INTRODUCTION

Minor Modernisms

Beyond Deleuze and Guattari

(First Century Jerusalem. A crowd of followers congregates outside the hovel where Brian, an anachronistic, parodic double for Christ, lives with his mother. The chanting mob arouses Brian from his first night with his lover, Judith, who is the sole female member of the Peoples' Front of Judea, an ineffectual splinter group fighting against the Roman occupation. Reluctantly, Brian opens the window and tries to get the noisy crowd to disperse.)

Crowd: A blessing! A blessing!
(*more pandemonium*)
Brian: No, please. Please. Please listen.
(*they quieten*)
I've got one or two things to say.
Crowd: Tell us. Tell us both of them!!
Brian: Look . . . You've got it all wrong.
You don't need to follow me.
You don't need to follow anybody.
You've got to think for yourselves.
You're all individuals.
Crowd: Yes, we're all individuals.
Brian: You're all different.
Crowd: Yes, we *are* all different.
Dennis: I'm not.
Crowd: Sssshhh!

—Monty Python, *The Life of Brian*

The 1979 movie *The Life of Brian* offers itself, in Monty Python's irreverent parodic logic, as parable and prelude for this study on the

margins of modernism.[1] Difference iterated and echoed in unison ("Yes, we *are* all different") is difference erased, a gesture that can be met only with resistance, with a refusal to be different in the manner prescribed by the consensus ("I'm not"). From its collective vantage point outside Brian's door, the crowd embraces otherness as a force that consolidates a majority. In the process, they turn Brian, that antiheroic mock-Christ, into a figure of absolute yet vacuous authority. But it is Dennis, the little bearded man in the left-hand corner of the frame on whom I wish to turn the spotlight in this study, the one who mumbles "I'm not" and is silenced by the crowd, never to be heard from again.

What does it mean to be that writer, that reader on the margins of international modernism, in the corner of the picture yet part of it, when the crowd at the center clusters around a homogenized, privileged construction of difference? What does it mean for the visibility or audibility of that writer, that reader, when the center, in the process of championing difference, denies both that writer's modernism and his or her minor status?[2] Finally, what does it mean for the field if the very theoretical models that aim to uncover "the damage inflicted on minority cultures" structurally, institutionally participate in replicating it (JanMohamed and Lloyd, 1990:9)?

Modernism is famous for its affinity for the marginal, the exile, the "other." Yet the representative examples of this marginality typically are those writers who have become the most canonical high modernists. Their "narrative of unsettlement, homelessness, solitude and impoverished independence" (Williams, 1989:34) may indeed have been cast in minor, discordant tones, but those tones were composed in the major key of the most commonly read European languages: English, French, German. While they sometimes acknowledge the multicultural, international nature of the movement, handbooks as well as theoretical debates on modernism and minor writing consistently focus on -isms and writers that are well within this major linguistic and geopolitical key. Consequently, even hugely influential trends within European modernism itself are sometimes made to sound like a casual codetta: Scandinavian modernism, by many accounts the overture to all later trends; or the two very different variations on futurism, the Italian and the Russian; or the still resonant din of Rumanian dada (described by most critics as French).[3] These modernisms usually get the cursory nod, while the focus of discussion remains on the

canonically privileged modalities of difference in Kafka and Pound, Proust and Joyce.

Very few of the discussions of international modernism available in English or French or German include Russian acmeism or Russian imaginism, although important poets who see themselves as affiliated with these trends can be found not only in Russia but also all the way over in the Palestine of the 1920s and 1930s. We love to read the acmeists Anna Akhmatova and Osip Mandelstam, even the imaginist Sergey Yesenin, in translation, but this doesn't make our view of international modernism more inclusive.[4] This is perhaps only natural, since historical and theoretical discourse on literature is always tacitly based on what I call a "selective modeling" of literary production, a modeling that both constitutes and serves its own cultural prototypes. But the selective processes, their tendentiousness and utility, should be opened up for analysis and not simply accepted as inevitable, built-in blinders.

Raymond Williams exposes the link between consolidating a Euro-American modernist canon from what was once a marginal literary trend and erasing unprivileged formations of marginality. His words resonate with special poignancy because they may have been among his last. These are his notes for the first chapter of an unfinished book, brilliantly edited and introduced by Tony Pinkney in the posthumous volume *The Politics of Modernism:*

> After Modernism is canonized, however, by the post-war settlement and its accompanying, complicit academic endorsements, there is then the presumption that since Modernism is *here* in this specific phase or period, there is nothing beyond it. The [once] marginal or rejected artists become classics of organized teaching and of travelling exhibitions in the great galleries of the metropolitan cities. 'Modernism' is confined to this highly selective field and denied to everything else in an act of pure ideology, whose first, unconscious irony is that, absurdly, it stops history dead.
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> . . . [W]e must search out and counterpose an alternative tradition taken from the neglected works left in the wide margins of the century. (Williams, 1989:34–35)

Searching out and counterposing such alternative traditions on the margins of modernism is, indeed, my primary project in this book. Many minor modernisms remain "in the wide margins of this century," excluded from standard accounts of this international move-

ment simply because they lie outside the official borders of the unarticulated yet powerful cartographic paradigm: international modernism = Europe + United States. Let me offer just one example. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane's excellent critical anthology *Modernism 1890–1930* ([1976] 1981) is much more sensitive than most traditional treatments of modernism to the movement's diversity and heterogeneity. It nevertheless adheres implicitly to the cartographic formula, never straying beyond the boundaries of Europe and the United States. Not coincidentally, this same anthology also systematically marginalizes the crucial role women writers and editors played in the dynamics of international modernism, minimizing even the contribution of those women who were active within the Euro-American frame.[5]

How to search out and counterpose an alternative tradition and alternative theory of marginal modernisms without universalizing them out of existence? How to account, within a theoretically rigorous model, both for the women and minorities traditionally marginalized within the Euro-American canon and for the diverse groups and individual female and male writers outside the cartographic and linguistic mainstream? Writers the world over have self-consciously participated in—not simply been influenced by—the great international experiment with the -isms of modernism. But, ironically, Arabic, Hebrew, Senegalese, Japanese, and Yiddish literatures (among many others) have been excluded from recent theories of minor writing by the theoretical premises of the very same recovery project that should have made their voices audible.

Nevertheless, current theories of the minor have had an important effect in a number of ways. They have refocused attention on the decentering, deterritorializing, indeed the revolutionary and innovative force of minor writing. At the same time they have also underscored the potential appropriation of the minor by the major canonical system; and they have pointed out ways in which a minor literature can replicate exclusionary practices in its attempt to model itself after the hegemonic literary canon. Recent discussions have also helped reinscribe the association between minor and modernist, charging the old alliance between the two concepts with a new political urgency. All these perspectives have proven exceedingly helpful to me in exploring the history and theory of marginal modernisms.

Yet coming as I do from the perspective of two literatures, Hebrew and Yiddish, whose (different) modernisms and modes of minor writ-

ing do not fit into the postcolonial models now in vogue, I am troubled by what I see as the exclusionary effect of current definitions of the minor. All too often the selective modeling of minor literature—as of "international modernism"—on a Euro-American geopolitics and linguistics effectively leaves all that is not English, French, or German (or "deterritorialized" versions thereof) outside our purview. This exclusion is not merely a result of some bad choice of examples but is logically entailed by the explicitly articulated principles of the most detailed theories of minor writing available to date.[6] Only if we construct the major through the minor, not—as current wisdom has it—the minor through the major, can we begin to discern the regionalism, contextual diversity, and interdependence of even the most highly canonical forms of modernism. Theories of modernism that are modeled on belated, decentered, or linguistically minor practices may provide some insight into the processes that have become automatized or rendered imperceptible in the canonical center. Through the multiple, broken prisms of the minor, the mystified notion of a unified canonical modernism is exploded, subjecting the very language of center and periphery itself to a critique that exposes its own historicity.[7]

Perhaps the best-known representatives of the current direction in theorizing about minor literature are Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, whose intent is undoubtedly progressive but whose effect may be quite restrictive. Their famous essay, "What Is a Minor Literature?" (Chapter 3 of Deleuze and Guattari, [1975] 1986)[8], elaborated on somewhat critically by David Lloyd (1987 and 1990)[9] and somewhat less critically by others (compare Renza, 1984), explicitly restricts minor, deterritorialized writing to "oppositional" writing in a major language[10]: "[a] minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986:16). But, according to the same authors, minor literature (linguistically thus restricted) becomes the most, in fact the only, privileged category in the new theory and politics of culture: "there is nothing that is major or revolutionary except the minor" (1986:26). Furthermore, "the minor no longer designates specific literatures but the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature" (1986:18).[11]

Deleuze and Guattari's highly influential essay and its offshoots in English and American postcolonial cultural criticism present a challenge I want to address in some detail. I believe their position has

highly restrictive theoretical and methodological consequences for a discussion of both modernist and minor writing. In a nutshell, I think Deleuze and Guattari's restriction of the minor to the language of the major culture precludes any alternative modeling of an international literary trend such as modernism on its "non-major" linguistic practices. Furthermore, their account privileges and universalizes the "minor within the major" as that which "no longer designates specific literatures but the revolutionary conditions of every literature" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986:18). In the process of setting up the "truly minor" as this essentialist achievement term, the historically, culturally, and linguistically diverse formations of minor writing become—yet again—invisible. Anticipating the exclusionary potential of their critical project, Dana Polan, the gifted translator of Deleuze and Guattari's *Kafka*, includes the following rather strongly worded cautionary note in the introduction to the 1986 American edition: "Dangerously, despite all the efforts of Deleuze and Guattari to deconstruct hierarchies, American literary criticism may treat them . . . as aesthetes of a high-culture avant-garde closed in on its own fetishes of interiority. . . . One hopes that a translation of *Kafka* will be something that readers will question, as well as use" (xxvi).

More significantly for our purposes, Polan forewarns the readers that a "picking up of Deleuze and Guattari, then, would have to examine not only what they enable but also what they disenable, what they close off" (xxvi). It is precisely the consequences of this disenabling potential that I wish to argue against, with an eye to reinscribing those marginal modernisms that Deleuze and Guattari's model would write off as not "truly minor" and, by implication, as not fully capable of being agents of social and aesthetic change. Through this critique I wish to prepare the ground for what I believe to be a less exclusionary theoretical and historical model of marginal modernisms, elaborated and applied to the production and reception of Hebrew and Yiddish poetic modernisms. Of greatest interest to me, therefore, is the slippage between the concepts of the minor and the modernist, a slippage that is implicit in Deleuze and Guattari's account and becomes self-critically explicit in Lloyd's extended version.

Underlying both Deleuze and Guattari's three characteristics of minor literature and Lloyd's extended conditions for minor writing is the same fundamental principle: a minor literature is not written in a minor language. I will have more to say about this linguistic imperative later on. But, to begin, here are the conditions for the minor (within the

language of the major), according to Deleuze and Guattari: "The three characteristics of minor literature are the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation" (1986:18).

Lloyd provides a more nuanced and historicized interpretation of what he himself describes as Deleuze and Guattari's "impressionistic" and "mostly synchronic" account (1987:5). Yet his analysis reproduces the basic structure and methodological grid of their argument. As Gluzman astutely points out, both theories try to squeeze the highly diffuse and open-ended category of minor literature into a "checklist" of "necessary and sufficient conditions for membership in the category of minor writing."[12]

Lloyd's conditions for minor writing (as distinct from minority writing) expand and interpret each of Deleuze and Guattari's. Their first and second characteristics of the minor are further divided by Lloyd into two conditions each, and the third is interpreted as having three interrelated parts. Here are Lloyd's conditions for the minor: (1) "[e]xclusion from the canon and, by extension, from the 'canonical form' of the state"; (2) sustained "oppositional relationship to the canon and the state"; (3) "[c]ommon perpetuating of non-identity"; and (4) refusal "to represent the attainment of autonomous subjectivity" (1987:21–22). Conditions (1) and (2) may be read as politicized, historicized extensions of Deleuze and Guattari's first characteristic, the deterritorialization of language. Conditions (3) and (4) may be seen as a more socially nuanced articulation of their second characteristic, the connection of the individual to political immediacy. Lloyd proposes further a triad of concrete stylistic strategies for minor writing that correlate roughly with Deleuze and Guattari's highly suggestive but unclear third characteristic, the "collective assemblage [*agencement*] of enunciation [*énonciation*]" (1986:18). These for Lloyd are three distinct but interrelated modes of intertextuality: parody, translation, and citation.

These criteria, and their attendant rhetorical devices, while much more coherent than Deleuze and Guattari's, preserve some of the original theory's methodological and historical difficulties. As Lloyd himself acknowledges, they fit not only minor writing but also—modernism!

> A minor literature so defined overlaps in many respects with what has become known as modernism, and in most respects with postmodernism. . . . If minor literature belongs to the general field of

> modernism, it does so only as the negative critical aspect of modernism. In other words, wherever the writer continues to conceive the work as playing in some sense a prefigurative and reconciling role, that work remains, whatever its stylistic features, assimilated to a canonical aesthetic. Hence modernists such as Eliot, Pound, and Yeats clearly belong within a major paradigm by right of the claims to transcending division and difference that constantly inform their works.
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> This ascription evidently initially has to ignore the difficulties these writers have in maintaining such claims in their historical moment, and to overlook the "minor" stylistic features to which they constantly have recourse. But these stylistic features . . . are symptomatic of a crisis of canonicity that is definitive of modernism itself. (1987: 23–24)

The attempts at separating the notion of the minor and the modernist seem to create more difficulties than they resolve. Minor literatures are modernist only in that they take a critical or oppositional stance within the canon. But in order to take such a stance they have to be minor (by Lloyd's conditions 1 and 2). Since the same negative characteristics (or negations of "major" ones) define both critical modernism and minor writing, perhaps one way out of the impasse is to do away with the stylistic features or treat them as necessary but not sufficient conditions: if a writer possesses the stylistic features of a minor writer (parody, translation, citation) but turns out to serve some reconciling function in the canon (whichever way that is to be assessed), then that writer will not count as minor, despite those intertextual strategies. But in what sense are these stylistic features related to minor status and not simply typical of (major or minor) modernism? And if, as Lloyd acknowledges finally, "the crisis of canonicity . . . is definitive of modernism itself," how then can it be used to define only the oppositional (the minor) formations of modernism?

What I find far more troubling, however, than this logical slippage is the implicit dehistoricization of both the minor and the modernist that accompanies it. Clearly, minor writing existed before modernism, even according to Deleuze and Guattari's linguistic principles, and will continue to exist after it; but to conflate the minor and the modernist without providing any historical criteria of contextualization is to blur the temporality and cultural specificity of both. Similarly, to identify as major those modernists whose works have come only later to be assimilated to a canonical aesthetic, is to disregard the resistant, even revolutionary role they may have played in the literary and political system of their time. And cannot the aesthetic-historical processes that

constitute literary canonization turn the role of a once minor poet into a "major" (canon preserving) one? As Raymond Williams pointedly observed in the passage I quoted above, "The marginal or rejected (modernist) artists become classics of organized teaching" (1989:34); or is Lloyd suggesting that some positions or stylistic strategies are "essentially," "eternally" critical? The reification of critical categories is no less a danger for progressive approaches than for conservative ones.

Let us consider for a brief moment an intriguingly analogous example taken from the opposite end of the literary-critical spectrum. Hugh Kenner is one of the modernist canon's most astute readers and an active participant in its formation and preservation. In his well-known article "The Making of the Modernist Canon" Kenner (1984) identifies "the supranational movement called International Modernism" exclusively, unabashedly with Irish and American "decentralized" English writing. To be a modernist is indeed to be an expatriate, a decentered writer, but it has to be in the one and only language of modernism: English. And not, God forbid, the English of African or African American or even Australian and Canadian modernisms. The deterritorialization that Kenner privileges is exclusively Amero-Irish, even if he gives this non-English English the name "International Modernism": "Though the language of International Modernism, like that of air control towers, proved to be English, none of its canonical works came either out of England or out of any mind formed there. International Modernism was the work of Irishmen and Americans. Its masterpieces include *Ulysses, The Waste Land,* the first thirty *Cantos*" (1984:367).

Kenner goes to some lengths to make his case by arguing first, that French, German, Russian, and Italian models were important only in nonverbal modernisms and in (technological) modernity, and second, that none of the important English proponents of International Modernism was in fact English. For that purpose he has to brutally decanonize Virginia Woolf: "She is not part of International Modernism; she is an English novelist of manners, writing village gossip;" (1984:371). He also needs to perform some acrobatics to deterritorialize those (male) "International Modernists" he does not wish to decanonize: "By contrast [with the expatriate American talent Pound, Eliot, H.D.] the native talent is apt to seem unimportant, or else proves not to be native: even Wyndham Lewis, who went to an English public school (Rugby), had been born near a dock at Amherst, Nova Scotia, on his American father's yacht" (1984:369).

This blatantly biased selective modeling of "International" Modernism would be quite amusing if it weren't so symptomatic. Although Deleuze and Guattari end up with a much more convincing illustration of modernist deterritorialization, their monolingual construction of the minor-within-the-major has a similarly exclusionary effect. This is the underlying premise of their famous reading of Franz Kafka as the prototypical example of minor writing. Let me stress that it is not the interpretive accuracy of their reading of Kafka that I am concerned with here, nor do I intend this as a critical reading of Kafka's own views about German, Yiddish, and Hebrew. What I focus on, instead, are the consequences of Deleuze and Guattari's use of Kafka as the paradigmatic example for their theory of minor writing. Their account of Kafka as a model for the minor runs into difficulties in three ways: the very choice of Kafka, the manner in which his minor status is constructed, and the modes of oppositional minority literature that such a construction excludes.

First, choosing one of the major writers of the international modernist canon as the example of minor literature immediately calls into question the usefulness of the category of minor writing itself. Nevertheless, one might argue, Kafka's major status within the canon was not part of the conditions under which his writing was shaped; furthermore, as Bluma Goldstein has observed, while Kafka is certainly highly canonical in the context of international modernism and as a contributor to that old category "world literature," his position in the German literary system is much more ambivalent.[13] Clearly, however, this choice pulls the category of the minor away from the senses of "marginalized," "suppressed," "excluded"—namely, away from a focus on the minor as a feature of the history and politics of a work's reception.

Second, in the process of constructing Kafka's minor position as a Jew writing in the hegemonic German within a Czech environment, Deleuze and Guattari in effect erase all the non-German dimensions of his literary affiliation—a remarkable feat since in the foreground of their narrative are pronouncements about multiculturalism, polylingualism, and in particular the "situation of the German language in Czechoslovakia, as a fluid language intermixed with Czech and Yiddish," which is what "will allow Kafka the possibility of invention" (1986:20). But upon closer examination it becomes clear that Deleuze and Guattari uncritically adopt the view (which Kafka himself may have held) that Yiddish is in principle just an oral, popular resource

that a writer like Kafka can use only to deflate German; not a full-fledged language but a means to achieve that underlying goal of all minor writing, the deterritorialization of the major language, while rejecting Hebrew and Czech altogether:

> Kafka does not opt for a reterritorialization through the Czech language. Nor toward a hypercultural use of German with all sorts of oneiric or symbolic or mythic flights (even Hebrew-ifying ones), as was the case with the Prague school. Nor toward an oral, popular Yiddish. Instead, using the path that Yiddish opens up to him, he takes it in such a way as to convert it into a unique and solitary form of writing. . . . He will tear out of Prague German all the qualities of underdevelopment that it has tried to hide. (1986:25–26)

In order to reduce Kafka's project to that one "truly minor" goal of deterritorializing German, Deleuze and Guattari need to radically ignore Kafka's profound (yet resistant and therefore minor on their own account!) engagement with the intertextual echo chambers of Yiddish and Hebrew literary culture. Even if Kafka, like many of the Hebrew and Yiddish modernists of his time, did choose to resist the ornate allusive pastiche of biblical and liturgical phrases, to reject the "oneiric," symbolic mode of premodernist engagement with Jewish literary sources, this should not be mistaken for a total rejection of Hebrew as a literary-cultural affiliation. On the contrary, this move might be precisely what draws Kafka so much closer to the minimalist project in the Hebrew and Yiddish modernisms that emerge in the Vienna and Berlin (but also in the Moscow, Warsaw, Kiev, Tel Aviv, and New York) of Kafka's time.[14] Other critics have observed Kafka's resistant, abstracted thematization of the reading strategies and the interpretive models developed within Hebrew and Yiddish literatures (parable, midrash, Hasidic tale, textual commentary) in place of the customary citational style of premodernist Jewish textual traditions.[15] What remains to be studied, however, are the ways in which Kafka's meta-textual practices may in fact point to partial affiliation (simultaneous with his other central European ones) with the liminal modernisms of the Hebrew anti-*nusach* (antiformulaic) modernists (Uri Nissan Gnessin, Avraham Ben-Yitzhak, David Fogel, and Yosef Chaim Brenner).[16] What also needs to be explored is Kafka's possible alignment—not in terms of influence but as historicized intertextual affiliation—with the general project of Yiddish minimalist expressionism whose resistance to the citational model was articulated in the

aesthetic principles of *nakete linyes* (naked lines) and *nakete lider* (naked poems). (See Eric, [1922] 1973.)

Deleuze and Guattari's reduction of Kafka's literary cross-cultural project to an essentially monolingual tension between "good" and "poor" (i.e., Jewish) German is therefore, at best, an instance of what I describe in this book as the single-lens construction of literary affiliation. My argument is that many of the exclusionary practices of literary theory and historiography can be traced back to an optical difficulty with stereoscopic and kaleidoscopic vision: the difficulty to see writers like Kafka, for example, as simultaneously maintaining multiple literary affiliations, and to view these multiple affiliations as partial, potentially contradictory, and ambivalent. But that is precisely the kind of critical vision I believe we need.

Deleuze and Guattari's narrative, slipping in and out of a suggestive but highly misleading *erlebte Rede* with the text of Kafka's diaries, letters, and lecture on Yiddish (1948–49; 1954) denies not only the links between his work and the textual practices of Hebrew and Yiddish literature but the very possibility of producing such oppositional literatures in the non-major languages. This third problem is to my mind the most critical one, for it is here that Deleuze and Guattari's model, and others based on its fundamental premises, come closest to Kenner's exclusion of the whole world except Ireland and the United States from international modernism: Kafka's modernism could only have been German and it could only have been oppositional (in the privileged sense) in German. Hebrew, on this account, cannot be the language of a minor literature during Kafka's period because it is associated with Zionism, mysticism, and a reterritorialization of language in the service of a nation building process—all ways in which a minority literature replicates the formations of a hegemonic, major culture. Yiddish fares even worse since it is considered to be not a language but a "graft"; it is denied minor status and access to independent literariness because it is nothing but impoverished German and therefore useful only for the purpose of a modernist dismantling of German from within (1986:25).

Interestingly, the denial of minor status to these (and, by their first principle, all other!) literatures in "indigenous" minority languages is correlated with the erasure of Hebrew and Yiddish modernisms. Deleuze and Guattari deny, or are simply ignorant of, the unparalleled creative explosion of Hebrew and Yiddish modernism, in fact of several different modernisms, across the shifting centers of Jewish

literature but also, significantly, in the cities where German was the dominant language of culture. Vibrant and oppositional, the project of these modernists needs to be understood both in its internal gesture of resisting and disrupting the whole structure of Jewish cultural/textual tradition, and, externally, in its self-conscious, ambivalent affiliations with the European modernist trends whose margins these writers inhabited and whose borders they wished to stretch.

Both Hebrew and Yiddish modernisms remained, to a large extent, deterritorialized expressive systems and not only during the first quarter of this century, before the center of Hebrew literature moved to Palestine. Yiddish, which never had a territory, reveals all the linguistic marks of a deterritorialized language, marks which Deleuze and Guattari, following Vidal Sephiha, call "tensors" (1986:22). As the proverbial landless language (its writers joke bitterly about imaginary trips to "yiddishland"), Yiddish became an ideal vehicle for international radical experimentation with modernism. Its breathtaking project was halted only with the decimation of the Yiddish writers and readers in the Nazi genocide and the Stalinist purges. From about 1910 on, and especially during the years between the two world wars, Yiddish poets, writers, and dramaturgs created some of the most innovative modernist writing in Europe—impressionist, futurist, expressionist—in groups that clustered around literary magazines like *Albatros, Khalyastre* (the gang), *Ringen* (rings), *Milgroym* (pomegranate). In the movement's perpetually shifting centers, Berlin and Warsaw, Kiev and Moscow, the Yiddish modernists participated in a critique of major European culture launched from the deterritorialized linguistic, cultural, and often political margins. In the period immediately after World War I, at least nineteen Yiddish-language journals and periodicals were published in Berlin alone (Alt, 1987). It is perhaps not accidental that Deleuze and Guattari's model reveals the greatest anxiety (conveyed by them ventriloquistically through Kafka's own anxiety, 1986:25) about Yiddish, for Yiddish modernism is the ultimate counter example to their exclusive association of deterritorialization with minor/modernist writing in a major language.

In the chapters that follow I address the many ways in which the trends and subversions of Hebrew modernism call into question the simple opposition of minor and major literature, and expose the fuzziness of the distinction between a deterritorialized and a reterritorialized language. My goal is to show that theories of minor writing will continue to replicate the exclusionary practices of the major if

they dismiss those forms of oppositionality which resist, quite literally, the idiom of the hegemonic culture: the ultimate refusal to obey the linguistic imperative to write in the language of the major modernisms of European culture.[17] Let me offer a single glimpse, by way of closure and preview, of one particularly intriguing form of resistance to the crowd's iteration/erasure of difference ("I'm not.") with which I began this introduction.

In Vienna, as early as 1908, the first modernist Hebrew poet, Avraham Ben-Yitzhak (Sonne) (1883–1950), developed the initial forms of a radically new liminal modernism that, as I argue in this book, was later to become the foundation for an alternative direction in Hebrew letters, a direction shaped to a large extent by an unprecedented number of women poets and by the non-Zionist male poet David Fogel. Marked, as Miron has observed, by a minimalist aesthetic of "thinness" (1991b:89–90) and obsessed with meta-artistic questions of perception and expression, Ben-Yitzhak's poetic project, like Fogel's later one, was lodged uneasily, critically, in the space between impressionism and expressionism, testing the limits of both.[18] By the time he moved to Vienna from his native Galicia, Ben-Yitzhak already possessed remarkable erudition in European letters. In Vienna he met Fogel, the Hebrew poet who would develop and refine the Viennese-Hebrew versions of marginal modernism that I describe in this book as an anti-*nusach* (antiformulaic) poetics.

During these years Ben-Yitzhak also met and befriended some of the central literary and artistic figures of the period who sought out his company because of his profound engagement in the literary questions of the time: James Joyce, Arnold Schoenberg, Georg Brandes, Robert Musil, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Arthur Schnitzler, and others. Herman Broch maintained a lifelong literary correspondence with him and even offered him a chair of philosophy and Hebrew literature at an American university (Hever, 1992:107; see also Silberschlag, 1985:39–40, and Ha-Ephrati, 1976: 162–66, 172–75).

In his memoirs of the 1930s, Elias Canetti, Ben-Yitzhak's devoted friend, describes him as an admired figure and role model: "The greatest Viennese writers were attracted to him as if spellbound. . . . In many ways he was a model. Once I had known him no one else could become a model for me."[19] By the time Canetti met him, Ben-Yitzhak had already stopped writing (Hebrew) and had become instead a sort of oral vehicle for (one is tempted to say almost an embodiment of) a modernist poetics. The language of Canetti's ex-

traordinary memoirs underscores this unique role throughout, but let me quote here some particularly suggestive examples. Canetti characterizes his daily need to listen to "Dr. Sonne" speak as "an addiction, such as I had not experienced for any other intellectual." Listening to him one "forgot that the speaker was a human being . . . [one] never regarded him as a character; he was the opposite of a character" (1986:133–135). At this point Canetti develops a detailed analogy between Ben-Yitzhak's "oral poetics" and a written—though unfinished—text that serves as Canetti's most prototypical example of the decentered formations of Viennese modernism to which he has apprenticed himself:

> But though I would not presume to reproduce his [Ben-Yitzhak/Sonne's] statements, there is a literary creation to which I believe he can be likened. In those years I read Musil. I could not get enough of *The Man without Qualities,* the first two volumes of which, some thousand pages, had been published. It seemed to me that there was nothing comparable in all of literature. And yet, wherever I chanced to open these books, the text seemed surprisingly familiar. This was a language I knew, a rhythm of thought that I had met with, and yet I knew for sure that there were no similar books in existence. It was some time before I saw the connection. Dr. Sonne *spoke* as Musil *wrote*. . . . Day after day I was privileged to hear chapters from a second *Man without Qualities* that no one else ever heard of. For what he said to others—and he did speak to others, though not every day—was a *different* chapter. (1986:136; emphases in the original)

What the Hebrew critics have always referred to as Ben-Yitzhak's "silent period," from 1930 to his death in Israel twenty years later, is here recorded not as a turning away from a hopelessly marginal (Hebrew) modernism, but as a resort to an oral (German) modernism, an art that is all process: "It was always new, it had just come into being" (Canetti, 1986:135). The fact that in Vienna, in the early and mid 1930s, Ben-Yitzhak "foresaw the worst and said so" (1986:145) underlines how untenable the option to write in German had become for him by that time. In fact we now know that Ben-Yitzhak actively tried out "the German option" earlier on. In an extraordinary piece of archival work which resulted in a two-volume annotated edition and monograph on Ben-Yitzhak's poetry and poetics, Hanan Hever discovered that six of the Hebrew poems in the *opus posthumous* also had German versions and that two were apparently written in German first and in Hebrew only later (Hever, 1992:85).

Yet Hebrew was to remain the language in which Ben-Yitzhak conducted his only written modernist experiment on Viennese soil. For a poet of Ben-Yitzhak's interests, sensibilities, and background the choice of Hebrew as the language of modernist minimalism was as far from self-evident as can be imagined. Not only was Hebrew not his native tongue, but it was not the first language of his readers either, in many cases not even the second. Hebrew had been the tongue of sacred intertextual study for the better part of its history, although it always maintained a minor, secular (and, intertextually, more pared down) strand. By the time Ben-Yitzhak started writing, Hebrew had already come a long way in the short span of time since its revival as a language of modern poetry in the 1890s in the work of Chaim Nachman Bialik and Shaul Tchernichovski. But it was still, in the first decade of the twentieth century, a largely textual language, severely lacking not only in the registers of colloquial speech and slang but also in popular and subcanonical literature. The heritage of *melitsah,* the intertextual pastiche of fixed expressions borrowed from biblical, Talmudic and liturgical citations was still very much there, now more as a stylistic memory, tempting with its rich metaphoricity and with the resonance of its intertextual echo chamber. As Bialik, the major Hebrew premodernist had forewarned, the status of Hebrew wasn't going to change until the language "got a life" and became a vehicle for unmarked, normal discourse.[20]

The Hebrew that Ben-Yitzhak so stubbornly stuck to even though he had another, more mainstream medium open to him, must have seemed a very unlikely instrument for minimalist, pared down expression. Yet that was precisely the challenge that Ben-Yitzhak and others after him undertook, a challenge that—in that particular respect—is not unlike Kafka's attempt, in Deleuze and Guattari's construction, to deterritorialize German from within. Ben-Yitzhak's project, which Deleuze and Guattari's model would not recognize as minor, is the ultimate act of modernist oppositionality: to write from a position of dialogic tension with German impressionism and expressionism and with the forerunners and paragons of international modernism as a whole; to critique the modernist project and try to explore it further but to do so in a language these major modernists could not understand. By grafting a radically modern idiom onto an ironically biblical, strongly antirabbinic Hebrew, Ben-Yitzhak revived but thoroughly secularized the silences and gaps that mark biblical literature as a new model for modernism, in the process forcing He-

brew to do what it had never done before. But the price was enormous. Ben-Yitzhak published only twelve poems in his lifetime and went into total (written) silence after 1930. Yet he continues to be, perhaps because of his enabling, liminal position between cultural and linguistic categories, a revered, almost mythologized figure in the small world of Hebrew letters.[21] I believe that in making the choice to write in Hebrew, Ben-Yitzhak knew that he would be denied entry into the modernist canon, a canon that would nevertheless continue to describe itself as a truly minor, truly international modernism. He refused to constitute his minor modernist project as productive, in Lloyd's sense of the term.[22] And yet, in abdicating a high modernist canonicity, in resisting reterritorialization, identity, and income, Ben-Yitzhak both asserted and denied the possibility of his project ever leaving a mark. The opening lines of the last poem published during his lifetime can be read as an ambiguous midrash on the success/failure of his—and Hebrew's—minor modernism:

אַשְׁרֵי הַזּוֹרְעִים וְלֹא יִקְצֹרוּ
כִּי יַרְחִיקוּ נְדוֹד.

Happy are the sowers that will not reap
For they will wander a long way off.[23]