JEWISHNESS IN RUSSIAN CULTURE

Within and Without

Edited by Leonid F. Katsis
and Helen Tolstoy

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Jewishness in Russian Culture

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INTRODUCTION: JUDAICA ROSSICA—ROSSICA JUDAICA

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Recent years have seen a sharp increase in the number of studies of both Russian Jewish literature and of the role of Jews in Russian literature. These studies seem to be in growing need of an institutional framework. On the one hand, Russian Jewish literature can be studied under the rubric of Judaica, as a Jewish literature in a non-Jewish language, similar to the German Jewish, French Jewish, or Polish Jewish literatures. On the other hand, the role of Jewish writers in Russian literature, even those whose works abound in Jewish images and motifs, can be described within the framework of Russian literary history or the poetics of Russian literature. This is the case, for instance, when it comes to the work of Isaak Babel. However, scholarly research in the field is hampered by problems stemming from a lack of interdisciplinary fellowship or mutual understanding; even a palpable lack of interest in the work or research topics of other scholars is remarkably common. In our opinion, this is the result of a basic asymmetry inherent in Judeo-Christian relations. A Jew can get along without being acquainted with Christianity, whereas a Christian must necessarily take the Old Testament into account. Similarly, an author of Jewish origin writing in a non-Jewish language has most probably mastered the language and the cultural codes of the surrounding milieu. But in addition, such an author also knows a Jewish language or languages, is versed in Jewish literature written in at least one of these languages, and, very likely, is aware of other Jewish literatures written in non-Jewish media, which are accessible to him or her in the original or in translation. Or, even if the Jewish author does not have command of any other languages, he or she still resorts to a national historical memory independent of the historical memory of the surrounding ethnos.

But titular cultures normally disregard the historical and cultural memory of their national minorities. This does not necessarily impede the reception of Jewish writings, whatever their authors' location on the literary scene. Quite the opposite is true: a Jewish writer can play on the double

entendre of Biblical passages, which are interpreted in mutually divergent ways in the Jewish and Christian tradition. A Jew may hide the immediate impulse to write, which can add depth to a work or make it enigmatic. Alternatively, a Jewish author may conceal a general political motif, masking it as a peculiarly Jewish concern.

A story by Isaak Babel is a case in point. The plot revolves about a "Black wedding"—a wedding of two paupers—depicting the proceeding as an exotic instance of Jewish lore. Historically, such a "Black wedding" actually occurred, and was widely publicized in Odessa's newspapers. The wedding took place in September 1918, when Odessa, after a short period of Red Terror, came under the control of Denikin's Dobrovol'cheskaya Army. The Jews of Odessa were in dread of the approaching Ukrainian armies, famous for their anti-Semitic brutality, to say nothing of what was to be expected in case of the return of the Bolsheviks. The "Black wedding" was supposed to prevent the catastrophe. The tragic political context of the 1918 ritual became unmentionable after the establishment of Soviet rule, but unspoken it remained a familiar memory among the Jews of Odessa when Babel's story appeared in 1923.

Wherever the titular non-Jewish press and the Jewish one coexist, the writings of the respective authors subsist in non-overlapping spaces. In Russia, it was possible for Russian Jewish authors' work to be reviewed both in the Russian and the Russian Jewish press, as well as in Yiddish and Hebrew periodicals.

The non-Jewish readers' and critics' near total ignorance of the Jewish world and its realities rendered whole strata of Russian Jewish literature unreadable or misunderstood by the Russian public. Sometimes, Jewish motifs were borrowed by the titular literature with decorative aims, or else were jumbled, or even intentionally presumed to have negative connotations they did not actually possess.

It is against this background that recent research has attempted to explicate the national elements in the Jewish writers turned Russian classics. The endeavor has met with considerable obstacles on the way to interdisciplinary interaction. In the case of Judaica, literary phenomena are typically approached from the point of view of writers' national self-definition, or in the context of the gap among generations, or else in connection with the choice between a Jewish and a non-Jewish language or between a religious and a secular worldview. Jewish scholars treat the Jewish element as being of paramount importance, sensing it as something akin to their own professional identity. As a result, this type of research tends to ignore or reduce the significance of phenomena familiar and acknowledged in Slavic studies.

The approach risks leading to the isolation of Russian Jewish works, locking them in a purely Jewish context.

This is often the predicament of research dealing with the poet Chaim Nachman Bialik, whose predominantly 19-century Russian poetic genealogy is ignored, while his own poetic creation is linked directly to the Bible and medieval Hebrew poetry instead. Similarly, a Judaica scholar can easily make the gross error of assuming that, for instance, the writer Mikhail Bulgakov had first-hand knowledge of the Talmud or Kabbala. The narrow definition of Jewish disciplinary interests spells out a lack of familiarity with the workings of modern Russian culture, such as the dissemination and impact of scholarly publications, translations, popularizations, and even occult periodicals. This state of affairs can play a bad joke on the scholars of today.

A case in point involves a prominent scholar, the author of a fundamental biography of S. An-sky, who concluded that there was no logic whatsoever in An-sky's abandoning his Populist convictions in the years following 1905, when the former Populist emerged as a Symbolist. However, the annals of Russian culture make it clear that by 1910, the Symbolist movement had triumphed in Russian literature, gaining control of Russia's major literary journals.

Conversely, in Slavic Studies, the Jewish elements in any one particular writer's work are easily taken to be the manifestation of individual poetic style, or interpreted as the direct reflection of the writer's biography. Alternatively, they are sometimes treated as sheer nonsense or trans-sense. However, our work indicates that even in avant-garde trans-sensical writings, phrases or expressions borrowed from Jewish sources are normally quoted in full and without distortion. For Russian and Jewish authors alike, such borrowed expressions are diagnosable components indicative of deep layers of meaning invariably inherent in the text. Yet explications of Jewish imagery, subtexts, or other elements of meaning, which are introduced in the work of Slavists or researchers of Judaica working in the Russian cultural space have provoked substantial resistance. They continue to do so still. The findings yielded by these studies tend to be omitted from normative histories or discussions of the poetics of Russian literature.

In the late 1980s, a researcher had trouble publishing an English-language article about Chekhov's Jewish bride: reviewers complained of "too little Chekhov and too many Jews" in the paper. At about the same time, D. Rayfield, a scholar from England, published his study of the Chekhov brothers' Jewish connections in *Judaism Today*, rather than in a Slavic Studies journal, where such a paper would naturally belong.

Such misappropriations can largely be explained by the different databases, methods, and value systems of the two disciplines in question. The phenomenon also has a historical dimension. Jewish and Russian Jewish themes were for many decades excluded from the Soviet curriculum. This resulted in several generations of scholars of both Russian and Jewish origin who were unaware of the very existence of these themes or did not see them as in any way relevant to their work. It is crucial to remember that there was a premeditated political campaign afoot in the Soviet empire, aimed at the de-Judaization of the USSR's Jews. This accounts for the absence of any demand for the description, analysis, or ways to gain an understanding of Russian culture's Jewish component, to say nothing of Russian Jewish literature. Under these circumstances, the towering giants O. Mandelshtam, B. Pasternak, I. Ehrenburg, and even I. Babel began to be seen as individual Jewish success stories in Russian literature. Several generations of memoirists and researchers have also made Mandelshtam and Pasternak into paragons of the successful self-realization of Jewish Christians in Russian culture and models for imitation by new generations of Jewish intellectuals striving for de-nationalization. A vivid illustration of this state of affairs is the omission from even latter-day Soviet-inspired Mandelshtam studies and bibliographies of works on Mandelshtam's connection to Jewish sources. This is the case despite the fact that such works are easily accessible through RAMBI, a bibliographic search system for material related to Judaica. Within this system of priorities, even when works dealing with Pasternak or Mandelshtam do touch on Jewish themes, the few corroborated facts they register are typically misinterpreted, reduced, or utterly distorted, and are in need of careful reconstruction.

Today, it is hardly appropriate to say that we have any clearly spelled out set of definitions of even the basic concepts or issues in the history of Russian Jewish literature. For these, one can turn to historical–cultural studies of the period like Brian Horowitz' books on the acculturation of the Jews of the Russian Empire and on the Jewish philanthropy and Enlightenment. But more specific problems still need solution. Indeed, how is a Russian Jewish writer to be defined? The simplest way is to follow an author's own self-definition. But such an approach is problematic from the outset. Authors experience profound changes in the course of their development; their identity does not remain unaffected by the metamorphoses which they undergo in time. Authors of the early period of Russian Jewish literature from Osip Rabinovich to Lev Levanda are normally taken to be the Russian voice of the Jewish community which, en masse, did not have a command of the Russian language. Semen Frug in the mid-1880s turned from assimila-

tion to national creativity. Vladimir Zeev Jabotinsky and Isaak Babel wrote in an age when Russian was becoming the primary language of Russia's Jews. Each of these authors explained his choice of literary identity differently. Babel never made any public proclamation of being a Russian Jewish author. He was categorized as such by critics and literary scholars. During the reign of Socialist realism, as well as during the two decades of officially sanctioned Soviet anti-Semitism, and following Babel's literary rehabilitation in the mid-1950s, no one was intent on stressing Babel's affinity with Russian Jewish literature. Throughout these different periods, this literature seemed long since expired. The pioneering studies of Russian Jewish literature which began to appear in the 1970s treated 1940 as the last year of this literature's existence: this was the year of Jabotinsky's death and of Babel's execution.

In speaking of a literature that expired after a bare 80 years of existence (1860–1940), there are no questions of method. But the devil, as usual in the history of science, hides in the details. Shimon Markish, the 1970–1990s' leading expert and researcher of Russian Jewish literature, had to make allowances for data that did not quite fit his rigid historical scheme. In his list of Russian Jewish writers, Markish had to include authors whose works naturally belonged to this literature, even though the set of Russian Jewish concerns was not always at the center of their attention. These works included I. Ehrenburg's *The Stormy Life of Lasik Roitschwanetz*, V. Grossman's *In the Town of Berdichev*, and others. It should be noted that *Life and Fate*, Grossman's famous novel about World War II, was written in the 1950s, thus falling outside the limits of Russian Jewish literary history as defined by Markish. All the creative work of the openly Russian Jewish writer Fridrikh Gorenshtein also dates from the 1960–1990s, beyond the scope of Markish's scheme. The case of Ilya Ehrenburg poses even more of a challenge. Ehrenburg was baptized in his early youth, becoming a Catholic while a political émigré in Paris. Upon his return to revolutionary Russia, Ehrenburg wept for the destruction of his motherland in his book of ecstatically Christian verse, titled *A Prayer for Russia*. During the Russian Civil War, he served as a White journalist, denouncing anti-Jewish pogroms, but later repented and returned to the Soviet fold to work as a Soviet cultural envoi in Europe. As a novelist during the 1930s, Ehrenburg became a leading representative of Socialist realism; he was the leading official Soviet journalist during World War II. But after the end of the War, together with Grossman, he co-authored the famous *Black Book*, and, in the wake of the murder of Solomon Michoels, became the one leading advocate of the Jews under the Soviet regime. The case of Ehrenburg and ones similar to it, including Lev Luntz, Veniamin

Kaverin, and others, led Markish to admit that at different points in their creative lives, authors could work as both Jewish and non-Jewish writers. Adhering to the principle of selection that this seemed to dictate, volumes of Grossman's, Babel's, and Ehrenburg's Russian Jewish writings were compiled and published in Israel, along with prefatory texts authored by Markish.

It was unavoidable that, after Markish, the next generation of researchers would have to look for new methodological principles in writing its histories and poetics of Russian Jewish literature. There were, clearly, two distinct ways to approach the subject. The first was resorted to as far back as in the title of *A History of Russian Jewish Literature* by V. L'vov-Rogachevsky (1916, published in 1922). In this book, Russian Jewish literature is understood to be Jewish literature written in the Russian language. This is hardly surprising. L'vov-Rogachevsky's work appeared as part of Gorky's grand program of writing the histories of non-Russian literatures of the Russian Empire. Parallel to the Russian Jewish project, other histories were planned, but not written: the history of literature in Yiddish, as well as of that in Hebrew.

1923 saw the immediate publication of a critical review of L'vov-Rogachevsky in *Evreyskiy Al'manach* (A Jewish Miscellany). This had been authored by Arkadii Gornfeld, a Russian and Russian Jewish literary figure who, rather than referring to "Jewish literature in Russian" (as per Gorky or Jabotinsky), proposed addressing "Jewish creative writing in Russian" instead. The collection of texts labelled in this way would include any Russian-language production by ethnic Jews, even if the texts in question were to be writings of Christian philosophers of Jewish origin (the work of Semen Frank is a case in point).

Tellingly, the same issues were being grappled with at the very same time in Germany. A solution was put forth in a collected volume of articles bearing the title of *Modern German Writers—Jews* and edited by Gustav Krojanker and Martin Buber. In the Soviet Union, the volume attracted the attention of David Zaslavsky, a well-known critic and author of Russian Jewish publications (and in later years, an officious journalist) who discussed it in a lengthy review in Russian. This episode is alluded to, among other texts, in O. Mandelshtam's *The Fourth Prose*.

General interest in issues of Russian Jewish culture waned in due course, shortly to be stamped out entirely. This development came in tandem with the shutdown of all Russian Jewish periodicals, a process creeping toward conclusion between 1924 and circa 1928, when the last of the journals, *Evreyskaya starina* (Jewish Antiquity), discontinued publication. From this time on, any Russian Jewish writing was automatically included in the

united stream of Russian Soviet literature, absolving the authors—and leaving them unable to make—any choice about whether to be Russian or Russian Jewish writers. This state of affairs prevailed until the late 1980s, when a Russian-Jewish press began to reemerge.

Given a different cultural context, the bulk of the prose written by O. Mandelshtam (completed by 1928), could function as texts of "double interpretation," both Russian and Russian Jewish. Today, Michael Stanislawski, a historian of Jewish culture, discerns in *The Sound of Time* echoes of Mandelshtam's Russian Jewish autobiography sounding like a parody of Hebrew or Yiddish autobiographies which date from the Haskala period.

1928 saw the peak of Isaak Babel's fame. Babel clearly belonged to Russian Jewish literature; no one at the time could have dreamed of including Osip Mandelshtam in the same category. Boris Pasternak's early prose, "Il tratto di Apelle" (1915), and his quasi-autobiography, "Safe Conduct", have never been considered in a Russian Jewish context, in spite of their highly charged Jewish content: the first enunciates a break with the author's Jewish heritage, while the second reflects Pasternak's decision to discontinue his academic work in philosophy under the tutelage of Hermann Cohen, who was becoming too "Jewish" of a philosopher. The culmination of this process came with Pasternak's novel *Doctor Zhivago* (1956), which includes a manifesto calling for the willed self-dissolution of Jewry in Christianity. (The novel is known to have irritated David Ben-Gurion.) The novel was never correlated with the Russian Jewish periodicals of the period it describes, such as *Evreiskaya mysl'* or *Novy Voskhod*, let alone Jabotinsky's *Feuilletons*. Even so, Pasternak must have retained a sense of the Jewish national trauma of the 1900–1910s as late as the mid-1950s. The key moments of this turmoil, such as the 1906–1908 claims against Jews in Russian literature, initiated by K. Chukovsky (Jabotinsky's protégé and pupil during his early years as a journalist in Odessa) were then fully unfurled by Jabotinsky in the widely publicized essays "On Jews in Russian Literature" and "Four Essays on the Chirikov Incident." Both of these appeared in Jabotinsky's *Feuilletons*.

The Beilis Trial of 1911–1913 alarmed all strata of Russian society. The next radical turning point in the history of Russian Jewry came with World War I, when all Russian Jews living in the frontline zone were collectively accused of espionage. This is precisely the time and the place where the 1915 dialogue between Zhivago and Gordon is staged. The central focus of attention in this meeting is the fate of the Jews. This crucial contextual element would obviously be missed by readers of the Nobel Prize-winning novel in the 1950s and '60s.

In the early sixties, some of Osip Mandelshtam's writings were restored to the reader, along with two books by his widow, Nadezhda Mandelshtam, which achieved instant fame. Nadezhda Mandelshtam did everything she could to ensure a literary image of her husband, which would not retain any traces of a Jewish aura. Under the influence of her understanding of his work, Mandelshtam's poetry was taken to be the primary component of his creation, while his prose, largely Russian Jewish, was brushed aside as marginal. Mandelshtam's *The Egyptian Stamp*, largely based on the plot of Sholom Aleichem's *A Bloody Joke*, based, in turn, on the Beilis Trial proceedings, and Mandelshtam's *The Fourth Prose* with its numerous allusions to the Jewish episodes of Heinrich Heine's autobiography, were both interpreted as avant-garde prose, fragmentary and often incomprehensible, or as something in the line of the then newest French novels. The Jewish layer of meaning remained either unidentified or ignored. Given such an approach, it should hardly come as a surprise that Mandelshtam's cycles of articles on Jewish Kiev or the Moscow Jewish Chamber Theater in the Ukrainian capital have only recently begun to receive attention.

Mandelshtam and Pasternak turn out to be the two extreme cases of the Buber-Krojanker scheme described above. Situated at the two opposite ends of the spectrum, the two authors addressed rejecting Jewish identity and the expressly Jewish substrate of a literature in a non-Jewish language. Russian Jewish culture throughout was oriented towards the corresponding Western models, mostly French and German. If we turn to research on French Jewish or German Jewish literature or culture, we shall see that the year 1940, traditionally seen as the end of the history of Russian Jewish literature, did not mark the end of these hybrid cultures according to any historical account. This in spite of the fact that in 1940, France was overrun by Hitler's armies, putting an end to the development of French Jewish culture. A similar assessment can be made of Germany, in spite of radical changes in the structure of the post-World War II Jewish community.

An important insight in this respect can be gleaned from Osip Mandelshtam's foreword to his translation of Radan the Magnificent, a novel by the French Jewish writer Bernard Lecache. Mandelshtam here compares the contemporary French Jewish and German Jewish literatures (Mandelshtam wrote internal reviews of new titles in German and French for publishers; he occasionally recommended Jewish authors).

Two facts that usually escape attention should be made a note of in this connection. First, a substantial number of German Jewish (especially in the Austrian-Hungarian Empire) and French Jewish writers at this time were of Eastern European origin. Second, a substantial part of modern German

and French literature translated in Soviet Russia in the 1920s belonged to what would in more up-to-date terms be called German Jewish or French Jewish literature. (The ambivalence was unavoidable: authors such as Jakob Wassermann were translated into Russian and published in journals sporting titles along the lines of Evreiskiy mir. In terms of content, the publication was a Russian Jewish translation of German Jewish work in prose, and its appearance in print was affiliated with Russian Jewish cultural organizations. But when the same authors' collected works appeared, or when they were published in Russian publishing houses, they were referred to as German literature). Thus, despite the extermination of the Russian Jewish press in the Soviet Union, the Russian reader could continue to remain abreast of developments in European Jewish literature.

Later, in the 1960–1970s, usually dubbed "the Years of Silence" for Russian Jewry, the absence of a contemporary Russian Jewish literature was supposed to be compensated for by Leon Feuchtwanger's novels about Josephus Flavius or the False Nero. An accompanying commentary on these works was provided by the Classics scholar Simon Markish—the same historian of Russian Jewish literature Shimon Markish mentioned earlier in this Introduction. It is clear now that nothing like the often alleged complete break with tradition occurred in Russian Jewish reality. "The Jews of silence" had never actually given up their self-awareness. The books discussed in these pages should be approached as a part of the annals of Russian Jewish literature, a point which again leads to the question: "What is Russian Jewish literature?"

The simplest case is the explicit self-definition of a writer who is a first-generation fugitive from the Jewish environment and is coming to Russian literature as a Jew.

A more complex situation involves the double self-identification of a Russian Jewish writer whose native tongue is Russian (or a writer who was educated in Russian) and who works in both Russian and Russian Jewish literatures. This situation can be further complicated if there are other Jewish languages at the writer's disposal.

Finally, there are Jewish writers who are native speakers of Russian and whose works have become classics of Russian literature, the most prominent examples being Mandelshtam and Pasternak. However, one could hardly expect writers in this last category, no matter how they relate to their Jewishness, to approach literature or their own private lives in strict accordance with any proclaimed position. Neither can one expect them to be neutral in their attitude toward Christianity, or Russian, or German patriotism. It is obvious that such writers cannot be described as Russian Jewish authors in

the same sense as those belonging to the first case outlined above. But completely excluding the Jewish component of their life and work may come at great cost for historians.

We must return to the question posed in the title of the present Introduction, the question which must be faced by today's Jewish historians: who writes Jewish history, and for whom is Jewish history written? Is Jewish history being written for absorption in global historiography, all in the hope that the world will take an interest in the Jewish part of the total, prepared in order to facilitate use in the study of world history by those unfamiliar with Jewish issues? Or is the historian of Jews or Jewish culture supposed to address those Jews who want to preserve or restore their historical memory?

Translated into our terms, the two approaches correspond to what may be called "Judaica Rossica" as opposed to "Rossica Judaica." Thus, the reader of Pasternak and Mandelshtam, who are today both included in Russian high school curricula, would not need to study the two poets' problems of national identification as a part of Russian literary history. Slavists pursuing issues in the history of Russian literature need not work on Mandelshtam's difficult texts in a direction contrary to the one indicated by his widow, whose writing is nowadays more in demand than her husband's.

Conversely, specialists in Judaica usually do not have expert knowledge of Russian poetry or poetics. Lacking this crucial background, their studies of the behavioral stereotypes of Russian writers of Jewish origin provide yet another instance of describing a Jewish fate already familiar to the research.

Students of either of these two disciplines are overly eager to subject aspects of their topics to a reduction, as well as to restrict the phenomenon of Russian Jewish culture to some particular period in the past. The predilection for intellectual packaging results in the reduction of whole stages in the history of literatures created in the Russian language.

Clearly enough, Russian Jewish texts can be taken as they come, without paying too much attention to those stages or episodes in their histories which do not look sufficiently Jewish, such as baptism or interest in being baptized, mixed marriage, refusal to work in the Russian Jewish press, aggressive Jewish anti-Semitism, extreme assimilatory tendencies, and the like. But a writer may return to Judaism, for good or for a period, or undergo even more complicated biographical zigzags. It is our conviction that these various possibilities must be taken into consideration, in light of the enormous influence which the vagaries of their fate had on the nationally oriented Russian Jews.

We need, then, to look for new approaches capable of helping us grapple with the complex situation which has been described above; alternatively, a

new area of study at the intersection where Slavic and Judaic Studies meet should begin to take shape.

The only way out of the present impasse of the "two non-sciences," in the late M. Gasparov's phrase, would be to include within the scope of Russian Jewish culture such intermediary figures and events as require familiarity with both the Russian and the Jewish components of Russian Jewry's life, regardless of their value for either Judaica or Slavic Studies alone. Both disciplines would benefit from the study of this no-man's land; each could then make use of the results as its adepts may see fit. It is quite clear that such an intermediary discipline is not yet in existence today, albeit the potential is obviously there; there is also no single method acceptable from the point of view of a large enough number of scholars. But as soon as the history of Russian Jewish literature begins to include a number of intermediary names that it did not formerly include, this history will begin to resemble the history of its European Jewish analogues. "The Jewry of silence," unrecognized as a part of any institutionalized discipline, will then have a voice of its own, largely through the efforts of authors who, like their readers, turn out to have a double or a mosaic identity.

Even the notion of Jewish baptism, prima facie a thoroughly un-Jewish act, has its own purely Jewish features, connected both with the social consequences of a Jew's baptism and with the theological makeup of the Jewish-Christian world picture.

The simplest upshot appears to be a comparative procedure of standard type. However, this will not work in our case, primarily because there was never any united "Jewish" stance vis-à-vis any issues whatsoever, which was expressed in non-Jewish languages comparably to the cultural or national positions of metropolitan European nations. In fact, European Jewish cultures in non-Jewish languages did not develop in tandem with each other. The German Jewish religious reformation, the Haskala, paved the way for such development over the course of almost 200 years. French Jewish culture emerged another half-a-century later, while Russian Jewish culture, which first appeared in the mid-19th century, lagged almost a hundred years behind. All the stages of Russian Jewish cultural development succeeded each other at great speed and within short periods of time. In addition, some of the earlier stages did not entirely disappear. The Pale of Jewish Settlement (in existence up to 1915 in Russia and also in the Baltic States, Western Ukraine, and Western Belorussia until their annexion by the USSR at the beginning of World War II) went on providing Russian Jewish literature with a steady stream of Yiddish-speaking Jews who, according to all criteria, would belong to the first stage of Russian Jewish cultural history.

Somewhat similar processes took place in France, where the gradual development of French Jewish literature was interrupted circa 1905 by the massive influx of Eastern European Jews into the country. Texts authored in French by non-French Jews and devoted to the concerns of Russian and Eastern European Jewry became an important part of French Jewish culture. Bernard Lecache, whom Mandelshtam chose to translate into Russian and to provide a commentary upon, came from just such a background: a Lithuanian Jew who had moved to France and who wrote—inter alia—about the anti-Jewish pogroms taking place in the Russian Empire.

Methodologically speaking, the way to approach this material would be by relying on a comparative-historical procedure which would juxtapose different Jewish cultures in non-Jewish European languages with each other, as well as with the Jewish literatures of the appropriate countries and periods. It is only on the basis of such a procedure that one can come back to making comparisons between distinct Jewish literatures in non-Jewish languages. This should then turn out to be the natural terrain for the specialized discipline which does not oppose Judaica (Slavica) Rossica to Rossica (Slavica) Judaica, but in which Slavists and Judaica scholars can find an area where their research interests intersect. Data and materials drawn from this field can then easily translate into terms meaningful both for Slavic Studies and for Judaica scholarship.

This collective monograph is the result of a scholarly meeting at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (23–25 June 2009, Jerusalem). The three-day Workshop "New Perspectives on Assimilation and Anti-Semitism in Russian Literature" was held under the aegis of The Institute for Literary Studies and The Department of Russian Studies at the faculty of Humanities of The Hebrew University, and was supported by Russian Friends of the Hebrew University. The event was devoted to new approaches and methods of the study of Jewish acculturation in Russian literature and the effects of and responses to this process. Rather than study separately the two well-known phenomena reflected in the workshop's title, the scholarly meeting was an attempt to re-define criteria and borders of a discipline situated roughly between Judaica Rossica and Rossica Judaica. It turned out to be a demonstration of a series of important events in Russian culture or a series of biographies of important literary figures whose very fates seemed to belong, synchronically or diachronically, to both disciplines. Thus it appeared possible to aim at uniting within a new conceptual framework the data accumulated by scholars and disciplines that exist separately, in different research spaces that do not overlap: in Jewish Studies and in the history of Russian culture. Scholars from different countries were supposed to exchange opin-

ions with Israeli scholars, to aim at a breakthrough towards a new methodology in the area(s) under investigation. Specific topics for discussion were chosen by the participants of the Workshop. Their contributions described borderline situations dealing with Russian Empire's Jewish policies, with the emergence in the first quarter of the 19th century of a new image of the Jew, with specific, often very complicated life stories of some leading figures in the Russian-Jewish interaction, with some background figures adding to our knowledge of important outstanding cultural events. As a result it became clear that a new picture was emerging, a new, unexpected, historically developing plot that throws a new light on the Russian-Jewish interaction from early 1800s to early 2000s. We also included in our plot such paradoxical cases as creation of philo-Semitic texts which use common anti-Semitic rhetoric—and the Jewish reactions to such baffling, ambiguous phenomena. In short, in our collective monograph we have tried describing the two centuries long cultural process of Russian-Jewish interaction not as a contradictory conglomerate of facts constituting it but as development of a historical plot along the axis of acculturation/anti-Semitism, accepting and/or trying to be accepted, being rejected—and/or rejecting, being within/without. These forms alternate in history and often in individual biographies, in some cases more than once. It seems that this framework can possibly be useful for further research.

The inclusion of the Jewish population in the Russian Empire brought the meeting of the Russian and the Jewish worlds. The meeting made necessary the formation of an intercultural dialogue. The relatively recent appearance of the Jews in the Russian territory makes it possible to trace the history of different types and forms of their penetration in or eviction from the Russian universum. The book's Chapter One starts with Olga Minkina's essay devoted to the earliest stage of this dialog when a rhetoric of Jewish self-presentation was formed by the elite of Russian Jewry, the stratum who was the first among the new segment of Russia's population to come into contact with the culture of the ruling class, Russian bureaucracy; it is noteworthy that the Jewish rhetoric draw on the Sentimentalist writing then in use in Russian society.

Mikhail Weisskopf in his article "'Diabolic Delight': New Light on the History of the Jewish Theme in Russian Romanticism" inspects development of Jewish themes in Russian Romantic writing. Romanticism that won the literary scene in 1830–1840 closely followed the entrance of the Jews into Russian cultural space. It was the most important literary movement that played a formative role for Russian national literature. Thus it was Romantic writers who introduced basic stereotypes of various Jewish

types, overwhelmingly negative, with one exclusion, that of the beautiful Jewess, for the most part adapting them from Western European models.

The turbulent epoch of the great reforms shifted attention to larger social processes rending the Jewish themes peripheral. Some Jews were acculturated through participation in revolutionary groups, some were accepted in gymnasiums and universities. But the reaction set in quickly, and the Jewish situation was deteriorating in the seventies and especially in the eighties after the revolutionary terrorists succeeded in killing Tsar Alexander II. The Jews who had been purposefully Russified during preceding decades and were overwhelmingly loyal were shocked by the response to the regicide in the form of "popular" mass pogroms. They were all suspect and unwanted.

The Jewish elite reacted to the ensuing unprecedented deprivation of elementary freedoms with the proliferation of Russian-Jewish press. That was the start of a new, literary stage of Russian-Jewish interaction. This stage was cut short by the World War I and the ensuing revolution. There were a number of highly influential cultural figures during this lull of time (not very successfully identified as "The Silver Age") who combined simultaneous (or consecutive, or alternating) work in the Russian and the Jewish cultural scenes.

One, and probably the most important such figure was the famous turn-of-the century literary, art, and theatre critic Akim Volynsky to whom Helen Tolstoy devoted her study "Akim Volynsky and His Jewish Cycle" where she focused on his less known "Jewish" side. Volynsky started his literary career as a Palestinophile fighting against assimilators, then entered Russian literary life reviewing books on philosophy, and soon created his own paradigm in Russian literary criticism; he worked in theater (promoting, among other things, Jewish theater), and in his late years became an ideologue of the Jewish theater "Habima", and, finally, a Jewish thinker. His whole life consisted in alternative waves of attraction to the Russian element, sometimes to the verge of baptism, and repulsion from it accompanied with attempts to deeper understand the Jewish world. The long creative life of Akim Volynsky, four and a half decades, demonstrates all possible versions of Jewish-Russian tensions within the cream of the cream of the Russian literary elite—from an anti-Semitic campaign aimed at him in the eighties and nineties, to hopes for him as a new religious leader of a synthetic kind among the intelligentsia following the revolution.

In the same decades when Akim Volynsky, at the top of the literary process, felt at home in the two worlds, that of Russian Symbolists and that of the Jewish encyclopedists, the Jewish playwrights reviewed by Galina Elias-

berg in her study "The drama of faith and the national question in Russian-Jewish playwrights (1880–1910)" folds out a whole spectre of possible Jewish fates, or "solutions of the national question" as they were reflected in mass literary production. This essay is important in particular in that it introduces the reader into the rich background which was the starting point of many ideas, images and dramatic fabulas in Russian-Jewish literature of the 20th century, not least, in Jabotinsky's plays and novels.

Vladimir M. Paperny examines an opposite situation when the Russian poet Viacheslav Ivanov who belonged to a quite anti-Semitic Symbolist cultural milieu, is forced by the cultural situation in the country to use the anti-Semitic rhetoric figures and images in use in this circle, to convey a totally opposite, philo-Semitic content. This case lets one measure the complexities, contradictions, and pain involved in the admission to the elite strata of Russian culture of Jews prepared for full assimilation, up to self-hatred (like Boris Pasternak). The alternative was the Jews who stuck to basic Jewish values—but masked them as oblique, ambivalent Jewish—Christian images, thus preserving the Jewish content inaccessible to the Russian reader who perceived it as something mysterious and unfathomably deep against the background of surrounding culture.

Brian Horowitz addresses the same circle of questions to the same person of Vyacheslav Ivanov in a new avatar of Russian culture—the post-revolutionary period. He sees then through the eyes of his hero—the famous scholar Mikhail Gershenzon who was the first to study the Russian Slavophiles, and later in life became a Russian-Jewish philosopher; he opposed Zionism but wrote prefaces to translated Hebrew poetry. Ivanov and Gershenzon discussed acception or rejection of the Bolshevik cultural revolution; Gershenzon emerged as a revolutionary nihilist calling for erasement of cultural memory and starting from scratch; Ivanov, as a conservative. Thus the relevant political problem actually masked a deep spiritual difference which can be interpreted as a Russian-Jewish or a Judeo-Christian argument among ruins of the cultural context where Jews and Russians had existed before World War I. The Jew thus is associated with radicalism. Contrary to previous scholars, Horowitz listens to the Jewish side of this epistolary dialog (titled "Correspondence from two corners") of the two writers who briefly shared the same room in a Soviet resthome.

Leonid Katsis revises the arguments on Dostoevsky that were started by Volynsky in late 1890s but were resumed in the situation of the collapse of the old Russia, its church and its spiritual values and the rise of the victorious new state ruled by materialism. In the Russian intellectual elite of the twenties this argument also has some features of a Russian-Jewish dialog.

The author examines the dialog between the Symbolist Andrei Bely who in the past was known for his anti-Jewish pronouncements, and philosopher Gustav Shpet, a follower of Husserl. It actually was a dialog between Moscow and Petrograd philosophers (Bely was acting as head of the Petrograd Free Philosophic Association, VOL'FILA). The dispute was not so much about Dostoevsky (whose anti-Semitism does not fail even now to provoke arguments). At its core was the struggle of Moscow-based phenomenologists anainst the Russian-Jewish Neo-Kantianism represented by Ya. Golosovker, M. Kagan, and A. Shteinberg, connected with Andrei Bely and his Petrograd Association. In this dialog, Bely, not really a Jewish sympathizer, was defending the Jewish philosophers. Shpet himself can least of all be suspected of anti-Semitism, but his insistence on the Platonic tradition excluded philisophizing in the categories of "Eastern" (meaning Indian and Jewish) thought, as distinct from Andrei Bely.

The post-revolutionary Russia, as the post-war Europe, became increasingly dangerous places for the Jews. Olaf Terpitz scrutinizes the "Jewish" novel by Il'ia Erhenburg (published in 1929 in Berlin) "The Stormy Life of Lazik Roitshvanets" (meaning "red tail") which is both tragically sad and extraordinarily funny. The novel reflects in grotesque forms the squalid life of the Jewish shtetl after the revolution brought an end to all economic activity. The hero, a provincial tailor, flees to Moscow, threatened with political persecution, and tries to find his place in the new Soviet reality posing as a critic. Exposed, he runs to Poland where he is jailed, to Germany where he nearly dies of hunger, and finally to Paris imitating an avant-garde painter of the ecole de Paris circle. Whenever he comes, Lazik is inevitably exposed, beaten, and thrown out from. All his attempts to settle in Europe fail, and Lazik sets for Palestine where he is not wanted either, and finally dies on Rachel's tomb. Terpitz establishes a tie with earlier Jewish-Russian writing in the picaresque genre, and finds some traits in common in Ehrenburg and G. Bogrov, one of the first Russian Jewish authors, who wrote his "Notes of a Jew" as a picaresque full of impossible situations, funny language and clowning Jews.

The times were getting harsher on the Jews, and in mid-thirties it became clear that they are in peril. Vladimir Khazan depicts one failed attempt to establish an emigre Jewish newspaper that would become an organ for Jewish self-preservation amongst the increasing threat of Fascism in Europe. The study focuses on the figure of a famous pre-revolutionary Russian journalist Poliakov-Litovtsev, who was Jabotinsky's friend and colleague.

Mikhail Odessky investigates the reappearance in modern times of the old topos connected to the problem "blood and the Jews". He argues that

although not setting themselves explicit anti-Semitic aims, numerous versions of narratives about Count Dracula, from the famous book to latest films and literary variations of the theme abound in anti-Semitic stereotypes.

Andrei Rogachevski has attempted at a psychoanalytic study of modern Russian writer Dmitri Bykov's novel *ZhD*. This novel hearks back to *Doctor Zhivago* notorious for its calls on the Jews for complete assimilation and baptism. At the dame time it is a complex Messianic construct aimed to decide, within modern limits of political correctness, what role Jews (in the novel called euphemistically "the Khazars") can play in the mystical historical process of today's Russia. The author sees the root if the world view of the Russian writer in psychological problems connected with early separation from his Jewish father, and the ensuing traumas inherent in his ambivalent identity.

Sergei Shargorodsky's essay is devoted to the life and work of Michail Gendelev, a modern Russian–Israeli poet, recently deceased. It examines the national, cultural, and linguistic self-definition of a modern Jew who realizes himself in new conditions of mixed Russian-Israeli cultural milieu. The author demonstrates that this situation is but a new transformation of traditional self-realization strategies of the Russian writer of Jewish origin fit for the constantly changing cultural context typical for the fates of Russian Jews during the whole of the 20th and early 21 st centuries. Historically the work of this poet rounds up that period of Russian–Israeli literature when the Israeli situation was hermetically closed, with no contacts with Russia possible: a new, 1990s' wave of repatriation brought new openness imposed by the fall of the iron curtain and, not least, by the coming of Internet. Mikhail Gendelev himself opened the new epoch with his journeys to Russia, leaving behind the period of Russian–language Israeli writing for literary historians.

To sum up, the proposed complex of the monograph's chapters introduces into scholarly use many fascinating instances of Russian-Jewish and Jewish-Russian interaction which helps fill numerous lacunae in the general picture of a most original cultural situation that have formerly evaded academic attention.

PART ONE

JEWS SPEAK TO THE EMPIRE—
THE EMPIRE CREATES ITS IMAGE OF THE JEW

CHAPTER ONE

THE JEWISH ELITE IN THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE OF THE LATE 18TH – EARLY 19TH CENTURIES: TOWARD A RHETORIC OF SELF-PRESENTATION

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The history of the Jews in Russia of the late 18th – early 19th centuries is not a favorite topic among the researchers of today. Even establishing a basic historical narrative framework for this period, simply recovering the sequence of its events, has so far yielded only incomplete results. This is primarily owing to the insufficiency of the primary sources. Jewish cultural history of this period tends to be approached either as part of the history of "the early Haskalah" (with the term often being understood as a reference to the reception of the German Haskalah), or as part of the history of Hasidism.[1]

In addition, an important element constitutive of the period's mood and orientation has never yet been fully appreciated: this is the objective, diligently pursued by members of the Jewish elite of the time, of promoting their status within the imperial estate system. Efforts undertaken with a view to achieving this aim are what the administrative documents of the period collectively describe as "domogatel'stvo" (importunity) and "the deleterious pretensions of the Jews."[2] These aspirations on the part of the Jewish elite had more than a merely practical expression (which came to the fore in the activities of the Jewish "deputaty," or delegates representing the Jewish community to the Tsarist authorities; singular "deputat"); the ambitions of the Jewish social elite had cultural repercussions, as well. A single "trend" brought together Hasidim and Misnagdim, the two groups together forming a single whole vis-à-vis the Maskilim, and even united them with the less

[1] See David E. Fishman, *Russia's First Modern Jews: The Jews of Shklov* (New York, 1995), *passim*.

[2] For further details, see: O. Iu. Minkina, "Evrei i vlast': deputatsii 1773–1825 gg. v Rossiiskoi imperii" ("The Jews and theAuthorities: Deputations of 1773–1825 in the Russsian Empire"), *Istoricheskie zapiski*, No. 10 (128), 2007, pp. 165–201.

"enlightened" multitude. Within this framework, a language (or, more precisely, languages) of self-presentation can be identified, which determined the stylistic devices used in petitioning the authorities and mobilizing public opinion among the general Jewish population.

The hermeneutic approach dubbed the "history of concepts" (Begriffsgeschichte) provides a useful tool for the study of this language or languages of self-presentation. A study of this kind begins by differentiating between the "field of experience" and the "horizon of expectations," which are both part of the political lexicon.[3]

The present article is based on primary sources which make it possible to reconstruct some features of the mode of self-presentation typical of members of the upper class of Jewish society in Tsarist Russia. These materials consist of odes, appeals, proposals, and items of correspondence. Both in content and form, these texts were in many ways dictated by formal considerations, as well as by the preferences of the addressees. In some cases, the scribe (usually an ethnic Russian or Pole), who was hired by the Jewish petitionerss, appears as the coauthor or even the principal author of the document. A typical formula would state that the scribe "composed and copied this appeal according to the words of the appellant." However, in some cases, no statement along these lines is part of the document, and some documents were written without mediation in Russian by the Jews themselves.

Jewish leaders typically used one of two principal stylistic modes, appropriately borrowed from the dominant literary trends of the time, to put forth their requests. The first of these complexes of rhetorical devices, which was related to official and "patriotic" rhetoric, stressed the idea of serving the state. This rhetoric often served as a launching pad for members of the Jewish elite who sought privileges accruing to the Russian nobility. Thus, in defending his right to own landed estates with peasants on them, Yoshua Tseitlin, an entrepreneur, wrote the following in 1802 to G.R. Derzhavin:

> It is insulting and painful to me to see myself defenseless and persecuted in my Fatherland, where I had hoped to flourish and spend the rest of my life in satisfaction and tranquility after having expended abundant efforts on behalf of the state. It should not have been necessary to explain this matter to your

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[3] *Istoricheskie poniatiia i politicheski idei v Rossii XVI–XX vv.: Sbornik statei* (Historical Concepts and Political Ideas in Russia from the 16th to the 20th Centuries: Collected articles, St. Petersburg, 2006). An example of the use of this approach in Jewish studies can be appreciated in Benjamin Nathan's *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley/ Los Angeles/ London, 2002).

> Excellency, who himself is constantly concerned with and involved in efforts on behalf of our Homeland.[4]

In this text, the defining elements of the status of the addressee (a member of the Russian nobility and a high-ranking government official) and of the petitioner (a Jewish entrepreneur) are set up as mutually equivalent. Both the Russian and the Jew are described as self-sacrificing servants of the Homeland deserving of rewards. The key terms for defining the status of the nobility at the time—"land" and "service"—appear in connection with the claims of individual wealthy Jews to the right of ownership of both land and serfs. Tseitlin appeals to instances of his service: first, his activities on behalf of the Russian Empire (as a supplier of provisions during the Russian-Turkish War), and second, his former position as a "court Jew" at the court of the Polish king in Warsaw.

Another kind of service typically cited by Jews was their work as secret agents for the Russian military command. In petitions authored by Jews, the "lowly" (in contemporary Russian society's view) role of spy would appear as a labor of noble "zeal" and "untiring efforts" to aid the Jews' new homeland and provide "patriotic service to their monarchs."[5]

The proliferation of "patriotic" rhetoric in texts written or commissioned by Jews was further encouraged by a surge of nationalistic propaganda during the Napoleonic war years. This is how Sora Brainin, a former merchant who sold food to soldiers, described her misfortunes during the war of 1812:

> Near the city of Polotsk, enemies of our Homeland robbed me of [merchandise valued at] 42,000 rubles … these same enemies tyrannized my husband and son in a multitude of ways for not telling them where the Russian troops were stationed.[6]

The following year, the Jewish Kahal (leadership of the Jewish community) of Vilna wrote this to the deputaty representing the Jews at the main headquarters of the Russian military: "Dear friends, do the utmost so as to bring relief both to our Homeland and our people."[7]

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[4] Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii arkhiv (Russian State Historical Archives, hereafter RGIA), f. 1375, op. 6, d. 1885, l. 15 ob.

[5] "Medal' byla by znakom monarshego vnimaniia i blagovoleniia": dokumenty k biografii khudozhnika-evreia Samuelia Mikhel'sona (1802) ("A Medal Would Have Been a Sign of Monarchic Recognition and Appreciation": Documents for the Biography of the Jewish Artist Samuel Mikhelson [1802]), published by D.Z. Fel'dman, *Paralleli*, Nos. 2–3, Moscow, 2003, pp. 464–465, 467.

[6] RGIA, f. 1284, op. 1, kn. 72, 1814, d. 206, l. 4,4 ob.

[7] Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Russkoi Federatsii (State Archives of the Russian Federation,

At the same time, the heads of the Kahals of Nesvizh and Slutsk complained about Jews being persecuted for their patriotism:

> … they practically skinned us alive because our souls are bound by bonds of love and kinship to the Russians, they called us 'spieny'[8] [spies; the untypical form of this last word evidently reproducing the Lithuanian pronunciation most natural for the author of the document].

After a description of appropriations and acts of insufferable oppression on the part of the French military, the author of the text itemizes a series of social ills:

> … it is a well enough known fact that Jews are poor, and have no land of their own, nor serfs, nor forests from which they might derive the resources to pay the taxes mentioned above.[9]

The patriotic theme can thus be seen as connected to aspirations to the rights enjoyed by the nobility. The text contrasts Jews loyal to the Russian authorities with Polish landowners, whose enmity to the Jews is attributed in the document to "their lack of loyalty to the [Russian] throne." Here too, the claim for Jewish patriotism is linked to claims for a status similar to that of the nobility.

As has already been noted, "service benefiting the Homeland" is associated in Jewish texts with providing supplies or intelligence for the military. However, the theme of service is more explicit in texts dealing with the work of the deputaty in various administrative bodies. The Jews' representatives obviously saw themselves as servants of the state. They used several different Russian terms to describe their work: "sluzhba" (service), "obyazannost'" (obligation), and "dolzhnost'" (office). They depicted themselves as loyal subjects characterized by their "userdie" (zeal), "chestnost'" (honesty), and "predannost'" (devotion).[10] It should be noted in this connection that the question of whether Jews should be permitted to engage in government service continued to be debated in administrative circles even after the unambiguously negative decision reached on this issue by Tsar Nicholas I in 1826–1828.[11]

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hereafter GARF), f. 1165, op. 1, d. 6, l. 2 (copy at the Central Archives of the History of the Jewish People (CAHJP, Jerusalem), HM 2/9450.10).

[8] Ibid., l. 5.

[9] Ibid., l. 5 ob.

[10] GARF, f. 109, 1829, d. 67, l. 33 = 34 ob; S. Pen, "'Deputatsiia evreiskogo naroda' pri Aleksandre I" ("Deputation of the Jewish People to Alexander I"), Knizhki "Voskhoda," No. 1, 1905, p. 75.

[11] RGIA, f. 1286, op. 5, d. 872, l. 2–5 ob.

A different strategy for formulating Jewish petitions and proposals involved the use of rhetorical ploys and devices borrowed from sentimental literature. This was the style of The Lament of the Daughter of Judah by Leib Nevakhovich, a work well known in its day; it also dictated the verbal shape of a petition originating with Jews thoroughly distant from Russian belles-lettres: Jewish merchants and Kahal members, as well as deputaty and other Jewish functionaries:

> If the unimity of the accusers does not deprive the accused of his right to defend his innocence, if finding him innocent may be no less acceptable than finding him guilty, if a faint and tremulous voice may carry the same power of conviction as an assertive one, then the present Kahal, placing its hope in the righteous judgement of the authorities, dares wax so bold as to put forth the claim that Jewish lessees in the villages are not as much of a source of harm and damage as people may think …

Such was the emotional response by Marko Abramovich and Lazar' Yakubovich, members of the Jewish Kahal in Kiev, to an issue raised by the First Jewish Committee in 1804.[12]

The communication addressed by Samuil Hirsh Friedberg, a deputat from the Jewish community of Riga, to the members of the Fourth Jewish Committee in 1826 was similar in style:

> Your Excellencies, to whom has fallen the fortunate lot of bearing the brunt of responsibility for the welfare of an entire people, combining justice with the tender inclinations of a sympathetic heart … The more harsh the abuse suffered by the Jewish People, the more praiseworthy the action of their rescuers and, praise to the Almighty, there do exist such persons who, without prejudice, are solely engaged in upholding goodness everywhere.[13]

An even more obviously fertile field for such sentimental rhetoric was in pleas and petitions dealing with personal matters, as the following excerpt makes clear:

> Forgive the boldness of a daughter of Judah who, having her seven orphans, dares to seek the shelter of your protection and to wax so bold as to distract you for even a few moments from your lofty occupation, so as to request that you read this brief account of her nine years of suffering and travail.[14]

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[12] Tsentral'nyi derzhavnyi istoricheskii arkhiv Ukrainy (Central State Historical Archives of Ukraine, TSDAU), f. 533, op. 1, d. 433, l 7 ob (copy at CAHJP, HM 2/7928.8).

[13] RGIA, f. 1286, op. 4, d. 349a, l. 83.

[14] Ibid., f. 1284, op. 1 1814, kn. 76, d. 350, l. 38.

This passage appears in the 1820 petition addressed by Rasya Levin to the Minister of Internal Affairs Count V.P. Kochubei. The image of the suffering and wandering Daughter of Judah crying out for justice was possibly borrowed from Nevakhovich's book. Here it appears here as a figure used by the supplicant to describe her very real misfortune: the tragic death of her husband, who "was boiled to death in a distillery cauldron at a" in Tobolsk Province, and the widow's suit against the owner. It should be noted that Nevakhovich's Lament of the Daughter of Judah was dedicated to the same Kochubei, then a member of the Jewish Committee.

An element crucial to the operation of this stylistic mode was affirming the Jews' innocence, pointing out the suffering of the innocent that called for redress from the high-ranking addressee. This call for redress was based not on the formal requirements of justice, but on an appeal to compassion and humanity. The Jewish petitioners were probably quite clear on the real intent behind the Tsarist edicts, which they often cited in support of their requests. The plain sense of the edicts was in perfect opposition to the objectives of the pleas in which the edicts were usually cited. But the Jewish petitioners proposed that the addressee make an exception by adhering to the values suggested in their appeals by terms such as "miloserdie" (mercy), "chelovekoliubie" (love of humanity), and "spravedlivost'" (justice).

This type of narrative should not be understood as a "narrative of assimilation." Rather, it employs patriotic, sentimental, and Enlightenment rhetoric to defend the values upheld in traditional Jewish society, for example, distinctive traditional Jewish dress. The issue of dress and appearance was an important one for the Jewish deputatysummoned to the capital in 1807 and for the Jewish representatives at the Third Jewish Committee of 1809–1812:

> The deputaty and representatives of the Jewish communities explained that, according to their laws, they do not shave their beards and, therefore, consider it much more appropriate to wear [traditional] Russian clothing, like the Russian merchants: should they have [modern] German-style attire along with unshaven beards, they would become the object of curses and derision.

The deputaty evidently attempted to procure from the authorities an extension on the permission for Jewish men to wear their traditional apparel, which bore a greater resemblance to the long-tailed jackets of the bearded [Russian] merchants than to the more modern "German dress." By associating the traditional Jewish garb with "Russian dress," the deputaty were in effect adapting their request to the patriotic spirit that was gaining ground at the time in Russia. The government-appointed committee approved the Jewish request; this was based on the committee members' belief that the

measure would facilitate "bringing both the concepts and customs of the Jews closer to thoseof the Russian populace."[15]

In contrast to their predecessors, the Jewish deputaty of 1818 did not try to defend the traditional dress of the Jews by appealing to Russian patriotic or aesthetic feeling, but argued that altering the traditional appearance of the Jewish male would be tantamount to contravening the commandments of his faith.[16] This choice of strategy may have reflected a belief that appealing to the conservatism of the audience, steeped as this audience was in with its own traditional religious values, may actually prompt the listeners to uphold Jewish traditional values as well.

The clash of these modes of discourse (the "inner" and the "outer") occasionally resulted in the production of mutually contradictory texts. Thus, in his 1829 appeal to the Head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Vilna merchant Zelman Saker, who had a conflict with the Vilna Kahal, complained about the Kahal functionaries, but made an effort to avoid appearing in the shameful role of a denouncer to the non-Jewish authorities (referred to as a "mosser" in Hebrew):

> I was gravely, even intolerably hurt by the insult to my reputation, which had been acknowledged by the Monarch … in a piece of slander [that] originated with [Jewish] community officials … who had no shame in decrying me as a troublemaker and claiming that I was responsible for the harm caused to others.[17]

Also noteworthy in these texts are the instances of "translation" of Jewish social and cultural realia into the Russian medium. In 1813, the heads of the Kahals in Slutsk and Nesvizh assured the deputaty that, as an expression of gratitude for their help, the Kahal leaders would have a "lyric-epic hymn" dedicated to them.[18] In this context, the term obviously did not refer to a triumphal ode in Russian (as in Derzhavin's "Lyric-Epic Hymn on the Routing of the French from the Homeland"), but rather to a work of the traditional Jewish "megilah" type (literally, a "scroll"). A megilah would be composed in a form reminiscent of Megilath Esther (the Biblical Scroll of

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[15] "Doklad o evereiakh imperatoru Aleksandru Pavlovichu" ("Report made concerning the Jews to the Emperor Alexander Pavlovich"), *Russkii arkhiv*, No. 2, 1902, p. 270.

[16] "Iz letopisi minuvshego: Bor'ba pravitel'stva s evreiskoi odezhdoi v imperii i tsarstve Pol'skom" (From the Annals of the Past: The Struggle of the Government against Jewish Apparel in the Empire and the Kingdom of Poland), *Perezhitoe*, Vol. 1, St. Petersburg, 1909, p. 11.

[17] RGIA, f. 1287, op. 12, d. 289, l. 27 ob.

[18] GARF, f. 1165, op. 1, d. 6, l. 5 ob. (copy at CAHJP, HM 2/9450.10).

Esther), as a narrative recounting the dire fate which threatened a Jewish community but which was, fortunately, avoided thanks to the efforts of influential Jews able to intercede with the ruling powers that be.[19]

In a parallel predicament, Nota Notkin, a Jewish intercessor, addressed an appeal to the Minister of Interior Affairs Kochubei. This document can be taken as: 1) defining the position of a "self-appointed" Maskilic intercessor. As an "enlightened" person, the Maskil can speak to the authorities on behalf of his people. The text can also be taken as: 2) translating the traditional values of a Jewish intercessor (shtadlan) into the medium of Russian bureaucratic documents.

Notkin's remark to the effect that "a patriotic spirit rouses and encourages me to undertake my intercession for the sake of the general good,"[20] has analogues in documents bearing upon the work of shtadlanim in the 18th century: the general good ("pol'za obshchaia") corresponds to the Talmudic notion of "tsorkhei tzibbur" ("public needs") or "tzorkhei rabbim" ("needs of the many"), while patriotic spirit ("patrioticheskii dukh") accords with the definition of the task of the shtadlan as a "melakha qedosha" ("sacred labor").[21]

Similar notes reverberated in other documents originating in a Jewish environment. Thus in an appeal addressed by the Jewish deputat Zundel Zonnenberg to Minister of Police A.D. Balashov in 1813, interceding for Jews under arrest is motivated not by some aspect of Russian law, but by the Talmudic injunction of pidyon shevuim (the ransoming of Jewish captives).[22] While the interpretation suggested above of the rhetoric used in Notkin's petition may be theoretical, the hypothesis remains that in their requests and petitions Jewish delegatesrepresentatives not only used the common mode of the Russian official discourse, but also relied on the Jewish discursive notions underlying the turns of phrase in the Russian documents. Such a possibility opens new hermeneutic venues for understanding Russian-Jewish exchanges of the period, and deserves further study.

At the same time, in texts addressed directly to their fellow Jews, Jewish leaders tried to present new realities clothed in traditional conceptual categories. Similar devices were subsequently used in early Russian Jewish

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[19] For further detail see: Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle, Washington, 1982/1986), pp. 36, 46–48.

[20] Ibid., l. 103.

[21] Pinkas va'ad 'arba' 'aratsot, Jerusalem, 1990, p. 312.

[22] GARF, f. 1165, op. 1, d. 10, l. 7–8.

publicist writing in Hebrew.[23] The Jewish tradition sees providing for public needs (tzorkhei tzibbur), including intercession on behalf of fellow Jews (shtadlanut), as the equivalent of Torah study in merit and significance.[24] The rhetoric of the Jewish deputaty addressed to their fellow Jews reflects an attempt to incorporate these elements of traditional Jewish attitudes. The documents deploy Biblical figures and images familiar to their audience, playing on the figures' implicit traditional associations. Thus, for example, Mordecai, "the Defender of his people,"[25] the Patriarch Jacob proffering gifts in an attempt to appease his brother Esau[26] (who in the post-Biblical Jewish tradition is understood as a figure for all of Christendom associated with Christian), and King Saul[27] all appear in support of the deputies' claims to Jewish community leadership and their aspirations to reform the communal power structure. During a fundraising drive on behalf of the deputaty, attendees at a Jewish delegates' meeting in Vilna in 1818 quoted verses from the First Book of Samuel, tacitly applying the message to the matter at hand: "for it is said: I am small and poor." However, as Isaac Sinaiskii from Vilna, the secretary of the meeting, notes, what actually appears here is a combination of two passages from the Book of Samuel. As Sinaiskii points out, two verses were cited at the assembly: 1) I Samuel 9:7, where Saul, having set out on a search for a missing donkey, deliberates about consulting the seer, and says to his servant that they have neither victuals nor a gift at hand with which to approach Samuel, and 2) I Samuel 9:21, with Saul's words addressed to Samuel: "Am I not a son of Benjamin, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? And my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin?" The two passages fused into a single whole are invoked to underscore the dire condition and the "poverty" of the deputaty, thus substantiating the community's must of providing for them.

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[23] See: O. Soffer, "The Case of the Hebrew Press: From the Traditional to the Modern Model of Discourse," *Written Communications*, Vol. 21, 2004, pp. 141–170.

[24] See, for example, E. Lederhendler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics: Political Tradition and Political Reconstruction in the Jewish Community of Tsarist Russia* (Oxford, 1989), and Scott Ury, "The Shtadlan of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: Noble Advocate or Unbridled Opportunist?," *Polin*, Vol. 15, 2002, pp. 267–299.

[25] Lietuvos Valstybės Istorijus Archyvas (Lithuanian State Historical Archives, hereafter LVIA), f. 378, BS. 1818, b. 286, l. 128 (copy at CAHJP, HM 2/9737.1).

[26] Hillel Noach Magid, *Ir Vilno* (The City of Vilno), Vol. 1, Vilno, 1900, p. 149.

[27] LVIA, f. 378, Kantseliariia litovskogo voennogo gubernatora (Office of the Lithuanian Military Governor), BS. 1818, b. 286, Postanovlenie vilenskogo sobraniia vyborshchikov 19 avgusta 1818 (Resolution of the Vilna Electors' Assembly, August 19, 1818), copy at CAHJP, HM 2/9737.1), l. 128.

The allusions to the Book of Samuel are quite intentional. There is a traditional Jewish linkage between Saul and Mordecai, "the first Jewish deputat," based on the genealogy of Mordecai as traced in the Biblical Book of Esther. Mordecai was supposed to have rectified the sin of his relative and predecessor Saul, who had opposed God's will by sparing Agag, the captured king of the Amalekites and the ancestor of Haman,[28] the later persecutor of the Jews in Mordecai's times. In the Jewish tradition, the name of Amalek came to stand for the archetypal anti-Jewish attitudes. As a metaphor, the name was applied in different contexts. For example, in the pinkas (community record book) of the burial society of Kamenetz-Podolskii, in an entry corresponding to the year 1796, "Amalek" refers to the Poles who drove the Jews out of the city.[29]

However, the Jewish community delegates convened in Vilna were not referring to the motif of the war against Amalek, which binds together the stories of Saul and Mordecai, but rather to the theme of king making. Thus, while the position of the Jewish deputaty vis-à-vis the Gentile authorities was associated with Mordecai, the story of Saul's becoming king was used to buttress the deputies' claims as the genuine rulers of the Jewish community. The authors of the document wanted to show that altering the organization of Jewish society by replacing its horizontal structure, which united different communities with a vertical one headed by deputaty would benefit the Jewry of the Russian Empire as a whole. The transformation of the deputaty into plenipotentiary heads of the Jews would raise their status in the eyes of the Russian authorities; hence, it would enable them the better to defend the interests of the Jews.

Besides the story of Mordecai, the Biblical narrative in the Five Books of Moses, the most authoritative part of the JewishS, includes another case of a Jew working in proximity to the supreme political powers. This is Joseph, referred to as Joseph the Righteous in the post-Biblical texts. Yet this image rarely appears in East European political rhetoric of the period discussed in the present paper.

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[28] W.A. McKane, "A Note on Esther IX and 1Samuel XV," *Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol. 12, pp. 260–261; D. Kopeliovich, "Pomni, chto sdelal tebe Amalek …: Literarurnyi genesis Amaleka kak glavnogo vraga Izrailia" ("Remember What Amalek Did to You …": The Literary Origins of Amalek As the Principal Enemy of the Jewish People), *Lechaim*, No. 3 (191), 2007, pp. 34–37.

[29] Y. Petrovsky-Shtern, "Russian Legislation and Jewish Self-Governing Institutions: The Case of Kamenetz-Podolskii," *Jews in Russian and Eastern Europe*, No. 1 (56), 2006, p. 118.

A letter written in November 1823 by the Hasidic leader Dov-Ber Schneersohn to the Vilna Kahal forms an exception to this rule. The letter was intercepted by the Imperial Police during an investigation of a suspected "Jewish revolt."[30] A paraphrase of the letter's contents along with a translation of some parts of it into Polish were included in a report submitted by the Vilna police chief to the military governor of Lithuania. In the text, Schneersohn uses this imagery to bewail the troubles experienced by the Jews in the Belorussian provinces: "our persecutors have multiplied in the absence of a decipherer of secrets."[31]

This expression, "decipherer of secrets," is apparently a calque of the Biblical epithet given to Joseph, "Tsofnath-pa'neach."[32] By weaving it into his description of the Jews' contemporary predicament, the Hasidic master voiced his concern that the Jews of his age had no adequate representative to help them deal with the Russian authorities. The Biblical image of Joseph, used by European Jews on more than one occasion (for example, in panegyrics to German court Jews of the 17th and 18th centuries[33]) had not become popular with Russian Jews. This may be at least partly accounted for by the Biblical Joseph's connection to denunciations, both familial and political, and the institution of slavery. Especially in Tsarist Russia, associations of this kind did not fit the notion of a noble and pious Jewish elite, an image the Jewish community's leaders were eager to uphold.

The need for intercessors to work on behalf of the Jews in a new, unfamiliar medium within the framework of a novel system of concepts, along with the need for rendering contemporary political realities in a language acceptable to the Jewish audience, played a crucial role in the formation of a modern Jewish discourse. The impact of these elements was no less significant than that of cultural influences from the West, which reached Russian Jewry after being filtered through the values of the Haskalah. Autobiographical and publicist Jewish texts, composed in the form of petitions, appeals, and proposals and addressed to non-Jewish readers, prepared the ground for key later developments. Within a few decades, they would find their sequel in the Jewish literature appearing in Russian in the Tsarist Empire.

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[30] For more information on this episode, see: O. Iu. Minkina, "Rossiiskaia vlast' i 'evreiskoe buistvo' 1823–1824 gg" ("The Russian Authorities and the 'Jewish Revolt' of 1823–1824"), *Ab Imperio*, No. 3, 2008, pp. 131–156.

[31] LVIA, f. 378, BS. 1824, b. 29.1.5 (copy at CAHJP, HM 2/9771.1).

[32] Genesis 41:45.

[33] S. Stern, *The Court Jew: Contribution to the History of the Period of Absolutism in Central Europe* (Philadelphia, 1950), p. 228.

The period of the gestation of a pristine Russian Jewish literature, which has been gestured towards in this paper, marks a decisive stage in the formation of the phenomenon of Russian Jewish culture.

CHAPTER TWO

"DIABOLIC DELIGHT": NEW MATERIALS TO THE JEWISH THEME IN RUSSIAN ROMANTICISM

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In the introduction to the Russian version of my book, *Pokryvalo Moiseia*,[1] I noted that even after a thorough review of Russian periodicals, which formed the database for the referenced monograph, some lacunae inevitably remain. I would like to introduce the reader to many of the thematically relevant texts which were not included in the Russian book.

The newfound material sheds novel light on the genesis and composition of the image of the Jew in Russian culture, altering significantly some of the nuances. This concerns, in part, the literary reception and assimilation of such an ancient and widely accepted Christian cliché as the notion of "Judaic spite" and vindictiveness. This stereotyped notion had become deeply entrenched in Russian secular literature before this literature had made the acquaintance of any real Jews. An example of this is *The Vengeful Jew* (1799), a debut effort by Narezhny, composed in the dramaturgic style of the German Sturm und Drang. In this book, a Jew kills a Christian elder after the latter reproaches him for his inhuman hatred of Christians. As he narrates this story, the author adds:

> Perhaps it will strike many as incredible cruel and bloodthirsty—which is in fact doubtful—yet I wouls urge the reader to consider that every Jew, despite his ignominy and servitude, is haughty and inwardly scornful of all other creatures, and that his hatred of Christianity has often driven him to horrific extremes.

The protagonist, young Ezekiel, throws himself upon the elder, tearing "his chest to pieces with frenzy and rage, and ejected the palpitating heart."

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[1] Mikhail Weisskopf. *Pokryvalo Moiseia. Evreiskaia tema v epokhu romantizma*: Gesharim, Moskva-Ierusalim, 2008. (The English version: *The Veil of Moses. Jewish Themes in Russian Literature of the Romantic Era*: Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2012).

Learning of this, the killer's father, a faithful "servant of God Almighty", "gnaws at the dagger" in his joy—and exclaims: "Let me fill myself with this blood, the abominable blood of a Christian. Nowhere will it find such suffering as in mingling with my own blood and circulating in my veins." The one thing that aggrieves him is that his son struck at the heart of his Christian victim only once, rather than many times, to prolong the Christian's suffering.[2]

Shortly after the publication of *The Vengeful Jew*, Narezhny published a dramatic fragment, "The Day of Crime and Revenge," in which a similarly bloodthirsty Jew appears, he, too, the bearer of a Biblical name. This character reassures himself with the following words: "Take courage, Boaz, nature has made you a Jew, the most contemptible creature in all Christian lands; she has scattered your people all over the face of the earth. I will avenge all." A satanic program for revenge is then laid out, somewhat anticipating *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*: "I shall arm brother against brother, father against son; I shall sever the hearts of lovers and strike at them with indiscernible blows."[3] It should be noted here that this same Narezhny in time would radically change his views concerning the "scattered people." Eventually, this would find its expression in Narezhny's creation of Yanka, a virtuous and charming Jewish character, in his novel, *The Russian Gil Blas*. The novel outraged censorship and was forbidden for publication.

Narezhny's evolution proceeded under the sign of the Enlightenment, which frequently intertwined a thoroughly positive attitude toward the Jews, as in Lessing, with a paternalistic anti-Semitic feeling. The latter was characteristic of the Polish Enlightenment, including some of its most authoritative luminaries. A telling example was Stasic, with whose anti-Semitic essays the Russian readership became familiar during the Alexandrian period.

A more humane approach to the issue was introduced to its readers by the newspaper *Severny Merkuriy*. In 1831, it published a fragment of *Leiba i Siora*, a novel by Julian Niemcewicz, translated from the German. The fragment was accompanied by a note from the editor, to the effect that the novel "with a masterly hand depicts the mores of Polish Jews." The heroine, Siora, languishes for her beloved, who has managed to instill in her a love of the Enlightenment and taught her Polish. In the fragment, which comes from

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[2] *Ippokrena, ili utekhi lubosloviia*. Moscow, 1799, pt. 2, pp. 217–227.

[3] Ibid., 1800. pt. 7, pp. 379.

the correspondence between Siora and Leiba, the young lady repudiates the contemporary "Yid language," which is merely a form of "historical German":

> Never did Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, nor our lawgiver Moses speak in such a language. The real language of every person is the language of the land where he was born. We were born in Poland; thus, the Polish language is our mother tongue, and that is the language in which we should write and speak.[4]

The novel goes on to depict the Jews' pernicious attachment to rabbinical scholarship, benighted "superstition," and the Talmud, contrasting this with the customs of all other nationas.

In the published fragment, Siora's father, an avid conservative Talmudist, strikes his daughter when, faint with thirst, she asks "a precious young Christian girl" for some water:

> You unworthy Israelite! You dare drink from a cup defiled by the lips of a goy! … Haven't you read in our holy books, in the Talmud, that only the Jews are the essence of God's creation; only in them did He put His soul; while other people, the children of His enemy, the Sitra-Akhra [sic], have no soul. They are unclean as the insects and reptiles groveling upon the earth! …[5]

Apart from their conventional hate of and vengeance towards Christians, Jews are also consumed by another permanent passion: greed. Cut from universal human values they know neither friendship nor love, which is proven in the scene in which Siora's father meets his relatives and friends: "They came up to him with expressions, after his long absence, of tender joy of sensible hearts, of kin and friendly feelings; but in a cold manner that showed in their greetings and silence. Indeed, I am now ready to believe that there are no creatures in all our nation except the two of us who can feel. They marry without love and without ever seeing each other⟨…⟩ Fathers agree about the dowry, or, to put it better, the price".[6] Father is preparing the same fate for Siora, who describes the Jewish nuptial rite with horror and disgust. She has even adopted the folk Slavic conviction that the Jewish wedding rite is conducted on manure or offal.[7] "On the given day the two

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[4] Julian Niemcewicz. Otryvki iz romana "Leiba I Siora". *Severnyi Merkurii*, No. 64,1831, pp. 257–258.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Cf. similar folk beliefs registered in East Poland, Podolia and Polesje, that Jews are married on a heap of trash or dung: O. Belova, V. Petrukhin. Evreiskii mif v slavianskoi kul'ture. Moscow-Jerusalem: Gesharim, 2008, pp. 281–282.

victims are united in a given place, made to dance on dirt, break a glass with a shoe, and ordered to live together—for ever …".[8]

But however hostile Niemcewicz may have been in his depictions of Jewish traditions and the predicament of Polish Jewry of the time, he, nevertheless, had the best of intentions. Thus, his ideal Jews are personified in the young couple, his enlightened Adam and Eve, signifying hope in the future healing of the entire Jewish People. In the West, the obviously traditional, albeit exotic Eastern Jews, and especially Eastern Jewesses, were especially liked; even so, their portrayal would typically be rendered in the didactic tone of the Enlightenment. In Russia, this mode of presentation became popular in some periodicals that fell under the influence of Romantic orientalism in vogue at the time, and which required stylizing Jewish beauties in a Biblical vein. In English literature, the Biblical theme was inspired by the hope for a future return of the Jews to Zion, which was enthusiastically embraced by large circles of British society of the first half of the 19th century. It should be noted that Lord Byron himself contributed greatly to such hopes. In Russia, his "Hebrew Melodies" were translated by many poets, including N. Markevich, D. Oznobishin, and others; Lermontov remains the best known among them. But even before Lermontov began working on the "Melodies" (in the summer and fall of 1830), his friend, N. Shenshin, who had also translated the philosemitic History of the Jews by Comte de Ségur, published his rendition of Byron's verse in prose.[9] The work appeared in *Severny Merkuriy* on May 2, 1830, possibly inspiring Lermontov by its example.

Byron in his treatment of the theme of the Jews' return to Zion[10] restricted himself to the Biblical and liturgical models, never touching upon the Christian hopes usually associated with this: in Protestant thought of the time, Jewish repatriation was typically seen as a pre-condition for the conversion of the Jews to the true faith. In literary works, most of the Jewish followers of the Gospel ideal are beautiful young Jewesses. Like Shakespeare's Jessica or Scott's Rebecca, many of them are drawn to Christian men if not to Christianity per se. These heroines, along with a few enlightened male Jews, were

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[8] Niemcewicz, p. 259.

[9] *Severny Merkuriy* 53 (1830), pp. 209–210.

[10] Sheila Spector in a recent article insists that the composer I. Nathan, who had ordered these poems from Byron, tried to outfit them with a pessimistic tonality in opposition to the proto-Zionist hopes. However, the work conformed instead to the Maskil taste of the composer himself, who preferred England to Zion and thought a Jewish return to Zion impossible. Sheila A. Spector, "The Liturgical Context of the Byron-Nathan 'Hebrew Melodies,'" *Studies in Romanticism* Vol. 47 No. 3 (Fall 2008), pp. 393–412.

automatically imaged in opposition to their Old Testament original environment, which was envisioned as condemned to perpetual rigidity, fanaticism, and cruel haughtiness. Niemcewicz's Siora takes her place among these positively cast characters.

In 1829, *Vestnik Evropy* (The Messenger of Europe) published a fragment from the novel *Zilla* (obviously the pronunciation "Tsilla" is meant) by Horace Smith in a translation from French. The fragment was entitled "Portraits of Jews in Late Hasmonean Times." An editor's notice associated the novel with "the many imitations of Walter Scott that have flooded Europe and especially England,"[11] introducing the author as one of Walter Scott's happiest imitators. The plot is set on the eve of the birth of Christianity; fires of events about to transpire kindle it retroactively. The heroine's father is an assistant to the Judean High Priest, an educated man with a command of Latin and Greek. He has taught these tongues to his young and beautiful Zilla, cultivating a taste for the best pagan authors in her. In short, he plays the same enlightening role in this novel that Leiba has in Niemcewicz. Thoughtfulness combines in Zilla's character with meekness, indicating an inner closeness to Christianity, a worldview and a way of thinking shortly about to manifest themselves historically. Zilla's profound piety makes her a true Daughter of Jerusalem. Piety and patriotism are synonymous and interchangeable for the sons and daughters of this sacred city. The only pleasure the heroine indulges in is music. This is a penchant typical of the Jews, who have favored this art ever since the times of Moses and David. But alas, the Jewish People has degenerated in a tragic way: the Jews are driven by national pride and a contempt for all other nations; they are inclined to idolatry, hypocrisy, and rebellions instigated by "a sect of the Pharisees," the strongest party in Jerusalem. Zilla's stepmother Salomee has the idea of marrying her off to the Pharisees' leader, but the girl has an aversion to the Pharisees, as if presaging what Jesus will say of them later. Her father takes the young woman to Rome, thus saving her from the unrest threatening Jerusalem. At this point, the text breaks off.

The project of baptizing young Jewesses was given impetus by the generally accepted notion of their charm and beauty; this held not only in the Christian world in Europe, but also in the East. In 1831, an article appeared in Molva, titled "Israelite Women in Tangiers." Among other things, this text proclaimed:

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[11] *Vestnik Evropy* No. 17 (1824), p. 280.

> Morocco's capital, Tangiers, is particularly famous for the beauty of its Israelite women, who are treated there with the utmost respect, in spite of the fact that they are children of slaves and serfs. ⟨…⟩ They are strictly prohibited from leaving home; therefore, a young Israelite girl is seldom seen outside her home before she reaches the age of 18–20; in some cases, she never crosses the threshold of her abode. If she does, then this takes place at no other time than at night and after taking great precautions. But in spite of such truly penitentiary conditions, these creatures, whose lot makes them pitiable, seem always very gay and happy.[12]

The article makes it clear that in the Moslem East, Jewesses were thought of as no less fit for conversion to Islam than they were for making Christian proselytes in Europe. In effect, such conversions to Islam proceeded in much the same manner as the baptisms (if the process is taken stock of in a realistic vein, rather than through a prism of Romantic stereotypes, which occasionally penetrated as deep as police protocols). The end of the article throws light on the reason why parents of young Israelite women kept their daughters in strict custody and concealed from alien eyes. The explanation is simple: "Their beauty is the object of the Moors' attention and passion. This circumstance sometimes causes beautiful Israelite women to leave their fathers' faith and, after converting to Islam, to become the Moors' spouses."[13]

Russian literature followed the European canon in granting full approval to the baptism of young Jewesses; but, following the same canon, it almost always treated baptized Jews with aversion and disgust, despite the discrepancy between such sentiments and the general Christian striving to convert the fallen People to "the true faith." Russian writers (Somov, Zotov, and others) manifested the same attitude. An erstwhile Jew opting for a different confession would everywhere meet with the same disgust. In his 1826 satirical sketch "A Man of Taste," Mikhail Bestuzhev-Riumin depicts a nimble, fawning rascal who has inherited the gifts of his father. The parent "realized in time that it is an unpleasant thing to belong to a tribe which the world holds in low esteem, and—from a Jew, he turned into a Frenchman!"[14]

In rare instances, a Jew not tasting of Christian beneficence would, nonetheless, be portrayed in a friendly manner. The model here, as in many other cases, was provided by Walter Scott. His *Ivanhoe* had been translated

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[12] *Molva* (1831), pp. 164–165.

[13] Ibid.

[14] M.A. Bestuzhev-Riumin, Sirius: A Collection of Writings and Translations in Verse and Prose (Published by M.A. Bestuzhev-Riumin, St. Petersburg, 1826), p. 109.

in 1826; the work's impact on the depiction of Jews in the Russian historical novel had ever since been on the rise. In 1827, a quasi-Walter-Scottian historical novella titled "The Red Corund" and signed cryptically "L.S." was published by A. Izmailov and P. Yakovlev in *The Calendar of the Muses*, an old-fashioned miscellany with anti-Romantic leanings. The time and place of the publication explain the text's indecision and ambivalence: on the one hand, the work is openly stylized in the Scottian manner, while on the other, it makes polemical references to the ubiquitous cult of Walter Scott.[15] The plot unfolds in 16th-century German settings. It features Samuel the Jew, a jeweler: "bowing low frequently, he peeps out on tiptoe, looking around every minute."[16] Tiptoeing along with him, the Jewish theme enters Russian Romantic prose. Like the Jew in Walter-Scott, Samuel touchingly tends a young knight who has rescued him from robbers, and was mortally wounded in the process. The Jew shares this with the kind Countess who is friendly to him. The Countess is the knight's former beloved; thinking the knight long dead, she has agreed to marry another man, a cruel and evil person, learning the truth only on the eve of the wedding. It turns out that the grateful Jews had dressed the wound of her true beloved, taken him to one of their houses, and summoned a knowledgeable doctor to him. "'Ah, Countess!' said Samuel, wiping unfeigned tears. 'Though your bridegroom says that Jews are not human beings, I can appreciate a good deed when one is done for me'." His gratitude is comically limited to a rather modest total: "I would give a tenth of my possessions to him who could revive the noble knight, my savior."[17]

The author is quite benevolent toward his Samuel on the whole; even so, the image of the "good Jew" suddenly undergoes a traditional and malicious correction, which again deprives him of human status. Learning that the wounded knight reproaches her for her supposed betrayal, the Countess is about to faint. She asks the Jew to loosen her girdle. Samuel does this "with

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[15] Replying to a hypothetical critic's reproach about the brevity of the work, whose ideational content really sufficed for a full-length novel, the author explains that what he has written is in fact nothing more than a piece of light reading for a miscellany. The author adds: "There are other people in the world besides your Walter Scott, aren't there? Can it be that we should not write badly because Walter Scott writes well? Why is he telling us what to do?" *Kalendar' muz* (*The Calendar of the Muses*), 1827, p. 204. "L.S." may be a penname of the miscellany's coeditor P. Yakovlev, who was known to have signed some texts as "Luzhitskiy starets," or "the elder from Luzhitsa".

[16] Ibid., p. 172.

[17] Ibid., pp. 178–179.

a tremor of his entire body. His lean, bony hands hovered, trembling, about the fair heaving bosom of the Countess. This was the first time that an animal this unclean came so close to the throne of love."[18]

Even so, the figure of the Jew as a grateful helper and intervener has retained its place in Russian literature since that time. It constitutes the rare positive element in the generally glum impression that the overall attitude to the People of Israel makes. Even Nestor Kukol'nik, a hyper-aggressive anti-Semite, depicted a highly efficient Jewish helper of this kind in his Evelina de Val'erol, a historical novel set in the era of Louis XIII (first published by Biblioteka dlya chteniya in 1841). The character in question is the mysterious, inventive, ubiquitous Jew called Goiko, who never fails to come to the rescue when the plot's heroes find themselves in distress.[19]

A more modern, humane approach to the issue was evinced in the story "A Novel within a Novel". In Russian it was simply titled "Roman"—(A Novel). It was authored by Ludwig Boerne, a well-known Leftist liberal journalist and the leader of "Young Germany." The periodical *Novosti literatury* (*Literature's News*) published the story in 1823. To the best of my knowledge, this was Boerne's first publication in Russia; it bore no authorial name, was translated rather freely, and included a number of tendentious, curious omissions. Only 13 years later did the story again appear in a Russian periodical: Nadezhdin's journal *Teleskop* ran the piece in 1836, this time signed "Boerne" and translated more faithfully.

The hero of the "Novel" is a colonel, a veteran of the Napoleonic wars, as well as a Jew. His bride Karolina, a Countess' daughter, has no inkling of the Jewish origin of her betrothed. As a pre-nuptial gift, or, even more, as a test, the Colonel writes a short "novel" without a title and reads it to his bride and her family. The story within a story portrays a happy young pair preparing to marry. Clara, the young bride-to-be, unexpectedly learns that her beloved is a Jew. The "novel" breaks off without coming to an end; the colonel stops reading and turns to his bride with the question about how she would have reacted in his heroine's place? Karolina is shocked:

> "Now there is a truly nice question indeed! You don't really think, Karl, that I could fall in love with a black, tricky Jew, do you?"
>
> "But there are also fair-haired, honest Jews," objected Karl calmly.

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[18] Ibid., p. 184.

[19] Cf. M. Altshuler, *Epoha Val'tera Scotta v Rossii*(SPb., 1996), p. 268.

A tirade unavailable in the German original follows, supplied as the Russian translator's own addition:

> "In our own times, we have seen a great many scions of this nation who have renounced their fathers' sad mistakes, have illumined themselves with the light of the true faith, enlightened their reason with science, and assumed respectable positions and offices in various countries."

Karolina objects:

> "I don't deny that there are exceptions to the rule. But even such a person can only hide until you learn about his origins … I would say to him: 'My dear friend! You may be a most honest man, but you belong to the Jewish race, and I would not be able to appear with you in society. I am very sorry for you; believe me, I loved you as long as I didn't know your genealogy; I know that you also love me⟨…⟩ Look here: these are my diamonds, my ribbons, my money! My entire dowry I leave to you as a souvenir: you may invest it in business at the first Leipzig fair and drink to my health afterwards. Only give me back my word!' "
>
> "You may have it!" the colonel exclaimed in a trembling voice and ran out of the room like mad.

Karl the colonel breaks with his bride. Her brother, an ardent Jew-hater, challenges Karl to a duel and is mortally wounded. In despair after all these events, the hero leaves Germany forever, setting out on wanders abroad. The heroine, shaken and full of remorse, chooses lifelong solitude. The colonel writes to a friend in Cadix: "You ask, why did I leave my motherland? But I have no motherland; everyone is a stranger to me. Those who are victims of their fate are my brothers; from under the dark roof of wretched misery does the familiar spirit of the motherland blow."[20]

Boerne's Jewish hero is an amalgam of stereotypes comprising the Romantic Alien and wanderer of the world with the Eternal Jew of an enlightened type, here cast as a cosmopolitane in search of justice. This turn of the plot was clearly prompted by the image of Ahasueros that had become fashionable in Europe at this time. His fate also intrigued the Russian readership. In 1830, N. Polevoy's newspaper *Moskovskiy telegraf* printed an anonymous translation involving this personage titled "A Mysterious Jew." The text was allegedly taken from the annals of the Spanish Inquisition. As I have had occasion to note, this text influenced Gogol's "Terrible Revenge" and, much later, Dostoevsky's figure of the Grand Inquisitor.[21] In

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[20] *Novosti literatury* XLII (1823) pp. 34–35; XLIII (1824) p. 52.

[21] "Tainstvenny zhid," *Moskovskiy telegraf* 1830, Part I, No. 3.

1833, Nadezhdin's Molva, an appendix to his journal Teleskop, published two pieces dealing with the image of the Wandering Jew. The first was a translation from French of the story "The Charmed Mirror: An Episode from the Life of Cornelius Agrippa,"[22] in which the Wandering Jew pays a visit to the famous alchemist. The second is a "Jewish Legend" about Ahasverus, composed by a Russian author signed as I.S.R.Z.K.[23] All these texts share the theme of the sorrow and remorse of the Wandering Jew, who is doomed to earthly immortality and eternal wandering for his sin. In the "Jewish Legend," Christ grants the sufferer a long-awaited demise, with the Angel of Death calling out over his ashes: "Rest now, Jew, rest in peaceful sleep, and know: The punishments of the Merciful One are not eternal! Your slumber, too, will come to an end! And you will see Him in His Glory, Whose blood dyed Calvary red, Whose charisma is available to you just as it is to every creature!"[24] However, on the whole, Ahasverus' image remained alien to Russian literature, albeit, in addition to Kuechelbecker and Bernet, such well-known poets as Zhukovsky paid tribute to it, and even Pushkin made reference to the theme.

Another canonized Jewish symbol, Shylock, did not have a good reception either in Russia of the period in question. *The Merchant of Venice* did not have a successful stage life in the Russian capital, largely due to awkward translations. But this was only part of the reason. Shakespeare was too complex both for the Petersburg public and for the stagers.

In early 1835, Shakespeare's play was staged at the Moscow Theater, based on a more adequate translation by N. Pavlov; the performance was a benefit evening for the famous actor Mikhail Schepkin. In anticipation of the performance, Stepan Shevyrev, a leading literary critic of the day, resolved to introduce the none too erudite audience to the figure of Shylock, "one of Shakespeare's greatest creations," "upon which Walter Scott based his Isaac in Ivanhoe, and whom anybody wanting to portray a Jew must needs imitate." Shevyrev's explanations are symptomatic of the first attempt to introduce the Russian reader to the Judeophobic views espoused by German Romanticism, sanctioned by the prestige of its ideologue, August Schlegel. As if in order to instruct Schepkin, who was to play Shylock, Shevyrev proceeds to quote Schlegel, "Germany's great critic," drawing upon Schlegel's "History of the Dramatic Art." According to Schlegel, Shylock's character

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[22] *Molva* 1833, Nos. 38–39.
[23] *Molva* 1833, No. 53.
[24] Ibid., p. 126.

combines vivid individual and ethnic qualities, with the latter eventually gaining the upper hand. The usurer becomes a symbol of all of Jewry. A linguistic comment follows, typical of German Judeophobes who tended to find fault with the speech of the rich and Germanized new Jewish elite: "In the words he utters today you as if hear a Jewish accent preserved, despite the refined education, even in the higher estate to which he now belongs." A dry rationalism combines with brutality, vindictiveness, and avarice in him:

> Shylock is quite an educated man, and a thinker of sorts; but the land where human feelings dwell remains unknown to him: his moral code is based on disbelief in kindness or nobility of spirit. The mainspring of his actions is seeking to avenge the oppression and humiliation suffered by his people, and this vengeance is coupled with avarice. Naturally, the Christians he hates the most are those true to their faith: instances of disinterested love for one's fellow he takes to be persecution of the Jews.

Finally, following St. Paul, Schlegel in Shevyrev's adaptation opposes the cruel Judaic Law to humble Christian grace:

> The letter of the law—that is his idol: he shuns the voice of grace issuing from Portia's lips with heavenly eloquence: unshaken, he holds on to the old law until it smites him on the head. Here Shylock appears as a symbol of the entire history of his unfortunate people.[25]

But the play was again a failure. Commenting on this, and as if coaching Schepkin retroactively, Shevyrev returns to the figure of Shylock:

> To appreciate the totality of the dramatic magnitude of this character type, one should give up the lowly, comic, caricatured idea of the Children of Israeltaken for granted in Polish inns. Jewish nature finds its expression in Shylock not only by means of the sidelocks, the soiled skullcap, the curved spine, or thebase exclamations: "Lordy helpy your kinny and ours-zee-zee!" This is the ideal Jew, an expression of the physiology in its entirety, an abridged history of the miserable nation who, branded with eternal damnation, is doomed to wander among fellow human beings, an immortal representative of humanity driven to the utmost degree of social nonbeing, having no rights, no present, nothing but a past long since perished and a most eagerly, avidly demanded future which, however, has not yet so much as been begun to germinate!

For Shevyrev, the fate of the Jewish People in the new European world is "a subject for deep, inexhaustible poetry." Shakespeare's Shylock is "an ideal, in which the reality of the Jewish character, for the most part farcically pitiful, is raised to the level of tragic, striking sublimity."

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[25] *Molva*, 1835. Part 9, pp. 62,65.

Shevyrev sounds an occasional note of enlightened compassion in his article, albeit reserved. He just as often also slips into demonizing his hero. The tragedy of Shylock consists in that this "rich Jew of Venice, a trade city where gold was everything," is, nevertheless,

> doomed to the lowest degree of humiliation. His countless treasures notwithstanding, people spit him in the beard, they push him about with their feet, they call him a dog! ⟨…⟩ A Jew, he is mean and lowly, the nothing of society; but there is a devilish grandeur in his meanness, his lowliness has about it something hellishly exalted …

Shylock's satanic vindictiveness is cast as a kind of Jewish spirituality. First,

> Shylock appears in all the hellish grandeur of a triumphant demon … Earthly greed struggles in him with the thirst for revenge ⟨…⟩ But in Act IV⟨…⟩ only the sense of revenge remains; the sacks of gold have lost their tempting charm; in cold blood does he sharpen his knife, readying to sever the precious f o r f e i t ⟨…⟩ But he is fooled in his revenge ⟨…⟩ the Jew returns to his former condition of nonentity; once again do the Jewish baseness and meanness issue from all his pores.

A most unfortunate circumstance: Schepkin for some reason did not want to portray all these abominations. As Shevyrev bitterly notes, "the actor from the very first scene was overly enthralled by the ardor which is his talent's element; I did not see in him that baseness of the Jew, with which the dramatic story of Shakespeare's Shylock begins and ends."[26]

But such Shakespearian double nuances were still too sophisticated of an assignment for the Russian stage. Rather than Schepkin's pathos, the public was more accustomed to the "basely comical, caricatured notion" of the Jew that so offended Shevyrev. At serf theaters (maintained at rich country estates, with serfs doing the acting), preference was given to more jovial type of spectacle, such as "The Fair in Berdichev, or the Recruited Jew" staged in 1828 by Corporal Pyotr Mayer and experienced as "the most hilarious of shows" with dances of all kinds, including "Jews' dances."[27] Incidentally, similar "Jews' dances" were featured in the earliest staging of a Gogolian text. This was the vaudeville "An Evening on a Farm near Dikan'ka" (based on the tale "The Night of Christmas Eve"), performed in January 1833 at Petersburg's Great Theater.[28]

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[26] "O benefise g-na Schepkina" ("Concerning Mr. Schepkin' s BenefitEvening"), *Molva* 9 (1833): pp. 116–120.

[27] Cf. V. Vsevolodskiy (Gerngross), *Istoriya russkogo teatra v 2 tomakh* (Moscow, 1929), vol. 1.

[28] Cf. O. Danilov, *Gogol i teatr* (Leningrad, 1936), pp. 117–118.

On the plane of religious allegory, rather than the "modern" Shylock and the Wandering Jew, Russian culture is satisfied with the more traditional image of the Jew: Judas Iscariot. This universal, age-old embodiment of Jewry in the Christian tradition in Russian literature served as a "totem": every Jewish image was measured against it as the forefather and prototype of all post-Evangelical Israel. A Jew would be pronounced a "Judas" for any reason at all, however trifling. Thus, in the N. Kovalevsky tale "Gogol in Little Russia" (1841), an effusive traveller calls a Jewish holder of a post station "damned Judas" only because the Jew fails to provide him with fresh horses. A fellow traveller tryies to soothe the angry customer: "Why is Judas to blame if all the horses have been taken?"[29]

A different, more modern Jewish type, the criminal Jew, which became a staple of anti-Semitic Western mythology, also remained unclaimed in Russian culture of the Golden Age. I mean Dickens' Fagin in Oliver Twist. In Russia, the novel was translated in 1841, at the close of the Romantic period. Even so, one motif here was familiar to the Russian reader: laughing at the Jew who has been sentenced to the gallows. In Russian literature, hangings of Jews are a common form of entertainment for merry Cossacks, Gaidamaks and the like; it requires no judicial pretext. In Dickens, the same motif appears in more civilized of a guise: Fagin has a court trial. Rather than violent laughter, his verdict is met with cries of public joy: "Guilty! The building rang with a tremendous shout, and another, and another, and then it echoed loud groans, that gathered strength as they swelled out, like angry thunder. It was a peal of joy from thepopulace outside, greeting the news that he would die on Monday" (Chapter LII). The Russian translation here is far from literate: shortening the original, the translator Gorkavenko put added emphasis on the "Jew," which had not been there in the original: "Guilty! The building resounded with cries of jubilation which were repeated more and more loudly outside. The Jew was to die on Monday."[30]

Then again, the criminal-demonic basic set of qualities making up the core image of the Jew had become established in Russian literature even without Dickens' aid. This fact is brought out by an anonymous story (originally signed by three asterisks) titled "Three Years of the District Police Officer," published in 1833 in Molva (N⁰N⁰ 95–97). The story is combination

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[29] N. Kovalevsky, "Gogol v Malorossii," *Panteon russkogo i vseh evropeiskih teatrov* (1841), Part 1, No. 1.

[30] *Otechestvennye zapiski* 19 (1841): 11, Part III, p. 174. (Translated by A. Gorkavenko).

historical sketch and fictional plot. The action is set in the past, during the reign of Alexander I. The hero, an honest and well-meaning local police chief bearing the appropriate name of Dobroslavov ("One of Good Fame"), decides to save the local Ukrainian peasants from the Jews:

The Jews had flooded the towns and villages of Little Russia, consuming, like locusts, the property of simple-hearted inhabitants still unfamiliar either with crooks' subtleties, or with the guile of hypocrites. Dobroslavov was the first to submit to the civil governor a project about exiling from villages and estates, royal and private, the Children of Israel who were by their crooked ways destroying the fine edifice of civilization erected by the care of the Government and the law, digging under its very foundations.[31]

But the police officer's efforts run up against an invincible Jewish conspiracy which launches a slander campaign against him; his many colleagues grown rich through bribery join the campaign. "The betrayers of Christ" spread ghastly rumors bred "by the Jewish imagination" about him, and so ruin the hero in the end. The story concludes with a panegyric to the new era of Nicholas I, whose advent heralds the triumph of justice and the delivery of the country from the abominations which had been rife during the preceding reign. As the author never provides any hard facts, resorting instead to sweeping moral generalizations, the reality of the alleged Jewish atrocities remains here as obscurely founded as the gist of the accusations that bring about the ruin of the innocent local police officer.

In literary works, Jewish avarice would typically be linked to the Jews' incredible, even monstrous commercial activism. In reminiscences about the suppression of the Polish rebellion of 1830–1831, Mikhail Markov depicts a hospitable Jewish home. A tablecloth factory operates in the top storey of the house; on the ground floor, two pretty girls, the hostess' daughters, flirt with Russian officers while pushing their perfectly superfluous goods upon them. The Jewish commercial élan often involved risking one's' life. In a different episode, Markov shows two Russian soldiers buying vodka from an old Jewess. This takes place in the doorway of the woman's house, which faces the river where a battle is in progress just then. The soldiers short-change the Jewess, treating her to a torrent of anti-Semitic jokes. "The old witch" argues back furiously. "I was shocked," comments the author, "by the Jewish readiness for self-sacrifice for the sake of a penny. 'Confound

[31] *Molva*, 95 (1833), p. 379.

you, old hypocrite!,' I shouted. 'You may be blown to pieces.' 'No matter!' she said. I have closed all the shutters facing the river.' "[32]

Gogol's Taras Bulba has very similar feelings when he sees that Yankel, a moment after he escapes death by the skin of his teeth in a pogrom, "had already put up a stand with a shade and was ... selling all sorts of army supplies" to the Zaporozhe Cossacks. "Stupid, why are you sitting here? Do you want to be shot like a sparrow?," Taras asks, "wondering at Jewish nature." In the same episode, Yankel tells Taras how, in order to claim a debt, he once made his way into a besieged town where he narrowly escaped the gallows. Jewish avarice, true or alleged, was linked in the religious tradition to Judas' "thirty pieces of silver." Jewish usury, ascribed to the Jewish nation as a whole, was also conceived of in connection with the same New Testament prototype. But the educated reader could have learned from Russian literature that things were quite different in reality: it was not the Jew who charged the squire interest, but the squire who collected interest from the Jew. The hero of Vladimir Vladislavlev's "At the Ball and in the Country" (1835) is an officer who happens to serve in Ukraine, where he wants to marry Nasten'ka, a squire's daughter. He arrives at her home to make a formal proposal, and is shocked by the dirt and squalor in which the local nobility live. Inter alia, in the hall he comes upon a Jew shown up "to pay interest on the money he'd borrowed." Pleading poverty, the Jew asks for a lower rate.[33]

The claim of poverty raises no doubts in Vladislavlev's mind, but other writers have been puzzled by the question: where do the Jews hide their treasures and why on earth do they live in such misery? There was a widespread folk belief that Jews take their wealth with them when they pass away and into the next world; this meant they must hide their wealth in their graves in anticipation of this transfer. Vladimir Dal' informs his readers that the distinct trade of "zhidokop" ("Jew-digger") obtained in the Vyatka sloboda, whose work consisted in plundering Jewish graves in search of gold.[34]

The worst and ultimately satanic misdeed associated with Russia's Jews was the notorious renting of Orthodox churches in the 17th century. According to popular belief, this was what provoked the outbreak of the rebellion

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[32] M. Markov, "Ocherki voennoy zhizni," in *Mechty i byli*, Part 3 (SPb, 1838), pp. 161–167, 211–212.

[33] V. Vladislavlev, *Povesti i rasskazy*. In 4 parts. (SPb., 1835), Part I, p. 45.

[34] Cf. *Tarbut: Sbornik materialov po evreiskoy kul'ture* (Jerusalem, 1983), vol. 2. I owe a debt of gratitude to Mark Kipnis for informing me about that publication.

headed by Bogdan Khmelnitsky and all too well known for its massacres of the Jews and annihilation of entire communities. It appears that I may well have found one of the real sources for this clichéd accusation. Most likely, the anti-Jewish claim was based on an analogy with an age-old Orthodox practice become a commonplace in Greece. On the eve of the Romantic period, an unnamed Russian naval officer penned a description of this tradition for the Russian readership after himself visiting the island of Corfu:

> Everywhere there are customs to be found that one cannot and should not condemn; but there is one local practice which is hardly likely to find imitators. Would you believe that the relics of St. Spyridon, worshipped by the island's rulers, are the property of a certain nobleman who has the right to bequeath them upon his heirs and to give them as dowry? Moreover, in all Greece, as based on an ancient custom, churches are rented, and the church builder receives the profit this brings without suffering from any pangs of conscience whatsoever.[35]

Presumably, during the period of the Union, with inter-confessional hatred rife and the Orthodox campaign of destruction unleashed by Khmelnitsky, adepts of Ukrainian Orthodoxy grafted the memory of the Greek practice of renting churches onto their notion of all adherents of non-Orthodox faiths. Later, the same accusations penetrated Romantic writing and became a motif for the pogrom described in "Taras Bul'ba."

Romantic values along with the Romantic longing for other worlds yielded a notion of the Jew as a mysterious, demonic being mediating between the earthly and the beyond. Such an image of the Jew may have blended with the cliché of the Romantic exile as a villain and a monstrous sinner. An amalgam of this kind can produce strange results. If the Jew is romanticized in such writing, then the Romantic hero is no less capable of appearing in the guise of a Jew. This is what happens in the 1839 novel Gudishki by Nadezhda Durova, in which a pagan Lithuanian wizard becomes a Jew and a Kabbalist. Two years earlier, a poem by Efrem Baryshov (1812–1881) was published in Moscow, bearing the title of "The Jew" ("Evrey"); in substance, this was largely an imitation of Pushkin's "Poltava." Baryshov's hero Yakov is a son of the Hetman Ivan Samoilovich who fell victim to Mazepa's intrigues and was exiled to Siberia. But Baryshov outfits his Yakov with a completely fantastic biography, sending him for many years to Palestine

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[35] *Novosti literatury* 1 (1823), Part 2, p. 9. The journal's editor wrote a note arguing that the local nobleman is considered the relics' custodian rather than their proprietor, a point which, to my mind, amounts to a minor difference.

and making him wander throughout Asia. Yakov has either converted to Judaism, or else masks himself thoroughly as a Jew, his past involving a love for an unidentified "flaming Rebecca." The hero is a terrible sinner: "Jehovah himself has doomed me /To fall prey to spite and contempt!" He admits to his vehement hatred of Christians. As a sinner, he can be compared to no one, not even the Jewish archetype: "I look to everyone more horrible than Judas." Yakov combines Judaism with occult knowledge and astrology: "I have studied a book of mysteries/ Concealing my knowledge from all"; he also entrusts his own fate to the stars. A single step remains separating this from the Jewish wizards and astrologers in Ivan Lazhechnikov ("Basurman" ("The Infidel"), 1838) and N. Kukol'nik ("Kniaz' Kholmsky" ("Prince Kholmsky"), 1841). But Baryshov's Yakov repents his sins. His masquerade of Jewish vindictiveness is aimed at Mazepa, in order to punish him not simply for the ruin of his family, but also for the treason he has committed against all of Russia.

Thus, with time, the stooping figure of the Jew in Romantic literature as a whole assumes a gloomy and awkward sublimity of sorts; this is embodied by Baryshev's hero:

> He was tall but lean and pale,/ Clad in black from head to foot./ A diabolic elation / Was to be discerned in the eyes of the Jew.[36]

I have tried to provide the reader of today with a sense of that elation.

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[36] On byl vysok, no khud I bleden,/Ves' v chernom s golovy do nog./Kakoi-to d'iavol'skii vostorg / V glazakh evreia byl zameten (Ye. Baryshov, "Evrey": A Poem (Moscow, 1837), pp. 8, 11–12, 109.

PART TWO

THE SILVER AGE AND THE JEWS

CHAPTER THREE

AKIM VOLYNSKY AND HIS JEWISH CYCLE

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Akim Volynsky (penname of Chaim Flekser, 1863–1926) began to publish in the Russian Jewish press in the 1880s. Three years before his death, Volynsky wrote a number of remarkable essays on Jewish themes, two of which, devoted to the Habima Theater, appeared in *Zhizn' iskusstva* (*The Life of Art*), a gazette where he headed the ballet section. The articles discuss Jewish identity and the Jewish People, and put forth unprecedented ideas, at least for the Russian-language press. Habima carried these articles with it like a priceless talisman throughout its wanderings, until it brought them to Eretz Israel.

Volynsky's entire life took place in the interim, between his modest debut in the Jewish press and his late infatuation with the Jewish theme. The central event of his life was his takeoff in Russian journalistic criticism, to which Volynsky transposed the same issues he had earlier announced in his Russian Jewish critical essays. The general scheme was this: Volynsky formulated his principal notions back in his Jewish phase, later developing them in his Russian criticism, before finally finding their application to Jewish material again.

Volynsky together with the Symbolist critic Merezhkovsky started the so-called reevaluation of values. He called upon Russian writers to turn to great religious, philosophic, and metaphysical ideas. It is thanks to Volynsky that the canon of Russian literature today is headed by Pushkin, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky, rather than other writers. And it was specifically thanks to Volynsky's articles that the late Gogol and Leskov were reinstated in Russian literary lore.

However, Volynsky was not acknowledged by his contemporaries, but was constantly subject to critical persecution from both right and left. He bore it all stoically. Ten years passed, and the ideas with which he had started his work finally triumphed: the collection *Problems of Idealism* by Berdyaev and Bulgakov appeared, paraphrasing Volynsky without providing any reference to his work. At the turn of the century, Volynsky

prepared a series of books on Dostoevsky, his magnum opus in Russian literature.

Volynsky's literary criticism is distinguished by a remarkable unity, despite the fact that he is always fighting on two fronts simultaneously: against anecdote, tendentiousness, sociology, sentimentality, the pettygrade, the soulful (rather than the spiritual)—that is, against naturalism; but also against immorality, perversion, subjectivity—that is, against the fashionable decadence which he saw as especially dangerous because in it the healthy is confused with the ill and the spiritual with the lowly.

Volynsky was hunting his phantom of purely spiritual art. But purely "spiritual art" is unavailable, neither in Tolstoy nor in Dostoevsky, even though he thought that Dostoevsky offers a pathway to it, or that it shines through momentarily in the later Chekhov.

Around 1905 Volynsky left literature becoming a theater critic. He was probably the first to oppose naturalism of the Art theater, and during two seasons worked in Komissarzhevskaya's theater. Behind the scenes, Volynsky was in 1907–1909 involved in Jewish theater in and its struggle for existence; he supported Jewish playwrights, advancing Jewish plays. Volynsky's role in helping the Jewish theater of the pre-Revolutionary years has yet to be studied.

His search for spiritual art brought him to study Byzantine religious painting in Greece. Finally, he studied the liturgical foundations of theater, and found his long sought-after purely spiritual art in ballet. Dance for Volynsky became a real, actual transformation of the flesh by the spirit. He soon became Russia's best-known ballet critic.

He "returned to literature" only in 1916, when he was invited to lead a critical-bibliographic column in the Birzhevye vedomosti. There he immediately began to publish Shklovsky and Eichenbaum, the future Russian Formalists. He did not emigrate after the Revolution, but was elected head of the Petrograd Writers' Union. In 1921–1923 he defended the constantly shrinking freedoms of writers, pleading for the arrested and the exiled. At the beginning of the NEP Volynsky started a number of publishing projects, and in 1922 received a ballet column in *Zhizn' iskusstva*. This is where he published his Jewish cycle. The idyll was short-lived, however: by 1925 he was jostled out of the gazette as well as from ballet, and his heart proved unable to bear it. He died of heart failure.

Volynsky's key idea was that Nietzsche was wrong. Beginning in the mid-1890s, Volynsky attempted to find a counterweight to Nietzsche's "Dionysian" ecstasies in the new, "Apollonian," perfectly lucent ecstasies. He fought against all sorts of "Falls" and "falling away" into paganism, barbarianism,

nationalism, conservatism. The same went for Freud. Volynsky acquainted himself with German intellectuals and studied psychoanalytic theory. His cycle of articles on Dostoevsky is psychoanalysis turned inside-out, proceeding from faith in the beneficent quality and "morality" of the subconscious bases of human being. In Volynsky's thought, it is pointedly the subconscious that turns out to be oriented along the good-evil axis, so that it is specifically by means of the subconscious that humanity is connected to God: the subconscious soul of Raskolnikov is what prevents his ill, evil reason from committing murder. Mental illness in Dostoevsky's characters—Stavrogin, Ivan Karamazov—as in Freud, results from the conflict between different strata of the psyche, except that the conflict is understood in a way opposite to the Freudian: not the rotted primitive levels opposing the rational strata, but, rather, the healthy subconscious foundations of life, which come in revolt against the erring mind.

Throughout these thirty years, Volynsky came very close to Christianity, going so far as to study esoteric mystical practices on Mt. Athos. However, he never converted to Christianity. Moreover, throughout his life he maintained an interest in Jewish issues, for instance, by helping victims of the Kishinev Pogrom.

Volynsky's First Jewish Apologies

One of the first public pronouncements made by Volynsky on the Jewish issue was his sharp response to Rozanov's use of Jewish themes in his journalism. This came in his 1916 article "The Fetishism of the Petty" in *Birzhevye vedomosti*. According to Volynsky, Rozanov himself

> is reflected in the[se texts] remarkably clearly, with the whole of the confusion of his psychological themes and maniacal conviction that by falling away from the cult of the majestic into the fetishism of the petty, he has achieved a true breakthrough in the very center of contemporary literature. … Here we are already face to face with the incoherent blubbering of a pygmy unable to see the true level of his intellectual capacities and literary talent … Rozanov's polemics are coarser than anything we have ever encountered on the pages of newspapers or magazines … He supplies an almost perfect absence of arguments or thought. Research and knowledge are terribly scarce …

All the while, the author's most important point is that Rozanov's basic conception is false: "The blending of the indecent and the sacred in one and the same concept in the basics of the Jewish faith is no more than Rozanov's phantasy …" On the contrary, Jewish ritual involves

> not a shade of voluptuousness in its interpretation of issues of a sexual nature … There is no hysteria of a diabolical rapture. Everything is noble and expedient from beginning to end. Natural throughout. But the natural is not elevated to the height of cult practice by the Jews … This is only a plastic ritual, not a principle of sacred faith in the true sense of the word.

This is what Volynsky wrote about the two paintings by Rembrandt, in which Bathsheba is shown before immersing herself in a reservoir of living water: "The general impression is that of tidiness and strict ritual … Maniacal eroticism is perfectly absent. Not a shade of it. Moral, pure, and noble. Not crumbly. Not loosened or rickety. Sturdy and wholesome … The beauty of starry heights. Reliable and eternal."[1]

It appears to us that it was the challenge of disproving Rozanov's concoctions, and of making it clear to the general reader what the real features of Jewish spirituality are and how they contrast with their counterparts in non-Jewish cultures, that pushed Volynsky to the grandiose synthetic conception to which he devoted the remainder of his life.

Making explicit pronouncements about the relationship between Judaism and Christianity became possible only after the February Revolution of 1917, once religious censorship had been abolished and when the old official, religious and state anti-Semitism had lost its force. Volynsky's most daring essays date from this interim period between 1918 and 1924, before the onset of a censorship of a harder kind and of the new state anti-Semitism.

In order to be heard, Volynsky had to turn to the most basic authority for his age: Nietzsche. Armed with the system of values of the author of *The Genealogy of Morals* and *The Antichrist*, Volynsky tried to to rehabilitate Judaism with their help, even if this meant revising Nietzsche. The values which unfailingly continued to arouse Volynsky's admiration, following Nietzsche, are "nobility," "elitism," "purity," "sturdiness," and "realism." Nietzsche saw Christianity as sick and unrealistic, arguing that it had inherited these qualities from Judaism. Christianity, according to Nietzsche, is the continuation of the Jewish denial of the world, Jewish make-believe and antirealism, as well as the Jewish decadent thirst for revenge of the weak upon the strong. By means of Christianity, Judaism cancels itself out.

In his book *The Four Gospels* (1922), Volynsky, apparently on the crest of sympathy for the recently sacked Russian Church, rewrites Nietzsche in such a way that the lofty, pure, sturdy Judaism turns out to have been polluted through Christianity by a "Chamitic" mass magicism, shamanism,

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[1] A. Volynsky. Fetishism melochei.V.V Rozanov. *Birzhevye vedomosti*, 20 January 1916, p. 2.

and Oriental fertility cults; the result is a compromise faith which, however, continues to persist, prevented from dissolving into a base materialistic man-godliness by the Church. It is the Church that fences in faith from the masses with dogma or the "mystery," sublimating and purifying the religious ideal, playing the role of defender against a heresy potentially capable of provoking a lethal degradation of humanity. The conclusion is transparent: the current, Bolshevistic cataclysm is a new materialistic man-godly heresy, yet another mass spasm. Volynsky's conclusion is that, by defending the eternal, higher, spiritual ideals of humanity, the two civilizing forces, Judaism and the Church, have always in different ways advanced toward a single goal.

At approximately the same time, in 1919, the editorial board of "Vsemirnaya literatura" witnessed the famous debate between Volynsky and Blok concerning V.M. Zhirmunsky's book on Heine. Volynsky did not agree with the author's notion of Heine as a dualist-Romantic. The discussion of Romanticism moved into the plane of comparing Christianity, alias Aryanism, alias Romanticism, with Judaism. In his polemic against Blok, Volynsky constructed a far-reaching cultural comparison in which Romanticism, or "the thought of the spirit in terms of nature," is contrasted with the anti-Romantic "thought of nature in terms of the spirit." This vision of the world most clearly comes to the fore in Judaism—and is precisely what Volynsky found in Heine. Such was his first attempt at a comparative typology of Jewish culture. At the same time, Volynsky split Romanticism and accepted its first stage, while rejecting conservative Romanticism with its penchant for Catholicism, the Middle Ages, and nationalist thinking. Heine was only a pretext: the critic used Heine as a pretext to move on to the Judaic world picture as he, Volynsky, understood it:

> Heine really does approach nature with an unconsciously Symbolic measuring rod. In Judaism, the natural does not have a significance of its own. It is not deified, not cultivated, not elevated to a Romantic pedestal as something self-contained or permeated with an autonomous beauty. However grandiose the natural phenomenon, however brilliant the zigzags of lightning plowing the heavens, whatever hurricanes may be raising the waves of the sea, the pure Orthodox Jew will not for a single moment stop before all this terrifically majestic order of nature with feelings of all-engulfing admiration. His eyes are ever raised to an invisible heaven. All things transpiring on Earth, all things encountered at one's every step he accompanies with the appropriate benediction, which turns the items of life and the objects of ritual into symbolic signs of an all-sanctifying majesty. There is no autonomous description of nature in the Tanach—in the Law, the Prophets, or the Ketuvim. Throughout its wanders in the desert … the Jewish People did not once encounter a

> phenomenon which would in its own right, in its individual contours, deserve special attention. Thunders sounded—but the Muses of the People were silent. An extraordinary stormy event took place once on a mountain peak, yet the outcome of this event was not a rapturous description, but a law-giving tablet. There is altogether no picturesque esthetics throughout the whole of Biblical space. Even the majestic lines of the creation of the world form but a chain of heavy links of creative thought—nothing to entertain the superficial reader's gaze. Nothing romantic. How perfectly Michelangelo grasped this! Creating Man, the Lord of Hosts extends to him His slightly bent finger, bringing it as close as possible to Adam's. Even so, there is no perfect contact between their fingers. A tiny morsel of space remains between them, the circuit is not closed. This space, however, signals the essential, irreconcilable difference between two theological systems, the Jewish and the Christian. In the Christian system, the fingers do touch, God is immanent to the universe, making it come alive and spiritualizing it. At times, He speaks the language of the natural itself, clothing Himself with its flesh, pouring into it His pull toward the world; He drinks of its wine and eats of its body. This is when Aryan poetry, constituting a sacrilegious transgression from the point of view of Judaism, achieves the most perfect likenesses of plastic creativity. But pure Judaism at this juncture preserves a severe silence.[2]

Volynsky's Hyperborean Myth

Volynsky jealously followed the attempt at a Christian Orthodox renewal which, from his point of view, had emerged from the new legitimization, initiated by himself, of religion as a part of culture. Historically, the attempt itself was not a success, but in literature its outcome was an entire spectrum of personal versions of the "Third Testament," ranging from the radical Christian Orthodox, Christian Orthodox Marxist, and sectarian Bolshevistic, to Merezhkovsky's religion of the Holy Ghost or of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, or even the Christian Orthodox-Egyptian synthesis a la Rozanov, who wrote about the holiness of sex in ancient Near Eastern cults. Against this background, Volynsky has the appearance of an unprecedented radical: he authors the only version of the "Third Testament" in Russian Symbolist culture, which focuses on Judaism.

Back during the pre-Revolutionary years, the contours were adumbrated of that "fanatical and fantastic" conception, in B. Eichenbaum's phrase, which became Volynsky's personal variety of the "Third Testament." This

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[2] A. Volynsky. Disput (Aleksandr Blok—A.L. Volynsky). Razryv s khristianstvom.//*Zhizn' iskusstva*, 1923, No. 31, p. 5.

was the attempt to transfer the much sought after, impossible, but desired synthesis of "Jewishness" and "Europeanism" back into the forgotten, antediluvian era, and to declare its restoration the chief objective of humanity.

This conception of Volynsky's is outlayd largely in his gigantic monograph on *Rembrandt* (1925), for which the modest-sized *Hyperborean Hymn* (1923) appears to have been a preparatory stage. Both these compositions remain unpublished. However, some articles written simultaneously with them did appear in print: this includes the polemics on Heine, "The Jewish Theater" diptych (1923), and the first article from the "Russian Women" cycle (1924). Of the unpublished materials, most remarkable is the article "Cedars of Lebanon" and the story "Jokhanan ben Zakkai" (1924), preserved, along with both monographs, in the writer's archives in RGALI (the Russian State Archives of Literature and Art).

Volynsky, hence, created his own myth, projecting onto the past the desired unity of mankind. He invented a stage of prehistoric kinship, which was supposed to have preceded the differentiation into today's races, something forecasting the current notion of the unity of the "Nostratic" languages. Volynsky referred to this kinship as the "Hyperborean" (in his day, this word did not yet have the unambiguously ominous connotation that it has in ours), and imagined it as the kingdom of a radiant monistic cult. Volynsky demonstratively took off from Ariosophic conceptions flowering in pre-War Europe, which had set the tone in university academic circles of the beginning of the century before being further actualized by the War. He called his "theory" "Hyperborean," a term appearing in the occult-Ariosophic, so called "Nordic" teachings about the Northern Ur-homeland of the Aryans. The historical, or rather, the legendary meaning of the word "Hyperborean" had to do with the worshippers of Apollo who lived so far in the North that they had to convey their offerings to the Sun God not directly, but, as it were, by relay. But this same notion had also been taken advantage of by Nietzsche in his Antichrist (1888, published in 1895): "Let us turn to ourselves. We are Hyperboreans, we know well enough how far we live from the rest … On the other side of the North, ice, death is our life, our happiness. We have discovered happiness, we know the way, we have found the way out from whole eras of labyrinth."

Here it becomes evident that utopian semantics accompanied the notion of the "Hyperborean" even in this text by Nietzsche, who is fundamental for modernism. Rather than Ariosophic, Nietzsche outfits the term with psychological content. Volynsky goes beyond this: even though, like the Ariosophs, he describes the proto-Aryans as descending into Europe from the North, and even though he uses "Hyperborean" as a term, in terms of

content, he undermines the Ariosophic view of the world. The corrections he introduces fundamentally alter the issue at stake.

First of all, in Volynsky's view, this is the point of common origin of the Aryan and the Semitic cults—the notion of a single solar deity and highest reason. (The same notion had also long been familiar to theosophs; it was popularized by H.P. Blavatsky even prior to the occult boom of the early 20th century).

Second, Volynsky does not at all see this pre-historic unity as a mystical or magical primeval heaven, in the way the Ariosophs imagined Aryan paganism. In his view, this was a period of pure monistic revelation, of an intellectual and rational "lucent" cult.

And finally, despite everything known about the occultist movement, and especially about Ariosophy, Volynsky was convinced that Biblical Judaism in particular had preserved the greatest degree of fidelity to this ancient all-human revelation.

Volynsky envisioned the future as a reconciliation of the Jews with a united humanity. Having settled in the plains of Europe and forgotten the search for God, immobilized in its natural cyclicity, Aryan humanity was to awaken and set off on eternal nomadic quest of the spirit. Volynsky prophesied: "Peoples of the world, don your hats! You are all on the road!" An ancient and eternal supra-national religion begins to rule: the people without temple or territory, but having retained this creed, is dispersing like dust. Humanity ripens and accepts the obligation of the "road," an obligation which had heretofore been only Jewish. That is, in fact, what the cessation of history is to be: like the Jews, humanity will have no states, no temples, no division into priests and flock—only care for the spirit. "So only one thing remains: the soaring of souls foretasting of the Sabbath."[3] This sought-after imperturbability is discovered by Volynsky right at home. The Hyperborean light in his last large monograph *Rembrandt* (1925) is identified with the "light of Judaism." This is, in fact, the "light without shadow," the light of pure spirituality, the light which knows no night, that same light which Volynsky sought all his life long, and which he found on his own hearth.

This is, in effect, what the "Third Testament" amounts to: humanity ripens and takes upon itself the obligation of the "road," which had heretofore been exclusively Jewish. This call for a new nomadism of the spirit sounds a polemical note addressed directly to Aryosophy, in which a wandering, homeless tribe threatens Aryan existence, beautiful in its natural cyclicity.

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[3] A.L. Volynsky. *Rembrandt*, RGALI, f. 95, op.1. d. 91, pp. 50–51.

As against the Aryosophs, Volynsky aims for a linear, uni-directed time headed toward redemption, rather than a turning of the cosmic cycles: "But the Jewish ark becomes lighter, as well—and will soon become solar dust." Like the Church Fathers, Volynsky foresees the bodily metamorphosis of Man and his transformation into "clusters of light, rays, body of Glory out of a body of dust." However, Volynsky is confident that even in this distant and lofty future, something will remain unperturbed: "edifices made out of Biblical cedar wood are particularly sturdy in their foundations and need not fear the destructive whirlwind of history. They will remain standing forever—this is something we can say with certainty."[4]

The secret of Jewish eternity, according to Volynsky, lies in denial, with entire poems subsequently focusing on that which the Jews have not. Thus, they have no history: "For the Jews, history is annihilated entirely, everything is destroyed: the Jewish Temple, the Jewish mission to the world, both secular and spiritual—everything. So, only one thing remains: the soaring of souls foretasting of the Sabbath."[5]

This is precisely what constitutes the desired eternity and the presaged Third Testament—the end of history. "Jewish history does not flow, not as a part of the process of metamorphosis, nor from one epoch into another. It is a worthy palimpsest with ancient writing constantly coming to light."[6]

Christ, too, belongs to this same scheme. Volynsky pedals Christ as belonging to the Jewish tradition: "It is impossible to imagine a running Christ. Everything is in its proper place, everything right here, next to one. Why rush?"[7]

The very idea of the Jewish People as the last living people of antiquity is quite original. It is partly reminiscent of a similar notion in Joyce's Ulysses, which made its appearance only later. Such a valorization of Judaism apparently did not please the Soviet authorities: during a search of Habima's quarters, they confiscated the treatise *Hyperborean Hymn*, in which this notion is set forth, and stowed it away in a special security storage facility.

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[4] Same. Kedry livanskie. RGALI, f. 95, op.1, d. 124, p. 6.
[5] *Rembrandt*, pp. 50–51.
[6] Ibid. p. 311.
[7] Ibid., p. 312.

The Jew as Theater

But where, then, is this Man of the future, spiritual through and through? Volynsky finally found the closest to him in actors of the Jewish theater-studio Habima. On these grounds, Volynsky bequeathed his *Hyperborean Hymn* to Habima—the same manuscript that was later confiscated.

Volynsky sees the Jewish People as the only living nation which in its customs, in its character types, and in its habits has preserved a memory of the pre-Aryan, proto-historical, solar, monistic unity of mankind. This is exactly why the Jew acts differently, never letting the daily routine overwhelm him:

On the one hand, the element of unstoppable poetry, without ever a break … and on the other, Lucifer with the whole of the immeasurable burden of his heavy and stifling prosaicities. The daily routine as a whole is prosaic. All of time is taken up with dull work. Voice, gesture, mode of walking are all distorted by a falsetto to the point of unrecognizability. Only rarely does a sense of theatric solar play-acting break through.[8]

As always in Volynsky, the kernel here is in instantaneous sketches: devoted all his life to what we now call body language or the semiotics of the body, Volynsky was a graduate of the school of ballet criticism. He knew how to paint in language:

> His [the Jew's] gestures … are abrupt, sharply descriptive, occasionally cutting the air like a knife, occasionally standing out as a bright, white splotch of the typical member-of-the-intellegentsia's hands. The speech of the hands for the Jew is a language in its own right … real, live, descriptive and insistently convincing speech. … The histrionically Greek expression about the wisdom of the hands becomes clear. The rationalistic logic is underscored, demonstrated, and impressively strengthened by the sharp pointing finger. The finger as if inserts the periods and the exclamation points, incessantly drawing conclusive signatures in the air to emphasize whatever has been said. At solemn moments in the debate, when speech falls silent in the fullness of the thought expressed, the hand with palm open remains suspended against the backdrop of a white wall … Such is the purely Semitic gesture …
>
> Let us hark to the living speech of the Jews. It is a fragment from the opera of life … At the market, in the street, at every step, speech suddenly transposes into an aria … And in the synagogues, it is just singsong all the way through. Swinging his entire body back and forth, in rhythmic bending and rearing of his back, the Jew loudly reads out his prayers in a singsong voice. At times this is a musical declamation, at others—enraptured rolls of liturgical

[8] A.L. Volynsky. Evreiskii teatr. Stat'ia 1-aia. // *Zhizn' iskusstva*, 1923, No. 27, pp. 2–4.

phrasing … As a matter of fact, Jewish speech is the real human speech. The human being was made to sing, rather than just speak … Our speech, amid the worries of struggling and daily living, in the net of hypocrisy and false bashfulness, arrogance, and reserve, has fallen away from its true sonic prototype. It is bedraggled and become nearly still in prosaically deadened talk. We speak a Lucifer's tongue, in decadent falsetto tones … While for the Jew, his mellifluous and vociferously expressive language is second nature.

And what, finally, is the Jewish gait like? It is the same in everyday life as on solemn occasions, at the synagogue and on stage. Nobody in the world can proceed in quite this way with a sacred item in his hands as a Jew can: solemnly and pointedly-interestedly at one and the same moment. Something touchingly and sentimentally enamored, festively elevated to the heights of veneration at the same time. The Jew walks with a pathetic hop, taking large, hurried steps. All in all, he has somehow contracted into himself, rushing forward in a rolling ball. This is how one of the protagonists in the first act of Ha-Dibbuk[9] walks, bearing a sacred yarmulkeh in his hands, somewhat unnaturally and even stiltedly, but with genius in its foreshadowing of the future bodily movements of humanity, commensurate with the pathetic foundation of our spirit. A gait liberated from Lucifer's bonds also acquires a musicality of its own, and free expressivity. With that, it becomes naturally similar to the expansive Semitic plasticity of our days. This is why the image of the Jew, both in sound and in mimicry, in different spectators and listeners gives rise to a sense of being touched and appealed to at one moment, and to irrepressible laughter the next.

No people weeps as the Jews weep … Amazingly does the Jewish People weep, with its every smallest particle, individually and remarkably personally, as well as collectively, in a holistic, indivisible mass expressivity. This is the deadly weeping over one's own sin which has brought destruction in its wake …

While the Jew is a hypocrite everywhere and at all times, a hypocrite by his very nature and spirit, he is theatrical in essence: voice and gesture, movement and mimicry, his whole dancing figure and gait are highly graphic and beg to be taken on stage. But the Jew is theatrical not only from the without, but also in the essential-hypocritical sense of the word.

He is by nature the trumpet of the people, even in the most poverty-stricken, beaten, and lowly of individual existences. He has no need of a warrant [mandat] for the stage. His personal life passes for the Jew in some state of indifference, a sort of equanimity toward external trifles: clothing, grooming, dress, or hairdo. His boot has not been shined? No worry! His handkerchief is sticking out of his pocket? No big deal! All this in itself is of no import

[9] The two article on the Jewish theater were prompted by Habima's performances on tour in Petrograd in summer of 1923: S.An-sky's *HaDibbuk* staged by Evgenii Vakhtangov was in the center of public opinion.

> in the face of other most vital concerns and elevating mindsets. These very mindsets are what make the Jew a hypocrite in every trinket, at the market, at home, and at the synagogue. A Christian Orthodox deacon is made up of two persons: one in the service of God, with a hieratic-Byzantine pompousness in his gestures and voice, and the other—the domestic one, humbly good-natured or violently drunk, depending on his life circumstances. Such is the deacon in Leskov[10] and Gusev-Orenburgsky … This is why even at the church ambo the Russian priest, just like the Russian actor, is not always impressive, is not always at his best, is not always performing in his best voice. This is why the Russian actor is also not always reliable on stage, given his all too frequent unauthorized self-devised improvisations and his non-mythological, individual burping. The Russian actor has his moments of shining as a hypocrite-genius … But of organic hypocrisy he has none. Hence his affectation and unbearably false declamation, distasteful to the modern audience. All this hails from the other, the domestic man, living as he does a life of his own which is alien to the theater and to culture. While the cantor does not serve as a seat for two persons: he is one man.[11]

Volynsky's theory of the Jewish person was learned by heart and imbibed by the new Jewish actor. It was an attack on fashionable notions of the new Jewish literature. His spiritualized new Jewish Adam is his polemical thrust against the image of the "baal guf," the man of flesh, cherished by modern Hebrew authors, because the flesh and the routine of daily life involve, according to Volynsky, submission to the power of Lucifer. Therefore his Apollo is also entirely different from the one worshipped by the protagonist of Saul Chernikhovsky after he runs away from Jewish tradition which appears to him dead. In Volynsky, this ideal is solar reason, moral spirit—the true brother of the Jewish monistic Godhead.

Rembrandt

The book's working hypothesis is the idea that, quite independent of his origins, Rembrandt achieves the fullest realization of the Jewish understanding of the world. Convinced that Rembrandt's pedigree consists of several generations of Marranos, Volynsky even attempts to explain Rembrandt's name, which resists etymological analysis in Dutch, as a Germanized Hebrew acronym along the lines of RaMBaM or RaMBaN. Volynsky was possibly led to this notion by the name of the Russian Jewish critic and essayist Ya.

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[10] Cf. Deacon Akhilla in Nikolai Leskov's novel *Soboriane*.
[11] Ibid.

Rombro, which he had come across in the 1880s. Whoever the painter may have been, he expresses a Jewish worldview[12] Volynsky constructs an extensive, fascinating anthropological comparison of the European Jew and non-Jew.

The portraits of Rembrandt's parents are for Volynsky eloquent testimony to their preserved Jewish identity. The elderly mother, in his view, holds the book in such a way as though she were about to open it from right to left. She is represented in an attitude of prayer, about to perform the penitential gesture of striking herself in the bosom. The mother goes from folding her fingers in a Jewish gesture to sitting before a cold cup of tea, symbolic of a Jewish death. In discussing Rembrandt's father, Volynsky notes that people in their old age always develop facial features of a Jewish type, something that, apparently, testifies to a common human root, the same root which is most clearly obvious among Jews. The son Titus holds the book "as the greatest treasure, as a Jew holds the Torah: with fingers spread out in an enamored grasp, while the bride he embraces with a Jewish chastity."[13]

Rembrandt is a man out of nowhere, an alien unconnected with any milieu. Volynsky speaks of him as an aerolite fallen from the sky.

> Rembrandt is not merely a name … it is a theme, a type of world sense and world understanding through ideas and images … Countenances are fluid, the contours of things are lost in bottomless dusk. The death of the gods takes place in a sky that is eternal, fiery, sunset-like. All this Rembrandt … Jew or non-Jew, Rembrandt is an agent of this fire-bearing sensing and thinking, so typical of Judaism.[14]

One of the main categories introduced by Volynsky for the purpose of cultural comparison is Habima. His ruminations are evidently initiated by the Leningrad triumphs of Habima, the Jewish studio at the Moscow Art Theater which had become an independent theater in its own right. Beginning with his articles on the Jewish theater, which had grown from reviews into something close to a Jewish anthropology or phenomenology of the spirit, Volynsky turns his pronouncements on the Jewish theme specifically to this troupe. Volynsky's attitude to the Jewish national revival is ambiguous: he welcomes everything "spiritual" about it, but approaches the attempt to liquidate Jewish uniqueness with the most thorough skepticism. The debate

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[12] *Rembrandt*, pp. 1–5.
[13] Ibid. *passim*.
[14] Rembrandt, p. 299.

about Habima on the eve of the Theater's departure for Palestine is testimony to Volynsky's profound disagreement with the secularization of the Jewish heritage.

For Volynsky, Habima (lit., "scaffolding," "stage" in Hebrew) is that point in the spiritual development of society when the ritual of worship is limited to the sacrificial scaffolding or habima, while the priest actors are contrasted to the passively beholding crowd of spectators. Habima, the theatricized cult, forces a theatrical ritualism even on daily life: these are the rituals of secular, court, mass production life, a decorated round of the diurnal, social and dress-related ceremony, followed by the secular art of Europe—a spectacle turned head-on toward the passive beholder.

One instance of the "Habimic" in Rembrandt, according to Volynsky, is the overwhelmingly false look of the *Self-Portrait with Saskia in His Lap*:[15] alone with a woman, a man is hardly likely to be raising a wine goblet in a pointedly picturesque gesture as if meant for a third party's appreciation. Volynsky determines a distinction between assimilation, conscious and spiritual, and the taking on of the outer rituals of European culture. Applied to Judaism, "Habima" is acculturation without assimilation, the observance of outer social rituals in dress, behavior, and the like. It is the exteriorization of Jewish life, which originally always turned inward.

Rembrandt is for Volynsky an undoubted bearer of the Jewish sense of the world, but a Habimic type at the same time. It is specifically to such a synthetic man that the revelation of a new synthesis is addressed:

> Faust in Rembrandt's engraving—what is this if not a Rosicrucian-style depiction of a Habimic man, illuminated by the light of eternal truth? One may not be a Jew by blood or birth certificate, and still be a Habima creature that has combined Elohim with Christ. The Gnostics of not only the first centuries of Christianity, but also of the later centuries, Gnostics as such and in general are grappling with the same one question about Elohim and Christ, and as long as this question is not resolved definitively, on its own, without external pressure, we will not leave the Habima period. Habima Man is before you. He stands before the radiant concentric circles of eternal wisdom, in which some inscriptions have been etched by an erring mind. [In the painting, the inscription in question reads: INRI—Author's note.] But one thing persists here: it is the sun emerging from the darkness, flooding the room of the Habima scientist.[16]

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[15] NB: The painting is normally identified as a scene with Rembrandt holding Saskia in his lap and posing as "The Prodigal Son in the Tavern". Translator's note.

[16] Ibid., p. 332.

Volynsky now[17] argues that Judaism is not the opposition of God and the universe, but His immanence in the world, not the opposition of sacral and worldly, but the permeation of all of life with the sacral; not the opposition of priest and the uninitiated, but the whole of life as divine worship. Volynsky finds in Rembrandt the equivalent of this sense of the world: eternal, age-old, golden light, which seems in his works as if to emanate from the objects themselves, or to be immanent in them. This is "the self-gestation of light in people, in the whole of the natura naturata of the surrounding world." It should be noted that this is yellow, solar light, rather than the astral white:

> In ordinary Christian mystics, the light of the transcendental world descends to Earth from the without, from somewhere in the upper galleries of the cosmos. But in Rembrandt, this light radiates from within, from the very mind of man, from the stuff of his intellectual essence, from his very body even. There has not yet been an artist who needed external light nimbuses for the figures he depicted less than Rembrandt. In Rembrandt, all these children's nimbuses are done away with naturally, of their own accord. Everything is radiant, everything brightened in a natural reflex through inner illumination of the substance.[18]

Volynsky relies on Nikolai Fedorov's concept of the *Philosophy of the Common Cause* to help him unpack Rembrandt's ideology, which he aims to reconstruct. Fedorov's "faith of the fathers" is something Volynsky understands as having grasped at the very core of Judaism. He stresses the group or collective character of Judaism with its primacy of what derives from the father, or the clan: "For the Jews, Israel, Judah, Ephraim, or the people in general is something compact, collective and gathered in one, almost, with Elohim himself. The people grows, achieves renown, and multiplies, but the individual person in it is forgotten, lost, and erased." This mark of fatherhood, clan, or species, is evident even in the morphology of a Jewish name. Volynsky claims that specifically in Judaism there is that living link with absent fathers, which was so sorely lacking for Fedorov. "The brother dies—and becomes father. The son dies—and becomes father. Everything translates into fatherhood." The whole of history is

> happy-grieving orphanage in dead fathers living but invisible. We go blind every hour, with every new parting, but we do not go blind forever. There will come yet a time when our eyes … will suddenly begin to see everything. All at

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[17] We remember that In his dispute with Blok he thought differently, describing immanence as a feature of Christianity.

[18] Ibid., p. 321.

> once will time disappear, night and death, and everything will begin to shine in some slowly thinning and finally thinned out light. At the last degree of cosmic transformation, the world of the fathers will suddenly appear before our eyes. Such are the inner beliefs of the Jewish people. Mourned, in effect, are not those who have died, but those who remain.[19]

Elsewhere in the book, the Jewish prayer house or Bet Midrash becomes the symbol of Judaism, open and lit up both day and night: at the time when the living are asleep, those coming to study are the deceased.

Volynsky derives another criterion for comparing Judaism with European culture from his favorite topic of beauty, emphasizing not the universal, but rather the limited historical character of beauty and its obligatory connection with the principle of individuality:

> Neither in the Bible nor in the Vedas is there a concept of beauty. Beauty is born not of pre-Aryan culture, not in the bosom of its great Oriental heiresses, but in later Europe, in Greece, in artists, writers, and philosophers, among the novo-Aryan cultural conquests, as a statement of the individual principle of the perfection of the perfect person … He [The individual person] made his appearance in Europe, in Apollo's Delos manger, and then proceeded forward along his proud triumphal way beneath the banner of beauty.[20]

According to Volynsky, Rembrandt's human figures are always more than persons: he speaks of the unique synthesis of the personal and the tribal, and remembers the special correlation of the personal with the general in the Jewish People: "Uniqueness is inseparable here from the face. Goldstein is not only the Goldstein given. Passover[21] was not only Alexander and Yakovlevich Passover, but primarily and in everything the Jew Passover. Such a burden is not easy to bear."[22]

And yet Rembrandtian figures, according to Volynsky, are endowed with adequate independence and selfhood. Taking Rembrandtian heads as his starting point, Volynsky even constructs a memorable comparison based on the morphology … of hair. This short chapter is called "Forests and Bumps."

> Straight hair, by its gradualness, by its flowing into other, somehow connective threads, somehow plantlike strings, binds people to each other. If we put a dozen heads with hair of this kind side by side, they can coalesce in a single

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[19] Ibid., p. 52.

[20] Ibid., p. 113.

[21] Aleksandr Yakovlevich Passover (1840–1910), a famous lawyer, one of Petersburg's most brilliant intellectuals.

[22] Ibid., p. 329.

> impression of a forest, whole and unblemished. But then take a group of curly Jewish heads. Now there is no forest. We have before us, rather, round bumps [bugry] of separate and distinct creatures. The market is full of Jews, full of terrific noise, but there is no herd, no crowd: every Jew is visible in his distinctness, his rampant individuality, his untamed temperament. Rembrandt's heads achieve precisely this impression of the introverted person. Bumps and more bumps are before us.[23]

Do not Osip Mandelshtam's "heads' bumps" [golov bugry] hail from here?

In 1923, in his article "Russian Women," Volynsky notes the dichotomy of the Jewish and the non-Jewish woman in connection with his quasi-Aryosophic idealization of the "Hyperborean" mode. The Jewish woman, in his view, retains the ancient camaraderie and strict purity of the family, without which survival in a nomadic way of life is impossible; she is a priestess, a "Druidess."

In Rembrandt, this comparison is structured as an opposition of the "plantlike" European woman and the Jewish woman, whose essence is revealed through the metaphor of the "stone":

> … In Saskia's enamored gazing upon precious stones we sense such an intensity, innate specifically to a Jewish woman. The daughters of Israel maintain a genuine cult of precious stones. At the same time, stones are of interest to them not just as decoration, not just in themselves. Something in such stones is iridescent, shining, playing, and evokes a resonance in the soul of the gazing woman. All women are to a greater or lesser degree plants and flowers, all women except for the Jewesses, who want to be like nothing else except precious stones in their Sabbath attire. Under a thick holiday covering of brocade or velvety fabric, contours of the body are not visible at all. Standing and walking before you is a living wardrobe. Only precious stones, pearls and diamonds sparkle and gleam on the rich cloth. The Jewish woman is snatched out of nature and sanctified. Morality thickens her, and by the age of some thirty years, already having two or three children, she constitutes a large lump of motionless stone. The Bible is all over studded with such likenesses. Rachel, Rebecca, Sarah, Sulamith, and Esther—are these really the works of Flora? Of that gentle plant life, that melted plasticity, which can be sensed in the women of other nations, we find in them none at all. We can, at most, think of Niobe, turned to stone by her grief, in order to image the likenesses of the souls of these wonderful women. Even Lot's wife, looking back in violation of the Divine command, turns into a pillar of stone, rather than a plant like Daphne when she rejects Apollo. Deborah is almost … a stone of wall-battering ram …

[23] Ibid., pp. 114–115.

> … In the European woman's embrace a man feels as if he were in a garden, among flower garlands open to view, touch, and smell. And next to a Jewish woman he has the sense of something thick and heavy, busy and replete with chores. No play, only obedience to the testaments and commands of nature.[24]

Elsewhere, Jewish women are brought together in Volynsky under the concept of "bread bakery." Like dough or bread, there is no music in them, Volynsky claims. He speaks with a personal, passionate, amorous rancor about the "narrow-linedness" of the Jewish virgin, about her penchant for tears: she cries "with heavy, pained tears, as if they were pouring out from that same fabric which is destined to break and tear … Everything is wept through to wetness, everything gathered in a single spontaneously seething small whirlpool." This is the Madonna in her ideal state: "sighs, birthing dreams, and tears in advance. … Such an idea could not have been invented. It had to be taken directly from the Jewish source."[25]

The center of this world, according to Volynsky, is the given "light" or "light-emitting" home, an ark-like home, which produces all its luminosity from within: "Here strong wine is drunk from a full goblet. Everything is general, gathered, and coalesced. This is the real truth of human relations, the best and eternal covenant, given unto all times."[26]

Thus, Rembrandt is more than an artist. "Not esthetics emanates from his paintings, but that moral essence, which enlivens humanity." He is contrasted with his times and surroundings; he does not melt into them, remaining profoundly suspect in their eyes. In Night Watch, Rembrandt depicts a Jewish girl with a sacrificial rooster in the center of a gala group portrait:

> To the entire world, thingly and material, terrible in its phantom magnificence, is opposed something barely graspable, contemplated by the spirit and sensed by the heart, light-bearing and not of the flesh … Precisely such ideas always aroused hatred and inflamed animosity. Because of them fires smoked and gallows were constructed. Spiritual Zion always was and will be a decomposing and at the same time constructive ferment in the history of peoples.[27]

This curious apology for the Jewish worldview, rare for Russian Symbolism, was available to the Petrograd literary elite. In 1925, K. Chukovsky wrote in his diary about Volynsky's reading of his Rembrandt at the Vsemirnaya

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[24] Ibid., pp. 129–130.
[25] Ibid., pp. 37–38.
[26] Ibid., pp. 247–248.
[27] Ibid., p. 229.

literatura editorial office (also documenting the hostile reaction by Fyodor Sologub on the same occasion). In addition, it appears to us that a number of motifs associated with Volynsky can be traced throughout Osip Mandelshtam's *The Egyptian Stamp*.

But in the second half of his Rembrandt, Volynsky suddenly, for the first time in his life, expresses doubt that pure spirituality is in fact attainable or even desirable. He comes to the idea of the need for a synthesis, and constructs one upon a metaphor he goes about unpacking, a metaphor in which the green branch of Christianity, natural and fresh, is grafted onto the "stonelike," dry as desert, pure Judaism. By contrast with his earlier pronouncements, here Volynsky is no longer speaking of the failure of Christianity. Instead, he calls it a great revelation and magical crystal which has smelted and transformed old epiphanies. But let us remind ourselves that Christianity is under attack in Russia at this point. It is the object of persecution, and, for all intents and purposes, is illegal.

The new synthesis is Rosicrucianism. Evidently, Volynsky is here responding to the occultist fads of the Soviet intelligentsia, which reached a peak in the early 1920s. It is specifically Rosicrucianism that provides him with the key to Rembrandt:

> This idea is syncretistic … Believers of the Christian faith of the 16th and 17th centuries clearly felt and graphically represented the union of two worldviews, the Old Testament and the New Testament ones. Given that, Christianity is also almost everywhere put in its proper place as one of the branches of the leafy Judaic tree. Christianity is just one small branch, just a sprig of Elohim, flowering richly in the conditions afforded by historic culture.[28]

Volynsky provides a Rosicrucian interpretation of the engraving, where concentric circles intersect from within with a cross consisting of small circles. In his view, this is an emblem of the synthesis or bridge between Elohim and Christ.

What we have before us here is a pioneering work in comparative cultural studies. The research here is only in its beginning stages, while the work as a whole remains to be inscribed within the intellectual picture of the early Soviet period. Volynsky's work was apparently well enough known, especially to members of the group referring to themselves as the "Lodge of Freemasons." The group used to gather during the Revolution and the

[28] Ibid., p. 332.

early 1920s at the apartment of the actor Khodotov, the Lodge "master"; it included art and theater people: Miklashevsky, Petrov, Yevreinov, Lyukom, Spesivtzeva, Akimov, Radakov, Tverskoy, Gibschman, Kurikhin, and many poets and actors. Once again, this union has not been researched, and the mechanism of Volynsky's influence on the culture of his time is not sufficiently clear to us.

Volynsky was strange and exotic at all stages of his literary career: expert in the Church Fathers cast as a ballet reporter, fighter against anti-Semitism, one of the first Russian Zionists—all this coexisting in the same person as the enamored interpreter of Dostoevsky. The list of contradictions can go on endlessly. This passionate and dry supporter of rationalism was always enthused by spirituality, and a religious pulse is alive beneath the surface in all his writings. It is most clearly evident in his latest, unpublished works. Especially apparent in them is Volynsky's separateness, his fateful untimeliness embodied in his pure faith in the abilities of reason.

What is this reminiscent of? This is the precious, momentarily slipping into oblivion type of the Russian Jewish idealist, naively believing, despite everything, in the light of science and the inevitability of progress. Struggling against the "dark" side of culture, which assumed different guises, Volynsky devoted his life to studying the "spiritual in art." Starting from literature, he went on searching for spiritual horizons in Byzantine and Russian religious painting, then, in liturgical foundations of theater, and finally, in dance.

This archaic and strict command of the "spiritual" is increasingly understood as a refusal of any unconscious or accidental elements in art and as a summons to clarity, rationality, and harmony. At this point, the incompatibility comes to the fore between Volynsky, a classicist and educator, and the culture of the prerevolutionary elite with its "spontaneous," "unconscious" dominant and its purely Romantic desire for the Fall. Its Romantic desires were tantamount to the elite's quest for dissolving in nature, in the masses, and in chaos—all identical to this culture's quest for death.

To this day, Volynsky is blamed for importing into literary criticism "disallowed" standards: philosophical, theological, and the rest. But the importing of such standards is a common and basic feature of Symbolism; Volynsky acted perfectly in accord with the spirit of his times. What was untimely was his attempt initially to find a balance between ecstasies of the "Dionysian" type and ecstasies of a new kind, the "Apollonian," which are perfectly light-filled. He fought against "Falls" and "falling away" of any kind: into paganism, into barbarianism, into nationalism, into conservatism, fighting at the same time against bans on metaphysics and religion, atheistic prejudice and

Satanism and fashionable types of mixture of the spiritual and the sensory. He was always fighting in the name of Reason and Spirit, which were for him synonymous, just as they had been in the early 18th century; and in the name of the universal Enlightenment truths, whose time was past. Clearly, every time he risked looking flat and unappealing, as well as risked being confused with well-behaved archaizer moralists, of whom there were plenty in Russian culture, especially among the Jews. In reality, however, Volynsky was a central figure of the modernist camp, a man ahead of his times. However, this was evident only to a small circle of admirers looking far into the distant future.

Hence his unpopularity. It cannot be explained simply by anti-Semitism; witness Volynsky's contemporaries, the Jews Gershenzon and Vengerov, who were generally acknowledged and loved. Was not Volynsky's rejection at the turn of the century similar to a religious refusal, a scenario reminiscent of the predicament of a bilious prophet? Volynsky's archaic "true" faith, i.e., his system of cultural values, turned out to be literally of the Old Testament. It took him many years to realize this.

Volynsky astounded his contemporaries with the breadth of his religious interests; from the early 1890s on, pride of place among these was occupied by Christianity. Within Russian criticism, Volynsky created a field of religious-philosophical belles-lettres centering on the neo-Christianity of Dostoevsky. Volynsky was taking off from the rightist Pochvennichestvo,[29] despite the fact that the place of Judaism in Russian culture was typically leftist: such a radical choice of route was astounding. It caught people unawares. This was his attempt not to ensconce himself on the liberal side, but to create a bridge, or himself to become precisely the bridge between the "centers" of two cultures, his own and that of the Other. preoccupation with the Judeo-Christian problem.

No memory of Volynsky as a writer on Jewish subjects has been preserved in Russia. Even so, there can be doubt that the oral tradition persistently surrounding Volynsky, and his articles on the Jewish theater were absorbed by the first-generation activists of the new culture then in the process of being created in Hebrew. Volynsky was thus a founding father of Habima and its first ideologue, the one who had explained to Habima's actors who they themselves were and who had invented the new Jewish Man. He was still remembered as such in the 1980s.

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[29] "Return to the Soil," late 1800s Russian nativist movement. Translator's note.

And yet, when it comes to novel forms of religious dialogue, new conceptual unions, and untried ideational syntheses, Volynsky's name will first be remembered in his own Russia, which had also been the first to turn away from him and his thought.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DRAMA OF FAITH AND THE NATIONAL QUESTION IN RUSSIAN-JEWISH PLAYWRIGHTS (1880–1910)

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The first decades of the 20th century formed the most brilliant period in the history of Russian Jewish playwriting. It has become common to associate this with the names of D. Aizman, O. Dymov, and S. Yushkevich. Their plays were not only staged in St. Petersburg, Moscow, and the provincial towns; they also achieved a public resonance in different regions of the Empire.[1] The question of baptism became one of the distinctive problems of Jewish and Russian Jewish drama at the beginning of the 20th century, along with the so-called "pogrom dramas" that emerged after the Kishinev Pogrom of 1903.[2]

Jewish playwrights focussed on the question of the young generation's abandonment of traditional values, or, conversely, of their return to their nation. Baptism as a central issuewas more typical of the works by Jewish authors writing in Russian than it was for Yiddish texts. As a rule, these plays combine family drama with social issues; consider, for instance, the question of the participation of the youth in the revolutionary struggle in Russia, or in the various Jewish national movements. Such dramas reflected a long-standing concern, with the debate concerning baptism unfolding on the pages of both the Jewish and the Russian Jewish press. At various points, prominent Jewish public figures, including Sh. Dubnov, Sh. An-sky, Ahad ha-Am, I. Zinberg, and others would write about an "epidemic of baptism."[3]

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[1] V. Levitina, *I evrei moya krov': evreyskaya drama—russkaya stzena* (Moscow,1991); B. Valdman, "Dramaturgiya russko-evreyskaya i perevodnaya" in Bat'ia Valdman. *Russko-evreiskaia zhurnalistika (1860–1914): Literatura I literaturnaia kritika*. (Riga, 2008), pp. 269–278.

[2] G. Eliasberg, "'Razbrosany i rasseyany:' Russko-evreyskaya dramaturgiya 1900–1910-h godov" in O. Budnitzky, O. Belova, V.M. Mochalova, eds., *Russko-evreyskaya kul'tura* (2006), pp. 216–248.

[3] S. An-sky, "Voprosy dnya: Paradoksy zhizni i smerti," *Evreysky mir* 1910, No. 1, pp. 18–20; S. Dubnov, "Ob uhodjashih," *Rassvet* 1913, No. 29, pp. 4–6; I. Zinberg, "Nelzya molchat': Pis'mo v redaktsiyu," *Rassvet* 1911, No. 48, pp. 8–9.

The conflict had had a formative impact on German Jewish literature. Suffice it to recall M. Nordau's well known play Dr. Cohn. (1897) Written on the eve of the First Zionist Congress, this became one of the first Zionist works. It was first translated into Russian and published in St. Petersburg and Kharkov in 1899, later to be included in the author's collected works (Kiev, 1902–1903; Moscow, 1913). Performances of Nordau's play met with success on different Russian stages, including the famous Korsh Theater in Moscow.[4]

The play became M. Nordau's response to Th. Herzl's drama The New Ghetto, (1894) in which the ambivalence of well-to-do Jews in Vienna is brought to the fore. Both dramas met with an enthusiastic response from the Russian Jewish intelligentsia.[5]

One of the first plays centering on the topic of baptism appeared in Russia much earlier. This was *At the Crossroads* (*Na rasputye*), a drama by Vladimir Baskin (Vilno, 1855—Petrograd, 1919) first published in the newspaper *Russky evrey* (1880, N⁰ 20–31; a separate edition appeared that same year in St. Petersburg).[6] The play went successfully on stage in metropolitan and provincial theaters.[7] This was the literary debut of the author, who, up until that time, had been a student at the Faculty of Law of the St. Petersburg University and a non-resident studentat the St. Petersburg Conservatory. He would later go on to become an authoritative music and theater critic, as well as head of the Music Section at the *Petersburgskaya Gazeta* (1887–1917); for many years, he would publish articles in the magazines *Rossiya, Niva*, and *Russkaya mysl'*. In the course of his career, Baskin also published a book of essays devoted to famous Russian composers.

Baskin's play *At the Crossroads* is deeply bound up with the spiritual experience of the young Jewish generation of the 1870s, who enthusiastically supported Russian Populism (Narodnichestvo). The play's center stage is taken by the love story of the 23-year-old Peter Rubanov, a philology student, and Verochka, the daughter of the landowner Kataev, dreaming of romantic love and family happiness in a rich house. "My desire is comfort, luxury and wealth …! You'll be a professor …," she says with confidence to Rubanov,

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[4] N.N. Sinelnikov, *Shestdesyat let na stsene* (Kharkov, 1935), pp. 235–248.

[5] A. Goldshtein, "Novoye getto," *Evreyskaya zhizn'* 1904, No. 10, pp. 113–119; A. Idelson, "O drame M. Nordau *Doktor Kon*" in idem., *Etudy po sionizmu* (SPb., 1903), pp. 1–24; B.I. Toporovsky, *Oput kharakteristiki Maksa Nordau* (Ekaterinoslav, 1902).

[6] V. Baskin, *Na rasputye* (SPb., 1880).

[7] A. Tarle, "Baskin, Vladimir Sergeevich," *Evreyskaya Entzyklopediya*: 16 tt., (SPb., 1909), V. III, p. 871.

originally her teacher of history and literature. Neither she nor her parents have any inkling of his Jewish origins. In the house of Verochka's father, Rubanov hears scornful comments made about the Jews. Russian nobles are ready to discuss—and make disparaging remarks about—the Jews, ignoring the presence of the rich banker Shtein among the guests of the house. The questions they raise are along the lines of "Whether Jews should be allowed in a decent house," and "Are there any honest people among them?" They are absolutely sure that "wherever you look, everywhere you find them: on the street, in the theater, in the clubs, and in the ballrooms." The Russian nobility resent that "Jews catch the eye, that's a purely national characteristic of theirs."

Comments made along these lines lead Rubanov to the painful realization that "Everywhere the same thing is to be heard: 'zhid!' And this is said by people who consider themselves civilized?" He has a deep sympathy for the drama of those who, just as he himself, have abandoned the Jewish way of life, led by the belief in the ideas of modern science and education. Even so, such enlightened individuals are unable to become part of Russian society because of the innate hatred this society harbors toward the Jews.

A Russian student, the son of Colonel Budilov, is the only one who sympathizes with Rubanov and is willing to respect the efforts of a Jewish boy who had had to struggle in order to be able to study in a Russian gymnasium despite the humiliation he suffered at the hands of his peers and teachers. He believes Rubanov to be an honest person who does a great deal of good for others, teaching children in Russian and Jewish schools without pay. Budilov recounts Rubanov's life story to the "civilized barbarians," as he calls the noblemen assembling in Kataev's house.

Pesakh Rubanov was the son of Yoneh, a poor tailor who had expected his child to sew and help the family. The father beat the child for stealing candles and secretly reading secular books at night. As a result, the boy ran away from home. His mother obtained the falsified documents that made it possible for him to gain admission to the gymnasium. He managed to persist through graduation from the gymnasium; he enrolled at the University. Rubanov feels that he is deceiving Vera; he resolves to tell her about his Jewish origins, but he is afraid of losing her love. The social elite opts to humiliate him for his act of deception.

Just as in Woe from Wit, the brilliant tragicomedy by A. Griboyedov, the higher echelons of society stage an outcry against the young man critical of their immorality. But while Griboyedov's hero Chatsky is declared insane, for Baskin's protagonist reprisal comes in the form of having the truth about his Jewish origins disclosed by the Jewish banker. For Shtein, this is an act

of personal revenge. Shtein's daughter Maria, influenced, as Shtein believes, by Rubanov, has refused a profitable match, opting instead to study in St. Petersburg so as to become a doctor and to be able to help the poor.

And just as in Griboyedov's play and in Gogol's Inspector General, in Baskin's work, the reader and the audience glean the truth about the forgeries and the fraud committed by the cheaters from the quarrels taking place between them. The cheating pair, Kataev and Shtein, find themselves in trouble together. Kataev reminds Shtein about his indebtedness to him, about how, in the past, the landowner had helped and sheltered the banker in his "shamelessly lying to the State treasury about his contracts. 'Hand in hand do we go in chains,'" shouts the banker to Kataev, threatening that he would tell the truth about their joint fraud and series of forgeries.

A contrast emerges between this and the Rubanov-Shtein conflict. As far as the Russian nobility are concerned, the emotional scene in which Rubanov criticizes Shtein for his greed and passion for money, his ostentatious religiosity, and his hatred for students and the new generation, is an intra-Jewish squabble, not a social conflict.

Baskin demonstrates the difference in attitude toward being Jewish between the older and the younger generation. In the dispute scene with the landowners, Shtein responds to the insulting shout of "zhid!" by proclaiming:

> I am not ashamed of being called 'zhid' … On the contrary … I am proud of the appellation … I am convinced there is something to be proud of … It is enough simply to bring up the great names of Spinoza, Börne, Heine, Mendelssohn, Meyerbeer, Antokolsky, Rubinstein, and others to silence any opponent … Only the ragged, only the poor students hide their origins …

By contrast, for Rubanov the question of his Jewishness seems a painful one. Striving to attain the ideals of progressive Russian society, he finds himself feeling an alien to all: "Jews hate me as an apostate, a heretic. And really, what have I to show as a link binding me to the suffering of the Jewish People? While the others hate me for being a Jew."

Landlords invite Rubanov to Vera's birthday party only in order to mock him. The nervous shock and the humiliation leave Vera and Rubanov dangerously ill. To rescue Vera, her parents pen a letter to the student, in which they declare that there is only one way leading into a real future—his baptism. But the young man realizes that this solution would kill his mother Leah. He is the only hope of her life. Realizing that her son has fallen in love with a Russian and is considering baptism, Leah reels in horror: she has suffered so much, sacrificing all that she could and more in order to give him an education. Yet what is the upshot? His decision to marry a Christian?

Rubanov understands that he cannot betray his mother; he cannot "replace faith ("vera" in Russian) with Verochka," sounding out what amounts to a sarcastic pun. "Everything is alien to me … as long as I continue to wear this fatal appellation of 'Jew.' But I am obligated to wear it, it is my duty …". He asks his mother for forgiveness, and then shoots himself. The last words spoken in the play are: "… sorry for him though he was a Jew."

Written in 1880, Baskin's play reflected the disputes concerning the Jewish question, which were unfolding on the pages of the Russian press, especially in the Novoye vremya gazette headed by A. Suvorin (editor since 1874), who supported the anti-Semitic hysteria of the day. Suvorin's gazette published a scandalous letter written anonymously (*Novoye vremya*, March 23,1880). The letter's title, "Zhid idet," ("Here Comes the Kike") was a play upon a famous coinage by N. Mikhailovsky, "raznochinets prishol" ("The commoner intellectual is here"), used in an 1874 text, in which the author welcomed students of non-noble origin struggling to obtain a higher education. The letter in *Novoye vremya* came out against admitting Jews to Russian universities. This inspired a series of similar publications in provincial press.[8]

But the discussion about Jewish students and the fear of the influence of the Jewish intelligentsia had reared its head considerably earlier, gathering momentum in the 1870s. For example, it came to the fore in Dostoevsky's "Writer's Diary," the author's regular column in the periodical *The Citizen* from 1873 until a year before his death in 1881.

The Russian Jewish press at the time was genuinely attentive to Jewish students' concerns. Articles appeared periodically about Russian legislation bearing upon these issues and the state education policy. A. Kaufman's article "Are the Jews learning?" ("Uchatsya li evrei?"), published in February 1880 in the newspaper *Rassvet*, provided the impetus for the scandalous anonymous letter's publication in Novoye vremya in March of the same year.[9]

Jewish moneymakers are cast in a negative light in other texts written during the same period, as well. This is the case in the novel by L. Levanda *Confession of a Businessman* (Ispoved' deltza), also published in 1880. Baskin's

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[8] John Doyle Klier, *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question, 1855–1881* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 404–407.

[9] A. Kaufman, "A.S. Suvorin: K yubileyu ego literaturno-isdatelskoy deyatel'nosti," *Novoye vremya*, "Druzya i vragi evreev," No. 3. (SPb., 1908); for discussions and publications concerning Jewish students during this period, see: Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002).

play thus came as a response to the publications of the day. In a review of the play published in *Russkiy evrei* (1880), J. Katsenelson (Buki ben Iogli) wrote that the cause of the tragedy of the main protagonist was not the humiliating mockery of his Russian milieu, but his own attempt to hide his Jewishness. "The source of their suffering lies within themselves," he wrote, comparing Rubanov to to an acrobat dancing on a tightrope: "one wrong move—and he will be exposed, his Semitic origins given away." A physician by profession, J. Katsenelson diagnosed this as "a mental disease consisting in the lack of respect for self. But diplomas and patents are not given for such respect. More respect for self, less shame, less cowardice and you, gentlemen sufferers, are saved."[10]

Baskin's hero rejects baptism as a remedy for such "illness." However, his suicide shows the insolubility of the problem in the consciousness of the Russian Jewish intelligentsia of the period just before the pogroms of 1881. The pogroms became a turning point in the history of Jewish national movements.

Another solution to the conflict between love, religion, and family is suggested in *Two Truths*, an early play by Osip Dymov (1899); a manuscript of the play has been preserved in the archives of the prerevolutionary Censorship for Plays at the State Theater Library in St. Petersburg.[11] At the time of the publication of the play, Dymov was a student at the Lesnoy Institute (Institute of Forestry) in St. Petersburg, from which he graduated in 1902. Dymov had begun to publish articles in the press as early as 1892.

In his drama, Dymov puts the question of baptism in the name of love in a way different from Baskin. Dymov's main protagonist, the 27-year-old lawyer Joseph Schiffers, is about to marry Jenny, the daughter of a wealthy Jewish family. The couple have known each other for more than eight years, beginning at the time when Joseph became Jenny's teacher. However, in her absence, he takes a fancy to Liza, the daughter of the poor Russian clerk Golubovsky. Georgiy Zatursky, who plays the role of "evil genius" for Joseph as well as other heroes of this drama, introduces the lawyer to the young Russian.

Dymov repeatedly stresses the similarity between the Golubovsky family and the Marmeladovs from Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, as if suggesting that he is delineating a new variety of the "humiliated and insulted."

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[10] Buki ben-Iogli, "Stradal'tzy," *Russkiy evrei* 1880, N⁰ 32, pp. 1274–1276. I am grateful to B. Valdman for indicating this source to me.

[11] O. Dymov, *Dve pravdy*, Archives of the State Theater Library (SPb.), F. 37037.

However, in Dymov's work, this position is assigned to the poor urban Russian family, while the Jewish family belong to the middle class. Most of these Jews live without luxury, but with modest dignity.

When it turns out that Lisa is pregnant, the protagonist confronts the question: can he undergo baptism in order to marry Liza, thus saving her and the future child (in contrast to the lot of her elder sister Kate who, probably seduced by Zatursky, hangs herself earlier in the play)? An alternative is to try to "buy off" the poor Russian family. This is what Joseph's brother Leon suggests to Jenny, who initially resolves to fight for her beloved. The brothers' uncle Aaron, having devoted his life to raising his two nephews, cannot tolerate the thought of Liza as Joseph's wife, to say nothing of Joseph's prospective baptism. He, too, has resolved to restore the former family peace. The old man is ready to give Liza his last money, which he has set aside for his own funeral, in return for her departure from the city. At the end of the play, Joseph decides to stay with Liza, to opt for baptsm and so to save her future. Uncle Aaron angrily leaves the house. Joseph proclaims that there must be "two truths," rather than just one: the truth of mercy to an individualperson besides the truth of allegiance to one's national religion and family.

Is there any reconciliation? The question becomes central in Dymov's early play. Joseph's mother tends toward mercy, accepting her future bride. But Jenny's heart is broken forever, and old aged Aaron abandons the family, condemning his nephew's apostasy and betrayal of the family's religious tradition.

Later, the problem of baptism would be considered from a very different perspective in Dymov's widely acclaimed play Shma, Israel! (1907), written in the years following the First Russian Revolution.[12] The play focusses on the horror and the tragic consequences of the anti-Jewish pogroms, the deaths and the misery of the victims.

There is a striking similarity between the names of the characters in these plays. The young man, Leon Schiffer, a graduate of the Mining Institute in St. Petersburg, returns to his native country town at a time when his Jewish family is in danger. Having left home seven years previously, at this hazardous moment he decides to rejoin his relatives. Leon is among those trying to protect a Jewish shop against looting. He is mortally wounded in the struggle. His approaching death is a tragedy for his parents. His father

[12] O. Dymov, *Slushay, Israel!* [Shma Isroel!]: Drama v 3-h deystviyah (SPb., 1907).

Aaron says: "Kaddish is a prayer to recite over the fresh grave of one's parents … Our sons are our prayer. But they, our prayers, have died in the streets …"[13]

From a note that Leon leaves behind, his family find out that he has been baptized seven years earlier. Conversion to Christianity was the only way for him to a higher education. This piece of news becomes another source of grief and shock for Leon's parents. Next, the Rabbi refuses to organize a funeral or to bury Leon in a Jewish cemetery. The grief of Leon's father, cast as the suffering of a new Job, becomes the main subject of Dymov's play.

When official confirmation of Leon's baptism reaches his parents, the father refuses to take part in the funeral. Thousands of Jews come to the cemetery to bid farewell to the victims of the pogrom, but only three people, including Leon's sister, walk behind the coffin of Leon, who is buried in the Christian cemetery. His weeping mother asks: "Is he a stranger? He died for them as a hero … But they threw him away, letting him be buried in a strange land, they put a cross on him …" Old Aaron is unable to bear the suffering. Demanding justice of God, he decides to put an end to his own life: "If they ask me, Aaron, why do you come early? I will answer, I accompany my son, because he has lost his way and needs to be shown it."

The play was accorded numerous positive reviews in the press and was successfully performed in Russian and Yiddish theaters. The issue of baptism receives further treatment in Dymov's novel *Avoiding the Cross* (1911), in which the author sarcastically portrays the mental confusion of Mikhail Slezkin, the baptized hero serving as an extraordinary lecturer (privatdotsent) at the University of St. Peteresburg.[14]

The longstanding issue of baptism as a ticket to European culture (as per an image borrowed from Heinrich Heine) or a pass to modernity, its education and science, had another tragic twist added to it during the years of the First Russian Revolution. The question was voiced in plays written in Yiddish and Russian as a response to the Kishinev Pogrom and to the revolutionary events of 1905–1907; for example, in dramas such as Dora by A. Abramova, *Pasynki zhizni* (*Life's Stepchildren*) by D. Benarye, or Di familie Tzvi by D. Pinsky (rendered into Russian with the title Pogromniye dni, or Pogrom Days).

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[13] Ibid., p. 16.

[14] O. Dymov, *Beguschiye kresta* (*Velikiy chelovek*) (Berlin, 1911); V. Khazan, "Pechal'ny vesel'chak Osip Dymov: Shtrikhi k portretu," *Paralleli: Russko-evreyskiy istoriko-literaturny almanakh* (Moscow, 2005), pp. 186–202.

At this juncture, M. Kissin's play *Freedom of Conscience, or Mother and Son*, published in Ekaterinoslav in 1909, needs to be brought up.[15] The action begins in the early 1880s, continuing through the revolutionary years as it traces the fate of the Jewish narodniks. The play's protagonists, Eliezer Zabretsky and Nadezhda, daughter of the pomeschik landowner Bogdanova, are in love with each other; however, Eliezer's baptism is a prerequisite standing in the way of their future union.

Eliezer's mother cannot accept the choice made by her son; she arrives at the house of the bride, begging the young woman to cancel the wedding. She cannot watch the baptism of her only son: "This will kill me … What right could supercede a mother's right to her son?" She asserts that Eliezer would not remain a good Christian for long: "What will happen when the Jew speaks out in him? … Betraying his Judaism, he dishonors Christianity." Out of pity and sympathy for the mother, Nadezhda refuses Eliezer's proposal of marriage.

The author depicts Eliezer's inner struggle, his intellectual confusion, and his doubts on the eve of the baptismal ceremony. In his dreams, Eliezer sees the shadow of his dead father, suffering from pangs of conscience. His decision to leave Nadezhda is the sacrifice that he makes as per the requirement set forth by his mother.

Ten years later, the paths of the former couple cross again. Eliezer has joined the revolutionary underground. He is arrested. Having no legal documents that could confirm his right as a Jew to live in central Russia, he is evicted. Escorted by policemen, Eliezer appears in the Bogdanovs' house one stormy night, where the travelers ask for shelter. This the point at which Eliezer meets his former fiancée.

At first, Nadezhda demands explanations, knowing nothing of the reason for his arrest. Eliezer responds bitterly, explaining that he has committed his crime by being born. His very existence and desire to live amount to a violation: "My crime is that I am a son of the great country of Antiquity. I was humiliated, they trampled my human rights, and there is nobody to help me defend them. But now is a time when our national consciousness, the glimpses of our national ego are starting to revive." Sympathizing with his ideas, Bogdanova says that as a Christian, she believes that sooner or later mankind will appreciate the Jews and do them justice; hatred and

[15] M. Kissin, *Svoboda sovesti ili mat' i syn* (*Freedom of Conscience, or Mother and Son*, Ekaterinoslav, 1909).

envy of the Jews will disappear. The novel turns taken by this exchange reflect the new national ideas the 1890s.

The concluding part of the play is set contemporaneous with the events of the Revolution of 1905. In his conversations with Russian socialists, Zabretsky explains the specifics of the Jewish national struggle. The play demonstrates the development of national ideas among the Jewish intelligentsia from general populist notions to Zionism. Zabretsky asserts that the Russian Populists have more solid of a grounding than their Jewish counterparts, who, in addition to the class struggle, must also fight for their national rights. Jewish nationalism is a protest against violence. Pogroms were a protest against freedom, but the mob only hunted down Jews, not Socialist Revolutionaries, not Social Democrats, and not Populists. Thus, "the first requirement must be the Land of Israel, and only then must we proclaim: Bread for the hungry, freedom for the oppressed!"

Zabretsky devotes his life to the revolutionary struggle, but he never achieves personal happiness. At the moment of his mother's death, he exclaims: "Fate! You broke my hope, you killed my love … All you left me was a clean conscience and the ability to mourn over the body of my mother." Nadezhda Bogdanova also shares populist ideas. She gives her land to the peasants, and starts to teach their children. She sends a peasant to warn Zabretsky about an upcoming pogrom. She tries to stop the violence, but it is too late. Zabretsky and the Russian socialists are killed. In his house, standing before the corpse of the mother and her son, Nadezhda bids farewell to the Jew "who was so dear to the heart of a Christian woman." Eliezer's baptism, unrealized, has not violated the union of mother and son, but it has also left two lovers forever unhappy.

The issue of baptism and its negative consequences for Jewish families was taken up by the famous sculptor I. Ginsburg in his play At the Son's (U syna).[16] The author read his work at a meeting of the Jewish Literary Society in St. Petersburg on October 6, 1913. In his short introductory speech, the author explained that his first experiment in literature should be considered as his own thoughts sounded out loud in the form of a play, because "Jewish life itself is genuine drama."[17] The play was published in 1919.

The plot focusses on Max, a gifted sculptor, who is forced to leave St. Petersburg for Paris in order to advance his professional career. Many years

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[16] I.Y. Ginsburg, *U syna*: Drama v 3-h aktah(SPb.: Antey, 1919).

[17] [S. R-r,] "V evreyskom literaturno-nauchnom obschestve," *Novy Voskhod*,1913, No. 41, pp. 36–38.

earlier, his father has managed to obtain false documents from abroad, which confirmed that he, his wife, and his children were all Lutherans. The documents ensured the family's right of residence in St. Petersburg, where the children were entitled to the right to attend gymnasium. But the original document forgery is suddenly discovered. This takes place after the untimely death of the elder son, who had become a lawyer. In order to embark upon his career, he, too, had to procure a certificate confirming that he belonged to a Catholic parish. The document cost him 10 rubles. As a result, the rabbi refuses to bury the deceased brother in a Jewish cemetery. But Minna, the deeply religious mother and a rabbi's daughter herself, cannot accept such a decision. Overcoming monstrous difficulties, she makes efforts to transport her son's corpse, in order to bury him at a Jewish cemetery near the border.

The play centers upon thoughts about the destiny of her younger son Max. In Paris for ten years since his brother's death, Max has received numerous awards and recognition as a fashionable sculptor. Yet he continues to yearn for spiritual "wholeness," which, as it seems to him, is possible only in Russia. The play features a series of discussions between Max, his uncle, and his sister about problems in education and the life stories of talented young Jews who found themselves unable to advance into the future their talents seemed to vouchsafe them. Max wanted to be recognized at home, but the real situation in Russia and the unfair governmental policy toward the Jews were such as to make this impossible. Faced with no choice, Jews try to oppose the tyranny of government and its officials by illegal means. The play raises the problem of Jewish intellectuals forced to choose between loyalty to their national religion, love of their families, and their professional careers. The author demonstrates his preference in favor of national and personal dignity. The play ends tragically with the death of Minna, who comes to visit the grave of her elder son and dies while next to it, as if in fulfillment of her wish to be buried together with him.

In the play *To the Old God* (1916) by B. Pisarevsky (penname of B.E. Schreiber), the problem of baptism is considered from the standpoint of traditional Judaism, whose adherents speak out in harsh accusation against their children's forsaking the values of their parents.[18] Their inflexibility can only lead to tragedy. In contrast to the dramas mentioned above, in which

[18] B. Pisarevsky, *K Staromu Bogu* ... Drama v chetureh dejstviyah (Petrograd, 1916).

the conflict unfolding in middle-class families is represented, Schreiber shows the attitude of the Jewish masses to baptism, as well as their constant suspiciousness of "educated Jews."

Dovid, a water carrier, embodies an irreconcilable rejectionist view. He accuses the "educated" of betraying the Jewish religion by their interest in material gain and their profit seeking. He does not believe their repentance can be genuine: "They who have abandoned the Old God, for them there is no return. Let them not bring disease into our family … A water carrier's conscience is cleaner than a doctor's. Our religion stands only on the water carriers, the cobblers, and the tailors. The educated have undermined our faith … we are suffocating because of them." The melamed Yankel objects: "A water carrier will always remain a water carrier. Neither a Rambam nor a Mendelssohn will come from a water carrier. And Herzl, thank God, was no water-carrier, either."[19]

The central conflict of the play unfolds in the family of the melamed Yankel in connection with his son Berel's return home after a ten-year-long absence. Berel is now a university graduate; he has become a physician. The family is proud of his success; however, Berel himself is disappointed and dreams of finding peace among his family at home. He acknowledges that he has remained a stranger to the city and to non-Jewish society. The play considers the question of true religious values, calling for mercy upon those returning to their native environment and experiencing mental anguish.

His old father is shocked when Berel admits that he has been baptized in order to be able to study medicine. The melamed, unable to endure the humiliation of this revelation, dies of grief. No less dramatic of an event is played out on the day of the funeral, when Dovid refuses to permit Berel to join the Jewish ceremony at the cemetery. Berel voices his anguish and pain in a passionate monologue. He had come home dreaming of being forgiven; he had planned to help his elders. A conciliatory call from Mottele, Dovid's son, puts an end to the quarrel. Mottele believes that the sincerely repentant apostates should not be alienated; it is rather a must to welcome and rejoice in their return. In this play, Pisarevsky presents the interaction among different social groups, gesturing toward a path leading to reconciliation. Based on this play, a film was produced in 1919 by the Mirograf studio in Odessa, with the famous actor M. Fishson as Dovid.[20]

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[19] Ibid., p. 25.

[20] "Malen'kiye odesskiye novosti," *Odesskiye novosti*, January 18, 1919.

A special place belongs to the drama *Israel and Christ, or the New Faith* (*Israel i Christos, ili novaya vera*) by I. Teneromo (penname of I. Fainerman, based on the author's original last name translated into Latin). Isaak Borisovich Fainerman (1862, Kremenchug–1925?) was an ardent admirer and follower of the religious and philosophical ideas of L. Tolstoy.[21] The manuscript of the play is preserved in Teneromo's personal archives in RGALI (Moscow).[22] It is reasonable to assume that the play was written in the 1910s, after Tolstoy's death. The most authoritative source of information about I. Teneromo to date is the edition of L. Tolstoy's complete works in 90 volumes (1928–1958), where Teneromo's name comes up in nearly every book of Tolstoy's letters and diaries (beginning from 1885).

Their acquaintance began in spring 1885, when the 23-year-old student sent a letter to Yasnaya Polyana. He wrote that he owed his spiritual rebirth to Tolstoy. Citing his indebtedness to Tolstoy's essays "Confession" ("Ispoved' "), "What I believe" ("V chem moya vera"), and "A Short Summary of the Gospel" ("Kratkoye izlozheniye Evangeliya"), the young man wrote that these works "shone the light of consciousness and understanding of … truly human good sense, which had been slumbering in me … in the stifling darkness of the materialist worldview … There was a time (long ago) when I felt a desire to preach the denial of the existence of the external God, our Jehovah (I am a Jew)." The author of the letter admitted that earlier he had himself passionately preached materialistic ideas: "If, indeed, our Jehovah exists, why did He allow the terrible evil of inequality …?"[23]

Speaking about his original enthusiasm for the natural sciences, Pisarev's articles, and Turgenev's hero Bazarov, the young man admitted that he came to "a total contempt for life and all that lives." It was Tolstoy's works along with the Historical Letters by P. Lavrov that saved him. At the end of the letter, the young man asks for permission to continue his correspondence with Tolstoy.

Thus began the nearly 25-year-long story of personal contact between the great Russian writer L. Tolstoy and Isaak Fainerman, an active participant of the "intelligentsia" agricultural settlements movement, organizer of an agricultural community in the village Glodossy in Kherson Province (1889–1890), journalist, playwright, and social activist, who published numerous

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[21] G.A. Eliasberg, "Teneromo—provintzialny korrespondent Tolstogo," *Filologicheskiye nauki*, 2009, No. 5, pp. 45–55.

[22] I. Teneromo, *Israel i Khristos, ili novaya vera*, RGALI, F. 497, Op.1, F. 16.

[23] Idem., Letter to Tolstoy, 1885, Archives of the State Tolstoy Museum. F.1, pp. 1–2.

articles and stories about his spiritual mentor in both provincial and large city periodicals. Most of these pieces were collected in the four volumes of his memoirs, stories, and legends devoted to L. Tolstoy.[24] His brochure Tolstoy on the Jews met with some critical responses; the brochure was published in 1908, in the same year as his book Tolstoy's Living Words (Zhiviye rechi Tolstogo), which marked the eightieth anniversary of the great writer.[25] Fainerman's second letter to Tolstoy is dated August 26, 1886. Momentous developments had taken place in the life of the young man during the intervening period, develoments which would leave a significant mark on his future. Details of Fainerman's biography during this period can be gleaned from the memoirs of Tolstoy's son Ilya, the Yasnaya Polyana governess A. Seron, and Tolstoy's followers M.A. Schmidt and A.S. Butkevich.[26] Most of these texts were composed in a spirit of respect and sympathy for Isaak Fainerman, who first appeared in Yasnaya Polyana in May 1885.

In the letters of this period which he addressed to his wife, Tolstoy repeatedly mentions Fainerman, writing about their conversation over tea in his house, their work together with peasants in the fields, or his lessons with peasant children.[27] These letters became an important source shedding light on Fainerman's baptism, which took place on August 17 of the same year. The letters also elucidate some of the repercussions that his baptism had on other events in Fainerman's life and the lives of those close to him.[28]

Teneromo's play *Israel and Christ* is based on a series of developments from the author's own biography. In a symbolic prologue set in in Galilee, the author imagines the spirit of the Patriarch Israel appearing to Christ and his disciples at the time of Jesus' sending the disciples to preach among the People of Israel. Foreseeing the tragic future, the Patriarch asks Christ to

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[24] Idem., *Vospominaniya o L.N. Tolstom i ego pis'ma* (SPb., 1905); idem., *Zhiviye rechi Tolstogo* (Odessa, 1908); idem., *V Yasnoy Polyane, Zhizn' i rechi Tolstogo*, (SPb., 1908); idem., *Zhiviye slova L.N. Tolstogo za posledniye 25 let ego zhizni* (Moscow,1912).

[25] Idem., *L.N. Tolstoy o evreyah* (Odessa, 1908). The second edition (Moscow, 1910) was published with the introductory note by O.Y. Pergament (1868–1909), prominent lawyer and Odessa Regional Deputy to the Third Russian State Duma.

[26] A.S. Butkevich, Vospominaniya: L.N. Tolstoy (*Letopisi gosudarstvennogo literaturnogo museya*, Bk 12, V.1, Moscow, 1938) pp. 350–354; E.E. Gorbunova-Posadova, *Drug L.N. Tolstogo Maria Aleksandrovna Schmidt* (Moscow, 1929), pp. 24–25; A. Seron. *Graf Lev Tolstoy* (trans. from the German, Moscow, 1896), pp. 110–114; I.L. Tolstoy, *Moi vospominaniya* (Moscow, 1969), pp. 196–200.

[27] L.N. Tolstoy, Pis'ma k Sofye Andreevne Tolstoy, October 12, 16, 18, 20, 22, 25, 27–28 1885; April 9, 29, 1886; in L.N. Tolstoy, *Polnoye sobraniye sochineniy: v 90 tt.*, Vol. 83, pp. 510–526, 561–565.

[28] August 17–18, 1885, ibid., pp. 506–507.

annul the cruel sentence against his descendants, who are destined to suffer a captivity worse than what they had experienced in Egypt or in Babylon. In exile (Golus), the nations surrounding them will believe in Jesus, but, deluded by their own madness, will commit heinous crimes against the Jews.

The play focusses on the baptism of the protagonist, Yasha Rosenzweig, a Jewish student at the Law Faculty. Yasha leaves the University, his parents, his young wife and baby daughter, in order to follow his spiritual mentor, the writer Prince Titanov. The First Act opens with Yasha's conversations with his parents and his wife Rosa just before his departure. Yasha's mother weeps as she sews him a wide shirt resembling the one Titanov wears in a portrait. The mother knows that her son has been carried away by his reading, while the prince does not follow his own religious teachings in his personal life. The son objects. Earlier, he was a revolutionary, he argues. He would speak out against the Tsar and the police, but now a new way of life has been revealed to him—the life full of love of the oppressed and the downtrodden. He dreams of living like the peasants, like those who suffer.

The father does not reply, even though his son's departure is about to cause great difficulties for the family which has no right of residence in a town beyond the Pale of Jewish Settlement. As a maskil, the father has suffered his share of injustice and persecution at the hands of the Jewish community. He expects the Prince's house to provide a safe haven for his son. The father pronounces a monologue about the similarity between the tenets of ancient Christianity and Judaism. He reminisces that not the early Christianity of Jerusalem, but rather the Christianity of Rome, Byzantium, and Alexandria are the ones to have transformed Jewish life into ongoing torment and pain, "a hell steaming with our blood." Frightened by the possibility of Yasha's baptism, the father demands an oath from his son that he would not give up his Judaism. The play's First Act ends with a scandal stirred up by Rosa's father, who takes both the Rosenzweig father and son to task as apostates, demanding that Yasha give his daughter Rosa a divorce.

The Second Act opens with Yasha working in the field side by side with peasants and the Prince. During a break, when the Princess, wearing traditional folk dress, offers them dinner, one of the peasants asks Yasha to teach the village children, there being no teacher at the local school. Titanov likes the idea. He discusses it with his guest, a landowner and Chairman of Local Government (uyezdnaya uprava), Aleksandr Ivanovich. Yasha is inspired by the prospect, but then Titanov informs him about the doubts voiced by his neighbor, who has expressed concern about Yasha's being a student. A student could be suspected by the inspectors of promoting populist ideas; another obstacle consists in Yasha's Jewish affiliation. Yasha tells

Titanov about the oath he has given his father. But then it turns out that a letter has arrived from his father, freeing Yasha from his oath in light of the father's awareness of Yasha's difficulties. Yasha reads this letter to Titanov. The Prince admires the spiritual strength of the father along with the youthful energy and commitment of the son. He tries to explain the symbolism of Yasha's dream of a Temple under construction.

For the sake of his ideal of serving the people, Yasha agrees to the baptism required of him. He learns the basics of the Christian faith with ease. The Russian priest admires his ability to interpret religious texts. The Third Act shows Yasha's christening in the presence of a peasant crowd gathered in the village church. The peasants are shaken by Yasha's unexpected fainting. While the ceremony is in progress, Yasha has a vision of his synagogue on Yom Kippur. Rather than joy, he feels deep regret as he walks out of the church, wearing a cross on a pink ribbon. The only person in whom he confides is the Jewish tailor Nuhim, arrived specially in order to express his resentment of Yasha's betrayal. Outside the church, a policeman hands Yasha a document to sign, thus expressing his agreement to educate his own children in the spirit of the Christian faith. Yasha repents deeply his decision to join a different faith.

His baptism causes Yasha great suffering; he understands that taking such a step was a compromise with his conscience. He is denied the teacher's position he had sought at the village school. He continues to live in the countryside among the peasants and to preach the ideas of a commune. A retired soldier, Ivan Shaly, is suspicious of the Jew; in the soldier's eyes, Yasha remains a stranger and a "zhid," his baptism notwithstanding. Shocked by Ivan's words, Yasha exclaims: "What have I done to you by being baptized? I have caused much grief to my parents and my wife, and even more to myself. But what evil have I done to you?" Yasha realizes that he has brought suffering to his own relatives. His daughter dies, while his wife's family demands a divorce for Rosa. Yasha'ss mother is pained at his father's funeral when the synagogue shammes refuses to pronounce the name of the dead man's son.

The play has a tragic conclusion. Yasha is denounced by Ivan. Soldiers surround the house where the peasants have gathered in order to discuss the principles of the commune. The soldiers beat up the peasants and drag them out of the house by force. Yasha is brutalized. He dies in the hands of his wife and Titanov.

Teneromo appeals to elements of his own biography in creating the plot of the play (baptism, denial of a teacher's position, demand of the father-in-law for a divorce, the father's death, the poverty in the village,

the strained relationship with Sofia Andreevna Tolstoy). The play describes events taken from real life at Yasnaya Polyana, including the discussion of the commune episode. The text of the play reproduces almost verbatim some exchanges from Teneromo's memoir stories "Day of Simplification" ("Den' oproscheniya") and "The Yasnaya Polyana Commune" ("Yasnopolyanskaya kommuna").[29]

Thus, the play by Teneromo reiterates the same basic motifs familiar from the plays mentioned earlier in this paper. Just as in Baskin's and Kissin's plays, the death of the hero becomes the only way to resolve the central conflict. Like B. Pisarevsky and other Russian Jewish playwrights, Teneromo appeals to the problematic of communication between educated youth, their traditional families, and the Jewish masses, and between the tenets of populism and socialism and the ideas of national rebirth. The question of baptism became a key challenge facing Russian Jewish playwriting, which also aimed to reflect the strained relationship between Jewish and Russian university students and between the educated and the folk masses, as well as between the Jews and Russian legislation and state educational policy.

[29] I. Teneromo, *Zhivye slova L.N. Tolstogo*, pp. 127–130,151–156.

CHAPTER FIVE

A PHILO-SEMITIC NARRATIVE IN THE ANTI-SEMITIC DISCOURSE: THE CASE OF VYACHESLAV IVANOV

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Those interested in an adequate understanding of Vyacheslav Ivanov's statements concerning the Jewish theme should first of all consider a peculiar nature of his discourse. Vyacheslav Ivanov's discourse was built in a supra-personal way—as a speech devoted to the eternal, divine and transpersonal Truth. However, the Truth for Ivanov was not a rational concept but rather a myth contained in ancient religious traditions. Therefore, his statements about the Truth were built as an articulation of messages, which seem to be transmitted not by the speaker himself but by some impersonal mythological tradition obediently expressed by the speaker. As Lev Shestov profoundly and fairly noted, Ivanov aspired to express not his personal thoughts and feelings, but whatever the Truth had ordered him to think and feel.[1]

Ivanov intentionally used to highlight the statements that were especially important for him, thus emphasizing their particular, supra-personally true nature. "I proclaim the dogma of the orthodoxy of art," he once (in his article "On Sect and Dogma") said (2, 613).[2] In fact, he could have said something like this about almost every text he had written, for he put the very presentation of the text—at least ideally—on the same footing as proclaiming the dogma in the name of some or other authoritative collective tradition—be it the Church, Christianity, Art, Symbolism, or the Russian Soul, etc. It should be also noted that Ivanov usually interpreted the term "dogma" not as a specific, rationally formulated proposition (as does the Church's tradition), but as a mythological narrative. Ivanov's attitude

[1] L. Shestov. Viacheslav Velikolepnyi (K kharakteristike russkogo upadochnichestva), *Potestas Clavium* (Vlast' kliuchei), Moscow, 2007, p. 279.

[2] In this way I refer to the numbers of the volume and the page of the Ivanov's Collected writings in Russian: Viach. Ivanov, Sobranie sochinenii. V 4 t. Bruxelles, 1971–1987.

we are describing here clearly reflects the traits of a traditional Russian imposture (though, definitely, not a petty one of Gogol's Khlestakov, but an exalted, pathetic and culturally respectable one). Besides, such an attitude had its objective grounds. Ivanov's text-generation process was not only aimed at creation of new texts within the established discourse space of the Russian literature, but also at inducement of new, external discourses as well. The significance of Ivanov's Hymns to Dionysus, or his stylization of a Greek tragedy ("Tantalus"), or his mystical meditations (namely and specifically in his poem "Man"), or his translations of Novalis' works is not restricted to the introduction of some new thematic and stylistic elements into the Russian culture. They have also enriched the Russian culture with comprehensive discourse complexes, which made multilingual voices of Hellenism, Dionysism, Renaissance Hermeticism, German Romanticism, and etc. sound in Russian.

The impersonalistic tendency to "displace a system-defined and psychological person" and thus promote an impersonalistic "objective artistic structure",[3] to replace the author as an individual creator of an individual textual structure with the herald of supra-personal discourse is known to be one of the leading tendencies of the Modernism-epoch literature. Vyacheslav Ivanov imagined himself to be, and really was such a Modernist author—a herald of discourse. So he envisaged himself and was in his whole creative work, just as he envisaged himself and was in his declarations devoted to the Jewish theme.

Ivanov's article "On the ideology of the Jewish question" (1915) was his main and the only full-scale public declaration devoted to the Jewish theme. This article was thoroughly commented by S. Markish in the context of the general theme: Ivanov and Jewry.[4] Nevertheless, I consider his commentary to be far from exhaustive; besides, Ivanov's article itself, though small, is so extremely intense and complex in its content, full of ambiguities and mythological allusions, that it is immensely significant. Therefore, I believe it would be useful to analyze it in detail.

The key point of Ivanov's article "On the ideology of the Jewish question" is the restoration of the "forgotten" "holy and true Tradition" of Christianity

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[3] J. Mukaržovsky, *Kapitoly z česke poetiky*, Vol. 2. Praha, 1928, s. 294. On this theme see also: V. Paperny. Poetica russkogo simvolizma: personologicheskii aspekt, in: *Andrei Belyi: Publikatsii. Issledovaniia*, Moscow, 2002, pp. 153–168.

[4] S. Markish, Vjacheslav Ivanov et les Juifs, *Cahiers du monde russe*, vol. 25, No 1 (Paris, 1984), pp. 35–47.

that the Church is a direct heiress of Judaism: "the more vivid and profound the mind of a Christian is, the more vivid and profound is his realization that he is the son of the Church—I would not merely say: a Philo-Semite, but a real Semite in Spirit." (3, 308–309).

As Ivanov notes, not only are the sons of the Church "Semites in their spirit", i.e., Jews in their souls, but the Church itself as a mystical body, "the body of Abraham's semen" (3, 309), is, so to say, a collective mystical Jew. These Ivanov's declarations directly ascend to the Apostle Paul's words: "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:29). However, this idea actually ascends only and solely to the words of the Apostle, whose "testimony" Ivanov specifically mentions (3, 309), but not to his teaching.

Paul claimed that the promise given to Abraham by the God "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:3) contains the foresight that "God would justify the heathen through faith" (Galatians 3:8). Besides, when Paul—quite forcibly—interpreted another God's promise to Abraham "and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 22:18), he claimed that this promise does not refer to Jews but exclusively to Christ, as "He saith not, 'And to seeds', as of many; but as of one, 'And to thy seed', which is Christ." (Galatians 3:16). This exegesis allows Paul to prove that, on the one hand, in case of newly converted pagans, the fulfillment of the "Law" (Torah's requirements) adopted by the initial Church—is unnecessary and even inappropriate, while, on the other hand, the Advent of Christ had cancelled the Law itself and replaced it with the Faith: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law" (Galatians 3:13); "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster." (Galatians 3:24–25). Being an exceptional "Abraham seed", Christ turns the pagans—his new believers—into Abraham's heirs—apparently, not biologically, but in a religious and legal sense.

Yet, all these details of Paul's teaching are absolutely irrelevant for Ivanov. Ivanov is seeking—and finds—authoritative "evidence" presented by Paul (3, 309), which might, as he believes, allow him to avow his own mythological narrative, which describes the centuries-old history of Christian-Jewish relationship to be "an ancient truth of the Church"—to be a Dogma. The content of this Ivanov's narrative is as follows. Christianity and Judaism are two parts of the mystical body of the Church, which is at the same time "the true, though invisible, body of Christ, and, through Christ, the body of Abraham's semen". This body was holistic in its initial state and will be holistic at the End of Time. However, at a certain moment in sacred history, this

mystical Judeo-Christian body split "like the veil of the Jerusalem Temple at the moment of the Death on the Cross", it "was torn in two; and the Jewish part is painfully seeking the whole, languishes and suffers from jealousy, and is bitterly angry with the other part, which, in turn, longs for reunification and entirety of the mystical Israel" (3, 309).

Ivanov builds his mythological narrative on the Judeo-Christian entirety and strife, as a sort of mystical love story, whose essence consists in peripetia of obvious enmity and hidden passion of the parties.

The role of the male protagonist of this story is assigned to the Church.[5] And the love of the Church to Jewry is described by Ivanov as the realization of all possible forms of the male Eros. This love is simultaneously a sexual love of a Groom for his betrothed Bride, and a filial love of a son for his Mother ("the one in Church loves Mary, the one who loves Mary loves Israel as his Mother"), and a brotherly love for a descendant of the common Father (a son of the Church as "Abraham's child" "through baptism" is presented by Ivanov as "in a mystical sense, a brother of Abraham's offspring").

The female character of Ivanov's mythopoetic story on Jewish-Christian relationships is the Jewry, which is presented by him as the betrothed Bride of the Church. Explaining this pretty daring mythopoetic innovation, Ivanov depicts the Jewish attitude to the Church as a certain kind of the female Eros that expresses love via hatred. As Ivanov states it, "despite her secret and subconscious love" for Christ, her betrothed Groom, the Bride-Jewry "hates him"—but hates "with such a peculiar hatred that springs from love offence and jealousy, which the Hellenes defined as the negative face of Eros—'Anteros' " (3, 309).

Being utmost brief, the text of the article "On the ideology of the Jewish question" does not allow for full comprehension of the sense of the mythopoetic construction presented above. Nonetheless, this sense can be reconstructed from the whole context of Ivanov's writings of the period when the article was written.

In his poem "Man", both in its text and the author's commentaries to it, in his article "Thou art" (and its version "Anima"), as well as in many of his other texts, Ivanov develops a pretty peculiar mythology of the universal androgyny, interpreted by him both as nuptiality and ambisexuality. The God—in whom "the Heavenly Aphrodite couples with Logos in a nup-

[5] It is well-known that, in the Church tradition, the Church is personified by a female figure—the Wife or the Bride of God. Ivanov, however, speaks of the Church as the mystical body of Christ; therefore, the Church in the above description is a male figure.

tial bond and is winnowed by the breath of the Holy Spirit"[6]—is androgynous. The Man (Anthropos), whose initial ambisexual entirety has been lost due to the Fall and who is eager to restore this entirety—through love, through Eros—is androgynous. The whole World Order is androgynous: the female Universe that broke away from God is afire with passion and eager to merge with the male God again. In the poem "Man", Ivanov impressively depicts an androgynous globe with everything—inanimate objects, animals and humans—overwhelmed with a powerful sexual drive. Female vaginal sexuality and male phallic sexuality jointly represent the manifestation of the female Universe fervently striving for coitus with the male God associated with Eros and Hyperion-Sun that inseminates the world with the arrows of his rays.[7] Androgyny, according to Ivanov, is also the essence of religion, interpreted by him as a passionate erotic search of a personality's female "ego" for the God's male "thou": "Psyche"—"Soul"—"Anima"—"Eve who rose from Adam's body while he was asleep" gets into a state of "orgiastic frenzy", "seeks after its Eros", "seeks after the rays of soul" emitted by "thou"—"the Groom"—"the Divine Center"—"the Absolute"—"Atman"—"Self"—"Son"—"Adam"—"Heaven"—"Heavenly Father" (3, 263 265, 271–274). Finally, a human being's internal world is also androgynous.

As Ivanov states, in the internal world of human personality is divided to the male orderly and conscious principle—Mind—and the female chaotic and unconscious principle—Soul. Mind represents the Logos, and Soul is both Fallen Sophia of the Gnostic myth (who departed from the God, fell into the chaotic material world and was distorted) and chthonic Aphrodite. Just like Acadian Ishtar, who used to kill her lovers and with whom chthonic Aphrodite was identified in ancient Greek mythology Soul is filled with a "husband-killing resistance to Logos" and fights against the Mind. However, the Soul's hatred for the Mind is merely a perversive form of her love for him, and at the End of Time they will enter to a holy marriage, that will also an embodiment of godly union of Heavenly Aphrodite and Logos.[8]

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[6] V. Ivanov, [Fragment kommentariia k poeme "Chelovek"], in: Viacheslav Ivanov: *Chelovek: Prilozhenie: Stat'i iI materialy*, Moscow, 2006, p. 9.

[7] V. Ivanov, "*Chelovek*", Moscow, 2006, pp. 27–39. Detailed analyses of Ivanov's mythology of universal Androgyny see in my article: V. Paperni, Motivy khristianskogo I evreiskogo gnosisa v tekste i kontekste poemy Viach. Ivanova "Chelovek*, *Jews and Slaves*, vol. 21 (Jerusalem—Gdańsk, 2008), pp. 237–239.

[8] My detailed description of this myhopoetical complex see: V. Paperni, op.cit., pp. 235–238.

Apparently, Ivanov builds his narrative about Judeo-Christian relationships as a repetition, up to minute details, of his narrative about a complex bond between the Soul and the Mind. This case allows us to reconstruct the mythological prototype onto which Ivanov projects Jewry: he sees Jewry as an embodiment of the Fallen Sophia/chthonic Aphrodite. Therefore, Jewry behaves exactly like this dual character of Ivanov's mythological system.

The mythology of the universal androgyny as a part of the mythopoetic system created by Ivanov summarized his mystical gnosis—his interpretation of the "secret" of Universe, Man, and God. And formulating the narrative on the Judeo-Christian relationships in terms of this mythology meant that a particular "secret" of the Judeo-Christian fate is nothing less than an aspect of the general "secret" of the absolute Fate: Man and Universe separated from God at the Beginning of the Time, and they must make their long and painful way back to him. In this context, Christianity symbolically represents Man and Universe as those who have already come back to God and merged with him. Jewry and Judaism symbolically represent Man and Universe as those who have departed from God—as the infidels. These infidels have a secret desire to return to God but are still infidels in their current state.

Ivanov's narrative on the Judeo-Christian relationships is expressly Philo-Semitic: in its subjective intention, it is the narrative of why Christians are supposed to, and, with rare exceptions, do love Jews. However, the discourse this narrative is submerged into reveals fundamental elements of the Anti-Semitic discourse of the Christian Church. The Church's Anti-Semitism is based on the doctrine, according to which Jews must admit that Christ was the Messiah and the God. Nevertheless, they not only avoid fulfilling this obligation, they even dare hate Christ and the Church. At the End of History they will join the Church, but now Jews are infidels. This basic principle of ecclesiastical Anti-Semitism is fully accepted by Ivanov.

The Anti-Semitism of the Church, unlike other forms of Christian Anti-Semitism, is well known to have a strong propensity to representing itself as a kind of a religious loving concern about the fate of Jews, whose rejection of Christ ruins their souls. This concern is especially typical for the Catholic Church (sf. the fact that up until 1955 the Catholic mass contained a special appeal for converting "infidel Jews"). Ivanov's conception of the Church was universal and ecumenical, i.e., in fact, the Catholic one. In this aspect, he followed Vladimir Solovyev, who had joined the Roman Church—and so did Ivanov in 1926 in Rome. In his article "On the ideology of the Jewish question", Ivanov especially emphasized Vladimir Solovyev's "affectionate love for Jewry" as an ideal model of the Christian attitude to Jews (3, 309). Ivanov's reference to Solovyev is highly significant. Just like Solovyev, Ivanov

believed in a religious-political utopia of assembling all the Churches under the auspices of Rome and, just like Solovyev, believed that Jewry will eventually join this Church alliance.[9]

As I have already mentioned above, in Ivanov's opinion, the attitude of Jews to Christianity combines love and hatred, i.e., is ambivalent. In fact, however, it is Ivanov's viewpoint on the "Jewish question" that is ambivalent.

In his article, Ivanov emphasized the statement on the hostility of Jews towards Christianity as well as to the "Russian soul"[10] though with certain reservations. Jews "curse us", they "do not want to love" "the Russian soul", to love "its sacred shrines", Ivanov writes (3, 309–310). "Personally I do not think that Jews really hate Christ nowadays" (3, 309), immediately adds Ivanov in a slyly ambiguous way, clearly implying that in the past the Jewish attitude to Christ was absolutely different. This implication justifies for him the fact that "the psychology of powerful representatives of the earthly church organization could have been poisoned with hostility towards Jews". However, Ivanov introduces another reservation right away. Church's representatives sometimes hated Jews, but "not the authentic ones, rather the current ones whom they suspected of being a bunch of Christ's enemies". And they hated Jews not because of their being Jews, but because Jews "seemed to them lacking the Jewish spirit, as if they ceased to be Abraham's semen" (3, 309). Ivanov was ready to admit, though quite indistinctly, the very fact of the existence of Anti-Semitism in the minds of Church hierarchs, and he was ready to condemn this Anti-Semitism, though not calling it by the name—to condemn it as an erroneous opinion, though. Together with that, according to Ivanov, the Church's intentions towards Jewry had always been correct. Moreover, Ivanov believes that the Church and its representatives have an absolutely legitimate right to judge which Jews are authentic and veritable, and thus, deserve Christian love, and which of them are not authentic, not veritable, and thus do not deserve this great love.

Distinguishing between authentic and non-authentic Jewry, in terms of distinguishing between Jews before and after Christ, as a rule, is one of the permanent elements of the traditional ecclesiastic Anti-Semitic discourse.

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[9] See my interpretation of V. Soloviov's and his followers' attitude to the "religious fate" of Jewry: V. Paperni, Bibliia, iudeo-khristianskaia konfrontatsiia i "novoe religioznoe soznanie" v russkoi kul'ture kontsa XIX—nachala XX veka., *Jews and Slavs*, vol. 4 (Jerusalem—St. Petersburg, 1995), pp. 166–178.

[10] See also the notes of young Ivanov on the problem of the relationships between Jews and Russians: K. Lappo-Danilevskii, Nabrosok Viacheslavs Ivanova "Evrei i Russkie", *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, N⁰ 21 (M., 1996), pp. 182–190.

And Ivanov actively uses this element. In the analyzed article, he compares "atheists among Jews" to "salt that has lost its strength" (3, 308). Several years later, in Baku, Ivanov said to his friend, a young Jew Moses Altman, who accentuated his "Anti-Zionism": "it was necessary for Jews to get disseminated throughout the world, but it is also necessary for you to settle again in Palestine at the end of time. But Zionism should turn into a religious movement. And your language should be Hebrew.".[11] Ivanov does not reveal why it was so "necessary" but this can be inferred from his general eschatological paradigm. Ivanov accepted this paradigm that emerged from the New Testament in its specific form, which Vladimir Solovyev gave to it in his "A Short Story about Anti-Christ" (1900).

Ivanov's attitude towards Jewry was characterized by demonstrative, stressed Philo-Semitism. Ivanov was one of the first representatives of the Russian intellectual milieu, who used to support Zionism as a movement devoted to the national revival of the Jewish people on the Land of Israel. Ivanov emphatically supported the revival of the Hebrew culture. He translated verses by a leading Hebrew poet of his time Haim Nachman Bialik's verses into Russian, and this fact reflects his real, vital interest in the New Hebrew culture.[12] Ivanov with enthusiasm supported revival of the Hebrew language that was for him, as the language of the Scripture, the holy language. It is, thus, significant that Ivanov's poem "Man" contains a description of a mystical vision of Jesus Christ as a gigantic Cosmic Man (Cosmic Anthropos), whose forehead bears Hebrew letters:

> I saw Aleph, I saw Beth—
> Dreadful light!—
> And above the giant's brow,
> I dare not read up to Tav
> The scroll of glory
> Of the Son of Man.[13]

Explaining this passage in his Commentaries to the poem, Ivanov wrote that he meant the Cabbala doctrine that "the holy alphabet is written on the human's body: the list of letters represents the list of secrets of the human being".[14]

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[11] M. Al'tman, *Razgovory s Viacheslavom Ivanovym*, Sankt-Peterburg, 1995, p. 52.

[12] See on this theme: R. Timenchik, Z. Kopel'man. Viacheslav Ivanov i poeziia Kh.N. Bialika, *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, N⁰14 (Moscow, 1996), pp. 102–115.

[13] V. Ivanov, *Chelovek*, p. 48.

[14] V. Ivanov, *Chelovek*, p. 107. On the sources of the cited passage from the poem "Man"

Ivanov valuated highly not only the Jewish mystics of the language, but also the Jewish mystical tradition as hole, though he knew it quite superficially and incompletely and most of his knowledge about it was, so to say, "second-hand". He included into his mythopoetic constructions a significant number of motives derived from the Jewish mystics. As he believed, the "secrets" revealed by Jewish mystics are an important component of the global secret knowledge (gnosis) of God, Universe and Man.[15]

For Ivanov, the brotherhood of blood was the most important mystical secret of the Judeo-Christian entirety, and he was ready to interprete this brotherhood quite literally. It is characteristic in this occasion that in 1905 Ivanov organized a very special ceremony of communion with Jewish blood in a very special place for such event—in his private apartment in Saint Petersburg, in the famous Tower. Drops of blood from a hand of a young Jew was poured into a glass of wine, and then the drink was drunk little by little by Ivanov and his friends.[16] This shocking and strange rite should have complemented a traditional Eucharist of the Church. It symbolized the brotherhood of Christians and Jews in the Crucifixion of Christ, in the Blood of Christ. At the same time, it was intended to be an alternative (but very provocative and ambivalent alternative) to the blood libel—the myth that Jews use Christian blood (the blood libel was widespread in Russia before World War I).

Ivanov's general attitude to Jewry was symptomatically expressed in his polemics with S. Dimanstein, the leader of "Yevsektsia" (the Jewish national organization within the Communist Party of Russia) in early Soviet years. Ivanov appeared in official debates to defend the Hebrew language, the Hebrew culture and the Hebrew theater "Habima" arguing against the demands of "Yevsektsia" to close the "Habima", to ban the Hebrew language and culture as bourgeois ones and to preserve the Jewish culture only in Yiddish.[17] No doubt, this argument with the "Yevsektsia" leader, as well as his debate with the "anti-Zionist" Altman, pleased Ivanov, who considered

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and of this commentary in the Bible and in the Jewish mystics see: V. Paperni, Motivy khristianskogo I evreiskogo gnosisa v tekste I kontekste poemy Viach. Ivanova "Chelovek", pp. 240–242.

[15] See on this theme: ibidem, pp. 232–234, 236–237, 240–243.

[16] As L. Katsis has reminded (see: L. Katsis, *Krovavyi navet I russkaia mysl'*, Moscow-Jerusalem, 2006, p. 292), V. Rozanov told about this event in his book: *Oboniatel'noe I osiazatel'noe otnoshenie k krovi*, and the part of the book with this story was firstly published by Rozanov in 1913 in the newspaper *Novoe vremia*.

[17] A description of this argument see: R. Timenchik, Z. Kopel'man, op.cit., pp. 105–107.

himself to be a true advocate of "authentic" Jewry against "current" Jewry. Unlike those Jews, who had lost their way, he—a Russian Christian—definitely knew what authentic Jew should be like.

Nevertheless, Ivanov's Philo-Semitism had its distinct and clear-cut limits. These limits exhibited themselves whenever Ivanov's own reasoning or certain social circumstances forced him to confront Anti-Semitism. As we have already seen, Ivanov refused to recognize the ecclesiastical Anti-Semitism as such, partly interpreting it as a peculiar form of Philo-Semitism, and partly considering it to be a series of excesses or errors. The only case of Ivanov's direct, openly and unambiguous condemnation of Anti-Semitism is presented in his article "On the ideology of the Jewish question". In the beginning of the article, he stresses his opposition to the "ideology of spiritual Anti-Semitism", which "ascribed many excellent and brilliant qualities to Aryans […] and saw nothing but negative energy in the Semitic influence on Aryans and impurity of the Aryan nature". Ivanov criticizes this ideology as "God-fighting and implicitly anti-Christ". Besides, he calls it a "wooden Trojan horse made in Germany", meaning that it is the ideology infused into Russian minds by Germans, who implemented it in order to weaken Russia, which fights against them (3, 308).

M. Bezrodnyj, who had analyzed this problem in details, noted that Ivanov's attacks against the racist Anti-Semitism of the Aryan doctrine were aimed at a specific Russian supporter of this doctrine—Emilii Metner, Ivanov's colleague and ideological contender in the "Musaget" publishing house.[18] The poisoned arrows of Ivanov's criticism were shot at Metner as a betrayer of Christianity, as a Germanophile and as German by birth.

It is quite typical for Ivanov to attribute—not without pleasure, I guess—"atheists among Jews, the ones ashamed of their kinship, who are like salt that has lost its strength" to the ranks of those who "rejoiced" "newly fashionable" racist Anti-Semitism (3, 308). He does not mention any specific names of these Jewish Anti-Semites, but the general context of his statements devoted to the "Jewish question" reveals what he implies. Ivanov condemns unauthentic, "current" Jewry. This Jewry rejects the mission it is destined for (destined by Christianity, of course); it does not limit its interests with its own, purely Jewish matters, but tries to get involved in the life of the Christian society and Christian culture. Such cosmopolitan Jewry deserves disapproval and disdain, Ivanov believes.

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[18] M. Bezrodnyi, Viacheslav Ivanov I "Musaget": zametki k teme, in: *Viacheslav Ivanov I ego vremia: Materialy VII mezhdunarodnogo simpoziuma*, Vena, 1998. Wien, 2002, p. 419.

It is worth mentioning Ivanov's assessment of Andrei Bely's (in his Anti-Semitic article "The Stamped culture") and later Metner's attacks on "the Jewish predominance" in Russian culture. As they proclaimed, Jews spoil the Russian culture and the Russian language by introducing the spirit of platitude and bourgeoisie, the spirit of "stock exchange", the spirit of all-embracing thirst for profit. In his article "Vyacheslav Ivanov and 'Musaget' " M. Bezrodnyj referred to several archival materials which testify to Ivanov's consent with Bely's and Metner's attacks; he also published several Anti-Semitic remarks found in Ivanov's letters to A.R. Mintslova—namely, his lamentations about "Jewish obstinateness and pushiness" and "Jewish slyness and intrusiveness" of one Jewish lady—their mutual acquaintance attacks.[19] As we see here, in his private epistolary dialogue with Mintslova, who was an Anti-Semite and his partner in his occupation in theosophy, Ivanov did not consider it necessary to stand upon ceremony and revealed the habitual and private aspect of his attitude to Jews, which he tried not to express in public. Such small displays of habitual Anti-Semitism might seem negligibly insignificant and by no means spoiling the showy portrait of Ivanov as the friend to Jewry, Zionism and the Hebrew language. Nevertheless, they are notable as they crack open the door to the usually closed sphere of Ivanov's purely private assessments.

Philo-Semitism was a part of the public image that Ivanov presented to the society. On the other hand, his individual, private personality hidden behind this image possessed certain Anti-Semitic reflexes. And Ivanov revealed these Anti-Semitic reflexes not only in separate "uncontrolled" Anti-Semitic utterances, but also in the fact that certain elements of Anti-Semitic discourse are the basic ones for Ivanov Philo-Semitic narrative.

A speaking subject is more or less able to freely choose themes for his narratives. He is also able to control their content more or less efficiently, able not to say what he does not want to tell. However, the choice of discourse cannot be really free. A discourse of a speaking subject directly and non-reflexively expresses the system of values that is integrally inherent to him. The fact that Ivanov's Philo-Semitic narrative basically grows from an Anti-Semitic discourse indicates sharp internal contradictions, which characterize Ivanov's attitude to Jewry. Ivanov both loves and hates Jewry. And when Ivanov speaks about a combination of love and hatred in the Jewish attitude to Christianity, he, in fact, speaks about himself, transferring,

[19] Ibid., pp. 417–418.

according to the well-known psychological law, his attitude to the object onto the object itself.

In a broad context of the European history of the 20th century, Ivanov's protest against the German racist Anti-Semitism, based on an Aryan myth, seems to be almost prophetical and may be assessed as his greatest merit. Yet, this protest looks absolutely different in a narrower historical context, in which it was presented.

Ivanov wrote his article "On the ideology of the Jewish question" in 1915 for the collection *Shield* conceived by its initiators as a joint protest of the outstanding representatives of Russian intelligentsia against brutal campaign which fell upon Russian Jewry after Russia had entered the World War. In the course of this campaign that was initiated by civil and military authorities and received broad public support, Jews were accused of sympathizing with the German enemy and even of mass espionage in favor of it. As a result, mass exile of Jewish families from the front-line area, accompanied by brutal violence, took place. Jewish periodicals, both in Hebrew and in Yiddish were closed (in June 1915). The very fact of Ivanov's participation in the *Shield* collection may be naturally interpreted as a demonstration of his protest, though in some way a silent one. Ivanov did not say a word about the Anti-Semitic practice of violence and prosecutions that was loudly shouting about itself from the pages of Russian newspapers. Moreover, his reaction was indistinct and ambiguous: some Anti-Semites are spiritual agents of Germany but, on the other hand, "Jewry with rare exception" "does not want to love the Russian soul" (3, 309)—so, everything is possible …

Ivanov's explicit refusal to confront a brutal reality of sufferings, which fell upon Jewry due to Anti-Semitism, requires explanation. As far as I can judge, the roots to this refusal not so much lie in a peculiar nature of his attitude to Jewry as in the escapism that characterized his thinking and his literary discourse. Ivanov did not want to wonder in the darkness of reality. He abandoned brutal reality for the subtle world of ideas, the world of enlightened mythological images, the world of shades of ancient cultures where the myth reigned, where the mystics searched for occult secrets, where Aphrodite coupled with Logos in a divine syzygy and where Jewish and Christian souls engaged in their complicated love play. Ivanov spoke a lot and with gusto of tragedy in the myth and literature, of Oedipus tragedy and the tragedy of Dostoevsky's characters, but he had simply nothing to say about real-life terror and the horrors of victims of violence. He could have debated "the Jewish question" with Metner, Altman and even with a comrade from "Yevsektsia", because he could argue with them and against

them about pure ideas only. Yet, he did not argue with extremist Anti-Semitic attacks against Jews that were committed by his close friend and disciple P.A. Florensky and his fellow V.V. Rozanov (Anti-Semitism of both of these Russian philosophers reached the level of direct instigation to violence against Jews). Why didn't he protest? He tried to avoid a real struggle that could have engaged him in real-life conflicts; he did not want to lose his friends and to shake off his contemplative calmness. In 1915, when racist Anti-Semitism was still a pure idea, Ivanov argued against it. Conversely, he kept silent in 1930s, when this Anti-Semitism became a frightening practice of mass violence. In 1934 Ivanov's young Jewish friend E. Shor invited him to join a collective protest against nazi prosecutions of Jews. Ivanov rejected this proposition. As D. Segal (who published the Shor's and Ivanov's letters related to this fact) explained, in this case Ivanov submitted to the Church discipline in the time, when the Catholic Church preferred to avoid direct confrontation with the Nazis.[20] I don't believe that such explanation is correct. The Church did not prohibited to his private members to protest. This case is very simple: Ivanov did not want to …

Ivanov was in Rome during World War II. He witnessed the deportation of Roman Jews who were taken deathwards. As soon as Rome was liberated, Ivanov wrote a poem "To whom the Hellene's night is dark …" (3, 173–174) dated May 17th in his poetic cycle "Roman Diary, 1944". This poem is thematically divided into two distinctly antithetic parts. In the first part of the poem (the first three quatrains), the author pathetically declares that, despite the schemes of the Hell, the results of God's constructive activities appear in the Universe, and the Jacob's ladder along which the Angels descend and ascend Earth connects Earth to Heaven.

> Hope! An apparent non-construction
> Is evidence of Someone's building,
> Though the inferno's play
> Of hellish forces conceals from eye
>
> The face of angels, who aforetime
> Descended to the one, who slept in Bethel,
> Downstairs from the sky, and, all creation
> Connecting to the sky, ascended.

In the second part of the poem (the last quatrain), the author turns to low and base human deeds, and his tone becomes sentimentally doleful:

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[20] D. Segal, Viacheslav Ivanov I semia Shor, *Cahiers du Monde russe*, vol. 35 (Paris,1994), No 1–2, pp. 349–351.

And we know nothing of Bethel;
We see that Herod is still reigning,
Rachel her children is lamenting,
A ditch is dug at each one's feet.

The motive of the "ditch" introduces the theme of massacres committed by Germans. These murders are presented both as the Jewish Holocaust (the murdered are "Rachel's children") and as a worldwide catastrophe that endangers "everyone". It is also important that Ivanov depicts modern massacres as a repetition of the Slaughter of the Innocents conducted upon Herod's decree—a terrible but inevitable event predestined by God himself and prophesied by Jeremy: Herod "sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof … Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, 'In Rome was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not'." (Matthew 2:16–18). The aim of Herod's Slaughter of the Innocents was, as the Evangelist claims, an attempt to kill the infant Jesus. This circumstance is extremely important for understanding this Ivanov's text: having repeated the thesis of his article "On the ideology of the Jewish question" on the Anti-Christian nature of German Anti-Semitism, Ivanov in his poem "To whom the Hellene's night is dark …" accuses Germans, who slaughtered Jews, of an attempt to slaughter Christ. Thus, a horrible reality of life is being cleared of the concreteness of life and turns into a pure idea, a sterile mythopoetic image of innocent sufferings that are human destiny. People have forgotten God, they hate God and "do not know about Bethel"—do not know about the angels scurrying about between the Heaven and the Earth in order to connect "all creation" with the Creator. There is nothing new in all that. Hence, there is nothing to protest against. And therefore, there is only one thing for the poet to do: to escape, to overcome a painful impression of horrible misfortunes of individuals in order to give himself up to sublime sorrow over their common pitiful destiny.

PART THREE

THE RUSSIAN-JEWISH DIALOG IN REVOLUTION YEARS

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTION THROUGH REVOLUTION: M.O. GERSHENZON'S SIDE IN THE *CORRESPONDENCE FROM TWO CORNERS*

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The *Correspondence from Two Corners* (*Perepiska iz dvukh uglov*; 1921), the classic work of early twentieth-century Russian thought written by Viacheslav Ivanov and Mikhail Gershenzon, has been viewed most often from the perspective of Viacheslav Ivanov's career and development.[1] Although the great poet Ivanov was the more influential of the two, nonetheless, Gershenzon's side is undeniably brilliant and profoundly important on its own right. More importantly (at least in terms of this paper) Gershenzon's side demonstrates his attitude in 1921, and serves as a signpost reflecting on his intellectual path from 1914 until his death in 1925.

In the years before World War I, Mikhail Gershenzon had worked hard to fashion a reputation as one of the leading intellectuals in Russia. He became well known for editing *Landmarks* (*Vekhi*; 1909), the volume of essays about the ideological errors of the revolutionary intelligentsia. His major monographs, such as P. Ia *Chaadaev: zhizn' i myshlenie* (1908), *Istoriia molodoi Rossii* (1909), *Zhizn' V.S. Pecherina* (1910), and *Griboedovskaia Moskva* (1912), were very well respected and his many articles on Pushkin and other poets brought him wide-spread acclaim.[2]

The *Correspondence From Two Corners* came at a pivotal time in Gershenzon's evolution. During the war, he had decided to turn his mind primarily to philosophy and metaphysics. By philosophy, I mean something like the

[1] Examples of studies of the *Correspondence* that focus on Ivanov's contribution include Robert Lewis Jackson, "Ivanov's Humanism: 'A Correspondence From Two Corners', in *Viacheslav Ivanov: Poet, Critic, Philosopher*, New Haven: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1986, 346–357.and Robert Bird's introduction to an edition of the *Perepiska iz dvukh uglov*, Moscow: Vodolei, 2006, 3–42.

[2] Some of Gershenzon's articles were collected in *Stat'i o Pushkine* (1926).

free speculation on epistemological questions. In the same year that he contributed to the *Correspondence*, Gershenzon also published *The Key to Faith* (*Kliuch very*; 1921), a study of the ancient Jews and their relationship with God, and *Gulfstream* (*Gul'fstrem*; 1922), a study of Alexander Pushkin in the context of ancient philosophy. Moreover, these two works came on the heals of his 1918 book, *The Triple Image of Perfection* (*Troistvennyi obraz sovershenstva*), and a series of metaphysical writings that in recent times have been collected in a single volume entitled, *Palmyra*.[3]

The *Correspondence* illuminates Gershenzon's biography, the life of a writer of Jewish origins who, having devoted himself to Russian culture, decided to turn to epistemology and metaphysics after 1914. In addition, Gershenzon's philosophical writings have a distinct Jewish context. During and after World War I, Gershenzon contributed to Jewish journals (in Russian) and in 1922, he wrote *The Fates of the Jews* (Sud'by evreiskogo naroda), dedicated to a philosophical refutation of Zionism.

In order to understand Gershenzon's side in the *Correspondence* one has to unpack a number of complex and intertwined contexts. In contrast to the book's many interpreters, I maintain that Gershenzon's side in the *Correspondence* acquires its primary meaning in the context of Gershenzon's own development rather than in its interaction with Viacheslav Ivanov.[4] At the time the volume appeared Boris Shletser, a critic, noticed the absence of a true dialogue. "Really the actual goal of this polemic both for V. Ivanov and Gershenzon was not to change the mind of the other, but to put oneself through a strict trial, to examine oneself, clarify one's feelings and thoughts, discover their final and to the utmost special form, explain reality and, if one needed to, justify it, or if one needed to, save oneself from it and hide."[5]

Lev Shestov claimed that the book's mock-epistolary form was uncongenial because it forced Gershenzon to respond to Ivanov rather than articulate his own philosophy.[6] It was precisely for Gershenzon to present his own views that Shestov perceives as the true function of the *Correspondence*.

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[3] M. Gershenzon, *Palmyra*, ed. V. Proskurina, Tenafly, New Jersey: Hermitage, 1997.

[4] The scholar Olga Deschartes shares the point of view that the Correspondence is integrally connected to Gershenzon's philosophical writings at the time. For more on her views, see her introduction to V. Ivanov and M. Gershenzon, *Correspondance d'un coin à l'autre* (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1979), 35.

[5] B. Shletser, review of 'Perepiska iz dvukh uglov', *Sovremennye zapiski* 11 (1922): 196.

[6] L. Shestov, "O vechnoi knige: pamiati o Gershenzone," *Sovremennye zapiski* 24 (1925): 237–245.

"Nonetheless the dozen letters by M.O. in this little book give us immeasurably a lot: the letters teach us how to read *The Key to Faith* and *Gulfstream*. They can teach us to read other books that also treat first and last things"[7] Gershenzon articulated a similar viewpoint, maintaining in a letter to Shestov from June 26, 1922, that the *Correspondence* was inextricably connected with *The Triple Image of Perfection*.[8]

After the *Correspondence* appeared, Gershenzon was unhappy with the result. In a letter to Lev Shestov from June 6, 1922, he writes, "Regarding the *Correspondence*, you observed subtlety and correctly. V.I.'s tone defined my own and that is why the book irritates me: … He started the correspondence and began to coerce me to answer him in writing. I didn't like it because there is something theatrical in it and I was very weak … I did not have any desire to write."[9] It is significant to note that Ivanov edited Gershenzon's side with the goal of advancing his own perspective and attempting to retain a strained ideological unity.[10]

Gershenzon's main ideas in the *Correspondence* pivot around the postwar situation: having seen the values of his time drive humanity to war and mass murder, Gershenzon wondered about humanity's future. It was impossible to retain innocence about the dangers that conventional values presented to society. Using himself as the object of his analysis, Gershenzon attacked what he perceived was an absence of authenticity in life. Maintaining that the values of cultural, technological, and intellectual achievement inhibited the true direct experience of life, he confessed about himself:

> Perhaps because I was weary of a burden become too heavy for me, perhaps because something of my original mind strove through the clutter there of knowledge and habit—whatever the cause, a simple, unmistakable feeling has risen and established itself inside me, as emphatic as the feeling of hunger or pain. I am not passing judgment on culture. I am merely attesting the fact that I feel suffocated by it. As did Rousseau, I dream of a state of bliss—no worldly cares, a complete freedom of spirit, a paradise. I know too much, and what I know weighs upon me. This is not knowledge acquired by me through personal experience; its origin is general and foreign, it is knowledge inherited from forefathers and ancestors. […] Precisely because it is general,

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[7] Ibid., 14.

[8] Letter of Gershenzon to Shestov, 26 June 1922, "Pis'ma k L'vu Shestovu M.O. Gershenzona," ed. V. Alloy. *Minuvshee* 6 (1988): 262–263.

[9] Ibid.

[10] V. Proskurina, *Techenie Gol'fstrema: Mikhail Gershenzon, ego zhizn i mif*, St. Petersburg: Aleteiia, 1998, 248.

> impersonally demonstrated, it is indisputable, and its indisputability freezes my soul. Proven facts by the million, so many unbreakable threads, imprison me in their net. They are impersonal facts, immutable, inescapable—horrible.[11]

Gershenzon's point is that the West's cultural legacy spanning literally hundreds (if not a few millennia) of years interferes with his ability to look out upon life as something new, original, and inimitable. Instead of interacting with things directly, a wall of prefabricated images, ideas, and reactions has arisen. Comparing authentic experience to cold water from a mountain source, Gershenzon claims that culture resembles the tasteless liquid from the kitchen tap.[12] It is mixed with chemicals and sent through a myriad of pipes and ducts. Similarly, in Gershenzon's view culture sucks the essence out of life, giving the individual values that he himself did not create, but come ready-made for everyone without distinction. If somehow he could remove all that he had learned, Gershenzon exclaims that he would be happy to jump into the river Lethe and forget everything.[13]

Nonetheless, he has an alternative in mind. "Yet I know of and consider possible another upsurge of creativity and another culture that will be able to forego transforming every last cognition into dogma, every blessing into a desiccated mummy, every value into a fetish."[14] His ideal is to turn to direct experience, inimitable, unique, and authentic. "I would give all the thoughts and the knowledge I have culled from books, as well as everything I have built on top of them, for the sheer joy of achieving spontaneously, through my own experience, just one piece of simple knowledge, fresh as a summer morning."[15]

Gershenzon valorizes those values that the individual discovers himself, produces himself at the moment of creation. In a central passage he emphasizes the right kind of perception, which attributes to Napoleon's mother:

> Everyone knew that Napoleon was not born an emperor. Any ordinary woman in the crowd watching him ride by during some great parade might have said to herself: 'Now he is the Emperor who almost lost his personal name: he is the ruler of whole nations. But when he was in his swaddling clothes he was nothing to the world, only his mother's child.' And I standing before a famous

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[11] V.I. Ivanov & M.O. Gershenzon, *Correspondence Across a Room*, trans. Lisa Sergio, Marlboro, Vermont: Marlboro Press, 1984, 10–11.

[12] *Correspondence*, 53–54.

[13] *Correspondence*, 11.

[14] *Correspondence*, 14.

[15] *Correspondence*, 13–14.

> picture in a museum think the same thing: the artist painted it for himself, in the creative act it was inseparable from him—he was in the picture and the picture in him. Yet now the picture has been exalted into an objective value recognized universally.[16]

According to Gershenzon, the mother who sees in the emperor not the image that everyone sees, but her son, embodies his idea of authenticity. Similarly, he claims that Rafael's paintings were alive once, when Raphael painted them. The same is true for Goethe, Shakespeare, and Pushkin—their creations cannot be separated from their creators; their essence was alive only once, during their creation. The finished product—the painting, symphony or novel—is a kind of phantom; it has the appearance of spiritual richness, but is really an empty vessel. The only way to bring about true authenticity is through a fundamental transformation, a revolution of consciousness.

> The poor heart which gave vent to the prayer loves it still, as a mother loves her child within the tyrant he has become, but she weeps as she obeys his impersonal will. At last there comes a time when love overcomes submissiveness: the mother brings the tyrant down in order to retrieve her son. So it was that Luther with his ardent heart brought down the cult, the theology, the church of the Pope, with the aim of liberating simple faith, personal faith from a strait-jacketing system. The French Revolution made away with the mystique of the throne and instituted a more direct relationship between the people and authority. Another rebellion is now shaking the earth: the truth of labor and of individual possession is struggling to break free of centuries-old complications, of the abominable fetters of social and abstract ideas.[17]

Gershenzon apparently believed that a social revolution was necessary and that it would have the result of returning humanity to a better place. In his reading of history, revolutions had liberated humanity, effectively improving fossilized and painful situations.

In *The Correspondence* Ivanov became irate that Gershenzon refused to accept his understanding of Christian humanism.[18] In addition, Ivanov accused Gershenzon of indifference to logic, accusing him of employing

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[16] *Correspondence*, 32.

[17] *Correspondence*, 36.

[18] In letter twelve Gershenzon writes, "You are angry and that is a bad sign. Irritated by my obtuseness, you are now classifying me among the 'self-simplifiers' who have 'forgotten their kin,' you even label me a member of the 'intelligentsia' (while you, O shrewd friend of mine, reserve a flattering title for yourself: son of the Russian land! And disciple of Saïs to boot!). But what irritates you most is my obstinately maintained sic volo—and refusal to argue." 63.

culture in order to destroy it. Other critics noted the contradiction that it was precisely one of Russia's best-educated and urbane individuals who relentlessly battered culture.[19] In a private letter to Gershenzon, his close friend and the philosopher Nikolai Berdiaev spelled out the contradiction. In a private letter from June 7, 1915, Berdiaev writes, "Often it seems to me that you are saying: 'All these ideas are only silly games and fantasies—creativity, literature, philosophy, invention and revelation, and so on and so on, they are all a superstructure set on top of life. The essential life is found in elementary feelings, work, bread, in simple things.' And you wage war with your own complexity, aestheticism, literary proclivities, your love for talking about ideas. It pains me that you are almost ashamed that you are a writer and therefore so occupied with literature."[20]

Gershenzon was fully conscious of this paradox.[21] In fact, he confessed in *The Correspondence* to feeling an ambivalence. "I live a strangely double life. From childhood I have been in contact with European culture, I have bathed in its spirit; not only have I become thoroughly familiar with it, but there is much in it that I love. I love what I think of as its cleanliness and comfort; I love science, the arts, poetry, Pushkin; I feel at home in the cultural family, I love talking about cultural matters with my friends, with all and sundry, the themes we discuss and the methods of developing them interest me genuinely."[22]

Gershenzon's philosophy had two sides. While rejecting ratiocination, abstractions, and art, he also envisioned a harmonious holistic way of thinking. The best expression of his philosophy can be found in *The Triple Image of Perfection* (1918) in which Gershenzon describes the negative way mankind thinks now, using as his example man's treatment of nature. For example, a tree only has value by being cut up into boards and nailed into the form of a desk. The exploitation of nature, he argues, serves as the model of how people relate to one another. His solution is for the individual to reject the aim of exploitation by realizing his own image of perfection (obraz sovershenstva). The image of perfection has three components: the perfect vision of oneself, the perfect vision of the world, and the perfect vision of one's

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[19] See in particular Renato Poggioli, "A Correspondence from Opposite Corners," *A Book of Essays about Some Russians Writers and Their View of the Self*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957, 208–228.

[20] Berdiaev to Gershenzon, 7 June 1915 (RGALI, f. 736 op.28, d. 31).

[21] *Correspondence*, 48.

[22] *Correspondence*, 65.

place in the world. The image of perfection can be realized through love, in which one's soul becomes full. In this case man returns to his primitive state when he originally perceived the world as an organic whole, and thus he achieves spiritual completion. "He who loves, in him the image of perfection is excited to action: either he realizes himself through his beloved or at least reinforces himself actively by protecting his beloved; he who loves learns through the confirmation of the beloved to know the image of perfection in himself."[23]

By love, Gershenzon means spiritual love and not erotic love, love in which the person perceives the other as a complete individual and an end in himself and not as a means towards an end. This "holistic" perception heals man of the wounds in his spirit caused by his former way of thinking. Thus, through the perception of the other as a subject, you yourself become whole as well. "Love is the polar opposite of culture because love means precisely to perceive the other in a holistic way. The image of the beloved that is imprinted in you is the image of your living unity, it belongs to you, only you. Confirming it, you confirm the holistic originality of your own individual personality."[24]

In *The Triple Image of Perfection* Gershenzon believed that he had discovered a new mentality founded on holistic perception and directed by an unchanging ideal. The triple image of perfection is intended to play the role of a spiritual compass leading man to a new epistemology that will heal his soul. In his view the problem with humanity—and the cause of war for that matter—is that people think abstractly, analytically, impersonally, without feeling. Mankind needs to return to a time in history when each individual knew the holism of life, when a type of epistemology reigned in which individuals did not separate things into its parts, but used intuition, rather than analytical reason, to understand themselves and the world.

The Bolshevik revolution is a central theme in the *Correspondence From Two Corners*. Where as Ivanov virulently opposed the October putsch, Gershenzon embraced the Bolshevik Revolution, marching as a supporter with the crowds on Moscow's streets.[25] Even in June 1920, Gershenzon did not fixate on violence and injustice exclusively, but dreamed about humanity's

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[23] Gershenzon, *Troistvennyi obraz sovershenstva*, 28.

[24] Ibid., 75.

[25] N.M. Gershenzon-Chegodaeva, *Pervye shagi zhiznennogo puti* (*vospominaniia docheri Mikhaila Gershenzona*), Moscow: Zakharov, 2000, 72.

higher urges and goals. In *The Correspondence* he cautiously left open the possibility that the Russian proletariat would take up the goal of spiritual achievement and lead humanity onto a new and better path.[26]

> What we see is the proletariat taking this hoard of values out of the hands of the few and into its own. At the same time we have no idea what the proletariat sees in them or has in mind to do with them. In them might it not see only an instrument of its timeless oppression, something it has no wish to own but needs to remove from the hands of its former masters? Or would it be that under the impact of public education the proletariat has come to place some store by culture and supposes its values worth having? Who can tell? Once the proletariat has got hold of these treasures, it may well realize that they are nothing more than chains and rubbish, and, disappointed and angry, toss them out and set to work creating different values of its own. Still another possibility is that it will lift these cultural values onto its own shoulders and carry them forward, assuming the burden of the cultural heritage in good faith. But if the old values continue in currency among the proletariat, the proletariat will infuse a new spirit into them and before long their molecular structure will have changed to the point where they are unrecognizable.[27]

Needless to say, Gershenzon's revolution hardly resembled the Bolshevik one. He did not approve of Lenin's suppression of political opponents, the imposition of martial law, or expropriation of private property. At the same time, Gershenzon sympathized with Bolshevism because it alone, it seemed to him, offered a radically different future. Viewing the Bolsheviks as a kind of modern Don Quixote, Gershenzon expressed his preference for a failed attempt at true change than any half-hearted or unfulfilled promise.[28]

Certainly Gershenzon's position in 1917 and later in the *Correspondence From Two Corners* was shocking to his friends. In contrast to nearly everyone in his intellectual community—Berdiaev, Belyi, Shestov, Remizov, Khodasevich—Gershenzon alone had confidence in the Bolsheviks. In fact, he was

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[26] The parallel with Alexander Blok's position is obvious.

[27] *Correspondence* 54–55.

[28] In a letter from 1917, Gershenzon expresses the reasons why he supported Bolshevism. "(Kadet liberalism) causes greater hostility in me than even Bolshevism because the Bolsheviks are ardent and often deeply honest, but the Kadets are cold, formal, calculating. Bolshevism is generally speaking a wonderful thing (I mean the extremism in our revolution, its utopian thrust). It is clear to me that the revolution will fail, but I am no less certain that our descendants will say that the reasons the Russian revolution did not succeed or hardly succeeded was the most beautiful aspet of it, in the same way that Don Quixote was insane and without doubt was the best man in Spain. I prefer such a failure because of utopianism, which will leave seeds of great promise to a Kadet success, which Miliukov wants and will probably attain." M. Gershenzon to I.V. Zhilkin, 1 August 1917, Zhilkin Papers in RGALI (f. 200, op.1, d. 18).

regarded as a traitor, although in truth by 1922, he seemed to have few illusions. He describes his position in a letter to Shestov from 1922, "For your ears and only yours I repeat what I wrote you: 'I have the same relations toward Soviet power that I had earlier to the tsarist, i.e. none at all; I have gone to Kamenev and Lunacharsky to help others, just as you would do, like Berdiaev and others have done, and I didn't try to get something for myself or use the occasion; nothing aloud, i.e. I have not expressed my approval or condemnation publicly, I have lived isolated entirely. As a result, in Moscow [Mikhail] Pokrovskii treats me as a member of the White Guard and [Vladimir] Friche said to me, "You are the enemy." In Paris [Mark] Vishniak knows that I have defended censorship and he believes that. Let people judge me by my writings and my life and not by the gossip about it."[29]

The Jewish theme creeps into the *Correspondence from Two Corners* in various ways. However, Gershenzon's autobiographical statement about feeling a foreigner in Russia draws particular attention. In letter twelve, his last missive, Gershenzon writes: "I live like a foreigner adapted to a country that is not his own, liked by the natives and liking them in return, concerned for their welfare and exerting myself willingly on its behalf, suffering when they suffer, rejoicing when they rejoice. But I know that I am a foreigner, and in secret I miss the fields of my homeland, its different seasons, the different odor of its flowers in the springtime and the different speech of the women there. Where is my homeland? I shall never lay eyes upon it, I shall die in a foreign place. And how passionately I long for it sometimes!"[30]

Although it would be convenient to see in his yearnings the hopes of a Jew for a homeland, he was certainly not an ardent Zionist, although he seems to have befriended with some individuals.[31] Such sympathies are demonstrated by his participation in a number of Zionist publications during World War I.[32] For example, Gershenzon participated in a volume entitled, *In the Light of War* (*Pri svete voiny*; 1916), a special issue of *Evreiskaia zhizn'* (1916) devoted to the twenty fifth anniversary of Hayim Nachman

[29] M. Gershenzon to L. Shestov, 13 Jan. 1923, "Pis'ma k L'vu Shestovu," 277.

[30] *Correspondence*, 66.

[31] For a study of Gershenzon's attitude toward Jewish culture, see Brian Horowitz's article, "Mikhail Gershenzon: A Jew in the Russian Elite," *Empire Jews: Jewish Nationalism and Acculturation in Late 19th- and Early 20th-Century Russia*, Bloomington, IN: Slavica, 2009, 214–228.

[32] See Brian Horowitz's article, "Russian-Zionist Cultural Cooperation, 1916–1918: Leib Jaffe and the Russian Intelligentsia," *Empire Jews*, 65–86.

Bialik's literary career, and he wrote the introduction to the Jewish *Anthology: A Collection of Young Jewish Poetry* (*Evreiskaia antologiia: sbornik molodoi evreiskoi poezii*; 1916)—all three works were subsidized by Zionist supporters. Although Gershenzon expressed a positive attitude toward Zionism in these works, he changed his viewpoint one hundred and eighty degrees, publishing, *The Fates of the Jewish People* (1922) in which he strongly criticized Zionism as one form of a general evil—nationalism.

In truth it would surprise no one if Gershenzon did support Zionists; many individuals supported the cause who had no interest in moving to Palestine. After all, Gershenzon was angry about the way Jews were treated in Russia and felt an emotional closeness to other Jews who like him had suffered from tsarist oppression. In his youth Gershenzon had wanted to become a professor and was offered the opportunity on one condition, conversion to Christianity. In addition, he was unable to marry his future wife, Mariia Borisovna née Gol'denveizer, because she was a member of the Russian-Orthodox Church. They lived together unmarried for some time until 1905, when, converting to Protestantism, she was able to initiate marriage with a Jew.[33] Finally, Gershenzon had grown familiar with the system of bribing Moscow's police in order to invite his mother to Moscow. However, these bouts with injustice did not promote a love for Zionism or radical socialism. At the same time, while Gershenzon had never converted, he did not value the Judaism or join closely with the Jewish people.

However, during World War I, the same state of mind that animated *The Triple Image of Perfection* also inspired his essays on Judaism. In an article entitled "A People Tried by Fire" ("Narod ispytuemyj ognem") Gershenzon seemed to express a belief in Jewish messianism.[34] In a similar display of national feeling Gershnzon wrote an entire book about the ancient Jews, *Key To Faith*. Although it is a complicated work, the main thrust is that

[33] See A.B. Gol'denveizer, "Vospominaniia," located in the Gol'denveizer Museum in Moscow or in B. Horowitz's doctoral dissertation, *M.O. Gershenzon and Intellectual Life of Russia's Silver Age*, Berkeley, 1993, 469.

[34] "Will a new myth be born in the country of exile at that hour when our oppression will finally become unendurable? There is harmony in the latest sorrow and unconsolable weeping is always sonorous; at the base of pain is a sharp life force. The first time since Yehudah Halevi, the soul of the Jewish people has already sang forth in Bialik an otherworldly song, an angelic-earthy song! Does it not presage the Jewish people's resurrection? Or is it true that only the land of Palestine can give birth to a new Jewish world? I do not know, but I strongly believe that the nation is alive in its letargic sleep and at the assigned moment it will awaken." M. Gershenzon, "Narod, ispytuemyi ognem," *Evreiskaia nedelia* 1 (January 3) (1916): 28.

by resisting God's will, the ancient Jews lead themselves to destruction. Although he is critical, Gershenzon showed his respect by considering the ancient Jews the first carriers of cosmic consciousness.

Although he an unfamiliar vocabulary and conceptual language in metaphysical questions, on the practical Jewish question in Russia he was decidedly simpler, expressing his support for integration. In his letters and in the way he lived one can perceive his approval of Jewish assimilation. Writing to Vasilii Rozanov, the author who was a known anti-Semite, Gersheznon explained his perspective on the role of Jews in Russian culture.

> I do not hide from myself that my Jewish spirit through my writings brings a foreign element into Russian consciousness: I am clearly conscious of it; it cannot be otherwise. But I think that the life of any great and strong people, such as the Russian people, works itself so deeply, distinctively and irrevocably that not only the economic or literary influence of Jews, the force of Germans and other things, but even historical events–1612, 1812, 1905 (excluding however the greatest events, such as ancient conquests)—are incapable of moving it from its fatal path by an inch. This is like a smelting over: whatever you throw into it, either burns and thus increases the smelting, or else improves the quality of the metal. Such is the participation of Jews and everything like it generally—insignificant in quantity comparatively with the people's life; a foreign admixture can become dangerous for the people only if it oppresses quantitatively, as occurred in the conquest of England by the Normans; but this already is one of those great historical events in which there is the hand of God!
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> … I think further that each effort of the spirit brings profit to the people no matter what the content or form—pious or heretical, patriotic or not—only if it is genuinely spiritual; therefore any honest writings in Russian by a Jew, a Latvian or a Georgian brings profit to the Russian people. Moreover, I believe such a foreign admixture exactly "improves the quality of the metal," because a Jew or Georgian perceives the world in his own way—the Jewish or Latvian way—turning things to society from such a side, from which society is not used to seeing them. That is why identifying myself as a Jew, I still allow myself to write in Russian about Russian things. This is conscious, that is, in this way I intellectually, forwards and backwards, justify my work.[35]

The key to understanding this passage is not only that Russians will absorb the Jewish element and become stronger, but also that an exorable process takes place that no individual can stop or manipulate. Believing in a kind of universal fatalism (cosmic force), Gershenzon was indifferent to ordinary

[35] M. Gershenzon to V. Rozanov 18 January 1912, "Perepiska V.V. Rozanova i M.O. Gershenzona," *Novyi mir* 3 (1991): 228.

distinctions between peoples and nations. At the same time referring to the "hand of God" and that the "admixture makes the race stronger," Gershenzon reposted Richard Wagner and Rozanov himself that Jews were dangerous to native cultures. The natural outcome of his worldview was of course cosmopolitanism and Gershenzon was apparently committed to the cosmopolitan ideal of a merging of cultures and peoples.

Despite the desire of at least one scholar to draw a line between the Jewish tradition and Gershenzon's philosophical ideas, is difficult for me to see a Jewish source.[36] His rejection of culture, his penchant for neo-primitivism, and his antagonism to ratiocination have little in common with the Jewish tradition. Although he was by no means a self-hating Jew, Gershenzon did not practice the religion. Moreover, few if any of his multiple allusions in the *Correspondence From Two Corners* refer to the Jewish tradition. Jews and Jewish culture seem to have played an important role in his thinking, but the role was primarily functional: he used them to engage ideas that were closer to his own thinking.

Gershenzon's side in the *Correspondence* is very complicated not only because the dialogue form inhibited a direct expression of his thoughts, but also because his ideas themselves were difficult, strange, and unconventional. In addition, the way he expressed them in allegory and through historical examples did not always bring greater clarity. Moreover, many of Gershenzon's other philosophical texts have either never been published or have only appeared in the last decade.[37]

The few scholars who have treated Gershenzon's philosophical writings have been surprised by the absence of an acknowledgement of Lev Tolstoy's influence. In fact, many of the ideas that Gershenzon asserts as his own echo Tolstoy; in particular, the idea of culture as a screen separating the individual from what is true and important.[38] Although Nietzsche was mentioned in the *Correspondence*, Gershenzon denied being his follower. George Florovsky has criticized Gershenzon for an indifference to religion and religious feeling, seeing in Gershenzon's complaints about culture something

[36] In a conference devoted to Jewish literature in Russia in May, 2009, in Hebrew University, Leonid Katsis attempted to show Jewish sources for Gershenzon's philosophical views.

[37] See V. Proskurina, *Techenie Gol'fstrema*. Scholars may want to consult with M.O. Gershenzon's archive (746) in the Manuscript Division of the Russian National Library in Moscow.

[38] N.P. Poltoratzky, "Lev Tolstoy and Vekhi," *Slavonic and East European Review* 42, 99 (1964): 332–352.

closer to a pagan expression of disappointment.[39] Vera Proskurina, a Gershenzon specialist, maintains that Gershenzon is a modern "gnostic" with a dual worldview comprised of a belief in this and another more perfect world.

I maintain that Gershenzon's idea of a "cosmic" spirituality actually governs his thought and that it has a commonality with Slavophile ideas.[40] In Gershenzon's view the cosmic force that seeks the unity of all actually has the paradoxical effect of promoting individuality. Much like the Slavophile concept of *Sobornost'*–on which Gershenzon's ideas are based—cosmic unity demands the subordination of the individual and at the same time finds any kind of coercion unacceptable. Such concepts unite the principles of collective holism and individual liberty. For Gershenzon the search for spiritual holism has primary importance, and consequently, we should be occupied with removing all impediments to its achievement. Culture, a short-hand term symbolizing these impediments, must be overcome and transformed.

My criticism of Gershenzon's philosophical views focuses mainly on his metaphysical naiveté. There is so much left out of Gershenzon's philosophical position that it seems impossible to perceive a practical program. What is the role of society, social institutions, economics, or politics in connection with the cosmic force? Although he might reply that he disdains hierarchies since they interfere with the individual's immediate perception of reality, nonetheless it is not clear what would happen to society if everyone followed his advice. Furthermore, how would tolerance function? Presumably not everyone would want to subordinate individual will to the group's needs. What would the group do about these misfits? Gershenzon does not deal with these questions and therefore we do not have answers. However, the absence of discussion regarding the consequences of a revolution in perception is likely to worry a questioning critic.

Having been diagnosed with tuberculosis, in 1922, Gershenzon decided to take his family to Germany for treatment and there make a final decision whether to return to Soviet Russia or stay in the emigration. He had endured severe deprivation during the Civil-War years in Moscow, including hunger, cold, and poverty. Although some of the intimate details may never be available, according to his daughter, Nataliia Gershenzon-Chegodaeva, Gershenzon took the advice of his children and decided to return to

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[39] G. Florovskii, rev. of 'Perepiska iz dvukh uglov', *Russkaia mysl'* 4 (1922): 138–139.

[40] B. Horowitz, diss., 206–230.

Russia.[41] Gershenzon apparently felt that he had an obligation to contribute to shaping Russia's future, at the same time doubting that he could offer much in the emigration.[42] It is also significant that at the same time that Viacheslav Ivanov had to leave Russia for survival itself, Gershenzon's ideas were not hostile to the Soviet state. He was permitted to return in 1923 and moreover, given a good position in GAKhN, the Academy of Arts. He died of heart failure two years later at the age of 56.

Gershenzon's side in the *Correspondence* is not unique in Russian cultural history. It echoes a group of texts by elite authors who reflect critically on their life and work, articulating a preference for a tabula rasa or return to nature. In the nineteenth century one can point to a number of such texts, including Tolstoy's religious writings, some of Dostoevsky's journalism (especially in *Dnevnik pisatelia*), Vasilii Rozanov's *Opavshie list'ia*, and Alexander Blok's "Narod i revolutsiia." Gershenzon's side in the *Correspondence*, therefore, cleaves closely to one of the central sentiments of the Russian intelligentsia—a struggle against reigning social norms, a romanticization of ignorance (compare with the Russian peasant), and a striving for a collective solution (couched in Gershenzon's text as coinciding with the individual's interests). In this sense Gershenzon's side links him tightly to the larger context of Russian philosophy and helps one understand his ideas and intellectual evolution.

[41] Gershenzon-Chegodaeva, *Pervye shagi zhiznennogo puti*, 185.
[42] Ibid., 228–229.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE DISCUSSIONS ON FEDOR DOSTOEVSKY AT THE MOSCOW BRANCH OF THE ST.-PETERSBURG "FREE PHILOSOPHIC ASSOCIATION" AS A RUSSIAN-JEWISH DIALOGUE

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The famous Russian intellectual society commonly known as "The Free Philosophic Association" was possibly the main place where Russian non-communist intellectuals could hold semi-official meetings during the early post-revolutionary years.[1]

As we have shown, earlier members of the St.-Petersburg (Petrograd) branch of this association were interested not only in the Russian Orthodox philosophical disputes over the main problems of Russian culture and literature, but they once even organized a Jewish-Russian discussion on F. Dostoevsky.[2]

Here one can find such names as Aharon Shteinberg, Israel Zinberg, Asia Veksler from the Jewish side and a famous Russian Orthodox thinker such as Alexander Meier.

It is important to note that the lecturer Aaron Shteinberg, a young Jewish Russian neo-Kantian philosopher who graduated from Heidelberg University, was a secretary of "The Free Philosophic Association" (Volfila). He was the main supporter of its chairman, the renowned Russian poet, writer and thinker Andrei Bely.

This point is of the utmost importance to our theme. The fact is that Andrei Bely was not a philo-Semite at all. He was the author of the key Russian symbolist novel "Petersburg" (1916), which was based on the idea of a combination of the so-called "yellow" danger (concerned with Japan

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[1] A general view is in: V. Belous. *VOL'FILA ili Krizis kul'tury v zerkale obschestvennogo samosoznaniia*. Sankt-Petersburg, 2007.

[2] L. Katsis. A.A. Meyer vs. A.Z. Shteinberg (iz kommentariev k russko-evreisim sporam 1920-kh gg.)// *Issledovaniia po istorii russkoi mysli* [*8*]. *Ezhegodnik 2006–2007*. Pod red. M.A. Kolerova i N.S. Plotnikova. Moscow, 2009. pp. 427–468.

and China) and the Jewish one, which could destroy Russia and even the rest of Europe along with it. At the same time, Bely was closely connected with an anti-Semitic wing of Russian Symbolism and its leaders, such as Emil Metner, who was one of the main active fighters against the Jewish dominance of the musical scene. The young virtuosos he most actively protested against were of Jewish origin. Andrei Bely expressed his solidarity with Metner in his article "The Stamped Culture".[3]

So, the general ideological and political context of Volfila, especially after the October revolution associated the first Bolshevik government with a Jewish presence, was not particularly liberal. But at Volfila, Andrei Bely unexpectedly proved himself to be a real liberal intellectual leader, both regarding politics and philosophy.

At the same time, Moscow intellectuals lead by Nikolai Berdiaev and Gustav Shpet independently organized something similar to Volfila, called the Moscow Academy of Spiritual Culture. Andrei Bely, emboldened by the success of his Petrograd initiative, decided to organize a Moscow Volfila on the base of the said Academy.

He thus sent the brothers Steinberg to Moscow. The second brother was a very significant figure in the Russian revolution. He was a member of Socialist Revolutionary Party and became a commissar of Justice in Lenin's first government of 1918. Like all other representatives of the non-Bolshevik parties, he left the Soviet government very soon after his appointment because of the impossibility of any forms of coexistence with Lenin, the Bolsheviks and their aspiration to political monopoly.

As opposed to his liberal younger brother, Isaac Shteinberg was a firmly orthodox Jew. From Aaron's works on Dostoevsky we know the real history: unlike Aaron's memoirs and his writings on Dostoevsky that have reached our time the leaders of the Moscow Volfila did not leave us with an opportunity to hear or read Isaak's lecture on the author of "The Crime and Punishment". Why and how this occurred we will try to explain here.

But beforehand, it is important to know some circumstances connected with the Petrograd Volfila discussions on Dostoevsky which developed into a Jewish-Russian dialogue.

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[3] These problems were studied in: M. Bezrodnyi. O 'iudoboiazni' Andreia Belogo.// *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*. Moscow, 1997. No. 28. pp. 100–125.: Same. Iz istorii russkogo neokantianstva (zhurnal *Logos* I ego redaktory)// *Litsa. Biograficheskii al'manakh*. I. Moscow-Sankt-Peterburg. 1992. pp. 372–408.; Same. Iz istorii russkogo germanofil'stva: izdatel'stvo "Musaget"//*Issledovaniia po istorii russkoi musli. Ezhegodnik na 1999 god*. Moscow, 1999. pp. 157–198.

It is essential to remember that 1921 was the double jubilee of two events of 1881, the first of which was the death of Dostoevsky and the second the 1 March murder of Alexander II. Indeed, Volfila dedicated more than 15 meetings to the first date, and one meeting was dedicated to Aaron Shteinberg's lecture, "Dostoevsky as a Philosopher".[4]

The main point of that lecture was that the leading Russian writer was comparable to a Bible Prophet, and according to Steinberg his philosophy was chiefly based on the Old Testament rather than the New. The lecture presented Dostoevsky's God, and even his world-view and his personality, as connected with the Old Testament and its God. Moreover, Aaron Steinberg failed to mention Christ at all.

It is not as interesting for us to analyze the whole discussion that followed that lecture, which required another special meeting. We shall mention here only the reply of the Russian Orthodox thinker Alexander Meier, who said that a Christian believes not in an abstract God, but in Christ and that Meier, as a Russian philosopher, was surprised when Steinberg used the "term" God as a Single entity instead of a Trinity.

Aaron Shteinberg answered his opponent by saying that if Meier agreed that Dostoevky was a Prophet, then he (Steinberg) did not know anything about the Christian Prophecy.[5]

Steinberg continued this discussion in his later book, "The System of Freedom in Dostoevsky" published in exile in Berlin in 1923. We do not know if Meier was aware of this book, but in any case Meier would have been unable to answer Steinberg openly in the Soviet circumstances. But the problem of the genesis of Christianity and the issue of Prophecy in the New Testament in comparison with its Judaic background had been discussed in the underground Orthodox philosophic seminars, "The Tuesdays," which took place in Petrograd, and which were lead by Alexander Meier without any direct connection to Volfila. Unfortunately, Steinberg did not know anything about these. Thus, an interesting Russian-Jewish dialogue was interrupted.

These events were held in Petrograd and Berlin. But let us return to Moscow.

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[4] Doklad A.Z. Shteinberga "Dostoevskii kak filosof" I preniia po ego dokladu na LXXXVI-IIom zasedanii VFA 16 oktiabria 1921 g.// V. Belous. *VOL'FILA* [*Petrogradskaia Vol'naia Filosofskaia Assotsiatsiia*] *1919–1924. Kniga pervaya: Predystoriia. Zasedaniia*. Moscow, 2005. pp. 637–702.

[5] See footnote 2 of this study.

It is well-known that the leader of Volfila, Andrei Bely, was very active from the end of 1910 to the beginning of 1920. His lectures touched on the broad variety of themes; he presented dozens of them on almost all aspects of the so-called "crisis of culture". This topic was at the focus of contemporary Russian thought which can be described as independent and non-Marxist. A little later we will refer to texts written by other participants of our history, but here it can already be mentioned that the main problem of such an approach to the most challenging issue of the time is that it was based on a resolution of the Apocalyptical problem in Christianity and eschatological issues in Judaism. Such a structure is based on the Abrahamic origins of Judaism and Christianity. In a nutshell, Christians are waiting for the Second Coming of Christ as the Messiah, while Jews are waiting for the Mashiach. Both, however, are of Jewish origins. Thus, Christians formulate their understanding of this process through the image of Judaism. Conversely, Jews do not need to avail themselves of any image of Christianity in their eschatological thought, but Jewish intellectuals felt a need to participate in the European philosophical process of the Fin de Siècle. They therefore paid attention to such problems as "The Crisis and Christianity", "The Crisis and the Church" and so on. Of course it is impossible to find something like "The Crisis and the Synagogue" in Christian thought.

The asymmetrical structure of the Crisis philosophical process led to the principal misunderstanding between the two sides of this dialogue and may be seen in some cases as the usual anti-Semitism of Christian thinkers. But the issue is not so simple when we take into account the identical German-oriented philosophical circle of all heroes of our study and the general problems of independent thought in post-revolutionary Soviet Russia for both Christian and Jewish thinkers. We will try to understand this phenomenon in the context of the Russian situation of 1920.

But for now it is important to mention a similar recent publication of the planned leader of the Moscow Volfila, the philosopher professor Gustav Shpet, a follower of Edmund Husserl' s who had been the founder of the Moscow Academy. Up until this point, nothing was known of his interest in this problem, which was so significant for Andrey Bely. We can thus conclude that the idea of establishing a Moscow branch of Volfila ahead of Shpet was not so strange to the leaders of both wings of Russian thought, both in Petrograd and in Moscow.

Now we can reconstruct the second wing of the Moscow-Petrograd discussion regarding this question. And this wing is so important and unexpected that we must pay a special attention to it.

Shpet based his position on the idea that mankind now stands not before the crisis of Thought (understood in strictly Platonic terms) but before the crisis of Culture, a crisis that is quite real. Its ontology is based on the destruction, not of any abstract culture but of the Christian culture that breaks into its two basic elements: Judaism and Paganism.[6]

Shpet understood contemporary Paganism at the time of the crisis as a development of Nietzscheanism. At the same time, he saw Judaism as a result of the development of the Jewish thought from Moses Mendelssohn through Steintal and Lazarus via Hermann Cohen to Theodor Hertzl and the main stage of that process was the "Spiritual Zionism" of Ahad Ha-Am.

Hence, Shpet includes a Messianic perspective as relevant to the crisis, as opposed to Andrei Bely's ideas, expressed in his "Glossalalia" (1917–1920) from an Anthroposophic perspective.

This important book, based on the ideas of Dr. Steiner, took its point of departure from a mystical analysis of the phonetics of the first words of "Bereshit" in its Hebrew variant., As is clear from this scheme, Bely incorporated this crisis into the so-called Abrahamic perspective.

One can thus conclude that the idea of establishing a Moscow branch of Volfila is situated at the crossroads of sharp and quite asymmetric philosophical discussions between two leaders of Russian thought in two cultural capitals of Russia.

It is interesting to point out that Shpet took part in the Petrograd meetings of Volfila; we do not know of any conflicts that might have come to the surface during these events. Hence, Bely could be hopeful that the idea that he tried to relay before leaving Russia for Berlin might preserve his beloved Volfila.

Now we can try to understand why such an apparently logical and quite realistic project of two branches of a seemingly single intellectual circle did not come to fruition.

Let us take examine the chronology in order to compare two schedules of Dostoevsky jubilees in two towns, paying special attention to events connected with Jewish themes and problems.

Aaron Shteinberg presented a lecture entitled "Dostoevsky as a Philosopher" on the 16th of October 1921. Discussion was held on the 23 of October

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[6] T. Tschedrina. Filisofskii arkhiv Gustava Shpeta: opyt istoriko-filosofskoi rekonstruktsii. Prilozhenie: G.G. Shpet. Krizis filosofii (1920)//*Issledovaniia po istorii russkoi mysli: Ezhegodnik za 2004/2005 god* [7]/ Pod redaktsiei M.A. Kolerova i N.S. Plotnikova. Moscow, 2007. pp. 92–103.

of the same year. At that time the circumstances in Moscow were as follows:[7]

> In the summer of 1920 Andrei Bely returned from Petrograd to Moscow and suggested the organization of the Moscow branch of Volfila. But practical realization took its time—till the middle of 1921.

On June 12, Volfila send its secretary Aaron Shhteinberg to Moscow. The initial group included Gustav Shpet and Isaak Shteinberg, among others. The formative meeting was at held on September 26 1921 and the first open meeting took place October 15. Thus, this event occurred one day before the Shteinberg Jewish-Russian lecture in the Petrograd Dostoevsky cycle, and a week prior to the discussion. Andrei Bely was a chairman of this initial meeting in Moscow. He was accompanied by both brothers Steinberg and Shpet.

On October 15 a lecture by Bely was held on "Dostoevsky and a Crisis of Culture".

After several open and closed meetings, members of the Moscow Volfila decided to organize their own Dostoevsky cycle.

According to the Protocol of the meeting of the Council from the 1st of November, one of the members—Jakov Golosovker—had his lecture on the Russian classic rejected. The Russian-Jewish discussion at Petrograd Volfila regarding Steinberg's lecture took place a week later.

What happened? The answer can be found in the same Protocol. One of the influential members of the Council, S. Mstislavsky, said: "Steinberg's ethnos (sic!) alien to us in its spirit".[8]

Another member of the Council—a Jewish philosopher of neo-Kantian orientation, Matvei Kagan—was (according to Mstislavsky), with Steinberg, "under suspicion".

After all it was decided to exclude Isaak Shteinberg from actual membership to Volfila after the conversation with Gustav Shpet. It is now known that Golosovker planned to speak about "The Secret of a Devil (Dostoevsky and Kantian Antinomies)".

At the same meeting of the Council, Matvei Kagan's lecture was rejected. We don't know anything about his plans concerning Dostoevsky. But we

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[7] MOSKVA 1921–1922// *V. Belous. VOL'FILA* [*Petrogradskaia Vol'naia Filosofskaia Assotsiatsiia*] *1919–1924. Kniga vtoraia: Khronika. Portrety. Predystoriia. Zasedaniia.* Moscow, 2005. pp. 193–232.

[8] Ibid. p. 221.

know about a cycle of articles he wrote regarding "The Church and a Crisis of Culture", "Judentum and the Crisis Culture" and so on.[9] We can thus conclude either that G. Shpet and S. Mstislavsky were excluded from the Moscow Volfila or that they banned three Jews from any activity.

It might be thought that the phenomenology-orientated Shpet excluded his neo-Kantian philosophic antagonists, but this is incorrect, as other Kantian lectures were held without any problems. Moreover, Jakov Golosovker was not a Jewish-oriented thinker as were the two Shteinbergs and Matvei Kagan. He was closer to Nietzsche.

Consequently, we cannot dismiss the suspicion that the element of race is relevant to our study especially in regard to the behaviour of Mstislavsky.

At the same time, one can understand the decision of three of the four above-mentioned Jews who did not want to work in such an impossible environment as Petrograd. But it is not so simple to justify Shpet.

Fortunately, history has provided us with an opportunity to hear some authentic remarks concerning our theme in the form of a dialogue between Shpet, Aaron Shteinberg and Kagan.

Recently two letters were published which are documents of the greatest importance, especially to our topic. One letter was sent by Gustav Shpet to Matvei Kagan on 20/02/1920 and the second was sent by Aaron Steinberg to Kagan on 17.10.1920. This provides us with real documents connected to the dialogue between Kagan and Shpet just before the organization of the Moscow Volvila that were sent by both sides.

Shpet writes: "Dear Doctor! (…) Your article is considered in Section I but unfortunately it cannot be accepted. As to my personal opinion my principal objection is first and foremost concerned with METHOD. Here I diverge not just from you personally but from the School that you belong to".

We do not want to analyze the professional antagonisms between two thinkers. But it is interesting to note that Gustav Shpet was wary of being suspected of anti-Semitism. He thus concluded his refusal in the following way: "Write me, please, how can I call your patronymic name, so I can approach you in accordance with the norms of the Russian language. Solem.".[10]

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[9] See: M. Kagan. Paul' Natorp I krizis kul'tury; Evreistvo v krizise kul'tury; Krizis tserkvi; O religioznom krizise sovremennosti in: *M. Kagan. O khode istorii*. Ed., comp. by V.L. Makhlin. Moscow, 2004. Pp. 93–98, 171–190. See our study on this topic: L. Katsis. Matvei Kagan—evreiskii filosof // *Lekhaim*. Moscow. 2008. N^{0}2,3; Evreistvo v krizise kul'tury. Evreiskaya tochka zreniia: Matvei Kagan.//*Lekhaim*. Moscow, 2009. No. 3.

[10] Cit. from: M. Kagan. *O khode istorii*. p. 629.

The last word is very interesting because Shpet tried to write "Goodbye" in Yiddish. But he make a mistake: in Ashkenazic pronunciation it would be "S(h)olem".

There is another letter that we shall translate almost in its entirety because it touches on all the issues dealt with in this study: "Distinguished Matvei Isaevich, your letter arrived in my hands very recently: for I have not been in Petrograd for nearly six weeks and part of the time I was cut off from the external world. Upon returning I found your long letter with so many pressing issues that against my will I was forced to lay aside your letter from day to day. Yesterday I met your brother who informed me that he visits you, and I decided to use such an occasion to give this letter to him. But to a certain extent it is superfluous: your brother informed me of your decision to come here for a short time. In this way we can discuss personally most of the questions mentioned in the letter. I will be able to convince you of how little can be done specifically regarding the philosophy. Our Philosophic Association is from some points of view an organization. And it is very difficult to assist it in its fight for life. When you come here you will be convinced of this yourself. Unfortunately, the same has to be said about the Jewish University, for the same law of fight for life chains all thoughts of any person who wants to think on his own risk … From the beginning of winter, the energy of our undertakings steadily expires to freezing point. What is to be done? (…) Your story about Shpet's outspoken recognition strongly impressed me. I do not mean its contents—I never doubt such attitudes to an alien—just its frankness is striking. The evaluation of an act of such confession places personal confidence in you: it is so much in our time".[11]

If we return to our main theme we can see that Shpet was not confused because of the fact that his "strange" colleagues left his Moscow Volfila. One cannot conclude that here we have an example of anti-Semitism of any kind. At the same time an open declaration, not of general neo-Kantianism but its specifically Russian-Jewish brand, did not seem to Shpet to be pertinent in that ideological context.[12]

It is an interesting trait of Russian reality that the first Soviet years which left intellectuals, especially those of a non-Marxist orientation, with too little breathing spaces, imposed a very specific ethos of coexistence on members of intellectual circles in 1920–1930th.

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[11] Ibid. p. 630.

[12] See about this variety of neo-Kantianism in: L. Katsis. Dialog: Yurii Zhivago—Mikhail Gordon, and Russian-Jewish Neo-Kantianism of 1913–1915 // *Judaica Rossica*, N^{0}3. Moscow. 2003. pp. 174–206.

Thus, Shpet and Kagan met one another at the auditoriums of the Russian Academy of Artistic Science (GAKHN). But many other philosophers had been exiled in 1922 on board the so-called "Philosophic Ships" along with almost all the intellectual elite of the pre-revolutionary Russia. The Shteinbergs left Russia on their own. Andrei Bely, by contrast, returned to the Soviet Union in 1923.

GAKHN began to prepare the recently published *Dictionary of the Artistic Terminology*. Shpet was a leader of that project and Kagan became its learned secretary. But the result was the same as we with all other contacts between Shpet and Kagan: no text by Kagan was included in the prooftext of this unpublished Dictionary.

Thus a friend and colleague of Lev Shestov (Shvartzman) and Mikhail Gershenzon cut his personal contacts with the last real Jewish philosopher of his circle. Kagan died in 1937 while serving as an economist in Soviet energetic structures. Shpet was shot during the Great Terror. And only Jakov Golosovker, after his imprisonment in the 1930s, lived in the USSR until 1970 to witness the 1963 publication of his book on Dostoevsky and Kant. It was republished in 2010,[13] two years after the first publication of Shpet's text on the Crisis of Culture. Kagan's philosophical text was published in 2004.

Aaron Shteinberg became, as is well known, a prominent Jewish thinker, memoirist and one of the leaders of The World Jewish Congress. A revised version of his memoirs of Volfila was published in 2009.[14]

Now they have all returned to us and it is up to us to choose whether to read them independently of each other or to try to understand their epoch in all its complexity. Only the latter approach will provide us with an opportunity to get full understanding of such processes as assimilation, anti-Semitism and principal differences of opinion. Otherwise, all cultural history will lose its authentic energy and drive.

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[13] Ya. Golosovker. Dostoevskii i Kant.//Golosovker Ya. *Izbrannoe. Logika mifa*. Sankt-Peterburg, 2010. pp. 311–388.

[14] A. Shteinberg. *Literaturnyi arkhipelag*. Moscow. 2009. Ed. By Nelly Portnova and Vladimir Khazan. See discussion about this edition with the participation of the editors, E. Finkelstein and the author of this study in: *Lekhaim*. Moscow, 2010. pp. 46–51.

PART FOUR

THE TWENTIES: STRATEGIES OF SALVATION

CHAPTER EIGHT

ASSIMILATION OR CULTURAL ENCOUNTER? THE PICARESQUE IN G. BOGROV'S *NOTES OF A JEW* AND I. EHRENBURG'S *THE STORMY LIFE OF LASIK ROITSCHWANTZ*

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With the arrival in the last few decades of postcolonial studies and of the diverse "cultural turns"[1] in particular in scholarly discourse, notions and concepts of "assimilation" and "anti-Semitism" became highly contested and diversified in their ramifications. Generally speaking, the focus shifted from static descriptions of phenomena usually associated with "assimilation" to the dynamics of inter-cultural contact and entanglement. More attention began to be paid to the specifics of the temporal, spatial, ethnic, and social settings in which cultural encounters took place in the past and continue to take place today. Historiography no less than literary studies embraced thus notions of "encounter," "integration," and "contact," particularly in the English-speaking academic world.

In Russian Jewish literature of the 19th and 20th centuries, works by Grigorii Bogrov and Ilya Ehrenburg have long been associated with what was referred to as "anti-Semitism," an elastic notion stretching so far as to encompass Jewish self-hatred and a blurry notion of "assimilation."[2] The writings of these two authors are striking representatives of the interaction among Russian, Russian Jewish, and European cultures and audiences. Different as the two writers' artistic and ideational agendas are from each other, taking a close look at elements of their biographies, their cultural disposition and

[1] "Cultural turns" refers to shifts in theoretical focus and interest taken by researchers and thinkers in the modern multi-disciplinary setting. Instances of cultural turns include the spatial turn, the linguistic turn, and the translational turn. Cf. Doris Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns. Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 2006). See also Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History?* (Cambridge, 2004).

[2] See, for example, Shimon Markish, "Tretii otets-osnovatel' ili 'K chuzhim kostram'" ("The Third Founding Father, or 'To Alien Campfires'"), *Ierusalimskii zhurnal* (*The Jerusalem Journal*) N^0 6, 2000.

societal position can yield a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics involved in the processes of reception and perception, which are vital to the unfolding of cultural encounters.

Preliminary Remarks on Reception and Genre

The history of the reception of Grigorii Bogrov's autobiographical novel *Notes of a Jew* is fraught with polemics and conflicting opinions. Simon Dubnov appreciated his encounter with the novel as a milestone in his own intellectual development. In his memoirs Dubnov wrote:

> […] usililos' moe otritsatel'noe otnoshenie k ortodoksal'nomu evreistvu pod vliianiem dvukh knig: "Avtobiografii" Solomona Maimona i […] "Zapisok evreia" Bogrova, pechatavshikhsia v luchshem russkom ezhemesiachnike "Otechestvennye zapiski". Maimon namechal mne moi sobstvennyi put' iz starogo mira v novyi, Bogrov zhe svoimi rezkimi oblicheniiami starogo poriadka v evreiskikh obschinakh obostril vo mne oppozitsionnost' k okruzhaiuschei srede.[3]

A similarly appreciative statement was penned by Jacob Teitel, the one and only Jewish judge in the history of the Russian Empire. In his autobiography, "Iz moei zhizni" (From my life), Teitel noted:

> V chisle lits, kotorym ia poslal svoe vozzvanie, byl G.I. Bogrov, avtor "Zapisok evreia", pechatavshikhsia togda v "Otechestvennykh zapiskakh", izdavavshikhsia Kraevskim i Nekrasovym. Eti talantlivye ocherki proizvodili sil'noe vpechatlenie na russkoe obschestvo.[4]

By contrast, the Russian Jewish newspaper Den' published a judgment diametrically opposed to this, authored by Adolf Landau using the pseudonym of "Gambit." Landau accused Bogrov of exaggerating and defaming his real subject: "G[ospodin] Bogrov, kotoryi, po-vidimomu, blizko prismotrelsia k zhizni, no ochevidno umyshlenno iskazil ee raznymi preuvelicheniiami […]."[5]

Interestingly, both Dubnov and Landauas well as others agree on the thoroughly bleak and dismal picture Bogrov paints of the Jews' predicament under Tsar Nicholas I during the 1830s and 1840s. They differ, however, in

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[3] S.M. Dubnov, *Kniga zhizni: Vospominaniia i razmyshleniia. Materialy dlia istorii moego vremeni* (St. Petersburg, 1998), p. 54.

[4] Jacob Teitel, *Iz moei zhizni: Za sorok let* (Paris, 1925), pp. 25–26.

[5] Gambit (Landau), *Den'*, 1871, N^0 9, p. 139.

their appreciation of the Notes as a factor in the historical movement toward emancipation, as well as of the Notes' role in Russian culture, to be more precise in the evolving supranational Russian imperial culture. They also disagree as to the reaction which was to be anticipated from the "Russian public." While the Russian liberal press praised the work, conservative critics assigned it to the same ideological realm as Jacob Brafman's writing whose infamous Kniga Kagala speaks for itself to convey the general ambiance of this intellectual space. Yet in all these cases, the elements pivotal to the argument are immediately linked to notions of assimilation, emancipation, anti-Semitism and Jewish self-hatred.

The evident gap between the different reception patterns calls for an explanation that will go beyond merely acknowledging the existence of varying political or ideological stances. In a more culture-comparative vein, it may be claimed that Bogrov created something which—in reference to Homi Bhabha—can be described as a "third space."[6] That is, Bogrov authored a communication space defined by a particular lingual accessibility—through Russian—and by the dynamics of inter-cultural encounter. As a consequence, Bogrov's "third space" was met with both welcoming appraisal as well as utter rejection. Those looking for a "usable future"—to resort to Roskies' coinage referring to a "usable past"—took the novel to be an inspiration, while those afraid of cultural intrusion (Jewish traditionalists and conservative Russians) rejected it, as did those who saw Bogrov as a cultural apostate or traitor.

The moment of interaction among groups and knowledge layers becomes perceivable when we consider the connection between (autobiographical) writing, biography, and the various interpretive concepts and techniques applied in the study of these materials.

Bogrov was one of the first Russian Jewish intellectuals to write and publish extensively in the Russian language on Jewish life in the Russian Empire. In his Notes, he wrote about regions of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth which had been incorporated into the expanding Empire. Whereas outstanding works of Russian literature directed their attention to "conquered territories," such as the Caucasus (consider Pushkin, Lermontov, Tolstoy), Poland or Polish themes clearly did not constitute a focal point of attention in contemporary writing. Bogrov fills a lacuna in this respect, entering the Russian language communication space with the doubly sensitive subject of the Jewish, as well as the Polish question.

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[6] Cf., for example, Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York, 1994).

To pursue the link between writing and biographical background even further: living in times of societal transformation and social upheaval, both Bogrov and Ehrenburg authored their works in a setting shaped by the conditions of physical and intellectual migration. Though approximately 50 years apart from each other, both writers experienced an era of shift when the coordinate axes of the societies they lived in, or aspired to live in, were being re-formulated and re-adjusted. Having recourse to the ideational and emotional means available at the time, the individual as portrayed in some of these writers' texts searches for the meaning of life and seeks to formulate a stance of his or her own in a changing world.

The present essay focuses on this search and on its manifestations in literature. Rather than relying on the concepts of "assimilation" or "acculturation," the essay draws on the idea of "encounter" to argue that features inherent in the literary texts themselves shed light on processes of transformation experienced by both individuals and groups. Analyzing those features will provide a more nuanced understanding of the phenomena of inclusion and exclusion, as well as of cultural transfer and interaction, leading to the development of notions which can eventually be traced back to the writer's historical context, including, inter alia, the various contemporary types of discourse on anti-Semitism.

After a brief contrastive discussion of literary and historiographical concepts, the essay outlines the way in which the analysis of the literary genre and mode of the picaresque can outfit the reader of today with a revised notion of "encounter."

Literary Genre and Historiographical Concept

Recent scholarship on Russian Jewish literature and culture has put considerable emphasis on questions of identity as this translates into issues of belonging. This is due to the fact that, as postcolonial theorists have made clear, the individual always functions within more than a single reference system at once. That is, the individual is always a part of a complex and dynamic setting.

The concept of assimilation, elaborate and historically contextualised as this is in the work of Till van Rahden,[7] relies on a rather static unilateral model. More often than not, Rahden's "assimilation" describes a minority's

[7] Till van Rahden, "Treason, Fate, or Blessing: Narratives of Assimilation in the Historiog-

presumed pursuit of the opportunity to merge fully with the dominant group, disregarding issues that involve ambiguity, doubt, contingency,[8] or interference.

In his analysis of Viennese Jews of the fin de siècle, the Austrian historian Klaus Hoedl boldly argues for the concept of the "performative turn" which allows a more detailed description of group interactions and transformation processes. He claims:

> Instead of viewing their [i.e., the Jews', O.T.] history after the Enlightenment as a one-sided cultural adaptation to the society at large, it stresses interactive processes between Jews and non-Jews. [...] it emphasises the temporal and non-essentialist dimension of specific situations. Jews in nineteenth-century Vienna were not a group that could or can be contrasted to non-Jews. Instead, both groups interacted with and constituted each other.[9]

The same can certainly not be said of Russian Jewry. It is evident that the entry of Russian Jewish intellectuals into Russian culture was more complicated and to a much greater extent determined by encounters of different kinds than the term "assimilation" suggests.

In "interaction," the experience of the individual is central. In personal documents such as diaries, letters, or interviews, each of the two writers this paper focuses on introduces ideas, contacts, and influences that shaped his artistic agenda, his poetics, and even his worldview as a whole in ways that go far beyond the biographical value associated with any of these elements. In a letter to Lev Levanda, the second "founding father" of Russian Jewish literature, Bogrov attempts to explain his personal and his poetic dilemma which has led many critics think of him as the assimilationist par excellence. He writes (I quote the passage in full):

> Pozhaluista, ne prinimaite menia za fanatika, za glupago patriota. Ia v obshirnom smysle slova *emantsipirovannyi* kosmopolit. Esli by evrei v Rossii ne podvergalis' takim goneniiam i sistematicheskomu presledovaniiu, ia by, byt' mozhet, perepravilsia na drugoi bereg, gde mne ulybaiutsia drugiia simpatii, drugie idealy. No moi brat'ia po natsii, voobsche chetyre milliona liudei, stradaiut bezvinno, uzheli poriadochnyi chelovek mozhet makhnut' rukoiu na takuiu nepravdu? Byt' mozhet, bortsy, podobnye mne,—Donkikhoty, no

raphy of German-Speaking Jewry since the 1950s," in: Christhard Hoffmann, ed, *Preserving the Legacy of German Jewry: A History of the Leo Baeck Institute*, 1955–2005 (Tübingen: Schriftenreihe wissenschaftliche Abhandlungen des Leo Baeck Instituts, 2005), Bd. 70, pp. 349–373.

[8] See Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*(Cambridge and New York, 1989).

[9] Klaus Hoedl, From Acculturation to Interaction: A New Perspective on the History of the Jews in Fin-de-Siecle Vienna, *Shofar* 25 (2007): 2, p. 103.

> ia predpochitaiu vsiakogo serdechnago, khotia i smeshnogo Donkikhota vsiakomu zheleznodorozhnomu geroiu—kak N …, ne prinimaiuschii evreev. Smorkatyi meschanin.[10]

In making this statement, Bogrov draws a line between the cultural and the social: on the one hand, he is aspiring to join a relatively open communication space which is situated in European culture transported and provided by the Russian medium. On the other hand, Bogrov discusses the social and legal reality facing the Jews in Russia, which imposes a constraint on his aspirations. He feels responsible, clearly identifying this feeling as a moral obligation, and tries to act accordingly. Ehrenburg at a later time will take a similar stance. Concerning his Jewishness, Ehrenburg says in an interview taken on the occasion of his 70th birthday: "ia—evrei, poka budet suschestvovat' na svete khot' odin antisemit. Ne natsionalizm prodiktoval mne eti slova, no moe ponimanie chelovecheskogo dostoinstva."[11]

The key to Bogrov's and Ehrenburg's understanding of being "Jewish" or "Russian," which the two writers did not see as necessarily mutually exclusive or opposing categories, should be looked for in their perception of the Russian language and culture. They do not consider Russian as the language of the Empire's titular nation; Russian means for them, rather, a pragmatic space of cultural encounter and exchange.

The process of appropriation involved is creative insofar as it entails tensions, inner contradiction, and anticipated conflict with the writers' intellectual surroundings.

But how does this find an expression for itself in literature? Have literary studies and literary criticism over time developed the analytical tools and models for describing continuities and discontinuities in cultural awareness and self-awareness? Can inherently literary features be identified in the texts, reflecting historical changes and breaks and capturing the search of the individual, the individual's doubts and antagonism, individual hopes, or even geographical and ideational wanderings?

Bogrov himself hints at one such model in his letter: he refers to Don Quixote, the unlucky knight whose image, first created by Cervantes and published in 1613, proved the beginning of the European novel.

Don Quixote is a wanderer among different worlds, who, despite unending disappointments, tries to resolve the inter-cosmic incongruence, so as to make the different worlds tally with each other as elements of a single

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[10] [Landau], "*Iz perepiski L.O. Levandy*," Evreiskaia Biblioteka X (1903), p. 16.

[11] Il' ia Ehrenburg, *Liudi, gody, zhizn'*, vol. 3, p. 101.

whole. Even so, the knight errant fails to secure a place for himself in the cosmic arrangement which he seeks to fashion.

Another model Bogrov refers to, conveyed by the very title of his novel, is the so-called genre of "zapiski" or notes. "Notes" had become established as a distinct genre in Russian letters some twenty years prior to the appearance of Bogrov's work, with the publication in 1852 of Ivan Turgenev's Zapiski okhotnika (Notes of a Hunter).[12] The text is structured as a series of episodes which provide the first-person narrator—a stranger to his surroundings—with a framework setting for describing his encounters with the locals he meets on his travels. The accounts also provide him with the opportunity to criticize sharply the downtrodden social condition and educational backwardness of the peasants.

Both the model of Don Quixote and the genre of the "Notes" accentuate the picaresque as an essential element of the work. In his groundbreaking essay "Toward a Definition of the Picaresque," first published in 1962, the literary theorist Claudio Guillén sketches some of this mode's distinctive features: the picaro is typically an introspective, self-reflecting wanderer who finds himself at odds with his environment. His life story unfolds at the center of the narrative. It is no coincidence that the title of many picaresque novels begins with "The life of …" In addition, the narrator normally assumes a partial and critical viewpoint, recounting his life episodically and focussing on the material elements of existence.[13]

The picaro, eventually embodied by the Schlemiel in Jewish literatures, and the picaresque as a genre were not unknown in Russian literature. Translations into Russian had made Western European picaresque novels accessible, thus introducing writers to the genre. This series of developments has been convincingly demonstrated by Jurij Striedter in his work.[14]

Bogrov and Ehrenburg could henceforth draw on elaborate literary models and genres, transforming them in accord with their own needs and purposes. An analysis of how the pseudo-autobiographical and the picaresque

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[12] Turgenev would later acknowledge Bogrov's work; see the letter of March 26, 1882, from Turgenev to Bogrov: "Iz Vashix knig 'Zapiski evreia' byli mne znakomy: ia, pomnitsia, goda dva tomu nazad prochel ikh v derevne v originale s zhiveishim interesom […]" (*I.S. Turgenev, Polnoe Sobranie sochineniy i pisem v 28tt, Pis'ma v 13tt*. (Leningrad: Nauka, 1968), vol. 13, p. 219).

[13] Claudio Guillén, *Literature as System: Essays toward the Theory of Literary History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 71–106.

[14] Jurij Striedter, *Der Schelmenroman in Russland. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des russischen Romans vor Gogol'* (Berlin, 1961).

are constructed in their texts should now make new insights possible into the mechanisms of cultural transformation and the dynamics of interrelation among "Jewish," including different kinds of "Jewish," and "non-Jewish" knowledge. Moreover, using the notion of the picaresque as an analytical tool will enable the observer to foster a distanced—and thus more thoroughly nuanced and adequate—perspective. Such a detached and distant position can in turn facilitate the identification of different patterns of discourse in the texts, which can eventually be traced back to each text's particular societal setting.

The Picaresque in Grigorii Bogrov's Notes of a Jew

Bogrov published his Notes of a Jew as a series of sketches between 1871 and 1873 in the liberal Russian monthly Otechestvennye zapiski. The journal was headed at the time by the poet Nikolai Nekrasov and provided a platform for the critical, even revolutionary Russian intelligentsia. The little that is known of Bogrov's biography and working environment largely originates from comments made by his contemporaries, including Simon Dubnov and Simon Frug, and short encyclopedia entries, such as the one authored by Israel Tsinberg. In recent decades, Shimon Markish and Gabriella Safran have meticulously traced and collected these pieces of information in their studies.

This essay takes its point of departure analytically from the moment of communication. Both Srulik, the first-person narrator in Bogrov's Notes of a Jew, and Lasik, his counterpart of Ehrenburg's The Stormy Life of Lasik Roitschwantz, aspire to enter and to take part in a variety of communication projects. In the end, both are unable to advance in their inter-cultural communication ventures for reasons of language skills, of modes of thinking and perceiving the world which appear alien or incomprehensible to the two protagonists' would be interlocutors. By "communication" here is meant inter-personal contact in the broadest sense: issues of language acquisition, change of names, reading habits, and more.

Bogrov's Srul' begins his life's account at the age of forty. His father, a kind of Doppelgaenger and point of comparison with Srul', was expelled from the kehilla after reading books on astronomy in Hebrew and manifesting an independent spirit and eagerness for tabooed knowledge. However, later in life, the father abandons his independence and Srul' receives a traditional education, being sent away from home at an early age in order to attend the traditional heder.

In his new town surroundings, Srul' encounters the milieu of Russian and Russians for the first time. He becomes friends with a neighbor's children and falls in love with Olga. This love imbroglio is to accompany him throughout the rest of his life. He is to meet Olga eventually at a later time as an adult, by then the widow of a Polish army officer, in yet another provincial town. It is Olga who introduces the narrator to Russian and tries to russify him. She changes his Jewish name Srul', a diminutive of "Israel," into the Russian Grisha, a diminutive of "Grigorii." A natural mocker of both Jews and Russians alike, at a later stage, Srul' makes fun of a clerk at his father's office. The man calls himself by the "genuinely" Russian name of "Konrad" (deriving from Old High German "audacious counsel") instead of his Jewish name "Paltiel" (which hails from the Hebrew for "God is my deliverance").

It is this same clerk that introduces Srulik to Russian literature. After years spent studying the Talmud, Srul' reads his first secular book in Russian, the "Russian version of a European romance in verse"[15] bearing the title of Angliyskii Milord. No more attracted than repulsed by this piece of popular fiction, Srulik ridicules the allegedly scandalous in it. He dryly notes that the Talmud, which gives things their proper names, has already familiarized him with the novel's subject matter. Interestingly, Srulik could also have read the novel in Yiddish translation, but proudly prefers to demonstrate his Russian language skills.

In its intellectual scope, Srulik's biography as a reader of Russian literature does not extend far beyond this work of Romantic kitsch. In connection with his affair with Olga, he alludes to Vasily Vonlyarlyarsky's novel Bol'shaya barynya, as well as makes references to the fables of Ivan Krylov—all in all, popular works which did not meet the standards of the critical intelligentsia that preferred to read Belinsky.

But where and why does Bogrov's protagonist need Russian in everyday life? Having learnt Russian in secret from his parents and teachers, he now uses it as a part of his encounter with Russians in his official position as tax collector for the otkup. However, due to his social position, this does not enable him to participate in any broader cultural context that could satisfy his intellectual strivings.

Most of the action is set in a Yiddish-speaking environment, which the narrator describes in Russian. Notably, the same is not the case with

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[15] Gabriella Safran, *Rewriting the Jew: Assimilation Narratives in the Russian Empire* (Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 41.

Ehrenburg's Lasik. The incongruence between subject and object language, indicative of the problematic cultural transfer Bogrov has to perform, both mirrors the suspended position of Srulik between an undesirable past and an unreachable future and points to Bogrov's own intricate struggle in achieving an adequate position in the Russian literary realm. Viktor Kel'ner remarks matter-of-factly in his recently published Dubnov biography: "Effekt romana byl by kuda bolee znachitel'nym, esli by v redaktsii *Otechestvennykh zapisok* osuschestvili ego bolee tschatel'nuiu literaturnuiu obrabotku. No v vek L. Tolstogo i I. Turgeneva trudno bylo rasschityvat' na osoboe vnimanie "izbalovannoi russkoi publiki" k etomu antikhudozhestvennomu proizvedeniiu."[16]

A gap separates Srulik's acquired language skills and cultural habits from the social belonging he aspires to in Russian society. In one of the many episodes highlighting this irresolvable tension, Srul', by now a grown man, encounters a Russian aristocrat. The two need to ferry over a river on a stormy night. While the Russian aristocrat is full of fear, Srul' evinces a courage and nobleness of spirit that are usually associated with the other's social class. The aristocrat recognises an equal in Srulik, who has taken on certain cultural codes from his Russian environment, and complains about the Jews. Only after arriving at the other shore does Srulik reveal his ethnic identity. The aristocrat apologises, embarrassed which in historical reality seems rather unlikely.

Apparently, language use and appropriation of cultural codes cannot resolve Srulik's suspended predicament; there is no unriddling his search and wandering. He is as much estranged from his inherited Jewish universe as he is alien to the world of things Russian. The communication space he has created in order adequately to answer his intellectual needs is still shared by neither of these two milieus.[17]

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[16] Victor E. Kel'ner, *Missioner istorii: Zhizn' i trudy Semyona Markovicha Dubnova* (St. Petersburg, 2008), p. 58.

[17] In this respect, Srulik as a character tallies with Zipperstein's historical diagnosis of the first maskilim: "In the absence of either civic emancipation (or, in truth, the likelihood of it) or increased contact between Jewish and non-Jewish intellectuals, the Haskalah offered its adherents a sensible haven for Jews caught between an inaccessible larger cultural world and an unacceptable Jewish one." (Steve J. Zipperstein, "Haskalah, Cultural Change, and Nineteenth-Century Russian Jewry: A Reassessment," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 34 (1983): 2, p. 193).

The Picaresque in Ilya Ehrenburg's The Stormy Life of Lasik Roitschwantz

Ilya Ehrenburg wrote the still rarely studied novel *The Stormy Life of Lasik Roitschwantz* in 1928, while in emigration in Paris and Berlin.[18] The plot weaves about the life story of Lasik, the first-person narrator, who undertakes a veritable odyssey through post-revolutionary Russia and post-war Europe, eventually concluding his wanders in Palestine.

In contrast to Srulik, Ehrenburg's Lasik since early adulthood operates in a Russian-language setting. Whereas the principal frame of reference for Srulik is an ideal situated in the midst of things Russian, Lasik's point of reference is anchored in Yiddish and Hebrew culture.

Though pretending to be a fool, Lasik possesses a sharp wit and a high level of ability at self-reflection. To his party superior in Kiev, he desperately summarizes: "No u menia net Talmuda, u menia Talmud tol'ko v golove, i ia ne mogu iz"iat' moiu zloschastnuiu golovu."[19]

The mode of his reference, however, depends on specific circumstances: in the newly emerged Soviet Union of the 1920s, Lazik reiterates rubber stamp slogans, such as talk of "ideological super- and substructure," but without actually grasping their meaning. Later, in Paris, he adopts other fashionable phrases that identify him as an avant-garde artist.

The series of narrated episodes representing Lasik's life introduce the reader to different settings which challenge the protagonist. Born into a traditional Jewish milieu in Gomel, he works rapidly through the leading ideologies and geographical foci of his time: communism in Kiev and Moscow, petty bourgeois culture in Königsberg, modernism in Berlin and Paris, philanthropy in London, British imperialism and mission in Liverpool, the British Mandate in Tel Aviv, and Zionism in Jerusalem.

Lasik meets the challenge of this multitude of lingual and cultural contexts with idiosyncratic detachment. He responds to them with similes and parables that transform developments in the present into a-historical argument; a fairly casuistic approach.

Moreover, this kind of discourse is characterized by a structure which is not, in fact, dialogical. Rather, the rhetoric is constructed so as to interpret

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[18] For a recent study, see Anja Tippner, "Bewegung und Benennung. Juedische Identitaet bei Il'ja Erenburg," *Osteuropa* 8–10 (2008); Shimon Markish, "Ilya Ehrenburg," in: *Babel' i drugie* (Moscow and Jerusalem, 1997), pp. 118–168, especially pp. 149–163.

[19] Ilya G. Erenburg, *Burnaia zhizn' Lasika Roitshvanetsa*: Roman (Moscow, 1991 [1928]), p. 41.

the world as it is perceived, endowing events and discourse with new meaning. Both consciously and unconsciously, Lasik is engrossed in playing with this asymmetrical arrangement. To the extent that others may join in this form of communication, they can do so only temporarily, if at all. Creator of a communication space of his own by means of language switches and a variety of adaptation techniques, Lasik ultimately finds himself trapped in a vacuum. The vacuum and the incongruence between his different cultural codes make a fool of the hero, turning him into a Schlemiel from the point of view of his antagonists, as well as that of the reader.

The moment of being trapped or suspended in language and thought becomes Lasik's permanent life condition. Almost everywhere he goes, he finds himself accused of some violation and sent to prison. He lives in an individual's bubble, an inner personal world unconnected to the time or space of the rest of historical humanity. On the way to his final geographical destination, en route to Palestine, he remarks shrewdly: "Ia popal pod istoricheskii vikhr'."[20]

The historical whirlwind strips the tailor from Gomel of his identity, leaving him to go through a series of different personal essences or ascriptions (including communist, lover, Cossack) and transforming his body into the icon of Modernity—a passport. "Ia, kazhetsia, dostatochno v moei zhizni razgovarival. Esli b vy menia uvideli bez rubashki, vy by, navernoe, akhnuli, potomu chto tam net mestechka bez pechati, kak budto moe skorbnoe telo—eto pasport."[21] The greatest gap yawns here between the notion of the individual as possessing free will and language and the individual technically understood as a number in a series.

At the end of his life, Lasik voices his understanding of the relationship between language and existence in an aesthetically elaborate story about the Baal Shem Tov. In this last parable, he recounts how not the Besht's prayers, deriving from the power of word and argument, but a child's innocent prank saves the Jews of Berdichev from God's wrath on Yom Kippur.

> Net. Bylo temno na nebe, i tam shla smertel'naia bor'ba. Vashi grekhi vesili stol'ko, chto ikh ne mogli perevesit' nikakie pokaiannye slezy. Bog zakryl sebe ushi. Bog zapretil mne plakat'. Bog ne slyshal bol'she moikh molitv. No vot razdalsia krik etogo rebenka. On dunul v dudochku, i bog uslyshal. Bog ne vyderzhal. Bog ulybnulsia. Eto zhe byla takaia glupaia zabava, rovno za piat' kopeek, i eto bylo takoe neprilichie v velikii post!. No ia skazhu vam

[20] Ibid., p. 191.
[21] Ibid., p. 185.

> odno, umnye evrei, vovse ne vashi dovody i ne moi molitvy spasli nash gorod, net, ego spasla zhestianaia dudochka, odin smeshnoi zvuk ot vsego detskogo serdtsa. Pogliadite skoree, kak etot Ios'ka ulybaetsia!.[22]

Not speech or rational thinking, but something beyond language achieves God's forgiveness—instinctive good will and joy. Lasik rejects language not as a mode of art, but as something that inevitably leads to misunderstanding through cultural and ideological incongruence. Eventually, language effects non-communication in various forms, such as anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic prejudice. This is the understanding of the function of language also put forth by Lasik's Christian fellow prison inmate in Königsberg.

Conclusion

Bogrov's Srul' and Ehrenburg's Lasik wander among geographies and cultures, languages and habits. Orphaned metaphorically, they embark on a search for the meaning which can provide life with the comfort of resolution. In the various encounters they have with different cultures, their comments and the actions they perform expose the underlying structures and thinking modes of society. Both protagonists challenge and contest existing societal paradigms that involve the presumption of exclusivity, homogeneity, and unambiguousness in either the Jewish or the Russian environment. As outsiders, both look for a niche in society capable of balancing their own aspirations and utopian leanings. Their predicament of being suspended between a dissatisfying and rejected past, and an unreachable future marks the scope of their questioning of the world; in analytical terms, this marks out the scope of the picaresque in both novels.

This is not to deny the self-evident differences between the novels by Bogrov and Ehrenburg, which come to the fore in their styles, aesthetic claims, and ideational contexts. Whereas Bogrov writes from a maskilic, occasionally even an epicurean point of view, delivering a fundamental criticism of traditional Judaism, Ehrenburg passes judgment on human hubris in general. Something the two texts do have in common, however is that both explicitly and implicitly reflect on language switching, and on changes in habitus and perception. Both describe the frictions and the moments of incongruence caused by what may be called "cultural appropriation or emulation."

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[22] Ibid., pp. 206 ff.

Bogrov and Ehrenburg draw on a variety of literary models provided by the Jewish, Russian, and European literatures. They adapted and transformed the Russian medium in which they worked and the literary genres and models to which they resorted, such as the genre of "notes," the picaresque, and the Bildungsroman, or the figures of the Schlemiel and the fool. This yielded their creation of a new "space of communication" not simply based on adaptation, but also fraught with convergence, rejection, and transgression.

Yet reducing, after a fashion, the distance between the two heroes' Jewish and the Russian cultures also lessens the visible "otherness" of the Russian culture's representatives, a development which, paradoxically, produces a locus for the growth of anti-Jewish, even anti-Semitic notions and argument. National and cosmopolitan (or imperial) tendencies collide.

The cultural production of Russian Jews since the mid-19th century and until the 1920s tells the story of an ambitious project of remaking and reinventing a culture. A close reading of the texts, an enquiry into the working and living conditions of the writers, and an analysis of the genres, motifs, styles, and characters emerging from the works reveal the dynamics of multifaceted transformation processes. Analysing works and particular literary elements, such as the genre of the picaresque, make it possible to have a more nuanced view of cultural continuities and discontinuities. Situating the results of these studies in a more general historical context will further our understanding of the notions of encounter and inter-culturation, as well as of the notion of anti-Jewish sentiment.

CHAPTER NINE

"… WE MUST SAVE OUR PEOPLE" (ON AN UNREALIZED PROJECT FOR A RUSSIAN JEWISH WEEKLY IN PRE-WAR PARIS)

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A biography of the noted Russian Jewish journalist, political publicist, writer, and dramatist Samuil (Solomon, Zalmen) L'vovich Poliakov (pseudonym Poliakov-Litovtsev; 1875–1945)[1] has yet to be penned. Throughout his life, Poliakov-Litovtsev maintained a passionate commitment to the Jewish cause, and his contribution to Russian culture is in fact inseparable from his achievements as an activist in Jewish society. Despite this, the name of Poliakov-Litovtsev has never yet been deemed worthy of inclusion in Jewish encyclopedias.[2] Consequently, his Jewish-related activism has remained obscure. In the present article, I focus on an unknown chapter of Poliakov-Litovtsev's life—his energetic, albeit unsuccessful, attempt to found a Russian Jewish weekly that, as he believed, would resist the waves of anti-Semitism washing over Europe in the 1920s and the early 1930s.

S. Poliakov-Litovtsev was born in Krichev, a town in the Mogilev Oblast, into a poor Jewish family. He first learned Russian at the age of 17.[3] Even so, diligent, persevering, and gifted, he became a leading Russian journalist, working with some of the largest Russian newspapers of the day: *Rech'* (*Speech*), *Russkoe slovo* (*The Russian Word*), and *Sovremennoe slovo* (*The*

[1] Hence, for purposes of faithfulness to the authorial intention, the present article will refer to him by his penname.

[2] Cf., e.g., *Encyclopedia Judaica* (in 16 vols., Jerusalem, 1971), or the *Kratkaya evreyskaya entziklopedia* (in 11 vols., Jerusalem, 1974–2005), where Poliakov-Litovtsev is mentioned only once, in 7:551, in connection with his novel *Sabbatai Zvi: Messiya bez naroda; Rossiyskaya evreyskaya entziklopedia: Biografii* (in 4 vols., Moscow, 1994–2000), *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (in 2 vols., Yale University Press, 2008).

[3] And yet, Poliakov-Litovtsev worked as the typesetter for F. Chaliapin's memoirs *Maska i dusha* (*Mask and Soul*) in 1932.

Modern Word). An attendee at the State Duma (Parliament) as a political correspondent of *Rech'*, Poliakov-Litovtsev proved an honest, intelligent, and quick-witted observer and reporter.

In addition to journalism, Poliakov-Litovtsev became well-known as a playwright, the author of *Chuzhaya skazka* (*Alien Tale*,1911), *Labirint* (*The Labyrinth*, 1913),[4] *Ognennoe kol'tso* (*Ring of Fire*, 1913),[5] *Grekh* (*The Sin*, 1914), and subsequently, with P. Potemkin, co-author of *Don-Zhuan—suprug smerti* (*Don Juan: Husband of Death*, Paris, 1928).

During World War I and prior to 1917, Poliakov-Litovtsev served as a foreign correspondent for *Russkoe slovo*, the second leading daily in Russia, owned at the time by Ivan Sytin (actual editor V. Doroshevich).[6] Poliakov-Litovtsev later recalled his experience as a journalist in his émigré memoirs Iz vospominaniy zhurnalista (From the Memoirs of a Journalist) published in the Parisian Russian magazine Illustrirovannaya Rossia [Russia Illustrated][7] and in the Poslednie novosti [Latest News] gazette.[8] Some chapters appeared in the Novoe russkoe slovo (The New Russian Word) in New

[4] *Biblioteka* [*zhurnala*] *'Teatr i iskusstvo'* No. 12 (1913), pp. 1–28 (second edition, Berlin: Mysl', 1921).

[5] *Biblioteka* [*zhurnala*] *'Teatr i iskusstvo'* No. 10 (1914), pp. 1–28. Performed at the Imperial Aleksandrinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg, the play was awarded the Ostrovsky Prize. See L.D. Leonidov, *Rampa i zhizn': Vospominaniya i vstrechi* (Paris: Russkoe teatral'noe izdatel'stvo za granitsey, 1955), pp. 37–41.

[6] Russkoe slovo continued under new titles after the Bolshevik coup d' etat: from January 16 to April 2, 1918, it appeared as the *Novoe slovo* [*The New Word*]; from April 11 until it was definitively closed down by the Soviet authorities on July 6, 1918, as *Nashe slovo* [*Our Word*]. Cf. Charles A. Ruud, *Russian Entrepreneur: Publisher Ivan Sytin of Moscow, 1851–1934* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990).

[7] *Russkoe slovo* No. 13 (1934, 460), pp. 5–6.

[8] In 1928: *Russkoe slovo* (No. 2552, March 18, pp. 2–3), "Korol'" (No. 2559, March 25, pp. 2–3), "Opal'nyi ministr" (No. 2566, April 1, p. 4), "Na puti v Parizh" (No. 2575, April 10, p. 2), "Parizh v pervye gody voyny" (No. 2582, April 17, pp. 2–3), "V odnoy kletke" (No. 2594, April 29, p. 3), "Kaleidoskop" (No. 2601, May 6, p. 4), "Proekt Dunayskoy imperii" (No. 2617, May 22, p. 4), "A.D. Protopopov v Stockgolme" (No. 2627, June 1, pp. 2–3), "Bessmyslitsa" (No. 2631, June 5, p. 4), "Prelyudiya" (No. 2638, June 12, p. 2), "Oktyabr'" (No. 2673, July 17, p. 4; No. 2678, July 22, p. 2); in 1931: "Iz besed s F.I. Shalyapinym" (No. 3854, October 11, p. 4; No. 3856, October 13, p. 3), "Don Kikhot" (No. 3882, November 8, pp. 4–5); in 1934: "Po povodu ubiystva rumynskogo prem'era Duka" (No. 4677, January 11, p. 2); in 1935: "Iz vospominaniy zhurnalista" (No. 5087, February 26, p. 2), "Venizelos" (No. 5108, March 19, p. 3), "Na kholmakh Gruzii" (No. 5220, July 9, p. 2), "Armyane" (No. 5227, July 16, p. 2), "Tiflisskiy tyl" (No. 5234, July 23, p. 2), "Stary russkiy Parizh" (No. 5241, July 30, p. 2); in 1936: "4 avg. 1914" (No. 5618, August 11, p. 2); in 1937: "S.A. Kozell-Poklevsky" (No. 5893, May 14, p. 2).

York.[9] None of these memoirs have ever been republished or collected in a book edition.

Following the Bolshevik upheaval in Russia, Poliakov-Litovtsev was for a time active in London, where he worked on the weekly The Russian Outlook, as an entry in M. Margulies' diary indicates (May 2, 1919): "In London at 8 p.m. At Piccadilly Hotel, Yu. I. Gessen, and A.V. Rumanov, both sent by Yudenich's Committee, and L.S. [sic] Poliakov (Litovtsev), who publishes a weekly here."[10]

Several million people fled revolutionary Russia in the wake of the cataclysms undergone by their country during the Civil War which engulfed the former Tsarist empire after the October Revolution of 1917. Poliakov-Litovtsev, who, as a foreign correspondent of *the Russkoe slovo*, was already working beyond Russia's borders, became an émigré "naturally." In the early 1920s, he found himself first in Berlin, and then in Paris. During 1921–1922, he was co-editor (with L.M. Nemanov) of *Golos Rossii* (*The Voice of Russia*),[11] an émigré newspaper published in Berlin. During the same period, his essays appeared in *Teatr i zhizn'* (*Theatre and Life*), a Russian journal also published in Berlin.[12]

In 1920–1924, Poliakov-Litovtsev actively collaborated with the *Evreyskaya tribuna* (*The Jewish Tribune*) weekly, which came out in Russian in Paris. Among the authors published on the pages of the Evreyskaya tribuna were notable Jewish publicists such as Maksim Vinaver, Solomon Pozner, Pyotr Ryss, Boris Mirkin-Getsevich (Mirsky), Mark Vishniak, and others.[13]

1923 saw the publication of Poliakov-Litovtsev's novel Sabbatai Zvi,[14] his most significant contribution to Russian literature.[15] In 1925, the novel was

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[9] "Radek—mnimyi prostofilya" (1937, No. 8792, February 28, p. 3), "Admiral i diplomat" (1942, No. 10769, August 16, p. 3), "London" (1942, No. 10845, November, p. 3).

The same newspaper published Poliakov-Litovtsev's reminiscences of "Russian Paris" after the *Russkoe slovo*'s transfer to the US prior to the Nazi occupation of France.

[10] M.S. Margulies, *Gody interventsii*, (Berlin, 1923), vol. 2, p. 54. In London, Poliakov-Litovtsev edited *The Russian Commonwealth*, an anti-Bolshevik weekly, together with Dioneo [I.V. Shklovsky].

[11] In February 22, 1922, *Golos Rossii* was purchased by the Socialist Revolutionary party.

[12] Cf., e.g., S.L. Poliakov-Litovtsev, "Tikhie buri," Teatr i zhizn' No. 5/6 (1921), p. 14, on the Moscow Art Theatre's performance in Berlin.

[13] Cf. Vera Kaplan, "Evreiskaya tribuna o Rossii i russkom evreystve (Paris, 1920–1924 gg.)," in M. Parkhomovsky, ed., *Evrei v kul'ture russkogo zarubezh'ya: Sbornik statei, publikatsiy, memuarov i esse*. 1919–1939 gg., vol. II (Jerusalem, 1993), pp. 167–180.

[14] S. Poliakov-Litovtsev, *Sabbatai Zvi* (Berlin: Russian University Press, 1923).

[15] The novel was republished with the title of *Messia bez naroda* (*Messiah without a People*,

translated into French by J. Kessel,[16] with the translation published by the well-known Nouvelle Revue Française. In his review of Sabbatai Zvi, A. K[ulisher] remarked:

> S. Poliakov-Litovtsev has found a way to approach this thoroughly trivialized topic in an original and profound manner. In the novel, written simply and compellingly, the particular story of the key protagonist naturally intertwines with the more general problem of "the people" and "the hero," of "law" and "miracle," all of which are introduced as part of the specifically Jewish historical fate and Jewish mysticism, which the author does not simply "know," but, most importantly, has an intuitive sense of.[17]

The novel's second reviewer, Arseniy Merich (A. Damanskaya), argued that

> It is to the wellsprings of the sufferings and the faith of the people that the author leads his reader. With the romantic passion of his national feeling, perhaps unconscionably, he extends the limits of his task, deepening his wonderful book to the level of unexpected significance.[18]

K. Mochul'sky emphasized that in Poliakov-Litovtsev's novel

> The action takes place beyond time—there is only a bare hint of decoration sets, only an illusion of "historicity." Hence—complete freedom in exposing the dynamic of the emotions, hence the immediate closeness to the human soul.[19]

During his life in exile, Poliakov-Litovtsev operated at the very center of the conflict between the right and left wings of émigré society. Nikolai Breshko-Breshkovsky, a writer representing the reactionary, monarchist camp, attacked Poliakov-Litovtsev, whom he grouped together with Pyotr Ryss, another Russian Jewish journalist, in the Introduction to his novel *Pod zvezdoy diavola* [*Under the Star of the Devil*]:

> In the Poslednie Novosti both outdid themselves in pouring dirt over the Russian Army, its generals, its Supreme Commander-in-Chief [P.N. Vrangel]. The same routine banalities were reiterated about reactionary landsknechts or tsarist generals dreaming of restoration and of stifling the "conquests of the

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New York: "Novaya zemlya", no date). On Poliakov-Litovtsev's February 13, 1943, reading of a fragment from *Messia bez naroda* at the Obschestvo priekhavshikh iz Evropy (Society of European Arrivals), see *Zarya* No. 4 (February 15, 1943), p. 16.

[16] Joseph Kessel (1898–1979), a French writer of Russian Jewish origin who accompanied Poliakov-Litovtsev on his travels in the Middle East.

[17] *Zveno* No. 24, (July 16, 1923), p. 4.

[18] *Segodnya* No. 156 (July 22, 1923), p. 5.

[19] K. Mochul'sky, "Ne roman, a drama?", *Evreiskaya tribuna* No. 22 (175, November 19, 1923), pp. 3–4.

> Revolution." They stirred up a frenzied persecution of several dozen thousand martyr fighters who, to the great regret of the Rysses and the Poliakov-Litovtsevs, had avoided execution and the Cheka.[20]

In the mid-1920s, an initiative was announced in Paris for creating a Jewish theatre modeled after Nikita Baliev's cabaret troupe "Letuchaya mysh'" ("The Bat").[21] The new endeavor was called "Jewish Mirror." According to the Russian Jewish weekly Rassvet (The Dawn), it was supposed to be headed by M. Ya. Muratov, former artist at the Moscow Maly (Small) Theatre, and V.A. Efremov, conductor at the theatre "Balaganchik" ("The Puppet Show"). Levin, a conservatory professor from Vienna, was in charge of the music, E.A. Marsheva and Viktor Khenkin were invited as directors. Heading the literary section had been assigned to Polyakov-Litovtsev.[22]

In 1926, when a Jewish writers' and artists' club was founded in Paris, Poliakov-Litovtsev became a member, along with J. Belen'ky, M. Berchin-Benediktov, N. German, J. Meyer, M. Nordau, A. Spire, A. Feder, and others. *Rassvet* reported that the first meeting was scheduled to take place on February 26.[23]

In the spring of 1926, Poliakov-Litovtsev visited Palestine. Upon returning to Paris, he spoke about his impressions before a gathering of the members of the Zionist group Bnei-Tzion.[24] A series of his essays about Palestine was published in the Poslednie novosti.

On May 27, 1928, a public debate titled "Ob antisemitizme v sovetskoy Rossii" ("Concerning anti-Semitism in Soviet Russia") was held in Paris; Poliakov-Litovtsev took part in the proceedings. In his view, this was a crucial

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[20] N.N. Breshko-Breshkovsky, *Pod zvezdoy diavola* (Novi Sad, 1923), p. 11.

[21] The Moscow cabaret theatre "Letuchaya mysh'" was founded in 1908 by Nikita Baliev, an actor at the Moscow Art Theatre, originally as the Theatre's club. The project was financed by N.L. Tarasov, an oil magnate and known philanthropist, together with the actress Olga Knipper-Chekhova, A.P. Chekhov's widow.

[22] *Rassvet* No. 46 (November 29, 1925), p. 12.

[23] Ibid., No. 10 (March 7, 1926), p. 12.

[24] The lecture took place on May 25, 1926, at the Societe de Savants (28, rue Serpente); cf. *Rassvet* No. 21(May 23, 1926), p. 14; *Poslednie novosti*, May 25, 1926. According to the *Rassvet* (No. 22, May 30, 1926, p. 11), Poliakov-Litovtsev was reported as saying that

> Palestine's very landscape creates a fascinating impression. A Jew crossing the threshold of this land immediately feels 'at home.' The heroic work of the chalutsim [pioneers], who are the real builders of this country, aroused his admiration. He was enormously impressed by the revival of the Hebrew language. In his opinion, Palestine offers enormous opportunities for the Jews. The transformation of this land into a Jewish 'homeland' depends on the Jewish People itself.

moment in Jewish history.[25] Poliakov-Litovtsev argued for the need for a meeting to take place between Jews and non-Jews, which would enable both sides to articulate what they "dislike" about each other. By means of such a discussion, Poliakov-Litovtsev hoped to give vent and thus to find a way to resolve mutual antipathies, traumas, and prejudices accumulated between the Jews and their haters in the course of history.[26]

Two days later, on May 29, *Poslednie novosti* published Poliakov-Litovtsev's article "Disput ob antisemitizme" ("Debate Concerning anti-Semitism"), in which the author argued for a dialogue between Jews and anti-Semites that would allow them to elucidate their mutual dissatisfactions. Poliakov-Litovtsev wrote:

> … For the conversation to be fruitful and health-promoting, it would be necessary to involve several honest people in the debate, people who having the courage to declare themselves anti-Semites and ready uprightly to explain why they are anti-Semites, but without referring to "Judaic Messianism," which one hundred and one anti-Semites out of hundred do not care about in the least … Simply, without slyness, they would say: "I do not like this and that about the Jews." And, together with them, there must be some no less sincere Jews who would answer: "And this is what we dislike about you …" Then one may be quite sure that such an honest and open exchange of opinion, with good will and interest in mutual understanding, would bring real benefit to both Jews and Russians—to Russia as a whole …

This article played an exceptionally important part in the historical conflict of Jews with those who "would have the courage to declare themselves anti-Semites." Responding to Poliakov-Litovtsev's challenge, Vasiliy Vitalyevich Shul'gin, a leading ideologue of Russian anti-Semitism, burst out with a treatise entitled *What We Don't Like About Them* (first published in 1929). In this text, identifying with the "honest anti-Semite," V.V. Shulgin formulated reasons for his hostility to the Jews, reasons which were not his alone, as he was purportedly representing an entire world of anti-Semites. The document is an outstanding instance of anti-Semitic discourse, occasioned by Poliakov-Litovtsev's provocative suggestion. Poliakov-Litovtsev's letter to Mikhail Poliak (reprinted below) is closely connected to his article, a circumstance which should explain the discussion of anti-Semitism in the letter.

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[25] See Solomon Poliakoff, "A Dangerous and Unnecessary Schism in Israel," *The Jewish Tribune*, October 1, 1926, p. 31.

[26] For comments on this public debate, see Z. Gippius, "Ne nravitsya—nravitsya," *Novy korabl'* No. 4 (1928), pp. 22–26.

In 1940, Poliakov-Litovtsev fled Europe, which was being overrun by Nazism, to the US. Settling in New York, Poliakov-Litovtsev worked in Russian émigré American periodicals: the daily *Novoe russkoe slovo* (*The New Russian Word*) and the magazines *Novy zhurnal* (*The New Review*) and *Novoselye* (*The New Home*). Poliakov-Litovtsev died in 1945 in New York of sarcoma of the lung.[27]

Of the myriad social and cultural turning points throughout Poliakov-Litovtsev's pied life, the present article will focus on a single episode: his plan to found a Jewish weekly which would stimulate a frank and fruitful encounter between Jewish and anti-Semitic intellectual forces. The project remained unrealized, and would also have remained unknown, had it not been for several letters written by Poliakov-Litovtsev to Mikhail Grigorievich Poliak. In these letters, Poliakov-Litovtsev asks for financial support for a Jewish weekly. One of the letters, which provides a full picture of the proposed project, is being published for the first time in what follows below.

Only incomplete biographical information is available about the magnate Mikhail Grigorievich Poliak (1862, Nizhny Novgorod-1954, Haifa). His father, Hirsch (Grigorii) Abramovich Poliak (?-1897), was the owner of Mazut, a well-known Russian company of oil-tankers.[28] Besides Mikhail, Hirsch Poliak had two other sons: Solomon (1859–1937), a medical doctor, and Saveliy (?-1940), a tradesman and banker. There were also two daughters: Sonia, who was married to Ginzburg, an engineer, with whom she lived in Germany in the 1920s, and moved to England after Hitler's rise to power; the other daughter married a chemist by the name of Beilin. After studying mathematics at Petersburg University, Mikhail together with Saveliy joined their father's business, which they successfully expanded, selling oil to Western countries. Mazut's trade partner was the Parisian house of Rothschild.[29] Prior to World War I, both brothers followed Edmond James de Rothschild's advice: they bought Shell stocks. This ensured that they not only did not lose their money during the October Revolution, but were actually enriched by the turn which events took. Saveliy remained in Paris,

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[27] Cf. Andrei Sedykh, "Pamyati S.L. Poliakova-Litovtseva," *Novy zhurnal* No. 11 (1945), pp. 348–349.

[28] I.M. Dizhur, "Evrei v ekonomicheskoy zhizni Rossii," Kniga o russkom evreystve ot 1860-kh godov do revoliutsii 1917 g. (New York: Soyuz russkikh evreev, 1960), pp. 178–179.

[29] A.A. Fursenko, "Parizhskie Rothschil'dy i russkaia neft'," Voprosy istorii ("The Rothschilds of Paris and Russian Oil," in Issues of History) No. 8 (1962), pp. 29–42.

while Mikhail moved to Palestine, which he had already visited a number of times previously. In 1923, operating with his own and some of Saveliy's capital, in Haifa, Mikhail established the Nesher Cement Works, which continues in existence to this day. Beginning in the 1920s, Mikhail Poliak invested enormous sums in developing the Land of Israel economically, funding a large number of projects of different magnitude. Neither Mikhail nor Saveliy ever married, nor did either of the two brothers have any children. Both were known for their responsiveness to requests for financial aid.

No precise information is available as to when or where Poliakov-Litovtsev first became personally acquainted with Mikhail Poliak. The two may have come into contact with each other through Solomon Poliak, a freemason like Poliakov-Litovtsev himself; or they may have met through Lev Solomonovich Poliak, Solomon's son, a long time acquaintance of Poliakov-Litovtsev's. However that may be, Poliakov-Litovtsev, in search of financial backing for his project, decided to appeal to Mikhail Poliak.

Poliakov-Litovtsev's letters to Poliak are of interest not only in view of their targeted subject matter—providing arguments in favor of an émigré Jewish weekly. Additional aspects of the text shed light on a number of issues, such as the famous meeting which took place in Stockholm in 1916, during World War I, between Alexander Protopopov (Vice-Chairman of the Russian Duma) and Fritz Warburg, a member of a German banking dynasty. Protopopov was sent to Stockholm by the Russian authorities as head of a parliamentary delegation for negotiations with the allied countries. The delegation included deputies of the Russian State Duma—P.N. Miliukov, A.I. Shingarev, A.I. Zvegintzev, B.N. Engelgard—and of the State Council—I.V. Gurko, A.V. Vasiliev, and Count D.A. Olsufiev. While on this visit, Protopopov met Warburg, who represented the German side. The secret meeting between the two took place in the hotel suite of Lev Solomonovich Poliak.

Word of this meeting reached Russia, stirring up a commotion; the "progressive" press accused Protopopov of betrayal and antiRussian conspiracy. Poliakov-Litovtsev knew the story first-hand: as has previously been noted, he served as a foreign correspondent for the Russkoe slovo in Stockholm, maintaining ties with Protopopov. On June 1, 1928, Poliakov-Litovtsev published a series of recollections about Protopopov, including the Stockholm episode, in the Russian émigré daily Poslednie novosti. He expressed the conviction that there had been no conspiracy. In Poliakov-Litovtsev's opinion, Protopopov was far too mediocre a personality for an act of this kind. No political significance was to be attached to his meeting with the German

representative.[30] In Poslednie novosti, he wrote: "An empty, meaningless meeting.

> But it played a significant role in Protopopov's life. It was the beginning of his break with the State Duma. It brought him closer to the capital city's reactionary circles, who now saw one of their own in him—some because Protopopov had spoken with a German, others because he had lost the trust of the 'revolutionaries' of the progressive block ..."[31]

A crucial element in the letters is Polakov-Litovtsev's anticipation of a worldwide anti-Jewish conflict, to which he refers as "the second Beilis Affair." The prophetic foresight was confirmed only a short time later, sweeping over Europe in a catastrophic and murderous wave of a magnitude greater than anything the text's author or his contemporaries could have imagined.

The first Poliakov-Litovtsev letter to Poliak is dated March 4, 1928, some three months prior to the Ob antisemitizme v sovetskoy Rossii debate. It follows that his project of a Jewish weekly was not connected with the public discussion. The plan was rather suggested by Poliakov-Litovtsev's urge to fight anti-Semitism then flooding Europe. The public debate on anti-Semitism further heated his sense of the urgency of the matter.

Poliakov-Litovtsev's letter to Poliak, quoted below, has been provided for publication as an original document by the Mikhail Poliak Archives (Nesher Cement Works, Haifa, Israel).

> June 4 [19]29
> Paris
>
> Dear Mikhail Grigorievich,

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[30] In this text, Poliakov-Litovtsev describes a curious episode he had once observed in the Duma while serving as a correspondent for the Russkoe slovo: a case of Protopopov's voting dishonestly, which nobody made any note of except for Poliakov-Litovtsev himself. Had the journalist mentioned what he had seen in his report, as was the norm, Protopopov's career would have taken a turn for the worse. But the journalist had refrained from bringing up the episode at the time.

N.E. Markov-II, a right-wing radical leader, responded to the episode in this way:

"'A truly valuable admission on the part of the Jews. A Jewish journalist's conduct decided the career of the last interior minister, the minister whose activity or, to be more exact, inactivity in a significant measure determined the survival or destruction of the Russian State.'" (N.E. Markov, "Kak pishetsya istoriya," Dvuglavy orel ("How History Is Written," in The Two-Headed Eagle) No. 18, (June 17, 1928), p. 23).

[31] S. Poliakov-Litovtsev, "Iz vospominaniy zhurnalista (A.D. Protopopov v Stokgolme)," Poslednie novosti No. 2627, (June 1, 1928), pp. 2–3.

Forgive me for writing to you only now—for a while, I was very much "out of touch with things": first, being stifled by urgent work, and then finding myself in the hands of the Aesculapian experts perfecting their medical skill at the cost of my health. Thank God, I survived, but breaking away from them was tough! P.M. Rutenberg gave me your regards and request some time ago. I have not forgotten; I will look at it closely in the very near future. Please do not think that I am treating it carelessly.

I am sending you a press-cutting of my article dealing with the "Debate concerning anti-Semitism" conducted in Paris. As you can see, our meeting turned out "to be fraught with consequences," as you aptly noted when leaving. My thoughts on the discussion were concentrated precisely on what you and I had talked about last time—the need for a straightforward and frank dialogue between the Jews and those whom we do not please. I would like to resume the conversation we last had in Paris and which we were unable to finish.

You probably remember: you were speaking about the devaluation of the printed word and that people trust deeds more than words. I dare disagree, Mikhail Grigorievich. I think you are not entirely right in separating word from deed. Before actions take place in practice, something must take root in people's minds, and be articulated in language as thoughts and statements; our reality is no less verbal than action-filled. Evreyskaya tribuna [The Jewish Tribune], which was edited by the late M.M. Vinaver, represented, in fact, "action" as well as "word." You would not deny this, would you?

You said yourself that the international Black Hundreds are rearing their heads. You and I know all too well what such "revivals" usually lead to. I do not think anything new should be expected this time, either, other than a banal Jewish pogrom. You in Palestine and we in Europe will not be saved from falling victim to it. This is why I am enthusiastically in favor of today's "word," which may prevent tomorrow's evil "deed." Given the prevailing critical circumstances, a life-saving role may be played by a periodical in which both sides would be granted the right to speak—both we, the Jews, and those who dislike us but are nevertheless honestly ready to discuss how and whence this feeling originates. To create a space for open discussion of this sort in print means to render a great service to the Jewish People. I would even say: to save it from perishing. And we must save our people.

If you, dear Mikhail Grigorievich, find it possible to support such a weekly financially, you will have accomplished a mission of immense political and moral importance.

I realize how many cares and responsibilities you bear at all times. But now, when the smell of a second Beilis Affair is in the air, and possibly even of something more terrible, we cannot rely exclusively on the talents of our skilful advocates. The hostility of the anti-Semitic gang could turn into a real danger if it is not thwarted in time.

I spoke about this issue with your nephew. He shares my fears, even though he abstained from offering any specific suggestions. Lev Solomonovich advised me to appeal to you and Saveliy Grigorievich. That is the reason I am writing to you now.

Incidentally, we spent a wonderful evening together with him not long ago, devoting ourselves to our memories. Indeed,

> The fighters remembered bygone days
> And battles they'd fought in together.

We undertook an expedition through events to which we both had been eye witnesses. It was highly interesting to see that we have the same feelings about them.

I reminded L[ev] S[olomonovich] of our meeting in Stockholm, where Protopopov brought the parliament delegation at the time. What a political storm arose afterwards, when it became known that Protopopov had had a meeting with Warburg! But it is unlikely that the two had serious intentions to conduct "separate negotiations …" They simply wanted tocheck each other out—no more than that. I am convinced that Protopopov never took part in any conspiracy nor ever intended to "sell Russia." I knew him well. He was a weak man, not much of a hero; it would be stupid to see him in the role of a "historical individual." Later, when I had to defend my colleague Ilia Trotsky, I understood how easy it was to defame a man in Russia and, against all logic, to accuse him of every sin. It was said of Protopopov that he had "sold out to the Jews …"

Well, let me not take up any more of your time.

I greatly rely, dear Mikhail Grigorievich, on your careful consideration of my proposal.

When are you coming to Paris? I hope to meet you soon.

Yours truly,

S. Poliakov-Litovtsev

We know nothing of Poliak's response to this letter. It even remains unknown whether he answered Polyakov-Litovtsev at all. The weekly for which Poliakov-Litovtsev requested financial aid never began publication. It appears that Poliak refused the request. This may be indirectly confirmed by evidence preserved in the papers of Pinkhas Rutenberg, a Palestine engineer.[32] Rutenberg, who did not take to Poliakov-Litovtdev's idea, recorded in his diary:

[32] Pinkhas Moiseevich Rutenberg (1878–1942), former member of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party. In 1919, Rutenberg immigrated to Palestine, where he became the founder and

> Polyakov-Litovtsev wants to found a new Jewish weekly in Paris, in order to prevent a "second Beilis Affair." This is how he defines his program. He plans to print anybody and everybody in there—right-wing and left-wing, Jews and anti-Semites. By means of, s[o to] s[peak], having it out peacefully among everybody, to arrive at universal accord. And then, following this, an "everlasting still peace" will be declared. A noble intention, but, in my opinion, an absurd one: it will not lead to any reconciliation, but will only irritate the old wound further, inciting new squabbles and misunderstandings.[33]

Based on this note, it is hard to say whether Polyakov-Litovtsev had appealed to Rutenberg directly or through the manager of the Palestine Electric Company (who, as it happens, was also a financial supporter of A.F. Kerensky's newspaper Dni [The Days] in Paris). Alternatively, Rutenberg may have heard of Poliakov-Litovtsev's plans through a third partiy—for instance, from Poliak, with whom Rutenberg maintained close ties. No letters from Polyakov-Litovtsev have been found in Rutenber's archives, but the two may nevertheless have met and spoken with each other: Rutenberg made regular trips to London, where the head office of the Palestine Electric Company was located. He made frequent stopovers in Paris, spending a few days at a time in the French capital, where Poliakov-Litovtsev was living and working during the same years.

Nor is any information available as to whether the story of the émigré Jewish weekly initiative had any continuation: did Polyakov-Litovtsev address similar requests to other persons able to grant financial support for his project? Despite the fact that this brief episode from the history of the struggle against anti-Semitism has to do with an unrealized and essentially problematic undertaking, it deserves reconstruction and analysis because of its connection with some of the weightiest issues of its time.

Of primary significance is the way that it reflects the Jewish intelligentsia's conviction that anti-Semitism could be overcome by means of discussion, exchange of opinion, or verbal dispute, i.e., by resorting exclusively to discursive intellectual methods. A practical businessman, Poliak cannot have missed the idealism and utopianism in Polyakov-Litovtsev's proposal. In fact, Polyakov-Litovtsev's plan has a number of distinctive messianic features, which are made manifest by the letter's rhetoric. Arguments intended to convince the letter's addressee of the importance of the planned initiative metamorphosed into a messianic mission: "Given the prevailing critical

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the first director of the Electric Company (Hevrat ha-hashmal) which continues operations today.

[33] Pinkhas Rutenberg Archives (The Electric Company, Haifa, Israel).

circumstances, a life-saving role may be played by a periodical in which both sides would be granted the right to speak—both we, the Jews, and those who dislike us but are nevertheless honestly ready to discuss how and whence this feeling originates. To create a space for open discussion of this sort in print means to render a great service to the Jewish People. I would even say: to save it from perishing. And we must save our people."

Polyakov-Litovtsev's letter suggests that the author was captivated by the messianic ideas of his own literary hero Sabbatai Zvi. The foreboding and the sense of an imminent threat hanging over European Jewry, which Jewish intellectuals were expressing throughout the 1920s–1930s, frequently combined with the sense of inability to resist. The only weapon the Jews could wield against the advancing enemy was verbal propaganda.

A consideration in closing: Russian émigrés between the two World Wars comprised a unique geo-political and socio-cultural extra-territorial formation. One of the centers of this formation was the Jewish community in the Land of Israel (Eretz-Israel). The "Russian" contribution to the Land of Israel via the Russian diaspora, and the contribution arriving from Palestine via the same cultural enclave in the opposite direction, may not have been crucial; even so, it was a thoroughly important factor in the turns taken by the cultural history of the time. Poliakov-Litovtsev's appeal to Poliak for financial support of the proposed weekly provides yet another instance of the multiple and various connections between Russian or Russian Jewish émigrés in Europe and the Land of Israel. Exploring this topic in depth is beyond the limits of the present essay; it will remain on the agenda until a new study is in process at a later time.

PART FIVE

OLD STEREOTYPES REEMERGE IN NEW GUISES

CHAPTER TEN

ANTI-SEMITISM AND THE VAMPIRE THEME

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Modern versions of vampire poetics can fruitfully be dated beginning from the Francis Ford Coppola film Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1992–1993), which provided the vampire film tradition with a new impulse. Since the opening of the third millennium, the avant-garde *Dracula: Pages from a Virgin's Diary* by the Canadian producer Guy Maddin (2002) continued the same intellectual line: Stoker's novel is here recast as an esthete's ballet, with the characters wearing makeup to resemble Coppola's characters, and acting in a mainly grey-scale silent film meant to evoke associations of *Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens* (rendered in English as Nosferatu: *A Symphony of Horror*, or *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Terror*, 1922), the expressionistic masterpiece by F.W. Murnau, which instantiates the perpetual opposition between Victorian chastity and vampire sexuality. In the films *Vampires* (1998) by John Carpenter (also known as John Carpenter's *Vampires*) and *Van Helsing* (2004) by Stephen Sommers, the struggle against vampires is extravagantly transformed into an action-packed thriller with vampire exterminators featuring as an elite fighters' unit in the service of the Vatican. The film *Dracula 2000* should be considered part of the same series, with the "2000" which appears in the title understood as an allusion to popular eschatology of the millennium. The producer, Patrick Lussier, made a movie based on an original script (written jointly with P. Soisson). The movie is not meant for family viewing; it rather addresses itself to intellectuals (a notion corroborated by the Miramax Company trademark).

The plot is a typical enough construct, based on yet another one of Dracula's resurrections. However it also contains an unexpected post-modernistic turn: the great vampire appears as a reincarnation of the great traitor, Judas Iscariot. This development makes it possible to "enrich" the traditional image by motivating the vampire's hatred of Christ, the Christian faith, and everything Christian per se.

The reception of Lussier's film in Russia was marked by a peculiar side effect bound up with a simple logical operation: Dracula's being Judas

Iscariot and Judas' being a Jew together imply that Dracula is Jewish. A participant in a dialogue conducted through the internet contributes the following considerations:

> Recently, I was finally able to watch this movie, and here is the conclusion I arrived at: the plot development is much too weak for this altogether not all that bad of a film. … The movie is very classical and conforms to the accepted myths about vampires: that they are afraid of crosses, holy water, and the like. They can be killed with an aspen stake, after preliminarily being beheaded. Everybody bitten by Dracula will be able to regain a human likeness if Dracula himself is killed. But! There are [two] things which make this movie stand out from among all the others: ⟨…⟩ …
>
> 2. Dracula is not the generally familiar Vlad Ţepeş, but rather the even more familiar Judas Iscariot.
>
> In short, the authors have recollected that history has seen an even greater sinner than some Polish petty prince (big deal if he stuck people up on stakes and feasted on dead bodies, but look at Judas—that's quite a lot sharper, taking aim at the Lord Himself!). And here I was, just overwhelmed by the realization: so Dracula, then, is a Jew! Wow, what a nationalistic movie that makes! The Jews are guilty of everything all over again.[1]

This internet writer, evidently, is being ironic. By contrast, "The Return of Rus': On the Way to a Russian State," an essay by Vladimir Popov posted on the internet approximately during the same years, takes itself quite seriously. Popov (editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Ekho Rossii* (Echo of Russia)) synthesizes the results of anti-Semitic historiography, theosophy, and research on the shady scientific undertakings of the early 20th century (cf. the Soviet project of crossing a human being with an ape), and offers far-reaching conclusions:

> The legend of Dracula opens before us the most secret reality of these non-human creatures. Dracula is the autobiography of the ape-Jew. In order to prolong his life, as a vampire, he must suck Aryan blood, thus prolonging unto infinity his existence as a zombie, absorbing the magical substance, which it contains. The truth about the ritual crimes of the Jews has been historically proven by the great Russian researcher Vladimir Dal', the author of the famous *Dictionary of the Russian Language* … Those who believe that the descendants of the Lemur monkeys are creatures just like other human beings, will never be able to understand them.[2]

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[1] Cf., for instance, http://www.proza.ru/2004/10/26-222.

[2] http://www.serrano.lenin.ru/golem.html.

There is further pertinent information providing food for thought, which is also included in the internet version of the essay by Popov:

> In the spring of 2002, Moscow was pasted over with posters advertising Dracula, a "romantic musical" dealing with the life of the Rumanian vampire-prince. The vampire sub-culture has come out of the basements into the light of day and is by now already being widely distributed, and not only by the elitist music store "Transylvania-2000," located on Tverskaya St. # 6/1. Today, vampire propaganda is the constant occupation of the Russian Radio, *The Independent Gazette*, *Arguments and Facts, The New Izvestiya*, GAZPROM, SLAVNEFT', YUKOS, and other, less well known bureaus and offices, along with the Hollywood movie companies.

For the sake of comparison, consider that the author of Mein Kampf apparently thought in a direction close to the one taken by Popov and the readers sympathetic to his views. Exposing the Jewish dictatorship in Russia, he proclaimed: "But the end of freedom for the nations enslaved by the Jews becomes at the same time the end of these parasites themselves. After the death of the victim, sooner or later, the vampire himself must also die." However, for the author of *Mein Kampf*, this is less a mythological claim than it is a rhetorical rubber stamp, adapted for the purposes of anti-Semitism.

Back in the 18th century, the word "vampire," having barely had the time to crystallize or to find an application for itself, was already being allegorized and transplanted into the area of sociology, where it usefully connoted parasite exploiters.

In his article on "Vampires" in the famous *Philosophical Dictionary* of 1764, Voltaire ironized:

> What! That in this our eighteenth century there should be vampires! They have been believed in—and that's after all the Lockes, the Shaftesburies … in the times of d'Alembert, Diderot … The living grow thin and pale, withering away, while the bloodsucking dead grow fat, developing a healthy facial hue, and looking altogether quite appetizing. They have been staging their festive meals in Poland, Hungary, Silesia, Moravia, Austria, Lotharingia. Neither in London nor even in Paris have vampires been even so much as heard of. I admit, these towns do have stock exchange players, innkeepers, and businessmen, who drink the blood of the people in broad daylight; these are, of course, perverted, rotten, but not dead. And as for living arrangements, these bloodsuckers dwell not at all in the cemeteries, but rather in very comfortable mansions.[3]

[3] Citation based on: G. Marigni, *Drakula i vampiry: Krov' za krov'* (*Dracula and the Vampires: Blood for Blood*, Moscow: 2002), pp. 110–111.

In an informative modern article citing, among other things, the noteworthy passage from the 1791 novel *Fausts Leben, Taten und Höllenfahrt* (*Faust, His Life, Acts, and Descent into Hell*) by Friedrich Maximilian Klinger, a representative of the generation of the German Sturm und Drang (King Louis XI drinks the blood of infants "in the demented hope that his old, dilapidated body will grow youthful thanks to the fresh and sound children's blood"), the perfectly justified remark is made to the effect that

> … the allegorical interpretation of the subject would later become deeply entrenched in the social-political speaking practice, and, having been superimposed on the new social-economic reality of the 19th century, would become the progenitor of the well known pronouncement by Marx about the "vampire-like thirst for the lifeblood of labor" characteristic of the capitalist mode of production.[4]

In the Russian leftist radical tradition, the figure of the "Vampire Tsar" begins to appear in the last third of the 19th century, along with other clichés of mythopoeic rhetoric.[5] Pobedonostzev turns into a vampire in a 1907 pamphlet by A.V. Amfiteatrov, with the generic imagery series further enriched by distinctive emotional detail:

> The omnipresent, all-seeing, all-hearing, all-penetrating, all-poisoning fog of bloodsucking authority, because of which the Russian man in the street can no longer breathe, and which, inebriating the Russian state activist and minister, makes him be an idiot and plunges him into administrative frenzy. It is slow murder in the midst of the rulers and slow death among the ruled.[6]

And so on.

In 1910, A.A. Bogdanov, in response to the Leninist pamphlet "Materialism and Empiriocriticism," claimed that the old world, to the ruin of the Russian proletariat, had

> … fashioned the vampire in the outer image and likeness of its enemy, and sent him to fight against young life. "Absolute Marxism" is the name of this phantom. The vampire does his work. He penetrates into the ranks of the fighters, attaching himself by suction to those who have not divined his iden-

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[4] S.A. Antonov, "Tonkaya krasnaya liniya: Zametki o vampiricheskoy paradigme v zapadnoy literature i kul'ture" ("The Thin Red Line: Notes on the Vampire Paradigm in Western Literature and Culture"), in: ed. S.A. Antonov, *"Gost' Drakuly" i drugie istorii o vampirah* (*"Dracula's Guest" and Other Vampire Stories*, St. Petersburg: 2007), p. 25.

[5] Michael Weisskopf, *Pisatel' Stalin* (*The Author Stalin*, Moscow: 2001), pp. 167–169.

[6] A.V. Amfiteatrov and Ye. V. Anichkov, *Pobedonostzev* (St. Petersburg: 1907), p. 41. For a more detailed discussion, see: T.A. Mikhailova and M.P. Odessky, *Graf Drakula: Opyt opisaniya* (*Count Dracula: An Essay in Description*, Moscow: 2009), pp. 172–175.

> tity beneath his outer covering, and occasionally achieves his goal, turning the useful workers of yesterday into the infuriated enemies of the necessary growth of proletarian thought. Our fatherland is the country of the young workers' movement, of a culture none too strong as yet, the country of a painfully exhausting struggle—it gave this phantom perhaps the best of its victims: G. Plekhanov not too long ago, V. Ilyin [the pseudonym with which "Materialism and Empiriocriticism" is signed—M.O.] as of late, not to mention other, less significant forces which nonetheless had in their time still been useful for the common weal. Comrades fallen under the sway of this evil phantom will form the object of our compassion, whom we will endeavor to cure, even by means of severe methods, if there is no other way. As for vampires, we will deal with them just as one should deal with all vampires: off with their heads, and drive an aspen stake into their hearts![7]

Thus, if the figures of parasite vampires and exploiters are a publicistic stamp, then the literal identification of the Jews with Dracula and vampires is a differential symptom of the specifically modern version of vampirism.

By contrast, the folklore tradition—as opposed to the "generally well known" tendency to opt for Christian, Aryan, and other such blood—never included the Jews in the class of vampires. Obviously enough, considering the immeasurable quantities of folklore, literary, and other types of material to be studied, such a claim can be of only a preliminary nature; even so, it is even at this stage appropriate to specify a number of points:

In his fundamental work *The Devil and the Jews* (first published in 1943), Joshua Trachtenberg wrote: "We have already noted that the Jews were suspected of an unhealthy interest not only in blood, but also in the organs of the human body." Acknowledging with bitterness the tenacity of "medieval conceptions" (with a reference to the authoritative German Dictionary of Superstitions, 1927–1939), the author cites a variety of motives for these stable "conceptions": the Jews supposedly acknowledge the superiority of Christian blood, using it for medical and magical purposes; they live up quite literally to the Evangelical malediction about the blood of Jesus,[8] and so on. It is indicative of the situation that vampirism as a sort of quasi-physiological need does not appear among the types of motivation listed.

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[7] A.A. Bogdanov, *Padenie velikogo fetishizma* (*The Fall of the Great Fetishism*, Moscow: Vera i nauka, 1910). Compare also the survey article by A.A. Bogdanov, "Velikiy upyr' nashego vremeni" ("The Great Vampire of Our Time") in: *Neizvestny Bogdanov* (*The Unknown Bogdanov*), ed. G.A. Bordyugov (Moscow: 1995), in 3 volumes, vol. 1.

[8] J. Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and Its Relation to Modern Anti-Semitism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943), chapters. IX, X.

Similarly, O. Belova indicates that widespread in "Slavic folk culture" is the "notion that the alien-born (alien believers) have no soul, and for this reason all of them are included in the category of 'non-people,' and are thus cast as possible embodiments of diabolical forces."[9] It would appear that, accordingly, given the centuries-long history of the blood libel, the Jews should have acquired some distinctive blood sucker traits. And indeed:

> According to Polish belief, noxious walking dead (vampires) are rendered active on days of the Jewish festivals (as well as on the New Moon or the full moon, on Friday or on the day of the week when the person died, as well as on the anniversary of his death, or whenever somebody in the area commits suicide).[10]

Interestingly enough, the clear and distinctive connection of vampires with Jews is here once again left without emphasis: the "Jewish" type of motive (Jewish festivals) is indifferently inscribed among the series of other kinds of motivation. According to the view of a modern Polish anthropologist, anti-Semitic or anti-Jewish "blood legends" are bound up "not with [the idea] that the Jews are vampires, but with [the suggestion] that they are wizards."[11]

It has been acknowledged as an established fact that European belles-lettres assimilated the vampire theme in the course of the first decades of the 19th century. If we dissociate ourselves from the peculiar model suggested by Goethe in his ballad, "The Bride of Corinth," then the image of the vampire apparently makes a first fleeting appearance in the boundless epic poem by Robert Southey, Thalaba the Destroyer (1801). The poem includes a note on folklore, with comments about a belief in the revived dead, which is supposedly typical of the Turks. A "horror" episode in particular is provided for reference: "passing by a Jewish cemetery," wayfarers see an old Jew "sitting at a grave. The janissary rode over to him and scolded him for defiling the world for the second time, and ordered him to return into the grave once again."[12]

The Romantics supported Southey's approach to the vampire issue, but the Jewish dead are no longer to be encountered in their anthological texts. In Byron's poem The Giaour (in his "Fragment of a Turkish Tale," 1813),

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[9] O. Belova, *Yevrei i nechistaya sila: Po materialam slavyanskoy narodnoy kul'tury* (*The Jews and the Evil Spirit: From Findings in Slavic Folk Culture*), p. 259, and cf. J. Trachtenberg, ch. XV.

[10] Belova, ibid., p. 270. The author cites B. Baranowski, *W kregu upiorow i wilkolakow* (Lodz: 1981).

[11] J. Tokarska-Bakir, *Legendy o krwi: Antropologia przesadu* (Warszawa: 2008), p. 264.

[12] Citation based on: M. Summers, *The Vampire: His Kith and Kin* (N.Y.: 1960), p. 280.

the mother of the dead Moslem pronounces a vampire curse against the protagonist, adorned with special exotic ethnographic features. Following Southey, Byron in a note to his poem indicates that "belief in vampires is widespread throughout the Orient," emphasizing, however, primarily Greek beliefs.

In 1819, John Polidori, Byron's doctor and secretary, published his own tale, The Vampyre, pretending that it was a text composed by the master. Published in a periodical, the tale was accompanied by an editor's note summing up the achievements of vampirology up to date. According to the note,

> ... the superstition, on which the tale is based, is extremely widespread in the Orient. It is a facet of the Arabs; the Greeks had never come across it before accepting Christianity; it assumed its present guise only after the separation of the Church into the Latin and the Greek; at this time the idea became dominant that the body of a Catholic is not subject to decomposition if it is buried in its own native soil. The idea's popularity gradually grew, and a multitude of incredible stories were composed, which continue current to this day, about the dead who rise from the grave and feed upon the blood of their young and beautiful victims. In the West, the superstition is known, with some variations, throughout Hungary, Poland, Austria, and Lotharingia ...[13]

In a legendary work of mystification, a series of mystical ballads by Prosper Merimee, La Guzla or the Collection of Illyrian Songs (1827), songs of the type in question comprise a separate section. In his survey sketch "On Vampirism," for instance, Merimee writes:

> Some people are of the opinion that one becomes a vampire as a punishment from God, while others are of the opinion that it is a curse of fate. Most widespread is the view that heretics and those excommunicated by the Church, who have been buried in sacred ground, cannot find rest in it and take their revenge upon the living for their torment.[14]

While in the would be folk song "Constantine Yacubowitsch," Merimee spells out the fault of the protagonist, who has, as it were, invited the vampire's attack: the protagonist has buried a stranger in the ground of his family plot in the cemetery, "without first clearing up whether Latin soil would accept the body of a schismatic Greek into its bosom." This is accompanied

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[13] Cf. ibid., p. 282.

[14] Citation based on: Prosper Merimee, "On Vampirism," trans. N. Rykova, in: ed. S.A. Antonov, *Gost' Drakuly i drugie istorii o vampirah* (*"Dracula's Guest" and Other Vampire Stories*), p. 140.

by the author's comment: "an Orthodox Christian buried in a Catholic cemetery becomes a vampire, and the other way around," that is, the same fate awaits a Catholic buried among Orthodox Christians. Incidentally, in the song "Marko Yakubovich," an adaptation of the invention by Merimee, "Pushkin relieves the motif of the transformation of the stranger into a vampire,"[15] that is, he ignores the issue of the "incorrect" burial.

In other words, if in "folk culture" (the Balkans and on the like), the Jew is a total stranger or "alien," then the vampire is one of "one's own kind," one that can, given certain circumstances, turn into an "alien" ("debate of the Slavs among themselves"). "The vampirism of the Jews" is a "discovery" which becomes current in the mass consciousness of the third millennium.

At the same time, a cultural comparative explanation of the mechanism of this discovery (besides the psychological, social, or political one) should be sought in the immanent features peculiar to the vampire tradition, particularly in the complex structure of the image of the ominous blood sucker. The image is based, at the very least, on these five elements:

(1) In traditional folklore, vampires, like witches, ghosts, and wizards, were an image of the monstrous, which functioned in the beliefs of different peoples as an interpretive reaction to certain "events" (occurrences of the diurnal cycle, or events in medicine, ritual, and so on). It should be added that whereas in contemporary culture the image of the vampire is meaningful and well developed, in folklore it is vague and imprecise, not being clearly distinguished from that of other supernatural creatures.

(2) Bound up with traditional folklore are the "vampirical" reputations of certain historical figures, with Vlad Ţepeş (Vlad III, the Impaler or Dracula, 1431–1476, three-time Voivode of Wallachia) foremost among them. Let us note that the Voivode's "vampirism" was discovered exclusively in "reverse" perspective, as a result of the influence of the novel by Bram Stoker, while, taken in historical perspective, this reputation either did not exist altogether (as in the opinion of the more patriotically inclined Rumanian historians), or else had a "secret," implicit status.[16]

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[15] Ed. L.S. Sidyakov, *Stihotvoreniya Aleksandra Pushkina* (*Poems by Aleksandr Pushkin*, St. Petersburg: 1997), p. 620.

[16] M.P. Odessky, "Krovavy n'iuzmeiker XV veka: Drakula i ego gosudarstvo v drevnerusskom skazanii'" ("The Bloody Showpiece of the 15th Century: Dracula and His State in the Old Russian Skazanie,") *Solnechnoe spletenie* N^{0}18/19 (2001).

(3) Vampires, in contrast to their "neighboring" breeds of werewolves, returning spirits of the dead, and the like, achieved their renown, thanks less to the work of folklorists or lovers of folk antiques than to the efforts of bureaucrats and publicists of the period of the Enlightenment, suddenly referred to in the appropriate literature as the "golden age of vampirism." In 1726, the Serb Arnold Paol, who had died after falling off a hay cart, was accused of exterminating people and livestock in the village of Medvezhya. Files were created on the territory of the Austrian Empire, a superpower ruled by exemplary order. In the course of the investigation, the army doctor Flukinger compiled the protocol "Visum et Repertum" ("Seen and Recorded"), in which, apparently, the term "vampire" was used for the first time. The protocol was published in 1732, and enjoyed wide European acclaim.[17]

(4) As has already been noted, in literature, the actuality of vampires, as well as that of other supernatural creatures, is bound up with Romanticism. At the end of the 19th century, within the framework of the so-called neo-Romanticism, Stoker constructed an impressive quasi-folkloristic image, supplanting tradition with literary play.

(5) The vampires of today are the vampires of Stoker, that is, the rules of their behavior should be traced back not to folklore, but rather to the English novel. At the same time, even though the contemporary vampire, as a general rule, bears the name of "Dracula," he is not at all identical to the character from Stoker. The contemporary mass cultish rendition resorts not to Stoker's novel, but rather to its remaking (in the various art forms), while Dracula belongs to the series of characters (Frankenstein, Golem, Tarzan, and on the rest) whose development history illustrates the so-called "death of the author": their adventures have almost nothing in common with the original source novels, coming closer rather to resembling the "serial," cumulative type of composition.

Moreover, the image of Dracula has crossed literary boundary lines and has had an impact on the space of social interaction. In Communist Russia, A.A. Bogdanov attempted to transform vampirism into a project of "physiological collectivism," or a blood brotherhood of the members of the society

[17] Cf. G. Marigni, *Drakula i vampiry: Krov' za krov'* (*Dracula and the Vampires: Blood for Blood*), p. 48.

of the future.[18] In post-Communist Rumania, tourist itineraries are charted along sites of the historical deeds of the voivode, Vlad Dracula, and of Stoker's protagonist. There is also a fashion (or rather, a style of life), popular among young people, which is oriented at "the Gothic" and the poetics of vampirism.

In short, the vampire myth, despite its gestation in folklore, continues to develop and grow in the conditions of post-industrial society, postmodernism, and the like, achieving greater and greater popularity. New rules are being generated. The composition and structure of the traditional image of the blood sucker is growing more complex. And this is precisely what creates the ideal conditions for further developments on this score. Dracula freely combines with Judas, and his association with the Jews, thus "brought to light," resonates in the space of social interaction, suggesting appropriate considerations about vampire Jews to the "concerned" audience.

[18] M.P. Odessky, "'Fiziologichesky kollektivizm' A.A. Bogdanova: Nauka—politika—vampirichesky mif" ("The 'Physiological Collectivism' of A.A. Bogdanov: Science, Politics, Vampire Myth"), in *Proektnoe myshlenie stalinskoy epohi* (*Project Thinking of the Stalinist Era*, Moscow: 2004).

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE 'KHAZAR'-'VARANGIAN' DIALOGUE IN DMITRY BYKOV'S *ZhD*: SOME PSYCHOANALYTICAL OBSERVATIONS

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Dmitry Bykov (b. 1967) is a prolific writer and media personality, whose two dozen books or so include poetry (*Poslednee vremia* [*The End-time*], 2006), fiction (such as the prize-winning novels *Orfografiia* [*Orthography*], 2003; and *Evakuator* [*The Evacuator*], 2005) and journalism (e.g. *Blud truda* [*Lust for Labour*], 2003; and *Khroniki blizhaishei voiny* [*The Annals of the Imminent War*], 2005), as well as the biographies of Boris Pasternak and Bulat Okudzhava.

Bykov's *ZhD*[1] is an alternative history novel, published in Moscow in 2006. It took Bykov ten years to complete. According to his interview to Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty of 29 October 2007, Bykov considers *ZhD* his favourite undertaking, which includes 'everything that [he] knows and understands'. At the same time, the novel's blurb characterises it as 'the most politically incorrect book of the new millennium'.

ZhD claims that 'any interpretation of history is acceptable' because 'no one knows what really happened' and 'all the sources have been falsified to some degree'.[2] Russian history is depicted in *ZhD* as an on-going struggle between two ethnic entities, the 'Varangians' and the 'Khazars' (I prefer to introduce and keep these terms in inverted commas because they do not

[1] *ZhD* is an abbreviation with multiple meanings. One of them assumes that the letters stand for *zhivye dushi* (living souls), in acknowledgement of Gogol's epic *Dead Souls* (1841) that has inspired Bykov's book (following Gogol's example, Bykov calls *ZhD* a poema). Living Souls have been chosen as *ZhD*'s title in its abridged English translation by Cathy Porter (London: Alma Books, 2010; for a review by Rachel Polonsky, see The New York Review of Books of 8 November 2012).

[2] Dmitry Bykov, *ZhD*, Moscow: Vagrius, 2007, p. 147. All the translations from Bykov (and other sources in Russian) are mine.

seem to have much in common with the Varangians and the Khazars as modern historiography describes them). 'Khazars' had allegedly conquered Russia (or whatever it had been known as at the time) in VI century AD, while 'Varangians' came to replace them approximately four hundred years later. Since then, 'Varangians' and 'Khazars' have been fighting continuously for control over Russia (thus, the 1917 revolution and Yeltsin's presidency are described as a 'Khazar' comeback after the periods of the 'Varangian' rule). Meanwhile, the indigenous population (which is given no ethnonym and is neither 'Varangian' nor 'Khazar') wastes all its energy trying to adapt to whichever side gains the upper hand. The novel's main action takes place in the near future, when a 'Khazar' state called the 'Great Khaganate' (easily identifiable as Israel) goes to war with Russia (ruled at this point by the 'Varangians') and wages battles on its territory intending to win it back from the 'Varangians'.

ZhD explains many Russian problems by the fact that both the 'Varangians' and the 'Khazars' are 'alien invaders who cannot ever make someone else's soil their native. This is where the perennial Russian rootlessness, fruitlessness and aimlessness of any creative enterprise originate. ⟨...⟩ 'Varangians' believe in the power vertical, statist rhetoric and ruling with an iron fist, but they treat their powerful state as an opportunity to humiliate and enslave others. 'Khazars' support a 'horizontal' approach [to management], but use the concepts of market and freedom to destroy and enslave others too, so the end result is always the same'.[3]

Given that Bykov's 'Varangians' and 'Khazars' are broadly equivalent to 'Russians' and 'Jews' respectively,[4] *ZhD* boldly lends itself open to accusations of being both Russophobic and anti-Semitic at the same time. The following quote from a conversation between a 'Khazar' called Everstein and a 'Varangian' called Volokhov could be used as an example of Russophobia. Everstein says: 'Why do Russians do to themselves things that even the Tartar invaders could not have thought of? A certain tendency can be traced. A native population would not treat its own land and people like that, nipping anything cultural in the bud before it starts blossoming. You are strangers to

[3] Aleksandr Garros, 'Polnyi razryv', *Gudok*, 6 October 2006.

[4] See Kirill Reshetnikov, 'Avtoru polegchalo. Delo za chitatelem', *Gazeta*, 4 October 2006; cf. Aleksandr Garros's opinion that Bykov's 'Varangians' represent the 'men of the soil (pochvenniki) and the statists (gosudarstvenniki) of the non-Jewish Caucasian type', while his 'Khazars' symbolize the 'liberal proponents of complete marketization (rynochniki) of the Jewish type' (Garros, op. cit.).

this land, and only the conquerors' pride prevents you from admitting it'.[5] A quote from another conversation, between Volokhov and his 'Khazar' lover Zhenya, could serve as an example of anti-Semitism. Speaking of perestroika and Yeltsin's rule, which he attributes to the 'Khazar' influence, Volokhov says: 'You [the 'Khazars'] have been responsible for fifteen years of limitless lawlessness (bespredel). And what did these years bring? Where are the great victories and triumphs that would stun the world? You can't offer anything to humanity—anything at all! You are unrivalled at mediation and PR, at promoting and mocking other people's values. You are very good at re-selling, destroying, downgrading and emasculating those values. You even know how to interpret those values, with a little help from black magic. You also know how to render those values in foreign tongues, although you alter the meaning in the process to suit your impudent provincialism. But this is all you Chosen people can do, if you pardon me a thousand times for saying so …'[6]

To what degree, if any, are these strong views of Bykov's characters representative of his own standpoint? Many critics believe that these and similar quotes, of which in the novel there are plenty, tend to reflect Bykov's own perception. Thus, Aleksandr Garros asserts that *ZhD* has been written 'to settle Bykov's scores with Russia once and for all'.[7] For his part, Aleksandr Chantsev recognises that Bykov's description of the 'Khazars' and the 'Khaganate' 'comes from various characters' but notes that 'the author himself is unlikely to disagree with them'.[8] There are persistent claims that *ZhD* is intimately autobiographical. Maiia Kucherskaia, for instance, states that in *ZhD* the difference between the author and his fictional characters is negligible: 'It is not at all a case of fictional identity (liricheskoe ia). This is Dmitry Bykov himself looking at us from under his curved black eyebrow, from every leaf of his 685-page long book'.[9] Vadim Nesterov has observed that four principal male characters in the book—the historian Volokhov, the writer Gromov, the governor Borozdin and the vagabond Vasily Ivanovich—are little else but 'four avatars of Bykov himself, a wanderer on a never-ending quest'.[10]

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[5] Bykov, *ZhD*, p. 125.

[6] Ibid., p. 382.

[7] Garros, op. cit.

[8] Aleksandr Chantsev, 'V ogne polemicheskoi voiny', http://booknik.ru/reviews/fiction/?id=11188.

[9] Maiia Kucherskaia, 'Otmstit' nerazumnym variagam', *Vedomosti*, 15 September 2006.

[10] Vadim Nesterov, 'Vasek, pridavlennyi khazarom', *Gazeta*, 13 September 2006.

A key to Bykov's intriguing attitude to ethnic Russians and ethnic Jews (the Jewry's religious dimension does not seem to play a significant role for him) might be found in his interview to Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty of 1 February 2004. In it, Bykov said: 'It seems to me that the question of national identity (natsional'nyi vopros) is the most important question of XXI century, so why avoid it? It seems to me that we won't be able to ignore the role of either Russians or Jews in Russian history. Why not discuss it openly, then? I'm [partly] Jewish by origin, and I talk about topics like that with pleasure. […] I am half-Russian too. My Russian half determines my actions, whereas my Jewish half determines my convictions. These halves are locked in an uncompromising clinch with each other, and I listen to their arguments with pleasure'.

It is obvious that Bykov perceives his own mixed origin as a conflict of two opposites, and *ZhD* therefore should perhaps be seen not as an alternative history of Russia but as a self-portrait of sorts, i.e. a picture of what is going on in Bykov's mind, both on its conscious and subconscious levels. (In Mark Amusin's opinion, expressed in the Jerusalem journal *Nota Bene* (18, 2006, p. 178), Bykov's 'polemic with the 'Khazars' ⟨is⟩ outwardly vigorous and uncompromising but may well be formidably masochistic on the inside, a product of heavy mental suffering (tiazhkie dushevnye perezhivaniia), awash with invisible tears'.) To take Bykov's own word for it, reflected in *ZhD*'s plot, these goings-on can probably be best described metaphorically as a war.

It is now clear why Bykov has chosen to juxtapose 'Varangians'/Russians to 'Khazars'/Jews, of all peoples. (This has caused astonishment among some Russian nationalists. One of them, the author Zakhar Prilepin, protested: 'As an inveterate 'Varangian', I am strongly opposed to the idea of treating 'Khazars' on a par with—how to put it mildly—the master nation (titul'naia natsiia), even if it happens in fiction only. In Russia, we have about a hundred other ethnic minorities, no less gifted in every sphere than the descendants of the Khaganate'.[11]) Bykov's choice must have been purely personal. Had he been, say, part Armenian, part Azeri, he might well have given the reader a masterfully written, convincing alternative account of Russian history, whose causes and effects would have been determined entirely by the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict.

[11] Zakhar Prilepin, 'Dmitry Bykov, ZhD', http://www.zaharprilepin.ru/ru/litprocess/knizhnaya-polka/dmitrij-bikov-zhd.html.

In the same *RFE/RL* interview of 1 February 2004 that contains Bykov's declaration about the dual nature of his identity, Bykov admits that his 'fiction is a self-therapy of sorts', because 'there are things that you cannot write about in poetry'. This statement, reminiscent of, and perhaps even influenced by, Mark Burno's concept of therapy by creative self-expression,[12] makes Bykov's art (and especially Bykov's fiction) eligible for a bit of gentle and non-intrusive psychoanalytical investigation.

It is common knowledge that Bykov's Jewish father, Lev Moiseevich Zil'bertrud, left the family when Bykov was rather little.[13] It does not take a qualified psychoanalyst to establish that Bykov has been bound to deal with the trauma caused by the absent father phenomenon, when the child simultaneously likes and loathes the features that are inextricably associated with the father's image (in Bykov's case, this must have included his father's Jewishness). Furthermore, Bykov is a non-Halachic Jew, which makes it hard for him to be accepted as a Jew in the eyes of the halachically Jewish community. These two factors together might well have contributed to a situation when things Jewish keep attracting Bykov's sympathy with the same inevitability as they tend to become simultaneously an object of his fierce criticism. The following passage from *ZhD*, describing Volokhov's attitude to a community of Russia-born Jewish intellectuals in Israel, gives an indication of how painful Bykov's non-acceptance by such a circle might feel: 'Volokhov had an impression that all of them grew up together, using the same literary quotes as passwords of sorts; some even expressed themselves through quotations only. *They all were on perfectly good terms with their parents* (the emphasis is mine.—AR). They all belonged to Soviet elite (that is, led a comfortable life in Russia too). Some of them were in the Khaganate on a visit, others spent half a year here and another half a year in Russia; a few spent most of their time travelling insouciantly around the world. They all spoke as if winking at each other: quotes, writers' names and terms drawn from literary theory served the same purpose. An uninitiated person would not understand much of their conversation and thus would be put in his place. Volokhov was more or less clued-up. He was well read, studied history […]; many names and quotes still meant nothing to

[12] See, for example, M.E. Burno, *Terapiia tvorcheskim samovyrazheniem: Psikhoterapiia psikhopatii i maloprogredientnoi shizofrenii—s defenzivnymi proiavleniiami*, Moscow: Meditsina, 1989.

[13] http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Быков_Дмитрий_Львович.

him, though, but this was not why he felt alienated. One reason was that these people felt suspiciously at home in Russian culture, especially in that part of it which had been created by the Khazars. This was their home turf which they inhabited in joyful confidence, as if they owned it. [...] Although he would not admit this even to himself, Volokhov envied them passionately, violently'.[14]

Bykov's negative treatment of both 'Khazars' and 'Varangians' may also have an additional psychoanalytical explanation. It appears that he has concerns about his weight (it is not by chance that an alternative reading of the abbreviation *ZhD*, suggested by Bykov himself, is the self-referential zhirnyi Dima / fat Dmitry). At a readers' conference in Glasgow on 24 April 2009, Bykov said that he was allowed on Russian television as a sparring partner (mal'chik dlia bit'ia) in political debates only because such a repulsively looking person would not be able to lead the masses anyway, and therefore was deemed admissible as a proponent of liberal values. It might well be that Bykov's critical view of his exterior is extended equally to both ethnic components of his identity, and this is why the issue of 'Khazars' vs 'Varangians' becomes so heavily personalised. This personal dimension might well provide a reason for Bykov's chastisement of 'Varangians' and 'Khazars', seen by some as 'justified, accurate, jaded and largely non-contentious'[15]—if one assumes that Bykov's reprimands are aimed first and foremost at himself. As one critic put it, 'if someone wants to calculate the proportion of Russophobia and anti-Semitism in this sad (skorbnaia) book, they are welcome. They can scan page after page with some 'ethnometer' measuring the number of lines and the strength of sarcasms in the 'Russsian' and the 'Khazar' scenes. But what's the point? For Bykov, all in all, both [ethnic groups] are equally bad (oba khuzhe)'.[16] Incidentally, Bykov has little positive to say about the indigenous population in *ZhD* either—possibly because it is solely a fruit of his imagination and is therefore part of him too. Hence, to quote from a review by the journalist Mikhail Leont'ev, these 'quiet and meek people', understandably, 'turn out to be the same "shit" as the rest'.[17]

However, Bykov's feelings about himself, just as his feelings towards his absent Jewish father, cannot of course be reduced to merely negative emo-

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[14] Bykov, *ZhD*, p. 157.
[15] Kucherskaia, op. cit.
[16] Evgenii Belzhelarskii, 'Okopnye khroniki', *Itogi*, no. 41, 2006.
[17] Mikhail Leont'ev, 'Bespriiutnyi Natsbest', *Profil'*, no. 23, 2007.

tions. According to a legend that forms the plot of ZhD, a child of mixed—either 'Varangian'/indigenous, or 'Khazar'/indigenous—origin should become responsible for a resurrection of the aboriginal nation and a break in the vicious circle of Russian history.[18] This undoubtedly means that, in Bykov's universe, the 'half-blooded' individuals may after all have a lot to be said for. According to Mikhail Leont'ev, in *ZhD* 'the image of an acceptable future emerges as a synthesis of heterogeneous "shit", which is actually a rather optimistic and politically correct statement'.[19]

In other words, from a psychoanalytical point of view, Bykov's case seems to be that of ambivalence, i.e. revealing 'the simultaneous existence of contradictory tendencies, attitudes or feelings in the relationship to a single object—especially the coexistence of love and hate'.[20] In all likelihood, Bykov is therefore neither a Russophobe nor an anti-Semite but someone who cannot reconcile the constituent—Russian and Jewish—parts of his ethnic identity harmoniously, is aware of the problem and is trying to resolve it by recourse to creative activity.

It is curious that yet another example of an ambivalent attitude to Russians and Jews (without disguising them as 'Varangians' and 'Khazars') is Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, as has been established a quarter of a century ago by the leading authority on the psychoanalytical approach to Russian culture, Daniel Rancour-Laferriere. In Rancour-Laferriere's opinion, Solzhenitsyn 'is threatened by the idea of being Jewish'[21]—because, for instance, he does not want to be associated with the Third Wave of Russian emigration which was Jewish to a considerable extent—but also has 'a Jewish shadow identity which never ceases to haunt ⟨him⟩'[22] (e.g. when the KGB

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[18] Bykov describes the cyclical nature of Russian history as follows: 'Roughly once a century, there would be a revolution leading nowhere […] Then a freeze would ensue, followed by a slight relaxation, known as the Thaw—to let off the steam. Afterwards the regime would become senile, and there would not be no other way of reforming it except for another revolution' (Bykov, *ZhD*, p. 183). That is why, according to Bykov, the circular image of a serpent devouring its own tail (an Ouroboros—an image significant to psychoanalysts, such as Carl Jung and Erich Neumann), 'a serpent-fighter and a martyr rolled in one, […] is the best symbolic representation of Russian history' (ibid., p. 208).

[19] Leont'ev, op. cit.

[20] Jean LaPlanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, transl. by Donald Nicholson-Smith, London: Hogarth Press, 1973, p. 26. Cf. an opinion that in *ZhD* Bykov fans 'the flames of philo- and anti-Semitism a-la [Vasilii] Rozanov' (Liza Novikova, 'Knigi za nedeliu', *Kommersant*, 23 August 2006).

[21] Daniel Rancour-Laferriere, 'Solzhenitsyn and the Jews: A Psychoanalytic View', *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, vol. 15, no. 3, 1985, p. 48.

[22] Ibid., p. 49.

was spreading rumours that Solzhenitsyn was in fact a Jew and his real surname was Solzhenitsker).[23] As a result, Solzhenitsyn 'is, properly speaking, neither an anti-Semite, nor a Zionist. [...] however, [...] some psychological underpinnings of each of these political polarities are present in his thinking. [...] There is an emotional ambivalence, a contradictory hate/love attitude at the heart of Solzhenitsyn's utterances about Jews'.[24]

With a significant degree of confidence, something similar can be said of Bykov. However, there is a notable difference between him and Solzhenitsyn, manifested in their attitude to the state of Israel. While Solzhenitsyn more than once 'expressed his admiration for Israel as a state with a guiding idea',[25] Bykov has repeatedly claimed that the voluntary Jewish confinement to the Israeli ghetto, as he terms it, is a step backwards, because the diasporic phase in the history of a nation should be seen as a peak in the development of that nation which at its high point is allegedly united by faith and/or culture, not by territory alone. Here is only one example of Bykov's pronouncements on the subject: 'The very idea of Israel, often misrepresented as a nation's return to its promised land, sacred national ideals and indigenous way of life, appears to me flawed, as any return would. [...] The appeal to reject assimilation is in fact an appeal for a hopeless and cheerless provinciality; to gather in the Middle East in order to establish yet another Middle Eastern state is an unforgivable step back for a nation that has managed to turn exile into a heroic deed and to achieve breathtaking cultural heights owing precisely to its *inner conflict* [the emphasis is mine.—AR].'[26]

Solzhenitsyn's partially Jewish identity is, of course, only a shadow one, and it did not seriously get in the way of his appreciation of Israel. As for Bykov's partially Jewish identity, it is obviously very real, and it appears

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[23] Cf. also the following observation: Solzhenitsyn 'sometimes seems closer to Judaism than to Christianity in his deep preoccupation with justice, in his nationalism, and, finally, in his proud conception of himself as prophet and avenger. Solzhenitsyn comes not as a messenger of the humble Jesus but as the emissary of the vindictive God of the Old Testament' (Robert Louis Jackson, 'The Mask of Solzhenitsyn: Ivan Denisovich', in Alexis Klimoff (ed.), *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich: A Critical Companion*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1997, p. 51).

[24] Rancour-Laferriere, op. cit., p. 30.

[25] Michael Scammell, *Solzhenitsyn: A Biography*, London: Hutchinson, 1985, p. 907. Scammell refers to *Le Monde*'s account of Solzhenitsyn's April 1975 interview to the French television. A number of other pro-Israeli statements by Solzhenitsyn have been listed in Rancour-Laferriere, op. cit., pp. 39–40.

[26] Dmitry Bykov, 'Vinograd russkoi i mirovoi kul'tury okazalsia dlia Zhabotinskogo zelen', http://booknik.ru/context/?id=26967&articleNum=3.

that, when talking about Israel, Bykov once again is in essence talking about himself. The inner conflict he mentions is evidently reminiscent of the driving force behind his own creative effort (which has already been demonstrated), and his rejection of Israel might well be dictated by the fear that he would struggle to fit in well in the Israeli society. This fear does not seem to be entirely unfounded. At the 23rd Jerusalem International Book Fair in February 2007, Bykov reportedly said that the idea of a nation-state had discredited itself and Israel was a historical mistake. Some of the local eye-witnesses immediately branded this statement 'anti-Semitic'.[27] It does not help that some Russian nationalists, apparently excited by *ZhD*'s provocative revival of the old conspiracy theory about Jewish attempts to take over Russia, which in the novel escalate into an all-out war, recommend Bykov's book as essential reading for the patriotically minded Russian youth. The critic Vladimir Bondarenko, for one, says: 'I would strongly advise our young, intellectually curious patriots to go through Dmitry Bykov's *ZhD*[28] with a fine-tooth comb. They won't find such an eye-opening Russian-Jewish dialogue even in the memorable fantasy novels by Iurii Petukhov, now banned by a court ruling'.[29]

I would argue that Bondarenko, as well as the Jerusalem Book Fair goers, have taken a one-dimensional view of Bykov in general, and of his *ZhD* in particular. Personally, in conclusion of a necessarily brief psychoanalytical examination conducted above, I prefer to agree with Andrei Nemzer's opinion that 'one has to be really stupid to consider Bykov in earnest either an anti-Semite or a Russophobe'.[30]

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[27] Sof'ia Shirokova, 'Kabakova ne uznali', *Lekhaim*, May 2007, http://www.lechaim.ru/ARHIV/181/shirikova.htm.

[28] In the Russian original, Bondarenko actually says 'ZhiDy' (kikes), thus interpreting Bykov's abbreviation as a thinly veiled ethnic slur, often used to insult Jews in a Russian-speaking environment.

[29] Vladimir Bondarenko, 'Vampiry na sluzhbe Piatoi imperii', *Zavtra*, 21 March 2007. Iurii Dmitrievich Petukhov (1951–2009) was editor-in-chief of the *Podlinnaia istoriia* [*Real History*] almanac and the author of such books as *Russkaia Khazariia* (*The Khazar State in Russia*, 2001), *Chetvertaia mirovaia. Vtorzhenie. Khronika okkupatsii Vostochnogo polushariia* (*The Fourth World War: Chronicles of the Invasion to the Eastern Hemisphere*, 2004) and *Genotsid. Obshchestvo potrebleniia. Russkii Kholokost* (*Genocide: The Consumerist Society and Russian Holocaust*, 2004). The last two were banned by the Perovskii court in Moscow for extremism and incitement to ethnic hatred, see Elena Pashutinskaia, 'Prokuratura otsenila tvorchestvo Iuriia Petukhova: V Volgograde trebuiut zapretit' knigi moskovskogo pisatelia', *Kommersant-Volgograd*, 20 July 2006.

[30] Andrei Nemzer, 'Eshche dva "nichego"', *Vremia novostei*, 29 September 2006. I would like to express my gratitude to Leonid Katsis and Vladimir Khazan for a number of useful bibliographical suggestions.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE DARKNESS OF BABYLON: A RUSSIAN-JEWISH-ISRAELI EXPERIENCE IN VISIONARY JOURNEYS OF MIKHAIL GENDELEV

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(Kiev, the Ukraine)

On a hot day in May 1977, a 27-year old underground poet from Leningrad (St. Petersburg), happily in love with his young and beautiful wife and full of high hopes, landed in the Land of Israel. So began the twisted and often bizarre saga of Mikhail Gendelev—a journey that included first-hand battlefield experience as military medic during Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, years of impoverished bohemian existence in a Jerusalem attic, cramped editorial rooms of Russian-language émigré newspapers, travels to the then-Soviet Union on behalf of then-secret Israeli Nativ organization and lavish life in post-Soviet Moscow where the poet rubbed shoulders with Russia's rich and famous. It came to an abrupt end in March 2009 at the Beilinson Hospital in Israel where Gendelev died after protracted illness and an unsuccessful lung transplant.[1] By the time, he was widely hailed as one of the most important contemporary poets writing in Russian and a foremost exponent of what he termed "Israeli Russian-language literature".

Recent years marked an upsurge in interest in the poet's heritage, academic and non-academic, culminating with the regular Gendelev Readings held in Jerusalem in November 2011-May 2012 by the Mikhail Gendelev Memorial Foundation. Of note are several eloquent essays devoted to him by Maia Kaganskaia; Mikhail Weisskopf deserves a special mention for his pioneering study of Gendelev's poetics.[2]

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[1] For more detailed bio-bibliographical information (in Russian) consult the poet's memorial site (http://gendelev.org). Its contents, compiled by the author of this study, include a comprehensive corpus of articles and book reviews as well as wide-ranging accompanying material devoted to M. Gendelev.

[2] See Mikhail Weisskopf, "Kamennye vody", preface to *Nepolnoe sobranie sochinenij*, by Mikhail Gendelev (Moscow: Vremia, 2003), pp. 5–27: Mikhail Weisskopf, "Teologiia Mikhaila Gendeleva: Opyt analiticheskogo nekrologa", *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* No. 98 (2009),

Many authors of recent studies on Gendelev have focused on the later period of his work (1990s–2000s) and on what M. Weisskopf appropriately describes as the "theology of Mikhail Gendelev".[3] Indeed, Gendelev's mature texts abound in striking examples of that 'theology', a post-Holocaust construct, built upon memory of the *Shoah*: he is haunted by visions of future Holocaust threatening the Jewish state. In Gendelev, the Jewish people's ruin is equal to a downfall of God. The poet indulges in heated arguments with and accusations against the Almighty whom he blames of abandoning His people and thus de-facto committing suicide. These instances fall within a well-developed Jewish tradition of 'arguing with God'.[4] Gendelev's recurrent motive of God's self-contraction and disappearance from universe bears outward semblance to the concept of *tsimtsum* in Lurianic Kabbalistic systems. The divine vanishing process, however, acquires a Gnostic turn with Godhead emanating an 'anti-God' or being substituted for by an antagonist here personified by Allah. The narrator-poet is the last survivor to bear witness to the Jewish people's doom: ultimately he accepts features of God himself. So, Gendelev's later 'theology' may be, perhaps without the poet's conscious knowledge, a Jewish derivation of the so-called "God is Dead" theological movement devised by Thomas J.J. Altizer and other thinkers.[5]

The present study attempts to elucidate true foundations of Gendelev's poetry, its visionary basis. It will be done by examining some of his texts, primarily the poem *Vavilon* [Babylon], exposing the internal structure of his poetical world. It belongs to his 'earlier texts', composed in the late 1970s and early 1980s, contained in two books,[6] *Poslaniia k lemuram* [Epistles to the

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pp. 223–231; Maia Kaganskaia, "Slovo o milosti i gordosti: Kratkij ocherk dushi i tvorchestva", afterword to *Legkajia muzyka*, by Mikhail Gendelev (Jerusalem-Moscow: Gesharim-Mosty kul'tury, 2004), pp. 94–99; Maia Kaganskaia, "Pamiati 'Pamiati Demona': Chernovik proshchan'ia", *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, No. 98 (2009), pp. 216–223: Maia Kaganskaia, "Ia khochu rasskazat' vam …", *Art in Process*, accessed Dec. 27, 2012, http://art-in-process.com/2010/05/ya-xochu-rasskazat-vam%E2%80%A6/.

[3] Weisskopf, "Teologiia".

[4] Of particular note is the practice and style of prominent Hasidic leader R. Levy Yitzhak of Berditchev (1740–1809), whose so-called *Kaddish of R. Yitzhak* Gendelev has partially translated into Russian. See Mikhail Gendelev, "Voina, govorite?", *Vesti-2* (Tel Aviv), December 7, 1995, p. 5.

[5] See Thomas J.J. Altizer, *The Call to Radical Theology*, ed. and introduction Lissa McCullough, foreword David E. Klemm, in *SUNY Series in Theology and Continental Thought* ed. Douglas Donkel (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2012); *Thinking Through The Death of God: A Critical Companion to Thomas J.J. Altizer*, ed. Lissa McCullough and Brian Schroeder, in *SUNY Series in Theology and Continental Thought* ed. Douglas Donkel (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2004).

[6] Gendelev has always insisted that he constructed tightly structured 'books' of poetry, as opposed to issuing 'collections' of assorted poems.

Lemurs, 1981] and *Stikhotvoreniia Mikhaila Gendeleva* [The Poems of Mikhail Gendelev, 1984].

Gendelev's second book, the 1981 *Poslaniia k lemuram*, still bore familiar birthmarks of the Leningrad poetical school. It was influenced by Anri Volokhonskij, an extremely gifted and exquisite poet who had been one of Leningrad poetic gurus, also transplanted himself to Israel and was Gendelev's mentor during the first Israeli years. Only in the 1984 volume, "The Black Book" (as poet's friends called it), did Gendelev's poetry achieve maturity; earlier themes, notions and concepts found here radically new imagery. That book is a virtual quintessence of his poetry, a map of his poetic world set to unfold in later years. It should serve as a starting point of all discussion of his oeuvre.

Yet the frilly, baroque, pretentious and imitative 1981 book of "Epistles", that elaborate and mannered construction hanging in a void, may also serve as a side door leading to Gendelev's inner space. One example is the poem *1099 god* [Year 1099], populated by monks, Crusader knights, the lunatic dance of Lilith, ring-decorated hand of Allah-Saladin "caressing the desert hide" and Holy City of Jerusalem dangling in mid-air on stone chains. In the midst of that effuse historical fantasy, mysterious equestrians with "masked faces" make a brief appearance ("Vsadnikov sokrytolitsykh ustalye koni nesli …"). This seemingly standard visual image (which could well be inspired by David Lean's 1962 movie epic *Lawrence of Arabia*, North African paintings of Eugène Delacroix, *keffiyeh* headdresses of Arab passers-by or all that together) is mentioned in unfinished autobiographical novel in verse *Zhizneopisanie, sostavlennoe im samim* [Life History Composed by Himself, c. 1998–2001] which contains a line:

> Pro vsadnikov sokrytolitsykh prisnilsia I stal naviazchivo snit'sia son
>
> [The dream of horse-riders with masked faces came and obsessively repeated itself …]

The key word has been spoken: a dream, dream vision.

Drugoe nebo [Another Sky], a cycle included in his book *Prazdnik* [The Feast, 1993], refers to the dead who have "their own language, different names and another sky seen by their eyes".[7] The poet explained that he dreamt of "the dead speaking to us, yet we fail to understand them as they

[7] "U mertvykh sobstvennyj iazyk / u nikh drugie imena / drugoe nebo na glazakh …" Mikhail Gendelev, *Prazdnik* (Jerusalem: Elia Capitolina, 1993), 94.

not only dwell in another world but also are given different names as they pass away, and speak a language of their own".

Instead of a warrior poet who has been viewed by some critics as 'colonialist' or at best 'orientalist', a follower of Rudyard Kipling and Nikolaj Gumilev,[8] Gendelev suddenly emerges as poet-dreamer, enthralled by visions appearing in darkness, on the night side of the soul. By his own admission, even such sembably 'theological' images as deserted Jerusalem and Allah riding a monstrous horse-camel in the longer poem *Triumfator* [Triumphator, publ. 1997] initially were the product of dreams.

The source of dreams and poetic inspiration has little to do with heaven: it is a black chthonic funnel, primordial darkness. Attempting to pinpoint the origins of his poetry, Gendelev has indicatively described a "black abyss opening in the corner of a room".[9] Elsewhere, he depicted the process of poetic composition in terms characteristic of meditation and mystical visionary experience:

> ... Liubaia chernaia korobka na vybor i—tishina, tishina, tishina, poka s grokhotom ne uslushu potreskivanie, razvorachivanie sukhogo, elektrizovannogo ⟨...⟩ shelka, muarakrylyshek svoikh motyl'kov
>
> [... Any black box of choice and—silence, silence, silence, until I hear the thunderous crackling, the unwrapping of the dry, electrified ⟨...⟩ silk and moiré of my butterflies' wings][10]

The poet's rhetoric excessiveness or garishness, 'carnavalized' images, sublime irony and vulgar cackle, shrewish or tragic arguments with God and recently departed fellow poets, the interpenetration of semantic fields—all those features of Gendelev's poetry might somewhat obscure its beginnings. In fact, Gendelev's poetic evolution was an evolution of forms, themes and means stemming from a permanent foundation. The layers of his poems ("at

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[8] See, for instance, Viktor Krivulin, "Voina bez pobeditelej i pobezhdennykh: O poezii Mikhaila Gendeleva", *Zvezda*, 12 (1990), 97; Viktor Toporov, "Mikhail Gendelev", in *Pozdnie peterbyrzhtsy: Poeticheskaia antologiia*, ed. Viktor Toporov, Maksim Maksimov (Saint-Petersburg: Evropejskij dom, 1995), 356; Valerij Shubinskij, "Privet iz Leningrada: (V sviazi so smertiu Mikhaila Gendeleva)", *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 98 (2009), 211–215.

[9] In a conversation with Peter Kriksunov, Gendelev's Israeli collaborator in Hebrew poetry translations and translator of his poetry into Hebrew, collected in: Mikhael Gendelev. *Hag*. Transl. by Peter Kriksunov (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz hameuhad, 2000). Reported by Kriksunov during his Gendelev Readings presentation in Jerusalem, January 5, 2012.

[10] Mikhail Gendelev, "Vid na krepost' v iasnyiu pogodu", *Okna*, January 27, 1994, 24. By 'butterflies' the poet refers to the graphic aspect of his strophes, which due to their central symmetry axis visually resemble butterflies.

the bottom of which darkness rests"[11]) cover unchangeable ontological entities. His poetic world remained enclosed, hermetic and even static in the sense of constancy of its essential components.

Returning briefly to the poem *1099 god*, we find the narrator-poet dismissing the surrounding atmosphere of pseudo-historical exuberance:

Povestvovan'e, kazhetsia, o drugikh
I vaznykh veschakh, kak-to: golod, liubov', voina, ...

[it seems the narration is about other
and important things, such as: hunger, love, war ...]

By 1984 when "The Black Book" was composed, that definition has achieved its final crystallization, with the element of 'hunger' replaced by something far more logical:

chto
po sebe est' sami
liubov', voina I smert'
kak ne
predlog dlia prostodushnykh opisanii
v povestvovanii o t'me I tishine
(*"Na russkom iazyke, poslednem mne ..."*)

[what
are as such
love war and death
if not
a pretext for simple-minded descriptions
within the narrative of darkness and silence]
(*"In the Russian language, my last one ..."*)

In later years Gendelev was to return to this poetic confession of faith; it was literally repeated in such major accomplishment as the poem *K arabskoj rechi* [To the Arabic Speech, 2004]. By naming his premortal book *Liubov' voina i smert' v vospominaniiakh sovremennika* [Love War and Death in the Recollections of a Contemporary, 2008], Gendelev once again stressed direct continuity of his texts as well as immanent statics of his poetical discourse.

Gendelev's poetry might be compared to kaleidoscope: a tube with faceted colored glass fragments, which to the eye of a beholder fall together into ever changing patterns. The observed pattern depends on the fragments' reflection in three oblongated mirrors, assembled in the form of a triangle. Those are the three entities of Gendelev's world: love, war and death.

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[11] "Na dne kotorykh / t'ma ..." Gendelev, *Prazdnik*, 50.

And still, close reading of the above-quoted text reveals that the main 'narrative' is devoted to "other things". Love, war and death do not constitute the poet's actual subject matter but only serve as a *pretext* for "simple-minded descriptions".

The definition should not be taken literally: Gendelev was anything but a simple-minded poet. It is not by chance that one of his later texts referred to a "simple-minded" companion.[12] To that personage the poet turns allegedly universal notions of 'love', 'war' and 'death'—yet in his poetics these acquire intensely personal meaning, defined only within a system of oppositions and negations. "Simple-minded descriptions" function as poetic digressions vis-à-vis the main narrative, somewhat like Pushkin's famed divertions in *Evgenij Onegin*. The main narrative is about *darkness* and *silence*.

The "Black Book" of 1984 resulted from what a psychoanalyst may call an 'insight', a sudden realization of unconscious or subconscious processes and forces.

Building up to that insight were a series of biographical events involving a poet who was at or nearing the fateful "age of Christ" (32–33) and engaged in a revaluation of his literary accomplishments. A medic by education and profession, Gendelev gradually arrived at the conclusion that he ought to drop medicine in favor of poetry; meanwhile, after a painful divorce, he parted with his family and house and moved into a bohemian attic in downtown Jerusalem that would soon become his trademark.

And finally, he encountered war.

For Gendelev, the 1982 invasion of Lebanon began with an order to report for reserve duty. Within a few hours, he found himself in the dark iron belly of an assault ship and then in moonlit orange orchard; his unit was slowly advancing toward Lebanese coastal cities, engaging in fire exchanges along the way. The surreal moonlit orange grove and the whistle of bullets became permanent features of Gendelev's 1980s–1990s poetry.

Adding to the surrealistic feel was a sense of alienation—the poet's Hebrew was so poor at the time that he once misunderstood a radioed order to withdraw and stayed on with his medical team at the port of Beirut, much to the dismay of U.N. troops. The stay in Beirut also laid the foundations for his later visions of deserted streets and dead cities: Gendelev's unit was

[12] Unpublished song text *Saliut*, author's typescript, M. Gendelev Memorial Foundation archive.

among the first to enter the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps following the Phalangist massacre of Palestinian inhabitants.

The poem *Nochnye manevry pod Beit-Dzhubrin* [Night Manuevers near Beit-Jubrin][13] stressed the dream-type essence of military experience: the narrator, a reserve soldier, wakes up from his dream of home to the reality of another dream, that of a military encampment.

The poet-dreamer woke up from his dream in a Lebanese orchard and saw the dream of war: this Shakespearean realization that the world is made of "stuff as dreams are made on" suddenly made internal realm of visions he formerly censored out fall into step with outer realities. Now the two worlds have demonstrated complete structural semblance.

Gendelev has found a forerunner and role model in the towering figure of Mikhail Lermontov, the Russian poet who fought against Muslim enemies at an imperial war.[14] However, Lermontov brings to mind not only the bloodshed and military bravery of *Valerik* (1840), but also the visionary *Son* [Dream, 1841] in which a mortally wounded officer agonizing "in the valley of Dagestan" dreams of his beloved who in turn has a vision of his dead body. The dreamy sequence of a dream within a dream, the motive of a *dead double* are repeated over and over in Gendelev's poems.

Our brief foray into Gendelev's wartime experiences would not be complete without the mention of yet another 'trophy' brought home from the battle. It is not difficult to discern in Gendelev's texts the recurrent motive of war as a "Machine of Heavenly Beauty".[15] The terrifying beauty of battlefield might only be observed and appreciated from high above, by the omnipresent eye of Almighty. War and bloodshed have paradoxically served the poet-agnostic as possible proof of God's existence. The "necked eye" of this very God, perceived as a hostile sniper, selects the poet to perish during an "instantaneous firefight on the border" in one of the book's concluding poems, *Ne perevernetsia stranitsa* … [The page shall not be overturned]. The 14-line poem ends on a disillusioned and embittered note:

Gospod' nash ne znaet po-russki
I russkikh ne pomnit imen

---

[13] Beit-Jubrin—Hebrew slang pronunciation of Beit Guvrin, a locale in southern Israel with the ruins of ancient towns and picturesque chalkstone caves that once served as burial chambers, work spaces etc.

[14] For discussion of Lermontov's place in Gendelev's poetry and outlook see Kaganskajia, "Pamiati 'Pamiati Demona'".

[15] Gendelev, *Nepolnoe sobranie*, 493.

[Our God knows no Russian
and does not remember Russian names]

This terse outcry perfectly summed up personal dilemmas of Mikhail Gendelev, a Russian-language poet in a Hebrew-speaking country. But it also expressed the dilemmas of the whole 'Russian' wave of emigration to Israel, which came to a forced standstill by 1979.

By 1984, when Gendelev published *Stikhotvoreniia*, that wave's cultural elite was cooking in its own juice. Any remnants of illusions and first of all cultural illusions have faded away. Israeli establishment rejected the 'Russian' cultural enclave, offering it the choice between absorption (i.e. annihilation) and cultural ghetto. The situation was further aggravated by the fact that many émigré authors, saturated with the riches of Russian culture, at the same time were detached from Jewish ways of life, customs and religious traditions. They made little if no effort to embrace Hebrew and Israeli culture, which they viewed as hopelessly provincial and backward.

Gendelev's personal 'insight' required the poet to free himself of any influences of the Leningrad poetical school. The task presumed radical abandonment of past achievements and complete restructuring of previous poetics. It was clear for Gendelev that new experience could not employ 'Russian' modes of expression.

Salvation came in the form of "Israeli Russian-language literature"—a concept that the poet devised along with Volokhonski, Kaganskaia and a number of like-minded authors.[16] The new literary hybrid was seen as equally independent of 'metropolis', represented by Russia and its culture, and of the third-wave Russian emigration.[17] It was meant to be a literature

[16] In the 1980s–1990s, Gendelev and kindred spirits also counted among exponents of this literature such authors as L. Girshovich, Iu. Shmukler, M. Weisskopf, A. Vernik, I. Bokstejn, Z. Bar-Sella, Iu. Miloslavskij, V. Glozman, I. Maler, E. Liuksemburg, Ia. Tsigelman, K. Tyntarev, S. Shenbrunn, L. Melamid, A. Goldshtejn, G.-D. Zinger, A. Barash, M. Korol', V. Tarasov, D. Kudriavtsev, A. Gorenko, certain critics, essayists and translators whose texts appeared in the *Dvadzat' dva* magazine (ed. R. Nudelman) etc. See also Evgenij Soshkin, "Leprozorij dlia nezriachikh: Mikhail Gendelev i proekt 'Russkoiazychnaia literatura Izrailia'", *Textonly No*. 29 (2, 2009), accessed December 27, 2012, http://www.textonly.ru/case/?issue=29&article=29952.

[17] In that sense Gendelev's "Our God knows no Russian …" represented polemics with D. Merezhkovskij who coined the famous motto of post-revolutionary Russian emigration wave: "We are not in exile but on a mission. Motherland for us has a spiritual, rather that geographical, sense". Gendelev viewed 'motherland' in precisely the opposite, geographical sense and never sought to be the carrier of 'spiritual Russia'. In this respect see Mikhail Gendelev, "Russkoiazychnaia literatura Izrailia", *Obitaemyi ostrov* 1(1991), p. 8.

of new semantics and plot devices, oriented at themes that were "unprecedented for the Russian literature"—a literature nurtured by the living spirit of new, Israeli existence.[18]

The construct, never outlined in proper detail, proved to be conceptually weak and not too viable in practice. Within several years, many prominent representatives of "Israeli Russian-language literature" have left Israel to seek their fortunes elsewhere. Gendelev perceived the giant immigration wave of the late 1980s – early 1990s, by and large, as an extension of Russia and felt that it was ill-prepared to embrace his concepts. By the late 1990s, the poet declared the notion of "Israeli Russian-language literature" to be dead.[19]

Yet in the first half of 1980s the new 'Israeli-Russian' literary concept was viewed almost as panacea, and it was this concept that Gendelev's poem *Vavilon* was in part designed to embody.

BABYLON

I

Stone snow is descending meantime
so as to live from memory and lighter
see the ox of silence and feel with your hands
the lowing of undivided speech
—language of the night—
I remember yesterday
we did not raise our voices till sunrise
while night under the Cyclopean tower
changed its beds of white smoke

stone snow had descended lower to fall
we
have no
shadows
in the valley of heavens
there are no us
no shadows
read by heart
of the rivers of babylon flowing back to their source.

[18] Gendelev, "Russkoiazychnaia literature", p. 9.

[19] See, for instance, Mikhail Gendelev, "Dialog poverkh golov", +(*972*), November (2004), pp. 3–4.

II

Silence
was such
that
it rarely happened
let it beat and live
between the throat and clavicle

who is he
a lodger, oh yes
in the bluish light of the moon
if I was to twitch
he will then
let know and make himself seen

and if I shout "Maria!"
a dream
barely remembering
if I yell wildly
the dark shadow will detach itself
from a lit face

thunderously
wings shall rise
of ancient unearthly craftsmanship
into a beak of porphyry glass
the mouth
shall open with a yawn

will bend
the city of babylon
its ashen neck
to spring back
I shall have no time
Gryphon shall hiss in me face.

III

Draw
with an insatiable gorge
in darkness coming up to the chest
oh, misfortune can not be explained
by the lack of fortune
at all

then do not explain!
the cross-bar
is not seen
while looking from eye sockets
you are clay from the clays of interfluve
for cuneiform of new tablets

and darkness is darkness and not
a wandering fire somewhere
repeat:
it is not light
nor the lack of light
neither the expectation of dawn

IV

First the doves
a snake of sand
trickling out slowly
those who are close ones
what is it with you?
where are you running?
the shoring is not strong enough?
what, architect, you meant to deceive?
eh,
architect?

the beams are monstrous
the shorings are strong
is it a cat—that inhuman screech?
Oh my God!
who raised the ceilings?
Oh my God!
do not remove your hand—
or
we all
shall be maimed

into the sky
the heavenly gap becomes wider
into the sky
which has nothing apart from itself
into the sky
like hats from the heads—are blown away
the heads of idols
and

nakedly
the gold-plated rooftops

down
not looking
everything has long been down
remember where this sing repeated itself?
everything has already happened
you
have already hanged
the end!
the dorse is bending sluggishly
like the horizon's turnaway

just
do not remove your hand!
roof
and crisp bread
and Sabbath dress
idols
dangle their tongues
from the tower into zenith
the oxen are winged
there is nothing
more solid and more winged.

V

Bull
ridging its jet-black wings
it is darkness
colossus
Aquarius is the night for it
and twinkling at nadir
the only eye—a star
or what was called a star

do not be born in the interfluve in law-abiding world
of clay grammar
should it not be neglected?
in the interfluve a word has four meanings:
a word
chronicle
enslaving signature
the speech of the king

repeat after me:
a word has
four
meanings—
word as such, perjury, signature and speech
for instance:
the rivers of babylon change the direction of their flow
when babylon orders them to flow under the oxen

for instance—it is the first heaven
which
I know
the heaven of the night
stretching in fog the river arises to it
jet-black wing—and the second wing is of gold
and
the bull closes its inflamed eye.

VI

Maria
do you remember the beds of dead rivers?
I dreamt
that I remember those rivers
I've been lonely for so long that it's been an age
and—all is well
one should not speak of the age

and still
I—was
and light of the world
fed my eyes on the eighth day of creation
oh is it true that cuneiform—a bird's footprint on kaolin
presumes
craw and feathers?

and maybe
just for the love of symmetry
sadness and memory—do stand at the bed-head
sadness and memory
that have chained the ligature
of the verse Maria! and not free-verse.

VII

Looking from the eye-sockets:
no darkness and no sorrow
the view of dawn is calm—the dawn is breaking indeed

I would have freed the birds
if they would fly
and there is where to fly

look at babylon
from the walls of Jerusalem
the bells are ringing the pagans are singing

posthumous heavens
are carried away by dawn
into the valley where they rise

look at babylon
at peaceful dwellings
at the tower for which the boulders were cut

that—is your world and captivity
but the eye from heavens is looking
for the submission of your spine

chariot driver
or the sandals are crushing quartz
or a stonemason—but higher the roof-beam!

I could free the birds
if they would fly
I could buy a falcon

the world is so illuminated
so festal is the valley
a slave is rising with a sword a veteran with hammer pick

look at babylon
from the walls of Jerusalem
look at babylon!]

Vavilon is one of the favorite texts of its author who often included it in his public readings. At the first glance, it is a programmatic poem. Fully corresponding to the notion of "Israeli Russian-language literature", the poem realizes a classical binary opposition and serves as the axis of that opposition, with Jerusalem and Babylon as its elements.

Such construction is characteristic of many poetical texts by Gendelev, which frequently might be described as metaphysical discourses on cultural, historical, religious and, finally, universal oppositions such as *live*|*dead*, *light*|*darkness* etc. To quote Weisskopf, "permanent interchange and equalization of binary oppositions, including the most fundamental oppositions of life and death, flesh and spirit, top and bottom" are among the "main constants" of Gendelev's poetics.[20] Gendelev's formative years passed under the sign of structuralist and semiotics studies as represented by the Tartu school which was at the peak of their influence in Russia's 1970s cultural paradigm. In his poetry Gendelev remained an explicit structuralism enthusiast.

In the case of *Vavilon*, Gendelev's opposition utilizes equally fundamental constants of Jewish history: *Jerusalem* as a holy city, Jewish spiritual and state center, and *Babylon* as the locale of Jewish captivity and exile, the proverbial kingdom of pagan sin, an empire. However, Babylonia also was a cultural center of Jewish diaspora, where Judaism's highest spiritual values were codified in the form of Babylonian Talmud—and from where the exiles returned to their historical homeland. In Zionist lyric of the 70s, Babylon, alongside Egypt, was overwhelmingly likened to Russia, the Biblical slogan "Let my people go" invigorated hearts, and Moscow was widely called by the Hebrew- and Yiddish-derived slang term *melikha* (state power, kingdom, empire).

The superficial 'Zionist' reading reveals the author's stance as that of a repatriate who is looking back "from the walls of Jerusalem" at Babylon-Russia left behind. Consequently, the poem appears to contain a whole series of sub-oppositions such as: *Jerusalem-Israel-state-Jewish-Judaic* | *Babylon-Russia-empire-Russian-pagan*—the very set of oppositions which, accompanied by ornaments, doubles, masks, cultural and historical realities, constitutes a common thread within the entire corpus of Gendelev's mature texts. His poetic mind adds to this set a number of other oppositions, which seem only too typical in such context: *Jerusalem-spiritual-heavenly* | *Babylon-bodily-earthly* and *Jerusalem-heavenly kingdom* | *Rome-world*. His later 'theological' texts employ similar principles in constructing sets of oppositions such as *God, Allah, Holocaust, Israel, the Jewish people, Gendelev, Jerusalem, Moscow, Russian poetry* etc.

The elements of these oppositions engage in whimsical interplay of modalities, creating a space for lyrical, rhetorical and metaphysical constructs. Yet at the core of the complex constructs, time and time again, is the

[20] Weisskopf, "Kamennye vody", p. 16.

shuffling of Gendelev's fateful three-card deck—the initial, almost Kantian entities of *love*, *war* and *death*. As opposed to the outer layer of elements engaged in the interplay of oppositions, these 'things in themselves', sui generis emanations of the Absolute, are variably defined but undividable.

The geography of Gendelev's poetic world displays, so to say, 'zones of transition' to the sphere of these primary entities: they are deserts, night gardens or orchards, silent houses illuminated by moonlight and often populated by the author's dead doubles or reflections. A signifier of transition is the dream-like state of *silence*. Movement direction is primarily horizontal, with attempts at levitation in search of Divinity—but they always bring back news of empty heavens: although Gendelev often refers to poetic 'flight', personified by the butterflies of his verses, his flight reports are discouraging. Expectably, Gendelev's poetry lacks any descriptions of spiritual or mystical ascent.

In lieu of pointless ascent to deserted heavens, of essence are only visionary descents toward the foundation of Gendelev's poetic world. The poet's Absolute is *darkness*, never included among sets of oppositions, total reality devoid of any qualities and attributes:

and darkness is darkness and not
a wandering fire somewhere
repeat:
it is not light
nor the lack of light
neither the expectation of dawn

That journey into darkness—not even the process of dying and death but the after-death—constitutes Mikhail Gendelev's main narrative.

The poet's generalized spiritual geography obviously reveals certain Gnostic traits and typological semblance to Kabbalistic systems. Indeed, many of his poems are akin to Kabbalah-inspired occult constructs of Late Modernity—in that the poet's constructs lack Kabbalistic instruments and content[21] and definitely cannot be termed religious.[22]

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[21] I would like to briefly point out here some similarities between Gendelev's poetic meditations and visions and Abraham Abulafia's practices of ecstatic Kabbalah. Some Jewish mystical and Kabbalistic affinities also have been noted by Weisskopf, as well as M. Iaglom and E. Iaglom: presentations at the Gendelev Readings in Jerusalem, February 2 and March 29, 2012, respectively.

[22] To quote Kaganskaia, "Gendelev is a theological poet, but not a religious poet at all" (Kaganskaia, "Slovo o milosti", p. 94), or Edelshtejn: "Gendelev's religion is rather an ideological construct, than a feeling of intimate connection to the world of Tanakh". See Mikhail Edelshtejn, "Zoometafizika Mikhaila Gendeleva", *Novyi mir* No. 8 (2005), pp. 158–163.

In addition to the theme, *Vavilon* supplies Gendelev with persistent motives, rich, visual citations and intertextual devices. Of note are the winged Mesopotamian Lamassu bulls, the vulture-headed Assyrian-Babylonian karibu/kuribu, gryphons and dragons derived from ancient Babylon's Ishtar Gate, as well as archaeological and mythological digressions.

The poem generously employs Biblical allusions, starting with the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1–9) (in this conyext it serves as a remote prototype of Kremlin towers), the place where God "confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth" (ibid., KJV); also present is the *shadow of death* of prophets and psalms (Job 10:21–22, Jer. 13:16, Ps. 23:4). The poem's rivers of Babylon flowing back to their source remind of Jordan "driven back" in Ps. 114:3–5; one of the poem's precedent texts is the famed Psalm 137 "By the rivers of Babylon", known in manifold poetic renditions and containing an oath of allegiance to Jerusalem: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning".

Gendelev's apocalyptic vision of Babylon's destruction shows dependence upon the Book of Isaiah with its prophecy of Babylon's doom (Is. 13:1–22). In part IV of the poem, the prophet's words "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save" (Is. 59:1) are curiously intertwined with Sappho's epithalamium LP 111 ("Raise high the roof beam, carpenters"), thus alluding to the concept of God as Israel's 'bridegroom'.[23]

Another important precedent text here is Osip Mandelshtam's eschatological poem *Veter nam uteshen'e prines* … ["The wind brought us solace …", 1922], which describes a heavenly battle involving six-armed "Assyrian" flying entities and the final victory of Azrael, the Archangel of Death. It brings to the poem a Petersburg dimension of Russia's Silver Age, of Mandelshtam, Anna Akhmatova and especially her second husband, the noted Assyriologist Vladimir Shilejko.

Certain allusions are carefully concealed: for instance, *mychanie nerazdelennoi rechi* [the lowing of undivided speech], referring to the yet-unconfouded language of Babel, reproduces V. Mayakovsky's *Prostoe kak mychanie* ["As simple as lowing", 1916] and J. Brodsky's *Niotkuda s liubov'iu* … ["From Nowhere with Love", 1975–1976], addressed to a distant beloved: "*Ia vzbivaiu podushku mychashchim 'ty'* …" ["I fluff up the pillow with a

[23] For Gendelev, Sappho's line was further actualized by J.D. Salinger's novella *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters* (1955), which became extremely popular in the former Soviet Union since its 1965 Russian translation by R. Rait-Kovaleva.

lowing 'you' …"]. The love motive demands a closer look at the poem's plot; the lonely narrator has nobody to *divide speech* with, he calls on "Maria", visibly abandoned and suffering a love trauma.

The poem's opening line speaks of *stone* snowfall—in Gendelev's texts a usual mark of dream, visionary experience, other words and death. The narrator submerges into *silence*, leading to dream ("I *dreamt* / that I remember those rivers"), Gendelev's transitional realm that connects entities (love, death) with the dark foundations of being. Night skies are hanging above the dreamer. His primeval undivided speech becomes the *language of the night*. The dreamer descends into *darkness*, which already has covered him "up to the chest", passing in his visionary journey the *dark shadow* of Babylonian monsters and the Biblical "valley of death shadow" itself: "Before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness and the shadow of death; a land of darkness, as darkness itself; and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness" (Job 10:21–22).

During this descent into darkness, a reversal of traditional mystical ascent to heavenly palaces and God's Throne, the dreamer finds solace in his memory ("sadness and memory—do stand at the bed-head")[24] and thinks of a creative act involving the lofty "new tablets" of poetic expression:

and still
I—was
and light of the world
fed my eyes on the eighth day of creation

The poem implements the whole arsenal of Gendelev's permanent motives: the language metamorphoses, the poet's departure for the realm of the dead, alien speech and the darkness of pre-existence, posthumous love, eschatological visions accompanied by chimeras and monsters and a transformation of the narrator-poet himself into a monster.

The poet's reflection here is his *dead double*: it is he invoking "Maria" *de profundis*. But who is that double? From the poem's fragmentary plot one can gather that he was a Jewish poet born "in the interfluve in law-abiding world", who used to don "Sabbath dress" and leave "a bird's footprint" of cuneiform characters on clay tablets. That poet stayed on in Mesopotamia and perished during the destruction of Babylon:

[24] An allusion-cum-negation to Bulat Okudzhava's song *Opustite, pozhaluista, sinie shtory …* (1959) where ["… at my bed the creditors stand / The silent Faith, Hope and Love".

the end!
the dorse is bending sluggishly
like the horizon's turnaway

The author tries on another version of his fate—of one who has stayed in Babylon-Russia. That Babylon rises in its glory as the legendary location of Paradise. The other fate reaches its pinnacle in 'pagan' temptation and magnificent cathartical ecstasy of resurrection, permeated with Roman and Christian motives and building upon Is. 2:4—

posthumous heavens
are carried away by dawn
into the valley where they rise

⟨...⟩

the world is so illuminated
so festal is the valley
a slave is rising with a sword a veteran with hammer pick

But the *world* of Babylon, Rome or Russia is the opposite of Jerusalem: a dweller of Jerusalem might only observe the scenes of resurrection from the city's fortified walls, slowly descending into darkness that promises no faith or hope.

Several years later, in his prose novel *Velikoe russkoe puteshestvie* [The Great Russian Journey, 1988–1989, publ. 1993], Gendelev ironically reproduced the collision of *Vavilon*, making his Russian double, one Mikhail Gendelev (still happily married) appear at the author's own poetry reading in Leningrad.

If one is to judge by declarations, Gendelev could not and would not envisage such a transformation into a Russian poet. "I do not consider myself to be a Russian poet, be it by blood, faith, military or civilian biography, experience or aesthetic tastes"—he wrote in an afterword to *Nepolnoe sobranie sochinenij* [Incomplete Collected Works, 2003].[25] But life was a different matter.

In the autumn of 1999, tired of struggling and constantly failing to win proper recognition within Hebrew-speaking Israel, Gendelev left Israel for Moscow. There he gained his living as a public relations expert and political analyst. His paradoxical thinking and poetic outlook allowed him to experience a different fate not only on paper. From then on, except for the last year of his life, he lived the life of his own double, looking at Jerusalem from the walls of Babylon.

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[25] Gendelev, *Nepolnoe sobranie*, p. 519.

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