How the Disenfranchised Came to Function as Halakhic Authorities:
A Regenerative Folktale on Miriam Ulinover, her Critics and the Logics of *Taytsh*

...the world is, as we say, an open book. But what about variant readings?... – Anne Carson

In the spring of 1922, amidst modernity's already violent and pervasive fracturing of traditional Jewish life,[i] a well-known orthodox publishing[ii] house in Warsaw pressed into circulation something of a textual anomaly. Not only one of the first ever collections of Yiddish poetry to be authored by a woman, this slim but profound volume marked with even greater historical significance the first ever collection of Yiddish poetry to be authored by a *religious* woman.[iii] Entitled *The Grandmother's Treasury* (*Der Bobes Oytser*), the collection was masterfully conceived of and sedulously stylized by Miriam Ulinover (1888-1944), a theretofore little-known Hasidic pietist from Lodz. Disseminated across Eastern Europe, Ulinover's text subsequently garnered a significant amount of critical attention as well as a wide and varied readership.[iv] Thirteen years after its publication, however, with the end of the Second World War, Ulinover had perished, and *The Grandmother's Treasury* – her sole publication – had fallen into obscurity.[v]

Although the handful of post-holocaust critics who have analyzed *The Grandmother's Treasury* have not been successful at keeping it separate from the brutality of Ulinover's fate, we need not allow this fate to continue to eclipse her work for us.[vi] Nor should we allow it to diminish the important ways in which her work was productively *put to work* before the war. Indeed, throughout the 1920s and 30s, both secular critics as well as religious reformers attempted to derive from Ulinover's poetry new definitions of what it meant to be "modern," "Jewish," and "gendered." A reexamination of their discourse can therefore help to telescope not only the concerns of 20th century Jewish intellectuals, but also the lyrical, archetypal and *existentially generative* kinds of reading practices they once employed.[vii] More immediately, a reexamination of this discourse can also help to return *us* – Jewish critics and

reformers of the 21st century – to re-engage Ulinover's poetry for the sake of modern (now post-modern), gendered (now trans-gendered), searching (still searching), Jewish bodies in crisis.

i. Tracing the Hermeneutical Logics of Critics Past

Into the public eye Miriam Ulinover was escorted over 80 years ago by Dovid Frishman (1860-1922), arguably the most influential Yiddish critic of his day. Born outside of Lodz to an "enlightened" but formerly Hasidic family, Frishman's fascination with Ulinover was immediate. Her work came to represent to him a past from which his parents had already severed themselves, a past – he argued – that would provide Ashkenazi Jews with a point of origin from which to reconstruct their collective sense of self. Thus did Frischman feel deeply invested in Ulinover's success. Helping her to secure a publisher, Frishman also offered Ulinover his imprimatur in a more public way, prefacing her work with a lyrical, almost hagiographical introduction. Like dominoes, this introduction set off in nearly all subsequent critics what I referred to above as an "existentially-generative" approach to the reading of Ulinover's work. In addition to this, Frishman's introduction further bred into many of its subsequent critics an idea of how the sensuality of her text could physically affect their *bodies*. In short, Frishman single-handedly created a discourse on *The Grandmother's Treasury* that rippled both the psyche and soma of all those who read his words as supplements to hers.[viii]

Frishman's Jewish Secularism

Beginning his introduction with a mythically-charged description of his first encounter with the poet, Frishman notes the light surrounding Ulinover as "early morning summer" and "god-kissed."[ix] He then proceeds to detail a type of amnesia that overtakes him as he listens

to her read. He "forgets" his sense of space and time, "forgets" that a young woman is reading before him, "forgets" that the grandmother she describes in not his own, and "forgets" that the poetry she reads is not a mimetic account of the past of *all Jewish people*.[x] Modernity, particularity, and genre dissolve, and Frishman's world goes archetypal. Suddenly, Ulinover's "mouth" has become "the Jewish Folk entire." And ironically, as the attentive reader will note, so too has Frishman's. Nowhere is this more evident than in a remark Frishman offers only a few sentences later. Romanticizing the aphoristic nature of Ulinover's folk-language, Frishman himself assumes the folk-language of an aphoristic story-teller. "O how the language of our little folk is so simple and pure – just like life itself!"[xi] Thus, by the end of his introduction's third paragraph, Frishman has not only internalized what he takes to be Ulinover's mythological vision of the world, but also the discursive style of her "simple and pure" speech. More specifically, Frishman's reality has been charged with a kind of "god-kissed light," while his rhetorical form has been entirely reshaped by the lyricism of Ulinover's metonymical mouth.

A shift in linguistic register and archetypal vision are not the only palpable effects *The Grandmother's Treasury* has on Frishman's life, however. More uniquely, Frishman also describes the visceral sensations that radiate out of Ulinover's words, then into his physical body. Watch the motion of this literary-somatic dynamic transpire as Frishman concludes his introduction:

> Something sensual – a scent – drifts out of these poems, a cozy recollection we have lost to modern gardens, a smell we have forgotten that begins to pull us unconsciously. It is not – who knows what! – it is not a lotus-blossom from the distant shores of the Ganges. It the simple, modest scent of a silver spice-box gifted to us by a grandfather. All at once, before our eyes, a table-cloth begins to shadow and shimmer, sweet-smelling and freshly-laundered, spread out across a mother's table on Shabes. Silver, dazzling candlesticks, dreams, wrap themselves around us. The winter, small-town atmosphere of a distant Hanukah night, of an old grandfather, of a Purim feast, of our light childhood years spent in the company of a

> great-uncle – all these *breathe themselves into us.* Who still can remember it? Who still can *feel* it?[xii]

Before delving in to the sensual elements of the above, it behooves us first to note that Frishman begins his paragraph with a more sociological concern. He worries that Jews are exchanging their ancestral culture for South Asian spirituality (a lotus-blossom from the Ganges) and West European aesthetics (a modern garden). Meanwhile the treasury of their own tradition lies untended. Frishman argues that the recovery of this treasury is essential. Yet it cannot be gained solely through the reading of Ulinover's text. Rather, it must be accomplished through the tasting, smelling, and feeling of her text – through our own readerly allowance of this text to penetrate our *sensoria.* By way of this process, a specifically Jewish cultural memory will "breathe" its way into us, re-culture our senses to the visceral *feel* of Judaism, then "pull us unconsciously" back to the cultural roots of our East European ancestors. From sentences to soma, this is Frishman's metalinguistic understanding of how textual memories can translate to sensations, sediment themselves into our bodies, and subsequently retrain the way we process the world.

Frishman's radical conception of *sensually embodied Jewish cultural memory* entails a conspicuous disregard for more normative conceptions of *rationally embodied Jewish religious practice.* As already mentioned above, Frishman's parents were "enlightened" Jews. They raised their son on the "secular reason" of Enlightenment values and, once grown, Frishman maintained these values dutifully. It makes sense then that, in his attempt to recreate a sense of *Jewish* selfhood, Frishman focused his reading of Ulinover on the "cultural" aspects of her work – on its folk lyricism and archetypal vision. Given his secular values, it also makes sense that Frishman seems to have deliberately avoided incorporating the more religious aspects of Ulinover's work into his interpretation – aspects such as a yearning for *halakha*

and normative ritual practice. By overlooking these elements of *The Grandmother's Treasury*, Frishman was able – quite literally – to have his cake and eat it too, cultivating his Jewish *sensorium* through Yiddish literature, all while participating in the secular logics of a secular world. To put it another way, although Frishman refused to trade his idealized Jewish culture for a "lotus blossom on the Ganges," he had no qualms whatsoever in exchanging Judaism's religious and institutional frameworks for the more deftly reasoned "secular" frameworks of the European Enlightenment. Ingeniously, Frishman had successfully translated antiquated Jewish ritual practices into secular Jewish reading practices.

Before moving on, we need to consider one final aspect of what I will hereafter refer to as Frishman's *Jewish secularism*.[xiii] After archetyping Ulinover as the "mouth of the Jewish people" in his introduction, Frishman goes on to specify that "she sings the entirety of Jewish life, the entirety of a Jewish woman's joy and pain."[xiv] Through eliding these two clauses, Frishman grammatically effects of a kind of *epistemological equation*, arguing that in order to represent Jewish life properly, one must necessarily have the experience of a Jewish woman *specifically*. The logic of this statement seems to stem from Frishman's rejection of the intellectual and spiritual pursuits of traditional Jewish men, contrary as they were to his own, secular values. That women were barred from a participation in precisely these religious aspects of Judaism made female Jewish experience all the more palatable to Frishman's project of cultural recovery. After all, women – or at least as Frishman imagined them – partook of a entirely different kind of Judaism, a Judaism constitutive of a *Jewish* lyrical and folkloristic mood, a *Jewish* mythological vision, and a *Jewish* sensorium, itself created through the "inhalation" of Jewish sensorial life.[xv]

What Frishman ultimately foresaw as the fate of Judaism, then, was a re-embodiment of the "women's tradition" by both women *and* men. Through this re-embodiment,

Frishman believed that the modern Jew would relearn his or her ability to sense, experience and articulate the world in a specifically Jewish way. His or her language would become "simple and pure;" his or her vision would catch the mythological "god-kissed" nature of light; and his or her body would be sedimented with the rich sensuality of a collective, cultural past. Conversely, Frishman abjected what he understood to be the religious, intellectual, and masculine tradition of Judaism, replacing it with the secular reason of modernity. As we shall see, while Frishman's lyrical, analytical and existentially-generative practice of reading Ulinover held among subsequent critics *formally*, the positive *content* of his readings oftentimes did not.

Bais Yankev's Feminine Traditionalism

Whereas Frishman sought to universalize Jewish feminine experience into the category of Jewish secularism, religious critics of Ulinover translated Frishman's vision into their own terms. Primarily linked with the Beys Yankev movement – a vast association of orthodox schools for women – these critics-cum-reformers offered interpretations of Ulinover that, like Frishman's, revolved primarily around her work's "feminine aspects." Unlike Frishman, however, Beys Yankev's critics did not culture the "feminine aspects" of Ulinover's text into the architecture of Jewish secularism. Rather, they spiritualized these aspects into a pious tradition of Judaism gendered specifically as *feminine* and marketed specifically to *females.*[xvi] To understand why this parochializing shift was so crucial to Ulinover's orthodox commentators, a brief history of the Beys Yankov movement and its political context seems to be in order.

As the tenets of Polish feminism began circulating into the orthodox societies of Eastern Europe, Sarah Shnirer – a Hasidic woman from Warsaw – counteractively founded

the Beys Yankev movement in 1917.[xvii] Contrary to what one might expect, Beys Yankev did not parry feminist claims of Judaism's discriminatory patriarchal structure by dissolving the *halakhic* barriers that historically divided women from men. Rather, it sought to romanticize the notion that there existed in Judaism an exclusively matriarchal tradition. While "softer and differently molded"[xviii] than the masculine tradition, Beys Yankev's feminine tradition was deemed no less spiritually valid. To this end, Bays Yankev denied their students access to the "masculine canon" – comprised of texts such as the Talmud, commentaries on the *Shulkhn Orekh*, Hasidic esoterica, and so on. Instead, Beys Yankev provided its students with their own, singularly *feminine canon.* Instituting Ulinover's work as a part of this canon, Beys Yankev disseminated *The Grandmother's Treausry* to over 38,000 students at over 250 schools,[xix] consecrating it as nothing less than a holy testament to the religious tradition of Jewish women.[xx]

As Moshe Prager, a key functionary of the movement, explained after the Holocaust:

> Miriam Ulinover's poetry found its way to Beys Yankev, the Jewish orthodox woman's movement, precisely because it breathed with warm Jewishness. In her every little song, living Jewish blood pulsed. And, there, in the Beys Yankev schools, [these poems] were put to good use, correctively spinning out the eternal web-of-generations between Jewish women, now made beautiful as gold, for they had received into themselves their generations-old *grandmother's treasury.*[xxi]

Descriptions of Ulinover's poetry as "breathing," "pulsing," and *feminine*, certainly recall the sensual-somatics of Frishman's wonderworking. So too does the passage's final sentence which describes how, as a result of reading this poetry, bodies can physically alter, turning as "beautiful as gold." Diverging from his critical predecessor, however, Prager limits Frishman's vision of a Jewish secular tradition to a Jewish religious tradition that – in the spirit of Beys Yaakov – belongs solely to women. Elsewhere in his article Prager

underscores this point more explicitly, writing that true content of Ulinover's tradition is not cultural at all, but a deeply "religious…sacred, Jewish inheritance."[xxii]

With Frishman's reading and its subsequent rereading by Bais Yaakov, the critical discourse on Ulinover was momentarily consolidated. For a couple of years thereafter, *The Grandmother's Treausry* was read almost exclusively for either the sake of Jewish secularists who longed to embody the sensuality of their past, or for the sake of religious Jewish women who longed to embody a spiritual tradition separate but equal to the tradition of their fathers.[xxiii] In both these cases, critics continued to articulate their readings of Ulinover in lyrical, archetypal and existentially-generative ways. In both these cases, critics also continued to feel their readings as a type of somatic re-schooling. Nevertheless, to this already complex discourse, a few years later, from across the sea in America, another critical aspect would be appended.

Feminine Jewish Secularism

Whether wittingly or not, in 1928, the essayist and anthologist Ezra Korman revised the discursive readings of Frishman and Bays Yankev in a deeply influential way. Tracing out a tradition of Yiddish female poetry from the 16th century forward, Korman published a 390-page anthology entitled *Yiddish Poetesses* (*Yidishe Dikhterin*). In it, not only does Korman allocate more space to Ulinover's poetry than to any other writer, but he also accentuates Ulinover's importance more explicitly by devoting the final pages of his introduction to a discussion of her work. In the spirit of Frishman, Korman therein describes Ulinover as "resurrecting" for her readers a past that "died long ago." Moreover, having "absorbed" (*ongezapt*) the "style, heritage, and longstanding culture" of this past, Korman argues that Ulinover possesses the uncanny ability to "body it forth" (*farkerpern*) to us.[xxiv]

Although Frishman and Korman both see *The Grandmother's Treausry* as a kind of "memorial" that has the sensual-somatic power to "respire" and "body forth," Korman also takes a page from the Bays Yankev movement when he ties Ulinover's text – along with every other modern woman writing Yiddish poetry at the time – to the liturgical literature of early modern Ashkenazi women. Positing an ineluctable set of linguistic conventions that have circumscribed women's speech and writing for centuries, Korman's anthology puts forward a kind of formalist argument. The "style, heritage, and longstanding culture" captured by Ulinover's poetry is, in other words, necessarily captured in a *traditionally* feminine tone.

In her analysis of Korman's anthology, Kathryn Hellerstein describes this notion compellingly, writing that "the very ability of the new women [poets] to find their voices and even to conceive of writing in Yiddish depended upon devotional literature for women. The dependence of the new, the secular, the revolutionary poets on the religious literature against which they actively define themselves is another example of the way modern Yiddish literature appropriates the past, at once subverting it and reclaiming it."[xxv] Thus, whether women wanted to step outside their gendered language or not, they were entirely bound by it, submerged within the feminine rhythms of a centuries-old speech-genre.[xxvi]

By situating Ulinover's work within this genre, Korman limited Frishman's universalizaiton of the woman's tradition on the one hand, while secularizing Beys Yankev's consecration of the woman's tradition on the other. In short, through his discursive recombination of Frishman and Beys Yankev, Korman had generated not only a tradition of *feminine Jewish formalism* but also a tradition for *feminine Jewish secularists.* Decades later, for example, with Korman's anthology in hand, Jewish feminist scholars begin the existentially-generative project to understand the evolution of the modern Jewish woman's voice through

Korman's collection specifically, internalizing not what might be read as its essentialist argument but rather the epistemic experience of women "documented" through the medium of its poetry.[xxvii] For these feminist scholars, much like for Korman, Ulinover's verse thus becomes a vital ingredient to their cultural and historical self-understandings.[xxviii]

A Scholarly Heritage

Over the course of the preceding survey, we have shuttled from Frishman's Jewish secularism to Beys Yankev's feminine Judaism to Korman's feminine secularism. As a result of these movements, we have been able to uncover a certain tendency among 20th century Jewish intellectuals to read Ulinover in an existentially-generative way. More interestingly, we also have noted a tendency among them to sensually embody the lyrical register and archetypal eye of their imagined pasts *through* their reading of Ulinover. From this position of their embodiment, our critics and reformers then proceeded to *body forth* a series of meaningful definitions to offer the modern Jew. As post-modern Jewish scholars ourselves, this is certainly a strange, but fascinating tradition of scholarship to inherit, one attended by an equally strange but fascinating collection of hermetical strategies. But how might we be able to integrate these strategies in our own scholarship? Is it possible at all? Would we even want to? Well, let's take a "deep breath" and find out.

ii. Tracing the Hermeneutical Logics of Ulinover Present

In nearly all criticism on *The Grandmother's Treasury* to date there has been an overwhelming romanticization of the past this book portrays. Again and again we see critics deriving from it the types of sensual memories, folklorist voices, and archetypal visions they so desperately longed to recover for their own purposes. With all this longing, however, these critics have

tended to uniformly overlook the actual cathexis of the book's narrator,[xxix] erasing *her* body's sensual-somatic reactions to the past and foregrounding their own instead. Take for example the following passage by Natalia Krynika, the editor of Ulinover's collected works (2003):

> One can understand all of [*The Grandmother's Treasury*] as an attempt to find the lost tradition of…the modern Jew…who has, in the wild hoo-ha of modernity, forgotten its honest worth. In order to find the way home, Ulinover creates an idiosyncratic world, the enchanted world of the *shtetl*, in which she imagines "home" just as every person might wish to imagine it.[xxx]

Krynicka then goes on to write that this "imagination of home" is recovered and embodied through the reader's sensitivity his or her "five-senses" while reading.[xxxi] But where is the narrator in all of this? Can her "five-senses" really be collapsed into ours?

While Krynika's analysis may cogently represent the home for which every *critic* longs, I do not believe the "enchanted world of the shtetl" represents the home for which the narrator herself pines. Indeed, in fixing our critical gaze upon the collection's narrator, the way she represents her own historical moment, the way she somatically relates to her past, and the language she employs to do so, we will be able to notice her body fleshed out with entirely different dimensions. No longer will she resemble the critic or reformer of yore – yearning for an idealized and unblemished past. Rather, she will appear to us as a woman who returns to her past not to embody its sensual content, but rather to body-forth in her present moment the discursive forms and religious practices denied to her when her past *was* her present.

Losing [His] Religion

As Ulinover's collection begins, a sun overhead is "slipping" into dusk. A river is rushing before her. There is a crossroads. A heritage. An anger. A loss. A yearning. A wish.

Mention of these objects and emotions all occur in the past tense. But what belongs to the narrator in the present? Once the "slipping" sun has finally set, temporal dimensions shift. Our narrator is thrust back into modernity. As a result, there evolves a breakdown, both somatic and literary. Loop into the rhythms and rhymes of this text, then feel them snap:

> When from my lovely shtetl,[xxxii] I made a saddened start,
> My zeyde[xxxiii] led me to the river. Side by side we marched.
> The springtime sun was shining down, the sky had blued across
> the crossroads where he gave to me the heritage I lost.
>
> To loose the heritage one gives, to think one can withstand
> the joys of being without meaning: To rove a modern land.
> Perhaps my heritage still lies there, decked in sand or earth.
> Perhaps the patriarchal names have faded or dispersed…
>
> The springtime sun, so mild and still, had slipped into the west,
> And now my yearning craves and crests,
> I'm crippled over in pain almost –
> Where's our tradition gone, our heritage, our old and erstwhile home?

Ringing with sunny, if not saccharine cadences, the poem's folklorisit voice chokes in the third stanza. Meanwhile, offering us blue skies, *zeydes* and rivers, its folkloristic imagery concludes in the kind of pain that "almost cripples over." There is indeed a yearning to all of this, but one that ultimately traumatizes the narrator and fissures her ability to speak. One wonders, Can the kind of longing that traumatizes really be called romantic?

In search of an answer, let us return to the poem's first stanza. Our narrator is being led out of the shtetl by her grandfather. A river. This image seems to point to a trope typical of shtetl literature, one which reckons the shtetl as Egypt, modernity as the promised land, and the journey from religious ideology to modern sensibility as a *kries-yam-suf*, an archetypal crossing of the red sea. In keeping with this reading, it is at the river that our narrator begins her process of secular conversion, overstepping a "crossroads," then letting drop her "patriarchal heritage." This past action, this "letting drop" of her patriarchal heritage, is nevertheless narrated through a traditional folk-voice, in turn revealing to us as

readers that – in fact – not all has been lost. On the contrary, the "feminine," the "matriarchal," the lyrical and archetypal aspects of our narrator's tradition seem to remain in tact. To pull back momentarily to the discourse surrounding Ulinover, this is the kind of secularization vision we attributed to Frishman himself, where to be a *modern Jew* meant to preserve and embody "feminine" folkloristic culture while abjecting "masculine" forms of religious practice. Whereas Frishman was able to appropriate this breed of Jewish secularism unproblematically, however, we realize at the end of the above poem that such an appropriative relationship to the past is not at all tenable to our narrator.

Indeed, already by the second stanza our narrator has begun to question just what was lost with the abjection of her heritage's patriarchal, religious aspects. She waxes reflective, then desirous, subtly articulating as a subjunctive ellipsis: "Perhaps the patriarchal names have faded or dispersed…" To wit: Perhaps the masculine authorities inscribing her religious tradition have turned to palimpsest. Subsequently: dusk. Our narrator snaps to. A yearning embodies her present. Her body "cripples over." And in a sentence-to-soma correspondence, her folkloristic language jags into uneven verse. This breakdown seems to come about as a result of our narrator recognizing that the resurrection of her feminine speech-genre also entails a resurrection of her yearning for the religious forms and rituals disallowed to her as a speaker of this genre. In other words, our narrator cannot embody her feminine folklorist tone without also embodying the memory of the exclusion she felt within this tone so many years ago.

Over the course of the next 33 poems, we will see ever more clearly that what our narrator yearned for, what our narrator continues yearns for, is a participation in masculine religious life *as a woman in the language of women*. This is not a longing for the past as embodied by Ulinover's critics. This is not a longing for feminine culture alone; nor is it a longing for

feminine religion to be kept distinct from its masculine instantiation. Rather, it is a longing to resolve the gender asymmetries of the past and then re-activate the traditional folk *and* religious practices of this past *in the present*. It is, I believe, for this reason and this reason alone that our narrator returns in her memory to the archetypal Egypt of shtetl life, re-fording her red river crossing in spatial-temporal reverse.

The Grandmother's Lovely Taytsh

As noted above, critics have often reveled in the "feminine nature" of Ulinover's poetic voice, paralleling it both to Yiddish bible translations for women as well as women's *tkhine* literature (collections of Yiddish prayers). In the previous poem, we noted a breakdown of this "feminine" style when it began to long for masculine aspects of the tradition. We also posited that this breakdown resulted from the fact that our narrator internalized an institutionalized anxiety about the essential *separateness* of masculine and feminine modes of religious and cultural expression. To desire a masculine mode within the confines of a feminine mode *would* necessarily lead to its fracturing. Through returning to her past, however, we will see how our narrator ingeniously discovers that – in fact – masculine discursive practices *have* historically penetrated and intermingled with the feminine speech-genre. Through embodying these practices, moreover, our narrator will subversively assume the type of religious authority previously allowed only to the men who could speak its language.

In order to understand just how our narrator's discursive re-appropriation comes about, we need first to examine the type of text that helped to form and limit our narrator's "feminine" language in the first place. The following is a *shas tkhine,* or collection of Yiddish supplications, published for women by the very imprint which first published *The*

> The meaning of this is: in all your acts I see your Godliness before me, and I place myself before myself in thought, watching myself, just as the Eternal stands next to me and watches my every action. This is the first and most important law of our Torah...therefore every thought should be thought with knowledge and clarity. We women especially must be warned of this for upon us women lies the responsibility to tend the lovely life of hearth, the economy of home, the raising of children...as it was for this reason that women were created.[xxxvi]

And so it was that through the feminine liturgy, women read into themselves the commandments to watch over their actions scrupulously as well as tend to their gendered domestic duties. These notions were given theological weight. Not only were they regarded as spiritual tasks but the ultimate reason for why women "were created."

The right bottom half of the *shas* provides yet another *double-taytsh* of *Berachot* 28b:

> What it means to accept the yoke of heaven and stand G-d in front of you: a woman should be a helper to her husband. If the husband is bad, he receives a wife who will stand against him. Still the wife can fix the situation through always acting as a helper to the man with her good deeds, with her sweet pure speech. Thus bad luck will be transformed to good luck.[xxxvii]

Like the *double-taytsh* of the upper region, this *double-taytsh* offers women a normative definition of how to behave, a definition which serves to cast women into the role of subservience. Although the above might generate a feeling a repugnance to the contemporary reader, wait. Our repugnance will become one of the very issues that "yokes" Ulinover's narrator. And this yoke – clamping shut the perimeters of her speech-genre and spiritual potential – she refuses to "take on." She will learn, on the contrary, to throw it well off.

Before describing the nature of this powerful and subversive act, however, we must note how both examples of *double-taytsh* considered above rely on certain "normative" Laws of the early 20th century Jewish religious establishment. These Laws were themselves the result of male legal authorities double-*taytshing* holy Jewish texts. Not only were women not allowed to execute this type of legal *double-taytsh,* but forbidden to read the texts worthy of

legal double-*taytsh* in the first place. Accordingly, women's spirituality was centered around praying out of books comprised of the institutionalized *double-taytsh* of men. Not a single "holy text" came to them unmediated, neither by literalist translation (*taytsh*) nor creative interpretation (*double-taytsh*).[xxxviii]

Unlike the normative and legal *double-taytshes* of the upper and lower right reaches of the *shas tkhine*, the lower left hand corner offers an entirely different mode of *taytsh*, one that deals in inspiring and archetypal stories. "The holy books tell us," this section records on the *shas'* first page,

> that when a man sleeps at night his [sic] soul flies into to the sky to mark all the actions of his [coming] day…and when early morning arrives and The Name, let it be blessed, does loving kindness to the man, He returns his soul to him. Then the soul is obligated to praise G-d's beloved name for its great loving kindness. Therefore is it the Law that that moment man rises, he must praise god…

This anecdote represents with masculine pronouns the way a man's soul circles the heavens as his body sleeps, gazing upon the goings-of the body's next day, then inspiring the soul to return to its body and *live*. Quite a different mode of interpretation than *legal* taytsh, this alternate mode of *taytsh* I will hereafter refer to as *mythological*.

From our examination of the above *shas tkhine* we can thus note two competing modes of *taytsh* at work in the female prayer book – the legal and the mythological. Whereas 1) the legal is given priority spatially, 2) the mythological is relegated to a single bottom corner. Turning back to *The Grandmother's Treausry* with this knowledge in hand, we will soon see how our narrator, like an ethnographer, revisits the shtetl of her memory to examine the way her grandmother applied the logics of legal and mythological taytsh to her reading of the world.[xxxix] Once our narrator masters the logics of these modes of *taytsh*, she will then apply them not only to her own reading of the world, but more significantly to her reading of the Jewish masculine tradition, double-*taytshing* her own legal rulings, transforming herself into a

halakhic authority, and thus legitimating the blending together of traditional masculine and feminine modes of discourse. "How I long for the Grandmother's lovely taytsh," she discloses in her second poem. And indeed, soon, with the recovery of this lovely *tatysh*, she will transfigure Jewish tradition forever.

Legal Taytsh

After declaring her longing to recover the "Grandmother's lovely *taytsh*," our narrator subjects her memories of various *taytsh* logics to a rigorous, sensual-somatic examination. In *Havdole Wine*, for example, the collection's third poem, our narrator returns to a painful memory, a memory in which she first came to regard herself as having a feminine body, and a memory in which she experiences as result of this, viscerally violent sensations. Set at the end of *Shabes*, our narrator begins this memory *in medias res*. Unlike in the first poem, in *Havdole Wine* our narrator's language does not falter once. Nor will it falter again throughout the remainder of her collection. For now – our narrator is on a mission, primed to uncover the way in which she can embody masculine religious practice within the limitations of her own folk-language. This mission empowers her. Regardless of how constraining these linguistic limitations might feel, she will write her way through them:

> Drinking from *Havodole*, every
> man drinks up, so I drink too.
> But the *bobe* says intently
> "Sweet one, hear this warning through:
>
> When a women drinks *Havdole*
> Bushy hairs will beard her chin.
> What you don't belief me? Read it –
> the holy books, they all say this."
>
> I collapse into my body,
> terrified I've grown a beard.
> But thank God my chin, it's soft
> and woman-like, though slimmed with fear.

In order to be properly understood, this seemingly simple lyric in fact demands a relatively involved familiarity both with the formal structure of *tkhine* literature as well as the contours of normative Jewish law. According to the Talmud's double-*taytsh*, women are not legally obligated to keep any ritual whose performance is required at a particular time of day.[xl] These types of rituals are all shuffled by Jewish tradition under the heading of "positive time-bound commandments." Nevertheless, according to the Mishna, women *are* obligated to keep all commandments during *Shabes*, whether time-bound or otherwise. Since *Havdole* is a ritual of *Shabes*, one might assume that the commandment of drinking from the *Havdole* cup would be a time-bound rite also required of women. However, many of the most influential *halakhik* authorities have judged that the drinking of *Havdole* wine falls outside the period of *Shabes*. Therefore, they are not obligated to keep the commandment of drinking from the *Havdole* cup. Quite a meandering logic indeed!

Like most commandments that women were not obliged to keep, the commandment of drinking *Havdole* became in Eastern Europe a ritual which women were in fact *forbidden* to keep. The Hafetz Hayyim – incidentally, the very *halakhic* authority who abrogated for Beys Yankev all historical prohibitions against formalized religious education for women[xli] – more conservatively ruled against the ability for "women to drink from the Havdole cup."[xlii] Furthermore, in the *shas tkhine* we considered above we can read this ruling *taytshed* into the "simple and pure language" of women. Quite plainly, offered in the shas' bottom right hand corner, it states: "women must not drink from the Havdole cup."[xliii]

From the invisible web of this legal context, the *taytsh* of our narrator's grandmother weaves itself out, offering a kind of mythological story to explain the legal ruling. At first, the grandmother's *taytsh* may seem humorous, banal, or just plain, *classic bobe*: "When a

women drinks Havdole/Bushy hairs will beard her chin."[xliv] Whatever our own relationship to this *taytsh*, however, we should not overlook the tremendous amount of *physical pain* it causes our narrator's body. She is "terrified" and subsequently "collapses." Nor does her terror end there. Rather, she also reveals a lasting psychological "fear" that entirely reshapes the kind of relationship she has *to* her body. In fact, this fear *inscribes* itself upon her flesh, "slimming" her face, constituting her chin as "woman-like" through threatening that, should she transgress religious categories of gender, it would become "un-womanlike." This body-altering horror "breathes" its way into our narrator. It effects are significant. Her sense of Self is transformed into HERself, and her world is bifurcated into the religious spheres of masculine and feminine.

This gendering of self and world is all brought about through the grandmother's hermeneutics. But how do they work? What are their logics? Quite simply, the process by which these hermeneutics are generated can be reduced to the following:

> a) The grandmother observes a particular physical phenomenon; in this case, our narrator drinking from the Havdole cup.
> b) The grandmother relates this phenomenon to a normative Law which has already double-*taytshed* the phenomenon for her; in this case, the Hafetz Hayyim's ruling that women should not drink from the Havdole cup.
> c) The grandmother employs the midrashic imagination – a mode of interpretation that she has tacitly acquired through reading the bottom-left hand corner of her *shas tkhine*.
> d) The grandmother spins out a myth to *de*scribe this phenomenon according to *pre*scribed Law, in turn *in*scribing Law onto flesh; in this case, the grandmother is offering a story to describe why women are legally forbidden to drink from the Havdole cup. Consequently, she inscribes her granddaughter's body with an archetypal sense of what is permitted and proscribed to the bodies of all Jewish women.

Given this mode of *taytsh's* dependence upon the legal double-*taytsh* of others, I will hereafter refer to it as "legal." Throughout *The Grandmother's Treasury*, our narrator will mark off this "legal *taytsh*" as the prevailing logic that underpins her grandmother's hermeneutical acts. But time and again this mode of *taytsh* will cause our narrator extreme physical and

emotional anguish. Recollecting how "breathing in" this *taytsh* ultimately does her body violence, our narrator therefore continues her search for an alternate *taytsh* logic.

Traditional Taytsh

Although the grandmother's legal *taytsh* contained within it an aspect of mythology, this mythology did not serve to inspire the narrator. It did not – to recall to the left-hand bottom of our *shas tkhine* – lift her "spirit" up to the heavens, circle it round the supernal heights of Myth, then re-deposit it in her body with a renewed sense of meaning. Rather, the grandmother's *taytsh* tormented our narrator, crippled her over, cut off her ability to partake of masculine Jewish ritual, gendered her world, and sexed her body. In our narrator's fifth poem, however, our narrator will recollect a mode of the grandmother's *taytsh* that *can* in fact help her to mythologically "body-forth."

The Little Cherry begins with a passage in which our narrator finds herself, once again, in pain. This time her pain is not the result of Law but rather the cruelty of other children. We learn that as a young girl our narrator was ridiculed by her friends for a birthmark on her face. Desperately, she therefore beseeches her grandmother to *taytsh* her a story that might offer not only consolation, but an almost redemptive kind of meaning to her "blemish." She implores:

> Tell me, bobe-love, you smart one.
> Tell me, bobe-love, you beauty.
> Tell where, this blemish comes from,
> cherried spot upon my left cheek.

Because the phenomenon of our narrator's birthmark in no way threatens the norms of traditional Jewish society, the grandmother's subsequent *tayth* of this phenomenon is free from the kinds of invisible legal structures that informed her hermeneutics in *Havdole Wine.*

Now, liberated from Law, the grandmother's *taytsh* has an entirely soothing effect. Here is a translation of it, quietly captivating:

> "Cherrytime your mother floated
> through the orchards of our town
> saw a cherry tree, enchanted,
> touched the left side of her brow.
>
> Dear one, grasp this lovely secret:
> Cherried spot upon your cheek
> is a grace God gave your mother
> picking cherries one sweet eve."

As a result of this *taytsh*, our narrator feels as if bathed in a "soft white foam." For scholars who employ a Freudian analytic, such an image may suggest a sperm-like effluvium, thus transforming the grandmother's *taytsh* into a kind of insemination. And perhaps rightly so. After all, here the grandmother is not merely passively riffing off the creative *taytshes* of masculine legal authorities, as she did in *Havdole Wine*. Rather, in *The Little Cherry*, she is *actively* generating her *own* taytsh, appropriating the masculine logics of this *taytsh*, but then uniquely applying these logics to a reading of her world. This blurring of masculine and feminine discursive practices thus lead to the blurring of masculine and feminine imagery. Women are inseminating women by *taytshing* masculine hermeneutical forms into their own feminine speech-genre.

Despite the interpenetration of gendered discourses that results from the grandmother's assumption of "masculine" *taytsh* practice, the spheres of folklore and religious Law still remain distinct. This is made clear through the fact that the grandmother marshals her masculine *taytsh* practices not in the service of re-interpreting *Jewish institutional religion*, as would a man, but rather in the service of legislating a myth to re-interpret the cultural world *outside religion*. Noting this particular detail, the logics of *The Little Cherry's taytsh* can be broken down as follows:

a) The grandmother is confronted with a physical phenomenon; in this case, the fact that children are deriding her granddaughter's birthmark.
b) The grandmother employs the midrashic imagination.
c) The grandmother spins out a myth to *de*scribe this phenomenon according to a sensual understanding of what the body needs, thus *in*scribing the body with a sense of self-love and Tradition; in this case, the grandmother is inscribing her granddaughter's body with the etiological myth of her body's "cherried spot."

Because this mode of *taytsh* lies outside the domain of Jewish Law but because it is also structured around a mythological notion of Tradition (the granddaughter receives her beauty mark from her mother's mythological experience), I will hereafter refer to it as "traditional *taytsh*."

In order to assess the benefits of this mode of *taytsh*, our narrator once again turns to her body. It feels calmed, loved, dear, and – to repeat – as if bathed in "soft white foam." Even still, our narrator recognizes that both the meritorious sensations it causes her body as well as the gender bending aspects it provides to her grandmother do not remedy its alienation from the masculine religious sphere. Of course, the women who practice this mode *taytsh* are indirectly lifting the masculine logics of the *shas tkhine's* bottom left hand corner off the page and into life. But directly, these women are still barred from applying "masculine" logics to the religious sphere itself. To reiterate, they *can* pray this logic out of the prayerbook and into myths they creatively generate themselves; however, they have yet to apply their assumption of these logics to the Jewish textual canon, *taytshing* out Laws as a result, then inscribing these Laws into bodies both contextual *and* textual. For our narrator soon all of this will change.

To Taytsh or Not to Taytsh, a Question of Legal Process

After circling the Mythic realms of her memory, in *Gut Vokh* – the final poem of *The Grandmother's Treasury* – our narrator is "re-deposited" into her modern body once more.

Perfectly book-ending the work, *Gut Vokh* – like the collection's opening poem – figures a sun "slipping" into evening. But now, this slipping-into evening betokens something far more archetypal, betokens an in fact slipping-out of *Shabes.* Thus returning to the threshold temporality of the *Havdole* ritual, our narrator must once again confront the border-drawing moment that first alienated her from her tradition, testing the limitations of her language and longing.

Subverting the spatial structure of a page ripped out from a *shas tkhine*, Ulinover's narrator here divides her own page into upper and lower regions. It seems as if she is mimicking the structure of devotional literature, or – less parodically – writing a new kind of *double-taytsh* to accompany a new kind of prayer. Blending aspects of mythological narrative, Law, and supplication,[xlv] the poem runs as follows:

> The Shabes sky swarms high above me
> Clouds blur brown and grey my sight…
> *Gut vokh* candle in my hand, does
> Law permit me, though, to light?
>
> Knotting out of shadows, deathly,
> *Bobe's* spirit mutely winks:
> "Now! In this dark *Shabes* hour
> Spark the wick with your instinct."
>
> *Bobe* flows away with Shabes
> flows as quickly as she came.
> So I light the *gut vokh* candle,
> this star unto to me seven days…
>
> ***
>
> *Gut vokh*!...I place myself before you
> as my *Bobe* streams.
> With a bright, illumined face
> I shine and am redeemed.
>
> Off I shake, shake off my worries,
> of the coming week.
> Fresh dew, fresh dew, I dash against you,
> *Shabes,* as you leave.

O my heart laughs ever deeper,
heed the *Bobes* taytsh –
then the week will ever circle
round the *gut vokh* light.

Like *Havdole Wine*, the above is written against both an invisible mesh of Jewish Law as well as the *tkhine* literature through which this Law penetrated the lives of Jewish women. Therefore, in order to fully understand what our narrator is attempting to convey in the above, we need to paint the normative Law of her context visible once more.

To begin, let's return to the right-hand corner of our *shas tkhine*. Flipping to its page on *Havdole* we find the following Laws inscribed:

> 4) If it is a cloudy day, one is not allowed to do any work until one is certain that, were the sky clear, one would have already seen three stars.
> 6) If one lights a candle before the completion of evening prayer [*mayrev*] one must say first, Blessed are You, the One-who-separates the holy from the quotidian [*burekh hamavdil beyn koydesh l'khol*].
> 8) Women must listen well to *Havdole* in order that they fulfill the Law.[xlvi]

These Laws, *double-taytshes* smuggled in from the masculine sphere,[xlvii] result in a tremendous anxiety on the narrator's part. Though she longs to light the candle and thus link herself to the religious practices she has lost, she worries that a) she is not permitted to light because of the clouds b) she is not permitted to light because – as a woman – her obligation is merely to *listen* to the *men* pray and c) she is not permitted to light because – without knowing these prayers in full – she cannot properly pray in the first place. Unlike in the first poem, however, in *Gut Vokh* our narrator's feminine language does not break down as a result of her longing to embody these masculine modes of religious expression. On the contrary, all of the memories she has examined up to this point have provided her with a knowledge of what she must do in order to integrate the two traditions into herself. Nu, with what does she commence this integration? An act of *taytsh*.

Our narrator's first *taytsh* is subtle, seemingly literalistic, and targeted at the Hebrew word *Havdole* itself. Typically in Yiddish, this word – *Havdole* – is simply maintained as *Havdole*. Accordingly, *Havdole candles* are referred to *Havdole likhtn*. Yet here our narrator chooses to *taytsh* Havdole – the Hebrew of which literally means *separating* – into a Yiddish idiom meaning *good week*. Why this small translation from *Havdole* to *gut vokh* is so important will be revealed in time. For now, let us move on to the first stanza's other subversive act.

Although innocent seeming at first, our narrator asks, "Does the Law permit me, though, to light?"[xlviii] This query's fundamentally legalistic nature transforms it into the complexity of a *kashe* – a problem that may only be addressed to a Halakhic authority for the sake legal arbitration. Nevertheless, here our narrator addresses the question to herself. The effects of this auto-address are more than momentous, they are mythological. For out of the space of silence circumscribed by the "feminine language" of this auto-address, the spirit of our narrator's grandmother "knots" itself, wordlessly, "mutely winking." What this spirit brings with it are the logics of traditional *taytsh*. What our narrator will do with these logics is wrest the Law into her own body. What the poetic process of wresting Law into body looks like can be broken down as such:

> a) Our narrator observes a physical phenomenon; in this case, the phenomenon is her self, longing to practice the ritual of *Havdole*.
> b) Our narrator listens to silence; in this case, the silence encompassed by her auto-address.
> c) Our narrator employs the midrashic imagination in order, in this case, to *taytsh* the text of her longing into the inspirational Myth of her grandmother's ghost.
> d) Our narrator listens to silence; in this case, the silence of her grandmother's ghost.
> e) Our narrator *taytshes* the silence; in this case, she hears a voice (is it hers?) call out "Spark the wick with your instinct."
> f) Our narrator's doubts her Myth; in the case, the grandmother's ghost flows away.
> g) Our narrator listens to silence; in this case, silence as the memory of Myth.
> h) Our narrator feels what she needs; in this case, to strike a match.
> i) Our narrator bodies forth the Law; in this case, a Law that allows her to strike a match.

j) Our narrator performs the ritual of her Law; in this case, she makes a traditional *taytsh*, legislates a tacit legal ruling, then embodies this ruling through striking a match.

As a result of this tenfold process, the product of our narrator's religious act shoots up in to the heavens like "a star." She inscribes it, the Process of this Law, this Star, not only into her body but out onto the page for us.

What comes next in the poem is a break, a division of the page into upper and lower halves. Whereas the poem's upper half required us to avail ourselves of the Laws featured in the *shas tkhine's* lower right hand section, the poem's bottom lower half requires our familiarity with the prayer featured in the *shas'* upper section. In translation, the prayer runs as follows:

> The beloved holy Shabes has now gone away. With it has also disappeared our quietude. A new week confronts us...an evil week which brings in its wake new worries, new terrors, new pains. All that is left to us is the hope of You alone. You are our only hope, and our faith in you, compassionate God, gives us the strength to carry our sorrows with patience...consoles our broken hearts. Heal our wounds...and send us your redemption...amen.[xlix]

In the above, the supplicant is to embody through reading sensations of fear, terror, and worry, anticipating that new pains that will inevitably attend the coming week. To ward against this, the supplicant addresses God, beseeching God to "redeem" her, to "console" her heart, and to give her the strength to bear her sorrow "with patience." In stark contrast, the lower half of Ulinover's poem describes our narrator as joyfully receiving the new week through a ritual of "dashing fresh dew" after *Shabes.* There is nothing to fear for our narrator at all. Nor is their reason to beseech God for "redemption." On the contrary, because she has learned how to *taytsh* Jewish Law, our narrator feels her body as if "illumined, bright, and shining." More than this, she feels her body "redeemed." Thus narrates our narrator a kind of prayer-like lyricism flowing from of her. She praises the

holiness of *Shabes* as much as she praises the holiness of the Week. And, ultimately, in her last couplet, she praises her grandmother's *taytsh* above all else. For it was through her grandmother's *taytsh* that she was able to raise her body out of "crippledom" and into this state of praise – this praise for the Past and its Traditions coupled to this praise for modernity.

Before concluding, we need address one lingering issue; namely, Why does our narrator translate *Havdole* (separating) as *Gut vokh* (good week)? It seems to me that the answer inheres in the way our narrator *taytshes* the sense of the ritual itself. Both the *Havdole* ritual as well as its *Gut vokh* translation attempt to make sense of threshold spaces, of suns slipping into and out of. The way the *Havdole* ritual deals with this ambiguity is by instituting order through such binaries as sacred/profane and, as we saw in the *tkhine* prayer, good/evil. Additionally, the Laws of *Havdole* deal with this ambiguity by instituting the binary of masculine/feminine. In contrast, the ritual of *Gut vokh* deals with ambiguity not through constructing binaries, but through instituting the very idea of ambiguity itself. Thus *Shabes*/week becomes good/good, or different/different. Similarly, although women maintain the "separateness" of their "feminine speech-genre" during *Gut Vokh*, masculine hermeneutics and the Power to Interpret flow into their genre, breaking-down its borders into semi-permeability. Even more radical than our narrator's *taytsh* of the gender Laws of *Havdole,* however, is her *taytsh* of the very concept of Law itself.

Unlike the Laws of Havdole, the Laws of *Gut vokh* do not *pre*scribe any positive content. They do not tell us when to light, what prayers to say, or who can say them. Rather, the Laws of *Gut vokh* simply *de*scribe the process by which an individual – regardless of gender – can come to legislate his or her *own* positive content from his or her *own* Law, filtering the hermeneutical *forms* of traditional Law through the framework of the body. As it

longs to maintain traditional forms, this act of filtration cannot be understood as run-of-the-mill antinomianism. It is simply a vision of Judaism which regards the *form* of Law as eternal, but the *content* of Law as eternally in process. Only with a view of Law as such, suggests our narrator, will she (will we in her stead) be able to "breathe" back into us (in ways gentle and productive) the formal entirety (masculine, feminine, folklorist, and religious) of our pasts.

iii. Transparent Tale-telling:
Toward a Scholarly, Trans-gendered and Post-modern Judaism

"Every individual, by living authentically, shall...become a law." – Martin Buber[l]

I began my reading of Ulinover with a search for criticism on her work. Tradition is a value I hold as well. While I oftentimes did not agree with the content of what these critics yielded through their hermeneutics, their existentially-generative method, their lyricism, their love of Myth, and their practices of sensual somatic-reading "breathed" a way into me. Of course these scholars and their "*double-taytsh*" deeply affected my own reading of Ulinover as well. Yet in my survey of them, I tried to justify the inevitability of affect by self-consciously translating their words out of the epithet of "criticism" and into the reservoir of "Ulinover's discourse." To put it another way, I have attempted to dissolve the line the separates the bottom of the page from the top. While old as the Talmud and thus archetypal,[li] such a methodology does not come without its own set of problems.

Take translation. When rendering Ulinover's poetry to English, I decided to follow the model of both Ulinover's narrator as well as her critics, feeling how her text affected me sensually and then rendering my *taytsh* accordingly. It goes without saying that this is not pure *taytsh*. Rather, it is a breed of traditional *taytsh*, one that shuttles between the words of Ulinover, the mediating words of her critics, my own latent affections, and – of course – the silence between us. This practice allowed me to feel a part of something much greater. And

as a result, my translations and analyses – my *double-taytsh* – seemed to flow more easily. While I maintain reservations about this approach, ultimately, it feels right, right now.

I do not believe this talk to be gratuitous. Still, I do not wish conclude my "folktale" on Ulinover and her critics with a discussion on my own methodology. Rather, I would much prefer to circle back to the poet herself, granting Ulinover a *taytsh* perhaps purer than what I've given her above. My hope is that, through this final, literalistic *taytsh*, I will be able to open further possibilities and precedents for post-modern and trans-gendered Jews to find their voice through actively intoning their ancestral texts. For while Ulinover's work as I have read it above does allow for a blending together of genders, it also chooses to accept upon itself the yoke of a gendered language and speech-genre. This is perhaps a yoke too much for us to bear, a yoke against which we should continue to struggle. And so, although the following translation rips *The Grandmother's Treasury* from its gendered formalism and vernacular, I try my best to reconstruct it in a register more well-suited to post-wave feminists like me. The finest *The Grandmother's Treasury* has to offer, the following poem is entitled *The Will*:

> "Good night upon you, my little town,
> and a good eternity!...
> Does it rustle a leaf from the tree?
> Does completeness sing this melancholy?
>
> Late. It rests the old steps.
> It moans already no more wooden boards.
> It takes this death these eyes to falling.
> I say a final prayer for sleep.
>
> Read my lettered will
> tomorrow without a melancholy:
> from the wood of my little bed
> build in the prayer-house a lectern.
>
> Will all you tomorrow bury me,
> so take, chop my little bed awry,
> and build from the grandmother's wood

a sacrificial-plank."

*

Long ago rotted the sacrificial-plank.
It stands still today the lectern.
Good night upon you, my grandmother's little town,
and a good eternity.

I will not offer you anything beyond this literalist *taytsh*. I will simply draw your attention to the images of the sacrificial-plank and the lectern, then pose a question. What pasts do you wish to sacrifice and what pasts do you wish to translate into the kind of institution that will enable your body to unfurl itself as Law?

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[i] For further information on the destruction of traditional Jewish life due to modernization, urbanization and emigration, see Dan Miron, *The Image of the Shtetl and Other Studies of Modern Jewish Literary Imagination* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), pp. 8-9; and Konrad Zieliński, "The Shtetl in Poland, 1914-1918," in Steven T. Katz (ed.), *The Shtetl: New Evaluations*, (New York-London: New York University Press, 2007), pp. 102-120.

[ii] Natalia Krynika notes that the book was printed by the Brother Levin-Epshteyn with a relatively large quantity of copies. See Natalia Krynicka, *araynfir* to *A grus fun der alter heym: lider/ Un bonjour du pays natal: poems* by Miriam Ulinover, ed. Natalia Krynicka (Paris: Biblioteque Medem, 2003), pp. ב- ט י. Here I would like to note that, although my interpretations diverge tremendously from Krynicka, she is a masterful exegete, and her scholarly work on Ulinover is thorough, important, and has greatly facilitated my own research.

[iii] This was also the first book to be narrated by a women who lived in "traditional Jewish society." See Krynicka, introduction to *A grus fun der alter heym* (above, note 2), p. ה נ.

[iv] Natalia Krynicka catalogues the book's popularity extensively. See, for example, Krynicka, *araynfir* (above, note 2), pp. כ א- נ.

[v] See Krynicka, *araynfir* (above, note 2), pp. כ א- ט י. In contrast, Ezra Korman described in 1928 that Ulinover was not "given her due" by audiences. See, Ezra Korman, *araynfir* to Ezra Korman (ed.), *Yidishe dikhterins: antologye* (Chicago: Farlag L.M. Stein, 1928), p. LXIII. Whether we trust Krynicka or Korman as to the public popularity of Ulinover's work, we can still note that – at the very least –20th century critics had Ulinover on their mind, many of whom sought their best to in fact popularize her. Except for a handful of post-holocaust scholars, even the *attempt* to draw audiences to Ulinover ended after the war.

[vi] This is ultimately what happens to Khaim Leyb Fuks in *Lodz, shel m'lah* (Tel Aviv: Y.L. Peretz Farlag, 1972), pp. 53-55; and Yeshia Shpigl in *Geshtaltn un profiln: literarishe eseyen* (Tel Aviv: Farlag haminorah, 1971), pp. 219-223.

[vii] I use the term *existentially generative* to describe a particular mode of reading whereby early 20th century Jewish critics and reformers were able to *generate* from literature self- and collective definitions for their Jewish publics and, more reflexively, themselves. The content of the definitions they generated did not assume the essentialism of some pre-discursive ontological truth. Rather, these critics acknowledged their definitions to be mere descriptions of their own worldly actions, participative scholarship, as well as the cultural discourses they both helped to structure and were structured by.

[viii] For Frishman's biography, see Shemu'el Niger and Ya'akov Shatski, eds., *Leksikon fun der nayer Yidisher literatur*, vol. 7 (Nyu York: Alveltlekhn Yidishn kultur-kongres, 1956-1981), pp. 505-513. For Frishman's assistance in helping to find Ulinover a publisher as well as for a discussion of his influence on other critics, see Krynicka, *aryanfir* (above, note 2), pp. ב–. ח י

[ix] Dovid Frishman, *araynfir* to *Der Bobes Oytser* (Varshe: Brider Levin-Epshteyn, 1922), p. III-IV.

[x] See Frishman, *araynfir* (above, note 9), p. IV. The trope of forgetting when listening to Ulinover's work recurs in Shpigl, *Geshtaltn un profiln* (above, note 6), pp. 220-1; as well as Krynicka, *araynfir* (above, note 2), p. . מד

[xi] Frishman, *araynfir* (above, note 9), p. IV.
[xii] Frishman, *araynfir* (above, note 9), p. VI. Translations throughout my own. Italicization my own.
[xiii] I have chosen the epithet of Jewish secularism rather than secular Judaism to emphasize what I feel to be Frishman's ultimate position on the question of Jewish self-understanding in the modern world. As did most proponents of the Jewish Enlightenment, Frishman deemed secular reason to be universal. In contrast Jewish culture functioned as an existential practice through which one could perform a particular kind of cultural meaning within the otherwise uniformity of well-reasoned secular society.

For a possible historical precedent to Frishman's secularism/culture binary see Moses Mendelssohn's enlightenment/culture binary in David Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry: 1780-1840* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), pp. 71-73; as well as Moses Mendelssohn's parable about how multiculturalism is the only way to ward against the monolithic hegemony of a reasoned, secular world. Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*, trans. Allan Arkush (Lebanon: University Press of New England, 1983), ff. 135.
[xiv] Frishman, *araynfir* (above, note 9), p. V.
[xv] Frishman's distinctions between masculine and feminine modes of becoming also obtain in his autobiography. There, through the language of inheritance, Frishman notes that he had acquired his "critical-analytical mind" from his enlightened father, and his lyrical-idealistic mood" from his cultured mother. See Shemu'el Niger and Ya'akov Shatski, eds., *Leksikon* (above, note 8), p. 505.
[xvi] This reading of Ulinover also penetrates Krynicka's analysis: "The task of guarding home and hearth is bound up with spiritual life, with the matriarchal tradition passed from mother to daughter, from grandmother to granddaughter." See Krynicka, *araynfir* (above, note 2), pp. ז נ. In contrast, Yosef Turko describes that Ulinover did *not* find her own domestic role in life spiritually fulfilling, at least not *in-and-of-itself*. Rather, she describes her domestic duties as "mundane" and "prosaic." The act of writing, on the other hand, "lifts her to the heights of true spirituality…without which the day to day would merely be a collection of weak and unmemorable moments." Nevertheless, Ulinover reports that it was only during housework that poetry began to "weave itself in [her] mind, in [her] heart, warm[ing] and ripen[ed]." See Yosef Turko, "Bay Miriam Ulinover," *Literarishe Bleter*, no. 48, 551 (November 30th, 1934): p. 803.
[xvii] See Deborah Weissman, "Bais Ya'akov, a Women's Educational Movement in the Polish Jewish Community: A Case Study in Tradition and Modernity" (master's thesis, New York University), p. 83.
[xviii] I pull this language directly from the literature of the Bais Yaakov movement. Judith Grunfeld-Rosenbaum, "Sara Schenierer—the Story of a Great Movement," in Leo Jung (ed.), *Jewish Leaders: 1750-1940* (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1953), p. 419.
[xix] Deborah Weissman, "Bais Yaakov: A Historical Model for Jewish Feminists," in Elizabeth Koltun (ed.), *The Jewish Woman: New Perspectives* (New York: Schoken Books, 1976), pp. 142-3.
[xx] For more on Bays Yankev's use of Ulinover's poetry see also Krynicka, *araynfir* (above, note 2), pp. כא-כ. For more information on the Beys Yankev curriculum/canon see, Harry M. Rabinowicz, *The World of Hasidim* (Hartford: Hartmore House, 1970), ff. 209.
[xxi] Moshe Prager, *araynfir* to *Antologye fun religieze lider un dertseylungen: shafungen fun shrayber, umgekumene in di yorn fun idishn khurbn in eyrope*, ed. Moshe Prager (Nyu-York: Forshungs-institut fun religiezn yidntum, 1955), p. 19.
[xxii] Prager, *araynfir* (above, note 21), p. 17.
[xxiii] In 1922, for example, Khayim Leyb Fuks adopts Frishman's lyrical sensualism and longing for the past: "And when we…find ourselves yoked by modernity…something wills itself to us…the longing for our past…and this Ulinover breathes into us, full of love." Citied by Krynika, *araynfir* (above, note 2), p. צ. In 1925 Binyomin Grobard adopts Frishman's notion of how women are the most valuable carriers of Jewish culture: "A woman, a true poetess, should fill the nationalistic pulse and folk-traditions better than a man...for she preserves all of the folk-tales, the legends, the superstitions which are the foundations of a people's culture and national life." See Binyomin Grobard, "Miriam Ulinover: *Der Bobes Oytser*," *Di Tsukunft*, vol. 30 (November 3, March 1925): p. 191.
[xxiv] Ezra Korman, *araynfir* (above, note 5), p. LXIV.
[xxv] Kathryn Hellerstein, "The Question of Tradition: Women Poets in Yiddish," in Lewis Fried (ed.), *Handbook of Jewish-American Literature* (Westport: Greenwood Press Inc, 1988), pp. 212.
[xxvi] I use the word genre here in a Bakhtinian sense. Bakhtin argues that genre is a kind of invisible substance which carries with it certain definable attributes. As genre is handed down from generation to generation, certain attributes are added, others subtracted. Thus can Bakhtin's idea of genre be a useful tool through which to analyze Korman's conception of "Yiddish women's literature." See, M.M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 101-180.

[xxvii] See Kathryn Hellerstein, "The Question of Tradition" (above, note 24), p. 223. Here I would like to note more generally that Professor Hellerstein has done tremendous work with the notion of the Jewish women's religio-secular Jewish canon. The following study is very much indebted to the feminist approach, analytical rigor, and existential importance of Hellerstein's scholarship. Wherever appropriate, I mark her influence as well as the confluences of our analyses.

[xxviii] After Korman, there is a significant increase of critics who situate Ulinover's work within the feminine secular/formalist tradition. See Itsik Goldkorn, *Lodzsher Portretn* (Tel Aviv: ha-Minora, 1963), p. 61: "[Ulinover's] song is an echo of a heart-filled Jewish *nign* from long ago, sung in the sweet voice of a tender pious poetess;" Rivke Zilberg (pseudonym for Kadya Molodovsky), "Miriam Ulinover: A Yidishe Dikhterin, vos hot gelebt eybenartik un iz geshtorben vi a martirerin," in *Forverts* (Feb. 13th, 1955): "Every word seems to be taken from a Yiddish woman's prayer;" Yeshia Shpigl. *Geshtaltn un Profiln* (above, note 6), p. 223: "Miriam Ulinover...appears to me...as a homeless, final Sore Bas Toyim;" and Y.Y. Trunk, cited in Moyshe Prager, *araynfir* (above, note 23), p. 17: "[Ulinover's] poetry belongs to...[the tradition] of the *taytsh khumeh* and Sore Bas Tovim."

[xxix] Kathryn Hellerstein proves the exception to the rule with her rich work on Ulinover. See Kathryn Hellerstein, "Fear of Faith: The Subordination of Prayer to Narrative in Modern Yiddish Poems," in Clemens Thoma and Michael Wyschogrod (ed.), *Parable and Story in Judaism in Christianity* (ed.,; New York: Paulist Press, 1989), pp. 205-235; Kathryn Hellerstein, "From 'Ikh' to 'Zikh': A Journey From "I" to "Self" in Yiddish Poems by Women," in Naomi B. Sokoloff, Anne Lapidus Lerner, and Anita Norich (ed.), *Gender and Text in Modern Hebrew and Yiddish Literature* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992), pp. 113-143; Kathryn Hellerstein, "On the Other Side of the Poem: Translating Yiddish Poems by Women," Shlomo Berger (ed.), in *The Multiple Voices of Modern Yiddish Literature* (Amsterdam: Menasseh ben Israel Institute, 2007), pp. 56-76; and Kathryn Hellerstein, "Songs of Herself: A lineage of Women Yiddish Poets," in *Studies in American Jewish Literature* (Fall 1990), pp. 138-150.

[xxx] Krynicka, *araynfir* (above, note 2), חא .

[xxxi] Krynika, *araynfir* (above, note 2), חג .

[xxxii] Little town.

[xxxiii] Grandfather.

[xxxiv] *Shas tehinah rav peninim: 'im tefilot* (Varsha: H. Levin-Epstein: 1905).

[xxxv] *Shas tehinah* (above, note 34), p. 1.

[xxxvi] *Shas tehinah* (above, note 34), p. 2.

[xxxvii] *Shas tehinah* (above, note 34), pp. 1-2.

[xxxviii] The incidence of female liturgists complicates the claim. Chava Weissler's brilliant work demonstrates certain females who offered unique *double-taytshes* of traditional texts. Still, their *double-taytshes* were mystical in nature, *not* legalistic. Ulinover's most aesthetically sophisticated collection of poems, *Shabes*, in fact attempts to represent what kinds of effects mystical *taytsh* can have on female practitioners. Because mystical *taytsh* promises gender symmetry in the eschaton and/or afterlife, it results in the thanatos and consequent death of Ulinover's narrator. *Shabes* can be found in Krynika, *A grus fun der alter heym* (above, note 2), pp. 161-173. See also, Chava Weissler, *Voices of the Matriarchs: Listening to the Prayers of Early Modern Jewish Women* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998).

[xxxix] Krynicka notes the grandmother's semiotic system of reading the world but not her narrator's appropriation of it. See Krynicka, *araynfir* (above, note 2), pp. חב-ג .

[xl] For more information on women and the "time-bound commandments" see, Rachel Biale, *Women and Jewish Law: The Essential Texts, Their History, and Their Relevance for Today* (New York: Schocken Books, 1984), 10-43.

[xli] Weissman, "Bais Yaakov: A Historical Model for Jewish Feminists" (above, note 19), p. 142.

[xlii] Yisroel Meir Ha-Cohen, *Mishnah Berurah*, ed. Rabbi Aharon Feldman and Rabbi Aviel Orenstein, vol. 3b (Jerusalem: Pisgah Foundation, 1981), p. 131.

[xliii] *Shas tahinah* (above, note 34), p. 166.

[xliv] According to the *Encyclopedia of Folklore, Customs and Tradition in Judaism*, there was a folk saying in Eastern Europe that "a woman who drinks Havdalah wine will grow a beard." Cited by Kathryn Hellerstein, "On the Other Side of the Poem" (above, note 29), pp. 64-5. N.B. Hellerstein offers a similar interpretation of *Havdole Wine*, "At a time when her own sexual role has yet to be realized, the narrator of the poem has been transfigured by the grandmother's warning." For an alternate perspective, see Natalia Krynicka, *araynfir* (above, note 2), p. ט . Krynicka argues that this kind of tone in the collection is meant humorously.

[xlv] For a luminous discussion on the way in which prayer is transformed to narrative in Yiddish poetry, see Kathryn Hellerstein, "Fear of Faith," (above, note 29).

[xlvi] *Shas tahinah* (above, note 34), pp. 163-66.

[xlvii] We can source the *double-taytsh* of this latter point to the Hafetz Hayyim who rules that women should "not recite Havdole themselves but should listen to Havdoleh made by a male." See, Yisroel Meir Ha-Cohen, *Mishnah Berurah* (above, note 41), p. 141.

[xlviii] The legal dimensions of the question are brought out more severely in Ulinover's Hebrew translation where the words "asur" and "mutar" are used. See Miriam Ulinover, Ha-otzar shel ha-savta, trans. Yehoshua Pan Tai (Jerusalem: Mossad Ha-rav Kook, 1975).

[xlix] *Shas tahinah* (above, note 34), pp. 165-166.

[l] Thanks to Zach Mann for this – *an ekht tsadikl un emesdiker khaver.*

[li] I am deeply indebted (scholastically as well as spiritually) to David Roskies' archetypal vision of Yiddish scholarship. See David Roskies, *The Jewish Search for a Usable Past* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 12.