Between Worlds: Dybbuks, Spirit Possessions and Demons, Angels and Maggidim[1]

Rachel Elior and Yoram Bilu[2]

The religious, artistic, and medical evidence of traditional societies amply document the preoccupation with strange voices from the beyond – voices that make themselves known to people in fluid states of consciousness defined as either ecstasy or mental illness, manifestations of great piety or possession, revelations or nightmares, always associated with entities beyond the grasp of the physical.

The evidence presented in these documents addresses the ritual methods communities use to confront liminal situations that threaten the social order, the hermeneutic and therapeutic setting provided in religious, social, and medical contexts, and the cultural patterns that change throughout history.

Other people have perceived these strange voices, audible to the listeners' spirits or wrenched from human beings under duress, as abnormal sounds representing unseen entities in possession of the speakers' bodies. In different cultures, these voices have been understood as coming from external sources, located in either the higher or lower worlds, which could

[1] A dybbuk is spirit possession in the Jewish tradition; a Maggid is an angelic mentor, or a divine voice speaking in a person's spirit.

[2] This essay is a reworking and expansion of the introduction to "Between Worlds: Spirits and Demons, Heavenly Voices and Dybbuks," written by the authors of this essay, to the second part of the book *Pass as a Dream, Possess as a Dybbuk: Dreams and Dybbuks Among Jews and Gentiles* (Hebrew), eds. R. Elior, Y. Bilu, Y. Zackowitz, and A. Shinan, (Jerusalem: Scholion—The Center for Multidisciplinary Research Center for Jewish Studies, Magnes Press, 2013), 217-234.

◂ "Tanz!", Carmel Bar and Yaara Bar, still from performance, 2014.

 https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110786279-006

seize control of human beings, animate them, and speak through them.[3] These entities, all distinguished by the fact that they cross boundaries and dissolve solid identities, have been interpreted as being the sounds of ghosts belonging to the dead, or as being the voices of intangible spirits or demons, or even as sought-after sounds from higher worlds manifested during the listeners' heights of religious fervor.

The voices have been recognized, both by those making them and those listening to them, as encounters with entities operating in the wide gulf between heightened sanctity, on the one hand, and spirit possession and madness, on the other. Spirit possession refers to the possibility that some supernatural force acquires control of a living body, displaces that person's usual identity, and disrupts his or her normal behavior. The survey in this essay will investigate the social construct and cultural understanding of these encounters, called trances or dissociative states. The concept of spirit possession encompasses the full range of these states, which go by different names in various traditional societies around the world.

In different cultures and societies, these unseen entities define the shifting boundary between normal and abnormal, sanity and madness, and sacred and profane. However, their character and behavioral and experiential manifestations change from one culture to another depending on the meaning attributed to them in different socio-religious and historical contexts. These contexts move on a scale where possession by malevolent spirits represents the negative end and religious ecstasy

[3] Erika Bourguignon (ed.), *Religion, Altered States of Consciousness and Social Change* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press 1973); idem, *Possession* (San Francisco: Chandler & Sharp, 1976); Colleen A. Ward, "Possession and Exorcism in Magic Religious Context," in C.A. Ward (ed.), *Altered States of Consciousness and Mental health: A Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Newbury Park, California: Sage, 1989).

represents the positive end. Their cultural parallels: evil spirits and harmful demons control people against their wishes, manipulate them, and force them to behave in strange and awful ways, causing them terrible suffering and arousing horror in spectators. By contrast, encounters with entities that are part of the divine entourage, whose voices generate exalted, mystical experiences, which in certain cultures even give rise to ceremonies soliciting their presence.

The social, religious, and cultural formation and construing of these phenomena, some of which will be discussed below in different historical contexts, have yielded a rich literature and dramatic, ceremonial events, created profound interpretations and varied systems of healing and therapy, and exposed fascinating aspects of the human experience in its relation with the supernatural and its effect on this world.

A dybbuk, the Jewish version of spirit possession, manifests as an occurrence in which the spirit of a person who died prematurely – a person deemed so sinful that even entrance to hell is denied to him or her – enters the body of a living person. The prematurely departed is thus left suspended between the two worlds, persecuted and tormented by malicious angels. The spirit enters the body of its victim to find refuge from its tormentors, where it usurps the body's previous identity, from now on controlling that body. The community in which this occurs perceives the dybbuk as a disease, not unlike many other types of spirit possessions defined as culturally dependent illnesses.[4]

However, as noted above, society did not automatically label states of spirit possession as pathological. Society's assessment of them as positive or negative depended on the moral status of the penetrating entity, the

[4] Jeffrey H. Chajes, *Between Worlds: Dybbuks, Exorcists and Early Modern Judaism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Matt Goldish (ed.), *Spirit Possession in Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003).

content of the message, and the social status of the person penetrated. On the one hand, the revelation of entities could be seen as a gift of grace and inspiration or ecstasy, with the possessed having been chosen for being in communion with God and devoted to the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, the source of the possession might be the nether worlds, touching on the chaotic sphere of ritual impurity and death, so that its expression in the body and spirit of a human being could be understood as a disturbance and curse, punishment and disease, hysteria, dissociation, or madness.

These entities, whose essence has always been characterized by a traversing of worlds and spheres, defiance of traditional categories, and disruption of identities or sexual ambiguity, have been given many names, including dybbuk, evil spirit, demon, the spirit of impurity; dybbuk from the external worlds, Aslai,[5] Zar,[6] Kula, Asmadeus, Markoob, Daemon, Demon, Satan, and Sheitan.[7] The encounter with forces originating in the sphere of the holy and the eternity of life, which are perceived by the human spirit as distinct voices sometimes heard by others too, are labeled as communion with the Holy Spirit, devotion to God, speaking with the Holy Spirit, being

[5] Aslai is the illness of spirit possession known to the Jews of southern Morocco. It was understood to be the result of a demon penetrating the human body. See Yoram Bilu, "Aslai, Dybbuk, Zar: Cultural Difference and Historical Continuity of Possession Illnesses in Jewish Communities" (Hebrew), *Pe'amim* No. 85 (2000): 138-141.

[6] For a parallel phenomenon among the Jews of Ethiopia, understood as resulting from the penetration of a Zar – a spirit that is neither a demon nor the spirit of someone dead – into the body of the possessed, see Eliezer Witztum and Nimrod Garisaro, "Possession by Zar Spirit in the Community of Ethiopian Immigrants in Israel" (Hebrew), in *Pass as a Dream, Possess as a Dybbuk: Dreams and Dybbuks Among Jews and Gentiles,* eds. Rachel Elir, Yoram Bilu, Yair Zakovitch, and Avigdor Shinan (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2013), 413-431; for more on the Zar, see also Bilu "Aslai, Dybbuk, Zar."

[7] For Markoob, Daemon, and Sheitan, see Elian Alkarinawi, "Possession Illnesses in Arab-Bedouin Society" (Hebrew), in *Pass as a Dream, Possess as a Dybbuk*, 432-444.

◂ "Foreign Root", Shira Borer, still from performance, 2014.

chosen, speaking with the Shekhina, the revelation of a Maggid (see note 1), an angel, or Elijah.[8]

The negative states of spirit possession – such as the Jewish dybbuk, satanic possession in Christianity, and demonic possession in Islam – may be conceptualized as cultural idioms that provide expression for private distress but attributed to supernatural forces, expropriating the dybbuk-possessed from normal consciousness and the community's routine conduct, disrupting control of the body and soul, and blurring boundaries and identities. Such an illness is treated with healing of a religious nature, using an established ritual structure that contains the cultural shape of states of distress and reaffirms the traditional therapeutic ways, their efficacy and significance.[9]

The source for the forces and entities from the world of spirits and demons, on the one hand, and the world of angels and the Holy Spirit, on the other, is to be found in antiquity. They were first created in the world of the Jewish mystics who possessed secret lore and magic and were known as the Merkava mystics ("chariot mystics") and "the

[8] These phenomena are extensively documented in the following: *Maggid Meisharim: The Mystical Diary of Rabbi Yosef Karo* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: 1960); *The Book of Visions: The Diary of Rabbi Haim Vitale* (Hebrew), Moshe Firestein edition, (Jerusalem: 2006); and *The Letters of Moshe Haim Luzzato and His Contemporaries* (Hebrew), Shimon Ginzburg edition, (Tel Aviv: 1937). For more on the historical and cultural context, see Raphael Zvi Werblovsky, *Rabbi Yosef Karo: Halakhist and Kabbalist* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: 1996); Rachel Elior, "Joseph Karo and Israel Ba'al Shem Tov: Mystical Metamorphosis - Kabbalistic Inspiration, Spiritual Internalization", *Studies in Spirituality*, Volume 17 (2007): 267-319.

[9] Yoram Bilu, "The Dybbuk in Judaism: Mental Disturbance as Cultural Resource" (Hebrew), *Jerusalem Studies of Jewish Thought* 2/4 (1983): 529-563. For historical background of medical treatment of possession as mental illness, see Carlos E. Forcén and Fernando E. Forcén, "Demonic Possessions and Mental Illness: Discussion of Selected Cases in Late Medieval Hagiographical Literature," *Early Science and Medicine* 19 (2014): 258-79.

secret masters" at the end of the age of antiquity and in the centuries immediately following the destruction of the Second Temple. Their ideas were transmitted to the Jewish sages and the fathers of the early church, and to the religious reality of the masters of the Koran and its interpreters.

The existence of these forces was acknowledged throughout the Middle Ages and into early modernity in the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim worlds as the explanation for the full range of phenomena associated with breaking the boundaries of concrete existence and breaching the sphere of the normal.

The dybbuk in Jewish culture – most cases of which involved the penetration of the spirit of a deceased male into a woman's living body, at time quite explicitly through her genitals – is comparable to forced sexual penetration, as is made clear by the dybbuk stories collected and edited by Gedalyah Nigal.[10]

The dybbuk is often a manifestation of private distress of a clearly gendered nature of someone who has been prevented from raising her voice about what is happening against her will in the private domain. In the traditional patriarchal Jewish culture, arranged marriages were the norm. These marriages were arranged by the parents or their proxies for very young girls and boys and involved forced sex as in be'ilat mitzvah,[11]

[10] Gedalyah Nigal, *Dybbuk Stories in Jewish Literature* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem, 1983). See book index, 292-295, entries for married woman, prostitution, fornication, adultery, marriage, wedding, bridal canopy, and arranged marriage. Also see Bilu, "The Dybbuk in Judaism,"533-534.

[11] The first time a couple has sexual relations after marriage; unlike other occasions in which a husband must withdraw and not complete the sex act should his wife realize she has started to bleed, this time – even though the bride bleeds as she is having marital relations for the first time – the husband is not obligated to withdraw and may continue until he climaxes in her

▲ "Between Two Worlds", Li Lorian and Adam Yodfat, still from performance, 2014.

incestuous relations, and the relations prevalent between masters and females servants.[12]

In this cultural tradition, the voice of the dybbuk usually issued from the mouths of women.[13] Without detracting from the validity of this explanation, which focuses on the traumatic aspects of forced sexuality, the dybbuk was also likely to serve as a vehicle for expressing sexual desires and fantasies that couldn't be realized in a traditional society with a rigid moral code that was particularly repressive towards women. The community was required to resolve this disturbance/illness, which disrupted the patriarchal social order, usually occurring in the bodies and minds of socially marginal women around the time of a forced arranged marriage and wedding. The solution was partly effected by an exorcism of the dybbuk, whose public function was to preserve the existing social order and to reaffirm it. The ritual, usually taking place in

[12] For arranged marriages, see Yaakov Katz, "Marriage and Married Life at the End of the Middle Ages" (Hebrew), *Zion* Vol. 10 (1944): 21-54; Yaakov Goldberg, *Marriages of Polish Jewry in the Eighteenth Century* (Hebrew), trans. to Hebrew by Tzofiya Lasman (Jerusalem: The Jewish Society of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, 1999), 171-216; David Biale, *Eros and the Jews*: *From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America* (New York: Basic Books 1992), 64-65, 127-128 ; cf. David C. Kraemer (ed.), *The Jewish Family: Metaphor and Memory*, (New York, 1989); for forced sexuality in the Jewish community, see Israel Bartal and Yeshayahu Gafni (eds.), *Eros, Marriage Vows, and Restrictions: Sexuality and Family in History* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem, 1998); for marriage age in the ancient Jewish tradition, see Adiel Shermer, *Male and Female Did He Create Them: Marriage at the End of the Second Temple Period and in Mishnaic and Talmudic Times* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem, 2004).

[13] Rachel Elior, "The Dybbuk: Between the Revealed and the Hidden Worlds – Speaking Voices, Silent Worlds, and Silenced Voices" (Hebrew), in *The Path of the Spirit: The Eliezer Schweid Jubilee* vol. 2, ed. Yehoyada Amir (Jerusalem, 2005), 499-536. For sexual coercion related to the dybbuk and its coerced penetration by a dead spirit of a living body through the genitals, see ibid., 509-513, and Bilu, "The Dybbuk in Judaism," 540-542, 545. For English translation, see: Rachel Elior, *Dybbuks and Jewish Women in Social History, Mysticism and Folklore,* (Jerusalem: Urim Publications, NewYork: Lambda Publishers 2008). [Translated from the Hebrew by Joel Linsider].

the sanctified space of the synagogue and conducted by representatives of the male hegemony, standing for the sanctified normative authority, was designed to reinforce the community's values and validate them by performing an action on the passive body the dybbuk-possessed.

The diagnosis of a man or woman as possessed by a dybbuk, demon, evil spirit, or Satan provided a label and meaning for human distress using familiar cultural idioms and traditional religious concepts. The diagnosis also paved the way to healing and reintegration into society by means of the power of the religious ritual where the community leadership had formulated its rules, carried it out in the sanctified space, and transcribed its contents as part of a religious, moral, mystical drama designed to generate moral lessons and a process of communal soul searching. This was effected by pointing to the threatening presence of the world of the dead in the dybbuk's speech, demonstrating the bitter fate of the sinners punished after death. The rabbi transcribing the dybbuk's words often recounted the dybbuk's confession of a great sin that had occurred in the private domain and was now revealed in public, and the heavy penalty decreed in the world of the dead on the sinner who had imagined he could elude judgement and punishment in the world of the living.

The various revelations of the boundary-crossing entities had two expressions: the hearing of a strange voice in a familiar body, and extraordinary, uncontrollable physical behaviors that somehow blurred the boundary between the world of the living and the world of the dead.[14]

[14] Similarly, someone possessed by devotion and in communion with God who hears voices from the upper worlds or is possessed by a revelation of the Holy Spirit is sometimes described as a seized, distorted body. This is evident from R. Israel Baal Shem Tov's "ascent of the soul" as described by his followers' testimony: "He stiffened and started making dreadful motions; his body bent backwards so far that his head was at his knees… His eyes bulged and his voice made the sounds of a bull being slaughtered," in *Shivhei Habesht*, Avraham Rubinstein edition, Jerusalem, 1992, 92.

These behaviors included epileptic-like falls and twitches, foul language and speaking in tongues, verbal and physical aggression, and uninhibited actions, such as tearing of clothing, uttering blasphemous words, and crossing forbidden boundaries. Such violations of all that is proper required a ritual designed to reestablish the normative social order, draw clear boundaries, and restore the order that was disrupted.

Anthropologist Mary Douglas made an instructive comment regarding the meaning of the phrase "disorder of the mind" manifested in dreams and in attacks of madness, spirit possessions and dybbuks, and the significance of the ritual designed to restore order:

> Disorder by implication is unlimited, no pattern has been realized in it, but its potential for patterning is indefinite… We recognize that it is destructive to existing patterns; also, that it has potentiality. It symbolizes both danger and power. Ritual recognizes the potency of disorder. In the disorder of the mind, in dreams, faints and frenzies, ritual expects to find powers and truths, which cannot be reached by conscious effort.[15]

Douglas's claim is apposite to the entire range of possession states: disordering demons and impure spirits coming from the nether world, the world of the dead underground, on the one hand, and boundary-breaking angels, Maggids, and holy spirits coming from the upper world, the world of eternal life, on the other. The former were considered to be doing the bidding of Satan, while the latter were doing the bidding of God. These entities, always seen as bearing hidden, horizon-expanding knowledge or knowledge threatening the existing order, were an inseparable part of the daily human experience and the conventional interpretive system charged with explaining these extraordinary experiential and behavioral situations

[15] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo*, (New York: Routledge, 1966), 117-140.

▲ "The Shining - radio play for talking lights", Josef Sprinzak, still from performance, 2014.

since antiquity. That is clearly evidently from the world of the Biblical text, the Septuagint, and the Qumran scrolls, the Apocrypha, the writings of Josephus, the New Testament, the Hekhalot literature, and Sepher Harazim.[16]

In his study of folktales,[17] Eli Yasif notes that the Jewish population at large believed in demons and spirits, witches and sorcerers, and other supernatural phenomena, and that these beliefs were extensively reflected in the Talmud and Midrash. The word "spirits" used in Talmudic literature refers to demonic entities and is usually paired with "demons," as in "demons and spirits." These are assumed to exist in tandem with natural human reality, just as the souls of the dead, which are assumed to exist in some sort of lifeform after death, and are imbued with hidden knowledge "heard behind the curtain" that could, under certain circumstances, be perceived by living people. The encounters between the worlds, described in the Biblical text (including the non-canonical books), folktales, and the sages' stories, teach us the very great extent to which demons and spirits were an inseparable part of the daily human experience in the era of the sages and in the Middle Ages, as well as the profound ambivalence

[16] For more about the world of angels and the world of demons, see Efraim Elimelech Urbach, *The Sages, Their Concepts and Beliefs*, (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1979) 81-160; Rachel Elior, "Mysticism, Magic, and Angelology: The Angel Doctrine in the Hekhalot Literature" (Hebrew), in *Offering to Sarah: Studies in Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah*, Moshe Idel et al (eds.), (Jerusalem, 1994), 15-56; Esther Eshel, "The Belief in Demons in Eretz Yisrael in Second Temple Times" (Hebrew), PhD diss. (Hebrew University, 1999); Gershom Scholem, *Devils, Demons and Souls: Essays on Demonology* (Hebrew), ed. Esther Liebes, (Jerusalem, 2004); Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History,* (Cambridge 2008); Yuval Harari, *Ancient Jewish Sorcery: Research, Method, and Source* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem, 2010); Filip Vukosavović (ed.), *All Angels and Demons, Jewish Magic Through the Ages* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem, 2010). For the tradition of the dybbuk in antiquity and dybbuk exorcism in the New Testament, see Yair Zakovitch, "The Legion of Demons in the Herds of Swine" (Hebrew), in *Pass as a Dream, Possess as a Dybbuk*, 235-250.

[17] Eli Yasif, *The Hebrew Folktale* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: 1994), 161.

with which the sages viewed this demonic world. That view was also linked to the opinion that was prevalent in all cultures from the time of antiquity until the modern era, according to which disorders of the mind and mental disturbances of various sorts were evidence of an invasion and penetration by demons and spirits into the human body. Those who took this view were aware of the necessity of expelling these invaders and silencing the subversive and unwanted voices, and they acknowledged the importance of exorcists.

Among the exorcists revered in antiquity were the Jewish patriarch Abraham who expelled a ru'ah bisha ("evil spirit") that had seized Pharaoh, as related in the Apocryphal Scroll to the Book of Genesis found at Qumran; Tobias Ben Tobit, who expelled the demon Asmadeus that had seized Sarah Bat Reuel in the Book of Tobit; and King Solomon, who was known as the first to possess the knowledge needed to expel demons and the first to write the imprecations with the power to exorcise the evil spirits.[18] Josephus Flavius, who cited this tradition regarding King Solomon, also wrote about the exorcism of an evil spirit that he personally witnessed at the end of the first century of the common era.[19] Several decades earlier, Jesus was also known as an exorcist of demons, as told in the New Testament.[20]

Dybbuk exorcisms linked to individuals of historic or literary value raise several questions: What is the significance of hearing the strange voice of a demon coming out of a familiar body in the world of the exorcist? What is the function of the "dybbuk from the external worlds" in elevating the figure of the exorcist and presenting him as the one who establishes the appropriate social order? What role do spirits and demons, on the one

[18] *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 8, lines 42-45, Hebrew edition.

[19] Ibid., lines 46-48.

[20] Zakovitch, "The Legion of Demons in the Herds of Swine."

hand, and those whom they possess, on the other, play in the social order? What is the significance of the power relations between the disordered, dybbuk-possessed individual, who undermines the normal order of the community, and the dybbuk exorcist, who represents the community's validity and authority? What is the cultural and religious/moral context of the stories of dybbuk exorcisms on the public social level, and what is the significance of the silenced voices erupting from the dybbuk on the private hidden level?

The dybbuk phenomenon is clearly gendered. All cultures provide explicit evidence for the very high rate of women as victims of possession. In the Jewish and Christian traditions, dybbuk exorcists are solely men, though in Muslim culture women and men alike, who were thus endowed or had the relevant ancestral merit, were likely to serve as exorcists or ritual leaders capable of encompassing a symbiotic connection with the spirit in the body of the possessed.

It should be remembered that possession in general and the exorcism of the possessing entity in particular are highly dramatic phenomena with a fascinating theatrical dimension, loaded with meanings and contexts that differ radically from the perspective of either the people possessed or the exorcists.

The latter viewed the possession, by virtue of its subversive, identity-disrupting essence, as a threat to the social order, but also as an opportunity to turn the confrontation with that threat into a morality play and sacred communal spectacle that would reinforce the spectators' traditional norms and the prestige of the religious establishment.

This objective was attained when the spirits, in the course of the exorcism ritual, confessed their bitter fate in the world to come and the terrifying punishments they were suffering in hell.

▲ "Dayn Kol Iz Mir Zis", Victoria Hanna and Noam Enbar, still from performance, 2014

These confessions provided concrete validation for basic religious truths on reward and punishment, and would arouse exacting soul-searching and all-around repentance. These moral lessons served to strengthen the power and status of the exorcists, who operated by virtue of a shunning ritual that cast terror in the onlookers and by virtue of threatening curses. The exorcisms were meant to solidify the sacred authority and the normative social order and were generally linked to God and His male representatives, the setters of the traditional order, which drew its values from the sanctified past, and to disrupt the dangers of impurity and heresy, the breaking of boundaries and disruptions of the social order – phenomena generally linked to Satan and his representatives, sinful women, or dybbuk-possessed women who had crossed the lines of that social order.

At the end of the Middle Ages and in the early modern era, the Christian world experienced a polarization between faith and heresy and their representations in the form of the Church, on the one hand, and Satan, on the other, as is evident from the literature discussing the Church's and its proxies' witch-hunts, in which it becomes clear that the dybbuk is a matter of Satan having entered the body of a sinful person in order to possess that person and speak from her mouth.

Possession was viewed as the pairing of a witch with Satan; in fact, it was determined that the woman's body served as Satan's refuge. At the end of the fifteenth century, two Dominican inquisitors wrote the famed book Malleus Maleficarum ("hammer of witches"), which describes those possessed as being struck by Satan, claiming that a dybbuk is the consequence of witchcraft – a sin punishable by death according to both the Biblical text ("Thou shalt not suffer a sorceress to live," Exodus 22:17) and canon law.

The book, one of the most widely disseminated works in the sixteenth and

seventeenth centuries, served as a legal handbook for the Church and was used to define witches and diagnose those possessed by Satan.[21]

The vast majority of those accused of witchcraft were women, just as the vast majority of the dybbuk-possessed were women. Hundreds of thousands

[21] Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, trans. from the Latin by Montague Summers, (New York: 1971). In 1487-1520, starting immediately after the printing of Malleus Maleficarum (1486), fifteen editions were published, and in 1574-1669, another sixteen editions were issued. The book was written by the inquisitor Heinrich Kramer, a member of the Dominican monastery operating in Alsace and Bohemia, and Jacob Sprenger, a Dominican inquisitor and theologian active in Germany. The most important legal Church document from the early Middle Ages dealing with sorcery and witchcraft was apparently published around the year 900 CE. In a critique of a book about the history of witchcraft, Isaac Lubelsky, who studies the history of Western esoterica, writes as follows, "The Canon Episcopi – "the bishop's law" – describes a phenomenon typical to corrupt women whom Satan had tempted off the 'right path.' The document says that Satan causes these women such extreme mental confusion – including delusions and terrifying visions – that they imagine they are riding through the night with the goddess Diana and covering vast distances. 'Such illusions,' says The Canon Episcopi, 'are implanted in the souls of those lacking in faith, though not by God but rather by Satan. Because Satan can assume the figure of an angel of light,' which allows him to lead the unfortunate women astray. The importance of the document is self-evident. On the one hand, it defined sorcery and witchcraft as nothing but delusion, and those believing in them as ignorant folk of little faith, thus perhaps helping to postpone witch-hunts until a later time. On the other hand, the very mention of witchcraft in this era clearly proves that belief in sorcery in Europe was widespread until the early Middle Ages. Another interesting issue in The Canon Episcopi is the mention of Satan's ability to assume the figure of an angel of light. This, of course, relates to Satan's Latin name – Lucifer ('the light-bearer'), a name whose source is the Latin translation for heylel ben shahar in the Bible (Isaiah 14:12). The document then set out a very clear equivalence between engagement in witchcraft and direct satanic influence, thereby helping to entrench the notion common also in later eras according to which witches and sorcerers worship Satan. This notion made it easier for the Catholic Church – which saw itself as God's representative on earth – to label and persecute certain groups on the pretext that they worshipped Satan." See Isaac Lubelsky, "From Satan Worship to the Mother Goddess in the New Age: Reviewing Jeffrey B. Russell and Brooks Alexander's A History of Witchcraft: Sorcerers, Heretics & Pagans" (Hebrew), *Zemanim* Vol. 107 (2009): 113.

of victims, mostly women, were diagnosed using this handbook, brought before priests and judges, and sentenced to torture and death by burning at the stake. The justification for this horrific punishment was the belief that this was the only way to save the souls of the afflicted on Judgment Day. Christian theologians claimed that the soul could not be truly ill because its essence is Godly; therefore, the disorders and deviances were evidence that an evil spirit had entered the person and therefore had to be expelled. The presentation of the great power of Satan through mental disturbances was in the Church's own interests, as it sought to highlight the polarized positions of faith versus heresy, including their opposite manifestations – one in the holy service in the Church, the other in the worship of Satan and sorcery – and the opposite representations of good and evil on earth – the priests and the witches.

"Spirit disorders" (caused by evil spirits) or "soul disorders" (whose soul was possessed by demons or spirits from the external worlds) were equivalent with heresy and witchcraft, and mental syndromes were understood in line with demonological doctrines as linked with states of possession. The burning of witches as Satan's allies, which took place in the Christian world in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, was the only reasonable conclusion to draw from a view that identified witchcraft as a Satanic crime and as a field of endeavor unique to women. The number of victims of the witch-hunts in that period – one that, ironically enough, is identified with humanism, the Renaissance, and the beginning of the modern era – has been estimated by various studies at between 300,000 and one million women and men.[22] People who suffered from mental illnesses, women affected by anxiety, women who

[22] See Hugh R. Trevor-Roper, *The European Witch-Craze of the 16th and 17th Centuries*, (New York: 1967); Stuart Clark, *Thinking With Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, (Oxford: 1997); Sarah Ferber, *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern France*, (London: 2004); Moshe Sluhovsky, "Woman Between Satan and the Holy Spirit: Possession in the Catholic World in the Early Modern Era" (Hebrew), in *Pass as a Dream, Possess as a Dybbuk*, 270-283.

lived alone, epileptics, depressed or eccentric men and women, anyone who failed to conduct her- or himself according to the standard norms, or people who expressed unusual opinions – all were deemed plausible targets for Satanic possession.

According to Catholic theologians fighting the Protestant and Calvinist heresies, empowering Satan and the public war on him would inevitably result in empowering the Church and strengthening its position and control. In Church circles, the dybbuk was considered a Satanic manifestation and the punishment of a sinner for his sins, but as a disease it was not a part of the Church criminal or religious law. By contrast, witchcraft – the cause for the dybbuk or the Satanic possession – was, based on the Biblical precedent and its interpretation in the New Testament and the writings of the Church fathers, a criminal offense in canon law. Because of the criminal nature of the offense, the legal reports on witchcraft and witches are usually to be found in Church writings and the legal literature of the Inquisition.[23]

Already in the sixteenth century, with the Lutheran Reformation in full swing, demon-expelling and witch-hunting priests were aware of the high rate of women among the possessed. Their explanation was that Satan preferred to work though the bodies of sinful and heretical women, because women's weakness of spirit and flightiness made it easier for Satan to seize control of their minds. The exorcists further determined that, due to women's lack of control of their bodies and minds, they were subject to hysteria (the marks of hysteria – the stigmata – made it is clear that their hosts were in league with

[23] See Shlomit Shahar, *The Fourth Class: Women in Middle Age Society* (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv, 1983), in the index under "dybbuk" and "witchcraft." Also see Mary Douglas (ed.), *Witchcraft: Confession and Accusations* (London, 1970); Vincent Crapanzano and Vivien Garrison (eds.), *Case Studies in Spirit Possession* (New York, 1977). The most common accusation against witches in Poland was that they cast magic and evil invocations that caused damage to people. In Polish, the technical term describing the phenomenon is *zadajac diabla* ("putting Satan in"). The last trial of witches took place in Poland in 1775.

Satan). The Greek word "hystera" means "womb," and the disease of hysteria was, since antiquity until the middle of the twentieth century, connected in medial etiology to the tortured uterus, wandering restlessly through the body because of the lack of sexual activity of women suffering from unfulfilled lust, or from manic hysteria, as explained in *Compendio dell'arte essorcistica*, written in 1576. Other exorcists who were active in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries also spell this out in their books.

The diagnosis of hysteria, the label attached to the women possessed by dybbuks, was erased from the medical literature only in the twentieth century.[24] In current anthropological research, it is common to explain the over-representation of women in possession cases by referring to social and gender constraints that limited women's ability to participate in the open public discourse.[25] In the historical research of gender, the explanation relates to the decisive role played by sexual relations in which young girls and women on the margins of society were forced to engage, whether as

[24] In 1869, in a lecture entitled "The Etiology of Hysteria," Freud determined that hysterical women and girls were victims of sexual exploitation in childhood or during and after puberty. "I therefore put forward the thesis that at the bottom of every case of hysteria there are *one or more occurrences of premature sexual experience*, occurrences which belong to the earliest years of childhood…" Under pressure by the public furor his thesis caused, Freud retracted and, later on, proposed an alternate theory, namely that the repression of desire caused the symptoms of hysteria. An analysis of familiar dybbuk stories indicates that the various presentations of the disorder have nothing to do with repressed desires but rather reflect an escape from terrifying events and a flight from violence. See Elior, "The Dybbuk," 511-512, and Joseph Prager, "Hysteria" (Hebrew), *Hebrew Encyclopedia* vol. 14, (Jerusalem, 1967), columns 323-325.

[25] See Michel de Certeau, *La Possession de Loudum* (Paris: 1970); Ioan M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism* (London: 1983). For the silencing of women and their exclusion from the public discourse in the patriarchal Jewish society, see Rachel Elior, "Noticeable by Their Absence: The Presence and Absence of Women in the Holy Tongue, Jewish Religion, and Israeli Reality" (Hebrew), *Alpayim* Vol. 20 (2000): 214-270.

▲ "Foreign Root", Shira Borer, still from performance, 2014.

the result of arranged marriages or rape, that is more general, a topic that could not be raised because of dependencies, master-slave relations, power differentials, and incest.[26]

From the sixteenth century onwards, possession became a key concept Christian theologian used to reexamine the relations between the natural and the supernatural, the Godly and the Satanic, healing of the body and healing of the spirit, the priesthood and laypeople, and men and women. In this period, possession in general became identified with suspicion and doubt as to women's spiritual activity, which was linked to Satan, demons, and heresy, not only to mental disorders with traditional external trappings.

By contrast, exorcism was identified with a true inner investigation of a soul, whether believing or heretical, carried out only by an approved priest using Church treatises that delved into the definition of Satan, demons, and witches, not only with healing rituals practiced in the sanctified space according to a fixed ritual. Therefore, only men who had the power to confront Satan and heresy were capable of being honest investigators, whereas women were usually the object of the investigation and were the object for the penalty incurred through being possessed by Satan and for being guilty of heresy.[27]

In comparative cultural studies, the claim that women use their body

[26] See Elior, "The Dybbuk," 508-513. Also see Phyllis Chesler, *Women and Madness* (Doubleday: 1972), revised and updated (St. Martin's Griffin: 2005), who says that madness is the choice of a woman who cannot or does not want to take the normative path and conduct herself in the way that is expected of her as a woman. Cf. Tamar Alexander, "Dybbuk: The Female Voice" (Hebrew), *Mikan* Vol. 2 (2001), 165-190.

[27] See Moshe Sluhovsky, "Woman between Satan and the Holy Spirit."

to transmit personal or public distress (or a combination of the two) is commonplace. The psychological need to speak of things that mustn't be spoken of – such as forced sexuality in the context of rape and incest – and the gender constraint to be silent, according to the social and religious mores regulating women's speech in public, create an intolerable mental dynamic whereby eventually speech finally does burst out of the woman's body, emerging however as an entity that is not her. Thus the woman succeeds both in transmitting her message to the community and in remaining silent, because she is not crossing the gender boundary, but rather only serving as a vessel or vehicle through which some other entity is expressing itself.

From a feminist perspective, the therapeutic success of the ritual is nothing by the downfall of the dybbuk-possessed. The exorcism of the evil spirit re-silences the woman and returns her to her so-called "natural," submissive state and the confined space in the traditional, private realm, where she is supposed to serve her family members with obedience and submit to her husband's will.[28] Sometimes, when the ritual fails, the woman dies or remains forever silenced, paralyzed, and speechless, as a result of the violent actions imposed on her body during the exorcism, as documented in stories of exorcisms, in plays, movies, exorcism testimonies, paintings, and photographs.

The phenomenon of possession in general and of dybbuks in particular were usually documented by men, because only they took part in the exorcism ritual in the synagogue, either as active participants or as

[28] I.e. "a woman's voice is nakedness,"; "the dignity of the king's daughter is inside"; "woman has no wisdom except for the spindle"; "a man's wifeman's wife is permitted to him; therefore, anything the man wants to do with his wife, he does. He has intercourse with her whenever he wants, and kisses any limb he wants, and penetrates her either vaginally or anally, though only making sure he does not spill his seed for naught," from Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, "Prohibitions of Intercourse," 21:9

observers. None of the men who told stories about dybbuks in the traditional world ever took an interest in the life experience of the silenced, dybbuk-possessed women. They focused only on the hegemonic point of view of the exorcist, who represented the community's values and sought to restore the normative order that had been disrupted, repair the reality in which the world of the dead had erupted into the world of the living, and restore the time-hallowed distinctions that endorsed and reaffirmed the social order. He would do this by carrying out a searching investigation of the identity of the dead spirit that had attached itself to the afflicted woman and of that spirit's sins and penalties, in public, while over and over again uttering threats and penalties aimed at the woman's body, so as to threaten the spirit and persuade it to leave.

The dybbuk exorcism in the traditional world, as described by eyewitness testimonies (in recent years, the phenomenon has even been videotaped and photographed), involved creating a sacred space, with the exorcist(s) purifying himself/themselves and donning death shrouds, decreeing ostracisms, blowing shofars, cross-examining and threatening the spirit, sometimes tying the woman down, binding the woman's hands, lashing her – all testifying to the great deal of violence that exorcists apply to the dybbuk-possessed, often resembling a blatantly gendered show of strength, almost inevitably arousing associations of rape and sexual coercion.

At the individual level, various phenomena of possession – by dybbuk, Zar (in the Ethiopian community), Aslai (in communities hailing from Morocco), Ofrit or Markoob (in Bedouin society), and the demonic possession (in the Christian world) – are a source of suffering and pain for those afflicted, expressed in unique idioms of distress. As such, they also challenge the founders of religions and the revivers of spiritual traditions,

religious healers, rabbis, "masters of the name,"[29] priests and imams, "Zar masters" and dervishes seeking to relieve the distress of the victims according to the best cumulative cultural, religious, and medical experience. A similar challenge of a different cultural import faces clinical psychologists, social workers, and psychiatrists offering treatment that combine an understanding of the cultural context in which their patients experience their distress, and the supernatural context with the insights provided by modern psychology and psychiatric medicine as to the "natural" source of these illnesses and the possibility of healing them in a given social context.

Entities that supersede the senses, such as demons, spirits, and dybbuks, as well as the states of possession they cause, are part of the traditional medical dialogue currently taking place alongside modern psychiatry, as evidenced in detail by studies analyzing the Zar dybbuk and the Kula among Ethiopian Jews, in light of the adjustment crises the community experienced after immigrating to Israel,[30] and the world of images referring to those "possessed" victims of demons and spirits in traditional Arab-Bedouin society.[31] These studies illuminate the meaning of the difference between the modern psychiatric model, which views states of possession as a mental

[29] Among the famed dybbuk exorcists in the Jewish world who experienced communion with God and Godly revelations or recognition of their religious greatness were: Jesus, the founder of Christianity; R. Yosef Karo, the founder of the Safed school of mysticism; the Ari, the founder of Lurianic kabbalah; R. Haim Vital, who disseminated Lurianic kabbalah; R. Yisrael Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hassidism; and the Hatam Sofer, the founder of Orthodoxy. For more on these dybbuk exorcists, see Rachel Elior, "Yisrael Baal Shem Tov and His Generation, Kabbalists, Sabbateans, Hassidim, and Mitnagdim" (Hebrew), 2 vols. (Jerusalem: 2014), Part 1, 349, 356-357, 361-362, 565-566. Also see Moshe Idel, "Studies in the Method of the Author of *Sefer Hameshiv*" (Hebrew), *Sefunot* 2/17 (1983): 224 and Rachel Elior, "Rabbi Yosef Karo and Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov."

[30] See Bilu, "Aslai, Dybbuk, Zar" and Witztum and Garisaro, "Possession by Zar Spirit in the Community of Ethiopian Immigrants in Israel."

[31] See Alkarinawi, "Possession Illnesses in Arab-Bedouin Society."

disorder of the dissociative kind and attributes them to internal factors in the mental world of the individual patients whose pattern of illness is unique and whose treatment takes place in private, and the traditional therapeutic model, which finds the source of the problem in external entities whose rationale for harming the individual stems from a collective cultural myth, so that the confrontation with them, i.e. the therapy, must be public.

A significant part of the issue of strange voices emerging from familiar bodies, perceived as voices from the world of the dead and beyond the senses, stemmed to some extent from their ability to communicate information about the world of the dead that was usually hidden from people. Voices from the long ago, marginal, silenced, rejected voices, or the voices of the living dead coming from the world of the dead, all involve a disruption of the boundary between the real and the non-real, making the line between the rational and irrational, elusive, mobile, unexpected, and fundamentally unstable. The belief in the heard existence of voices from the world of the dead, like the belief in dybbuks or the existence of witches and Satan, or hearing the voices of demons and angels, and an ongoing preoccupation with them in the communal setting, were in large part dependent on the recognition and validity that highly respected social and religious authorities gave them – the very authorities in charge of the communal dybbuk exorcisms in the Jewish world and the demon exorcisms in the Christian and Muslim worlds – and a written system of communication that established their existence, which gained wider audiences after the introduction of the printing press.

The exorcism of possession disorders was always carried out by a reputable holy man, who represented sacred authority and the power of the Christian Church or the validity of the Jewish community. In the latter, the exorcism was conducted by a respected rabbi who was generally also a kabbalist or famous for his expertise in writing amulets who could expel the invading

entity using a set formula that was part of a ritual fixed since the middle of the sixteenth century.[32]

A close reading of the stories and treatises written by various dybbuk exorcists reveals that possession disorders and exorcisms were common in places and at times of extreme social changes in which heresy and conversions, disregard for Jewish ritual laws and customs, a loosening of ties to tradition, and a decline in allegiance to the institutions of religious authority became widespread.[33] Closing the ranks of the believers behind the fence of the religion and tradition by using threats of what could be expected in the world to come, emphasizing descriptions of the punishments suffered by the sinners in hell, stories of reincarnation and dybbuk or demon and spirit exorcisms, as well as reinforcing the belief in dreadful punishments imposed in the world of the dead on lawbreakers who, while alive, believed they could evade future punishment, is one of the majors keys to reading these stories.

Many of the Jewish dybbuk stories feature the spirits of converts to Christianity, suicides, adulterers, rapists, those guilty of incest, and murderers who had fled community punishment while alive, and they speak extensively – as we're told by the exorcists who transcribe their growls and groans – of their bitter fate and the full measure of their

[32] The first evidence for a dybbuk exorcism, conducted by R. Yosef Karo in 1545 in Safed, is found in R. Yehuda Haliwa's book in a manuscript of *Sefer Tzofnat Pa'ane'ah*. See Idel, "Studies in the Method of the Author of *Sefer Hameshiv*." The spirit exorcist R. Yosef Karo was famed as having had a revelation of a Maggid, an angelic mentor, whose voice he heard and whose words he transcribed starting in 1533, as described in his book *Maggid Meysharim*, Lublin, 1548. See Elior, "Rabbi Yosef Karo and Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov."

[33] See Yaron Ben-Na'eh, "A Look at the Hidden in the Possession Stories in the Writings of R. Eliyahu Hacohen of Izmir" (Hebrew), *Pass as a Dream, Possess as a Dybbuk*, 305-323. Cf. Jeffrey H. Chajes, *Between Worlds*.

suffering in the world of the dead.[34] In stories of the spirits of the dead being punished for the sins they committed in the world of the living, having been pursued by destructive angels until they found refuge and safety in the body they penetrated, the exorcists, transcribing the dybbuk's utterances with great flourish, clearly demonstrate the claim that, for the sinner, there is no escape from horrific punishment, because "there is judgment and there is a Judge"[35] in the world of the dead if not in the world of the living: sinners who avoided community punishment in their lifetime are punished with merciless severity after death. When reading the testimonies in dybbuk stories it sometimes seems as if, in his dialogue with the possessing evil spirit, the exorcist is confronting the community's past failures by trying to understand, complete, or heal and lessen the faults of the past, while the concrete suffering of the dybbuk-possessed woman is pushed aside.

Possession states and dybbuks were an unlimited source of inspiration and creativity for folktales and stories about the sages, Church documents and books by exorcists, books of spells and morality literature, mystical autobiographies, the history of medicine, cross-cultural anthropological research, historical research of heresy and ethno-psychiatric studies, modern poetry, modern plays, the theater, satire and parody, feminist writing, and queer theory, which relates both to changes in sexual identity and to the containment of different sexual identities in a single body. Shows of dybbuk possessions and exorcisms were an endless source for

[34] See Nigal, *Dybbuk Stories in Jewish Literature*, index, 292-297, under "hell," "destructive angels," "conversion," "convert to Christianity," "murder," "suicide," "prostitution," "drowning," "heresy," "idol worship," and "cross." Cf. Sarah Tzefatman, "A Tale of a Spirit in the Holy Community of Koretz" (Hebrew), *Jerusalem Studies of Jewish Folklore*, Vol. 2 (1982): 17-65.

[35] This is a contradictory paraphrase of the question in Va-yikra raba 28: "Is there judgement? Is there a judge?"

inspiration, hermeneutics, and vast creativity among people from different backgrounds and locations for thousands of years.[36]

Hebrew and Yiddish culture provide much expression to voices rising from the world of the dead and the voices of the silenced, the rejected, and the subversive. In this context, the play *Between Two Worlds*, also known as *The Dybbuk*, by Shloyme Zanvl Rappoport (1863-1920), better known by his pseudonym S. An-sky,[37] holds a unique place. Various studies contain discussions about performances of *The Dybbuk* and their meaning, alongside attempts to discover the author's sources of inspiration in literature, folklore, and ethnography, as well as discussions about the literary and theatrical transformations of the play in the twentieth century.[38]

[36] For examples from various religious and cultural contexts, see *Pass as a Dream, Possess as a Dybbuk: Dreams and Dybbuks Among Jews and Gentiles*, 217-444.

[37] For different contexts in which *The Dybbuk* was performed, in Israel and around the world, see Freddy Rokem, "*The Dybbuk* in the Land of Israel: Theater, Criticism, and the Formation of Hebrew Culture" (Hebrew), *Katedra*, Vol. 20 (1981): 183-202, which notes that the first performance of the play was in Yiddish and took place in December 1920 by the Vilnaer Truppe in Warsaw; about the first performance of *The Dybbuk* in the land of Israel, see F. Rokem, "*The Dybbuk* on the Haifa-Jeddah Road" (Hebrew), *Katedra*, Vol. 26 (1983): 186-193. Rokem's 1981 essay cited above was reissued in Shimon Levy and Dorit Yerushalmi (eds.) *Please Do Not Expel Me: New Studies of 'The Dybbuk'* (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv: 2009). The book contains many interesting perspectives on the play in its various contexts and the unexpected reworkings of the original. See, e.g., Diego Rotman, "The Dybbuk Isn't Moshe Sneh: Satirical Parody of *The New Dybbuk* by Dzigan and Shumacher (1957)" (Hebrew), in *Please Do Not Expel Me*, 179-197; Naomi Seidman, "The Ghosts of Queer Loves Past: An-sky's Dybbuk and the Sexual Transformation of Ashkenaz," in *Queer Theory and the Jewish Question*, eds. Daniel Boyarin, Daniel Itzkovitz and Ann Pellegrini, (New York: 2003), 238-241.

[38] See the studies noted in note 36 above; also see Rivka Dvir Goldberg, "*The Dybbuk* and the Realms of Longing: *Between Two Worlds* (*The Dybbuk*) by An-sky and Its Hassidic Roots" (Hebrew), in *Pass as a Dream, Possess as a Dybbuk*, 355-377; Zvi Mark, "The Dybbuk as Imagery and as Mental State in the Life and Poetry of Yona Wallach" (Hebrew), *Pass as a Dream, Possess as a Dybbuk*., 377-392; Yair Lifschitz, "One Mustn't Exclude the Dead from Any Celebration: The Lament of the Queer Body in Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* and *The Dybbuk*" (Hebrew), *Pass as a Dream, Possess as a Dybbuk*, 393-412.

An-sky, who excelled at observing at the harsh fate of people incapable of protesting against the social order enforced on them, wrote the following of himself: "The happiness and tragedy of my life are that I live more in visions than in reality." The play *The Dybbuk*, was based on oral and written testimonies of dybbuk stories An-sky collected as part of ethnographic expeditions to many Jewish towns in Volhynia and Podolia in 1911-1914. It was further based on artistic and literary evidence from folktales and Hassidic lore, which reflected events that took place in the Jewish world of Eastern Europe in preceding centuries, both openly and behind closed doors.[39]

The play, which was originally written in Russian,[40] was translated by An-sky himself into Yiddish and was put into Hebrew by poet Haim Nahman Bialik. It was also translated into other languages, either as *Between Two Worlds* or *The Dybbuk*, and since its first performance, in Yiddish in Warsaw in 1920, and in Hebrew, in Moscow in 1922, the play has been performed in many versions and treatments. The play contains harsh social critique of the institution of arranged marriages in the traditional patriarchal world

[39] For a comprehensive biography of An-sky, see Gabriella Safran, *Wandering Soul: The Dybbuk's Creator, S. An-sky*, (Cambridge, 2010); for the play and its versions see Shmuel Varses, "An-sky's *Between Two Worlds* (*The Dybbuk*) in Its Textual Transformations" (Hebrew), *Hasifrut*, Vol. 35-36 (1986): 154-194. For the background to the play's writing in terms of the ethnographic expeditions and the uniqueness of the author and his sources, see Goldberg "*The Dybbuk* and the Realms of Longing" and Rivka Gonen, "Searching for 'the People's Spirit': An-sky and the Ethnographic Expedition 1912-1914" (Hebrew), in *Pass as a Dream, Possess as a Dybbuk,* 344-354.

[40] About two decades ago, the Russian version of An-sky's *The Dybbuk* was unexpectedly discovered: C. An-sky, *Between two Worlds (Dybbuk)*. A censored version. Jewish dramatic legend in four acts with a prologue and epilogue (in Russian). V. V. Ivanov published the text, wrote the Introduction, and the glossary. See: S. An-sky, "*Between Two Worlds (The Dybbuk)*: Censored Variant," introduction by Vladislav Ivanov. In *The Worlds of S. Ansky: A Russian Jewish Intellectual at the Turn of the Century*, eds. Gabriela Safran and Stephen Zipperstein (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2006).

and its disastrous consequences, including madness as an escape from the expectations of a reality that those involved were incapable of meeting.

Every exorcism of an evil spirit, demon, Satan, or dybbuk, across various cultures, had a mythopoetic and mystic dimension that theatrically connected the creative imagination reflected in religious and cultural assumptions binding the hidden to the revealed, the normal to the abnormal, on the one hand, and the moral and religious spectacle presented in for the public's betterment, on the other. This dimension got a new treatment in the twentieth century in secular contexts. The calmly malicious essence of the dybbuk was examined in relation to the writings of Yona Wallach, who in her poetry wrote of her experience of being possessed by a dybbuk, in a state in which "from his throat spoke a different voice, not his, that of another,"[41] and ruled out the exclusivity of the psychological explanation for mental illness based on her own life's experience.

In her poetry and prose, Wallach noted her belief in reincarnation and her deep connection to alternate states of consciousness and the blurring of the boundaries of the rational with regard to dybbuks. Her poetry, surprisingly, shows her profound closeness to the heroine of An-sky's *Dybbuk*, Lea'leh: the spirit of her beloved, Honen, who died when he heard that she had forcibly been betrothed to another, enters her in order to unite with her and create a reality in which she becomes forbidden to another man.[42] The entrance of a spirit from the world of the dead makes Lea'leh dybbuk-possessed, but she prefers the possession of the world of the dead to the demands of the world of the living of the present, or prefers a liberating madness[43] to fulfilling the social expectations of a coerced normalcy of an arranged marriage.

[41] Mark, "The Dybbuk as Imagery and as Mental State in the Life and Poetry of Yona Wallach."

[42] Ibid.

[43] "Die kalleh iz meshugeh gevoren" is the original Yiddish line in An-sky's play.

As a gesture to An-sky's play, *The Dybbuk* was rewritten as *A Dybbuk* by contemporary American Jewish playwright Tony Kushner.[44] Kushner, one of the major voices in American theater of the late twentieth century since his subversive *Angels in America*, added a new layer to An-sky's play, that of the dybbuk as a queer figure.[45] This figure, blurring the lines between masculinity and femininity, contains both in a single body in which there is a gap between spirit and flesh that isn't the spirit's, and between body and voice that isn't the body's. Kushner read the complex place of the dybbuk as body, political, and theatrical imagery, connecting the past to the present, and the hidden to the revealed, and relates to the body that is sick, hurting, and dying (of AIDS) or possessed by spirits from the world of the dead, thus threatening the supposedly healthy normative society from the margins.

In his writing, Kushner maps out a better political future in which repressive, normative social structures are destabilized by figures that the past refuses to abandon. According to Yair Lifschitz, who writes about Kushner's works, these figures "are the only ones capable of sketching out a subversive, revolutionary horizon for a better future; only they are capable of asking, from the margins of the community and the rejected body, what it is and what the political meaning of the citizenship of the dead could possibly be."[46]

The concepts of "possession" and "dybbuk" and their parallels are notable for extraordinary multidimensionality. It would seem that there aren't many concepts linked both to mental disorders and religious persecution, both to

[44] See Yair Lipshitz, "One Mustn't Exclude the Dead from Any Celebration."

[45] For queer theory and what it means, see Boyarin, Itzkovitz, and Pellegrini (eds.) *Queer Theory and the Jewish Question* (New York, 2003) and Yair Keidar, Amalia Ziv, and Oren Kanner (eds.), *Beyond Sexuality* (Hebrew), in *Genders Series*, 2003.

[46] Lifschitz, "One Mustn't Exclude the Dead from Any Celebration: The Lament of the Queer Body in Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* and *The Dybbuk*" (Hebrew).

religious/moral/mystical/communal theater and modern subversive plays, parody and satire, both to gender issues and the destabilizing of supposedly fixed identities, and to ways of escaping standard social expectations.

Furthermore, there aren't many concepts that, at one and the same time, are linked to unusual states of consciousness seen as related to crossing boundaries between worlds and a communal attempt to deal with disorders and illnesses, and are linked both to the reinforcement of society's power mechanisms and to defiance of unequivocal lines by presenting complex, boundary-crossing identities.

In addition, there are not many concepts reflecting, at the same time, voices in folktales as to the meaning of mental disorders and culturally dependent illnesses, and hegemonic voices reflecting the proper attitude to disrupting orders by body or by soul, as seen in books on morality, authoritative medical treatises, and legal books with sacred validation. The treatment of such disruptions of order was always linked to the representatives of the hegemony and the social order and to the symbols of religious tradition and common custom. These representatives assumed the job of interpreting the essence of the order-disrupting distress manifested in an external, supernatural force, seizing control of a person, and confronting it according to the religious and cultural explanation in whose context they operated.

The multidimensional picture emerging from the concepts of dybbuk, possession and hysteria, exorcism of dybbuks, evil spirits, and demons, is indicative of the complexity of the concepts describing transitions between revealed and hidden worlds, and the link between abstract concepts linked to defining the boundaries of the body and the soul, the normal and the deviant, on the one hand, and concrete and symbolic power relations and the establishment of sacred social orders, on the other.