,

⁹ Ibid., p. 82.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 137.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 130.

¹² Ibid., p. 71.

¹³ Ibid., p. 128.

¹⁴ Robert Alter, *The Invention of Hebrew Prose: Modern Fiction and the Language of Realism*, Samuel and Althea Stroum Lectures in Jewish Studies (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), p. 9.

¹⁵ Myhill, *Language*, p. 128.

growing from 13% in Saint Petersburg in 1881 to 29% in 1890 to 42% in 1910.¹⁶ Most Hebrew writers had done their general reading in Russian,¹⁷ and it served as the language for the educated class and civil rights discourse. The push for Jewish Russianization came both from government actors, who saw incorporation of isolated Jewish communities into the Russian education system as a way to ease societal tensions, and from *maskilim* who sought to gain respect and equality by using the language of the majority.¹⁸ Writers who wrote in Russian, therefore, would be guided towards a larger audience than solely the Jewish-Russian community. It would be far too pat to simplify the complex discourse around language and herald Russian as the language of civil society, Hebrew of nationalist activism, and Yiddish of the common person; yet the three bodies of literature contained within them different aims and thus different audiences.

Russian Jewry was far from homogenous, whether ideologically or linguistically. Rather than highlight the differences between the literary canons, this thesis aims to identify commonalities in the construction of new masculinities that leap across these boundaries and shine in literatures Yiddish, Russian, and Hebrew alike. All of these works identify the inadequacy of the historical biblical masculine binary and create new sets of men to stand in their places. Throughout, the theories of Butler, Melucci, and de Lauretis will be our guide, both to establish what it meant to be a classical Jewish man and to illustrate how these early twentieth century characters diverged from it.

ii. Defining Classical Jewish Masculinity

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 137.

¹⁷ Alter, *Hebrew Prose*, p. 17.

¹⁸ Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, *Anti-Imperial Choice: The Making of the Ukrainian Jew* (New Haven, United States: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 3.

In the introduction to his text on religious Jewish masculinity, Daniel Boyarin describes growing up as a “sissy” in New Jersey, with passions residing in intellectualism and ballet rather than sports and athletics.¹⁹ He posits that Judaism served as a welcome home for this sort of rejection and subversion of conventional, dominant, “real” masculinity; a Jewish man dodged “such cultural archetypes as Iron Johns, knights, hairy men, and warriors within.”²⁰ The “classical Jewish man” rests in this nexus, prominent both in traditional Jewish texts and modern interpretations. A Jewish man does not allow his aggression to overtake him. A Jewish man uses his wits to triumph rather than raw strength. A Jewish man is gentle, scholarly, and godly, fully in control of himself and his reactions. Warren Rosenberg posits that what I refer to as “traditional Jewish masculinity” was reinforced and burnished by active anti-Semitic exclusion from these majority narratives, whether on the basis of character or physical deficiency²¹; Jews could not, and would not, be seen in unison with the Iron Johns, forcing them to create an alternative model. While the role of anti-Semitism in the construction, and later shifting, of Jewish masculinity is more than worthy of discussion, there is a clean line running from the origins of Jewish theology and self-conception to Boyarin's “male femme.” De Lauretis's positioning of gender's representation as its construction re-enters the picture here. Within the Jewish community, the genteel man built upon himself, praising and re-praising these values.

For the purposes of this thesis, I will be using largely Biblical texts to outline traditional Jewish masculinity, given their prominence both in Jewish religious and social life, while adding texts from the Rabbinic period (first to sixth centuries) for context and to lend an understanding of how historical Jewish figures might have interpreted these figures. The Torah establishes

¹⁹ Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. xii.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

²¹ Warren Rosenberg, *Legacy of Rage: Jewish Masculinity, Violence, and Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), p. 20.

gentility as the praised model through a series of binaries, with one figure representing the good Jewish man and the other symbolizing the opposite. It is a well-worn model presenting a didactic sort of easily digestible, easy to follow masculine morality. To follow Butler's argument, the positive gender performance was drawn from the negative gender performance, and vice-versa. While there are certainly biblical figures who exist beyond these oppositional stories of good versus bad, I believe that expressing these historical traits as generally as possible is integral for showing how the Jewish men in early twentieth century literature upended history and tradition and established their own radical new standards of masculinity. First and foremost would be the tale of Cain and Abel, where the aggressive and jealous Cain murders his godly and praised brother. The text goes far beyond critiquing Cain. He is introduced as a tiller of the ground, which serves as the basis for his characterization. His dismissed offering is the “fruit of the ground,”²² and the actual killing of his brother is in the field, another echo of Cain's dominion over the realm. Yet when he kills Abel, his abhorrent act supplants his entire prior identity, making it his new sole defining trait. The land itself, the core of his offering, is now saturated with his murder: “the voice of [Cain's] brother's blood crieth unto [God] from the ground.”²³ It becomes “cursed”²⁴ to him, ensuring that it will no longer yield to him, and he becomes marked in the process and forced to wander the land. Cain is painted as unable to master his jealousy and rage, and as a result, he is divorced inexorably from the entire foundation of his being, while Abel symbolically conquers him post-mortem by claiming his land as his own with his crying blood.

A second case of this binary occurs later on in Genesis, when Jacob and Esau come into conflict over their mutual desire to earn their father Isaac's blessing. Similarly to Cain and Abel,

²² Gen. 4:5 (Jewish Virtual Library).

²³ Gen. 4:10.

²⁴ Gen. 4:11.

Jacob was a “quiet man, dwelling in tents,”²⁵ whereas Esau was a “cunning hunter, a man of the field.”²⁶ As in the previous example, the gentler man is cast as the good Jewish man, whereas the more physically aligned one is cast as more negative. Isaac's blessing is cast as a form of divine praise, much like Cain and Abel's offerings earlier, and Jacob is determined to gain the benefit above his brother, who is entitled to it by virtue of being the firstborn. What's interesting is that Jacob's use of guile and disguise to outwit his father is fundamentally similar to Cain's use of murder, in that both are trying to upset the divinely prescribed order, Jacob by stealing his brother's blessing and Cain by targeting his brother's praised offering. Yet unlike Cain, Jacob is not only able to earn the blessing but also is prescribed as his brother's lord, with “all his brethren [...] given to him for servants.”²⁷ Later, after reconciling with Esau, Jacob is granted the name Israel as well as the right to carry on the line of the Jewish people. The chief difference between these two acts is how this desire to get closer to God is performed. Cain uses violence, Jacob uses his wits. Therefore, Cain is expelled from godliness, while Jacob keeps the blessing and the legacy.

The most prominent hyper-masculine figure in the Jewish tradition, however, is Samson. Samson is, at first glance, a contradiction. He differs from the prior two cases in that there is no gentler man to compare him to, and his actions are both praised and condemned. His gendered nature thus exists externally from the historical binary, which we are forced to delineate through his own actions and the contrasts drawn in his textual handling. He manages to express similar masculine attributes as worthy of praise as in the tales of Jacob and Esau and Cain and Abel, while disrupting the existing binary by virtue of his presence as a single complex individual. His physical strength and physical depiction, stemming from the instruction not to cut his hair or

²⁵ Gen. 25:27.

²⁶ Gen. 25:27.

²⁷ Gen. 27:37.

shave, echo the knights and hairy men from which Boyarin and many other Jewish men had felt excluded. He is able to tear apart a lion with his bare hands, slaughter thousands of men with a jaw bone, and uses his powers as a defender of the Israelites. Unlike many other biblical men and more specifically biblical heroes, he is cast as sexually proliferate. In the three books of Judges, he sleeps with three different women: his initial Philistine wife, a prostitute in Gaza,²⁸ and Delilah of the Wadi Sorek. A few aspects of his parade of partners cast him as a uniquely hyper-masculine figure in the text, with the first being their religious and regional origin. None of them are Israelites, with his Philistine wife being singled out as a religious transgressor; his parents bemoan his chosen bride, saying, “Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines?”²⁹ The invocation of circumcision hearkens back to the original covenant with Abraham and the foundation of the Jewish people. By casting his wife as estranged from that, the text positions her and by extension Samson as external to this foundational morality. Two of the three women, with the exception of Delilah, are not even afforded a name, defined only by their relation to Samson. Again, this serves as a statement that their representation is less vital than how they affect Samson. Finally, two of the three exist outside of the bounds of marriage, and the one marriage which does exist is the aforementioned condemned marriage with the Philistine woman.

Samson is a figure of both great glory and great folly, a spiritual precursor to Russian-Jewish figures who will be discussed later in this thesis that emerge from their texts both praised and condemned for how they perform their manhood. His praised attributes mirror much of what Jacob and Abel represented, while his more condemned attributes, including his eventual

²⁸ Judg. 16:1.

²⁹ Judg. 14:3.

downfall, align with Cain and Esau. From his very inception, Samson is pitched as a sort of divine experiment whose very arrival in the world is due to an angel dictating to his mother what she was meant to do for her as-of-yet unborn child.

An angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, “You are barren and have borne no children; but you shall conceive and bear a son. / Now be careful not to drink wine or other intoxicant, or to eat anything unclean. / For you are going to conceive and bear a son; let no razor touch his head, for the boy is to be a nazirite to God from the womb on. He shall be the first to deliver Israel from the Philistines.”³⁰

Samson's father is fully absent from the discourse, as is all manner of human agency, with his mother being afforded no choice in his raising and serving as only a vessel for divine attention and a host for the child to come. The language chosen is forceful, with the angel saying “you shall,” “the boy is to be,” and “he shall.” His purpose is explicit: to deliver Israel from the Philistines and be the saviour for the people, a path which is chosen by the divine rather than by Samson himself. The precision and purpose of these instructions are reinforced whenever Samson exercises his super strength for a praised purpose, as it is always prefaced by stating that “the Spirit of the LORD came upon him.”³¹ It indicates that Samson's strength is not his own, and has a specific purpose: to serve the Israelites and God by extension. Yet for his other hyper-masculine acts, whether physical, sexual or otherwise, he does not earn this preface. He is a servant of the divine when he follows the path, and a mere man when he fails. His agency and independence have evaporated from the equation, and whenever he exercises it, he gains textual condemnation.

Samson meets his end when he sleeps with Delilah, who had been sent to undermine him and take the Israelite strongman down. While Samson is praised for following God's instructions, his undoing comes when he strays, his sexual desire overwhelming his desire to serve God. Just

³⁰ Judg. 13:3-5.

³¹ Judg. 14:6, 19, 15:14.

as Esau mortgaged his birthright, Samson mortgaged his position as leader of the Israelites. Udi Aloni suggests that Samson had become “addicted to the game of bondage,” misled by Delilah’s invocation of love and serving as an exemplar of male power succumbing to a manipulative feminine force.³² The invocation of the game of bondage indicates that it was a series of Samson’s choices that led him down the path to his own destruction, rather than being outwitted by an external force, which is supported by the text. He had already been cautioned against women from uncircumcised, non-Israelite cultures, and Delilah was the third one whom he had courted. He cites his strength as coming from his position as a “Nazarite unto God from [his] mother’s womb,”³³ and when he crosses that boundary, he would be “weak like any other man.”³⁴ His human urges remove him from the position of a divine vessel to any other human untrusting in God; the text states that “the LORD was departed from him” when he attempts to summon his strength once more.³⁵ His partial redemption only comes with his complete sacrifice of self. He pleads for God’s return to him yet the text does not state that the divine gripped him once more, an echo of Cain’s estrangement from the ground: some sins could not be fully atoned for, and would lead to a permanent change of selfhood. His masculinity had been abused, and by being unable to call on God in his redemption, he is reinforcing his punishment simultaneously.

By taking all three stories in conjunction — murderous Cain and gentle Abel, scorned hunter Esau and cunning Jacob, and praised and condemned Samson — we gain a more complete picture both of how gender was constructed in the Tanakh and how it challenged its own gender models. The praised attributes, the ones contributing to their masculine characters’ legacy-making, revolved around godliness. Abel’s praise was found in his offering to God,

³² Udi Aloni, “Samson the Non-European,” *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 12, no. 2 (13 April 2011): pp. 129-130, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15240657.2011.559441>.

³³ Judg. 16:17.

³⁴ Judg. 16:17.

³⁵ Judg. 16:20.

Jacob's in his desire to grow closer to God through his father's blessing, and Samson's in his acceptance of God's instructions and allowance of the spirit of the Lord to fill him. The negative men are criticized and condemned for their aggression and assumption of their own superiority, or lack of willingness to work within their natural order. Cain believes he and his offering are superior to Abel, so he murders him. Esau prizes his immediate needs of hunger over that of his divine birthright, leading his younger brother to become his superior. Samson believes himself to be beyond reproach, so he sleeps with non-Jewish women, neglects his divine instruction, and gets his strength stolen. Samson's power itself occupies an equivocal place in Rabbinic period narratives. On one hand, he was praised for being a representation of the might of God and its power to redeem the Jewish people,³⁶ yet on the other hand, he also drew criticism for being an “unrighteous individual” with dangerous powers.³⁷ The power even in the cases of the praise is seen as God's, not Samson's; he is a representation of the might, not the source of the might itself. Every aspect of his overwhelming power and masculinity not positioned in defence of the Israelites and God's will created his downfall. He may have further reinforced the casting of biblical men as needing to be aligned with divine values, but he also proved that the simplistic Genesis construction of good Jew-bad Jew was insufficient when approaching a more nuanced set of behavioural attributes.

This vision of classical Jewish masculinity may have originated in biblical texts, yet its influence carries on beyond the confines of the Tanakh. Indeed, the avoidance of aggression and humility is praised and reinforced systematically through both religious and non-religious Jewish figures; one only needs to look at an episode of *Friends* to see Ross Geller serving the role of

³⁶ Matthew J. Grey, “‘The Redeemer to Arise from the House of Dan’: Samson, Apocalypticism, and Messianic Hopes in Late Antique Galilee,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 44, no. 4–5 (2013): p. 572, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700631-12340391>.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 579.

demure, studious, humble Jewish man, as starkly removed from Boyarin's Iron Johns as Abel and Jacob. This reinforcement of gentility as a positive value existed in Eastern Europe even in the years immediately preceding a more radical reorientation of Jewish masculinity.³⁸ Sholem Aleichem's *Tevye* tales, serialized short stories featuring the eponymous dairyman and serving as the foundation for *Fiddler on the Roof*, were first written in the 1890s and carried through the early 1900s. Tevye is a humble man who regularly quotes the Torah despite never quite placing the verses in their proper context, a symbol of his desire to live a godly life despite not having the education and traditional knowledge to do so according to the letter of the Talmudic law. He also identifies strongly with his traditions, to the point of disowning his own daughter and sitting shiva for her for the crime of marrying a non-Jewish man.³⁹ Tevye is the constant in a shifting and secularizing world; he is stubborn and not always praised or rewarded, yet relies on these classical mores of masculinity to provide his framework. Whether or not his faithfulness was rewarded, it was still the dialogue he contributed to and reinforced and the model he played into.

³⁸ Of course, this skips over thousands of years of Jewish history in Europe, much of which served as reinforcement of these models of masculinity and features far too many events and far too much legislation to list concisely. This brand of genteel masculinity was reinforced both by internal community values and external anti-Semitic actions, and shifted through the many events that beset European Jewish communities. Many books cited in this thesis would be excellent resources for further exploration; Leonid Livak's *The Jewish Persona in the European Imagination* depicts archetypes used to depict Jewish figures in Christian conversation from medieval times; John Klier's *Russia Gathers Her Jews* describes the political machinations surrounding the early integration of Jews into the larger Russian Empire; David G. Roskies's anthology *The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe* is a treasure trove of writings from Jewish writers after traumatic events; Boyarin's *Unheroic Conduct* is a specific look at the development of Talmudic concepts of masculinity through all annals of Jewish history. While it would be a mistake to claim that Jewish masculinity was static from the Torah to the present day, I mean only to highlight the familiarity between the classic Jewish model I presented and a more contemporary interpretation.

³⁹ Michael R. Katz, "'Go Argue with Today's Children': The Jewish Family in Sholem Aleichem and Vladimir Jabotinsky," *European Judaism* 43, no. 1 (May 2010): pp. 66-67, <https://doi.org/10.3167/ej.2010.430105>.

The praised and condemned aspects of what I'm calling traditional Jewish masculinity that are established here are essential to understand before diving fully into the works of early twentieth-century Russia. That this performative pattern was so pronounced before the time period explored in this thesis not only indicates it as an established bulwark of the Jewish identity conversation, but also reinforces how profound of a departure it was to praise and empower the previously condemned aspects of masculine construction, and condemn and scorn the previously praised. A grounding in biblical masculinity and analysis is also relevant due to these texts' intertextual dialogue with the stories and attitudes of the Torah, in which all have at least a moderate grounding—after all, as described above the average eastern European Jewish man was expected to have at least a passing familiarity with Jewish liturgy in its native tongue. Five works will be examined for their contributions to newer models of gender. The first chapter will situate H.N. Bialik's Hebrew "In the City of Slaughter" (1903) and Sholem Aleichem's Yiddish "Tevye Goes to Palestine," a later entry in the aforementioned *Tevye* cycle (1914), will be used to identify a strain of "Jewish Shame" which outlined a lack of place for classical Jewish masculinity to deal with contemporary issues. The second chapter will revolve around Isaac Babel's Russian *Red Cavalry* cycle (published throughout the 1920s) and how it illustrates the first of our two models for reoriented Jewish men: the Assimilatory Jew, which realizes classical Jewish masculinity as an inherent weakness and implies salvation can emerge through consistent imitation of the Russian majority. The final chapter deals with Vladimir Jabotinsky's Russian "In Memory of Herzl" (1904) and Ilya Selvinsky's Russian "Bar Kokhba" (1920) as they create their Jewish Supermen. The Jewish Supermen not only ignore the classical model as a virtue but fully supplant it with their own, seeing a revitalized Jewish masculinity as not only praiseworthy but

also a *fait accompli*. The Torah and the divine are dismissed as moral guidelines, grounding Jewish men as authors of their own fate and, by extension, that of their entire community.

These works exhibit and craft a broader gender model than merely masculinity, of course; masculine expression does not exist in a silo, and in a generative model that leans so heavily on binary thinking it stands to reason that the manifestations of femininity are equally essential to understanding the nuances both of a shifting cultural ideological identity and the manifestations of the reoriented masculinity itself. Its significance cannot be downplayed. Women are prominent in all of these works of literature, often in concert with the instances I selected to illustrate the new masculinity and serving various roles with varying amounts of in-text agency. Bialik's righteous anger stems from Jewish men standing by as pogrom perpetrators; Tevye's power is tested by each of his daughters' unconventional marriage choices; *Red Cavalry's* protagonist Kirill Lyutov is instructed to “rough up a woman” in order to gain respect; the titular hero of “Bar Kokhba” loses his life in a night of passion with the Roman commander's wife. I am choosing to directly compare masculinities within the texts to each other, rather than elaborating on the interplay between in-text masculinities and femininities, because I believe that these divergent male models best illustrate the shifting emotions and norms within the early twentieth-century Jewish-Russian social climate. Both men and women were called upon to craft a new identity for a newer secular Jewish world, whether they were serving Revolutionary or Zionist ideologies, and the shift in masculinities was so radical as compared to how Jewish men had been taught to behave prior. Much ideological and literary ink had been spilled on how men *should* act in this newer world, and ultimately I relished the opportunity to approach these older texts and the patriarchal constructions inherent within them using a more nuanced, feminist lens. These bold new men perform their gender in a manner heretofore unseen within Jewish writings,

dismissing the model of “good” and “bad” in favour of a series of gender relations as complex as the early twentieth-century Jewish community itself, and shining a light on a tumultuous period in Jewish history.

II. CHAPTER ONE: On the Genesis of “Jewish Shame”

i. Historical Overview

Over the course of this thesis, I will be examining forms of the reoriented Jewish-Russian masculinity that cropped up in the early twentieth century. In order to do so, it is imperative to establish both a historical framework for the evolution of this Jewish-Russian identity while also delineating the initial literary response to this impetus. This context sets the stage for the following two chapters, as by getting a sense of the key dates and key emotions for reconstituted Jewish masculinity, the literary models of these bold new men become clarified. As such, I will dedicate this chapter to outlining two essential aspects of the discussion before proceeding into the modelling chapters. First, I outline some of the key dates and factors within the Jewish-Russian community that helped shape these pieces of literature and hone in on the Jewish involvement within each moment. Second, I locate within the communal literary canon the emotional reorientation of Jewish-Russian masculinity, which shifted the Talmudic, traditional praised vision of masculine gentility into masculine shame and expressed a lack of place for the Talmudic man in contemporary Jewish-Russian society. As such, we are able to chart the flourishing of this value shift as a consequence of and reaction to the social changes impacting the Jewish community at the time and evaluate whether or not this shift was solely recognized within ideologically inclined communities at the time.

Prior to the events discussed in this thesis, the Jewish-Russian community had been undergoing a marked process of secularization quite unlike those that came before in Jewish cultural history, and especially marked considering their continual restriction to the Pale of Settlement. The nineteenth century saw a flourishing of secularization movements and mainstreaming of Jewish people into the Russian whole, replacing what had once been a largely

isolated Jewish community. The internal Haskalah or Jewish enlightenment philosophical movement, which took hold all across central and eastern Europe throughout the nineteenth century, was one piece of the puzzle; the movement scorned the attributes of Judaism which were incompatible with larger secular world and promoted and emphasized those values that they believed were compatible, including stable family life, financial skill, biblical Hebrew, and a praiseworthy history of Judaic philosophical discourse.⁴⁰ Externally, a few policy changes drew an isolated Jewish community further into the Russian whole. In 1874, Russia mandated military service yet allowed exemptions in the case of enrolment in higher education. This helped encourage a sevenfold increase in Jewish enrolment in Russian gymnasiums between 1865 and 1887, and a thirteen times increase in Jewish enrolment in Russian universities,⁴¹ a major factor in the proliferation of Russian within the Jewish community as mentioned in the introduction. These closer communal ties induced a different dialogue—the more secular, more engaged Jewish community gained a modicum of buy-in and influence in the Russian whole and became privy to more of the broader cultural norms.

The year 1903 saw a key touchstone moment in Jewish-Russian history and this thesis's analysis: the Kishinev Pogrom in what is now modern-day Moldova. The pogrom had been stirred up in *Bessarabets*, Moldova's sole newspaper at the time, blessed outwardly by the Orthodox church and accepted by the government, with Russian minister of the interior advising the local authorities to not take action against it.⁴² Early twentieth century Jewish-Russian historian Simon Dubnow described the Kishinev pogroms as an intentional wedge to divide

⁴⁰ Steven Zipperstein, “Haskalah, Cultural Change, and Nineteenth-Century Russian Jewry: A Reassessment,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 34, no. 2 (1 October 1983): p. 193, <https://doi.org/10.18647/1102/JJS-1983>.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

⁴² Monty Noam Penkower, “The Kishinev Pogrom of 1903: A Turning Point in Jewish History,” *Modern Judaism* 24, no. 3 (10 September 2004): pp. 187-190.

burgeoning revolutionary forces within Russia at the time, movements which would coalesce into the larger 1905 Russian Revolution, saying it aimed to pit the “Jewish revolution” against the “Russian populace” in an artificial binary.⁴³ This state-sanctioned or at the very least state-condoned violence served as the backdrop for H.N. Bialik's 1903 poem, “In the City of Slaughter” (discussed in this chapter) and Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky's “In Memory of Herzl” (discussed in the third), published in 1904. As I outline in the literature, these events served as the booster of a concept that I will be calling “Jewish Shame.” Jewish Shame here means that these Jewish writers saw a world evolving away from accommodating what I have defined in the introduction as classical Jewish masculinity and introduced the necessity for a change. This desire for a mass emancipatory change had not originated in the post-Pogrom period—for an earlier example, Leon Pinsker's anonymous 1882 pamphlet *Auto-Emancipation!* is discussed in the third chapter—yet as Dubnow wrote, the Kishinev pogroms had been the first to “[awaken] the burning feeling of martyrdom, but with it also the feeling of heroism.”⁴⁴ The tragedy also spurred the Second Aliyah, or mass wave of emigration to Palestine, which was constituted of Russian Jews fleeing the violence. These *olim* rejected the idea of dependency on larger groups, whether existent Zionist groups or European states, and saw themselves as creating a self-sufficient Jewish worker's class meant to stay in Israel for their lifetimes.⁴⁵ This class of Russian Jewish emigrés, including David Ben-Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel, and Meir Dizengoff, the first mayor of Tel Aviv, formed the dominant part of the political and social class in the *yishuv*.

⁴³ Simon Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland: From the Earliest Times until the Present Day*, trans. Israel Friedlaender, vol. 3 (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1916), p. 69.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁴⁵ Ben Halpern and Jehuda Reinharz, “The Cultural and Social Background of the Second Aliyah,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 27, no. 3 (1991): p. 497.

The 1903 pogrom was one of a combined 57 anti-Jewish pogroms through October 1905,⁴⁶ many of them carried out by actors of the state, with Kishinev memorable mostly for the scale of the devastation wreaked upon the Jewish community: it saw nearly 50 deaths and nearly 500 injuries.⁴⁷ It was one of many contributors to the large-scale social unrest and instability, alongside mass unemployment and the estrangement created by the Russian tsarist government's treatment of minority groups, which led to the 1905 Russian Revolution. In the 1905 Revolution, Jewish men and women played a far more pivotal role than they had in prior Russian social unrest, as the multicultural character of the resisters provided a platform for increasing numbers of Jewish youths to develop their imprints on both the external society and internal community relations. Socialism, whether Zionist or revolutionary socialism, provided a framework for young educated Jews who sought to use their education to gain influence within a framework that didn't ostracize Jewish voices,⁴⁸ a descriptor which did not apply to the imperial Russian context. One of the popular methods for the politicized working class was the establishment of *birzhas*, or street-based social spaces where contemporary political discourse was often brought to the fore.⁴⁹ These *birzhas* were targets of the Cossack forces, and were often protected by physical force, including killing those who sought to break them up.⁵⁰ These movements helped bring the concepts of newer Jewish masculinity from theory into reality, providing an outlet for reorienting the aforementioned Jewish Shame into a prideful self-determination. The newly established State

⁴⁶ Abraham Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905* (Stanford, United States: Stanford University Press, 1988), vol. 1, p. 131.

⁴⁷ Penkower, p. 188.

⁴⁸ Inna Shtakser, *The Making of Jewish Revolutionaries in the Pale of Settlement: Community and Identity during the Russian Revolution and Its Immediate Aftermath, 1905-1907* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 59.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

Duma, which led to increased social rights via the 1905 October Manifesto,⁵¹ also became a forum for increased Jewish political participation. The first Duma in 1906 saw twelve Jewish members elected, nine of whom represented the centrist Kadet party,⁵² while in the 1917 elections Jewish nationalist parties received a third of all seats won by national and religious parties.⁵³ Sholom Aleichem's 1914 "Tevye Goes To Palestine" (discussed in this chapter) is the one work which I analyze in my thesis to be written after the political gains of the 1905 Revolution, yet before the 1917 Revolutions and ensuing radical social changes. The time period between revolutions played host to four iterations of the State Duma and the start of the First World War, which led to both a militaristic rise in patriotic enthusiasm within Russia and dissatisfaction at the hemorrhaging of resources and lives on the Eastern Front.

The 1917 Revolutions, and the events of the near half-decade-long succeeding Russian Civil War, will be our last touchstone date for this thesis and the culmination of this transitioning Jewish masculinity. Jewish people had outsized political influence when compared to their share of the general population, a fulfillment of the promise of the 1905 Revolution and a seeming about-face on the conditions leading to Bialik's Jewish Shame. While a preponderance of Jews fell in with the Bolsheviks and the Red Army, many falling in with its vision to deliver increased rights and status for ethnic minorities,⁵⁴ there were still Jews who aligned with the Menshevik vision. Daniel Pasmanik is an example of a Russian Zionist who became an editor for a White daily journal, seeing Bolshevism as an attack on the large numbers of Jews who were members

⁵¹ Ascher, vol. 2, p. 253.

⁵² Simon Rabinovitch, "Russian Jewry Goes to the Polls: An Analysis of Jewish Voting in the All-Russian Constituent Assembly Elections of 1917," *East European Jewish Affairs* 39, no. 2 (1 August 2009): pp. 211-212, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501670903016316>.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

⁵⁴ Liliana Riga, *The Bolsheviks and the Russian Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

of the bourgeoisie and seeing the Mensheviks as a safer path forward.⁵⁵ This time period was also one of the most tragic in Russian history for the Jews, particularly in Poland and Ukraine, with pogroms running rampant perpetrated by all militaries though largely the Whites and Ukrainian revolutionaries. These pogroms led to the deaths of tens of thousands of Jews.⁵⁶ It was during this time period that Isaac Babel served as a war correspondent with the Red forces; his experiences led to the *Red Cavalry* collection (discussed in Chapter 2) published through the early and mid 1920s. It was also the stage upon which Ilya Selvinsky wrote the epic poem “Bar Kokhba” (discussed in Chapter 3) in 1920, later published in 1924. It was a time both of massive Jewish gains and indescribable Jewish loss, a permanent imprimatur of Jewish presence and prominence on the Russian social sphere, and the culmination of the Jewish secularization and political engagement burgeoning since the Haskalah movement and through the 1903 pogroms.

ii. “In the City of Slaughter” and Crisis

This historical context leads us to the contents of the first chapter, as mentioned above: that of the literary perpetuation and recognition of a concept of Jewish Shame, which manifested as a recontextualizing of classical Jewish values. As mentioned in the introduction while leaning on the performative theories of Judith Butler, the traditional Jewish man was predicated on, among other things, contrasting two biblical figures’ moralities against each other. Being gentle, god-fearing, and humble were good traits for a Jewish man to have; the inverse was violence, arrogance, and dismissal of the divine. The works in Chapter 1 dissolve that binary, establishing those attributes said to belong to a good Jewish man as insufficient or unwanted in the modern

⁵⁵ Taro Tsurumi, “Jewish Liberal, Russian Conservative: Daniel Pasmanik between Zionism and the Anti-Bolshevik White Movement,” *Jewish Social Studies* 21, no. 1 (4 December 2015): p. 164.

⁵⁶ Simon Rabinovitch, “Jewish-Ukrainian-Soviet Relations during the Civil War and the Second Thoughts of a Minister for Jewish Affairs,” *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 17, no. 3 (1 December 2017): p. 364, <https://doi.org/10.1111/sena.12256>.

climate for Russian Jewry and devising a range of responses. The texts put varying amounts of faith in that theory — Bialik's response to Kishinev sees the departure from classical Jewish masculinity as an absolute necessity, whereas Sholem Aleichem's Tevye bemoans it — yet both pieces of literature posit this reorientation as an existent construct. One disputes and one upholds the new gender model, yet as De Lauretis writes, both facets contribute to its construction. This concept of Jewish Shame is the soil from which the two models of Jewish masculinity outlined in Chapters 2 and 3 grow, as without that sense of the old ways of masculinity no longer working, the impetus to craft a new man would be far less pronounced.

It was in this milieu that Zionist poet H.N. Bialik was sent to Kishinev in 1903. Bialik had been a rising star within the Jewish Russian poetry world throughout the early 1890s, with Dubnow writing that he considered him as “[having] brought the poetical forms of ancient Hebrew speech to unprecedented perfection.”⁵⁷ The newly created Kishinev Historical Commission endeavoured to learn as much as possible about the pogrom, in hopes of lobbying the Russian imperial bureaucracy to change its anti-Semitic laws.⁵⁸ The result was “In the City of Slaughter,” a searing epic poem in Hebrew written by a clearly wounded and horrified Bialik that exemplifies a reoriented view of how to be a good Jew, and good Jewish man in particular. Throughout, Bialik's rage is directed more towards the victims of the pogrom, who did not defend themselves adequately, than the aggressors. This work pioneered the Jewish Shame, holding it as a construct needing to be overcome by societal action. Bialik's poem is deeply pessimistic and devoid of praise for any actors within, whether Jewish or gentile. It upends the prior model of divine reward or condemnation for certain actions. No reward is available for the trauma of the Kishinev pogroms, and “In the City of Slaughter” serves to excoriate Jewish men

⁵⁷ Dubnow, *History of the Jews*, p. 63.

⁵⁸ Penkower, p. 195.

as a whole for their errors during the attacks and by extension adherence to the prior model of masculinity.

The poem begins with a description of the vivid, visceral horrors of the Kishinev pogrom, which serves to emphasize the irredeemability and sheer poison of the scenes. He writes, “on tree, on stone, on fence, on mural clay, // the spattered blood and dried brains of the dead” and “the shattered hearth, [...] the broken wall,”⁵⁹ imagery which underscores the depth of the devastation and evokes a more primal force than mere humanity. He also creates a biblical, divine framework through which to see the act. The opening line of the poem, in its original Hebrew, starts “*kum lekh l'kha*,” which translates to “come,” “bring yourself,” or “get up.”⁶⁰ It also shares a name with a Torah portion, which itself derives its name from the opening verse, containing the same *lekh l'kha*. The opening verse has God telling Abram to “get thee out of thy country” in order to serve as the father of the Jewish people.⁶¹ In “In the City of Slaughter,” Bialik is issuing the same invocation to the reader, a pseudo-divine summons to go and see what had occurred in Kishinev. Robert Alter writes that most Hebrew poets of the era had intimate knowledge of the Torah and assumed their readers would as well,⁶² this invocation only serves to play on that relationship and subtext. The positioning of Bialik, the poet, as the authority and scribe while highlighting the same language used by God indicates both the immensity of Bialik's journey and the immensity of his authority. This is further developed by the inclusion of

⁵⁹ Hayyim Nahman Bialik, “In the City of Slaughter,” *Complete Poetic Works of Hayyim Nahman Bialik*, trans. Israel Efros (New York: Histadruth Ivrit of America, 1948), p. 129.

⁶⁰ Hayyim Nahman Bialik, “In the City of Slaughter,” *Selected Poems*, trans. Maurice Samuel (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1972), p. 105.

⁶¹ Gen. 12:1-2.

⁶² Robert Alter, *The Invention of Hebrew Prose: Modern Fiction and the Language of Realism*, Samuel and Althea Stroum Lectures in Jewish Studies (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), p. 23.

religious objects in the post-pogrom debris. Bialik writes of “scroll heaped on manuscript, // Fragments again fragmented,”⁶³ an invocation of a permanently damaged Torah.

In the opening of the poem, the presence of religious Jewish imagery serves a dual purpose. Bialik's *lekh l'kha* uses the historical connection to deliver himself as a pan-Judaic authority, yet the destruction of the texts indicates a severance of that connection. The foundational Torah is in scraps, the holiness of the Jewish soul has drifted away. Similar to the influencers in the midst of the Haskalah movement, “In the City of Slaughter” is selecting which parts of the Jewish cultural and religious canon to emphasize in the upcoming social dialogue. Later, it is mentioned that “God called up the slaughter and the spring together, — // The slayer slew, the blossom burst, and it was sunny weather!”⁶⁴ The divine is invoked without being genuflected to by the verses, and the faith-based manifestations are brought into the sweeping, all-encompassing carnage. On its own, the mentions of God are indicative of Bialik's commanding tone. In conjunction with later invocations against Jewish men, they symbolically destroy prior narratives of Jewish masculinity, with the aspects of faith so praised in Jacob and Abel insufficient against the forces of terror. By stating both that God called up the slaughter and that God's children were weak in the face of it, Bialik's divine imagery respects the tradition while reinforcing its needed contemporary mutability.

The pogrom itself is not characterized as the performance of humans or organizations, but is largely de-personified, with Bialik depicting it as an inescapable force rather than a human activity. A headless Jew is struck by “the self-same axe,”⁶⁵ rather than a person wielding the axe. The martyrs are found by “the hatchet,” and the events attacking the victims are often expressed

⁶³ Bialik, trans. Efros, p. 129.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

in the passive voice, such as stating that the men “were hung” or the women “were fouled.”⁶⁶ Even when the perpetrators are referred to in a near-personified manner, they are referred to as the “wild ones of the wood, the beasts of the field”⁶⁷ who attack the women of Kishinev rather than a human force. The effect, of course, is that the only humans and only “choices” highlighted in the poem belong to the Jewish people, and largely the Jewish men. It carries an echo with both early European and Israeli Zionist rhetoric on the nature of the diaspora and the Jews residing in it. Theodor Herzl held that anti-Semitism was at least partially “legitimate self-defence,” on account of the overrepresentation of Jewish figures in the local economy.⁶⁸ The *yishuv*, or early Zionist settlements in British Palestine, held that the diaspora was an inherent position of weakness for the Jewish people, with 1933 articles holding that Nazi persecution was a “punishment” for attempting to integrate into German society,⁶⁹ and Polish-Zionist leader Yitzhak Gruenbaum referring to Jewry “preferring the life of a beaten dog to death with honour”⁷⁰ in 1942. The idea of diaspora as an inherently untenable position for the Jewish people echoes the de-personification of the pogromists in Bialik's poem; anti-Semitism is not a choice but a *fait accompli*, and the path forward for the Jewish people was to avoid the axes, so to speak.

Shortly into the poem, Bialik expresses a thorough indictment of the actions of the Jewish men of Kishinev, with particular focus on their inability to fight against their oppressors.

Note also do not fail to note,
In that dark corner, and behind that cask

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 132-133.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 133.

⁶⁸ Paul Reitter, “Zionism and the Rhetoric of Jewish Self-Hatred,” *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory* 83, no. 4 (1 September 2008): p. 346, <https://doi.org/10.3200/GERR.83.4.343-364>.

⁶⁹ Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust*, First edition (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), p. 18.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 71.

Crouched husbands, bridegrooms, brothers, peering from the cracks,
 Watching the sacred bodies struggling underneath
 The bestial breath,
 Stifled in filth, and swallowing their blood!
 Watching from the darkness and its mesh
 The lecherous rabble portioning for booty
 Their kindred and their flesh!
 Crushed in their shame, they saw it all;
 They did not stir nor move;
 They did not pluck their eyes out; they
 Beat not their brains against the wall!
 Perhaps, perhaps, each watcher had it in his heart to pray:
*A miracle, O Lord, — and spare my skin this day!*⁷¹

Bialik does a similar evaluation of the preferred performance for a Jewish man here, condemning the actions seen as improper in a similar way to the Torah, yet differs both with the praised values and the lack of positive counter-example upon which to contrast these negative depictions. The initial invocation of “also do not fail to note” comes immediately after the aforementioned reference to the beasts of the field attacking the Kishinev women, symbolically placing them on a similar level of condemnation. The bodies of the women are described as “sacred,” a descriptor not afforded to the religious objects prior. The godly aspiration so praised in Jacob and Samson is shown as weakness here, with God seen as an excuse for a lack of intervention and a refuge for selfish action. The most prominent invocation is that of the men being “crushed in their shame” for seeing and not acting. This mirrors the earlier Zionist rhetoric about diaspora Jewry expressed by Herzl, and later Gruenbaum in the Yishuv; just as the men of Kishinev saw the struggles of the women and chose to turn their backs, so too did the people of the diaspora see the struggles of the Jewish people and choose to turn their backs. The inferiority of traditional Jewish masculinity comes not necessarily from being physically weak but mentally weak, and unwilling to do anything beyond hope and pray.

⁷¹ Bialik, trans. Efros, p. 133-134.

Mikhal Dekel posits that the role of God and religion in Zionist works, and in “In The City of Slaughter” in particular, serves a dual and contradictory purpose. It needs to both exist as a unifying principle to claim a Jewish identity, yet then be discarded to create a “secular” national culture. As a result, in the poem, the God is not the purposeful and magisterial God of the Old Testament but represented as capricious, helpless, contradictory, and human.⁷² By the end of the poem, Bialik takes on the voice of the divine more fully, positioning the perspective of the divine as a receiver of pleas and their simultaneous ignorer, both attuned and removed. He refers to God both in the first person and third, reinforcing the coopting universalism of the earlier invocation of *lekh l'kha* and removing the divine as a solution. If Bialik is taking on the perspective of a divine figure, he is positioning the poetics as the new unifying principle for the Jewish people; if, as Dekel writes, the divine is represented in the poem as human, it allows for a more magisterial, less humble human than existed before. Bialik's final stanza can then be seen as a set of instructions for how to reclaim the glory lost in the pogroms and a paean to the helplessness and uselessness of putting trust in forces beyond their own:

“What is thy business here, O son of man?
 Rise, to the desert flee!
 The cup of affliction thither bear with thee!
 Talc thou thy soul, rend it in many a shred!
 With impotent rage, thy heart deform!
 Thy tear upon the barren boulders shed!
 And send thy bitter cry into the storm!”⁷³

The reimagination of classical Jewish gentle masculinity as contemporary Jewish Shame tracks with a series of both external and internal conversations as to the positioning of the Jewish community. Rosenberg's assertion of anti-Semitic exclusion playing a role in Jewish self-conception helps lend an explanation as to the origin of the shame. Leonid Livak, in his book

⁷² Mikhal Dekel, *The Universal Jew: Masculinity, Modernity, and the Zionist Moment* (Evanston, United States: Northwestern University Press, 2010), pp. 158-160.

⁷³ Bialik, trans. Efros.

The Jewish Persona in the European Imagination: A Case of Russian Literature, outlines centuries of imagery othering and diminishing Judaism from a non-Jewish, Christian perspective. He refers to the Jewish people in lowercase, as “the jews,” to signify that this representation is a unidirectional model involving no Jewish input which serves to emphasize cultural difference.⁷⁴ “The jews” were held as spiritual pollutants, able to degrade and defeat the good Christian moral character through economic exploitation, poison, sex, and murder, both a symptom of and impetus for further development of these exclusionary archetypes.⁷⁵ Meanwhile, Eastern Zionist leaders such as Leon Pinsker, whose *Auto-Emancipation* pamphlet will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 3, held that Judeophobia was a punishment for ceding societal power, and that the Diasporic Jew was doomed to serve as a perpetual and unwelcome beggar among the “haler” nations.⁷⁶ Central European Zionist Max Nordau posited that Jewry was in decline, had lost its self-respect, and needed to abandon the cities and return to the country in order to reclaim it.⁷⁷ This ideal is furthered in Bialik's poem, which emphasized an ahistorical representation of the horrors of the pogrom; the Jews of Kishinev had not hidden in the basement or prayed for their own deliverance as stated in the poem, rather with several bands of Jewish locals organizing and fighting back against their oppressors.⁷⁸ By painting the Jews as greater victims than they actually were, Bialik is able to further the impression that they are in need of a new future and an abandonment of their present mores, a climate not solely exemplified in his universe. There are

⁷⁴ Leonid Livak, *The Jewish Persona in the European Imagination: A Case of Russian Literature*, Stanford Studies in Jewish History and Culture (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), p. 4-5.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 55-73.

⁷⁶ Dekel, *Universal Jew*, p. 147 and 150.

⁷⁷ Raphael Falk, *Zionism and the Biology of Jews* (New York: Springer, 2017), <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1007/978-3-319-57345-8>, p. 59.

⁷⁸ Michael Gluzman, “Pogrom and Gender: On Bialik’s Unheimlich,” *Prooftexts* 25, no. 1–2 (2005): pp. 42-45, <https://doi.org/10.2979/pft.2005.25.1-2.39>.

no good Jews in Bialik's poem, no binary to be upheld, only devastation, horror, and a sequence of impermissible actions.

iii. Tevye the Dairyman's Loss of Agency

One case study for this reorientation and shifting climate is the differing handling of Tevye the Dairyman at the start and conclusion of his cycle of short stories. As mentioned above, Tevye is the spitting image of the classical Jewish man, godly and aspirational towards education yet humble and simple. As well, by beginning his narrative in the 1894 and ending it in 1914, Sholem Aleichem unwittingly positioned his titular hero at the nexus of the larger changes in Jewish-Russian society. The stories were written in Yiddish, with interspersed idioms in Biblical Hebrew and Russian, and the *Tevye* cycle as a whole exemplified the "for the people" aspect of Yiddish literature. While Tevye himself changes very little, the world around him and most importantly his role in his children's lives shift greatly. He is the perpetual centre against whom myriad diverse representations of Jews are cast, providing him with insight on how the values of his world are shifting and complicating around him. This positions him as a transitional figure or a sort of canary in the coal mine for the Jewish communal value shift; he loses power, along with his personal value system. In the earlier stories, Tevye is posited as the moral fulcrum of his own world and the one who bends the arc towards justice as the patriarch. "Modern Children" presents him with a dilemma: he promises his daughter Tzeitl's hand in marriage to Lazer-Wolf, the wealthy, formerly married butcher, who offers Tzeitl a life far better than Tevye could provide, yet his daughter wants to abandon the prospective marriage in favour of a union with her true love, poor tailor Motel Kamzoil. After reflection, Tevye decides to fake a dream involving his wife Golde's deceased grandmother and Lazer-Wolf's former wife Fruma-Sarah,

stating that Tzeitl should get married to Motel instead. This convinces Golde that Tzeitl should have her way, and the daughter and the tailor are engaged the next day.⁷⁹

The power dynamics in this story encourage us to see that, while Tzeitl is the one dissatisfied with the status quo and Golde is the one whose approval is sought, it is Tevye whose compass allows the “proper” marriage to proceed. When Lazer-Wolf seeks Tzeitl's betrothal, he sees the wedding as a financial proposition rather than a statement of romance, and when Tevye invokes faith-based objections, Lazer-Wolf reacts as such:

“Just as you say,” I agree. “I won't stand in your way. But I have to talk it over with my wife. [...] As Rashi says: '*A mother is not a dust rag.*' Besides, there's Tzeitl herself to be asked. How does the saying go? 'All the kinsmen were brought to the wedding and the bride was left home. . . .’“

“What foolishness!” says Lazer-Wolf. “Is this something to *ask* her about? *Tell* her, Reb Tevye! Go home. Tell her what is what, and get the wedding canopy ready.””

“No, Reb Lazer-Wolf,” I say. “That's not the way you treat a young girl.”⁸⁰

The disagreement between Tevye and Lazer-Wolf is used to elucidate which aspects of Tevye's personality are meant for praise, particularly in conjunction with the eventual marriage of Tzeitl to Motel. Tevye bases his objection on Talmudic grounds, whereas Lazer-Wolf argues on societal ones and dismisses the role of the tradition. Tevye is judicious and fair, whereas Lazer-Wolf demands imperious assertion. When Tevye chooses Motel for Tzeitl, he highlights that Motel is a “good man” and “honest,”⁸¹ two attributes aspired for by Tevye and ignored by Lazer-Wolf. Tevye couches his falsified dream in the realms of tradition and history with Golde's grandmother, reasoning that the pull of dead relatives would overwhelm any imminent material

⁷⁹ Sholem Aleichem, “Modern Children,” *The Tevye Stories and Others*, trans. Frances Butwin (New York: Pocket Books, 1965), pp. 16-32.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.20.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

concerns.⁸² Michael R. Katz posits that Tevye is breaching tradition at the behest of his daughter by forsaking an arranged marriage for a marriage of love,⁸³ yet by doing so he is hewing to the deeper traditional masculine values of Judaism while still retaining his authority. He couches his principles in godliness and humility and acts according to them, blessing the new union and condemning the old one. At this point in time, God is still the locus of goodness and power.

In contrast, Tevye is almost completely devoid of agency in “Tevye Goes to Palestine,” a later story in the saga. Tevye still performs the same standard of masculinity as he did in “Modern Children”: he relies on the word of God and scripture as a moral arbiter, still quoting the Talmud as a defence for his own opinions and judgments. He still prizes education in all forms; when confronted with his son-in-law Padhatzur's ignorance of the Gamorah, he says as an aside, “It seems to me that if God has chastised you by making you illiterate, at least keep it under your hat instead of boasting about it.”⁸⁴ His values of gentility and humility are still strong, along with his steadfast desire to do right by his family. The difference lies in how he is received by those around him, particularly those individuals who are opposed to him morally and seek to go through him for their own ends. The situations are similar: whereas in “Modern Children” Lazer-Wolf is attempting to persuade Tevye to force his daughter to marry him, in “Tevye Goes to Palestine” Padhatzur is treating Tevye as a nuisance in his fait-accomplis marriage to Beilke. Both Lazer-Wolf and Padhatzur reject Tevye's faith-based objections to the nature of their marriage, both of the objections centring on their unjust treatment of their brides, yet Lazer-Wolf is dismissed and outwitted in a way that Padhatzur is not. Lazer-Wolf and Padhatzur are both

⁸² Ibid., p. 31.

⁸³ Michael R. Katz, “‘Go Argue with Today’s Children’: The Jewish Family in Sholem Aleichem and Vladimir Jabotinsky,” *European Judaism* 43, no. 1 (May 2010): p. 65, <https://doi.org/10.3167/ej.2010.430105>.

⁸⁴ Sholem Aleichem, “Tevye Goes to Palestine,” *The Tevye Stories and Others*, trans. Frances Butwin (New York: Pocket Books, 1965), p. 102.

men of wealth in their spheres, yet in the years between “Modern Children” and “Tevye Goes to Palestine,” the potency of wealth has ballooned with relation to Tevye, while Tevye's godly masculinity has lost standing to this secular vision of power. The text is careful not to condemn or dismiss Tevye or lend credence to Tevye's doubters, choosing instead to highlight the shifting intragender power relations Tevye occupies in a different time period.

Over the course of Tevye's meeting with Padhatzur, Tevye is dismissed first in the role of the head of the family, second as a moral man of independence, and third as a part of his society. He realizes very quickly that Beilke is not the same as she once was, comparing her to “[having] exchanged my hard-working little horse for a strange colt that might turn out to be a real horse or nothing but a dummy.”⁸⁵ Yet he never acts on this intuition, nor the knowledge that Beilke cries at night due to the marriage. Whereas Tzeitl pleads to Tevye, begging for him to renege on his promise to Lazer-Wolf, Beilke knows that Tevye is powerless in the face of Padhatzur, who fails to seek his approval in any aspect of their relationship. When Padhatzur first attempts to exile Tevye, he does so on the grounds of wanting him to change his professions, saying, “I'll help you with money, you can have whatever you need, as long as you quit being Tevye the Dairyman.”⁸⁶ Padhatzur takes on symbolic ownership of a family whose fates were once assigned by Tevye, in the process renouncing the basis of his identity. The method used to knock Tevye off said identity is one decried by him earlier in the story, when he cites the Torah as saying “money is worthless.”⁸⁷ He is successfully diminished through the use of something he cares little about, making even his values subject to the reoriented worth.

The final indignity, that being Padhatzur sending Tevye away from the Pale of Settlement and towards Palestine, helps orient the commonalities and differences between the Tevye cycle

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 101.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 103.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 97.

and Bialik's "In the City of Slaughter." Tevye's departure is initially posited as a journey to America rather than Palestine, which frames it as an exilic journey rather than one of choice, further reinforced by Padhatur announcing Tevye had accepted before the dairyman had a chance to reject. Tevye is fond of the concept of Palestine, yet he does so on religious grounds more than ideological or social ones as all of his dream sites have roots in the Tanakh. In addition, almost all of the sites referenced by Tevye bear ties to death and loss; he cites the tombs of the Hebrew Patriarchs and Rachel, the Wailing Wall, the leftover section of the destroyed Second Temple, and Pithom and Raamses, two cities built by the Israelites in Exodus and a product of their loss of freedom.⁸⁸ His position is the inverse of the explicitly Zionist Bialik, as Bialik trades in rhetoric establishing the diaspora as unfit for Jewry and Tevye laments the loss of his diasporic existence despite his fondness for the religious symbolism of Zion. Yet both agree on one point: there is increasingly no longer a place for the Tevye-esque traditional Jewish man in the contemporary Jewish world. The mores that served him, his family, and his community well in the past have been divorced of all social capital, and as a consequence he is being near-literally exiled from his prior life.

What makes this signifier so stark is how much more sympathetically Tevye is written than Bialik's Kishinev men. Tevye is not only the centre of all of these stories but also their raconteur; they are framed as reports to his old friend Sholem Aleichem as their paths cross. As he loses power, he does not lose his praise or his relatability, and we are never asked to turn our backs on his method of masculinity as the world around him does. There is little to no in-text condemnation of his actions, nor are they thrust under a larger political umbrella. Sholem Aleichem himself wrote on many points on the ideological spectrum when he chose to delve more intently into politics, with his 1913 "Menachem Mendel" political feuilletons ridiculing

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 104.

and identifying with Zionist leaders and Russian ideology in equal measure.⁸⁹ Padhatzur, the opposing and indomitable force, represents great wealth and has implied coziness with rich Jewish figures such as the Poliakov and Rothschild families, yet is not explicitly politically aligned.⁹⁰ While the Tevye cycle cites contemporary events from the pogroms⁹¹ to local revolutionary rhetoric,⁹² the text never serves a larger purpose nor props up or condemns the same negative masculinity scorned by Bialik. Rather than being criticized or cast aside, Tevye is othered and mourned. The deprivation of the Tevyes of the world is a tragedy or a *shanda* rather than the necessity highlighted by Bialik.

By placing these two diametrically opposed narratives next to each other, one written in Hebrew and the other in Yiddish, we can gain a more fulsome picture of the early twentieth-century reconstruction of Jewish masculinity. De Lauretis writes that “gender represents not an individual but a relation, and a social relation; in other words, it represents an individual for a class.”⁹³ The social construction of the Jewish men in these stories signals an ongoing process of reconstituting these social relations. Both of these narratives have male characters or character groups who come in contact with larger, more hostile powers. Tevye's foes are internal, Jewish foes, while the Kishinev men's foes are external and non-Jewish, yet both fronts dismiss God and faith as a decider and give the aggressors their rewards. Both reinforce the powerlessness of the traditional Jewish man to deal with the shifting world. These works less propose a new model of

⁸⁹ Valery Dymshits, “The Return of Menachem Mendel: Sholem Aleichem as a Political Commentator,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 43, no. 1 (1 April 2013): p. 37
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13501674.2013.772367>.

⁹⁰ Sholem Aleichem, “Palestine,” p. 103.

⁹¹ Sholem Aleichem, “Schprintze,” *The Tevye Stories and Others*, trans. Frances Butwin (New York: Pocket Books, 1965), p. 76.

⁹² Sholem Aleichem, “Hodel,” *The Tevye Stories and Others*, trans. Frances Butwin (New York: Pocket Books, 1965), p. 50.

⁹³ Teresa De Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*, *Theories of Representation and Difference* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 5.

masculinity than illustrate the lack of place for the old one. Tevye and the Kishinev Jews were both told they should be ashamed of their prior existence and behaviour, whether by the author or by other characters. As evidenced by Tevye and Bialik, these works both transcend and reflect the political rhetorics (both self-reflexive Jewish rhetoric, whether Zionist or revolutionary, and external anti-Semitic rhetoric) of the time. The values exemplified by Jacob, Abel, and Samson no longer held the same water. The desire for a new Jewish masculine model pervaded these works both sympathetic and unsympathetic to the traditional model, helping set the stage for later performances of masculinity from within the Jewish community and allowing for interpretations beyond the simple opposition of good and bad.

III. CHAPTER TWO: *Red Cavalry* and the Assimilatory Jew

i. Defining the Assimilatory Jew

In the two decades after the Kishinev pogroms, the concept of what I am calling Jewish Shame and thus the idea of there no longer being a place for the gentle, Talmudic Jewish man became buttressed by increased political action within the Jewish-Russian community, as discussed in Chapter One. The Jewish revolutionaries in 1905, 1917, and the pursuant Civil War represented a multitude of points of view yet all inextricably tied to a newer political presence of Jews. The organized Jewish men and women left behind the passivity and helplessness bemoaned in “In The City of Slaughter,” casting themselves as resisters and revolutionaries rather than victims. As touched on in Chapter One, the immediate post-revolutionary period featured both gains and setbacks for the Jewish community; it was a time of great Jewish cooperation with other non-Jewish minority groups, forming political alliances to benefit the revolution, and leading to the reforms of the 1905 October Manifesto, allowing Jewish political representation. It also led to a fresh wave of pogroms, preventing complete Jewish investment in revolutionary goals.⁹⁴ This combination created a friendly climate for active Jewish sociopolitical involvement, which carried through the fall of imperial Russia and into the Civil War years. Accompanying the shift of self-conception within the Jewish community was a shift in the modelling of Jewish male literary heroes. This chapter will examine one of the consequences of this reforming masculinity: the establishment of the Assimilatory Jew as a literary model for new Jewish men.

The two prominent models discussed in the second and third chapters of this thesis are the Assimilatory Jew and the Jewish Superman. Both wrestle with the problem posed by Zionist

⁹⁴ Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862-1917* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 140-152.

and Revolutionary figures including the aforementioned Bialik and the soon to be discussed Leon Pinsker, asking the question: if Jewish men should no longer be gentle and godly, how can they go about charting a new future? How should a new Jewish man behave? And, most crucially, how does this new model of behaviour represent their Jewishness? Both models held similar praised attributes at the centres of their masculinities: aggression, both physical and sexualized, outward self-determination, and their role as an ideological defender. Their key prong of difference comes when considering the source and feasibility of this new form of masculinity. The Assimilatory Jew had to copy the modes of behaviour from the non-Jewish outside, whereas the Jewish Superman saw no separation between their Jewishness and their strength. Or, to put it another way: the Assimilatory Jew holds the desired masculinity as a Russo-Soviet quality, whereas the Jewish Superman sees it as a Jewish one. While these two models are not the exclusive ways Jewish masculinity was constructed within early twentieth century literature, and the literatures do not provide a monolithic expression of the way Jewish men are and must behave, nor are Jewish and Cossack characters confined to behaving as what the text establishes as their roles, I believe them to be useful organizational, overarching constructs for ascertaining the shifting mores of masculinity.

The Assimilatory Jew carries forward the concept discussed by Warren Rosenberg in *Legacy of Rage*, the one of historical Jewish exclusion from dominant secular narratives of glory and value on the basis of real or imagined character defects. Per this explanation, a Jewish man would not be “fully” male, a transgressor to the secular masculine space.⁹⁵ As the logic carried, if the Jewish body and Jewish sense of manhood were insufficient, in order to truly gain acceptance they would have to follow a distinctly non-Jewish lead, in this case aligning with distinctly

⁹⁵ Warren Rosenberg, *Legacy of Rage: Jewish Masculinity, Violence, and Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), pp. 19-20.

Russo-Soviet visions of manhood. The Assimilatory Jew model posits two things: that Jewishness is inherently weaker, othered, and lesser, and that the imitation of their assimilatory targets was the sole way to gain respect and admiration of any sort. It holds that a Bialik-esque sense of Jewish Shame and passivity is an inextricable precondition of Jewishness, and that it must be overcome if there is any chance at a secure Jewish future. It also holds that a Jewish man is a perpetual outsider, unable to fully integrate yet still needing to perform the language of the majority in order to have a hope for attention.⁹⁶ To borrow from Butler, the societal imitations necessary to construct Jewish masculinity are external imitations rather than internal imitations, or Jew-to-outsider rather than Jew-to-Jew.

In *Red Cavalry*, Isaac Babel (1894-1940) creates a series of performative models of praised behaviours to show how Jewish men stand in comparison to the Red Cossack soldiers, yet he upends the praised gender relations that classical Jewish masculinity held so dear. The gentility, worship, and scholarship that became Jewish Shame for Bialik became outright execrable weakness and passivity in Babel, and the wanton violence so scorned in the cases of Cain and Samson became an aspirational ideal in the sweeping *Red Cavalry* cycle. Through it all, the text explores the viability of Jewish inclusion in the praised Cossack whole, pushing characters up against the barriers between the two worlds and evaluating their successes and failures. As mentioned in Chapter One, the Russian Civil War played host to some of the

⁹⁶ For more context on the nature of Jewish-Russian and Jewish-Ukrainian assimilation, I recommend Liliana Riga's "Ethnonationalism, Assimilation, and the Social Worlds of Jewish Bolsheviks in Fin de Siècle Tsarist Russia" (*Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 2006). She outlines the waxing and waning of Jewish assimilation in Russia, with several big city Jews seeing their Russian-ness as primary to their Judaism, whom she calls "non-Jewish Jews." Many of them grew increasingly involved with Revolutionary movements, similar to Isaac Babel. Several held assimilation as essential to combat "ancient régime Judeophobia." As discussed elsewhere in this thesis, they were both abetted and harmed in this goal by the Imperial Russian government and their actors, with increased Jewish presence in secular universities in the late 19th century followed by *numerus clausus* laws limiting Jewish presence in said universities, and pogroms driving a wedge between Jewish and Russian citizens.

bloodiest pogroms in Russian history, which were perpetuated by multitudinous military forces and led to the deaths of tens of thousands of Jews and the devastation and displacement of the survivors' communities. *Red Cavalry* is set amongst these wars and pogroms, and while it takes its cues from “In the City of Slaughter” when critiquing the insufficiency of the Jewish response, it manages to make its Jewish characters even more pitiable. In the most extreme cases, outwardly Jewish characters are robbed of their voices and forced to exist on the margins of the narrative as execrable objects. Judith Butler writes in her essay on gender performativity that “performing one's gender wrong initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect, and performing it well provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity after all.”⁹⁷ Babel leans heavily into this perception of gender essentialism and extends it into religious gender essentialism, treating Rosenberg's explanation that a Jewish man wouldn't be fully male as a *fait accompli* and punishing them in-text for failing to live up to the expectations of the more hypermasculine whole, usually with social exclusion or physical defeat. At its worst, the classical Cossack and the classical Jew are “incompatible,” and only those in the Cossack realm can gain admiration. At its best, Jewish figures can push beyond their labels of “lesser” and gain a modicum of respect, however temporary. Both “Cossack” and “Jew” were labels that transcended ideology and political time period, as the Cossacks of the Empire bore little in common with the Cossacks of *Red Cavalry* beyond their label. A Cossack was the emblem of freedom and a warrior spirit,⁹⁸ and the Red Cossacks were the latest manifestation of that iconography despite the Bolshevik turn away from any tethers to Imperial Russia.

⁹⁷ Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): p. 529, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3207893>.

⁹⁸ For more on the Cossack mythos, Robert H. McNeal's *Tsar and Cossack, 1855-1914* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1987) is an excellent beginning resource.

Throughout *Red Cavalry*, social acceptance is treated as a language to learn, a code of behaviours to follow, to help capture a semblance of your best self and induction into the larger community. Violence is used to send messages, reasoning that a show of strength in and of itself is more important than achieving a desired outcome, and becomes the primary vehicle for conveying ideology and a sense of brotherhood. The term language here is intentional, though it could be equally replaced by coded performance or normative model, meant to emphasize the communicative and translative power of this freeing Cossack masculinity. Far beyond conveying values, it is used to present the self in a manner comprehensible to those in power, in order to gain both their attention and respect. The Jewish figures in *Red Cavalry* speak this praised language with varying degrees of success, serving as a challenge to the oppositional relationship between Cossacks and Jews and helping test the immutability of the boundary between the two.

This picture is complicated by Babel's tense relationship with his own Judaism, and the role of Kirill Lyutov as the main, though not exclusive, narrator mirroring Babel as the author. The *Red Cavalry* cycle is based heavily on Babel's own experiences at the front of the 1920 Polish-Soviet conflict, to the degree that Babel shared a pseudonym (Kirill Vasilievich Lyutov) and a profession (embedded chronicler of the campaign for a communist publication) with his future protagonist and narrator.⁹⁹ As such, he bore witness to pogrom after pogrom. Throughout the campaign, as per his diaries, he would continually deny or obscure his own Judaism when in public and would alternately refer to himself as a Russian or a Jew in his own writings. He both sympathized with the war-torn Jewish communities of Poland and called them “repulsive,” both feeling a part of their struggles and ostracizing himself from them.¹⁰⁰ Lyutov, the character, occupies a similar space: he abhors the damaged Jewish communities yet finds himself drawn to

⁹⁹ Carol J. Avins, “Kinship and Concealment in *Red Cavalry* and Babel’s 1920 Diary,” *Slavic Review* 53, no. 3 (1994): p. 694, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2501516>.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

chronicling them nonetheless. He also conceals his Judaism, which at times seems more foisted on him than embraced. The outward reluctance to advertise his own Jewishness, combined with the implied cultural gender essentialism depicted in the novel, can make Lyutov seem less like an insider demanding change and more like the avatar of the anti-Semitic thinkers of before, for some making its position as a piece of “Jewish literature” more tenuous. Nevertheless, *Red Cavalry* is unmistakably a series of short stories written by a Jewish author featuring Jewish characters and addressing Jewish issues. Whether or not it was Babel's intent to write the piece as such, this thesis will approach the text as a statement for the Jewish community's idealized path forward, via reorienting its own masculinity as much as possible.

If Cossack masculinity was seen as a language to learn, Lyutov himself can then be seen as both a transient and a translator figure, much in the same way that Babel himself was. He places himself firmly within the Red Cossack bloc both intellectually and politically, yet is never fully free from his Jewish roots and thus is never consistently able to interact with them on the same level, as equals. He aspires to be a full member of the Cossacks, yet never fully succeeds at doing so. Likewise, he is never fully at peace with his Jewish brethren, yet is able to communicate with them while adopting the positioning of a revolutionary soldier. Because he sits on the fringes of both worlds, he is able to illustrate and deconstruct both the “Soviet” and “Jewish” methods of masculine discourse. He does not serve as a full member of either world yet is a reader of both. He is an educator within Jewish contexts and a student within Cossack ones, both one step removed from the horror of the Jewish milieu and one step away from being a genuine Cossack. The multifarious methods of masculinity, whether Cossack-tinged or Jewish, are laid on either side of him. His role is as the performer of masculinity, and his personal and social boons are directly correlated to his success in said performances. By lending credence to

the Cossack performances, he further makes them real, for as Butler writes, gender is real only to the extent that it is performed.¹⁰¹ His responsibility, then, is to delineate between the “performance” and any deeper truths the performances attempt to speak into reality; he illuminates how and which facets of this new sort of masculinity are available to Jewish men, and which parts are illusory dreams.

ii. Modelling Masculinities in *Red Cavalry*

The modelling ritual of masculine violence is constructed as an important one for the Soviet troops. The Red Cossacks are brash, forthright, hypermasculine, and dominant, and they exhibit these traits in a way that transcends mere character traits and becomes a foundational dialogue. Whether it is held as a worthwhile or valued mode of masculinity is almost secondary to the respect afforded by the actors within the story, as their judgments and recognition of each other serve as the basis for the masculine construction. Their portrayal is not unambiguously positive or “good” in the text, but the power and agency wielded by the Cossack block is inescapable and secure, lending their model a veneer of superiority and “correctness.” We get a window into this method of communication in “Squadron Commander Trunov.” The story follows the events immediately preceding and following the death of the titular character through the eyes of Lyutov, and illustrates both the prized and “unworthy” methods of masculine communication. We meet the commander when interrogating Polish prisoners in an attempt to find the officers amongst them. Instead of wheedling the necessitated information out of them, or attempting to negotiate, Trunov resorts to brute force. Initially, he pushes the Poles with the butt end of his revolver, then tests a prisoner by placing an officer's hat on his head. When the hat fits

¹⁰¹ Butler, “Performative Acts,” p. 527.

on his head, Trunov jams a sword through the prisoner's throat.¹⁰² Trunov is placed within the classic Cossack literary “baroque machismo”; he is uncaring, unworried, and an instrument of violent revolutionary change.¹⁰³ He is contrasted with Andrey Vosmiletov, a Cossack soldier who attempts to steal the trousers off of the dead Polish officer, itself counter-revolutionary, and fails to listen to the myriad shouts telling him to stop. It becomes Trunov's responsibility to communicate the impermissibility of Andrey's action, and his tool becomes the extreme machismo of the classic Cossack.

The Cossack was half way there when Trunov suddenly fell on his knees and called after him in a raucous shout:

“Andrey!” he cried, staring at the ground. “Andrey!” he repeated, without raising his eyes from the ground, “our Soviet Republic is still alive, it's too early to go sharing it out into lots, so drop those rags, Andrey!”

Vosmiletov did not even turn his head, but went on at his amazing Cossack trot, and his little horse tossed up its tail jauntily, just as if it were brushing us away.

“Treachery,” then muttered Trunov in surprise. “Treachery,” he said, and jerking up his rifle to his shoulder, fired—missing, in his haste. This time, however, Andrey stopped. He turned his horse about to face us, bouncing in the saddle like a peasant woman. His face grew red and angry, and he kicked his legs about.¹⁰⁴

These paired sections illustrate how effective the pairing of masculinities, one proper and praised and one improper and punished, can be, just as referenced in the Torah and in Butler. Their respective truth and falsity are defined against each other, with the oppositional nature highlighting each man's worth in the narrative. While this interaction is only a microcosm of the many shades of Cossack masculinity, it is nevertheless useful in terms of establishing in a general sense what a good Cossack man “should” or “shouldn't” do and crafting a standard

¹⁰² Isaac Babel, “Squadron Commander Trunov,” *Red Cavalry*, trans. Nadia Helstein (London; New York: A.A. Knopf, 1929), pp. 196-7.

¹⁰³ Richard Freeborn, *The Russian Revolutionary Novel: Turgenev to Pasternak*, Cambridge Studies in Russian Literature (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 81-82.

¹⁰⁴ Babel, “Trunov,” p. 198.

against which Jewish characters are often judged. Trunov's gunfire succeeds where the other Soviets' shouts fail, and only this is able to break through Andrey and convince him to abandon his escape. Andrey's reaction to this is cast in the realm of unmasculine and improper, as the text reveals that he bounces in his saddle like a peasant woman, a descriptor in the vein of those historically and within the story associated with Jewish men. While he threatens violence, he fails to actually execute it. The textual superiority and textual rewarding of Trunov are borne out throughout the rest of the day. Trunov is Butler's successful exhibitor of gender performance; he is elevated by dint of his title and power, which is reinforced by the titling of the story. He is referred to by his title throughout the interaction with the Polish prisoner, again reinforcing his position atop the hierarchy, whereas Andrey is initially referred to as *Andryushka*, the diminutive and more childlike form of his name.¹⁰⁵ Most importantly, both Trunov and Andrey are killed on the day covered by the story. Trunov, the proper communicator and effective performer, gets memorialized and mourned by his squadron and the narrator Lyutov, being afforded the title of the story. Andrey, the failed one whose actions run counter to this praised character, does not get the same luxury. Two relatives take his body away, which acts as symbolic post-mortem concealment, whereas Trunov is buried "in a place of honour."¹⁰⁶

What further enhances the Soviet Cossack form of communication, and by extension its praise of masculinity and critique of non-masculinity as commendable behaviour, is its positioning of violence as a language of justice and, somewhat bizarrely, as a language of peace. This peace is not an all-encompassing, social peace, rather an internal mechanism of calm and method for stilling the self. This is seen mostly through the tales of Nikita Balmashev, one of the non-Lyutov narrators of the short stories in the Red Cavalry cycle. Unlike Lyutov, he is a proud,

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

open, and accepted Cossack without a hint of doubt at his aims, who goes as far as signing his letters as “Soldier of the Revolution.”¹⁰⁷ In the short story “Salt,” Balmashev is confronted by a woman who attempts to smuggle a shipment of illegal salt on a train under the guise of carrying a baby. When she is discovered, she protests the Revolution and its key figures Lenin and Trotsky, claiming that as she has lost her salt, she is no longer afraid of speaking the truth.¹⁰⁸ Like Trunov, Balmashev responds to the counterrevolutionary and anti-Soviet impudence with his rifle. Unlike Trunov, Balmashev succeeds at killing the woman.

And I don't mind telling you straight as I threw that citizen out below the railway embankment while the train was still going. But she, being big and broad, sat down and flapped about her skirts and went on her vile way. And seeing that woman going along like that and Russia round her like I don't know what and the peasants field without an ear of corn and the outraged girls and the comrades lots of which go to the front but few return, I had a mind to jump out of the carriage and put an end to my life or else put an end to her. But the Cossacks took pity on me and said:

“Give it her with your rifle.”

So I took down my faithful rifle off the wall and washed away that stain from the face of the workers land and the republic.¹⁰⁹

In this case, femininity is both the vehicle of the crime and the crime itself, and masculinity is held up as its antidote. The salt is disguised as a nursing infant, couching her sin directly as an aspect of her motherhood; indeed, Balmashev only lets her on board the train because of her motherhood, rather than for any other quality.¹¹⁰ When she leaves the train, she goes about on her vile way with “skirts flapping,” again emphasizing the link between femininity and impropriety. The mere thought of the woman surviving and going out in the world causes Balmashev, the epitome of this masculine Cossack revolutionary force, inexpressible anguish to

¹⁰⁷ Isaac Babel, “Salt,” *Red Cavalry*, trans. Nadia Helstein (London; New York: A.A. Knopf, 1929), p. 166.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 165-166.

¹¹⁰ Eliot Borenstein, *Men without Women: Masculinity and Revolution in Russian Fiction, 1917–1929* (Duke University Press, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822379904>, p. 59-60.

the point where he would sooner jump out of the carriage and end his own life. As Val Vinokur writes, “his soul has no peace until he throws her off the moving train and shoots her in the back.”¹¹¹ The tools for this act of personal soul-settling are provided by his fellow Cossacks. They are the ones who see his distress, who take pity on him, and encourage him to shoot her; they state “give it her,” as though he is compelled to deliver a just reward. What's more, they seem to speak in unison, emphasizing the unified brotherhood and collectivity inherent not only to the Cossack style of communication but Bolshevik-era visions of the idealized Soviet man.¹¹² This is a sign that the Cossack Soviet language of violence is one understood by more than the one executing it, while also imbuing it with a therapeutic power. Like Trunov, Balmashev is rewarded for conveying his message and emotions through violence, which in his case comes as peace of mind. Pursuant to this, these praised actions again reinforce a performative act of gender within the confines of Red Cavalry; the rewarded, hypermasculine Cossacks set a standard of revolutionary machismo, while the counterrevolutionary woman is punished for her inability to ever meet up to these dominant standards. In this example, the woman becomes a prop to help illustrate that the “proper” way to act is with imposition. Violence here is the prized method of self-expression, and as with Andrey in Trunov, superiority is ensured through a “blotting out” of the offending party.

At this point, it becomes essential to elaborate on the concept of the “new Soviet man,” including how *Red Cavalry* both echoes it and spurns it in favour of older anti-Semitic, pro-Russian imagery. In Leon Trotsky's 1924 text *Literature and Revolution*, which outlines his vision for a future proliferation of proletarian literature, devotes space to his vision of idealized

¹¹¹ Val Vinokur, “Morality and Orality in Isaac Babel's ‘Red Cavalry,’” *The Massachusetts Review* 45, no. 4 (2004): 674–95, p. 683.

¹¹² Jay Bergman, “The Idea of Individual Liberation in Bolshevik Visions of the New Soviet Man,” *European History Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (1 January 1997): 57–92, <https://doi.org/10.1177/026569149702700103>.

masculinity as one utterly in command of himself and the world around him; his new man will “[give] the movement of his own limbs the utmost precision, purposefulness, and economy”; “learn how to move rivers and mountains”; and “add to his own life [...] a dynamic quality of the highest degree.”¹¹³ This new man was meant to be a pusher of change in society and fully emancipated, and at the peak of physicality and emotionality. Trotsky was not unique in having this point of view. Jay Bergman, in his article, delineates early Soviet thinkers’ ideal visions of what sorts of men and women would fit into their dream Communist society. While many perspectives differed, virtually all Bolshevik thinkers were in agreement on some attributes; as Bergman writes, “[T]he New Soviet man [...], like a modern Prometheus, [...] would use reason and logic, along with science and technology, to subjugate nature, thus transforming it from an alien force into something he could use, at his discretion, for his own purposes.”¹¹⁴ This dominance over nature is expressed throughout the *Red Cavalry* narrative, with the unrelenting red Cossack forces rolling through burnt rivers in “Crossing the Zbroutch” and dead bees in “The Road to Brody.” Nature has not only been subjugated, it has been destroyed. The physical characterization of the Cossacks in *Red Cavalry* hews most closely to the vision of Bolshevik scientist and poet Alexei Gastev, who championed a merging of machines and men to increase productivity and improve society. The result: men and women with “nerves of steel,” “muscles like iron rails,” and so devoid of individuality and devoted to the collective that they wouldn’t require names.¹¹⁵ This echoes the unified construction of the soldiers in *Salt*, whose physical soldier-ness — that is, their positioning as a mechanized, unified body — is manifested as them speaking all at once.

¹¹³ Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1957), p. 254.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 60. This image of masculinity was particularly attached to Soviet construction goals.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

However, part and parcel of these visions of the individual perfecting and subsuming themselves into a larger whole was the concept of all humans being inherently the same, politically, socially, and physically, which is attacked by Babel's presentation of the Cossack and the Jew as incompatible. Lynne Attwood writes that much of early Soviet behavioural psychology was based on the research of Ivan Pavlov. Pavlov's research on dogs and how they reacted to various stimuli was extended to humans. The logic went that humans' reflexes were conditioned by their surroundings, and speech was a way of engaging these conditioned reflexes without the proverbial bell at hand.¹¹⁶ Seeing these as conditioned rather than innate implied the concept of all humans being equal, with no inherent cognitive differences across class, race, sex, or nationality¹¹⁷; the differences came through education, environment, and other external factors. This ran counter to imperial Russian theories on racial difference and anthropology from as recently as the early twentieth century, which presupposed an innate difference between races (and particularly Russians and Jews) that was borne out through physical measurements. In 1902, anthropologist R.L. Veinberg held that Jewish brains were, on the whole, smaller than the brains of Slavs and tended to weigh less.¹¹⁸ As a consequence of scientists such as Veinberg and others, Jewish bodies were “increasingly described as weak, unhealthy, and unfit for performing social duties such as military service.”¹¹⁹ Babel, the aspiring soldier of the Revolution, leans far more closely into the imperial “race science” model than the Soviet ideals when he consistently emphasizes the differences between Cossack and Jewish masculinity, morality, and physicality. The difference between a Jew and a Cossack is not a matter of conditioning in *Red Cavalry*; if it

¹¹⁶ Lynne Attwood, *The New Soviet Man and Woman: Sex Role Socialization in the USSR*, Studies in Soviet History and Society (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 43-44.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 44.

¹¹⁸ Eugene M. Avrutin, “Racial Categories and the Politics of (Jewish) Difference in Late Imperial Russia,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 8, no. 1 (29 March 2007): p. 31, <https://doi.org/10.1353/kri.2007.0000>.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 24.

were, Lyutov would not be ostracized on sight and diminished even when he does perform the proper coded behaviours.

Of course, while the Cossack Supermen bear many physical, functional, and ideological similarities with the idealized Soviet men, their portrayal is not held as an unambiguously positive one by the text despite their general positioning as the most powerful and morally righteous. While Trotsky enthusiastically endorsed the societal shifting brought on the Revolutionary forces, he abhorred the violence brought about by the Revolution, writing that “the poetry of the revolution is not in the booming of machine guns, nor in the struggle behind barricades [...] because all of these moments are found in a war of violence also.”¹²⁰ Fellow early Bolshevik Alexandra Kollontai wrote that future generations would react in shock and horror at the violence and murder necessitated by the Revolution, on the basis of all life being sacred.¹²¹ On the face of it, it would seem to rob the powerful Cossack model in *Red Cavalry* of any manner of moral superiority. The speeches given by Cossack leaders are often sapped of their potency and heroism, on occasion veering into rambling. Of note, regiment commander Pugatchev's eulogy for the aforementioned hero Trunov is seen almost sarcastically by Lyutov; the text mentions twice that he “shouted a speech,” and he's described as “trembling” through his repetitive, demotivational speech.¹²² General Budyonny levelled charges of “slander” and “ignorance” against Babel for his depiction of the First Cavalry,¹²³ claiming that Babel's glorification of and refusal to hide the violence of his colleagues resulted in a “blackening” of the

¹²⁰ Trotsky, *Literature*, p. 97.

¹²¹ Alexandra Kollontai, “Soon,” *Selected Writings of Alexandra Kollontai*, trans. Alix Holt, Motive (London: Allison and Busby, 1977), p. 235.

¹²² Babel, “Trunov,” pp. 193-194.

¹²³ Charles Rougle, *Red Cavalry: A Critical Companion* (Northwestern University Press, 1996), p. 10.

Red Cavalry's name.¹²⁴ That said, as Carol Luplow argues, “Lyutov's positive attitude toward the Cossacks tends to elicit reader sympathy for them.”¹²⁵ Because they are held as the masculine model aesthetically, morally, and in terms of power dynamics by both Lyutov in-text and Babel as the text's scriptor, they are thus idealized in a way that overcomes any squeamishness at their wanton violence and lack of cohesion in their actions. Pugatchev may be unable to cohere a proper eulogy for Trunov, yet Trunov still gets mourned as a hero and held as a hero. Balmashev may be violent, a poor writer, and unable to properly express his thoughts, yet he is worshipped by his colleagues and provided with peace through the execution of violence against the counter-revolutionary woman. It would be a mistake to hold them as perfect avatars of ideological purity—certainly, these characters were far from representatives of Trotsky’s dream men—yet they occupy a similar privileged place with enough common traits to be reminiscent of a shared social power, and serve as a clear aspirational model to follow.

Red Cavalry's Jews are cast heavily in images of forcelessness and impotence when Lyutov, the narrator who through most of the narrative refuses to outwardly present as Jewish, first encounters them. Lyutov is both the intermediary between the Jewish and Cossack worlds and the chief Jew in-text aspiring to reach the Cossack standards, which allows us through him to understand both the manners of communication and performative gender norms of the characters who are used as exemplars for either the Cossack or Jewish standards of behaviour. He is the conduit for understanding and deconstructing these two overarching gendered languages due to his lack of presence in either world; both Jews and Cossacks are highlighted *against* him rather than *through* him, allowing for more clarity when assessing their modes of behaviour and more malleability in his own roles. The stalwart example of the “less than fully male” Jew comes

¹²⁴ Norman Davies, “Izaak Babel’s ‘Konarmiya’ Stories, and the Polish-Soviet War,” *The Modern Language Review; Cambridge* 67, no. 4 (1 October 1972): p. 850.

¹²⁵ Carol Luplow, *Isaac Babel’s Red Cavalry* (Ann Arbor, United States: Ardis, 1982), p. 38.

when we are introduced to Ghedali, a Jewish shopkeeper, in the story that bears his name. We meet Ghedali as a nervous and fearful man in the face of what he and Lyutov refer to collectively as “the Revolution,” an echo of the actions of the unified Cossack brotherhood in “Salt.” His shop is hidden away in a row of others, he rubs his hands together, and he plucks at his beard. Later on in the passage, he twists and untwists his pointed beard, again reinforcing his nervousness, especially in the face of Lyutov who is visiting him in the capacity of a soldier of the revolution.¹²⁶ When he begins to speak, he “whisper[s]...in a voice that [is] barely audible.”¹²⁷ He seems almost apologetic when talking about the pain he suffers and acts in deference to Lyutov whenever possible. He calls Lyutov “kind Pane,”¹²⁸ a Polish term of respect, in the same breath as reminding him that, “You shoot because you are the revolution.”¹²⁹ Ghedali is gentle and welcoming almost to a fault, both binding up his guest within the guise of his oppressor and simultaneously absolving him of the violence the Revolution perpetrates on him, while also making himself small in the face of it.

Not only is Ghedali portrayed as emotionally subservient and lesser to Lyutov, he is also shown as physically subservient. The hands that he rubs together out of nervousness are “small” and “white,” the beard that he plucks at is “little” and “grey,” and he himself is not just an owner but also a “small owner.”¹³⁰ Zsuzsa Hetenyi notes that his features are described as highly childish in their original Russian, and are often rendered in their diminutive form: his hands are ручки rather than руки, and his water is водица rather than вода.¹³¹ This could be reminiscent

¹²⁶ Isaac Babel, “Ghedali,” *Red Cavalry*, trans. Nadia Helstein (London ; New York: A.A. Knopf, 1929), pp. 44-45.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.46.

¹²⁸ Translates to “gracious sir,” or “my lord.”

¹²⁹ Babel, “Ghedali,” p. 47.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.

¹³¹ Zsuzsa Hetenyi, “The Visible Idea: Babel’s Modelling Imagery,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne Des Slavistes* 36, no. 1/2 (1994): p. 57.

of well-meaning if paternalistic attitudes towards Jewry from some early Soviet thinkers; when Kollontai was discussing the majority Jewish workers who had been inconvenienced by a 1907 leather worker lockout in Vilnius, she referred to them as being “as defenceless as children.”¹³² Phillip Ross Bullock notes that the Cossacks are held “not so much as human beings, but rather as aesthetic objects that invite contemplation as if they were themselves works of art.”¹³³ If the muscular Cossacks are aesthetic perfection, the small Ghedali is their clear inverse, and a likewise clear failure at meeting the masculine standards set forth. In addition, Ghedali frequently refers to himself in the third person. He says, “Yes, I cry to the Revolution; yes, I cry to it, but it hides its face from Ghedali and sends only shooting ahead...”¹³⁴ All bound together, we get the impression that Ghedali is unable to communicate at a proper level with his physical and emotional smallness. He represents a Jewish figure who is cast into the realm of improper forms of gender; he is unable to meet the standards established and praised by the Cossack troops and is thus almost pitiable to the interpreter figure that is Lyutov. He may engender sympathy, but he does not engender respect.

That said, the vast majority of Red Cavalry's Jews are not even afforded the shreds of characterization and voice that shopkeeper has. In the same story, “Ghedali,” we are introduced to the local synagogue as a decrepit and infectious place.

I roam through Jitomir in search of a shy star. By the ancient synagogue, by its yellow and indifferent walls, old Jews with prophets' beards and the rags of passion on their sunken chests sell chalk and wicks and washing blue.

¹³² Alexandra Kollontai, “Around Workers’ Europe,” *Selected Writings of Alexandra Kollontai*, trans. Alix Holt, Motive (London: Allison and Busby, 1977), p. 96.

¹³³ Philip Ross Bullock, “The Cruel Art of Beauty: Walter Pater and the Uncanny Aestheticism of Isaak Babel’s *Red Cavalry*,” *The Modern Language Review* 104, no. 2 (2009): p. 515.

¹³⁴ Babel, “Ghedali,” p. 46.

Here, before me, is the bazaar. Gone is the fat soul of plenty. Dumb locks hang upon the booths and the granite of the bridge is as clean as a skull. My shy star twinkles and fades out of sight.¹³⁵

Once more, these groups of Jews are cast as physically weaker and morally lesser. The passage situates the synagogue as the physical centre of the milling Jews, then paints its walls yellow and indifferent, a colour conjuring up images of diseased flesh and an adjective emphasizing that the Jews' physical and moral centre does not adequately care about them. This “illness” spreads further when the Jews are given sunken chests and rags, a lack of both vitality and money. These Jews are seen as a monolithic group like the Cossacks were in “Salt,” yet do not carry the same manner of brotherhood and acceptance, nor do they support any aspects of Bolshevik theorists’ ideas around the new idealized human. They do not speak, they do not get a name beyond “Jew,” they do not impact the plot or provide the narrator with any tools to succeed, and serve only as an anguished, suffering collective. Instead of lifting up the narrator, they depress him, thanks to their inability to cater to his needs or serve as a model he feels comfortable identifying with. In “Trunov,” this is further reinforced. A grieving Lyutov is drawn to a mass of Jews who are arguing over Kabbalah.

A big square stretched away on the left-hand side of the gardens—a square built round with ancient synagogues. Jews in ragged long garments were quarrelling in that square, pulling one another about in incomprehensible blindness. A section of them—the orthodox Jews—were extolling the teaching of Adassia, Rabbi of Belz. They were being attacked by the Chassidim of moderate doctrine, the disciples of Juda, Rabbi of Gussiatin. The Jews were disputing about the Cabbala and made mention in their discussions of the name of Ilya, Gaon of Vilna and persecutor of the Chassidim.

“Ilya,” they cried, wriggling and opening wide their hair-fringed mouths.¹³⁶

Again, the Jews are referred to solely as “the Jews,” and again, they are placed by ancient synagogues with ragged garments. In an echo of Ghedali's infantile and rudimentary speech, they

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 45.

¹³⁶ Babel, “Trunov,” p. 199.

are shown “pulling one another about in incomprehensible blindness,” and only utter the word “Ilya,” showing an inability to even use reasoned speech. This is a clearer problematization of outright Jewishness in *Red Cavalry* with regards to communication; they are indecipherable, weak to the point of chaos, and unable to enforce any sort of change. When held up against the idealized, respected Cossack model of masculinity, they are explicit failures, and are punished both by their own suffering and Lyutov's own loathness to truly associate with them.

So what happens when a member of the Jewish group, such as Lyutov, who is himself bookish and physically unfit, attempts to perform according to the standards of the Cossack group? What happens when the boundaries of an overarching binary construct are pushed up against, and how and where do they fray? Eliot Borenstein writes, “to the Russian consciousness, there could hardly be more antithetical male types than the Cossack and the Jew.”¹³⁷ Jewish characters who attempt to traverse this boundary, while never fully fitting within the boundaries of Cossack masculinity, are still rewarded for their successes and criticized for their failures as they attempt to overcome the overarching structure. “My First Goose,” which tells the tale of Lyutov's introduction to a new Cossack platoon, is the stalwart example of what happens when a Jewish man adopts the Cossack manner. The commanding officer ridicules Lyutov's bookishness and mentions that his necessary rite of passage in order to gain the respect of the platoon is to abuse a woman; as Steven G. Kellman writes, rape is the prescription for fellowship,¹³⁸ serving as a symbolic assertion of masculinity in this case by conquering femininity. Lyutov is not able to fulfill the primary instructions, yet he still manages to emotionally wound a landlady by

¹³⁷ Borenstein, *Men Without Women*, p. 73.

¹³⁸ Steven G. Kellman, “The Birth of a Batterer: Isaac Babel’s ‘My First Goose,’” *Bucknell Review* 44, no. 1 (2000): p. 104.

stomping on the head of a goose and forcing her to cook it for him.¹³⁹ He is rewarded by his acceptance into a previously hostile platoon. One says, “The lad's all right,” and they invite him to dinner. Over here, the message is explicit: the Jewish Lyutov is asked to express himself in the Cossack style, he does so, and as a result he is able to partake in the brotherhood. Yet he does not fully lose the trappings of his perception as a Jew; one of the other soldiers calls him “Kiddy” in an echo of Ghedali's childlike and innocent portrayal.¹⁴⁰ He is not fully on their level, yet he is still accepted. The vocabulary choices betray Lyutov's joy at performing this masculine language: he is not merely a deaf man but a “triumphant deaf man,” not merely reading but “read[ing] on and rejoicing.”¹⁴¹ Not only that, but he is able to participate in the collective bliss Balmashev receives in “Salt,” as he and his comrades all sleep together at night. For both men, they have earned themselves the peace that they were lacking. His performance is better than that of the other unnamed Jewish figures, and thus does his acceptance grow. Of course, both men also contradict Trotsky's distaste for the use of violence in promoting revolutionary goals, which he states reflects the ways of the “old society.”¹⁴²

If “My First Goose” is an example of Jewish success at passing into the realm of the Cossacks and performing their brand of masculinity, then “Death of Dolgushev” is an example of Lyutov's failure at fully inhabiting a power role. In this tale, Lyutov is asked to put a fellow Cossack out of his misery and kill him, yet he fails to do the deed. His friend Afonka Bida executes the soldier, and refuses to tolerate Lyutov's failure:

'Afonka,' I said with a wry smile and rode up to the Cossack. 'I couldn't, you see.'

¹³⁹ Isaac Babel, “My First Goose,” *Red Cavalry*, trans. Nadia Helstein (London; New York: A.A. Knopf, 1929), p. 54.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

¹⁴² Trotsky, *Literature*, p. 189.

'Get out of my sight,' he said, growing pale, 'or I'll kill you. You people in specs take about as much pity on our brother as a cat on a mouse—'

And he raised the cock of his rifle.

I rode away slowly, without turning round, feeling death at my back and cold.¹⁴³

Later on in the story, Lyutov adds, "To-day I've lost Afonka, my closest friend—"¹⁴⁴

Bullock holds that this story illustrates the "impossibility" of Lyutov truly being a part of the world of the Cossacks,¹⁴⁵ owing to his position as a member of the diametrically opposed religious background, and *Red Cavalry's* treatment of its Jews as passive to the point of weakness lends credence to this view. Holding to Butler's theories of gender as a performative act, this speaks to an improper reaction and poor emulation of masculine standards, which can in turn reflect the faux-essentialist enumeration of gender standards from the dominant Cossacks; if the failure is due to Lyutov performing poorly, Bullock explains *why* he performs poorly.

Lyutov's inability to kill the soldier and exercise his violence on another human is not seen as gentle but rather as compassionless and pitiless, which mirrors Balmashev's use of violence as a language of peace. Afonka's reaction to Lyutov is similar to Trunov's reaction to Andrey; he is disgusted and alarmed by a situation that flies in the face of the Cossack ideals of brotherhood, and he communicates this disgust and alarm with his rifle. Like with Balmashev, his emotional health cannot tolerate this action flying in the face of his values, as he "grows pale" at the sight of Lyutov and his failure. Lyutov is punished for this with the explicit loss of the sense of brotherhood that is pitched as the reward for Soviet masculinity and masculine community. The text uses the words "closest friend" to highlight the magnitude of Lyutov's loss, and uses "I've lost" to indicate that this was an active process arising from Lyutov's own choices. The fact that

¹⁴³ Isaac Babel, "Death of Dolgushev," *Red Cavalry*, trans. Nadia Helstein (London; New York: A.A. Knopf, 1929), p. 90.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁴⁵ Bullock, "The Cruel Art of Beauty," p. 519.

Afonka was not even a particularly close friend highlights the depths of Lyutov's estrangement from the normal. Afonka demonstrated the praised model of masculinity, and for his failure, Lyutov was shut out of all that Afonka had gained by it. At this juncture, it becomes clear that a Jewish man's worth in the text's eyes rests on his ability to perform as a Cossack. While the two dominant groups have characters exhibiting various shades of worth and unworthiness in the text, the overarching relations and narrative voice indicate the necessity of physical strength and violence in gaining respect.

iii. Is Comradeship Available for Jewish Men?

Red Cavalry, although written by a Jewish author, hews far closer to the view of nurture as anti-Semitic cudgel than praiseworthy behaviour, and further drags this gentility into passivity and weakness. In his book on Russo-Soviet literary masculinity, Eliot Borenstein elaborates on the theories of Sigmund Freud, Lionel Tiger, John Remy, and J. Glenn Gray to establish the concept of comradeship, as opposed to friendship, and how it aligns with the image of the Cossack in revolutionary literature. Friendship is couched in the individual, and requires a personal commitment and mutual affinity, whereas comradeship requires a sacrifice of true individuality and does not require any affinity beyond common goals.¹⁴⁶ This comradeship has Slavic Christian roots, with the "blood brotherhood" and communal fellowship shared by all Slavic Orthodox peoples giving way to the more secularized term "comrade" in the Soviet days, with the shared ideology shifting from church-based collectivism to left-wing collectivism.¹⁴⁷ While Borenstein intentionally avoids discussion of the Cossack-Jew binary in his evaluation of Lyutov in *Red Cavalry*, with the reasoning that it distracts from other large questions on the role of masculinity in *Babel*, he provides ample discussion of his inability to prove himself once and

¹⁴⁶ Borenstein, *Men Without Women*, pp. 24-25.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 28-30.

for all as a “comrade.” He reasons that Lyutov holds the soldiers as friends with each other when in fact they are comrades, a realm that has a lower barrier of entry yet one that he is still unable to overcome, with the exception of fellow dying Jewish revolutionary Ilya in the final story of the cycle.¹⁴⁸ Lyutov is compared to and mocked as a woman by his fellow soldiers, with Borenstein ascribing his victories to a step in a longer “courtship ritual” that is never satisfactorily resolved.

Despite Borenstein's intentional deemphasis of the Cossack-Jew binary in his evaluation, I think these overarching duelling masculinities (or, in the anti-Semitic and Babelian case, Jewish emascularity), however imperfect and broad-based, lend another detail to the relations he outlines. The binary may not be as strict as it may seem, with characters such as Lyutov butting against it and testing its resistance, but the labels “Cossack” and “Jew” do carry resonance in this instance along with associated attributes. Bullock highlights the labels’ incongruity on aesthetic terms, casting the Soviets as “timeless embodiments of the Hellenic ideal”¹⁴⁹ and Lyutov as “the bespectacled Jewish intellectual” who yearns to join them,¹⁵⁰ yet comradeship presupposes a moral gap rather than a fully physical one, a gap which we see strongly in the tale of Afonka Bida. The inaccessibility of comradeship to Lyutov mirrors Rosenberg's illustration of Jews as transgressor to secular and gentile spaces, especially given that Borenstein highlights the Orthodox origins of the specifically Soviet concepts of comradeship. If a comrade is descended from a brother, and a brother comes from the church, then one historically external to those spaces would therefore be external to these concepts of brotherhood. Returning to Leonid Livak's elaboration on Jewish archetypes in the European literary canon, he holds that these constructed characters were written as spiritual pollutants, able to undermine the faithful and degrade the

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 102-104.

¹⁴⁹ Bullock, “The Cruel Art of Beauty,” p. 516.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

Christian moral character. Lyutov's failure to permanently integrate into the Cossack whole then can be seen as less of a personal failure and more of an inherent inability to attain the rank of “comrade” in a Babelian estimation. Comradeship requires a lower threshold of behaviour than friendship, which makes it all the more galling when Lyutov fails to hit it consistently, especially when he ostensibly shares the same values and goals as the rest of the red Cossacks: a promotion of Communism, a glorification of Lenin, and a desire to aid the war effort in whichever way possible. After all, per Trotsky, the key to proletariat culture is to do away with class culture and all the divides it entails rather than reinforce it.¹⁵¹ Lyutov flounders in, and his fellow red Cossacks highlight, the areas he can not easily change: his lack of physical strength, his perceived bookishness, and his lack of military acumen. For the most part, these points of distinction are cosmetic rather than ideological. If Lyutov, and Jewish men in general, are unable to overcome these cosmetic hurdles, then they are doomed to be excluded from Cossack comradeship in perpetuity; Lyutov's courtship ritual would never be able to succeed, and the Cossack-Jew binary would be reinforced through his ineffectuality. Likewise, if the Jewish non-comrade is placed in opposition to the new Soviet man, he would be ostracized from this space as well, in spite of his personal buy-in to the ideals and the stated early Soviet-Pavlovian principles of equality across all humanity. In essence, it creates a tension between these two larger ideals: how can Lyutov be truly equal if he can not be the idealized masculine? Or, more importantly, how can this incongruence be overcome? Is the performance itself enough to overcome this “real” personal flaw? Or does this binary stand to be dissolved by Lyutov's ability to transport between the two worlds when he is able to, if not all the time?

These all bear massive consequences for the assimilationist model of Jewish masculinity; if true comradeship is impossible for a Jew, can one truly assimilate, and should assimilation

¹⁵¹ Trotsky, *Literature*, p. 186.

even be a goal? Another question posed by this: inherently, is it a praised or desired model if it is a model that is impossible to achieve? I would argue that, irrespective of any textual inaccessibility of comradeship, Lyutov is by and large far more praised both internally and externally when he copies these chosen behaviours, in a way that doesn't eliminate but still neuters the preconceptions of his weakness. A true and seamless immersion may be impossible according to Borenstein, but the sheer ritual performative act is in and of itself a value-added proposition and thus softens the rigid divide between Cossack and Jew. Trying may not be “enough” for the Jewish men to reach the idealized Cossack masculine in *Red Cavalry*, but it is very clearly the path to avoiding the devastation that is the unconverted, completely un-Cossack and emasculated Jewish man. Lyutov then serves both as a translator between the two worlds and a way forward. He is not the inherent holder of these masculine values, but he is their clear observer and thus reflector. Here, we return to Butler's work once more, in particular her invocation of gender as a constructed and artificial act. She writes, “In effect, gender is made to comply with a model of truth and falsity which not only contradicts its own performative fluidity, but serves a social policy of gender regulation and control. Performing one's gender wrong initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect, and performing it well provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity after all.”¹⁵² This performance is analogous with the courtship ritual described by Borenstein, which stubbornly persists as the Cossack-Jew binary becomes more and more reinforced and attempts to prove an inborn essentialism. Yet of course, the performance of “becoming more male by acting more hypermasculine” only works if Jewish men are held by *Red Cavalry*'s imagination as fully male.

At this point, it may be illustrative to look at the example of a female Jewish character in *Red Cavalry* who attempts to take on some of the characteristics of the Cossack male in order to

¹⁵² Butler, “Performative Acts,” p. 528.

gain some manner of respect. Lyutov stays in a Jewish woman's house, and he finds himself sleeping next to the corpse of the woman's father.

“Pane,” says the Jewess, shaking the mattress, “the Poles killed him, and he begged them: ‘Kill me in the back yard so my daughter doesn't see how I die.’ But they did it as it was most convenient to them. He died in this room and thought of me. And now I'd like to know,” cried the woman with sudden terrible violence “—I'd like to know where you'd find in the whole world another father like my father!” (Babel 19)

In this passage, two Jewish figures are established in conjunction with each other: the woman and her father. Both were Jewish, and both were communicating with external forces, whether the Poles or the concealed Lyutov. The father used a more “Jewish” manner of communication with the Polish forces, or at least hewing to classical Jewish masculinity; he begged and he pleaded, using reason and empathetic argumentation, aiming to protect his daughter from violence. His method of communication is rejected out of hand both by the Poles and the text, and he is punished for this with a public execution in her face. His daughter, however, aims to mimic at least several aspects of the Cossack method of violent, masculine communication. First, she shakes the mattress. Second, she becomes accusatory. Finally, her voice changes, making way for a “sudden, terrible violence.” Her message is prized over her father's not solely because she isn't dead, but because of its situation. Lyutov doesn't brush off the woman's exhortations but listens to them, ensuring that her father will be remembered solely because of his daughter's presentation of him. While the father's words were undecipherable to the Poles, his daughter's carried the necessary violence to be heard by Lyutov, the behavioural interpreter, who thereon is able to communicate with her on a more even-handed and sympathetic level than he could have before. While the reward of peace is not as clear in “Crossing the Zbroutch” as it is in “My First Goose,” she gained an added element of self-determination: she is far more concrete than the milling about Jews in “Trunov,” and can express

her perspective concisely, giving her the ability to ease her own personal tumult and call for justice. There is no punishment for speaking this way, only praise.

The Jewish woman is as unable to fit into idealized Cossack manhood as Lyutov. If one follows the theory that Jewish men are excluded from dominant masculine spaces for being “not fully male,” she as a woman is obviously equally ineligible. Her situation is also not fully analogous to Lyutov's, in that Lyutov is attempting to integrate fully and the woman has no imminent desire to do so, while Lyutov is communicating directly with the Cossacks and the woman speaks only to Lyutov, the Cossack in uniform if not in deed. Yet the same performance is praised in both parties and both situations, while the same manners of dialogue are condemned. In effect, both the feminine and the emascule Jews could be seen as grudgingly respected transgressors to the masculine space when they communicate using the Cossack language, and only as long as they communicate using the Cossack language. To be more precise, the assimilationist model presupposes a permanent minority status for the Jewish people, with no sense of automatic acclimation into the majority Cossacks but an ability to achieve at least a temporary reconciliation of the two concepts. It is a resigned view that manages to take its cue both from historical Eastern European secular anti-Semitism and revolutionary ideation, in essence saying that *if* it were possible for Jewish men to truly become full comrades, this is how they would do so, but the act is successful only as far as it is performed. It both confirms and rejects Butler at the same time, by imbuing the performance with the power to construct a positive gender representation while insisting that it does not go beyond a representation. The binary is not shattered, but it is toyed with and butted against. Trotsky argued that the new society was being constructed by the Revolution using the methods of the old society;¹⁵³ perhaps the struggles of Lyutov and other Jewish figures to reconcile their Jewishness with their

¹⁵³ Trotsky, *Literature*, 189.

majoritarian goals are the dying vestiges of the old society, and are ideally a step along the road to dissolving the Cossack-Jew divide once and for all.

Lyutov's presence argues that the mores are both artificial and real, artificial in the sense that they can be taken on by anyone with minimal punishment yet real in the sense that these gender mores stem from something innate to the Cossacks and external to the Jews. The qualities assigned to the Cossack men only match partially with the desired attributes espoused by Bolshevik theorists, and the outlining of Jewish men does not match at all, yet a sequence of power relations and gender performances of mixed success herald the imperfect red Cossack forces as a model to truly follow for both Russian gentiles and Jews alike. Cossack masculinity itself serves as an indiscriminate force, begging to be imitated and a communicative social law meant to delineate between the powerful and powerless, and by extension in the text, the valued and the valueless. Essentially, the way to be respected as a Jewish man in the assimilatory model and in *Red Cavalry* is to "be less Jewish," or act less according to these broad-based depictions of Jewishness. When they perform these un-Jewish actions, they gain a measure of self-determination and prestige previously unavailable to them and allow them to inch closer to self-actualization and respect within the larger eastern European community. The texts stops short of both saying that idealized Cossack masculinity is completely inaccessible to Jewish men, as well as saying that idealized Cossack masculinity is achievable for anything longer than a short period of time. *Babel* and *Red Cavalry*, as with the later entries in the *Tevye* cycle, don't disagree with the Torah on the core attributes of Jewish masculinity, only on whether or not they're meant to be valued and performed. A Jewish man may always be gentle and bookish in this estimation, but their world has less and less space for this performance.

IV. CHAPTER THREE: The Jewish Superman

i. Leon Pinsker, Jewish Self-Determination, and a New Masculinity

In this chapter, I will be exploring the second concept of Jewish-Russian masculinity outlined in the introduction: that of the Jewish Superman, which represented a vision of Jewish men serving as authors and leaders of their own fate rather than imitating an external standard of behaviour.¹⁵⁴ I will use early Zionist leader and *Hovevei Zion* founder Leon Pinsker's anonymous 1882 text *Auto-Emancipation! An Appeal to his People by a Russian Jew* in order to establish an ideological background both for early twentieth-century Jewish self-determination ideology and the literary Supermen who emerged from this era. I will use two poems as case studies: Vladimir Jabotinsky's "In Memory of Herzl" (1904) and Ilya Selvinsky's "Bar Kokhba" (1920), which represent two different time periods and ideological standpoints, as Jabotinsky was a firm Zionist and Selvinsky was not politically active when he wrote the poem yet later joined the Communist Party. Through this, I will illustrate how the desire for a physically hale, emotionally strong, secular Jewish masculine leader was not unique to one part of the Jewish community, and how these works interpreted said form with their own individual nuances.

As explained in previous chapters, the "Great Reforms" of 1860 and the *haskalah* movement within the Russian Empire's Jewish community encouraged a greater degree of secularization and integration. The 1903-1905 pogroms and the ideals of the 1905 Revolution, along with many other factors, galvanized the empire's Jewish community into outward-facing political and social action. Some of the more significant ideological fomenting took place outside

¹⁵⁴ I am using the term Jewish Superman not to indicate any specific ideological or spiritual connection between these authors, Friedrich Nietzsche, and his concept of the *übermensch*, even though early Zionist leaders had a fondness for Nietzsche's ideas, something detailed more thoroughly in Jacob Golomb's *Nietzsche and Zion* (Cornell University Press). Rather, I am using the term Superman in the simplest sense possible: that these Jewish male heroes were depicted as beyond both the typical man and the typical Jewish man.

Russia—both in Central Europe and the *yishuv* in Palestine—before it became incorporated into the mainstream Jewish-Russian ideological climate. Yet at the same time, Jewish self-determination thought had roots in Russia beyond its Central European and *yishuv* imports. It can therefore be instructive to analyze some of the writings and attitudes of Jewish Russian thinkers in the wake of the 1880s pogroms, a series of attacks on the Jewish community after the 1881 assassination of Czar Alexander II. The attacks led to a wave of emigration to Palestine under the collective term of the “First *Aliyah*,”¹⁵⁵ in addition to an outpouring of autonomic thought from those left behind in the Pale of Settlement.

While Zionist ideology and new notions of masculinity had yet to fully calcify at this time, especially not to the same degree as in the post-1903 and 1905 situation, Russian-Jewish thinkers had begun to elaborate on their sense of despair at the diasporic Jewish condition. In 1882, Leon Pinsker anonymously published *Auto-Emancipation! An Appeal to his People by a Russian Jew*, a pamphlet that became a foundational tract for later Zionist thinkers, including Theodor Herzl.¹⁵⁶ Similarly to Bialik's “In the City of Slaughter,” *Auto-Emancipation* excoriates the Jewish people for their passivity in the face of pervasive national crisis and acceptance of an untenable situation. Pinsker writes that the Jews are held below foreigners by their secular hosts as the Jewish people have no country to search back on and no ability to repay the gift of hospitality in their own, dooming them to be unwanted guests and aliens wherever they roamed. He compares the Jewish acceptance of such a condition to “a sick man, [absent] of desire for

¹⁵⁵ For more on the pogroms and the ensuing waves of Russian Jews fleeing to the *yishuv* as a result, please read Shulamit Laskov's “The Biluim: Reality and Legend” from *Studies in Zionism*.

¹⁵⁶ Dimitry Shumsky, “Leon Pinsker and ‘Autoemancipation!’: A Reevaluation,” *Jewish Social Studies* 18, no. 1 (2011): p. 33, <https://doi.org/10.2979/jewisocistud.18.1.33>.

food” and “allowing a blind fate to rule over us all,”¹⁵⁷ and exhorts the Jewish community to embrace self-sufficiency in establishing a new and stable Palestine rather than suffer under their persecutors. Key is his delineation of a conditional Jewish dignity, one which “[is esteemed] no less highly than our oppressors do theirs” yet simultaneously unable to be successfully defended “until we stand upon our own feet.”¹⁵⁸ The denizens of the second Aliyah further expanded on Pinsker's desired auto-emancipation, using the similar terms of illness to describe the diasporic or exilic experience and positing a reorientation towards the naturalistic roots as the only cure.¹⁵⁹ In essence, the traditional professions and *modi operandi* of the formerly scorned Esau and Cain—that of tilling the soil in Cain's case and hunting in Esau's, both spaces of engagement with the natural world—grew back in vogue within the Jewish community in Pinsker's estimation, now being seen as the counter to the rampancy of Jacob and Abel's gentility and humility.

Of course, the idea of Jewish men, or all men, reclaiming their dignity through equality and increased personal representation in the dominant cultural narrative in a self-sufficient manner was not unique to the Zionist movement. Pinsker himself occupied multiple places on the political spectrum, spending the 1850s and 60s promoting a Russification of the Jewish community before segueing into a more nationalist path post-1881.¹⁶⁰ Prior to the fatalism of *Auto-Emancipation*, his older writings held that Jewish nationalism and Jewish emancipated secularization were twin goals that necessitated a hand-in-hand approach. Jews needed to

¹⁵⁷ Leon Pinsker, *Auto-Emancipation! An Appeal to his People by a Russian Jew*, trans. D.S. Blondheim in 1916, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/quot-auto-emancipation-quot-leon-pinsker> (accessed February 17, 2019).

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ben Halpern and Jehuda Reinharz, “The Cultural and Social Background of the Second Aliyah,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 27, no. 3 (1991): p. 494.

¹⁶⁰ Shumsky, “Leon Pinsker,” p. 39.

become “sons of their immediate homeland” without disassociating from their historical roots.¹⁶¹ A stronger Jewry could create both a stronger Russia and a stronger Palestine. Revolutionary and Zionist ethics both paid special attention to their adherents' relations with nature, both seeing it as a tool for a parallel individual liberation and communal boon. Early Zionists saw the spiritual and emotional boons of nature, adopting it both as symbol and tool for their eventual reliance on the land in opposition to their diasporic existence.¹⁶² The revolutionary subset, with focus on the early Soviets, saw nature as an object to be subjugated by a climbing industrialism, seeking to use and mete out to the impoverished peasantry rather than conserve and cherish.¹⁶³ In a 1922 short story titled “Soon,” Soviet thinker Alexandra Kollontai said that the future generations of communists would, having already subdued the social forces, then seek to subdue nature altogether.¹⁶⁴ Both ideologies posited a similar sort of man to be the stewards of this land and this people: physically hale, aggressive and dominant, and unambiguously dedicated to their people's greatness.

These two parallel ideological bents mirror a second archetype of post-pogrom, revolutionary Jewish masculinity operating parallel to the Assimilatory Jew: that of the Jewish Superman, able to represent both revolutionary and Zionist ideals with panache. These two models occupy two opposing halves of Pinsker's text: while the Assimilatory Jew assumes that Pinsker is speaking the truth when he refers to the Jewish people as the perpetual outsider doomed to being the unwanted guest, the Jewish Superman relies on his assertion that the Jewish

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 42.

¹⁶² The socialist, or labour, Zionists were particularly strong proponents of this attitude. A.D. Gordon was a Russian-Jewish ideologue who proposed a greater connection with nature so as to foster an increased rootedness.

¹⁶³ Bernd Stevens Richter, “Nature Mastered by Man: Ideology and Water in the Soviet Union,” *Environment and History* 3, no. 1 (1997): p. 73-74.

¹⁶⁴ Alexandra Kollontai, “Soon,” *Selected Writings of Alexandra Kollontai*, trans. Alix Holt, Motive (London: Allison and Busby, 1977), p. 235.

people have an internal dignity waiting to be unleashed. Jewish Supermen share in the hypermasculine traits Daniel Boyarin in *Unheroic Conduct* attributes to the Iron Johns and hairy men. They are figures of towering strength both physically and emotionally, motivational when they speak, and exercise their mastery from the beginnings to the ends of their stories. They are warrior leaders without an ounce of Jacob and Abel's humility and restraint, and unlike Samson, these Supermen are never scorned or punished for circumventing the divine will. In fact, as with the Zionist and revolutionary traditions, God is completely dislocated (or, more accurately, relocated into a servant of the Jewish people rather than leader) from their origins and missions. The Jewish Supermen are self-made and self-guided, yet still retain an unambiguous Jewishness. They are not heroes who happen to be Jewish, but Jewish heroes, illustrating that the concepts of the Jew and the gentile are not nearly as disassociated as Babel and the Assimilatory Jew assume. This chapter will analyze two poems featuring Jewish Supermen: one written by Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky in 1904, in the wake of the Kishinev pogrom, and one from Ilya Selvinsky written in 1920 and published in 1924, coming in the wake of the Revolution and in the midst of the Russian Civil War.

The Jewish Supermen, similarly to Babel and *Red Cavalry*, invert the Talmudic values and assign anti-traditional values as the ones worthy of praise, yet unlike the Assimilatory Jews do not rely on scorning the powerless for their poor personal and political choices to emphasize their own superiority. It is fundamentally impossible to construct a binary or even a spectrum of Jewish masculinities, because these Supermen stand on their own both as drivers and perspectives of their own tales. The performances stand against themselves. Rather, their masculinities are pitched as a magnetic force that lifts all those around them into a superior national identity, in a way that echoes the theories of collectivism so beloved by early Soviet

thinkers. In Clay Steinman's analysis of Burt Reynolds in the television show *Evening Shade*, he describes how Reynolds manages to become both an erotic object for women and an object of desire for heterosexual men without stoking masculine panic of seeping into femininity or homosexuality. Steinman argues that in order for a man to both attract men and not invoke this fear, his masculinity must be “undoubted” in order to avoid possible future mixed feelings, something Reynolds achieves by being the most attractive and physically fit character in addition to being the centre of the narrative.¹⁶⁵ The Jewish Supermen occupy a similar place: the centrality of and lack of doubt in their own masculine power allows them to be a flame attracting the adulation and aspiration of both men and women inside their narratives. None stand up next to them in prominence, stature, or strength, thus sealing their positions as objects of aspiration and adulation. The combination of this centrality and their central Jewish identification makes them not only Supermen but Jewish Supermen. They exemplify what Dubnow called the spirit of the Jewish people in the wake of all the trauma and terror, which “has grown stronger in its worn out body,” and which survived “the Hamans of Russia who have attempted to crush the Eternal People.”¹⁶⁶

The construction of literary Jewish Supermen in the post-pogrom period shares similar values with the desired construction of living, breathing Jewish Supermen in the cultural sphere and the aforementioned Soviet Supermen from Babel's chapter. If we accept De Lauretis's concept of gender only being as real as it is reproduced, and every aspect of society being an aspect of gender creation, and all cultural representations reflecting the core concept, then these

¹⁶⁵ Clay Steinman, “Gaze out of Bounds: Men Watching Men on Television,” chap. 14 in *Men, Masculinity, and the Media* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc., 1992), p. 208, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483326023>.

¹⁶⁶ Simon Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland: From the Earliest Times until the Present Day*, trans. Israel Friedlaender, vol. 3 (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1916), pp. 163-164.

literary Jewish Supermen are rounded out by the political machinations of individuals like Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky. Jabotinsky began his adult life as a poet, playwright, lecturer, and newspaperman in Odessa before transitioning into life as a Zionist leader in Palestine starting in 1917.¹⁶⁷ He founded the Betar Jewish self-defence movement in 1923 and espoused the concept of a “New Jew,” which served as an ideological reorientation of the praised aspects of Jewish masculinity. Jabotinsky proposed an actionable Jewish identity, rather than a contemplative one, where men would be able to stand up for their ideals with both their wits and their fists. Jabotinsky preached that shooting should be taught to schoolchildren alongside reading as a matter of “historical reality,” reasoning that while intelligence and hard work would sustain the Jewish state, militarism would be necessary for its citizens' base survival as occupants of a new territory.¹⁶⁸ Like Pinsker, Jabotinsky held the Jewish state of exile as the source of Jewish decay, using a similar language of sickness as the more revolution-oriented Isaac Babel to describe the existing Jewish condition and depicting nationalism as the “dew” of a new day.¹⁶⁹ Indeed, negation of the diaspora was a common theme amongst Zionist thinkers who favoured a Jewish state in Palestine.

The Jewish Supermen were also burnished by a push to reclaim historical and proto-Biblical Jewish figureheads, who were used as avatars for national glory in place of more contemporary Jewish military heroes who had yet to come. Bialik, in “City of Slaughter,” referred to the cowering Jews as sons of Maccabees, shaming them for not living up to the same

¹⁶⁷ Maxim D. Shrayer, *An Anthology of Jewish-Russian Literature: Two Centuries of Dual Identity in Prose and Poetry*, vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 146.

¹⁶⁸ Arye Naor, “Jabotinsky’s New Jew: Concept and Models,” *Journal of Israeli History* 30, no. 2 (1 September 2011): 141–59, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13531042.2011.610120>, pp. 149-150.

¹⁶⁹ Arye Naor, “The Leader as a Poet: The Political and Ideological Poetry of Ze’ev Jabotinsky,” *Israel Affairs* 20, no. 2 (3 April 2014): p. 169, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537121.2014.889890>.

historical standard.¹⁷⁰ Jabotinsky saw the Betar movement and New Jews as reanimations of King David's dynasty, metaphorically crowning them with his legacy.¹⁷¹ The historic Judean revolutionary Simon Bar Kokhba became a key target of reclamation within the Jewish nationalist contexts, with Yiddish playwright Abraham Goldfadn's 1883 play (appropriately titled *Bar Kokhba*) serving as an example. Bar Kokhba was fashioned into a daring and proud Western-style hero, a “fine warrior on the Field of Mars and attentive lover on the Field of Venus”¹⁷² and a clear member of the archetypes Boyarin holds as historically excluding the Jews. As with Pinsker's paean to reclaiming Jewish dignity, Goldfadn's Bar Kokhba aimed to “[draw] a new consciousness and a sense that Jewry could yet again hold its head up high.”¹⁷³

Nor were these actions unique to the Jewish-Russian context; Sigmund Breitbart was a popular strongman in 1920s Vienna billed as the “Strongest Man in the World” who regularly blended traditional Western style heroic and Jewish iconography in his performances. He performed in the outfits of both Roman centurions¹⁷⁴ and Bar Kokhba for both Jewish and non-Jewish audiences, waved a Zionist flag onstage,¹⁷⁵ and by doing so reinforced the Jewish Superman model of Jewish male heroes being able to occupy similar prized narratives as Western ones. Similarly to Babel's prose, the Superman model features a strong aspirational and idealist construction of identity involving a realignment of Jewish historical heroes into contemporary men amongst men, with the design of standing both amongst and beyond the secular world. In the same way that modern Hebrew attempted to create a language that could

¹⁷⁰ Hayyim Nahman Bialik, “In the City of Slaughter,” *Complete Poetic Works of Hayyim Nahman Bialik*, trans. Israel Efros (New York: Histadruth Ivrit of America, 1948).

¹⁷¹ Naor, “New Jew,” p. 147.

¹⁷² Seth L. Wolitz, “Forging a Hero for a Jewish Stage: Goldfadn's ‘Bar Kokhba,’” *Shofar* 20, no. 3 (2002): p. 62.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹⁷⁴ Sharon Gillerman, “Samson in Vienna: The Theatrics of Jewish Masculinity,” *Jewish Social Studies* 9, no. 2 (2003): p. 82.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 74.

stand amongst the European languages,¹⁷⁶ the literary Bar Kokhba was turned into a hero who could stand amongst the European heroes. Unlike Babel, of course, this aspirationalism does not manifest as diminishing Judaism in the eyes of the secular masculinities. Rather, it takes the standards of behaviour and power *Red Cavalry* broadly applies to Cossacks and applies it to the specific Jewish heroes of history as well. This ethic is compatible with both Zionist and revolutionary attitudes, with both praising a similar vein of heroism and relying on the creation of pseudo-contemporary avatars of glory.

ii. Vladimir Jabotinsky on Theodor Herzl

The heroic Supermen were not limited to antiquity figures, however. Jabotinsky's 1904 poetic eulogy "In Memory of Herzl" lionizes the recently departed Zionist leader Theodor Herzl along the same lines as many of these antiquity icons. The former lawyer, intellectual, and journalist was cast as a titan borne from nature, depicted as the one true saviour of the Jewish people, both supported by the legacies of past Hebrew heroes and placed as an advancement on them, and given a legacy of majesty that extends beyond his death. Jabotinsky's Herzl is not placed against another individual to burnish his heroism; rather, he is positioned as a warrior against the concept of exile itself, and his collection of personal traits and appeal to the collective Jewish populace are seen as the antidote. Even though the exilic Jew is not represented in human form in "Herzl," the tension between the hale self-determined Jew and the weak diasporan is present and intentional, with the counter-image carrying along Butler's theories of promoting masculinity by punishing the failure to live up to the standard. That said, this exile being attacked and negated is not presented as something tangible to duel against, and Herzl's ability to shepherd his people beyond an unenviable condition is shown as unimpeachable. Jabotinsky saw

¹⁷⁶ For more on the development of Modern Hebrew, see Robert Alter's *The Invention of Hebrew Prose* (University of Washington Press, 1988), along with the paragraph in our introduction on the nuances between the different languages spoken by Jewish people in Russia.

Herzl as one of the idealized New Jews, less reminiscent of the despair of exile and more of the reclaimed Biblical heroes, pushing him forward as the instigator of a new vein of history.¹⁷⁷

The opening stanza of the poem tells us what to expect of Jabotinsky's representation of Herzl. He's immediately compared to the giants of the Jewish tradition and placed on their shoulders, emphasizing his centrality to the Zionist cause.

He did not fade, like Moses long ago
 right at the margin of the promised land;
 he did not shepherd to the motherland
 her children longing for her far-off song.
 He burned himself and gave his whole life
 and didn't "forget you, O Jerusalem,"
 but fell too soon and in the desert died,
 and on the finest day to our dear Palestine
 we shall conduct the tribune's ashes home.¹⁷⁸

Moses, the man who shepherded the Jewish people out of Egypt with God's help, is held here as a failed and faded leader. On the face of it, the two share similarities, in that both inspired their people's return to Zion yet did not survive to see it fully accomplished. Moses is banned from Israel by God for not listening to his instructions in the desert; instead of speaking to a rock to produce water as commanded, he hits the rock in direct contradiction of his orders.¹⁷⁹ This serves as the ultimate rebuke of insufficient faith in God's words, one of the core pillars of the praised traditional Jewish masculinity. Yet in this stanza, Herzl's demise is not seen as a punishment, but rather a consequence of excessive self-sacrifice. The language of the divine and the tradition pervades this tradition without centring itself on Herzl's narrative. The land is referred to as the promised land, yet the text does not linger on who promised the land to whom. Herzl is described as burning himself and giving his whole life to his cause, language which

¹⁷⁷ Naor, "New Jew," p. 153.

¹⁷⁸ Vladimir Jabotinsky, "In Memory of Herzl," *An Anthology of Jewish-Russian Literature*, ed. Maxim Shrayer, vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 148.

¹⁷⁹ Num. 20:6-12.

invokes the *korban*, or sacrificial offerings, from the Torah. In this respect, Jabotinsky's language mirrors Bialik's in "City of Slaughter," as Bialik similarly invokes the Jewish tradition without attributing the modern actions to it. In this stanza, the exilic experience is represented as a desert despite deserts being barely existent in continental Europe and present in Palestine at the time, in a manner that echoes both Babel's invocation of the synagogue as a diseased, lifeless place and Bialik's portrayal of Kishinev's desolation post-pogrom. The exile is unable to provide sustenance for the Jewish people, and only Herzl is able to provide the warmth they need through self-sacrifice.

The poem accords Herzl several natural metaphors to enhance his masculinity. Jabotinsky depicts him in a manner inconsistent with his physical role in the Zionist movement yet consistent with the evolving Jewish Superman masculinity. As Jabotinsky writes, "he was a titan who had granite shoulders, // an eagle he was, with eagle-eyed insurgence, // an eagle's sorrow on his noble forehead."¹⁸⁰ By calling him a titan, Herzl is drawn beyond the realm of Jewish Supermen and into secular ones, with the titan implying his godliness even on non-Hebrew terms. The granite shoulders are symbolically a stable and imperturbable foundation for the Jewish people, allowing him to support his people in a physical manner for their own good. By comparing him to an eagle and giving him naturalistic attributes, Herzl is both reinforcing the Zionist turn to nature as sustenance for ideological grounding, and being cast as a predator bird, a reinforcement of Pinsker and Jabotinsky's desires for the Jewish people to no longer be cast as victims. In the next stanza, he puts forth a performative model for aspiring Zionist men to follow: he is "proud and lofty and fearless," his call heralds "no matter what it takes" as a motto for the Zionist dream, and his invocations are termed as a song, carrying within them the implication

¹⁸⁰ Jabotinsky, "Herzl," p. 148.

that his words are meant to be echoes and repeated back to him as with those of any other inspirational leader.¹⁸¹

As mentioned in the second chapter, Babel assigned power and respect to his characters based on concepts of strength and weakness; the stronger Jews per *Red Cavalry*'s definition of strength were the better ones, whereas the weaker Jews were the ones to be avoided and scorned. In Jabotinsky's Herzl poem, however, value is ascribed based on how free or emancipated his Jewish figures are. While the Jewish Supermen are obvious exemplars of physical strength, their strength is not inherently what their value is derived from, and unlike in *Red Cavalry* it is not what they use to communicate their ideology. This strength is never depicted as violence. The consequences of not following Herzl are described along similar lines of Bialik's scenes of horror in "In the City of Slaughter."

Let us rot beneath a yoke of pain,
let whirlwinds mutilate the holy Torah,
let our sons become nocturnal robbers
and our daughters enter dens of shame,
let us become instructors of smut and vice
at that black hour, on that worst of days
when we forget your song and all your ways
and so disgrace the one who died for us.¹⁸²

Again, the religious historical past is invoked to elevate Herzl, and again he is cast as the steward of the tradition in place of the divine. The moral and physical degradation of the Jewish sons and daughters echoes Bialik's depiction of the "sons of Maccabees" sitting back and allowing their wives and daughters to be raped in the Kishinev pogrom. Both poems operate with similar heralds of what doom means for the Jewish community, and what constitutes Jewish Shame, while also implying that this doom is something the Jewish people would allow to happen rather than be doomed to. The key difference is the presence of Herzl as the Jewish

¹⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 148-149.

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 149.

Superman and avatar of hope, encouraging the community to move beyond the destruction. Where Bialik is pessimistic and ashamed as to the state of Jewish men, Jabotinsky is optimistic. The words here hearken to Psalm 137, an Israelite lament that summarizes the dream of returning to Israel and expresses a sense of mourning at losing a connection to their promised land. It states, “How shall we sing the LORD's song in a strange land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.”¹⁸³ The parallels extend beyond physical punishment for forgetting a Zionist dream, with both referring to Israel as a “song” to be followed, almost as an alluring siren. Like in Bialik's “City of Slaughter,” “In Memory of Herzl” uses the language of the divine to reinforce the message by referencing memorable Tanakh passages in the poetry, with Herzl in the locus of the divine messenger rather than the poet for Bialik. Like with Bialik, the divine is established through this linguistic similarity in order to be dislocated, a foundation for a larger message of Jewish men being respectful of the traditions but not bound by them. This metaphorical dislocation and invocation is made more explicit in the next stanza, which compares Herzl's voice to “manna from the clouds” and states that “*chai haShem*,” or by the name of God, they will finish his song.¹⁸⁴ Herzl is a Zionist pseudo-deity in the poem, not only a man amongst men but also a man amongst the supernatural.

The poem concludes by repeating the honourifics already afforded to Herzl by Jabotinsky and affirming him as the Jewish Superman once and for all. He is called “our eagle” and “our regal tribune,” reinforcing the natural world metaphors from earlier stanzas, his unimpeachable majesty, and his position as a man *for* the people of Israel, if not fully *of* the people of Israel.¹⁸⁵ Jabotinsky willingly places himself and the rest of the Jewish community as subordinate to Herzl and following his call, rather than Herzl as a follower of a larger, divine call. This serves as

¹⁸³ Psalms 137:4-5.

¹⁸⁴ Jabotinsky, “Herzl,” p. 149.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

another key distinction between him and the biblical figures of masculinity, not to mention Babel's piteous Jews of *Red Cavalry*; Herzl answers to no one, is subordinate to nothing, and has ideals which are his and his alone. This is one of what differentiates the ideological Jewish Superman from the Assimilatory Jews in the prior chapter. The Superman does not aspire to anything or anyone but is aspired to by others. Yet this brings up a secondary, methodological question: if Herzl occupies the role of the divine in this poem, would it not be more prudent to compare his brand of masculinity and heroism to that of God in the Torah, rather than Jacob, Samson, Cain, and Abel, who served the divine and bid for favour? Beyond questions of sacrilege or blasphemy, not to mention the many occasions where God engages in conduct he specifically prohibits the Jewish people from echoing, an important distinction to note is that between dislocation and dissolution. Herzl is not replacing or dismissing the influence of God on the Jewish people, but rather using its legacy to augment his own masculinity and presence. He still exists in both narratives, making it more fulsome to evaluate the shifting relationship with the divine as a representation of human masculinity rather than the shifting exemplars of superiority. More importantly, God is not depicted in the Tanakh as one to imitate, less so than obey. In Exodus 19, when pitching the Mosaic covenant, God does not ask for his deeds to be echoed but for his words to be followed, as the people of Israel say “All that HaShem hath spoken we will do.”¹⁸⁶ As such, the divine in this case exists outside of a performative model of masculinity, because there is no performance to imitate. One is not meant to become God, yet any Jewish man can follow Herzl's example of a Zionist dream.

iii. Reconstituting Bar Kokhba for a Contemporary Message

Herzl, of course, was not the only realized Superman in the Jewish imagination; as mentioned above, Simon Bar Kokhba's legacy took hold in nationalist circles, leading to a

¹⁸⁶ Exo. 19:8.

recasting of his memory as that of a Zionist exemplar. As Yael Zerubavel argues, “Since the Bar Kokhba revolt is the only ancient war that is identified by a single leader, his image plays an important role in the construction of the memory of the event,”¹⁸⁷ a memory which was “[elevated]...as a major turning point in Jewish history.”¹⁸⁸ His name itself carries the natural resonance afforded to classical strongmen, as Bar Kokhba translates to “son of a star.” In addition to the aforementioned Yiddish play by Goldfadn and Sigmund Breitbart's strongman routine, Jabotinsky's Betar self-defence movement was named after Bar Kokhba's historic fort. Bialik wrote a poem on Bar Kokhba,¹⁸⁹ and in the *yishuv* period many stories were written on the theme of Bar Kokhba duelling with a lion, a motif made prominent by a 1913 song by Levin Kipnis.¹⁹⁰ The presence of Bar Kokhba next to a lion is both another representation of Superheroism as dominance of nature and another case of Biblical resonance used to prop up a Jewish Superhero's legend. In this case, the original Jewish strongman is used to retrofit the new one: in Judges 14, Samson slays a lion with his bare hands.¹⁹¹ One other facet of Bar Kokhba making him appealing for nationalist reclamation: his embrace of Hebrew as a national language, similar to the contemporary Zionists. Promissory notes from Bar Kokhba's revolt have been found in Hebrew, in contrast to other ancient Jewish notes found in Aramaic or Greek,¹⁹² and a lead weight was found bearing the Hebrew inscription “Prince of Israel.”¹⁹³ Indeed, Bar Kokhba serves as a suitable figure for Yiddish, Hebrew, and Russian literatures and myth making: he is a

¹⁸⁷ Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 49-50.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 103-104.

¹⁹¹ Judg. 14:5-6.

¹⁹² Magen Broshi and Elisha Qimron, “A Hebrew I.O.U. Note from the Second Year of the Bar Kokhba Revolt,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 45, no. 2 (1994): pp. 286-287.

¹⁹³ Boaz Zissu and Amir Ganor, “A Lead Weight of Bar Kokhba's Administration,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 56, no. 2 (2006): pp. 178-179.

distinctly Jewish revolutionary who creates a historical connection with the land of Israel and uplifts the Jewish proletariat in the face of imperial power.

While Bar Kokhba is a historical figure from the Rabbinic period, his reception is reconstituted from how he was perceived by the scholars in his own era, several of whom expanded on earlier tropes of Biblical hypermasculinity. He was either depicted as a Messianic figure or more often an exemplar of failed rebellion featuring improper masculinity, with all of the stories containing a non-dislocated divine figure superior in the same manner as Samson. After all, Bar Kokhba's revolt against the Romans did not lead to a liberation of the Jewish people. A name for Bar Kokhba in early Jewish writings was not Bar Kokhba but rather Bar Koziba, with “star” replaced by the Hebrew word for “lie.”¹⁹⁴ While some accounts support historical rabbis, such as R. Akiba b. Joseph, endorsing Bar Kokhba's claim to messianism,¹⁹⁵ there is far more support for the idea that he was a sacrilegious failure. In one tale, he murders a Rabbi with a swift kick to the head and is punished with a death described as only possibly being from God: wrapped with a large snake.¹⁹⁶ In other accounts, he shuns the aid of God entirely, specifically requesting the divine not to interfere in the war.¹⁹⁷ In all of these tales, Bar Kokhba's masculinity manifests as similar to several of the desired Zionist ideals: he is proud and self-reliant, he has a fierce passion for the Jewish people that is not reliant on divine approval, and he occupies a similar Messianic role as Jabotinsky bestows upon Herzl in his poem. The chief difference comes in how this performance manifests. What is praiseworthy in the contemporary is held as vain in the historical and positioned as an explanation for the rebellion's failure. In

¹⁹⁴ Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*, p. 50.

¹⁹⁵ Matthew V. Novenson, “Why Does R. Akiba Acclaim Bar Kokhba as Messiah?” *Journal for the Study of Judaism: In the Persian Hellenistic & Roman Period* 40, no. 4/5 (September 2009): pp. 551-552, <https://doi.org/10.1163/004722109X12499530635251>.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 563.

¹⁹⁷ Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*, p. 51.

these stories, Bar Kokhba is the one condemned and discouraged from being emulated, while the faithful rabbis are showcased more positively; around the dawn of the twentieth century that relationship is flipped.

“Bar Kokhba,” the 1920 epic poem in Russian, exemplifies the Jewish nationalist Supermanization of Bar Kokhba, the figure, yet author Ilya Selvinsky does not fit neatly into the image of an early twentieth-century Jewish nationalist. If one assumes twin poles of Zionism and Revolutionism in the Russian Jewish community, Selvinsky's allegiances then hew with the Revolutionary movement. Unlike Jabotinsky and similar to Babel, his writing career unfolded in the Soviet Union, and he never grew affiliated with Jewish nationalist movements. He fought with the Reds in the Russian Civil War, served as a battalion commissar in the Second World War, and was an early leader of the Soviet constructivist movement.¹⁹⁸ All of his writing was in Russian. His writing, throughout his career, had a distinctly Jewish character: he incorporated Yiddishisms into his Russian verse,¹⁹⁹ wrote the aforementioned Bar Kokhba poem and on Birobidzhan,²⁰⁰ and was one of the first Soviet poets to write about the local victims of the Holocaust.²⁰¹ “Bar Kokhba” demonstrates Jewishness beyond the subject matter and location of the poem. It is packed with the biblical allusions of Jabotinsky and Bialik, is dotted with Hebrew words despite being originally written in Russian, and references historical Jewish revolutionaries to reinforce Bar Kokhba's majesty. Above all, it shows that the archetype of the Jewish Superman is not exclusive to Zionist representations, effectively serving as a repudiation

¹⁹⁸ Shroyer, “Anthology,” p. 226.

¹⁹⁹ As touched on in the introduction, Yiddish gained respect among communist circles as a “language of the people.”

²⁰⁰ Birobidzhan was the capital of a region in the Soviet Union's Far East designated as a Jewish Autonomous Region in 1934. For more on its history and stories, please consult Masha Gessen's *Where the Jews Aren't: The Sad and Absurd Story of Birobidzhan, Russia's Autonomous Region* (Schocken Books, 2016).

²⁰¹ Shroyer, “Anthology,” p. 226.

of Babel's arguments outlined in Chapter Two. Not only does this Jew look and act like the Cossacks in *Red Cavalry*, he shows an inextricability of Jewishness and hypermasculinity and becomes an exemplar even for the non-Jewish figures in the story. His admiration is unbounded by national distinction or opposition within the conflict depicted in the poem, making him less of a Jewish exemplar for solely Jews and more of a Jewish exemplar for all.

The poem “Bar Kokhba” indeed occupies a very specific space: he is blending a vision of Jewish emancipation with early 1920s Bolshevik ideological writing, which called for collectivist unity and a proletarian rise in the face of an oppressive majority. The characteristics of the New Soviet Man that were outlined in Chapter Two’s discussion on *Red Cavalry* are far more on the nose in “Bar Kokhba.” Unlike the revolutionary soldiers with whom Lyutov cavorts, Bar Kokhba is introduced as an unemancipated worker under the yoke of oppression and “Latin power,” rather than one merely following the Revolution. He exemplifies Alexandra Kollontai’s quote that “only workers can generate in their minds new methods of organizing labour as well as running industry.”²⁰² While Bar Kokhba is militaristic in his Revolution, the violence is less glorified than seen as a necessary skill, unlike the calls to “rough up a woman” in “My First Goose.” It is a story of rise and triumph over adversity, featuring an ideologically sound protagonist who is a paragon of physical strength. Yet it would be a mistake to pitch “Bar Kokhba” as the keynote Bolshevik ideological poem; for one, its redolent Jewishness, despite a displacement of God as a hero in the narrative, is far more charitable to the bounds of individual faith and culture than one might expect of one praising the abject godlessness of a piece of Soviet ideological literature, exemplified by Leon Trotsky’s paeans for socialist art to be

²⁰² Alexandra Kollontai, “The Workers’ Revolution,” *Selected Writings of Alexandra Kollontai*, trans. Alix Holt, Motive (London: Allison and Busby, 1977), p. 184.

“[w]ithout God, of course.”²⁰³ Bar Kokhba is also not a pure hero, as despite being afforded strength and majesty through his demise, he is still given a demise in the story. He is still shown as an exemplary Jewish Superman, yet he is not pristine and thus cannot be fully shoehorned.

Selvinsky's Bar Kokhba has similar natural bonafides as Jabotinsky's Herzl that extend beyond his “son of a star” name, with his initial description serving as the antithesis to anti-Semitic portrayals of Jewish men as puny and deficient and making him an idealized lodestar for Jewish self-actualization.

And he was huge, his whole frame filled with might,
As if Leviathan's own nursling splendid.
His wary bowels rumbled in despite,

Within him sinews intertwined upended,
His bushy shoulders' solid slabs extended
Aglow, like a rich fish stew, with a lustrous light.

He dwelt within the realm of trees and boulders.
He spied the eagle's weighted pennons winging.
And to his face the reddish smoke was clinging
That from the ringlets of his ram's fleece smolders.²⁰⁴

The opening line of the poem emphasizes Bar Kokhba's overwhelming physicality, much more overtly than Jabotinsky's Herzl. Unlike Herzl's ideological strength, in this case the strength is both internal and extremely external. The invocation of Leviathan, an ancient and chaotic sea monster, both reinforces this otherworldly physicality and uses the communal Biblical “language” to highlight his credentials. Leviathan is described in Job as near-impossible to be defeated, with scales “shut up together as with a close seal,”²⁰⁵ a heart “as firm as a stone,”²⁰⁶

²⁰³ Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1957), p. 245.

²⁰⁴ Ilya Selvinsky, “Bar Kokhba,” *An Anthology of Jewish-Russian Literature*, ed. Maxim Shrayner, vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 228.

²⁰⁵ Job 41:15

²⁰⁶ Job 41:24

and fire and smoke leaving his mouth and nostrils “as out of a seething pot or cauldron.”²⁰⁷ Most crucially for Bar Kokhba in this poem, “upon earth there is not his like, who is made without fear.”²⁰⁸ Leviathan's presence is noteworthy because he is not only an indefatigable natural and primordial force but is also an oppositional force, in stark contrast to Samson's establishment as a divine experiment. Robert Alter describes Leviathan as blurring the line between mythology and zoology owing to the biblical period's lack of concrete information on the world's creatures, both at once a member of the animal kingdom and beyond it, and “a climax beyond a climax.”²⁰⁹ Leviathan is the ruler of nature just as Bar Kokhba is the revolution writ large, and by casting Leviathan as Bar Kokhba's parentage, the titular hero becomes both of nature and over nature himself. In addition, dominion over nature was a core underpinning of Soviet mythology, with Trotsky heralding the colonization of both internal and external nature as something fostered by the rise of socialism.²¹⁰ Bar Kokhba is showing himself here as not governed by the same ethics as the classical Jewish heroes. His primordial force is not divine but natural, and he is beholden to none but himself, having complete agency over his actions. He does not get filled with the spirit of the Lord when he acts. His earthbound majesty satisfies both Zionist and Soviet visions of masculinity and heroism, both of which desired to create a secularized strength free of religiosity. Indeed, the reference to his body as “aglow, like a rich fish stew” introduces a nurturing and fulfilling quality to his masculinity, pitching him as a necessitated sustenance for a hungry people.

²⁰⁷ Job 41:19-21.

²⁰⁸ Job 41:33.

²⁰⁹ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uvic/detail.action?docID=769482>, pp. 131-133.

²¹⁰ Alla Bolotova, “Colonization of Nature in the Soviet Union. State Ideology, Public Discourse, and the Experience of Geologists,” *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung* 29, no. 3 (2004): p. 110.

Beyond his positioning as a superior man from nature, though, Selvinsky's Bar Kokhba serves to both redeem and repurpose several traits classically associated with Jewish men both from internal and external sources. His reddish hair and beard strike back against ancient non-Jewish biases against red hair from England to Russia, which have them as markers of the demons inside the fires of hell and of Judas.²¹¹ As such, they were associated with Jewry, such as during the Spanish Inquisition when those with red hair were seen as inescapable markers of Judaism.²¹² Yet the reference to his beard as “smoke” also harkens back to Herzl's positioning as a burnt offering to the Jewish people, a reference redoubled in the third stanza when Selvinsky references the Jerusalem holy temple's “sacrificial smoke” and “sacred flame.”²¹³ The allusions to fire are far more overt in “Bar Kokhba” than in “In Memory of Herzl,” being used not only as a sacrificial element but also as an extension of his physical masculinity, destroying the Roman oppression just as it redeems the Jewish people. The most marked departure, however, comes with how he not only dislocates the divine but also actively spurns God in the process of leading the Jewish people. God is only directly mentioned twice in the fifteen stanzas of the poem, and both cases feature Bar Kokhba rejecting the premise that God can help the Jewish people's redemption in the same way that he can. In the third stanza, Selvinsky writes of the holy temple, “And sacred flame, which secret urns embower. // Is it not time Eloheynu awake?”²¹⁴ In the sixth, in the midst of a Bar Kokhba speech, he says, “Now neither God, nor Caesar, nor your leaders // Will save you — shepherds! Plowmen! — from your plight.”²¹⁵ Taken together, they cast God as a passive observer failing to act. It is time for God to awake, yet he does not. God is

²¹¹ Leonid Livak, *The Jewish Persona in the European Imagination: A Case of Russian Literature*, Stanford Studies in Jewish History and Culture (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), p. 90.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Selvinsky, “Bar Kokhba,” p. 229.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid., p. 231.

cited both as someone who *should* lend aid yet is failing to do so, which builds upon a typical Soviet poetic un-religiosity or de-religiosity to echo Bialik's excoriation of the paralyzed Jewish men, in that both reject and even mock the idea of external salvation in favour of internal self-realization. Or put another way: the lack of faith used to exclude Moses from Israel is now seen as a virtue for the suffering Israelites. Yet this faith is still seen as a touchstone and framing for the discourse rather than completely negated altogether, which tracks with the tendency of my chosen Jewish-Russian authors to use references to the divine and the Torah to create a common vocabulary of Jewishness, making it not quite the ideal Trotskyist atheist poem for the Soviet Union. God is dismissed yet not discarded or ignored altogether. While God may be insufficient, the language of the Torah is not.

As with Jabotinsky's Herzl, Bar Kokhba steps into a more deity-esque role to inspire the Jewish people, yet goes a step further by refusing to cite God as his source. He manages to take the language of the faithful and fully place himself as the target of the faith. As such, he makes himself the hyper-masculine saviour the Jewish people need to emulate.

He bellowed to his tribe from his watchtower,
 And saying thus unto his nation spake:
 "Beware, Yehudi! This jet black daybreak
 Foretells that war on cliffs and vales will flower.

Aflame as if a tree unburnt for sake
 Of faith, I won't desert our sacred bower—
 Against these fattened swine I'll lead the fight,

So grave dust on the goyim we'll be pouring.
 Now flock, you eagles clamoring and soaring.
Sh'ma Israel! Now the final hour's in sight!²¹⁶

The text is laden with biblical references and Jewishness, whether the tree unburnt hearkening back to Moses's unburnt bush in Exodus or the reference to their opposition as

²¹⁶ Ibid., p. 230.

“goyim,” or non-Jews. In addition, the Romans are referred to as “fattened swine,” casting them as an unkosher animal waiting to be slaughtered. The idea of the Roman opposition being not only oppressors but also spiritually impure reverses the classical anti-Semitic interpretation of the Jewish people being spiritual pollutants and diet-based insults against Jews, placing them on their oppressors' heads instead.²¹⁷ Most significant is the Hebrew invocation of “sh'ma Israel,” or “Hear, O Israel,” a direct quote from Deuteronomy and a direct quote from God that also serves as the opening line for a Jewish prayer. Indeed, throughout this passage Bar Kokhba makes a claim for the position traditionally occupied by God; the tribe is “his” tribe and the nation is “his” nation, he is leading the revolution, and he is the one calling out “Hear, O Israel” rather than God. The ability to bellow commands to an entire nation reinforces his supreme strength, and by calling the Jewish people “you eagles,” he is granting them a piece of the naturalist superpowers with which he was imbued. Unlike Samson, who serves as an avatar of the divine operating in place of the Jewish warriors, Bar Kokhba lifts up the Jewish people alongside him by exhorting his people to follow his example. Like Jabotinsky's Herzl, he uses his voice to summon the Jewish people to his mission, yet unlike Herzl his message is explicitly secularized and militaristic. For both, their masculine strength and foregrounding makes them ideal exemplars.

There are no condemned Jewish figures, or even condemned Jewish experiences such as the diasporic exile, against whom Bar Kokhba is highlighted. Any binary has given way to a totalizing praised masculinity. Bar Kokhba is pitched as an unparalleled motivational figure who is able to rally the Jewish people to his side with no resistance. Similarly to Jabotinsky, the experience of bondage is pitched as the opposition to Jewish self-realization, but unlike in “In Memory of Herzl,” the exilic experience is pitched less as the fault of the Jewish people and

²¹⁷ Livak, *The Jewish Persona*, p. 32.

more a consequence of their oppressors' nefarious actions. If any men are to be condemned for their actions by the poem, they would be Roman ones and all those who enabled them, mirroring the excoriation of the bourgeoisie in early Soviet poetry. This is a collectivist victory. The poem takes care to mention that “all husbands, elders, stripling boys, // Their brothers, grandsons, maidens with persuasion, // All whet their swords, new honed by trees' abrasion, // On Rome, on those who for a portal's ploys // Betrayed their homeland and their hovel's joys, // On those who hide their sons in fear and cower.”²¹⁸ Selvinsky gives every Jewish individual agency and a sword in their hands, and delineates their opposition very clearly: the “Roman yoke” which was placed over them. Unlike in Bialik, the fear illustrated here is not a fear of their oppressors but rather a fear of the resurgent power of the Jews. As mentioned above, the Romans are referred to in unflattering terms of excess, whether as fattened swine or calling Roman displeasure “epicurean.”²¹⁹ It bears the implication that Bar Kokhba and the Jews carry a cause (emancipation) whereas the Romans fight only for a gluttonous form of control. Bar Kokhba's preferred masculinity bears implications beyond the Jewish context, for the lesson applied within this contrast speaks to more than just Jewish issues. A dramatic class struggle is supremely relevant within the purview of early Soviet poetry, and the historic Jewish struggle against the upper-class Romans fits neatly within this motif.²²⁰ It resembles the steadfast ideological purity of Balmashev and the Cossacks in *Red Cavalry*, in that both are called to action at least superficially by ideological patriotism and pride.

Just as with Samson, Bar Kokhba experiences his own death at the end of his tale. Unlike with Samson, Bar Kokhba is allowed to retain his majesty and superiority through his own death;

²¹⁸ Selvinsky, “Bar Kokhba,” p. 231.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 230.

²²⁰ A particularly explicit example of this would be Vladimir Mayakovsky's immediate post-Revolutionary poetry, much of which trumpeted the success of the Russian proletariat at overthrowing the capitalist world order.

he is absolved of responsibility in his own demise and retains his role as leader and inspiration postmortem. If Samson's death is a consequence of misused masculinity, Bar Kokhba's is a consequence of him being too successful at his Jewish revitalization. In this regard he is far more similar to Jabotinsky's Herzl than Samson; while he isn't as vivid a martyr for his cause as Herzl, the ninth and tenth stanzas are dedicated to the Roman response to Bar Kokhba. Like with Bar Kokhba himself and similar to the contemporary Zionist movement, the Roman emperor elevates Bar Kokhba's credibility by comparing him to Jewish revolutionaries of years past, giving him in-text a workable, non-deistic history to draw upon and burnish his own standard.²²¹ These also make Bar Kokhba's revolution a success rather than a failure, as he has accomplished his goal of making the Romans aware of the power and potential of the Jewish forces. The tenth stanza emphasizes his physical and personal enormity, as it dedicates itself to listing off the eleven named peoples dispatched to put down the Bar Kokhba revolt: Romans, Gauls, Etruscans, Alans, Noricumians, Carians, Cimbri, Basques, Scythians, Corfians, and Parthians,²²² whose homelands spanned from as far east as modern-day Pakistan and as far west as modern-day France. The invocation of all of these nations serves to highlight the magnitude of Bar Kokhba's motivational power and by extension his Supermasculine magnetism; it implies that only a supernatural force can take down this hero of the common people, and showcases his ability to create a proletarian army worthy of a disproportionate response. Bar Kokhba is seen as a force of fearful admiration both for Jews and non-Jews, yet the non-Jews find themselves unable to join him, a complete reversal of historical anti-Semitic values excluding Jewish figures from the minority. Indeed, they are excluded on a similar physical and moral basis as the Jews were from traditional Western heroism, and they betray their own fear and weakness by sending disproportionately

²²¹ Selvinsky, "Bar Kokhba," p. 232.

²²² *Ibid.*, p. 233.

large forces to combat a local rebellion. Not only that but the opposition is described as “savage races” with “lupine faces,” a repurposing of the exclusionary rhetoric used against Jewish figures. Historically, Jewish figures had been associated with dogs and wolves, particularly in Russia where dogs were banned in sacred spaces.²²³ In this case, the majority Romans are the wolves. This is a complete and utter shattering of anti-Semitic paradigms in the strongest and most direct possible terms, and a dramatic reshuffling of historical gender roles.

This picture is complicated by the actions leading directly to Bar Kokhba's death: he is undone by a beautiful and deceitful woman, not only an echo of Samson's demise but also an event not at all reminiscent of the prolonged siege leading to the actual Jewish revolutionary's own demise. Lucilia, the wife of the Roman praetor Julius, is sent to woo Bar Kokhba and distract him enough to allow the sneak attack to proceed without a hitch. She succeeds, as Bar Kokhba “[loses] his mind in winsome joy's embraces,”²²⁴ ensuring that he is unable to armour himself in time to save his life. He is not a perfected martyr in the way that Jabotinsky's Herzl was; he loses his life at least partially due to his own flaw, rather than a form of divine misfortune. Despite this, Bar Kokhba retains all of his masculine glory through his death.

A shaggy giant, he was immolated,
Pierced by a feathered knife in duskiness
But as his fitful deathbed throes abated
With one hand's grasp he bared his girlfriend's breast.²²⁵

The sacrificial, burnt offering rhetoric introduced both in Jabotinsky's Herzl and earlier in this poem crops up again, as he is “immolated” by the same fire used to burn the Roman yoke off the shoulders of his people. Just as Herzl burned himself to keep the Jewish dream afloat, a light in the darkness, Bar Kokhba's task was so herculean that his effort would by necessity result

²²³ Livak, *The Jewish Persona*, p. 74.

²²⁴ Selvinsky, “Bar Kokhba,” p. 234.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

in his sacrifice, a giant offering to the greater Jewish good. While burnt offerings are prominent in Jewish thought, self-sacrifice is a far more prominent concept in Christian philosophy than Jewish, with the sacrifice of the self only condoned in cases of immorality and sinning rather than to uplift a nation or advance ideals.²²⁶ Much of the Russian revolutionary imagery derives from this tradition. His last post-sacrificial and pre-mortem act is used to reinforce his masculinity via sexual mastery, in a way which hearkens back to the Red Cossacks' demands that Lyutov “rough up a woman” to gain acceptance. He uses one hand to bare her breast, showing the ease of the action for him, and exposes Lucilia in a way that emphasizes his dominion over her even after she had outwitted him. He essentially reclaims the vulnerability forced upon him by his own death. The narrative shades her aphrodisia, not her cunning, as the reason for Bar Kokhba's defeat, and his exposure of her breasts elucidates both her lack of identity beyond this, and his complete control over said identity. Of course, even in death, Bar Kokhba is afforded the role of supreme aphrodisiac.

The matron's ears were deaf to all that night...
 She dreamt about the musk scent of her lover,
 The tawny fur, his tousled chest's thick cover—
 And he was huge, his whole frame filled with might.²²⁷

Lucilia, who was sent by her husband to con Bar Kokhba, winds up completely enraptured by the man whom she only knew for one night. Jewish characters are very rarely seen as sexually desirable, much less more sexually desirable than a non-Jewish military leader. His musk and tawny fur reinforce his primal, hyper-masculine nature and are in contrast to her husband and the remainder of the Romans' glossy arms. If the idealized, classical Jewish male exists in opposition to the sexually aggressive hypermale, as Boyarin argues in *Unheroic*

²²⁶ Leah Whittington discusses the Christian concept in her article “Vergil's Nisus and the Language of Self-Sacrifice in *Paradise Lost*” (*Modern Philology*, 2010). Of note: the self-sacrifice is pitched as a central act of heroism.

²²⁷ Selvinsky, “Bar Kokhba,” p. 235.

Conduct,²²⁸ then Bar Kokhba subverts that on every level. By emphasizing his size, Bar Kokhba is again shown as having dominion over both Lucilia's material world and emotional world. He is able to overwhelm his deceiver even through his physical death; it indicates that the groundswell he inspired is far from departing the Roman consciousness. With this, Bar Kokhba cements his place as the ultimate self-made Jewish Superman: his body is as strong as the natural forces imbued in it and subverts anti-Semitic stereotypes, his aggression rallies the Jewish people into demolishing their oppressors, his potent sexuality is irresistible even to his enemies, he is a victim only of his own success, and even through his death, he has complete control over friend and foe alike. By exhibiting his specifically Jewish brand self-determination Bar Kokhba is not only a superior warrior but also a superior lover. The old Talmudic binary is gone.

Selvinsky's Bar Kokhba pushes the Jewish Superman archetype to its zenith, carrying his performance of masculinity farther than Jabotinsky's Herzl did his. Part of this is an issue of narrative perspective as while both are central characters in their respective epic poems "Bar Kokhba" more clearly tells a story in a way that "In Memory of Herzl" does not, providing fundamental differences in their characterizations. In addition, "Herzl" is written from the perspective of a follower, whereas "Bar Kokhba" is told from the general's own perspective. Yet even beyond this, they are presented as two different variations on a similar theme. Jabotinsky's Herzl is not afforded any flaws or faults, with his masculinity "undoubted" in the vein of Steinman's Burt Reynolds argument, and is almost more of a monument than a man. Herzl's example is presented as a message or song rather than a sequence of actions, and his flawless example is presented in contrast to the flawed diasporic experience. Herzl's *values* are the instruction manual for Jewish emancipation. Herzl is depicted post-mortem, not unlike Bar

²²⁸ Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. xii.

Kokhba, yet never has a light shone on his pre-mortem thoughts. His struggle and the rightness of his values are seen as a *fait accompli*: he's never challenged, his work has a divine and directly inspirational purpose, and his opposition is internal rather than external. It exists in the abstract rather than the specific, and Herzl himself does not rage against it. Rather, the rage is on the part of the narrator, who applies overt significance to Herzl's performance. A direct line is drawn from Herzl's steadfastness to the eventual emancipation of the Jewish people.

In contrast, Selvinsky's Bar Kokhba is allowed to be imperfect while still retaining his masculine energy and, most importantly, his aspirational position at the head of the Jewish people. Unlike Herzl, who is almost emotionless in the Jabotinsky poem, Bar Kokhba carries the rage and impetus of Jewish liberation within his own actions. He gets “drunk with battle glut”²²⁹ and he loses his life due to a sexual act, lending an image of a man able to fall prey to his own impulses. Yet these impulses or impurities are spun into victories: his intoxication on the field of battle leads to his overthrowing of the Roman yoke, and as mentioned above, he retains physical and sexual majesty over Lucilia after she outwits him. Bar Kokhba's ideology is still the prized ideology, but it is less of a matter of fact statement than Herzl's. It comes *from* him *for* his people and is reflected by *his* actions, with Bar Kokhba less of a channel for something greater and more of the something greater himself. His masculinity and his Jewishness are held as the antithesis to timid non-Jewishness, and his liberation is a consequence of divine lack of attention, rather than a manifestation of overarching social/cultural/religious legacy. Unlike with Jabotinsky's Herzl, Bar Kokhba's masculinity is more of a performance or expression than an ideological statement. His will and his masculinity are the lodestars for the Jewish people. He and Herzl are equally indefatigable with their emancipatory mission, both hewing to Leon Pinsker's vision of auto-emancipation as the way forward for the Jewish people.

²²⁹ Selvinsky, “Bar Kokhba,” p. 232.

These two Jewish Supermen provide different perspectives on the archetype, yet they ultimately reflect the same core concepts. Both present a man with “undoubtable” masculinity as a vehicle for emancipatory ideology; assign their heroes physical strength in a way anti-Semitic thinkers would see as impossible for a Jew; place their heroes in a leadership role traditionally occupied by the divine; speak to and condemn the helplessness of the Jewish people in the face of minority status; and present themselves as a singular, motivational force. Most importantly, both reflect the ideological and emotional shifts within the early twentieth century Jewish community. The Jewish Superman bears a different character than that of the Assimilatory Jews highlighted in the previous chapter, for rather than following an example, these Jewish men *are* the example. They produce a model of gender that is not questioning or hesitant, allowing male readers to aspire to a measure of security and safety not provided by the Assimilatory model. While these two characters based on history are far from identical in methods and attitudes, and the two poems afford them differing shades of masculinity, both serve to prove that Jewish men were capable of being a “real” man.

V. CONCLUSION

This Master's thesis began by identifying an inconsistency within the literature in the historically praised elements of Jewish masculinity, during a turbulent and change-filled period in Jewish-Russian history. Leading up to the early twentieth century, Jewish literary male heroes had been imbued with a certain set of characteristics by their writers: gentility, humility, scholarliness, and faith in God. These values were often installed via a good Jew-bad Jew binary: the good Jew would be rewarded by the text with reassurance, power, glory, or favour, whereas the bad Jew would be scorned, excluded, or otherwise diminished in the text. Yet in the early twentieth century, ranging from the pogroms of 1903 through the Russian Civil War ending in 1922, the texts radically reoriented this vision and flipped it on its head. Gentility, humility, scholarliness, and faith were discarded as a value system in favour of personal strength, violence both physical and sexual, and God was replaced in value systems with human activity and impulse. These literary changes operated in concert with myriad changes within a secularizing Jewish community. The 1905 October Manifesto afforded increased Jewish political opportunities, including a presence for Jewish parties within the new State Duma, and members of the Jewish-Russian community became active both in early Zionist and Russian revolutionary circles. Both ideologies encouraged Jewish men to occupy a position of strong leadership, which they hadn't been privy to before, preaching similar values for their idealized men.

I have taken a look at five separate texts, grouping them to illustrate three different elements of this shift in masculinity. The first two works, Sholem Aleichem's *Tevye* cycle (1894 to 1914) and H.N. Bialik's poem "In the City of Slaughter" (1903) exhibit a burgeoning sense of "Jewish Shame," or the idea that the classical attributes associated with Jewish men were no longer sufficient for the contemporary moment. Bialik's poem excoriates the Jewish men who

failed to intervene when the pogromists raped their wives and daughters, and chides them for their weakness. One who is gentle and scholarly is a bad Jew in a landscape of horror devoid of good Jewish men. The *Tevye* cycle is far more sympathetic to its titular hero, yet illustrates a world shifting around Tevye, which deprives him of his agency and declares him no longer fit for centrality in communal decision-making. At the start of the cycle, his biblical quotes and humility help situate him as the moral centre of his family, able to weigh in on whether or not his daughter's marriage is the proper one and help her achieve her wishes. In the final story, "Tevye Goes to Palestine," Tevye is excluded entirely from his daughter's marriage and exiled to Palestine, reasoning that his mere presence in the contemporary Russian world was improper. He goes from the central good Jew to the ostracized bad Jew over the course of the series, without changing his behaviour or morals.

The second and third sections name two models for these reconstituted masculinities: the Assimilatory Jew and the Jewish Superman. The Assimilatory Jew is most prominent in Isaac Babel's *Red Cavalry* cycle, released throughout the early 1920's; it relies on the assumption that Jewish men will always be weak outsiders, with the only way to gain even temporary respect and agency coming when imitating the behaviours and mores of the Red Cossack majority. *Red Cavalry's* Jewish characters are passive, forceless, and perpetual victims, and its Jewish protagonist Kirill Lyutov is unable to fully conceal his identity and integrate with his unit. The Jewish Superman appears in Vladimir Jabotinsky's 1904 poem "In Memory of Herzl" and Ilya Selvinsky's 1920 "Bar Kokhba." In these, the titular heroes' masculinity is inextricable from their Judaism, and rather than following an external behavioural example as with the Assimilatory Jews, they create a behavioural standard and use it as motivational for their entire nations. The two models share many commonalities: both see the experience of Jewish passivity in the

diaspora as something to be avoided, both glorify their hypermasculine heroes whether Jewish or Soviet, and both preach the insufficiency of prayer or faith to solve their issues while still acknowledging a connection to the historical tradition of Judaism or the Cossack name. The key difference comes in the source of the models' malaise in the Jewish status quo: the Assimilatory Jew model posits that Jewishness is the issue, whereas the Jewish Supermen scorn the exilic presence of the community instead. Both also represent a profound reorientation from classical Jewish masculinity.

The works of all three chapters combine to present a newer picture of intragender relations, ones that exemplify both the ideological and activist turn in early twentieth century Russian Jewry and the transitory nature of the implementation of these ideologies. Thinkers such as Max Nordau, Leon Trotsky, Alexandra Kollontai, and Leon Pinsker sought to define a new age of humanity, nation, and identity in a way which hadn't been before, and this jolt of common conversation led to a more pointed expression of masculinity than had been in the literature before. Yet due to the turbulence and uncertainty of the early twentieth century, with all of these works being crafted prior to the calcification of socialist realism, any attempts to elucidate a unified sense of "gender truth" and "gender falsity" only showcase the flexibility of any notion of gender truth. Lyutov flits somewhere on the spectrum between the twin poles of "the strong Cossack" and "the weak Jew," occupying different places based on his own performances of his Judaism and his masculinity; Herzl and Bar Kokhba both occupy similar pseudo-divine loci in their own stories, yet Herzl is noticeably more perfected and idealized than Bar Kokhba, who was written during the period of more pronounced ideological conversation; Tevye never loses his praise and sympathy even while losing his agency in-text, while *Red Cavalry's* Ghedali exists further along the same axis of Tevye, having already lost all but his name; Bialik's faceless men

are both the perpetrators of Jewish shame and its eventual salvation. There is no one harmonized understanding of this masculinity, yet all presuppose a changing masculinity and all attempt to dig at the nuances of these new masculinities.

These works have also had wildly varying levels of scholarship: *Red Cavalry* has spawned a great body of work, yet there is a complete paucity of sources on Selvinsky's *Bar Kokhba*. By taking such a wide breadth for my examination and putting works in concert that have not necessarily been analyzed against each other before, I have attempted to showcase this new Jewish masculinity as not merely being a factor of one dominant ideology. These literary heroic traits transcend political lines and speak to a larger sense of community anima. These authors have reconstituted the oppositional Biblical morality and dissolved it, assigning the characteristics of the historical “bad Jew” as praiseworthy in the contemporary and vice versa. That this shift crossed so many intra-community lines makes the research all the more rife for new directions. Future analyses could research the roles of femininity within the same works, whether or not this newfound masculine shift existed in central European- or American-Jewish literature, and the evolution and future dissolution of the hypermasculine Jew model within the Jewish-Russian tradition. By doing so, one may be able to fully grasp the scope and scale of these bold new Jews.

It would be a mistake to assume that the commonalities within these five works represent homogeneity. Despite all being written by Jewish-Russian authors, the works diverge in meaningful ways beyond their chosen model of Jewish masculinity. While several of the works were distributed in translation between these languages, the three languages chosen for the original texts—Russian, Yiddish, and Hebrew—each connote an authorial ideological statement, whether intended to or not. Bialik’s Hebrew “City of Slaughter” plays on the tendency of the

Hebrew canon to use flowering, biblical language and crafts a top-down assignation of masculinity, with the poet telling the Jewish men they were insufficient, hearkening back to the status of Hebrew as a language used and prized by elites. Sholem Aleichem's Yiddish *Tevye* cycle features no scolding nor moralizing, only a presentation of men and women navigating their milieus, a perfect encapsulation of the working-class, human-focused reputation of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Yiddish literature. The three Russian texts all pay service to ideals external to the Jewish community, and two served as journalists before or during their literary career. All three, in some sense, reflect a conversation with non-Jewish ideals in the construction of Jewish ones. These works were also penned by writers on all points of the political spectrum, ranging from ardent Zionist leader Jabotinsky to proud Bolshevik revolutionary Babel to the mostly apolitical Sholem Aleichem.

An equally rich and fulsome analysis could be constructed by digging at the unique intersections of these three literatures and the turbulent political climate, yet I have found myself much more interested in the commonalities between the five texts than their difference, of which there are numerous. At their core, they all contain a similar impetus: a deep malaise about the present state of the Jewish community in Russia. They do not share the same dissatisfactions—Bialik and Babel may not agree with Sholem Aleichem's remorse at the loss of the *Tevyes* of the world—but all are responding to a sense of lacking in the community. All, too, identify a newly existing or the desired existence of a new sort of masculinity, one based on the discarding of the divine and the praise of physical strength and self-sufficiency. These new men may or may not have been wanted, though most of these writers praised the rise of the new men, but all recognized they were coming. The central question for them all, as Leon Pinsker addressed so neatly in his 1882 pamphlet, is that of emancipation for the Jewish people and what it would look

like. Would it be based on fully assimilating into Russian society and performing their behaviour at the possible expense of one's Jewishness, as *Red Cavalry* claimed? Would it reside on tapping into the hypermasculine heroes of Jewish lore in an attempt to find a core of strength within one's own Jewish character? Or would it be a reason to lament all we have lost, per Sholem Aleichem's estimation? These texts may differ on their answers, yet they all address the same question, same society, and use the same backlog of history and legacy as their guide.

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