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Jiddistik heute

Yiddish Studies Today

ייִדיש ‧ אויסגאַבעס און פֿאָרשונג

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Der vorliegende Sammelband לקט eröffnet eine neue Reihe wissenschaftlicher Studien zur Jiddistik sowie philologischer Editionen und Studienausgaben jiddischer Literatur. Jiddisch, Englisch und Deutsch stehen als Publikationssprachen gleichberechtigt nebeneinander.

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ייִדיש ℘ אויסגאַבעס און פֿאָרשונג

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Herausgegeben von Marion Aptroot, Efrat Gal-Ed,
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Band 1

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Jordan Finkin

The Consolation of Sadness
The Curious Exile of Dovid Hofshteyn's *Troyer*

Dovid Hofshteyn's poetic cycle טרויער (Sadness; 1922) was written –
or, more properly, given that the majority of its poems were written
and published separately prior to 1922, assembled – as a response to
the devastating anti-Jewish violence of 1919–1920.[1] At the time of its
conception, Hofshteyn was in Malakhovka, a refuge for orphans of
the violence and a waystation for Yiddish writers, and undertook the
preparation of טרויער in collaboration with Marc Chagall, who was liv-
ing in Malakhovka at the time. The resulting dramatic modernist text,
the proceeds of which were earmarked for the support of the orphans,
presents a vivid and fragmented depiction of the aftermath of the vio-
lence in eleven poems of varied form and perspective, including cal-
ligrams, nature poems, Expressionist lyrics, long modernist associative
rambles, and tours of the smoldering shtetl. Unlike the big-voiced pro-
test of other contemporary pogromologies – though no less anguished
for it – טרויער achieves its emotional ends through a less nightmarish
and more "subtle" vocabulary of pain.[2] Though Seth Wolitz has written
two important articles on the art and artistry of טרויער,[3] it has otherwise
received very little contemporary scholarly attention. This essay seeks
to remedy that situation. As I think Wolitz rightly opines, the germinal
core of טרויער consisted of three poems published in the second volume
of the literary miscellany אייגנס in Kiev in 1921. Appearing under the
collective heading *Tristia*, in Latin type, the poems present the somber
and ominous existence of Jews forced into the role of prey-like victims
of violence and epochal rupture. The reference to Ovid in the title is
pivotal, I suggest – far more so than the few brief references to it in the
literature might indicate.[4] *Tristia* (Sad Things) is the title of a book of
elegiac poems which Ovid wrote after he was exiled to Tomis (pres-
ent-day Constanţa in Romania) on the Black Sea after falling afoul of

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1   The literature here is robust. See for example the relevant portions of Novershtern 2003;
Roskies 1999; Mintz 1984; as well as Wolitz 1987: 56–72; Koller 2010: 105–122.
2   One critic notes Hofshteyn's "grimly silent, deceptively dispassionate and seeming
philosophical observations [...]" (Kerler 1998: 178). While I do not find this evaluation ac-
curate, its intuition of a distinction in Hofshteyn's diction, imagery, and technique is valid.
3   Wolitz 1995–1996: 95–115; Wolitz 1997: 111–129.
4   See, for example, Wolitz 1997: 114.

Emperor Augustus. For their pathos, pain, ire, resentment, and overall psychological and literary complexity, the poems of Ovid's Tristia have long captivated readers as some of the most compelling literary depictions of the exilic mind. His insights have been a particular source of inspiration to modernist poets. Hofshteyn not only gestures to Ovid in the title of the poems in אייגנס – and in a converted form in the echoing word טרויער – but also adopts an Ovid-inflected persona: "the poet as exiled protagonist."[5] As I will argue, however, one of Hofshteyn's radical revisions of Ovid is to present that exile not as an exile from homeland (expatrial exile), but as exile in homeland (intrapatrial exile). This is the state that Hofshteyn describes so devastatingly.

Consolatio ad Exulem

The dominant linking figure in the expanded cycle of טרויער is that of the devastation of Ukraine as seen through the window of a train by one of its native Jews. This perspective of fractured and dynamically shifting images has its counterpart in the modernist mechanics of the verse itself and in the accompanying artwork by Chagall.[6] Wolitz sees a larger structural dynamic at work in the orchestration of the chaotic fragments, in effect a chiasm, nascent in *Tristia* and brought into sharper focus in טרויער, with its hinge or pivot in the concept of "abyss" (אָפּגרונט) in the sixth poem, אין פֿאַלן (In Falling). Schematically, the chiasm runs (in Wolitz's analysis): "order/chaos//chaos/hoped-for-order."[7] It is less "order," however, that occupies the final position in both poems than a kind of consolation. This is one of the strongest points of consonance between טרויער and Ovid's work.

One of Ovid's innovations in his *Tristia* was a revision of the traditional genre of *consolatio ad exulem*, or 'consolation of an exile.' His *khidesh* presented a 'self-consolation' and a mythologization of his exilic persona, which in many ways flout the traditional conventions of the philosophical genre, and in which "[…] Ovid sets a paradigm for the literary treatment of the hopes, fears and vicissitudes of political displacement. Hereby he fixed many of the conventions of exilic poetry, for example the stereotyped bleakness of the place of exile, the metaphor of exile as death, and the mythologizing of the central, lonely

5   Claassen 1999: 24.
6   This essay will not deal with Chagall's artwork, but Wolitz's article (Wolitz 1995–1996: 95–115) gives the most synthetic presentation of the composite text. For the image of modernist fragments in the poem see Wolitz 1997: 114–118.
7   Wolitz 1997: 116.

figure of the exile."[8] *Mutatis mutandis*, this description could also serve as an eerily accurate characterization of the poems of טרויער. However, within the fulcrum poem, "In Falling," Hofshteyn has not described a Jewish existence utterly consumed by the gaping abyss, but offers a poetic consolation of sorts, a way of beginning to convert טרויער (mourning, sadness) into טרייסט (consolation). The central image of the poem describes a hunter wounding and indeed killing a white fox on the Ukrainian snows. The image of Jewish victimization needs little elaboration here. Given the biblical resonance of the cycle as a whole, the choice of the fox takes on a threnodial complexion. Not only in Ezekiel (13:4)[9] but also in Lamentations (5:18), the fox is the haunter of ruins. How much starker a visual contrast could there be than that between the white fox upon the white snow, with little black eyes and leaking red drops of blood?[10] The red blood drops in turn act as a legible text,[11] the text of a poem Hofshteyn himself is inscribing. Moreover,[12]

נאָר טרייסט איז פֿאַר קיינעם	But consolation is not forbidden
אויף ערד ניט פֿאַרבאָטן!	To anyone on earth!
פֿאַר פֿיקסל אַזוינעם,	For such a little fox
וואָס האָט ניט געוואָלט,	Who had not wanted it
און האָט פֿאָרט זיי צעשאָטן,	And for all that had scattered them,
די בלוטיקע טראָפֿנס,	The bloody drops
אויף זויבער פֿון שנייען,	On the cleanness of the snows,
איז אויך נאָך אַ טרייסט דאָ פֿאַראַנען, –	There is also yet a consolation, –

Though still inchoate, the cycle will go on to provide the rudimentary prescription for this consolation through a process of mythologizing.

A conventional example of the *consolatio ad exulem* genre normally takes the form of a second-person discourse, addressed to the person in exile (e.g., a letter). The Ovidian self-consolation deploys first-person as well as second-person devices. In Jo-Marie Claassen's account of Ovid's techniques, "To the degree that we have distinguished creative poet [...] and suffering exile [...] we may see Ovid's pervasive first person narrative as a form of impersonalised mythologising. Each allusion to a mythical hero recalls an encapsulated tale. In that sense the exilic poems have an extensive subtext of untold narratives that re-

8   Claassen 1999: 22, 30f.
9   Wolitz 1995–1996: 100.
10   Hofshteyn 1922: 14–16.
11   "And your poem will be so free and clean / like bloody drops / upon the snows [...]" (Ibid.: 14).
12   Ibid.: 16. All translations from Hofshteyn, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

late to dispossession and alienation."[13] Hofshteyn's modernist sensibilities orchestrate the tensions of this "dispossession and alienation" in a similar deployment of the first and second persons. Hofshteyn's swing to consolation takes place in the next poem (the seventh), קינדער-שפּרוך (Children's Incantation). As Wolitz notes, "The poetic voice reflects the dualism witnessed about. The first-person voice is splintered between the 'I,' which presents itself in its present decentered and dislocated insecurity, and its 'Other,' often addressed in the second person singular 'You' as either the past self (Poem 7) or the objectivised self."[14] It is tempting to hear an echo here of a similar tension in Pushkin. One of Hofshteyn's favorite poets,[15] Pushkin penned a poem "*K Ovidyu*" (To Ovid) with which Hofshteyn was surely familiar. The poem was written during Pushkin's own internal exile to the southern parts of the Russian empire, not too distant from Ovid's own place of banishment. Stephanie Sandler notes a "rhetorical equivocation" in the text "between apostrophe and self-address, between dialogue and soliloquy,"[16] which echoes the tensions in the poem between Pushkin's simultaneous identification with Ovid and drawing of essential distinctions between himself and the ancient poet. Where Ovid ultimately sought eternal fame through his poetry (though proximally seeking an easing of his punishment from Augustus), Pushkin published his poem only anonymously.[17] As we will see, Hofshteyn's consolatory mode is neither the immortality of fame nor Romantic anonymity, but conscious artistic memorialization and collective ethical action.

Returning to the mythic discourse, from a technical point of view biblical allusions and epigraphs serve as both the analog to the Ovidian self-mythologization as exile and the engine of Hofshteyn's consolatory discourse. The two epigraphs to "Children's Incantation" point to the despair-to-hope trajectory of the work as a whole:[18]

13   Claassen 1999:70.
14   Wolitz 1997:120.
15   Sherman 2007:106.
16   Sandler 1989:47.
17   See Sandler 1989:51–54.
18   Hofshteyn 1922:17. Hofshteyn's citation of Isaiah 25:8 differs slightly from the text.

אסור לקראת...   It is forbidden to read...
בנביאים וכתובים   Prophets and Writings,
ומותר לקראת באיוב...   but permitted to read Job...
(דיני אבילות)   (Laws of Mourning)

·   ·   ·   ·   ·

בלע המות לנצח   He will destroy death forever,
ומחה אדני דמעה מכל־פנים...   And God will wipe away tears   from every face...
(ישעיה כ״ה)   (Isaiah 25)

We note the interesting irony that simply to read the second epigraph, from the prophet Isaiah, is in direct opposition to the law of mourning cited immediately before it. This confounds and denies any religious content to the consolation. That is another reason why the central intertext of this poem is not vatic, but rather is Job.[19]

מײַן טרייסט איז איז אין דעם מיר אין באַשטאַנען,   My consolation consisted in the fact that
וואָס ערגעץ אַ לאַנד אַזאַ עוץ איז פֿאַראַנען,   There was such a land as Utz,
וואָס דאָרט האָט געוווינט אַ מאַן איוב,   Where there lived a man named Job,
און דאָ אָט, אין שטאָט, וואָס הייסט קיִעוו,   And right here, in this city called Kiev,
מיט יאָרן מיט טויזנטער שפּעטער,   Thousands of years later,
געמישט האָב איך גלאַטינקע בריטישע בלעטער,   I turned the smoothish British pages
                                                             [of a prayerbook],
אָט דאָרט, ווו פֿון איובֿ אין זיי איז פֿאַרשריבן...   Right there where in them is written
                                                             down about Job...

In the fourth poem of the cycle, Hofshteyn evokes a different biblical landscape. מײַן לאַנד he says, was a beautiful valley אין גליל. The tokens of the life of Jesus (son of אַ ייִדישע מאַמע) in Ukraine – the crosses on the churches – torment the Jewish traveler.[20] In this spatial mapping of Ukraine and Galilee, the 'here' is unstable. This identification of Ukraine with Galilee is found, however, in the pre-consolatory half of the chiasm. Its counterpart in the consolatory half is the connection of Ukraine with Job's land of Utz made in the passage above. In Ukraine-Galilee there is torment, crucifixion, and pogrom. In Ukraine-Utz, however, Job suffers at the hands of God, in whom he finds recourse and from whom he receives his ultimate consolation. (How like Ovid's continued pleas – alternately laudatory, plaintive, and *kvetching* – to Augustus, whom Ovid regularly portrays as an avatar of Jove, for clemency and even repatriation!)

19   Hofshteyn 1922: 18.
20   Ibid.: 10.

A different Joban theme is brought into stark relief, however, when one compares טרויער to its core sequence in Hofshteyn's *Tristia*, in which Job is deployed to up the ante on the Ovidian tropes of exilic trauma. Ovid's mythologization of the poet-as-exile, drawing upon a vast array of mythological similes for his own condition, has its counterpart in Hofshteyn's use of Job. And how the echo reverberates when Ovid, in his inversion of his birthday poem,[21] (*Tristia* III.13) writes:

> My birthday god's here again, on time – and superfluous:
>   what good did I get from being born?[22]

A Jewish reader cannot but think of the beginning of Job's lament in chapter 3: "Perish the day on which I was born and the night it was announced 'A man has been conceived'" (Job 3:3).

Ovid's complaints, constant and bitter, focus on the unbearableness of his physical, spatial dislocation: both being in the inhospitable, inclement barbarian wilderness and not being in Rome. That is why the exile-as-death image recurs so often in that work. Hofshteyn, however, claims that his reality is far worse, and, through his use of Job, intimates an exile-in-homeland. Neither the pains of frigid winter nor the threat of barbarian assaults on the lonely Roman outpost can match the actual communal slaughter at the hands of erstwhile neighbors so stinging to Hofshteyn.

Looking at the epigraph to Hofshteyn's *Tristia* we find the kernel of both lament and consolation which is curiously downplayed – but not erased – in טרויער. The dedication to טרויער, incorporated into a design by Chagall, reads „אַלע פֿאַר דער צײַט פֿאַרשניטענע" (All those cut down before their time), with an epigraph taken from "In Falling": "I do not demand, / I only ask..." This rhetoricizing gesture replaces the earlier dedication from *Tristia*: "*Ale far der tsayt farshnitene gevidmet*" ("*umibsori ekheze eloya*" Job 19) (Dedicated to all those cut down before their time" ["But in my flesh I will see God" Job 19:26]).[23] The context of chapter 19 in Job is central to Hofshteyn's use of the citation. In the previous chapter, Job's so-called friend and would-be consoler Bildad has concluded a screed against the wicked, which is but a thinly veiled accusation that Job is complicit in his own misfortune in spurning the wise counsels of his friends. Job then complains both that his friends torment him and that God has authored such a series of cruel punishments:[24]

21   The genethliacon genre; see the note on this text by Peter Green (Ovid 2005:251f).
22   Ovid 2005:61.
23   Hofshteyn 1920:44.
24   Tanakh 1985:1365. All translations from Job are from this JPS translation.

אַחַי מֵעָלַי הִרְחִיק   He alienated my kin from me;
וְיֹדְעַי אַךְ־זָרוּ מִמֶּנִּי: My acquaintances disown me.
חָדְלוּ קְרוֹבָי   My relatives are gone;
וּמְיֻדָּעַי שְׁכֵחוּנִי: My friends have forgotten me.
גָּרֵי בֵיתִי וְאַמְהֹתַי לְזָר תַּחְשְׁבֻנִי   My dependents and maidservants regard
נָכְרִי הָיִיתִי בְעֵינֵיהֶם: me as a stranger;
    I am an outsider to them.

(Job 19 : 13–15)

The word for 'stranger' here – נכרי – is often more strongly spatial than
the English word 'stranger'; it means 'from a foreign place.' The verb
meaning 'alienated' has the sense of 'placing afar off.' Taken in sum,
the passage describes the psychological torments of being in exile *in
one's own home*.

But Job goes on:

חָנֻּנִי חָנֻּנִי אַתֶּם רֵעָי   Pity me, pity me! You are my friends;
כִּי יַד־אֱלוֹהַּ, נָגְעָה בִּי: For the hand of God has struck me!
לָמָּה תִּרְדְּפֻנִי כְמוֹ־אֵל   Why do you pursue me like God,
וּמִבְּשָׂרִי לֹא תִשְׂבָּעוּ:   Maligning me insatiably?
    [or: You are not satisfied with my flesh].

(Job 19 : 21–22)

Job's call for his friends to pity him – or show mercy to him (חָנֻּנִי) – is a
call for consolation they are ill-equipped to provide. It is only then that
Job makes the volta in which Hofshteyn's epigraph is embedded:

וַאֲנִי יָדַעְתִּי גֹּאֲלִי חָי   But I know that my Vindicator lives;
וְאַחֲרוֹן עַל־עָפָר יָקוּם: In the end He will testify on earth –
וְאַחַר עוֹרִי, נִקְּפוּ־זֹאת   This, after my skin will have been peeled off.
וּמִבְּשָׂרִי אֶחֱזֶה אֱלוֹהַּ.   But I would behold God while still in my flesh.

(Job 19 : 25–26)

This Vindicator (גואל) – how this recalls Ovid's pleas to Augustus! – is
precisely the God who Job complains so bitterly persecutes him. But no
matter his calamities, what Job wants more than anything here is a kind
of poetic comeuppance to his tormenting friends:

גּוּרוּ לָכֶם מִפְּנֵי־חֶרֶב   Be in fear of the sword,
כִּי־חֵמָה עֲוֹנוֹת חָרֶב   For [your] fury is iniquity worthy of the sword;
לְמַעַן תֵּדְעוּן שדין [שַׁדּוּן]:   Know there is a judgment!

(Job 19: 29)

Job trusts that God's ire will punish them for their blaming of and fail-
ure to console him. Job's feeling of trust filters through to the conclu-
sion of "In Falling," which presents Hofshteyn's most vigorous image of
self-consolation:[25]

אָ, קלוגער אליפֿז,   Oh, clever Eliphaz
אליפֿז פֿון תימן,   Eliphaz the Temanite,
דײַן קלָארע חריפֿות   Your clear acuity
ניט ווארעמט שוין קיינעם...   Warms no one...
מײַן קאָפּ איז מיט אַש ניט באַשאָטן,   My head is not strewn with ashes
איך שטיי אָן אַנטבלויזטער –   I stand stripped bare –
פֿאַר מיר איז דאָ גאָרניט פֿאַרבאָטן!   For me nothing here is forbidden!
מײַן אָנמאַכט, מײַן מענטשלעכער אָנמאַכט   My powerlessness, my human powerlessness
איז נידעריקער נאָך פֿון די דילן פֿון קלויסטערס,   Is lower still than the floors of churches,
פֿון דילן פֿאַרבוקטע   Than floors bowed
דורך שטערנס פֿון דורות   By the foreheads of generations...
נאָר ס׳האָט אויך אין הייך ניט קיין גלײַכן   But in height it has also no equal
מײַן מענטשלעכע דרייסטקייט –   My human boldness –
איך וויל פֿון קיין טרייסטערס ניט וויסן   I do not want to know any consolers
אָט דאָ אויף דער ערד צווישן וועלטן!   Here on the earth between worlds!
די גרייס פֿון מײַן מענטשלעכן עלנט,   The size of my human misery,
די גרייס פֿון מײַן טרויער –   The size of my sadness [troyer] –
אָט דאָס איז מײַן טרייסט,   This is my consolation [treyst],
מײַן געוויסן,   My conscience
מײַן דרייסט   My boldness
און מײַן כּוח...   And my power...

The paradoxical conversion of sadness to consolation, of powerlessness
to strength, is more than a poetic conceit. In this swing out of the abyss,
Hofshteyn will ultimately come to an ethical conclusion. Where for
Ovid there is a kind of "psychological redemption by means of poetry"[26]
in which "attention to the delights and endlessly playful possibilities
of poetic composition [...] draw[s] the exile in another guise, as a self-
consoler, whiling away his dreary time"[27] – though in a famous elegiac
gesture Ovid laments "that writing a poem you can read to no one is like

25   Hofshteyn 1922: 19.
26   Claassen 1999: 10.
27   Ibid.: 141.

dancing in the dark" (*Epistulae ex Ponto IV.2*)[28] – Hofshteyn's goal is more complicated. While he was very consciously producing high modernist art, some of the contours of which this essay seeks to tease out, his primary aim is emblematized on the back cover of די גאַנצע טרויער (All of the proceeds הכנסה פֿונעם בוך לטובֿת די הונגערנדיקע ייִדישע קאָלאָניעס from the sale of this book will go towards the benefit of the starving Jewish colonies). The mobilization of communal support by means of the self-consolatory act of buying and appreciating new art itself enacts the conversion of powerlessness to strength.

Temporality

Comparison of Ovid's exilic model with the way Hofshteyn constructs his poetic reality in טרויער points up the fact that the two diverge most obviously in the presentation of space. Ovid's exile describes a Roman center and his own extreme peripheral distance. Hofshteyn has no such distance. While he is an exile – particularly in the Joban sense – he has not left his center. It is rather in the presentation of time that Hofshteyn further expands the exile-in-homeland model. In Claassen's description of Ovid's exilic temporality:[29]

> The encapsulation of time by means of the normal epistolary remove involved in true letter-writing reflects a basic aspect of exilic psychology. The poet, writing in an exilic 'now and here,' projects his readers' reception of a poem in a future 'then' and distant 'there.' A further time shift occurs when he pleads [...] that his readers should, at the time when they read it, remember his circumstances, already past, within which the letter-poem was written. The device conflates present, future and past.

The poet-as-exile composes his verse in a "shifting series of 'nows'" and as a result "[e]very year passed in exile forms part of an agglutinated 'now,' with very little perception of progression within it."[30]

An intuitive apprehension of that complex static present is heightened in Hofshteyn's 'Cubist' approach to the exilic tour through his homelandscape. In Wolitz's analysis,[31]

28 Ovid 2005: 176.
29 Claassen 1999: 185.
30 Ibid.: 186.
31 Wolitz 1997: 118.

The present, recognised and depicted as dislocated, splintered and decentered in the verses is, through the poetic fragments, necessarily foregrounded. Thus the poet gives the elusive present a defining artistic shape – the fragment – in order to accommodate that complex of emotions attendant upon the unexpected disaster of the pogroms. The persona functions in the body of the text suspended upon the horizontal axis of chronological time and earthly space, and within the vertical synchronic axis, the poles of which are the decanted void of the sacral and the all-too real abyss. Between these four poles the persona wends a disastrous path lost in the present.

In the pre-consolatory section of the cycle, especially in the calligram זון־פֿאַרגאַנג (Sunset), the image of decline and rupture predominates.[32] However, in the consolatory section, Hofshteyn focuses on the inter-generational distribution of grief:[33]

ווי האָט ער געטרויערט, מײַן זיידע?...	How did he grieve, my distant grandfather?
ווי וועלן זיי טרויערן, קינדער נאָך קליינע,	How will they grieve, those still small
נאָך ווילדע,	Still wild children
וואָס ברעקלען דעם טונקלען געוועב פֿון מײַן שווייַגן,	Who crumble the dark web of my silence,
און מאַכן אים גאַנץ באַלד,	And make it soon whole
און וויקלען צונויף אים	And roll it up
אין איינעם מיט קלאַנגען פֿון יונגן געפֿילדער...	Together with the sounds of youthful noise...

Here we have a polyphony of grief across multiple generations, which rejects the exilic topos of silence – not only in Ovid,[34] but most classically in Psalm 137 ("How can we sing the Lord's song upon foreign [נֵכָר] soil?" [137: 4]). In the poem's exploration of these temporal markers, both the past ("grandfathers") and the future ("children") are interrogated for their interpretive insight into the consolatory speculation of the immediately preceding poem ("In Falling"). For the children – and we remember that not only is the poem offered to them as an "Incantation," but the book טרויער itself came into being to raise money for the orphaned victims of the violence – despite the fact that they are destined to grieve, it is their noise which constitutes their power here;

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32 „אַלץ דאָ טויג פֿאַר פֿרייַען פֿלאָם פֿון לעבן... / האָט געוויין דיר אָפּגעזאָגט דער טאָג, // איז ביז טיפֿער אין דער נאַכט דיר גלי פֿאַרבליבן – / ווייַ פֿון ריס, פֿון אָפּשייד ווייַט צעטראָגן!...“ // (Everything here is good for the free flow of life / So the day told you all its laments, // Till deep into the night a glow remained for you – / The pain of rupture, of departure being carried far off! //) (Hofshteyn 1922: 11).

33 Ibid.: 17.

34 See Claassen 1999: 129f.

it is their wildness which serves as the animating analog to the poet's consolatory 'boldness' at the conclusion of the poem.

In the present of the poem, however, the temporality is more complicated:[35]

ווי האָט ער געטרויערט, מײַן זיידע?...	How did he grieve, my grandfather?...
עס אַרט מיך ניט שטאַרק, נאָר איך פֿרעג עס,	It does not concern me greatly, but I ask,
פֿון פֿרי הײַנט אין שטילקייט אַ פֿראַגע באַלייט מיך:	From early on today *silently* a question
	accompanies me:
... און ס׳האָט זיך באַוויזן:	...And it showed:
אַ סידור אַן אַלטן	An old prayerbook
(מיט דיני־אַבֿילות –	(With the laws of mourning –
אַן אַלטן בית־יעקבֿ)	An old Beys-Yankev)
האָב איך הײַנט צו דאַנקען	Today I have to thank
פֿאַר מאָנעלעך טרייסט,	For little bits of consolation,
פֿאַר אַ פּאָר פֿרישע רגעס...	For a couple of fresh moments ...

The 'agglutinating' temporality of the poem comes not from the conflict between a never-changing present and the passage of time in exile, but from reading and from text. It is precisely here that the allusion to Job mentioned earlier appears. The equation of "little bits of consolation" and "a couple of fresh moments" runs counter to the static present of Ovidian exile. The frangible modernist 'moment' for Hofshteyn is the device by which he can read Job now, how Ukraine-Utz can be here. It is not because of a simple thematic consonance with grief that the epigraph's citation of the Laws of Mourning (echoed in the passage just quoted) permits the reading of Job but forbids the reading of the Prophets, whose vocabulary of imprecation defers its effects endlessly into the future. Echoing the experience of grief can provide consolation, but pronouncing the expectation of it provides none.

It ought not to be overlooked that in this period of upheaval, rupture, dislocation, and (thus) exilic thinking, Hofshteyn was not the only Jewish poet invoking Ovid. The Russian poet Osip Mandel'shtam's second book of poems, *Tristia* (1922) – whose title appears (I would say significantly) in Latin type – came out in the same year as Hofshteyn's. In that volume we see a similar interest in reconfigurations of time and space. To take but one example, in an untitled poem (dated 1917) we see a young Levite at his vigil during the rebuilding of the Temple.[36]

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35   Hofshteyn 1922: 17f. Emphasis my own – note again the foregrounding of silence.
36   Mandel'shtam 1922: 30. Translations from Mandel'shtam are my own.

> He said: the sky is an alarming yellow,
> Night is already upon the Euphrates, so run, Priests.

These compact lines present a complicated exilic consciousness. The Jews have returned to Jerusalem, the Babylonian exile is over, and the Temple is being rebuilt. However, for the young Levite – a high functionary of the Temple cult whose very office revolves around Jerusalem's centrality in and to the world – time is not reckoned by the present place but rather from his native Mesopotamian time zone. If the sky is twilit yellow here in Jerusalem, then it must already be dark in Babylon; and *therefore* the Sabbath must soon begin here. The realities of "here," the supposed center, are irrelevant to a consciousness of one's homeland. And as the poem concludes:[37]

> And with the heavy Menorah we illumined
> The Jerusalem night and the charcoal-fumes of nonexistence.

The poem describes competing claims to the meaning of home based on a realignment of how time and space are understood. A homeland which is not home is like a wisp of sacrificial smoke, indeed a "nonexistence." This is one dramatic conceptualization of exile. Hofshteyn is more ambivalent about the biblical imagery. Nevertheless, he is explicit in the case of Ukraine-Utz that the biblical landscape is textual and not historical.

Ukraine

One of the clearest points of breakdown between the exilic discourse of Ovid's *Tristia* and Hofshteyn's is suggested by Pushkin. In "To Ovid" Pushkin's identification with the Roman poet only goes so far: "As a severe Slav, I have not shed any tears, / But I understand them."[38] In reappropriating Ovid's denigration of the co-territorial barbarians (Scythians, Sarmatians, Getae), Pushkin goes on to say that while the rugged wilds and inclement frigidity of the Black Sea shore may have been inimical to the Italian, to the Slav they were more than familiar. (Ovid's frigid North is Pushkin's South.) His exile was in a way much closer to home.

   The image of exile that Hofshteyn paints is much closer still. One of Hofshteyn's earlier poetic achievements, and part of what has secured his enduring legacy in Yiddish poetry, was the body of lyrical por-

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37   Ibid. 1922: 30.
38   Sandler 1989: 43.

traits of the rural beauty of his native Ukraine. I would like to conclude this essay by turning to the important second poem of טרויער, entitled אוקראַינע (Ukraine).[39] There are two contemporary corpora into which this poem fits. As part of the cycle טרויער, it can be placed, as has generally been done, alongside the other great pogromologies of 1919–1920, including Perets Markish's די קופע (The Heap) and Leyb Kvitko's *1919*. However, it can also be paired with Markish's וואָלין (Volhynia) and Moyshe Kulbak's רייסן (White Russia), as distinctly intimate evocations of the poets' native Eastern European space as homeland. These two parallel, or indeed overlapping, readings point directly at the exile-in-homeland theme that Hofshteyn develops so powerfully.

Structurally, the poem "Ukraine" forms an apostrophe to the poet's native Ukraine as he travels by train over that landscape in the aftermath of the pogroms. The train-car vantage point allows for kaleidoscopic, and nearly simultaneous, pulses of nightmarish images and the meditations they inspire: the "wasted cities," the gentle fields, the marketplaces with their violent rabbles, the Dnieper and the steppes. And even though the poetic persona is a traveller there after the fact, he implicates himself in the vista of destruction:[40]

[...] ווי עס שווינדלען	[...] As oases of my ruins
אָאזיסן פֿון מיַינע חורבֿות	Reel
אויף ברייטער פֿלאָך פֿון פֿעלדער מילדע,	Over the broad plain of gentle fields,
שטיל פֿאַרשאָטענע	Quietly strewn
מיט בענקשאַפֿט,	With longing,
רייַך באַפֿײַכטע	Richly moistened
מיט מײַן בלוט...	With my blood...

The juxtaposition of the silence and the bloodshed are part of the associative structure of "ruins." Hofshteyn's own possessive vocabulary – "my ruins," "my blood" – shows that in vieweing scenes of destruction from the train, he has become distanced from his own real, physical body; this is part of the psychic toll the devastation of the pogrom has taken on the poet. Because of both his transience and his dissociation (so beautifully illustrated by Chagall on the cover of טרויער by a two-headed man, one head with a face and one without, pierced through the chest by the word "*troyer*"), the poetic persona can only be called an exile.

But for all the violence of the bandit-like, drunken perpetrators, the poet's erstwhile neighbors, and all his incomprehension ("What outweighs / A drop of blood / From a childlike / Innocently-beautiful

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39 This poem was first published in full in the journal *Shtrom* 2 (1922): 26–28.
40 Hofshteyn 1922: 7.

being…"),[41] Hofshteyn cannot help but speak affectionately about this place, which is still his home and homeland, after all:[42]

איך פֿיל מיט ליבע נאָך:	I still feel with love:
עס האָט קיין שויב דאָ ניט געפּלאַצט	No windowpane here has been broken
אין בערג־טורעמס אין דײַנע,	In your mountain-towers
וואָס קוקן, לויטער נאָך,	That look out, still pure,
אויף די געוויסערן פֿון דניעפּר,	Over the floods of the Dnieper,
אויף סטעפּעס דײַנע…	Over your steppes…

This self-consciously loving description of the landscape – the mountains, the Dnieper (which echoes other bucolic river scenes used to construct the literary landscape of homeland in Kulbak's descriptions of the Nieman River in רייַסן or in Markish's depictions of the Horyn River in וואָלין), and the steppe – participates in a discourse of home and homeland, and folds it over onto the modernist catastrophe genre. Hofshteyn, however, brings his description to a head by explicitly inverting precisely the paradigm of exile that was complicated in the folding-over of discourses.[43]

איך ווייס דאָס אויך:	I know this too:
ביסט דורות לאַנג	You were for generations
געווען אַ מיקלעט־פּלאַץ	A place of refuge [*miklet-plats*]
פֿאַר אויסוואָרפֿן	For the exiles [*oysvurfn*]
פֿון גרויסן גרויען לאַנד…	From the great grey land…
אויף אַלע־אַלע שטרעקעס זײַנע	Over all-all of its distance
שאָטנט זיך דײַן שאַנד,	Your shame hides itself,
אוקראַיִנע!	Ukraine!

There is doubtless an ideological dimension in these lines, as elsewhere in the poem. (Wolitz for his part makes a case for an overtly political reading of the poem as a "fellow-traveller dirge."[44]) The complexity of Hofshteyn's modernist polyphony may be unpacked still further, however, beyond these ideological dimensions.

41   Ibid.: 7.
42   Ibid.: 8.
43   Ibid. As Wolitz assesses this passage, Hofshteyn's "moral and social protest defends his own and his folk's right to inhabit the Ukraine no less than the Gentile peasant" (Wolitz 1997: 122).
44   Wolitz will make an analogous and similarly persuasive case for Perets Markish's long poem ראַדיאָ (Radio; 1922) as a brilliant exponent of Yiddish agitprop (Wolitz 2011: 103–113).

Let me here recapitulate some of the intuitions I have written of elsewhere about how a sense of homeland fits into an oppositional construction of Exile and Diaspora.[45] Hofshteyn's use of "generations" as the temporal measurement, which we have seen elsewhere in the cycle, presents the familial or tribal element over against the national or historical vocabularies used to inscribe Jewish life in Ukraine. This in turn sets up the core biblical intertext which follows. The phrase Hofshteyn uses, "place of refuge" (*miklet-plats*), is a calque of the Hebrew *mĕqōm miqlāṭ*, with the same meaning. That phrase is itself a later Hebrew synonym for the biblical *'īr miqlāṭ* (city of refuge). Of the seven Hebraic words used in "Ukraine," this is both the most marked and the least common. Given both the carefulness and the relative straightforwardness of Hofshteyn's diction in general, and the relative paucity of Hebraic words in his work as a whole, this word choice seems particularly semantically fraught. The term *'īr miqlāṭ* is used in the book of Numbers, as well as elsewhere in the Bible,[46] to refer to a specifically urban settlement singled out as a place to which someone who has unintentionally killed a person may flee for safety from retribution. At the very least, the stigma of some kind of guilt attaches to anyone seeking out such a place. However, Hofshteyn's refuge-seekers are not – or not simply – the manslaughterers associated with the biblical term. Instead they are explicitly referred to as 'exiles' (אויסוווּרפֿן). The term is itself a study in a kind of modernist ambiguity, in that it can mean both 'exile as outcast' and 'exile as outlaw.' Interpretation is a matter of perspective. The generational timescale, biblical intertext, and an association of travellers (פּוֹסגייער) and wanderers (וואַנדערער) with the demography of the steppes all implicate both Jews and non-Jews in Hofshteyn's understanding of space. Hofshteyn makes no claim to sacredness of place; rather, he verges on his own version of sentimentality when describing his native environs. Nevertheless, in deploying the Ovid-inflection of טרויער – *Tristia* he inverts the exilic trope implicit in that association: Jews are ultimately no more in exile in Ukraine than are its non-Jewish denizens, and therefore equally at home. This is precisely the reason that "place of refuge" (*miklet-plats*) is presented as an inversion of "city of refuge" (*'īr miqlāṭ*). The train-travelling voyeur has become an exile in his own home.

To conclude, never forgetting that the work is a profound expression of grief and sadness at the all-too-real destruction and bloodshed,

45 This discussion is part of my monograph manuscript "An Inch or Two of Time: Time and Space in Jewish Modernisms."

46 Numbers 35, Joshua 20 and 21, 1 Chronicles 6; in the Bible the word *miqlāṭ* occurs only in the phrase *'īr miqlāṭ*.

it is nevertheless also a consummate work of modernist art, one which tries to understand that sadness in a variety of ways. At the risk of over-indulging the intertextuality of *Troyer – Tristia*, I think Hofshteyn's connection with Ovid's *Tristia* is more than fortuitous, especially since Pushkin and Mandel'shtam evince a similar sort of connection to it. The thematic consonance is simply too great. Hofshteyn subverts the traditional understanding of Exile (*goles*; *gālūt*) as a distinctly negative experience of negated space (i.e., absence from the center, from homeland). The privations and depredations of anti-Jewish violence do not arise out of or as a result of a state of being in such an Exile. After all, Hofshteyn is very clear in describing this Ukrainian landscape as the poet's homeland, his center. In this Diasporic, as opposed to Exilic, state – a state of being that is consonant with the progressive ideals of the revolution with which Hofshteyn sympathized – an exilic condition is still possible. But it is an exile understood by modernist means. Hofshteyn orchestrates the spatial and temporal complexities of exile, complexities implicit in the very idea of writing about it (classically in Ovid), in conversation with a strongly read tradition of consolation and circumspection (especially Job). In doing so, he advocates a communal cohesion – and its ethical core – which can still participate in a universalized, humanist project.

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Avrom Sutzkever: Self portrait
Courtesy of Mire Sutzkever