

“Inmitn fun velt-tseris” Perets Markish’s *Di Kupe* (1921) at the Crossroads between Tradition and Modernity, Jewish and Christian Literary Context

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¶1 With this article on Perets Markish (1895–1952), a Yiddish Modernist poet from the Soviet Union, we would like to contribute to the celebration of Ádám Nádasdy, our former Yiddish teacher, poet and linguist, who introduced us to this wonderful language and colourful culture. Whoever has followed Ádám’s Yiddish Courses at ELTE will remember the heros fun sotsialistisher mi. Independently of the Zeitgeist, both in traditional and modern contexts, educating students, scholarly work, and/or creating literature all require “mi”, that is, hard work, which is one of the many lessons we were lucky to learn from Ádám.

The title translates as ‘[Why am I afraid of taking a step, me,] In the middle of world-split’, a quotation from the poem, page 3.

Introduction

¶2 The cycle of poems by the Yiddish Modernist poet Perets Markish (1895–1952) *Di Kupe* was published in 1921 in Warsaw, and later on in a slightly revised version in 1922 in Kiev.[¶] Markish had gained first-hand experiences concerning the war and its inhuman nature. *Di Kupe*, an expressionist literary work, remembers the Gorodishche-pogrom, which took place according to the sources on September 23, 1920 and took 216 victims (Roskies 1989:362).

Concerning the differences of the two editions see Wolitz (1987:65).

¶3 Roskies cites Eliezer David Rosental, according to whose sources the Gorodishche pogrom took place two days before Yom Kippur 1920 (Roskies 1984:325). Nonetheless when we take a calendar we can see, that September 23, 1920 was the 11th of Tishrei 5681, so the date referred at the beginning of the poem was exactly 3 days after Yom Kippur.

¶4 *Di Kupe* has been considered by many as the climax of modern Yiddish Expressionism. Therefore, it has been in the focus of attention of numerous analyses.

¶5 Most work took the 1922 edition as their starting point. The present article aims at interpreting the cycle, based on its 1921 edition, from novel points of view that may shed new light on Markish’s relation to Tradition and Modernity.

¶6 Based on the traditional view on history in Jewish collective memory, we analyse the way Markish approaches the historical event of the Gorodishche-pogrom. Previous interpretations have focused on the motif of destruction, and have connected the poem to the Ninth of Av and the High Holidays. Unlike them, we shall add Pesach as another and less obvious layer of intertextuality, hence Pesach being our *leitmotif*. The latter also leads to the concept of offerings, which shall bring us to Christian myths. By finding correspondences between Jewish motifs with Christian ones, Markish creates new semiotic layers to already existing

literary symbols, and so he links the poem into the flow of European culture and contemporary modernism.

- ¶17 We thereby demonstrate that Markish, as well as his poem both stand at the crossroads. His modernism lies in the reinterpretation of the traditions, namely of both Jewish and Christian traditions. It will turn out that the poem should be interpreted having an understanding of both traditions, but also having the contemporary literary achievements in mind (Hetényi 2013).
- ¶18 As the poems within the cycle do not have titles, we shall refer to them according to their place in the sequence.

Tradition and remembrance

- ¶19 The relation of Jewish tradition to remembrance of history and historical events has been elaborated in details by Yerushalmi (1983) and Roskies (1989:4) among many others.
- ¶10 The Jewish tradition has always emphasized – such as in the early rabbinic Midrash featuring in the Pesach Haggadah and sometimes even contradicting both the Biblical text and theological-philosophical considerations rejecting anthropomorphism – that *God himself was active* in the Exodus story, and did not act via intermediaries. He personally passed over the houses of the Israelites, he personally divided the water of the Red Sea and he personally appeared at Mount Sinai. During the Exodus story, God entered the stage of history as never before since Creation, and as never after until the Messianic times. It is not a coincidence that God's two major appearances on this stage, the Exodus and the Messianic times, are both called *geule* ('salvation'), that is, God's deliverance of the people of Israel. Moreover, according to the traditional view, these two *geules* form the framework within which history, that is, the history of the Jewish people, takes place. Traditional view has held since the Deuteronomistic historiography that events during times of "ordinary history" between the two *geules* are driven by God and follow a pattern of sins-and-punishments. God is nevertheless hidden behind the scenes, as expressed in the well-known folk-etymology of the name of Esther ('I shall hide').
- ¶11 Another aspect of the traditional Jewish view of history is that similar but unrelated events are interpreted as different tokens of the same prototype. The analogical way of thinking seeks in these events the same features of divine acts, rewards or punishments, destruction or rebuilding. Each latter story is a circle organized around the first, prototypical episode; at the heart of any subsequent event the earlier layers also become visible. Roskies came to the same conclusion when examining the literary reactions to the topic of destruction:

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Through the use of archetypes destruction could be made to fit into the covenantal scheme. When chroniclers and poets expressed their anguish and their rage, they used the archetypes of exile, destruction, martyrdom and redemption that were fixed in the ancient, immutable texts. [...] Though punctual and never superseded, the archetypes were

- ¶12 Roskies refers to a point of central significance. The importance of remembrance, of the collective recollection is also corroborated by Yerushalmi: Israel knows God by his acts in history, for instance by his deliverance from Egypt, Israel must continuously remember these divine acts (Yerushalmi 1983:9). Based on prescriptions from the Torah, this act of ritual remembrance has become a major component of Jewish liturgy. It is obviously not history that is repeated during remembrance, rather mythical time. It is not a coincidence that the instruction to remember how God brought out Israel from Egypt is repeated several times; it is rather by this ritual that the positive commandment of remembrance and the negative commandment of not forgetting together ensure that the collective memory is maintained through the generations.

A hidden connection: Di Kupe and Pesach

- ¶13 *Di Kupe*, as argued by Wolitz (1987:56), is a “modern Ekha” when it commemorates the Gorodishche-pogrom. That is, the poem employs the prototype of the destruction of the Temple(s) and, therefore, the liturgy on the Ninth of Av, to react to contemporary events. Wolitz carefully develops how the traditional way to remember the *Khurbn* is reworked to create “modernist dirge”, so we are not elaborating on this issue here anymore. He also shows that the poem is related to two further Jewish holidays, namely, to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur; without repeating his intertextual analysis, we shall return only to the semantic connection between these holidays. At this point, we rather focus on the connection between the cycle to a fourth Jewish holiday, Pesach. Given the historical background of the poem, one is much less tempted to look for such a connection. Yet, as we shall see, there are many.
- ¶14 In 1920 the Temple had been demolished for almost two millennia, so there is nothing to demolish. Nonetheless, the recent experience of devastation and ravage reactivates the past layers in human memory. So one has to remember the acts of God, as well as the reactions of the people thereupon; hence the connection to the Ninth of Av. At the same time, remembrance is not only Israel’s duty, but also God’s, and this fact is another critical point for the interpretation of Markish’s poem. God must look after Israel in the same way as Israel must stay faithful to God. What is more, should God forget this obligation of his, and should he fail to remember his nation, one is allowed to remind him of it (Yerushalmi 1983:107, n.1). The end of Psalm 44 calls for God to “wake up” and save his chosen people being oppressed by its enemies.
- ¶15 As just mentioned, Exodus is the decisive starting milestone of Jewish history, and its commemoration at Pesach is similarly decisive from the viewpoint of Jewish collective memory. The Bible emphasizes that the month of the Exodus should be counted as the first month of the year

(Exodus 12:2), and Pesach is the beginning of Jewish history, and the time of the first redemption.

¶16 Analysing *Di Kupe*, we can observe that Pesach and traditions related to it emerge at several points of the cycle, which phenomenon creates a strong intertextual connection. Allusions to Pesach are formed primarily through motifs. For instance, the poem of page 3 shows that the two borders of the imaginative space of the poem are the Nile and the Dniepr. References to the ten plagues and the motif of passing over the threshold recall the crucial episodes of the Exodus story:¶

¶17 Page 3:

O, ir mayne blinde tates!
Vifl znus hot mikh getrogn?
Vifl trakhtn ongezoyste?..
— Vos zhse shrek ikh zikh a trit ton,
ikh in mit fun velt-tseris!..
Hey, tseshpreyt zikh velt-zeytn!
Funem Nil biz Dnyep di rod itst, —
du, mit oysgeshpizte oygn,
hepe, kupe, vildn fiber
iber griber, iber shvel...

Although it is the mythical time and not the historical fact which repeats itself in the process of remembering, Markish nevertheless identifies Egypt with Gorodishch even in a geographical sense, when the Nile and the Dniepr together become the frontiers of the physical world within and without the work:

Page 3:

Hey, tseshpreyt zikh velt-zeytn!
Funem Nil biz Dnyep di rod itst, —
du, mit oysgeshpizte oygn,
hepe, kupe, vildn fiber
iber griber, iber shvel

The angel of death passed over the signed houses in Egypt, saving by this means the Israelites. The *Kupe* jumps over graves and thresholds, that is, over killed people and over the realm of death, instead of saving the Jews. Similarly to the traditional interpretations of the *malakh hamoves*, the *Kupe* is either an angel of God or God himself. Thus, the *Kupe* becomes a divinity in a strongly blasphemous way, but at least it aims at the heaven such as a *golem*:

Page 7:

*Kupe kletert oyslekn dem himl, vi a teler khmaredike dralis,
un oyssmokn fun velt dem opgeshkrabetn dem foyln beyn, —
ot yushet fun ir royter meshugas oyf veytn un afyamen...*

It is interesting to note that many of the ten plagues appear as motifs in *Di Kupe* — and what is more, usually as part of the description of the *Kupe*. Such are the frogs (*se krikhn oyf mikh fresh* on page 2 and page 29), louses (page 2: *zey loyzn zikh*), pestilence (*oysgeshstike oyfes*, even if this could also refer to human massacre). The revolving stick of the traveller on page 5 can also be read as a metaphor of the stick of Aaron that was turned into a snake during one of the first encounters of Moses and Aaron with Pharaoh (Exodus 7:10).

¶18 The presence of these minor motifs already confirms the viability of our analysis focusing on the connection of the poem to the Exodus story and its context. Yet, unveiling the semiotic network of the poem, we shall understand that deeper connotations are also present beyond the direct, lexical relations already mentioned.¶

Later, we shall turn to the detailed analysis of further Pesach motifs that have greater significance than the few examples mentioned above. But first, we tackle the general meaning of Pesach, as an additional layer of liturgical and Biblical intertextuality.

¶19 The connection to Pesach reminds us of the known Midrash featuring in the Pesach Haggadah that teaches the direct and active role played by God in the Exodus. Thereby the *Kupe* supposedly becomes an event related to the redemption, in which God also plays a direct and active role. In other words, the event shifts from the prototype of the *Khurbn* (Ninth of Av), in which God's role is only indirect, to the prototype of the *Geule*. Consequently, God's responsibility can be directly raised, as done prototypically, as already mentioned, in Psalm 44.

Among the motifs related to Pesach, mention should also be made of *Parashat Shkalim* (Exodus 30:11–16), read in the synagogues on the first of the four special Shabbatot preceding Pesach. This Biblical portion describes the way the Israelites had to be counted. Each paid half a shekel, hence the sum collected corresponded to half of the number having contributed, and this amount was then used to repair the Temple before the holidays. Page 16 of *Di Kupe* makes direct reference to this Biblical passage. As the sum thus collected before Pesach was primarily used on the High Holidays (Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur), we obtain another semiotic connection between Pesach and these other holidays playing a central role in *Di Kupe*. Consequently, the motif of *Parashat Shkalim* complements the interpretation of Glaser, which focuses on the motif of the marketplace and the market scene described on page 11 of the Warsaw edition.

¶20 To sum up, the prototype of the *Geule* is present at the side of the archetypes of the *Khurbn*. We shall shortly elaborate on the relationship between these two elements. A peculiar (re-)interpretation will be uncovered that links Pesach to the holidays more overtly present in the poem, namely, the Ninth of Av, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. By the end of the article we shall see that Markish not only reworks the tradition, but he also quits its frameworks by employing the Christian myths of sacrifice.

Di Kupe and the Jewish tradition: Pesach, Ninth of Av, Yom Kippur¹

Textual connections: references to the High Holidays liturgy

- ¶21 As the cycle contains numerous direct liturgical quotations, the significance of the Jewish holidays and the historical events behind them as archetypes is obvious from the point of view of the interpretation. Following the Jewish religious and literary tradition, Markish's work also builds upon the basic archetypes and "arche-texts" (*Urtext*) anchored in the Jewish collective memory: the vision of the bones in Ezechiel 37, Lamentations and Kinot. These texts all figure as organic part of the synagogue liturgy, and therefore contribute to the intertextual ground of the poem. Seth Wolitz having developed the parallels in detail between Markish's work and the liturgy of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and the Ninth of Av, we now focus on a few additional points.
- ¶22 In what follows we shall differentiate between three levels of intertextuality. One type of links to sacral "arche-texts" is the case when Markish directly quotes the words of some prayers. Another type is when Markish only employs motifs from or refers to Biblical and liturgical texts, whereas the third level of intertextuality can be built by a chain of free associations motivated by the text.
- ¶23 Examples for the first type include *Hineni ha'ani* (page 4), *El melekh neemon* (page 12), and the *Kedusha* (Trisagion, page 12). All these prayers are recited by the *shliakh tsibbur* before or during his repetition of the High Holidays Mussaf. The *shliakh tsibbur* is a spokesman on behalf of the entire congregation. Thus the lyrical ego of *Di Kupe* also becomes a spokesman, a mouthpiece of the community, which corresponds to the three-way-communication scheme that engaged the writer, the people and the God of Israel, described by Roskies (1989:4). Nonetheless, the community, the lyrical ego is *shliakh tsibbur* of, is nothing but a heap of dead bodies.
- ¶24 Hence, the *shliakh tsibbur* of this special congregation does not praise God, but recites a "prayer" calling him to account for his deeds and blaspheming his name – the exact opposite of the sanctification of God's name in the usual *Keddusha*. On page 12, in the poem beginning with *Di aplen – mist...*², the *Trisagion* is not recited towards God. Its context is a mutilated woman body, and even if she is not necessarily the addressee of the *Kedusha*, the context renders the text certainly blasphemous. Note that the Biblical word *k'desha* denotes a female temple-prostitute (e.g., Deut. 23:18). This coincidence of meanings reminds us of the poem on page 9 where a *bey's zune* ('house of prostitution') appears in the context of three divinities. We shall return to this poem soon.
- ¶25 As an example of the case when the text only refers to liturgy without actually quoting the prayer, let us turn to the mentioning of the *Kaddish*. In the introduction the poem calls to recite a *Kaddish*, and the very last line of the last poem provides an answer: "tsu gots nomen – Omen!". The

Di aplen – mist
fun oysgetogte lender,
fun opgekrokhene farnakhtn, –
oysgeplikhete-zate,
leyg ikh zikh – a late
tsu oysgerinene tsu foyle brist,
tsu an onfensterdikn got-hoyz,
– kodoysch, kodoysch, kodoysch!

question is automatically raised whether the whole cycle can be seen as a Kaddish.

- ¶26 As already mentioned by Wolitz (1987:58), the role of the *Kaddish* when recited by a mourner is to help accept God's justice. Kaddish was originally not a prayer for the dead, rather a prayer to sanctify the Name of God. Both its name (the root *k.d.sh.* meaning 'holy') and its content refers exclusively to the holiness of God, without any connection to death. Its recital was proposed to the mourner in Talmudic times, probably both because its text helps accepting death as a divine decision and God's power over life and death, as well as the fact that its recital requires a quorum forces the mourner to reintegrate into the community. Markish's "kaddish" is recited within the "quorum" of dead people, and, more importantly, it does not sanctify but blasphemes the name of God.
- ¶27 In the present context, "kaddish" can also remind us of the second meaning of the expression "sanctification of the divine name" (*kiddush ha-shem*), which is martyrdom. According to the traditional view, martyrdom is one of the highest mitzvot, but Markish seems to imply that the slaughter of Jewish people in a pogrom or in the war is absolutely meaningless.
- ¶28 This last remark already belongs to the third level of intertextuality, namely, to free associations to traditional texts or concepts. Another such association can be obtained if we turn to another way martyrdom appears in the High Holiday musaf prayers. Namely, a famous insertion in the repetition of the Yom Kippur musaf is the touching poem describing the martyrdom of Rabbi Akiva and his nine colleagues in the second century CE. In short, Markish's poem can be argued to be a twentieth century, modernist version of the same poem, referring this time to the martyrs of the Gorodishche pogrom.

Semiotic connections between Pesach, the Ninth of Av and Yom Kippur

- ¶29 The three holidays mentioned above are interconnected by the *linear* flow of events in Jewish history. On the face, they belong to three very different prototypes from the point of view of the traditional understanding of history. Yom Kippur is certainly the single day of the year whose connotations are most out of space, time and history. Pesach represents the two end points of history: the *geule* of Egypt and the messianic *gueule*. The Ninth of Av, however, being the archetype of destruction (*Khurbn*), marks a real historical event.
- ¶30 Jewish tradition, however, has an additional point to make. The Exodus story begins with the leaving of Egypt, commemorated on Pesach. After the revelation on Mount Sinai (associated post-biblically with the holiday of Shavuot), Moses spends forty days on the top of the mount. It is on the 17th of Tamuz that he descends the mount; seeing the golden calf, he broke the first set of the Ten Commandments. Note that the fast of the 17th of Tamuz is closely related to the fast of the Ninth of Av. He returns to the mount for another forty days, to obtain God's forgiveness by Rosh Chodesh Elul (the month of repentance). The end of the third forty-day-

long period, when he finally returns to the sons of Israel with the second set of the Ten Commandments, is said by the tradition to fall on the tenth of Tishrei, that is, on Yom Kippur. The next year, the traditional chronology says, it was on the Ninth of Av that the Israelites were condemned to the forty-year-long wandering in the wilderness, following the story of the spies. To sum up, the events in the earliest history of the Jewish people provides a connection between these seemingly unrelated holidays.

- ¶31 The classic source for the archetypical way of viewing history, and at the same time for this connection of the 17th of Tamuz and the Ninth of Av to the events of the wandering, is the following Mishna:

“

Five things happened to our forefathers on the 17th of Tamuz, and five on the 9th of Av. On the 17th of Tamuz the tables of the covenant were broken, and the everyday Tamid service had to be ceased [due to the lack of ship during the siege of Jerusalem], and walls of the city [of Jerusalem] were broken [by the Romans], and Apostmos burned the Torah, and a statue of an idol was erected in the Temple. On the 9th of Av it was decreed that our forefathers would not enter the Holy Land [following the story of the spies in Numeri], and the Temple was demolished both the first and the second times, and Beitar was conquered [following the Bar Kokhba revolt], and the city [Jerusalem] was ploughed. As the [month of] Av begins, the joy is reduced. (Mishna, Taanit 4:6)

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- ¶32 Later tradition has also connected many more terrible events to the Ninth of Av, such as the expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492 or the beginning of World War I. Thus, the Ninth of Av has become the archetype of every *gezeyres* in Jewish collective memory (see also Roskies 1989:5).

Therefore it is clear that the Ninth of Av must serve as the archetype of the Gorodishche-pogrom.

- ¶33 At the same time, the real historical date of the event, as we are reminded by the text of the poem, also connects it to Yom Kippur. Actually, the cycle ends by mentioning the date 11th of Tishrei 5681, which is the day immediately following Yom Kippur, the tenth of Tishrei.

- ¶34 Finally, as we have shown, already traditional sources connect Pesach to the Ninth of Av and Yom Kippur via the dating of certain events of the Exodus to these special days. Thus, it is already the traditional view which brings together these special days of the calendar, despite their very different primary meanings. Note however that the traditional connection between them is a strictly linear, chronological, cause-and-effect relationship. What is truly unusual in Markish's way of combining elements of these holidays is their non-linear emergence in *Di Kupe*. Breaking with the traditional, linear logic and with the causal relations are modernist reflections on reality beyond literature.

- ¶35 Let us now focus on further meetings between tradition and modernity in connection with the three holidays, in order to demonstrate the way Markish reinterprets the tradition.

- ¶36 According to the interpretation being proposed, Yom Kippur can be viewed as the day of the process of writing, namely, the date on which, as already mentioned, the second set of the Ten Commandments have been received.
- ¶37 The trice forty-day-long period is relevant for the interpretation of *Di Kupe* for several reasons. The time spent on Mount Sinai is characterized by the most direct connection and the most active communication between Moses and God. A similarly intensive connection can be observed in Markish's poem between the lyrical ego and God, even if the latter communication is primarily one-directional and has a negative sign compared to the Biblical context.
- ¶38 When seeing the Golden Calf, Moses turns extremely outraged and as a consequence of his fury at his people, he breaks the tablets of the Ten Commandments. *Malke Kupe* behaves similarly, she spits the Ten Commandments back. But while Moses is angry with the people, *malke Kupe*, that is, the slaughtered masses, the people, is angry with the one they received the tablets from: with God. At Sinai, it was the people who broke the covenant they had entered with God, while Markish hints at that in 1920 it was God who turned away from his people.
- ¶39 Breaking the tablets also involves breaking the Scripture, destroying the "holy writings", exterminating the divine revelation. Moses could destroy the physical objects of the tablets, even if written by God. Yet, the writing itself, God's words cannot be destroyed, so they were rewritten. A cradle of writing, in an archetypal sense, is in heaven, between the stars, as its parallel can be found in *Di Kupe*:

“

Page 3:
S'iz mayn goyerl oyfgehangen
Af der blutiker levone,
Nor nekudes ire glantsn:

“

Page 4:
o, efn, efn oyf dayn shterndikn sher-blat,
Almekhtiker fun veltn, —
Hineni ha'ani...

”

”

- ¶40 The fate of the lyrical subject is a text, therefore, it can be written by somebody: according to *Di Kupe*, by the Almighty of the Worlds.
- ¶41 At the same time Yom Kippur's traditional message is that this is the day of atonement, but also the day of God's judgement about Life and Death. God inscribes the people into the Book of Life or into the Book of Death. So here again we find another motif of writing on Yom Kippur in Jewish folklore. As a parallel in Markish's poem to this traditional idea, what does the poet do on Yom Kippur at this special occasion? He writes a poem about the dead, but without names.

Sacrifice and redemption – parallelisms in tradition

- ¶42 When interpreting *Di Kupe*, it is not sufficient to consider the tradition as a set of separate elements. It turns out that two additional, overarching topics, relevant for the interpretation, contribute to the connections between Pesach, the Ninth of Av and Yom Kippur: these are the motif of the sacrifice and the motif of redemption.
- ¶43 Both Pesach and Yom Kippur had their very characteristic *sacrifice* in the times of the Jerusalem Temple: the Pesach lamb (Exodus 12:21–24) and the two Yom Kippur goats used for atonement (Leviticus 16). None of the other Jewish holidays had such a characteristic sacrifice beyond the typical holiday offerings listed in Numeri 28–29. Note the fact, which will surprisingly become essential for the interpretation of *Di Kupe* that the theology of the New Testament seems to have blended these two sacrifices: the crucifixion of Jesus is interpreted as a Pesach lamb ritual, but understood as an ultimate Yom Kippur atonement offering. A detail that might have contributed to this blending is that while the Yom Kippur service takes place on the tenth of Tishrei, the first Pesach sacrifice began exactly half a year earlier, on the tenth of Nisan (Exodus 12:3). We shall momentarily see that Markish seems to employ the same blending of the two offerings.
- ¶44 The second central idea of Judaism that creates a link between Pesach and Yom Kippur is the relation between *repentance* (*tshuve*) and *redemption* (*geule*). Jewish thought has that the people was exiled from the Holy Land due to their sin, so it is by practicing the mitzvot and repentance that they can bring about the coming of the Messiah. Yom Kippur is the principal day for repentance and Pesach is the key date for redemption. As already discussed, Pesach is not only the day of the first *geule*, that is, the redemption from Egypt, but also the day for the second one. The well-known image of Elijah's cup on the Seder night is just one expression of the fact that Pesach has always been the day when the immediate coming of the Messiah was most expected. The association between sins, repentance, redemption from the sins and redemption of the world by the Messiah is even more pronounced in the Christian theology regarding Easter, a fact that cannot be neglected in connection with *Di Kupe*.
- ¶45 To add the Ninth of Av to this line of thought, we are recalled the Talmudic tradition about the Messiah being born on the Ninth of Av. By having the Messiah born on the day of the destruction of the Temple in the gates of Rome (i.e., where the destructor comes from), the rabbinic mind turns the deepest point of Jewish history into the opening of a cheerful future. Note that while this twist is a recurrent motif in rabbinic tradition, Markish does not hint to the slightest hope concerning the future after the. Summarizing, we have established the connection between the Ninth of Av (the birth date of the Messiah), Pesach (the expected date of the coming of the Messiah) and Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement, a prerequisite to his coming).

¶46 A further minor detail, also alluded to in *Di Kupe*, reinforces the special connection between Pesach and Yom Kippur. The sentence *le-shana ha-baa birushalayim* ('next year in Jerusalem'), featuring exclusively on these two holidays, is another reference to the Messianic era. Its place is clear in the context of Pesach, the day when the Messiah is expected to arrive, but its surprising reappearance at the closure of the Yom Kippur Neilah service reveals – confirming our argumentation – that Yom Kippur also includes a messianic message. Therefore, Pesach is the time associated with the coming of the Messiah (the idea being reproduced in Christian theology by having Jesus crucified on that day), whereas the end of Yom Kippur is the moment of the year when a traditional Jew feels himself the closest to the Messianic times. Now, keep in mind that Markish refers exactly to this date (the day following Yom Kippur) in the poem of page 2.

The new meaning of the threshold: Pesach as the meeting point of the Jewish and Christian tradition

¶47 Viewed from the aspect of the Jewish history, the first *geule*, that is, the redemption from Egypt, does not end with leaving the land of slavery. It also includes the wandering in the desert highlighted by a number of subsequent miracles, and lasts at least until Moses brought down the second sets of tablets on the day that would become Yom Kippur. Both Pesach and Yom Kippur are present in *Di Kupe*, not only on the level of motifs but also on the level of related connotations and reinterpretations, and therefore *Di Kupe* relates to the millennia-old Jewish view of history – even if employing an unusual approach.

¶48 In relation to the motifs of the Messiah and redemption, we could already see that all these cannot be separated from the Christian context of the same motifs. Most scholars analysing *Di Kupe*, not surprisingly, deal with the Jewish aspects of the poem. Glaser already refers to the presence of the Christian context, yet she does not enter into the uncovering of further intertextual connections and their deeper study (Glaser 2004:16). Roskies also points to Christian motifs, as elements to be interpreted rhetorically (Roskies 1984:99), without developing further connections. In what follows, we aim at presenting an overview of Christian allusions, in order to complement the long list of Jewish allusions already outlined here by us or earlier by others.

“Alla, Kristos, Shadai”

¶49 The fact that Jewish tradition has to be considered in a broader context is best and most explicitly exhibited by the mentioning of one of God's names according to the Jewish tradition in the context of two names borrowed from other religions. One can understand this list of different divine names as a symbol of the faith of the lyrical subjects in God. Yet, in the modern, quarrelling, blasphemous context of *Di Kupe* there is not need to discuss the relation of Markish to religions and God.

¶50 The divine names used by the three of the five world religions – the ones being most present in European culture, that is, the monotheistic ones – appear three times in the poem. Their first co-occurrence begins with Allah (page 9). The lyrical ego calls the gods and the pilgrims not to the usual “house of God”, but to the “house of prostitution” (*beys zune*). Heavenly and earthly kings – Allah and aged, senile sultans – all become either witnesses or even active participants of prostitution. The image is actually a blasphemous version of its not less expressive Biblical prototype in Jeremiah 5:7.

“

Page 9:
 Alla! Kristos! Shadai! Ver nokh? Aher, farbaygeyer, farfirte piligrimen!
 Aher, farblondzshete, s'iz a beys-zune!...
 Fun gor der velt, fun erdn un fun himlen,
 far malke iber ale berg vel ikh dikh, kupe, kroynen!...
 [...]
 – Geyt, valgert zikh a gantse nakht oyf oysgeshmirte tome beykher
 loyft oyspompen fun zikh di letste tropn shimldike zere,
 un hulyet op, vi alte oyver-botldike sultans raykhe...

”

¶51 The next two invocations reverse the order of the addressees, uniformly to the Tetragrammaton followed by the name of Christ and finally by Allah. First, the lyrical subject calls these divinities to plunder the Tabernacle and to join in a Dionysian carnival, to drink and become drunken, inviting them to a *lechayim*:

“

Page 16:
 Un vel ikh farbaygeyer ongeyn antkegn:
 – Kumt! Nat aykh, tseefnt dem mishkans farmegn,
 tseboytet dem omet, trinkt on zikh mit veytok,
 – L'khayim! Adonay, Kristos un Alla!

”

¶52 Some poems later, they drink again literarily for life. Here the blasphemy already present in the previous poem is intensified even further, since it is related to the blood of the animal being offered as a sacrifice:

“

Page 18:
 A drey zikh... a tselem... a brokhe... a moytse...
 Un khik in dem helzl in shney-vaysn mitn,
 un nat aykh a hitl
 mit vareme blutn,
 tsetaylt zikh oyf [af] drayen – un yedn baglaykh!
 – L'khayim! Adonay, Kristos un Alla!...

”

¶53 Back to page 16, the narrator invites those passing by to eat and drink, and then ask them to wish an *aliye*. The *aliye* being wished most probably refers to the sentence *Le-shana ha-baa birushalayim* (‘next year in Jerusalem’). This wishful expression is recited both at the end of the Yom Kippur *Neila* service, hence, just before eating, and at the end of the seder night, after having finished the dinner. The formulation of the poem is ambiguous: The fact that the cycle is dated to *motsaei Yom Kippur* (the night and the day after the Day of Atonement), seems to imply that the invitation in this poem refers to a feast breaking the 25-hour-long fast. Yet, the fact that the *aliye* is wished only after the banquet points rather to a seder night. The use of this motif thus corroborates our argument that Pesach and Yom Kippur are semantically intertwined in *Di Kupe*.

Page 16:

Un vel ikh farbaygeyer rufn fun vegn:
 – Arayngeyt, arayngeyt, do iz a farfor-hoyz,
 a heyliker eynfor, do got aleyh shteyt eyh,
 arayngeyt, ir, shnorers,
 mit meylar gedrolene, blove un toyte, –
 a moltsayt far tsvantsik yor-hunderts fargreyt iz,
 o, onkumt, arayngeyt
 un frest zikh, un trinkt zikh, un vuntsht an aliye,
 – L'khayim! zey zoln zikh dort far undz mien!...

”

- ¶54 The poems just quoted can be connected to each other in two different ways.
- ¶55 First, the Tabernacle which is full of goods and is plundered recalls a few biblical stories about feasts with plundered goods from the Temple, for example the feast of Belsacar. Because the Temple was full with money and goods, it reminds us the tradition of *parashat shkalim* already mentioned earlier. The feast of Balcasar as a symbol can stand for a decadent world living on stolen goods.
- ¶56 Second: the blood in the cup is said by the poem to be the blood of a “little goat” (*a tsigle* – page 18). The goat brings us back to Pesach, namely to both the Pesach sacrifice – even if in *Di Kupe* there is a goat instead of a lamb – and to the famous song at the end of the Haggadah, the *Khad Gadya*. We shall return to the latter in the next section. In any case, the blood in the cup is the sacrificial blood of the lamb, which is an extremely surprising image in a Jewish context, even if the blood would be drunk by divinities. Yet, the image makes much more sense if we transfer it to the Christian tradition. Namely, the wine transformed into the blood of the Pesach sacrifice – the lamb that Jesus is metaphorically called – is drunk from a cup during the Holy Communion. Yet, it is only in the Christian tradition that the Pesach sacrifice of “God’s little lamb” has an atoning function.
- ¶57 This passage offers further elements that induce both Jewish and Christian associations. The *brokhe* followed by the *moytse* refers to the sequence of blessings on Shabbat and on Jewish holidays, supposing that the *brokhe* covers the *kiddush* recited over wine – but certainly not over blood. As just explained, it is in a Christian context that the red kiddush wine turns into sacrificial blood. The originally white colour of the lamb, emphasized by the poem, has also multiple connotations: it not only denotes that the Pesach lamb must not have any defect, but it also recalls the purity of the atonement sacrifice, either the Jewish one on Yom Kippur, or the one of Jesus at Easter. This ambiguity between different religious traditions is further strengthened by the word *tselem* appearing just before the word *brokhe*: the former also designates the crucified body of the Christ.

The Pesach sacrifice: Jesus Christ and/as Khad Gadya

- ¶58 To obtain a most thought-provoking interpretation of the multi-layered Pesach component of the cycle, we shall return to the motif of the *Khad Gadya* and approach it as a symbol of the Pesach sacrifice.

¶59 The Khad Gadya, this children song appearing in the Pesach Haggadah, has several readings. Given its simplicity, rhythmicity, redundant repetitions typical to folktales, the song represents the children way of viewing the world. Now, both the child and the lamb is a symbol of the people in both Jewish and Christian traditions: Israel is the son of the heavenly Father, and also the flock of the shepherd God (see Psalm 23:1, or the Yom Kippur *slikhes* “*Ki anu amekho ve-ato elohenu...*” ‘We are your people and you are our God’). At the same time, the child’s aspect becomes a tool for the narration.[¶] The story of the *Khad Gadya* is recited by the child (“my father bought...”), who is an outsider to what happened to the kid. The same angle of reciting the story is taken by the narrator of *Di Kupe*. The main difference is that he does not believe in God’s power over death. In the traditional song the *Kadosh-barukh-hu* is capable of slaughtering the *malakh ha-moves*, the angel of death, whereas for *Di Kupe* the latter is the highest power in the world, that is, the violent death caused by human hatred and cruelty. Put in a different way, the gods of the three monotheistic religions jointly drinking the blood of the innocent (white) kid (*tsigele*) turn into the cruel *malakh ha-moves* without a Holy-Blessed-Be-He on top of them.

For the topic of the narrative method of the children’s eye view reflecting the dual identity of generations of assimilation see Hetényi 2008:229–257.

¶60 It is noteworthy that *Di Kupe* contains most of the participants in the chain of the *Khad Gadya*: the cat, the dog, the rod, the fire, the water, the meaningless butchery and the *Malakh ha-moves*, with the exception of the bull and the most important lack: with the exception of God.[¶]

We are thankful to Zsuzsa Hetényi for having called our attention to this reading and the interpretation of Elie Wiesel (*A Passover Haggadah*. Simon and Schuster, New York, 1993).

¶61 In order to obtain a modern, intertextual reading of *Khad Gadya*, we have to combine the Jewish and the Christian traditions, notwithstanding that the Christian tradition itself is based on an earlier Jewish tradition.

¶62 The juxtaposition of the Jewish and Christian traditions reaches its peak in the penultimate poem of the cycle, the last poem preceding the closing poem in the frame, where motifs from Jesus’ crucifixion appear in a very obvious and explicit form. Nevertheless, the Golgotha, the place of the crucifixion, and the death of the Christ is strongly related to the rest of *Di Kupe*. There is an apocalyptic, chaotic feast, a mad carnival going on in the city infected with smallpox. The bells, supposed to remain still after the crucifixion and before the resurrection, are celebrating, and even the “Babelic” Golgotha dances instead of mourning. Everything is to be sold, and everybody can be bought: God is making business even with his own servants and his own “houses”, that is, with the churches.

¶63 This is the moment when the crowned Kupe arrives, who is, according to the poem, as “Babelic” as the Golgotha: chaotic and unintelligible. Modern times are not thirsty only for money. To satisfy their thirst, they exterminate physically, they consume literarily whoever preceded them: they drink the blood dropping from his hand, similarly to the gods who had earlier clinked glasses with the blood of the sacrifice.

“

Page 28:

“Tseblutikt valgert zikh oyf [af] gasn got,
i unter glekers feyerlekhn vildn vioken,
i unter dayne tents, o, tsveyter bovlsher Golgot!...
Tsu dir, tsu dir, o, kupe mist, o, malke barg,
vet zikh inmitn mark

zayn kerper tsvyoken,
 vi tsu der erd zikh tsvyoket pokndik di shtot...
 Golgot!
 Shoy'n tsey'n kloysters op, vi tendlers nakhtishe, far got
 dos zilber;
 bay dayne trot
 fun kroynen oysgeshnayt hot zikh a blendndike hogl!
 – ikh klop arayn dem ersht tsvyok in zayne fligl
 oyf dayne hoykhe, kupe, bovlidike vent...
 Oyf ershtn tropn blut fun dayne hent
 – a dorshtiker, a tfilediker logl,
 – shoy'n untershtelt hot zikh dos moyl dos srefedike fun baginen...

”

¶64 The leg is the symbol of crossing the borders, which has at least two levels of meanings in connection to the crucifixion. First, Jesus washed the feet of the apostles himself during the last supper, conveying thereby the message that whoever has clean feet in a physical sense, is a clean person spiritually (John 13). Second, Jesus was the only person crucified whose leg was not broken by the soldiers. That is to say, while in *Di Kupe* we do not find entire people, but fragmentised bodies, Jesus, on the other hand, remained intact even in his death. Reading further the text, we encounter another image: Maria Magdalene, reported by the New Testament to be the witness of Jesus' resurrection and the messenger of this news, is begging for atonement at the feet of Jesus. She is accompanied by nineteen generations. Recognizing these generations as centuries, we obtain a reading according to which the twentieth century is the one that does not ask for and does not receive forgiveness. This is the century that lies outside the reality of the literary work, but is still present, this is the century in which human acts and divine actions melt together, and so this century is not comprehensible, but fully “Babelic” and chaotic. The millennia-long covenant between man and God is nullified, and consequently there is nobody whose pardon man could beg. God abandons his chosen people, who are butchered in mass incomprehensibly, even without providing them a reasonable funeral. In this world there is no difference between the living and the dead: “mir zenen do”, as Markish writes, that is, we, the living ones, the survivors are also part of the *Kupe*.

Mounts and heads: Babel, the Golgotha and the Kupe

- ¶65 As we have just seen, in the poem just analysed Markish employs the adjective “Babelic” both to the Kupe (a personified hill, appearing in the text) and to the Golgotha. This observation suggests some connection between the two heaps, as well as between the two heaps and the tower of Babel. First of all, note that the name “Golgotha” was derived from the Aramaic word for ‘skull’ or ‘head’, which motif links the place with the acting persons at this place in the following way.
- ¶66 The soldiers of Pontius Pilate called Jesus the king of the Jews, and so they even crowned him in an ironical manner: after having adorned him with a cloak, they placed a crown of thorn on his head. Markish crowns the Kupe to a Queen (the *malke Kupe*) with floating stars – similarly to the crown of stars surrounding Mary. So Jesus becomes not only the source or the prototype of the sacrificial lamb, but also its counterpart, its antipode.

Incidentally, this latest remark also demonstrated the significance of duality and of bipolarity (or even, of multipolarity) in Markish's cycle.

- ¶67 Yet, the *Kupe* is feminine not only in this interpretation, but also grammatically – see *Di Kupe* and *malke Kupe*. As a mythological archetype, it should therefore symbolise future and fertility. Well, fertility is indeed present in the verse, both in connection to humans (ten-tuple twins) and to the soil (sowing three times, harvesting nine times; honey and milk flooding on the fields, a hundred stalks growing from a single seed). Nonetheless, as it is typical of the artistic tools employed in the cycle in general, here again we find amplification and exaggeration. Aggrandized fertility becomes nonsense. Borders are pushed back more and more, until they smash, abolishing thereby the former order:

“

Page 18:
 Shteyt oyf, ir, oyf moltsayt, geter gebrakhte
 der tayvl mit „kibed” fun oyb’n vart aykh!
 – es yom-toyvn Odem’s farshikerte kinder,
 es pashen zikh ale – di shof un di rinder,
 Oyf felder – i honik, i milkh vayse rint dort,
 un kerner in zangen – far eyntsikn – hundert!...
 Un brustike leyber shoyn preglen zikh kretsik,
 un shayers fun shefe tseshparn di vent zikh,
 un shtroyene dekher fun ongeshtop platsn,
 vi froyen, vos trogn tsu tsendlingen gantse...

”

- ¶68 At the same time, the *Kupe* is “Babelic” not because it is chaotic and confused; the *Kupe* is also the antithesis of Babel. They are both towers or heaps, crying towards the sky. The Tower of Babel was built by humans to reach God, and its demolition became the symbol of human insatiability, but also of the limits of human beings set by God. So the *Kupe* is the antithesis of Babel, because instead of demonstrating the limits of human constructions, it demonstrates the limitless nature of human destruction.
- ¶69 The *Kupe*, the heap of human dead bodies described by the cycle, was built, if not directly by God, but by God’s not having obstructed to the human destructive forces. The parallel to Babel poses another question: if the destruction of the Tower of Babel is the symbol of God’s punishment for humans’ extreme ambitions, then what (divine) intentions are to be found behind the formation of the *Kupe*? Possible answers can be derived from interpreting the Markishian *Weltanschauung* transmitted by the cycle, which we shall turn to next.

The tradition not adopted: Markish and the biblical archetypes

- ¶70 Wolitz argues that Markish creates a modernist dirge, a novel type of *Kinot*. Thereby, he also hints at that Markish seems to accept the tradition of the *Kinot*. Yet, if we scrutinize the details and features of the Biblical pre-texts that were *not* adopted by Markish, we reconstruct not only his attitude to tradition but also his worldview in more general.
- ¶71 We have already established that the motif of the Pesach *geule*, which is deeply rooted in Jewish collective memory and Judaism’s approach to history, is also a starting point to the interpretation of Markish’s cycle.

- ¶72 *Di Kupe* breaks with the *three-way communication structure* referred to by Roskies. The avant-garde lyrical subject empathises with the tragedy of the pogrom, with the pointless slaughter. Yet, the traditional roles of communicating with God are blended together, and so they proliferate within a single poem or a single thought, similarly to the poetic images. The lyrical ego splits its identity in a schizophrenic way: The first person singular voice of the narrator refers sometimes to an external observer, sometimes to an internal one, or even to an active participant. Moreover, occasionally the same voice acts as the representative of the nation calling God to trial, and at another few times again the narrator takes the role of the Kupe itself.
- ¶73 Still, the communication continuously remains one-directional: God does not become a partner in the communication process, and his voice is never heard (unlike in traditional literature). Still, the silence of God does not appear as an occasional lack of speech, but as the non-existence of divine communication. The lyrical subject repeatedly addresses God, but he does not expect him to answer. The poetic exclamations, the blasphemous and arrogant questions do not aim at establishing a bi-directional communication, as they do not seek new information. By questioning facts that have been unquestionable, they directly cast doubt on the existence of God.
- ¶74 Markish – unlike Biblical and traditional Jewish approaches – does not view the catastrophe as a divine punishment following from the sins of the nation. The motif of a prophet warning the people of the danger in advance is also absent. An essential background to Markish's poem is the *Kinot* literature, but he also misses a feature typical of the most famous kinot, namely, of the *Zionides* of *Judah Halevi*: Markish does not long to Zion, either in a geographical sense (he rejects becoming a Zionist), or even in a spiritual meaning. By not only putting the destruction in the context of millennia-old Jewish traditions, but also by employing Christian motifs, and first of all, the motif of Jesus' crucifixion, Markish incontestably links up with European culture and tradition at large.
- ¶75 The slightest hint of a messianic belief cannot be found in Markish's cycle. The hope of the prophets in a positive turn after the destruction is not there, either. If God abandons his nation, if everything intact has broken, then God's word cannot be trusted, and there is no need of an intermediary prophet. The apocalyptic vision, the solar eclipse (page 25) envisages the end of the world, whereas no visionary is needed for the period following the end of the days. Once – due to God's inaction and blindness – human cruelty has wiped out fertility and constructive force both in a physical and in a spiritual sense, once living creatures become identified with the dead (*mir zenen do*, on page 29) then reconstruction also becomes meaningless. There is nobody to reconstruct, there is nothing to be reconstructed, and there is nobody for the sake of whom one would launch the reconstruction.

¶76 The belief in the coming of the Messiah, the role of the prophet, the reconstruction and the promise of the final redemption are all features pertaining to God. Leaving them out of the Markishian *Weltanschauung* contribute to the creature of a novel image of God. A punishing divinity cares about his nation: he punishes them so that they change their ways and follow a righteous path, and at the same time he also demonstrates his existence and greatness. Yet, a divinity who is unfair and not concerned about his followers should not be expected to save his nation.

¶77 Not only is the cycle of poems on a crossroad, so is also Markish. He stands on a borderline, on a threshold, both in a historical-temporal sense and in an intellectual one. Reality beyond literature is in ferment and wars ruin values. As a reaction to this situation, the poet unconsciously seeks his radically novel directions between tradition and modernity, and under the attracting forces of both Jewish and Christian/European histories of ideas:

“

Page 3:
— Vos zhse shrek ikh zikh a trit ton,
ikh in mit fun velt-tseris!...

”

¶78 At the beginning of the cycle, we still get the impression that the poet is afraid of stepping over the threshold that separates the pieces of the world being fallen apart. The interpretation of the last poem in the cycle has, however, demonstrated that although he does not create new, full-fledged myths according to the symbolist line, he is still able to connect traditions, values and motif systems that used to exist separately. He manages to do so in the midst of a world falling into pieces by following a guiding principle under the hallmark of modernity, relying on his aesthetic courage and daring. Consequently, being connected to several cultures does not bring about in the case of Markish a rupture and becoming rootless, but a multiplied identity, which provides the author with new opportunities of self-definition and self-interpretation.

Conclusions

¶79 Markish's cycle *Di Kupe* stands on the crossroad of tradition and modernity. It is modern poetry, but which cannot be understood without a profound understanding of Jewish tradition, liturgy and history. So is a familiarity with modernity also essential to uncover the layers of interpretation of the cycle.

¶80 Even though the cycle is strongly expressionist, its expressionism can be observed mainly in the use of poetic-artistic tools, in the imagery, in the rhythm and fragmented nature of the way the text is organized, and the proliferation of the use of poetic tools. The organizing principles of the cycle are the symbols coded multiply and not fully decipherable. Expressionism cannot be interpreted without an understanding of Symbolism and without the strong connections between the two movements, but the key of the explanation is also probably the same experience in both groups concerning the world being (un)knowable (Hetényi 2013). One of the central ideas of symbolism is that the world, similarly to the human process of thinking, is composed of a system of

unclosed symbols with multiple layers and multiple meanings, which cannot be fully deciphered. Under the influence of Wagner, Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, the symbolists viewed the task of art in an all-encompassing *Gesamtkunstwerk* or in Russian: *sobornoe iskusstvo* and in the creation of collective myths. In contrast, Markish, whose worldview in *Di Kupe* also demonstrates post-Nietzscheian influences (such as *Got is tot*), is unable to create a new universal myth or new values filled with novel contents, when he is confronted with the chaos, the rupture of the world, the dissolution of former borders. We can discover his modernity first of all in the way he develops parallels employing expressive tools, placing them in the context of the Jewish and Christian traditions, and thereby creating a new system of symbols with novel layers of meanings.

- ¶81 The date given at the end of the poem is 11 Tishrei 5681. The year 5681 is given, as usual, employing the numerical values of the Hebrew letters. Thus, the year can also be read in Hebrew as *tirpa*, meaning ‘you will cure/heal’. It remains a mystery if Markish ever realised this coincidence, and if he did, how he understood this very final word in the poem. One is namely inclined to interpret it as an extremely hidden messianic hope in God, the ultimate physician in Jewish tradition, curing all injuries caused by the bloody twentieth century. Even if this interpretation were right, the analysis of the entire poem remains unchanged, for this single spark of traditional messianic hope in a time of distress stays extremely deep in Markish’s unconscious.

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