To Tatyana

Contents

Acknowledgments

My interest in Russian literature written in Israel was not immediate and spontaneous, as one could probably expect. Perhaps, it demanded more distance from the experience of emigration. At last, I learned to recognize the genuine soul of this literature, and there emerged an idea of a book about the metaphysics of Russian-Israeli literature.

Thus, I would like to thank, first and foremost, the Israeli writers who dare to write in Russian—both those who are under discussion in this book and those who are not, but definitely could be. My interest would not come to fruition without kind-hearted support and invaluable comments of my colleague scholars—Maxim Shrayer and Dennis Sobolev. I am thankful to the translators and editors who worked on the manuscript: Haim Weitzman, Haya Naor, Ori Weisberg, Sharon Erez, and Athena Lakri. Special thanks go to my friend Yan Mazor—the translator of most of the quotations, exceptionally challenging, from the novels under discussion. This is the opportunity to thank all the team of Academic Studies Press for highly professional work of turning the manuscript into the book.

Last but not least, I would like to heartily thank my dear family—my wife Tatyana and my children Anna and Eli—who, for many years, have helped me foster my love to Russian language and literature and bravely endured my experiments with "nostalgia for a foreign land."

Preface

Writing about the literature written in my own generation, by members of that generation, is akin to walking through a minefield. Each step on seemingly safe ground may explode into countless new and unexpected possibilities. The dangers and pleasures of such a path are even greater when the researcher feels a deep sense of affinity with the writers—immigrants from the former Soviet Union, searching for meaning in their new homeland. In such a case, reading turns into a search for a promised time in a promised space—into pure infinite potential. All that one can say and all that one *does* say diffuses into the open-endedness of the future; discourse, transcendent to itself in this openness, empties itself out. A paradox emerges: the critic finds himself writing about that which has not yet been written; the desire precedes its object, just as nostalgia for a foreign land precedes its discovery. Only after despairing, at the end of a grueling journey, does he discover that his absurd gesture is nothing but a pale imitation of the gesture of the literature he writes of—the gesture that seeks to reappropriate the possible future indigeneity. A large part of the Russian corpus under discussion here—the writings of those who immigrated to Israel in the 1990s—is Israeli in its content and, even more so, in its search for a hypothetical "Israeliness," with or without "the Mediterranean note."[1] Their literature realizes the prediction of Alexander Goldstein: their "Russian word in Israel" becomes a homonym of its metropolitan counterpart, "a point where the Identical and the Other meet but do not recognize each other."[2] The authors discussed here are immigrants, but I do not examine their works within the context of *émigré literature*. This is not only because of the special focus of my study, but also because

1 Alexander Barash, *Sredizemnomorskaia nota: Stikhotvoreniia* [The Mediterranean note: Poems] (Jerusalem, Moscow: Gesharim, Mosty kultury, 2002).

2 Alexander Goldstein, *Rasstavanie s Nartsysom. Opyty pominalnoy ritoriki* [Parting from Narcissus: Essays on memorial rhetoric] (Moscow: NLO, 2011), 293.

of the unique nature of the literature produced by the immigrants of the 1990s and 2000s. The literature of this immigration wave, more than that of the previous wave creates what Dennis Sobolev, in his book *Evrei i Evropa*, called "the unified geopoetic space" of Russian-language literature in Israel.[3] As he writes, this literature is by no means more "émigré literature" than the literature of Russia that, in the last decade of the twentieth century, collectively emigrated from one world to another, and thus its residents possess all the complexes of emigrant.

This literature seeks ways to elude the immigrant paradigm. To this end it creates, in its own way, possibilities for a metaphysical leap, a leap beyond the constraints of postmodernism toward a rediscovery of the metaphysical dimension of existence and discourse. Moving beyond post-humanism, this literature seeks to establish a new subject, one that is free, autonomous, and neomodern. As Mikhail Epstein has shown in his book, *Slovo i molchanie* (Word and silence),[4] the method of exposing literary metaphysics is vital for the purpose of discovering what Alexander Blok called literature's "long thoughts." "Literary metaphysics" has two meanings: literature as an expression of a metaphysical outlook and literature as an object of metaphysical inquiry. While Sobolev defines Jewish European literature as antimetaphysical,[5] one can observe strong metaphysical tendencies in contemporary Russian-language Israeli literature. In this book, the term "metaphysics" is not imparted with any specifically religious meaning. As Grigori Tulchinsky and Mikhail Uvarov put it, nowadays metaphysics cannot be seen as a finished and closed body of knowledge, a conceptual or ideological totality, but rather as the purposeful and rational practice of probing the borders of knowledge—unstable, unpredictable, and uncertain, as questioning that aspires toward a state beyond being (*za-bitie*).[6]

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3 Dennis Sobolev, *Evrei i Evropa* [Jews and Europe] (Moscow: Text, 2008), 402.

4 Mikhail Epstein, *Slovo i molchanie. Metafizika russkoj literatury* [Word and silence: The metaphysics of Russian literature] (Moscow: Vysshaia shkola, 2006).

5 Sobolev, *Jews and Europe,* 197-199.

6 Grigori Tulchinsky and Mikhail Uvarov, *Perspectivy metafiziki: klassicheskaia i neklassicheskaia metafizika na rubezhe vekov* [Perspectives of metaphysics: Classical and nonclassical metaphysics on the edge of centuries] (St. Petersburg: Aleteia, 2000), 43, 363. Cf. Nicholas Rescher's realistic view of metaphysics, with the conception of

This book's essays reveal four facets of the Russian Israeli literary metaphysics of the 1990s and 2000s. This neometaphysics is comprised of alternating sets of city and language axes—Babylon, the city and the name, reassembled from its ruins. Dina Rubina's many redeemers and pirates migrate from the deconstruction of memory and identity into their recollection in a maternal source. Nekod Singer's neoeclecticism progresses into neoromanticism and the rebirth of the authorial subject. The network philosophy of Elizaveta Mikhailichenko and Yury Nesis leads them into a historical hyperhumanism that identifies the network with the transcendental source. Mikhail Yudson fashions a new language that marks the transition from total deconstruction to multifaceted metanarrative. Other facets may be revealed in the study of the writing of Alexander Goldstein, Dennis Sobolev, Alex Tarn, Victoria Reicher, Yaakov Schechter, Leonid Levinson and Dmitri Deich. These writers, among many others and along with Israel's Russian and bilingual poets, remain outside the scope of this book, but I will address them in future studies.

The history of Russian-language literature in Israel goes back almost a century.[7] Its beginnings can be seen in the novels of Abraham Wissotzky (1884–1949), written in the 1920s and 1930s. Encompassing hundreds of writers, intellectuals, journalists, and scholars, along

limitedness, imperfectness, and fallibility of knowledge (*Metaphysics: The Key Issues from a Realistic Perspective* [Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2006]).

7 See Roman Timenchik, "Samuil Kruglikov i ego kniga 'V krasnykh tiskakh' (Iz istorii russkoy knigi v Izraile)" [Samuel Kruglikov and his book *In red vise* (On the history of Russian books in Israel)], *Ierusalimsky bibliofil* [The Jerusalem bibliophile], vol. 1, 51–52 (Jerusalem: Filobiblon, 1999); "Russkoe slovo o Zemle Izrailia" [Russian word on the Land of Israel], *Lekhaim* 4, no. 168 (2006), www.lechaim.ru/ARHIV/168/timenchik.htm; "Glaz i slovo" [Eye and word], *Lekhaim* 8, no. 172 (2006), www.lechaim.ru/ARHIV/172/timenchik.htm; Vladimir Khazan and Wolf Moskovich, eds., *Russian Word in the Land of Israel. The Jewish Word in Russia* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Center for Slavic Languages and Literatures, 2006); Mikhail Weiskopf, "'Prostye khleboroby': sionistsky russoism i Sovetskaia Rossiia v russkoiazychnom tvorchestve palestinskogo 'ishuva' 1920–1930 godov" ["Simple grain-growers": Zionist russoism and the Soviet Russia in Russian-language works of the Palestinian "yeshuv" in 1920–1930], in *Eastern European Jewish Literature of the 20th and 21st Centuries: Identity and Poetics*, ed. Klavdia Smola: 185–190 (Munchen, Berlin, Washington: Verlag Otto Sanger, 2013).

with journals, newspapers, and publishers, it was also influenced by writers who migrated via Israel to other countries. During this extensive period, the demise of Russian writing in Israel was frequently forecast, but new waves of immigration continuously revived it. The greatest of those waves, those of the 1970s and 1990s, made Israel into the largest center of Russian writing outside the former Soviet Union. Yet, because these two waves differ so vastly from one another, it would be an arduous task to present the literatures they produced as part of a single historical continuum. Roughly, the literature of the 1970s can be characterized as the Russian *émigré literature* in Israel, whereas that of the 1990s is characterized as Israeli literature written in Russian, despite the latter's image of being both apolitical and a-Zionist. The difference lies largely in geopolitical and geomental factors. Among these are the collapse of the Soviet Union along with its mentality, globalization, the normalization of transcultural migration, and the harmonization of the relations between Jewish and Russian identities, whether by blurring the difference or by their nonconflictual reinforcement by a new kind of universalism. As with every literary process, these factors are bound up with aesthetic factors—and they attempt to cope with the challenging temptations of postmodernism and the search for new poetic languages.

The literature discussed here devotes its long thoughts to the issues that fashion our contemporary spiritual and cultural climate. Such issues include that of the source and copy, as well as the correlation between personal and historical memory that Rubina explores; the issue of culture and violence and that of the victim and heroism, as discussed by Mikhailichenko and Nesis; the problem of the unity of the subject and of the work, which preoccupies Singer; and the issue of personal repair in relation to the historical collapse that Yudson focuses on. When the complete history of Russian Israeli literature is written, it will have to include the story of its different circles, icons, and wars; but first and foremost, it will include the archaeology of its ideas—the "cursed questions" it has wrestled with. I hope my book will contribute to the study of its literary metaphysics.

CHAPTER
ONE

Dina Rubina: The Steps to the Metaphysical Window

This chapter focuses on the most renowned Russian-language writer in Israel—Dina Rubina. Although Rubina was first published and received literary recognition in the Soviet Union, the bulk of her work, and, in particular, her ten novels discussed here, were written in Israel after she had immigrated in 1990: from *Here Comes the Messiah!*[1] in 1996 to the trilogy *Russkaia kanareika* (A Russian canary) in 2014–2015.[2] Maxim Shrayer included a fragment from Rubina's *Here Comes the Messiah!* in his *An Anthology of Jewish-Russian Literature*, having claimed that "her career is increasingly taking her away from artistic prose and in the direction of popular entertainment."[3] *A Russian canary* attests to the truthfulness of this claim. On the other hand, being "popular" does not necessarily mean one is "simplistic"; this perception was built on a great deal of misunderstandings in the criticism of

1 Dina Rubina, *Here Comes the Messiah!*, trans. Daniel M. Jaffe (Brookline, MA: Zephyr Press, 2000), originally published as *Vot idot Messiia!* (Moscow: Ostozhje, 1996). Page numbers throughout this book refer to the 2000 edition.

2 *Russkaia kanareika. Zheltukhin* [A Russian canary: Zheltukhin] (Moscow: Eksmo, 2015); *Russkaia kanareika. Golos* [A Russian canary: The voice] (Moscow: Eksmo, 2015); *Russkaia kanareika. Bludnyi syn* [A Russian canary: Prodigal son] (Moscow: Eksmo, 2015).

3 Maxim D. Shrayer, ed., *An Anthology of Jewish-Russian Literature*, vol. 2 (Armonk and London: M. E. Sharpe, 2007), 1168.

Rubina's writings—not in the interpretation of the details, but rather on the metaphysical plane of "long thoughts" and "cursed questions."

Along with numerous reviews in periodicals (some of which will be mentioned further), Rubina's writings have been discussed in several academic publications and dissertations, such as those by Eleonora Shafranskaya, Henrietta Mondry, and Anna Ronell. Shafranskaya discerns many of Rubina's important themes ("texts," in her terms) and discusses them in comparative contexts as a part of the writer's "mythopoetics."[4] However, she reduces the mythopoetics to mythological and folklore motifs, and the interpretation of the central themes has raised numerous questions. The themes of home and the return to one's origins can be developed by Rubina's much more complex and dominant idea of the flight from home. The hero-trickster is portrayed as a "fool" in the narrow context of low culture and is differentiated from the hero-artist (except for in one novel, where a combination of the two is discussed as the theme of "genius and evil"). Ronell, too, falls under the spell of Rubina's overloaded self-interpretation, particularly in her uncritical acceptance of the carnival paradigm—a misleading one when surveyed from the height of the ideological observation of Rubina's work as a whole.[5]

These difficulties point to the problem that Mikhail Epstein posed in *Word and silence*: Rubina herself expresses her "folkloric" and "mythological" sources so abundantly that the metaphysical reading of the unspoken in her writing—the reading of something that is not a "text"—becomes much more sought after. Henrietta Mondry makes a series of interesting observations about Rubina's corporeal imagination and her "invention of an alternative ethnic Self," in reference to the Spanish one.[6] However, this conception is based on the researcher's presupposition about Rubina's consciousness as "an ethnic Other

4 Eleonora Shafranskaya, *Sindrom golubki* [Dove syndrome] (St. Petersburg: Svoio izdatelstvo, 2012), 21–42, 189–205, 213–226.

5 Anna P. Ronell, "Some Thoughts on Russian-Language Israeli Fiction: Introducing Dina Rubina," *Prooftexts* 28, no. 2 (2008): 197–231.

6 Henrietta Mondry, *Exemplary Bodies: Constructing the Jew in Russian Culture, 1880s to 2008* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2009), 188–207.

in the hostile culture of the Soviet Union and in post-Soviet Russia." This presupposition originates from the victim mentality and stereotypical figure of the Jew in the late-Soviet period; yet, this vision is quite contrary to Rubina's harmonizing and indigenous mentality, as well as her dominant attraction to a nonvictimary individual heroism.

At the center of all of Rubina's novels, there is an artist figure in various manifestations—creator, prophet, nomad, criminal, savior, adventurer, avenger, warrior, etc. This figure reveals itself through subjects and symbols, such as victimhood and heroism, exile and destruction, the Holocaust, personal and national memory, migration and indigeneity, the search for identity and return to the source, appropriation of the familial and national heritage, the new Jew and the ten lost tribes, along with Zionism and messianism. The figure of an artist as a metaphysical pirate, an adventurous intellectual, is one of the keys to the overall understanding of Rubina's novels and perhaps also of her other works, including those not discussed here. Perhaps, this developing and multifaceted figure represents the entire course of Russian literature and the literary thinking of the Big Aliyah of the 1990s in Israel, including writings by Nekod Singer, Elizaveta Mikhailichenko, Yury Nesis, and Mikhail Yudson discussed in the other chapters, as well as the works of novelists such as Dennis Sobolev, Alex Tarn, and Yaakov Schechter, which are not discussed in depth in the present volume. The immigrant literature of the Soviet period responded to the challenges of history with the social, cultural, and intellectual protests against the past. Alternatively, post-Soviet Russian-language Israeli literature perceives the challenge as an actual historical and cultural quest. This literature responds to the "cursed" questions of being, justice, freedom, nation, and Jewishness as a living reaction to the changing spaces and landscapes around it, much like in the artistic metaphysics of the Second and Third Aliyahs (except for the fact that translingual dynamics have, in most cases, been replaced by transcultural dynamics).

In Rubina's writings, this process is most vividly embodied in the figure of a pirate who conquers the space, thus translating it into history and reappropriating his cultural heritage and memory in order to construct his new indigeneity. In the analysis below, I attempt to

reconstruct the development of this figure in Rubina's novels, not fully consistent with the chronology of their publication, from its most naïve form as an ironic neoromantic messiah, through its maturity in the overcoming of victimhood, to its highest realization in the metaphysical leap out of ghetto—into history.

My view of the philosophical evolution of Rubina's hero has been influenced, to a great extent, by the philosophical anthropology theory of the American scholar, Eric Gans—one of the most original contemporary thinkers. This theory, known as "generative anthropology" or "originary thinking," revises the main assumptions of Jacques Derrida and René Girard concerning the role of violence and its deferral in relation to the origination of language, culture, and ethics. For Gans, representation first appears as a sign of an "abortive gesture of appropriation" toward the object of desire; this "nonvictim" constitutes the center of the originary scene of the culture's development from the deferral of violence.[7] Gans's thinking has its own implied hero—quite similar to that of Rubina—the one who rids himself of the victimary and carnival fantasies and sets out on the dangerous adventure of authentic historical existence and cognition—the return to the originary scene and cognition of the origins of symbols, signs, narratives, and names of the language.

In one of his most recent works, Gans writes that language is, in "its very essence," a paradox, "the first word designates, points-to-as significant, a referent that cannot by definition have possessed this status before its designation."[8] This paradox, as any other, exists due to the contradiction between the a-temporal "model-relationship between representation and its object" and the temporal, empirical qualities of the discourse, the narrative. To return to the originary scene of appropriation means to live and apprehend this paradox, this "everyday miracle" of language and representation. This return, one can add, is the

7 Eric Gans, *A New Way of Thinking: Generative Anthropology in Religion, Philosophy, Art* (Aurora: The Davies Group, 2011).

8 Eric Gans, "Language and Paradox," *Chronicle of Love and Resentment* 495, August 29, 2015, accessed September 10, 2015, www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/views/vw495.htm.

metaphysical escape from the ghetto of the given, the taken-for-granted, which is the only way to return to history and to appropriate it anew. Rubina's metaphysical heroes are those who revive and live this paradox, thus embodying the very essence of language, culture, and art. As Alexei Losev put it, in empirical history a hero realizes his or her transcendental purpose, and this is the miracle that constitutes the hero's myth.[9] However, this miracle is also a paradox: the hero realizes the myth, but this myth cannot exist before the hero's realization. This paradox points to a contradiction between conceptions of myth-as-model and myth-as-becoming. The only way to overcome this contradiction is to jump, to board the miracle, the origin—like a pirate. Rubina creates an entire gallery of such jumpers: Ziama jumps into the waters of memory, Lucio—into the pit of his family curse, Dina—into the fiery rays of reality, Katia—into the sins of history, Anna—into the future, Zakhar—into the past, Peter—into love, and Ettingers—into resentment. All of these inhabitants of some version of a piratic schooner left their homes in search of a lost history in a new, foreign homeland.

INTRODUCTION

Dina Rubina was born on September 19, 1953 in Tashkent (Uzbekistan) to a Jewish family from the Ukraine that had come to Tashkent after World War II. In 1971, her first story was published, and until her immigration to Israel in 1990, she published four collections of stories. Since then, Rubina has published dozens of story collections and novellas, ten novels, essays, articles, and interviews. As she has written many times, both in her autobiographical books and in essays and interviews, Tashkent left its imprint on both her personality and her writing: scores of ethnic groups from all parts of the Soviet Union lived in impossible, overcrowded conditions in the narrow streets and decrepit houses of the Uzbeki city, creating a cacophonic bedlam of sounds, colors, faces, and languages.[10] Rubina compares Tashkent to Babylon,

9 Alexei Losev, *The Dialectics of Myth*, trans. Vladimir Marchenkov (New York: Routledge, 2003), 185.

10 Shafranskaya writes about the "Tashkent text," with the "city carnival" at its core in *Dove syndrome*, 267–392.

but it would be more accurate to compare it (and her writings) to the ruins of the Tower of Babel—a site of worldwide catastrophe, in which people wander around ("des tours de Babel," in Derrida's terms), desperately searching for some sense of meaning in life.[11]

Rubina's novelistic oeuvre in Israel, and the searching of her heroes, can be divided into three periods. The first period includes three novels: *Here Comes the Messiah!* (2006), *The last wild boar from the forests of Pontevedra*, and *Syndicate*.[12] They constitute a quasi-biographical cycle about the postemigration experience: the heroine copes with the difficulties of an unknown country and language, searches for a proper job and a place to live, and tries to comprehend the political situation and form her own opinion concerning it. She never stops writing, even while working at a Russian newspaper in the cultural center (*matnas*) of a small town and, at the same time, at one of the biggest Israeli institutions—the Jewish Agency. Working in this "syndicate" brings her, for the first time since the immigration, back to Moscow. Thus, she finds herself caught in the middle of the atrocities of Arabic terror in Israel and the convulsions of the collapsing Jewish life in Russia.

The second period includes four "international" novels: *On the sunny side of the street*, *Leonardo's handwriting*, *White dove of Cordova*, and *Petrushka syndrome*.[13] Rubina's heroines wander in the remembered, imagined, and real spaces of Tashkent, Lvov, Prague, Toronto, Madrid, Cordova, Vinnitsa, Guryev, Jerusalem, and other cities all over the world. She tries her hand at different artistic endeavors, but first and

11 In a similar sense, Rubina (in *Sindikat. Roman-komiks* [Syndicate: Novel-comics] [Moscow: Eksmo, 2004], 354) compares the Syndicate, her literary parallel of the Jewish Agency, to the Tower of Babel and through it, symbolically, to all of Russian Jewry, perhaps even to the entire Jewish Diaspora.

12 *Poslednyi kaban iz lesov Pontevedra. Ispanskaia suita* [The last wild boar from the forests of Pontevedra: A Spanish suite] (St. Petersburg: Symposium, 2000, first published Jerusalem: Pilies Studio Publishers, 1998); *Sindikat. Roman-komiks* [Syndicate: Novel-comics] (Moscow: Eksmo, 2004).

13 Dina Rubina: *Na solnechnoy storone ulitsy* [On the sunny side of the street] (Moscow: Eksmo, 2006); *Pocherk Leonardo* [Leonardo's handwriting] (Moscow: Eksmo, 2008); *Belaia golubka Kordovy* [White dove of Cordova] (2009; Moscow: Eksmo, 2012); *Sindrom Petrushki* [Petrushka syndrome] (Moscow: Eksmo, 2010).

foremost is painting, the art of both Rubina's father and her husband, Boris Karafëlov. During this period, the heroes' wanderings take them to the limits of the normative and perceptible world, to the very limits of knowledge and reason.

The trilogy, *A Russian canary* (2015), constitutes a new period. This is a family saga, well rooted both in the Russian past and the Israeli present. The protagonist—a talented singer and a Mossad agent—is much more "Israeli" than the heroes of Rubina's previous novels. He represents a new generation—those who were brought to Israel as children and grew up as Israelis, still carrying the burden of their Russian culture. This population recently referred to itself as "Generation 1.5." At the focus is the history of his family, which led him and his young son, a second-generation Israeli, to sing in a concert hall in Jerusalem.

Rubina is a mainstream writer and a very popular storyteller. She is greatly admired in Israel, in Russia, and throughout the Russophonic diaspora worldwide. To a certain extent, the charm of her writing stems from its nomadic nature. The author is very attached to her home; in her interviews she often says she would never exchange the Jerusalem landscape for any other: after Jerusalem, everything else is a letdown. Nonetheless, her literary persona, her other self, present in most of her works, is that of a citizen of many countries and cities, and she claims to feel at home in each one. Moreover, many of her novels' protagonists are true nomads—talented, skilled, and characterized by the obsessive inspiration of traveling.[14] While for some writers, assimilation and exile

14 Rubina is not regarded as a Russian author in "exile" nor is she part of the waves of Russian immigrants according to the accepted historiography (Mabel Greta Velis Blinova, "Twentieth Century Russian Literature in Exile," in *Literature in Exile of East and Central Europe*, ed. Agnieszka Gutthy [New York: Peter Lang, 2009], 7–20). Nonetheless, this historiography is based on the psychological distinction between enforced exile and voluntary immigration, a distinction that is problematic and rather obscure. On the other hand, in contrast to the tendency in Alvin Rosenfeld's renowned collection of essays, one could say that Rubina is not uprooted but rather rooted everywhere; nor is her language "nomadic language" (certainly not in her latest novels), the Kafkaesque writing that Norman Manea describes in that collection (Alvin H. Rosenfeld, ed., *The Writer Uprooted: Contemporary Jewish Exile Literature* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008], 3–4). She preserves the language of her country of origin. However, her implied narrator

serve as the source of their literary fecundity,[15] Rubina finds this source in the formation of a new nativity (neoindigeneity),[16] the essence of which is a combination of Israeli culture, Jewish identity, and the Russian language. Rubina, unlike many of the (Jewish) immigrant authors who preceded her, is not a writer of multiple diasporas and varying languages but rather a writer of multiple homelands and one language. To a great extent, she is confident in her language because in her work there is none of the problematics of communal identity—just of the Jewish Russian identity, with all the baggage of its historical memory.

The nomadic nature of her writing establishes the geographical, linguistical, national, cultural, and geomental multiplicities of narrators and heroes. Rubina's works are colorful geocultural cognitive maps in which real and imagined borders are engraved in a dense network, and each step of the protagonist, each bit of recollection by the narrator, or every image or thought that arises from the depths of the author's erudition, entails the crossing of a border. The crossing of a border and an encounter with the self beyond the border is the major motif in Rubina's writing. This motif is embodied in the image of the mirror, which is at the center of her most nomadic novel, *Leonardo's handwriting* (2008). The novel *White dove of Cordova* (2009) underscores another aspect of this motif: the crossing of a border is not only an existential act of a paradoxical gaze at the truly imagined other

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is truly a nomad in her soul, a professional nomad, as it were. And, the nomad—in contrast to the immigrant, the exile, or the refugee—is at home everywhere.

15 Michael P. Kramer, "The Art of Assimilation: Ironies, Ambiguities, Aesthetics," in *Modern Jewish Literatures: Intersections and Boundaries*, ed. S. Jelen, M. Kramer, and L. Lerner (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

16 Neoindigeneity can be viewed as an opposite of the phenomenon that is widely discussed nowadays and can be called neodiasporism or diasporic transnationalism. See the works of Khachig Tölölyan and his fellows: Khachig Tölölyan, *Redefining Diasporas: Old Approaches, New Identities—The Armenian Diaspora in an International Context* (London: Armenian Institute, 2002); Carolin Alfonso, Waltraud Kokot, and Khachig Tölölyan, eds., *Diaspora, Identity and Religion: New Directions in Theory and Research* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2002). See also Allon Gal, Athena Leoussi, and Anthony D. Smith, eds., *The Call of the Homeland: Diaspora Nationalisms, Past and Present* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); James Clifford, *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

self, but it is also an act of transgression, a violation of the written laws (as in *Syndicate* [2004]) and unwritten rules (as in *On the sunny side of the street* [2006]), the bittersweet sin of the loss of the self and the madness of duality. The crossing of borders creates doubles that constantly duplicate themselves. In this way, Rubina poses the question that can be viewed as the second major motif in all of her writings—that of *the original and the copy*—inherited from both Romanticism and Modernism.

From Plato to Derrida, this question remains at the beating heart of epistemology.[17] Thought, imagination, signification—all seem to be a movement from an original to a copy and back, sometimes while traces are erased, sources are lost, or their copies are rejected. Processes of forgetting and "efforts at remembering"[18] are based on this movement. These movements establish the literary and cultural time and narrative, and the plots concerning the meaning of life. One can assume that Rubina's focus on the original/copy issue in her writing stems from them, and of course from her profound ars poetica, autoreflexive interest in the essence of art: the homeland and the alternative homeland, the real identity and the fictitious identity, original works of art and their copies, ideas and their falsifications, doing and imaging (these are several of the forms this question takes in Rubina's work). At her philosophical core is the problem of faithfulness or responsiveness to the self, to inspiration, to the call of the inner (or the transcendental) voice, to the personal or the historical, familial, dynastic task.[19] The essence of the task is to create a copy in order to preserve or establish

17 This issue appears in different forms—mimesis, representation, signification, icon, symbol, etc.—until the "surface thought" of Gilles Deleuze (*Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton [London and New York: Continuum, 2004]) aspires to remove it from the agenda within the framework of the struggle against the Western metaphysics, which is led by Derrida from his early works onward (*On Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak [Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998]).

18 Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 56–92.

19 The task, in the sense used by Mikhail Bakhtin—as he received it from Matvei Kagan and Hermann Cohen—is the opposite of *given-ness*, an ethical act in writing or in any other creative work. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, trans. Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993).

the original, and thus realize the self. This is also, for example, the way of the painter and forger, Zakhar, in *White dove of Cordova* (2009), the Russian adventurer who finds his brother/doppelgänger in the form of the Spanish pirate in the depths of historical memory and in the expanses of European geography. The tension between the original and the copy reaches its apogee in the novel *Petrushka syndrome* (2010), in which the puppet artist and his partner wife create and destroy their doppelgängers—the puppets—and compete with them in a struggle to control their lives. In their struggle over the original, the memory, and the heritage, the protagonists become pirates. As we shall see, the pirate is the archetype, the fundamental myth[20] that unites the main motifs in Rubina's work.

Translation, as a philosophical, literary problem, as well as a geocultural and geomental problem, appears as another fundamental axis in Rubina's writing. The multiplicity of languages, the direct result of the wanderings of the author and her characters, plays an extremely major role owing to the crisis inherent in it: emigration and the linguistic dangers it entails, especially when the emigrant is a writer and when her autobiographical representative appears in most of her works. Rubina immigrated to Israel when she was a famous, popular author. Her difficulties in acclimatizing, described so vividly in her writing, did not undermine, even momentarily, the centrality of the Russian language. Relinquishing her mother tongue for another language, forgetting the self for the sake of the other, was definitely not an option. Hence, translation was not only necessary for putting down roots in the new environment, but it was also a paradigmatic model of recognition—recognition of the world created anew before the eyes of the author. When Rubina prepares to build her new home in her new homeland, in the linguistic "geography," the situation is reversed: Rubina's Hebrew

20 I am using a term borrowed from the scholars of myth, Viacheslav Ivanov and Vladimir Toporov: "Le mythe indo-europeen du dieu de i'orage poursuivant le serpent: reconstruction de schema" [The Indo-European myth of god the thunderer killing the serpent: Reconstruction of the pattern] in *Échanges et communications; mélanges offerts à Claude Lévi-Strauss à l'occasion de son 60ème anniversaire*, vol. 2 (The Hague: Mouton et Cie, 1970), 1180–1206.