

## SPLIT IN TWO OR DOUBLED?

Zsuzsa Hetényi

The title is taken from an article by Iosif Bikerman published in 1910.<sup>1</sup> There it is presented as a statement ('not split in two but doubled'), but I shall consider it as a question because the history of Russian Jewish literature is not only a thing of the past: Russian Jewish authors began to ask questions that we continue to ask even today and that we cannot yet answer. My purpose in this paper is threefold: to discuss some theoretical questions, to give a short survey of the 80 years of Russian Jewish literature, and finally to analyse a short story by Lev Lunz.

First, I would like to say something about how I arrived at this topic. In 1991 I published a book on Isaac Babel's *Red Cavalry*,<sup>2</sup> a collection of 35 stories based on the writer's experiences with Budenny's Cavalry in 1920. The main issue for me was what problems led Babel to this unusual form of self-expression. The most important layer of this cycle of stories is Babel's duality, which is expressed in various ways. 'I am an outsider, in long trousers, I don't belong, I'm all alone', he writes in his diary of 1920.<sup>3</sup> Babel is ambivalent about his Jewishness – he belongs organically to his people and at the same time he finds them repellent. Sometimes he lies to his fellow Jews, hiding his Jewishness. When going to the synagogue, he is moved by the service but unable to follow it in his prayer book. This discrepancy, a psychological by-product of Jewish assimilation, is experienced by Babel very deeply because his ambivalence is not confined to his Jewishness. He is enchanted by the Cossacks' masculinity and theatrical appearance, the spectacle of their cruelty. This admiration, coupled with horror vis-à-vis those possessing power, is used in the *Red Cavalry* as an important component of another duality, namely his ambivalent reaction to the Soviet system. At times, this duality results in a paradox (I quote from his diary of 1920): 'Our men were looting last night, tossed out the Torah scrolls from the synagogue . . .'.<sup>4</sup> This alien intellectual wishes to be at home with the Cossacks and with the Bolsheviks, a lonely Jew who admires the cruel, merciless antisemites and wants to be part of their safe community.

I came to realise later on that Babel did not emerge out of the blue but was, so to speak, the tip of an iceberg and that there was a significant Jewish literature in Russian that prepared him to the same extent as Russian literature proper to become an outstanding writer of world standing; that is, he is equally part of both literatures.

Shimon Markish outlines four criteria for Russian Jewish literature or Jewish literature in any non-Jewish language,<sup>5</sup> illustrated here with my commentary.

1. *Writing in the language of the national majority, in this case, Russian.* The native language of a Russian Jewish writer is Russian – Isaac Babel did not write in Russian by accident, as Saul Bellow supposes in his introduction to the collection *Great Jewish Short Stories*.

2. *A conscious affiliation to Jewish culture.* Ilya Ehrenburg, who never denied his Jewishness, and was the only Jew accepted and even presented as such by the Soviet authorities in the 1950s, did not grow up in a Jewish milieu or know enough of Jewish

<sup>1</sup> 'Nationalism and nation', *Ievreiskii mir*, Book 2–3 (1910), p. 151.

<sup>2</sup> Zsuzsa Hetényi, *Csillagosok, keresztetek – Mítosz és messianizmus Babel Lovashadseregében* [Under the star and under the cross – myth and messianism in Babel's *Red Cavalry*] (Budapest, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Isaac Babel, *1920 Diary*, edited and notes by Carol J. Avins (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 51.

<sup>4</sup> Babel, *1920 Diary*, p. 85.

<sup>5</sup> Shimon Markish, *Russko-yevreyskaya literatura: predmet, podkhody, otsenky. Novoye literaturnoye obozreniye*, No. 15 (1995), p. 220.

traditions: if it were not for his two novels featuring Jewish protagonists (*The Tormented Life of Lazik Roitschwanetz* and the *The Protochnii Passage*) he would not have a place in the history of Russian Jewish literature. Some years ago an Israeli scholar, Ephraim Sicher, published a book entitled *Jews in Russian Literature* in which he includes four writers: Isaac Babel, Ilya Ehrenburg, Osip Mandelstam, and Boris Pasternak. He suggests that all four were of Jewish origin and wrote in Russian, and that that is enough to classify and treat them in the same category. Anyone who knows even a little about these four writers and their relationship to their Jewish roots will never agree with this common classification. Mandelstam gives a sincere, disillusioning description of his repellent Jewish grandparents in his prose work *The Noise of Time* (1925).

All the elegant mirage of Petersburg was merely a dream, a brilliant covering thrown over the abyss, while round about there sprawled the chaos of Judaism – not a motherland, not a hearth, but precisely a chaos, the unknown womb whence I had issued, which I feared, about which I made vague conjectures and fled, always fled . . . the strange, cheerless holidays, grating upon the ear with harsh names: Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. . . . As a little bit of mush fills an entire house, so the last influence of Judaism overflows all of one's life. O what a strong smell that is! Could I possibly not notice that in real Jewish houses there was a different smell from that in Aryan houses? . . . Books on the lower shelf . . . the Judaic chaos thrown into the dust.<sup>6</sup>

Mandelstam never defined himself a Jewish poet, and Pasternak never even felt himself to be a Jew. He was deeply involved in ideas of Russian Orthodoxy (*pravoslaviie*), and he complained to Gorky in a very long letter how he was mistreated as a Jew. One of the characters in *Zhivago* is a Jewish friend, Misha Gordon, who speculates on the Jewish question at the age of eleven. 'What did it mean to be a Jew? What was the purpose of it? What was the reward or the justification of this unarmed challenge which brought nothing but grief?'<sup>7</sup> Gordon later moves into a Christian phase and holds that the Gospels preach beyond nations to individuals: 'Why do not the leaders say to the Jews: that is enough, stop now. Do not hold on to your identity, do not act together in a crowd. Disperse. Be with all the rest. You are the first and best Christians in the world.'<sup>8</sup> Theodor Lessing's term, *Selbsthass* [self-hatred] can be applied to both Mandelstam and Pasternak.

3. *Representing the Jewish community (if not in religious or ritual, then in national and cultural terms) and describing it from inside.* The most striking example is Franz Kafka (I deliberately cite a non-Russian example in order to make things clearer), who, although of course a Jew, did not introduce any elements of this culture into his works. It was possible for the younger generation of the 1960–1970s to read Kafka with great enthusiasm without knowing that he was a Jew. There are, of course, literary analyses which seek to show that Kafka's mentality and psychologism (psychological prose) derive entirely from his Jewish way of thinking and of seeing the world. The question of mentality is very difficult to define, however. Some critics say that Jews are uniquely preoccupied with the idea of redemption (in fact, a central motif also in Christian thought) and that redemption is the key to the work of Kafka. Other commentators prefer to see 'the uniqueness of the Jewish imagination as exile and alienation'. In this view, the Jewish genius consists of the insistence that Jews are never really at home in the world. Examples illustrating this idea of ontological exile begin with Kafka and include Walter Benjamin, and sometimes end with Derrida. This generalisation is too vague: if we accept it, we should define authors such as James Joyce and Arthur Rimbaud, not to mention most postmoderns, as Jews. Kafka's Jewishness is also sought in his style.

<sup>6</sup> Osip Mandelstam, *Collected Works in Three Volumes*, ed. G. P. Struve and B. A. Filippov, 2nd ed. (New York, 1971), Vol. 2: Prose, p. 55.

<sup>7</sup> Boris Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago* (Moscow: Knizhnaya palata, 1989), p. 22. The translation is mine.

<sup>8</sup> Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*, p. 102. The translation is mine.

Gershom Scholem called him a secular cabbalist and found parallels between an eighteenth-century mystical parable and Kafka's writings. Robert Alter says that

certain fundamental aspects of traditional Jewish culture continue to live a kind of ghostly afterlife among Jews in the process of assimilating into a different culture. . . . And so Kafka the Germanophone Czech ended up creating at least a few texts that sound as if [they were] invented by an 18<sup>th</sup>-century Polish Jewish mystic or even by a creator of [a] rabbinical Midrash in 5<sup>th</sup>-century Palestine.<sup>9</sup>

The question derived from this Kafka-debate for a historian of Russian Jewish literature is the following: in what way and in what elements a Russian Jewish prose work is different from its Russian contemporaries and whether these elements come from the writer's Jewish roots even when he is separated from Talmudic learning and Jewish tradition by a buffer of one or two generations or not.

4. *Dual cultural affiliation: the works of the writer belong equally to Jewish literature and to the literature of the host nation.* Here emerges once again the importance of the cultural and socio-cultural tradition, but accompanied by a fundamental problem, language. Under the term 'Jewish literature' encyclopaedic, historical, and other general and specific works generally include literary works written in Hebrew and Yiddish. This definition derives logically from the axiom that a nation's literature is written in the national language of that nation. In that case Maimonides writing in Arabic and Moses Mendelssohn writing in German would be expelled from this literature. Jews have been writing in languages other than Hebrew for more than 2000 years. In the nineteenth century – due to the growing influence of the Haskalah – Jewish identity depended on Jewish languages less than ever before. Jewish literature was and is a multilingual literature. (The question 'What one is the Jewish language?' was at the centre of very interesting debates around 1908 at the so-called Czernowitz conference where the adherents of Yiddish reached the decision that Yiddish was a '*nationale sprach*'.)

In the twentieth century the notion and existence of an American Jewish literature became a well-known fact – it is the literature of American Jewry written in English that belongs equally to American and to general Jewish literature. However, this is not evident for everybody. Saul Bellow tells how Samuel Agnon suggested that he translate his (Bellow's) books into Hebrew "because", he said, "they would survive only in the Holy Tongue". . . . I cited Heinrich Heine as an example of a poet who had done rather well in German. "Ah", said Mr. Agnon, "we have him beautifully translated into Hebrew. He is safe."<sup>10</sup>

The situation of Russian Jewish literature is even more complex. Jewish writers and critics such as Shaul Chernichovski, Arkadii Gornfeld, and Mark Slonim declare that everything written in Russian belongs to Russian literature. (Shimon Dubnov did not agree.) Russian literature, however, does not accept this uninvited guest: histories of literature take no notice of Russian Jewish authors, even the most talented, most prolific ones, and this is not because they belong to the second or third rank, but because their specific problems, topics, heroes, and *sujets* are not those of the Russian nation. (A droll fact of history: in the 1897 national census in Russia the most orthodox and wisest rabbis were included in the category of 'illiterate' because they did not write in Russian.

Much more ambiguous are the problems of language as the artistic material of self-expression. The first Jewish writers in Russia were accused of not mastering Russian perfectly. Even Levanda says that when reading the poems of the first Jewish poet, Leon

<sup>9</sup> Robert Alter, 'The Jewish Voice', *Commentary*, October 1995, p. 42. Cf. the following: 'If modern literature in general is a literature that adopts the viewpoint of the outsider, Kafka, as the alienated member of an exiled people, is the paradigmatic modernist precisely because he is a paradigmatic Jew.' Robert Alter, 'Jewish Dreams and Nightmares', in *After the Tradition: Essays on Modern Jewish Writing* (New York, 1969), p. 27.

<sup>10</sup> *Great Jewish Short Stories*, ed. Saul Bellow (New York: Dell Publishing, 1963), p. 16.

Mandelstam, in Russian, he feels as if he was chewing stones and losing all his teeth. But Jewish authors of the twentieth century who were fluent in Russian were still accused of having their specific mentality and strangeness come through their language. This constitutes an interaction between language and thinking, between the structures of language and the human mind that should be addressed in a philological analysis. Linguists have introduced terms such as ‘polysystem’ and ‘bilingual symbiosis’ for this phenomenon.<sup>11</sup>

Let us go back to the beginning, to the nineteenth century, when modern Jewish literature was born. Nineteenth-century writers striving to create a new Jewish culture that would be an integral part of European modernity were faced with the problem of having to represent everyday reality in a language that nobody spoke but which had always been considered as the only possible language for Hebrew literature. Robert Alter says that to understand the difficulties of a Hebrew novelist in the nineteenth century, ‘one must imagine Defoe trying to write *Robinson Crusoe* or Richardson *Pamela* in Latin’.<sup>12</sup> Hebrew had been in continuous literary use for about 3000 years and it was or could have been intelligible for modern readers, but – both biblical and rabbinical – Hebrew had always lived under the weight of the powerful authority of the Bible.

It is striking how some elements of biblical poetry and style – parallel clauses, synonyms, catalogues – survive in the process of creating Jewish prose in another language, and appear also in Russian Jewish prose. An element of Jewish prayer, the metaphor of Shabbat as a young woman in Babel’s short story is read with an absolutely different eye by a Jew and by a Russian: for the first it is part of his tradition, for the second an original invention of Babel. It is even more interesting and challenging to analyse how patterns of language correlated with patterns of thought influence the general style of a writer. I am personally interested in the problems of anecdotal style and the phenomenon of Hebrew parataxis in the modern Hungarian and Russian language of these Jewish authors writing in modern languages. I am convinced that the Jewish tradition of texts, textuality, textology, textual criticism and textual commentary, and the Jewish approach to the world and to truth, which was focused decisively on textuality rather than on empirical investigation, not only discovered common roots with the mainstream of modern twentieth-century literature, but was one of its main fertilisers.

1. The whole body of Russian Jewish literature between 1860 and 1940 falls in the second period of the integration–acculturation–assimilation or settlement–double affiliation–assimilation process. Four periods can distinguished in the development of Russian Jewish literature (some scholars distinguish three, others four but with different dividing dates, this division is mine).

The real beginnings do not go back earlier than the date of publication of the first Jewish periodical written in Russian, *Rassvet* (even if there are some earlier Jewish literary texts in Russian). In 1860 co-editors Joachim Tarnopol and Osip Rabinovich called their weekly *Rassvet* [Dawn] in recognition of the fact that a brilliant new age was dawning.

Progress in Russia, by the natural course of events, will lead to culture and progress among our masses and consequently also to their moral and civil well-being. It is an incontestable truth based on history, a reality recognised by all eminent publicists that in all states the most energetic protector of our nation has always been the spirit of progress; light has been its strongest guaranty, civilisation its best safeguard. Our Emperor, who has tackled the problems of an oppressed class, has also given consideration to the state of our brethren.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Itamar Even-Zohar, ‘Russified Literary Models’, paper delivered at the symposium ‘The Dynamics of East European Ethnicity Outside of Eastern Europe’, Bellagio, Italy, July 1977.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Alter, *The Invention of Hebrew Prose. Modern Fiction and the Language of Realism* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1988), p. 20.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Alexander Orbach, *New Voices of Russian Jewry. A Study of the Russian–Jewish Press of Odessa in the Era of the Great Reforms 1860–1871* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980).

This is how – influenced by the reformist spirit in tsarist Russia – Tarnopol announced the forthcoming *Rassvet* that was devoted to the improvement of the moral and civic well-being of the Jewish population of Russia. He turned to the Jewish community in Russian. This indicates that by 1860, less than a century after Poland had been partitioned and Russia acquired a substantial Jewish population (one million Jews), there emerged a group of writers and thinkers that identified themselves, at least culturally, with the Russian literary tradition, as well as a reading public. The year 1860 was one of change for Russian Jews. Alexander II included the improvement of the situation of the Jewish population in his reforms. Catherine II confined Jews to the Pale of Settlement (at the end of the eighteenth century) and established a frightening complex of restrictive laws, continuously reviewed and changed under Nicholas I. (By 1915 the number of Jews had grown to 7 million and the anti-Jewish laws ran to 1,000 pages.)

The Jewish periodical press hoped to satisfy two needs. First, they believed that the Jewish community had to be made aware of the specific demands of the age and prepare itself accordingly to deal with the problems of modern life, as well as with all the responsibilities of citizenship in a modern state. It is important to understand how Jewish writers envisioned this. They did not know or accept the French idea expressed by Clermont-Tonnerre, a deputy of the *Assemblée générale* at the time of the French Revolution: ‘One must refuse everything to the Jews as a nation but one must give them everything as individuals, they must become citizens.’ (Catherine II established the Pale of Settlement in Russia at the time when this sentence was uttered.) Instead, the Russian Jewish intelligentsia continued to accept the idea of the Jews as a distinct national–religious group which should not have to abandon their identity in order to attain civic rights within the modern state.

Secondly, Jewish periodicals hoped to influence Russian society as a whole. They created a forum where the Jewish question could be openly discussed, in the best interests of both Russians and Jews. This was a futile hope – Russian liberals did not want to accept the Jewish problem as a common cause, their liberalism was too shallow for that. This could be clearly seen in the so-called *Illustratsiia* affair. In 1858 a group of wealthy Jews then living in the Pale of Settlement asked in a petition for permission to reside in Russian cities. *Illustratsiia* in an essay condemned the morals and manners of Jews residing in the western part of the Empire; two Jewish journalists who responded to this in liberal Russian periodicals were attacked by the journalist from *Illustratsiia* in an antisemitic article; *Russkii Vestnik* defended the two journalists, saying that they had the right to respond without provoking a campaign against them, but the antisemitic statement was not discussed.<sup>14</sup>

The Odessa-based Russian-language Jewish press (*Rassvet*, *Sion*, and *Den*) and their contributors were very much aware of the negative image of Jews and Jewish life in the general press and they tried to respond accordingly. From 1871 St. Petersburg became the centre of Jewish culture. In this first period of hope – or one might say, utopia – when Jewish intellectuals hoped to find a homeland for Russian Jewry in Russia, three very different writers were in the vanguard.

Osip Rabinovich struggled in two directions in his essays: when writing for a Jewish public, he criticised the old-fashioned Jewish way of life and the so-called spirit of the ghetto, but when he turned towards non-Jews, he wanted to show the values and assets of the Jews, as well as their suffering, and defended them. This so-called ‘apologetic period’ is typical of early Jewish literatures in non-Jewish languages: see, for example, English Jewish literature (Israel Zangwill) or that of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (Karl Emil Franzos). Apologetic literature tries to explain the history and background, the whys and wherefores of Jewish life and its specificity. Rabinovich in his *Shtrafnoi* [Refractory soldier] 1859 and the *Nasledsvennyi podsvechnik* [The inherited candlestick] could not yet use all the achievements

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<sup>14</sup> John D. Klier, ‘The Illustratsiia Affair of 1858: Polemics on the Jewish Question in the Russian Press’, *Nationalities Papers* V, No. 2 (1977), pp. 117–35.

of contemporary Russian prose, but he could transmit a cathartic message concerning the terrible Jewish fate in the Pale of Settlement through his characters, and at the same time he presented an encyclopaedic account of the conditions, restrictions, everyday problems, troubles, and difficulties of the Jews. Who was a *lovets* and who was the *poimanik*? How should a leader of the *kahal* [Jewish community] replace someone from his *kahal* and serve instead of him in the army for 25 years?<sup>15</sup>

Rabinovich's masterpiece is the anecdotal story of *Chaim-Shulim* (1865), a poor provincial Jew from Kishinev who won the lottery and went to Odessa, the wicked, evil town, to get the money. *Chaim-Shulim* with its splendid humour does not want to convey a message to the reader, but it established a literary model: Rabinovich accomplished in his text a marriage of the 'low', subcultural ironic anecdote and 'high culture', the biblical parable, and he left behind the framework of traditional prose, the mimetic description of real life.

Lev Levanda, who was committed to the cause of Jewish self-improvement, initiated a discussion of contemporary Jewish life, even if that discussion did not always cast the Jewish community in the best possible light. Levanda's tragic life was symbolic: he propagated russification, and wrote for all the Jewish periodicals. His works add up to 20 volumes, most of which was non-fiction. Although he was popular, he was considered a bad writer by critics.

Levanda's big novel, the *Goriachee vreme* [Turbulent times] shows Russian Jewry before and during the Polish Revolt at a juncture when they had to choose between Russia and Poland. Levanda uses very modern devices of narration. He starts his novel with the diary of a Jewish girl, then we read the letters of young men and women concerning problems of identity and the generation gap between fathers and children. He does not give solutions or recipes, but *nolens volens* concludes his heroes' lives in an very disappointing way: Jews homesick in emigration together with their enemies; the Poland-oriented nobles; girls in forced marriages or in mental hospitals; one dies, another runs away . . . Levanda himself ended up in an asylum after the pogroms of 1881–1882: he had undergone a complete reversal of position and had become a staunch supporter of the idea that Palestine should become the homeland of the Jews, and the change had made him mentally unbalanced.

The third writer was Grigorii Bogrov. His only prose work, an autobiography of 1,000 pages, was re-read if not rewritten by the famous Russian poet and writer Nikolai Nekrasov (and also by others) and published in the capital's leading journal *Otechestvennyie zapiski*. Bogrov not only criticised, but also hated the traditional forms of Jewish life, the fanaticism, the strict and (as he thought) senseless laws, the spiritual ghetto. He suffered the hell of an early arranged marriage for years and went through the hard school of assimilation from the agricultural colonies to self-education and, not long before his death, to conversion to Christianity. Bogrov was not a talented writer and sometimes very tendentious in his opinions, but his book is a unique confession of an outcast Jew's personal assimilation.

The Jews in this village could not remain indifferent vis-à-vis a brother of theirs who ate Russian food, shaved his face, smoked on Shabbat, did not fast, and, most importantly, lived separated from his lawful wife, and did not register a birth every year or every other year. My position was specific and

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<sup>15</sup> *Poimanik* ['detainee']: a Jew arrested for not having a valid passport. A passport was valid for 2 years and it was very complicated and expensive to validate it. *Poimaniks* were obliged to start military service immediately. Sometimes the passport was taken from the Jew and even torn to pieces. *Poimaniks* were a good source of money – they could be "exchanged" for the fathers of big families or young educated men who were ready to pay for someone to do military service instead of them. The *lovetz*, *lovtzi* [catcher] was usually a gendarme who sold this man, sometimes not to somebody called up for military service but to his *kahal*. It was the *kahal's* responsibility to collect the number of soldiers required according to the number of *kahal* members. *Kahals* themselves sometimes sent out *lovtzi* if they wanted to save the father of a big family because the *kahal* was obliged to maintain families without breadwinners for many years, and it was cheaper to find a poor, lonely Jew or someone from another community and send that person to the army.

unbearable: Jews considered me a Russian, but the Russians waited only for the opportunity to tell me that I was a *yid* who had forgotten where his place was.<sup>16</sup>

Bogrov here declares a truth with countless historical examples. A parallel idea was expressed by American sociologist Robert E. Park in 1928 in his famous essay ‘Human Migration and the Marginal Man’:

When the walls of the medieval ghetto were torn down and the Jews were permitted to participate in the cultural life of the peoples among whom they lived, there appeared a new type of personality, namely a cultural hybrid, a man living and sharing intimately in the cultural life . . . the traditions of two distinct peoples, never quite willing to break with his past and his traditions, and not quite accepted, because of racial prejudice, in the new society in which he now sought to find a place. He was a man on the margin of two cultures and two societies. . . . The emancipated Jew was, and is, historically and typically the marginal man, the first cosmopolite and citizen of the world.<sup>17</sup>

Bogrov’s novel is also a very important source for Jewish ethnography and sociology. (I could mention moments from his book that could have been included in the four-volume folkloric study of Sándor Scheiber, a great Hungarian Jewish scholar who scrupulously gathered examples and citations from literary texts on customs such as glass breaking at weddings, and so on.) After Rabinovich’s *Shtrafnoi* it was the second literary work accepted by Russian readers.

The dividing line between the first and the second period of Russian Jewish literature is sharper than any other in the history of literature. When the great pogroms began, the hopes of assimilation faded immediately, especially when it became clear that Russian liberals did not react the way the Jews had hoped. Not finding their place in Russian society, which they had longed for so much, Jews were faced with two alternatives. The first was to return to the Jewish community and reorganise it along modern principles so that they could find a productive, meaningful life within it. The national rebirth was preparation in this direction. The second was to find a path to the socialist movements that offered a common future for the poor, the deprived, and the miserable, based on the view that the reason for failure lay in Russian society. Moreover, the idea of socialism was in some ways similar to traditional Jewish solidarity with the poor and it opened for Jews a new community where religion, origins, and background did not matter and where there was even a kind of messianic promise of general redemption and of heaven on earth. Researchers call socialism ‘conversion to a secular religion’. We should mention yet another solution, so characteristic of the Jewish diaspora, namely leaving Russia forever, to go to Palestine or secure a better life in Western Europe or the United States.

Sergei Iaroshevski in his *V vodovorote* [In the whirlpool] depicts a pogrom in a little town and the vain attempts of the assimilated Jewish intellectuals to find support among the Russian liberals and high officials who tell them that all Jews should leave Russia, that there is no place, no future for them there. Iaroshevski’s date of birth is unknown, and he met a tragic death: he committed suicide on the tomb of his son who had committed suicide in 1907.

Jakov Rombro (Filip Krantz) wrote his *Zapiski sumashedshego orem-bohera* [Notes of a crazy *orem bocher* (a poor guy)] during the pogrom years, although he does not mention the pogroms. It is again an autobiography, or rather a first-person narrative about the typically tormented life of a young Jew who wants to find his way out of his sufferings – those he endured in the traditional Jewish school, the prison of the Talmud, the suffering of the social outcast – and he becomes a vagabond. Rombro lets his hero wander and meet different people in order to show the prototypes of different solutions. There is a dream at the very end of the

<sup>16</sup> Grigoriy Bogrov, *Zapisky yevreya* (Odessa, 1912), Vol. 3, pp. 177–78. The translation is mine.

<sup>17</sup> Robert E. Park, ‘Human Migration and the Marginal Man’, *American Journal of Sociology* 33 (May 1928), pp. 891–92.

novel, a parable very much reminiscent of the famous Legend of the Grand Inquisitor from Dostoyevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov*. In this dream Moses descends from Heaven to Earth to see whether Satan is right about Jews deserving to be annihilated. Moses understands nothing of the synagogue ritual and finds that the Jews do not observe his (Moses') laws, and after a debate in which it turns out that he knows nothing about the Talmud he has to run away. The author also ran away: Rombro left Russia for London, then New York in 1883 where he was a collaborator on Yiddish periodicals.

Another way was chosen by Ben-Ami (Mordechai-Mark Rabinovich). His oeuvre remains within the framework of Jewish culture; he writes of his childhood with nostalgic love, and with sorrow in his voice concerning the difficulties of keeping the traditions, of the separation of families due to emigration to America (*Sabbath Candles*).

The marginal situation of the assimilated Jew is shown in Naum Kogan's *V glukhom mestechke* [In the back of beyond, 1892]. A young Jew who left his village and was educated at a Russian university comes back to his village to teach Jewish children in a Russian-language school. He wants to be a mediator between the Russian authorities and gendarmerie, on the one hand, and the old and poor *melamed* [religious teacher] who is not allowed to keep a Jewish school, on the other. The young man as an assimilator cannot be a mediator, he stays in between the two counterparts as an outcast from both sides. This was the third prose work that aroused the interest of the Russian reading public (after Bogrov and Rabinovich). As Chekhov wrote in a letter, 'Why does one have to write of the Jews saying that it derives from Jewish life and not simply from life? Have you read Kogan's short story *In the Back of Beyond*? He tells the story of Jews but you feel that it comes not from Jewish life but from life in general.' Before publishing it, the editor asked Kogan not only to change the title of his novel (*Reb Shloime*) but his own name, from Naum Lvovich Kogan to N. Naumov, which sounds more Russian. By the way, Kogan – or Naumov-Kogan, as encyclopaedias refer to him – never saw his novel published, he died at the age of 30 at a railway station on his way to a hospital in the Crimea.

An extraordinary life but typical in its diversity is that of Semion Ansky (Shlomo Rappoport), author of the world-famous *Dybbuk*. He started his literary career in Russian. As a *narodnik* he emigrated, stopped writing for a while and was personal secretary to the *narodnik* revolutionary Piotr Lavrov in Paris. After his return to Russia in 1904 he wrote both in Yiddish and Russian. His short stories carry the message 'keep your Jewish identity!' In 1911 he took part in a three-year ethnographic expedition (paid by Baron Ginzburg, a famous Jewish *maecenas* of that time) through the tiny villages deep in the Ukraine where Hasidism originated to gather and record Jewish legends, songs, and folklore. He heard the old folktale *Dybbuk* from an innkeeper's wife, but he used for his play a number of different motives and a popular interpretation of mysticism and Cabbala. Ansky wrote the first version of *Dybbuk* in Russian before the First World War. He gave the manuscript to Stanislavsky, the great Russian director of the Moscow Art Theatre, who advised him to rewrite it in Yiddish and have it performed by a Jewish troupe. When Ansky did so and presented it to the Vilna Troupe they considered it for a time and then decided against it. Ansky never saw it performed: he died in 1920. His collected works – with another, unfinished, play, *Day and Night* – appeared in Yiddish in 15 volumes in Warsaw between 1920 and 1925. After his death the Vilna Troupe decided to prepare the play quickly for presentation as a tribute to Ansky's memory. To their astonishment the production presented at the end of the thirty-day mourning period on 9 December 1920 at the Elysium Theatre in Warsaw was a great success and they performed it many times. A year after the premier in Warsaw, it was staged in New York in Yiddish and several months later in Moscow in Hebrew (1921) by the Habima Group under the direction of Stanislavsky's disciple Ievgenii Vakhtangov. By May 1928 the Habima celebrated the 600<sup>th</sup> performance of the play. In 1938 a film version was made in Poland. A TV version was made in 1960–1961, directed by Sidney Lumet. In 1970 another film appeared in Israel. The history of *Dybbuk*'s music is no less remarkable. Ansky constructed



the drama on the leitmotif of the Hassidic melody 'Mipnei Mah' (Oh wherefore). It was the basis of the first stage music composed by Joel Engel who accompanied Ansky on his ethnographic expedition. Since then four operas, two ballets, and a musical suite have been based on the play. This play therefore existed in the three languages spoken by Russian Jewry: Russian, Yiddish, and Hebrew, although Russian was excluded as early as the 1920s because, as I mentioned earlier, Stanislavski refused to perform *Dybbuk*, so Russian culture did accept the *Dybbuk*.

Let us now go back to the beginning of the twentieth century, when the third period of Russian Jewish literature started. Jewish writers entered Russian literature even if they were not always accepted. In parallel with the crisis of the 1905 Revolution and the pogroms following it, the problems leading up to the First World War – growing antisemitism, political and social problems – appeared in literature and sometimes even guided it. Writers like David Aizman or Aleksander Kipen became an organic part of Russian literature and the Russian literary scene; they were in the circle 'Znanie' formed around Gorky. The so-called Silver Age of Russian literature inspired Russian Jewish literature from the artistic point of view. The unique Russian symbolist prose influenced the short stories of Aizman and Rivkin. Semion Iushkevich, the popular playwright who was born in Odessa and lived there until his emigration in 1920, is often referred to as the Jewish Chekhov. He depicted the changes in Jewish life through Jewish middle-class and lower-class families, for example, in his three-volume novel *Leon Drei*. His play *Korol'* [The king] is about the conflicts between a Jewish factory owner and Jewish workers, the Jewish young generation. Perhaps the best short introduction to Iushkevich is the second act of his play *Comedia braka* [The comedy of marriage], which is a conversation between Jewish women and girls in the waiting room of a gynaecologist who carries out abortions.

As Shimon Markish has pointed out, a new hero, the physically strong and mentally healthy, self-confident Jew appeared at that time; see, for example, *Tikhoie techeniie* [Slow flow] by Andrei Sobol and *Liverant* [Horse dealer] by A. Kipen. He is a master of his trade, almost a psychologist who understands both horses and customers. He is strong, he can lift a cart out of the mud alone, but then new laws forbidding Jews to live in villages come into force and he is sent away. 'Go home', he is told. 'I have no home but this steppe', he says and leaves. The only solution offered to him by his customers is to convert to Christianity.

This represents a new voice in Russian Jewish literature: the apologetic position is replaced by an 'only-for-show' laconism, and by indirect dialogues without author's commentary or tendentious interventions.

In the 1920s, Andrei Sobol, Semion Hecht, Lev Lunz, Mikhail Kozakov, and, of course, Isaak Babel used all the experimental forms and innovations of Russian prose, which was at its peak at that time: stream of consciousness, the *ostraneniie* method, the mosaic structure of non-chronological narration, and the *skaz*-technique (that is, the stylisation of the different layers of the spoken language). These writers are Russian master-writers at the peak of their powers even when they speak of the duality of the Jew, of antisemitism and pogroms.

Lev Lunz died in 1924 at the age of 23. His brilliant talent made him an important person of his age, the beginning of the legendary 1920s. This period of Russian literature and culture in general was preceded by a period of free experimentation by a number of very diverse smaller and larger groups and art communities. Politically many of them were sympathetic to the new regime. Lunz became the theorist of an important apolitical group, the Serapion Brothers, and the proclamation of the group written by him was entitled, strangely enough for this period, 'To the West'. **The title implies their concept of writing in great plots [?], using interesting motifs of fantastic literature [?]**cím azt jelentette, hogy a korabeli, irodalmat széttördelő atavantgárd törekvésekkel szemben ők vissza akarták hozni a nagyívű cselekményt, az érdekes szüzsét és a fantasztikum eszközét az irodalomba, following their master, E. T. A. Hoffman (the name of the group comes from Hoffman's short story). They

advocated this concept because in the literature of the period the traditional plot was forgotten, disintegrated or simply pushed into the background.

‘I am now full of doubts, full of contradictions that are – how terrible – ethical contradictions!’, complains Lev Lunz in a letter to Gorky in August 1922, one month after the short story *The Homeland* was written.

I am a Jew, a committed, faithful Jew, and I am glad to be like that. I am a Russian writer. But I am a Russian Jew, Russia is my homeland, I love Russia more than any other country. How is it possible to reconcile, to balance all that? I have reconciled everything for myself, for me everything is clear and clean, but others think differently. They say: A Jew cannot become a Russian writer! I know why they say that. I do not want to write in the same manner as nine-tenths of Russian writers. I don’t want their thick, heavy provincial dialect, the petty daily round, the tedious play with words, even if it is florid and beautiful.<sup>18</sup>

In another letter he turns to his parents: ‘I will not leave Russia. I cannot live outside Russia, I am a Jew, but Russia is my homeland, my mother tongue is Russian, I am sorry about these sentiments.’<sup>19</sup> Curiously, unlike these letters, Lunz’s short story *The Homeland* does not give a determinate answer to the contradiction of the dual rootedness of Jewish culture in a host country.

Duality is reflected at the very beginning of his short story in the form of the dialogue itself. Venya, one of the interlocutor’s names, suggests that he is identical to Venyamin Kaverin, to whom the short story is dedicated, while Lyova, the first-person narrator of the first chapter, refers to the author (see Figure 1). The dialogue between the two characters parallels an implicit, inner dialogue, present in both of them as a result of their internal conflicts. Moreover, when the plot is displaced into the biblical past (chapter 2), the parallelism of the two historical eras also evokes the form of a vivid dialogue, and, after all, the simultaneity of the two cultures, the juxtaposition of the two homelands also involves the form of dialogue as an eternal duality where there is no choice or definite answer.

*Figure 1*

In real life	writers	Lev Lunz	Venyamin Kaverin
In the short story	in St. Petersburg	Lyova	Venya
	in Babylon	Yehuda	(Doppelgänger) Benyomin
In the Bible		Judah	Benjamin

The three chapters of the short story are arranged in a structure of frames: the first and third chapters are set in Petersburg, in the present day. The second chapter, which is divided into ten subchapters, transfers the plot to Babylon, to the time of the Babylonian Exile. The two protagonists descend into an underground corridor through a little door in the wall of the synagogue on Shabbat. This descent or *cathabasis* leads not only to the past, to Babylon, but also to the depths of the subconscious. In accordance with the leap in time the names of the two characters are transformed into their Hebrew version: Yehuda and Benyomin (see Figure 1)

<sup>18</sup> Lev Lunz (‘Serapionov brat’), *Vne zakona. Pyesy, rasskazy, statyi* (St Petersburg: Izd-vo ‘Kompozitor’, 1994), p. 219. The translation is mine.

<sup>19</sup> Lunz, *Vne zakona*, p. 222. The translation is mine.

The two contrasted times, the twentieth century and the Babylonian Exile, are linked in the repetitive descriptions of two cities, Petersburg and Babylon, their straight streets and perpendicular corners with geometric crossings in the same words. In this parallel Petersburg becomes a place of exile: it is the same 'strange city with a strange language' as Babylon. The word 'strange' runs throughout the whole story and it is the story's last, concluding word. However, Yehuda 'loves Babylon because he was born there' and Lyova, his modern incarnation 'loves Petersburg because he was born there'.

The common root of the Russian verb '*rodils'a*' [born] and the title of the short story 'Rodina' is no accident. What is the definition of homeland? Is it the place where one was born or is it rather an inner identification with a nation and its culture? The answer to this question separates the two friends Benyomin and Yehuda. Venya who tries to deny and reject his Jewishness three times in the first chapter seems to be a self-hating Jew ('I do not like Jews. They are dirty.' 'I do not want to be a Jew.' 'I am a stranger to myself.') (cf. Kafka's letter to Felice 1913: 'What do I have in common with Jews? I have hardly anything in common with myself and should stand very quietly in a corner, content to be breathing.') Benyomin, his Babylonian alter ego, after suffering an epileptic attack, is given the gift of uttering divinely inspired revelations. Later, he becomes the leader of his people on its way back to Jerusalem, to the West 'where there was a mysterious, beautiful, strange country'. He rejects his friend Yehuda and treats him as a traitor to his people because he does not leave Babylon with the Jews.

Benyomin is as immovable in his new role as a prophet as his alter ego Venya was unshakeable as a self-hating Jew. Lunz does not bring him back to the present, he remains forever in the past. Unlike Benyomin, Yehuda returns to Petersburg with ease, and there are three reminders in the text showing that it was not his first visit to the past, it was not the first time that he had come to the synagogue to step across the magic door. ('I come here not for the first time.' 'I have been here many times.' 'I have already been here three times.') Lyova is uncertain, doubtful, divided, and his split personality helps him to cross the line between the different times with ease – and this metaphoric point gives a clue to the interpretation of the short story.

Yehuda/Lyova has to pay dearly for this freedom of returning to the past. Lunz creates a twofold structure through the repetition of portraits which widens this metaphor. The first portrait, which repeated itself in two overlapping portraits – those of the present-day Venya and his alter ego in the past Benyomin – outline a romantic, heroic image of the prophet in all aspects. 'In the mirror there is a tall man with a mighty face, his black hair falls furiously on his stubborn forehead, and his wild, deep, deserted eyes shine passionately under his peaceful, clear eyebrows.'

The other portrait is a negative version of these two, and contrasts with these same details. This time it is Lyova's face which is reflected in the mirror. (The mirror itself helps to stress again the doubled, split personality of the main character.) The negative character of the first-person narrator is crowned by this explicitly repulsive picture consisting of antisemitic clichés. Lyova, who is short, puny, despondent, finds himself disgusting. 'In the mirror there is a short, bald man with narrow forehead, with wet and sly eyes, he is dirty and disgusting. It is I. I recognise myself. I realised that I had left there everything that was beautiful and ancient in me, my high forehead and enthusiastic eyes.'

The corresponding details in the heroic-romantic and in the negative-repulsive portraits also link together the two contrapuntal poles by showing that the characters, schizophrenic in their doubts, are *Doppelgängers* with different solutions to their fates. They are brothers in the Bible, Judah and Benjamin, and these brothers in history and in myth are duplicated in Lunz's two characters, Yehuda and Benyomin in Babylon, then once again in Petersburg (Lyova and Venya), and finally in the characters' background figures, the two writers Lunz and Kaverin in Petersburg, who were, in a way, also brothers, 'Serapion Brothers'.

Lunz gives the biblical version of the two characters' names (Yehuda and Benyomin) in a spelling which is different from that of the Russian Bible. This phonetic transcription of the Hebrew names emphasises their etymological meaning. 'My name is Lev, but what is in me from a lion? I am short and puny, my nose looks down crookedly towards my lips.' This correlation recalls Genesis, where Jacob blesses his son, saying: 'Judah is a lion's whelp; On prey, my son, have you grown. He crouches, lies down like a lion' (Genesis 49:9). While Yehuda's fate does not correspond to the meaning of his name, Benyomin's destiny in the short story is anticipated in his name. Benyomin means 'the son of the right hand', and Lunz makes him fulfil the meaning hidden in his name. Benyomin becomes the one-armed prophet after having cut off his left arm because he was not able to scrape down the three points forming a triangle on it. This triangle, 'the eternal stigma of the wise Europe', is a common sign on both Yehuda's and Benyomin's arms showing that they met in Babylon and can speak a common strange language (apparently Russian). The three vaccination scars, the marks of the smallpox shot again link the two different layers of time: the two protagonists have met already – in the future – and were brothers, 'Serapion brothers'. The significance of these marks is amplified by the fact that the three points forming a triangle is a well-known and widely used code of abbreviation in masonic texts. This symbolic meaning can be supported with other masonic allusions, namely that the members of the group were given metaphoric names and called themselves brothers of an order with metaphoric functions and offices. Thus, Kaverin was Brother Alchemist, Lunz Brother Wandering Artist, and Fedin, Nikitin and Slonimsky were also given common masonic functions.)

The dramatic culmination of the plot is embedded in a biblical context. The story seems to be saturated with biblical references. Surprisingly, many of these references appear to be only quasi-biblical. Remat, the name of Yehuda's wife, gives, inverted, Tamar, the name of the woman who gave sons to Judah, son of Jacob. Geographical nouns, like rivers, only phonetically imitate the spatial reality of Babylon and are not mentioned in the Bible. Some references are intentionally modified (the number of Jews leaving Babylon for Jerusalem is not 42,360 as in Ezra 2:64, but 42,600, and so on). The plethora of biblical elements does not prevent us from recognising the sweeping alteration that the biblical history undergoes in Lunz's hands. The significant divergence from the Bible is not confined to the tradition of developing and expanding the story into a secularised version. Lunz does not seem to accept the sacredness and integrity of the biblical text when he chooses a crucial point in the biblical history of the Jews. In the first chapter of Ezra, when the Jews return to Jerusalem from exile, Judah and Benjamin are mentioned together: 'So the chiefs of the clans of Judah and Benjamin, and the priest and Levite, all whose spirits had been roused by God, got ready to go up to build the House of the LORD that is in Jerusalem.'<sup>20</sup> The names of the fourth and twelfth sons of Jacob here figure as an emblematic *pars pro toto*, the whole being the Jewish people. After the birth of David, Judah's tribe assumed the leadership of Israel. But Benjamin's tribe brought down all the other clans' wrath on itself, and was almost totally massacred (Judges 20). This intertribal war resulted from an initial conflict caused also, as in Lunz's short story, by an unfortunate marriage.

From the point of view of the short story two more details might be relevant. The first is the symbolic meaning of the name 'Judah'. Its plural form, *Yehudim*, gave the general name to the entire Jewish people. The second peculiarity is a historical one: Judah's tribe included more non-Israelite elements than any other Jewish tribe. This might be associated with Yehuda's split personality and unusual, rule-breaking Jewishness.

Yehuda's and Benyomin's names at the beginning of the Book of Ezra probably stand for an implicit parallel between the return from the Babylonian Exile and the liberation of Israel from slavery in Egypt. And here we are in Lunz's story where the tradition of parallel is

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<sup>20</sup> Ezra 1:5 in the *Tanach. A new translation of The Holy Scriptures according to the Traditional Hebrew Text* (Philadelphia–New York–Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985), pp. 5746.

broken: Benjamin is going with his people to Jerusalem and Judah does not return there. With Yehuda's reluctance to go to Jerusalem and by saving him (and only him, not Benyomin) for the future, Lunz manifestly destroys the frames of the scriptural tradition. His text, which acts at once diachronically and synchronically, establishes a new relationship to the past and to the Bible.

If Lunz rejects the canonised text as tradition, he does not identify his hero Lyova's Jewishness with the laws of Judaism. Lyova breaks the rules and tradition of Shabbat; Judaism is no longer his religion. Yehuda's character consists of romantic, poeticised stereotypes. 'He had no father, no mother, no grandfather, no friend, and nobody knew his clan or tribe of origin but he was a Jew'. This romantic rootlessness in a short story devoted to the seeking of a homeland foreshadows the paradox presented by Lunz at the end of the short story. In essence, his story is more about the pursuit of oneself than about the pursuit of a homeland. His spiritual search is spatially concretised in the *cathabasis* that leads to the past and to the depths of the subconscious.

I also found an interesting, accidental parallel in Franz Rosenzweig's letter, where the great philosopher and contributor to Martin Buber's new German translation of the Hebrew Bible uses the same allegorical image of *cathabasis* in order to explain how he had rediscovered his Jewish roots. The origin of this allegory for the philosopher can be easily identified: it is the popular *Golem* of Gustav Meyrinck where descent is the way to the past, and eventually the way to the present. Meyrinck's Pernat finds the exit through his own childhood to the present; Yehuda returns to be Lyova again when he is beaten to death by his own people. Rosenzweig's philosophical theory of dialogue is based on this return to the past that should provide an opportunity to find the old treasure in the Jewish heritage, bring it out into the light of the present, and see that it does not fade. His theory suggests that Judaism is the eternal root to which European culture must turn (and return) in the form of a dialogue. This is Lunz's relationship to the past and to Jewish heritage. This vivid dialogue is a privilege with which he endows only his double character Lyova, who is able to go back and forth in time.

Lunz gives a kind of answer to the question asked in our title. Yes, when split in two, Jews are doubled in the sense that they are enriched because they manage to preserve both aspects of their cultural selves intact. As Gershon Shaked said, while German Jewish writers suffered from their double identity in the early twentieth century, an American Jewish writer today is happy to have at least some memory of his Jewishness and says: 'Lucky me, I am neurotic (nyu), lucky me, I suffer from a dual identity.'<sup>21</sup> Lunz does not seek mythopoetic archetypes in the biblical parallelism, but directly links the present and biblical time. Lunz's approach to the biblical plot is a secular, psychological version of allegorical exegesis in which one can spiritually go through the events of Jewish history once more.

## SOME RUSSIAN JEWISH PERIODICALS

*Rassvet* (1861–1862) Odessa, weekly, editors Joachim Tarnopol and Osip Rabinovich

*Sion* (1862–1863) Odessa, weekly, editors Lev Pinsker and Emmanuel Soloveichik

*Den'* (1869–1871) Odessa, weekly, editors Samuil Orshtein, Ilya Orshanskii and Mikhail Morgulis

*Rassvet* (II) (1879–1883) St. Petersburg, weekly, editors Aleksander Tsederbaum, Aron Goldenblum, Mark Varshavskii and Nikolai Vilenkin (=Minskii)

*Voskhod* (1881–1906) St. Petersburg, monthly, editors Adolf Landau and Samuel Gruzenberg

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<sup>21</sup> Gershon Shaked, 'Shadows of Identity: German-Jewish and American-Jewish Literature – a Comparative Study', in *Handbook of American-Jewish Literature. An Analytical Guide to Topics, Themes and Sources*, ed. Lewis Fried et al. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), p. 410.

*Nedel'naia Kkhronika Voskhoda* (1882–1897) the weekly version of *Voskhod*  
*Khronika Voskhoda* (until 1906)  
*Knizhki Voskhoda* (from 1899), were series, books, edited by the *Voskhod*  
*Russkii ievrei* (1879–1884) St. Petersburg, editors Lazar Benua, Grigory Bogrov and Lev Kantor  
*Ievreiskaia biblioteka* (1871–1903) St. Petersburg, 10 volumes, editor Adolf Landau  
*Rassvet* (III) (1907-1915, 1917-1918) weekly, editor Idelson  
*Ievreiskii Mir*, St. Petersburg, monthly in 1909, weekly in 1910–1911, volumes from 1918, editor Andrei Sobol  
*Rassvet* (IV) (1922–1934) Berlin, Paris, monthly, editor Vladimir Zhabotinskii