



CULTURES
of the
JEWS

A New History

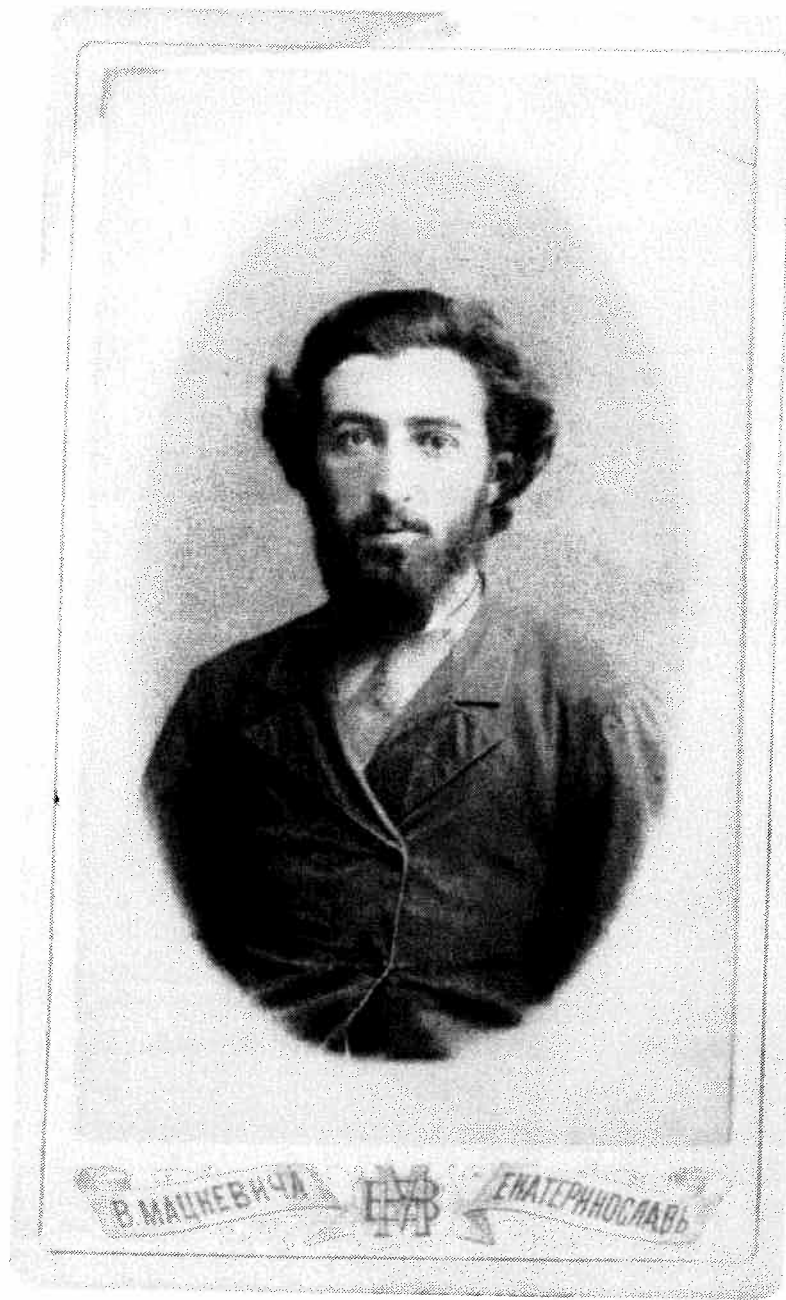
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The writer, activist, and ethnographer S. Ansky (Solomon Rapoport) in 1888, at age twenty-five. (YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, Photo Archives, New York; YIVO RG 121)

T W O

A JOURNEY BETWEEN WORLDS:
*East European Jewish Culture from the Partitions
of Poland to the Holocaust*

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In an undated autobiographical fragment composed early in the twentieth century, the Russian Jewish folklorist, writer, and social revolutionary S. Ansky (Solomon Rappoport) wrote of his circuitous path away from and back to Jewish life:

A young man, born and raised in the thick of Jewish life, underwent a very paradoxical evolution; works in the Hebrew language forcefully and violently tore me away from ancient Judaism and its traditions and awakened within me a hatred and contempt for its traditions, thrusting me [instead] toward Russian letters, so that later, in the Russian language, I would discern the splendor of the poetry that lies buried in the old historical foundations and traditions [of Jewish culture].¹

This compact statement, written, significantly, in Russian, might be multiplied many times for several generations of East European Jews. Here Ansky traced the contours of Jewish culture in Eastern Europe after 1800, encompassing the traditional Jewish world and the many forms of rebellion against it. Born in 1863 in the White Russian town of Vitebsk, which boasted both an outstanding Lithuanian-style yeshivah and a strong community of Ḥabad (Lubavitch) Hasidim, Ansky was steeped in both of the branches of nineteenth-century East European Jewish Orthodoxy. Like many of his generation, he abandoned talmudic study for Haskalah (the movement of Jewish Enlightenment) but soon passed further on the road to acculturation by embracing social revolution. While agitating among Russian miners, he adopted a Russian-sounding name (but one that also drew from the Yiddish custom of forming last names from the first name of one's mother) and soon began writing solely in Russian. After a period of exile in Paris, he came back to Russia in the wake of the 1905

Revolution. By the end of the Paris period, Ansky had begun the return to his people, and he returned as well to writing in Yiddish, the language in which he had started writing some 20 years earlier. Once back in Russia, he threw himself into the Jewish national revival that was in full swing in response to the wave of pogroms accompanying the Revolution. In 1912, Ansky organized and led the first expedition of the Jewish Ethnographic Society, which collected a vast array of stories, folk beliefs, songs, manuscripts, photographs, and ritual objects. In the years before his death in 1920, he wrote the work for which he is most famous, *The Dybbuk*, a play that, as we shall see, combined many of the themes of his life's journey. In the pages that follow, I will use the stages of Ansky's life—Orthodoxy, Haskalah, Russian acculturation, and return to the folk—as markers of the various cultural paths that the Jews pursued in their confrontations with the peculiar forms modernity took in Eastern Europe.

Although Ashkenazic Jewish culture goes back at least a thousand years to the Jews of the Rhineland, the culture produced by the nineteenth-century East European Jews is frequently seen by many today, through a kind of optical illusion, to be equivalent to a timeless Ashkenazic culture. The Jews who are our subject here inherited much from their Central and East European ancestors—their language, religious customs, popular practices, and forms of communal organization—but on this foundation they created something new, which became, by the twentieth century, *the* culture of Ashkenaz.

As Ansky's journey suggests, the nineteenth century for East European Jews was an age of border crossings between competing identities. This was a period of enormous internal divisions: between Hasidism and the Lithuanian yeshivah culture, between *maskilim* (disciples of Enlightenment) and Orthodox authorities; between those who wanted to develop Jewish culture in Hebrew or Yiddish and those who found their cultural homes in one of the non-Jewish languages of Eastern Europe; and, finally, between "assimilationist" revolutionaries who sought Jewish salvation in a Russian or Polish revolution and "nationalists" who wanted to preserve Jewish identity and find a Jewish solution to the "Jewish Question," either in Palestine or in Europe. All sides of these disputes contributed toward the formation of a unique culture, one that encompassed competing and contradictory voices. Despite their differences, however, these voices also shared certain surprising affinities. All of them, even the most ostensibly conservative or "Orthodox," were responses to the peculiar conditions of Jewish life in Eastern Europe, and particularly in the Russian Empire, in the period between the partitions of Poland in the late eighteenth century and the Holocaust. All of them contributed toward the formation of new Jewish identities—identities that still echo and even persist today.

In 1772, Russia annexed the White Russian provinces of Polotsk and Mogilev from the tottering Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Among the towns in Polotsk that now fell under Russian rule was Vitebsk, which was to be Ansky's birthplace nearly a century later. Although Vitebsk was the home of probably no more than a few thousand Jews, the total population of Jews that the Russian state inherited was about 45,000. At the same time, Poland's other powerful neighbors, Austria and Prussia, swallowed up other districts of the Polish Commonwealth. Thus began a process that, by 1795, was to dismember the medieval Polish state and transfer the Jewish population to new political rulers. By the end of the partition process, at least 800,000 Jews would come under Russian rule, some 260,000 would fall under Austria, and an additional 160,000 under Prussia.²

The cultural implications of these dramatic political developments were not immediately apparent but would become increasingly so in the course of the nineteenth century. For the Jews in the vast and variegated region of what has been called "East Central Europe"—the Austrian Habsburg Empire and eastern Prussia—a window was open toward the West and, with political emancipation in the last third of the nineteenth century, increasing numbers were to abandon Jewish tradition and adopt modern forms of life. In Czernowitz, the capital of Bukovina, on the eastern border of the Habsburg Empire, for example, many Jews enthusiastically embraced the German language and German culture, as they did in Bohemia and Moravia, the Czech lands in the empire. In the Hungarian part of what would become (after 1867) the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary, a process of "Magyarization" took place throughout the nineteenth century, particularly in the cities, in which Jews embraced the Hungarian language and culture.

In Russia, which took control of the largest number of Jews, the process of acculturation was more delayed, circuitous, and complicated. The Pale of Settlement, created by the Russian state in several steps after the partitions of Poland, prevented most Jews from living in the main Russian cities, thus precluding the kind of rapid acculturation that occurred farther to the West when Jews moved in the first half of the nineteenth century to Berlin, Vienna, Prague, and Budapest. Only very few were able to enter the wealthy merchant guilds and escape the Pale. Needless to say, they could not join the aristocracy, which, at least in the cities, was often the Westernized element in Russian society, nor could they identify with the peasants. Russian society lacked a strong, emerging middle class, so the Jews did not find a social base for assimilation as they did in Germany, Austria, Hungary, France, Italy, and England. The Russian state failed to emancipate the Jews, as had the nations of Western and Central Europe in the

course of the nineteenth century; the Jews of the Russian Empire remained subjects, but not full citizens, until the 1917 Revolution. In this respect, the status of the Jews scarcely differed from that of other peoples in the empire: all were subjects, since the modern category of citizen was not allowed to cross the borders of the czarist state.

In Poland, which was a semiautonomous kingdom under the czar and in which Jews were subject to fewer disabilities than in Russia proper, a process of Polonization occurred earlier in the century as a new Jewish middle class adopted Polish language and culture. Joining with their Polish neighbors in the insurrections against Russia of 1831 and 1863, some Polish Jews, particularly in the cities, were able to turn this political alliance into an avenue for acculturation. But here, too, Polonization was limited to the larger cities; the vast majority of Jews, scattered in smaller villages and towns in the countryside, would remain far less affected by Polish culture.

Whereas in Western and Central Europe it became increasingly possible for Jews to identify themselves as, for example, "Germans of the Mosaic faith," such a purely religious identity was all but impossible for the Russian Jews: they were seen by others, and largely viewed themselves, as a distinct and separate national group within a multinational empire. Blocked from assimilating directly into non-Jewish society, many young Jews chose instead to align themselves with the groups seeking to overthrow the old order. Revolutionary politics became its own form of assimilation and acculturation. To take the case of Ansky: as a result of reading the literature of Russian populism, he discovered new ways of defining Jewish culture. But the "Russian" culture that he, like many young Jews, absorbed was that of resistance and revolution, itself—like Marxism—at least partly imported from the West.

For all of these reasons, what appears to us in perhaps distorted hindsight as the "inexorable" waves of modernization that were sweeping up Jews in Western and Central Europe produced very different, even contrary, results in Russia. In fact, we should probably avoid using the term "modernization" altogether for Imperial Russia because it raises more questions than it answers. Although the Russian state, starting with Peter the Great in the first half of the eighteenth century, began to take steps to Westernize, the nineteenth century witnessed significant moves to resist the European Enlightenment and the doctrines of political liberalism that it preached. Under Nicholas I (r. 1825–55), the slogan of "autocracy, orthodoxy, and nationalism" captured the desire of the regime to insulate itself from the winds of modernity behind a high wall of "Slavic" identity. Nicholas's regime adopted far-reaching policies to try to "Russify" the Jews, but these often coercive measures were quite different from the forces of assimilation in the West.³

Lengthy conscription (25–30 years) into the Russian army, the attempted dissolution of Jewish communal self-government in 1844, and government regulation of Jewish educational and rabbinical institutions all created enormous hostility to the Russian state among most Jews. The czarist government set up two official rabbinical seminaries and a system of official rabbis (*ha-rabanut me-ta'am*) with authority over matters like divorce. Poorly trained, these rabbis received little popular legitimacy, and they contributed to the undermining of communal authority. Because the authorities were forced to deliver up conscripts—many of them kidnapped children—to the army in order to fulfill draft quotas, popular hostility was further directed against them and especially against those thought to be “informers” to the government. The policies of Nicholas thus shattered the cohesiveness and solidarity of the Jewish community, leaving an increasing leadership vacuum with profound implications for Jewish culture. Some have even argued that the tendency of Russian Jews to embrace revolutionary causes later in the century was at least partly a result of the abiding hatred of the state engendered under Nicholas. Yet, despite these harsh measures, Russification of the Jews remained limited to very small groups; Russification failed but it paradoxically may have planted the seeds of revolution.

The regime of Alexander II (r. 1855–81) abolished many of the policies of Nicholas I, and it was during Alexander's reign that Jewish acculturation in Russia began in earnest.⁴ Starting in the 1860s, his government promulgated a series of liberal reforms that allowed many more Jews to migrate to urban centers such as St. Petersburg and Moscow: from a mere 11,980 in 1858, the numbers in the main Russian cities rose to 59,779 in 1880 and 128,343 in 1897.⁵ Young Jewish students, both male and female, who were allowed to attend the gymnasias and universities were exposed for the first time to Russian culture and politics. Russian became the native tongue for increasing numbers of Jews, rising, in St. Petersburg, from 2 percent in 1869 to 37 percent by 1900. Yet the government, even in its most liberal days, scarcely contemplated the full emancipation of the Jews, and most Jews remained trapped in the Pale of Settlement, still speaking Yiddish as their mother tongue.

It was under these conditions in the Pale that East European Jewish culture developed its peculiar and particular forms. Despite increasing adoption of Russian or Polish culture as the nineteenth century wore on, the vast majority of Jews who did not migrate to the big cities cultivated an indigenously Jewish culture in which the primary languages were Hebrew and Yiddish. In Ansky's Vitebsk, for instance, Yiddish was still known—and probably spoken as their main language—by 99.2 percent of the Jews as late as 1897.⁶ With Western influences seeping through the borders of the empire, some Jews began to rethink their traditional culture, but because few joined Russian society fully, the new

“modern” or “secular” movements tended to develop their own singular forms in which the “Jewish” elements predominated over the “non-Jewish.” For this reason, terms like “modern” or “secular” may be misleading. Even though Jews elsewhere in the modern world also developed their own subcultures, in Eastern Europe this subculture was insulated enough from the surrounding cultures as to feel often more like a separate culture. As we shall see, even the strand of this culture that we call “Orthodoxy” or “ultra-Orthodoxy” today was not equivalent to pre-modern or traditional Jewish culture in Eastern Europe because, like its various critics, it was born from the encounter with the singular conditions of the nineteenth century.

Prior to the Polish partitions, the Jews regarded themselves and were regarded by others as a separate and distinct group, but, as Moshe Rosman has shown in his chapter on the pre-modern Polish Jews, the walls segregating the Jews from non-Jewish society did not preclude cultural interchange. In the nineteenth century, various internal and external forces demanded that the Jews change their traditional culture and adopt that of the non-Jewish society, but this challenge often resulted paradoxically in new forms of distinctive self-identification and new feelings of difference among both the traditionalists and their opponents.

The deepening sense of a separate Jewish culture was due, in part, to the demographic preponderance of Jews in the Pale. Reversing an eighteenth-century trend to spread out into the countryside, Jews in the nineteenth century concentrated more and more in small cities and towns; by the end of the century, as we have seen, they were moving into the larger cities as well. Throughout Europe, a population explosion was under way, but the Jews of Eastern Europe increased, for reasons still debated by demographers, at a greater rate than their non-Jewish neighbors. The countryside may have been Ukrainian, Belorussian, or Polish, but the urban settlements were Jewish: in many of the *shtetlach* and cities of the Pale (with exceptions in Ukraine), the Jews often constituted the majority of the population. To take Vitebsk, again, as our example, in the middle of the nineteenth century there were only 9,417 Jews in the town. In the period of Ansky’s boyhood, from his birth in 1863 to his departure from the town in 1881, the population jumped from about 14,000 to approximately 24,000. By 1897, when the most authoritative Russian census was taken, the Jews of Vitebsk constituted 34,420 out of a total population of 65,719. So, the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed a nearly fourfold increase, reflecting both the enormous natural growth of the population and the movement of Jews—like Ansky’s father—from the surrounding countryside into urban centers.⁷ It was perhaps partly as a result of this feeling of living in a preponderantly Jewish world that the modern movements of Jewish nationalism arose at the end of the nineteenth century in Russia. If Zionism, to take the most prominent of these

movements, wished to create a Jewish nation, then it did so because such a nation was already coming into being demographically and culturally in Eastern Europe.

THE INVENTION OF EAST EUROPEAN JEWISH ORTHODOXY

*A young man, born and raised in the thick of Jewish life . . .
ancient Judaism and its traditions.*

Vitebsk lay on the border between the provinces of Mogilev and Polotsk—the first, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, a stronghold of the Lithuanian yeshivah culture, and the second a center of Hasidism, the eighteenth-century pietistic movement. In Vitebsk itself, both of these competing movements found representation. Already in the eighteenth century, an important early Hasidic teacher, Menaḥem Mendel of Vitebsk, gathered followers in the town (he eventually led a group of Hasidim to emigrate to Palestine), and, later, the Lubavitch or Ḥabad sect of Hasidism made Vitebsk one of its centers. But the town also boasted a flourishing yeshivah in the Lithuanian style, headed by a number of learned rabbis who were the authors of widely distributed rabbinic commentaries. For a Jewish boy, to grow up in Vitebsk in the last third of the nineteenth century entailed exposure to both of these religious movements that had dominated Eastern Europe for nearly a century.

Any account of the culture of nineteenth-century Ashkenaz must start with these manifestations of Orthodoxy. We must, however, distinguish between tradition—Ansky's so-called "thick of Jewish life"—and Orthodoxy. Many Jews, probably the overwhelming majority, continued to live traditional lives throughout the nineteenth century in terms of their daily practices, values, and aspirations. But the articulation of that tradition changed dramatically as its defenders confronted the challenges of the age. The result of this confrontation was the "invention" of Orthodoxy, which was a culture every bit as "modern"—in the sense of "new"—as that of the modernizers. And rather than only opposing the modernizing movements, Orthodoxy often interacted with them in complicated and entangled ways.

The creation of this new Orthodox culture had its roots in the second half of the eighteenth century with the rise of Hasidism and its opponents. Yet neither Hasidism nor Mitnagdism (from *mitnaged* or "opponent") was a fully coherent movement at this time, and it is only from the vantage point of their later development that we imagine them so in their early years. In the nineteenth century, disciples of these two movements shaped the images of their founders—Elijah

ben Solomon, the Gaon of Vilna (1720–97), and Israel Ba'al Shem Tov, or “the Besht” (ca. 1700–60)—as exemplifying the values of the movements. These images were based, to some degree, on historical truth, but they also embodied the primary cultural values that the early-nineteenth-century leaders tried to instill in their followers.

The Lithuanian Yeshivot Let us begin with the Gaon of Vilna and see how his biography played itself out in the culture of the Lithuanian yeshivah movement, the institutional setting for the Mitnagdim.⁸ The Gaon was the greatest talmudic scholar of the eighteenth century but held no rabbinical office. He headed neither a communal rabbinic court nor a yeshivah. Instead, he cultivated a reclusive lifestyle for which he developed a kind of theological justification. Although he did play a significant role in the polemics against Hasidism, primarily by instigating one of the first bans against the movement, he was only a public figure in a limited sense. It was, rather, his sons and students who turned him into the titular leader of the anti-Hasidic forces and the founder of the Lithuanian yeshivah system. Indeed, as the nineteenth century wore on, the Gaon increasingly became something like a Hasidic *rebbe* (or *anti-rebbe*) for the Lithuanian opponents of Hasidism. He was seen as the mirror image of the Besht, a founder of a movement who, like the Hasidic leader, could perform magical acts of intercession for his disciples.

After the Gaon's death in 1797, two of his sons, Abraham and Judah, published his commentary on the *Shulhan Arukh* (Joseph's Karo sixteenth-century legal code that had become the standard for Jewish law) with an introduction that contains a fascinating biographical sketch of their father. Among its many interesting features is the way this biography creates a kind of individual personality, an exemplary one, to be sure, but still a personality with a sense of individual subjectivity that we usually identify with the Enlightenment. Indeed, the emergence both in the yeshivah world and in Hasidism of biographies—often accompanied by portraits—of great rabbinic figures was a new phenomenon, though it also drew from the medieval tradition of hagiography.

The Gaon is portrayed as a cloistered and ascetic scholar, perhaps more so than any spiritual figure from the Middle Ages. But he is also said to have developed a new ethos. Rather than cultivating “fear of God” as a primary value, he elevated the study of Torah to a position of absolute importance. The virtues of study had been, of course, central to rabbinic Judaism since late antiquity, and, indeed, the Mishnah proclaimed that “the study of Torah is equal to all [the commandments].” But the Gaon and his disciples raised such statements to a new theoretical level, even above the commandments: “The Torah is like bread, upon which man's heart feeds . . . and it is needed constantly, like bread. . . . But

the mitzvot [commandments] are like a confection, which is good periodically and in the proper time, like a confection which one eats from time to time.”⁹

If the commandments are understood as reflecting also a person's social involvement, the Gaon here resolutely proclaims the superiority of solitary study. Never before had pure study been valued more highly than prayer or the performance of commandments. Yet it must be emphasized that study for the Gaon meant not only talmudic study but also kabbalistic. The Gaon was no less a mystic than were the leaders of Hasidism. He saw no contradiction between the rational argumentation of the Talmud and the esoteric speculations of the Kabbalah.

This fierce ideology of intellectual immersion plays a central role in the biographical sketch written by the Gaon's sons. Referring directly to both Hasidism and the Haskalah, they wrote that, through his single-minded devotion to study, he was able to “always worship God through joy [the Hasidic ideal] . . . [and] every day true Enlightenment [*haskalah amitit*] was strengthened through his hands.” By coopting the values of these two competing movements, the Gaon's sons reinforced the centrality of traditional study. They recount with awe that their father never slept for more than two hours in any twenty-four-hour period and never for more than half an hour at a time. During these brief naps, his lips continued to whisper words of “law and legend” (*halakhot ve-aggadot*). To illustrate that study even crowded out familial affection, they tell a story of how the Gaon's favorite son, Solomon Zalman, was taken ill at the age of five or six. The Gaon nevertheless followed his customary practice of traveling some distance from Vilna in order to seclude himself in study:

There [in this secluded study spot] the springs of nature were dammed up to the point that he forgot his house and his children for more than a month. Once, he went to the bath house and, since, as is known, it is forbidden to meditate on the Torah there, he began to think about personal matters and in this way he remembered that he had been away from home for more than a month. And he also remembered his beloved son who was lying on his sick bed. [At once] his compassion was aroused and he ordered his carriage prepared to take him home so that he could seek after his son's welfare.¹⁰

Since talmudic times, elite Jewish culture had exhibited persistent tensions between domesticity and study: both were given high value, but the lure of intellectual study frequently won out over family. So it was also with the Gaon, but here his ability to literally erase any thought of his family—and even of his beloved son who was ill—while he was studying is held up as a kind of heroic ideal. And this is not the only story in this text or in others about the Gaon's ex-

traordinary ability to do so. We cannot, of course, determine whether such stories are true or are hyperbolic inventions. But even if they are fictions, it is remarkable that it is the Gaon's own sons who relate this account in celebratory tones, even when the story involves their father's neglect of themselves. Their paradoxical intention was clearly to turn the Gaon—who, as the text makes clear, was an intensely private man—into a public icon of scholarship. In so doing, they created a radical distinction between the realm of domesticity and the realm of Torah study, one that had its roots in earlier Jewish tradition but was also similar in function to the distinction emerging in European culture between the “private” and the “public.” Even though the Gaon's sons were unlikely to have been responding to these new ideas, their account fits well into a larger cultural trend.

If the Gaon himself considered study a private affair, his preeminent student, Ḥayyim of Volozhin, was to translate his ideas into a public institution, the yeshivah of Volozhin, founded in 1803. It does not appear that the Gaon instructed Rabbi Ḥayyim to create this school. But Volozhin became the setting for a new type of educational institution that would, in turn, reshape the culture of the traditional Jewish world of the Russian Empire. Generations of the brightest young Jewish men passed through its doors as well as the doors of other yeshivot inspired by its example, such as Telz, Mir, and Slobodka. The poet of the nationalist revival, Ḥayyim Nahman Bialik (1873–1934), celebrated Volozhin as the “school where the soul of the nation was formed,” by which he meant the institution that trained not only rabbinical authorities but also those who later became maskilim or, like Bialik himself, Zionists, as well as poets, mystics, philosophers, novelists, and folklorists. Although earlier rabbinical academies in Eastern Europe sometimes attracted students from a distance, none ever achieved the prominence of the great Lithuanian yeshivot, which drew them from a wide geographical range and, like nineteenth-century European universities, contributed to the creation of a national elite not tied to a specific locale.

The curriculum of the yeshivot also resembled the classical, humanistic training of the German or English university systems, albeit in a Jewish idiom. For the most part, the goal of talmudic study was not primarily to train rabbis or to investigate legal questions for their practical significance. The *rosh yeshivah* (yeshivah head) was neither a legal authority nor a communal rabbi; this new institutional figure resembles in Orthodox Jewish terms something like a university academic, an “ivory tower” scholar. In the second half of the nineteenth century, this tendency reached new heights of abstraction in the so-called “analytic” school of Ḥayyim Soloveitchik of Brisk and others, which focused on the logical ramifications and linguistic formulations of talmudic arguments

rather than either textual erudition or legal applications.¹¹ Some have compared this method to the school of analysis developed by English philosophers at Oxford and Cambridge in the twentieth century in which the linguistic meaning of propositions became the core of philosophical investigation. Although the yeshivah method itself grew at first out of an internal development in the history of the halakhah starting in the eighteenth century, by the second half of the nineteenth century it became an intellectual alternative to the historical approach to Jewish texts championed by the Haskalah.

Far from a mere continuation of traditional methods of study, the Lithuanian yeshivot represented a powerful, theoretical response on similar intellectual grounds to modern skepticism and rationalism. Indeed, some of the opponents of the analytical method from within the Lithuanian yeshivah world were disturbed by its very innovative and, one might even say, "modern" character. The sheer intellectual attraction of this method found perhaps its most eloquent expression in the essay *Halakhic Man*, written by Ḥayyim of Brisk's grandson, Joseph B. Soloveitchik, considered by many the most brilliant exponent of the Lithuanian yeshivah system in the twentieth century. Soloveitchik, himself trained in Western philosophy as well as rabbinics, argued that the analytic school's method of study was similar to modern science, even though its terms of reference were quite different.¹²

This doctrine of absolute intellectualism owed its origins to the Gaon, who, as we have seen, argued that love of God is best expressed by engaging in the rational exercise of talmudic discourse. Because of this emphasis on critical inquiry, the Lithuanian system encouraged constant questioning of all dogmatic answers. Ḥayyim of Volozhin taught that "a disciple is forbidden to accept the statements of his teacher when he questions them, and sometimes the truth is on the side of the disciple, just as a small tree ignites a large one. . . ."¹³

Although rabbinic discourse since the Talmud encouraged questioning and disagreement, Ḥayyim raised such freedom to a new level. This faction of the new Jewish Orthodoxy encouraged the very opposite of conservative "traditionalism" even as it defended the superiority of traditional learning. The very value of free inquiry, which was to inform the Jewish Enlightenment, can be found in the schools of its opponents. However, this free inquiry was itself limited by the abstract, theoretical questions that were central to the Lithuanian yeshivah culture: since such questions generally had no practical application, they provided a safe outlet for the intellectual curiosity that might otherwise turn toward heretical modernity.

The Lithuanian yeshivah movement made another major contribution toward the later rise of secular Jewish culture in its promotion of book publishing. One

impetus behind the establishment of the Volozhin yeshivah was a sense among the Lithuanian scholars that knowledge of Torah in Eastern Europe had diminished and that part of the problem was the lack of books. Few of the yeshivot of the day possessed full copies of the Talmud, and the libraries of most rabbis were probably even more meager. With the regeneration of talmudic study in Volozhin came a dramatic increase in the publishing of rabbinic texts. Eager for business, publishers sought out new markets of readers, to whom we will return, from Hasidim in search of tales of rebbes, to maskilim interested in translations of European literature and science, to female consumers of romantic chapbooks and religious manuals. Perhaps the most famous of these publishers was Romm of Vilna, established at the end of the eighteenth century. During the reign of Nicholas I, Romm was one of only two Jewish publishers officially allowed to operate, and it gained a virtual corner on the market, publishing the famous Vilna Talmud in thousands of copies as well as works of Hebrew and Yiddish literature. During its most active period, Romm was directed by a woman, the widow of the original proprietor, with her brothers; the firm became known as “the press of the widow and the brothers Romm.”

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, there was, then, a certain overlap between the Lithuanian scholarly tradition and the beginnings of the East European Jewish Enlightenment. An example of this overlap is Joshua Zeitlin (1742–1821), a wealthy merchant from Shklov who supported both the work of proto-maskilim like Barukh Schick (1744–1808) and traditional rabbinic scholarship, including the establishment of the Volozhin yeshivah. Schick, a disciple of the Gaon who spent time in Moses Mendelssohn’s circle in Berlin and tried to promote scientific knowledge among East European Jews, claimed that the Gaon himself favored learning science: “I heard from his holy tongue that for every deficiency of knowledge a man has in the sciences, he will have ten deficiencies of knowledge in the science of the Torah; for Torah and science are closely related.”¹⁴ According to some of his disciples, the Gaon was knowledgeable in mathematics and music, because he believed these disciplines necessary for solving problems in the Torah. Statements of this kind by the Gaon—whether real or fictive—were seized upon by those of his disciples inclined toward Haskalah to prove the importance of studying modern science, a preoccupation of the Haskalah throughout the nineteenth century. There was a strong sense among these proponents of the Enlightenment that lack of scientific knowledge made the Jews look like fools in the eyes of the world. As one member of the early Haskalah circle in Shklov, Judah Leb Margoliot (1747–1811), wrote:

For it does not befit the honor of the Lord’s religion and congregation for us to be fools in the eyes of the Gentiles and to be considered like wild beasts. Does

the Lord wish for [the sciences] to be honored in the hearts of our enemies and for us to be considered fools and idiots?¹⁵

From the vantage point of the early twenty-first century, it seems incredible that the Jews, so preeminent in the sciences today, considered themselves only 200 years ago utterly ignorant of scientific knowledge, something that could not be said of Italian, Spanish, or Middle Eastern Jews in earlier periods, or even of sixteenth-century Prague Jews like Judah Loew (the Maharal) and David Gans.

It would, however, be a mistake to argue that the Gaon and his tradition were primarily responsible for the rise of the Jewish Enlightenment in Eastern Europe. Schick's statement about the Gaon's interest in science became a bone of contention between maskilim and traditionalists through the nineteenth century. As time went on, the Gaon's spiritual heirs tried to restrict the meaning of such putative positions and, like other Orthodox authorities, to forbid the study of any non-Jewish books. Similarly, in the face of Haskalah demands to leaven the study of Talmud with study of the Bible and Hebrew grammar, they suppressed the Gaon's own advocacy of such a broadened curriculum. Increasingly threatened by modernity, they seized upon the Gaon's insistence on the exclusive value of Torah study to label all foreign sciences *bitul torah* (annihilation of Torah). In fact, the Volozhin yeshivah was closed down in 1892 because it refused to bow to the Russian authorities' demand to limit the number of hours of Torah study and increase the hours spent on secular subjects in its curriculum. (It was reopened three years later, but on a much reduced scale.)

The Gaon's legacy was therefore double-edged: the Lithuanian yeshivot cultivated an intellectualism that resembled the Haskalah, but the single-minded focus on Torah study led to a total ban on any other type of learning, a position that was not so much traditionalist (since Jewish intellectuals in previous times had often learned sciences) as it was an innovation. In this rejection of "worldly sciences," all of the branches of East European Jewish Orthodoxy in the nineteenth century—from the Lithuanian yeshivot to Hasidism and Hungarian Orthodoxy—were in general agreement (although some of the leaders of these movements were not entirely ignorant of intellectual developments outside their world, and one exceptional yeshivah, at Lida, was founded by Isaac Jacob Reines in 1907 to include secular subjects). If the nineteenth century began with some cautious openness to "foreign books," by the end of it, to be an Orthodox Jew in Eastern Europe meant overwhelmingly to be opposed to any secular study outside of Jewish texts.

The intellectualism of the Lithuanian yeshivot was not the only development within the traditional world of the nineteenth century; despite its self-image as the monolithic defender of tradition, the new Orthodoxy took many forms.

Within the Lithuanian world itself, a reaction took place in the form of the *musar* (ethical) movement of Israel Salanter (1810–83).¹⁶ Salanter, who was a product of the yeshivah culture, developed a doctrine of personal introspection and ethical self-restraint that built on medieval ethical literature and the teachings of the Gaon but addressed nineteenth-century issues in an acute way. Although he did not explicitly deny the centrality of Torah study, he placed alongside it—and perhaps even above it—the importance of *yir'ah* (fear of God). In a way that seems remarkably modern, he shifted the struggle against the Evil Impulse (*yetzer ha-ra*) from the theological to the psychological realm. Here was a doctrine that added to rational talmudic discourse a preoccupation with the self and its emotional states. Salanter also broke with the prevailing elitism of the Lithuanian yeshivot and addressed his teachings to a wider audience, taking into account the material sufferings of the Russian Jews. In this respect, as well as in offering a spiritual ethos beyond textual study, Salanter's doctrine resembled Hasidism, though his was a movement within the yeshivah world. Another resemblance to early Hasidism was the way his followers, usually adolescents studying in yeshivot, formed radical fellowships.

Salanter's main source for this new psychology was a work called *Ḥesbon ha-Nefesh* (An Accounting of the Soul) by Mendel Lefin (1741–1819), one of the first East European maskilim, again pointing to an overlap between “traditional” and “modern” Jewish cultures. Although Salanter's *musar* movement did not arise primarily as a reaction against the Haskalah, it undoubtedly functioned, like Lithuanian intellectualism, as a traditionalist alternative to modern cultivations of the self. Its solutions may have been different, but it was addressing the same new consciousness of individualism.

It was Salanter's seemingly “modern” emphasis on the self and the doctrine of introspection that excited the opposition of the leaders of the Lithuanian yeshivot. One of the preeminent rabbinic authorities of Eastern Europe in the early twentieth century was Abraham Karelitz of Kossov (1878–1953), known better, after one of his works, as the *Ḥazon Ish* (The Vision of a Man). Like the Gaon of Vilna, the *Ḥazon Ish* never held any institutional position, but, due to his charisma, he is widely considered to be one of the founders of the *Ḥaredi*, or ultra-Orthodox, community in Israel (he arrived in Palestine in 1933). The *Ḥazon Ish* rejected *musar*'s focus on the self and argued instead that the best way of conquering the Evil Impulse was by super-punctilious observance of Jewish law. For this reason, he insisted on the most stringent interpretations of the law so as to make observance as difficult as possible. Absolute submission—and not personal autonomy—was the goal (although such submission was characteristic of certain tendencies in *musar* as well). Yet this extremism was itself not so much

traditional as new, a product of the peculiar dynamics within the Lithuanian yeshivah world in the face of new challenges.

A similar ultra-Orthodox culture of extreme rigidity developed in Hungary. Perhaps in no other country of Eastern Europe was the process of modernization from the mid-nineteenth century on as dynamic as in Hungary. In the 1850s and 1860s, the introduction of compulsory secular education and “Magyarization” (linguistic nationalism) transformed Jewish culture there to a degree unheard of elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Even among Jews who retained a traditional way of life, Hungarian or German sometimes replaced Yiddish as the primary language, a development uncommon elsewhere. At a time when the majority of Jews in the Russian Empire continued to be traditional in their way of life, the Orthodox in Hungary, like their counterparts in Germany, were threatened with becoming a minority within the Jewish community. Against the religious innovations of the Reformers and modern Hungarian culture, Jewish traditionalists, especially in the eastern regions of Hungary, developed an ultra-Orthodox response. Indeed, it was precisely because of the immediate threat of modernity that such an extreme reaction developed much more in Hungary than in Russia, where, as we have seen, the challenge of modernity was significantly more distorted and delayed.

The titular founder of Hungarian ultra-Orthodoxy, Moses Sofer (1763–1839, also known as “the *Ḥatam Sofer*”), who was the chief rabbi in Pressburg (Bratislava), where he founded a large and enormously influential yeshivah, declared in his ethical will:

Do not touch the books of Rabbi Moses [Mendelssohn] of Dessau and your foot will never slip. . . . The daughters may read German books, but only those which have been written in our own way. . . . Be warned not to change your Jewish names, speech, and clothing—God forbid. . . . Never say “Times have changed.” We have an old Father, praised be His name, who has never changed and never will change.¹⁷

Sofer opposed the reading of any foreign books by men, and even women—who were typically allowed greater latitude in their reading—were only to be permitted German (by which he probably meant Yiddish) books if they were written in the traditional manner. Adapting several rabbinic midrashim which claimed that the biblical Israelites survived exile in Egypt because they did not change their names, speech, or clothing,¹⁸ he stipulated that the same standard should apply in the nineteenth century. Although throughout the centuries Jews had in fact adopted non-Jewish names, languages, and costume, the nineteenth-

century Hungarian ultra-Orthodox, in contrast to the Orthodox in Germany, took the midrash literally and as a commandment. Questions of language and dress would become critical markers of identity in the wars between different groups of Orthodox and modernizers in Eastern Europe.

Like the *Ḥazon Ish* in the twentieth century, Sofer opposed any liberal innovation in the law. He argued that God “granted authority to the sages in each generation to establish customs in Israel, and once they are spread, it is forbidden to uproot them,”¹⁹ a position that seems on the face of it self-contradictory but was intended to reconcile the legislative freedom of the rabbis of each generation with unwavering conservatism. Akiva Joseph Schlesinger (1837–1922), the leader of Hungarian ultra-Orthodoxy in the latter part of the nineteenth century, went even further. He elevated the *Shulḥan Arukh* into a canonical text in which “every rule . . . is equal to the Ten Commandments; and every Jewish custom is equal to the Ten Commandments.”²⁰ By giving such authority to this body of law, Schlesinger cast implicit aspersions on the traditional talmudic culture—as well as the Lithuanian yeshivah culture—valuing disagreement and debate. These tendencies to equate law with custom and to favor rigid codes over talmudic discourse were to become characteristics of East European ultra-Orthodoxy and its twentieth-century heirs. Yet, as with the *Ḥazon Ish*, these ostensibly “traditional” positions were themselves radical innovations.

The culture of the yeshivot was predominantly elitist. Not only did they explicitly appeal to the most talented boys of the Jewish world, but they did so based on an elitist ideology. According to the theology promulgated by the disciples of the Gaon, the spiritual capabilities of most men (about women there was hardly any question!) were limited, and only the select few might attain true learning. Kabbalistic teachings were certainly part of legitimate wisdom (like the Gaon, *Ḥayyim* of Volozhin and other Lithuanian authorities were themselves Kabbalists), but the Kabbalah was to be transmitted as an esoteric doctrine because only the few could understand it. As opposed to the Hasidic teaching of divine immanence, which might make God accessible to all Jews, the Mitnagdim typically taught that God was transcendent and unknowable. Only the Torah provided access to divine wisdom, but full understanding of the Torah was only possible for a small religious elite—a classically medieval position. In this regard, Mitnagdism positioned itself both against the Haskalah, with its Enlightenment zeal for universal education, and against Hasidism, the movement of popular piety that became, in the early nineteenth century, a mass movement.

Hasidism Let us turn now to Hasidism, the other major component in the emerging Orthodox culture of Eastern Europe.²¹ Hasidism, as Moshe Rosman

shows in volume II of this series, dates back to the middle of the eighteenth century, but because many of the sources from that period are either apologetic or polemical, it is hard to estimate just how widespread it was in its first half-century. It is likely that the Hasidic communities were no more than scattered, small worship circles organized around charismatic leaders. Although these *tzadikim* may have attracted followers from distant places, the sects had not yet acquired the wide geographic scope and broad popular allegiance that would be the case in the nineteenth century. In part, this was due to the power still wielded by their opponents, who typically controlled the local communal institutions (the *kahal*). The initial spread of Hasidism may have profited from the Polish government's abolition of the Council of the Four Lands in 1764, which prevented traditional communal authorities from enforcing a nationwide ban on the sect. But with the partition of Poland, the governments of Austria and Russia, which had inherited the areas where Hasidism flourished, sought to weaken local communal power as well. The growing strength of Hasidic groups in the early nineteenth century may have had something to do with this new political atmosphere. Indeed, the bans against Hasidism promulgated in the last quarter of the eighteenth century by the Vilna Gaon and his allies had no counterparts in the nineteenth century. The weakening of the *kahal* and its formal abolition (it continued to function unofficially, however) by the government of Nicholas I in 1844 created a leadership vacuum that not only Hasidism but also the Haskalah and later movements tried to fill.

Like the Mitnagdic use of the Gaon, the nineteenth-century Hasidim also shaped the image of their founder, the Besht, as a way of advancing the identity of the movement. The collection of stories entitled *Shivhei ha-Besht* (In Praise of the Ba'al Shem Tov), published in 1815, is less a historical source for the life of the Besht than it is a mirror of how early-nineteenth-century Hasidism wished to portray its founder and itself. Let us consider one story from this hagiography that concerns turning the teachings of Hasidism into written texts, perhaps an echo of the struggle against the textual culture of the Mitnagdim:

There was a man who wrote down the teaching of the Besht that he heard from him. Once the Besht saw a demon walking and holding a book in his hand. He said to him: "What is the book that you hold in your hand?" He answered him: "This is the book that you have written." The Besht then understood that there was a person who was writing down his teaching. He gathered all his followers and asked them: "Who among you is writing down my teaching?" The man admitted it and he brought the manuscript to the Besht. The Besht examined it and said: "There is not even a single word here that is mine."²²

As in many of these stories, the Besht is clairvoyant, in this case because he can see demons. Those who write down the Besht's teachings are like demons, and what they write bears no relationship to the actual teaching. Like many popular movements and like early rabbinic Judaism itself, Hasidism began with oral doctrines. The Besht himself never actually wrote anything systematic, beyond a few letters. By the time *Shivhei ha-Besht* was composed, many oral teachings attributed to him had appeared in written form. In the case of the Besht and other Hasidic masters, whose primary form of communication was oral, the written versions were all translations from the Yiddish, in which they were told, into Hebrew. Even if these teachings were authentic—and this story questions their authenticity—the very act of translation would naturally change their meaning. The story thus appears to take issue with the emergence of a literary Hasidic culture in Hebrew in favor of a more popular oral culture, which would have been primarily in Yiddish, a tension between an “elite” and a “popular” language that would be replicated by the Haskalah writers later in the century. This criticism is particularly ironic, because Hasidism itself played a major role in the increase in printing of Jewish books that took place in the nineteenth century and that contributed to a veritable revolution in reading among East European Jews.

In fact, one of the books most often published in both Hebrew and Yiddish editions was *Shivhei ha-Besht*. So, an additional irony is that this story is a written version of a teaching of the Besht, even though it teaches us not to write down his teachings! *Shivhei ha-Besht* therefore has a peculiar status as a work of folklore that tries to preserve the oral character of its sources. It is well known that Hasidism raised storytelling to a spiritual art, as, indeed, one tale in *Shivhei ha-Besht* makes explicit:

When there was a circumcision ceremony in the house of the head of the court of the holy community of Horodnya, I heard from the rabbi of the holy community of Polonnoye and then from the rabbi of our community that the Besht said: “When one tells stories in praise of the *tzaddik*, it is as though he were engaged in *ma'ase merkavah* [mystical speculation on the nature of God].”²³

Here is a story that legitimizes the telling of stories about the *tzadik* as equivalent to kabbalistic speculation about God and thus turns the *tzaddik* into something close to God. It is as though the author of *Shivhei ha-Besht* is quoting the Besht himself as the warrant for his own creation. In the last third of the nineteenth century, there would be a veritable explosion of this kind of literature of

the “deeds of the tzaddikim” (*ma’asei tzaddikim*). Like the *Shivhei ha-Besht*, these were tales collected long after their subjects had lived by Hasidim motivated by an impulse similar to that of secular folklorists. In fact, it was in this same period, as we shall see later, that secular writers were also to “rediscover” Hasidic tales and undertake their own collections of folklore. Hasidim, secularists, and even Mitnagdim were all engaged, for different but interrelated reasons, in a culture of remembrance.

Many Hasidic storytellers borrowed from older Jewish folktales, but they used traditional motifs to express the particular struggles and anxieties of their age. Traditional stories about children taken captive by non-Jews might give voice to the need to fight against the allure of a non-Jewish world now beginning to tempt Jewish children. Another threat was the Jewish Enlightenment and other manifestations of modern culture. One story, published in 1866, tells how Satan ensnares a young man and promises to let him return home only if he agrees to read one page of a certain book every day. The young man takes an oath to do so, but after he reads one page, he loses all desire to study. With each succeeding day, he reads another page and gradually gives up obeying one commandment after another.²⁴ The tale clearly deals with the dangers of reading a work of Haskalah, but the maskil who tries to corrupt the youth is transmuted into a traditional demon. Interestingly, the youth’s slide into heresy comes from that most traditional activity, study, but here studying a heretical book causes him first to lose all desire to study, including, presumably, even to study the heretical book! In this way, the story implicitly recognizes the overlap between traditional and modern Jewish cultures: both are based on books, but books of radically different meaning. And, finally, the story also resonates against the tale from *Shivhei ha-Besht* in which a demon reads a book ostensibly written by the Ba’al Shem Tov but really written by a demon. Taken together, these tales suggest a culture quite anxious about books and their potentially dangerous consequences. Hasidism undertook an uneasy and tense mediation between books, which represented the intellectual elite, and oral tales, which represented the *vox populi*.

Tales like these were one of the ways in which Hasidism developed its own particular brand of popular culture. The growth of Hasidism as a truly popular movement took place in the first half of the nineteenth century in far-flung corners of Eastern Europe: White Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Galicia, and Hungary. The courts of the tzaddikim became sites of pilgrimage from miles around and transformed the very character of the towns in which they were located. For example, when the small town of Gora Kalwaria in Poland became the seat of the rebbe of Ger (the Yiddish name for the town), the town’s population exploded.²⁵ Like the Lithuanian yeshivot, the courts of the tzaddikim became supra-local in-

stitutions that filled the vacuum left by the disbanded Council of the Four Lands by creating links between communities and by contributing to the emergence of a new form of Jewish national identity in Eastern Europe.

Perhaps the most successful of the early-nineteenth-century Hasidic leaders was Israel of Ruzhin (1796–1850), the great-grandson of one of the Besht's primary disciples, Dov Ber, the Great Maggid of Mezeritch. Starting in 1813, Israel built an extraordinary Hasidic empire, first in Ukraine and then, as of 1841, in Sadagora, in the Galician province of the Austro-Hungarian empire, to which he escaped after having been accused of involvement in the murders of two Jewish "informers." Though cut off from the majority of the Ruzhin Ḥassidim in Russia, Israel and his dynastic successors built an opulent palace in Sadagora where they received visitors from far and wide, including maskilim and curious non-Jews. Unlike other Hasidim, the Ruzhin rebbes dressed in semimodern garb and imitated the lifestyle of the Galician nobility. Alluding to the messianic tradition, Israel styled himself as a kind of Jewish king, which undoubtedly increased his appeal to Jews living under the absolutist monarchs of Russia and Austria.

Israel's success as a leader owed little to either his learning or spiritual gifts, which by all accounts were quite minimal, but rather to a kind of charisma as well as great organizational ability. His charisma was pastoral rather than mystical, and his Hasidim regarded him primarily as a devoted father to his vast flock. Israel himself made no secret of his lack of learning and, in fact, created a theory to legitimize his style of leadership:

When the early *tzaddikim* had to improve the lot of their followers [*le-hativ la-olam*], they did so by teachings and prayer, because at that time the world was in a loftier state [*behinat gadlut*]. But now that the world is in a state of decline [*behinat katnut*], when the *tzaddik* has to improve the lot of his community, he can only do so by means of stories of the deeds [of the earlier *tzaddikim*] and other simple devices.²⁶

With the age of Hasidic greatness over, the *tzaddik* can only use the stories from that past rather than original doctrines, a development that already begins, as we have seen, with the *Shivḥei ha-Besht*. In another place, Israel speaks of himself in Yiddish as a "coarse Jew" (*grobeyon*) and explains that this is because his work involves dealing with material matters in order to raise them up to their source.²⁷ The doctrine of the "raising of sparks" from the material world was central to eighteenth-century Hasidism, but Israel of Ruzhin clearly intended to justify both his materialistic lifestyle and his often crude and provocative behavior. Beyond the idiosyncrasies of the Ruzhin dynasty, however, teachings like these capture the transformation of Hasidism from small pietistic sects to a mass

movement concerned less with esoteric spirituality than with the material and pastoral needs of its followers. As traditional or premodern community institutions declined, Hasidism in the nineteenth century filled an increasingly felt vacuum.

The various types of East European Jewish Orthodoxy that developed in the nineteenth century—the Lithuanian yeshivah movement, Hungarian ultra-Orthodoxy, musar, and Hassidism—all should be considered self-conscious articulations of traditional ways of life in the face of a changing world. Yet, as much as this new Orthodoxy was a “conservative” or “reactionary” response to modernity, the development of this response often involved the use of very modern techniques and tools. Examples can be found in a wide variety of spheres. The Orthodox came to understand the importance of political organization and, in 1912, formed the Agudat Yisrael party, which became a particularly vigorous force in electoral politics in interwar Poland. The Orthodox also adopted the Haskalah’s means of dissemination of ideas through newspapers and journals such as *Ha-Levanon* and *Ha-Tevunah*.

Yet another “modern” or new phenomenon in the Orthodox world were portraits of rabbis, which became popular throughout Eastern Europe in the nineteenth century, as they had in the previous century in Germany.²⁸ As both Hasidism and the yeshivah world came to venerate their charismatic leaders through virtual “cults of personality,” the visual images of these rabbis assumed ritual importance, something almost unknown in the Jewish Middle Ages. Because the followers were spread over great distances, those who could not be immediately in the presence of the rabbi often found that a portrait on the wall served as a handy substitute. These portraits might take the form of lithographs or even, in one unusual case, an image made of micrography (miniaturized writing that formed the lines of the picture and thus combined the visual with the textual). A scandal broke out in Hungary in 1866 when the venerated Rabbi Yehuda Aszod died; his followers, intent on preserving some memento, propped him up on a chair with a book and took his photograph, which was reproduced and then widely circulated. In these surprising ways, visual culture found a place in the Orthodox world of Eastern Europe—and, as we shall see, in the secular.

Even synagogue architecture reflected the influence of contemporary trends.²⁹ In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Jewish communities in Eastern Europe adapted the architecture of the traditional wooden churches to create a distinctive type of wooden synagogue; these structures, which had their own singularly Jewish features, represent the interplay between Jewish and Christian culture in pre-modern Poland (see Moshe Rosman’s chapter on this period). But in the nineteenth century, with the growth in the Jewish population throughout Eastern Europe and particularly in the cities, the traditional synagogues

were often inadequate for their congregations. The communities where Hasidic courts were located also needed large buildings to accommodate the many worshippers on important holidays, as well as to lodge the households of rebbes like those of the Ruzhin dynasty. In early-nineteenth-century Poland, the civil authorities enforced a classical style on large buildings. Many of the synagogues built from then through the 1920s boasted Doric or Tuscan pilasters. In the larger towns and cities, the Jews considered it appropriate to follow the architectural canons of their surroundings, and thus many of the synagogues of the time bore striking resemblances to neighboring churches. Later on, as urbanization accelerated and communities became more prosperous, synagogues increasingly became vehicles for Jewish self-expression. Some styles, like the classical, neo-Gothic, neo-Renaissance, and neo-Romanesque, suggested the connections between Jewish and historical European culture. Others, pioneered in 1854 by the synagogue in Wloclawek, in western Poland, demonstrated the Jews' "Oriental" identity by adopting motifs from Islamic architecture, a trend these Polish Jews borrowed from their German cousins during this period. And these developments were not limited to Poland. In Russia proper, similar architectural styles might be found, as we can observe from a picture of the great synagogue of Vitebsk with its columns, arches, and towers.

In this way, the Orthodox Jews of Eastern Europe, who may have insisted on their isolation from the contagion of modernity and the non-Jewish world, demonstrated in their buildings, as in many other features of this new traditionalism, that the walls against the outside world were often quite permeable. The very invention of Orthodoxy—the resolute denial of change in Jewish tradition—was itself the innovative product of a creative interaction with the surrounding world. When Ansky spoke about “the thick of Jewish life” in which he grew up, he scarcely imagined how different this culture already was from “ancient Judaism and its traditions.”

THE CULTURE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

[W]orks in the Hebrew language forcefully and violently tore me away from ancient Judaism and its traditions and awakened within me a hatred and contempt for its traditions.

In an autobiographical fragment from 1910, Ansky remembered that, when he left Vitebsk in 1881, he took with him a bundle of Haskalah works that he had read during the previous year: Moses Leib Lilienblum's *Sins of Youth*, Isaac Ber Levinsohn's *Zerubavel*, Abraham Mapu's *The Love of Zion*, and Peretz Smolen-



The Izhorier synagogue of Vitebsk, which was the “Grand Synagogue” of the *mitnagdim* (opponents of Hasidism), photographed in 1910. It became a meeting place for Zionists and was the site for a memorial for Theodor Herzl after his death in 1905.

Typical of nineteenth-century Eastern European synagogue architecture, it combined an eclectic array of styles to convey a sense of churchlike grandeur. (YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, Photo Archives, New York; YIVO R 1 Vitebsk 46)



The Hasidic Ziretsheir synagogue in Vitebsk, constructed in a grand manner like that of its *mitnagdic* competitor. As opposed to the usual image of Hasidism, the synagogue was known for its cantor and large choir. It stood directly opposite the family home of the socialist writer Chaim Zhitlovsky. (YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, Photo Archives, New York; YIVO R 1 Vitebsk 45)

skin's *A Donkey's Burial*. It was these "works in the Hebrew language" that had such a violent effect on the young Ansky, as they did on so many other Jewish youths of the nineteenth century, creating not simply a disillusionment with "ancient Judaism and its traditions"—or, better, the new world of nineteenth-century Orthodoxy—but "hatred and contempt."

By the time of Ansky's youth, the Haskalah had become a relatively well-established literary movement, which produced significant numbers of novels, poems, memoirs, newspapers, journals, and translations of European literature and science—all in the peculiar, cumbersome Hebrew style that the maskilim developed. The Haskalah did not start with the intention of overthrowing the Jewish religion, but, as the nineteenth century wore on, it became increasingly radical and secular. This secular "moment" in Jewish history was the product of the singular constellation of political, economic, and social barriers that largely prevented the kind of bourgeois assimilation that Italian, German, Austrian, and French Jews experienced in the course of the nineteenth century. With these avenues blocked, the Jews developed their own intense, internal culture that sought a variety of solutions to the dilemmas posed by Eastern Europe. This secular culture ultimately found expression not only in Hebrew but in Yiddish and East European languages as well.

Although the Haskalah in Germany quickly became the credo of the growing middle class, the political and social stagnation under which the East European Jews suffered left the maskilim of the East an embattled minority for most of the nineteenth century; in fact, the challenge they posed led to a virtual "cease-fire" between Hasidim and Mitnagdim. Out of their struggle for survival against censorship of their books and communal persecution, the maskilim became intent on redistributing power within Jewish society. They advocated a new kind of community in which power would be shared between an enlightened state and enlightened, acculturated intellectuals like themselves, a common move among subject intellectuals in colonial societies. Following this approach, some of the early maskilim even sought an alliance with the repressive regime of Nicholas I. The reordering of power they envisioned went hand in hand with a new form of knowledge: secular learning would take the place of rabbinic learning, just as modern leaders would take the place of rabbis.

Much of Haskalah literature was oppositional in character, permeated with a hatred of traditional Jewish life that, given its authors' own origins in that world, suggested self-loathing. Beginning with satirical anti-Hasidic literature early in the century, such as Joseph Perl's *Revealer of Secrets*, the fiction and journalistic writings of the modernizers typically featured harsh criticisms of traditional Jewish communal and religious life, reminiscent of the French Enlightenment's

vituperative anticlericalism. Some of these works, like Smolenskin's *A Donkey's Burial*, thematized the struggle between maskilim and their benighted opponents against the backdrop of the shtetl. The only relief from the dreary portraits of traditional Jewish life came from escapist romances set in biblical times, like the first Hebrew novel, Mapu's *Love of Zion*. Because most of the writers who attacked shtetl culture were by then writing in cities like Odessa or Vilna, this literature also expressed urban contempt for rural culture.³⁰ For a boy in a town like Vitebsk (itself more urbanized and sophisticated than a backwater shtetl), such "works in the Hebrew language" constituted a revolutionary manifesto against tradition indeed.

The maskilim were interested in the integration of the Jews into Russia, even though the Hebraists among them envisioned a Jewish subculture in Hebrew; their position might be considered "proto-nationalist." After the pogroms of 1881–82, many became disillusioned with this vision and turned toward other forms of national regeneration. But the maskilic culture of self-criticism infected the revolutionary political movements of the end of the century, from Zionism to Bundism: for these political ideologies, the common Jews of the vast reaches of the Pale were a pitiable and contemptible lot who had to be radically transformed, transported away, or a combination of both.³¹ Perhaps never have movements of national regeneration held such disparaging views of their subjects: uncompromising criticism of tradition itself became a tradition. The Orthodox themselves contributed to the culture of criticism and schism, labeling the maskilim heretics by applying to them the names of historical "deviants" like "Karaites" and "Sadducees." As the traditional authorities lost their power to ban the maskilim and their books, they became no less embattled than their opponents. In the modern State of Israel, where the heirs of these parties still struggle for cultural and political hegemony, this extraordinarily contentious culture struck new roots in ancient soil.

The East European Haskalah had started as a moderate enough movement within Jewish learned culture, spreading eastward from Germany as the nineteenth century progressed. This process was partly the result of the way Poland was partitioned. The area of Galicia, which was taken over by Austria, began to absorb Western influences before the areas annexed by Russia. Although, as we have seen, there were a few aspiring maskilim who traveled from the Russian Empire (particularly from Shklov, in Volhynia) to Mendelssohn's Berlin, the first real East European Haskalah developed in mercantile towns like Brody around such figures as Joseph Perl, Solomon Judah Rapoport, and Nahman Krochmal. The "Russian Mendelssohn," Isaac Ber Levinsohn (1788–1860), whose apologetic work against Christian missionizing, *Zerubavel*, found a place in Ansky's suit-

case, spent a number of years in these circles in the early nineteenth century before returning to Russia and publishing his Haskalah manifesto, *Te'udah be-Yisrael*, in 1828.

Although these early maskilim absorbed Western Enlightenment ideas, their writings were often cast in rabbinic forms of argument. *Te'udah be-Yisrael* begins with the approbation (*haskamah*) of an important Vilna rabbinical authority in the manner of traditional books.³² Yet Levinsohn dedicated the work to Czar Nicholas I, received a 1,000-ruble prize, and thus ensured its publication; the dedication and the book's publication history point to the attempt by the Russian Haskalah to serve as a bridge between the Jews and the state. Echoing arguments from earlier maskilim, Levinsohn argues for the study of foreign languages and sciences, but his arguments are couched in traditional style, using proof texts from rabbinical sources. Like Moses Maimonides, the great medieval hero of the Haskalah who had tried to reconcile the Bible with Greek science, Levinsohn sought to show that the tradition itself is on the side of Haskalah. In its defense of studying foreign sciences, *Te'udah be-Yisrael* spoke the language of at least some of the disciples of the Gaon of Vilna and, perhaps, the Gaon himself. Here we can observe the proximity between the learned culture of the Lithuanian yeshivah movement and the early Haskalah. It was not uncommon for full-fledged disciples of the Haskalah later in the century to speak of their own fathers as "maskilim," which probably meant that the fathers were steeped in the traditional intellectual values shared by the Haskalah and Mitnagdism. The similarities between the two groups, at least initially, shows not so much that the Haskalah "grew out of" the yeshivot as that they were virtually simultaneous developments of nineteenth-century Jewish culture.

Yet maskilim and Lithuanian scholars quickly parted company as the yeshivot became increasingly hostile to foreign books. Levinsohn's manifesto already departs radically from the culture of the Mitnagdim, even though he uses traditional proof texts. He opens with a panegyric to Pallas Athene, hardly a theme one might expect in a rabbinic text. In a barely concealed attack on the exclusive study of Talmud in the yeshivot, Levinsohn argues—as had the earlier German Haskalah—for systematic training in Hebrew grammar and the Bible, two disciplines that had disappeared from the educational curriculum in Eastern Europe but had been part of Spanish Jewish culture in the Middle Ages. And, in his argument for studying foreign sciences, he liberally laces his text and footnotes with words in Latin characters, thus pointing the way to a new synthesis between Jewish and non-Jewish cultures.

As we have seen, the Orthodox frequently defended their tradition by adopting literally the midrash that the Jews had been preserved in exile by not chang-

ing their “names, language, and clothing.” These were three of the features of Jewish culture that were particularly under attack during the nineteenth century. Absolutist regimes, in an effort to extend bureaucratic control over the Jews, required them to take on proper last names, as opposed to the traditional first name and patronymic. They also attempted to impose the use of European languages and dress. These were measures favored by the maskilim as well. Levinsohn was the first in Eastern Europe to argue for learning foreign languages, although he, like most maskilim, also favored the revival of Hebrew as the national Jewish language.

In choosing either Hebrew or a European language, the maskilim were almost deliberately constructing an elite culture, because the vernacular of the vast majority of Jews was Yiddish and few could read Russian or German or the flowery, artificial Hebrew of the Haskalah. It was only later in the century that a secular literary culture was to emerge in Yiddish. Levinsohn set the tone that was to prevail among the intelligentsia toward the language of the “folk” when he wrote in *Te'udah be-Yisrael* that Yiddish could not be the language of Enlightenment because it was not pure: “This language which we speak in this land, which we borrowed from the Germans, is called ‘Jewish German’ [*yehudit ashkenazit*], and it is thoroughly corrupt since it is intermixed with words taken from Hebrew, Russian, French, Polish, and the like as well as from German and even the German words are mispronounced and slurred.”³³ This characterization of Yiddish, epitomized later as a “jargon,” was more ideological than linguistic since all languages are to some extent “intermixed.” Ironically, maskilim like Levinsohn rejected the “fusion” character of Yiddish while demanding that modern Jewish culture become a hybrid between Jewish and European traditions: language must be pure, but culture needed to be mixed.

In fact, depending on the region, by the second half of the nineteenth century many Jews had become increasingly familiar with multiple Jewish and non-Jewish languages, a sign of the growing hybridity of their culture. In the larger cities and towns especially, they read Hebrew and spoke and read Yiddish and the local language (Polish, Russian, Hungarian) and, not infrequently, some German as well. The memoirs of one Polish Jew about his father, born in 1882, relates:

Father, who went only to *heder* . . . knew five languages: Hebrew, Yiddish, German, Polish and Ukrainian, although he apparently could not write Ukrainian. No one thought of this as anything extraordinary. . . . “True” foreign languages were French and English. If you asked my father before World War I, he would certainly have answered that he knew no foreign language.³⁴

Whether he actually “knew” all of these “non-foreign” languages, he at least had some familiarity with them. Although Jews in many places throughout the ages were “multilingual” in this sense, the century or so before the Holocaust in Eastern Europe may have been one of the most multilingual periods in all of Jewish history.

The question of clothing was also a critical marker that divided maskilim from the Orthodox and especially from the Hasidim. The Hasidim in particular regarded adoption of modern dress as a sign of apostasy, and they elevated “traditional” garb (itself borrowed from eighteenth-century Polish fashion) to virtually the status of law. This acute sensitivity to clothing and appearance as signs of identity stemmed from the attempts of governments and maskilim alike to modernize the Jews by changing how they looked. Israel Aksenfeld (1787–1866), who wrote the first Yiddish novel in the 1840s, *Dos Shterntikhl* (The Headband), satirized traditional Jewish life by making the central symbol of his book one of the characteristic pieces of Jewish dress, the jewel-encrusted headband that wealthy married women wore. In Aksenfeld’s novel, women represent traditional culture and the maskilic hero, Mikhl, symbolically defeats this bankrupt world by marrying the heroine but presenting her with a shterntikhl made of false pearls.³⁵

Samuel Joseph Fuenn (1818–90), the maskil who edited the important Hebrew journal *Ha-Karmel*, gave a historical explanation for Jewish dress:

[T]he foremost cause of the distance and enmity between the children of Israel and the Christians in our state is the difference of dress. . . . The division and difference in dress derive not from reasons of religion, but rather from a corrupted source, the hatred of the nations during the Middle Ages toward Israel. Wanting not to mingle with the children of Israel they placed a seal on the brow of the Jew which established his religion. . . . In the course of time this became a distinguishing mark among the children of Israel, setting them off from their oppressors. From this isolation they took comfort. . . . In the course of time, when the original reason had been forgotten, they claimed it was for their benefit and was freely chosen.³⁶

Against the Orthodox claim that Jewish dress was a traditional, indeed commanded, marker of identity, Fuenn argued that it is a relic of medieval hatred of the Jews. It was the Christian oppressors, not the Jews, who wanted such an external sign of difference. In a time theoretically free of such medieval prejudice, neither Christians nor Jews ought to need such signs.

Fuenn’s argument suggests that, in the public culture the maskilim tried to

create, the Jews would not be immediately identifiable by appearance. In the words of the Hebrew poet Judah Leib Gordon (1831–92), the goal of the Haskalah was to be a man on the street and a Jew at home.³⁷ This ideology was entirely unrealistic in Eastern Europe, where such a “street” (or “neutral society”) devoid of ethnic, class, and religious differences did not exist for Russians or Poles any more than it did for Jews; there was no single “Russian” or “Polish” form of dress since different social castes—aristocrats, peasants, and merchants—all dressed differently. But if the maskilim could not make the Jews look like Russians or Poles, homogeneous categories that were still imaginary, the debate over dress did create visible signs of party affiliation *within* Jewish culture: a maskil was distinguishable from a yeshivah student who was in turn distinguishable from a Hasid. Russia’s inability to fulfill Gordon’s slogan created a paradoxical effect: a Jewish public culture of remarkable vitality, but one whose vitality might be measured by the fierce battles between its many factions.

Memoirs and the Cultivation of Modern Jewish Identities Among the library of Haskalah books that Ansky mentions taking with him from Vitebsk, he cites one in particular as having a disproportionate influence on him and his comrades: Moses Leib Lilienblum’s (1843–1910) *Sins of Youth*, first published in 1876. Lilienblum’s autobiography, written when he was less than 30 years old, was a wholesale attack on traditional Jewish life as exemplified by what he portrayed as the tragedy of his own life: the personal as political. Regarding himself as already an “old man,” Lilienblum blamed the traditional family life of the East European Jews—especially childhood and early marriage—for eradicating his ability to fulfill himself in the modern world. This indictment—so far from contemporary sentimental portraits of the family as the foundation of a healthy Jewish life—was a key plank in the Haskalah’s platform: only by transforming the family might it be possible to begin transforming the Jews as a people.³⁸

By paying new attention to the domestic sphere, the maskilim developed an entirely new concept of individual Jewish identity. This new “self,” based on Enlightenment ideas of individuality, also required a thoroughgoing assault on traditional definitions of the self. The maskilim undertook both of these tasks most frequently by writing autobiographies, a genre itself based on the modern idea of the individual, which they adopted with the greatest enthusiasm.³⁹ The idea that an individual might have a unique history had no real precedent in earlier Ashkenazic Jewish culture, and neither biography nor autobiography had played important roles. (Two exceptions in the eighteenth century can be found in Germany: the autobiography of the Rabbi Jacob Emden, and that of the wealthy merchant woman, Glückel of Hameln.) The first Haskalah autobiogra-

phy, which was to become a model for most nineteenth-century East European writers of the genre, was Salomon Maimon's *Lebensgeschichte*, written and published in German in 1792. Following Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*, Maimon (ca. 1753–1800) eschewed traditional formulas and set out to tell what he advertised as the unvarnished truth about his life. The result is a kind of mélange of the picaresque and the *Bildungsroman*, as he describes his adventures escaping the world of Lithuanian talmudism and becoming a child of the Berlin Enlightenment. The outrageous character of many of the episodes in the book suggests that Maimon was less intent on telling his life history as it actually happened than in constructing a literary persona shaped by Enlightenment ideology.⁴⁰

This was also to be the case for Maimon's successors in Eastern Europe, such as Mordecai Aaron Guenzburg, Abraham Ber Gottlober, Ephraim Deinard, Yehzkel Kotek, and Lilienblum himself. These authors used the stories of their lives as portraits of traditional Ashkenazic culture and as arguments for why and how it should be overturned. They claimed that talmudic study and early, arranged marriage impoverished and stifled the individual's self-expression. As with Maimon's autobiography, their works need to be seen as ideological statements, based, to be sure, on their own lived experiences and not as accurate generalizations about how all other Jews of their world in fact experienced their lives. But for aspiring rebels like Ansky, these memoirs provided a narrative into which they could insert their own lives, a model for how they came to understand themselves and the world they rejected.

The memoirs focus typically on two major traumas: the *heder* (or primary school) and marriage. In line with their argument for new types of schools and their cooperation with the czarist regime's attempt to impose such schools on the Jews, the maskilim typically portray the *heder* in the most horrific terms, with the *melamed* (teacher) a barely educated brute who physically abused his pupils. Going to the *heder* was an experience of being wrenched out of the security of the family and thrown into the callous arms of one of the traditional community's stock institutions. This was a boy's first encounter with the unremittingly hostile Jewish public world.⁴¹

The next such encounter was marriage, an institution no less publicly sanctioned and controlled than education. For centuries, it had been the ideal custom among Ashkenazic Jews to marry off their children at the beginning of adolescence (13 for boys and 12 for girls), though probably only the wealthy could afford to do so consistently. Because most of the future maskilim came from relatively well-off families, their engagements, arranged by the traditional *shadkhan* (marriage broker), were typically made at age 11 or 12 and their mar-



A. Trankowsky, *The Jewish Wedding*, late nineteenth century. Oil on canvas. (In the permanent collection of The Magnes Museum, Berkeley; 75.19. Photo: Ben Ailes) Note the combination of traditional clothing (the father of the bride) and modern “bourgeois” clothing (the man wearing a top hat). The traditional Eastern European “klezmer” musicians are portrayed on the left.

riages took place a year or two later. They were then packed off to the houses of their in-laws, where they lived with their young wives for several years (determined by the dowry), during which time they were expected to study.

The memoirs devote considerable attention to the conflicts with in-laws, for it was frequently during this period that the young men began to discover the writings of the Haskalah. The first to do so was Maimon himself, who describes in his characteristically caricatured and comic manner the beatings he suffered at the hand of his mother-in-law and the tricks with which he amply repaid her. Lilienblum attributes the very writing of *Sins of Youth* to his conflict with his mother-in-law: “It was my mother-in-law who in a real sense was the creator of this autobiography, that is, of the tragic part of it.”⁴² The struggle against the traditional world therefore took the form of an intergenerational battle, not between “fathers and sons” (the title of the Turgenev novel that resonated with many Jewish intellectuals) but between parents-in-law and sons-in-law.

Little wonder that, when the maskilim later came to write their memoirs and

ideological tracts, the institution of early marriage should figure so prominently as something that needed radical change. According to their ideals for an enlightened Jewish society, marriage would follow European ideas of free choice and romantic love. Young boys would learn productive professions and only marry when they could support their families. Their wives would no longer go out to the marketplace while the men studied but would find their true roles within the home in the image of European bourgeois domesticity. By revolutionizing marriage and the family, the maskilim hoped to create a new private sphere that, in their view, was utterly absent in traditional Jewish culture. The Haskalah also pioneered a critique of the traditional role of women as the breadwinners in their families and as captives of the patriarchal system of law, an ironic proto-feminism since it was an attack on a system in which women had considerable economic power. Judah Leib Gordon's famous poem "On the Point of a Yod" attacked the way the law discriminated against women abandoned by their husbands without a *get* (writ of divorce), which left them destitute and unable to divorce or remarry. These proto-feminist arguments reflect the influence of nascent Russian feminism as the maskilim came into greater contact with Russian intellectual currents in the more liberal reign of Alexander II. Yet this primarily male movement was equally ambivalent about the independent, modern woman. A number of maskilim expressed hostility toward women writing in Hebrew, an unusual phenomenon represented by figures like Yente Kalman-Wohlerner (1810–91) and Miriam Markel Mosesohn (1841–1920).⁴³

Although it was not until the twentieth century that women began to contribute in large numbers toward the secular Jewish culture of Eastern Europe, the nineteenth century witnessed a revolution in their education.⁴⁴ In traditional society, girls were typically taught to read prayers and moralistic literature like the midrashic *Tsene u-Rene* primarily in Yiddish. They were usually taught at home, but, if they did attend a *heder*, it was for fewer years than the boys. It was not uncommon by the mid-nineteenth century for families with bourgeois aspirations to hire tutors to teach their daughters Russian. As the maskilim and the Russian government established "modern" schools, more girls were given formal education and, by the 1897 Russian census, nearly a third of Jewish females aged 10–29 could read some Russian, as against almost half of males. The Orthodox world itself came to recognize the importance of female education in the early twentieth century with the establishment of the network of Beis Yaakov schools for girls. From the 1860s, small numbers of women began to make their way to universities. Here is a description of student life at the University of Kiev in the 1870s:

The [student nihilists] favored complete equality of rights for women, and they decided that men had no right to rule over them. . . . The male and female students would gather together and read forbidden books. . . . Here the question of women was easily solved, like all other social questions: there is no God, no law or etiquette, there is no rich or poor, no race or nationality, no difference in status or gender. Young men and women from our people went almost crazy from the complete freedom that they encountered here . . . and gradually all restraints were cast off. The laws of modesty and etiquette were violated. . . . The Jewish girls would sleep in student apartments of the members of the new party [that is, the revolutionaries], not distinguishing between Jews and Christians.⁴⁵

Although the maskilim believed that their proposals for change fell on deaf ears in the traditional world, major changes such as these were, in fact, under way in Jewish culture in the second half of the nineteenth century. The age of marriage rose among all Jews, including the Orthodox, so that the early marriages denounced by the maskilim became increasingly rare. The values of romantic love and free choice in marriage not only captured the imagination of secular university students but infiltrated popular culture as well. Yiddish chapbooks sold by itinerant booksellers became the source for “modern” ideas, often wedding traditional practices with romance. For example, a girl and a boy might fall in love, only to discover at the end of the story that they were destined for each other by the traditional vow (*tekias kaf*) sworn between their respective parents at birth.

One remarkable anonymous tale tells of the daughter of a rabbi from Constantinople who is engaged to a rabbi’s son from Brisk, a geographical improbability that is typical of this kind of literature.⁴⁶ She is the best student in her father’s yeshivah in Constantinople, also an improbable detail because, of course, women were not allowed to study in yeshivot. The engagement with the boy in Brisk takes place when she is 12, and she and he exchange the traditional formulaic letters. But curiosity gets the better of her and, disguised as a boy, she travels to Brisk, where she enrolls in her fiancé’s yeshivah. This story was to be repeated by later authors, among them, most famously, Isaac Bashevis Singer in his “Yentl the Yeshivah Boy.” What is fascinating here is the way this nineteenth-century popular fiction collapses the traditional gender separation of family life and yeshivah: instead of waiting for her betrothed, the girl conceals herself as a boy and enters his world. It was perhaps through such literature that popular culture might register covert protest against the rigid values of elite Lithuanian scholarship.

Jewish folklore and folksongs from the nineteenth century attest to the attenuation of traditional values on the popular level. One folksong relates how a girl who falls in love with a boy commits suicide as a result of opposition from her parents. In another song, which may have been based on an actual incident in Moldavia in the early 1870s, a boy, enraged at the opposition of his girlfriend's parents, kills her and then attempts, unsuccessfully, to kill himself. The parents regret their opposition and warn other parents not to interfere in their children's romantic affairs.⁴⁷ That this kind of romantic literature and folksong, mixing traditional and modern elements, began to affect the way people lived can be seen in the following rabbinic court case from 1879:

The boy Chaim said that for a long time, perhaps four or five years, the soul of the virgin [Neḥama] had adhered to him in love . . . and, once, the two of them found themselves by chance together . . . and they talked together day and night. She said to him that it seemed to her that their love was eternal. During this whole time, she wrote him many letters containing statements of love and affection.⁴⁸

Clandestine love was, of course, nothing new (the girl here was already engaged to someone else) and romantic love was certainly not absent from traditional Jewish life.⁴⁹ But this case does contain some modern elements. Engaged couples were encouraged to use form letters (*egronim*) to communicate; the maskilim themselves wrote such letters to try to infiltrate modern values into traditional culture. Here, the girl uses one of these Haskalah formularies or even writes in her own voice.

In addition, traditional society would have tried (not always successfully) to prevent any meeting between young men and women. By the second half of the nineteenth century, young Jews developed new spaces in nature for escaping traditional strictures. As the Hebrew writer M. J. Berdichevsky (1865–1921) wrote in a short story at the end of the century: “A generation went and a generation came and a new generation rose in Israel, a generation that began to walk on the Sabbaths at the borders of the city.”⁵⁰ Traditional Jewish culture was contained within the boundaries of towns, and the vast regions separating the towns were the realm of the peasants; now, Jews ventured forth into nature, symbolically crossing over into the non-Jewish world, a world where the Sabbath laws were no longer observed and all manner of transgression of boundaries suddenly became possible.

For the maskilim themselves, the new Jewish identities and family values they preached often seemed out of reach. The marriages of these ideologues rarely

went well, and a high percentage of them either divorced their wives voluntarily or were forced to do so when their in-laws discovered their heretical leanings. Some never succeeded in achieving a happy domestic life. And, despite their advocacy of equality for women, many, like Lilienblum, who conducted an ultimately fruitless epistolary affair with a young female disciple of Haskalah, never fully realized their ideology in their own lives.

In fact, the experience of these young maskilim reflected the implosion of Russian Jewish family life in general.⁵¹ Even in the first half of the nineteenth century, the divorce rate among Russian Jews was surprisingly high, probably reflecting increasing economic deprivation. Toward the end of the century, it dropped, but not because family life became more stable: desertion became more common as husbands, partly by emigrating to America and other destinations, separated from their wives without formal writs of divorce. Although before the partitions of Poland the Jewish communities had usually been able to control marriage and divorce through the powers granted to them by the Polish government, this form of stability collapsed in the nineteenth century. The Russian government increasingly intervened in Jewish family law, either through making its own court system available to Jews disgruntled with rabbinic courts or through the state rabbis, whose authority paralleled that of traditional rabbis. The result of this confusion of authority created a social and cultural vacuum in which individuals might pursue their own desires. The scenes of free love such as we saw at the University of Kiev were but one example of this breakdown of traditional authority.

In the wake of this breakdown, the cultural self-perception of many young Jews was often more gloomy than liberated. In the literature produced by the heirs of Haskalah, the writers of the national renaissance of the turn of the century, the protagonists were typically incapable of fulfilling their romantic longings: the failure of Eros became a metaphor for a growing culture of pessimism and despair. The stock-in-trade of this literature was the figure of the *talush*—meaning “uprooted”—typically a young maskil, alienated from both his people and the non-Jewish culture he wished to enter, his intellectual and cultural impotence symbolized by sexual impotence. The *talush* was a passive and masochistic figure, tormented by erotic longings but unable to fulfill them. It was the *talush* who, more than any heroic figure, was the most representative of the literature of national renaissance, a symbol of the presumed national impotence of the Jewish people.

Consider the unnamed protagonist of Joseph Hayyim Brenner's (1881–1921) Hebrew novella, *In Winter (Ba-Horef)*, published in 1904: he is no longer a part of traditional Jewish society, but neither can he find solace in the Haskalah or in

any political movement, remaining a wanderer between two worlds, unable to put down roots. At the end of the story, he finds himself penniless and without a ticket on a train. After being discovered by the conductor, he is roughly thrown off with a hail of antisemitic curses. A village lies some three miles away, but he is told that there are no Jews there. The novella ends with the protagonist lying on the ground as rain beats down and snow envelops him. If, as we shall presently see, the train represents the modern world in which the Jewish intellectuals sought to integrate, then the implication of Brenner's story is that they will not stay on for long. Once on the train, they will travel too far from the traditional Jewish world ever to return to it, and, thrown off by the antisemites, they will perish on cold and alien ground. In Brenner's dark tale, the Haskalah's attempt to create a new Jewish self seems doomed: his talush, anonymous and incapable of coherent action, has lost both his creative individuality and his tie to a community. Such was the culture of despair that paradoxically accompanied the political movements of Jewish national awakening.

SHEM AND JAPHET ON THE TRAIN

... thrusting me toward Russian letters. . . .

In 1912, Ansky wrote a short story in Yiddish under the title "A Goyisher Kop" (Gentile Mentality) that, like Brenner's, takes place on a train.⁵² The story involves a meeting in a railway car between the first-person narrator and an old revolutionary acquaintance who had previously taken a Christian name and tried to pass as a Russian; now he was dressed in the European style but had reverted back to his Jewish name, Moses Silberzweig. A discussion about conversion ensues between the two, with an elderly Jew in the compartment joining in. The travelers recount several tales of conversion, the purpose of which seems to be to demonstrate the absurdities of identity in the Russian context. The first story concerns the mass expulsions from Moscow in 1891–92, when many Jews tried to escape the edict by converting to Russian Orthodoxy. One clever fellow, having mastered the catechism, became a "professional" convert: for a hefty fee, he would appear with someone else's identity papers and go through the conversion for him. In this way, he went through 55 conversions and earned hundreds of rubles—without actually converting himself! The second story deals with a non-Jewish girl working for the revolution who infiltrates into St. Petersburg with a phony Jewish passport. When the police challenge her residency papers and repeatedly demand that she pay them bribes, Silberzweig (the narrator of this story) attempts to persuade her to convert to Christianity, which would ob-

viate the need for papers. But the irreligious girl refuses to convert, even though she was always a Christian! The narrator of the frame story concludes: "For the first time in my life I felt that it wouldn't be such a bad idea to talk to a goy."

Both of these stories within the story suggest the sometimes bizarre and fuzzy borders between Jewish and non-Jewish identity in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Russia. For those, like Ansky himself, who had undergone the process of acculturation—had turned to "Russian letters"—a certain fluidity of identity became possible: one could slip out of one's Jewish clothing and into Russian, perhaps later changing back. For the vast majority of Russian Jews, still mired in the largely Yiddish-speaking Pale of Settlement, such fluidity was, of course, not possible. But in the revolutionary movements, as in the second story, as well as in the description of student life in Kiev, Jews and non-Jews might mix promiscuously even to the point of adopting one another's identity. Yet Ansky's story also reinforces the boundaries between Jew and gentile: in all three cases (Silberzweig himself, the expulsions from Moscow, and the revolutionary girl), conversion does not work as it is meant to. The convert reverts to his previous identity, or he does not really convert, or she cannot convert because she really had a different identity to begin with. No matter how much a Jew might adopt Russian culture, Ansky seems to suggest, he or she could never really become Russian.

Written after he had already made his journey back to the Yiddish language and Jewish life, Ansky's criticism of the possibility of changing identities in the Russian context reflected his own partisan point of view. But by the early twentieth century, there were those who had made the journey without turning back. The young Vladimir Jabotinsky (1881–1940), who would later become the leader of the Revisionist Zionists, was born into a Russified Jewish family in Odessa, ignorant of all Jewish languages and determined, until he saw the Zionist light, to make his career in Russian letters. He was not alone. As the statistics from the beginning of this chapter show, the opening up of the Russian universities and major cities under Alexander II produced an ever-increasing Jewish population educated in Russian culture, a process that took place in the other national cultures of Eastern Europe as well. Many young people, like Ansky, found inspiration in the new traditions of Russian revolutionary populism and devoured such writers as Pisarev, Chernyshevsky, and Lavrov (Ansky was Lavrov's personal secretary in Paris). But not all became revolutionaries: Jabotinsky is an example of a young Jewish intellectual less moved by Russian politics than by Russian literary aesthetics.

Conversion symbolizes the ultimate assimilation into another culture, and, though far less common among Russian Jews than among their contemporaries

in Germany or France, it did take place and it is evidence for more widespread Russification than is frequently assumed. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Pauline Wengeroff (1833–1916), the wife of a wealthy Lithuanian merchant, wrote her autobiography, a rare occurrence for a woman, and published it in Berlin in German under the title *Memoirs of a Grandmother: Pictures Out of the Cultural History of the Jews of Russia in the Nineteenth Century*. Wengeroff's husband had abandoned much of Jewish religious practice, and her children had all converted to Russian Orthodoxy. Her memoir is at once an exercise in nostalgia and an amateur ethnography of Russian Jewish life during the transition from tradition to modernity. Quoting her own mother in a kind of Yiddishized German, she writes:

“I [that is, Wengeroff's mother] and my generation will certainly live and die as Jews; our grandchildren will certainly not live and die as Jews. But what our children will be I cannot foresee.” The first two parts of this prophecy came true. The third is now coming true, for our generation is some kind of mongrel (*Zwitterding*). . . . [The Jews] could not acquire the new, the alien, without renouncing the old, what was most unique and holy to them. How chaotically these modern ideas swirl about in the minds of Russian Jewish men! . . . The old family values disappeared without anything new taking their place. For most Jewish women of that time, religion and tradition suffused their inner essence . . . and for that reason, a difficult struggle took place in their most intimate family circle.⁵³

Wengeroff describes this destruction of the old world as a consequence of the great liberalization of the 1860s and 1870s, although her own husband, who is clearly the model of the confused Jewish man, had renounced tradition even earlier, apparently out of disillusionment with Hasidism. Largely ignoring the rising feminism of Jewish women, she sees them as the guardians of tradition and men as its destroyers. But she herself came into her marriage already literate in Russian and German and was actually responsible for teaching her husband German. Wengeroff's exaggerated portrait of a generation of Jews rushing headlong into assimilation and apostasy was based on her own experience as a woman in the wealthy merchant class, but she nevertheless gives us insight into an aspect of East European Jewish culture that, in the shadow of pogroms and persecution, has too often been played down.

Ansky's story of the misadventures of identity takes place significantly on a train, a metaphor for many Jewish writers (like Brenner) for the modern sites, such as cities, where Jews might encounter non-Jewish culture under

new circumstances, sometimes positive and sometimes negative.⁵⁴ For the nineteenth century, the train represented modernity in several ways. The railway altered conceptions of time; journeys that, from time immemorial, had taken days could now be compressed into hours. Of equal importance was the new space created by the railway carriage, a territory that was at once private and public. Perfect strangers found themselves thrown together for long periods. Although the first-, second-, and third-class divisions of trains reproduced the class divisions of society, the railway car could still serve as a kind of social leveler and as the territory, at once intimate and anonymous, for a new kind of social discourse between strangers. As Tolstoy reflected in his famous story "The Kreutzer Sonata," the train setting allowed passengers to tell their private stories in a public space.

For Jews, too, the train represented a new social space in which some of the intimacy of the shtetl might be reproduced but not necessarily with familiar faces. Although East European Jews were accustomed to an active public sphere in the synagogues, study halls, and marketplaces of their communities, this public domain remained a localized one. As the isolation of communities was overcome, the train contributed greatly toward the new sense of the Jews as an interconnected nation within the Russian Pale. This development registered not only on modernizing Jews but on the traditionalists as well, as railway lines served to bring farflung Hasidim in closer proximity to the courts of their rebbes. For example, the small town of Gora Kalwaria, which, as we have already seen, housed the court of the rebbe of Ger, became much more accessible to the sect's disciples when a special rail line was built to connect it with the main railway system.

But the train also served as the vehicle for destruction of the old world of the shtetl, providing, as it did, the means for escape to the big cities and the foundation for a new market economy that would destroy the shtetl's main function. Both for Jews in their everyday experiences and for writers of fiction, the train mirrored the urbanization of their life: in the cities of Eastern Europe, as in the trains, an anonymous existence became possible, though not always one in which a person might hide his identity as a Jew. The railroad car came to symbolize the creation of what was called in Yiddish the *yidische gas* (Jewish street), a new public place where secular politics and culture could strike roots and flourish, yet dramatically opposed to the old "Jewish street" of the shtetl.

The railroad also created a new territory for encounters between Jews and non-Jews. Here, the complex traditional relations between Jewish merchants and innkeepers, Ukrainian peasants, Polish noblemen, and Russian petty officials (all of whom were stock figures in Jewish literature of the nineteenth cen-

ture) might be reproduced but also transformed, not necessarily in a better way. A classic exposition of this issue is Mendele Mokher Sforim's "Shem and Japhet on the Train," written in 1890, just a year after Tolstoy's train story. Mendele was the pseudonym as well as the fictitious narrator (Mendele the Bookseller) of the great Hebrew and Yiddish writer Sh. Y. Abramowitsch (ca. 1836–1917).⁵⁵ Mendele distinguishes between the Jews of the third-class compartment and the gentiles who ride in second and first class, and in so doing he weaves together the question of Jewish-gentile relations and the train as a new form of transportation symbolizing modernity. He contrasts the train with the wagon on which he used to tour the countryside selling pious books to the common Jews. Here he engages in a striking linguistic inversion. Many of Abramowitsch's stories start with Mendele the Bookseller traveling on his wagon, the term for which, in both Hebrew and Yiddish, is *agalah* or *agoleh*. Indeed, the most prevalent form of transportation in the East European countryside was the wagon, and the *ba'al agoleh* (wagon driver) was a stock figure in life as in literature. But in the present story, Abramowitsch uses this word to signify the railway carriage; conversely, when he refers to a horse-drawn wagon, he uses the word *karon*, which most Hebrew writers employed to signify a railway car. By using a term with primitive and homey associations to refer to the technological marvel of the railway, Abramowitsch mocks the ostensible power of modern inventions to change the Jews' fate: no matter what vehicle may convey them, Jews will always remain Jews.

Mendele, the narrator, makes the train a symbol for all the evils of modern urban life—alienation from nature and class conflict:

[T]he railway train . . . is like a whole city in motion with its tumult, its populations split into classes and sects, who carry with them their hatred and envy, their bickerings and rivalries and petty deals. Such passengers may traverse the whole world without regard to the grandeur of nature, the beauty of the mountains and plains and all the handiwork of God.⁵⁶

The horse-drawn coach, like the shtetl it stands for, represents by contrast a kind of freedom, even if the passengers are "jammed together like herrings in a barrel." As insecure as the shtetl may have been, it was being replaced by an even more uncertain and unfamiliar reality.

Like the shift from shtetl to city, the story within the story deals with the new encounter between Jews and gentiles. Reb Moses and his family are riding on the train, having been expelled from Bismarck's Prussia. Moses explains that they are victims of the new racial antisemitism—hence the ironic reference to

the biblical Shem and Japhet, the sons of Noah who were construed as the eponymous ancestors of the Semites and Aryans. They are traveling with a Polish Christian, who was also expelled from Germany. This Pole was an old acquaintance of the Jew but had become an antisemite himself, a commentary on the vicissitudes of historical relations between Jews and Poles. Now united in the train of exile, the two become friends again, and Moses proposes to teach the Pole the lessons the Jews have learned over the centuries in order to survive. These lessons involve begging and deference to all authority. Mendele is so struck by the solidarity between the Jew and the Pole (perhaps an allusion to the Jewish participation in the Polish revolts against Russian rule in 1831 and 1863) that he ends his story with a prayer: "Lord of the Universe! Grant us a few more such disciples—and Shem and Japhet will be brothers—and peace will come to Israel!"

As is often the case in these Mendele stories, Abramowitsch stands at an ironic distance from his pseudonymous narrator. Mendele's logic is terribly askew, for even if modernity subjects other peoples to the terrible sufferings and exiles experienced by the Jews, it is highly unlikely that Japhet will come, in the biblical phrase, to "dwell in the tents of Shem." Abramowitsch ridicules the hoary tactics of begging and licking the boots of the authorities. Indeed, Abramowitsch is no more sympathetic to Mendele's nostalgia for his coach and shtetl than he is sanguine about the ostensible alliance of Jew and goy on the train. True Jewish survival can only come by changing this approach to the world—getting off the train, as it were, and starting afresh. Or, perhaps, it requires getting on a different sort of train that would take the Jews out of Europe and to a life in Palestine (as the nascent Zionist movement advocated) or to America (as many Russian Jews were already voting for with their feet).

The onset of modernity in Eastern Europe had indeed changed relations between Jews and non-Jews but often in directions that scarcely seemed better. Violent attacks on Jews were nothing new in the late nineteenth century, but the pogroms (the word itself became current at this time) of 1881, 1903, and 1905–6, as well as the revival of the medieval ritual murder accusation, seemed to signify at once an unexpected return to the Middle Ages and something different: not only riots that got out of hand and that the authorities could not control but possibly the products of a new antisemitic ideology and governmental collusion. Although Western and Central Europe witnessed attacks on Jewish emancipation in the forms of the Dreyfus Affair and the rise of antisemitic political movements, only in Russia did antisemitism take on the flavor of mass violence. Thus, Jewish/non-Jewish relations in Eastern Europe were caught in a vise between growing acculturation and political identification with the state, on the one

hand, and new forms of violence, prejudice, and segregation, on the other. It was precisely this tension that Abramowitsch captured in his train story.

Another sign of the ambivalent relationship with Russian culture was the recurring fantasy in literature of erotic relations between Jews and Christians. Bialik, the poet laureate of the national renaissance, devoted a disturbing story to the subject. "Behind the Fence" tells of the love between a Christian girl, Marinka, and a Jewish boy, Noah; their love stands in opposition to the brutality and xenophobia of his parents and of her witch-like stepmother. At the end of the story, he is forced to marry a Jewish girl, having left Marinka pregnant. On one level, the story is an indictment of traditional Jewish society and of the "fence" between Jews and gentiles—a rather shocking position, no doubt, for readers of the Hebrew national poet! On another level, however, the figure of Marinka's stepmother hints at the demonic potentialities of the gentile world, a theme with strong echoes in popular folk culture.

Indeed, fascination with the erotic attraction of the non-Jew was often bound up in literature with a fear of the demonic Other. Devorah Baron (1888–1956), one of the early female writers of Hebrew and Yiddish fiction, explored this theme in a bizarre fable about a female "Jewish" dog. Dogs have negative associations in Ashkenazic folklore and are generally associated with the gentile world. Baron's dog is a symbol for the vexed relations between Jews and gentiles in Eastern Europe. She bears puppies sired by a dog belonging to a local nobleman, but her offspring are stolen from her. She is kidnapped by gentiles and gang-raped by their dogs. Finally, she falls in love with a "gentile" dog, becomes as vicious as the gentiles, and betrays the Jews to whom she had once belonged. The story ends with the Jews strangling her: such is the violence, the story suggests, that attends on those who would cross the borders between Jews and their neighbors.

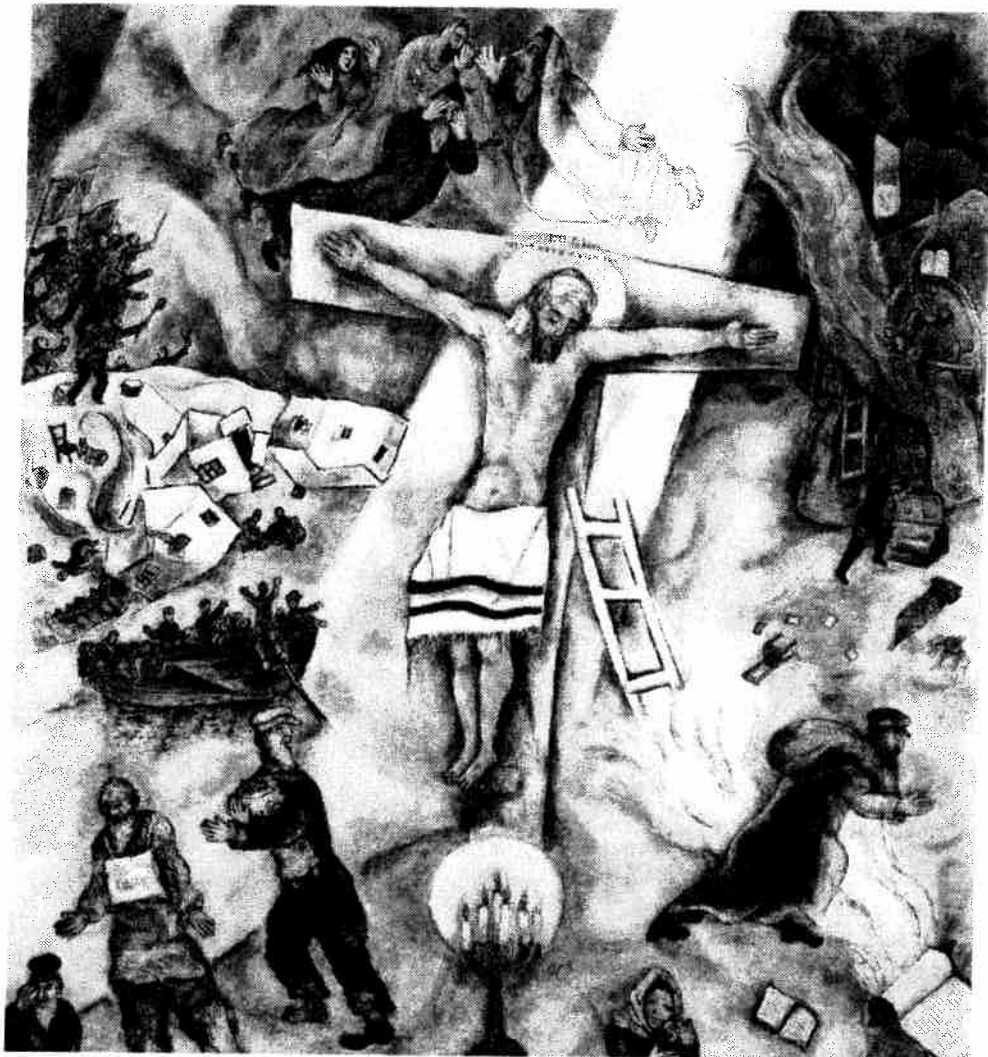
The ambivalent relationship to Russian culture found expression not only in literature but also in visual art, in which Jews in Eastern Europe began to engage by the last part of the nineteenth century. Here, we may return to Vitebsk, whose academy of art (a very unusual institution in a town of the Pale and a sign that Vitebsk was already modernizing), established by the painter Yehuda (Yuri) Pen, turned many young Jews into artists, the most celebrated of whom was Marc Chagall (1887–1985). In his autobiography, Chagall recounts his escape from academic failures at the Russian gymnasium to Pen's School of Painting, which in turn prompted him to go in 1907 to St. Petersburg to pursue a career as a painter. For Chagall and others, art became a vehicle for mediating between Jewish and European culture.

Perhaps nothing in the work of Chagall and other Jewish artists (such as Maurycy Gottlieb, Mark Antokolsky, and Samuel Hirszenberg) captured the re-

lationship to the attractions of “Japhet” more than the figure of Jesus, to which they returned again and again in their art. Just as historians and writers like Joseph Klausner, Lamed Shapiro, Uri Zvi Greenberg, and Sholem Asch, in very different ways, tried to reappropriate Jesus for the Jews, so the visual artists sought to wrench him out of Christianity and make him over into a Jewish symbol.⁵⁷ These works were equally subversive toward traditional Jewish belief, for which Jesus was a black magician. (East European Jews would traditionally play cards or dice on Christmas eve and refrain from studying Torah in the belief that the demonic spirit of Jesus was abroad and could only be countered by sacrilegious activities.) For these modernist writers and artists, Jesus as Jew became a palimpsest for a new Jewish identity, at once universal and particular.

Three brief examples will suffice. In 1873, Mark Antokolsky sculpted his *Ecce Homo*, which represents Jesus with East European Jewish features, side curls, and a skullcap. Anticipating criticism by both Christians and Jews for appropriating a Christian theme, Antokolsky wrote that he identified with Jesus as a revolutionary—a model, he implied, for rebellion against both the Russian and Jewish establishments. Here was Jesus not so much as a figure of reconciliation between Jews and Christians but as a prophet of transformation of both worlds. In the wake of the pogroms, other artists applied Christian symbols to Jewish suffering. Samuel Hirszenberg’s (1865–1908) *The Wandering Jew*, painted in 1899, depicts a bearded figure, clad only in a loincloth, who runs with a terrified expression over heaps of sprawled corpses scattered in a forest of crosses.⁵⁸ He is the only survivor, it would seem, of the pogroms/crucifixions that had destroyed and mutilated his brethren: the Jews are the suffering Christs tortured by the Christian world. Finally, Chagall’s own preoccupation with Jesus, from his *Golgotha* in 1912 to his *White Crucifixion* in 1938 and other Christological paintings from the World War II period, completes the appropriation of Jesus as the symbol of Jewish suffering. It is possible that Chagall’s first depiction of Jesus in *Golgotha* (originally named *Dedicated to Christ*) was intended as a reference to Mendel Beilis, the Russian Jew who had been accused of ritual murder.⁵⁹ In *White Crucifixion*, a Christ clad in a prayer shawl for a loincloth hangs on a cross in the middle of the painting; surrounding him are scenes of Jews fleeing burning towns. The destruction of Jewish life in Europe thus found its ultimate, ironic expression in the primordial symbol of Christianity, a symbol also of that acculturation which many Jews so fervently sought.

If the train of Ansky’s story “A Goyisher Kop” had originally symbolized the ambiguous promise of modernity and cultural integration, within a few years of Chagall’s *White Crucifixion* painting it would become the predominant symbol of the deportation and murder of so many East European Jews. There was, of



Marc Chagall, *White Crucifixion*, 1938. Oil on canvas.

(The Art Institute of Chicago, Gift of Alfred S. Alschuler, 1946.925. All rights reserved.)

Chagall's painting reflects the artist's use of the Jewish Jesus to represent the destruction of Eastern European Jewish life through pogroms and flight, even before the Holocaust.

course, no inevitable trajectory from acculturation to the Holocaust, nor should one be implied. On the contrary, the tensions and struggles over the attempts to adopt non-Jewish cultures in Eastern Europe, and the incomplete and frustrated nature of those struggles, were to produce Jewish cultures of remarkable vitality in the decades before the Great Destruction.

TO THE FOLK!

*I would discern the splendor of the poetry that lies buried in the old
historical foundations and traditions.*

For those, like Ansky, who imbibed the Russian populist traditions of “going to the people,” a return to the Jewish folk (if it did take place) was frequently based on images of the folk refracted through “Russian letters.” The folk whom these intellectuals discovered, often as a response to the pogroms and persecutions of the latter part of the nineteenth century, was a folk they, in a sense, created. As we have already observed, most of the intellectuals of the Haskalah had fled the shtetl for the cities—Odessa, Vilna, Warsaw—and their critical and satirical portraits of Jewish village life were written at a distance, both geographical and mental. Now, the return to the people involved going back to the countryside, as Ansky and his collaborators did in the ethnographic expeditions that he launched in 1912. In a programmatic essay written in 1914, Ansky described Jewish folklore as an “oral tradition”: “like the Bible [it is] the product of the Jewish spirit; it reflects the same beauty and purity of the Jewish social, the same modesty and nobility of the Jewish heart, the same loftiness and depth of Jewish thought.”⁶⁰ Ansky clearly intended his characterization of Jewish folklore as an “oral tradition” to usurp the rabbinic idea that the Talmud was the oral law; for an intellectual alienated from the world of talmudic scholarship, rabbinic culture had become a fossilized “written” tradition. The oral tradition of Jewish folklore, rather than the written traditions of the rabbis, might unite the secular intellectual with the people, but the ravages of modernity threatened to destroy this culture at precisely the moment when it was most needed.

By the late nineteenth century, the effects of urbanization, mass emigration, and impoverishment convinced many that the traditional culture of the folk was doomed to extinction. Although at this time the majority of Jews, though fewer than before, still lived in small towns, followed religious tradition, and spoke Yiddish, some intellectuals became caught up in a culture of nostalgia for the world of their fathers and mothers.⁶¹ This had its parallels in neo-Romantic, nationalist movements in Russia and elsewhere in Europe to memorialize the life of the folk before it was irretrievably lost. Writing in the 1880s, Abraham Ber Gottlober (1810–99), who was one of the founders of the Haskalah in Odessa, constructed his autobiography in the form of an ethnography of customs that were rapidly becoming unfamiliar:

Before I relate the history of my life from the time I became a bridegroom, I will place before the eyes of the reader the customs of our people in those days (and, with some small changes, these are still today the customs of many of our people) . . . in order that they should be available in the future for the next generation which will forget the ways and customs of the days that have passed.⁶²

The tone of Gottlober's memoir is distinctly different from that of his younger colleague in the Haskalah, Lilienblum, in *Sins of Youth*. Gottlober mixed criticism with sentimentality for a vanishing world, and what is fascinating about his statement is that, like Wengeroff, Gottlober wrote in a period in which, as he himself says, many of the traditional customs persisted; although some practices, like adolescent marriage, had indeed disappeared, the accelerating processes of urbanization, proletarianization, and Russification had still not totally eradicated traditional life. His nostalgia, like that of others in this period, might be called "anticipatory nostalgia," a prophecy of a time when all that would be left would be memories.

The culture of nostalgia spawned historical, literary, and folkloristic enterprises that contributed greatly toward the creation of a popular secular culture. Simon Dubnow (1860–1941), the dean of Russian Jewish history, put out a call for documents and records from small communities throughout the Pale; he enlisted a small army of amateur researchers who sent him a treasure trove of materials that became the first historical archive of East European Jews. In the first decade of twentieth century, a Society of Jewish Folk Music and a Jewish Ethnographic Society were formed to recover and preserve the culture of the folk. Some writers, like Berdichevsky, Y. L. Peretz (1852–1915), and Martin Buber (1878–1965), rebelled against the Haskalah's contempt for Hasidism by collecting and rewriting Hasidic stories, a movement of "neo-Hasidism" that found a romantic echo especially among German Jews in search of authentic Jewish roots.

The culture of nostalgia touched many diverse groups, not all of them secular. Among the Hasidim, as mentioned earlier, a desire arose to collect and publish tales of the tzaddikim.⁶³ Many of the stories that would be retold by the secular "neo-Hasidic" writers had their origins only slightly earlier in the Hasidic world. The Hasidic collectors were engaged in a kind of folkloristic and historical enterprise of their own that implicitly reflected a surprisingly modern sensibility. And within the world of the Lithuanian yeshivot, biographies of great talmudic scholars became an accepted genre, attesting to a similar kind of historical impulse: Orthodox culture, like its secular opponent, became preoccupied with its own history and with remembering a vanishing past.

The attempt to create a marriage between secular intellectuals and popular

culture had its origins in the emergence of modern Yiddish literature in the middle of the nineteenth century. As we have seen, the maskilim regarded Yiddish as a disreputable hybrid language that could not serve as the vehicle for modern Jewish culture. But since Hebrew or Russian were not accessible to most Jews, any author seeking a real audience had no choice but Yiddish. A ready market for literature of all kinds in Yiddish existed throughout the Jewish world of Eastern Europe due to two factors: widespread literacy, especially female literacy; and printing, particularly after Alexander II loosened censorship on Jewish books. Much of Yiddish literature had for centuries been directed primarily toward women or toward uneducated men, but it was limited in variety and scope. By the second half of the nineteenth century, there was a proliferation of such literature. Some of it was devoted to traditional religious themes and to Hasidic tales of the tzaddik, but certain maskilim writing in Yiddish began to appropriate the popular forms of romance and adventure to spread their doctrines to the masses. One example is Azik Meyer Dik (1814–93), who claimed, at one point, that “one hundred thousand copies of my books have already been sold and new orders from the booksellers arrive daily.”⁶⁴ Dik wrote scores of pulp romances aimed primarily at female readers and often designed to inculcate the new bourgeois values of domesticity. Thus, in his *Words of Righteousness* (1863), Dik states that “if, with God’s help, you really obtain a good apartment with all the amenities, which is as difficult to obtain as a good match, then it is incumbent upon the housewife to keep it clean and tidy.”⁶⁵ He makes this argument sound traditional by scattering a variety of biblical and rabbinic proof texts, a rhetorical style that had trickled down from the yeshivah into popular culture (and that would later be much satirized by Mendele Mokher Sforim and Sholem Aleichem).

The new journals and newspapers published by the maskilim served as important conduits, in addition to books, in bringing popular literature to a wide audience. Although the Hebrew and Russian Jewish publications necessarily had limited scope, their Yiddish supplements had greater circulation. Alexander Zederbaum (1816–93) was one of the great pioneers of both the Hebrew and Yiddish press. His Hebrew newspaper *Ha-Melitz* was the most important organ of the Haskalah, but in 1862 he began to publish a Yiddish weekly, *Kol Mevasser*, first as a supplement to *Ha-Melitz* and later as an independent journal. In 1867, Zederbaum serialized Y. Y. Linetski’s satiric Yiddish novel (which appeared as a book two years later), *Dos Poylishe Yingl* (The Polish Boy). Whereas the Hebrew Haskalah had lampooned Hasidism in a parodic style accessible only to a highly educated audience, Linetski’s text accomplished the same goal in much more popular fashion. In fact, as evidence that this kind of literature was read not only

by a secular audience but also by Hasidim themselves, here is Zederbaum's testimony:

The story caught the interest of the public to such an extent that people, waiting impatiently from week to week for the new installment, would read it immediately whenever the most recent issue arrived, even before they read the latest news. . . . More than that: Hasidim, who are enemies of *Kol Mevasser* in general—let alone of the author of this story, whom they would gladly see dead—even they would look every week for the new issue and read *Dos Poylishe Yingl* with pleasure.⁶⁶

This passage suggests that perhaps we would be too hasty to divide this reading public into “religious” and “secular.” Just as the lines between yeshivah culture and the Haskalah were often fuzzy, so the readership of a spoof on Hasidism might include the Hasidim themselves.

It was on this foundation that the “classicists” of nineteenth-century Yiddish literature—Mendele Mokher Sforim, Sholem Aleichem (Shalom Rabinovitz, 1859–1916), and Peretz—created their great works. All of these authors started out writing in Hebrew or, in the case of Peretz, Polish. The switch to Yiddish was undertaken with a certain ambivalence, captured in part by the assumption of folksy pseudonyms. Mendele, who published his first Yiddish story in 1864, later claimed that he had lowered himself from the lofty heights of Hebrew in order to save the folk from the trashy novels of writers like Dik and the extraordinarily prolific Shomer (N. M. Shaykevitch, 1846–1905). The ambivalence of writers like Mendele suggests the complex relationship between the intelligentsia and popular culture that informs the history of Yiddish literature in its so-called classical age.

Yiddish culture was, then, not so much the culture of the folk as it was the culture that intellectuals wished to attribute to the folk. As a variety of political movements emerged at the end of the nineteenth century to attempt to find collective solutions to the problems of the Russian Jews, culture became a weapon in the battle. In opposing Zionism, which in Eastern Europe championed Hebrew culture, Bundists and other so-called “territorialists” (those who advocated the realization of Jewish national rights in Eastern Europe) often embraced Yiddish. A leader in this effort was Ansky's boyhood friend from Vitebsk, Chaim Zhitlowsky (1865–1943), who, like Ansky, had joined the populist Narodniki in his youth but, following the pogroms of the 1880s, returned to the Jewish folk. He became one of the ideologists of the socialist Bund in 1898 and later joined the more moderate territorialists (he would go on in the United States to adopt

and then shed a variety of other ideologies). Zhitlowsky's "Yiddishism" was an attempt to construct a secular culture of the East European Jews as the foundation for Jewish national rights.

The term *yiddishkeit* became a secular substitute for traditional religious culture. It is interesting to note that the term was also taken up by the Orthodox to evoke the world of tradition. Thus, for Akiva Schlesinger, the ideologue of Hungarian ultra-Orthodoxy, beyond the traditional realm of the halakhah lay the category of "Jewishness" (*yahadut*—here the Hebrew equivalent of *yiddishkeit*), which he contrasted with "gentileness" (*goyut*): these were no longer mere religious categories but instead something like essential national or ethnic characteristics. The traditional notion of *am yisrael* (the people of Israel) now began to take on secular, nationalist associations, once again complicating the conventional dichotomy between the secular and the Orthodox.

The return to the folk was inextricably bound up with identification with Jewish suffering. Here, folk memory might serve the needs of those intellectuals whose attitude toward popular Jewish culture now shifted from satire to sentiment. In 1901, two of the new ethnographers, S. M. Ginzburg and P. S. Marek, published a collection of "Yiddish Folksongs in Russia," some of which purported to go back to the conscription of Jewish children into the army of Nicholas I. We recall that Jewish communal leaders were often complicit with the government in kidnapping poor boys into the Cantonist brigades. Now, the protesting voice of the people found its place in print:

*Little children are ripped from the heder
And dressed in soldiers' garments.
Our leaders, our rabbis
Help to give them up as soldiers.⁶⁷*

The maskilim of the time of Nicholas had also deflected blame for this terror away from the czarist government and onto the communal authorities. Later in the century, though, in the wake of the pogroms, the conscription came to be seen as an early stage in the unremitting czarist hostility toward the Jews.

Yet the military reforms of Alexander II significantly changed the Jewish military experience. A beautifully illustrated minute book of a Jewish prayer fraternity in the Russian army, composed between 1864 and 1867, suggests that some draftees continued to adhere to their religious traditions.⁶⁸ Although anti-Jewish opinion argued that the Jews were draft evaders—and many, no doubt, were—conscription into the Russian army from the 1860s on served as another road to acculturation but not necessarily to complete loss of Jewish identity.

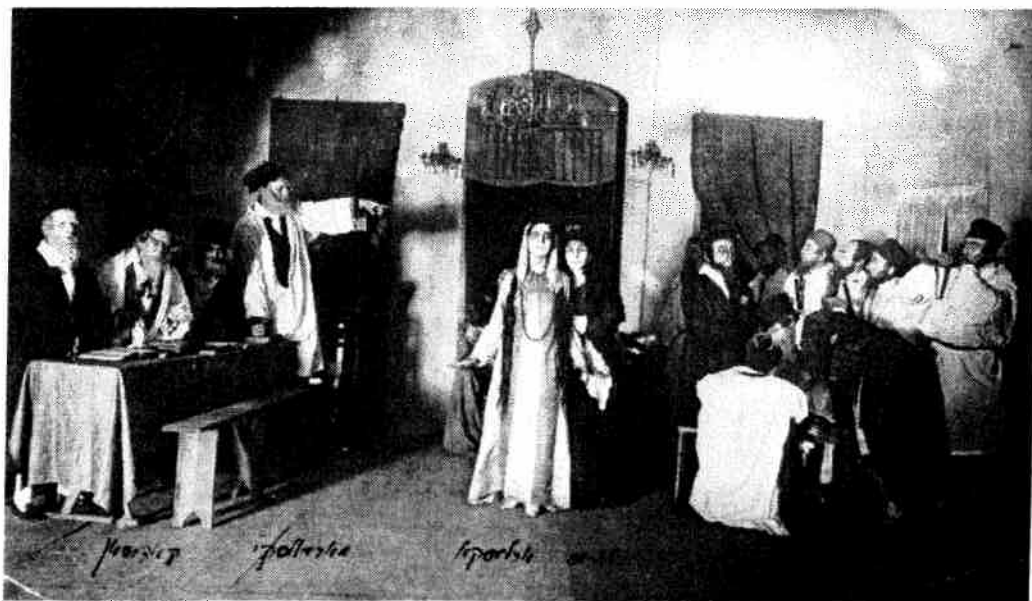
In response to the pogroms of the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, a whole literature of lamentation emerged in Hebrew and Yiddish.⁶⁹ At times, lamentation was mixed with protest, as in Bialik's famous poem "The City of Slaughter," which took the Jews of Kishinev to task for not defending themselves against the pogromists (an accusation actually contradicted by some of the evidence; in fact, this was a time when Jews began to organize armed self-defense). During World War I, massive pogroms in Galicia prompted Ansky, who undertook a campaign to aid the victims, to chronicle the devastation. His account became the inspiration for other, similar chronicles of pogroms during the Russian Civil War.

Another cultural response to the perceived passive suffering of the Jews and the need for self-defense was the development of a new literary hero, the *ba'al guf*—meaning "he who has a [strong] body"—who represented the exact opposite of the *talush*, a Jew with vitality and strength and perhaps even a dose of violence. The figure takes his name from Bialik's 1899 Hebrew short story "Aryeh Ba'al-Guf" and was elaborated by a panoply of Hebrew, Yiddish, and Russian writers, from Sholem Asch to Isaac Babel. In Asch's famous Yiddish story "Kola Street," tough Jews defend their community against the pogromists, but their own violence is partially responsible for the pogrom. Asch glorifies the bloody, anti-intellectual nature of his Jewish gangsters, but there is almost a comic-book quality to their violence that throws some doubt on just how the author understands them.

Berdichevsky developed the *ba'al guf* figure in his works of fiction; as an ethnographer, he searched for real-life models of the underside of Jewish society: violent butchers and muscular hewers of wood instead of emaciated *yeshivah* students. Berdichevsky's biography reflects many of the different cultural forces we have been following. Born of a Hasidic family in Ukraine, he studied at the Volozhin *yeshivah*, a sign that, by the last part of the nineteenth century, the old antagonism between Hasidism and Mitnagdism had waned considerably. At Volozhin, Berdichevsky discovered *Haskalah*, but he went past it to embrace a radical form of Jewish cultural nationalism. He denounced the "religion of the book" in favor of a "new Hebrew man" who would follow a "religion of the sword." Under the influence of Nietzsche, he turned to the folk as the ostensible representative of a vitalistic culture opposed to the ethical intellectualism and passivity of elite rabbinic culture. Here, then, was an example of an intellectual who, like the Russian *Narodniki*, sought an alliance with "the people" (or, to be more precise, his *image* of the people) against the official establishment: only the folk, in their elemental vitality, could defend against Jewish suffering and construct a new collectivity based on nationalist virtues.

The return to the folk was therefore never direct and uncomplicated but

instead always shaped by the modernist and secular ideologies of the intellectuals. All of these themes now came together in Ansky's last work, *The Dybbuk*, first put on the stage in 1920, after its author's death. *The Dybbuk* wedded folklore with Jewish modernism. Ansky based the play on folktales about dybbuks, the restless spirits of the dead that, in Jewish folklore, might inhabit the bodies of the living, but he wove the traditional tale into a "modern" story of romantic love. *The Dybbuk* takes the typical Haskalah form of a conflict between romantic love and the traditional engagement (*shiddukh*), but Ansky goes a step further by creating an alliance between popular Jewish culture, the culture of the folk, and modern values against a repressive rabbinic establishment. Following a standard theme from popular culture, Chanon, the brilliant young kabbalist, is promised to Leah in an oath sworn by their parents before their birth. But following Chanon's sudden death, Leah's parents betroth her to another boy for purely pragmatic considerations. In revenge, Chanon possesses her in the form of a dybbuk and refuses to let her marry the husband her father has chosen for her. Leah becomes both male and female when the dybbuk enters her, and this gender confusion subverts the marriage. Possession by the dybbuk, with its sexual overtones, symbolizes a kind of erotic revolt against the reactionary establishment of rabbis and parents, but, because of the prior pledge between the parents, it is also a revolt that has divine—or traditional—backing.



A 1921 production of Ansky's *Dybbuk* in Vilna. (YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, Photo Archives, New York; YIVO RG 119 Vilna Troupe 016)

Chanon is a kabbalist, but his Kabbalah is really a camouflaged form of erotic modernism. He says of himself: "I am one of those who searches for new ways."⁷⁰ He propounds a doctrine of the "holiness of sin" and asserts that the greatest sin, lust for a woman, can be purified into the greatest holiness. However, the tragic end of the story, in which Leah, too, dies and is now united with Chanon in the "other world," suggests that romantic love cannot yet find a home in this world. Although tragedy of this sort could be found in the Yiddish romances of the late Middle Ages, Ansky's play is a contemporary commentary on the power of the establishment as against the counter-culture of the folk or the revolutionary doctrines of modernity. The original title of the play, "Between Two Worlds," suggests not only the obvious "world of the living" and "world of the dead" but also the dilemma of Jews caught between the vanishing world of popular culture and the world of modern values still struggling to be born.

A romantic tragedy ending with the death of the "star-crossed" lovers, *The Dybbuk* also reverberates with more ominous overtones. Ansky wrote the play during World War I, which had witnessed some of the worst pogroms against the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe since 1648–49. Although *The Dybbuk* does not allude directly to these events, the deaths of Chanon and Leah are pre-figured by the slaughter of a bride and groom in 1648 by Chmelnitski Cossacks as the couple was being led to the wedding canopy. According to the folk custom of the town, at every wedding thereafter the guests danced around the grave of these martyrs and invited them to take part in the festivities. This implicit identification with the martyrs of a past pogrom hints that the untimely end of Chanon and Leah is more than a romantic tragedy: it also points to the pogroms of the era in which *The Dybbuk* was written, the horrors of which would ultimately be overshadowed by the Holocaust.

BETWEEN THE WARS

The Bolshevik Revolution aborted an attempt to premiere *The Dybbuk* in Moscow; although the reasons were not immediately political, Ansky's turn to the magical elements of Jewish folk culture was clearly not in line with a politically correct view of the people's consciousness. Ansky himself fled to Vilna, which was to become part of the newly independent Polish Republic. Between the two world wars, the Russian Revolution and the rise of an independent Poland were the two political events of the greatest importance for East European Jewish culture, which, like a supernova star, burned perhaps most brightly just before it was snuffed out. In both Russia and Poland, but for different reasons, a vibrant Jewish culture flourished for a limited time and all of the rich

tensions and conflicts that we have followed in this chapter found their final expressions.

In the new Soviet Union, the policy articulated by the regime shortly after the Revolution called for a culture that was “national in form and socialist in content.” The Jewish Sections of the Communist Party (known by the abbreviation Yevseksia) took on the task of revolutionizing Jewish culture in line with party ideology.⁷¹ The parameters of this new culture were dictated by what the party considered bourgeois versus what it considered progressive. Because Hebrew had become the language of the Zionist movement, which was judged a bourgeois-nationalist deviation, the Bolsheviks rejected it as a legitimate Jewish national language. Schools conducted in Hebrew were shut down, and Hebrew writers banned and harassed. Nevertheless, for nearly a decade after the Revolution, Hebrew culture struggled to survive in the Soviet Union. The Habimah theater was perhaps its greatest vehicle. Its production of *The Dybbuk*, in Bialik’s Hebrew translation and heavily influenced by Expressionism, became a sensation, attracting the attention of prominent non-Jews. But despite the support of such luminaries as Konstantin Stanislavsky, the director of the Moscow Art Theater, and the writer Maxim Gorky, Habimah was forced to shut down and its company had to go into exile in 1926.⁷² In a sense, the Yevseksia’s war on Hebrew culminated in an extreme way the language wars of the Haskalah period, but now with those favoring Yiddish armed with state power.⁷³ Indeed, it is ironic that Yiddish should have won the war in light of its original reputation among modernizers as a medieval “jargon.” But the fact that a secular Yiddish culture had developed by the turn of the century made it possible to conceive of a Communist war against the shtetl and its religious culture carried on in the primary language of that culture.

Let us return again to Vitebsk to observe briefly how that war was waged. Immediately after the Bolshevik Revolution, Chagall came back to his hometown as the commissar of fine arts and as director of a Free Academy of Art, a successor to Pen’s academy where he had gotten his start. From 1918 to 1920, when he went to Moscow to work with the new Yiddish State Theater, Chagall led a populist Jewish cultural renaissance in Vitebsk. But Vitebsk also became an important Yevseksia center, and it was there that the Jewish Communists published their Yiddish organ *Der Royter Shtern* (The Red Star), the purpose of which was to agitate for Bolshevik policies on the “Jewish street.” The Yevseksia launched attacks against institutions of traditional Jewish life in Vitebsk, confiscating synagogues and banning study houses. In 1921, they staged a public trial of the *heder*, which, as we have seen, had also been one of the Haskalah’s main targets. Throughout the 1920s, this campaign continued; it culminated in 1930

with the closing down of the Lubavitch yeshivah. Here was the realization of the Haskalah's most extreme agenda, but never in the nineteenth century had the maskilim mustered the power to carry out such a far-reaching revolution. Whether the maskilim or their successors would have used such extreme and brutal tactics against their traditional opponents if they had been able to do so is hard to know. But now their critique had been taken over by an ideology even more hostile to the culture of Jewish tradition. Because many of the leading Bolsheviks were themselves assimilated Jews, the new policies reflected the confluence of all of the cultural trends we have followed in this chapter.

The official endorsement of Yiddish as the national language of Jewish culture created a brief but intense renaissance in theater and literature, but now the multilingualism that characterized the nineteenth century came to an end. The Yiddish State Theater, where Chagall designed the sets, performed plays based on the works of Mendele, Peretz, and Sholem Aleichem, but these were staged to emphasize the most anticlerical and proletarian aspects of the writers. Yiddish prose and poetry also flourished. If earlier generations of writers had been influenced by the Russian literary tradition of rural sketches, often based on satirical or neo-Romantic realism, the new generation imbibed European modernism: Introspectivism, Expressionism, and Symbolism. A group that formed in Kiev before World War I that included David Bergelson, Pinchas Kahanovich (*Der Nister*), David Hofstein, and Peretz Markish continued into the Soviet period. Younger writers, such as Itzik Feffer, composed works of "socialist realism" in Yiddish. By the end of the 1920s, these authors were subjected to increasing political criticism and forced to write in conformity with party dictates. Yet this was clearly a period of extraordinary literary activity. Daily newspapers and journals appeared in Yiddish in many cities, including Kiev, Odessa, and Minsk. In 1928, 238 Yiddish books were published, with a total circulation of 875,000. The 1930s witnessed a significant decline as Stalin consolidated power, but there was again a Yiddish cultural renaissance during World War II and immediately after, as part of the wartime ideology of antifascism. Between 1948 and 1953, however, Jewish culture in the Soviet Union suffered its death blow with the shutting down of Yiddish theaters, newspapers, and publishing houses and with the execution of 24 of the most important Jewish writers on August 12, 1952.⁷⁴

Events in Russia narrowed the Jewish cultural system to Yiddish, but a more multilingual process took place in Poland, where Jewish life flourished perhaps with the greatest intensity in the interwar period.⁷⁵ Let us consider one particular community, the city of Wloclawek, which lies some 185 kilometers northwest of Warsaw, along the Vistula River. At the beginning of the twentieth century, it had a Jewish population of 4,000, which rose to some 10,000 by the 1930s (out of

a total population of 56,000). At a time when Jewish culture in Vitebsk was undergoing coerced constriction, Wloclawek enjoyed a veritable renaissance.⁷⁶ The community was run by a kahal board, chosen in hotly contested elections by all male Jews in the town. A wide range of political parties represented all the cultural options that I have traced here, including the Hasidim of Strykow and the Agudah representing the strictly Orthodox, the religious Zionists (Mizrahi), socialist Zionists (Poale Zion), Revisionist Zionists, and the Bund (non-Zionist socialists). Most of these political parties were associated with a school system: Tarbut and Yavneh (Hebrew), TSYSHO (Central Yiddish School Organization), Horev and Beis Yaakov (Orthodox schools for boys and girls, respectively), as well as Polish public schools. Several gymnasia (including one for girls) were opened at the end of World War I, and many of the young people of the town joined the range of youth movements—Betar, Hashomer ha-Tzair, He-Halutz—paralleling the political parties. A Jewish press, a theater, and sports organizations flourished. Although the foundations for this rich and varied culture were laid before World War I, it was in the two short decades of Polish independence that it achieved its full vitality.

Two contradictory linguistic trends determined the course of Jewish culture. On the one hand, although Yiddish remained the mother tongue of the majority, increasing numbers of Polish Jews received their education in Polish (most of the Jewish schools mentioned above were required to teach some subjects in Polish), and this became their primary language of communication with friends and even parents. This tendency toward Polonization, which existed to some degree before World War I, gained enormous impetus with the emergence of an independent Poland. (The same adoption of the indigenous language can be seen in the new Czechoslovak Republic, where Jews who had previously identified primarily with German now embraced Czech.) On the other hand, increasing Polish nationalism was accompanied by significant new antisemitism that sought to exclude the Jews (who constituted 10 percent of the population) from many corners of Polish life. Faced with mounting barriers, the Jews developed their own complex culture, which took place simultaneously in Hebrew, Yiddish, and Polish.⁷⁷ Although the Tarbut network of schools—dedicated to teaching Hebrew—existed throughout Poland, Hebrew culture had perhaps the greatest difficulty. Neither a Hebrew press nor Hebrew theater succeeded in putting down roots, and most Hebrew writers and poets left for Palestine. Hebrew culture in Poland was primarily imported; a significant market existed for Hebrew newspapers and books produced in Palestine as well as Berlin (at least during the 1920s). Yiddish culture had an easier time, with significant literary centers emerging in the interwar period in Warsaw and Vilna. The Yung Vilna

circle of the 1930s made a particular mark with the poetry of Abraham Sutzkever, Leyzer Wolf, and Chaim Grade. Yiddish newspapers flourished, reflecting all of the different political and religious movements; 11 were published in Warsaw alone. The theater staged Yiddish classics plus translations into Yiddish of great dramas from world literature.

It was the growth of Jewish culture in Polish, however, that signified the singular nature of Jewish Poland between the wars. In Warsaw, Cracow, and Lvov, daily papers appeared in Polish that were published by Jews and intended for Jewish audiences.⁷⁸ It appears that Jews preferred to get their general news—and not only news of the Jewish world—from a Jewish source, even if their preferred language was Polish. Similarly, a Polish Jewish theater emerged in 1925 under the directorship of Mark Arnshteyn (1879–1943), producing, among other works, a Polish translation of Ansky's *Dybbuk* steeped more in Polish romanticism than in Jewish folklore.⁷⁹ It was in developments such as these that a Jewish subculture in Polish took shape in the years before the Holocaust.

The Great Destruction swept away this remarkable culture, just as Stalinism did in the Soviet Union. To be sure, East European Jewish culture did not end with its demise in Europe. It had already sent strong offshoots to both North and South America as well as to what was to become the State of Israel. The flourishing of Yiddish or Hebrew culture in those places continued the legacy of Eastern Europe in new forms that lie beyond the scope of this chapter. Today, our memory of that culture is caught between the horror in which it died and nostalgia for a harmonious past that never existed. Immediately after the Holocaust, Abraham Joshua Heschel, the scion of a great Polish Hasidic dynasty, eulogized East European Jewish culture in a Yiddish address later translated and published as "The Earth Is the Lord's." There is much in Heschel's beautiful evocation of the spiritual grandeur of this culture that still rings true, but, in one sense, he failed to capture the full measure of the Jews whose cultural variety we have followed here. For, like Ansky's journey "between two worlds," the culture of the East European Jews was neither static nor seamless. Instead, the secret to its vitality lay precisely in its fissures, conflicts, and struggles in search of new identities in a fragmenting world.

NOTES

1. Quoted in David Roskies, "S. Ansky and the Paradigm of Return," in Jack Wertheimer, ed., *The Uses of Tradition: Jewish Continuity in the Modern Era* (New York, 1992), 247. Roskies translates to English from a Yiddish translation of a Russian manuscript from

Ansky's literary remains left in St. Petersburg. The Russian was published in *Evreiskiya Starina* 2 (1924). The Yiddish appeared in Moyshe Shalit, "Maye protim vegem Sh. Anski," *Literarishe Bleter* 340 (1930): 839. I have slightly altered Roskies' English translation based on the Yiddish. For my overall analysis and use of Ansky, I am very much indebted to Roskies, especially his introduction to S. Ansky, *The Dybbuk and Other Writings* (New York, 1992), and his "The Maskil as Folk Hero," *Prooftexts* 10, no. 2 (1990): 219–35.

2. These figures are anything but exact and are based on unreliable census data, some of which is a projection forward of the 1765 Polish census. See John Klier, *Russia Gathers Her Jews: The Origins of the "Jewish Question" in Russia, 1772–1825* (Dekalb, Ill., 1986), 19.

3. See Michael Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews: The Transformation of Jewish Society in Russia, 1825–1855* (Philadelphia, 1983).

4. On this period, see John Klier, *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question, 1855–1881* (New York, 1995).

5. See Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley, 2002).

6. See Baruch Karu, ed., *Sefer Vitebsk* (Tel Aviv, 1957)—a translation into Hebrew of the article on Vitebsk from the *Russian Jewish Encyclopedia*.

7. See *ibid.*, 4; Jacob Lestchinsky, "Vitebsk and the District in the Nineteenth Century" (Hebrew), 5–21; and Aronson, Gregor, ed., *Vitebsk amol; geshikhte, zikhroynes, hurbn* (New York, 1956).

8. On the Gaon, see Immanuel Etkes, *Yahid be-Doro: Ha-Gaon me-Vilna—Demut ve-Dimui* (Jerusalem, 1995). On the culture of the Mitnagdim, see Alan Nadler, *The Faith of the Mitnagdim: Rabbinic Responses to Hasidic Rapture* (Baltimore, Md., 1997). On the Lithuanian yeshivot, see Shaul Stampfer, *Ha-Yeshiva ha-Lita'it be-Hithavutah* (Jerusalem, 1995).

9. *Be'ur ha-GRA le-Mishlei* (Psalms), 4:4, in Immanuel Etkes, *Rabbi Israel Salanter and the Musar Movement*, trans. Jonathan Chipman (Philadelphia, 1993), 24.

10. Introduction to *Bi'ur ha-GRA*, Oraḥ Ḥayyim.

11. See Norman Solomon, *The Analytic Movement: Hayyim Soloveitchik and His Circle* (Atlanta, Ga., 1993).

12. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, trans. Lawrence Kaplan (Philadelphia, 1983).

13. Hayyim of Volozhin, *Ruaḥ Ḥayyim al Avot*, chap. 1, mishna 4, p. 7. See also H. H. Ben Sasson, "The Personality of Elijah, Gaon of Vilna, and His Historical Influence" (Hebrew), *Zion* 31 (1966): 199.

14. Barukh Schick, *Uklides* (The Hague, 1780), intro., translated in David E. Fishman, *Russia's First Modern Jews: The Jews of Shklov* (New York, 1995), 22. Fishman's book is the best treatment of the relationships between the Gaon, his disciples, and early Russian Haskalah.

15. Judah Leb Margoliot, *Bet Midot* (Shklov, 1786), 20b; translated in Fishman, *Russia's First Modern Jews*, 115.

16. See Etkes, *Rabbi Israel Salanter*.

17. Translated in Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World*, 2d ed. (New York, 1995), 156.
18. *Mekhilta*, ed. H. S. Horowitz (Jerusalem, 1960) 14, Bo, par. 5; *Midrash Rabba Leviticus*, *Emor* 32:5; *Pesikta de-Rav Kahanah*, ed. Solomon Buber (Lyck, 1868), Vayehi be-shalah 83b and *Pesikta Zutarti Shmot* 6.6 (for not changing clothing), Numbers Rabba 13.19, 20.22, Midrash Rabba on Song of Songs 4.25.
19. Moses Sofer, *Derashot*, ed. Yosef Naftali Stern (Cluj, 1929), 2:243a–b, translated in Jacob Katz, “Towards a Biography of the Hatam Sofer,” in Frances Malino and David Sorkin, eds., *From East and West: Jews in a Changing Europe, 1750–1870* (Oxford, 1990), 253.
20. Akiva Joseph Schlesinger, *Lev ha-Ivri*, vol. 2 (Lemberg, 1868), f. 846, n. 23, translated in Michael Silber, “The Emergence of Ultra-Orthodoxy: The Invention of a Tradition,” in Wertheimer, ed., *The Uses of Tradition*, 49.
21. For a summary of recent scholarly views of Hasidism, see Ada Rapoport-Albert, ed., *Hasidism Reappraised* (London, 1996).
22. *Shivhei ha-Besht*, 123; trans. in Dan Ben-Amos and Jerome Mintz, eds. and trans., *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov* (Bloomington, Ind., 1979), 179.
23. *Shivhei ha-Besht*, 133, trans. in Ben-Amos and Mintz, eds., *In Praise*, 199.
24. *Sefer Sippurei Kedoshim*, ed. G. Nigal (Jerusalem, 1977), 34. See also Elie Yassif, *Sippur ha-Am ha-Ivri* (Jerusalem, 1994), 429–30.
25. See Elonora Bergman, “Gora Kalwaria: The Impact of a Hasidic Cult on the Urban Landscape of a Small Polish Town,” *Polin* 5 (1990) : 3–23.
26. Israel of Ruzhin, *Irin Kadishin* (Bnei Brak, 1983), 106. See also David Assaf, *Derekh ha-Malkhut: R. Yisrael me-Ruzhin u-Mekomo be-Toldot ha-Hasidut* (Jerusalem, 1997), 146–47.
27. *Keneset Yisrael* (Warsaw, 1906), 8a.
28. See Richard I. Cohen, *Jewish Icons: Art and Society in Modern Europe* (Berkeley, 1998), 114–53.
29. See Maria and Kazimierz Piechotka, “Polish Synagogues in the Nineteenth Century,” in Antony Polonsky, ed., *From Shtetl to Socialism: Studies from Polin* (London, 1993), 212–31.
30. On the special character of the new city of Odessa and its role in nineteenth-century Russian Jewish culture, see Steven J. Zipperstein, *The Jews of Odessa: A Cultural History, 1794–1881* (Stanford, 1985).
31. On the culture of Jewish politics in the late nineteenth century, see Jonathan Franke, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862–1917* (Cambridge, Eng., 1981), and Ezra Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale: The Formative Years of the Jewish Workers’ Movement in Tsarist Russia* (Cambridge, Eng., 1970).
32. Isaac Ber Levinsohn, *Te’udah be-Yisrael* (Vilna, 1828; rpt., Jerusalem, 1977). On Levinsohn and the early Russian Haskalah, see Immanuel Etke’s introduction to the 1977 edition of *Te’udah be-Yisrael*. For the relationship between the early Haskalah and the regime of Nicholas I, see Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews*.
33. Levinsohn, *Te’udah*, 34.

34. Roman Ziman, "Gatunek: Podroz," *Kultura* 11 (1983): 24, quoted and translated in Chone Shmeruk, "Hebrew-Yiddish-Polish: A Trilingual Culture," in Yisrael Gutman, Ezra Mendelsohn, Jehuda Reinhartz, and Chone Shmeruk, eds., *The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars* (Hanover, N.H., 1989), 289.
35. See Dan Miron, *Ben Hazon le-Emet* (Jerusalem, 1979), 177–216.
36. Letter from Samuel Joseph Fuenn to Bezalel Stern (1840) in *Pardes* (Odessa, 1897), 3: 149–56, trans. in Mendes-Flohr and Reinhartz, *The Jew in the Modern World*, 382–83.
37. A paraphrase of the line in Gordon's poem "Awake My People" ("Hakitzza ami"), published in 1866. On Gordon, see Michael Stanislawski, *For Whom Do I Toil? Judah Leib Gordon and the Crisis of Russian Jewry* (New York, 1988).
38. See David Biale, *Eros and the Jews* (Berkeley, 1997), chap. 7.
39. On Haskalah autobiographies, see Alan Mintz, "Banished from Their Father's Table": *Loss of Faith and Hebrew Autobiography* (Bloomington, Ind., 1989).
40. My student, Abraham Socher, has completed a doctoral dissertation on Maimon's autobiography and its relationship to his philosophical work (Berkeley, 2001).
41. On the heder and its image, see Steven J. Zipperstein, *Imagining Russian Jewry* (Seattle, 1999), chap. 2.
42. Moses Leib Lilienblum, *Ketavim Autobiografim* (Jerusalem, 1970), 1 : 108.
43. See Shmuel Feiner, "The Modern Jewish Woman: A Test Case of the Relations Between the Haskalah and Modernity" (Hebrew), in Israel Bartal and Isaiah Gafni, eds., *Eros, Erusin ve-Issurim* (Jerusalem, 1998), 253–304.
44. See Shaul Stampfer, "Gender Differentiation and Education of the Jewish Woman in Nineteenth-Century Eastern Europe," in Polonsky, ed., *From Shtetl to Socialism*, 187–211.
45. M. Kamionski, "Jewish Nihilists in the Seventies" (Hebrew), *Ha-Shiloah* 17 (1907): 257–63.
46. Anonymous, *Ayn Sheyne Historye fun aynem Ekhtikn Rovs Tokhter fun Konstantinopl un fun ayn Rov Zayn zun fun Brisk* (n.p., n.d.).
47. See Meir Noy, "The Theme of the Canceled Wedding in Yiddish Folksongs: A Bibliographical Survey" (Hebrew), in Issachar Ben-Ami and Davnoy, eds., *Studies in Marriage Customs* (Jerusalem, 1974), 61–65.
48. Abraham Landau Bornstein, *Avnei Nezer* (Pieterkov, 1916), *Even HaEzer*, pt. 1, no. 119.
49. On this theme, see Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, chap. 3.
50. M. J. Berdichevsky, "In Their Mothers' Womb" (Hebrew), in his *Kitve M. J. Bin-Gorion* (Tel Aviv, 1965), 1: 102. The borders of the city represent the farthest reaches Jewish law allowed one to walk on the Sabbath: these Jews were walking past the very boundaries of the halakhah.
51. See ChaeRan Freeze, *Between Marriage and Divorce: The Transformation of the Jewish Family in Imperial Russia, 1825–1914* (Hanover, N.H., 2001).
52. Translated under the title "Go Talk to a Goy" in S. Ansky, *The Dybbuk and Other Writings*, ed. David Roskies (New York, 1992), 145–50.

53. Pauline Wengeroff, *Memoiren einer Grossmutter*, 2d ed. (Berlin, 1919), 2: 138–39.
54. See the introduction by Ruth Wisse to Sholem Aleichem, *The Best of Sholem Aleichem* (New York, 1979).
55. On Mendele, see Dan Miron, *A Traveler Disguised: A Study in the Rise of Modern Yiddish Fiction in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1973).
56. “Shem and Japhet on the Train” (Hebrew), in *Kol Kitve Mendele Mokher Sefarim* (Tel Aviv, 1947), 399. The story is translated in Robert Alter, ed., *Modern Hebrew Literature* (New York, 1975), 15–40.
57. See Zivia Amishai-Maisels, “The Jewish Jesus,” *Journal of Jewish Art* 9 (1983): 84–104, and David Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), 258–312. My student, Matthew Hoffman, has completed a dissertation on this theme: “Reclaiming Jesus and the Construction of Modern Jewish Culture” (Berkeley, 2000).
58. Cohen, *Jewish Icons*, 217, 223–27.
59. Zivia Amishai-Maisels, “Chagall’s *Dedicated to Christ*: Sources and Meanings,” *Journal of Jewish Art* 21 (1995): 69–94.
60. S. Ansky, *Dos yidische etnografishe program*, ed. L. I. Shternberg, vol. 1 (Petrograd, 1914), 10, quoted in Roskies’ introduction to Ansky, *The Dybbuk and Other Writings*, xxiv.
61. For a discussion of how Russian Jewish intellectuals pioneered the nostalgic image of the shtetl that would later surface in such works as *Life Is With People* and *Fiddler on the Roof*, see Zipperstein, *Imagining Russian Jewry*, chap. 2.
62. Abraham Ber Gottlober, *Zikhronot u-Masa’ot* (Jerusalem, 1976), 85.
63. See Israel Bartal, “True Knowledge and Wisdom: On Orthodox Historiography,” in J. Frankel, ed., *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 10 (1994): 178–92, and Ada Rapoport-Albert, “Hagiography with Footnotes: Edifying Tales and the Writing of History in Hasidism,” *History and Theory* 27 (1988): 119–59.
64. A. M. Dik, introduction to *Maḥaze mul Maḥaze* (Warsaw, 1861).
65. Quoted in Naomi Seidman, *A Marriage Made in Heaven: The Sexual Politics of Hebrew and Yiddish* (Berkeley, 1997), 20.
66. Zederbaum’s introduction to the 1869 Odessa edition of *Dos Poylishe Yingl*, quoted in Dan Miron, *A Traveler Disguised: A Study in the Rise of Modern Yiddish Fiction in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1973), 5.
67. S. M. Ginzburg and P. S. Marek, eds., *Evreiskie narodniye pesni v Rossii* (St. Petersburg, 1901), no. 50. See the rhymed translation in Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, 59.
68. Michael Stanislawski, *Psalms for the Tsar: A Minute-Book of a Psalms-Society in the Russian Army, 1864–1867* (New York, 1988).
69. See Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, for a comprehensive and nuanced account of this aspect of the culture.
70. S. Ansky, *Der Dybbuk*, in *Di Yidishe Drame fun zosten Yorhundert* (New York, 1977), 44.
71. On the Yevseksia, see Mordechai Altshuler, *Ha-Yevseksyah bi-Verit-ha-Mo’atzot (1918–1930): Ben Le’umiyut le-Komunizm* (Jerusalem, 1980).

72. On Jewish theater in the Soviet Union, see Mordechai Altshuler, ed., *Ha-Te'atron ha-Yehudi bi-Verit ha-Mo'atzot: Mehkarim, Iyunim, Te'udot* (Jerusalem, 1996).
73. See Jehoshua A. Gilboa, *A Language Silenced: The Suppression of Hebrew Literature and Culture in the Soviet Union* (Rutherford, N.J., 1982).
74. On Jewish culture in the Soviet period, see Zvi Y. Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence: The Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1881 to the Present* (New York, 1988); Nora Levin, *The Jews in the Soviet Union Since 1917* (New York, 1988); and David Shneer, "Reinventing Yiddishkayt: Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture, 1917–1930" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2001).
75. See Gutman et al., eds., *The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars*; Antony Polonsky, Ezra Mendelsohn, and Jerzy Tomaszewski, eds., *Jews in Independent Poland, 1918–1939* (London, 1994); and Celia Heller, *On the Edge of Destruction: Jews of Poland Between the Two World Wars* (New York, 1977). More generally, see Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars* (Bloomington, Ind., 1983).
76. For information on this community, see Katri'el P. Tkorsh and Me'ir Koz'an, eds., *Vlatslavsk ve-ha-Sevivah: Sefer Zikaron* (Tel Aviv, 1967).
77. See Chone Shmeruk, "Hebrew-Yiddish-Polish," in Gutman et al., eds., *The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars*, 285–311.
78. See Michael Steinlauf, "The Polish Jewish Daily Press," in Polonsky, ed., *From Shtetl to Socialism*, 332–58.
79. See Michael Steinlauf, "Mark Arnshteyn and Polish-Jewish Theater," in Gutman et al., eds., *The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars*, 399–411.

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