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WHISPERS AMONG THE SCREAMS: EMOTIONAL RESISTANCE TO THE HOLOCAUST
IN THE WARSAW GHETTO

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ABSTRACT

What is emotional resistance? Rebellion against an occupying presence can manifest into a variety of forms, yet the most conventional incarnations of revolution remain the most popular. That is resistance by violent force, or in more democratic scenarios, political action. The former is ubiquitous for its simplicity and accessibility, in the use of physical, corporal harm to achieve a sociopolitical gain against an occupying presence. As representative of the popular conscience on resistance, such armed revolts attract the overwhelming majority of scholarship. Nazi-occupied Warsaw is no exception to this rule, as the failed Warsaw Ghetto Uprising enjoys significant academic attention. While the insurrection is noble in its intentions and valiant in its participants, this paper contends that other, less conventional forms of resistance are equally (if not more) profound and potent in challenging the Nazi ethic. Secretive instruction of illicit Jewish topics, sustained productions of cherished Yiddish plays, and defiant, poignant literature were all abundant throughout ghettoized Warsaw, indicating a conscious communal effort to challenge Nazi ideology. Furthermore, all of these manifestations of emotional resistance were created by Jews for their fellow Jews, who demonstrated a clear intention to provide peaceful mechanisms of relief, and resistance, for a suffering audience.

Given that ghettoized Warsaw presents a dualistic scenario- a uniquely Nazi fusion of severe militaristic control with psychologically disturbing elements- it is now a worthy case study for the emergence of emotional resistance. Under the aegis of a Nazi regime whose interests in territorial annexation transcended tangible, materialistic gains to installing concepts of Aryan racial superiority, concrete forms of resistance may not always prove effective. Consequently, against an oppressive Nazi power whose fundamental ideology relies upon the imposition of denigration and dehumanization, challenges against such rhetoric can serve as astonishingly effective remedies towards a plummeting morale. As was the case with Warsaw, this nonviolent resistance reignited

the communal spirit in its motivation, resilience, and creativity through the conception of novel means of shedding the shackles of occupation- both structural and psychological. Therefore, this thesis defines emotional resistance as the Jewish community's conscious effort to combat the demoralizing intentions of Nazi racial ideology, whether through the continued instruction of Hebrew topics under clandestine circumstances, leaving fine arts as an expressive force, or the employment of literature as a vehicle of rhetorical rebellion, specifically. This thesis will explore each of these forms of resistance individually, and illuminate the potential for nonviolent rebellion to occur under emotional, psychological, and cognitive pretenses.

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Primarily, this thesis is dedicated to the memory of every soul, Jewish or otherwise, who perished at the hands of hateful Nazi race ideology and its concurrent atrocities, yet continues to live on as an inspiration of remembrance, coexistence, and the delicacy of life. I would also like to specifically commemorate the heroic efforts of Emmanuel Ringelblum, whose unflinching confrontation with death and commitment to history produced the voluminous Warsaw Ghetto Archives (Oneg Shabbath). His work has singlehandedly immortalized the emotions, spirit, and resilience of an entire city suffering under the Nazi German flag.

I would also like to personally thank my thesis supervisor, Dr. Sabine Doran, for her guiding hand, reassuring voice, and encouraging sentiments throughout the year. Researching, writing, and refining a thesis is a grueling process, but you have made the process much more manageable- and truly enjoyable!

And of course, I would be remiss to not mention my wonderful mother, without whose unconditional love and support, this paper would not be possible.

“Why, oh why did the soul plunge,
From the utmost heights, to the lowest depths?
The seed of redemption,
is contained within the fall”

-Der Dybbuk, Act I

Chapter 1

“Jewish Capital of Europe” to Nazi Occupation

Few proclamations occupy a light as ironic as Woodrow Wilson’s during his justification to engage American military forces to the continental conflict ravaging Europe. The so-called “Great War” enjoyed a different moniker on American soil, and across Wilson’s tongue, the latter of which dubbed it the “war to end all wars.” This conflict, the president argued, would be a necessary assertion of the preeminence of democracy as a peacekeeping ideological force, now harnessed and pitted against “barbaric” German imperial forces, an antiquated Ottoman regime, and a collection of squabbling monarchies insistent on retaining power over foreign lands. Self-determination hung as the rhetorical centerpiece in rationalizing commitment of forces, material, and financial support to this bloody engagement, a war that occupied a unique juncture in global history. Juxtaposed between the dying hour of Western imperialism’s final vestiges and the burgeoning moments of modernized wartime technology, The Great War witnessed a clash between dated political ideologies with borderline-prototype weaponry. The conflict, naturally, was crude and gruesome, exacting innumerable casualties via a variety of methods, none of which were particularly expedient in their lethality. Furthering the irony, the prospect of an eternal peacetime was pursued by forces wielding belt-fed machine guns, suffocating gaseous grenades, and airplanes capable of unleashing explosives on unsuspecting, and in plenty cases, civilian targets. However, the indiscriminant barbarism of the conflict’s instruments produced an eventual victory for the Allied cause, whose postwar desires aligned with the Wilsonian naiveté mentioned previously.

The victorious party was dominant by three nearly monolithic figures, whose ambitions matched their political statures. As the representatives of the United Kingdom, France, and the United States,

respectively, David Lloyd George, Georges Clemenceau, and Woodrow Wilson endeavored to shape the craterous husk of Europe into a crucible of democracy and self-determination. They dissolved the Ottoman Empire along Anatolia and the Middle East, and toppled the Habsburg dynasty that controlled Austria-Hungary and the Balkan Peninsula- yet the question of sanctioning Germany remained. A clear belligerent in the war, merciless in its implementation of “unrestricted submarine warfare” strategy and offering immense financial aid to the aforementioned empires, severely tarnished its reputation in the eyes of Lloyd George and Clemenceau. The two Western European leaders swiftly conceived a decisive and debilitating punishment was in order, much to the dismay of Wilson, manifested in the Versailles Treaty. Infamous now, due to implications then unforeseeable, the Treaty imposed harsh restrictions on German militaristic development, including the forbiddance of grooming a standing army, air force, or navy. Further inflaming the German conscience was the guilt clause, a term which commanded Germany to publically accept full and uncontested accountability for the war- an obvious source of extreme transnational humiliation for the losing party. Lastly, and most destructively, the Allies charged financial “reparations” for the damage exacted upon civilians throughout war-torn regions, a bill which totaled about 133billion Reichmarks. This figure was, understandably, far from a feasible payment for the already beleaguered German economy, which once mobilized to fulfill these installments, only further sunk into hyper-inflated disarray. Upon concluding analysis, the Germans interpreted the Treaty as a gross, blatant, and uncompromising display of Allied vitriol, intended not only the comprehensive destruction of an entire state from a functional perspective, but the demoralization of its people and denigration of its culture.

While the allies rejoiced at what they understood as a monumental victory for the, somewhat bloated, pursuit of deathless democracy, German public opinion soured dramatically. The collective fury and shame expressed by a battered populace spawned more than a few radical characters, all of whom were hell-bent on a restoration of German pride, prosperity, and preeminence. Among the early emerging forces in the category of alternative methods to reestablishing German supremacy were an irate failed art

student, a crestfallen Luftwaffe deserter, an incisive cultural journalist, and a venomously racist social theorist with a “mousy” complexion. These four men comprised the “Inner Circle” of what would eventually develop into the National Socialist German Workers’ Party, abbreviated in conversation as Nazi’s.¹ Listed in sequential order as their epitaphs above, Adolf Hitler, Herman Goring, Joseph Goebbels, and Heinrich Himmler operated commanding roles, projecting from the group’s early incarnations to the height of its capabilities during the Second World War. Adolf Hitler soon postured himself as the group’s *de facto* leader, weaponizing the calculated anti-Semitic vitriol of his underlings into powerful, magnetic speeches that drew considerable acclaim. In 1923, Hitler and his conspirators were imprisoned for falsely staging a purge, or *putsch*, of Munich’s government under the aegis of National Socialism. By 1933, Hitler’s party secured a majority share of German parliamentary seats, earning the controversial leader the title of Chancellor of the Reichstag. The meteoric rise of a fledgling, obscure, and ideologically fringe political party is extremely rare as a political phenomenon, especially in a widely franchised state like Germany, but Hitler capitalized on the vulnerability of a country pulverized by the ramifications of the Versailles treaty. Fingers were pointed, scapegoats established, and an entire race of people labeled as financial saboteurs, but the National Socialist Workers’ Party of Germany still achieved parliamentary majority.

Mirroring the rapidity of Nazi Party expansion in the political arena, Hitler’s Germany matched this pace in the social domain. Critical to the catapulting of Nazi popularity into the stratosphere was anti-Semitism, manifested in the explicit shaming of Jews as the architects of German financial destruction. Historically, Jews operated in a variety of monetary industries in 20th century Germany, including banking, corporate financing, and precious gem trade, but the outright denigration of Hebrew peoples far precedes the 20th century. Post-war Germany was not only a state of economic desolation, but a simmering cauldron of social volatility, filled to the brim with a desperate clamor for financial remedy- or blame. Shrewdly, Hitler and his Nazified

¹ Bergen, Doris L. *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust*. Rowan and Littlefield. 2016. Page 60.

compatriots exploited this sensitivity as a premier opportunity to unilaterally slander the Jewish race as a covetous, selfish, and impulsive force intrinsically opposed to German prosperity for their own personal, material gain. The venom and vitriol underpinning their rhetoric was glaringly caustic, but a nihilistic populace readily accepted any socio-political organization that offered recovery from a dismal economic state. In a confluence of unrelated incidents that proved a miraculous boon to the Nazi political machine, the rapidly decaying health of president Paul von Hindenburg and Communist-feared arson of the Reichstag induced a state of agonizing hysteria in the German conscience. Capitalizing upon palpable fears of instability and intrusion, Hitler issued his Reichstag Fire Decree, which, in all but title, exalted his position from a mere Chancellor of the Parliament to a supreme, singular, and unilateral wielder of German governmental power. The document, terse in wording but profound in implications, installed a “temporary suspension” on the civil rights expressly outlined in the German constitution, “including freedom of the press, on the right of assembly and the right of association, and violations of the privacy of postal, telegraphic, and telephonic communications, and warrants for house searches, orders for confiscations as well as restrictions on property.”² As indicated by the previous wording, which is directly extracted from an English translation of the initial fiat, provided unprecedented punitive freedoms for the Jewish government by virtue of legislation. As one could conceivably anticipate, this rollback of individual rights was never repealed or contested, providing extensive *de jure* foundations for the imminent persecution of German Jews. In 1934, President von Hindenburg passed away, and the vacuum in power, both functional and symbolic, afforded Hitler the opportunity to fuse the Chancellor and President into a singular role of sweeping power, eventually termed *Führer*. Once commanding political primacy on a scale never before witnessed in post-imperial Germany, Hitler inaugurated his consolidation of power with the drafting a legislation that

² Decree of the Reich President for the Protections of the People and State. German History in Documents and Images. 28 February 1933. http://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=2325.

directly reduced the roles of Jews in society. Hitler and his Inner Circle, with a keen eye towards gradually grooming the German public towards universal acceptance of Anti-Semitic policy, offered of swatch of initial regulations that hinted towards their future goals. In 1933, Jews were prohibited from working in governmentally funded jobs; 1935 witnessed the development of Nuremburg Race Laws to establish a racial Jewish definition; 1937-38 suffered the stripping of Jewish doctors, professors, and medical professionals of their respective certifications; while 1938 served as the cumulative apex of prewar anti-Semitism in the Kristallnacht pogrom. This event signified a catalytic shift in Nazi German- Jewish relations from legislative activity confined to Reichstag halls, to a systemized violence inflicted on body and building alike, conducted not only by political figures, but an equally inflamed, impassioned, and hateful populace.³ The Jewish condition within Europe only cratered with the outbreak of The Second World War in 1939, christened by the invasion of Poland.

Poland, “the gateway to the east” and seemingly inexhaustible wellspring of *lebensraum*, has historically suffered as a victim of location.⁴ Wedged between two, oftentimes belligerent, lands of centuries-long monarchical traditions in Germany and Russia, the buffer state usually existed under a variable degree of occupation. The Second World War, of course, failed as an exception to that axiom, as bloodthirsty invasive forces from both the west and east converged on the unfortunately positioned state. To the Soviets, the Polish territory was little more than a conveniently located staging area for an advance into Germany, but they were far from accommodating to their occupied peoples. Regardless of the forceful absorption of Polish land under Soviet domain, and the consequent siphoning of resources and commodities by extortion, Nazi brutality far exceeded their

³ *Anti-Jewish Legislation in Prewar Germany*. The Holocaust Encyclopedia. United State Holocaust Memorial Museum. N.a. n.d. <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/anti-jewish-legislation-in-prewar-germany>

⁴ Bergen 129

Communist counterparts.⁵ Western Poland, by grace of their genealogy, was somewhat exempt from Nazi barbarism, as their dominant ethnic German population led to these regions' annexation into the grander Nazi German state. The central portion, however, did not enjoy similar pleasantries. Comprising the majority of statistical Polish territory, and major urban centers of Lodz, Krakow, and Warsaw- known colloquially as "the Jewish capital of Europe"- the newly absorbed territory was renamed the "General Government" of Nazi Germany's foreign acquisitions.⁶ In Nazi eyes, this region was a cesspool of "enemies of the state," a backwash of culturally dull, inherently fruitless Slavic Poles and an alarming concentration of emboldened Jews. As this paper will eventually deconstruct, Jews flocked en masse to Poland seeking refuge from Romanov Russian persecution, and eventually resuscitated a floundering Polish economy. Consequently, Polish Jews occupied positions of considerable esteem, including banking, legislature, and academia. This, of course, posed a perceived threat to Hitler and his expansion of Nazi racial ideology, prompting the conception of a swift, logistically sustainable, and societally crippling means of controlling 3,000,000 Jews instantaneously: ghettoization.⁷ By 1940, under the oppressive pall of ghetto structure, entire cities were transformed into Jewish holding areas, horridly similar to those employed to contain cattle destined for slaughter. Rural Jews comprised a large portion of the ghetto populace, as their previously distal and sporadic distribution posed a logistical difficulty for occupational Nazi forces. In an ironic parallel with the livestock they domesticated, the agrarian Polish Jewry were corralled in sweepingly efficient fashion, consequently deported en masse to local ghettos. Once the extent Jews of Poland were concentrated in the new "General Government's" ghettos, a holding pattern was initiated that would provide fleeting glimpses of hope, merciless acts of anti-Semitic violence, endlessly

⁵ Bergen, 135-136

⁶ Bergen, 134

⁷ Gutman, Israel. *Resistance: The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*. Houghton Mifflin. Boston. 1994. 16. Print.

fluctuating degrees of Jewish autonomy, and ultimately an ominous stagnation on the eve of liquidation.

Ghettoized Jews occupy a complicated, confusing, and intriguing position in the trajectory of the Nazi regime. Initially, they were spared and simply forced to relocate from previous villages, a fate far more lenient than the Einsatzgruppen-massacred Jews of the Balkan states. Once ghettoized, Jews continued to live a semi-sustainable life, especially when juxtaposed against their camp interned counterparts. Existence within the ghettos, especially in highly concentrated cities like Warsaw, Krakow, and Lodz, was no more fulfilling than that- existence, mere survival, and the perpetuation of the human body without its accompanying soul. By design, and worsened by oversight, ghettos were hovels of regulation and oppression. Exclusively Jewish activities, in all incarnations, were overtly prohibited. Repercussions for transgressions against such anti-Semitic legislature were expectedly severe, worsening into public executions for offenses committed later in the occupation timeline. Among the actions unwaveringly restricted was the conduct and observance of Hebrew rituals, instruction of Yiddish in classrooms, and working in occupations other than those exclusively designated for Jews, the most common of which was the production of rags.⁸ Nazi ideology invariably informed such legislations, whose passage was intended to corrode the Jewish spirit and weaken popular morale into a mindless, conscienceless shell of its former vibrancy. Implicit in a regime whose doctrinal fundamentals rely upon the denigration of an entire religio-race is the subordination of identity, and in creating an inferiority complex amongst Jews, Nazi forces hoped for a renunciation of faith that dually acknowledge an Aryan supremacy of cosmic origins. Humans, Jews especially, can be witnessed throughout a vivid global history fraught with countless instances of occupation, relegation, and racial consternation as incessantly resistant to domination. Warsaw, the largest ghetto in Poland, was no exception such resilience, but the

⁸ Winkler, Jerzy. *The Ghetto Combatting Economic Servitude*. Warsaw Ghetto Underground Archives. 1942. Print. Reproduced (Primary)

opposite: a vibrant city of undying Jewish pride that spawned a rich plurality of resistance forms. Many of such incarnation of revolt rejected armed uprising for vehicles of dissent that were creatively singular, emotionally inspired, and cerebral in their challenges against Nazi rhetoric. The city will serve as the origin point for this paper's sources, and the focus of its analysis, exploring an alternative version of revolt that this paper advances as "emotional resistance." Examining three sites of creative resistance- clandestine Jewish education, amateur reproductions of Yiddish plays, and the propagation of evocative and nuanced literature- this thesis challenges the singularity of armed revolt, and conversely suggests the potency and profundity of nonviolent, intellectual incarnations of rebellion. Emerging from the uniquely Nazi crucible of denigration and defamation, the bold, dignified, and communally empathetic works evaluated in the following chapters function as immortal embodiments of a Jewish community, one which refused to subject to the intimidation and vitriol of their occupiers- even as the reality of death drew near on the horizon.

Chapter 2

Educational Resistance

Tragic in its accuracy, Avraham Lewin was candid in his explanation that children were “hit hardest” by the Nazi occupation of Warsaw, as their young lives would be inevitably corrupted, distorted, and in many cases, prematurely ended, by their occupiers.⁹ Centering Nazi racial ideology is the denigration of the Jews, a unilateral consideration of adherence to Hebrew tradition as not only religiously incompatible with the regime, but denoting an individual of primitive inferiority. Naturally, as the Nazi war machine ravaged Poland and annexed its major urban centers, the pall of ghettoization subjected Polish children to an “Aryan” education. Dually intriguing and appalling, the infusion of anti-Semitic vitriol into Polish curricula was not an addition characteristic of Nazi oppression however, as ethnic, staunchly Catholic Poles radiated Jewish hatred¹⁰. As Brian Bergman reveals in his Shoah Foundation interview, young Polish men routinely greeted one another in casual social scenarios with the emphatic “those Jews are sons-of-bitches, eh?” which only serves to capture such a universal contempt.¹¹ Blending nascent Polish anti-Semitism with scathing Nazi venom, the social attitude on the dawn of German occupation was dangerously volatile, hinting at an impending explosion of Jewish persecution. In Warsaw, on the streets, in the schoolyard, and in academia, such was the case.

Although utter desolation and demoralization lay within reaching distance for Warsaw at the onset of Nazi aggression, the Polish capital had previously served as the *de facto* epicenter of Jewish intellectual life. From a statistical standpoint, Poland exhibited the highest concentration of Jews within

⁹ Lewin, Avraham. *Eulogy Read at a Commemorative Evening in Honor of the Late I. M. Weissenberg*. Trans. Josef Kermish. Warsaw Ghetto Underground Archives. September 13 1941, Published 1942. Print. Reproduced.

¹⁰ *Youth and Their Education*. Trans. Josef Kermish. Warsaw Ghetto Underground Archives. 1942. Print. 495.

¹¹ Bergman, Brian. Interviewed by Nancy Fisher. *Shoah Foundation Visual Archives*. 07 July 2015

its borders, boasting a (relatively) staggering 10% of its population as claiming adherence to Judaism¹². Dating back to medieval pogroms and Romanov Russian tensions, Jews from across eastern-central Europe fled for refuge within Poland's borders, who graciously welcomed Jews into their society.¹³ The mass diaspora of Russian Jews was prompted by an uncompromising anti-Semitism espoused by the regime, best represented by forced conversions, illegalization of Hebrew rituals, and gruesome raids of Jewish villages. The unilateral nature of this anti-Jewish vitriol, disseminated across a sprawling imperial landmass, constructed a nationalistic identity termed the "Soviet Jew." Historian Israel Gutman refers to this psychological state as the byproduct of systematic oppression and persecution by a colonial regime, which through widespread suffering, fostered a communal identity among all Jews within the empire's borders.¹⁴ Naturally, displaced and disenfranchised Jews sought asylum in the nearest eastern city willing to accept a religious out-group. Warsaw, reeling from an existence of relatively decrepit living conditions and seemingly endless conflicts with Russia, was economically ravaged. The Jewish migrants, typically operating in the lucrative industries of financiering, municipal banking, and precious gem trade, offered an immediate economic remedy. Leveraged for their potential in national monetary revival, the Jewish diaspora soon settled permanently in Warsaw. The repatriated Jews, unified by their collective suffering under Russian dominion, established Warsaw as the growing "capital of Jewish people in the east" while permanently ingraining its roots into the city's financial, cultural, and most preminent, intellectual spheres.¹⁵

Fueled by what Avraham Lewin classified as a "vigorous instinct for life" among the Jewish community, the reimagined Warsaw beamed as a glistening beacon of intellectualism, attracting the foremost minds in Hebrew academia.¹⁶ In a logical continuation of Jewish diaspora patterns, in which the

¹² Gutman, 14.

¹³ Gutman, 16

¹⁴ Gutman, 32

¹⁵ Gutman, 32

¹⁶ Lewin, 452

wealthy, educated Jews constituted the urban centers while their poorer counterparts populated rural regions, a gentry was soon established. The children of these financially emboldened Jews sought higher education, and began flooding university halls in disproportionate amounts. According to a figure compiled retroactively by the Warsaw Underground, 1921-22 witnessed college enrollment comprised of a 24.6% Jewish minority- a colossal representation when considering that Jewish adherents only composed 10% of the national complexion.¹⁷ As expressed in Rabbi Isaac Bashevis Singer's compilation of ghetto diaries, *The Family Moskat*, Warsaw's emboldened position as an academic epicenter was not lost on the common Jewish civilian. R. Dan Katzellenbogen, a Jewish emigrant of blue-collar origins and Hassidic adherence, commented with lavished praise on the scholarly aura beaming about Warsaw. Exclaiming that "the city was a place of study," while noting its varied institutions of educational development, R. Dan felt extremely impressed by the depth of opportunities available in all stages of life. Daycares, primary schools, synagogues, and elder's communities all possessed a pedagogical intention. Moreover, R. Dan lauded the extensive tax system established across the city, financially weaving together a web of financial influx for world-renowned Yeshivas. In his final comments, one's which possessed a certain profundity, the author celebrates that "from the heders and the religious schools, one hears the voices of schoolchildren, by virtue of whose breath the world exists."¹⁸ A line that was then poetic now appears prophetic, as that same rationale will fuel future insistence on a resurgent intensity for early childhood education, which will be argued by some as a viable nonviolent remedy against Nazi oppression. Despite a decorated history of educational tolerance, the Jewish academia of Warsaw would soon witness the dissolution of their domains. Before chronicling the eventual collapse of university education as a state-sanctioned source of Jewish identity, a tradition of Polish anti-Semitism must be established.

¹⁷ Gutman, 28

¹⁸ Singer, Isaac Bashevis. *The Family Moskat*. University of Michigan Press. 1950.

Recalling the historical patterns of Jewish refugees seeking asylum in then-tolerant Warsaw, the organic construction of an empowered Jewish aristocracy produced vehement animosity across ethnic Poles. Anti-Semitism, in the Polish context, was far from an alien concept on the eve of Nazi invasion. It was truly the opposite. Centuries of an emboldened Jewish populace exacting premier control over city finances, industry, and culture bore intense resentment from comparatively underendowed Poles.¹⁹ Prefacing any tension precipitated by socioeconomic stratification, the endemic Jewish rancor that raged throughout Poland features theological roots. Mirroring the Romanov disgust regarding the Jewish faith within a staunchly Catholic dominion, Polish anti-Semitism grew from a similar intensity in religious adherence. Orthodox Catholicism, the spiritual force that inspired a complete Russian rejection of Jewish civilization, and its consequential migration to Polish borders, informed an identical hatred in the new, surrogate Jewish home.²⁰ As European civilization progressed into modernity, tolerance via secularism offered a glimpse of hope for a Jewish population not marginalized, but resented for their prosperity. Poland however, long considered the unfortunate backwater of European civilization and a dumping ground between competing Russian and German powers, was infamously “immune to the pressures of secularization.” Series of legislatures were established that attempted to secure a legally defined Polish identity, namely through standardizing language, religion, and education curricula.²¹ These homogenization efforts, pursued by a chain of exclusively Polish catholic monarchs and militaristic “presidents,” retained sinister intentions in the exclusion of Jews. In the Jewish psyche, these policies were intended to invoke an inferiority complex sprung from envy, but from a more tangible aspect, they inspired a gradual reduction of Jewish educational freedoms that doomed the intelligentsia.

In a intricate, and somewhat confusing, display of anti-Semitism that precedes Nazi occupation (but was then exacerbated by its eventual presence), Polish rollbacks on Jewish academic liberties invoked an urgency among the community- one whose emotional intensity transitioned into the

¹⁹ Gutman, 32

²⁰ Gutman, 15

²¹ Gutman, 15.

ghettoized period, eventually inflating the rhetoric of resistance educators under Nazi occupation. Rachel Auerbach, an illuminated Jewish scholar whose career spanned numerous Polish hotspots and the entire lifecycle of the holocaust, from ideological inception into retrospective memory, recounted the meteoric collapse of academic freedoms for Jews. During the 1935 conference on Yiddish instruction, the morale among Jewish intellectual elite plummeted. An imposing Polish nationalism, informed by centuries of hatred but inflamed by the post-WWI economic crisis, bore down with relentless force on Jewish curricula. Instruction of courses in any language other than Polish would merit an immediate firing, whereas departments centering in Yiddish language, Hebrew heritage, and Jewish sociology courses suffered severed funding cuts. The national Polish universities, namely Warsaw, once stood as unvanquished bastions of academic progress for an otherwise persecuted Polish populace. Now, their reduction to primitive arenas of brutish, myopic nationalism produced what Auerbach termed a “spiritual sluggishness and lack of unified action.”²² Auerbach’s biographer is careful to note that this was not apathy by privilege, but a calculated act of self-preservation among Jewish scholars that was not exclusive to those bumping elbows with the focal character. Typically without practical experience or trade knowledge beyond niche humanities degrees, Jewish professors were forced to grovel under the pressure of curricula rollbacks for their own financial survival.²³ Legislation failed to stop at substantive limitations on *what* was thought, as the late 1930s witnessed restrictions on *who* was taught. Reflecting on the previous figure of nearly 25% of university education as represented by Jewish students, enrollment plummeted to 9.9% by 1938, a 60% decrease. Series of restrictive quotas occupied the role of guilty party in this case, as their intention to reconcile a perceived discrepancy between Jewish elite and

²² Syzmaniak, Karolina. “On the Ice Floe: Rachel Auerback, the life of a Jewish intellectual in Poland.”

Catastrophe and Utopia: Jewish Intellectuals in Central and Eastern Europe in the 1930s and 1940s.

University of Wroclaw. 2017. 331.

²³ Syzmaniak, 312

impoverished Poles had an inverse result.²⁴ Discrimination exuded from these measures, which served to only further exclude Jews from academia in a blatant display of anti-Semitism. The undertones to the incremental disintegration of Jewish academia produced what Israel Gutman notes as a renewed “awareness of their Jewishness...and [thinking] in terms of the Jewish future.”²⁵ Contemporary scholar Auerbach shared this notion, commenting on the urgency of collective Jewish action before the Nazi threat grew palpable. As heads bowed under the financial pressures linked with obedience to restrictive legislation, mentioned above, Auerbach grew genuinely concerned with the trajectory of Jewish education, and identity. Assimilation, she noted, was a grim, and preeminent, assault on Jewish union as those who mindless complied with nationalistic Polish directives would facilitate a destruction of an entire community, renouncing their faith, heritage and dignity in doing so. Continually, Auerbach lobbied for “direct engagement” with the Jewish status in Poland, otherwise total dissolution into the state apparatus would occur.²⁶ As the 1930s drew to a close, and Polish nationalistic efforts escalated in tandem with Nazi proliferation, Jewish scholars grew increasingly aware of their precarious position. In a decade that upended the Jewish intelligentsia with startling rapidity, the academic community “recognized that if they were to have any influence [in their fate], they would have to introduce changes into the educational system.”²⁷ Auerbach indicates her support of this notion by commenting on the “certain responsibilities for their compatriots” exhibited by educated Jews during the destruction of their academic rights.²⁸ As the Nazi war machine mobilized in not-so-foreign lands with explicitly sinister intentions, the reality of occupation grew increasingly imminent. Fusing this fear of impending invasion with the liberally applied anti-Semitism that characterized the Polish educational agenda, collective action revealed itself as the only remedy. Once the stifling curtain of ghettoization fell upon Warsaw in the

²⁴ Gutman, 28

²⁵ Gutman, 29

²⁶ Syzmaniak, 313

²⁷ Gutman, 35

²⁸ Syzmaniak, 315

coming year, this attitude of communal mobilization would prove even more vital than the Jewish intellectual elite could have imagined.

Anxiety, fueled simultaneously by outrage and terror, characterized the Jewish intellectual conscience on the outset of occupation. Gradually, rights both civil and educational were stripped from Warsaw's scholars as curricula transitioned to an exclusively Aryan ethic. In accordance, instruction of exclusively Jewish topics such as Yiddish language, Hebrew history, and scripture were barred in a graduated fashion- first in state funded institutions, then public schools, and then rapidly these courses' instruction became pinned as capital crimes. Morale and optimism, understandably, plummeted following these developments, as now not only were these professor's careers in immediate jeopardy.²⁹ Defeatism, in the academic context, was not restricted to the classroom. Best expressed by a public notice challenging the Jewish community to collectively organize against Nazi oppression, the general public was well aware of the stifling of Hebrew tradition in the classroom. Titled, "A Call for the Establishment to Live and Die with Honor," and left without author, the note expresses that the oppressed Jewish community has been "silent too long," essentially voiceless in their own demise. Continually, the notice inflames the populace and ignites support by calling upon those "among whom the feelings of brotherhood, decency, and human dignity have not yet died out".³⁰ The notion of Jewish pride extinguished by the onslaught of Nazi persecution will function as a recurring theme throughout resistance through education, feeling the desire to sustain the instruction of Hebrew topics in the classroom. Although without author or organization, the anonymous note was effective, and mobilized the community into collective action.

Sprung from the primordial consensus of early Jewish collectivization, the Yiddish Culture Organization (YIKOR, in its Yiddish acronym) emerged as a preeminent group in guiding educational

²⁹ *Secondary Schools During the War*. Trans. Josef Kermish. Warsaw Ghetto Underground Archives. 1942. Print. Reproduced. 492. Print.

³⁰ *A Call for the Establishment of an Organization for Moral Supply in the Warsaw Ghetto*. Anonymous. Translated and Annotated by Josef Kermish. Warsaw Ghetto Underground Archives. N.D. Print. Reproduced.

efforts across the ghetto. In his retroactive account, Warsaw Underground historian Hersz Wasser notes that the organization's main prerogative was "altering the atmosphere of Jewish public institutions," which he qualified to include not only Yiddish instruction, but an infusion of "cultural content."³¹ Naturally, the next step was the simple task of sourcing adequate educators for the organization. Though he notes the group never lacked "devotion" to the Jewish community, Wasser continues by explaining that YIKOR pursued unorthodox options for professors, as those who were classically employed by the Nazi-Polish education system were diluted by their hateful curricula. Assimilation, both "external and internal" plagued YIKOR educators as a genuine fear as the program's pupils faced daily pressures from their Nazi oppressors and anti-Semitic Polish peers to renounce their faith.³² Blending these two concerns, the YIKOR produced a four-pronged attempt to spearhead Jewish education. This multilateral effort, a reciprocal assault against denigrating Nazi rhetoric, was buttressed by its major tenets: Public performances for Hebrew holidays, comprehensive coursework for secondary school students, enriching "play centers" for Jewish youth, and the trademarked "Culture for All" weekend coursework for university students."³³ Regardless of its initial formation as an organization providing supplemental activity for the Jewish community, YIKOR exploded into a staple of daily life in the ghetto. Its Yiddish classes, daycare options, and most importantly, university coursework drew immense popularity within occupied Warsaw.

Qualifying the YIKOR's foundation as opportune timing would be a grave understatement, as the ruthless oppression of Nazi forces plummeted Jewish morale to a degree never before witness in this generation of Warsaw. From an emotional and psychological standpoint, the vulnerable Jewish populace was at a precarious crossroads in their destiny entering the 1940s. Best distilled by a fiery eulogy that captures the dread ravaging Warsaw's ghettoized denizens, Avraham Lewin highlighted the urgency of

³¹ Wasser, Hersz. *Yiddish Culture Organization "YIKOR."* Trans. Josef Kermish. Warsaw Ghetto Underground Archives.. 1942. Print. Reproduced. 442. Print.

³² Wasser 443.

³³ Wasser 444

education as a remedy to persecution. Invoking selected quotes from his sermon reveals an intriguing portrait of the animosity and intensity typically reserved for violent resistance options, but instead pulsing throughout educators and intellectuals. His rhetoric follows a path of shock, inflammation, and calls-to-action, exploiting the Jewish anxiety shrewdly. First, is a visceral examination of the mass extermination of Jews who, “live in a prison, degraded to the level of homeless and uncared-for as animals, [who looking] at the swollen, half-naked bodies of Jews lying in the streets, feel as if we found ourselves at some subhuman level.”³⁴ The outrage that followed was only exacerbated by the eerily prophetic predication that the “only thing that may surprise is mass murder by way of systematic extermination.”³⁵ As one could imagine the horror and pain that reverberated around the synagogue, Lewin keenly ends on an inspirational note. Instructing listeners to “not forget that we were once free-beings, creat[ing] in every province of life,” Lewin insists that the sustained Yiddish and Hebrew education is the only viable option to combat persecution. Violent, armed uprising, according to Lewin, would be utterly ineffectual against a superior German military. Conversely, resistance via education will be their hope and salvation, if “extinguished under the thick layer of ashes, [it] shall prove the triumph of the human over the inhuman.”³⁶ This final quote is profound in not only its insistence on education as the preeminent means of combating ghettoization, but also the courage and venom in publically denouncing the German’s as soulless in their endeavors. This sermon, though a single document, effortlessly contains the urgent Jewish spirit in 1940, a pivotal period in the rapid escalation of educational, intellectual, and communal efforts against Nazism in Warsaw.

Invigorated by a mobilized Jewish populace, whose morale was reinforced by communal efforts to reject the psychological intents of Nazi policy, educators dutifully devised the initial means to combat occupation through academia- the Yiddish language. Pioneering intellectual Rachel Auerbach, long renowned for her inflammation of Jewish fervor for a decade prior to ghettoization, insisted that emphasis

³⁴ Lewin 449

³⁵ Lewin 450

³⁶ Lewin 451

on Yiddish language instruction is the “heart of the universal Jewish identity.”³⁷ As mentioned above, a bold Polish commitment to assimilation and language homogenization was far from a protected intention. Conversely, the desire for a universality of Polish language, and consequently ethnicity, throttled the assemblage of anti-pluralistic policies, which were installed with joy, both by independent Poles and Nazi occupants.³⁸ Auerbach recognized that a resurgence of Yiddish study would serve to reassert the preeminence of Jewish pride. Countering the vitriol expelled by the Polish, and eventual Nazi, attitudes, she is credited with disputing that Yiddish was “merely a remnant of the past, [and] a symbol of backwardness.” Instead, Auerbach leveraged Yiddish language, commonly understood but rarely practice among repatriated Polish Jews, as a “powerful vehicle” of education, unity, and post-occupation empowerment.³⁹ In what would eventually be transformed, in spirit, into the wartime Yiddish Culture Organization, Auerbach pioneered the *Tsushtayer* Yiddish group. Concentrating authors, playwrights, journalists, and intellectuals into a singular group of Jewish artistry, the *Tsushtayer* published weekly papers, hosted book clubs, and fielded elective courses in upper division studies- all with a Yiddish young and Jewish flavor.⁴⁰ The underlying intention of this multilateral institution was the reconstitution of L’viv and Galicia, cities of previous Jewish haven that recently transformed into nodes of German Aryanism. As the group garnered critical acclaim, commercial success, and among its target populace, communal value, its reach extended across with a fierce acceleration. Noting the bursting success of her fledgling organization, Auerbach exalted the urgency in Yiddish instruction under an interminable threat of a Polish nationalism she quipped as “an illness of the national organism.”⁴¹ The *Tsushtayer* persisted beyond the relative tranquility of the interwar period, providing a profound source of inspiration among the early educational initiatives within the ghetto. As outlined in brief previously, the Yiddish Culture

³⁷ Szyaniak, 324

³⁸ Gutman, 28-29

³⁹ Syzmaniak, 324

⁴⁰ Syzmaniak, 328

⁴¹ Syzmaniak, 328.

Organization of ghettoized Warsaw established four core tenets of education that they believed would be critical in combatting the “threat of assimilationist efforts, both external and internal.”⁴² This cognizance of dually hindering Polish homogenization agendas and complacency among affected Jews mirrors Auerbach’s prewar insights, whose ethics then transitioned into the implementation of the YIKOR foundational principles. The second aim of the YIKOR was to provide comprehensive educational enrichment to primary and secondary school students that ranged from “sociological to historical and literary contexts.” Understanding the delicate malleability of childhood identities, organizers, who partnered with the Yiddish Youth Community (YIGO), boldly sought a reigniting of Jewish pride among otherwise suppressed Jewish children.⁴³ The mentality of inciting an emotional resistance to Nazi pressures through the resilience of children influenced the extension of educational initiatives into a third principle. Noting that astute, receptive, and ultimately impressionable, pre-school aged children are subjected the Polish anti-Semitism among parks and playgrounds citywide, the YIKOR-YIGO joint committee established “safe play centers.”⁴⁴ These areas, typically repurposed corners of synagogues or Yeshivas, functioned as an experimental domain for the religiously-tinged educational initiatives administered amongst older school groups. Moreover, assimilation by social pressures, as recounted exhaustively throughout this paper, posed a veritable threat to Jewish identity that began almost immediately in a child’s life. With these play corners, then, anti-Semitic detractors of Jewish pride could be extinguished from the early stages of a child’s life. Lastly, and in extension of the *Tsushtayer’s* supplemental university courses, the YIKOR hosted weekend enrichment classes on Jewish-centric courses to the city’s collegiate populace. Multiple contemporaries note of the mass success, and popularity of these classes, as their provision of a protective space for Jewish educational discourse “strengthened [their] dignity, among hundreds of young, adult intelligentsia.”⁴⁵ Hundreds to thousands of

⁴² Wasser, 442.

⁴³ Wasser, 443

⁴⁴ Wasser, 444

⁴⁵ Wasser, 444

locals congregated at each lecture in a quick transcendence from its initial intention. The courses exploded into a weekly crucible of debate, discussion, and solidarity as the pressures of ghettoization eroded Jewish morale. Individuals of all ages, education levels, and financial standing converged on these courses to collectively unite in academic efforts against the outwardly disparaged ignorance of Nazi ideology and Polish nationalism. Rachel Auerbach, recounting her despair in the less-than-ideal enthusiasm amongst her Jewish intellectual peers in unifying Yiddish instruction, remarked that the war against bigotry, prejudice, and religious nationalism would not be won with brandished weapons. Instead, modest and incremental shifts in the Jewish psyche, best installed in the minds of shapeless youth through education, would be the remedy that catalyzes an ideological war in the Jewish favor.

Upon his assessment on the status of secondary school pupils and university students under occupation, Warsaw Underground historian Emmanuel Ringelblum echoed Auerbach's sentiments. In detailing the transformation of Hebrew education from a state supported institution facilitated at a variety of conventional facilities to clandestine meeting centers, he notes that "[despite] uncertainty of the day and the moment, with no prospect of tomorrow...there is still a universal, primordial, unquenchable drive for learning, contrary to all logic and braving all obstacles."⁴⁶ And as has proved itself to be thematic in this paper, the inexhaustible spirit for education, dashed with a distinctive Jewish flavor, naturally, reverberated around a ghetto otherwise pulverized into Nazi submission. In transitioning with previously outlined decay of religious coexistence in the Polish school system, ghettoization forced the complete dissolution of all Judaic secondary schools. Occupying the instructive vacuum filled were "complements," bands of outcast Jewish professors who instructed groups of students in a diverse curriculum- under penalty of arrest and for a menial wage. Typically, the instructors were composed of jettisoned academics whose subjects of research were no longer tolerated by an oppressive state apparatus. Systemized anti-Semitism was far from a novel development under Nazi occupation, but the

⁴⁶ Ringelblum, Emmanuel. *The School System*. Trans. Josef Kermish. Warsaw Ghetto Underground Archives. N.d. Reproduced. Print. 501. Print.

induction of German forces into the state education network complete a total reversal of then-tense Jewish acceptance into outright removal.⁴⁷ Instructors composed an assortment of curricula that were far from innovative or experimental, but just a repatriation of the previous Polish secondary school standards into a Jewish framework. Courses such as mathematics, natural sciences, and technical trades received a heavy emphasis, namely due to the Nazi German limitations on occupations legally permissible for Polish Jews. Consequently, the two “faculties,” or colleges, conceived within this loosely linked “complement” system featured the ever-popular technical crucible titled Natural Sciences and Mathematics. Occupying the other option was Judaic, the dually dangerous and courageous school that heavily exalted the study of Jewish humanities, as its title would suggest. Pedagogy, philosophy, and psychology represented the most popular disciplines within this school, reflecting the urgency in dedicated Judaic students to reshape the popular psyche, and reinstall a compulsion towards Jewish education.⁴⁸ In allegorical sense, these two course pathways function as a representation of the collective Jewish demeanor following more than a year of occupation, cultural suppression, and physical persecution. The former, the practical route, serves to parallel acquiescence and submission. By focusing intellectual and educational efforts on technical training, exclusively in domains which the Nazi occupiers permit, those students are simply conforming themselves to the boundaries established by a regime committed to their eventual destruction. Conversely, the Judaic discipline represents the rebellious spirit and seemingly interminable defiance to overt efforts of Jewish denigration. In continued pursuit of a role in Jewish academia, these post-ghetto pioneers gambled their lives to redefine the Polish-Jew identity, refusing to bow their heads (or brains for that matter) to a Nazi force whose ideological prerogative is the normalization of a theoretically superior Aryan race. Although Ringelblum himself notes that the Judaic school boasted “far too much ambition” and a loaded coffer whose resources would be better allocated in areas more “realistic and urgent,” the significance remains. Sustained instruction of subjects critical to the Hebrew identity, ranging in

⁴⁷ Ringelblum, 509

⁴⁸ Ringelblum, 513

perspectives from historical to spiritual to sociological, plastered together to form a rigid mental foundation against the maws of persecution- all while offering a momentary escape from the psychological duress of the ghetto.

Unfortunately, the trend of previously booming centers of Jewish education splintering into mutually exclusive groups expressing either Nazi-induced complacency or unfazed individuality translated into the Yeshiva system. By design, Yeshivas were, and continue to be in the modern sense, beacons of Jewish intelligentsia that produce Hebrew heritage professionals in a multitude of domains. Warsaw, as the Jewish capital of Europe, abided to this pattern as expected, boasting over 5,000 students officially enrolled in courses on the outset of war.⁴⁹ The seven state-sanctioned Yeshivas, representing the country's major urban centers, fell into one of three stylistic categories: Hasidic, Lithuanian-Hasidic, and Lithuanian. Only the Lithuanian-Hasidic possessed a lenient, "Westernized" conduct code, as the others enforced stringent restrictions on dress, grooming, and intersexual communication.⁵⁰ Within Warsaw, 80% identified with and subscribed to the Hasidic dogma, and continued their Hebrew education accordingly. In stark contrast to other Jewish denominations and their accompanying instructional styles, Hasidic Jews restricted themselves to a severely regimented lifestyle while in Yeshiva. Anchoring these limitations is a scathing Hasidic mantra that, when roughly translated from Yiddish, is fractiously expressed as "one mustn't act deferentially towards anyone, and one mustn't show respect towards anyone."⁵¹ Ironically, this attitude, which is inherently off-putting, disrespectful, and condescending, benefitted the Hasidic disciples greatly during the age of ghettoization. Once fused with the overarching Nazi government, Poland immediately severed all state funding to Yeshivas and synagogues while forbade the instruction of Judaic subjects under penalty of death. The Judenrat, artificially constructed to provide Jews with a transient sense of false autonomy to ensure compliance, groveled beneath Nazi

⁴⁹ Hashem, Kiddush. *Daily Life and Death in the Warsaw Ghetto*. Yeshiva University Press. 1987. 175. Print.

⁵⁰ Hashem, 178-19.

⁵¹ Hashem, 181

pressures. In 1940, the Judenrat council passed an ordinance incontrovertibly forbidding all forms of Jewish worship, which intrinsically included instruction, but the Hasidic scholars remained undaunted.

Yeshiva membership cratered under Nazi occupation, as one would expect, as its mass exodus was fueled by valid fears of a joint Nazi-Polish anti-intellectual pogrom. Enrollment figures reflected this plunge, as 1941 witnessed only 200 full-time pupils actively enrolled in Yeshiva studies. According to one commentator, who requested anonymity when interviewed by a Warsaw Underground historian, assembly became “virtually impossible...merely walking from one’s home to the Yeshiva involved risking one’s life.”⁵² Seizures and deportations were a regular concern for commuting Yeshiva students, the victims of anti-Semitic vitriol fused with logistical concerns. As able-bodied 20-somethings capable of both manual labor, but also intellectual challenge to Nazi ideology, these students were perfect candidates for labor camp detention. Consequently, Hasidic students fled from Yeshiva halls to musty basements, but continued their instruction with that aforementioned dismissive mentality. Prominent among the numerous Hasidic students unfazed by Nazi occupation were the Gerers, practitioners of a particularly austere interpretation of the Torah. Persecution remained a persistent threat and immutable reality, but the Gerer Hasidics embodied the elitist mentality effortlessly. The group, directed by a tandem of *halacha* interpreters termed “commanders,” abided by the Torah-mandated eight hours of minimum daily study, assembled multiple times daily to discuss scripture, and routinely bathed in the Vistula River to simulate the cleansing Hebrew *mikveh* ritual.⁵³ Moreover, to avoid the imminent threat of capture and deportation, the Gerer commanders organized *shibtls* under the clandestine pretenses. Usually housed in a Rabbi or commander’s private residence, the Gerers committed their entire existence to the continuation of advanced Judaic study, rarely ever leaving to communicate with outsiders while being forbidden to mention their family under severe Hasidic order. Naturally, organization for spiritual and didactic purposes in this manner would readily incur Nazi rebuke if caught, the true audacity rests in

⁵² Hashem, 179.

⁵³ Hashem, 186

the Gerer Sabbath festivities. In total ignorance of the ceaseless pounding of Nazi boots on ghetto concrete, and the ubiquity of beatings viciously conducted in enforcement of Nazi law, the Gerers facilitated banquets each Saturday in honor of the Sabbath. These raucous affairs consisted of “singing and dancing in a fiery circle,” a celebration only intensified by excessive alcohol consumption, and hosted in public courtyards easily within Nazi earshot. Furthering the narrative of unrepentant Hebrew pride and steeled courage against Nazi persecution, the Gerers brashly sang sacred hymns and traditional Hebrew songs- all acts actionable for execution under the ghetto penal code.⁵⁴ Although the Gerers’ defiance is commendable when considered under the context of Nazi ghettoization, their exclusivity and hedonism corrupted their intentions. Systematically, the Gerer Hasidics robbed their neighbors, extorted money from family, and imbibed extreme quantities of alcohol, all while their supposed compatriot Jews languished in abject squalor. Prominent Warsaw rabbi, Betzalel Alter, penned an open letter lambasting the Gerer decadence, a group he labeled as “companions of the destroyer... [and] defilers of the Torah.”⁵⁵ Noting the internal aspirations amongst the Gerer Hasidics, and the outright disgust espoused by their Jewish peers, a complicated issue regarding resistance is uncovered. The Gerer spirit, undaunted in its resolve and uncompromising to Nazi aggression, fueled a rebellious ethic that decayed into disjointed self-preservation. Solidarity, a critical component in nonviolent resistance efforts across the ghetto, was an alien notion to the Gerers, who not only neglected- but abused- their suffering Jewish peers for personal pleasure. Yes, from a psychological and emotional perspective, these Hasidic students defied the derisive intentions of politicized Nazi ideology, but at the expense of the collective Jewish morale.

In an antithetical relationship with the Gerers, who abused the defiant spirit for hedonistic gain, another Yeshiva castaway, Rabbi Yitzkhok David Marguilles, founded a Judaic study organization predicated on his perceived “moral obligation” to repatriate the communal Jewish spirit. Marguilles was revered within the ghettoized Jewish conscience as a “lover of fellow Jews, and remarkable

⁵⁴ Hashem, 181

⁵⁵ Hashem, 183.

philanthropy,” who refused to view Jews under denominational lines.⁵⁶ Instead, he shrewdly recognized the rapid acceleration of persecution, an equally indiscriminate process, which necessitated Jewish solidarity. His brainchild, the “Love of Torah and Fear of Heaven” study group, was conceived to combat a rapidly expanding nihilism among ghettoized Jews. The organization, completely blind to doctrinal differences among Jewish denominations, rooted its operations in intensive Torah study- but with an inclusive ethic. Marguilles rigorously instructed his pupils on the urgency of compassion under the pall of ghettoization, who then recruited teams of Jewish artisans to construct concealed receptacles in abandoned synagogues. Woodworkers, masons, and artisans, subscribed to the egalitarian doctrine of Marguille’s “Love of Torah,” built deposit boxes into the walls of previous centers of Jewish assembly, in which locals were urged to place scraps of bread, unused foodstuffs, and meager financial donations.⁵⁷ In a subtly profound way, this communal pooling of resources under religious pretense is a direct act of resistance against Nazi ghettoization. Jews suffered severe, physically debilitating rationing on foodstuffs, intended to reduce their corporal capabilities to a bear minimum for survival. Yet those who managed to acquire a greater-than-average amount of either food sources or money, willingly donated their surplus for the collective benefit of an impoverished Jewish majority. Underpinning this generosity were the three guiding principles of Marguille’s courses: reconstitution of Jewish deserters into observance, championing of the delicacy of life, and lastly, a revival of pride and passion for the Hebrew heritage.⁵⁸ Education, under these inflections, proved itself a powerful instrument in combatting oppression. Yeshiva students, wholly aware of the inherent dangers of continued instruction, committed themselves to the dissemination of Judaic subjects. The consequences that followed was a reignited Jewish pride, momentary glimmers of hope for an otherwise downtrodden populous, and most primary, a cognitive barrier to the psychologically destructive efforts of racially-tinged oppression.

⁵⁶ Hashem, 186

⁵⁷ Hashem, 187

⁵⁸ Hashem, 186

Pouring over the voluminous archives compiled by the Warsaw Ghetto Underground reveals a massive, multi-lateral, and nearly universal insistence on continued education despite overt Nazi pressures to act otherwise. In the Jewish faith, instruction and pedagogy are critical components of the Hebrew lifestyle, instrumental in composing an identity and psychological outlook aligned with the Torah. Naturally, then, is a cultural valuation of education as a vehicle of imparting kindness and compassion, but also unflagging pride in the wake of a millennia-long trajectory of persecution. The Nazis, venomously anti-Semitic and highly systematic in imposing *de jure* racial legislature, posed a seemingly insurmountable threat to the targeted Jewish populace of Europe. Despite the superiority of Nazi military capacity, political influence, and resource possession, their tangible gains failed to translated into psychological victories. The Jewish spirit, an intimate respect for one's heritage and incorruptible commitment to sacred rituals, failed.

Chapter 3

Theatrical Resistance

“The Ghetto is Dancing. The Law and Order tried to break up the good time but... [it] could not be touched,” Emmanuel Ringelblum explains with a tempered joy.⁵⁹ Although Warsaw neared its 18-month anniversary of Nazi occupation during this journal entry’s composition, ghettoized Jews refused to relinquish their cherished cultural traditions. While overt religious rituals and theological schooling remained domains of intense Nazi restriction, the artistic sphere enjoyed a relatively liberated experience. Such staples of leisurely Yiddish custom continued to flourish amongst Jewish enclaves, whose fragmentation from the urban whole would not deter expression and exuberance. Traditional plays, experimental performances, street theater, burlesque shows, comedy, and more all nestled into their respective niches and refused to allow their flames to extinguish. With venues and genres as disparate as the imposingly massive Golgotha theater (traditional Yiddish plays) to the notoriously risqué Melody Palace (burlesque and drag), performance arts dazzled an otherwise dismal Warsaw Ghetto with an appeal to any palate. These cultural institutions persisted as the resilient, but increasingly persecuted, vestiges of a people who, by 1941, have become agonizingly aware of their dimming fate. Despite a predictable doom, Yiddish theater functions as a gleaming example of the rebellious nature of artistry when in confrontation with denigrating Nazi ideology. As efforts increasingly strengthened, intellectually in schools and corporally in the streets, to subdue Jewish pride, the flamboyant absurdity of Jewish theater remained unabashed. This section will then assess the not-so-subtle manner in which stage performances were employed as a vehicle of social cohesion against occupying Nazi forces. Their power, then, was

⁵⁹ Ringelblum, Emmanuel. *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto*. Trans. Jacob Sloan. Publishers Group West. 2006. 125. Print.

derived from the bombastic self-awareness and daring characters of a multifaceted circuit whose actors' rejection of Nazi intimidation was imparted upon the audience.

Representing the most preeminent genre of Yiddish performance art, the theater emerged in the late 19th century as an Eastern European sensation whose focal themes persisted into the eve of ghettoization. Credited with founding the first cohesive theatrical troupe, Romanian Jew Avrom Goldfadn unleashed his bizarre, critically panned, but popularly revered repertoire upon the Russian world.⁶⁰ The casts, often consisting of a composite of totally amateurish and heterogeneous day job workers, were noted for their obscenely poor performances that evoked intense emotions from the crowds. Cognizant of their ineptitude, Goldfadn pioneered a genre of Yiddish theater that featured historical melodrama, exaggerated caricatures, and overt political satire. Plays such as *The Two Kuni Lemls* elicited raucous laughter from the audience as the blind, hobbled protagonist navigated ill-fated romances, while *Purim-Shpil* glamorized Jewish biblical tradition with dramatic, yet poorly acted, combat scenes.⁶¹ Goldfadn's work was notable for its popularity among an otherwise anti-Semitic Russian culture, and as such, spurred a multitude of imitators. One of which, the Kaminski family, transplanted Yiddish theater to a salivating Warsaw audience. Matriarch Ester-Rokhl and her daughter Ida expanded upon Goldfadn's Yiddish "canon" with nuanced, compelling characters and a heightened emphasis on dominant female characters.⁶² Playing the leads in *Khashe the Orphan Girl* and *The Mirele Efros*, Ester-Rokhl Kaminski's portrayal of powerful women laced oft-desired seriousness into the theater. Ida furthered her mother's commitment to redefinition and injected audacious political satire in her works, which proved increasingly provocative in her lauded circuits of 1938-39.⁶³ In distillation of the

⁶⁰ Steinlauf, Michael C. "Yiddish Theater." *YIVO Encyclopedia*, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Theater/Yiddish_Theater.

⁶¹ Steinlauf, "Yiddish Theater"

⁶² Steinlauf, Michael C. "Kaminski Family." *YIVO Encyclopedia*, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Kaminski_Family.

⁶³ Steinlauf, "Kaminski Family"

forerunners of a cohesive Yiddish theater, focal motifs that (re)emerge are engaging characters who create solidarity with the audience, romanticization of the Jewish tradition to reassert pride, and gratuitous humor to highlight the absurdity of surrounding political scenarios. These themes will prove crucial in assessing the recuperative and rebellious values of theater during Warsaw's age of occupation.

Interwar Russia mirrored the ironic progressivism of Weimar Germany, and during a brief- yet prolific- stint of peace, the former boasted a bohemian environment that enabled the blossoming of Yiddish theater. Although pogroms during the Tsarist 19th century forced a significant portion of the Russian Empire's Jews westward, thus creating Warsaw as the "Jewish Capital" of Europe, genteel locals cherished Jewish plays⁶⁴. Both a vehicle by which disparate religions could connect in solidarity and a novelty whose humor derived from the lampooning of outrageous, exaggerated stereotypes characters, the Jewish play circuit was entrenched itself in the cultural conscience of Eastern Europe by the end of the 19th century. The Bolshevik Revolution, intriguingly, aided the Jewish artistic cause as the removal of an institutional state religion "relaxed restrictions" against expression of Jewish ethnic identity- including open practice of rituals, speaking in Yiddish dialects, and censorships of the subject matter of traditional plays. Consequently, in the year 1906, on the eve of the 50th anniversary revered Yiddish playwright Avram Goldfadn's passing, the theater flourished.⁶⁵ As rag-tag bands of makeshift troupes, equitably stocked with seasoned professionals and impassioned amateurs, toured across eastern Europe, Warsaw author Y. L. Peretz grew enamored with the movement. Peretz, previously mentioned in this paper's chapter on education, was an esteemed folk hero within Warsaw, distinguished for his achievements within the intellectual sphere and championing of the Yiddish language as a demarcation of cultural pride.⁶⁶ Transplanting his vehement anti-assimilation attitudes to the theater, Peretz is credited with striving for a distillation of Yiddish theater into a respectable artistry- one that could be no less than the

⁶⁴ Hashem, 175

⁶⁵ Steinlauf, "Yiddish Theater"

⁶⁶ Bulat, Mirosława M. "Warsaw Yiddish Art Theater." *YIVO Encyclopedia*, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Warsaw_Yiddish_Art_Theater

“highest aesthetic and moral aspiration of the Jewish people.”⁶⁷ Inseparable from Peretz’s pursuit of a theater that was more “literary, artistic, and refined” than its predecessors, is a term liberally lobbied against poor shows in the Warsaw circuit. *Shund* entered the Polish Jews’ lexicon as a monosyllabic means of stigmatizing a work of theater as cheap in its entertainment, profane and artless, and deriving humor from base, immature sources- or literally, “trash.”⁶⁸ However, *shund* would evolve into a cherished source of entertainment well into the ghettoized period, especially as its crude laughs provided an escapist service to an oppressed people.

The antithesis to *Shund* is the critically acclaimed, artistically innovative, and politically incisive theater produced by two groups who mainstreamed the Peretz ethic into the Jewish Circuit- the Vilna Troupe and Warsaw Yiddish Art Theater (VYKT). With bizarre origins in their titular city, the Vilna Troupe formed in 1915 by grace of the donations of Jewish community leaders, celebratory Russian expats, and Weimar German officers with an appetite for progressive theater.⁶⁹ Noting the emergence of an intellectual Jewish epicenter in Warsaw, the group shifted locations in 1917 and immediately captured the attention of Y. L. Peretz. “Raised on Socialist Ideology and the new Yiddish Literature,” the Vilna Troupe gleefully adopted Peretz’s perspective on artistic integrity, reinvigorated Jewish pride, and stylistic innovation. Injecting Peretz’s influence into their organizational structure, the Troupe opted for a cooperative distribution of power, equitable profit sharing, and construction of equal roles that nudged the “star system” into obsolescence- all factors that would inform the communal ethic of Yiddish theater during the ghetto period.⁷⁰ The Vilna Troupe achieved global renown for *Der Dibek* (*The Dybbuk*, a Hebrew phrase which refers to a parasitic malicious spirit which possesses an earthly human in vengeance for an insult against the entity’s honor), which has been retrospectively hailed as the “the

⁶⁷ Steinlauf. “Yiddish Theater”

⁶⁸ Steinlauf. “Theater”

⁶⁹ Bulat, Mirosława M. “Vilner Trupe.” *YIVO Encyclopedia*, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Vilner_Trupe.

⁷⁰ Bulat. “Vilner Troupe”

representative work of Yiddish Theater.”⁷¹⁷² Contemporary critics regarded *Der Dibek* as the quintessence of modernized Yiddish theater, namely in its infusion of artistry and intellect into a familiar fable and balancing humor and dignity in its characters.⁷³ Although the Vilna Troupe faded into increasing obscurity prior to their 1933 disbanding, the egalitarian pay structure and creative edge that the group pioneered was adopted by their counterparts in the VYKT- a more politically minded group whose visibility persisted until the literal eve of war.

The Warsaw Yiddish Art Theater, known colloquially by acronym VYKT, was founded by Ida Kaminsky and Zygmunt Turkow in 1924. Kaminsky, whose mother was previously mentioned as a contemporary of Goldfadn, pioneered a subgenre of Yiddish Theater that sought to diversify Goldfadn’s dogma. From her perspective, the audience deserved an “international repertoire” that blended traditional Yiddish-Hebrew screenplays with “contemporary political and social” editorial.⁷⁴ Moreover, in adoption of her mother Ester-Rokhl’s motifs, Ida sought to create equally evocative female characters whose “subtle psychological realism” provided an empathetic connection with the audience.⁷⁵ Both the confrontational political themes and relatable characters will heavily value the VYKT’s plays in the conscience of the downtrodden Jews during ghetto period. Such revered and relevant plays included the VYKT’s remastered versions of Victor Hugo’s *Der Glokntsier*, Romain Rolland’s *Velf*, and Leonid Andreev’s *Der Gedank*.⁷⁶ Tracing the path of equity paved by the Vilna Troupe, VYKT’s most profound contribution to the Warsaw theater scene was normalizing a rejection of the “star system” that characterized previous circuits. Instead, the politically conscious troupe recognized the increasing anti-Semitic hostilities in the Polish atmosphere during the 1930’s, and as such, assumed an emphasis on ensemble productions, economic set designs, and egalitarian profit-sharing- similar to that of the Vilna

⁷¹ Bulat. “Vilner Troupe”

⁷² “Dibbuk (Dybbuk).” *Jewish Virtual Library*, AICE, www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/dibbuk-dybbuk.

⁷³ Steinlauf. “Theater.”

⁷⁴ Steinlauf. “Warsaw Yiddish Art Theater”

⁷⁵ Steinlauf. “Kaminski Family”

⁷⁶ Steinlauf, “Warsaw Yiddish Art Theater”

Troupe.⁷⁷ More saliently, founding member Turkow noted the ethical duty of the VYKT was to transform their catalog as “less European Theater in the Yiddish Tongue” and more of a socially responsible outfit that addresses the condition of the “Jewish Conscience.”⁷⁸ As their 1938-39 circuit enjoyed lavished critical acclaim, due in no small part to biting political overtones and socio-cultural relevance, the group sold out what would be, in 1939, the last performance by a professional outfit in Warsaw until the Nazi’s realized defeat. As raucous cheers and exhilarating anticipation characterized a crowd of sold-out playgoers in Warsaw’s Elizeum Theater, Nazi artillery pieces bombarded the showing—fittingly calling an early curtain to professional Yiddish theater in a chillingly allegorical portent of the three impending years of bigotry, bloodshed, and ghettoization.

While the liberated Warsaw cultural scene decayed into a crucible of discrimination, theater was one of the few domains that “astonishingly...[continued] as some form of afterlife,” due in thanks to its dual appeal to subjugated Jews and Nazi occupants. Initially, the play circuits continued to function, especially as professional actors’ high-profile and known wealth pivoted them as worthy recipients of Judenrat extortion.⁷⁹ Cited as necessary for the “financial stability” of the Council’s operational coffers, the siphoning of funds from the theaters desiccated actors’ morale, turning both veterans and neophytes away from the stage. Moreover, as noted in Emmanuel Ringelblum brief recitation of Judenrat ordinances, all plays in the “Jewish repertoire” that confronted “current [political] topics are to be appended,” while productions that wished to remain in existence will suffer extensive censorship and immense levies “to be paid to the municipality, and to the community authorities.”⁸⁰ With a sharp decline in artistic freedoms and financial vitality of the theatrical circuit, actors began to flee their former occupations en masse. Nobly, civilians then assumed the burden of upholding their cherished traditions,

⁷⁷ Steinlauf, “Warsaw Yiddish Art Theater:

⁷⁸ Steinlauf. “Yiddish Theater”

⁷⁹ Ringelblum, *Notes*, 177.

⁸⁰ Ringelblum, Emmanuel. *Jewish Theater and Entertainment Sites*. Trans. Josef Kermish. Warsaw Ghetto Underground Archives. N.d. Published 1942. Print. Reproduced.

plays, and folklore- usually in clandestine circumstances.⁸¹ Under the threat of death, the Jewish Warsaw citizenry perpetuated the spirit and principles of Yiddish theater, facilitating amateur renditions of the ever-popular *Shulamis*, *Mirele Efros*, and *Der Dybbuk*. Conversely, though the professionalism and artistry had been extracted from the Yiddish theater, their venues remained in operation as surrogate instructions for the immensely popular comedy and burlesque shows. Revered mainstays of the Yiddish circuit such as the Elizeum Theater, The Golgotha, and Melody Palace housed the residual embers of Jewish theater as actors suffered mightily to provide their colleague with dim hopes of survival, and their spectators with an emotionally recuperative relief from the horrors of ghetto life. All incarnations of the Yiddish theatrical ethic that emerged, by necessity, during Warsaw's ghettoization were equal profound in their representation of resistance- whether in the refusal to sacrifice tradition, insistence on inflaming Jewish pride, or pursuit of a craft that decompresses and relates with an oppressed people.

Of the three traditional plays that dominated the amateurish pseudo-circuit of ghettoized Warsaw, the "mystical...[yet] tragic" *Shulamis* features as the oldest, but is also regarded as indicative of Yiddish Theater's nexus as a serious art form.⁸² *Shuliamis* stars the titular daughter of an Ancient Israeli tribal leader whose unfortunate descent into a well leads to her eventual rescues by an emboldened prince. Radiantly handsome and fabulously wealthy, the dashing Prince Avisholom appears to be the perfect suitor for Shulamis, until she is outdone by a rival princess. Once united, the two royal heirs produce two children who ultimately perish, a horrid fate attributed to the Avisholom's ignorance of his previous vow to marry Shulamis.⁸³ Eventually, the pair reconnect, but the relevance and profundity of the Avram Goldfadn's 19th century creation resonated with a languishing Warsaw Ghetto who related with the play's anguish. Suffering is crucial within the plot, as Shulamis's misadventure into the well produces corporal

⁸¹ Steinlauf. "Yiddish Theater."

⁸² Steinlauf. "Warsaw Yiddish Art Theater"

⁸³ Shepard, Richard F. "Operetta: 'Shulamith' by Goldfaden." *The New York Times Digital Archive*, The New York Times, 28 Oct. 1982, www.nytimes.com/1982/10/28/arts/operetta-shulamith-by-goldfaden.html.

pain, social isolation, and nerve-wracking uncertainty- all of which are eventually reconciled by the arrival of prince Avisholom.⁸⁴ In a Jewish conscience whose historical trajectory and religious tradition is dominated by the virtues of suffering- both material and spiritual- such a message struck a heightened chord of significance during the Nazi's occupation. Logically, such themes would restore hopes that God would reward the Warsaw Jews for their perseverance, and punish those who transgressed against their faith. Moreover, suffering also features in *Shulamis* as a consequence of abandoning tradition. Once Avisholom discarded his commitment to the poorer, tribal Shulamis for the regal, stately Avigael, his selfishness and blasphemy directly triggered the death of his two children.⁸⁵ Such a notion is grim and stark, but reasserts the sanctity of marriage. For those under the pall of ghettoization, spousal separation, whether by deportation, demanding schedules, or increasingly death, a reaffirmation of matrimony's spiritual ordinance would be invaluable. Moreover, such an obvious motif would remind partners to cherish each moment with their spouses, comfort those separated from their partners, and deter against an apathy-informed temptation towards adultery. Perhaps the most enduring aspect of *Shulamis* was its "elegant, tuneful...[and] operatic" score.⁸⁶ Amongst the songs that dramatize biblical conflict and contextualize romantic agony in hysterics is a subtle lullaby whose popularity only soared during the ghetto period. *Rozhinkes mit mandlen*, or "Raisins and Almonds" functions as a tune of hopefulness and comfort that places the boundless prospects of the future in the fate of an infant. In the expected metronomic tone, the lyrics follow as "in the melody, my child, are lots of prophecies; of the time you will go out into the world; you will be a merchant of all types of produce; from which you will earn a lot, a lot, of money!" The refrain continues by reminding the child that "when you are rich, Yidele; may you

⁸⁴ Berkowitz, Joel. "Shualmith, Oder, Bas Yershohlayim." *Digital Yiddish Theatre Project*, yiddishstage.org/plotting-yiddish-drama/shulamis-oder-bas-yerushohlayim.

⁸⁵ Berkowitz, Joel. "Shulamith"

⁸⁶ Steinlauf. "Warsaw Yiddish Art Theater"

remember this melody.”⁸⁷ “Raisins and Almonds,” a tune that still populates the lullaby setlist of loving Jewish parents to this day, served ghettoized Jews as a source of relaxation and reassuring hope. As will be discussed in later chapters through the “true macabre humor” of ghetto denizens and nihilistic writings of Yoshua Perle, Warsaw’s Jewish populace grew increasingly aware of their fates, and accepted an impending doom with steeled resolve. With a will to live so readily sacrificed, what would follow naturally was a need, both biologically hard-wired and psychologically relieving, to impart that forsaken hope into the next generation. As such, “Raisins and Almonds,” was more than a simple nursery rhyme, but an opportunity for a parent to offload the burden of their uncertain future into the nascent optimism of future generations.⁸⁸ *Shulamis* would fail to achieve its current status without its conscientious preservation by the Warsaw Ghetto Jews, a group who gambled their liberty, safety, and livelihood for the preservation of cherished cultural traditions. Amateur productions of *Shulamis* may underscore the death of professional Yiddish theater, but signified a communal reception of their forerunners’ torch in an awareness of the urgency in reasserting Jewish pride against the imposition of Nazi ideology.

Adapting Jacob Gordin’s 19th century Shakespearian classic for a progressive, bohemian palate, the VYKT debuted *Mirele Efros*, or colloquially “The Jewish Queen Lear,” to the Warsaw circuit in 1939. The unveiling would be brief, however, as the Nazi invasion of 1939 halted the circuit’s creative momentum, and cast *Mirele Efros* into a realm of mystique and mythology. Future incarnations would now only occur through the imaginations of amateurish outfits seeking to preserve the modern classic.⁸⁹ Ida Kaminsky devised the piece as a feminized extension of *The Jewish King Lear* that evoked the matriarchal dynamics of Jewish family life through a dominant lead, whose role also doubled as an inspiration to woman spectators.⁹⁰ Kandinsky’s *Mirele* was thematized all at once as demanding and

⁸⁷ Avram, Goldfadn. “Rozhinkes Mit Mandlen.” Translated by Batya Fonda, *Jewish Folk Songs*, www.jewishfolksongs.com/en/rozhinkes-mit-mandlen.

⁸⁸ Shepard “Operetta: ‘Shulamith’ by Goldfadn”

⁸⁹ Steinlauf. “Warsaw Yiddish Art Theater”

⁹⁰ Steinlauf. “Kaminski Family”

merciless, calculating and intelligent, but most importantly, spiritually committed to her husband's memory following his death. Mirele, the upstart flax distributor and lynchpin of a tumultuous family, is buttressed throughout the play by a series of crafty resolutions to unfulfilled debts, contracts, and arrangements that highlight the necessity of dignity and astuteness in an atmosphere of exploitation.⁹¹ Moreover, Mirele is notable in her unflinching rejection of male suitors following her husband's passing, citing the sanctity of marriage and value of the nuclear family.⁹² The play's themes, when digested by a ghettoized Warsaw audience, would stand in direct opposition with, and resistance against, the dynamics of Nazi occupation. First, occupational restrictions only intensified with the passage of time within Warsaw. One of the key objectives of tightening regulations was not solely the economy destruction of Poland's Jewry, but the relegation of women to a less prominent role in society.⁹³ In a similar vein, the dignified and independent Mirele contrasts starkly with Nazified gender roles, under which women were celebrated as child-bearers, but little else. They existed in a private sphere fundamentally separated from public life and inarguably subordinate to that of their husbands. Moreover, the Judenrat Council shared a convoluted relationship of discrimination and capitulation with the Nazi authorities, and as such, readily deceived their Jewish compatriots for personal preservation.⁹⁴ *Mirele Efros* illuminated the need for alertness in an unforgiving atmosphere, even going so far as to boldly portray fellow Jews as capable of exploitation, if it advanced their interests. Lastly, Mirele derives pride and virtue from her refusal to compromise the sanctity of marriage. The Warsaw Ghetto radiated with sexual perversion, stemming dually from Judenrat Police agents leveraging their power to abuse women, while nihilistic Jewish men lusted for the cheap, ephemeral comfort of prostitutes.⁹⁵ *Mirele* reinforced the importance of marriage as

⁹¹ "Mirele Efros (1939) - Full Synopsis." *Turner Classic Movies*, www.tcm.com/tcmdb/title/496507/Mirele-Efros/full-synopsis.html.

⁹² "Mirele Efros (1939)"

⁹³ Potter, Pamela M. *Art of Suppression* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2016). Print. 171-73

⁹⁴ Ringelblum, Emmanuel. *Jewish Warsaw is No More*. Warsaw Ghetto Underground Archives 1943. Trans. Joseph Kermish Reproduced. 40-43. Print

⁹⁵ Ringelblum, Emmanuel. *Notes*.

a safeguard to civil society, instilled dignity amongst spouses, and returned sexuality to a realm of sacredness and monogamy that provided normalcy in a turbulent Warsaw. The play, in its core motifs and dominant female characters, also stands as a deathless testament to Jewish culture that refused to bow its head to the intimidation and compulsory assimilation into a Nazified society.

In continuation of the thematic Jewish “mysticism” in which community religious leaders could reduce “esoteric rabbinic doctrine...[into] psychological size,” *Der Dybbuk* represents a preeminent example of a Yiddish classic loaded with ancient Hebrew lore that retains its moral, emotional weight with contemporary spectators- regardless of the time of their viewing.⁹⁶ The Vilna Troupe opus, adopted from a Russian novel of the same name, encapsulated the intriguing dichotomy of *shtetl* life. Both anchored in antiquated tradition and eager to adopt modernity, the *shtetl* refers to a rural, homogenously Jewish community. Frequently in such societal organizations, both factual and fictionalized, there is a perpetual struggle between elders and youth, tradition and transformation, and mystical and mundane forces.⁹⁷ *Der Dybbuk* and *The Fiddler on the Roof* are widely considered timeless capsules of *shtetl* culture. Naturally, confusion would arise as to why such a bucolic production would attract a feverish urban Warsaw audience, but as noted prior, the spiritual and interpersonal motifs present within *Der Dybbuk* spoke to a struggling ghetto. In synopsis, the play centers on a malicious, vindictive spirit that haunts the earthly body of Leah, the coveted daughter of a wealthy merchant whose incessant demands thwart the advances of would-be suitors. One of such ill-fated men was Khanan, whose infatuation led to his grief-stricken death upon learning of his ineligibility for Leah’s hand in marriage, triggering his sublimation into the parasitic Dybbuk spirit.⁹⁸ Thematically, the production challenges topics such as

⁹⁶ Ansky, Stephen. *Der Dybbuk and Other Writings*. Trans. David Roskies. Yale University Press. New Haven. Digital Print. Introduction.

⁹⁷ Kassow, Samuel. “Shtetl.” *YIVO Encyclopedia*, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Shtetl.

⁹⁸ Steinlauf, Michael C. “Dybbuk, The.” *YIVO Encyclopedia*, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Dybbuk_The.

female autonomy, honoring of ancient tradition, and the interplay between Jewish mysticism and modern sensibilities- imparting solidarity and nostalgia upon the Warsaw viewership.

Der Dybbuk's ominously chanted opening choral parallels the blight of ghettoized Jews, and acts as a launchpad for a strikingly applicable play. "Why, oh why did the soul plunge; from the utmost heights to the lowest depths?; the seed of redemption; is contained within the fall."⁹⁹ The verse is barked by ghastly voices which emanate from disparate locations across a dark, imageless curtain, as followed by a pause to allow reflection among the audience. The cadence of the lyrics is critical too, as the soul's catastrophic "plunge" is framed as a beguiling question, only to be followed by a definitive, irrefutable answer. Presented as a statement, "the seed of redemption, is contained within the fall," this line underscores the Jewish valuation on suffering as an inalienable reality of life that invites divine, spiritual reward for perseverance. The relationship between hardship and catharsis features heavily throughout Yiddish artistry, as influenced by millennia of historical persecution, but would retain a modern relevance. Warsaw spectators, upon processing the significance of the opening chant, would experience sensations of reassurance, momentary comfort, and a reminder that with each setback will follow a meteoric return to "the utmost heights." Warsaw, the emboldened "Jewish Capital" of Eastern Europe, pulsated with innovation, creativity, and scholarship pre-war due to the influx of educated Jewish personae. Imaginably, the rapid installation of Nazi troops and racially discriminatory legislation would be perceived as a stark contrast with the liberty and prosperity enjoyed by Warsaw's Jewish populace, only a meager few years beforehand. Their fall from the "utmost heights" previously reached, therefore, would be compensated, in hopes, by that "seed of redemption". In Act II, bride-to-be Leah enters into an impassioned spiritual debate with one of the townsfolk, Frade, in an exchange that would alleviate tensions and promise redemption should the situation worsen for Warsaw's Jews. After Frade warns that "[Evil is] everywhere around us, hiding in every hole, and lurking in every corner...waiting," Leah retorts with a steeled resolve when confronting death, if not challenging the degree to which it is feared. In

⁹⁹ Roskies, "Der Dybbuk" Act I

reference of her late mother, Leah calmly explains that those who prematurely pass “return to complete the span of life which he was given on earth, to finish the work he began, [and] to feel the joys and sorrows he did not know”¹⁰⁰ The screenplay’s stage cues indicate a tonal shift upon this response from Leah, foreshadowing her possession by the Dybbuk spirit, as evidenced by the revelation of arcane spiritual knowledge. In that sense, the supernatural entity could be considered a reputable resource on the mechanics of the afterlife, and while reincarnation is not as dogmatic in Judaism as it is in other faiths, eternal assignment to heaven or hell has not achieved universal consensus either.¹⁰¹ For Jewish spectators growing increasingly conscious of a grim future in the Warsaw ghetto, the prospect of redemption for an underserved, premature death would assuage frantic minds. Moreover, in a religious culture that emphasizes the sanctity of fulfilled commitments to labor, love, and family, the notion that those unsatisfied sacraments could be compensated in posthumously would provide only further comfort. In this sense, the return of the unjustly killed to torment those who dealt indignities is an act of resistance by its notion alone. Obviously, this concept casts the Nazi occupants and their accomplice perpetrators into a demonized visage, or more topically, the ubiquitous “evil” mentioned by Frade. And in confluence with *Der Dybbuk*’s vindictive themes, the Nazi’s exhaustive efforts to stifle the Jewish spirit will be justly punished through the retributive torment by the spirits who perished under Nazi German atrocities. Finally, the dramatic climax of *Der Dybbuk* arrives with Leah’s exorcism of her parasitic demon. Writhing in pain, flailing in protest, and bellowing in agony, Leah remains indomitable in her resolve, and can function as an allegory for Warsaw during ghettoization. “I am tormented by the most vicious and merciless spirits...but as long as I have even an ounce of strength within me, I will resist!”¹⁰² The exorcising mystics invoke the laws of “Almighty God...[and] The Torah” to compel the spirit’s exit, further highlighting the heresy and trespassing of the *Dybbuk* (Nazi Germany) on Leah’s body

¹⁰⁰ Roskies, “Der Dybbuk” Act II

¹⁰¹ Jaffe, Rabbi Howard. “In Judaism, What Is Believed to Happen to Someone After They Die.” *ReformJudaism.org*, 6 June 2016, reformjudaism.org/judaism-what-believed-happen-someone-after-they-die.

¹⁰² Roskies, *Der Dybbuk*, Act IV

(Warsaw).¹⁰³ In this cathartic finale, the just and hallowed forces of the rabbinic shamans persevere, and triumph, over the malicious interloper, prophetically characterize the ghettoization period: rapid occupation by a sinister external Nazi force, commendable resolve by a beleaguered population, and rejoice after the intruder's equally rapid expulsion.¹⁰⁴ As audiences attempted to mentally process a period of extreme prejudice and normalize violence, all of which predicated on anti-Semitic vitriol, *Der Dybbuk* would resonate with empowerment and vindication. It is unsurprising, therefore, why a time-honored staple of professional theater became a constant force amongst amateur audiences in Warsaw's creaky cellars and abandoned synagogues. The message was, and is, that profound.

Although Yiddish theater soared to meteoric heights prewar, both in popularity and artistry, it was not the only incarnation of live Jewish performance that endured into the period of ghettoization. Comedy and burlesque remained firmly entrenched in the seedy Warsaw nightlife as revered forms of affordable entertainment. Its appeal was unilateral, charming Nazi occupants, Judenrat conspirators, and the ghetto denizens themselves. The two genres existed in a paradoxical state of isolation and interconnectedness, at both times singular styles and symbiotic performances. Conveniently lumping the two into "cabaret comedy," the circuit featured "a mix of short theatrical sketches, humorous skits, songs, stand-up comedy, and [an offering of] biting commentary on current political issues"¹⁰⁵ As Emmanuel Ringelblum penned in his February 12, 1941 diary entry, it was still quite possible to "have a good time in the Ghetto-with dancing and new nightclubs being opened all the time" (RINGLEBLUM 134). Lezno Street, equitable to New York City's Broadway, retained its throne as the city's performance art epicenter with Yiddish venues such as The Elizeum, The Golgotha, and Melody Palace all remaining in various degrees of operation during ghettoization. Comedy pervaded all aspects of the Jewish cultural sphere,

¹⁰³ Jaffe, Rabbi Howard. "In Judaism, What Is Believed to Happen to Someone After They Die." *ReformJudaism.org*, 6 June 2016, reformjudaism.org/judaism-what-believed-happen-someone-after-they-die.

¹⁰⁴ Kassow. *Der Dybbuk*.

¹⁰⁵ Manhin, Anna "Cabaret comedy and the taboo of 'Jewishness' in twentieth-century Hungary." 2012. *Comedy Studies*, 4:2, 167-178, DOI: 10.1386/cost.4.2.167_1

notable for its merciless attitude, tendency towards vulgarity, and equal distribution of political critique and self-deprecation.¹⁰⁶ Its popularity, consequently, was not an anomalous Eastern European phenomenon, but satisfied palates internationally. The Marx Brothers dominated American vaudeville with their absurdist style while the team of Dzigan and Schumacher toured extensively throughout the Slavic regions, to glowing reviews. The latter tandem could be credited with consolidating the cannon of the Yiddish humor that elicited eruptive laughter in Warsaw. Hallmarks of the Dzigan and Schumacher style, known by the portmanteau “Shudzig,” consisted of lampooning the Jewish family dynamics, observational humor, and acerbic barbs pointed at “anti-Semites and government functionaries.”¹⁰⁷ With a repertoire that provide both lighthearted chuckles and scathing political critique, the duo fled from Warsaw during the Nazi occupation, but hoped their works offered “consultation for difficult days...and revenge against our enemies” (CITATION). Jerzy Jurandot also enjoyed considerable acclaim within the Warsaw circuit. The ghetto denizen spoke with a candid realism in his tragicomedies, sublimating his hardships endured in an alien, cramped, and filthy Warsaw into relatable humor that established solidarity amongst the audience. His opus, *Love Looks for an Apartment*, features two displaced Jewish couples forced to shared a decrepit apartment in the Warsaw Ghetto, and derives humor from bizarre predicaments, taboo love triangles, and an illumination of the absurdity of Nazi ideology (CITATION). Capturing the resilient tone of the Jewish comedic spirit, these figures were not without imitators, and their style undulated throughout all tiers of comedy- from professional productions, to amateurish segments, and even jokes between passerby- illustrating the value of humor as a form of emotional coping, escapism, and resistance.

Of the more structured comedy routines practiced by ghetto civilians in cultural centers, residential basements, and other secretive venues was *The Jewish King Lear*, another cherished piece written by Jacob Gordin. Though composed in New York City for a predominantly Russian-Jewish

¹⁰⁶ Steinlauf. “Yiddish Theater”

¹⁰⁷ Gross, Natan. “Dzigan and Schumacher.” *YIVO Encyclopedia*, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Dzigan_and_Shumacher.

audience, the Yiddish manuscript eventually migrated to Warsaw in 1908, and as such, featured heavily in the discourse and humor of theater fans.¹⁰⁸ The titular *King Lear* is Reb Dovidl Moysheles, a patriarchal community leader whose domineering presence and micromanagement of his children's affairs is warned to lead to a descent into penniless insanity- much in the same vein as Shakespeare's *King Lear*, ergo the name. Despite the thematic seriousness, the play is staged as a comedy, marked by embellished caricatures and scathing humor interspersed with out-of-place song. Respect for tradition radiates throughout the comedy, as exhibited in one particular exchange. While dinner guest Mr. Yaffe is decrying the superficiality of Purim celebration, he is humorously berated by the Moysheles' servant. "For such advice, may you get a pain in the shoulder!"; "Don't trip on the way home"; and "Well we have a new guest in town. Blessed is he who comes. The Godless Goy is here!"¹⁰⁹ The servant Tyrtel's barrage of caustic wit assuredly would evoke laughter from the audience, and exemplifies the valuation on unfiltered sarcasm in Yiddish comedy, but also underlines the sanctity of ancient Jewish rituals. Such traditions were systematically prohibited by Nazi-Polish legislations during the ghetto period, and a reappraisal of their necessity would connect directly with the viewership. Black humor infiltrates the work as well, which mirrors the "truly macabre" jokes that will be dissected in the following chapter on literature. In a fit of melodrama, Reb Dovidl is complaining incessantly about his hunger after returning from the synagogue, but upon learning of an empty cupboard, retorts with a defiance to death that crucial to maintaining dignity in Nazified Warsaw. "Why do you think it is such a misfortune?" he scolds his wife "Don't forget little fool, the less I eat, the less the worms will have to enjoy after my death. May they have little pleasure from it!"¹¹⁰ Clearly under hyperbolic circumstances, this departure into macabre comedy reflects a general unflinching attitude towards death and mortality in Jewish comedy. Within

¹⁰⁸ "The Jewish King Lear." *Digital Yiddish Theatre Project*, yiddishstage.org/plotting-yiddish-drama/der-yidisher-kenig-lir.

¹⁰⁹ Gordin, Jacob. *The Jewish King Lear: A Comedy in America*. Tran. Ruth Gay. Yale University Press. 2011. Act I.

¹¹⁰ Gordin. "The Jewish King Lear: A Comedy in America." Act II.

ghettoized Warsaw, such jokes were commonplace as mechanisms to psychologically cope with an ever-present visage of death and depravity. Similarly, Reb Dovidl's dismissive attitude towards his own mortality, as furthered by a later exclamation of surprise that his children "haven't gotten rid of him yet," would be embodied by the play's actors as a refusal to submit to the terror of their own fates within Nazi occupied Warsaw.¹¹¹ In Reb Dovidl's redeeming final act, he reconciles with his estranged children and reminds them, as well as the audience, to cherish their current lives, regardless of its conditions, as circumstances will change before appreciation could be registered. "Do you see what a fool I was? Always worried, always worried," Reb Dovidl laments, "a person can never judge his own good fortune. Only when he loses everything with which God blessed him...then can he judge!"¹¹² Now, at the time of *The Jewish King Lear's* underground circuits in 1939-41 Warsaw, the present was appearing increasingly grim, and with such oppression and barbarism came an acknowledgment that death may lay on the horizon. Labor camps rapidly pervaded the public conscience as the dreaded death sentence of Judenrat occupational assignments, chiefly in that factories, lumber yards, and steel mills underwent rapid conversion into proto-concentration camps. With death becoming an unavoidable facet of daily life in Warsaw, noted in Ringelblum's diary as a "mass phenomenon" of a "gallery of sick people without the strength to get up and beg," defiance would be valuable, but an appreciation of the present pivotal to one's sanity.¹¹³ A truly deceptive medium, comedy employs humor to soften the impact of its subject matter, core themes, and targets of commentary, and as a result, imparts profound messages upon the audience without the self-awareness of other media. *The Jewish King Lear* is just a single example of structured humor employed as an act of resistance, superficially against prohibitions on Yiddish culture, but spiritually on the discouraging, odious intentions of anti-Semitic Nazi rhetoric.

Worthy of brief note is the Jewish cabaret that remained in existence during the ghettoization period, the byproduct of a complication relationship between actors' commitment to the amusement of

¹¹¹ Gordin. "The Jewish King Lear" Act II

¹¹² Gordin. "The Jewish King Lear" Act IV

¹¹³ Ringelblum. *Notes*. 177.

their suffering peers- even to the point of “shivering topless in the cold”- coupled with the patronage of burlesque shows by lustful Judenrat officials and Nazi troopers.¹¹⁴ Synonymous with the Warsaw cabaret scene was the Melody Palace, a local institution revered for its ability to leverage Yiddish performance art to a vastly diverse audiences through the deployment of cheap ticket prices, overt sexuality, and comedic sketches interlaced with suggestive dance numbers. Even during ghettoization, Emmanuel Ringelblum notes, Melody Palace was one of “*them*” in that “she couldn’t be touched” due to the venue’s allure to salivating Judenrat officials, Jewish police officers, and garrisoned Nazi troops.¹¹⁵ The Melody Palace, and other incarnations of Yiddish burlesque, emerged from a then-novel phenomenon of *kleynkunst*. “Little art,” as the literal translation refers, indicates Yiddish performance art forms that are inexpensive to perform and attend, appeal to less refined tastes, and can be staged in any location.¹¹⁶ The Yiddish Gang pioneered the deviation of burlesque shows from the *kleynkunst* umbrella, establishing their troupe as respected professionals who blended comedic wit, choreographed dance, and tasteful sexuality into their work by the arrival of the 1932 circuit. Well-received by lowbrows and high critics alike, the outfit inspired similar acts across Eastern Europe, including emerging cabaret appetites in Lodz, Vilna, Bielsk, Grodno, and others.¹¹⁷ Now emerging as an established artform, Yiddish burlesque raged across Poland as a theatrical sensation. Of course, the core tenets of such performances were provocative dances and slapstick humor, but the cabaret was notable for its infusion of innovative artistry into a medium that financially accessible to a wide audience. During the ghetto period, as noted prior, the Yiddish cabaret circuit remained in partial operation thorough Warsaw, catering to a diverse, if not troubling, audience. Although seats were oftentimes filled with Nazi officers, regime conspirators, and Judenrat functionaries, so to were the stands for Warsaw Ghetto denizens. For the latter group, the Yiddish burlesque provided a

¹¹⁴ Steinlauf. “Theater”

¹¹⁵ Ringelblum. *Notes*. 125.

¹¹⁶ Bulat, Mirosława M. “Kleynkunst.” *YIVO Encyclopedia*, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Kleynkunst.

¹¹⁷ Bulat, “Kleynkunst”

familiar comfort, immediate escapist entertainment, and a slim hope that Jewish artistry would not succumb to Nazi cultural erasure. Due in an unfortunate combination of Nazi-Judenrat prohibition of historical recording and the impromptu style of burlesque shows, detailed and comprehensive scripts, screenplays, setlists and lyrics have been lost in to time, if available at all during this paper's focus of 1939-42.

Artistic intrigue, whether directed at music, sculpture, theater, or any other medium, is inspired by the same universal characteristic: subjectivity. Such incarnations of creativity retain interest for decades, if not longer, due to the potential for each piece to be consumed, processed, and applied to reflect emotions and attitudes of the spectator's present time. The steeled resolve of Leah in *Der Dybbuk*, matrimonial virtuosity of Mirele in *Mirele Efros*, or even the dignified self-deprecating humor of Dzingan and Schumacher function as vignettes of theatrical creativity that may have objectively originated before the ghettoization of Warsaw, but witnessed a reappraisal of value under the context of Nazi rule. For nations under the dominion of the oppressive regime, denigration and humiliation of minority groups- featuring Jews foremost- existed as both an operational goal and incorruptible ideological tenet. This paper's dissected pieces, as well as those now inaccessible, permitted a reinvigorated artistic spirit within the oppressed Warsaw Ghetto populace. Moreover, such traditional tales as *Shulamis* and *Der Dybbuk* not simply reasserted Yiddish aesthetic value, but provided an artistic mouthpiece through which the ethos and energy of an anguished populace could connect with their compatriots. Dialogue underwent an interpretive reconfiguration, characters an allegorical re-imagination, and children's folk songs a tragic urgency, but in doing so, these processes represent a Jewish refusal to extinguish the creative, emotive, spiritual autonomy that their enemies sought viciously to snuff out. Intrinsic with the shifting of traditional Yiddish features to clandestine circumstances, as well as the stringent censorship of themes and lyrics within performance art, some of the potentially envisioned pieces of the period are inexistent in a textual, document form. Their prewar incarnations or retrospective translations, dissected above, however, are salient in their reported popularity during the ghetto period, which again suggests a timeless

profundity as forces of emotional articulation, grief catharsis, and challenges to Nazi rule by allegory and metaphor. Each piece remains, therefore, a form of theatrical resistance in its own unique right.

Chapter 4

Literary Resistance

Effortlessly and masterfully capturing the nagging insecurity that interminably plagued Nazi German leadership, occupying forces in a Warsaw chose an extremely intriguing target for the first of what would be hundreds of directed assaults, usually on hardened locations. One of the earliest victims of these destructive campaigns was not a military installation, police department, or other arena for violent force- but a writers' guild. The Association of Jewish Writers and Journalists, conceivably located in the Jewish quarter of Warsaw that would eventually comprise the ghetto, was demolished in September of 1939. The building's comprehensive bombing, an extremely calculated and well-executed demolition operation that guaranteed total destruction, followed the invasion of Poland by a mere weeks.¹¹⁸ Prior to the curtain of ghettoization descending upon Warsaw, the guild garnered considerable acclaim for its concentrations of renegade, radical, and modernized Jewish authors. These intellectuals consciously chose Warsaw as their city of congregation due to the region's reputation as a considerable think-tank pre-war, and *de facto* "capital of eastern European Jews."¹¹⁹ The Nazi's occupiers decision to instantly eradicate a deliberated center of Jewish scholarship highlights two critical components that underpin this study. First, impulsivity and a perceived intransience pestered Nazi ideologues, who readily conducted pogroms against Jewish domains of intellectual and educational engagement. Second, and in extension, the targeting of these locations hints at a subtle, underlying Nazi affirmation of the power of emotional resistance. Were forums of discourse, scholarship, and reignited Jewish pride considered negligible as threats to the Nazi mentality, it would be illogical for them to be pinpointed with such lethal intensity. This extension of rationale could be considered as an interpretive validation of this chapter's emphasis on literature's manipulative power on popular culture, and conscience.

¹¹⁸ Cohen, Nathan. "Association of Jewish Writers and Journalists in Warsaw." *YIVO Encyclopedia*. N.d. <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/printarticle.aspx?id=274> 1.

¹¹⁹ Gutman, 14.

Prior to an examination on the literary culture of Warsaw during occupation can be adequately conducted, a qualification must be established. Inseparable from the voluminous archives compiled by the Warsaw Ghetto Underground, among other conservationist Jewish forces, are personal diaries. Although these personal records are both ubiquitous and insightful, they will be excised from this study for a variety of research and argument related reasons. First, diaries are intended for singular personal consumption, and not a wider audience. Consequently, they can be labeled as unintentional in any impact they may retroactively inspire, as the direction of those pieces upon compositions is simply recitation, recordation, and to a degree, escapism. Moreover, the copious amount of personal diaries and records available could disrupt this paper's direction due in dual part to their number and idiosyncratic qualities. Conversely, this study will illuminate "literature," operationally defined as a work of fiction or non-fiction that is marketed towards a larger audience with express intent of dissemination. Moreover, literature typically confers qualities of artistry, experimentation, or style. These components are fundamental in interpreting an artist's intentions and messages, critical for a differentiated approach to Holocaust literature. Lastly, literary works of the period are distinguished by two universally pursued goals: escapism from the holocaust's brutality fused with confrontation of its grim realities. In this sense, literature as an analytically examined form of resistance is a force both unique in its artistry, but recuperative in its designs.

Relevant to this study is the preeminence of literature as a rehabilitative aid, a dynamic which has arguably existed for as long as the practice of expressive writing itself. In her exploration of "Trauma and the Healing Power of Literature," Paolo Baseotto references the term "bibliotherapy." Obviously, this concept has only recently entered the modern lexicon, but it represents the linguistic culmination of millennia of practice. Plato, Baseotto explains, openly acknowledged the restorative capacities of literature by noting the dual associate of god Apollo with poetry and healing as "far from a

coincidence.”¹²⁰ Moreover, experimental and unorthodox literature that emanated from Europe’s various Renaissance produced fundamentally troubled characters. These figures, Baseotto argues, feature a “spiritual state and virtuous energy” only as robust as their “acceptance of traumatic experiences.”¹²¹ In this sense, their cultural relevance could be interpreted as a valuation on enduring personal hardship to demarcate resilience and valor. Modern philosopher Terry Eagleton offered his theoretical assessment on the therapeutic capacity of literature as a fusion of the historical trajectory mentioned prior, and the intrinsic intention of literature to consolidate extremely complicated thoughts, emotions, and situations into readily consumable sentences. Primarily, he insists “healing is about power, and thus about authority.”¹²² When an individual is suffering from an ailment, whether physical, psychological, or completely imaginary, the vigor of recovery is contingent upon a lost sense of control. Once an individual is convinced that his or her situation can be improved, and proper remedial action is under pursuit, then constitution will likely rebound. Eagleton extended this rationale to the contextualizing efforts of authors, namely in producing artful, engaging, and culturally valuable literature. Authors, under this praise, are considered fundamentally aligned with psychologists in their “shared aim to deliver a shapely narrative about the world.” In the categorization of pain, insecurity, and trauma as “shapeless and nameless,” but also integral to the careers of psychoanalysis and literature alike, the author’s provision of a “coherent story” invokes a profound reaction.¹²³ Once a nebulous and emotionally disconcerting situation is distilled in an easily accessible state, in this case a novel’s sentences, a variety of emotions are elicited. Reframing the reader’s trauma into a tangible format rapidly expedites the healing process, chiefly through removing the mystique of an inherently nebulous concern. Moreover, and critical to holocaust scholarship, the author’s transmission of a message that is deeply painful, while also mutually

¹²⁰ Baesotto, Paula. “Trauma and the Healing Power of Literature: A Case Study” *AIA Conference*. 15 September 2017. Accessed Digitally. 1.

¹²¹ Baesotto, 2.

¹²² Eagleton, Terry. “The Art of Medicine: Literary Healing.” *The Lancet*. N.d. Accessed Digitally. 2. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(08\)60583-8/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(08)60583-8/fulltext)

¹²³ Eagleton, 3-4.

relatable, conveys a sense of solidarity. Comfort in this form can outweigh isolation, again reinforcing literature as a rehabilitative instrument. Lastly, literature retains a cherished escapist attribute, which during an existence best characterized as hellish, can prove immensely useful to those under duress. In synopsis, although terms such as “bibliotherapy” and “traumatic scholarships” exist as modern scholarly constructs, their implications wildly predate their labels. Both of the academics above, in their differentiated approaches to rehabilitative literature, bolster the notion that artistic expression in written form can be understood as a representation of emotional resistance.

In an inextricable bond with the intellectual ethic that characterized Warsaw’s more academic domains pre-war, the region concurrently functioned as a hub of literature, artistry, and experimentalism. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the remnants of Jewish persecution of Eastern Europe sought refuge in the then-tolerant Polish capital. Academia and intellectualism flourished, painting the city as a beacon of progressivism, and eventually, a launchpad for fledgling Jewish authors. The embodiment of the Hebrew ethic, and a Warsaw folk hero, Isaac Leib Peretz is generally considered the forerunner to the literary movement within the city. Peretz, prolific and diversified in his disciplines, produced seminal pieces of literature, poetry, and playwriting that reasserted an intense pride in the Jewish heritage. Chiefly, Peretz is regarded as fostering a movement towards a “culturally autonomous Polish Jewry” that rejected the overt, systematic efforts of assimilation that the gentile majority pressured.¹²⁴ Peretz’s crowning achievement during this attempted paradigm shift was the repatriation of a fading relic of the past, and source of ostracism by the ethnic Polish, into a vigorous source of renegotiated identity: the Yiddish language. As expressed in the previous chapter, the Hebrew-Slavic fusion existed in an extremely divisive realm prior to the intellectual efforts of Polish Jews. Under Peretz’s mastery of the language, however, he is credited with singlehandedly “providing a new cultural vocabulary for an audience accustomed to grappling with moral dilemmas.”¹²⁵ These two aforementioned mentalities

¹²⁴ Weise, Ruth R. “Peretz, Yitshok Leubysht.” *YIVO Encyclopedia*. N.d. Accessed digitally. 2.

¹²⁵ Weise, 3.

lauded by Peretz, rejection of assimilation and resurgence of Yiddish language, underpinned his efforts to apply Jewish nationalistic ethics to the literary scene. As the nineteenth century transitioned into the twentieth, vestiges of Tsarist Russian occupation depleted the cultural reserves of Jewish Warsaw. Noting that his beloved centers of education and expression were in rapid decline, Peretz converted his numerous apartments into “literary hubs,” catapulting budding Jewish writers into local stardom.¹²⁶ Peretz’s structured approach for communal authorship created free forums of both inspiration and competition, which directly influenced the conception of similar spaces following his death. Although Peretz died prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, he perished a revered Jewish hero, as over 1500 people attended his funeral services. More poignant was ghettoized author John Hersey’s characterization of Peretz’s tombstone, *Ohel Peretz*, as a miraculous survivor of Nazi German destruction and local anti-Semitic graveyard defilements, pegging as “a symbol of spiritual resistance in the Warsaw ghetto.”¹²⁷

Following Peretz’s untimely 1915 death, Warsaw suffered immense turmoil throughout the First World War as a territory coveted by German, Hapsburg, and Soviet forces alike. Noting the urgent nature of not only the physical state, but its Jewish constituents under any of the aforementioned regimes, scrambling authors formed the Association of Jewish Writers and Journalists. The authors’ guild was founded in the similar clandestine, self-sustaining ethic that Peretz intended with his apartment studios. More thematically, these intrinsically roguish centers for intellectual activity sparked a new wave of Jewish-Yiddish authors that conformed to a “revolutionary style of writing.”¹²⁸ Melec Ravitch, Uri Tsevi Grinberg, Perets Markish, and I. J. Stinger comprised the foundational core of the organization, while establishing a precedent of uncompromising Jewish pride that ghettoized writers readily adapted. In the two decades leading up to the German invasion, the Association rapidly disseminated literature that postured Yiddish as not only viable in communicating exclusively Jewish messages, but also equally as a

¹²⁶ Weise, 2.

¹²⁷ Weise, 4.

¹²⁸ Cohen, 1.

capable of elegance and artistry in framing as other tongues. In 1929, the group successfully lobbied for Yiddish to be accepted into PEN, the international writers' association, while advocating for multi-lateral educational reforms within Poland to incorporate a more Jewish-tolerant curriculum.¹²⁹ Progress, in this sense, is tragically ironic due to its ephemerality. Established legislature, protocols, or social norms that transcend oppressive boundaries, commendable as their achievement may be, forever retain a potential for immediate erasure. Such a fate was witnessed as Nazi forces descended upon Warsaw.

As ghetto chronicler Emmanuel Ringelblum notes in his contemporary account on literature's status under occupation, Nazi forces exerted considerable effort to suffocate Jewish literary spheres. The Association, mentioned previously, was an immediate victim of such campaigns, while less inflammatory and concerning institutions, such as the Jewish Writers' Union and the Patronage, suffered severe censorship. Micromanagement installed under the Nazi ethic toed the usual line: elimination of all shades of independence, while expressing a shrewd caution of total community enagement.¹³⁰ Understanding the ghetto's role as a logistical staging center prior to "resettlement" campaigns nationwide, cooperation and agreeability were necessarily to establish short-term. Such was the value of the Judenrat, a Nazi puppet that present a veneer of false autonomy. Under these regulations, few complete and comprehensive novels managed to escape the ghetto conscience, due in dual part to the Nazi recognition of literature's value in rapidly altering popular ideology, as well as the time constraint imposed by an uncertain future. *Mein Kampf* was, deliberately, a decorative stable on every Aryan German's coffee table and venerated as the focal guidebook on Nazi racial ideology. Amazingly, however, is the proliferation of shorter works that characterized ghetto literacy. "Short stories, sketches, essays, reports, poet[ry]...current notes and commentaries" disseminated throughout the ghetto en masse, serving as glimmers of artistic light in a stifling scenario."¹³¹ Due to the sporadic and unpredictable nature of these

¹²⁹ Cohen, 1.

¹³⁰ Ringelblum, Emmanuel. "Moral Defense and Resistance in Literature." *Warsaw Ghetto Underground Archives*. N.d. Reproduced. Print. 645

¹³¹ Ringelblum, 646

works' dispersal, and survival, a wealth of celebrated writers abounded during the ghetto period. Yehuda Feld, Izhak Katznelson, Joshua Perle, Peter Opozynski, Hershele Danielewitch, among others, garnered considerable acclaim during occupation, and retrospectively. As Ringelblum notes in summation, these authors succeeded in producing unique, creative, and engaging work that "captured the feelings" of the ghetto community while "[the authors] faced destruction, and the physical threat of death was hanging over the whole nation."¹³² Commendation continues for particularly active authors, such as Opozynski and Hershele, for their courage in candidly confronting the ghetto's ills, from the "the condition of homelessness and the refugee to the curse of poverty and the tragedy of children." The most meritorious aspect of these texts, however, is their capability of transmitting their message with "the greatest ethical value."¹³³ Such effusive praise lavished upon his contemporaries by Ringelblum reflects the two core themes of rehabilitative literature championed in this study: capitalizing on literary artistry to create a compelling, escapist experience while simultaneously confronting the hells of ghettoization without restraint. Their value in this sense, as well as the resilience of the authors who composed such work, will be explored in the following sections.

Authorship is inherently burdened by the challenging task of constructing a coherent narrative, conveying lurid imagery, and consolidating complex themes into simple spurts. Prized essayist Peretz Opoczynski mastered these obligations in his voluminous prose collections, anthologies of brief vignettes that convey the horrors of ghetto life. Gruesome, graphic, and nihilistic, his works accomplish the troubling task of recounting the Jewish experience under occupation, while retaining the resilience to do so with artistic flair. *In the Dark of Night*, a concise amalgam of four "scenes from the ghetto," Opoczynski epitomizes his competencies while providing a stark, grimly relatable text for the ghetto readership. Dehumanization is on full display, a common theme in Holocaust scholarship, as the author compares the incessant wails of agonized women to "jackals." Exhibiting the "same despair and

¹³² Ringelblum, 647

¹³³ Ringelblum, 647

hopelessness” as their allegorical animals, these women are “wanderers of night, in dark and hunger.”

¹³⁴Their tortured screams are a byproduct of a variety of ghetto ills: starvation, family loss, domestic disputes, and sexual abuse by Nazi-Polish police forces. The encapsulation of such deplorable situations inspires a sense of commonality that provides relief via communion among those afflicted- crucial in healing through literature. Opocynski continues with an exposition of the ghetto’s innumerable dead. Homelessness as a ubiquitous ill, “piercing the night’s silence [with] lamentations that hang in space and tremble as the last sound of a dying, broken fiddle” Eventually, these final vocalizations will subside into an inevitable death, crowding the streets with infection ravaged, exposure stricken, blued corpses. Blending evocative prose into a gruesome scene, Opocynski remarks that “every morning the eyes of pedestrians fall on the dead, strewn in the streets like leaves from a wilted tree.”¹³⁵ The poignancy of this scene is two-fold. Namely it accomplishes the author’s ethical obligation to use their communicative skills to chronicle a gruesome situation that demands reconciliation, requiring courage in itself. More specifically, Opocynski pursues this goal with elegance and prose, hinting at a refusal to subordinate his artistic capacities in a Nazified culture of Jewish intellectual oppression. Lastly, Opocynski finishes his *Foundlings* piece by depicting the grimly mundane scene of “passerby steeling [their] conscience” as they spread packing paper across exposed corpses, preserving the departed’s dignity while exemplifying the communal Jewish ethic.¹³⁶ Composing a piece that covers such grotesque reality requires an exceptional degree of resilience, a resistance against the demoralizing aura of ghettoized Warsaw. Terror and submission are eschewed for a hardened determination to provide Jewish readers with an accurate portrayal of their universal oppression, sprinkled with subtly reassuring flakes of prose-laden artistry.

Bearing a similarity in conferring grim topics, celebrated essayist Joshua Perle approached his recitation of ghetto oppression with a defeatist sardonic ethic. Extremely troubling realities for the

¹³⁴ Opoczynski, Peretz. “In The Dark of Night: Scenes from the Ghetto.” *Warsaw Ghetto Underground Archives*. N.d. Reproduced. Print. 1

¹³⁵ Opoczynski, 3

¹³⁶ Opoczynski, 3

occupied Jew are expressed throughout his focal essay, *4580*, with an intensely personal accuracy and relieving sarcastic tone. Directly referential to the essay's numerical title, degradation of Jews to a commodity was a disgracing aspect of life in the ghetto's ubiquitous factories, workshops, and textile mills. Perle, who feels "honored" to have stemmed from "the sobs of pain of a crushed nationality" remarks that his given name is sacred component of a Jewish man's identity.¹³⁷ Originating as "inheritance from my grandfather and great grandfather," his name he champions as inseparable, and vital, to one's body as "flesh and blood."¹³⁸ In the Jewish tradition, names are sanctified as continuations in a familiar story, veritable next chapters in the perseverance of a people whose collective identity is besieged by persecution and oppression. And although Perle quips that he seriously doubts "if he did possess any good qualities," as insisting opposition to such would be "sin committed by words," he remains undaunted in the solemnity of his name.¹³⁹ Comically intended sarcasm would appear refreshing for the reader, whose existence is generally polluted with darkness and desolation. Noting that value, Perle's decision to infuse his writings with a sardonic wit demonstrates his knowledge of the author's obligations: distilling confusing societal scenarios into consumable bits, and providing an escapist experience for the readership. The author continues by dissecting his commodification, epitomized in the relegation of the given name for his numerical designation: 4580. Though these untraditional labels appear "funny and meaningless," they replicate a miniaturized version of the "murderous weight of Warsaw."¹⁴⁰ Ghettoized Jews, those deemed capable of work and worthy of life, were treated as exhaustible, expendable commodities. Human value was only as high workplace production. Perle provides an indictment on this system, which he charges as demoralizing to the Jewish conscience and fundamentally inhumane due to its utilitarian ethic. More profoundly, yet subtle, in commenting on the numerical system as laughable Perle highlights the absurdity of Nazi bureaucracy. When a dominant

¹³⁷ Perle, 1

¹³⁸ Perle, 2

¹³⁹ Perle, 2

¹⁴⁰ Perle 1-2

global force and cesspool of politicized vitriol is reduced to a mere chuckle within an “oppressed” subject’s writings, it illustrates the utmost resistance. Emotionally, Perle remained steeled against a Nazi force hell-bent on his demoralization, and his works therefore, provided the same constitutional boost to a desperate readership.

Perle’s trademark comedic approach transcended topics as comparatively tame as 4580’s numerical naming, to themes of uncertain futures, impending doom, and the nihilistic dread that pervaded Warsaw. One sentence in particular embodies, when dissecting, crystalizes the profundity of Perle’s writings perfectly. “I have no idea how to conduct myself when, after length of my allotted life, I am put into my Jewish grave (I believe that it may perhaps turn out so) and the admitting angel, casting a glance and with which ask ‘eh-eh mister, what’s your name?’” (Perle 665).¹⁴¹ First, the phrase “allotted life” is especially poignant. The term allotted conveys an operational quality, as if the extent of Perle’s life is predetermined by factors beyond his control. Moreover, as a term often used in logistical and financial scenarios, “allotted” further alludes to the utilitarian nature of ghettoized Warsaw. *The Photographer*, a retrospective documentary that blends Judenrat sponsored images with contemporary interviews, pulses with this motif. As liberties, rations, and commodity entitlements were incrementally stripped from the Jewish populace, extremely Machiavellian principles were enacted. Ledgers and calculations dominate the still images on-screen, of which the narration explains that the provision of food is calculated on a bare necessity basis. Only those who were physically capable of manual labor were allotted substance, and only to a degree to promote survival- not nourishment.¹⁴² Next, relating to the Perle excerpt, “my Jewish grave” can be interpreted in two separate manners. First, and more mundane, Jews are traditionally buried in collective graveyards intended for a Jewish audience, with the proper funerary rights and respects observed on purely religious grounds. More sinister however, is the potential for the “Jewish grave” to refer to a ditch of mass interment. Ghetto operations rapidly escalated by 1942, the

¹⁴¹ Perle, 5

¹⁴² *Fotomator*. Dir. Dariusz Jablonski. Prod. Dariusz Jablonski, 1998. *Swank Motion Picture Library*. Accessed digitally.

year of this piece's composition, during which Jews experienced severe punitive measures for any perceived dissidence. The Ubungsplatz deportations, a single event in the Warsaw trajectory, alone featured group murders in a dark precursor to the eventual liquidations, mass executions included (Emmanuel Ringelblum, *Jewish Warsaw is No More*, 41).¹⁴³ By confronting the subject of an impending doom in an ignoble grave, Perle is expressing a hardened acceptance of reality, which his readers may adopt. Lastly, the infusion of humor into the presumably dead Perle's interactions with an angel is especially vital. The angel, upon admitting Perle to heaven, is utterly bewildered by a now numerical name. She asks puzzled "eh-eh mister, what is your name?" simulating a total disbelief that an individual, especially one whose life featured all of the requisite Jewish rituals, could possess a name comprised merely of numbers. This exchange demonstrates two components of Perle's authorship. First, introducing comedic relief into the most dreaded fate of one's life, its termination, the author demonstrates extreme resilience to a possible doom. Next, again, Perle further lampoons the nonsensical nature of Nazi policies, claiming the numerical naming system as so bizarre that even metaphysical, transcend, omnipotent beings such as angels are incapable of processing the absurdity. Under these conjectures, Perle's work can be lauded in the modern sense with the same enthusiasm that ghetto chronicler Ringelblum espoused upon him in an introductory chapter. The direct, unflinching confrontation of gruesome themes, all beneath overtones of humor, represent a stylistic decision to use sarcasm to deflect an environment whose sole intent upon conception was the utter demoralization of an entire people. Writing, such as Perle's, artfully and gracefully rejects that notion.

Black comedy, especially employed as a defense mechanism, was not unique to Perle's musings as recovered documents have revealed the transmission of clandestine "joke books" between ghetto denizens. Though initially communicated orally, humor in the ghetto oftentimes found itself inscribed on napkins, loose-leaf, or discarded articles of a cloth as a means to solidify the comedy that kept occupants in high spirits- and an emotionally resilient to the surrounding desolation (CITATION) In the few

¹⁴³ Ringelblum, Emmanuel. "Jewish Warsaw is No More." 41.

remaining excerpts collected by the anonymous “N.R.,” who jotted down a series of jokes extracted from keen eavesdropping, a phenomenon is exhibited. Their translator, archivist Emmanuel Ringelblum, terms the thematic value of the jokes as “true macabre-humor,” grim reflections of the time that blend the Yiddish-Jewish tradition of comedy with a steeled acceptance of impending doom (CITATION). One of such jokes centers on two Jews being led to the gallows by Nazi soldiers. During their grave procession, the two men discuss their fate with candor and wit. After one quips that he notes this situation as a reversal of fortunes classifiable as “turning for the better [for Jews],” his bewildered compatriot requests elaboration, with disdain. The optimistic man continues by explaining, “stupid [man], can’t you see that if the German could spare the bullet he would not be taking us all the way to the gallows?” (CITATION). Though only immortalized by three lines in a reproduced text, this situational joke is predicated on a profoundly content- if not rebelliously sardonic- acceptance of death. Mirroring Perle’s prose in the paragraph prior, this joke, as one would overhear among casual conversation between ghettoized Jews in the purgatory for an unknown future, represents strength. Those who express such “true macabre humor” would do so without weeping or self-pity, but instead wide grins that hint at the greatest courage imaginable: an unflinching confrontation of death. Moreover, and politically, stating that the German executioners “could not spare the bullet” suggests an awareness of growing logistical struggles that haunted the Nazi war machine. Inseparable from the acknowledgement of Nazi operation woes is hope, a thin yet powerful glimmer of hope, that offsets morbid truths by motivating perseverance.

Although there is admiration for courage required to pen such bleak, grim humor when facing a likely doom -as outlined in Perle’s writings and N.R.’s overheard jokes- has been rectified as a valid form of rebellion by modern psychological scholarship. Transcending short-term relief, studies demonstrate that black humor doubly strengthens the mental constitution of both the emitter and recipient of the joke- first as a mechanism for coping, while later acting as a vehicle of “emotional regulation.”¹⁴⁴ In a test

¹⁴⁴ Samson, Andrea C., et al. “Humorous Coping and Serious Reappraisal: Short-Term and Longer-Term Effects.” *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, 2014, ejop.psychopen.eu/article/view/730/pdf., pp 571-581, p 571.

conducted by Samson, et.al. subjects were separated into two groups and asked to rate their degree of emotional disturbance for their respective anxieties after attempting “serious reappraisal” or copious black humor. Almost universally, the patients approached by the former, a fundamental psychoanalytic tool, represented a marginal change in their demeanor whereas the test group who employed dark jokes and off-color banter as coping mechanisms expressed a massive upswing in mood- even soaring from oppressive despair into giddy joy.¹⁴⁵ Applying this principle to the Warsaw Jews, who were likely unaware of the therapeutic benefits of black comedy, the use of such jokes provided a reprise from the grim realities of ghettoized life. Moreover, the resurgent mood would spur optimism, productivity, and resilience, all of which could be instrumental in survival. Chaya Ostrower contends a value in “gallows humor” beyond a simplistic, momentary respite. In her article, she explains that expressing humor when confronted with one’s own death, immediate or eventual, demonstrates a sense of “superiority” in the victim. By posturing his or herself on a plane of emotional resilience that debases the impact of intimidation, hate, and violence by perpetrators, the victim is engaging in a uniquely psychological form of rebellion.¹⁴⁶ Eschewing armed uprising or inflicting pain on captors, Ostrower highlights the preeminence of “gallows humor” as invoking “the morale of the oppressed,” which in turn further demonizes aggressors, reasserts a fractured pride, and weaves social bonds.¹⁴⁷ Consequently, deploying black comedy in the context of even graver situations functioned as a powerful tool in uniting spirits and opinion against oppressors, especially as increasingly grotesque Nazi atrocities would unimaginable utterly devastate those affected. Although the grim jokes expounded upon in Perle and N.R.’s pieces exemplify the emotional fortitude on which this paper is predicated, such courage was likely uncommon. Conversely, terror, shock, or a loss of will to live were likely more ubiquitous.

¹⁴⁵ Samson, Andrea C., et. al., p 574-5

¹⁴⁶ Ostrower, Chaya. “Humor as a Defense Mechanism during the Holocaust.” *Interpretation*, vol. 69, no. 2, Apr. 2015, pp. 183–195, p 1919 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020964314564830>

¹⁴⁷ Ostrower, 91

Preference of death over continued oppression functioned heavily amongst the intelligentsia, writers, and authors of Poland- a group who suffered extreme persecution due to their perceived “pretention” and recognized power as cultural influencers. One such composition of personal prose reflects the decay of artistic respect and activity in occupied Warsaw. “He turned old not by his own fault, it was the times...which brought about his outdated appearance, and graver still, actually removed him from surrounding life,” a pseudonym-operating journalist remarks over the passing colleague Zwi Prylucki.¹⁴⁸ The author, who publically posted the article under a false identity of “Sz. Szejnkinder” (which upon translation bears no intelligible results), compiled a comprehensive document that details the final hours over her counterparts. Four other journalists are mentioned by name in the document, but only Prylucki enjoys the honor of the article’s title and the distinction as its focal figure. In continuation of the titular figure’s admirable apathy in accepting death, as expressed above, Szejnkinder associates death as a rapidly approach inevitably in Warsaw. More precisely, the author exalts the termination of one’s life as a far preferable fate, than a continued existence under Warsaw’s oppressive pall. In commenting upon the atmosphere surrounding the document’s 1942 composition, the author refers to each death as a contributor force in the “echoes of the tortured and the starving.”¹⁴⁹ These wails of agony and torment are, however, incapable of detracting from the “pulsating community in the Warsaw ghetto”¹⁵⁰ When considered unto each other, these lines adequately represent the complicated, dichotomous notion of ghettoized artistic life. Although the deafening, boisterous cries of all-too-familiar pain permeate the air, and potentially silence the literate community, creativity persists. This fortitude required to produce compelling works while under immense personal, psychological duress is ascribed to the deceased Prylucki.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Szejnkinder, Sz. “Zwi Prylucki” *Warsaw Ghetto Underground Archives*. 21 May 1942. Reproduced. Print. 1.

¹⁴⁹ Szejnkinder, 1.

¹⁵⁰ Sjenkinder, 1.

¹⁵¹ Skenkinder, 2.

Szejnkinder's borderline praiseworthy exposition of the beloved Prylucki's death could be interpreted as a parallel the status of artistic expression under an increasingly oppressive pall of ghettoization. The voices mentioned and analyzed in the previous sections highlight a valiant and resilient subset of the population, but a subset at that. As 1942 transitioned into 1943, mass deportations, grotesque displays of violence, and fractures of entire families grew increasingly common as the morale of Warsaw sank into disarray and hopelessness. By the "closure" of the ghetto in the summer of 1943, which was a euphemistic term for the gross destruction and deportation of its denizens as retribution from the failed Warsaw Uprising, the Nazi's finalized an objective undertaking immediately upon arrival in 1939. Demolishing the Association of Yiddish Writers and Journalists headquarters as a preemptive strike on Jewish intellectualism, Warsaw's occupiers completed their outright razing of the city by 1943, and in doing so, extinguished the residual, final embers of creative energy. In a discouragingly ironic return to the socio-cultural factors that pushed refugee Jews into Warsaw, the post-war city was annexed by the Soviet Union and subject to intense discrimination. This horrid confluence of hate, only surpassed by Nazi collusion, featured the nascent Polish anti-Semitism and longstanding Soviet disdain for Jewish presence that brewed a hostile atmosphere. Few surviving Jews chose to repatriate their former home, instead turning to Western European states, the American east coast, and newly-minted Israel. Those who did return enjoyed protection under the Central Committee of Polish Jews, operating in a similar conceit as the Yiddish Culture Organization mentioned prior.¹⁵² Despite fomenting a resurgence of synagogues, theaters, and educational centers, their presence was minimal and heavily diluted by an oppressive social atmosphere.¹⁵³ Grimly, Jewish culture would not reclaim its former "capital" until the after the dissolution of the U.S.S.R., leaving the literature proliferated during the ghetto period to function as final remnants of a multi-century tradition. And although such pieces were few, produced by a marginal percentage of the population (and if not then surely lost to time) those that survived represent the pinnacle

¹⁵² "Confinement and Extermination." *Poland Virtual Jewish History Tour*, www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/poland-virtual-jewish-history-tour.

¹⁵³ "Confinement and Extermination"

of Jewish perseverance. For a people whose entire religio-ethnic tradition has been dominated by oppression and subjugation, the Warsaw Jews took their suffering in stride, and employed a characteristically sharp wit and headstrong attitude to imbue literary work with palpable courage- all of which remained unaffected by the immense psychological distress under which they languished. That is emotional resistance exemplified, and Nazi ideology dispelled.

Epilogue

Eerily prophetic and commendably defiant, especially from the mind of someone severely oppressed by virtue of their Jewish faith, Avraham Lewin’s fiery eulogy radiates with brilliance and profundity when considered in retrospect with this paper. Not only is the speech provocative, and a capsule of the suffering, rage, and resistance expressed by those languishing under Nazi occupation, but its challenge to the Jewish population was accepted- and accomplished. Despite the “thick layers of ash” covering the Warsaw Jew’s streets (literally) and its inhabitants’ psyche (metaphorically), the downtrodden, oppressed, and ghettoized enjoyed their “triumph [as] the human over the inhuman.”¹⁵⁴ In “every province of life,” a people who endured a horrid existence under Nazi occupation, which of course conferred a ubiquitous, irrevocable threat of death and deportation, continued to “create and enrich.”¹⁵⁵ Jewish education flourished as the intellectual elite sought underground means of facilitating crucial lessons in Hebrew history, Jewish tradition, and Yiddish language to that student body violently shorn from their school systems. Actors and amateurs alike promulgated time-honored plays, performing under the strict cultural policing to entertain and uplift the ghetto sufferer. Authors, heavily censored by the Judenrat and demonized by the Nazi ideologues, produced profound and nuanced works that allowed for a sense of cathartic solidarity by their partitioned Jewish readers. In summary, although the onset of ghettoization witnessed the rapid restriction of Jewish access to their former vehicles of artistic expression and intellectual articulation, the community united around the universality of their discrimination, and continued to create.

Mirroring the selfless heroics of this paper’s inspiration, archivist Emmanuel Ringelblum, the Warsaw Jewish ethic prioritized the perpetuation of tradition, preservation of pride, and proliferation of

¹⁵⁴ Lewin 451

¹⁵⁵ Lewin 451

art over their own lives. In doing so, in recognizing the insignificance of their own mortality when contrasted against the reaffirmation of an immutable Jewish faith, cultural pride, and individual dignity- all under the auspices of discriminatory, hateful Nazi doctrine- the Warsaw Ghetto population embodied, and effortlessly epitomized, the notion of “emotional resistance.” This thesis simply intended to present a name for this phenomenon.

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