Archive of Violence: Neighbors, Strangers, and Creatures in Itsik Kipnis's *Months and Days*

by Harriet Murav

Abstract

Itsik Kipnis's 1926 Yiddish novel, Months and Days: A Chronicle *(Khadoshim un teg: A khronik) offers one of the most important accounts of the pogroms of 1919 by focusing on the events that took place in the shtetl of Slovechno (at the time, Volhynia province). This paper argues that Kipnis's apparently naïve testimony offers important insights into the documentation and experience of violence, and in addition, opens a window in the conceptualization of violence. The key term is the Hebrew and Yiddish word hefker, which Kipnis uses to describe how he feels on the first night of the Slovechno pogrom. The word means "ownerless property" and "abandoned object." I suggest that this term has broader ramifications for the particular forms of violence characteristic of this period, and the strange transformations to which both perpetrators and victims were subject. Moreover, the term hefker shares important parallels with current theorizations of violence, especially as formulated by Agamben and further developed by Eric Santner.*

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Two thousand days passed since then—two thousand days and two thousand nights.
Days like polished brass disks shining in the sun; and nights, like sated deer stock-still for hours. Or maybe the opposite: days, like foreheads bruised and broken; and nights, like cups of oleum tipped onto animal skins, poisonous sulfuric acid that flows, burns, and brings death.
In any case, the first thousand days and nights were like that.
And before then, it was summer. Summer with blossoming days like poppies in June. I had just gotten married.[1]

Introduction

This passage opens Itsik Kipnis's[2] 1926 Yiddish novel, *Months and Days: A Chronicle* (*Khadoshim un teg: A khronik*). The novel offers one of the most

[1] Itsik Kipnis, *Khadoshim un teg: a khronik*, (Kiev: Kultur-Lige, 1926), 11. All references are to this edition, and unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own. For more on Kipnis, see Harriet Murav, *Music from a Speeding Train: Jewish Literature in Post-Revolutionary Russia*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 248–258.

[2] Itsik Kipnis was born in Slovechno, Ukraine in 1896. He worked as a leather tanner until the Leather Workers Union sent him to Kiev to study in 1920. *Months and Days* was the first work for which Kipnis received significant critical attention; he was widely known as a children's author in Yiddish and Russian translation. Kipnis returned to the theme of the pogrom in Slovechno and its consequences in later work, including *Untervegns* (On the road); after World War II, he wrote a fictionalized memoir about his native shtetl (*Mayn shtetele Slovechno)*, and short stories about Babi Yar and postwar Jewish life in Kiev. His praise of the Jewish star as an object of pride and the general anti-Jewish turn in the Soviet Union led to his arrest in 1949. His interrogators, it should be noted, also brought up the allegedly "nationalistic" qualities of *Months and Days* as another mark against him. Kipnis spent seven years in the gulag, and was rehabilitated in 1956. He died in Kiev in 1974. I base my account on Mordechai Altshuler, "Itsik Kipnis: The 'White Crow' of Soviet Yiddish Literature," *Jews in Russia and Eastern Europe* 52/53 (2004): 68–167. Another discussion of *Months and Days* can be found in Mikhail Krutikov, "Rediscovering the Shtetl as a New Reality," in *The Shtetl: New Evaluations*, ed. Steven T. Katz

important accounts of the pogroms of 1919 by focusing on the events that took place in the shtetl of Slovechno (at the time, Volhynia province); Slovechno is 162 miles northwest of Kiev. Kipnis uses a unit of time that does not appear in any calendar: "a thousand days." He proposes two scenarios to describe his experience, one of utter stillness and the other of violent injury. The aftermath of the pogrom was nightmarish, painful, and, ultimately as lethal as the acid that "brings death." The choice of poisons is not accidental. Kipnis had worked as a tanner, and sulfuric acid was used in the processing of animal hides. The substance that is an instrument of manufacture appears here as an instrument of death, and metaphor for a particular quality of time. Before the bizarre, unrecognizable time, it was summer, a familiar, pleasant season, made even pleasanter by the fact of the author's recent marriage. As the passage suggests, the novel "Chronicles" violence and desire by intertwining two incommensurable stories: the author's honeymoon, and the pogrom in Slovechno. Kipnis's mother-in-law and two of her children were killed in the pogrom, his first wife Buzi, pregnant at the time, later died of typhus, after giving birth to their daughter. Kipnis names the names of Jewish victims and non-Jewish perpetrators, lamenting the first and calling for revenge against the second. Yet, in a postscript to the novel, he comments on the "strangeness" of seeing orphaned children – victims of pogrom violence and its retribution – eating together at feeding stations. "It was a bit strange for the grown-ups to contemplate this. Indeed, even very strange."[3]

In the preface to the 1926 edition of *Months and Days* the Soviet and Jewish literary critic Isaac Nusinov called Kipnis's work a "rare testament (*eydes*) to the tragedy of 1919." The term "*eydes*" refers both to the witness and the testimony the witness provides. Kipnis's use of language, narrative structure, imagery, and his choice of a seemingly simple, conversational style for his literary testimony makes the experience of violence, and even, care in the midst of violence, strange and unrecognizable for his readers. Making a phenomenon strange, "defamiliarizing" it, to use the language of Russian formalism, is not merely an artistic technique, but additionally, an intervention in thought, a way of changing how we think about the phenomenon under question. This paper argues that Kipnis's apparently naïve testimony offers important insights into the documentation and experience of violence, and in addition, opens a window

(New York: New York University Press, 2007), 211–232. For more on Kipnis, see Harriet Murav, *Music from a Speeding Train: Jewish Literature in Post-Revolutionary Russia*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 248–258.

[3] "*Kumt oys di eltere abisl modne ontsukukn azelkhe. Shoyn afile gor modne.*" Kipnis, 8 and 150.

in the conceptualization of violence. The key term is the Hebrew and Yiddish word "*hefker*," which Kipnis uses to describe how he feels on the first night of the Slovechno pogrom. The word means "ownerless property" and "abandonment." I suggest that this term has broader ramifications for the particular forms of violence characteristic of this period, and the strange transformations to which both perpetrators and victims were subject. Moreover, the term *hefker* shares important parallels with current theorizations of violence. I begin with the historical context and the documentary impulse that characterized Kipnis's literary milieu. I then turn to the specific dynamics of the violence in Slovechno in 1919. The final sections of the paper explore the concept of *hefker* and its relation to the violence of abandonment.

The problem of context

Approximately 150,000 Jews were killed during the Russian Civil War. Some regions saw the complete decimation of their Jewish populations. Warring state and non-state armies, gangs, and individuals perpetrated violence in the aftermath of World War I and the political and social collapse that it caused, which one historian has termed "shatterzone of empires."[4] The rapid succession of five different governments in Ukraine from 1917 to 1919 created an environment where lawlessness flourished. These contextual factors are part of the explanation for the anti-Jewish violence in Ukraine. World War I is particularly important. The anti-Jewish sentiments and policies of the tsarist army that deported thousands of Jews paved the way for the brutality in the same region in the years immediately following.[5] The period 1918-1921 is but one phase of the "continuum of conflict" that began in World War I and continued through World War II.[6] The larger environment of violence as Peter Holquist puts it, "the practices of total war" conducted internally and externally by the Bolsheviks, including not only military combat, but also, the forced appropriation of material goods and summary executions conducted by different

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[4] I take this language from *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands,* eds. Omer Bartov, Eric D. Weitz, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

[5] Oleg Budnitskii, *Rossiiskie evrei mezhdu krasnymit i belymi,* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2005).

[6] Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution : Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914-1921,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

branches of the new government as it struggled to establish power.[7] The mistaken perception that Jews were necessarily Bolshevik, anti-Bolshevik sentiment, the desire for land, the availability of weapons, and the "prolonged absence of a central authority in Ukraine" were among the most important factors leading to the pogroms.[8]

Too much emphasis on context, however, might lead to the unintended consequence of making the pogroms appear inevitable, part of the landscape. Artistic literature such as Kipnis's and personal testimonies show the particular factors that led to violence in specific cases. The pogrom in Slovechno was the work of neighbors. Jan Gross and other scholars have written about neighborly, or, intimate violence, in relation to the Holocaust, but this topic has not received the same attention with regard to the pogroms of the Russian Civil War.[9] Some individuals took part in neighborly violence or did not; they felt angry, humiliated, deprived, sought revenge, or, surprising themselves and others, they offered care in the ongoing force-field of violence. The breaks in the continuum of violence are particularly important, and Kipnis's text offers several instances in which violence could have taken place, but did not, because care was offered instead. Literary work of the pogrom period expresses the complexity and contradictory emotions that contributed both to neighborly violence and its mitigation. I am particularly interested in what makes these events strange, unpredictable, and lacking in rationale to the actors who performed them and to those who study and try to make sense of the violence.

The Literature of Testimony and the Literature of Fact

The Holocaust has given rise to a vast body of theoretical literature about testimony and memory. Scholars working on the Gulag, in African-American studies, and other disciplines have raised important questions, for example,

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[7] The civil war became the training ground for the perpetrators of Stalin's Terror. Lynn Viola, "The Question of the Perpetrator in Soviet History," *Slavic Review* 72, no. 1 (2013): 1–23.

[8] Henry Abramson, *A Prayer for the Government : Ukrainians and Jews in Revolutionary Times, 1917-1920,* (Cambridge, Mass. : Distributed by Harvard University Press for the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute and Center for Jewish Studies, Harvard University, 1999), 109–139.

[9] See Jan Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Jeffrey S. Kopstein and Jason Wittenberg, *Intimate Violence: Anti-Jewish Pogroms on the Eve of the Holocaust*, (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2018).

about testimony's political force, objecting to the overly abstract discussions that have prevailed in the scholarship. The Holocaust nonetheless remains paradigmatic for academic discussions of testimony.[10] The accumulated weight of philosophical interventions on the topic of witnessing and testimony, authored by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, and Giorgio Agamben, among others has produced a witness who embodies loss and trauma, and the lack constitutive of subjectivity in the modern era, and the crisis of representation characteristic of the postwar era.[11] The best witnesses cannot speak, and thus the witness who does "must speak solely in the name of the incapacity to speak."[12]

The aesthetic and political context of the 1920s, in both Russian and Yiddish, offer an alternative to these notions of witnessing and documentation. The circumstances that prompted philosophers, historians, and literary scholars to posit a crisis of representation after World War II did not dominate the post-revolutionary milieu in Russia. Russian-language proponents of the "literature of fact," or, "factographers," who included Jews and non-Jews--argued for an activist approach to literature and for the importance of genres not previously understood as belles-lettres. Newspaper reporting, memoirs, diaries, and travelogues were no longer considered peripheral genres, but as forerunners of an entire new type of literature, oriented to the fact and immediate, ongoing reality. While prerevolutionary authors could only imagine a better world, the early Soviet state sent writers to construction sites and agricultural settlements to document and thus promote the production of the new, better, socialist world as it was being constructed. Whether the facts being reported were positive or negative, reporting them meant attentiveness to what was changing in the new revolutionary society, and thus, charting how the present showed the future.

In addition to factography, the impulse toward documentation and the production of documentary art in Kipnis's literary environment also sprang from

[10] For a study of Gulag testimony, see Leona Toker, "Toward a Poetics of Documentary Prose--From the Perspective of Gulag Testimonies," *Poetics Today* 18/2 (Summer 1997): 187–222. A discussion of the attempts of 19th and 20th century Russian literary authors to serve as witnesses in their own trials, and to provide literary testimony in the court cases of their time, see Harriet Murav, *Russia's Legal Fictions,* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998).

[11] I am relying on the overview and argument of Michal Givoni, "Witnessing/Testimony," *Mafte'akh*, 2 (Winter 2011): 147–169.

[12] For Agamben, the best witness is the Muselman of the death camp, reduced to "bare life," the condition of mere biological existence that makes political life possible. Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz* cited by Givoni, 157.

another source. From the late nineteenth century on, Russian-Jewish intellectuals called for the writing of Jewish ethnography and history in the face of imminent change. Shimon An-sky's ethnographic expeditions in the Pale of Settlement before World War I and his subsequent accounts of the deportation and devastation of Jewish communities during the war are prominent examples.[13] The documentation of Jewish communal catastrophe was a key feature of the new secular historiographical self-consciousness of the late 19th and early 20th century.[14] Artistic literature also played an important role in documentation. Commissioned by Shimon Dubnov and others to document the 1903 Kishinev pogrom, the Hebrew poet Khayim Nakhman Bialik instead wrote a stunning poem of lament and accusation—against Jewish passivity in the face of violence.[15] Jewish literary writers responding to the violence of the Russian Civil War were also responding to Bialik's *In the City of Slaughter*. Kipnis, for example, speaks of his terrible feeling of shame and disgrace (*kharpe*), which also plays a prominent role in Bialik's poem, even though Kipnis, unlike the Jews whom Bialik accuses, articulates his fervent desire for revenge, and narrates how it was satisfied.[16]

In the midst and aftermath of the pogroms half a dozen Jewish organizations launched a massive relief effort, in so doing, creating a vast archival record, including first person accounts, reports, statistics, financial records,

[13] For discussions of An-sky, see Gabriella Safran, *Wandering Soul: The Dybbuk's Creator, S. An-Sky*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010); Eugune M. Avrutin et al., *Photographing the Jewish Nation: Pictures from S. An-Sky's Ethnographic Expeditions*, (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2009). For a comparative discussion of An-sky, Babel, and Vasilii Grossman, see Polly Zavadivker, "Blood and Ink: Russian and Soviet Jewish Chroniclers of Catastrophe from World War I to World War II," UC Santa Cruz, https://escholarship.org/uc/item/48x3j58s.

[14] Laura Jockusch, "Chroniclers of Catastrophe: History Writing as a Jewish Response to Persecution Before and After the Holocaust," in *Holocaust Historiography in Context: Emergence, Challenges, Polemics, and Achievements*, eds. David Bankier, Dan Michman, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 135–166; Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record!: Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[15] For an account of the Kishinev pogrom and the worldwide response to it, see Steven J. Zipperstein, *Pogrom : Kishinev and the Tilt of History*, (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2018). For another discussion, see Nakhmen Mayzel, "Itsik Kipnis," in *Untervegns un andere dertseylungen*, (New York: IKUF, 1960), 13–14. See also David Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 84–106.

[16] Kipnis, *Khadoshim un teg: a khronik*, 137.

correspondence, and photographs.[17] The new Soviet government prosecuted some perpetrators and documented these proceedings. The Jewish aid organizations, however, were disbanded in the mid-1920s, and the Soviets withdrew the archival record from public access. A plan for a multi-volume study of the pogroms was cut short, producing only two published works.[18] The loss of documentation means that literary texts such as Kipnis's are all the more important.

The call to document events and the sense of obligation that it created was a distinct feature of the literary milieu in both the Yiddish and Russian-speaking worlds in the 1920s. The literature of fact and the Jewish documentary impulse converged in the production of Kipnis's novel-chronicle. Kipnis wrote *Months and Days* in all likelihood as a response to a specific request that he provide an account of the events that he had seen in Slovechno. On September 16, 1921, the Information and Statistical Division of the Jewish Public Committee for Assisting Pogrom Victims (*Evobshchestkom*) considered a proposal from the eminent Yiddish poet David Hofshteyn to employ literary artists to document the pogroms in Ukraine.[19] Hofshteyn had written his own monumental poem cycle *Grief* (*Troyer*)—illustrated by Marc Chagall—in 1922 in response to the pogroms. He suggested that Jewish authors return to their native shtetls to gather information about the pogroms "in the form of a chronicle, which should contain not only the factual side of the pogroms," but also, a description; "the chronicles could be composed in the form of diaries or memoirs." In the milieu in which Hofshteyn and Kipnis were writing, poetic language, memoir, and information went hand in hand. While other members of the executive committee doubted the feasibility of the proposal, in writing *Months and Days*, especially in the choice of the subtitle "a chronicle," it is reasonable to assume that Kipnis, Hofshteyn's protégé, was fulfilling his mentor's request. Indeed,

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[17] These included, for example, the Kiev District Commission of the Jewish Public Committee for Relief to Victims of Pogroms (1918-1924), DAKO, FR-3050 and the All-Ukrainian Public Committee for Relief to Victims of Pogroms, TSDAVO, F2497. Some materials were used as evidence on behalf of Shlomo Schwartzbard, who confessed to murdering Symon Petliura and was acquitted by a French jury. See David Engel, *The Assasination of Symon Petliura and the Trial of Scholem Schwartzbard 1926-1927: A Selection of Documents*, (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016).

[18] Joseph B. Schechtman and Cherikover, *Istoriia pogromnogo dvizheniia na Ukraine 1917-1921*, (Berlin: Ostjudisches Historiches Archiv, 1923); Elyohu Cherikover, *Di Uḳrainer pogromen in yor 1919*, (New York : Yidisher Ṿisnshafṭlekher Insṭiṭut--Yiṿo, 1965).

[19] DAKO, f. 3050, op. 1, d. 123. "Protocol zasedaniia informatsio-statisticheskogo otdela Evobshchestkom from 9/16/1921. Accessed at the University of Illinois Library.

Kipnis's phrase "brass disks shining in the sun" (*tatsn antkegn der zun*) is a poetic homage to Hofshteyn's *Grief.* Hofshteyn describes the blinding glare of day as "the sun dances with a thousand burning disks."[20]

Documentary Indeterminacy

Kipnis's narrative straddles the border between fact and fiction. It is a boundary text that frays the distinction between the two genres. On the one side, Kipnis uses factual information. Literary convention, in both Russian and Yiddish, avoids the names of places and people, using initials or fictitious toponyms instead. In contrast, Kipnis names real-life victims and perpetrators in *Months and Days.* The same names appear in the archival sources. For example, the name Dovid Freynk comes up in an episode in Kipnis's work. His widow sings a dirge for him. In the Kiev District Commission list of Jewish victims for Ovruch and Slovechno in 1919, the same individual is listed in Russian as "David Evseevich Freink," age 28, occupation, tailor.[21] Kipnis blames the eruption of violence in his native shtetl on his neighbor Marko Lukhtan, the chief of police, and an individual named Kosenko, in addition to peasants from the town and the surrounding region. The names Lukhtan and Kosenko with the variant Kosinko appear in both the archival documents and in *Months and Days.*[22] Kipnis describes Lukhtan, who was a veteran of World War I, as a "liar, a gypsy, and a beggar."[23] According to the eye-witness account of Itsko-Mordakovich Pashkovskii, who worked in the forest in the area surrounding Slovechno, "Lukhtan" was a nickname, Marko's real last name was "Detskii."[24] Kipnis also refers to an unfamiliar "couple" walking around the shtetl taking notes, seeking information about the age of the inhabitants, and in so doing documents the documentary process as it unfolds in his own town.

The strong compulsion to name names and give other documentary information evident in Kipnis and other authors and pogrom investigators, however, was also

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[20] "Mit toyznt tatsn heyse tantst di zun." David Hofshteyn, *Troyer*, (Kiev: Kultur-Lige, 1922), viii.

[21] DAKO, f. 3050, op. 1, d. 225. Accessed at the University of Illinois Library.

[22] Testimony from L. Kaplan, in "Kievskaia raionnaia komissiia evreiskogo obshchestvennogo komiteta po okazaniiu pomoshchi postradavshim ot pogromov," DAKO, f. 3050, op.1, d. 225, ll. 17-ob.

[23] Kipnis, *Khadoshim un teg: a khronik*, 41.

[24] TsDAVO, f. 2497, op. 3, d. 154, "Pokazanie Itsko-Mordakovich Pashkovskii."

accompanied by a sense of anxiety about the accuracy and integrity of the information they provided. Kipnis probes this question in his own way, using open-endedness, shifting perspective, multiple time frames, and a changing emotional and stylistic register to explore the boundary where dates and names lose their specificity and meaning. His reliance on certain documentary strategies does not mean that his text is exhaustive, complete, or impartial.[25] The biblical cadences and violent imagery of the opening passage, as I have already discussed, push the text beyond a simple narrative of the facts. In the aftermath of the pogrom, daytime feels like "bruised foreheads" and nighttime, like cups of sulfuric acid. As I will show, the testimony and the terror, the facts and the poetry pull against each other in *Months and Days*. The ambiguities and tension among them creates the unique texture of the novel/chronicle.

The Strangeness of Pogrom Time

Dates and times are key elements of testimony. The pogrom began on a Tuesday, as Kipnis notes, the 17th of Tamuz, when the walls of Jerusalem were breached, one of the events leading to the sacking of the Second Temple. The 17th of Tamuz is a minor fast day in the Jewish calendar. "Tuesday" is one of the days of terror that the title of the work, *Months and Days*—indicates.[26] Kipnis, according to his own self-description in *Months and Days* was not a particularly observant Jew; nonetheless, he evokes the traditional Jewish historiographical mentality that sees ongoing reality in light of biblical history. Kipnis seeks to add the utterly unique days of the pogrom in Slovechno in July 1919 to the recurring cycle of ritual observance of Jewish national catastrophe.

In the context of the concern with dates and anniversaries that Kipnis develops in *Months and Days*, a startling question appears in the penultimate chapter:

[25] As was typical for accounts of the time, Kipnis is reticent about rape. He strongly hints that his young sister-in-law was raped, but does not provide details. A study of rape during the pogroms can be found in Astashkevich, Irina, *Gendered Violence: Jewish Women in the Pogroms of 1917-1921,* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2018). For a discussion of documentary strategies in literature, see Ilya Kukulin, "Documentalist Strategies in Contemporary Russian Poetry," trans. Josephine von Zitzewitz, *The Russian Review*, 4 (2010): 585-614. One of the strategies that Kukulin identifies, parataxis, the juxtaposition of contradictory elements, is also characteristic of the love story/pogrom chronicle of *Months and Days*.

[26] For a discussion of the significance of "days" in the work, see Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, 183–185.

"Does anyone know what day it is?"[27] It is as if the reading audience is also asked the question; the "anyone" could be anyone reading the novel. No addressee is specified. No speaker is identified as the source of the question; there are no quotation marks or any other punctuation that delimit who the speaker is. The simplicity of the question belies the profound disorientation that created it in the first place as well as the disorientation it causes in the experience of reading. The loss of an ordered sense of time is a consequence of the violence of the pogrom. Kipnis goes on to say that there was "no day in the week that had the color or the name" as the day of the pogrom in Slovechno, echoing again the "days" of terror in the title. The question about the calendar echoes the opening passage and reopens the problem of the loss of the ordered sense of time. This question and others like it would seem to challenge the veracity of Kipnis's account and the accompanying demand that readers believe him. To put it differently, if he didn't know what day it was, how can we be so sure about details that he provides, for example, that refugees sheltered in Avrom-Ber's house? Uncertainty about one set of facts could easily contaminate certainty about other facts. Kipnis's strategy of direct address makes a demand on his readers' faith in him in ways that undermine his credibility as someone in control of the facts. Kipnis's unit of time is a fiction from an impossible, mad calendar that only exists in his poetic universe, outside the boundaries of normal, conventional time. In Hebrew, "no-man's land" is *sheteh hefker*. Pogrom time is no-man's time, *hefker* time.

Later in the novel, the narrator expresses his inability to distinguish the living from the dead; he can't believe that those who have been "tormented are really dead and those who are speaking are alive":

> On whom does the mark of the scythe lie? Look and find out. Because now one hour by night or one gibe by day can do what a hundred round years cannot erase or rinse off. Just look at our living together with the dead.[28]

The phrase "look and find out" ("*kuk un darken*") is reminiscent of the Talmudic phrase "come and see," but introduces an important disparity between Kipnis and Talmud scholars. In the Talmud, "come and see" generally introduces an interpretation offered by a scholar, but here, in contrast, there is no clarification, what we are invited to contemplate boggles the imagination.

[27] Kipnis, *Khadoshim un teg: a khronik*, 133.
[28] *Ibid.*, 128.

Deciphering and interpreting the marks or traces left by the scythe on the bodies of the dead and possibly the living is a reading practice for which there is no rabbinic commentary. An hour of pogrom time leaves incalculable harm on the bodies and psyches of victims. To enter the *hefker* condition of exposure to violence leaves traces that cannot be undone. The horrifying loss of the separation between the living and the dead is one of the transformations wrought by abandonment to utter lawlessness. Kipnis changes the "marks left by the scythe," the physical and psychological scars of the exposure to violence--into marks left on paper, the words of his text. Far from offering restoration, the narrative that he produced disorients, unsettles, and accuses his readers.

Neighbors

Jan Gross's argument about the unique circumstances of particular episodes of violence, in other words, their "situational dynamics" provides a point of departure for understanding the neighborly violence that took place in Slovechno. From Kipnis's perspective in *Months and Days*, the Russian revolution of 1917, and the subsequent regime change in Kiev had little meaning except for the violence these events unleashed. He asks: "Who doesn't know that in Russia it's been a year since the great revolution? Of course we know. But no revolution occurred in the places where we lived."[29] The reports in the Kiev District Commission Archive and Kipnis's novel both describe common economic conditions shared by Jews and non-Jews in Slovechno. There were approximately 1475 inhabitants in Slovechno in 1919, out of which 905 were Jews. As Isaac Goldberg, age 23, put it in his testimony about the events in Slovechno, "the Jews worked just like the peasants; they walked bent over, and were tattered and oppressed."[30] Although this is a Jewish perspective, Goldberg's characterization makes it less likely that economic inequality and resentment about alleged Jewish wealth were prime factors in the killing of Jews in Slovechno. The town included a mill, several tanneries, a slaughterhouse, a church, and two Jewish cemeteries. Kipnis's mother-in-law, whose husband was in the U.S., provided for herself and her children by selling crockery to peasants in the neighboring villages, including Behun (Begun). Jews from Slovechno and

[29] "*Ver veyst es nit, az in Rusland iz shoyn a yor nokh der groyser revolutsye? Avade veysn mir. Ober in undzere mekoymes gufe zaynen nokh keyne shum revolutsyes nit forgekumen.*" *Ibid.*, 24.
[30] Elias Heifetz, *The Slaughter of the Jews in Ukraine in 1919*, (New York: Thomas Seltzer, 1921), 369.

peasants from the surrounding area knew one another. In Slovechno proper, Jews and non-Jews lived in close proximity, except for the center of the town, where there was a greater concentration of Jewish families.

Jews and non-Jews, according to the sources, lived together peacefully. Peasants brought Jews potatoes, flour, honey, a calf and Jews provided processed animal hides, coats, and boots.[31] Kipnis's father, a tanner, had Jewish and non-Jewish customers; during the pogrom in 1919, Kipnis reports, one of his non-Jewish customers was anxious that his hide would be taken during the looting. Before the violence of July 1919, to use Kipnis's words, there was every indication that Jews and non-Jews "would live well together until the Messiah came."[32]

They did not do so, however. As I mentioned earlier, Kipnis held his neighbor Marko Lukhtan responsible for the outbreak of violence. Relations between the Kipnis and Lukhtan families were uneasy at best, even though Lukhtan, according to Kipnis, used to look the other way when Jewish children took cherries from his trees. When Marko returned from military service one Friday night, the door of the Kipnis's parents' house was open, and the sunset was visible through the trees in the Lukhtan garden. This is one of the few images of neighborly harmony in the entire text. The non-Jewish cherry trees provide the backdrop for the onset of the Jewish Sabbath. To herald Marko's arrival, Kipnis's youngest sibling ran to tell Marko's wife that he had come back from the war. He brought candy for all the children, including the Jewish ones. But Kipnis's mother did not accept the gift. As if to compensate for her refusal, she gave Marko some freshly baked cookies with cinnamon, a Sabbath treat.

According to first person accounts in the Kiev District Commission Archive, Kosenko, another pogromist named by Kipnis, was a young man of the age of nineteen or twenty. He was literate and worked for a time as a clerk for the Food Board. In the period before July 1919, he had no definite occupation, but then joined the local police, and, together, with the police chief, began an anti-Jewish agitation campaign in nearby villages and settlements. The main points of his speeches were that Jews were going to seize churches and transform them into synagogues, force peasants to register marriage, births, and divorces with rabbis, and also, that Jews hoarded manufactured goods, particularly, salt, in order to

[31] Kipnis, *Khadoshim un teg: a khronik*, 52.
[32] *Ibid.*, 50.

fleece peasants.[33] Kosenko was telling the peasants that the Jews were going to take over and impose their way of life on them.

Rumors about an outbreak of anti-Jewish violence prompted Jews to seek assurance and protection from Lukhtan, as chief of police. The testimony of pogrom survivor Goldberg suggests, however, that Lukhtan had made a prior arrangement with a group of "bandits" to storm the town on his signal. Another Slovechno resident, Pashkovskii, also testified that he heard the cry "Begin!" (*Nachinai!*) around 2:30 in the morning of July 15, 1919.[34] Kosenko's agitational speeches, and the evidence given by Goldberg and Pashkovskii show that the violence in Slovechno was not the result of a spontaneous explosion of emotion, but instead, the product of careful planning and preparation.

In *Months and Days*, Kipnis reports that he his wife went to sleep in their clothes. The sound of shooting woke him, and the couple fled through the garden. The next day they learned that one Jew was severely beaten, another killed, and that shops and houses were ransacked. Kipnis remarks with bitter irony, "each family celebrated the holiday their own way."[35] The killing and destruction continued for two more days. Kipnis writes, "All our streets were crisscrossed with filaments of dread."[36] One eyewitness reported 68 killed and 45 wounded in Slovechno; other reports give slightly different numbers, "more than 60" killed and more than a hundred wounded.[37]

Kipnis accuses his non-Jewish neighbors of carrying out violence. He poses the rhetorical question: "And you, goyim, my faithful neighbors, did you at least wash the blood from your scythes and your knives?"[38] However, not all the interactions among Jewish and non-Jewish neighbors before and during the pogrom were violent. Pashkovskii says that a fellow worker, a non-Jew, warned him that he had heard of impending anti-Jewish violence from the peasants in the area. The archival record provides examples in which members of the same

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[33] Testimony from L. Kaplan, in "*Kievskaia raionnaia komissiia evreiskogo obshchestvennogo komiteta po okazaniiu pomoshchi postradavshim ot pogromov*," DAKO, f. 3050, op.1, d. 225, ll. 17-ob.

[34] TsDAVO, f. 2497, op. 3, d. 154, "Pokazanie Itsko-Mordakovich Pashkovskii."

[35] Kipnis, *Khadoshim un teg: a khronik*, 89.

[36] *Ibid.*, 103.

[37] L. B. Miliakova, *Kniga pogromov: Pogromy na Ukraine, v Belorussii, i evropeiskoi chasti Rossii v period grazhdanskoi voiny 1918-1922 gg*, (Moscow: Rosspen, 2007), 179.

[38] Kipnis, *Khadoshim un teg: a khronik*, 138.

family treated Jews differently. Even though Kosenko perpetuated violence against Jews, his mother attempted to intervene and care for Jewish victims. Khana Avrom-Berova Gozman, age 45, another resident of Slovechno, testified that her children were severely wounded during the pogrom. A peasant sheltered and fed them, and Kosenko's mother washed the children's wounds and warned Gozman and her family to flee as quickly as possible.[39] *Months and Days* also provides an example of neighborly care between Jews and non-Jews, as well as the failure of Jewish neighbors to take care of each other, as I will show.

Abandonment, *Hefker*, and Creaturely Life

After the pogrom began, it was difficult to figure out where to sleep. Kipnis comments on the experience of having to flee his home: "Then we were like creatures, which at nightfall were abandoned and utterly helpless."[40] Indeed, one of the testimonies about the pogrom in Slovechno reports that after the violence had stopped, abandoned Jewish livestock that had been released from their enclosures wandered freely throughout the town. Abandoned creatures, both human and animal, were part of the pogrom landscape and the larger landscape of civil war violence. The key term in Kipnis's characterization of his own condition is *hefker*. *Hefker* is used in every day speech in Yiddish to refer to neglect and abandonment, and also, lawless, dissolute, and licentious behavior, as well as political anarchy. In the preparations for the Passover holiday, during which leavened food are forbidden, householders disavow ownership of any leavened products remaining after the cleaning of their homes by proclaiming them to be unknown to them and "*hefker* like the dust of the earth."[41] While Yiddish authors used the term to signal their artistic freedom from constraints of the past, Kipnis and other Yiddish authors, including, for example, David Bergelson, Uri Tsvi Grinberg, and Itsik Manger—also used this term in relation to pogroms in Ukraine and the larger situation of Jews in the interwar period in Europe generally.[42] *Hefker* in this context refers to people thrust outside the law,

[39] Heifetz, *The Slaughter of the Jews in Ukraine in 1919*, 380.

[40] "*Itst zaynen mir geglikhn tsu bashefenishn, vos inavnt vern zey ingantsn hefker un hilfloz*" in Kipnis, *Khadoshim un teg: a khronik*, 92. It is not an accident that Sholem Aleichem's short story about a severely disabled girl, "Bashefenish," was published in the year of the Kishinev pogrom, 1903.

[41] Shimon D. Eider, *Halachos of Pesach,* (Lakewood, N. J.: Feldheim Publishers, 1998), 107.

[42] For *hefker* used aesthetically, see Naomi Brenner, "Milgroym, Rimon and Interwar Jewish Bilingualism," *Journal of Jewish Identities,* 7/1 (January 2014): 23–48. For Bergelson, see Harriet

"like the dust of the earth," exposed to violence that is carried out with impunity, for which there is no restitution. As literary scholar Efrat Gal-Ed puts it, the "experience of being *hefker* destroyed all confidence in the possibility of belonging" leading to the persistent sense of "being excluded from any system of law and abandoned to arbitrary power."[43]

Scholars interested in theorizing violence and its relation to the foundations of political life, most notably Giorgio Agamben, have argued that abandonment as a form of violence is constitutive of political order. I introduce Agamben here, because his concept of abandonment and the Jewish understanding of the condition of *hefker* reveal certain common traits.[44] Agamben argues that political life is built around the ongoing production of bare life, mere killable flesh. Whereas Foucault showed that modern forms of power produce the subject as the recipient of care, for Agamben, sovereign power produces and depends on the production of bare life. Foucault argues biopower arises in the political transition from the power of the sovereign to the sovereignty of the people, and the modern administrative state. Agamben brings together the legal and "biopolitical" dimensions of power to argue that the "production of the biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power."[45] The sovereign determines the state of exception, the suspension of the normal juridical order for some part of the population, although the possibility of the loss of protections and the exercise of sheer power over mere biological life is ever present in the ordinary life of ordinary citizens, who are but temporarily clothed in rights, norms, limits, and entitlements. The temporary clothing fell away during the Russian Civil War.

To undergo the process of abandonment means to be "open to all," available without limit, stripped of all social recognition, legal protection, and vulnerable to the naked operation of power, or, in a nutshell, *hefker*. The argument may be

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Murav, *David Bergelson's Strange New World: Untimeliness and Futurity*, (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2019), 189–190 and 214–215. Grinberg plays on the multiple meanings of *hefker* in the work he did for his journal *Albatros*. See, for example, Uri Tsvi Grinberg, "Proklamirung," *Albatros* 1/1 (1922): 3–4.

[43] Efrat Gal-Ed, "Yiddishland: A Promise of Belonging," in *Twentieth-Century Yiddish Culture in Its European Context*, (Dusseldorf: Dusseldorf University Press, 2015), 12.

[44] For Agamben and *hefker*, see Noam Leshem, "Spaces of Abandonment: Genealogies, Lives and Critical Horizons," *Enviroment and Planning D-Society & Space* 35/4 (August 2017): 620–636.

[45] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Meridian: Crossing Identities, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 6.

raised that abandonment in Agamben's sense is something that a state does, but there was no stable state authority in 1919 in Ukraine. Where there was no law and no tsar, anybody could be tsar for a day, so to speak, and perpetrators created the trappings of their short-lived authority. Kosenko invented a title for himself: the "Commissar of the Slovechno Insurgent Army" (*Komissar Povstancheskikh voisk Slovechanskoi volosti*). Instead of state authority, there were multiply contested forms of temporary rule, animated by multiple forms of antagonism, sometimes ideological, sometimes having to do with the resentment of rural inhabitants against city-dwellers. Groups, or, even, individuals took power for a limited time, and conducted their rule by means of violence. Violence in Ukraine, including pogrom violence, was less coherent than the violence of abandonment carried out by governments.

I return to the passage that I quoted above: "We were like creatures, which at nightfall were abandoned and utterly helpless."[46] Note first the term "creatures" (*bashefenishn*), that is, not merely animals, but creatures who have suffered a particular fate. Abandonment, whether simply neglect, or the heightened abandonment to sheer power without legal protection—brings about changes in human behavior. Eric Santner, a scholar of German literature, has characterized the changes wrought by abandonment as the emergence of "creaturely life."[47] Even though the human beings who inhabit creaturely roles appear to more closely resemble animals, the shifts they have undergone are not the product of nature. They are the product of specific historical and political circumstances. To bear the characteristics of creaturely life means to have been exposed to the violence of unlimited power, at the boundary between law and non-law. Inhabiting this boundary corresponds to the *hefker* condition.

Santner modifies Agamben's notion of bare life. As I discussed earlier, Agamben argues that the abandonment of certain parts of the population and their transformation into mere killable flesh is the necessary substratum of political life. Santner's intervention is to introduce the notion of excitability into the concept of bare life. Exposure to sheer power means the enhanced capacity for excitation, a kind of skinlessness with regard to the external world. It is significant that the Jewish concept of *hefker* also includes the idea of excitation, or, provocation to licentiousness.

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[46] "*Itst zaynen mir geglikhn tsu bashefenishn, vos inavnt vern zey ingantsn hefker un hilfloz.*" Kipnis, *Khadoshim un teg: A khronik*, 92.
[47] Eric L. Santner, *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

This usage of the term *hefker* appears in rabbinic literature in discussions about sexual behavior and promiscuity. Individuals could "make free with themselves," or, in other words, behave with abandon, an example of which could include a woman offering herself in marriage to a man. In key instances in rabbinic literature when the term *hefker* and words etymologically related to it are used in relation to human beings, and not merely objects, the question of female sexuality is at the heart of the discussion.[48] The various matters the rabbis consider center on cases of sexual assault against freed slave women, for which there was no penalty, and analogously, sexual assault against women who were still enslaved. Thus free men were not eager to marry women who had formerly been slaves, because as such, they resembled "ownerless property," in other words, anyone could do what they liked to women in this category. In another instance, the rabbis urged that a woman who was half slave and half free should be manumitted entirely so that people around her would not treat her like ownerless property, in other words, licentiously. Their concern was less for the woman herself and more for the morals of the community. The term *hefker* describes a boundary condition defining the limit between those who enjoy protections over their bodily integrity and those who do not, in other words, those whose bodies are mere material for the power and pleasure that others take from them. The legal and structural ambiguity generated the moral ambiguity. Being positioned on the threshold between the right to protection and the lack of such rights somehow was understood to excite wayward desires. Abandonment as a legal condition, as in the case of the freed slave woman, and even in the case of the slave woman, against whom sexual assault could be carried out with impunity is transformed into willing self-abandonment with regard to moral behavior. The person whose legal status is ambiguous, or, who ambiguates certain categories in the law, is presumed to behave in a *hefker* manner and to provoke others to do so.

The condition of heightened excitability and *hefker* wantonness emerges in Kipnis's description of the first month of his marriage. This is the atmosphere in the room he and his new wife shared:

> I had just gotten married and lived in our room, a room for a newly wedded couple. Why not? After all, we were a married couple, she and I.

[48] I am relying on Gail Labovitz, "More Slave Women, More Lewdness: Freedom and Honor in Rabbinic Female Sexuality," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 28/2 (Fall 2012): 69–87.

> Anyone who entered our room would be overwhelmed by the tipsy fragrance of early spring. It would make you drunk, if you inhaled it with an open heart, your blood would tingle all the way down to your little finger… Every speck of air was bound up with us both … Every hands breath of space was not hers and not mine separately—but bound up with the both of us …with our shameful, polished wooden beds; the homey curtains on the windows; the enameled blue water jug with big handles … We were in everything and everything was in us… [ellipsis added][49]

Kipnis modifies his first name in the novel, calling himself "Ayzik." Everything Ayzik and Buzi touch and all the objects that surround them are permeated with their passion. The erotics of the scene work through the principles of displacement and metonymy.[50] They are at the center of the metonymic chain that links their desire to the space of their room, the curtains on the windows, the enameled jug, and especially, the "shameful" beds. Ayzik and Buzi are ecstatic, "beside themselves," in a constant state of intensified and contagious pleasure. Their passion electrifies the very air they breathe.

In *Months and Days* the excitability of creaturely life takes several other forms, in addition to the passionate love scene I have just described. Kipnis's text provides key episodes that show how the loss of stable and clear-cut boundaries, the condition of being *hefker* activates the already available potential for excitation, leading to violent transformation and uncanny metamorphosis. The central motif linking the various episodes has to do with the fraying distinction between humans, animals, and other forms of life that are indeterminate. I have already discussed Kipnis's use of the phrase "abandoned creatures" to describe how he felt on the first night of the pogrom, but there are other important instances as well, found in his descriptions of both Jews and non-Jews.

The first day after the killings Ayzik and his wife encounter the widow of Dovid Freynk, the furrier, as she wanders through the streets singing a dirge for her husband, killed in the neighboring village of Behun together with his mother and younger brother. As Kipnis notes, she wasn't singing, but "muttering like a

[49] Kipnis, *Khadoshim un teg: a khronik*, 11.

[50] In the poetics of pleasure deferral and metonymic transfer heighten the erotic effect. See for example, Susan Rubin Suleiman, "Pornography, Transgression, and the Avant-Garde: Bataille's Story of the Eye," in *The Poetics of Gender*, ed. Nancy K. Miller, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 117–136.

golem" ("*zi premplt nor azoy vi a golem*").[51] Seven stanzas of the dirge she sings appear in the text, beginning with the line, "Of course, you all know Dovid" ("*Avade kent ir ale Dovidn*"). It goes on to describe his beauty, the widow's love for him, and how she begged her husband's killers to kill her too.[52] She wants to follow him in death, but doesn't know what to do with their child. The sudden appearance of this woman maddened in grief terrifies Ayzik and especially Buzi. His "blood runs cold" and he worries that the widow will recognize him and demand his help. Kipnis's description of the widow amount to a portrait of uncanny undeadness, including wandering, muttering, the repetition of the same words over and over, and the comparison to a golem, which can mean simply that she seemed like a fool, someone without intellect, but also refers to the legendary creature made of clay animated by day and dead by night.

Ayzik and Buzi react to the sight and sound of the widow without empathy. Instead, their response is fear. Ayzik wants to speak to her but fails to do so; he turns away to take his wife home. The widow is also an "ownerless creature," abandoned by her fellow Jews. Kipnis's account does not provide any further information about the widow; the very lack of information accentuates the sudden strange appearance of the wandering widow, and adds to the strangeness of the scene and the stark refusal of her neighbors—Jewish neighbors—to help her. Her accusation against her husband's murderers is thus also an accusation against her Jewish and non-Jewish neighbors, about whom she says, "Of course *you* all know Dovid Freynk" [emphasis added].

Kipnis's description of his non-Jewish neighbors similarly emphasizes the theme of excitability and uncanny metamorphosis. These neighbors knew the Jews, but prevented them from leaving Slovechno. They were familiar, but had changed: "*heymishe goyim, nor zey zaynen megulgl gevorn*." As I discussed earlier, the neighbors had listened to the provocative speeches of the individual named Kosenko, who told them that the Jews were going to take power in the town. Kipnis's language contains the term "*megulgl gevorn*." There are many other words in Yiddish for transformation or change, and therefore the choice of "*megulgl*," is significant. The Hebrew word "*gilgul*" refers to the transmigration of the soul, a Jewish mystical concept. The human soul that had not attained perfection during its lifetime would have to enter the bodies of other creatures, for another chance to fulfill the commandments.

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[51] Kipnis, *Khadoshim un teg: a khronik*, 107.

[52] *Ibid.*

In works of Yiddish literature with which Kipnis was familiar, "*megulgl gevorn*" could simply mean "to turn up unexpectedly," or, it could suggest transmigration. Sholem Aleichem's *The Penknife* offers an example. In the story, the child-hero wonders why a non-observant Jew doesn't suffer punishment from God for his failure to observe the commandments. The boy's teacher explains that the Jew, who is German, has become a German as a form of punishment, that he is a "transmigrated soul," *("megulgl gevorn*"), "and might later appear as a wolf, a cow, a horse, or even a duck."[53] Even though Sholem Aleichem's use of the term "transmigrated soul" is comic and Kipnis's is frightening, both passages show that the term has to do with a state of unexpected change, a boundary condition, where the definition of being human becomes uncertain, and the line separating humans from other animals grows unclear.[54]

In *Months and Days*, the question of who was a human and who was an animal was one of the forms in which antagonism between Jews and non-Jews was expressed. Who was responsible for turning the other into an animal? During one of the nights of the pogrom Kipnis's family shelter in a close-by village; his father knows someone there, and their wagon is allowed into this man's courtyard for a time. An old woman, not Jewish, appears from one of the houses. Her appearance is strange. She is half naked, wearing only "a canvas shirt and two aprons, one in front and one in back—this is her dress." She is agitated, crying and lamenting that she was fated to see the day when such things should go on as taking other people's property, referring to the looting of Jewish homes, and wonders whether World War I played a role: "did the damn war so corrupt the people?" ("hot es di farsholtene milkhome azoy tselozn dos folk?"). The old woman goes on to say that the Jews are also guilty, because they "hid" salt: "There's nothing worse than food without salt! Even a cow won't take a drink of water unless you give it salt. What other proof do you need? Even a cow!"[55]

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[53] Sholem Aleichem, *Some Laughter, Some Tears: Tales from the Old and the New*, trans. Curt Leviant, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1968), 116–117. For the Yiddish, see Sholem Aleichem, *Ale verk fun Sholem Aleichem*, vol. 1 (New York: Sholem-Aleichem Folksfond, 1918), 15.

[54] For an argument about the importance of violence in "The Penknife," see Litvak, Olga, "In the Evil Kingdom of Things: Sholem-Aleichem and the Writing of Everyday Life in Jewish Literature," in *Jews in the East European Borderlands: Essays in Honor of John D. Kiler*, eds. Eugene M. Avrutin, Harriet Murav, (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2012), 83–105.

[55] Kipnis, *Khadoshim un teg: a khronik*, 97.

Other passages in Kipnis's narrative suggest that he concurs with the old woman about the salt problem. "Everything was upside down at the market," Kipnis goes on to say. Peasants would exchange a wagonload of wood for "a bit of salt," which was frequently adulterated with chalk, flour, saccharine, paint, or dye.[56] The non-Jews turned the Jews into "*hefker* creatures," but the Jews treated non-Jews worse than animals, by refusing to sell them salt. The fact that Kipnis includes the story of the old woman, as well as his own commentary suggests his interest in probing both sides of the question.

The Strangeness of Neighborly Care

The episode of the strange old woman has an unlikely outcome. Even though she attempted to justify the non-Jews' anger at the Jews, she returned to her house and brought out baked potatoes for the child-refugees in the courtyard. This miniature story within the larger narrative could have ended very differently; it could have become the prelude to more violence. The outcome, however, confounds expectations. Instead of a final statement or act of anger, the woman feeds the Jewish children. The woman herself and her action are strange in the sense of breaking with expectations that the larger narrative sets up, that is, violence that leads to more violence. Whether this episode took place or not, what it suggests is that the continuum of violence was not necessarily a continuum, violence did not penetrate every speck of available social space. The old woman – who accused her own people of corruption, blamed the war and the Jews, but still gave Jewish children her own food – is strange to begin with, because of her costume, and her behavior is strange, because she interrupts the continuum. Providing food in and of itself does not necessarily restore ordinary social relations, because the manner in which it is given can be yet another expression of power. The restoration of social recognition depends on some evidence of an acknowledgment of the common humanity and vulnerability of the provider and those she feeds. In this episode, the old woman's strangeness, expressed in her emotional display and her nakedness show evidence of mutual susceptibility and vulnerability. The heightened exposure to the power of others, thrust forward during conditions of public violence, is always part of daily life, and in the case of the half-naked strange old woman, all the more so.

[56] *Ibid.*, 67–68.

For most of his text Kipnis expresses his own desire for revenge. He wonders at one point, for example, when Jews will go out and murder *shikses* (non-Jewish women), and it is highly likely that his dream of revenge also included other forms of violence against non-Jewish women. It bothers him that non-Jewish children (whom he describes with the derogatory term "*shkotsim*") are, as he says, treading on the bodies of his dead.[57] The novel's postscript includes a few episodes of retributive violence. Jews also played the role of kings for a day. Kipnis reports that nine local non-Jews plus three others were taken by wagon to Ovruch, where they were killed. Chinese soldiers were given alcohol to drink and told to shoot the men, and they complied.[58] The 1930 Russian translation of the novel omits these details, in all likelihood because of the extremely negative portrait of the ethnic Chinese, for whom, the narrator says, shooting these men meant nothing.[59] Marko Lukhtan, Kipnis's neighbor, managed to hide at first, but was later discovered. He was taken outside the town limits and shot in broad daylight, together with his brother and brother-in-law; their bodies were brought back in a wagon. Unlike other episodes in *Months and Days*, Kipnis does not name who did the shooting. The shootings of non-Jews by Jews also shows the larger context, the force-field of violence, in which humans are stripped of social recognition, and the intimate relation between sovereign power and creaturely life emerges all the more starkly. The number of murdered victims in Slovechno that I gave earlier does not include non-Jews killed by or at the behest of Jews.

Conclusion

I return to the postscript:

> Marko had murdered Jews and Jews murdered Marko. And the orphaned children came running with their bowls to the kitchen. They didn't think about anything. They only lifted their eyes and mouths to

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[57] *Ibid.*, 136.

[58] A significant number of Chinese nationals took part in the civil war. In addition to internationalists, who joined the Bolshevik cause, out of work Chinese migrant workers received salaries from the Bolsheviks if they fought in the Red Army. See Mikhail Akulov, "War Without Fronts: Atamans and Commissars in Ukraine, 1917-1919" (PhD. Dissertation, Harvard, 2013), 100–101.

[59] For a discussion of Chinese participants in the Red Army, see Benton, Gregor, *Chinese Migrants and Internationalism: Forgotten Histories, 1917-1945*, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 23–25.

> their food. For the grownups it was a strange sight to see, a very strange sight.[60]

The strangeness of the scene requires explanation. In the midst of ongoing violence, time, space and human beings lose their ordinary qualities. The distinction between life and death vanished, as the living struggled to stay alive by hiding among the dead and pretending to be dead—as one child survivor of the pogrom reports having done. The fundamental categories of experience, having collapsed, lead to an epistemological crisis. To quote Kipnis, "Tuesday was a day, and we, it seemed were human beings."[61] The affirmation of the day of the week and Kipnis's self-affirmation as a human being suggests that his experience of the pogrom had led him to doubt both the calendar, and the status of both Jews and non-Jews as human beings. They had all undergone a strange metamorphosis, a transmigration that led them to the boundary separating humans and animals and the living and the dead. The act of eating appears strange; Kipnis's description emphasizes its animality; the children don't think, their mouths are "*piskelekh*," little snouts. In this scene the perpetrator/victim distinction is erased, which emphasizes the common vulnerability of human beings in the aftermath of violent conflict. What is strange in the scene is the same thing that is strange about the bizarre old woman in the courtyard: when unthinkable neighborly violence is taking place, neighborly care is also unthinkable, "strange." When violence unmakes the world, remaking it requires another adjustment, a shift in what we expect.

By examining a work at the boundary between chronicle and fiction in the aesthetic context of factography and the theoretical context of abandonment, the *hefker* condition, and "creaturely life," this study attempts to make a contribution to what I call the "archive of violence." Prolonged, extreme, and intimate violence thrusts human beings out of the structures and ordering of their lives, including time, space, and the recognition of their common vulnerability to the power of others. Even though Kipnis uses the term *hefker* only in relation to his fellow-Jews, a close examination of his text suggests that the term may also be applied to his non-Jewish neighbors. *Months and Days* shows the human capacity to be provoked, excited to violence, or, as in the case of the strange old woman, to transform anger and frustration into the desire to offer care.

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[60] Kipnis, *Khadoshim un teg: a khronik*, 150.

[61] *Ibid.*, 105.

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Key words: Violence, Pogrom, Abandonment, Neighbors, Literature, Yiddish

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