

“NO PEOPLE, NO LAND, NO GOD, AND NO MAN”?

Writing Trauma in the Jewish Poetry of Catastrophe

by

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This essay is dedicated to Prof. Esther Frank, who opened the door;

To my parents, friends, and professors, who helped me cross the threshold;

*But most of all to Prof. Howard Adelman, who never let me settle
for simply walking through.*

- J.C.P.

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Chapter One

A fundamental element of Jewish identity since the biblical period has been a belief in the covenant between God and the Jewish people. Additionally, the existence of a covenantal theodicy has been central to the Jewish understanding of history and tragedy. Covenantal theodicy refers to the theological idea that: 1) God and the Jewish people are linked by mutual rights and obligations in an eternal covenantal relationship; 2) this covenantal relationship is the correct framework within which to wrestle with the problems of good, evil, and collective and individual suffering; and 3) the launching point of any such discussion is the understanding that God is fundamentally good, just, and omnipotent, the lord of history and sole creator and director of the world. This vision of the world is in tension with the experience of catastrophe. The object of this essay is to explore poetry written in response to catastrophic events in order to examine how some are remembered as traumas in Jewish history and literature.

These five poems were written at moments in Jewish history when the religious and cultural stability of a people was radically undermined. The biblical Book of Lamentations was composed in the wake of the destruction of the First Temple and exile to Babylon c. 587 BCE, while Isaac bar Shalom's poem "There Is None Like You Among the Dumb" was a response to the paradigm shift of the First Crusade in 1096. At East European Jewish modernity, c.1900, the rapid erosion of belief in covenantal theodicy, unprecedented social change, and the accelerated rate of violent upheaval made traumatized responses to catastrophe more prevalent. I selected three poems from the first two generations of modern Jewish poets as examples: Hayyim Nahman Bialik's "In

the City of Slaughter” (1904), Peretz Markish’s “The Mound” (1921), and Isaac Lamdan’s “Masada” (1926).

All of these poems locate themselves in the tension between the covenantal worldview and the experience of catastrophe as trauma. To understand what happened in Jewish literature when these two incompatible understandings of the world collided, it is first important to clarify what trauma means and how it operates relevant to the concerns of religion and culture. In Jewish history, all traumas come from catastrophes, though not all catastrophes are traumas. That is, although Jewish communities had many experiences of catastrophe marked by suffering, dislocation, and persecution, not all of these were expressed as traumas in literature. There are two useful approaches to this problem: trauma theory and literary history. However, in the context of Jewish culture, both of these are only comprehensible by reference to the covenantal worldview. Therefore, three major scholarly concerns will structure this paper: 1) theories of trauma, 2) literary history, and 3) covenantal religion.

An Introduction to Trauma Theory: Freud and Alexander

Two competing frameworks of trauma stand out. The first is the classic view of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), and the second that of a group of historians and sociologists who jointly authored *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* in 2010: Jeffrey C. Alexander, Ron Eyerman, Bernhard Giesen, Neil J. Smelser, and Piotr Sztompka. By means of a brief intellectual genealogy of trauma theory, I will compare these two theories and later apply them to an analysis of the poetry on the basis of a four-part

taxonomy. This taxonomy considers two approaches to and two problems of trauma.

These are:

1) *Naturalist vs. constructivist perspectives*: naturalist thinkers argue that certain events are inherently traumatic and that traumatization occurs simultaneously with the event that caused it; constructivists hold that the designation ‘trauma’ is a socially mediated designation that becomes applied to certain events as the result of cultural consensus that they fit a widely held definition of trauma.

2) *Individual vs. collective trauma*: individualist thinkers are primarily concerned with the causes, symptoms, and functioning of trauma in individual psychology; collectivist thinkers are interested in cultural or physical (i.e. wars, natural disasters, etc.) traumas in the collectivity, as well as the process of social negotiation of trauma.

3) *Repression vs. expression*: the problem of expression is universal to all trauma, as “the conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is [its] central dialectic,”¹ but some thinkers are more interested in the way trauma is repressed and then manifested in or misdirected into symptoms; others are concerned with the problems of expressing and negotiating trauma more explicitly.

4) *Disruption vs. routinization*: some scholars hold that the primary manifestation of trauma is a disruptive mode that privileges the loss of meaning and the associated negative affect, while others are most concerned with how trauma is resolved and reincorporated into the cultural mainstream. All four categories will provide the basis for

¹ Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The aftermath of violence – from domestic abuse to political terror*, Rev. ed. (New York : Basic Books, 1997), 1.

analyzing the evidence of trauma in selected poetic responses to catastrophe in Jewish literature and for better understanding the functioning of trauma in the text.

On an introductory level, the basics of Freud and Alexander and his colleagues' theoretical frameworks of trauma can be summarized based on the above taxonomy. Throughout his body of work on the subject, Freud theorized that traumatization occurs instantaneously in response to an event that overwhelms an individual's existing psychological safeguards and inflicts a mental wound. His theory of trauma is therefore: 1) naturalistic; 2) individual; 3) oriented more toward repression than expression, although it considers both; and 4) concerned with disruption as a symptom of trauma and "working through," or routinization, as a cure. However, it is important to note that in the later part of his career, Freud did become interested in problems of trauma and cultural groups, especially in matters of religion.

Jeffrey Alexander and his colleagues present a competing theory. They argue that trauma is created gradually when groups within a given culture negotiate the meaning of a catastrophic event through various social institutions and media. Eventually the wider group arrives at the consensus that the event constituted a wound to the collectivity that radically undermined their shared identity. Alexander defines the originating event in this trauma formation process as "a claim to some fundamental injury, an exclamation of the terrifying profanation of some sacred value, a narrative about a horribly destructive social process, and a demand for emotional, institutional, and symbolic reparation and reconstitution."² The problem of identity, therefore, lies at the heart of his theory: groups

² Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma," in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, eds. Jeffrey C. Alexander et al (Berkeley : University of California Press, 2004), 11.

initiate the remembering of catastrophe as trauma when they feel their identity has been destroyed, and the trauma is only resolved through its routinization into a new identity. Alexander's theory can therefore be categorized as: 1) constructivist; 2) collective; 3) focused more on expression than repression; 4) oriented toward the routinization of trauma. However, it is important to expand on both these frameworks, as well as briefly trace how trauma theory evolved to connect Freud and Alexander.

Freudian Trauma Theory:

Sigmund Freud was not the first psychological theorist to use the term “trauma” in something approaching its modern usage.³ However, Freud's work on the role played by trauma in psychological health was the most comprehensive and innovative of his day. More importantly, Freud's theories are influential in both psychoanalytic and cultural thought and are at the root of most subsequent scholarship. The word trauma itself is directly derived from the Greek *trauma* meaning “wound.” However, unlike a physical wound, Freudian traumas are psychological injuries that are interior, unconscious, and generally characterized by a period of latency before their effects appear.

For Freud the mind, like the body, is all too vulnerable to damage from the outside. Following a medicalized model, he argued that in much the same way as the immune system deals with viral and bacterial infections, the mind harbours, defends against, and succumbs to harmful mental states.⁴ His first theories of trauma, published

³ Neil J. Smelser, “Psychological and Cultural Trauma,” in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, eds. Jeffrey C. Alexander et al (Berkeley : University of California Press, 2004), 32.

⁴ Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism [Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion]*, trans. Katherine Jones (New York : Knopf, 1939), 105; Smelser, 33.

between 1888 and 1898, propose a relatively straightforward pathology. First, there is a psychologically damaging incident, the trauma.⁵ The memory and associated emotions or affect of the trauma are profoundly forgotten, or repressed. After a period of quiescence or latency, some later experience triggers a return of the affect, but not the memory. This resurgence “is defended against, and ultimately is converted into... organic symptom[s]...”⁶

Freud’s proposed cure is understood to be recovery of the original memory by means of psychoanalytic “working through,” defined as the gradual discovery and verbalization of the traumatic memory under the guidance of the analyst. In other words, the patient must transform repression into expression in order for the disruptive damage of the trauma to be cured. Prior to successful working through, the latency and symptomatic periods are in tension between the drive to communicate the trauma by any means necessary (hence the manifestation of physical or mental symptoms) and the drive to avoid the disruptive and unacceptable consequences of the trauma. In Freudian theory, this unwillingness to confront the full force of the trauma is referred to as its “unspeakable” dimension.

Later in his career, Freud’s focus began to diversify and include attempts to identify a similarity between individual and collective psychology. This should be distinguished from Freud’s colleague and rival Carl Gustav Jung, who posited the existence of a collective unconscious. Rather, Freud suggested that human psychological states in the collective, including trauma, bore a similarity to the same processes in

⁵ Freud, 1926a [1896], quoted in Smelser, 32.

⁶ Smelser, 33.

individuals. “Phylogenetic memory” was a vague term Freud used to describe repressed collective memory and trauma that could be passed down between members of a collectivity by means of the body or the blood, an idea linked with scientific race and physiognomic theories in Freud’s day. However, it has been problematic for subsequent Freudian scholars to defend, but as a result it has been a productive intellectual stimulus.

Freud also combined his theories of collective memory and trauma in an attempt to explain the origins of religion as a building block of human cultural life. As a Jew struggling with modernity, Freud was particularly interested in the formation and psychological impact of monotheism. Given the importance Freud placed on “the Oedipal drama,” or the psychosexual dynamics between parents and children that underlie all psychological development, he paid a great deal of attention to covenantal religion. The fundamental covenantal metaphor of God as father lies at the heart of his theories of religion. In *Totem and Taboo* (1913) and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), Freud proposed that an experience of trauma had been the origin of all religion, and it reached its full impact in Jewish and Christian monotheism.

Totem and Taboo and *Moses and Monotheism* share the central assumption that the earliest human communities lived in small patriarchal hordes and at some point the younger males killed their father in order to gain sexual access to their mothers and sisters. Early religion in the form of totemism came about when, as a result of the young men’s guilt, they attributed the powers of the father to an animal, repressing the real trauma. Over centuries religious behaviour, the symptom of trauma, evolved away from the deep repression of totemism and followed a gradual “return of the repressed” toward animal- and then human-form gods, and eventually, with Judaism, the revival of the

father in the form of a sole universal God.⁷ This patricidal narrative is repeated in Judaism, with Moses standing in for the patriarch who is killed by the rebellious Hebrews. Moses' pure monotheism was repressed, but gradually returned to conscious memory as Judaism evolved.

Whether Freud believed this narrative to be true in a literal way is the subject of great contention among later scholars. Freud himself insists on a multiple vision of truth. The story is true, he offers, because its effects can be seen and because the structure is helpful in understanding and managing trauma and religious faith. However, he very well might have believed that this was a natural pattern of human behaviour; he was certainly interested in phylogenetic memory. "An essential part of the argument," emphasizes Freud, "is that all primaeval men underwent [this] fate..." though he concedes that he tells the story "in a very condensed way, as if what in reality took centuries to achieve, and during that long time was repeated innumerable times, had happened only once."⁸ Marsha Hewitt, a contemporary psychoanalyst, argues for the experiential and cultural reality of indirect communication of memory, perhaps through literature, art, biology, or some interpersonal mechanism that modern Western culture does not yet know or accept.⁹ The most relevant point is that in Freudian thought Judaism, which orients its identity to an intimate relationship with God, is rooted in and shaped by trauma. The covenantal relationship was born in trauma and is therefore vulnerable as the site of further traumas.

⁷ Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, 127-133.

⁸ Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, 127.

⁹ Marsha Hewitt, guest lecture at Queen's University, March 4 2011, for RELS 802.

From Freud to Alexander: Criticisms and Constructions

All of these basic ideas provided a platform upon which both critics and supporters of Freud built up increasingly complex and diverse applications of his initial theories of trauma. Some of the strongest criticisms of the theories of trauma and religion include pointing out Freud's Judeo-Christian and Enlightenment bias, the cultural imperialism implicit in this kind of evolutionary theory of religious forms, and the lack of any sound basis for the somatic or racial transmission of specific memories. The most basic of criticisms came almost universally from historians, Bible scholars, archaeologists, and anthropologists who demonstrated that most of the evidence Freud deploys for his prehistoric scenarios are either nonexistent or discredited. Jewish and Christian theologians disparaged his work as a transparent atheistic attack on religion and its founding narratives. As a result, these disciplines generally resisted engaging with Freudian trauma theory as it relates to religion.

In his critique of Freud, Yerushalmi sees Freud's intention not as a private allegory but rather as an attempt to grapple with the difficult Jewish legacies of covenantal religion, persecution, and suffering.¹⁰ This connects well with Yerushalmi's argument that traditional Jewish history, like the Freudian view, distinguishes between "material truth" (for which there is empirical evidence) and "historical truth" (happenings whose truth is demonstrated by their psychological, artistic, or emotional resonance and

¹⁰ Yerushalmi, *Freud's Moses and Monotheism: Judaism Terminable and Interminable*, New Haven : Yale University Press, 1991).

usefulness), and privileges the latter.¹¹ In such a scheme, the empirical correctness of Freud's formulations is less important than the information it can impart about the way history and trauma have been understood, remembered, transmitted, and felt in Jewish culture.

French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) pioneered scholarship on Freud, trauma, and literature. Lacan extrapolated Freudian theories of trauma in an argument that the mechanisms of the trauma process could be observed and analyzed in the use of language.¹² For him, the functions of structural linguistics, as well as word choices and omissions in written and oral communication could provide a window into the speaker's unconscious and emotional life. Literature scholars like Cathy Caruth went back to *Moses and Monotheism's* concept of latency to explain the role that literature plays in repressing trauma, defending against it, and working through it. She focused on the way language, theme, and narrative combine to express the intrusion of collective traumas into individual lives and individual traumas. For Caruth, who is interested in the paradoxes of expression, trauma is both individual and communal, represented and unrepresentable, spoken but unspeakable.¹³

The transition between theories of individual and collective traumas was completed by the non-psychological social sciences, particularly sociology and history. Scholars in these fields identified trauma as an event that overwhelms the individual's or

¹¹ Yosef Hayyim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1982).

¹² Alexander, 6.

¹³ Cathy Caruth, "Literature and the enactment of Memory: Duras, Renais, *Hiroshima mon amour*" in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore and London : Johns Hopkins UP, 1996), 25-56.

the community's mental and emotional resources and forces a change in identity and behaviour. For example, Kai Erikson was among the first to attempt to conceptualize the differences between individual and collective traumas.¹⁴ In historical and sociological theories, when a trauma occurs, it is "perceived clearly by actors, their responses are lucid, and the effects of these problems are problem solving and progressive...

[unrestricted by repression and latency] Memory guides thinking about the future."¹⁵

This kind of trauma theory is collective and focused on expression, but still naturalistic and concerned with disruption.

Alexandrian Trauma Theory:

Alexander and his colleagues drew on the preceding theories to create a theory of trauma even further removed from Freud's beginnings. Alexander disputes all previous approaches – psychoanalytic, literary, and sociological – because he insists they commit "the naturalistic fallacy": an assumption that certain events are naturally traumatic.¹⁶ The alternative theory Alexander presents is radically constructivist. "First and foremost," Alexander writes, "we maintain that events do not, in and of themselves, create collective trauma. Events are not inherently traumatic. Trauma is a socially mediated attribution... It is only through the imaginative process of representation that actors have the sense of experience."¹⁷ He then introduces a step-by-step outline of the constructive "social process of cultural trauma," or traumatization. Alexander's insistence on total constructivism is frequently overstated. For our purposes and given that literature is

¹⁴ Kai Erikson, *Everything in its Path* (New York : Simon and Schuster, 1976).

¹⁵ Alexander, 3.

¹⁶ Alexander, 8.

¹⁷ Alexander, 8-9.

necessarily constructed (in that it is composed purposefully by a writer), the outline that follows is useful for an understanding of the constructed elements of trauma in literature.

Alexander argues that traumatization begins when a specific social sub-group, the “carrier group,” makes a claim that they have been traumatized. That claim is then aired to a broader social audience who judge the presence or absence of real trauma through a construction and agreeing upon of the “master narrative” of trauma.¹⁸ This is analogous to the Freudian idea of working through. According to Alexander, four critical questions must be dealt with for the master narrative to take hold culturally. These are: the *nature of the pain*; the *nature of the victim*; the *relation of the trauma victim to the wider audience*; and the *attribution of responsibility*.¹⁹ The answers to these are worked out in various sanctioned and authoritative public cultural spaces, or “institutional arenas,” including religious institutions, published writing, and the mass media.

According to Alexander, after the master narrative of trauma is created by some degree of community consensus then the fact of the trauma must be dealt with. Alexander calls this stage “identity revision, memory, and routinization.”²⁰ At this stage, his definition of trauma becomes clearer and more useful. Due to trauma’s social construction as a master narrative, Alexander argues that it must radically undermine the identity of the collectivity. The successful construction of that new identity for the post-traumatic collective depends the final stage of routinization.

¹⁸ Alexander, 11-12.

¹⁹ Alexander 13-15.

²⁰ Alexander, 22.

Although this framework has potential as a methodological tool, I am unconvinced of some of its claims. The most difficult of these is the radical, total constructivism of collective trauma. It is difficult to accept, even after the theory is laid out in full, that there are some events, such as genocide, that are not inherently traumatic. Alexander does not ever address this point head-on, other than to dismiss it early as a “naturalistic fallacy.” He does raise thought provoking questions about why some horrific events in the life of certain communities have not been remembered as traumas while others have (for example, he contrasts the present-day cultural memory of the Nanking massacre during the Japanese invasion of China in 1937 and the Holocaust). However, he does not tackle the opposite problem, grounded in earlier Freudian theory, of events so loaded with traumatic potential that they overwhelm any constructive process and are immediately are fully-fledged traumas. As a result, he does not address the tension between lived experience and collective memory. This is a problem for the universal claims Alexander makes for his theory.

His constructivist view is that it fails to account for the lived experience of a trauma. Even though Alexander states offhand that traumatization can occur simultaneously with the occurrence of the trauma, he does not explain how this would work in practice. Taking into account Freud’s assertions about repression, it seems likely that those experiencing the trauma may be too consumed by experiencing it to construct it and express it.

Conclusion:

I argue that what is needed is a middle ground between these opposing theories, a space where I can identify and draw out what is useful from both poles as represented by Freud and Alexander. In this study, I intend to open a space where trauma's paradoxes can be allowed to exist without immediate resolution in order to use them as tools to investigate literature. Literature offers just such point between the both theories. Seen through the Alexandrian lens, published literature is the result of a constructivist compositional process designed to create a product that will be released for public consumption and subjected to rational interpretation. However literature is also designed to preserve the sensations of trauma in a more Freudian sense, to convey the strong affect of the author as he or she is before working through occurs. The rhetorical elements of a literary work can therefore be seen as the symptoms of a repressed trauma. Literature can be all these things at once, without contradiction. As Marsha Hewitt suggests, perhaps literature is a 'third' between the extremes of naturalism and constructivism, between repression and expression. Literary products like poetry are spaces where memory and affect can be transmitted between individuals and within cultures in a variety of ways depending on the circumstances of composition, transmission, and reception. It is with just such a balanced perspective on trauma theory that this essay is concerned.

Chapter Two

Biblical literary critics have developed methods of analyzing the types, genres, and theologies of covenant in general, and covenantal theodicy in particular. In addition to trauma theories, scholarship in biblical criticism and literary history are vital for my study. In pioneering the study of the Bible as literature, such critics paved the way for connections to be made between later literary products and biblical writings. They also uncovered genres and forms of poetry and prose in the Bible, refining the ability of scholars to study those forms of Jewish literature in continuous evolution over time. In linking theological and literary development in the Bible, the same is achieved for the consideration of religion and literature. Literary-historical studies of Jewish literature frequently draw on the ideas and vocabulary of biblical criticism.

From Biblical Criticism to Literary History: Scholarship on Text and Trauma

The Bible scholars Claus Westermann and Walter Brueggemann defined the common structures of the genre of biblical poetry known as lament, complaint psalm, the law-court pattern of prayer, protest prayer, prayer of the righteous sufferer, and psalm of disorientation.²¹ This genre of biblical poetry, which the Book of Lamentations draws from frequently, is one of the most concentrated responses to suffering in the Hebrew Bible. Westermann studied the social settings and uses of the psalms of petition and lament, in part inspired by his own experiences as a soldier and prisoner of war in World

²¹ William Morrow, personal communication, THEO 719, Queen's University, May 9th 2011.

War II.²² Categorizing and describing the different kinds of Psalms and theorizing about their social functions let Westermann introduce discussion of what the cultural and historical significance might be when Psalms and other biblical genres appear in other works of biblical or post-biblical literature in distorted or alternative forms.²³

Westermann's theory that genre rules are broken and new genres are created in response to unprecedented social change is fundamental to studies of trauma in biblical literature.

Walter Brueggemann followed Westermann as a literary-social scholar of the biblical text. His work on the significance of structure and social purpose of lament and protest are useful not only for analysis of biblical literature, but also for Jewish literature more broadly. Brueggemann argues for the existence of two main streams among the lament/complaint/protest literature representing differing theologies of suffering and relying on different metaphors for the covenant.²⁴ These are identified as *structure legitimation* and *pain embrace*. Structure legitimation affirms a contractual theology that seeks to rationalize and to return to the status quo in the wake of calamity; it leans heavily on the monarchical metaphor (God as sovereign king) and advocates retribution theodicy (the idea that suffering is the result of God's justified punishment for sin; the good prosper and the wicked suffer). On the other hand, pain embrace is a more difficult, disruptive voice that laments over suffering without knowledge of how to resolve it. It is frequently found in spaces where the covenantal rhetoric and metaphors are breaking down and covenantal paradigms of meaning and theodicy are dissolving.

²² James Limburg, "Old Testament Theology for Ministry: The Works of Claus Westermann in English Translation," *Word and World* 1/2 (1981), 169-170.

²³ Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, trans. Richard N. Soulen and Keith R. Crim (Louisville, KY : Westminster John Knox Press, 1981).

²⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology: Essays on Structure, Theme, and Text*, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis, MN : Fortress Press, 1992).

As a result of pain embrace literature's anti-establishment and theologically difficult content, it is generally too problematic to comprise a whole book or poem in the social mainstream. Rather, it is usually found in smaller passages from larger works, or in minority literature with the notable exception of its quintessential incarnation: the Book of Lamentations. In this way pain embrace can be considered to be a written form of the disruptive experience of trauma. It is a minority voice with no structuring view of the world, and therefore it remains a restless undercurrent in the biblical literature. Pain embrace is a literature of trauma, whereas structure legitimation is that which is untraumatized or repressed. This schema will be important for my understanding of the Jewish literature of trauma and catastrophe.

William S. Morrow is a theologian and biblical critic much in the same line as Westermann and Brueggemann, but who, in addition to his work on lament and consolation in the Major Prophets, has directly connected his findings to later Jewish literature and contemporary culture.²⁵ His study of the revival of lament forms in medieval *piyyutim*, or liturgical poetry, links together covenantal theodicy, literary history, and biblical genre study.²⁶ Morrow has also published articles on the links between biblical protest and lament and trauma.²⁷ Throughout, Morrow argues for the separation of traumatic events from catastrophic ones. He refers to the distinguishing factor as "paradigm collapse"; this is, whether the event in question invalidated or fatally

²⁵ William S. Morrow, *Protest Against God: The Eclipse of a Biblical Tradition* (Sheffield, UK : Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006).

²⁶ William S. Morrow, "The Revival of Lament in Medieval *Piyyutim*," in Nancy C. Lee and Carleen Mandolfo (eds), *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Contexts*, SBL Symposium Series 43 (Atlanta/Leiden: Society of Biblical Literature/Brill, 2008), 139-150.

²⁷ William S. Morrow, "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Vicarious Atonement in the Second Isaiah," in J. Harold Ellens and Wayne G. Rollins (eds.), *Psychology and the Bible: A New Way to Read the Scriptures*. Vol. 1. *From Freud to Kohut*, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 167-183.

undermined existing paradigms of meaning. There is a strong parallel between Morrow's paradigm collapse and Alexander's focus on the erosion of identity in trauma.

As well, Anson Laytner uses techniques drawn from theology and biblical criticism to show that the law-court pattern of prayer, which has its roots in the Hebrew Bible, and which operates within a covenantal framework in order to challenge God and advocate for a suffering Jewish people, can be found in Jewish literary culture from the Bible to rabbinic literature, the medieval period to the modern, and even in literary responses to the Holocaust.²⁸ Like Morrow and other theological scholars, Laytner demonstrates how social conditions, like the strength of covenantal identity and liturgical modes of history, influence the evolving forms of literary responses to calamity. Morrow and Laytner's studies constitute an important bridge between biblical criticism and the study of Jewish literature and culture.

Historians of Jewish literature like David Roskies and Alan Mintz are part of a movement in American post-Holocaust scholarship that has sought to locate poetry of lament and protest in the wider scope of Jewish literary creativity in response to catastrophe. Roskies and Mintz analyze a wide variety of literary responses and explain the dynamics of how and why some resist incorporation into the liturgical mode of history and routinization described by Yerushalmi in *Zakhor*.²⁹ However, while Mintz and Roskies avoid the use of the word trauma to describe the literature they consider, they do, like Morrow, argue for a differentiation between types of responses. They use

²⁸ Anson Laytner, *Arguing with God: A Jewish Tradition* (London : Jason Aronson Inc., 1990), and William

²⁹ Alan Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1985) and David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Cambridge, MA : Harvard University Press, 1984).

“catastrophe,” much as Morrow uses “paradigm collapse,” to denote an experience of calamity that goes above and beyond the ability of existing definitions of meaning and justice to explain. There is, again, considerable overlap between Roskies and Mintz and Freud and Alexander’s definitions of trauma, but not a perfect correspondence. Paradigm collapse and catastrophe are both useful terms for describing the historical and theological context of a given poem. However, in close reading of poetry, trauma theories work alongside these historical ideas to allow for analysis on a further level.

Rhetoric, Covenant, Subversion: Analytical Categories

I have developed a basic taxonomy designed to identify the topics and characteristics that are consistently shared between Jewish literary responses to catastrophe that remember and record a given catastrophe as a trauma. This taxonomy concentrates on what Roskies calls the covenantal drama in Jewish literature: literary focus on the signs, symbols, and affective power of the covenantal relationship between God and Jewish people. The poetry analyzed in this study presents these signs in four interrelated ways, and in defining them I will illustrate their use by speaking broadly about some of their relevant shared characteristics.

1) *Interiority* describes the author’s use of symbolism, imagery, and literary devices to foreground the intimate and exclusive dimension of the relationship between God and the Jewish people. I am interested here in how the author’s literary technique communicates the focal point of his understanding of trauma. Blame, responsibility, and anger are almost exclusively located in the internal relationship between God and Jewish people, rather than in an external dynamic with the Gentile other. Each of these poems

uses literary devices like dehumanization, metonymy, or theological metaphor to keep the focus off external forces and enemies. Instead, the imagery and vocabulary of the poem is bounded by the covenantal worldview.

2) *Use of 'voice'* refers to the rhetoric and imagery of silence, speech, noise, and prophecy. I found two recurring structures: the Jewish people are crying out, and God does not respond; or the poet values silence over speech as the only authentic response to trauma. Already it is possible to see a connection with Freudian concerns about the opposing drives toward speech and silence in the face of trauma. Exploring this recurring device leads me to a consideration of the role of dialogue in covenant. In the active covenant, there is speech between God and the patriarchs, kings, prophets. As well, prayer and sacrifice facilitate communication between God and people. All these poems protest the lack of any effective dialogue, especially the silence of God. An evocative traditional archetype used frequently in this kind of literature is the prophet, who, in the language of the Bible, mediates between God and people and testifies to His ongoing activity in human lives. The absence (or parody) of prophecy is therefore an effective and almost ubiquitous shared element of these five poems, signifying the collapse of covenantal safeguards.

3) *Formulaic/liturgical complaint* examines how poets commonly parodied and reappropriated sacred texts, traditional liturgies, and tropes of suffering, consolation, and remembrance. In a pattern repeating over thousands of years, all five poems wrestle with the legitimacy, relevance, and usefulness of early literary responses to catastrophe for writing their own trauma. As a result, the five poets seem to be writing in a way that is intended to be radically innovative and incommensurate with earlier forms. The poets

seem to intend their radical responses to remain radical, but despite the fact that the poets frequently rejected the rabbinic imperative toward cyclical, liturgical history most of the poems were eventually “domesticated” back into the traditional sphere.

4) The last taxonomic category looks whether each poem is willing to take its negative affect and textual subversion all the way to *blasphemy*, which is more than profaning the name of God. Rather, blasphemous poems potentially reject God’s existence and certainly reject His goodness or divine power. They contain bitterness, rage, and/or profanity. This wider view of blasphemy allows for the rhetoric of anger with God to coexist with ongoing expressions of faith. Although the modern poems often profess to reject God, they remain within a covenantal framework of protest and lament, albeit a distorted one. That is, although the poems may declare God impotent, irrelevant, or a lie, they keep on speaking to Him directly or through a refraction of religious literature. This tendency points to the place of trauma in rejecting previous modes of belief while simultaneously affirming the incommensurability of trauma with previous experiences.

My hypothesis is that this comparison will reveal an important shift occurring in the twentieth century, poems. That is, although seeds are visible in the ancient and pre-modern poems, there is something innovative in these modern, Eastern European responses to catastrophe. With the entrenchment of modernity in Eastern European Jewish life, poets like Bialik, Markish, and Lamdan created a literature of destruction that not only innovated but also subjected their antecedents to harsh kinds of subversion, parody, profanity, and outright rejection. This will also have a significant bearing on where they fall relative to the Freudian and Alexandrian theories of trauma. Where the

poem locates itself up and against Jewish religious and literary culture will influence the way the poet conceives of and expresses traumatization. While still constraining themselves to a greater or lesser degree to the traditional battleground of the covenant, all five poets beginning with the pre-modern authors of Lamentations and “There is None Like You Among the Dumb” struggled to define their work as the best possible poetic memory of unprecedentedly traumatic periods in Jewish cultural life.

Conclusion:

Incorporating the theories and methods of the Bible critics and literary historians will allow me to ground my close readings within the contexts and cultures of the composition of the poems, which is the subject of the next chapter. It will also aid me in showing the transitions and disruptions that marked the evolution of the poetry of trauma, tracing the repression and re-emergence of traumatized and pain embracing literature from the Bible to the first decades of the twentieth century. This will be the first step in untangling the knot of these complicated poems.

Assisted by set of analytical categories with which to examine the shared and recurring literary motifs of these poems, I will also analyze the ways that the poems remember catastrophes as traumas based on Alexander and Freud’s models, mapped across the four categories (individual vs. collective, repression vs. expression, etc.) Using my theory of literature as a space that plays between different theories without resolution, I will examine myriad ways the poetry understands and expressed traumatization when remembering catastrophe. In other words, I argue that the poetry will draw from both Freudian and Alexandrian definitions of trauma separately and

simultaneously. The final determination of which model has emerged as the dominant one will illuminate the intersecting roles of covenantal religion, historical situation, and literary technique. Special attention will be paid to the ways each poet relates to Jewish traditional religion, and how it seems to view the poem's routinization into a liturgical mode of history.

Chapter 3

Introducing the Poetry in Context:

Although Jewish history is crowded with incidents of both triumph and suffering, an overview of the historical and literary context of each poem will highlight occasions of combined paradigm collapse, catastrophe, and trauma. But what were these catastrophes? What might it mean to remember and write them as traumas? What hypotheses can be gleaned from interplay of these questions in the cultural and historical context of each poem? Throughout all traumatic experiences, human beings retain a persistent need to express and to explain what has happened to them, despite the pain and disruption this causes. Psychiatrist Judith Herman asserts, “the conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma.”³⁰ What is the context for expression of each poem? In their own context, what kinds of expressive outlets were available? A major barrier to expressing trauma is the desire to live in the coherent, comprehensible world of structure legitimization, not in the frightening chaos of pain embrace. We attempt to exorcise, domesticate, and render our traumas comprehensible.³¹ What happened to each poem after its publication? What was its legacy? Posing these questions will serve as a method for introducing each poem in its context.

The Role of the Covenantal Worldview:

The first question is the easiest to answer: for the purposes of this study, Jewish catastrophes are events that not only caused substantial destruction and death but also

³⁰ Herman, 1.

³¹ William Morrow, personal communication, May 9th 2011.

struck at the root of the covenantal relationship, destabilizing both collective identity and individual psychology. However, this suggests an exploration of the next question: in Jewish literary culture, could remembering catastrophe as trauma hinge on the communal significance of the covenant and its external signifiers in the objects of the Temple and Jerusalem? The centrality of the covenant as the primary means by which Israel constructed its own identity could explain why the destruction of its material markers was understood as not only a catastrophic event, but also a trauma. The covenant provided not only foundational narratives, but also a rubric by which past, present, and future could be ordered and understood, and represented a reciprocal, intimate relationship of cosmic import. In return for Israel's election, salvation, and continued existence as a dignified and independent people, the nation became subject to responsibilities and communal sacralization above and beyond any other people.

Crucially for this discussion of literary responses to catastrophe, the covenant also operated in the reverse direction. As a result of its chosenness, Israel also gained the entitlement to deliverance from suffering, the ability to atone for sins, and the right to God's ear. God was supposed to accept petition and prayer, to receive sacrifices and to protect against unjust treatment. Although God was without question the superior partner, the covenant was a partnership and not mere divine tyranny. As a result, the covenant made the universe intimately alive and intelligible from the most personal to the most cosmic level. Since covenantal religion was the primary force driving identity formation and maintenance in pre- and post-Exilic biblical literature, did the disruption of that continuity at the Destruction of the First Temple mean that the author of

Lamentations, as well as his culture as a whole, were moved to write about the catastrophe in a traumatized way?

However, the city of Jerusalem, and to an even greater extent the Temple, were more than symbols of the covenantal relationship. Levenson argued that biblical literature also conflated them with other significant places and buildings from Israelite covenant history. The theophany to Moses at Sinai was merged with the ongoing divine dwelling in the Temple on Zion; the law revealed at Sinai was the same law disseminated from the Temple, and so on. Levenson also responded to those who asserted the foreignness of the Temple as a building, arguing for the depth and native character of an Israelite belief in the cosmic significance of the Temple's physical presence, from its design to geographical location. The Temple, and by extension Jerusalem, were the navel of the world.³² The Temple was a cosmic flashpoint between God and Israel. In the pre-Exilic kingdom of Judah it was the sole acceptable site to make the required sacrifices for maintenance of the covenant and atonement in the case of communal sin. It was the place where the divine universe made contact with creation, and with Israel. The Temple, in the practical religious life of the people, *was* the covenant.

The Book of Lamentations:

Written in the wake of the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the First Temple in c.587 BCE, Lamentations reflects a moment of profound discontinuity in the covenantal worldview of pre-Exilic Israel.³³ The siege and fall of Jerusalem, and with it

³² Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (New York : Winston Press, 1985).

³³ I use "Israel" here to refer to the Biblical community up until the construction of the Second Temple.

the destruction of the Solomonic Temple and the exile of a significant portion of the population, was much more than just a military defeat. It struck a profoundly disorienting blow to the nation's understanding of God. Israel's self-understanding as a protected and holy people in an intimate covenantal partnership with God seemed incoherent given the reality of what it had experienced.

Like many other books of the Bible, particularly Job, the major prophets, and many of the Psalms, Lamentations struggles with how to understand the problem of Israel's individual and collective relationship to God in the context of suffering and calamity. Morrow refers to it as a "poetry of grief," which discomfortingly invites readers into the experience of grief without suggesting an answer or a resolution. It disrupts rather than constructs, disorients rather than consoles. As Herman's theory suggests, if Lamentations is indeed a literary memory of traumatization, might it also struggle to express itself clearly?

There is evidence of distorted or incomplete genre forms of pre-existing complaint and lament literature in Lamentations, particularly the Psalms and some passages from the Torah – is this marker of its traumatization? Morrow uses Brueggemann's framework to indicate the building blocks of the complaint/lament form, which will be rearranged and differently emphasized in a variety of later literature. These basic elements are: 1) *address*, 2) *complaint* (further broken down as the first person *I-complaint*, the second person *you-* or *God-complaint*, and the third person *enemy-complaint*), 3) *confession of trust*, 4) *petition*, and 5) *promise of praise*. Perhaps Lamentations in order plays with this foundation in order to bitterly comment on the original meaning, or perhaps because the poet feels that, in their current form, they are

inadequate to convey what he wants to express.³⁴ Given these characteristics of the poem, could it be the case that when composing Lamentations, its author(s) intended to record and share a memory of Israel's collective trauma?

Due to its attendant covenantal crisis, it is certainly possible that fit the definition of a trauma under both Freud and Alexander's frameworks. In Freudian terms, the overwhelming, unknowable nature of the event (total cancellation of the covenant was an unprecedented event in Israel's political and cosmic history) could well have damaged the psychology of the community beyond the coping ability of the existing cultural defenses. In Alexander's vocabulary and given what I established about the centrality of the covenantal worldview to Jewish identity, the Destruction seems indeed to have been a "fundamental injury... the terrifying profanation of some sacred value... a horribly destructive social process..."³⁵ that profoundly disoriented Israel's collective identity. Trauma theory seems also to suggest that Lamentations likely represents a literary record of Israel's traumatization after the Destruction of the First Temple.

Although Lamentations is a quintessential text of pain embrace, it was also canonized as an influential structure legitimization response to catastrophe, particularly in the synagogue liturgy. Much of the post-exilic content of the Hebrew Bible and rabbinic works drew on some of its less disruptive passages in writing later untraumatized responses to catastrophe. In the vocabulary of trauma theory, although Lamentations has been routinized as a site of memory, and therefore much of its disruptive affect has been worked through contextually, the memory of the trauma or trauma claim is still

³⁴ Morrow, personal communication, May 10 2011.

³⁵ Alexander, 11.

discoverable in the text of the poem itself. As a result, the subversive, traumatized text has also been a source of inspiration for much subsequent literature of trauma.

From Lamentations to the Middle Ages:

After the Destruction of the First Temple there followed an approximately fifty year period wherein the population remaining in the former Judahite kingdom was subjugated and the elites were in exile in Babylon. After the return of the elites during the reign of Cyrus, a phase of national rebuilding began which culminated in the eventual construction of the Second temple. After the eventual Destruction of the Second Temple in 70CE, rabbinic Judaism gradually emerged out of the sectarianism of the late Second Temple period. In response to the paradigm shift that the loss of another Temple represented, early rabbis developed a complicated system whereby study, jurisprudence, prayer, and personal piety could take the place of the Temple cult in the people's covenantal obligations. Rabbinic Judaism channeled much of this new religious orientation into tremendous literary creativity.

The primary response to the loss of the Second Temple and the mass dispersion of the Jewish population was the gradual formation of rabbinic Judaism itself.³⁶ In the first centuries of the Common Era generations of rabbis wrestled with the problems of catastrophe, exile, and the resultant covenantal drama. They left a legacy of complex legal and literary interpretation, *halakhah*, *aggadot*, and *midrash*, that shows an

³⁶ See for example Shaye J.D. Cohen's "The Significance of Yavneh: Pharisees, Rabbis, and the End of Jewish Sectarianism" HUCA 55 (1984), and Judah Goldin's "On the Account of the Banning of R. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus: An Analysis and Proposal" in *Studies in Midrash and Related Literature*, edited by Barry L. Eicher and Jeffrey H. Tigay (Philadelphia, 1988).

occasionally subversive approach to the relationship between God, Jews, and suffering. As a result, a powerful new engine of identity construction prevented new catastrophes from becoming traumas.

For almost a thousand years, the literary record we have involves mostly canonized rabbinic works like the collections of the *Midrashim*. Rabbinic writers of the first millennium kept much of the complaint tradition alive in the form of the law-court pattern of prayer and folktales, but rabbinic complaint never became literary manifestations of trauma.³⁷ *Lamentations Rabbah*, a collection of midrashic and aggadic responses to the themes of Lamentations, records stories like “Abraham and the Alphabet” in which rabbinic writers reach back into the sacred texts and call forward characters from the covenantal narratives to present God with evidence of Jewish suffering. Many of these stories are ahistorical, conflating the Destructions, aggregating various enemies, and bringing characters from different periods of Jewish history together.³⁸ The stories are concerned with a cyclical view of history, consisting of archetypes and repeating events, a view of history with its roots in the Bible’s covenantal narratives and in the liturgical life of the rabbinic synagogue. This period was marked by the decline of lament and pain embrace and the dominance of alternative forms of protest and prayer. However, after the First Crusade the severe blow to Ashkenazi self-identity caused a resurgence of pain embrace and trauma in its literature, a new literary movement that also drew on the traumatized worldview of Lamentations.³⁹ In much crusade

³⁷ Laytner, *Arguing with God*.

³⁸ David G. Roskies, *The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe* (New York : The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 52.

³⁹ William S. Morrow, “Revival of Lament in Medieval *Piyyutim*,” in *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Cultural Contexts* (Atlanta, GA : Society of Biblical Literature, 2008).

literature the rage of Jewish survivors was directed against the Christian aggressors in exceptionally violent works of prose and poetry.⁴⁰ The Crusade chronicles of Solomon bar Simson, R. Eliezer ben Nathan, and the ‘Mainz Anonymous’ contain examples of this in both poetry and prose.⁴¹ In *piyyutim* like “There is None Like You Among the Dumb,” how was this turn dramatized? Did consideration of the other remain within the covenantal framework, or break out of it?

“There is None Like You Among the Dumb”:

In 1096, mobs inspired by the upheaval of the First Crusade attacked Jewish communities throughout the Rhine valley. The violence was worst in the communities that comprised the demographic, cultural, and religious nerve centres of early medieval Ashkenaz: Worms, Mainz, and Speyer. Although, as Robert Chazan points out, “the attacks of 1096 were localized and the bulk of Ashkenazic Jewry survived unscathed,” the destruction was also “the first major crisis encountered by early Ashkenazic Jewry...”⁴² If there was a subsequent literary depiction of the First Crusade as a trauma, what could it tell about of the role of construction in differentiating a catastrophe from a trauma?

Medieval Jews living in the European Diaspora continued to draw on the rabbinic idea that, after the Destruction, Torah study and prayer replaced Temple sacrifice for the

⁴⁰ Roskies, *Literature of Destruction*, 72.

⁴¹ Robert Chazan, “The First Crusade Narrative of R. Eliezer bar Nathan,” in *Between Rashi and Maimonides: Themes in Medieval Jewish Thought, Literature, and Exegesis*, Ephraim Kanarfogel and Moshe Sokolow (eds.) (New York : Yeshiva University Press, 2010).

⁴² Robert Chazan, “The History of Medieval Jewry,” in *From Mesopotamia to Modernity: Ten Introductions to Jewish History and Literature*, Burton L. Visotzky and David E. Fishman (eds.) (Boulder, CO : Westview Press, 1999), 122.

purposes of covenantal obligation. Sacrificial themes and motifs are widespread in rabbinic and medieval literature, and a correspondence between the human being and the Temple as the site of worship of God was a foundational idea. The centres of Ashkenazic learning and piety were considered to be *kehilot kedoshim*, holy communities. These communities were: "... centers of Torah study of such importance that it may be fairly said that they were the direct successors in the early Middle Ages to the great Talmudic academies of Palestine and Babylonia," and as a result were the physical manifestations of rabbinic Judaism in Europe, a point of connection between God's commandments and the Jewish people.⁴³ The Crusader massacres raised many of the same theological problems as the Temple destructions, Morrow points out, namely in the way that "for these collective institutions to be violently eliminated was to threaten the very foundation of the God-Israel relationship... By creating [the people and their institutions] Israel's deity had a responsibility to ensure their continuity." It is this same logic that underlies biblical and post-biblical poetic "protests of collective complaint" like "There is None Like You Among the Dumb."

Given the role of rabbinism in maintaining covenantal continuity after 70CE, did medieval authors draw a parallel between the First Crusade and the Destruction of the First Temple?⁴⁴ How might this have manifested in the poem at hand? Centering the structure of the poem on an imperative petitionary refrain ("Do not keep silence!"), bar Shalom, author of Hebrew *piyyut* (liturgical poem) "There is None Like You Among the Dumb" (c.1147), protests the perceived inaction and withdrawal of God in the face of the

⁴³ Mintz, *Hurban*, 85.

⁴⁴ a) Morrow, "Revival," 145; b) Roskies, *Literature of Destruction*, 72; Mintz also points out that the innovative construction of mass chosen death as *kiddush hashem* itself redirected the focus of the massacres inward into the Jewish relationship with God. Unfortunately space limits my ability to comment further.

crisis of the First Crusade. Doing so also tests the boundaries of the protest space opened by Lamentations, where doing violence to God's sacred word mimics the historical violence done to the people by God. God's two sacred spaces, the Torah and the Temple (merged in rabbinic theology), are where bar Shalom and his contemporaries and successors locate their efforts.⁴⁵ Like the poet(s) of Lamentations, bar Shalom draws on biblical forms of complaint, investing them with renewed emotion. As Roskies points out, "the intensity of the complaint was new, even if the form was not."⁴⁶ With all these ingredients taken together, it seems that this poem also might lend itself to literary traumatization.

Intriguingly, historical evidence indicates that the generation that actually experienced the catastrophe of the First Crusade was likely not responsible for creation of the most literature in response to it, and bar Shalom was likely no exception. Writing only began in the next generation, which was itself threatened by a renewal of the catastrophe in the period immediately preceding the Second Crusade (a threat which never materialized). This generation wrote under the twin pressures of actual and threatened catastrophe, but was also freed from much of the impulse to repress or keep silent that can overwhelm the immediately traumatized. Could Alexander's theory be useful to conceptualize the process as one of trauma claim by the first generation, and the subsequent negotiation and confirmation of that trauma by the community? That is, after the Second Crusade did not result in the same paradigm-shattering events, was medieval Ashkenazi culture able to routinize and write its trauma through liturgical and cultural

⁴⁵ Roskies, *Literature of Destruction*, 72.

⁴⁶ Roskies, *Literature of Destruction*, 72.

incorporations of mass chosen death and periodic violent instability? “There is None Like You Among the Dumb” could therefore communicate something significant about the way that the covenantal drama moves into prominence at the moment of greatest threat, and how poetic rhetoric can occupy the shifting space between repression and routinization.

From the Middle Ages to Modernity:

The rabbinic model of writing catastrophe remained effective and dominant for many hundreds of years. Even as the centre of gravity of European Jewish life shifted eastward, from France and Germany to Poland and the Russian Empire, external persecutions and internal restrictions ensured that Jewish cultural life remained relatively insular and oriented around religious ways of life. This protected both the covenantal worldview and the liturgical model of history, as well as routinized catastrophic events to prevent traumatization. Jewish life was still marked by episodes of violence and persecution, but the literary record shows little evidence of full expressions of pain embrace and trauma. Roskies lays out the ways that chronicles, folksongs and humorous parodies served as a means of coping with outbreaks of anti-Jewish violence and institutional oppression in the centuries between the Middle Ages and the modern era.⁴⁷

The social and cultural ruptures associated with European modernity reached Eastern Europe, and particularly the often-isolated Jewish *shtetlekh*, or market towns, relatively late. Eastern European Jewish culture also resisted modernization, due in large

⁴⁷ Roskies, *The Literature of Destruction*, 115-144.

part to its traditional forms of life. However, in the second half of the 19th century the Jewish intellectual “Enlightenment,” the *Haskalah*, and the various civil emancipation laws revolutionized the position of Jews in wider society and accelerated the pace of integration. Urbanization and assimilation began to alter the material forms of Jewish life, while the rise of Zionism, socialism, and assimilation revolutionized its intellectual content. As a result, modernity caused a rapid and dramatic erosion of Jewish consensus and faith in the ability of covenantal theodicy to prop-up identity stability and formation.

“In the City of Slaughter”:

Hayyim Nahman Bialik’s “In the City of Slaughter” was written at a time with suggestive similarities to that of bar Shalom’s Crusades, effecting the descendants and cultural inheritors of medieval Ashkenaz. Between 1903 and 1906 a massive wave of pogroms crashed over Eastern European Jewry. They, and especially the first of these pogroms in the spring of 1903 in Kishinev, southwest Russia, constituted a radical rupture and marked a new era of communal life. The pogrom at Kishinev marked such a traumatic moment that the city’s name subsequently stood for the violence of the whole period, and was placed among the parade of other names (like Jerusalem and Mainz) and dates (like 587, 70, and 1096) that functioned as ritualized signposts of communal catastrophe and signified a severe disruption of the God-Jew relationship.

An already mature and highly active poet, Bialik was sent to Kishinev by the Hebrew Writer’s Guild as a reporter, along the typical lines of response to the pogroms the generation before, in 1881-1882. However, unlike those previous journalistic or elegiac accounts, Bialik returned with something very different: a blisteringly angry,

daringly bold, oracular poetic account of the aftermath of the pogrom that spared no party to the covenantal drama, Jews or their God. It seems that with this poem there could be a shift beginning from what I hypothesized was the privileging of Alexandrian trauma in pre-modern poetry to a more Freudian mode in the modern poems. “In the City of Slaughter” contains many references the covenantal crisis on the behaviour of the Jewish community, certainly, but is the real rhetorical heart of the poem the internal psychological battle of the poet to find a meaningful way to express catastrophe as trauma? Is he more interested in the communal or individual response? If it were so, would we once again find covenantal dynamics at the heart a traumatized response to catastrophe?

The role of generational gaps in encouraging Alexandrian tendencies in the traumatization of the pre-modern poems reverses in the modern period. A key difference of the twentieth century poetry from much of the pre-modern is that the modern poetry is being written in the same generation as the catastrophe; it was even written within a year or two of the events themselves. This leaves an opportunity for the traumatization process to be foreshortened, which could favour the Freudian model. Do modern poets then write a more personal than communal trauma? That is not to say that the poets’ words would not reflect on and contain the experiences of the community more broadly, but is the distance between speakable and unspeakable is being redefined? Is the personal voice rising to the fore? Many critics have identified “In the City of Slaughter” as a ‘proto-modern’ Hebrew poem. That is, although Bialik’s poetry represented a decisive break from literary tradition and some movement into modernism, it was ultimately a more liminal space of transition to the fully modern poetry written by the

succeeding generation.

“The Mound” and “Masada”:

All across Europe, World War I had devastated traditional ways of life and shook the faith of many in religion, humanism, and technological and intellectual progress. At the same time, the revolutionary years of the beginning of the century had seemingly culminated in the world-shaking triumph of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, bringing with it a message of unstoppable change, and supposed improvement, to the deepest foundations of European civilization. For the Jewish population, the War, the Revolution, and the pogroms that had accompanied both had devastated the way of life of the Russian Pale of Settlement and Jewish Poland, the two largest Jewish populations in Europe. The Polish-Soviet war of 1919-1921 raged over the same Jewish heartlands as the previous war, preventing regeneration and prolonging displacement of the population. Migration to urban centres reached tremendous proportions, further accelerating the shift in the centre of gravity of Jewish cultural life from traditional provincial to urban technological. In Palestine, a third wave of pioneers fled the upheaval in Europe to try to create a new way of life in an unfamiliar but profoundly significant land. For almost everyone, but particularly among the political and artistic youth, the mood was radically unmoored and apocalyptic. It is from this whirlwind of cultural activity that Peretz Markish and Isaac Lamdan wrote their poetry of trauma.

The literary movement that most captured the *zeitgeist* of Jewish (and more generally European) modernity, Expressionism, took up the challenge to finally explode the limits of literary convention. As a result of the apocalyptic mood and chaotic social

reorganizations that followed World War I and the Russian Revolution in 1917 Expressionism spread rapidly both west and east across Europe. Eastern Europe, more recently and incompletely modernized and the most severely shaken by the Revolution, was fertile ground. Literary groups in its urban centers seized on the hysterical emotion, grotesque imagery, and primal mythological mood of Expressionism as the only possible response to their experiences. More dramatically unmoored than many of their Gentile countrymen, and eager to seize on the Revolution's promise to sweep away the old world of oppression, young Jewish writers created their own brands of Expressionism in their own languages: Yiddish and Hebrew.

Yiddish Expressionism solidified its presence on the scene with the two significant Warsaw publications: Uri Zvi Greenberg's short-lived journal *Albatros* (1922-1924) and a series of manifestos by Peretz Markish entitled "The Aesthetics of Struggle in Modern Poetry" (1922).⁴⁸ Markish highlighted lines from a poem by Moyshe Broderzon as the motto of the movement: "We, the young, a happy, boisterous gang / We're trodding on an unknown path / through deeply melancholic days / through nights of fright / Per aspera ad astra!"⁴⁹ Henryk Berlewi, who created much of the cover art for expressionist journals and poems (including those of *Albatros* no. 3 and the Markish's "The Mound") specified one of the reasons for the "melancholic days" and "nights of fright": "We have no ground under our feet;" we wrote, "our time-honored tradition has disappeared."⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, 98; Avidov Lipsker, "The Albatrosses of Young Yiddish Poetry: An Idea and its Visual Realization in Uri Zvi Greenberg's *Albatros*," *Prooftexts* 15 (1995): 89-108.

⁴⁹ Seth Wolitz, "Khalyastre," *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 18 August 2010 (20 June 2011), <<http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Khalyastre>>.

⁵⁰ Wolitz, *Khalyastre*.

Conclusion:

Still, both poems cannot, or will not, leave the covenantal frame behind altogether. It is their response to the demands of covenant and cultural history that fueled the traumatization that was written into the poetry, and the covenantal crisis that marked out their catastrophes as something more damaging than before. This is true of all the poems analyzed in this study, as the above survey has illustrated. Therefore, in traumatized Jewish poetry of catastrophe there should be a link not only between covenant and the presence of trauma, but also between the poet's understanding of covenant and tradition and his understanding of trauma and catastrophe.

In other words, the model of trauma that the poet drew on, Freud's or Alexander's or some mix of the two, should also be informed in some way by his attitude toward covenantal religion and the cultural baggage, like liturgical history and religious literature, that comes with it. It also stands to reason that the way the poet communicates that understanding of traditional Jewish identity, the rhetorical techniques, imagery, intertextual references, and emotional tone of the poem he uses, can also give information about kind of traumatization he is writing. It is precisely with these investigations that the next to chapters of this study are concerned.

Chapter 4

Lamentations: A Close Reading

Through its rhetorical devices the text of Lamentations attempts to speak the unspeakable and compare the incomparable in a way typical of trauma.⁵¹ It also struggles to present a coherent voice, and as a result the author writes from a variety of perspectives that shift in the gender and number of the speakers. There are three individual speakers. First is the personification of Zion as the weeping, violated woman with which the poem opens. “How lonely sits the city that was once full of people! How like a widow has she become...” the poet begins in Lam. 1:1, but the city also speaks for herself out of the depth of her grief: “Look, O Lord... for I am despised,” she cries, and then protests, “Is it nothing to you...? Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow...” (1:11-12). This introduces early two of the principle thematic concerns of Lamentations: grief and anger at the loss of the covenant, and the expressive problem of finding comparison and constructing meaning.

This is followed by the anguished voice of the poet who breaks through to expressly point to the problems of speech and incommensurability in chapter 2. In response to the horror of the images the poet is both creating and recalling, Lam. 2:13 says: “What can I compare or liken to you, O daughter Jerusalem? What can I match with you, to console you? For your ruin is vast as the sea; who can heal you?” In his trauma, the poet is failing in his responsibility to comfort, to interpret, to make what has happened comprehensible, and to do this by reference to the domains of both language

⁵¹ Alan Mintz, “The Rhetoric of Lamentations,” *Prooftexts*, vol. 2 (1982), 1-17.

and sacred history. However, the use of a metaphor in the last sentence is illuminating: he has not yet stopped trying to draw the very comparisons that seem impossible.

The final clearly individual speaker is the persecuted *gever* (a Hebrew word that emphatically indicates a single hyper masculine individual) of chapter 3. Lam. 3:1-2 begins emphatically in the third person: “I am the man [*ani ha-gever*] whom the Lord has shepherded with the rod of his wrath.” This is wordplay against the sacred texts, a bitter inversion of Psalm 23 (“The Lord is my shepherd; I lack nothing...”).⁵² At the opening of chapter 3 God’s punishment is characterized as frighteningly brutal and relentless. In a sustained metaphor of God as gladiatorial persecutor of the *gever*, the poem locates itself in a traumatized world:

He [the Lord] has worn away my flesh and skin; / He has shattered my bones...
And when I cry and plead, / He shuts out my prayer...
He has filled me with bitterness...
He has broken my teeth on gravel, / Has ground me into the dust.
My life was bereft of peace, / I forgot what happiness was. (3: 4, 8, 15a, 16-18)

This God does not love, but only wounds and refuses to hear or be heard. The dignity of the human partner is utterly lost, and the justice of the divine one withdrawn. The passage shows a horrifying inversion of the proper covenantal dynamic, and a profound expression of grief at that inversion. In the individual voices, the poem is both highly disruptive and overwhelmed by the problems of expression. In its confusion and grief, the beginning of Lamentations seems to be tilting Freudian.

However, immediately following the above complaint there is a complicated, incomplete shift to the presence of communal protests and prayers in the later chapters.

⁵² Roskies, *Literature of Destruction*, 72.

Mintz argues that these shifts reflect a theological wrestling that is fundamental to understanding Lamentations. The terrible vision of the relationship between God and man offered by the poem up to the middle of chapter 3 is difficult to reconcile with 3:33 intellectually reasoned confession of faith: “For He [the Lord] does not willfully bring grief / Or affliction to man...” the *gever* concludes, and goes on shift into the first person plural as he exhorts the sudden collectivity to trust in God’s justice and repent their unspecified sins (i.e. adopts a theology of structure legitimation).

The confession of trust is also immediately followed by what Boase refers to as “a communal lament which protests about God’s inaccessibility.”⁵³ It claims that although the people have admitted to sin, following the traditional trajectory for atonement and forgiveness, God has not honoured His role in the drama. The community then accusatorily calls God to account, saying: “You have clothed Yourself in anger and pursued us, / You have slain without pity” (3:41-42). God has also stymied Israel’s only means of expressing their protest: “You have screened Yourself with a cloud,” the lament accuses, “That no prayer may pass through...” (3:43-44). Although the poet’s conclusion is that this petition has been unsuccessful and God is removing himself from his proper covenantal role, he is still shifting the onus of carrying and coping with the trauma from the individual to the collectivity. Alexander’s trauma theory indicates that this may signal further shifts in the poem’s approach to remembering trauma, which indeed it does.

⁵³ Elizabeth Boase, “Constructing Meaning in the Face of Suffering: Theodicy in Lamentations,” *Versus Testamentum* 58 (2008), 461.

There is a journey in the first three chapters from pure emotive lament (or affect) followed by individual protest and rage against God, concluding with a triumphant synthesis of traumatized individual and hopeful nation. Although the third chapter is constructed as the “theological nerve centre” of the book, and does seem to offer a resolution of sorts in its rhetorical movements, the final two chapters do not sustain the theological ‘breakthrough’ of chapter 3, reverting to a more pessimistic and frustrated view of God and Israel’s current and future relationship. Lamentations attempts to use traditional theodicies and literary forms to resist trauma, but this is ultimately unsuccessful. In other words, the shift to the calmer, more clearly expressive collective voice signals an increasing openness to the Alexandrian model of trauma, with its focus on cultural communication about and negotiated consensus on the trauma claim. This includes an increasing desire for routinization of the trauma. However, this shift is not complete. The ends with a statement of trust that God will hear the lament, one based on the poet’s past experience of a healthy covenant in which God heard and answered his prayers, and protected the quality of his life (3:56-7). However, in the context of both the chapter and book this trust is unrewarded. Lamentations has no instances of God actually replying, no elements of thanksgiving praise, and no visions of deliverance.

Examples of Lamentations’ tendency to distort genres of formal complaint can be found in all chapters, but chapters 2 and 5 are particularly rich. For example, there are fragments of formal laments in 2:19, resulting in verses that are vehement in their condemnation of God. There is an address (“O Lord”), God-complaint (“Alas, women eat their own fruit, their new-born babes! Alas, priest and prophet are slain in the Sanctuary of the Lord!”) and petition in the form of imperative words (“See O Lord...behold, to

whom you have done this”). However, there is no confession of trust, no promise of praise; rather, the lament is dominated by protest and negative discourse about God. The next verses (2:21-22a) continue the protesting God-complaint, which is already abnormally long. “You slew them in your day of wrath,” the poet accuses. “You slaughtered without pity. / You summoned, as on a festival, my neighbors from roundabout. On the day of the wrath of the Lord none survived escaped...” Lamentations plays with these elements in order to convey the enormity of the catastrophe or express rage and protest against God from within an accepted (though repurposed) genre framework. This subversion of traditional texts indicates that Israel’s literary defenses against suffering were not functioning appropriately, and that the poet of Lamentations was in tension between salvaging expressive material from within the existing tradition or innovating and creating new genres appropriate recording the disruptive impact of the catastrophe as a trauma.

The poet tested both solutions. An example of a more innovative use of pre-existing lament genres is in chapter 5. That chapter’s complaint section is much longer than in any other parallel in biblical lament literature, to extent that Westermann suggested it is in fact an innovative creation, not an alternate use of the form. Complaints run uninterrupted from 5:2-16, fifteen of the chapter’s twenty-two verses. Calling on God to look down and see the people’s suffering, the complaint presents the evidence of reversal of the natural social order:

Our inheritance has been passed to aliens, our homes to strangers...
Slaves are ruling over us, with none to rescue us from them...
Gone is the joy of our hearts; our dancing is turned into mourning.
The crown has fallen from our head... (5:2, 15-16).

Everything is reversed, from the ownership of the land, the social hierarchy, and most importantly the standing of the Jewish people. From the chosen people of God, they have been reduced to the vassals of slaves and the most abused of women. Even their emotional state is reversed by the withdrawal of the covenantal relationship. This turn to social inversion also signals an increasing attempt by the poet, in an Alexandrian move, to signal the collective nature of the trauma and the vested social interest in routinizing it.

The dire state of the people's covenantal identity and the depth of the perceived trauma are reinforced at conclusion of the poem. Following genre conventions, there is a 'turn to God' (confession of trust), but it is notably brief and perfunctory, consisting only of 5:19: "But you, O Lord, are enthroned forever; your throne endures through the ages." Ch. 5 contains no promise of praise at all, but ends with an ambiguous accusation against God of excessive anger and rejection (5:20-22). 5:20 turns the words of the poem's own trust confession back onto God, demanding that if He is indeed enthroned forever, then He must answer "Why have You forgotten us utterly, forsaken us for all time?" 5:21 sounds a briefly hopeful note, saying "Take us back, O Lord, to Yourself, and let us come back; renew our days as of old!" but 5:22 concludes the tentative hope on a desolate thought. "Renew our days as of old – unless You have utterly rejected us, and are angry with us beyond measure." The implied question is never answered, and the poem ends there in a state of terrible uncertainty. This ambiguity calls into question the state of God and Israel's relationship at the close of the poem, in Boase's words "raising the fear and possibility that the God who has always been known as the protector of God's chosen

people may have abandoned them.”⁵⁴ There is also a note of defiant anger in the conclusion as well; the people have done what they can, and the ball, as it were, is now in God’s court. The people can only wait to hear an answer that may never come, from a voice that may never sound again.

This explains why Lamentations makes a good attempt at asserting a retributive theodicy, one that understands suffering as a result of the sin of the people, which is being justly punished by God. However, the text is unsuccessful at doing so. Lamentation’s few attempts to make some sense out of what sin Zion is supposed to have committed, and whether that sin fit the catastrophic punishment, are inconsistent. The attempts are vague and dwarfed in power by the pain and rage in the poem. Lamentations, contrary to functional covenantal beliefs, is “almost devoid of hope.”⁵⁵

Routinization:

It is in this tension that it is possible to locate the textual trauma of Lamentations. As poetry the book is caught between expressing two competing demands. The first is the full horror of what has happened to writer and people, which is overwhelming their identity as God’s covenantal people. This corresponds to Freud’s tension between repression and symptom, the inability to process and speak a trauma and its subsequent expression in chaotic, exaggerated, or misdirected form; and Alexander’s ‘fundamental violation’ and trauma claim, the perception on the part of a collectivity that their cultural identity has been devastated and the attempt to broadcast that claim to their larger

⁵⁴ Boase, 456.

⁵⁵ Roskies, *Literature of Destruction*, 20; Boase, 463.

society. The second demand is the attempt to understand, contextualize, and resolve that horror. This need corresponds to Freud's working through, the conscious and curative expression of the trauma; and Alexander's traumatization and routinization, the cultural consensus that a trauma did indeed occur, and the absorption of that trauma into the structures of a new collective identity.

Despite the fact that at the close of the poem the covenantal crisis remains unresolved and the trauma unrelieved, the Book of Lamentations was in fact ultimately worked through or routinized by later generations. This came from the text itself to a limited extent, chiefly in the shift toward a more Alexandrian approach to understanding trauma that opened the text to the concerns of the cultural collectivity. Such a shift also offered some instances of a more mediated mode of expression, as well as attempts at a tentative structural legitimation theology. However, this routinization occurred primarily through the way these openings in the text allowed it to be canonized and absorbed into liturgical history. With the advent of rabbinic Judaism after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE Lamentations became standardized as the heart of the liturgy for the Ninth of Av, the date chosen to formally commemorate the destruction of both temples.

It not only became firmly installed in the religious-literary mainstream, but also became intimately familiar to the entire community. In this way the disruptive, traumatized pain-embrace of Lamentations' poetry was muted and made a site of memorialization rather than active trauma. For example, in its liturgical recitation, the agonizing edge of the book's final verse is blunted by a closing repetition of 5:21 both

before and after v.22.⁵⁶ However, liturgical familiarity also allowed its powerful language and emotional resources to be mined by generations of Jewish writers of trauma who used its disturbing images and theological ideas to locate and legitimize their own innovations. Lamentations became an *agent provocateur* from within traditional religious life. Discussing just this kind of complex routinization process, Alexander's words apply powerfully to the role that Lamentations would play in the literature of catastrophe, almost despite itself: routinization is often

welcomed with a sense of public and private relief... [since] efforts to institutionalize the lessons of the trauma will eventually prove unable to evoke the strong emotions, the sentiments of betrayal, and the affirmations of sacrality that once were so powerfully associated with it. No longer deeply preoccupying, the reconstructed collective identity remains, nevertheless, a fundamental resource for resolving future social problems and disturbances of collective consciousness.⁵⁷

Lamentations' enduring cultural power lay in its very ambiguity, the way it carried both Freudian and Alexandrian modes of traumatization, offered theologies of both pain embrace and structure legitimation, and repurposed Israel's fundamental narrative of redemption, the covenantal worldview, to convey the most hopeless grief. Lamentations was thereby able to be played for thousands of years as one of the most subversively discordant notes in the liturgical chorus.

“There is None Like You Among the Dumb”: A Close Reading

In “There is None Like You Among the Dumb,” it seems at first that an exclusive focus on the covenantal framework may have been lost. There is an explicit attention to the enemy absent from Lamentations. Those attacking the Jewish community are

⁵⁶ J.P.S. *Hebrew-English Tanakh* (Philadelphia, PA : Jewish Publication Society, 2000), 1764.

⁵⁷ Alexander, 23.

excoriated as “Those seekers of ghosts and idols” and their crimes laid out in detail (line 11). These include attempts at converting the Jews (lines 15-20); desecration of the Torah, Talmud, and other holy books (lines 50-55); and mass murder (lines 57-61, 67-69), are brought before to the addressee, God, as evidence of the violations inflicted against the Jewish community. The intent behind this is to dramatize the enormity of the injustice in the face of which God continues to “keep silence.” However, it is important to point out that, in the poetry, the primary point of reference for rage is the relationship with God. Repetition of “do not keep silence!” at the end of every stanza brings the reader back to the poet’s ultimate goal: reminding God of His covenantal obligations to the Jews and expressing rage at his failure to honour them. Note that the poetic rages against the enemy are not meant for that enemy; they are directed instead toward God (in the case of the *piyyutim*) or the Jewish community (in the case of the chronicles). The focus remains, ultimately, on the internal dynamic of the covenant.

As He was in Lamentations, God is asked to hear the evidence of depravity against the Jews, and then to fulfill his covenantal obligations and respond appropriately: to comfort the Jews and take vengeful action against the enemy. Also as in Lamentations, that call to God is left unanswered within the bounds of the text. In “There is None Like You Among the Dumb,” the kinds of action God is being asked to take are based on biblical types from the narratives of salvation, righteous warfare, and punishment that God has deployed in the past: “the swinish beast” of Amalek-Rome; the “monster of the Nile”, Egypt; and Seir-Edom (lines 74, 78, 81). Doing so demotes the enemy from a present, three-dimensional danger to a stereotyped accessory to covenantal history. Such an effort by the poet to restrain his rhetoric and remain within the

covenantal view of the enemy is in Freudian terms, obsessive thinking about the source of one's trauma as a symptom of traumatization. The parallel Alexandrian explanation is that represents the airing of the victims' trauma claim within the wider institutional arena of religion.

In "There Is None Like You Among the Dumb" Isaac bar Shalom's fixation on *interiority* extends to the arrangement of the text. The thematic concerns and literary devices of the poem are established in the first two lines. "There is none like You among the dumb," bar Shalom writes, "Keeping silence and being still in the face of those who aggrieve us."⁵⁸ Such an opening delivers a scathing criticism of God protectively couched in rabbinic wordplay parody (derived from Ex. 15:11 and Ps. 89:9, "who is like You/ there is None like You among the mighty" [*'eilim*] and T.B. Git. 56b, "Who is like you among the dumb?" [*'ilmim*]). This kind of parody is a sign of engagement with previous literature of complaint, including rabbinic literary tradition.

In recounting the chosen deaths of the Jewish population, the ways they then kill themselves and each other are explicitly associated with the Temple sacrifices, and bar Shalom poem reinterprets several biblical and early rabbinic events as prototypes of those chosen deaths.⁵⁹ For example, the tenth stanza (lines 64-70) conflates "the time of Nashon's sanctification" (God's smiting of an Israelite for his violation of the purity of the Tabernacle in Deut.) with the brutal deaths by fire of "Those who study difficult things / Light things and syllogisms / The laws, statues, and instructions..." However, the repetition of "Do not keep silence!" at the end of the stanza reminds the reader that

⁵⁸ Quoted in Roskies, *Literature of Destruction*, 74; lines 1-2.

⁵⁹ Roskies, *Literature of Destruction*, 73.

the intent is less glorifying of the dead than rendering intelligible a trauma by referencing past experience, and to hold God to account as the covenant is designed to. Parody and textual subversion, as bar Shalom demonstrates, are ways to strike back at God while remaining within the covenantal religious worldview.

By this method, bar Shalom constructs the response of the Jewish community to the enemy – mass chosen death – as an internalized response to their own covenantal obligations to honour and serve God. For example, lines 29-31 read: “*They* prepared a slaughter of children. / *We* turned our minds to the sacrificial blessing: / Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one...” (emphasis mine). The poet emphasizes the contrast between the murderous intentions of the enemies and the Jewish community, calling to mind rabbinic legends of martyrs dying with the Shema’ on their lips in order to sanctify what is about to happen. The stanzas that follow maintain the turn inward, explicitly drawing comparisons to the activities of the Temple. In the poem, the community “bound the children and their mothers. / And burnt their skins by fire.../ As priests for their whole burnt sacrifice...” and the martyrs will “sprinkle the blood of sisters and brothers / [as] sacrificial portions...” (lines 36-40). Bar Shalom reappropriates the violence of the enemy as a voluntary and private religious act between God and Jewish community, both heightening the perception of a covenantal crisis and legitimating his response to it within the shelter of routinized literary precedent. Inverting the imagery of both Temple sacrifice and late biblical narrative simultaneously reinforces the poem’s grounding in a covenantal worldview and reminds the audience of that worldview’s fracture in the face of trauma.

In response to the goading and conversion attempts of the enemies, bar Shalom's Jews respond: "'From our God we turn not, nor shall we worship yours! / ... Him we shall serve, and Him we praise. / In time of trouble, He is our salvation.' / For His Name's holiness are we slain..." (lines 23, 26-27, 33). In the poem, their loyalty cannot be shaken and their faith informs their actions completely. However, this attitude is in tension with bar Shalom's voice as an author, which pushes the acceptable boundaries of sacred parody and flirts with blasphemy in his daring petitions of God, petitions not backed by any sure statement of faith or praise in his own voice. Bar Shalom's deployment of language of speaking and silence is a central device of the poem. It creates a contrast among three impassioned voices: the Jewish people, who cry aloud to God; the poet, who assertively petitions God; and God's silence in the face of atrocity. Bar Shalom does stop short of directly stating that God's silence is a betrayal of his covenantal responsibilities. He does this mostly by remaining within the realm of implication of covenantal failure by using the ancient petitionary forms of biblical argument/lament/protest. That is, he implores "Do not keep silence!" rather than stating definitively that God *has* kept silence. However, the degree of the poem's bitterness against God, and bar Shalom's failure to mitigate it in any way (i.e. to make a 'confession of trust' that God will not remain silent, or imagine a prophetic experience of God speaking), verges on the blasphemous. Like Lamentations, he pushes the boundary but does not cross it, and was able to be routinized as a result.

Unlike the Temple's burnt offerings, the Crusade deaths do not seem to have worked to stabilize a communicative relationship with God. With each subversion of a traditional text, the world of the poem veers closer to an incoherent worldview barren of

God's justice. Only the concluding petition ("Do not keep silence!") and the faithfulness of the dead allow for hope for the resumption of meaning in the future, all the while protesting its absence in the present.

Routinization:

In Freudian terms, bar Shalom is caught between the drive to speak the full disruptive horror of the trauma, and repressing it favour of the more stable, comprehensible option: the routinized, domesticated voice of structure legitimation and a just theodicy. Using Alexander, however, it is possible to see that in recording the community's trauma, bar Shalom has left the poem open to routinization in order to further the process of trauma creation in order that there might be full cultural recognition of the martyrs' cry.

The influence of the liturgical/cyclical mode of history that was central to Ashkenazi society acted to cushion the disruptive protest of "There is None Like You Among the Dumb." The poem was incorporated into the medieval Ashkenazi liturgy on the first Sabbath after Passover, which in the liturgical calendar commemorates the Crusade deaths. It seems to have been written or adapted as a *zulat* poem, a *piyyut* inserted into a given service in a given community, between more standardized prayers and readings. In this case "There Is None Like You Among the Dumb" was read in the morning service after the Shma' prayer on that day. Following the Shma's closing declaration of the most fundamental attributes of the Lord ("The Lord is God, the Lord is one"), bar Shalom's own opening with its resonant wordplay transitions to another, related attribute of God: His unique might and divine justice, juxtaposed to his current

silence. This placement and programmed repetition provides the affirmation of faith and the collective mourning that bar Shalom's traumatized poetry cannot.

Conclusion:

Such intersections of historical context, textual content and devices, and covenantal religion can be seen to map intriguingly on to psychological and sociological theories of how traumas are created, manifested, and managed. At this point in the study, it is possible to draw preliminary conclusions about the writing of trauma in the pre-modern poetry. It is helpful to return to the comparative frameworks of trauma theory introduced in chapter 1, which looked at four problems of trauma as contrasting pairs: naturalist vs. constructivist perspectives, individual vs. collective traumatization, coherent expression vs. chaotic repression, and disruptive impact vs. routinized domestication. The Book of Lamentations and "There is None Like You Among the Dumb" share a general orientation vis-à-vis this scheme. Both are constructivist in that they consciously set about airing a claim to trauma and engage in rhetoric deliberately designed to convey the experience of trauma to the reader, rather than leaving the affect of trauma buried at a depth only careful reading could uncover. By that same rational, both are more oriented toward expressive communication than repressive acting out. However, both poems are still troubled at the deepest level by the problems of expression.

Lamentations explicitly asked the question of how a traumatized poet can dredge the resources of his cultural background and relationship with God in order to construct some kind of meaning in the face of the incomprehensible horror of trauma. The limitations of expression manifested in the poet's rhetorical shortcomings and his

corruption of existing genres of complaint available to him from the religious corpus. Still, the poet chose to try and salvage means of expression from within the tradition, rather than rejecting it all together. Fracturing his poetic voice between individuals and the collective, he poignantly struggled to retain dignity and self-identity when confronted by paradigm collapse, but ultimately he was more concerned with the traumatization of his community than himself. Lamentations pondered the meaning of the Destruction on the level of the whole covenant worldview, and the poet stared hopelessly into the void of not only his personal abandonment by God, but also the possibility of cancellation of his people's entire cosmic structure of meaning. Although the poem ends on a disruptive note so disturbing that it is altered in liturgical recitation, it also left itself open to the possibility of routinization by remaining within the covenantal framework in its protests and imagery.

Similarly, in "There is None Like You Among the Dumb" bar Shalom looked to his religious tradition for tools with which to process trauma. He went to considerable artistic trouble to record the trauma of the First Crusade as intelligible within the scope of the covenantal worldview and commensurable with previous responses to catastrophe. He was still, however, dogged by the limitations of expression, both his and God's. No one previous literary response was enough to convey the catastrophe, and bar Shalom splintered and parodied his literary culture in order to find the language to express what had happened. As well, although the Jewish people in the poem cried out and vindicated themselves, God never did so. In the covenantal worldview, expression was fatally limited so long as it remained one-sided. As in Lamentations, bar Shalom was appealing to religious resources chiefly on behalf of the wider cultural trauma. Also like

Lamentations, “There is None Like You Among the Dumb” remained disruptive when standing as a text on its own, but was designed for routinization into a liturgical structure. Both poems, then, in seeking to salvage from and work within Jewish religious culture, record a process of traumatization much more in line with the Alexandrian model than the Freudian one. Where the poem stands on all four measures of traumatization type seems to stem from its orientation to Jewish religious culture and its willingness to wrestle with the problems of expression inherent in such self-constraint. Whether this pattern held true through the upheavals of modernity is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Modern Jewish poetry of catastrophe aggressively took on the full canon of the Jewish literary canon in radical and unprecedented ways. While some things remained the same, like the overwhelming literary focus on the pleasure and pain of the covenantal drama, the way modern poets wrote trauma with a ferocious daring that redefined how Jewish poets could express themselves in the face of paradigm collapse. As well, the privileging of an Alexandrian model of trauma began to shift toward a Freudian one as poetry began to be written out of more personal, more historically immediate, and more totally destructive experiences than ever before. However, as much as modern poets struggled to push off what they experienced as the dead weight of traditional modes of expression, their poetry remained bounded the same covenantal framework that had undergirded Jewish literary responses to catastrophe since before Lamentations.

“In the City of Slaughter”: A Close Reading

“In the City of Slaughter” is a monologue delivered by a dramatic speaker to a silent listener, a speaker who orders the listener to move through different areas of the city and bear witness to the atrocities. But who are these two personae? The high Biblical diction, coupled with the resonance of the first words (“*Lekh-lekho*,” “Arise and go”; the words spoken by God to Abraham) identifies the listener as a prophet.⁶⁰ In fact, not only did Bialik adopt for himself here the grandiose persona of the prophet (as he did

⁶⁰ Mintz, *Hurban*, 141.

in much of his poetry),⁶¹ but much more shockingly, the speaker is God: “the entire poem was written *in God’s own voice*. It is God who leads the tour, God who calls on his prophet...”⁶² “In the City of Slaughter” is a tightly structured poem built around the central concern of speech and silence. The use of voice in the poem informs everything about it from its vocabulary to its theology.

The poem is consumed by the question of the value and purpose of speech in the face of traumatic suffering. That is, what constitutes the more appropriate response to trauma, speech or silence? Does it matter what kind of speech? Does speech diminish the memory of trauma or is it a necessary form of expression? Is trauma properly understood as repression or expression, incommensurability or routinization? Although it would be overly simplistic to claim that Bialik presents a definitive answer in the poem, “In the City of Slaughter” signals a shift away from the expressive modes of writing trauma that were so pronounced in *Lamentations* and “There Is None Like You Among the Dumb.” From the medieval poem’s desperate injunction to God to “not keep silence,” the proto-modern Bialik gives readers a God who speaks, but only to a poet-prophet of whom He commands absolute silence.

As Mintz argues: “The poem is preoccupied in all its parts with the suppression and release of feeling.”⁶³ At each location to which He directs the poet, God’s monologue not only describes what can be seen and what occurred there but also

⁶¹ Reuven Shoham, “H.N. Bialik: Autobiography of a Poet-‘prophet’ and defeated hero in the period of the Hebrew ‘rebirth.’” In *Poetry and Prophecy: The Image of the Poet as a “Prophet”, a Hero and an Artist in Modern Hebrew Poetry*. Brill’s Series in Jewish Studies, v. 31 (Leiden, Boston : Brill, 2003), 93. Emphasis in the original.

⁶² David G. Roskies, “Modern Jewish Literature,” in *From Mesopotamia to Modernity: Ten Introductions to Jewish History and Literature* (1999), 244.

⁶³ Mintz, *Hurban*, 151.

commands the poet to feel specific emotional responses to what is described. Then, crucially, God forbids the poet-prophet from speaking or giving voice to any of the terror and loathing that God enjoined him to feel. “Such silence will take hold of thee, thy heart will fail / With pain and shame,” says God to the poet, “yet I / Will let no tear fall from thine eye. / Though thou wilt long to bellow like the driven ox / That bellows, and before the altar balks” (lines 179-183). As in the Freudian model of repression, God and the catastrophe of the pogrom generate negative affect in the poet but then render him unable to express it outside of his own mind. The poet’s mind and body become a closed system in which emotion is imprisoned and left to circulate impotently, doing psychological damage along the way (the Freudian neurotic symptoms). One of his primary literary devices is to extend this parallel to the poet’s relationship to the Jewish community. In much the same way that God forces the poet’s emotions repressively back into the body’s closed system, Bialik redirects the horror of the pogrom back into the closed system of the covenantal relationship.

“To permit feeling but forbid expression is a move of great consequence,” writes Mintz, and “this wedge has been driven into the poet’s being because expression itself has become suspect.”⁶⁴ This suspicion manifests in Bialik’s contemptuous language when he describes the formulaic, liturgical response to catastrophic events. In response to the “Ululating, lachrymose” praying men in the synagogue, God’s monologue instructs the poet that “Thy skin will grow cold, the hair on thy skin stand up... / Thus groans a people which is lost. / Look in their hearts, behold a dreary waste...” (lines 221-223;

⁶⁴ Mintz, *Hurban*, 152.

230). Those who use speech in a formulaic, liturgical way are not appropriately feeling or responding to the full traumatic weight of Bialik's rendering of the pogrom.

Later in the poem, the theme recurs. This time, explicit mention is made of the congregation's failure to respond appropriately to hearing the Book of Lamentations read in the wake of the pogrom. Bialik is playing here with the tension between the traumatized text of Lamentations, which ought to inspire disorientation and "pain embrace" (grief and protest that disrupt the status quo) in the listeners, and its routinized liturgical use, which is contributing to what he believes is the people's ongoing complacency and mindless traditionalism in the face of a world-altering catastrophe. Bialik has God himself directly condemn the community for doing so, saying: "The mark of death is on their brows; their God / Has utterly forsaken every one... (lines 295-6). Bialik's God rejects a people who would continue to try and speak to Him in traditional ways, when the catastrophes of modernity and pogrom are invalidating that tradition. For Bialik, expression has become an unreliable means of coping with trauma in Jewish culture for two related reasons. First, there is no interpolation of a generation between the event and the poem and consequently less opportunity for culture-wide negotiations of trauma in the Alexandrian sense to take place. Consequently, trauma in the Freudian model can dominate and privilege repression over expression. Second, the weight of the untraumatized and routinized literary canon suggests that expressive literature may not be a safe way to preserve the raw and disruptive affect of trauma.

Therefore, Mintz argues that when Bialik castigates traditional liturgy and literature in the poem, he in fact "negates not the texts and ideas of the tradition but the liturgical use to which they have been put..." However, given the importance of the

liturgical mode of coping with catastrophe to preventing trauma, this is not an insignificant negation. Bialik's own avoidance of direct expression and subversion of traditional literature is "an attempt to... thwart the dulling effects of convention and convey the true horror of horror..." and also to resist the way that "the purgative rituals of weeping and mourning can neutralize the sense of outrage and draw the horror into the quiescent folds of the tradition."⁶⁵ The distrust of spoken expression in the poem, especially as represented by Bialik's use of formulaic and liturgical literature, is a form of resistance to the routinization of trauma.

"In the City of Slaughter" is densely packed with allusions to the whole of the Jewish literature of catastrophe, from Lamentations, the midrash, the medieval piyyutim and chronicles, to contemporary journalistic and fictional accounts of the pogroms.⁶⁶ In one part of the poem, Bialik uses his tightly controlled style to demonstrate his command of the recurrent images and devices of that antecedent literature while also suggesting, in the ease of their compression, the extent to which they have become sterile. All that Bialik has to do is refer in rapid succession to: "A tale of cloven belly, feather-filled... / A tale of nostrils and nails, skull and mallet... / A tale of a babe beside his mother flung..." and he had summoned for his reader all the affect associated with several hundred years of disaster literature clichés.⁶⁷ The problem of speech also recurs at the end of this catalogue of: the dagger "halved the infant's word," cutting off meaningful speech and leaving only a nonsense syllable "ma" instead of "mama." In the original

⁶⁵ Mintz, *Hurban*, 150.

⁶⁶ Mintz, *Hurban*, 146.

⁶⁷ Mintz, *Hurban*, 146.

Hebrew, that line is constructed out of wordplay on a Biblical verse; A.M. Klein's translation retains the referent to the problem of expression while losing the allusion.

As in *Lamentations*, it is a reference to the death of children, starving and murdered, that first provokes the poet to break through and directly lament the inadequacy of his own rhetorical abilities and the psychological toll of the trauma. "O, even now its eyes from me demand accounting," he thinks, for "such tales that sever / Thy body, spirit, soul from life, forever!" (lines 67-70).⁶⁸ Also like *Lamentations*, "In the City of Slaughter" is composed in large part of endless allusions to, parodies on, and distortions of the textual canon of traditional Jewish literature, especially responses to catastrophe.⁶⁹ This is yet another sign that Bialik held traditional forms of expression to be inappropriate in the face of trauma. At the close of the stanza Bialik has God command the poet to suppress his affect again: "Stifle the wrath that mounts within thy throat, / Bury these things accursed, / Within the depth of thy heart, before thy heart will burst!" (line 72-74). This reads like an accurate poetic description of traumatic repression, and reaffirms the link between suspicion of expression and trauma .

This rhetorical structure of the poem, which uses speech to raise concerns about antecedent literature and trauma also informs the approach of "In the City of Slaughter" to interiority and blasphemy. It is the poet's adoption of God's voice that first forces us to understand the poem as an internalized covenantal drama. Therefore even though the poem attacks "traditional religious hopes and travesties the image of God... God remains

⁶⁸ Compare Lam. 2:11-13: "My eyes are spent with weeping; my stomach churns; my bile is poured out on the ground because of the destruction of my people, because infants and babes faint in the streets of the city... What can I compare or liken to you, O daughter Jerusalem? What can I match with you, to console you? For your ruin is vast as the sea; who can heal you?"

⁶⁹ Mintz, *Hurban*, 148.

the speaker of the poem.”⁷⁰ All of the blasphemies and parodies of the poem are conveyed as words from God’s mouth to man, not the other way around. Profoundly shaken both by the pogrom and by the modern erosions of meaning in and attachment to the covenant, Bialik directed his anger against God, whom he simultaneously disavows and yet calls into dramatic life.⁷¹ Shoham calls this the type the “rebellious prophet against his Lord,”⁷² and Bialik pushes its boundaries into blasphemy, turning the traditional rebellions of people and prophet into a rebellion incited by God against himself. Bialik’s God demands of his silent prophet:

Speak to them, bid them rage!
Let them against me raise the outraged hand,-
Let them demand!
Demand retribution for the shamed
Of all the centuries and every age!
Let fists be flung like stone
Against the heavens and the heavenly Throne! (lines 244-250)

In this way, Bialik’s rebellious rhetoric can both push the boundaries of conventional attitudes to religion in Jewish literature, while still remain inextricably bonded to covenantal modes of feeling and expression.⁷³

The poem also engages in moments of profanity and blasphemy, parodying the *kiddush hashem* tradition that portrayed the chosen and unchosen deaths of the medieval period in terms of holy martyrdom and of the sacrificial temple cult. Bialik also introduces blasphemy in implying the absence, indifference, or impotence of God as the reason for the meaninglessness of this death. Juxtaposing the sacred and the unclean in

⁷⁰ Mintz, *Hurban*, 142.

⁷¹ S. Daniel Breslauer, *Covenant and Community in Modern Judaism*, Contributions to the Study of Religion, Number 21 (New York : Greenwood Press, 1989).

⁷² Shoham, 97.

⁷³ Shoham, 99.

his descriptions of the pogrom dead in a way that will be taken to its extreme by Markish in the next generation, Bialik describes the victims in two passages.

The first describes a man and his dog lying together on a garbage heap, killed by “the self-same axe” and remaining unburied, exposed to the degradations of the elements. The way Bialik mentions the “hound” and the “swine [who] seek dung” in the garbage heap as sharing the dead man’s grave is calculated to shock religious sensibilities and to obviate the possibility of holiness in this death (lines 28-31). There is also a direct negation of the sacrificial tradition in his description of the man’s “lost” blood whose “cry will not be heard,” counteracting the very purpose of the Temple’s slaughtered offerings (lines 32-35).

Bialik states his subversion of martyrology more starkly in the second passage when he compares the dead to slaughtered calves but denies any sacrificial or religious meaning behind their deaths. “Your dead were vainly dead,” God informs the poet-prophet, “and neither I nor you / Know why you died and wherefore, for whom, nor by what laws; / Your deaths are without reason; your lives are without cause.” God also declares His own weakness as the cause of this meaninglessness, explaining: “Yours is a pauper-Lord... / poorer still of late / ... see, I am fallen from my high estate... / What says the Shekhinah? In the clouds it hides / In shame, in agony abides...” In these two descriptions of murdered of Kishinev Bialik has his God utterly reject the traditional response to catastrophe that sacralizes the dead as martyrs and sacrificial offerings to God. The progression of the language of Temple sacrifice went from justifying the chosen deaths in “There Is None Like You Among the Dumb” to nullifying them in “In the City of the Slaughter.”

Bialik's also uses metonymy to avoid direct expression. Metonymy "makes equivalences between things according to contiguity or association, that is, between part and whole, cause and effect, thing and attribute... the instrument stands for its agents."⁷⁴ In "In the City of the Slaughter," metonymy takes the form of images of stones, feathers, weapons and other objects left in the aftermath of the pogrom that are used as a stand-ins for showing the enemy directly.⁷⁵ For example: "The hatchet found them here, and hither do they come," where the hatchet is described instead of a direct reference to the people actually wielding the hatchets (line 46). In other places, the enemies' eyes are all that are allowed to stand in for them. Metonymy is at its heart a technique of frustration, which Bialik deploys for a variety of motives. One is to eclipse the enemy, to redirect the considerable amount of frustrated emotion that the half-described atrocities have induced in the reader (and in the silenced poet-prophet) away from the external enemy and back into the covenantal drama.⁷⁶ Metonymy thereby ensures that the poet's method of expression is itself largely governed by the dominance of repression, constraining both the emotional and rhetorical effect of the poem to a range still fully bounded by a covenantal worldview. Likewise in traumatic repression the affect and memory generated by the trauma remains bounded by the constraints of the individual mind and cannot find meaningful expression, appearing only as energy misdirected to physical and psychological symptoms (like psychosomatic illness and behavioural neuroses).

Even in the one place where the enemy does break through Bialik's metonymy, attention is diverted almost immediately away, repeating the effect of metonymy by

⁷⁴ Mintz, *Hurban*, 145.

⁷⁵ Mintz, *Hurban*, 145.

⁷⁶ Mintz, *Hurban*, 148.

displacing the revulsion generated by the rapist pogromists onto the Jewish husbands, fathers, and brothers hiding in terror and looking on passively. By continually keeping the anger directed inward at both parties to the covenant, God and Jewish community, Bialik again mirrors repressive Freudian traumatization and redirects his expressive powers.

It is possible to see in “In the City of the Slaughter” the sudden eruption of the shift in traumatization to the personal and the repressive. Although Bialik did remain unrepressed enough to develop a rhetorical structure for the poem that raises his suspicion of tradition expression in a complex yet coherent way, by distrusting expression, attempting to sidestep routinization, and rejecting the coping strategies used in Jewish tradition for almost two thousand years, Bialik introduced a shift away from the earlier Alexandrian model of writing trauma.⁷⁷

Routinization:

Despite its explicit rejection of traditional routinization, “In the City of Slaughter” has entered the canon of Jewish response to catastrophe not as a disruptive, traumatic force, but as the archetypal modern example of the literature of destruction. It was a highly influential poem that was taken up by various secular Jewish groups as the perfect expression of the perceived ills of Eastern European Jewish culture. These groups saw Bialik’s condemnation not as wholesale rejection but as a wake-up call to salvage all that

⁷⁷ Mintz, *Hurban*, 147.

was strong and proud left in the culture and to waste no more time in using it to spur on the creation of new modern forms of Jewish life.

In that light, many groups interpreted it as a cry for Jewish self-defense against pogromists, and organized pockets armed resistance in response. Others saw it as supportive of Zionism, others as radically atheist, still others as reaffirming the need for religious reform. Most ironically of all, some modern congregations have even incorporated it into their Yom Kippur liturgy, much like congregations did for “There is None Like You Among the Dumb” 750 years before. Bialik successfully ensured that the poem would have a maximum of impact by preparing his own Yiddish translation in order for it to reach readers in both Jewish languages. “In the City of Slaughter” remained current in literary circles, widely read, debated, and imitated, from its publication until the Holocaust.⁷⁸ Perhaps because of the wide-ranging cultural impact of the poem, it also served to radically redefine the boundaries of how far modern poets of trauma could go in their critique of Jewish literature, religious traditions, and the covenantal worldview.

“The Mound”: A Close Reading

Markish’s poem “The Mound” (Yidd. *Di Kupe*, which is also translated “The Heap”) is a poetic howl from the darkest side of the expressionists’ apocalyptic fervour.⁷⁹ At the same time as the poem’s publication, Markish was editing the journal *Khalyastre*

⁷⁸ Mintz, *Hurban*, 154.

⁷⁹ There is currently no complete published English translation of “The Mound,” so I am using the most extensive translation, that of Leonard Wolf. See Bibliography for publication details.

in whose opening manifesto he declared: “Our criterion is not beauty, but horror.”⁸⁰

Although “The Mound” is a poem that powerfully expresses both communal disillusionment and personal emotional agony, it nonetheless lacks a stable identity. There is no narrator, no stable speaker, and no consistent perspective; like the fractured Lamentations the poetic voice is different in each chapter, and its tone changes regularly “from tragic reverence to grotesquerie to sentimentalism to satire.”⁸¹ Nothing exists outside of the poem’s emotion and imagery, no sustained grounding in time or place or self-identity.

Alexander’s theory of trauma as provoked by identity collapse is helpful in understanding why Markish depicts traumatization in such a way. However, overall it is Freud’s repressive model of trauma that dominates the poem. As metonymy and covenantal focus did in Bialik’s poem, the absence of self-identity and Markish’s total dependence on an internal sensory epistemology prevent coherent self-expression. They also force affect to remain trapped within the poet and manifest through symptoms; in this case poetic expressions of rage and profanity.

The poem is composed of a series of monologues centering on a pile of corpses in the market square of a shtetl town. However, carefully controlled rhetoric like Bialik’s has given way to the unstable, subjective emotional landscape of Markish’s Expressionism. Its opening epigraph and first stanza introduce the primary manifestation of trauma in the poem: subversion of religion to the point of blasphemy and profanity. The opening epigraph declares that the poem is a *Kaddish* for “you, the killed... / In a

⁸⁰ Avraham Novershtern, “Markish, Perets,” *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 15 December 2010 (15 February 2011), <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Markish_Perets>.

⁸¹ Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, 98.

mound...” setting up a mock liturgical framework and setting up a reader knowledgeable in Jewish liturgical tradition. The poem continues with a verbal assault mingling religious imagery, grotesque sensory descriptions, and profanity (in the sense of the intrusion of vulgar or earthly things or behaviours into the realm of the sacred). Markish, writing as the Mound, has it describe itself as “vomit on the earth’s black thigh” and has it cry to the reader “Away! I stink. Frogs crawl on me” (I: 5-6). The way Markish uses blasphemy and his manipulation of the cosmic, covenantal worldview indicate the destabilization of the self and community in the face of trauma.

Throughout “The Mound” Markish scattered references to the death, degradation, and fruitlessness of Jewish cultural heritage, both religious and literary. Distorted biblical references and profane imagery sustain the alternately furious or yearning affect of a people “Two thousand years of a fierce blizzard wandering in a well / And still not yet arrived at the unsated depth” (V: 10-11). Markish transforms biblical images of redemption and covenantal renewal into images of death and degradation. The “land of milk and honey” becomes “the day of blood and honey”; Noah’s doves become “dead spies upon the land” rather than messengers of hope (II: 2-5). Markish also rejects the rabbinic sacralization of “*Avot*,” literally “fathers,” which refers to the transmission of learning and tradition between generations, and the veneration of the family when he asks “Ah you, my blind fathers. / How many bloated wombs, / How many debaucheries have borne me?” It is another distortion of a traditional image of vitality and fruitfulness into a universe of putridity and a moral rupture.

Markish extends his own disgust with the people and the tradition to God. Addressing Him blasphemously as a raven perched on a dung heap, Markish urges God

to demonstrate his rejection of the poet and polluted people and to “peck, peck what the chariot of twenty generations brought” (III: 23). Markish also envisions a day when, like an eclipse, the Mound will block out the sun (and with it, God), plunging the world into its grotesque sensual horror. The eclipse is defined by blasphemy and understood in terms of subverted biblical imagery. It will be a “day is obscured with blood and pus,” where the Mound itself will rise as “a Babel of corpses... a filthy cloud” and “blaspheme” as it demands to know who is left to console it and give it hope. The answer comes in the form of a cruel play on Ezekiel’s redemptive covenantal theology when Markish cries to the Mound: “In thy blood live! / In thy blood live” (XXI: 9-32).⁸² Through parody, Markish transforms a biblical expression of God’s mercy into an evocation of the Mound’s spectacle of unredeemed mass death.

Markish’s turn to such angry use of traditional lament, protest, and apocalyptic literature serves two purposes. First, it tells the reader that the root of the cultural trauma is the loss of the covenantal worldview. Repressive fixation on the covenant and its cultural manifestations manifests as interiority in poetry of trauma. Despite Markish’s rejection of God and Jewish tradition, covenantal interiority in the form of blasphemous textual and liturgical corruptions structures the rhetoric of “The Mound.” It does so even to the extent erasing of the enemy: the Christian pogromists are never mentioned directly and the only reference to them is the simile of the church sitting near the corpses “like a polecat beside a heap of strangled fowl...” (I: 11).⁸³ Second, Markish’s subversion of traditional literature highlights the inadequacies of previous modes of expression along

⁸² Ezekiel 16:6: “And when I passed by thee, and saw thee wallowing in thy blood, I said unto thee: In thy blood, live; yea, I said unto thee: In thy blood, live.”

⁸³ Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, 100.

the Alexandrian model. He is refusing both routinization and clear public expression (indeed, when Markish first appeared on the scene “no one could understand him, and [yet] people crowded to his readings...” and Roskies argues that “The Mound” has “a metaphoric density that is sometimes impenetrable”⁸⁴) in favour of a disruptive rejection of the literary and religio-cultural status quo, as well as repression of negative affect into the symptoms of loss of identity, rage, and grief. Markish seems to have believed, almost in answer to Freud’s problem of cultural trauma and phylogenetics, that the indirect but affective language of Expressionism could transmit and remember the subjective and experiential dimension of trauma better than the traditional literature.

However, in “The Mound” Markish alludes to an attempt to cope with his trauma through religious and liturgical avenues. Early in the poem, Markish betrays a moment of exhaustion and reveals his ambivalent nostalgia for traditional religious expression in response to catastrophe. He cries out: “Ah, Almighty of the world... / I yearn to merge with you in prayer / And yet my heart, my lips are moved / Only to blasphemies and to curses” (III: 7, 10-12). The poet tries to hand himself over to God, pledging Him his “prayer-exhausted, / tenfold dishonored hands...” but is unable to maintain the tone. Immediately after begging God to take him back, Markish erupts into furious and grotesquely sensual blaspheming. “Caress [my hands],” he writes, “lick them, as a dog / Licks its scabby supporting hide... / I’ve built you a new ark... / [The] black mound... / Seat yourself upon its buxom roof / Like an old raven on a dungheap” (III: 16-23).

Markish (like Bialik’s poet-prophet) resists expressing himself in traditional ways. In

⁸⁴ a) Melech Ravitch, “Peretz Markish,” in *The Way We Think: A Collection of Essays from the Yiddish*, Vol. 2, compiled and trans. Joseph Leftwich (Cranbury, NJ : A.S. Barnes and Co., Inc., 1969), 449; b) Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, 98.

exposing his ambivalence Markish portrays the grief and the rage of trauma in addition to the intimacy and the humiliation of covenant.

By the ninth stanza, Markish has devolved into frenzied profanities designed to cut to the heart of religious sensibilities and traditional ideas of decency and holiness. Depicting the activity of the shtetl on the day after the pogrom, which is also the day after Yom Kippur, Markish gives readers a reworking of Bialik's grave-robbing marketplace beggars that is a shockingly blasphemous.⁸⁵ The Jewish townspeople, "beggars on *banduras*" cheat the peasants "with false yardsticks" and false blessings, selling the Gentiles all that remains to the town: ripped fragments of Torah scrolls in place of their usual "ribbons, beads, buttons and tubs" (IX: 9-14). As this happens, Markish writes his most shocking accompaniment to the degradation of the town's Jews, constituting the ultimate violation of Jewish religious culture and God's most basic legal expectations for humanity, as "An idiot pig, somewhere in a culvert, / Wets the holy Ten Commandments / As on a piece of smeared and foaming rag" (IX: 15-17). That Markish's disruptive feelings of rage manifest exclusively as blasphemy against God and rejection of the formulaic literature and liturgical culture testifies yet again to the import of covenant in Jewish literature of trauma.

By the end of "The Mound," Markish has utterly reversed the covenantal worldview and its ordering of Jewish culture; "all covenants have been abrogated and all sanctities have been defiled. The corpse heap now vies for authority with Mount Sinai, and the Ten Commandments are cast into the mud... where God too can be found, bloody

⁸⁵ See "In the City of Slaughter," lines 326-340.

and recrucified.”⁸⁶ Indeed in a rare moment for the poem, which contains very few references to direct speech by the poet, preferring the indirect hysteria of apocalyptic, near the end Markish agrees that “I will utter the Sovereign Mound’s decree: / It flings the Ten Commandments back at Mount Sinai / [with] Its thirsty mouth, a swill of grief...” (XXIII: 2-4). Speaking now as the prophet of the Mound, he cries: “Hey, markets and mountains, I call you to oath with my song. / The Mound spatters Mount Sinai’s commandments with blood” (XXIII: 6-7). This dark prophet announces the triumph of the Mound not only over the condemned people, but also over God and his covenant. In the traumatized, revolutionary world social and cosmic order has been reversed. God has been deposed and humiliated, and to him Markish shouts: “Ah, Mount Sinai! In the upturned bowl of sky, lick blue mud, / Humbly. Humbly as a cat licks up its midnight prayers / Into your face, the Sovereign Mound spits back the Ten Commandments” (XXIII: 12-14). When he ends the poem, as in began, with a “resounding liturgical flourish” (saying: “to God’s name Amen!”), Markish has given the reader a horrific tour of his traumatized worldview, one that remains, as ever, bounded by the experience of covenant.⁸⁷ He has demolished everything in his path, taking on and spitting out the liturgy, the Bible, the law, and the archetypal patterns, structures, and mountains of Jewish theology.

⁸⁶ Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, 98.

⁸⁷ Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, 100.

Routinization:

Although Expressionism was oriented toward expression by its nature, this does not necessarily mean the kind of retreat to repression seen in Bialik. This is largely because Expressionism does not advocate the same kind of expression criticized in “In the City of Slaughter.” Expressionist poetry advocates a chaotic, egocentric, subjective, and indirect form of expression that accords well with trauma theory in two ways. The first, as stressed by Alexander, is a collapse of a strong and meaningful framework for communal identity and the loss of personal selfhood in the poetry. Paradoxically, the second (related to the overwhelming and disruptive force of the Freudian trauma) is its foregrounding of personal subjectivity, the epistemological dominance of sensory and emotional experience. Roskies calls this Expressionism’s idea of “*real* history, evoked through the medium of sensation.”⁸⁸ Markish also resists routinization through obscenity, blasphemy, and parody that crosses the line beyond redemption.

All that remains “real” at the end of “The Mound” is the subjective experience of violation and trauma, the overwhelming sensory horror of the pogrom. Even the writer’s self has fractured into multiple personae, licked up and eclipsed by the apocalyptic juggernaut of the Mound. It is possible that, as Roskies concludes, “rescuing” the reality of pogrom was Markish’s purpose in writing the poem, his attempt to find something tactile and tangible in the face of upheaval, chaos, and trauma. However, Markish’s use of Expressionism in the poem is an indication that it represents something closer to an

⁸⁸ Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, 99.

unprocessed symptom of trauma than a verbalized expression of working through. It certainly resists Alexander's notion of routinization in its Jewish cultural forms.

Even though the poet's self is mythologized and fractured, the poem's sensory epistemology, alone without solid ground to stand on or God to look up to, is the centre of gravity. The poet's trauma is a personal one although his literary tools are communal; it is his people's two thousand year-old storm raging inside his own twenty-six year-old body. The trauma of "The Mound," then, has much more to do with the Freudian conception of trauma as unknowable, repressed, personal and naturalistic than Alexander's framework of the socially negotiated expressive and communal trauma.

Certainly there was no intention or possibility of bringing the poem into a liturgical as had been done with previous traumatized literature of catastrophe like Lamentations and "There is None Like You Among the Dumb." "The Mound" itself was not embraced in the same way as "In the City of Slaughter" was, and Lamdan's "Masada" would be. "The Mound" was too Jewish and too lacking in redemptive revolutionary vision for Markish's fellow communist poets. In its wholesale rejection of everything in modern Jewish culture and publication only in Yiddish, it had nothing to offer Zionists. Conservative Jewish reaction against it was vehemently negative, and the poem was a niche publication by and for Expressionist literary circles.⁸⁹ It was Markish himself more than "The Mound" that was embraced as the quintessential poet of the historical moment. In lieu of a liturgical arena for incorporating new poetry of catastrophe, many of Markish's young contemporaries had literary journals and writers'

⁸⁹ Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, 98.

groups that hailed him in religious terms as “a young prophet whose tongue shot fire, not words... [and] the times were apocalyptic.”⁹⁰

Even though after his return to Soviet Russia Markish, accused of counterrevolutionary activities, fell victim to the Stalinist purges of the Yiddish writers in 1948, many peers and critics in Europe and North America remembered him as “the fullest expression of both the Revolution in life and the revolution in literature.”⁹¹ “The Mound” was also eventually recognized as an important development in the history of Jewish literary responses to catastrophe and has accordingly been occasionally anthologized, as well as taught in some university classes. However, anthologization is not the same as incorporation into the synagogue liturgy and so it is reasonable to say that “The Mound,” with its fullest embrace of the Freudian model of trauma, is also the least routinized, resolved, and worked through of the poems considered in this study. Whether this hostility to routinization is a necessary result of Expressionism, or peculiar to the this particular poem, is considered in the final close reading, of Isaac Lamdan’s “Masada.”

“Masada”: A Close Reading

Although literary Expressionism is relatively homogenous in its goals and methods, Hebrew Expressionist poets like Isaac Lamdan often differed in their presentation of trauma from Yiddish Expressionists like Markish. Much of interwar Hebrew literature, like the Yiddish, is concerned with communicating both “the violent stylistic antinomianism of Expressionism and the equally violent vision of destruction

⁹⁰ Ravitch, 449.

⁹¹ Shlomo Belis, “Peretz Markish,” in *The Way We Think: A Collection of Essays from the Yiddish*, 459.

and deliverance in Jewish apocalyptic.”⁹² However, the prevalence of belief in Zionism among Hebrew writers of the 1920s made them less likely than Yiddish writers to try and blast away all their Jewish cultural baggage in poetry. Rather, Hebrew literature of the period “describes an apocalyptic moment caught between the certain disintegration of European Jewish life and an unproved hope for redemption in Palestine.”⁹³

Lamdan’s “Masada” oscillates between pessimistic and optimistic moods, between despair at the desperate situation of Jewish culture and brash confidence in the face of an insurmountable challenge.⁹⁴ It is also a presentation of “the expression of a generation, exposed and alive to the contemporary cataclysm... a full-blooded expression of the twentieth century... [written] in the blood of his period,” portraying communal rather than individual trauma.⁹⁵ Like Lamentations, the poem skips without explanation between speech by an ‘I’, a ‘we’ and a ‘he.’ Like “The Mound,” the objective reality of the narrator’s self is often obscured to the point where it is difficult to tell who is speaking. However, unlike Markish, for Lamdan the idea of Zionism is able to act as “a sort of glue saving the personality from complete disintegration.”⁹⁶

Although before the departure for Masada a narrator describes the post-Revolutionary world as “chaos, chaos, chaos – no people, no land, no God, and no man...”⁹⁷ the source of identity available in Zionism, and the corresponding desire to find aspects of Jewish tradition worth saving, better allows “Masada” to withstand domination

⁹² Mintz, *Hurban*, 166.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Leon I. Yudkin, *Isaac Lamdan: A Study in Twentieth-Century Hebrew Poetry*. East and West Library. (Ithaca, NY : Cornell University Press, 1971): 38.

⁹⁵ Yudkin, 35.

⁹⁶ Yudkin, 60.

⁹⁷ Yudkin, 207. Yudkin’s translation of “Masada” does not have line numbers, so I refer to the page numbers of his book *Isaac Lamdan*, of which the poem in translation is an appendix

by the overwhelming, chaotic and incoherent Freudian model of trauma. Instead, he is able to present an expressionist poetry that engages with Alexander's constructivist, communal, and socially mediated trauma as well.

Lamdan's resilience against total abandonment to repressed trauma manifests in his recurring use of the phrases "nevertheless," and "in spite of everything." The paradoxical centre of Lamdan's work is his determination to continue striving for a resurrection of a healthy Jewish culture, even while acknowledging that the enterprise is doomed and that he and his collectivity are traumatized.⁹⁸ This creates an intriguing tension between Freudian and Alexandrian models of trauma in the rhetoric of the poem. There is a swing from the passionate faith of dancing young pioneers who jubilantly declare: "Masada is the reward... Never again shall Masada fall!... [and] If the age-old Fate derides: 'In vain!' we will pluck out its inciting tongue!"⁹⁹ to the constant thoughts and acts of suicide that plague Lamdan's pioneers ("Today, in the midst of battle, someone cast himself from the top of the wall into the abyss... Ah, who knows if all of us here, one by one, will not slip away into the abyss"¹⁰⁰). Central to the tension between optimism and pessimism in "Masada" is an ambivalent attitude to Jewish traditional responses to catastrophe, one that surfaced only very briefly in the midst of Markish's blaspheming.

Like the other poems, "Masada" is rich in references to the cultural idiom of Judaism as well as parodies of them. Lamdan uses the vocabulary of liturgical practice to create an allusive new terminology for his pioneers. For example, he repeatedly plays on

⁹⁸ Yudkin, 71.

⁹⁹ Yudkin, 215.

¹⁰⁰ Yudkin, 230.

the idea of the *havdalah*, the ritual prayer said at the end of the Sabbath to mark the division of the sacred day from the profane one. Lamdan uses this wordplay throughout the poem as a hopeful symbol of “the discrimination that the people must exercise in order to make the Zionist experiment a success.”¹⁰¹ However, it is also used pessimistically to describe Fate’s cruel and arbitrary division of the Jewish fate from the Christian one, a bitter inversion of the covenant’s theology of chosenness.¹⁰² In the optimistic passages, Lamdan draws on that heritage to paint inspiring images of the continuity of the Masada project with the best of the Jewish past. “The chain is not broken,” he writes, “the chain still continues, from father to child, from bonfire to bonfire, the chain still continues... Thus danced our fathers... so let us dance... Onward, onward, onward.”¹⁰³ In pessimistic ones, he angrily denounces all of Diaspora Jewish culture as a dead end for his life and his soul, as the narrator explains at the beginning of the poem:

Only father remained fast to the doorpost, wallowing in the ashes of destruction,
 And over the profaned name of God, he tearfully murmured a prayer.
 While I, still fastening my crumbling soul with the last girders of courage,
 Fled, at midnight, to the exile ship, to ascend to Masada...
 The final banner of rebellion had been unfurled there...
 Against the hostile fate of generations, an antagonistic breast is bared with a roar:
 ‘Enough!...’¹⁰⁴

A related device that runs through the poem is the singing of Psalms. Lamdan uses it as a shorthand for the whole of Jewish religio-cultural life, and in the construction of the poem it functions as a pivot on which the perspective of the narrator shifts between moods and between chapters. However, this is not to say that even though Lamdan has

¹⁰¹ Yudkin, 37.

¹⁰² Yudkin, 181-182.

¹⁰³ Yudkin, 213.

¹⁰⁴ Yudkin, 199.

written a poem that is occasionally nostalgic for or ambivalent about religion that he is seeking to place Zionism within a renewed a covenantal world. Religion is too much bound up in the world of the exile, where “the God of Israel inserted a severed head” into the “bosom” of the narrator of the passage, who cries out that he is unclean: “its blood has touched mine...”¹⁰⁵ Lamdan does, however, have his narrator (breathtakingly arrogantly in terms of the traditional covenantal worldview) offer God a chance to come on board with the pioneers’ endeavour – or be left behind.

The overriding mood and imagery of “Masada” is of religious hysteria, though expressed in a secularized version, and apocalyptic urgency.¹⁰⁶ In his determination to make his last stand, one of Lamdan’s narrators engages in a brief prayer on behalf of the pioneers, the one time that God is directly petitioned in the poem. Using modified forms of address, complaint, and petition adapted from biblical lament and prayer, the speaker addresses God and lists the sufferings and trials of the fighters at Masada. He asks God to strengthen, comfort, and protect the pioneers, who have reached their breaking point:

Til when will the wasted hand of the people grapple with blind fingers on the enclosures of salvation?
Oh God, look, it is stretched out, and on its palm is the last dream that it has drawn up from nights of wandering: ‘MASADA!’...
If this time as well, O God, you have no mercy, and do not accept the dream with favour, and now do not turn to the sacrifices of its interpreters –
God, guard Masada!¹⁰⁷

Although there is no spoken response to the prayer, it is followed by a brief moment of exaltation and renewed hope (“Wait, O heart, wait, there is a merciful father. He has

¹⁰⁵ Yudkin, 68-69, 207.

¹⁰⁶ Yudkin, 176.

¹⁰⁷ Yudkin, 229.

called us from the depths unto chaos – Masada will not fail!”¹⁰⁸). Similarly to Lamentations’ confession of sin and faith in chapter 3, however, the mood is not sustained. When the petitioner rejoins the others the poem is plunged back into despair with the passage on hopelessness and suicide entitled “Into the Abyss.”¹⁰⁹ Earlier in the poem, the pioneers had attempted to declare their solidarity with God and tradition as they shout “Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One!” Lamdan describes the Shma’ as the “rebellious cry” which “Never amongst the nations’ cries has been swallowed,” and alludes to the martyrological connotations of reciting the prayer in the face of certain doom. However, the only response the fighters receive is “from the four winds... an orphaned howl” that puns on the prayer by answering bitterly that God is only “One insatiable grief!”¹¹⁰ For Lamdan, this betrayal of his attempt at regaining traditional religious faith is all that is needed to move him resolutely into blasphemy and a secularized re-appropriation of tradition.

The poem ends with the consequences of God’s failure to make himself known and to ally himself with the people of Masada. In the final stanza, Lamdan subverts the traditional formula that ended medieval Hebrew books, by declaring the poem: “Finished! (Finished, finished and completed, though not ‘finished and completed with praise to God, creator of the world.’ We have no praise for God, creator of the world)–”¹¹¹ Lamdan concludes by claiming for the poem the status of a new Torah for a new Jewish people, the “remnant of our ancient wine, the last preserved... with the

¹⁰⁸ Yudkin, 229.

¹⁰⁹ Yudkin, 230.

¹¹⁰ Yudkin, 217.

¹¹¹ Yudkin, 233.

disappearance of the Sabbaths”¹¹² carried in a ritually dividing *havdalah* cup up to the new sacred, Masada. “As from now,” he writes, “a new book of Genesis is opened on the wall. / As did our fathers on finishing the book of the Law... let us roar with a new and last roar of the beginning! / Be strong, be strong, and we shall be strengthened!”¹¹³ With this ending, Lamdan not only exemplifies his particular take on blasphemy, but also reinforces the interiority that governs the poem, keeping the focus inward on the God-Jew dynamic, though clearly privileging (and ultimately only hearing) the side of the partnership that is the Jewish voice. Expressionism acts here not to muffle or repress externalized expression, as it did in Markish, but to furnish a language in which the Jewish voice can roar its way to a coup-d’état of covenantal leadership without needing to abolish the throne all together.

Routinization:

Like Bialik’s and Markish’s poetic voices, Lamdan’s registers clearly as a traumatized one in the ways it deals with the collapse of the covenantal worldview through voice, interiority, blasphemy, and its use of formulaic and liturgical tropes and literature. However, unlike his generational and stylistic contemporary, Lamdan’s “Masada” is able to seek something salvageable not just in the fact of the poet’s own subjective sensual experience, but also within a hope for a reconstructed Jewish community and Jewish tradition. This suggests that the addition of a belief in a specifically Jewish ideology of modernity means that the form of the trauma as remembered in the literature is closer to the Alexandrian model than the Freudian one.

¹¹² Yudkin, 231.

¹¹³ Yudkin, 234.

“Masada” is primarily concerned with airing the claim of the trauma to its own social group, and then negotiating the meaning and content of that trauma inside that same culture, thereby constructing both pessimistic narratives of profanation and grief and optimistic ones of a re-constituted group identity. Although the poet’s self and world are in turmoil, the poem expresses less by way of the disruptive, bewilderingly repressed raw emotionalism that, by the Freudian model, was the unresolved symptom of Markish’s trauma, or the enraged rejection of any interference from tradition shown by both Markish and Bialik.

Unlike any of the other poems considered in this study, “Masada” even contains the seeds of its own routinization in its declaration of the “new book of Genesis.” Lamdan himself betrayed a continuing profound ambivalence in much of his later poetry, which often focused on the faltering covenantal faith of biblical characters, and he would eventually commit suicide. On the other hand, “Masada” became wildly popular in the nascent Jewish state. It was received in both its pessimistic and optimistic parts by the pioneers of the Third Aliyah as the perfect expression of the times and their struggle. The birth of the State broadened its cultural dissemination, but narrowed the terms of its acceptance.

Many of its optimistic passages became popular subjects of memorization and public performance, especially in Zionist youth groups. For years it was taught in Israeli schools as an optimistic nationalist masterpiece, and “Never again will Masada fall!” has become a national slogan of the State of Israel that endures to this day.¹¹⁴ However, in a

¹¹⁴ Barry Schwartz, Yael Zerubavel, Bernice M. Barnett, George Steiner, “The Recovery of Masada: A Study in Collective Memory,” *The Sociological Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Summer, 1986): 147-164.

secular modern version of liturgical domestication of traumatized poetry, this has entailed the selective “forgetting” of the pain embracing, pessimistic passages that are just as central to the poem as the triumphant ones. Even Alexandrian traumas are still traumas, narratives of terrifying disorientation and radical upheaval. The domestication of “Masada” is a reminder of the risk inherent in routinization of the loss of lived experience, the “howling blizzard” of its affect, which was so resisted by writers of trauma from the Bible to modernity.

Conclusion:

This chapter on modern poetry has revealed a fluctuation in the applicability of the Freudian and Alexandrian models of trauma. For Bialik and Markish, the breakdown in the covenantal worldview and the rapid erosion of traditional Jewish life left them with a distrust of traditional forms of Jewish reactions to catastrophe. As a result, they were left in a vacuum when it came to a means of expression for their own catastrophes. Combined with the grief and horror provoked by these events and the culture-wide perception of radical upheaval, Bialik and Markish produced poems that reflect traumatization in along Freudian lines.

Their approaches to blasphemy, interiority of covenant, formulaic and liturgical vocabularies of catastrophe, and particularly speech and prophecy indicate a traumatization that is individualized, repressive, disruptively symptomatic and un-worked through. In “The Mound” and “In the City of Slaughter” Bialik and Markish share a desire to reject and condemn traditional Jewish culture, and particularly its recourse to covenantal and liturgical worldviews, although to different degrees. Although Bialik

spared no one is his disparaging rhetoric, his intention in writing, whether it was meant as a prophecy of damnation or a call to a renaissance of Jewish life is unclear, and has been obscured by the use the poem was put to by a variety of ideological groups. However, given the dominant characteristics of both poems it could be reasonable to conclude, between Bialik and Markish, that the modern response to catastrophe in Jewish poetry was a traumatization best explained by the theories of Freud.

However, Lamdan's "Masada" complicates the picture. It seems that with the addition of Zionist faith to Hebrew Expressionism came a decrease in wholesale rejectionism and a return to a more expressive and collective literary approach to remembering trauma. For although the Book of Lamentations and Isaac bar Shalom's "There Is None Like You Among the Dumb" are deeply concerned with the limitations of expression and covenant in the face of catastrophe, their determination to remain within the covenantal worldview (while still pushing and expanding its boundaries) made them more able to be routinized into collective culture and identity and be remembered as traumas that privileged Alexander's model. "Masada," as a whole, is closer to this pre-modern model than to Lamdan's contemporaries. It is not exactly the same, of course, as in a truly modern development the poem does choose a secular vision, re-appropriating covenant and liturgy without the participation of God.

Although Lamdan's intentions cannot be known, the poem presents a poet-prophet that is more balanced between the roles of revelation, condemnation, and consolation. Much of the material in "Masada" deliberately salvages pessimistic images of tradition from one part of the poem in order present them as fortifying inspirations in another. Whatever Lamdan's personal conviction ultimately was, parts of "Masada" are

wildly hopeful and earnestly seek for a useable past within the culture of the covenant. As “In the City of Slaughter” does with Freud, taken as a whole the poem conveys an Alexandrian understanding of trauma. It therefore seems reasonable to conclude that, as I hypothesized in chapter 1 of this study, it is a poem’s orientation toward covenantal theodicy and the resulting cultural expressions of Judaism that determines whether and in what way it remembers catastrophe as trauma.

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