An Anthology of Jewish-Russian Literature

Volume 1: 1801–1953

Two Centuries of Dual Identity in Prose and Poetry

Maxim D. Shrayer, Editor
CONTENTS

Volume 1: 1801–1953

Acknowledgments xiii
Note on Transliteration, Spelling of Names, Dates, and Notes xvii
Note on How to Use This Anthology xix

Editor’s General Introduction: Toward a Canon of Jewish-Russian Literature  Maxim D. Shrayer xxiii
Jewish-Russian Literature: A Selected Bibliography lxi

THE BEGINNING

Editor’s Introduction  Maxim D. Shrayer 3
Leyba Nevakhovich (1776–1831) 5
From Lament of the Daughter of Judah (1803) 7

GAINING A VOICE: 1840–1881

Editor’s Introduction  Maxim D. Shrayer 13
Leon Mandelstam (1819–1889) 15
“The People” (1840) 17
Afanasy Fet (1820–1890) 20
“When my daydreams cross the brink of long-lost days...” (1844) 24
“Sheltered by a crimson awning...” (1847) 25
Ruvim Kulisher (1828–1896) 26
From An Answer to the Slav (1849; pub. 1911) 28
Osip Rabinovich (1817–1869) 33
From The Penal Recruit (1859) 35
Lev Levanda (1835–1888) 44
From Seething Times (1860s; pub. 1871–73) 47
CONTENTS

Grigory Bogrov (1825–1885) 60
From *Notes of a Jew: “Childhood Sufferings”* (1863; pub. 1871–73) 62

**FIRST FLOWERING: 1881–1902**

Editor’s Introduction  *Maxim D. Shrayer* 71

**Rashel Khin** (1861–1928) 73
From *The Misfit* (1881) 75

**Semyon Nadson** (1862–1887) 79
From “The Woman” (1883) 81
“I grew up shunning you, O most degraded nation . . .” (1885) 81

**Nikolay Minsky** (1855–1937) 83
“To Rubinstein” (1886) 85

**Simon Frug** (1860–1916) 86
“Song” (1890s) 88
“Shylock” (1890s) 88
“An Admirer of Napoleon” (1800s) 91

**Ben-Ami** (1854–1932) 95
Author’s Preface to Volume 1 of *Collected Stories and Sketches* (1898) 97

**Avraam-Uria Kovner** (1884–1909) 100
From *Memoirs of a Jew* (ca. 1900) 102

**ON THE EVE: 1903–1917**

Editor’s Introduction  *Maxim D. Shrayer* 111

**David Aizman** (1869–1922) 113
“The Countrymen” (1902) 115

**Semyon Yushkevich** (1868–1927) 133
From *The Jews* (1903) 135

**Dmitri Tsenzor** (1877–1947) 142
“The Old Ghetto” (1903; rev. 1940) 144
“Father” (1914; rev. 1940) 145

**Vladimir Jabotinsky** (1880–1940) 146
“In Memory of Herzl” (1904) 148
“An Exchange of Compliments” (1911) 150

**Leyb Jaffe** (1878–1948) 159
“In an Alien Tongue” (1900s) 162
“Off the Corfu Coast” (ca. 1905–6) 162

**Sasha Cherny** (1880–1932) 164
“The Jewish Question” (1909) 166
“Judeophobes” (1909) 167

**Ossip Dymow** (1878–1959) 168
“The Guardian Press” (1900s) 170
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S. An-sky (1863–1920)</td>
<td>“The Book” (1910)</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ilya Ehrenburg (1891–1967)</td>
<td>“To the Jewish Nation” (1911)</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Jews, I haven’t strength to live with you...” (1912)</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vladislav Khodasevich (1886–1939)</td>
<td>“Evening” (1913)</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Rachel’s Tears” (1916)</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rahel (1890–1931)</td>
<td>“I love all temples—my own and others...” (1916)</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Tablets of the Past and Chains of the Past” (1916)</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuil Marshak (1887–1964)</td>
<td>“Palestine” (1916)</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sofia Parnok (1885–1933)</td>
<td>“My anguish does the Lord not heed...” (1913–22)</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Hagar” (1913–22)</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Not for safekeeping for awhile...” (1913–22)</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### REVOLUTION AND BETRAYAL: 1917–1939

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Editor’s Introduction</td>
<td><em>Maxim D. Shryer</em></td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Regimental Inspection” (1917)</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mikhail Gershenzon (1869–1925)</td>
<td>Preface to <em>The Jewish Anthology</em> (1917)</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elisheva (1888–1949)</td>
<td>“Eretz Isreal” (1919)</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I won’t light a candle at the Sabbath hour...” (1919)</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valentin Parnakh (1891–1951)</td>
<td>“I will make your heaven as iron...” (1919)</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Deportees (1914–1917)” (1919)</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Sabbetaians” (Excerpt) [1919–22]</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ilya Selvinsky (1899–1968)</td>
<td>“Bar Kokhba” (1920)</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osip Mandelstam (1891–1938)</td>
<td>“Slip back into your mother, Leah...” (1920)</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“One Alexander Herzovich...” (1931)</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Say, desert geometer, shaper...” (1933)</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>From <em>The Noise of Time</em>: “Judaic Chaos” (1925)</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vladimir Lidin (1894–1979)</td>
<td>“Jewish Luck” (1922)</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


CONTENTS

Lev Lunts (1901–1924)
“Native Land” (1922) 255

Veniamin Kaverin (1902–1989)
“Shields (and Candles)” (1922) 270

Ilya Ehrenburg (1891–1967)
From The Extraordinary Adventures of Julio Jurenito and His Disciples: “The Teacher’s Prophecy Concerning the Destinies of the Tribe of Judah” (1922) 278

Andrey Sobol (1888–1926)
“The Count” (1922–23) 285

Viktor Shklovsky (1893–1984)
From Zoo, or Letters Not about Love (1923) 292

Matvey Royzman (1896–1973)
“Kol Nidre” (1923) 301

Isaac Babel (1894–1940)
“The Rebbe’s Son” (1924) 311
“Awakening” (1931) 313

Iosif Utkin (1903–1944)
From The Tale of Red-Headed Motele, Mr. Inspector, Rabbi Isaiah, and Commissar Blokh: “Miracles of Kishinev” (1925) 321

Elizaveta Polonskaya (1890–1969)
“Shop of Splendors” (1925–29) 325
“Encounter” (1927) 326

Yury Libedinsky (1898–1959)
From The Commissars (1925) 330

Vera Inber (1890–1972)
“The Nightingale and the Rose” (1925) 340

Mark Tarlovsky (1902–1952)
“This Path” (1927) 348

Mikhail Kozakov (1897–1954)
From A Man Is Brought to His Knees: “Thirty Pieces of Silver” (1928) 354

Viktor Fink (1888–1973)
From Jews on the Land: “The Preachers” (1929) 365

Semyon Kirsanov (1906–1972)
“R” (1929) 372

Eduard Bagritsky (1895–1934)
“Origin” (1930) 377
From February (1933–34) 379

Ilya Ilf (1897–1937) and Evgeny Petrov (1903–1942)
“The Prodigal Son Returns Home” (1930) by Ilf 388
From The Little Golden Calf: “Passenger of the Special-Charter Train” (1931) by Ilf and Petrov 392
Mark Egart (1901-1956)
  From _Scorched Land_ (1932)
Arkady Shteynberg (1907-1984)
  “David awoke in an unfamiliar bedroom . . .” (1932; pub. 1997)
  “One night I saw the Black Sea in a dream . . .” (1935; pub. 1997)

EMIGRATIONS: 1917-1967

Editor’s Introduction  _Maxim D. Shrayer_  419

_Vladislav Khodasevich_ (1886–1939)
  “Not my mother but a Tula peasant woman . . .” (1917; 1922)
  “In Moscow I was born. I never . . .” (1923)

_Mark Aldanov_ (1886–1957)
  “The Assassination of Uritsky” (1923)

_Evgeny Shklyar_ (1894–1942)
  “Shield of David, crescent or icon . . .” (1923)
  “Where’s Home?” (1925)

_Dovid Knut_ (1900–1955)
  “I, Dovid-Ari ben Meir . . .” (1925)
  “A Kishinev Burial” (1929)
  “Haifa” (1938)
  “Tsfat” (1938)
  “The Land of Israel” (1938)

_Don-Aminado_ (1888–1957)
  “Autumn in the Provinces” (1920s; pub. 1928)

_Raisa Blokh_ (1899–1943)
  “A snatch of speech came floating on the air . . .” (1932)
  “Remember, father would stand . . .” (1933)
  “How can I find you again, holy names . . .” (1934)

_Anna Prismanova_ (1892–1960)
  “Grandmother” (late 1930s–early 1940s; pub. 1946)
  “Eyes” (late 1930s–early 1940s; pub. 1946)
  “Shine” (1938–39)

_Sofia Dubnova-Erlieh_ (1885–1986)
  “Shtetl” (1943)
  “Scorched Hearth” (1944)

_Sofia Pregel_ (1894–1972)
  “Pharaoh’s Daughter” (early 1950s; pub. 1953)
  “In the Ghetto” (early 1950s; pub. 1953)
  “You Shall Not Forget” (early 1950s; pub. 1953)

_Yuly Margolin_ (1900–1971)
  From _A Jewish Tale: “The Exodus from Poland”_ (late 1950s)
Andrey Sedykh (1902–1994) 498
  From *The Promised Land*: “If I Forget You, O Jerusalem” (1960s) 500

**WAR AND TERROR: 1939–1953**

Boris Yampolsky (1912–1972) 513
  From *Country Fair*: “Mr. Dykhes and Others” (ca. 1940) 515

Ilya Ehrenburg (1891–1967) 529
  “Rachels, Hayims, and Leahas wander . . .” (1941) 529
  “Because remembrance of Esther’s sultry midday . . .” (1944) 530
  “Babi Yar” (1944–45) 530
  “To this ghetto people will not come . . .” (1944–46) 531
  “To the Jews” (1941) 532
  “Jews” (1942) 533
  “The Triumph of a Man” (1944) 535

Vassily Grossman (1905–1964) 539
  “The Old Teacher” (1943) 542

Margarita Aliger (1915–1992) 561
  “To a Jewish Girl” (1940) 564
  From *Your Victory* (1944–45) 566

Lev Ozerov (1914–1996) 573
  “Babi Yar” (1944–45; pub. 1946) 575

Pavel Antokolsky (1896–1978) 580
  “Death Camp” (1945) 582

Yury German (1910–1967) 584
  From *Lieutenant Colonel of the Medical Corps* (1949; pub. 1956) 586

Boris Pasternak (1890–1960) 591
  “In the Lowlands” (1944) 594
  “Odessa” (1944) 596
  From *Doctor Zhivago* (1946–[1955]; pub. 1957) 598

Bibliography of Primary Sources for Volume 1 607

The Jews in Russia and the Soviet Union, 1772–1953:
  A Selected Bibliography 631

Index of Translators 1-1
Index of Authors 1-7

About the Editor 1-13
Jewish Culture in Diaspora and the Case of Russia

Dual Literary Identities

What are cultures measured by? Cultural contributions are difficult to quantify and even harder to qualify without a critical judgment in hand. In the case of verbal arts, and of literature specifically, various criteria of formal perfection and originality, place in literary history, and aspects of time, place, and milieu all contribute to the ways in which one regards a writer’s contribution. In the case of Jewish culture in Diaspora, and specifically of Jewish writing created in non-Jewish languages adopted by Jews, the reckoning of a writer’s status is further riddled by a set of powerful contrapositions. Above all else, there is the duality of a writer’s own identity—both Jewish and German (Heinrich Heine) or French (Marcel Proust) or Russian (Isaac Babel) or Polish (Julian Tuwim) or Hungarian (Imre Kertész) or Brazilian (Clarice Lispector) or Canadian (Mordechai Richler) or American (Bernard Malamud). Then there is the dividedly redoubled perspective of a Diasporic Jew: both an in-looking outsider and an out-looking insider. And there is the language of writing itself, not always one of

1. In the context of Jewish-Russian history and culture, the juxtaposition between a “divided” and a “redoubled” identity goes back to the writings of the critic and polemicist Iosif Bikerman (1867–1941?42?), who stated in 1910, on the pages of the St. Petersburg magazine Jewish World (Evreiskii mir): “Not dividedness [razdvoennost’] but redoubledness [udvoennost’]”; quoted in Shimon Markish, Babel’ i drugie, 2nd ed., 186 (Moscow and Jerusalem: Personal’naia tvorcheskaia masterskaia “Mikhail Shchigol’,” 1997). I am increasingly aware of the body of scholarship, most notably Caryn Aviv and David Shneer’s New Jews: The End of the Jewish Diaspora (New York: New York University Press, 2005), which argues that one is no longer justified to speak of the Jewish Diaspora—and, by implication, of the Jewish culture in Diaspora. Such controversial arguments are bound to challenge future scholars of Jewish-Russian literature to rethink some of their concepts and precepts.
the writer’s native setting, not necessarily one in which a writer spoke to his or her own parents or non-Jewish childhood friends, but in some cases a second or third language—acquired, mastered, and made one’s own in a flight from home.

Evgeny Shklyar (1894–1942), a Jewish-Russian poet and a Lithuanian patriot who translated into Russian the text of the Lithuanian national anthem and was murdered in a Nazi concentration camp outside Kaunas, wrote in the poem “Where’s Home?” (1925):

... In Judaism fierce, hidden strengths appear
To nurture twice exile’s flowers
And deep within the heart’s most buried bowers
To pick amongst them and to make it clear
You’re going either where all’s alien but dear
Or where the majestic past regales the hours . . .

(Trans. Maxim D. Shrayer and Andrew Von Hendy)

The poem, which appears in the first volume of this anthology, was composed at a time when dreams of a Jewish state were becoming much more than a poet’s parable. The land “where all’s alien but dear” is, of course, Shklyar’s native Pale of Settlement, while the place where “the majestic past regales the hours” is Shklyar’s vision of Israel. The duality of a Diasporic Jew’s dividedly redoubled loyalties is both political-ideological and cultural-linguistic. In the poem’s final line, envisioning his own life as a Jewish-Russian poet and translator of Lithuanian poets into Russian come to Israel to hear children “greet [him] with words of welcome in ivrit,” Shklyar employs the italicized (and transliterated) Hebrew word for the ancient Jewish tongue. The poet’s word choice in the final, rhyming position also underscores the duality of his identity: linguistically and culturally at home in the east European abode where “all’s alien but dear” and spiritually, if symbolically, traveling to the land of Israel, “where the majestic past regales the hours,” and yet where Shklyar’s Jewish-Russian poet is culturally a foreigner.

“Exile” in Shklyar’s poem is the Diaspora, where Jews have added Hebrew-Farsi, Ladino, and Yiddish to their Hebrew, while also translating their identities, albeit never fully or completely (but is translation ever?), into Arabic, Spanish, Italian, French, German, English, Polish, Russian, and many other languages spoken in the places of their dispersion. But Shklyar’s “exile” is also the Jewish poet’s exile from his literary home, his Russian tongue, and this duality renders nearly meaningless debates about the legitimacy of “Jewish” literatures in “non-Jewish” languages.

In the late nineteenth and the twentieth century, the torrents of history, coupled with personal artistic ambitions, thrust Jewish writers across the globe in numbers far greater than ever before. In their adopted countries, some continued to cultivate writing only in their native non-Jewish languages, while others became bilingual or multilingual authors. Using the Jewish languages to define the “religion,” “identity,” or

2. Hereinafter, unless indicated otherwise, all translations from the Russian are my own.
“nationality” of a Jewish writer’s work becomes especially knotty in the twentieth century, when a critical mass of the Jewish population shifted from the use of Yiddish to the use of modern European languages or Modern Hebrew. The Shoah then completed the undoing of Yiddish as the transnational language of Ashkenazic Jews, the undoing that the rigors of modernization, acculturation, and integration had been performing both in the USSR and in the West for almost a century.¹

“All writers immigrate to their art and stay therein,” stated the Russian-American writer Vladimir Nabokov (1899–1977) soon after having fled to America from war-stricken Europe with his Jewish wife and son aboard a ship chartered by a Jewish refugee agency. One is tempted to ask where Jewish writers immigrate, whence they emigrate, and where they stay. One also wonders how the dualities of the Jewish writers’ selves change in their travels across time and culture, and, finally, what these Jewish writers share in their comings and goings. A Jewish poetics, perhaps? Some of the answers to these questions lie in the many nineteenth- and twentieth-century works gathered in this anthology of Jewish-Russian literature.

In the two centuries that followed the spread of the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment) in the late eighteenth century, linguistic self-expression in non-Jewish languages was central to the Jewish experience and Jewish survival in Diaspora. The experience of working on this anthology has taught me that, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Jewish literary culture created in non-Jewish languages increasingly served as one of the main receptacles into which the traditions of Jewish spirituality were poured. Varieties of Jewish self-awareness are channeled and transmitted through what is called, for lack of a better term, “secular literature.” Quite often, while an uninformed reading of a Jewish text created and published in the literary mainstream reveals only superficially Jewish references, a rereading shows how much of the Judaic heritage is captured and preserved in its pages. A classic example of such a dual, non-Jewish and Jewish, model of (re)reading is Isaac Babel’s novel-length cycle of stories Red Cavalry (first book edition 1926). A recent example is Saul Bellow’s novel Ravelstein (2000), where a dying Jewish-American gay neoconservative intellectual finds himself truly at home only in one book, The Book, if in any place at all.

As I think of the ways Jewish literature transgresses and transcends the boundaries of history, politics, and culture, I am reminded of an essay–testament by one of the

3. A few examples will suffice: Abraham Cahan, born outside Vilna in 1860, died in 1951 in New York; wrote in Yiddish and English; Gertrude Stein, born in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, in 1874, died in Paris in 1946, wrote in English; Stefan Zweig, born in 1881 in Vienna, died by his own hand in 1942 in Petrópolis, Brazil, wrote in German; Rahel, born Rahel Bluwstein in 1890 in Saratov, died in Tel Aviv in 1931, wrote in Russian but mainly in Hebrew; Paul Celan, born Paul Antschel in 1920 in Czernowitz (then Romania, now Ukraine), a suicide in Paris in 1970, wrote in German; Joseph Brodsky, born in 1940 in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), died in 1996 in New York, wrote in Russian and English.
protagonists of this anthology, Lev Levanda (1835–1888). Titled “On Assimilation,” Levanda’s polemical essay appeared in the St. Petersburg Russian-language Weekly Chronicle of Sunrise (Nedel’naia khronika Voskhoda) in 1885. “The Jewish nationality, that is, the universal doctrine known as Judaism, does not particularly need a strictly assigned territory: its territory is the entire wide world!” wrote Levanda. “... Jews do not consider themselves a living people; they consider themselves a living nation that lives and must live, namely, a Jewish nation, that is, a doctrine, an idea. As an idea, Judaism does not necessitate a particular territory. . .” By implication, as it embodies aspects of Jewish spiritual life both directly and obliquely, Jewish literature is perhaps also not bound to a particular local philological terrain and retains its Jewishness in translation. While translation from a non-Jewish language into a Jewish one, or into another non-Jewish language, may either enhance or obscure a writer’s subterranean Judaic references, Jewish literary culture itself is both national and transnational.

One of the reasons to study Jewish literature is that it preserves and reveals aspects of the Jewish condition that a Jewish religious mind would commonly seek elsewhere and a non-Jewish mind might not at all be conscious of during the act of reading. Among the letters between the Russian poet and thinker Vyacheslav Ivanov (1866–1949) and the Jewish-Russian philosopher of culture Mikhail Gershenzon (1869–1925), gathered in Correspondence from Two Corners (1920; published 1921), one of the most tragic of Gershenzon’s letters underscored a survival of Jewish memory in the works that acculturated Jews address to the cultural mainstream: “How can I forget my native Jewish Kishinev of the spring of 1903!” Gershenzon cried out to his non-Jewish interlocutor. “Perhaps this Kishinev is outside of Russian history, perhaps the Krushevans are outside the history of Russian society [the journalist Pavel Krushevan incited anti-Jewish violence in the Kishinev pogrom], but they live on in my memory, and I am their judge. . . . And my people is outside history, and its history is outside the schemas of the world historians—but I know the price of all these historical constructs by writers who do not wish to know the truth.”

In Russia

This anthology tests our conception of Jewish literature in Diaspora on its most extreme case: the case of Russia and the former USSR. In Jewry and the Christian Question, written in 1884, three years after Fyodor Dostoevsky’s death, the Russian religious philosopher Vladimir Solovyov (1853–1900) posited three main questions about the interrelation between Christianity, and specifically Russian Orthodoxy, and Judaism. Solovyov’s questions also apply to the survival of Jewish identity and culture in Russia:

1. Why was Christ a Jew, and why is the stepping-stone of the universal church taken from the House of Israel?
2. Why did the majority of Israel not recognize its Messiah, why did the Old Testament church not dissolve into the New Testament church, and why do the majority of the Jews prefer to be completely without a temple rather than join the Christian temple?
INTRODUCTION: TOWARD A CANON OF JEWISH-RUSSIAN LITERATURE

3. Why, finally, and for what purpose was the most solid (in the religious aspect) part of Jewry moved to Russia and Poland, placed at the boundary of the Graeco-Slavic and Latin-Slavic worlds?

Solovyov, who on his deathbed prayed in Hebrew for the Jewish people, did not live to see the pogroms of 1905, the 1917 revolutions and the ensuing civil war, the destruction of traditional Jewish life during the first Soviet decades, and the horrors of the Shoah. With slight adjustments, Solovyov's fundamental questions still hold true: Why, despite all the misfortunes and pressures, have the Jews of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union survived without losing their selfhood, even though so many have lost their religion and living ties to Yiddish and Hebrew? One of the most fascinating cultural paradoxes of Russian Jewry is that, against all the historical odds, even during the post-Shoah Soviet decades, it continued to nurture its dual sense of self, both Jewish and Russian, and Russian letters became its principal outlet for articulating this duality.

Russia was the last European nation to gain—through western expansion—a large Jewish minority and also the last to free its Jews of oppressive legal restrictions. Since the 1860s the Jewish question has occupied a prominent place in Russian—and later Soviet—history. The Jewish question in Russia involved the mostly prejudicial attitudes of both the Russian government and the general population toward the Jews but also the attempts of the Jewish community to preserve its spiritual and cultural identity as a minority without a territory of its own. The double bind of anti-Jewish attitudes and policies during the tsarist era presented a contradiction: on the one hand, the Russians expected the Jews to assimilate if not convert to Christianity; on the other, fearful of a growing Jewish presence, the Russians prevented the Jews from integrating into Russian life by instituting restrictions and not discouraging popular antisemitic sentiments.

By the early twentieth century, the Russian Empire had the highest concentration of Jews in the world: in 1897, about 5.2 million (about 47 percent of the world's Jewish population), and in 1914, at the beginning of World War I, still about 5.5 million, including Poland's 2 million (about 41 percent of the world's Jewish population). According to the same census of 1897, 24.6 percent of Jews in the Russian Empire could read and write in Russian, but only 1 percent considered Russian their mother tongue. In growing numbers, the nonemancipated Jews strove to enter the Russian social and cultural mainstream. Anton Chekhov (1860–1904), an astute student of the Jewish question, remarked as he sketched a southern provincial town in "My Life" (1896) that "only Jewish adolescents frequented the local...libraries." In the story "Tonych" (1898), Chekhov stressed again that...the people in S. read very little, and at the local library they said that if it hadn't been for unmarried ladies and young Jews, one might as well close the library." The Jewish question certainly preoccupied the creator of Ivanov (1887), "Steppe" (1888), and "Rothschild's Fiddle" (1894), and during his final years in Yalta, Chekhov was likely to hear from his acquaintances among the Jewish-Russian intelligentsia about the mesmeric and polarizing impacts of both Zionism and Marxism.

Russia offers the student of Jewish literature and culture a challenging case study of contrasting attitudes, ranging from philosemitic dreams of a harmonious fusion to
VLADIMIR JABOTINSKY

Vladimir (Ze’ev) Jabotinsky (1880–1940), writer and Zionist leader, was born to an affluent Jewish family in Odessa. In 1898 Jabotinsky was expelled from a gymnasium and soon went abroad, pursuing the study of law at the University of Berne and later the University of Rome. He became a published author at sixteen. In 1898–1901, under the pen name Altalena (swings in Italian), he published regular “Italian Letters” in the Odessa News (Odesskie novosti). As a newspaperman, he learned the celebrated Russian fueilletonist Vlas Doroshevich (1864–1922). After Jabotinsky returned to Odessa in 1901, his dramas Blood and So Be It were staged at the Odessa City Theater. A number of his books were published in Odessa in the 1900s.

Jabotinsky’s first Zionist poem, “City of Peace,” appeared in 1899 in Sunrise (Voskhod). The Kishinev Pogrom (April 1903) firmly changed his life. Jabotinsky joined Jewish self-defense, formalized in the wake of the Kishinev Pogrom, and became an active Zionist. In August 1903, Jabotinsky attended the Sixth Zionist Congress in Basel, where he heard Theodor Herzl speak. Jabotinsky moved to St. Petersburg in 1903 and wrote for both the Jewish-Russian and the mainstream Russian press. A fabulous speaker, he lectured in 1905–07, traveling across the Pale. In 1910 his play Alien Land premiered in St. Petersburg, calling on Jewish-Russian youth to abandon the revolutionary movement and devote themselves to serving Jewish national goals.

Jabotinsky first visited Palestine in 1908. He left for the front in 1914 as a correspondent of The Russian Gazette (Russkaia gazeta), remaining a Russian journalist until 1917. That year, in Alexandria, he met Joseph Trumpeldor and poured his energies into the newly created Jewish legion, going through a sergeant’s training and later taking a commission. Following the dismantling of the Jewish legion, Jabotinsky organized the first regular units of Jewish self-defense (Haganah) in Jerusalem. During the 1920 Passover pogrom by an Arab mob, he tried to break into the Old City with a unit. Sentenced to fifteen years of hard labor by the British Mandatory Government, Jabotinsky was released under international pressure. He became a member of the Zionist Executive in 1921 but resigned in 1923 over profound political and strategic differences.

As part of his publishing activities, Jabotinsky prepared the first Hebrew-language atlas of the world. In 1922–34 he stood at the helm of the émigré Jewish-Russian periodical Dawn (Rassvet), which appeared in Berlin and later in Paris. Jabotinsky contributed essays on Jewish subjects in several languages to a number of periodicals and published the novels Samson (1927) and Five (1936; English translation 2005), a collection of stories, and a volume of poetry in Russian. After Dawn ceased to exist in 1935, Jabotinsky
stopped writing in Russian; he wrote his autobiography in Hebrew. As an adult, Jabotinsky, whom Michael Stanislawski called “the most cosmopolitan Zionist leader,” had an excellent working command of seven languages besides Russian.

Jabotinsky headed the Jewish military-nationalist youth movement Betar from its creation in 1923 (see Y. Margolin’s prose in vol. 1). He established the Union of Zionists-Revisionists (Hatzohar) in 1925 and the New Zionist Organization (NZO) in 1935. The principal political goals of the NZO were to press for free immigration to and the establishment of a Jewish state. Banned by the British in 1930 from entering Palestine, Jabotinsky settled in London in 1936; he organized and became the commander of the Irgun Tzvai Leumi (IZL), the military branch of his tripartite movement. Jabotinsky and his organizations were instrumental in delivering the British Mandate of Palestine to tens of thousands of Jews on the eve of the Shoah.

In February 1940 Jabotinsky left for the United States to create a Jewish army to fight the Nazis on the side of the Allies. He suffered a heart attack on 4 August 1940 and died at a Betar camp in upstate New York. He had requested in his will that he be buried in Israel, and in 1964 the remains of Jabotinsky and his wife Jeanne were reburied on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem.

A number of Jabotinsky’s Russian oratorical political poems, including Gonta’s monologues in the play Foreign Land (1907; published 1922) and “In Memory of Herzl” (1904), belong to the best in this genre. Also remarkable are some of his translations of Hayyim Nahman Bialik, especially Tale of the Pogrom [The City of Slaughter], and some of his love lyrics. (First published in St. Petersburg in 1911, Jabotinsky’s translation of Bialik’s Songs and Poems had gone through six editions by the time of its 1922 publication in Berlin.) “In Memory of Herzl” appeared in the St. Petersburg monthly Jewish Life (Evreiskaia zhit’) in June 1904 and later in Dr. Herzl (1905), a slender volume consisting of the poem and two essays. In the original publications it bore the title “Hesped,” which refers in Hebrew to the mitzvah of eulogizing the deceased and to the traditional funeral oration.

A volume of Jabotinsky’s selected feuilletons appeared in St. Petersburg in 1913 (third, corrected, edition in Berlin in 1922); another collection, Causeries, came out in Paris in 1930. Unapologetic about their Jewish-centric political agenda, Jabotinsky’s feuilletons present today’s reader with gems of intellectually witty and brilliantly feisty literary prose.

In 1926 Jabotinsky wrote in the New York’s Yiddish paper The Morning Journal (Der morgn journal): “For most of us Russia has long since become foreign [. . .]. But the Russian language [. . .] has sentenced us to a lifelong bond with a people and a country whose destiny concerns us no more than last year’s snow.” Compare Jabotinsky’s sobering comments with the remarks of the émigré writer Mikhail Osorgin on the occasion of Jabotinsky’s fiftieth birthday (1930): “I congratulate the Jewish people that they have such an activist and such a writer. But this does not prevent me from being most sincerely angry that Jewish national affairs have stolen Jabotinsky from Russian literature. . . .”
In Memory of Herzl

He did not fade, like Moses long ago
right at the margin of the promised land;
he did not shepherd to the motherland
her children longing for her far-off song.
He burned himself and gave his whole life
and didn’t “forget you, O Jerusalem,”
but fell too soon and in the desert died,
and on the finest day to our dear Palestine
we shall conduct the tribune’s ashes home.

I’ve understood the riddle of the phrase
that Bar-Hanina relates in Aggadah:
that buried in the silent desert are
not just the house of craven runaways,
the lowly line, onto whose hearts and backs
Egyptian whips once seared a burning brand,
but next to them, amid the voiceless tracts,
the mighty ones lie buried in the tracks—
their hearts of steel, their bodies copper strands.

And yes, I’ve grasped the sage’s ancient writ:
we’ve left our bones throughout the world’s reaches,
not forty years, but forty jubilees—
we’ve wandered endlessly across the desert;
and not a single slave who fed on scourges
we’ve buried in the arid alien land:
he was a titan who had granite shoulders,
an eagle he was, with eagle-eyed insurgence,
an eagle’s sorrow on his noble forehead.

And he was proud and lofty and fearless,
his call would rumble forth like metal stakes,

1. Herzl, Theodor (1860–1904)—born in Budapest and educated in Vienna, founder of modern political Zionism, journalist and publicist, author of The Jewish State (Judenstaat, 1897) and other works; presided over six Zionist congresses (1897–1903). After the formation of Israel, Herzl’s remains were moved from Vienna to Israel, where he was reburied on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem in 1949, fifty-two years after the meeting of the First Zionist Congress.

2. Paraphrase of Psalm 137 (“By the rivers of Babylon . . .”): “If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither . . .” (Psalm 137:5).

3. Jabotinsky most likely is referring to Bar Hanina (Hanina [Hinena] Bar Papa), the fourth-century Palestinian amora (a special title given to Jewish scholars in Palestine and Babylonia).
his call went out: no matter what it takes!
and led us all ahead and to the east,
and sang amazingly of light-filled life
in a far country—free, majestic, ours.
He slipped away just when his purpose thrived,
the thunder crashed, the song of his life die-
but we shall finish his song in Eretz.  

Let us rot beneath a yoke of pain,
let whirlwinds mutilate the holy Torah,
let our sons become nocturnal robbers
and our daughters enter dens of shame,
let us become instructors of smut and vice
at that black hour, on that worst of days
when we forget your song and all your ways
and so disgrace the one who died for us.

Your voice was just like manna from the clouds,
without it we are bowed with grief and hunger:
you dropped your all-commanding hammer,
but hammers we will lift—a hundred thousand—
and grief will fade beneath their crashing clamor,
our hunger die amid all their uproar
of triumphs in the land where we belong.
We’ll gnaw the granite cliffs to lay our roads,
we’ll crawl just when our legs cannot endure,
but, chai Ha Shem, we’ll finish his whole song.

Thus long ago our father Israel
came near the threshold of his native home,
but God himself stood waiting in the road
and wrestled him, but Jacob still prevailed.
Like leaves, a storm has tossed us through the world,
but we are your descendants, you who grappled
with God, and we shall win against all odds.
And if the road is guarded by God’s sword
we shall still move ahead and wrestle.

4. From Eretz Israel (Heb.) = Land of Israel.
5. Chai Ha Shem (Heb.) = I swear by God; literally, I swear by the Name.
Sleep, our eagle, sleep, our regal tribune,
the day will come—you’ll hear our celebration,
the squeak of carts, the footsteps of our nation,
the flap of banners, and our ringing tune.
And on this day from Ber Sheva to Dan
a grateful nation will acclaim its savior,
and singing songs of our independence
our maidens will perform a circle dance
before your crypt in our beloved Zion.

1904

Translated from the Russian by Jaime Goodrich and Maxim D. Shrayer


An Exchange of Compliments
A Conversation

It was nothing but a conversation, a discussion, a *causerie*. I didn’t participate; I was sitting off to the side and listening, and therefore I am not responsible for the arguments or the conclusions. The topic considered by the discussants came from Stolypin’s sensational article about the “inferior race.” There were two speakers: one a Russian, the other a Jew. They were sitting quietly, drinking their tea, and tenderly considering whose race was inferior.

“In my opinion,” said the Jew, “there is no such thing as an inferior or superior race. Each race has its own characteristics, its particular aptitudes, and I am convinced that if it were possible to find an absolute standard and precisely evaluate the inborn qualities of each race, in general it would turn out that they are all more or less equal.”

“How could that be? The Eskimos and the Hellenes are equal?”

“I think so. Put the Eskimos in ancient Greece, and they undoubtedly would have given the world their gifts. Not the same ones as the Greeks, because every nation is different, but gifts nonetheless, and quite possibly equal in value to those

6. Most likely Aleksandr Stolypin, brother of the Russian statesman Pyotr Stolypin. A. Stolypin was an author and a journalist, who in the early 1900s edited the newspaper *St. Petersburg News* (*Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti*) and later became one of the principal editors of the newspaper *New Time* (*Novoe vremia*).