Mutual aid and direct action are prefigurative social forms. Cindy Milstein defines prefiguration as “the idea that there should be an ethically consistent relationship between the means and the ends. […] Anarchists participate in the present in the ways that they would like to participate, much more fully and with much more self-determination, in the future—and encourage others to do so as well. Prefigurative politics thus aligns one’s values to one’s practices…”

Prefiguration is one key aspect of anarchist temporality, collapsing the deferral of ethical behavior from ‘after the revolution’ into the urgent present. It is in one sense a temporal interruption. Walter Benjamin writes of the psychological interruption demanded by living out prefigurative ethics:

The more antagonistic a person is toward the traditional order, the more inexorably he will subject his private life to the norms that he wishes to elevate as legislators of a future society. It is as if these laws, nowhere yet realized, placed him under obligation to enact them in advance, at least in the confines of his own existence. In contrast, the man who knows himself to be in accord with the most ancient heritage of his class or nation will sometimes bring his private life into ostentatious contrast to the maxims that he unrelentingly asserts in public, secretly approving his own behavior, without the slightest qualms, as the most conclusive proof of the unshakable authority of the principles he puts on display. Thus are distinguished the types of the anarcho-socialist and the conservative politician.

Benjamin identifies the schism produced by a prefigurative ethics “nowhere yet realized,” which demands one elevate their actions above the status quo. Woven throughout Benjamin’s One-Way Street is a fascination with dreams and their interpenetration with reality—another form of prefiguration.

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2 ‘Prefigurative politics’ has gained wider discussion by contemporary anarchists (Bray, 2013; Graeber, 2009, 2013; Maeckelbergh, 2011, 2012; van der Sande, Sitrin, & Azzellini, 2014; Yates, 2015). Paul Raekstad has recently made the claim that Marxism shares a concept of the prefigurative, which he points to as a potential common ground rather than split with Bakunin (“Revolutionary Practice and Prefigurative Politics: A Clarification and Defense,” 2018).
3 Benjamin, from the literary fragment titled “Ministry of the Interior,” One-Way Street, 31-32.
Kburhm: this word refers to the ancient destruction of the first and second temples in Jerusalem and the Nazi genocide, as well as pogroms, the Spanish Inquisition, and other catastrophes of Jewish history. The use of a single word links each catastrophe with cumulative force. Trauma is intertextual: each new crisis triggers memory of devastations that came before, collapsing these disasters across territory and time into a continual, repeating eruption of violence. The poetics of Sacco-Vanzetti elegy tie the trial of 1920 to the Haymarket trial of 1886. Like a traumatized fixation, writers return to the site of the trial again and again. The court process shaped time, a traumatizing moment that reorders what follows. But it is also a moment of origin: Emma Goldman dated her life as an anarchist from the origin point of Haymarket.4

Grief is labor. Traditionally, elegies move through three stages of mourning: lament for loss, praise for the dead, and consolation for the bereaved.5 Anarchist poets politicize the elegiac form, aiming to galvanize rather than console. Grief becomes the raw material of collective action. These elegies seek to lift up historical figures and re-position them within a meaningful, sweeping genealogy—which calls upon readers to identify outside of time as well.

Grief reorders time. Jewish rituals of mourning are structured by a five-stage temporal cycle: first sitting shiva for one week, when the bereaved are visited by congregants known and unknown, bearing food; the second stage of mourning is one month long (sheloshim) for all but a parent; after one year, the deepest mourning ritual for a parent is complete (yud-bet chodesh); and for every year after comes the yortzeit, or the annual memorial for the dead, marked by prayer and candle. Grief is a site of mutual aid: to comfort the bereaved.

Grief is power. In most cases, the Yiddish writers did not personally know their subjects;

5 Steve Hopkins article on Blake and lament
AE Torres / On Anarchist Temporality / from Horizons Blossom, Borders Vanish: Anarchism and Yiddish Literature / AJS 2020 / Don’t circulate

yet their poems express the loss of intimate comrades and seek to extend that fellow feeling to their readers, to create new comrades through loss. As Claudia Rankine writes: "National mourning, as advocated by Black Lives Matter, is a mode of intervention and interruption that might itself be assimilated into the category of public annoyance. This is altogether possible; but also possible is the recognition that it’s a lack of feeling for another that is our problem. Grief, then, for these deceased others might align some of us, for the first time, with the living."⁶

Elegies seek to re-organize time: they may be sung on anniversaries, reprinted annually, inscribed on monuments. May Day could function as a kind of seder, re-inscribing participants within a cycle of memory: We all stood there at Haymarket! Repetition, recitation, remembrance, ritual: structures of religious practice are repurposed with radical content. There is an etiquette to the elegy: rarely were defendants’ complexity permitted. As the journalist Heywood Broun wrote of Sacco and Vanzetti’s “shining spirits”: “They are too bright, we shield our eyes and kill them.”⁷

Besides their social function in carving into grief’s boundless time, elegies’ internal temporality intervenes in nationalist temporal structures, posing a way out from capitalist and carceral time. In Beside You in Time: Sense Methods and Queer Sociabilities in the American 19th Century, Elizabeth Freeman writes of the “timed” body, analogous to the “racialized” or “gendered” body: the process by which social time imposes itself upon the human body. She begins where Foucault’s model of temporal discipline left off: “Time penetrates the body and with it all the meticulous controls of power.”⁸ [Foucault prison time table] Thus time and hagiography are the first and second subjects of elegy.

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⁷ In Richard Polenberg’s “Introduction,” Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti, xvii
⁸ Freeman, Beside You in Time: Sense Methods and Queer Sociabilities in the American 19th Century, p3.
Two dates loom in the memory of US immigrant anarchism: November 11, 1887 and August 23, 1927. The first marks the execution of four anarchists in Chicago following the Haymarket affair. All of the defendants were German by birth or heritage except for the Mayflower descendant Albert Parsons, who alone turned himself in to the police with faith that he would receive a fair trial. In Boston in 1927, the Italian workers Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were executed after serving seven years in prison. The deaths of the Haymarket “martyrs” instigated the first mass wave of anarchist organizing in the United States; forty years later, Sacco and Vanzetti’s incarceration and deaths galvanized the labor movement. Newspaper coverage carried the anarchists’ voices further than their own propaganda could reach, and in turn these causes célèbres inspired an outpouring of poetry, prose, film, and music.

A courtroom makes clear how a state controls an individual’s time: life, death, or prison. Anarchists identified fiercely with the defendants of these trials. The recitation of these dates rang throughout anarchist poetry as an amulet against forgetting. Beyond simple remembrance, the temporality of Haymarket and Sacco-Vanzetti poetry was also inventive: it thematizes anarchist temporalities and disrupts punitive structures of time, making visible the state ownership of these men’s lives. State control of time is spectacularized in the courtroom as nowhere else, and so anarchist literature attempts to intervene by prefiguring other temporalities. Dovid Edelshtat’s Haymarket tributes thematized citizenship and migration, placing non-Jewish radicals within the sweep of Jewish history. His poems are messianic,

9 YIVO archives. (Telegrams used ‘stop’ as punctuation for the end of sentences.)
Spiritualizing—even judaizing—the Germans’ deaths. Moyshe Leyb-Halpern and Yankev Glatshteyn’s poems on Sacco and Vanzetti employ a strategy of intertextuality, reinvent the tropes of Haymarket-era poetry, linking the generations and turning to svetshop poetry as an archive of verse. Their poems of the 1920s are far more cynical, more ornate, in their representation of the prison years, still resistant of punitive time. Thus anarcho-syndicalism remains present and persistent through this line from the Proletarian poets to Modernist responses to the Sacco-Vanzetti trial and beyond. A Yiddish version of Haymarket speeches was published on November 11, 1933—again, to coincide with the anniversary of the executions—with an introduction by Alexander Berkman.

Following Chana Kronfeld’s metaphor for the transmission of literary history as a rope with multiple overlapping threads, this chapter remaps the relationship between Labor Romanticism and Yiddish Modernism through the relation of 1887 and 1927. It concludes with a reading of Martín Espada’s “I Now Pronounce You Dead,” representing a new entry in the Jewish American literary tradition of the Sacco-Vanzetti elegy.

Edelshtat, Bovshover, Halpern, Glatshteyn, and Espada model a temporality of the margins, making visible the machinations of punitive time from a diasporic position. At the same time, while they perceive themselves as outside the state, they also participate in what Mark Rifkin calls “settler time” [--]. The literature inspired by these trials examines temporality as phenomenological experience—its warping by prison, its constrictions and expansions—as well as thematizing history and genealogy, creating hagiography and martyrology. Here I examine the poetics of anarchist temporality, their utopian futurities and critique of capitalist time. Rather than arguing for a single entity called “anarchist time,” I

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10 Barimte redes fun di shikago’er martyrer (Famous Speeches by the Chicago Martyrs). Amshol-Kropotkin Group, New York: 1933. Translated by the prolific A. Frumkin.

investigate the varied forms anarchist temporality may take within literary texts.¹²

**Glatshteyn’s Sacco-Vanzetti Poema**

Glatshteyn’s “Sako un vanzeti montik” (“Sacco and Vanzetti’s Monday”) was published in 1929, two years after the execution, when Glatshteyn was thirty-three—the same age as Vanzetti at his death.¹³ At about two hundred and seventy lines long, divided into four sections and a prologue, it’s an expansive work. The title of the poem, “Sacco and Vanzetti’s Monday,” establishes its unusual temporality. Is this the Monday before their execution? The title sets it in mundane, expectant time during their prison sentence: neither the day of the execution (a Saturday), nor the day before or after. In the opening verse, blue dawn fog wraps a city (unmarked as Boston). The city is returning to rhythms of mass industry, as people emerge from the privacy of the weekend into collective working life: “everyone solitary while together,/everyone together while solitary,/tens hundreds thousands millions—/millions walking, walking, walking/(solitary while together)/[…] gates shut and sealed like coffins,/ deafened are the ears of the city./Nothing, nothing will happen.”¹⁴ Glatshteyn’s opening lines echo the first line of Vanzetti’s 1924 memoir, *Story of a Proletarian Life*: “Nameless, in the crowd of nameless ones, I have merely caught and reflected a little of the light from that dynamic thought or ideal which is drawing humanity towards better destinies.”¹⁵ Even in the format of a memoir—which one might expect to contain an individualistic account of the self—Vanzetti introduces himself as apiece with the masses, coming into subject-hood as mere refraction of “the Ideal.” Glatshteyn’s opening verse draws from archetypal images of Labor poetry, such

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¹² [JC] See Daniel Colson’s meditations on time and history in *Trois essais*, particularly part 2 (on Arendt and the concept of history). See also the entry on “eternal return” in his *Lexicon* (pp. 79-84).

¹³ Glatshteyn, Kredov (1929)


as Bovshover’s image of the city as teeming factory.  

Glatshteyn here echoes Bovshover’s cumulative structure in “A Song to the People,” which describes factory work through the precise accumulation of repetitive gesture, mimicking the repetition of labor itself: “…The mute ordinary (der _obtumer geveynlekh_) knocks swiftly and in haste in every gate, in the houses alarm clocks are ringing, coffee grumbling in blackened pots, fresh rolls waiting. A heavy cover of holiness winds above the city, Is it the train of Sunday’s dress, or a dream clinging/To the city’s marrow? Was there something or will something happen?” The translator Larry Rosenwald writes, “[Glatshteyn] is more interested in the relation between the two prisoners’ calendar and the regular calendar of the week than he is in either by itself… We might sum up that exquisite balance [of _chronos_ and _kairos_] by looking at an apparently simple line: _di frische zeml vartn_, ‘the fresh rolls are waiting.’ What are they waiting for? On the one hand they wait to be picked up, brought inside, buttered, and eaten; they await their ordinary fate. But they and the other beings and objects in the scene are also waiting for something extraordinary to happen, some unique event in the non-cyclical story of Sacco and Vanzetti.”

Glatshteyn alternates between biblical intertextuality and mock-epic register: “A heavy cover of holiness winds over the city, Is it the train of Sunday’s dress, or a dream sleepily clinging/To the city’s marrow?” (“_Iber der _obtot vikt zikh a schvere bil fun beylikayt, Iz es nokh di _oblep fun zuntik, aod er kholem vos klept zikh/Teum farshlofenem markh fun der _obtot_?”) The specter of a divine presence covering the city is feminized: here it is not the Shkhine hovering over the city, but “the train of Sunday’s dress.” Rather than _havdole_, the ritual marking sabbath’s departure, the workers feel Sunday’s dress sweep past as the work-week begins. The religious image is further deflated and ironized by Glatshteyn’s orthography, which phoneticizes loshn-

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16 In Bovshover’s “A Song to the People,” for example, factory walls rise higher but there is neither inside nor outside: “Lift up your eyes and see the factory walls that grow, / Where workers saw and plane and weave and knit and sew, / And forge and file and carve and chisel and sand and brace, / And create wares and create riches for the human race.” _Sing, Stranger_, 72.

17 Rosenwald, 4.
kroydsh, severing the visual relationship between Hebrew/Aramaic and modern Yiddish. The line “Deafened are the ears of the city” has shades of Jeremiah: wailing for the destruction of Jerusalem merges with images of a fallen city and the grinding banality of state violence. The socialist Ahrne Glanz Leyeles’ Sacco-Vanzetti poem also employs biblical intertextuality: “Sing me a song of that which must come./Sing me the song of payment./How can I sing when every night I turn on and off electric lights…” Leyeles parodies a verse from Psalm 137: “Sing us a song of Zion./How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?” Here it is not exile, but the American electric chair, that mutes the singer’s tongue.

Glatshteyn’s rhythm twists and turns back on itself, repeating the sound of *tse-* (emphasizing fracture or dispersion) and *tsu-* (together), as in the line *Klor in der toetumlenišb hot er a toetumler klorn gezon*, whose sounds themselves are indeed bent together:

18 Translation by Finkin, 56.
19 Rosenwald translates *plonter* as ‘confusion,’ but I think it is a more material image.
20 I adapted Rosenwald’s line, “Clear in the bewilderment did he bewildered see clearly.”
stunned figure is Sacco or Vanzetti awaiting execution at dawn, but this expectation is upended:

“Because from yesterday till today the Governor/has paced on the bridge of a sleepless night.”

The governor, self-appointed “guard... of the consciences of the world,” paces with a gun on his shoulders. The poem centers the governor’s dark night of the soul, not Sacco and Vanzetti’s suffering. Glatshteyn describes the governor’s nocturnal musings with mythic invention:

"Midnight. Joyous demons have danced his own thoughts around him/and laughed away, mocked away from him the fear in his eyes." This refusal to dehumanize the governor or reify/naturalize his power recall the appeals from the International Anarchist Group helmed by Van Valkenburgh, who wrote:

Governor Fuller should be given every opportunity to prove himself a fair and just man, an able and humane executive but he lives in a world apart from the workers and he may be unconsciously swayed by the powerful forces which have so far won their case by deceit and cunning, by threat and chicanery.

SHOW YOUR SOLIDARITY THAT YOU STAND ON THE SIDE OF HUMAN RIGHTS
JOIN THE MIGHTY MOVEMENT TO FORCE JUSTICE FROM THOSE WHO SIT IN HIGH PLACES. PRESERVE YOUR OWN LIBERTY BY INSISTING UPON THE LIBERATION OF SACCO AND VANZETTI.²¹

This ‘verse’ is reminiscent of the visitation from ghosts of history in Yosl Grinshpan’s poem “Vanzetti’s Ghost” (1929): as Judge Webster Thayer lies “in his palace/on his golden bed,” he envisions Vanzetti as an incinerated skeleton, pacing the floorboards, bringing with him ghosts of the American past: “And behind the red Satan stands,/the Yankee Klan... and the anthem swarms with slaves.”²² In Grinshpan’s poem, Thayer’s own mind produces historical hauntings far before the Vanzetti case. Compare both Grinshpan and Glatshteyn’s mythic temporality—where the present is penetrated by the past—to, for example, John Dos Passos’ 1927 poem, where prison regulates time (“Do you know how many hours there are in a day/when a day is

²¹ Undated typed doc, with heading:
NEW MOVE IN S V CASE. Likely 1927. Labadie Collection, Van Valkenburg to EG Box 2, Folder 7.
In the world of Dos Passos’ poem, the machinery of prison time has no hold on the outside. In contrast Do Passos’ ideological stereotypes of wardens, judges, and statesmen as “black automatons,” Glatshteyn richly imagines the governor’s haunted nights:

"Di nakht iz gelegn vi ayn sbtik fun sbwartve tsayt,
Un nit er bot gebert vi ez ankern op di minutn,
Un nit er bot gebert dem plyoik fun a gefalener obo in vaser.
Nor vi a obere dumpike voy bot di nakht geboyet iber im
Un farbhtelt dem toyer tsu a morgn.
Vet morgn keynmol nit kumen?
(Zol morgn keynmol nit kumen)
Di ffo vern mid fun kin-tourik,
Sbpan avek fun zikh,
ariber yen yer zejt fun farglivertn fntoter.

The night lay there like a piece of black time, and he hasn’t heard how the minutes weigh anchor, and he hasn’t heard the splash of a fallen hour in the water, but only how a heavy, musty wave hangs in the night above him and blocks the gate to a new day. Will tomorrow never come? (Let tomorrow never come.) The feet grow weary of back-and-forth, stride away from themselves, beyond the far side of the curdled darkness."

Time appears at once material and fluid, with the heaviness of an anchor and the mystery of a suspended wave. The repetitive movements of the governor, pacing back and forth in his room at midnight, recall the movements of workers walking to work on Monday morning at the opening of the poem. Everyone faces the same horizon of dread, eroding the difference between powerful and powerless.

Only in the third section of Glatshteyn’s poema are Sacco and Vanzetti finally alluded to, appearing in a hallucinatory flight of imagery—storming the Bastille (for they were sentenced on Bastille Day), leaping flames and children rejoicing at the prisoners’ liberation, history and

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23 John Dos Passos’s "They Are Dead Now ——" appeared in the New Masses, October 1927.
24 Adapted from Rosenwald’s translation.
25 Also reminiscent of Arturo Giovannitti’s "The Walker" (1914)
the present unfurling simultaneously: “Someone has reshuffled the cards./Reversed what’s to come and what’s been.” These lines embody the spiraling of time: “Twinned are yesterday and today/and grown together and bent together.” The Yiddish grants agency to time: Glatshteyn coins the word for literally “twinning themselves.” In Glatshteyn’s vision, Sacco and Vanzetti might experience a liberation of time, while the temporality of the state constrains the governor to live like “a prisoner in the State House” peering out of a tiny window. This inversion evokes Morris Rosenfeld’s poem “The Sweatshop”: set during lunch hour, an “island in time” during which the worker can imagine beyond the oppressions of the present. Similarly, the fluid temporality of Sacco and Vanzetti allow for moments of possibility not available to the governor.

This “chaotic, kaleidoscopic” mode undoes the stringencies of nationalist time, interrupting the notions of history espoused by the governor, who says: “the cloak of method can never be stripped away./and revolutions happen only in history./And history is what is taught by old grandfathers with no teeth/and it always begins with Once—once upon a time.” The governor’s ambivalence towards his role in history is revealed in his imagined monologue to the singing protesters calling for clemency:

Ver bot oygezungen inmitn nakht?
Oyf der brik zvit eyner un twirt fun kelt.
Di fis aruntergehangen in vaser,
Zvit er un zingt sbtil:
Ratevet! Ratevet!
Gut. Zing biz veytok.
Shtekh mikh durkh mit dem gezang vi mit goldene shpilkes,
Ober ze, boyb oyf dem kop tsu mir an farabtey:
Ikb bin nit erobt un bin nit tveyt un bin nit sof.
Ikb bin a flater in dem bliask fun shneln farbrikn haveg,
Ikb trog mit obrek an opgetogenem guf,
Ver bin ikb tsu vern mer vi ikb bin?

Who sang out in the night?
Someone sits on the bridge and trembles with cold.
His feet hanging down in the water,
he quietly sits and sings:
Clemency! Clemency!
Good. Sing till you break.
Run me through with your song like a golden needle,
but look, lift your head up to me and understand:
I am not first and not second and not the end.
I am a fluttering in the brightness of quick, colorful motion,
I carry in fear a worn-out body,
who am I to be become more than I am?

The protesters call out for clemency, but what would it have meant to pardon Sacco and Vanzetti, as the last Haymarket defendants escaped their sentence? Can the poets acknowledge that martyrdom was more galvanizing than clemency? Elias Canetti theorizes that state power is reified more powerfully through the act of pardon, which seems to restore a man back to life—more powerful than execution. And comparing to state resurrection, what power lies in Vanzetti’s forgiveness of his executioner? Sacco and Vanzetti were often portrayed as Christ-like despite their non-pacifism, as in Vincent G. Burns’ poem: “Cruel men, beware! The Christs you kill/Will walk in power with us still!” Glatshteyn reverses the trope of the alpha and omega, placing it in the mouth of the governor: “I am not the first and not the end,/before me and after me a chain of people/cynically immortalizing
themselves,/fastening themselves to the neck of a world-memory/and the waters will never erode their names.” Glatshteyn’s sardonic, mock-epic reference to Song of Songs 8:7 is juxtaposed with Christ-like imagery of alpha and omega. This passage further judaizes the judge as one to whom they lift their eyes for help. The governor knows his immortality will be granted not in history books, but through the protest songs of his opponents:

Vey iz mir. Vey un vey un vey.
In mayn oyern klingen twoy nemen
Un mit zey vet mitklingen mayn nomen.
Un du voo zingt in mun der oberer nakht
Zing mikh oykh areyn in dayn gezang,
un veb mikh oykh areyn in di fedim [fodem] fun dayn lid
Her du mikh un mayn obtim vi zi obneydt durkh di velt:
Ratevet!

Woe is me, woe and woe and woe.

26 Canetti, Crowds and Power, 298.
See also The Legacy of Sacco and Vanzetti, eds. Louis Joughin, Edmund M. Morgan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).
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In my ears two names are sounding
and my name will resound with theirs.
And you singing amid the heavy night
sing me too into your song,
weave me too into the threads of your song
hear me and my voice as it cuts through the world:
Clemency!

Sweatshop tropes of labor converge in this image of song: threads of music, weaving, and the remarkable “Run me through with your song like golden needles.” Shtekh mikh durkh mit dem gezang vi mit goldene shpilkes transforms the humble instrument of garment workers, or perhaps the shoemaker Sacco’s leather-working tool, into gold. The pin and are needle are the paradigmatic image-object of sweatshop poetry, with intertextual echoes in proverbs, fables, and scripture. The repetition of a single gesture over long hours of work renders the movement of the worker an extension of the machine’s automation: the staccato of an electric sewing machine marks time like the ticking of a clock. Morris Rosenfeld’s “To My Beloved” represents these gestures of labor: “Here rules the struggle harsh for bread, / And I must tremble when I sew.”

Imagery of needles is found in many popular Yiddish labor songs, such as “Mit a nodl, on a nodl,” which emphasizes the nobility of work, combining pious traditions with labor consciousness.

This needle passage is among the most direct of Glatshteyn’s reinventions of sweatshop poetry. In his signature poem “The Millionaire of Tears,” Morris Rosenfeld writes:

Oh, no golden tuning-fork
Tunes up my throat to sing,
A hint from high above cannot
Raise high my voice to ring;
The sigh of weary slaves awakes
The song I make for others—

O, nit keyn goldner kamerton
shtimt on meyn kol tsyn zingen,
e veyn der vunk fun oybn on
mayn shtim nit makbn klingen;

nor velt in mir di lider, —

28 Glatshteyn’s imagery of needles recurs in “The Baron Tells of His Last Experience,” recasting acts of labor as producing magic. Using common and familiar materials, the worker reinvents Creation: “And here I am, in the middle of a forest,/Where needle-and-thread don’t grow on trees./So I carved a needle from a thin twig,/Threaded its eye with sundust/And sewed my blue military trousers./When night fell/The trousers served me well on the road—/The sunstitches glowed like lanterns/And the road was like a highway of diamonds.” Sing, Stranger, 458-9.

29 Sing Stranger, 27.
30 You may listen to Ruth Rubin singing this song on the Smithsonian Folkways website: http://www.folkways.si.edu/ruth-rubin/mit-a-nodl-oh-a-nodl-with-a-needle-without-a-needle/judaica/music/track/smithsonian
And flaming high my song revives,  
un mit a flam lebt oyf meyn lid,

The song for my poor brothers.\(^{31}\)  
Fir meyne or’me brider.\(^{32}\)

Rosenfeld’s sweatshop worker laments that “not a golden tuning-fork/tunes up my throat to sing”: the speaker’s creativity is circumscribed by poverty. Glatshteyn’s image of “golden needles of song” is the art of proletarian singers holding the governor accountable—a tribute, perhaps, from the Modernist to the Proletarian poet.

Modernist reinvention of images of domestic labor is not unique to the Yiddish context. Nina Gurianova notes that while Italian Futurist artists tended to ecstatically embrace images of new machinery and momentum, Russian modernist artists tended to depict hand tools of traditional trades: “While Italians chose to be the utopians in their purely futuristic ambitions, Russians never rejected the past, and indeed ‘internalized’ and deconstructed archaic myth, making a clear argument in their poetics for primitivism against all the attractions of civilized modernity.”\(^{33}\) As Russian Futurists experimented with imagery of the humble hand tool, so did the Yiddish anarchist modernists refuse to give up Labor symbology. This represents not a rejection of the previous generation, but a retention and reinvention. Like Harry Houdini, the magician (and rabbi’s son) who primarily used common household objects like needles and locks in his stage act, this is an image of transcendence via the tools of the mundane. One of Houdini’s signature acts was called the “East Indian Needle Trick,” described as a “yogie masterpiece.” Despite dressing it up with an orientalist name, that stage image was read by Jewish audiences as the cunning transcendence of a man over drudgery and labor.\(^{34}\) Houdini


\(^{32}\) Rosenfeld, 7.

\(^{33}\) Gurianova, *Aesthetics of Anarchy: Art and Ideology in the Early Russian Avant-Garde*, 62. "It is difficult to spot any significant objects of technological innovation or new machines, such as cars, or electric lanterns, in Russian Futurist compositions. Instead, there are familiar traditional objects, often rural—such as bicycles, knife grinders, sewing machines, samovars, sickles, and saws—that are normally associated with domesticity, or the backward life of the agricultural societies... I think the reason for such a marked rejection of technological ‘subjects’ is much deeper [than their relative urbanism] and reflects the ideological difference between Russian and Italian Futurisms."

would have his mouth inspected by a committee of men on stage, then swallow 50 to 100 needles, 20 yards of thread, and drink a glass of water to “wash them down.” He would then pull out the thread, with all the needles threaded upon it. Although earlier magicians had performed this feat using a few dozen needles, Houdini used enough needles and thread to stretch across the length of the stage. In this studio portrait from about 1915, he stands before the committee who had inspected his mouth for hidden needles; in the second image, he triumphantly holds the threaded needles aloft. Like Houdini’s stunning stagecraft built from domestic tools, Glatshteyn takes the signature vocabulary of the shtetl poets—needles, workers’ songs as resistance—and creates a Modernist image from it. By re-combining the components of an older style, he threads the needle anew. Like Houdini’s transcending tools of hand-labor, Glatshteyn takes the signature vocabulary of the earlier anarchist poets—needles, workers’ songs of resistance, the possibility of time liberated—and reinvents them in magical, Modernist images.

_Aquí estamos y no nos vamos_: Martín Espada and Sacco-Vanzetti

Martín Espada offers a new entry in Jewish American poets’ enduring fascination with Sacco and Vanzetti. In 2017, to commemorate the ninetieth anniversary of their execution, the Puerto Rican poet published “I Now Pronounce You Dead,” subtitled “For Sacco and Vanzetti, executed August 23, 1927.” Espada’s work draws often from labor history, as in his sonnet sequence of sonnets about the Paterson Silk Strike of 1912, _Vivas to Those Who Have Failed_. He takes up the tropes of canonical Sacco-Vanzetti poetry: the dramatic retelling of the execution, the time-stamp of their death, the elegiac honoring of Vanzetti’s unearthly virtue towards his executioner, and the rejection of linear-national time. Like Glatshteyn and Halpern, Espada’s gaze follows the warden and executioner rather than Sacco and Vanzetti:

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On the night of his execution, Bartolomeo Vanzetti, immigrant from Italia, fishmonger, anarchist, shook the hand of Warden Hendry and thanked him for everything. *I wish to forgive some people for what they are now doing to me,* said Vanzetti, blindfolded, strapped down to the chair that would shoot two thousand volts through his body.

The warden’s eyes were wet. The warden’s mouth was dry. The warden heard his own voice croak: *Under the law I now pronounce you dead.* No one could hear him. With the same hand that shook the hand of Bartolomeo Vanzetti, Warden Hendry of Charlestown Prison waved at the executioner, who gripped the switch to yank it down.

The walls of Charlestown Prison are gone, to ruin, to dust, to mist. Where the prison stood there is a school; in the hallways, tongues speak the Spanish of the Dominican, the Portuguese of Cabo Verde, the Creole of Haiti. No one can hear the last words of Vanzetti, or the howl of thousands on Boston Common when they knew.

After midnight, at the hour of the execution, Warden Hendry sits in the cafeteria, his hand shaking as if shocked, rice flying off his fork, so he cannot eat no matter how the hunger feeds on him, babbling the words that only he can hear: *I now pronounce you dead.*

Espada makes a new entry in anarchist temporality: a decolonial move, appealing to the transience of empire through the fall of this particular prison, succumbing “to ruin, to dust, to mist” within continental space. Espada notes the significance of place in the poem: “I wanted to draw a connection between the repression of immigrants past and present. This is nothing new, and it doesn’t work. It so happens that the former site of Charlestown Prison, where Sacco and Vanzetti were executed, is the current site of Bunker Hill Community College—a school with a sizeable immigrant population, speaking in many tongues. As the saying goes: *Aquí estamos y no nos vamos.* Here we are and here we stay. The poem is also about the paradox of a good man in a bad system—the warden at the prison, in this case—and the compromise with lethal injustice that will haunt him for the rest of his days.”

Like Halpern and Gлатshteyn, Espada makes visible the half-tied hands of power. He focuses not on hagiographic portraits of victims but on ambivalent perpetrators, as with

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56 Interview: https://www.massreview.org/node/6383
Halpern’s image of a ‘fellow worker’ as brother-betrayer. The poem jumps back in time from stanza three to stanza four, back to a suspended moment when the haunted warden remains unable to eat. The temporality of the poem seems at first bound up with an eternal mourning for the two men, then its scope widens to take in the multiplicity of immigrant languages of Boston—Spanish, Portuguese, Creole—as though rhyming with Vanzetti’s own tongue from “Italia,” his own words lost to ether. The prison has eroded, its inmates replaced by free children, rhyming with Vanzetti’s own longing for the future. But Espada gives the last word to the warden, perhaps putting the lie to August Spies’ defiant shout from the gallows: “The day will come when our silence will be more powerful than the voices you strangle today.”

[1 thank Espada for permission to quote his work in print.]

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