



***Badkhones in Life and Cinema: A Reading of the Marshalik in the 1937 Dybbuk Film***

by Joel Rosenberg

**A Festschrift in honor of David Roskies**

*In geveb: A Journal of Yiddish Studies* (June 2020)

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# **BADKHONES IN LIFE AND CINEMA: A READING OF THE MARSHALIK IN THE 1937 DYBBUK FILM**

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**Abstract:** *This essay explores the “Jewish way of saying things” in the 1937 Yiddish film version of S. An-ski’s The Dybbuk, by examining the marshalik (emcee), badkhn (jokester), or wedding bard, featured prominently in the story. Comparison with a 1971 badkhn performance in Israel by Yosef Gruenwald, an ordinary practitioner of the art, emphasizes the badkhn’s paradoxical role as hired help—a professional outsider who nonetheless occupies a central role in articulating mythic and archetypal dimensions of nuptial union. In the film, the Marshalik is played by the same actor who played ill-fated Nisn, whose dear friend Sender had vowed with him to pledge their unborn children in marriage. Nisn dies and the vow goes unfulfilled, but their children meet and fall in love, and are eventually separated by death and reunited by dybbuk possession. The film is a complex, layered structure uniting, via mashal (proverb) and story, the nineteenth century shtetl, An-ski’s Great War-era play, interwar Poland, and the literature of catastrophe.*

## **1.**

More than five decades ago, I was a house guest of my cherished friend David Roskies (“Dovid”) in Montreal. We conversed much about literature, and Yiddish poetry in particular. I recorded in my journal the following—my own words, not Dovid’s, but influenced by him:

Yiddish poetry—a change from Whitmanesque cataloguing; a tightness, selectiveness, distillation, but not in the effete way of academic poets; a *folk proverb mentality*, shaped by the Talmud, the commentaries, the oral tradition; a midpoint between seeing everything as significant and seeing everything as shaped by the poet’s mind, between discovery and willed creation—shaping things so their inner contour reveals itself, writing not so that centuries from now someone will open a book to read, but so that centuries from now one’s parables and metaphors will be on the lips of housewives in the marketplace.

Accompanying this was an example of a folk proverb mind: “Like a holiday chicken that feels at home in the yard.” (*Vi a yontefdik hindl vos dreyt zikh [a frayer] arum in hoyf.*)

Compressed into that witticism was a sardonic reminder of ever-present danger; of comparability between animals and humans; a disenchantment expressing an inveterately skeptical world view. I’ve often thought about that characterization of the moods and idioms of Jewish writing and felt challenged by it. In my own writing, I’m not sure I’ve fulfilled Dovid’s standard. But let me place folk practices in view at the outset of writing about a particular kind of Jewish poet, the *badkhn* (jokester), *marshalik* (emcee), or wedding bard, featured in the magnificent 1937 Yiddish movie of S. An-ski’s Great-War-era play *The Dybbuk* (ca. 1916), and through it, to think further about the mission of the Jewish writer.

If we ask, as does this volume, what is “a Jewish way of saying,” two vital criteria at first come to mind: utterances (1) addressing the historical experience of the Jewish people; and (2) reading it through scriptural, rabbinic, kabbalistic, or Hasidic paradigms. These grew from the impulse to seek biblical prototypes for postbiblical history and Torah’s laws, and from the *aggadic* and speculative traditions growing from it. But then, brewing up from below, the oral dimension from many sectors, a pointedly self-contradictory dimension, is (3) folk wisdom: proverb, parable, and story—effortlessly seizing, when needed, Bible and midrash, prancing nimbly, oft in rhyme and parallel, in apostrophic address and epigrammatic concision, much studied by formalists, but still eluding formal analysis.<sup>1</sup> Often speaking directly neither for nor about Jewry but *from* that home base fully human—addressing all, and universal in sweep—a secular, skeptical humanism embraced by some of our greatest modern Yiddish writers. In two recent, sublimely groundbreaking essays, Roskies indelibly reminds us that the sounds of Yiddish are immeasurably variegated—each utterance an index of individual and collective experience, history, region, surrounding tongues, relative (ir)religiosity, ideology, gender, social class, social function, bookishness, literary succession, and, above all, potentially infinite interiority and dialogue.<sup>2</sup> Pivotal here is the juncture between folk practice and literary/artistic expression, preaching and narration—which, for the *Dybbuk* film, hinges on the linkage between *mashal* and story.

## 2.

Consider *badkhónes* (Heb. *badhanút*), the variously enacted craft of the wedding bard. Jean Baumgarten has provided a thoughtful study of such art in its ordinary dimensions in examining a bardic performance in 1971 by professional *marshalik* Yosef Gruenwald, at a Hasidic wedding in Rehovot, Israel.<sup>3</sup> In Baumgarten’s assessment, Gruenwald was a run-of-the-mill practitioner, neither especially gifted nor renowned—basically, “semi-lettered,” midway between *amorets* (unlettered Jew) and *talmid hokhem* (traditionally learned Jew).<sup>4</sup> His discourse is interesting initially for its complex overlay of Yiddish dialects, stemming both from Gruenwald’s Hungarian origins and from various forms of Southeastern Yiddish, absorbed both in Eastern Europe and among Hasidic communities in Israel.<sup>5</sup> The “learned” component is that of *loshn koydesh* (sacred tongue), the Hebrew-Aramaic amalgam of premodern textual culture. Baumgarten generalizes on the significance of Gruenwald’s performance as a way of “understanding the hierarchy of social groups, the cultural taxonomy and place of the *badkhn* at the heart of Hasidic society.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On both strengths and limitations of formal analysis, see Beatrice Silverman-Weinreich, “Towards a Structural Analysis of Yiddish Proverbs,” *Yivo Annual of Jewish Social Science* 17 (1978), 1-20.

<sup>2</sup> David G. Roskies, “Call It Jewspeak: On the Evolution of Speech in Modern Yiddish Writing,” *Poetics Today* 35 (2014), 225-301; idem, “The Small Talk of I. L. Peretz,” *In geveb: A Journal of Yiddish Studies*, May 23, 2016, <http://ingeveb.org/articles/the-small-talk-of-i-l-peretz>, accessed 05.25.2016.

<sup>3</sup> Jean Baumgarten, “Les traditions orales des *bathonim* en langue yiddish,” in *Linguistique des langues juives et linguistique générale*, ed. Jean Baumgarten and Frank Alvarez-Péreyre (Paris: CNRS, 2003), pp. 349–384. Baumgarten’s transliteration reproduces Gruenwald’s dialect. My hashtags (#) indicate quatrains/stanzas.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 374.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 374-377, esp. 376-377.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 374.

Gruenwald's performance, if boilerplate *badkhones*, opens the way, says Baumgarten, to both literary and mystical dimensions of Jewish tradition, the nuptial couple here symbolizing reunion of the exiled (female) Divine Presence (Shekhinah) with the transcendent (male) divinity (Tiferet). In places, Baumgarten omits certain direct lineages of premodern Jewish culture — e. g., reading as biblical allusions (which they also are) what are in fact direct quotation from Jewish liturgy and sixteenth-century kabbalism,<sup>7</sup> and, more generally, presenting what were, in truth,<sup>8</sup> commonplaces of premodern kabbalism long ingrained in folk consciousness. Nonetheless, he usefully applies Max Weinreich's coinage: *ayngeshmoltsn loshn koydesh* (merged sacred tongue)<sup>9</sup>

An overview of Gruenwald's performance reveals familiar but notable markers of the wedding bard's art (chanted in multiple traditional melodies), embracing both spatial and temporal dimensions of the Hasidic universe. I can't do justice to the whole (nor, alas, the music), but among them are: *in a gite shu, in a mazldike [shu]* (in a good hour, a celestially favored [hour]—the lack of gender agreement typical of Haredi Yiddish). He welcomes kinfolk and in-laws (*mekhitunem*), especially learned (male) spiritual leaders among them (with the acronym honorific *shlita*, “May he live for [many] good days, amen”)—arriving both from nearby Bnei Brak, Ramat Gan, and Ashdod, and from such remote diaspora backwaters as Pittsburgh and Mexico. He mentions deceased elders dancing today among the living; many descendants; and new pathways in learning. He uses abundant synonyms for joy, rejoicing, and blessing (*simkhe, susn, hatslukhe, brukhe, groyse frayd*, etc.) He establishes several temporal coordinates: the wedding week, from prenuptial Sabbath *ufruf* (bridegroom's synagogue Torah blessing) through the *Sheva Brukhes* (Seven Blessings) of the ceremony and week to follow; the *mitsve-tants* (mitzvah dance) ending wedding-day festivities; the wish for longevity *biz hunert un tsantsig [sic]* (to 120!); Hasidic history back to the Baal Shem Tov; and, above all, mythical time, from *Ganayden* (Garden of Eden), via Elijah, *ad biyes ben Duvid* (till arrival of David's [Messianic] son). In Baumgarten's estimation, the *badkhn's* role is synthesizing and community-enhancing. His tropes are commonplace yet cosmically embracing. And yet, another dimension perhaps lurks therein.

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<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., *ibid*, 366 (#56), correctly identifying Isa. 49:19 and 62:5[a] but overlooking direct quotation from Sabbath hymn “Lekha Dodi,” which includes textually absent but metonymically “present” 62:5[b].

<sup>8</sup> See ethnographic researches (1912-14) of Sh. An-ski, *Gezamlte shriftn*=GS (Vilna-Warsaw-New York: “An-ski” Publishing Co., 1920-25), v.15: *Folklor un etnografiye*; *idem*, “Tvishn tsey veltn (Der dibek).” In *idem*, GS 2: *Dramen* (Vilna, et al., 1920-25), 1-105; *idem*, *The Dybbuk and Other Writings*, ed./Intro. David G. Roskies, trans. Golda Werman (New York: Schocken, 1991). Also, Abraham Rechtman, *Yidishe etnografiye un folklor: Zikhroynes vegn der ekspeditsiye ongefirt fun Sh. An-ski* (Buenos Aires: YIVO, 1958). Cf. Joel Rosenberg, “The Soul of Catastrophe: On the 1937 Film of S. An-ski's *The Dybbuk*,” *Jewish Social Studies* 17, no. 22 (Winter 2011), 1-27, esp. 1-12; 17-20; 26, nn. 19, 28; and 27, nn. 32-34.

<sup>9</sup> Baumgarten “Traditions orales,” 374 and *ibid*, n. 27. Cf. *idem*, “Le multilinguisme dans la société hassidique,” <https://bcrfj.revues.org/2912?lang=en> (accessed 06.07.16) 16, citing Max Weinreich, *Geshikhte fun der yidisher shprakh* (New York: YIVO, 1973), n.p. Cf. Max Weinreich, *History of the Yiddish Language*, ed. Paul Glasser, trans. Shlomo Noble, Joshua Fishman (2 vols., YIVO / New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2008), 1:29-39, 68-7, and Index, s. v. MERGED HEBREW.

Let me single out from Gruenwald's performance two non-consecutive quatrains—interesting for being among the *badkhn's* few self-referential moments, here introducing the bridegroom's dance (translation mine):

*Deriber veln mir nisht makhn kayn lange hakhunes*  
*Vayl der iker iz der riked in nisht di badkhunes*  
*In mir nemen zikh take shoyrn der tsi*  
*Ve-akaveh sheloy ekushayl bi-leshoyni (#62)*

For this we shall need no lengthy preparation,  
for the main thing is dancing, not *badkhn's* narration.  
So, we'll take this up now and make it our goal,  
and I hope my tongue's words won't stumble and fall.

*Vayl er iz fil mit ahaves toyre ve-yiras shomayim,*  
*er iz nisht bloyz nue doyrish nor oykh nue mekayim,*  
*in vayl er vays az khasene hot men nor eyn mul in lebn*  
*deriber ken men dem badkhn oykh fargebn (#65).*

For the bridegroom loves Torah and fears Heaven's will,  
not just nicely interprets but nicely fulfills.  
Since he knows that you marry but once while you live,  
for this may you also the *badkhn* forgive.

In Hebraically and rabbinically saturated language, the *badkhn* presents himself self-effacingly, ceding all glory to a central nuptial figure, but seems, in the latter quatrain's final line, to stand out, perhaps unwillingly, like a sore thumb. The word *fargebn* bears a double meaning: wedding guests might hear "appoint," but more likely the bard means "forgive."<sup>10</sup> He wishes the bridegroom a life of piety, free of divorce, a lifelong monogamous perfection, upon which the bard (for whom weddings are many, at least as a gig, and behind which his own personal life remains hauntingly obscure) begs forgiveness for intruding. A rootless presence amid a community of purpose and contentment, the *badkhn* represents a certain instability—reflecting a wider world of (both internally and externally) multicultural modernity. A life of the hired help. He absorbs, as he travels, Yiddishland's dialects and customs. He embodies life's randomness, both Jewish and beyond. Shekhinah's wanderings are partly his own. Here, story (*his story!*)—is surreptitiously embedded in his preachment.

### 3.

Baumgarten notes the paradox of the Bard's simultaneously second-class citizenship and his indispensability "at the heart"—his task of calming and affirming, admonishing but praising, evoking both laughter and tears. I'm here indebted to Ariela Krasney's argument that by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the *badkhn* had "two faces: one of riotous, chaotic, topsy-turvy jesting, rooted in ancient [pagan] sacrificial traditions surrounding the god Dionysius and evincing a tendency towards social subversiveness; and the other of conservative, learned discourse rooted in the fixed system of halakhic

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<sup>10</sup> Uriel Weinreich, *Modern English-Yiddish/Yiddish-English Dictionary* (New York: YIVO/McGraw Hill, 1968), 480, s.v. "fargebn."

*mitzvot*.”<sup>11</sup> Krasney locates *badkhones* as far back as Talmud B. *Ta’anit* 22a and *Hullin* 95b, but ties its theoretical dimensions to traditions of the Jewish fool and Bakhtin’s study of the carnivalesque.<sup>12</sup> Space forbids exploring either her rich theoretical discussion or the extraordinary array of *badkhones* samples she quotes. But let’s view here especially two, portraying the rapacious reign of the wealthy:<sup>13</sup>

Community leaders who pretend to be pious,  
And all the town funds are in their pockets,  
Like wolves  
Who bite the lambs,  
They hear voices crying  
And do not look around.

And again:

I ask of you! I cry out [*shray gevalt*] for Jews . . .  
I beg of you! Bankers! . . .  
I beg of you! Community leaders [*gaboyim*]! . . .  
See and consider the pains of today  
And have a spark of love in your hearts.

Krasney portrays the *badkhn*’s typical delivery of such lines as moments of temporary discomfort among the assembled, who are nonetheless seduced by *bonhomie* of the occasion to merge with the *badkhn*’s humor—such that “Both audience and performer [are] liberated from...shared fears of authority and...shared social conditioning into a space of unrestrained laughter.”<sup>14</sup> The latter half of Krasney’s essay explores the *badkhn*’s effort, largely from financial need, to cast his performances in writing, a trend flourishing in the late nineteenth century and coinciding with the rise of a secular Yiddish literature.

#### 4.

We arrive here at the 1937 *Dybbuk* film. It was steeped simultaneously in the culture of *loshn koydesh* and in Yiddish secularism; in playwright An-ski’s orientation to class struggle and to his landmark ethnographic expedition of 1911-14; in *The Dybbuk*’s rapidly canonic status, during 1920-37; in Mark Arnshteyn and Alter Kacyzne’s screenplay; and in filmmaker Mihał Waszyński’s flawless visual selectivity—as important for what it omits as for what it adds. This is arguably the greatest Jewish movie of all time, encompassing both spiritual and material history, reading the former through the lens of social class—not just resembling socialist revolutionary An-ski but already present amply, via Yiddish’s boundless heteroglossia, in Roskies’ Peretz.<sup>15</sup> One

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<sup>11</sup> Ariela Krasney, “The *Badkhn*: From Wedding Stage to Writing Desk,” *Polin* 16 (2003), 7-28 (here, p. 7), based on her longer study in Hebrew, *Ha-Badkhan* (Bar Ilan: Universitat Bar Ilan, 1998).

<sup>12</sup> See M. M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), esp. 1-58.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

<sup>15</sup> Roskies, “Small Talk,” 17-20, powerfully told.

savors the paradox of director Waszyński, self-feigned Polish aristocrat (who eventually settled in Fascist Spain),<sup>16</sup> creating a film so impeccably attuned to class struggle, reflected especially in the contrast of indoor and outdoor wedding celebration, the checkerboard alternation in dances of rich and poor,<sup>17</sup> and the story's otherwise systemic invisibility (but haunting presence) of impoverishment evolving within a single generation.<sup>18</sup>

Let's look especially at the film's wedding sequence, where Marshalik/*Badkhn* plays a key role. Between *badkhones* as life and *badkhones* as cinema, we find a common framework of traditional Jewish culture at the cusp of modernity—the pivot of all traditional cultures struggling, often flailing, amid a social Darwinist world. It's not all tragedy and devastation. My *khaver* Roskies has described unforgettably how, stumbling on an abandoned library of multilingual secular literature, writer Peretz first experienced the wider world with a rush of exhilaration, being opened to human dialogue—"the passages between the dashes"—where, as Peretz later said, "Each dash seemed....a crack through which to look into a human soul."<sup>19</sup> Peretz's career, as pioneer of Yiddish fiction and shaper of Yiddish language itself, would eventually collide with hard truths of Jewish poverty and desolation.<sup>20</sup> Like An-ski soon afterward, he effectively underwent a journey that opened up such a world—already before wholesale slaughters of Jews during the first Great War.<sup>21</sup>

The *Dybbuk* film's roughly 24-minute sequence of the would-be wedding day for an unwilling Leah and a wealthy, professionally match-made (but equally unwilling) bridegroom, tells us much. A single figure dominates the wedding sequence, namely the Marshalik, whose prominence is wholly filmmaker Waszyński's innovation. Like 1970s-era *badkhn* Gruenbaum, he's but one of the hired help. But wait: where have we seen that face before? Could it be actor Gerszon Lemberger, who earlier in the story portrayed ill-fated Nisn ben Rivke, father of the impoverished Khonen? The Marshalik is wholly absent from the film's opening credits, but, especially given the downward-pointing nose, the physical resemblance is striking.<sup>22</sup> If so, it is an understated way of letting an after-image of the deceased Nisn preside over the very wedding intended (by Leah's father Sender, Nisn's once-beloved friend, whom Sender

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<sup>16</sup> Samuel Blumenfeld, *L'homme qui voulait être prince: les vies imaginaires de Michal Waszyński* (Paris: B. Grasset, 2006). Cf. Rosenberg, "Soul of Catastrophe," 15-24.

<sup>17</sup> See Zehavit Stern's trenchant discussion of the dances, "Ruhot refa'im 'al masakh ha-qolnoa': li-she'elat ha-zikkaron ba-seret *Ha-Dibbuq* (1937)," in "*Al-na' tegarshuni!*": *Iyyunim hadashim be-Ha-Dibbuq* (Tel Aviv: Assaf/Safra, 2009), 198-219, esp. 215-18. Cf. Gabriella Safran, "Dancing with Death and Salvaging Jewish Culture in [films] *Austeria* and *The Dybbuk*," *Slavic Review* 59:4 (Winter, 2000), 764-81.

<sup>18</sup> Rosenberg, "Soul of Catastrophe," 17.

<sup>19</sup> Roskies, "Small Talk," 2-5. See *The I. L. Peretz Reader*, ed. Ruth Wisse (New York: Schocken, 1990), 267-359, esp. 343-49.

<sup>20</sup> See esp. Roskies, "Small Talk," 19-20.

<sup>21</sup> On the latter, see Sh. An-ski, *Khurbn Galitsye: der yidisher khurbn fun Poyln, Galitsye, un Bukovine, fun togbukh 1914-1917* (= GS, vols. 4 and 5), trans. Joachim Neugroschel as *The Enemy at His Pleasure: A Journey Through the Jewish Pale of Settlement During World War I* (New York: Henry Holt, 2002).

<sup>22</sup> Stern, "Ruhot refa'im," 211, notes the ambiguous interaction of "phantom" Messenger and "actual" wagon-driver Noteh. Analogous ambiguity arguably applies to non-contiguous Nisn/Marshalik. As Roskies has noted in a private communication, Abraham Morewski, who played the Miropoler Rebbe, was also one of the dancing beggars.

now betrays) to obliterate Nisn's memory forever. The appointed bridegroom's name is Menashe, "He-Who-Makes-[Us]-Forget"), suggesting the willed amnesia of material greed.<sup>23</sup> The Bard's entry creates a stir among the populace, especially the poor assembled outside. The lavishly regaled indoor folk, for their part, seem to view the Bard as confirming their privilege and respectability. Here's what Marshalik/Nisn tells the poor—but, Janus-faced, also tells the rich, and indeed, it's more appropriately aimed toward them, though the outdoor setting makes it public to all, and universal in embrace. I offer here my own translation, inspired by the fine rhymed subtitle renderings by Roskies and Sylvia Fuks Fried, which I'll share more directly later on for Discourse #2:<sup>24</sup>

### **Discourse #1:**

*Ha-'adam [ho'odom] yesoydoy me'afar, ve-soyfoy le'afar [leyufor],*  
Man is born out of dust and the dust is his coffer,

*Oy, tsi vus, narishe mentsh, iz dayn mi un dayn offer?*  
Oh, for what, foolish one, is the toil that you offer?

*Vus toyg dayn loyfn, dayn shnapn, dayn yug*  
What good is your running, your search, or your chase,

*Az dayn gebeyn vet men, say-vi-say, tsum keyver trugn?*  
When your bones, even so, must be dragged to the grave?

*Es vet nisht helfn kayn tfiles, un nisht kayn geveyn,*  
No prayers can be helpful, nor any lament,

*Alts vos leybt muz af eybik fargeyn*  
For all that lives, ever away must be sent.

*Un hostu dayn freyd, vest du oykh veynen in gikhn*  
And what joy you might have, soon as woe is enripened.

*Dos lebn fun a mentsh iz vi a toytn-tants geglikhn.*  
For the life of a person is to a Death Dance enlivened.

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<sup>23</sup> A phenomenon rooted, as it were, in bourgeois subjectivity. For extreme mass consequences of such amnesia (reckoned globally), see Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 2000), 362-63. Cf. *Ibid.*, 356, 366-67.

<sup>24</sup> *The Dybbuk*, dir. M. Waszyński, Poland, 1937. Restored by National Center for Jewish Film (NCJF) with new English subtitles by David G. Roskies and Sylvia Fuks Fried. Based on Yiddish screenplay by Alter Kacyzne and Andrzej Marek (typescript courtesy of NCJF and its director, Sharon Rivo), PDF 22-23. Literal translation is my own.

The Bard's first discourse, with its wholly Hebrew first line, is rooted in Gen. 3:19, and borrows Kohelet's archetypal disenchantment from the New Year reflection, *U-Netanneh Tokef* ("Let us now acknowledge..."):

All of humanity is founded on dust,  
of dust they are made, and to dust they return,  
as long as they live, they strive for their bread,  
like vessels of clay, they can break.  
Like grass they can wither, like flowers they fade,  
like shadows they pass, like clouds they are emptied,  
like wind, their strength is exhausted.<sup>25</sup>

Discourse #1 is keenly fatalistic and unabashedly frank. And at weddings, Jews and Gentiles alike have literally practiced the *Toytntants* (Death Dance).<sup>26</sup> But in the sequence soon following for guests indoors, the Bard's wisdom is tailored more gently for the *haute bourgeoisie*. Here is the fine rendition by Roskies and Fried:<sup>27</sup>

### **Discourse #2:**

Do not tremble, child. Don't be afraid. / You are guarded by...sixty warriors  
brave / Sixty warriors with swords,/ from [ills are your guards]. / You'll be led to  
the [nuptial] canopy. / And blessed will that hour be. / Your mother, virtuous and  
wise,/walks forth from Paradise. / On her robes---gold and silver. / Now two  
angels come to greet her. / They stand on either side, / to the left and...right, / "O,  
Khanele mine, Khanele the fine,/why on your gown do gold and silver shine?" /  
And Khanele answers them, thus and so: / "My joy is great. Why should my  
gown not glow? / My only child, the crown of my head, / is on this day to the  
canopy led." / "O, Khanele mine, Khanele the fine, then why is there pain in those  
eyes of thine?" / And Khanele answers thus and so: / "And shouldn't my heart  
grieve, should it not feel woe?/Strangers to the wedding now lead the bride/while  
I in sadness must stand to the side."/ Soon to the canopy they'll lead  
her./Young and old will come to greet her. / Elijah will come and take the great  
goblet in hand/and recite a blessing for the entire land. / Amen and amen.

Discourse #2, unlike the Kohelet-style perorations of Discourse #1, bears affectionate tones of one wishing to soften the sting of fate. Perhaps only from hindsight are we now inclined to see Discourse #1 as mocking or reproving. But the poor are pros at shouldering their destiny; the wealthy, not so much. This sequence has three foci: (1) the film's first close-up of Nisn/Marshalik's face; (2) Leah, communing inwardly with her dead lover Khonen, but sitting ironically calm, with almost a smirk (while yet lacking bridal veil, and wearing soiled gown); and (3) a slow camera pan of tearful, joyously nodding and smiling faces of wealthy women, clad in elaborately embroidered, jewel-encrusted finery. The men, for their part, are ensconced—almost, it seems, hermetically sealed off—in a plain, white room, studying sacred writ and Rambam. All

<sup>25</sup> From *Kol Haneshamah: Mahzor le-Yamim Nora'im/Prayer Book for the Days of Awe*, ed. David A. Teutsch, trans. Joel Rosenberg. (Elkins Park, PA: The Reconstructionist Press, 1999), 353.

<sup>26</sup> See Safran "Dancing with Death" (above, n. 17), 769-70.

<sup>27</sup> Kacyzne and Marek (above, n. 23), 21-22. (Trans. adapted.)

seems *almost* as it should be. But the dances of rich and poor are in dialectical counterpoint, and contradictions pour forth.

Gruenwald's real-life *badkhn* performance is notable for its nearly complete absence of women. Only the bride is a major focus (#48ff.), but entirely in an eschatological dimension populated by pious males and Hasidic dynasts—contingent, of course, on her bodily purity and her hand at the end of a kerchief. When we turn to the cinematic Marshalik's Discourse #2, we find it wholly given over to women, and, cinematographically, to women's faces—in a context where *all* key women in the tale are absent or eclipsed, somewhat like the bygone, chastely homophilic friendship of the two fathers. The Bard himself is now a ghost—and, as such, an old, dear friend who's been wronged. "Khanele the fine" lives only through his words. Her joy and despair are simultaneous, a centerpiece of this festive occasion: joy that her daughter marries, but despair that her state now prevents her from *bodily* attending the festive event. More than a lament among the living for the dead, we find its reverse: grief of the dead over their estrangement from life, especially when the next generation's children are led about everywhere by strangers: into arranged marriage; into the logic of money and social class; into early death and the grave; and, in this story, a second death. The Golden Chain of memory no longer reaches far. Shekhinah still has long to travel.

The "Jewish way of saying" embodied in this movie is a complex, layered structure, chiefly comprised of: (1) An-ski's monumental ethnographic-folkloristic researches of 1911-14, which plumbed the daily wisdom, proverbs, parables, storytelling, superstitions, dream-life, inner worlds, and social and communal institutions of the shtetl—the *esn teg* (eating days for impoverished Talmud scholars); Shabbes customs; the women's *Tse'nah-U-Re'enh* book; betrothal practices and *shadkhones* (professional matchmaking); dowry negotiations; pursuits of Kabbalah and magic; death and burial; *khevreh kedisha* (burial association); *tsedakah* gleanings; the wedding day; ministrations of the *badkhn/marshalik*; and, in unexpected circumstances, procedures for exorcism. (2) The wartime context of An-ski's *Dybbuk* play: the Cossack massacres of 1914 onward (and memories of 1905 Kishinev and Chmielnicki's 1648 marauders), the general devastation of Galicia, Volhynia, Podolia, and the wider Russian Pale; the larger toll of war and catastrophe in Europe more generally. (3) The interwar context of Waszyński's film, nourished by a rich fund of reflection on catastrophe among Jewry in several languages, but chiefly in Hebrew and Yiddish—an introspective culture, searching the roots of social chaos, not just in the malevolence and violence of a foreign enemy, but also amid the fissures, class divisions, and moral amnesia that lay within.<sup>28</sup>

The boundlessly rich array of *badkhn* careers and practices, often boisterous, sometimes quietly subversive, from late-medieval Europe onward, as adduced by Ezekiel Lifschutz, highlights certain tensions useful for understanding *badkhones* in the *Dybbuk* film.<sup>29</sup> Among them, I would suggest, is a tension between preaching and storytelling—or perhaps, as described by Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, between narrative and non-narrative discourse: "There are no professional storytellers...hired for

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<sup>28</sup> On this culture more generally, see David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984) and Alan L. Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Hebrew Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

<sup>29</sup> E. Lifschutz, "Merrymakers and Jesters Among Jews" [1930], *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 7, ed. Koppel S. Pinson (New York: Yiddish Scientific Institute—YIVO, 1952), 43-83, esp. 54-83.

the sole purpose of telling stories,” and “There are no ‘public performances’ for the sake of storytelling alone.”<sup>30</sup> Storytelling, while deeply ingrained in Jewish life, was inherently distrusted, and often denounced by rabbinical authorities as encouraging irreverence and lewdness. “The sermon and *badkhn*’s spiel,” writes Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, “are among the most formal...contexts in which storytelling occurs. Formality is achieved, however, by virtue of what happens not to narration but to the non-narrative discourse in which the stories are embedded...[an] indication that speech events are defined in terms of... non-narrative discourse even when...dominated by storytelling.”<sup>31</sup>

As I, among others, have shown, non-narrative discourse was fundamental to biblical storytelling and story-cycles. Both story and cycle were typically constructed symmetrically. Layers of what we might call traditional bookkeeping (namings, etiologies, sacred sites, treaties, covenants, itineraries, etc.) form multiple parenthetical structures that inadvertently move a story forward with misleading temporality—call it story-in-spite-of-itself.<sup>32</sup> Such rhetoric of temporality lies at the heart of parable and proverb—both we call *mashal*—whose principal content is conceptual and atemporal. “Man is born out of dust, and the dust is his coffer/Oh, for what, foolish one, is the toil that you offer?” chants Marshalik/Nisn at the heart of the *Dybbuk* film’s wedding sequence, “What good is your running, your search or your chase/When your bones, even so, must be dragged to the grave?” Life itself is symmetrical—beginning and ending in the cradle of earth. Measured against the profit motive, the frenzy of greed, or moral amnesia, the ground wins out every time. Discourse #1 is primarily *mashal*. Discourse #2, more unabashedly narration.

But these discourses are inherently two-way events—as Bakhtin has described, they activate, socially and dialogically, both speaker and listener.<sup>33</sup> An *exchange* of speakers is essential, and is here latent in the *badkhn/marshalik*’s address. 1971 marshalik Gruenbaum inserts his personal voice half-apologetically, but implied in the short distance (and social gulf) between performer and listeners is a lively process of laughter, tears, and perhaps sober reflection. Marshalik/Nisn voices his art in a different context (multiple ones: nineteenth-century Poland, and both wartime and interwar Europe). And, as Bakhtin insisted, context is everything.

*The Dybbuk* is about loss, unfathomable loss—cosmic in scope yet remarkable for being so tightly compressed into the hearts of two lovers and the bygone faulty bond of their fathers, two onetime friends. Both An-ski’s play and Waszyński’s film capture the despair of the irretrievable—and as such, the whole shape of modern history. Yet the film is often misleadingly called a tragedy of “star-crossed lovers.” The lovers in fact end up together in a way no two people can typically be. Free of money, merging castes

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<sup>30</sup> Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, “The Concept and Varieties of Narrative Performance in East European Jewish Culture,” in *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking*, ed. Richard Bauman and Joel Scherzer (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 283-309; quoted, 283.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 301-02.

<sup>32</sup> Joel Rosenberg, “The Garden Story Forward and Backward: The Non-Narrative Dimension of Gen. 2-3.” *Prooftexts: Journal of Jewish Literary History* 1, no. 1 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 1-27; cf. sources cited there; idem, *King and Kin: Political Allegory in the Hebrew Bible* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 69-98.

<sup>33</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern W. McGee, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984), 60-102, esp. 65-91.

inextricably, they are indeed classless society. And in their mutual resting place, *dybbuk* (possession) becomes *dvekus* (attachment)—a meshing we can only dream about. Khonen called it “Holy of Holies.” The couple’s two fathers, Nisn and Sender, called it “Song of Songs.” For the rest of us, it only peeks through the noise wherein we dwell. But sometime, somewhere “between discovery and willed creation,” we, too, are there, in our yearnings and our dreams. And there, the lovers are triumphant.