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Acknowledgements

This book is the translation of my 2019 German-language monograph (*Wiedererfindung der Tradition: Russisch-jüdische Literatur der Gegenwart* [Vienna, Cologne, and Weimar: Böhlau-Verlag, 2019]).

I would like to thank my colleagues in Germany and abroad, who accompanied me for a short or long period of time during these years and shared their expert knowledge with me. Their comments and suggestions, as well as our cooperation within research projects and on collective publications on related (and unrelated) topics—in short: the intellectual micro-climate in which ideas sometimes arose in quite unexpected situations and moments—were crucial not only for the development of argumentation in this study, but also for my scholarly progress in general.

In particular, I would like to thank Michael Beizer, Mieczysław Dąbrowski, Eva Hausbacher, Zsuzsa Hetényi, Ulrike Jekutsch, Aleksandr Kantor, Leonid Katsis, Roman Katsman, Vladimir Khazan, Ann Komaromi, Walter Koschmal, Ber Kotlerman, Mikhail Krutikov, Ilya Kukulin, Mirja Lecke, Mark Lipovetsky, Hartmut Lutz, Magdalena Marszałek, Cornelia E. Martyn, Christina Parnell, David G. Roskies, David Shneer, Maxim D. Shrayer, Christian Suhm, Olaf Terpitz, Dirk Uffelmann, and Mikhail Weiskopf.

The conversations with some authors who are featured in this book, especially with David Shrayer-Petrov, David Markish, and Filipp Isaak Berman, showed

me that the academic knowledge about the epoch sometimes differs very much from narrated memories and emotional testimonies.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to the Technology University of Dresden for its generous financial support, without which the translation and editing of this book would not be possible.

All translations from French, Polish, and Yiddish are mine, if no other source is indicated.

1. Introduction

> What survives even when the storyteller gets the material in translation [...] is the paradigm of rebellion, loss, and negotiated return.
>
> David G. Roskies [1995: 342–343]

1.1. Tradition and Innovation in Judaism—Text and Commentary

In this book, I ask: How do contemporary East European Jewish literatures (in my case, the Russian Jewish) deal with the Jewish tradition? Within such texts, the period after the Shoah and the decades of communist politics resulted in the loss of its former cultural reference system and its lively connection to the reader. In the era of *postmemory* [Hirsch 2008] devices and practices that deal with reconstruction as well as reinvention of the past become prevalent.[1] The tendency of folklorizing and "virtualization" [Gruber 2002] of Jewishness—an inevitable consequence of the ever-increasing temporal disconnection from the

1 See the terms "reinvention" and "re-creation" in Roskies 1995: 5. On the phenomenon of "inventing of tradition" cf. also Hobsbawm 1983.

lost culture—explains the emphasis on performativity and autoreflection in writing and artifacts. Art and literature become *tropes* in their own right; they represent, in a complex way, the state of tradition in the present.

While postwar East European Jewish literatures produce very different poetics, they all reflect on the breach of tradition as their point of origin and, to a large extent, the condition of their own existence. Their treatment of the Jewish tradition is conceived or staged as a new recreation after destruction, a beginning after an end. The impossibility of a "natural" continuity, however, is not solely a consequence of historical breaks and catastrophes; it is also a characteristic of secularized postmodernism.[2] In the era of plural historiographies, literature uses poetic strategies that demonstrate the failure of the hermeneutic understanding of the past.

Paradoxically, however, the cultural practices of radical reimagining of the tradition up until the postmodern dispersion of meaning come close to the origins of the Judaic tradition, in particular to its undogmatic relationship between text and commentary.

"Jewishness has lived and lives with an open and permeable canon without ever denying its core" [Gelhard 2008: 1]. This principle of Jewish thought arose with its beginnings in rabbinical literature and has been articulated again in recent decades by researchers of Jewish literature on various continents. The range, diachronicity, and historically conditioned semantics of renewal in Jewish literatures in various languages are topics that always refer to the dialectic of proximity and distance to the Jewish tradition. These topics seem to be of increasing interest today, in time of blatant heterogenization and de-essentialization of the Jewish worlds, literatures included.

The connection to the Talmudic heritage, and, at the same time, the never-ending intellectual practice of interpretation, questioning, and subversion of authority, which is also rooted in the Talmud—what one might call the *tradition of questioning the tradition*—are the most striking features of Jewish religious thought. After the Haskala, they coin the Jewish secular thought as well. Dorothee Gelhard evokes this dialectic of following and denial, connection and questioning to the point of negation when she points out that "the Hebrew word for the past is 'lefanim, lifne,' [. . .] which means 'front,' 'face,' or 'in front of the face.' In this model, the past stands not *behind*, but ahead of us" [ibid.: 3]. Therefore, a brief digression into the rabbinic exegesis will help us to discern the specifics of later literary processes.

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2 The polyseme concept of postmodernism is here—in contrast to chap. 11.2—not discussed in terms of literary history, but in the philosophical sense of Lyotard's time diagnosis and in the sense of the poststructuralist negation of any purposeful ideological narrations.

The Jewish practice of unorthodox continuity has been discussed in several important works of literary criticism in the last decades. In her book quoted above, Dorothee Gelhard asserts the inexpressibility and concealment (immateriality) of God in Judaism, which lead to the intangibility of the truth, of the last sense of scripture. This becomes the basis of exegetical freedom and the reason for the symbolic charge of language "as a link between God and the humankind." "The written Torah [means] the mere potentiality, the possibility of reading and understanding") [ibid.: 5–6]. From this, Gelhard derives the principle of symbolic reading, which, instead of the direct literal meaning of the Torah (*peshat*), emphasizes its semantic potentiality, polyvalence, associations, and distant connections (*derash*).[3] Gelhard transfers this distinction of exegetic methods not only to literary theories, such as that of intertextuality, but also to the literary texts themselves and their relationship to tradition. The development of Jewish literatures and of individual literary works thus follows the history of the Jewish commentary on the book.

In his investigation of "interlacings" in Jewish literatures Dan Miron looks at the works of the famous Hebrew writer Achad Ha'am and his heretical, Zionism-inspired "psychologization" of the divine. In his essay "Moses" Achad Ha'am equates the flames of the burning thorn bush, the symbol of revelation, with the moral zeal of Moses as a national leader. This drastic reinterpretation of the divine was unacceptable for the critics of that time. "However, this dualism, characteristic of Achad Ha'am's philosophy, the secularization of the sacred and the sacralization of the secular, presaged the entire development of contemporary Hebrew literature" [Miron 2007: 94]. To this day, imagination in Jewish literatures is often founded by the symbolic act of bringing the sacred down into the real world, its humanization, "sacrificing" the doctrine to the divided historical world. Often, the commentary on the "original text" of the tradition is constructed by the means of poetics, literary forms, and devices. Just as modern Hebrew poets routinely use postbiblical traditions as the main source for the development of their national literatures—Miron mentions imitations of psalm poetry, quasi-biblical legends, literarization of the Talmudic Aramaic, lyrical "prophecies," adaptation and translation of Talmudic and midrashic legends, and the reinvention of the Hasidic novella [ibid.: 96–101]—Russian Jewish authors referred and continue to refer to certain genres, figures, plots, and linguistic features in order to continue the creative "genealogy" of Jewishness or to confirm its loss. Literary symbolization becomes that "act of mediation, negotiation and translating" [Slezkine 2004: 20], which connects eras as well

3 Gelhard refers to [Goodmann-Thau 2002] and [Kilcher 1998]. See [Gelhard 2008: 4–9].

as cultures, and uses the past to explore the present. In this respect, cultural *translation* in the broadest sense means a creative, reflexive, and highly semantic re-reading and re-actualization of the book—an action that among other things, stands in for the tradition of the midrash, only the entirety of a lost Jewish culture here takes the place of the Hebrew Bible as the object of reference.

The poststructuralist research on the method of text interpretation in the midrash, which flourished in the United States in the 1980s and the 1990s, deals above all with the question: "How does one mediate the past for the world of the present?" [Holtz 1992: 377]. In this regard, the realization of the fact that the activity of the midrashists extended far beyond the interpretation of passages from the holy scriptures, and became the creation of literature, of primary texts, is both symptomatic and relevant.[4] This conclusion opens up a broad field of reflection on the methods of text analysis that can be relevant to Jewish Studies in the period of academic postmodernism, as well as the use of Jewish tradition in literary texts. Characteristic of the midrash are the borderless semanticization of the original text, the meticulous interpretation of the words and letters—Holtz speaks of "hyper-intensive reading" and "rabbinic microscope" [ibid.: 384]—and, above all, the principle of an a-contextual, associative, highly intertextual reading of the Torah. This tradition inspires literary practices of the reinterpretation of the past and sets in motion mechanisms of cultural renewal.

Engaged in a potentially endless intertextual activity[5] of interpretation and rewriting (two strategies that, according to Geoffrey H. Hartman, have a symbiotic relationship), the midrash makes the notions of originality and origin particularly problematic: "Originality shifts its meaning or doubles its locus. The canon is [. . .] extended by an intertextual reflection that has accepted the task of memory and preservation while adding a spacious supplement [. . .]" [Hartman/Budick 1986: xii].[6]

In its interpretation of the past, the midrash employs the cultural codes of its time and uses quotations from the Torah to *refer, above all, to itself and its era.* Boyarin carries over the poststructuralist negation of the fixed signifier/signified attribution to the history of Jewish biblical exegesis, which (again) strips the rabbinic reading of its exclusive, timeless authority and opens the scripture to the "strong reader." The rabbis, thus, are the early readers, who are competent

4 "[. . .] midrash itself becomes a first-order body of work, A LITERATURE—indeed a sacred text—in its own right" [ibid.: 379]. Daniel Boyarin traces this view of the midrash using the works of various authors from Maimonides to Isaak Heinemann (1974) [Boyarin 1990: 1–11].

5 For the history and the most important concepts of intertextuality see [Smola 2004: 13–42].

6 As already mentioned, Gelhard also establishes a connection between Jewish hermeneutics and the theory of intertextuality, yet without mentioning Boyarin's work [2008: 7–8].

and yet limited by the context of their time, as they attempt to fill the gaps in the meanings of the Torah, which is itself endlessly intertextual and dialogical:

> The Torah, owing to its own intertextuality, is a severely gapped text, and the gaps are there to be filled by strong readers, which in this case does not mean readers fighting for originality, but readers fighting to find what they must in the holy text. Their own intertext that is, the cultural codes which enable them to make meaning and find meaning. [Boyarin 1990: 16]

This newly discovered connection between biblical comments, such as midrash and aggada, and fiction accompanied a productive turn in the study of Jewish literature(s) and their relationship to tradition. Works of Jewish literature were examined as forms of *modern midrash* in the broader sense, and the literary process, as a constantly updated exploration of the scripture and religious texts. In this way, David C. Jacobson views the key texts of twentieth century Hebrew literature as an integral part and an afterlife of the Jewish exegetic: "In calling this study *Modern Midrash*, the term *midrash* is used to refer to the Jewish tradition of the interpretive retelling of biblical stories that began within the Bible itself, developed in the rabbinic and medieval periods, and, I believe, has continued in the present" [1987: 1]. Thus, literature—as midrash—was able to provide a response to the various crises of Jewishness, such as the revision of the Hasidism as a result of the split during the Haskala [ibid.: 4–9].

In his monograph *A Bridge of Longing. The Lost Art of Yiddish Storytelling* [1995] (a title that already hints at the idea of a constructed connection with the past, David G. Roskies narrates[7] the emergence of Jewish folk culture and, in particular, of the Yiddish storytelling, out of religious legends and folklore: "The Torah was the book of life, the source of law *and* lore. [...] The story could never be fully 'emancipated' from the Book of Books" [Roskies 1995: 21–23, italics in the original].[8] According to Roskies, Yiddish literature from Rabbi

7 I deliberately use this verb, which is associated with literary activity, since Roskies masterfully recreates his research object while turning his own writing into a fascinating gesture of storytelling.

8 Founded in 1981 by David Roskies and Alan Mintz, the literary journal *Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish Literary History* has a programmatic title. The central concept, *"prooftexts,"* which combines biblical and literary traditions and interprets literature in the broadest sense as a *comment on scripture*, is explained on the cover page of each issue: "PROOFTEXTS: The scriptural passages used by the Rabbis to legitimate new interpretations. As the title of a journal of Jewish literature, PROOFTEXTS indicates a concern with the significance of both literary traditions and contemporary issues of textuality. PROOFTEXTS encompasses literary approaches to classical Jewish sources, the study of modern Hebrew and Yiddish literature, American and European literature, and Jewish writing in other languages."

Nachman of Bratslav to Isaac Leib Peretz to Isaac Bashevis Singer developed out of the violation of tradition and partial oblivion. The artistic rebellion of individual influential authors against the constraints of tradition, as well as the gaps caused by forgetting, changed the Jews' knowledge of their own traditions and legends. The result was a folklorization of literature, for example, by Eisik Meir Dick or Sholem Aleichem, and thus the fusion of various sources and layers of time in what was now perceived in the popular consciousness as authentic folk culture.

Roskies expresses the historically evolving dialectic of continuity and innovation, which is very important for my book, with a concise phrasing in which "creative betrayal" becomes the key term:

> The Jews who occupy that middle ground, seeking to synthesize old and new, form the subject of my book. Their attempt to address contemporary concern in the language(s) of tradition I will call "creative betrayal". The focus of my book [is on] writers, artists, and intellectuals who choose to reinvent the past because [. . .] they are removed from the folk, its stories and songs. [Roskies 1995: 5]

The poststructuralist reinterpretation of the midrash genre in categories of contemporary literary criticism is meaningful not least because it connects the midrash to the postmodern practices of Jewish prose writing. Thereby it explicates both the significance of Jewish tradition for the present and, conversely, the reforming effect of contemporary literature on the Jewish tradition. Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budick describe this shift and blurring of genre demarcations in the following provocative sentence: "So it is, we might say, with the midrashic exegeses of Rabbi Akiva, Reb Derrida, Reb Kermode; as with Reb Milton, Reb Agnon, Reb Borges: *pseudepigrapha all*" [Hartman/Budick 1986: xi, italics mine—K.S.].[9]

Reflections on literature as a type of midrash are becoming even more relevant when applied to the texts that explicitly make this genre and the traditions of Jewish hermeneutics the subject of their imagination. In this case, literature turns into a metatext and plays with its own task of creating fictions.[10] Today, authors seem to know everything about the theories of poststructuralism,

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9 Characteristic for this collection is Myrna Solotorevsky's essay on Borges's subversive commentaries on the Bible [Solotorevsky 1986: 253–264].

10 See the analysis of Iakov Tsigel'man's novel *Shebsl-muzykant* (*Shebsl the musician*) in chap. 11.2.4.

which gives them the opportunity to incorporate the newest interpretations of Jewish sources into their performative (meta)reflections—in all seriousness and ironically at the same time.

1.2. Semantics of the Posthuman Era: The (Re)Invention of Jewishness

The literary resurrection of the Jewish tradition, which I discuss in this study, refers to the period to which David Roskies dedicates the last chapter of his monograph. It is the time of *memory after/of oblivion* that started, at the latest, after the Shoah. In Jewish literature this new period is marked, among other things, by a change in the status of the author and the narrator. The "hidden tradition" [Arendt 1976] of Jewish knowledge, from which literature drew, cannot be evoked with the earlier self-evidence. The once living meanings and contexts now require a (cultural-)historical explanation; the civilizational break caused by the Holocaust and the consequences of the communism rule still slow down the impulses of renewal and emphasize the necessity of preserving the heritage—a literal conservatism. The tendency towards reconstruction, collection of traces, explanation, and canonization transformed narration into a form of reminiscence of the past.

In fact, Jewish literatures constituted a new poetics that has heavily influenced their intertextuality. The author or the narrator assumes the position of a commentator or a historian, a cultural archaeologist, and an ethnographer, a keeper of the memory archive, an artist of stylization, or a director staging the past, who always remains aware of the artificiality or theatricality of this undertaking. This last situation exposes the play of proximity and distance and opens up a special space for the "creative betrayal": a device that illustrate the illusion of the literary return to one's roots. In what follows, I will concentrate, among others, on the texts that find ways to modernize the Jewish tradition with a radical de-trivialization or destruction of the literary form. Here, affirmative or, bluntly said, positivist practices of reconstruction and imitation are questioned, and tradition, in the form of the canon, undergoes a renewal and joins the (epistemic) revaluations of the present.

In her vast historical analysis of cultural memory practices, Aleida Assmann asserts the "current crisis of empiric memory" and the "unstoppable process of forgetting" [1999a: 13–14]. She explains, with the help of Pierre Nora's and Maurice Halbwachs's theories, the phenomenon to which I refer as "posthuman" memory. I use the term "posthuman" to emphasize the separation

of memory from its biological carrier and the metaphorical after*life* of memories that are based on the testimonies of the (sometimes living, but more often deceased) witnesses or, without any witnesses, on culturally coded knowledge and "normative texts" [ibid.: 13]. Whether knowledge was transmitted initially by means of immediate communication (for example, inside the family), or mediated by culture, the word "memory" here describes a compensatory action that is less and less bound to reality and experience. Symptomatically, Assmann relates this new type of memory to the cultural rupture caused by the Shoah, which demands that "the empiric memory of contemporary witnesses must be translated into the cultural memory of posterity" [ibid.: 15].

This translation, in which the tradition is revived and, at the same time, partially lost, is explored by Marianne Hirsch in her analysis of "postmemory" [2008]. Hirsch focuses on time "in the aftermath of catastrophe" [ibid.: 104] and thus describes a phenomenon that ultimately extends far beyond her immediate field of investigation, namely the perception of the past by the second generation—the children of Shoah survivors. Hirsch's approach potentially encompasses the use of and reflection about all artistic means *in the situation of biological and cultural loss*, which I call "posthuman" in a wide sense of the word. With this, I designate a totality that can be applied to explore a large variety of devices and semantics used in literature, visual art, or performative practices that name or symbolically embody the loss. Hence the importance of Hirsch's definition of postmemory, which emphasizes the general state of "belatedness" and thus the combination of continuity and rupture [ibid.: 106].

This expanded interpretation is viable when applied to describe symbolic responses not only to a catastrophe that has happened in the relatively recent past (still present in one's family memory), but also the rupture of tradition in general, which is resurrected by the media because, in some way or other, it regains a living meaning in the present. The recourse to the *long forgotten*, which again becomes a source of identity as a result of historical and political changes, is even more open to the processes of recreation than commemorative work with the lingering consequences of a trauma. The distance makes the above-mentioned phenomena of folklorization and virtualization of Jewishness possible in the first place, as it offers broader and more daring possibilities of reinterpretation to the artist.

Another important component of Hirsch's reflection is her observation about the increasing medialization of references to the past. She mentions "the practice of citation and mediation" [ibid.], the "archival" knowledge, and the institutionalized remembrance—official images, actions, and narratives—that

deform or even replace individual memory.[11] The inevitable dwindling of the (albeit pretended) authenticity of memory is compensated in the culture of postmemory through empathy, longing for the past, and individualization of the neutral and generally available documentary knowledge. This results in a paradox that combines testimony and imagination, fidelity and ignorance.

The authors whose works I analyze in this book often acquire their knowledge about Jewish culture only from written sources. Thus, the question of how collective "memory" affects the structure of individual remembrance is supplanted by a larger issue: *all references to tradition are, of necessity, mediated by literature*. So, my focus will not only be the (fictionalized) memory, but rather the artistic mediation of tradition, that is, literature as a comprehensive, self-explanatory trope of memory.

It is at this point that the paradigm of cultural memory most closely aligns with that of cultural semiotics. For semiotics, the text as a sum of its literary devices becomes the symbolic and iconic sign of memory. With reference to Iurii Lotman, Renate Lachmann understands the cultural space "as a space of a 'common memory' [. . .] in which 'certain common texts can be stored and updated.'" "The memory is therefore not a passive storage unit, but a complex text production mechanism" [Lachmann 1993: xvii]. Here, the "desemiotization and resemiotization of cultural signs" creates cultural dynamics. Lachmann speaks of the "movement [of signs] into latency" or their "reactualization" and distinguishes between informative and creative memory. Creative memory in particular is capable of making "the total text repertoire of a culture potentially active" [ibid.: xvii]. In an earlier study, Jan Assmann describes some landscapes as topoi that can regain their symbolic character and actuality under certain circumstances: "they are elevated [. . .] as a whole to the status of a sign, i.e. semiotized" [Assmann 1992: 60]. Below, I will show to what extent and under what historical circumstances certain strata and topoi of cultural tradition were resemiotized in the period of the late and post-Soviet Jewish renaissance, and how the attempt to "return to one's roots" was related to the Jewish traditional paradigm of memory.

The resemiotization of Judaistic constants was at the core of the late Soviet aliyah[12] culture and literature (see chap. 5). Political implications of the Jewish

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11 Cf. Aby Warburg's generalizing expression "pre-established forms" [Hirsch 2008: 120], used to describe remembering "only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up" [ibid.: 106].

12 The word *aliyah,* Hebrew "ascension," in the Bible referred to the way to the Jerusalem Temple, which was located on Mount Zion. After the beginning of the Jewish diaspora, the word aliyah was used to describe the return of Jews in exile to Eretz Israel, and today it mostly refers to the

national movement and of the entire Jewish underground culture in the Soviet Union, which was dominated by struggle for emigration and Israel idealism, evoke Jan Assmann's concept of "hot memory." Unlike "cold memory," hot memory is called upon to bring about "break, rupture, and change" [Assmann 1992: 70]. Biblical origins, the topos of the Holy Land, the destroyed Jewish Temple and the *galut*[13] suddenly gain a tremendous explosive power in the secular here and now. The remote past becomes the present and paves the way for the longed-for future. In this context, collective memory rises to become a historical event, according to Lucian Hölscher, who claims that "historical interpretations, as they are made in memories and aspirations, are themselves historical events" [1995: 166]. Interpretations of the past in the spirit of the new Zionism and sometimes also of Jewish messianism, as they appear in exodus literature, become a part of not only cultural and literary, but also political history. Often used in this context is the metaphor of awakening from the long sleep of amnesia—a mythological and folklore motif: "The danger of forgetting arises from the attack of a demonic power, it is the the strategy of hostile cunning. [. . .] Man is held with power and deceit in a world in which he does not belong [. . .]" [Assmann 1999a: 169]. The communist regime appears in the mystical exodus prose such as Efrem (Efraim) Baukh's *Lestnitsa Iakova* (*Jacob's ladder*) or Eli Liuksemburg's *Desiatyi golod* (*The tenth hunger*) as a hypnotic state, a *somnium*, a slumber, which is only overcome by turning to Judaic knowledge and the subsequent "return" to Eretz Yisrael—a "gnostic drama" that includes a new version of "every alienation story" [ibid.].[14] As we will see below, the aspirations reflected in exodus literature combine ahistorical messianic hopes of redemption with the real political vision of Zionism. The Judaistic discourse of awakening is linked to the Platonic doctrine of anamnesis: "The anamnesis is the return of the soul to its own eternal origin and the reassurance about what is given to it from there" [Folkers 1991: 365]. The "anamnesis" of one's origins, which is necessary in the Egyptian captivity of the Soviet Union, is constituted as a thorny path, full of hardships, which leads through the simulacra of the present to pure knowledge, a laborious breaking

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repatriation of Jewish emigrants in Israel. Often synonymous with this is the term "exodus," which also refers to the exodus of Jews from Egypt and their liberation from slavery, described or invented in the Book of Exodus. Generally, "exodus" refers to the Jews leaving the country of exile. Both terms connect the Jewish emigration today with biblical "origins."

13 The Hebrew *galut* (Yiddish *golus*) corresponds to the Greek word "diaspora" ("dispersion"), but denotes the situation of banishment or exile, a primary notion of Judaism, in short: not home.

14 Aleida Assmann writes that the metaphors of sleep and awakening have become the traditional element of political rhetoric of revolutionary and national movements since the nineteenth century [Assmann 1999a: 169–171].

through a thick layer of coincidence and falsehood: the anamnesis is a "cleansed memory" [ibid.]. Thus, Horst Folkers finds in Walter Benjamin's thought a synthesis between Plato's anamnesis theory and the Judaistic dogma stating that the "memory" of liberation from slavery is always present for a religious Jew [ibid.: 364–366]. In the heyday of global postmodernist writing, with its skeptical, subversive, or playful treatment of the traditional Jewish topoi, late and post-Soviet aliyah literature—an anachronism of a kind—(re)produced idealistic, retrospective models of Jewish topography and identity. This literature became both a counter-script and an unintended projection, a mirror image of communist and socialist-realist teleology (cf. chap. 5.6).

In my book, the specific literary forms of mediation, "a bridge of longing" [Roskies 1995], will be analyzed in the context of the *Jewish revival*—a phenomenon that extends far beyond Eastern Europe. The renaissance of Jewish culture began in the United States and Western Europe after World War II. In Eastern Europe it went on, in the underground and in semi-official circles of Jewish intelligentsia, starting from the 1960s, before it became mainstream after the fall of the communist regimes. It can, as indicated above, hardly be explored without taking into account the issue of the destroyed Jewish identity. The paradox of the vibrant presence of the reconstructed, museified, or staged Jewish past, combined with a very small quantity of traditionally living Jews, has attracted the attention of researchers in recent decades and produced a number of synonymous terms: "virtually Jewish" [Gruber 2002], "le Juif imaginaire" [Finkielkraut 1980], "Imagining Russian Jewry" [Zipperstein 1999], "the constructed Jew" [Gantner/Kovács 2007], "(in)visible Jews" [Rüthers 2010]. The associated ambivalence of Jewish identity—supported by Jews as well as by non-Jews—makes the problem of stereotypization, cultural unification, i.e. the blending out of internal differences, and (positive) ascriptions of alterity to Jews more relevant. In early 1980s, Alain Finkielkraut had the courage to raise the issue of the "imagined" or conceived Jew in his autobiography, where he analyzed his own Jewishness as part of the collective fantasy that he had internalized as a child, as a fiction of unique individuality. This individuality is based on the notion of sublimity and exclusivity of Jewish victimhood: the tragic experience of the past remains the foundation of identity for generations of Jews who—for Finkielkraut, in the Western European context—ignore the growing complexity of the present and live in an eternal anachronism:

> [. . .] with Jewishness, I received the best present a child after the Holocaust could dream of. I inherited the suffering that I have not experienced. The persecuted gave their image to me, but I

> have not endured the persecution. I could enjoy my exceptional destiny completely at ease. [Finkielkraut 1980: 13]

Finkielkraut's analytical confession was followed by studies on the constructions of Jewish identity in the media, museums, popular culture, literature, and art. Summarizing the results of this research under one term, is becomes apparent that the *performativity*[15] plays a key role here. Steven J. Zipperstein observes, for example, a shift in the perception of East European Jewish life in the United States in the 1950s, which provoked the creation of a bright, coherent, and nostalgic image of the Jewish past, in particular of the cozy and pious shtetls. To the aspiring, successful American Jews, this image was supposed to offer a "proof for continuity" of Jewish culture before and after the Shoah [Zipperstein 1999: 5ff., 16–39]. The shtetl utopia produced a topographical myth that related to the spiritual needs of the present. The myth of the vanished Yiddish civilization was "a mythic home, not one that they [American Jews] want to return to but one that they want to bear witness to. It is a land of Jewish ghosts and of lost cultures" [Aviv/Shneer 2005: 8]. Ruth Ellen Gruber interprets the enormous popularity of everything Jewish in Europe over the last three to four decades of the twentieth century as showing a tendency towards alternative and, in Eastern Europe, often nonconformist self-identification. Judaism or Jewishness became a characteristic component of counter-culture, while Jewish history and culture as well as the Jews themselves became the object of mythologization, often based on half-knowledge [cf. Gruber 2002: 3–30]. *The performative role of Jewishness*, as a universalized product of external projections, consisted in it being a fluid, "metaphorical symbol" that fitted many trends and phenomena, "filling in the blank spaces" [ibid.: 9].[16]

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15 I derive my understanding of performativity from the context of the cultural studies debates of recent decades, which draw from John L. Austin's theory of speech acts (cf. most recently [Yurchak 2014: 62–69; 74f.]: Yurchak refers to Jacques Derrida and Pierre Bourdieu and analyses, above all, the performative rituality of Soviet reality). Important is the concept of culture as the emergence and exchange of constantly changing symbols and attributions of meaning. According to the ethnologist Clifford Geertz, cultural meanings are staged and inscribed into dynamic social contexts (cf. [Bachman-Medick 2004: 26–30]): "Culture is produced and reproduced by representing" [ibid.: 28].

16 A prominent example of the collective construction of Jewish identity informed by distance and belonging is the phenomenon of the East European Jew, *Ostjude*. Since the end of the nineteenth century in both Western and Eastern Europe this image has become either a negative, or an idealized, projection of Jewish culture in the process of dissolution. Monica Rüthers [2010] describes this work of the collective imaginary, which was promoted by intellectuals such as Semen An-skii and Martin Buber as well as by the broader intellectual public, up to Polish post-communist period with its multimedial culture of *Jewish revival*. Rüthers also draws attention to the importance of "media translation" of the image of the

At the end of the communist era, quite a few Russian Jews sought to return to the relieving circular, mythical-religious sense of space and time their grandparents had rejected at the beginning of this period in the first third of the twentieth century. Both eras were motivated by the desire for breakout and liberation. The hope of escaping from the small world of the pious Jews into world history, which united the Jews during the revolutions of 1905 and 1917 [Krutikov 2001: 115–117],[17] was followed by disillusionment and a new revolt. However, the late Soviet turn of the spiral in the process of collective Jewish self-discovery was, to a large extent, already part of the internalized Soviet utopia.

Despite the shared dialectics of the loss of tradition and the approach to it, return and invention, differences between collective and popular culture processes, on the one hand, and literary and artistic developments, on the other, are obvious and important. Literature and art more often address problems and disparities, ironies, paradoxes, or criticisms. They channel not only empathy and individuality of the references to tradition, which Marianne Hirsch observes in the practices of postmemory and which can be manipulated by the media. They also demonstrate the awareness of complexity that "fends off" idealizations and stereotyping and sometimes makes them the object of artistic reflection.

Jewish literatures, moreover, carry within themselves the—possibly resistant and negating—memory of the Torah and its exegesis, as has been previously mentioned. The "double situation of the secularization of the sacred and the sacralization of the secular," as phrased by Dan Miron, the questioning return to the origins, and the exploration of the distance between epochs form the essential impulse for the creation of these literatures to this day.

1.3. Semiotic Context

The renaissance of Judaism in the late Soviet Union, on the one hand, marked the emergence of Jewish underground culture and, on the other hand, replicated in some of its most important trends the mythological, (sub)religious paradigms of thought that structured and energized the official culture of the Soviet period. Thus, exodus literature proved to be both a counterpart and a structural and ideological reflection of the socialist-realist doctrine. I consider the new

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shtetl, for example in Roman Vishniac's photo albums of the 1940s: "This world is not differentiated in itself, but homogeneous, timeless, and directed entirely towards the spiritual" [Rüthers 2010: 84].

17 Mikhail Krutikov describes the changes brought by the 1905 revolution for the Russian Jews and especially for Yiddish writers as the transition from the "cyclical sequence of seasons and religious festivals" to the "rapid and straightforward linear development" [2001: 115].

Zionism-inspired exodus prose, either unofficial or created during emigration, as a symbolic expression of the duality that Iurii Lotman and Boris Uspenskii formulated for Russian culture in general: "[. . .] the new [is] understood not as a continuation, but as an eschatological replacement of the whole" [1977a: 3]. The "regeneration of archaic forms" [ibid.], from which the Soviet power and culture of the socialist-realist canon drew its ideological potential, was directly inherited by the Jewish resistance literature: both were inspired by collective spiritualism. The thesis of cultural semiotics about a mechanism of mythological coding of historical events, activated especially in times of violent upheavals and ideological shifts [Lotman/Uspenskii 2004], proves itself once again in the *revived Jews'* approaches to Judaism. The Jewish movement charged contemporary political events with the symbolic power of biblical tradition, drawing on both the legendary layers of the past and distant geographical spaces. This appropriation of the past had the power to create an alternative identity for a large community, while remaining under the influence of the Russian-Soviet collective myths. This situation corresponds to the well-known model of the (here synchronous) "double culture" (*dvoinaia kul'tura*), which was developed by Iurii Lotman and Boris Uspenskii [1977, 1977a] and recently revised.[18]

> As a structural quantity, double culture means an ensemble of dualistic-binary codes of social behavior, textual and iconic practice, and various sign types: Here the structures determined by censorship and counter-censorship are conceived as the oppositions of official/unofficial, open and dialogical/closed and monological, hierarchical/anti-hierarchical. [Lachmann 2012: 114]

Evgeny Dobrenko explores Soviet cultural discourse as a "metaphor of power" (*metafora vlasti*) and interprets the concept of myth, following Roland Barthes, Ernst Cassirer, and Iurii Lotman, in relation to the communist art canon (here also with recourse to Andrei Siniavskii) as a metaphorical transformation or distortion of language. For the authorities, linguistic manipulations were a tool that could be used to create a model of reality and to legitimate it aesthetically [1993b: 31–39]. The politically charged substitution of reality with symbols has an inherent historical teleology that gives the created figures of the canon a symbolic, abstract, and hyperbolic character. In socialist realism, both the power

18 See the anthology edited by Susanne Frank, Cornelia Ruhe, and Alexander Schmitz in 2012 and in particular the contribution by Renate Lachmann.