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# Justin Jaron Lewis

## “EYDELE, THE REBBE”

### Shifting perspectives on a Jewish gender transgressor

*Eydl of Brody was a nineteenth-century woman who took on the normally male role of a Hasidic Rebbe, perhaps with tragic consequences. She has left contradictory and troubling traces in history. This article presents the available data about Eydl, brings all known primary sources about her together for the first time, and gives the fullest available English translation of these sources. The theme of gender transgression is traced through the various texts, and previous scholarship focused on this theme is critiqued, the author's own work included. An understanding of Eydl as a transgendered person turns out to be both illuminating and limiting.*

Eydl of Brody,<sup>1</sup> a nineteenth-century Hasidic woman who became a Rebbe, is the subject of fascinating and troubling stories. This article presents the fullest available English translation of the sources about Eydl, and considers several perspectives on her transgression of gender boundaries. Eydl was a daughter of the Rebbe of Belz, R' Shalom (1779–1855), founder of the Belz dynasty, and his wife Malkah (d. 1852). She had an older sister, Freyde, who died in her parents' lifetime (Michelson 25), and five brothers; the youngest, Joshua, succeeded his father as Rebbe of Belz.<sup>2</sup> Eydl married Rabbi Isaac Rubin, a descendant of the famous Rebbe Naphtali of Ropczyce. The couple settled in Brody, the hometown of Eydl's parents. They had three sons, who became rabbis, and three daughters, Dinah, Ella and Hannah Rachel, who became rabbis' wives (Padva 66ff).<sup>3</sup> Ella married a grandson of one of Eydl's brothers,<sup>4</sup> and Hannah Rachel married a son of Eydl's brother R' Joshua, the Belzer Rebbe.<sup>5</sup> Apparently Eydl was well integrated into her prestigious family and the endogamous rabbinic aristocracy of Eastern Europe. Within this community, nevertheless, Eydl's life was highly unusual. She took on the normally male role of a Rebbe. She had followers; she accepted *kvitlekh*, written petitions for advice or blessing, which is the prerogative of a Rebbe (see Schachter-Shalomi 108; Rabinowicz 272); she was capable of miraculous healing. The primary sources differ in presenting this career as a success or as an aberration with a tragic ending. I have not found Eydl's dates of birth or death in any source.<sup>6</sup>

#### Perspective one: Rabbi Abraham Itinga in *Dover Shalom*

A Hasidic compilation about Rebbe Shalom of Belz, *Dover Shalom* (*Speaker of Peace/Shalom*), published in 1910, contains the earliest printed story about Eydl, contributed

by Rabbi Abraham Itinga of Dukla, who was from Brody (Michelson 26).<sup>7</sup> It has been retold in later Hasidic and non-Hasidic publications (Klapholts 100ff; Padva 62ff; Novick, tape 3; Buxbaum 135ff; cf. Brayer 44):

The second daughter of the holy Rebbe, our master R' Shalom of Belz, was the famous Rebbetzin [rabbi's wife, learned woman] and holy woman Madam Eydele of blessed memory, of Brody. She conducted herself as a Rebbe (*vehi hayta mitnaheget berabanut*) and people gave her *kvitlekh*. And I heard that her father said about her, "*Mayn Eydele felt nor der spodek*" ("My Eydele is missing only the fur hat [worn by Hasidic men]"). And I heard that a man from Brody was sick with a disease of the lungs and the chest, and the doctors despaired of his life. Once the blood was flowing from his throat and the doctors said that this blood was the last remaining piece of his lungs, and the moments of his life were numbered. And his family rushed tumultuously to her and told her the words of the doctors. And she answered saying: "Behold, with my holy father, the memory of a holy man for a blessing, a story like this happened. And my holy father said, 'First of all I do not believe the words of the doctors who say that he has no lungs left. And secondly, even if he has no lungs left, who says that a person needs lungs? The One who said that we can live with lungs will say that he will live without lungs!' And that man was restored to health. And I hope to The Blessed Name that this person too will return to health." And so it was, for he was healed and lived for many years after this story.<sup>8</sup>

In context, the purpose of this story is to glorify Rebbe Shalom of Belz. He performed miraculous healing, and he produced an exceptionally gifted daughter. Eydl's own act of healing is implicitly ascribed to his merit.<sup>9</sup> The story is built around a talmudic allusion. In Taanit 25a, R' Hanina ben Dosa finds that his distraught daughter has poured vinegar instead of oil into the Sabbath lamp. He responds: "The One who said to the oil that it should burn will say to the vinegar that it should burn!" The lamp indeed burns. R' Hanina's words are echoed by R' Shalom's. Eydl, like R' Hanina's daughter, turns to her father in a time of need. Verbally and structurally, the story thus equates R' Shalom with the great Sage R' Hanina.

Regarding Eydl's role as a Rebbe, this narrative is not particularly anxious. Her gender nonconformity is acknowledged in the remark that she is only missing the *spodek*. A similar expression occurs in other stories about powerful Hasidic women (Buxbaum 140, 287, Note 1). It is related to the expression "*zi geyt in spodek*" ("she goes around in a *spodek*"), which is like the English "she wears the pants". Thus it does not imply anything about literal cross-dressing and should be read as jocular and, in this context, admiring and affectionate.

What is the cultural context for this unruffled attitude? There is no indication that Eydl transgressed Jewish law. The prohibition of cross-dressing (Deuteronomy 22:5) was a live topic in the nineteenth-century Hasidic milieu.<sup>10</sup> Yet although Eydl took on a role normally reserved for males, nothing in this account suggests that she either cross-dressed or donned a prayer shawl or *tefillin*, sometimes seen as included in this prohibition.<sup>11</sup> Also, there were other women in Hasidic history who took on the role of Rebbe.<sup>12</sup> The most famous today is Hannah Rochel, the Maiden of Ludmir, who rose to prominence through her own charisma. Her career was at its peak in the 1820s (Deutsch 186); while highly controversial, it continued in some form, according to Nathaniel

Deutsch's magisterial study, until her death, towards the end of the nineteenth century (Deutsch, Chapter 11). More often, such women were daughters or wives of Rebbes.<sup>13</sup> For example, another nineteenth-century figure, Miriam Hayah, daughter of Rebbe Meir of Premishlan and wife of Rebbe Joel of Shotz, is said to have acted as a Rebbe in partnership with her husband and, after his death, in her own right.<sup>14</sup> Nehemiah Polen has drawn attention to the Chentshiner Rebbetzin, Sarah Horowitz Sternfeld (1838–1937), who, as a widow in her old age, became a respected holy woman in interwar Poland, accepting *kvitlekh* and bestowing blessings (Polen 10–13). While unusual, then, Eydl's role was one for which Hasidic culture sometimes allowed.

*Dover Shalom* indicates that Eydl entered into a male gender role—that of a Rebbe. It does not necessarily imply anything about her gender identity, her sense of self. If Eydl's gender identity included masculinity, however, that need not have stirred anxiety—at least for the learned Rabbi Itinga. Jewish tradition provided gender categories beyond the male-female binary, including *androginos* (hermaphrodite) and others.<sup>15</sup> Thus, Rebbe Abraham of Sochaczew (1839–1910) calmly discusses a query about two genitally anomalous children, deciding that one is male and the other perhaps *androginos* (Responsa *Avnei Nezer, Yoreh De'ah* 322). Conversely, a psychological, rather than physical, gender difference might simply not have registered on the rabbinic mind.

Still, there is ambivalence here regarding Eydl's role. Rabbi Itinga tells us “*vehi hayta mitnaheget berabanut*”. Understanding Hasidic Hebrew often depends on reconstructing the underlying Yiddish (see Heschel Vol. 1, 7). This phrase could be a Hebrew equivalent of “*zi hot gefirt rebistve*”,<sup>16</sup> which would mean “she was a Rebbe”,<sup>17</sup> but that idiom is rendered differently in another story in *Dover Shalom*.<sup>18</sup> The phrase used about Eydl more likely corresponds to “*zi hot zikh gefirt vi a rebe*” (“she conducted herself as/like a Rebbe”).<sup>19</sup> In 1937, exactly this Yiddish phrase appeared in an obituary for the Chentshiner Rebbetzin; Polen comments that it was a way of referring to her role “circumspectly”, rather than fully acknowledging her as a Rebbe (Polen 13, quoting the New York Yiddish newspaper *Der Moment*).<sup>20</sup> Neither *Dover Shalom* nor any other account actually states that Eydl was a Rebbe,<sup>21</sup> and this clearly is an issue of gender roles: there would have been no question that a man of her lineage and abilities was a real Rebbe. As Polen (15) notes, Hasidic references to holy women are careful to avoid any concession to religious egalitarianism. Therefore, a “charismatic woman leader” had to be seen as a special case who “does not now set a precedent for other women to follow”.<sup>22</sup> In this light, Rabbi Itinga's implication that Eydl was like a man, missing only the man's hat, is a way of containing her transgression of assigned gender roles within safe bounds. If she was different from other women, they would be less tempted to follow in her footsteps.

## Perspective two: Dov Sadan

The other primary source for anecdotes of Eydl is a memoir by an important Israeli author, critic and folklorist, Dov Sadan.<sup>23</sup> Sadan, like Rabbi Itinga, grew up in Brody, where he was born in 1909; he heard stories of Eydl from his family and others. In 1925 he immigrated to Palestine, where his memoir, *Mimehoz hayaldut* (*From the Realm of Childhood*), was published in 1938. Sadan makes Eydl the main subject of a chapter entitled “A little about the klezmer musicians of our town and a lot about Eydele the

Rebbetzin” (Shtok 287–97; Sadan 256–64).<sup>24</sup> The chapter begins with the musicians who would play for Eydl at the close of the Sabbath, and continues with legends about Eydl’s son R’ Melekh’l, who was blind but could see many things miraculously. In a poetic Hebrew style echoing traditional religious literature, Sadan interweaves his account of Eydl herself with Hasidic, talmudic and historical material. His own compassionate reflections about Eydl and her father appear throughout. The pervading tone is one of sadness and longing. This is skilful literary work, using oral traditions about Eydl as raw material.

The following are the narrative kernels about Eydl, extracted from Sadan’s much longer chapter.

Reb Sholom’se [Sadan refers to R’ Shalom of Belz by this affectionate diminutive] had a lot of sons; his son who inherited his leadership, R’ Joshua, was the dearest to him; but his daughter, Eydele, was dear to his heart, even more than his son. He would even say: “The light that was stored away, which was to illuminate the whole world,<sup>25</sup> is stored away in my daughter Eydele. If she were male, what holy man could have been as great as she! She would certainly have brought the redemption near. But it is one of the deeds of Satan, the accuser, that she was not born male.” And in truth, her father was pained by this for most of his life. Even as he was dying, when they chased away the daughters from his bed, so that their wailing would not disturb the moment of his death, he said: “Eydele will stay, because Eydele is not a daughter to me, she is a son to me.” And to what point he treasured her and held her dear can be seen from the story of the gift. Once a man was going from Belz to our town, and R’ Sholom’se said to him: “Take this little package; I have wrapped up in it a silk shawl, a present for my daughter.” That man brought the package to Rebbetzin Eydele; she untied the cord around the package, opened the paper, and there was not a silk shawl wrapped up in it, but a *parokhet* [curtain for the ark where the Torah is kept] was wrapped up in it. A few days later, when that man went back to Belz, Eydele sent the package back with him to her father. The man came to the Rebbe and said: “Your holiness made a mistake; you said you would wrap up a silk shawl and you wrapped up a silk *parokhet*.” The Rebbe laughed and said: “A mistake about what? Is not my Eydele a scroll of the Torah?” (Shtok 290; Sadan 258ff)

...

The memory of this noble woman was treasured in our family, not only in the last generation, when a grandson of her blind son married a granddaughter of my grandmother’s father, Reb Yoshi the shochet,<sup>26</sup> but in the generation before that, during the lifetime of Reb Yoshi himself. During the thirteen years that he studied in the Rebbe’s house in Belz, he learned a lot about the ways of the household and the members of the family. That the accusing Satan had prevented Eydele from being born male was an article of faith to him. (Shtok 291; Sadan 259)

...

The Hasidim who gathered around Rebbetzin Eydele’s table were many. They spoke in praise of her teachings,<sup>27</sup> they spoke in adulation of her responses to

*kvitlekh*, there was much admiration of her wisdom, and even from her nickname, *Eydele der Rebe* [Eydele the (male) Rebbe]<sup>28</sup> you can tell how greatly she was honoured. (Shtok 292; Sadan 260)

...

[There are] light-hearted stories that are told about [Rebbe Sholom'tse]—that in her childhood he would dress her in a skullcap, or that he would jokingly say to it, “Skullcap, skullcap, if only you were worthy, I would be worthy, and my Eydele would be worthy of you, and you would be worthy of her.” (Shtok 296; Sadan 263)

Along with these anecdotes, Sadan gives a tragic account of Eydl's career (Shtok 292–97; Sadan 260–64). He says that she saw herself as the true successor to her father, R' Shalom, and bitterly criticised her brother R' Joshua, the actual successor, who had many more followers. In time, this resentment came to dominate her life. Eydl denounced the opulence of her brother's court on every possible occasion. Two words, “*vebene hemder*” (“woven shirts”, i.e., luxuriously expensive clothing), recurred in every denunciation and gradually became an obsessive refrain that those around her heard over and over again (Shtok 293; Sadan 261). Then, at least in the perception of the townspeople, matters took a fearsome turn: Eydl was possessed by a *dybbuk* (the wandering soul of someone deceased). Her brother the Belzer Rebbe, R' Joshua, performed an exorcism. Eydl, or the *dybbuk* in her, cursed her brother in a male voice, which, to the shock of those present, had some of the music of her father R' Shalom's voice. Taken aback at first, R' Joshua rallied and called down anathemas on the *dybbuk* until Eydl collapsed. Exorcised, she sank into a life of melancholy, which Sadan compares to the darkness in which her blind son lived. The end of the chapter returns to the musicians who played for Eydl after the Sabbath. She would sing along with a melody called *Hirschenjagd* (*The Stag Hunt*), identifying with the hunted deer. Her son, R' Melekh'l, the blind rabbi, would praise their music, but Eydl said nothing.

This sad and beautifully told view of Eydl is startlingly different from that of *Dover Shalom*, where there is no hint that Hasidim remembered Eydl as an aberration or failure. The perspective of *Dover Shalom* is followed by those later Belz sources that mention Eydl at all.<sup>29</sup> A 1993 Belz publication prints a facsimile of an invitation from Rebbe Joshua of Belz to his son's wedding to Eydl's daughter in which he refers to Eydl as “my sister, the famous holy woman” (Padva 188) using the same expression (“*hatsadeket hamefursetmet*”) as *Dover Shalom*. This letter, the marriage itself and Eydl's son R' Melekh'l's eventual burial in Belz (Michelson 26; Shtok 289; Sadan 258) seem to testify to good family relations. Today, a knowledgeable descendant of Eydl, P. Y. Mund, notes: “I never heard of the tale of Eidel and the *dybbuk*, and neither have my close family members” (E-mail correspondence, 4 November 2006).

On the other hand, Sadan was a folklorist, and there is no reason to doubt his word that he is citing legends he heard orally. Since he was writing in the early twentieth century about a woman of the mid- to late-nineteenth century, his statement that he heard about Eydl's exorcism from eyewitnesses is plausible. And if Eydl opposed her brother and suffered possession and exorcism, it would make sense for Hasidim to suppress this information. It would not even be surprising if a letter from her brother were forged to help with this effort.<sup>30</sup> Still, in Hasidic culture, which

values genealogy, it is unlikely that the basic information regarding Eydl's daughters' marriages would have been invented. Furthermore, would Hasidic sources not have played down Eydl's very existence if her life had been as scandalous as Sadan's account suggests? There are only a few references to Eydl in Hasidic literature, but then this is a literature that scarcely mentions women at all. The Maiden of Ludmir, much better known to general readers today, is not mentioned, at least by name, in any Hasidic text (Deutsch 54ff).

Some details in Hasidic sources contradict Sadan's account yet seem unlikely to have been invented for that purpose. Particularly, Sadan's "when they chased away the daughters from his bed" does not fit the data that Eydl was R' Shalom's only living daughter by that time.<sup>31</sup> Oral traditions—and the recollections of eyewitnesses—change over time (as Sadan acknowledges—Shtok 293; Sadan 261), and Sadan heard about Eydl a generation later than Rabbi Itinga. Perhaps traditions about Eydl had become confused with stories of other women such as the Maiden of Ludmir, who was accused of being possessed by a *dybbuk*.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, Sadan refers to Brody as "a town of *mitnagdim* and *maskilim*" (Shtok 290; Sadan 258)—that is, both conservative and liberal opponents of Hasidism, who would have had an interest in telling disgraceful stories about the family of the famous Belzer Rebbe. Alternatively, all the data could be harmonised in one way or another. Perhaps Hannah Rachel's wedding meant the absorption of a member of Eydl's family into R' Joshua's, solidifying his dominance over his sister. Or, conversely, perhaps the possession and exorcism were only a passing episode, like the year-long nervous breakdown that is said to have interrupted the career of the great Rebbe Levi Isaac of Berditchev (see Dynner 82; Wiesel 105ff).

I will focus on the tension around gender in Sadan's account of Eydl. If *Dover Shalom* presents Eydl as being like a man, it could be only because she took on "a man's job". The salient issue is her transgression of conventional gender roles. For Sadan, the problem of gender is deeper and more pervasive. Thus, where *Dover Shalom* includes an idiom with an image of male headgear (the *spodek*), Sadan's account literalises this as R' Shalom dresses the young Eydl in a yarmulke. Sadan adds that R' Shalom longed to put his *tefillin* on little Eydl (Shtok 296; Sadan 263).<sup>33</sup> In the story of the gift, R' Shalom appears to be offering his daughter an item of female clothing, but when the gift is opened, the clothing is not there. Thus R' Shalom both dresses Eydl as a boy and draws back from dressing her as a woman.

Intriguingly, in one of his reflective asides, Sadan anticipates Judith Butler's new paradigm of gender as performance (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 171–90), implying that Eydl performed maleness, but ultimately failed to convince:

When a magician builds a house before you in an instant with its halls and its rooms, you do not ask him to build you a house that you will really live in... All the attributes of a holy man were hers, she even had a throng of devotees who believed in her, but for all that the core of reality was missing from the book of her life. (Shtok 293; Sadan 260)

It is not clear on what Sadan bases this assessment. Perhaps there is a clue in the nickname "Eydele der Rebe", which could be understood as teasing or derogatory. A male Rebbe would not be referred to as, say, "Shalom the Rebbe", but as "Rebbe Shalom".

Though Sadan himself states that the nickname shows that she was held in honour, much would depend on how it was spoken, and by whom.

Further, in Sadan's account:

- Eydl identified with her *father* and saw herself as his successor.
- Her father, and Belz Hasidim after him (like Sadan's ancestor Reb Yoshi) believed that she "should have been born male".
- Her father called her a son, not a daughter.
- She experienced possession by the spirit of her father or a male *dybbuk*.

Why does gender play such a large role in Sadan's version of Eydl's life, as compared to that of *Dover Shalom*? The oral traditions on which Sadan drew may represent a "folk" perspective as compared to the rabbinic perspective of *Dover Shalom*. Eastern European Jewish communities were, like many close-knit minority cultures, notoriously gossipy and suspicious of differences (see Tebbutt 3). Learned rabbis might maintain a calm attitude toward someone of ambiguous gender; this likely did not extend into broader circles. Moreover, Sadan's account of Eydl is shaped by his own ideas. Hasidic tales told by Hasidim do not psychologise. Characters act out their emotions straightforwardly, dancing with joy or crying with sorrow, or state them forthrightly. A Rebbe may expose someone's ulterior motives, but narrators do not speculate about Rebbes' ulterior motives. Therefore, whenever Sadan speaks of R' Shalom's or Eydl's yearnings and desires, we can assume that these are his own speculations, not taken from oral tradition.

Sadan's chapter includes a great deal of such speculation, which I have not translated. For example, Sadan suggests that R' Shalom had an intense relationship with his mother and redirected these feelings toward his wife Malkah, and then toward Eydl (Shtok 295–96; Sadan 262–63). Sadan writes that he has attempted to understand Eydl through "*darkhei haheker shel torat hanefesh*" ("the investigative methods of the theory of the psyche") (Shtok 294; Sadan 262).<sup>34</sup> He was writing at a time when psychoanalysis was a cutting-edge science that some in the Zionist movement embraced as part of the project of building a stronger, healthier Jewish people.<sup>35</sup> The decades before the publication of his memoir had seen a great deal of attention to sexual and gender variance. The German Jewish sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld (1868–1935) campaigned for homosexual rights, theorised about "intermediate levels" ("*Zwischenstufen*") between male and female, and coined the word "transsexualism" (Pfaefflin; see also Steakley, Introduction; Prickett, in Finney, Chapter 7). Thus, concern with psychology, sexuality and gender was in the air for Sadan as a Jewish intellectual of his time, and played a part in shaping his construction of Eydl.

### Perspective three: Yoram Bilu

Psychology dominates what may be the best known account of Eydl: <sup>36</sup> Yoram Bilu's article "The Woman Who Wanted To Be Her Father: A Case Analysis of *Dybbuk* Possession in a Hasidic Community", which first appeared in the *Journal of Psychoanalytic Anthropology* in 1985 and has been reprinted a number of times.<sup>37</sup> Bilu (b. 1942), a professor of anthropology at the Hebrew University, advances an analysis of Eydl based on Sadan's



account.<sup>38</sup> This does involve some additions to her story—in particular, the motif of cross-dressing becomes even more salient. Sadan wrote: “Whenever [R’ Shalom’tse] looked at his *tefillin*, he wanted to see her head crowned with them” (Shtok 296; Sadan 263). Bilu (“The Woman”, 202) writes: “When she was young he used to decorate her head with his phylacteries”—turning a presumed desire into an action. Bilu (“The Woman”, 207) also refers to “the fact that she was raised as a boy”—a claim that goes well beyond the traditions reported by Sadan.

Bilu (“The Woman”, 201) writes that after Rebbetzin Malkah’s death: “For many years [R’ Shalom] could not be consoled... His only ray of comfort in his anguish was his daughter, Eidel.” “Many years” is a quotation from Sadan, where the point is that R’ Shalom’s deep mourning went on longer than Jewish custom usually allowed (Shtok 295; Sadan 262).<sup>39</sup> In that context, the “many years” need not be more than the three the historical record allows for between the death of Rebbetzin Malkah and R’ Shalom’s own death (from 23 August 1852 to 10 September 1855). Bilu, however, is arguing that these “many years” of being her father’s only female love object had a profound effect on Eydl’s psyche.<sup>40</sup> This does not fit well with the historical time frame, or with the fact that Eydl was no longer a young child when her mother died.<sup>41</sup>

While Bilu (“The Woman”, 198, 206, 208) touches on broader issues and expresses sympathy for a feminist approach, his focus is on gender. He argues that R’ Shalom made “attempts to masculinize Eidel” not only to express his esteem for her in a patriarchal culture, but as “a defensive device against libidinal wishes and fantasies in connection with his daughter” (Bilu, “The Woman”, 202). Eydl learned from this “that being loved is associated with being male” and she “internaliz[ed] a male representation”, unconsciously absorbing aspects of her father’s personality (Bilu, “The Woman”, 205). The story in *Dover Shalom* is mentioned as evidence that “she explicitly used Rabbi Shalom as a model” (Bilu, “The Woman”, 202). Her persistence in casting herself, against all odds, as his true successor “might be taken as an indication of how thoroughly she introjected her father” (Bilu, “The Woman”, 206). Bilu argues that Eydl’s *dybbuk* possession was “a means of articulating her experience” as “she regressed from identifying with the father into a more primitive type of internalization, that is, incorporation” (Bilu, “The Woman”, 206, 207).

While *Dover Shalom* shows Eydl taking on a male gender role, and Sadan depicts other people wanting her identity to be male or perceiving it as such, Bilu’s argument addresses Eydl’s own sense of gender identity. Basically, though he does not use this terminology, Bilu reads Eydl as transsexual,<sup>42</sup> and traces this to her victimisation by her father as a result of his own psychosexual burdens. The historical context of Bilu’s article is one in which trans people were becoming ever more visible. In the preceding decades, transsexuals such as Wendy Carlos, Christine Jorgensen, Jan Morris and Renée Richards were in the public eye. Sex reassignment through hormones and surgery was increasingly available. Social and legal recognition of transsexual people took its first steps. A leading figure in these changes was Harry Benjamin (1885–1986), a Jew from Germany who was influenced by Magnus Hirschfeld.<sup>43</sup> Benjamin performed and advocated sex reassignment surgery, published a groundbreaking study, *The Transsexual Phenomenon*, in 1966, and has been called “the founding father of transsexualism” (Elkins 309). In this context, it had become possible to focus overtly on gender identity as a key to understanding Eydl. Bilu’s retelling of Eydl’s childhood makes her resemble a classic transsexual as depicted in psychiatric literature:

In the scientific literature, the psychologically harmful influences in childhood, so-called “conditioning”, are the most frequently mentioned and most widely accepted causes of transvestism, transsexualism, as well as homosexuality.

Literally, or in substance, here are statements that were made to me by transsexual patients... [for example:] My mother wanted me to be a girl and secretly dressed me as a girl and brought me up that way till I was old enough to go to school. (Benjamin 67ff)

Such discourse provided a model for Bilu’s depiction of an Eydl, whose father put his *tefillin* on her and raised her as a boy—his own additions to Sadan’s account.

While I owe much of my own understanding of Eydl to Bilu, I find his psychoanalytic approach unconvincing, because of its contradictions with available data, and morally unsatisfying, because it pathologises her. While Sadan’s poetic text takes Eydl’s part, the analytic voice of Bilu’s article stands in the same position toward Eydl as those in Sadan’s account who put her through the ordeal of exorcism.<sup>44</sup>

#### **Perspective four: my own suggestions**

In two conference papers, at the University of Toronto in 2002 and the Association for Jewish Studies in 2005, I built on Bilu’s approach to Eydl’s gender identity, while affirming a transgressive gender identity as her own rather than as something inflicted upon her by others. The historical context for this reading is clear. Since Bilu’s article was first published, there has been an explosion of transgender activism, and gender-related discourse has changed radically. Overcoming strong opposition,<sup>45</sup> trans people entered and transformed the movement for gay and lesbian rights. The word “transgender(ed)” itself came into use in the 1980s, connoting a broader range of possibilities than the binary connotation of “transsexual”,<sup>46</sup> and both have been superseded to some extent by the umbrella term “trans”. Gender Studies and Queer Studies have taken their place in the academy. In Israel, trans singer Dana International gained global renown in the 1990s, and trans activist Nora Greenberg became a leader of the (renamed) *Agudah* of Gays, Lesbians, Bisexuals and Transgendered in the early 2000s. Rabbis grappled with new questions and the Reform movement admitted an “out” transsexual, Reuben Zellman, to its rabbinical school in 2003. Jewish trans activists such as Kate Bornstein and Leslie Feinberg made intellectual contributions to an increasingly diverse and challenging movement; Feinberg and others searched history to find predecessors for today’s trans struggles (see Feinberg; Devor 3-36; Wallace).

Many biographical and autobiographical accounts of trans experience include the motif of cross-dressing. In retelling Eydl’s story, Bilu literalised the idiomatic reference to cross-dressing found in *Dover Shalom*. In my conference papers I went further, arguing that since a Rebbe often wears distinctive clothing (in the early generations of Hasidism, Rebbes wore white), Eydl likely wore distinctive, perhaps masculine, garb in her role as Rebbe. Moreover, according to Sadan, Eydl’s repeated complaint about her brother’s followers was a reference to clothing. This gives us a glimpse—I argued—of choice of clothing as a central concern in Eydl’s mind. Retrospectively, in the absence of more

solid evidence, I recognise that these suggestions turned me into one more imaginative re-teller of Eydl's story.

I would like to summarise what I consider my more plausible insights about Eydl from a trans perspective, while fully acknowledging that this is only one possible way of reconstructing her story. I will continue to use female pronouns for Eydl, for convenience and because that is what all our sources do.

The fact that both primary sources, *Dover Shalom* and Sadan, indicate that Eydl's role as a Rebbe was seen as masculine cries out for a brief comment in the light of contemporary thought. Eydl conducted festive meals with followers, taught, responded to written requests for blessings (*kvitlekh*), told stories and offered healing. In many other cultures these actions would not be coded as masculine, and some might be distinctly feminine. This highlights the culturally constructed and arbitrary nature of gender (see, e.g., Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 10). Today's trans activism, incidentally, largely embraces a view of gender as constructed, though it exists in unresolved tension with the strong sense of gender identity felt by many trans people (Roen).

Looking more closely at *Dover Shalom* and Sadan, we see that they do not depict Eydl herself so much as (borrowing a term from visual art) the "negative space" defining her contours. We are given little access to her own thoughts, but we are told those of her father, brother and followers. It is perhaps because of this structural aspect of the texts that Bilu analyses Eydl as a passive entity, shaped by her father, rather than an active agent. This depiction clashes, however, with Eydl's evident strength of personality. It is possible to shift perspectives and see other people's words and gestures about Eydl's masculinity not as forces that shaped her, but as responses to her.<sup>47</sup>

As Bilu ("The Woman", 202) notes, fathers in traditional Jewish communities might give a male education to a daughter when they had no sons, but R' Shalom had five sons. He also had a daughter, Freyde, to whom he did not ascribe masculinity. I would conclude that he had no motive to *make* Eydl masculine. It is more reasonable to gather that Eydl made a masculine impression on him. Eydl's mother, Malkah, figures prominently in a number of Hasidic tales (see Michelson 5, 25, 39, 41, 42, 61, 62, 67, 364; Langer 39ff; Klapholts 80–89)<sup>48</sup> as a spiritually gifted, wise woman. Like her daughter, she could bring about miraculous healing (Michelson 42, retold in Langer 38ff). She is also consistently depicted as R' Shalom's partner and supporter, an ideal wife. No story about Malkah suggests that she was ever perceived as playing a male role. Jewish storytellers have thus been capable of depicting a Hasidic woman of power without any hint of gender transgression. Eydl need not have been depicted as masculine unless there were reasons to do so; unless, for example, she did present a gender identity that was felt to be male. If the Malkah stories reflect historical reality, Eydl had a role model of how to be a spiritually powerful, respected woman while remaining within a clear female gender role. Yet the sources agree that Eydl did not follow this path. If she followed her father's way rather than her mother's, perhaps this was truer to her own identity.

Many accounts of trans identity strongly emphasise the body.<sup>49</sup> Read in the light of Sadan's account, the story in *Dover Shalom*, which involves Eydl as a narrator, could be giving us a glimpse of her somatic experience. It is a very physical story, with its graphic image of blood flowing from the throat. In her bold assertion that one could live without lungs, Eydl claims that through divine power the body can perform its physical functions even with pieces missing that would ordinarily be required. As she tells the story about her father, and re-enacts his miracle, she thereby places herself in a male role. A claim

about her own physical self is implicit: though her own body may also lack a piece ordinarily required to take a male role, through divine power she can act as a male. Jay Prosser (4) argues that “transsexuality is always narrative work”. Eydl as narrator can be seen as exploring and laying claim to a male identity.

Finally, I turn to Sadan’s account of Eydl’s “exorcism”. A trans perspective allows deeper understanding of why this might have happened and its continuing relevance. Whether Eydl saw herself as a man or as outside the gender binary, or whether she was simply a woman who refused her culture’s limitations, she transgressed gender norms. In this context, the exorcism can be seen as a punishment of her transgression. “Violence based upon gender does not solely affect the transgendered. Anyone just perceived as crossing gender lines can become a victim.”<sup>50</sup> To the victimisers, distinctions between gender role and gender identity are irrelevant.

A video of the exorcism of a young woman, conducted by Rabbi David Basri in Jerusalem in 1999,<sup>51</sup> sheds light on the account of R’ Joshua calling down curses on his sister. The gruelling procedure shown in the video largely consists of a group of men shouting the “possessed” woman into submission, a sustained onslaught of verbal violence. The video presents only an edited version of the exorcism, which lasted more than six hours (Alexander, quoted in Goldish 319). It is easy to imagine that such an onslaught, especially from a brother, could “succeed” in causing a psychic breakdown. Violence against trans people functions as a deterrent to potential transgressors of gender roles or identities. Eydl’s exorcism, a public event, could similarly have prevented others from following in her footsteps (j wallace, E-mail correspondence, 21 December 2005).

### Eydl in her own voice

While revising this reflection on male authors’ views of Eydl, I received a text apparently written by Eydl herself. It is a letter, preserved by descendants of Eydl, congratulating her daughter Dinah on the birth of her first child.<sup>52</sup> Typically for its time, the letter moves back and forth between rabbinic Hebrew, filled with formulaic honorifics, and Yiddish, which is also permeated with pious phrases. Discerning Eydl’s own voice through the layers of convention may not be easy, but is worth the effort:<sup>53</sup>

[*The letter begins in Hebrew*] With the help of God.<sup>54</sup> The fourth day of the week of the Torah portion *Tetsaveh*, 5626 [Wednesday, 21 February 1866], here in Brody.

*Mazel tov, mazel tov, mazel tov*, peace and everything good to my beloved, cherished, treasured daughter, the worthy, modest, intelligent, dear Madam Dinah *leb*,<sup>55</sup> may she live for many long and good days and years. With greetings to her husband, my dear son-in-law, distinguished in Torah and piety, of holy ancestry, honoured, etc.,<sup>56</sup> our teacher and rabbi, Meir,<sup>57</sup> long may he live.

[*Yiddish*] We wish you *mazel tov*. May the blessed Name help everyone, so that for all of you and for all of us there may be good fortune (*mazal tov*). May we all merit to raise the precious daughter, Malkah *lebn*, with many more good, pious children, to the Torah and the wedding canopy and good deeds. I very much want the blessed Name to help so that you will be able to breastfeed her yourself, in good health, easily.

We are very surprised that we weren't telegraphed.

Praised be the blessed Name for His great kindness; may He always do ever more undeserved kindness with us. May you all be healthy and strong.

[*Hebrew*] From your mother who looks forward to always hearing good news from one another, and to seeing you with much joy, Eydl, daughter of the holy Rabbi, the righteous man of blessed memory for the life of the world to come, may his merit shield us, [and from] Elimelech (long may he live), Malkah (long may she live),<sup>58</sup> and Hannah Rachel (long may she live); with his honour the rabbi,<sup>59</sup> we bless you with a blessing of *mazel tov*.

Greetings to my beloved *makheteneste* [child's spouse's mother], the worthy, modest Rebbetzin, the righteous woman, of holy ancestry—may God be our help—Madam Miriam Hayah (long may she live). [*Yiddish*] We wish you *mazel tov* and we request of you to continue to befriend our good dear child *leb* and care for her.<sup>60</sup> May your ancestral merit and ours stand by us forever. I greet your children<sup>61</sup> (long may they live) and we wish them *mazel tov*. From your *makheteneste* who wishes you everything good and much joy from all the children (long may they live), Eydl daughter of the holy Rabbi, the righteous man of blessed memory for the life of the world to come, may his merit shield us.

Through all the pious stock phrases, this letter lets us hear enough of Eydl's own voice to change our impressions of her. Except for her proud identity as her father's daughter, this Eydl contrasts with depictions of her by male authors, myself included. She is a familiar Ashkenazi Jewish maternal figure, showering her daughter and granddaughter with blessings while allowing herself the "*kvetch*" that she would have liked to have received the good news sooner, by telegraph. She is a womanly Eydl, who, in contrast to any of her literary representations, is in loving relationships with other women. As Rabbi Léah Novick has observed, "we really don't know how any of these [Hasidic holy] women related to other women!" (Email correspondence, 28 July 1999). From this letter, we know a little more. Eydl asks her *makheteneste* to befriend and look after her young daughter. She extends to her daughter an intimate blessing about breastfeeding. All this adds a dimension to the picture of Eydl that was missing from other sources.

To my reading, this evidence radically calls into question constructions of Eydl as "gender dysphoric" or male-identified. This Eydl seems at home in her own skin as a woman. In this light, I regret the title of my 2002 conference paper, "The Soul of a Rebbe in the Body of a Rebbetzin". I noted at the time that the "soul of one gender in the body of another" motif is seen by some trans people as dated and limiting.<sup>62</sup> I would now add that it seems singularly inapplicable to the Eydl of this letter. My title completed a pattern leading from one perspective on Eydl to the next. In *Dover Shalom*, Eydl was a woman almost as accomplished as a man. To Sadan, she was a woman whom others wanted to be a man. To Bilu, she was a woman who wanted to be a man, and finally in my paper she was a man in the body of a woman. I am troubled at this pattern of male authors increasingly masculinising Eydl. Would we have been more comfortable if Eydl had not enacted a female role, marrying a man and having children? Both *Dover*

*Shalom* and Sadan minimise the number of Eydl's children, with Sadan leaving the impression that R' Melekh'l was her only child.<sup>63</sup> Bilu, further, feminises her husband, writing that R' Isaac Rubin "refused to behave as an *admor* [Rebbe]"—a detail that I do not find in the sources—and speculating about "a marital pattern in which the husband was passive and less domineering than his wife" (Bilu, "The Woman", 209).

Nathaniel Deutsch (125) has identified a similar phenomenon regarding the Maiden of Ludmir: "[H]er biographers... consistently sought to portray the Maiden as consciously embracing a male identity... while her self-conception remains more elusive."<sup>64</sup> Regarding Eydl, this pattern could be seen as an ever-increasing manifestation of *Dover Shalom*'s patriarchal refusal to see her as a potential role model for other women. Deutsch's nuanced chapter on this issue "explore[s] the possibility that... in constructing her social and religious identity the Maiden of Ludmir drew on male and female influences alike and in so doing went beyond dichotomous constructions of gender" (Deutsch 125). In the end, then, Deutsch does not insist that Hannah Rochel should be understood in only one gender category. In the terminology of this paper, he rejects a characterisation of the Maiden of Ludmir as transsexual in favour of an understanding of her as transgendered.<sup>65</sup>

There is still room to understand Eydl as transgendered in this broader sense. Her letter highlights the conventionally female aspects of her personality, but there is more in it than meets the eye. Eydl's *makheteneste* Miriam Hayah is the aforementioned daughter of Rebbe Meir of Premishlan, a holy woman who gradually took on the role of a Rebbe. The relationship between these two mothers, then, is also a relationship between two powerful crossers of gender boundaries. There is nothing here that contradicts what we are told by *Dover Shalom* or Sadan about Eydl's taking on the "male" role of Rebbe, seeing herself as her father's successor or being perceived by others as masculine. The letter need not negate impressions drawn from these texts; instead, it can add to them. Perhaps Eydl's gender identity was large enough to encompass as much femininity as this letter shows, and a great deal of masculinity too.<sup>66</sup> A more sophisticated approach to Eydl through the lens of gender may yet have much to teach us.

It is my hope that more written or oral sources about Eydl may come to light. I hope that descendants of Eydl who encounter this article will come forward with what they know. In the meantime, whether we approach the existing sources through the lens of gender or from any other perspective, I would argue that the challenge is the following: to find ways of reading the sources that honour Eydl, and that make her more vivid rather than more obscure. In this way, perhaps, we can approach Eydl's table, rub shoulders with her disciples and listen to her teach.

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## Notes

1. An alternative English spelling of Eydl is “Eidel”. Several sources call her “Eydele”, an affectionate diminutive. “Eydl” (*alef yud yud dalet yud lamed*, in old Yiddish spelling) is found in a letter attributed to Eydl herself (see the end of this article).
2. Eydl’s age relative to her brothers is unclear. All sources list the brothers first and then the sisters, but there is evidence that Freyde was born before Joshua: the story cited in Note 31 implies that she was already alive when her husband-to-be, Hanokh Henikh of Olesko, was a little boy; he was born in 1800, while Joshua’s dates are 1825–1894. I have not found birth dates for the other brothers.
3. There may have been another daughter, Malkah (see Note 58).
4. Moses (see Michelson 24; Klapholts 89; Wagschal 249).
5. The marriage took place in 1874 after the death of Eydl’s husband Rabbi Isaac Rubin (see Klapholts 102; Padva 188), but had been planned earlier (Padva 132–35, 187ff).
6. A descendant of Eydl, P. Y. Mund, has told me that he does not know Eydl’s dates or any stories about her (E-mail correspondence, 24 October 2006).
7. Born in Brody in 1874, Itinga moved to Dukla after his marriage in 1902 (Wunder vol. 1, 131.)
8. All translations in this article are my own.
9. There are similar tales about male Rebbes who re-enact the miracles of great Rebbes of the past. For a well-known example, see Scholem 349ff.
10. Thus the *Maharsham*, Rabbi Shalom Mordecai ben Moses Schwadron (1835–1911), a highly respected Galician rabbi, investigates whether a young man is permitted to dye his greying beard or whether it would violate this prohibition (Responsa *Shut maharsham* 2:243).
11. Based on Targum (Pseudo-)Jonathan, which specifies *tallit* and *tefillin* as male garments in its paraphrase of Deuteronomy 22:5. Yoram Bilu’s “The Woman Who Wanted to be Her Father” (discussed further below), is thus inaccurate in stating that “there is no explicit prohibition against women adorning themselves with male religious objects” (Bilu, “The Woman”, 203).
12. Ada Rapaport-Albert lists eleven women mentioned in various sources “who are said to have commanded a following in their own right”, including Eydl (see “On Women in Hasidism”, in Rapaport-Albert & Zipperstein 518, Note 39). Bilu (“The Woman”, 204) cites I. Alphasi (*Hasidism*. Tel Aviv, 1974) as mentioning “about 15”.
13. Polen (19, Note 38) suggests that controversy around the Maiden of Ludmir “may have been prompted in part by the fact that her charismatic powers evidently did not derive from her connection to an already established lineage... almost all *male* masters were themselves the sons of masters”.
14. She lived until 1903 (Rabinowicz 329). Stories about Miriam Hayah are gathered in Buxbaum (140–45).
15. Arguably, *aylonit*, *saris hamah*, *saris adam*, *androginos* and *tumtum* are halakhic gender categories. Maimonides’ definitions of these Talmudic terms are in the first two chapters of *Hilkhot ishut*.
16. This phrase is used about Malkah of Trisk in Shemen (Vol. 2, 330).
17. The masculine equivalent (*er hot gefirt rebistve*) is a common Yiddish idiom.
18. *Lenahel et harabanut* (Michelson 61), a calque of the Yiddish infinitive *firn rebistve*.
19. The masculine form of the same expression (*hayah... mitnaheg berabanut*) appears in another Hasidic hagiographical work, *Siah sarfei kodesh*, where a Hasid, out of financial need, acts as a Rebbe by accepting money to bless women to have children (Qadish 28.)

20. “She conducted herself as a Rebbe” is Polen’s translation of the Yiddish phrase there. Another New York newspaper, *Der Tog*, did refer to the Chentshiner Rebbetzin as a “*froy-rebe*” (“woman Rebbe”) (Polen 13).
21. The recent Belz source *Be’oholei tsadiqim* says only that Eydl “took *kvitlekh* like one of the Rebbes” (Padva 63). Buxbaum (135, 140, 145) does bestow the title “Rebbe” on Eydl and some other Hasidic women, but this is from a perspective outside Hasidic culture.
22. Bilu (“The Woman”, 203) notes: “Most [Hasidic holy women] ... did not attempt to revolutionize Jewish conceptions and definitions regarding males and females.”
23. Thank you to David Assaf for drawing my attention to this source. The mention of Eydl in the memorial book for Belz appears to be based on Sadan’s account (Rubin 62, 117ff). Sadan is also the probable source for the mention, in the entry on Eydl’s husband in Wunder (Vol. 4, 703), of Eydl’s opposition to her brother R’ Joshua.
24. Shtok was Sadan’s original family name, used in the 1938 edition.
25. The light of the first days of creation, before the creation of the sun and stars; often understood as divine radiance.
26. The 1938 edition has “my grandfather [*avi zeqeni* rather than *avi zeqenti*] Reb Yossi”. I am assuming that the later reading is correct since it is more unusual; otherwise, the translation follows the 1938 edition when there are slight variations.
27. *Torot she’amra* (“the torahs she said”), from the Yiddish expression used for a Rebbe’s oral teachings.
28. The 1981 edition has “even from her nickname, as she was called by most people, Eydele the Rebbetzin, and especially from her nickname as she was called by a few people, *Eydele der Rebe*”. This involves inserting ten words into the text, and perhaps they were left out by error in the first edition. On the other hand, the later version weakens the point considerably. It also makes less sense: there is nothing impressive about the nickname used by “most people” in this version (Eydele the Rebbetzin) since she obviously was a rebbetzin (a rabbi’s wife).
29. Klapholts and especially Padva. Eydl is not mentioned in Aykhler’s Belz hagiographic work about R’ Shalom (Aykhler 1995). Nor does the memorial book for Brody (Gelber) mention her. Eydl is mentioned in the Belz memorial book, where the account appears to be based on Sadan, as mentioned above. Dovid Herskovic, connected to the Belz community, told me that, to his knowledge, no stories of Eydl are told among Belz Hasidim today (E-mail correspondence, 7 June 1999).
30. For a famous example of the use of forged letters to support Hasidic historiography, see the discussion of the “Kherson genizah” in Rosman (123ff).
31. Freyde died in 1848. Even if *habanot* here could be translated “the girls” rather than “the daughters”, R’ Shalom’s words imply a contrast between Eydl and others of her own family and generation. Another reason to doubt the historicity of this incident is its close structural parallel with a story in *Dover Shalom*, where R’ Shalom, about to set out on a journey, “was surrounded by little boys, and among them the child [who would become] the Rabbi Reb Hanokh Henikh; and when the Rebbetzin [Malkah] saw, she came out of the house to chase them away from the carriage, but the holy Rebbe said to her, ‘The boy Henikh do not chase away, because he will be (God willing) the husband of our daughter Freyde’” (Michelson 25).
32. “[N]early every one of the Maiden of Ludmir’s biographers has claimed that she was accused of being possessed by a dybbuk” (Deutsch 147). See Deutsch’s discussion of an eyewitness memory told to him, involving another woman possessed by a dybbuk, possibly influenced by accounts of the Maiden of Ludmir (Deutsch 15, 17–9).



33. This comes just before the paragraph about the skullcap translated above. I have not included it there because I believe it is mere speculation about R' Shalom's psychology—other examples of which will be discussed below.
34. Sadan's poetic Hebrew expression could also be translated in more traditional terms as "the ways of philosophy of the Torah of the soul".
35. See Liban and Goldman on the importance of Freud and psychoanalysis in the Hashomer Hatz'a'ir movement.
36. Thus David Halperin, on his website, says: "For a fascinating and practically unbelievable story of a woman rebbe, see Yoram Bilu, 'The Woman Who Wanted to Be Her Father'"—implying that Bilu's article is *the* source on Eydl.
37. Citations in this article follow Klass and Weisgrau. More recent reprints can be found in: Castelli (331–45); Bilu, "La femme".
38. Bilu ("The Woman", 200) states that Sadan's memoir is his source: "The dybbuk account under discussion was taken from a volume of memoirs." Bilu's article seems to approach Sadan's chapter about Eydl as a naïve account that can be taken as historically accurate; this ignores the variability of oral traditions, which Sadan (293; Shtok 261) himself comments upon, and Sadan's literary artistry. Bilu ("The Woman", 201) also cites Klapholts regarding the close relationship between R' Shalom and Rebbetzin Malkah. There is an apparent reference to *Dover Shalom*, without a source note: "There is some scant evidence in the Belze chronicles that . . . she explicitly used Rabbi Shalom as a model, reciting verbatim, for example, his healing formulae" (Bilu, "The Woman", 205).
39. I did not translate above the parts of Sadan's chapter that are about R' Shalom and Rebbetzin Malkah, rather than Eydl. Most of the stories involved can be found in the sources cited in Note 48.
40. "It seems plausible to assume that the younger Eidel was when her mother died, the stronger the impact this event had on deterring her from taking her mother as a role model" (Bilu, "The Woman", 205).
41. Sadan depicts R' Shalom sending a gift to Eydl when she is already living in Brody, presumably as a married woman, at least in her teens. Even if this happened at the end of R' Shalom's life, Eydl would not have been in her formative early childhood three years before.
42. Following the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition, see Note 65. Definitions of "transsexual", "transgender(ed)" and the umbrella term "trans" are political flashpoints today.
43. "It is doubtful Benjamin would have survived beyond World War II had he returned to Germany, as he also was Jewish" (Vanderberg 3; on Benjamin, see Pfaefflin; Wheeler & Schaefer).
44. Cf the views of Israeli trans activist Nora Greenberg regarding psychiatry: "'You have caused us a great deal of suffering and damage,' she hurled at [an audience of psychiatrists]. . . . [Psychiatry's] conversion of transsexuality into a psychiatric-medical problem is one means society uses to protect conservative gender molds'" (Sarig).
45. Epitomised by Janice Raymond's 1979 diatribe *The Transsexual Empire* (see Rudacille 143ff, 168ff; see also Halberstam 143ff; Prosser 14).
46. See Note 65.
47. Benjamin (69) raises this possibility regarding theories of parental impact on children who grow up trans: "A question of cause and effect should be raised in this connection. Could it not be that a constitutionally rather feminine-looking boy 'conditioned' his parents . . . 'He always looked and behaved more like a girl than a boy,' is the explanation that parents gave to me." Among trans people today, researcher Deborah Rudacille (265) notes: "[M]ost of my sources trace their feelings of gender dysphoria

- to their earliest childhood. Sometimes their intuition of the disjunction between their bodies and their sense of themselves as boys or girls is their very first memory.”
48. Stories about Malkah are told among contemporary Belz Hasidim, according to an informant connected with that community, Dovid Herskovic (E-mail correspondence, 7 June 1999).
  49. A vivid example: Trans lawyer/activist Shannon Minter of the National Center for Lesbian Rights explains: “I [transitioned] because I was miserable having a female body, and I’m so much happier having a masculine body. I prefer to have facial hair, more muscle mass, denser bones, rougher skin, no menstruation, no breasts, less body fat, a penis rather than a vagina, etc. The desire to have a differently sexed body is the essence of being transsexual. It is a very immediate, somatic, physical thing” (quoted in Graff).
  50. From <[www.gender.org/resources/dge/gea02001.pdf](http://www.gender.org/resources/dge/gea02001.pdf)>, which adds: “More than one new anti-transgender murder has been reported in the media every month since 1989. Countless others have been ignored.” More recent material on the gender.org website confirms these statistics (on the value of this website, see Ellis et al. 62). Salvador Vidal-Ortiz, “Queering Sexuality and Doing Gender”, likewise notes that one trans person is killed every month in the United States (quoted in Gagne & Tewksbury 190; see also Rudacille xxii ff). Roughgarden (387) refers to “the extraordinary threat of violence that transgendered people face just living their daily lives”. November 20 has been designated as Transgender Day of Remembrance and is observed internationally.
  51. Shown by Tamar Alexander at a lecture at the Jewish Theological Seminary on 14 December 2000. Alexander mentions data about this video in “Love and Death in a Contemporary *Dybbuk* Story”, in Goldish (319).
  52. I received a facsimile of the handwritten letter and a typed transcription of the text electronically from P. Y. Mund on 23 October 2006; my translation incorporates occasional corrections of the transcription. The letter from Eydl is followed by greetings from her husband, Rabbi Isaac Rubin, which I have not presented here. Mr Mund writes: “The letter was inherited by my great-grandfather Rabbi Yoel Moskowitz, probably from his wife, who... is a double descendant [of Eydl]. My great-grandfather gave the original to my great-uncle, of which my grandfather has a copy which is what I sent to you” (E-mail correspondence, 4 November 2006). To my knowledge, this letter has not appeared in print.
  53. See Gray (especially 308, 320–321)—a poignant reflection on a biographer’s desire to “hear the voice” of her subject.
  54. The standard pious opening to a letter.
  55. *Leb* or *lebn*, meaning “life”, is a Yiddish suffix expressing endearment.
  56. The honorifics were so standard that it was not considered necessary to write them all out.
  57. Meir Moskowitz of Shotz (Padva 132; Rabinowicz 272). These titles may be purely formulaic since, if the dates in Rabinowicz are correct, Meir was 13 at this time. Such young marriages were not unusual.
  58. A daughter of Eydl’s named Malkah—presumably, like the new granddaughter, after Eydl’s mother Rebbetzin Malkah—is not mentioned in the sources cited earlier. Perhaps this was a second name of Eydl’s daughter Ella, or perhaps the sources were simply unaware of this young Malkah.
  59. Eydl’s husband, Rabbi Isaac Rubin.
  60. It was common for newlyweds to live with the bride’s parents. In this case, it seems that the young couple was living in Meir’s parents’ home, or nearby; this merits further investigation.

61. *Kinderlekh*, an affectionate diminutive.
62. In 1994, Kate Bornstein wrote, refusing such pigeonholing: “Up until the last few years all we’d be able to write and get published were our autobiographies, tales of women trapped in the bodies of men or men pining away in the bodies of women” (Bornstein 12). For contrary recent perspectives, see, e.g., “Smith” or Illman, who presents the factual possibility of being “a man trapped in a woman’s body or vice versa” as a finding of “recent scientific research”. Prosser (69) argues that “being trapped in the wrong body is simply what transsexuality feels like”.
63. Michelson (26) (after the narrative portion translated above) knows only of him “and some daughters”.
64. Deutsch (124–43) devotes a chapter to this issue: “False Male and Woman Rebbe?”. As he notes, this pattern has cross-cultural precedents: “Caroline Walker Bynum... has noticed a similar tendency among the male biographers of woman saints” (Deutsch 260, Note 4, citing Bynum (166–67), and other sources).
65. In the sense of the *Oxford English Dictionary* definitions of both terms: transsexual: “having physical characteristics of one sex and psychological characteristics of the other” (2nd edn, 1989); transgendered: “Having an identity which does not conform unambiguously to conventional notions of male or female gender” (draft entry, March 2004, <<http://www.oed.com>>).
66. Paradoxically, recent developments in trans culture may help us to understand Eydl better than the older model of “a man in a woman’s body”. There is increasing comfort with broad gender identities that do not require renouncing femininity to claim masculinity (see the Gwendolyn Ann Smith interview in Ellis et al. 69). New possibilities include childbearing and breastfeeding for transmen (see Gorton et al. 56).

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