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## REVIEW ARTICLE

### Out of a maelstrom: a deferred history of Jewish-Russian prose

**In a Maelstrom: The History of Russian-Jewish Prose (1860-1940)**, by Zsuzsa Hetényi, translated by János Boris, Budapest/New York, Central European University Press, 2008, 332 pp., €31.95 (hardback), ISBN 978-963-7326-91-2

In the spring of 2005, as I prepared for publication my two-volume *Anthology of Jewish Russian Literature: Two Centuries of a Dual Identity* (2007), I heard from the late John D. Klier about a Hungarian scholar of Jewish-Russian culture. I made enquiries and learned that Zsuzsa Hetényi, a professor at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest, had published widely on the subject, in Hungarian, but also in Russian, English, and French. I was delighted to find that Hetényi's publications included not only *Csillagosok-keresztsek (Under the Star and the Cross, 1992)*, a monograph on Babel, but also the two-volume *Örvényben (In the Maelstrom, 2000)*, consisting of a concise Hungarian-language history of Jewish-Russian prose from 1860 to 1940 and a companion anthology of 17 authors in Hungarian translation. Professor Hetényi kindly furnished me with an English-language table of contents for her history and anthology, and I was able to reference the two volumes alongside other scholarship on Jewish-Russian literature – sorry as I was not to know Hungarian. I have been especially looking forward to the publication of *In a Maelstrom* in English because Hetényi is the widow, and a close disciple, of the late Shimon Markish. Jewish-Russian literature<sup>1</sup> found its most prominent student in Shimon Markish (1931–2003), the son of the martyred Yiddish writer Perets Markish (1895–1952) and brother of the Russian-Israeli writer David Markish (b. 1938). Although his numerous articles and encyclopedic surveys amount to a cumulative account of Jewish-Russian literature, Shimon Markish died without publishing a book-length history. One of Markish's premises was the notion of a unity of Jewish culture across the languages in and of the diaspora. By giving us an expanded English-language translation of her Hungarian “history of Russian-Jewish prose,” Markish's widow has carried her husband's torch into the twenty-first century.

The English-language edition features a polemical introduction and a historical overview in four chapters. The chapters organise Hetényi's survey of the period between 1860 and 1940 around distinct historical junctures.<sup>2</sup> In place of a conclusion, Hetényi adds a chapter which is not present in the Hungarian edition; it puts forward the fruits of Hetényi's lifelong fascination with Isaac Babel and offers her observations on the comparative dynamics of Jewish literature. The book takes its aphoristic title from Sergei Yaroshevsky's tale “V omute” (1883; *omut* means “maelstrom” or “whirlpool”). Hetényi's title calls to mind not only the Jewish condition in Russia but also the oxymoronic Russian saying “v tikhom omute cherti vodiatsia” (literally, “in a calm maelstrom petty demons dwell”). One of the principal problems with the deferred publication of Hetényi's history in English is that by now many of the old critical demons no longer dwell in the maelstrom of Jewish-Russian literature.

To begin with, even back in 2000, a book of this span and focus was not “the history,” but rather a series of selected chapters toward a history of Jewish-Russian prose. Most of all, the present book reads like a chronological, critical study of Jewish-Russian prose narratives of acculturation, assimilation (and, in some cases, apostasy) from the reforms of the 1860s to World War II. Hetényi is aware of the hybrid nature of her book: “The method of my work,” she writes, “combines the genres of literary history and a collection of essays” (xi). She claims her book to be “the first comprehensive monograph ever on this particular topic” (ix). I suspect that much of what Hetényi states about her book was – and still is – true for Hungarian scholarship, but it is not – or no longer is – true for Jewish-Russian studies more generally.

A word is in order about Hetényi’s conceptual framework and its relationship to the present-day state of scholarship. Hetényi writes in the Preface: “my philological research was naturally dominated by a *thematic approach*, since I am dealing with largely unfamiliar works and authors” (xi). Combining a thematic approach with structural analysis, Hetényi concentrates on prose fiction and some nonfiction, only very occasionally engaging works of Jewish-Russian poetry or theatre. To her mind, this is justified partly by “the predominance of the genre” and partly by “the fact that only prose provided a continuous report in the changing forms of consciousness characteristic at various stages of the historical road to assimilation of Jewry” (xi). Cognizant as she is of her mission to undo a chronic “exclusion [of these works] from the history of literature,” Hetényi also admonishes the reader that works of Jewish-Russian prose “rarely come even close to the peaks conquered by Russian prose, quite unique world-wide, and are mostly writings by second or third-rate authors” (2). Yet criteria of first-rateness, second-rateness, and so forth are not written in stone and tend to vary, both within and outside the realm of Jewish-Russian literature. This is especially relevant for the earlier decades of Jewish-Russian literature, when few authors broke out of the confines of Jewish-Russian periodicals and publishing houses to enter the Russian cultural mainstream.<sup>3</sup> No matter how much or how little one appreciates Hetényi’s reasoning on its own terms, her approach does not bode well for the history of Jewish-Russian literature. Especially during the beginning and first flowering of Jewish-Russian letters in the nineteenth century, but generally until the 1910s, a deliberate focus on prose at the expense of poetry or drama forces a straightjacket of second-rateness on a rather more wide-ranging corpus of texts.

Hetényi’s provocative survey of scholarship and commentary on the subject of Jewish-Russian literature does not include a number of critical landmarks. Given that she claims “to fill a major gap” with her book, “a huge blank spot in philology, a literary *terra incognita*” (x), I wonder how she can afford to be so selective in her bibliography. Even if one only considers principal contributions produced and published before 1999, the year prior to the monograph’s publication in Hungarian,<sup>4</sup> I am not sure how to account for the absence of references to the work of a number of important critics and scholars.<sup>5</sup>

I also have trouble with the way in which Hetényi engages in gratuitous polemic with scholars whose work was, in its time, pioneering. Of Maurice Friedberg, perhaps the only American Slavist in the 1970s to champion Jewish-Russian literature, Hetényi writes: “The East European émigré author not only fails to establish criteria as to what constitutes Jewish literature with a double identity, but makes statements which are fundamentally incorrect (based probably on his own, Polish experience)” (10). Such declarations fall far below the book’s many intellectually captivating moments. To take another example, Hetényi deems Alice Stone Nakhimovsky’s *Russian-Jewish Literature and Identity* “a more eclectic introductory overview” (12). Perhaps Hetényi needs to rely on polemical verve to justify the claim on which her own sense of mission hinges, namely, that “it remains an indisputable

fact that up to very recent times, even highly qualified scholars of Russian studies had no idea about the existence of Russian-Jewish literature” (12).

Hetényi operates on the premise that “Russian-Jewish literature is a borderline phenomenon, a literature with dual cultural roots” (2). In a section of her introduction on “The concept of Russian-Jewish literature and Jewish literature in another language,” Hetényi seeks to work out the interrelationship between the body of texts she includes in her history and the criteria she applies in order to pick and choose from among hundreds of authors and thousands of texts. This is, perhaps, the most exciting yet conceptually tricky aspect of Hetényi’s strategy. She takes as her point of departure Shimon Markish’s definition of Russian-Jewish literature as “Jewish literary creativity (broadly conceived) in the Russian language” that forms “one of the branches of the New Jewish letters.” Yet she seems somehow uneasy with the definition’s broadness, openness, and expansiveness. “An author’s belonging to Jewish literature,” Hetényi argues, “is decided neither by descent nor by private behaviour, and the evidence of letters is not decisive either” (24). To Hetényi, an author’s self-definition and self-identification are paramount. Yet one should keep in mind that up until the 1900s, when Jews began to penetrate the Russian literary mainstream, such a problem (am I a Jew in Russian literature, a Russian writer who happens to have been born Jewish, or some combination of both?) had not existed in any quantifiable fashion. On this point, but already looking ahead into the twentieth century, Hetényi challenges Efraim Sicher, author of *Jews in Russian Literature after the October Revolution* (1995):

Sicher simply ignores the problem, and the very title of his book ... indicates his starting point, namely that the Jewishness of writers is given due to their origin, and what is common in them is that they write in Russian. Under that common title he discusses the work of Babel, Mandelstam, Pasternak and Ehrenburg, disregarding the fact that Mandelstam and Pasternak came very close to ... Jewish self-hatred. Sicher also ignores the self-description of the writers themselves. (25–26)

As a general observation, the historical study of literature fares best when based on a combination of critical self-restraint and open-mindedness. A great number of parametric variables contribute to the creation of a literary text; their number is even greater in the case of a writer with multiple cultural identities (this is true not only for Jewish-Russian authors but for African-American authors, French-Canadian authors, and so forth). Therefore, determining whether a given writer is a *Jewish* writer or a writer of *Jewish descent* (in the broadest of views, the latter means the former) often requires the kinds of analytical procedures that cultural studies have yet to master. As Hetényi explains, some critics, “similarly to Sicher, make efforts to classify all writers of Jewish origin as belonging to Jewish literature, no matter how far they are from Judaism and how distant they grew from the Jews as a people” (27). How can one avoid a predicament where a student of Jewish writing becomes a judge of a writer’s commitment to Jewishness? Although sometimes unavoidable, a literary historian is usually better off refraining from such judgements. Hetényi cites a comment made in 2007 at a conference of Jewish writers in Jerusalem, “A Jewish writer is a writer whose mother is Jewish” (30). One smiles at this comment, both with relief (this is *not* untrue) and with bemusement (this is *not* sufficient). How can one not agree with Hetényi when she indicates that a halakhic criterion alone does not guarantee one a ticket to a Jewish writer’s Elysium – that thematic and textual criteria are necessary as well? Yet Hetényi is torn between the view that a Jewish writer’s texts, in terms of their content and/or structure, must exhibit discernibly Jewish/Judaic features and the assumption that a Jewish writer is a Jewish person who is a writer. Speaking here in a very personal, moving voice, Hetényi explains that “the ‘Jewishness’ of a writer, for me, is determined by three elements: the word

'Jewish' may signify *religious, national, and cultural* identity, and the mixture of these elements in different proportions may produce countless variants, and forms of appearance, not excluding the lack of, or complete dominance of one element either" (32).

One of Hetényi's most original theoretical suggestions is that "it is more practical to apply the criteria relating to Russian-Jewish literature, as described above, to individual works rather than to authors" (33). Yet her Hungarian two-volume book of 2000 haunts the present volume. In its original format, Hetényi's work provided both a literary history and an anthology illustrating that history. Yet there is a substantial difference between a selective anthology (and any anthology is selective by definition) and a literary history (however concise). Any writer of Jewish origin who has written in Russian, major or minor, good or bad, self-hating or self-proud, has a place in the history of Jewish-Russian literature. A short anthology (17 authors) of prose needs to be very selective. This can lead to a situation of "the tail wagging the dog" where one tailors one's criteria to justify the selection of anthologised works. Many if not most anthologists and canonisers are guilty of this very thing; literary historians should not be.

This tension forces Hetényi to engage in parametric contortionism. On the one hand, she pleads that we should "avoid forcing artists, who went through various changes during their career themselves, into rigid categories, and sacrificing to theory more subtle shades which ought to be subject to literary analysis" (33). On the other hand, she argues that it "can be quite clearly and definitely decided" whether any particular work "belongs to Russian-Jewish literature or Jewish literature written in any language" (33). Here Hetényi is presumably talking about the chapters in her history that cover the nineteenth century, for she adds that "it was of course, only in the twentieth century that all this became so endlessly complicated" (33). I completely agree that things get infinitely more exhilarating as Jewish writers become more visible in the Russian literary mainstream, and especially so during the early Soviet years. Of a literary historian this demands both a greater openness of judgement and a greater subtlety of discernment. Hetényi concludes her theoretical introduction by stating that "the majority of the writers in this book may be called Russian-Jewish writers because they wrote exclusively or mostly works belonging to Russian-Jewish literature" (33). An account of Jewish-Russian literature is, then, not a story of authors but a history of texts. Roland Barthes might have been pleased to read this about Jewish writing.

The tension between the role of anthologist and literary historian also has a bearing on the choice of authors selected by Hetényi to represent Jewish-Russian prose between 1860 and 1940 in the present volume. The first chapter, "'Turbulent Times' – The Utopia of Assimilation," covers the period between 1860 and 1882. In a section on Osip Rabinovich, Hetényi deems *A Story of How Reb Khayim-Shulim Feiges from Kishinev Journeyed to Odessa, and What Happened to Him on the Way* (1865) Rabinovich's "most brilliant" work (44). Hetényi's is the most detailed and insightful treatment to date of this text, of its Odessian roots and its links to Yiddish and Russian literature. I suspect, though, that Vladimir Sollogub's *Tarantas* (1845) should also be engaged among the Russian sources for Rabinovich's satirical travel tale. Moreover, many students of Jewish-Russian writing would be more comfortable ranking *The Penal Recruit*, published in 1859 in the Moscow review *The Russian Messenger* and widely acclaimed by Russian Jewry, as Rabinovich's principal work. The section on Lev Levanda is very good although there is considerably more recent scholarship on Levanda's novel, *Seething Times*, than on any work by Rabinovich, and Brian Horowitz's work on Levanda, in particular, should have been noted. Hetényi's discussion of Grigory Bogrov is less satisfying, in part due to her lack of appreciation for *Notes of a Jew* (published in 1871–73) which she characterises as "an eventful, adventurous, at times sentimental literary autobiography ... considerably blemished by the author's mediocre talent and by his tendentious

declarations of his opinions” (71). Mediocre by what standards? To be sure, if we judge it by the standards of some of the best Russian prose coming out in Nikolay Nekrasov’s review, *Fatherland Notes*, where chapters of *Notes of a Jew* appeared, then it is not a great literary masterpiece. Yet if we operate within the framework that Hetényi establishes in the first chapter of her history – Jewish-Russian writing in the 1860s and 1870s – it is hardly mediocre. And I doubt we can deem “tendentious” a Russian Jew’s lamentations about his origin and unhappy childhood, penned in the 1860s and published so early in the history of Jewish-Russian letters. In fact, Hetényi later calls *Notes of a Jew* not a memoir but a “novel” (77), and I would agree. Hetényi’s engagement of Yakov Rombro is arguably the first notable treatment of this author who should be remembered because of his “Cholera Wedding” (1884). Rombro best suits Hetényi’s notion of a second- or third-rate but nevertheless important Jewish author, and she is at her finest when she traces the motif of a Jewish wedding at the time of an epidemic back to Mendele Moykher Sforim and its Yiddish sources and forward to Ilya Ehrenburg’s *The Stormy Life of Lazik Roitshvanets* (1927).

In Hetényi’s next chapter, “‘In a Maelstrom’ – After the Pogroms,” covering the period 1882 to 1897, two sections briefly treat Ben-Ami and N. Naumov (Kogan), the author of the once famous short novel, *In a Backwater Small Town* (1892). Hetényi focuses on Sergei Yaroshevsky in a separate, longer section.<sup>6</sup> Yaroshevsky and his prose are very important for historical reasons. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first such extensive analysis of Yaroshevsky, and I am grateful to Hetényi for her pioneering work. Her treatment of the 1880s and 1890s cries out for a discussion of Rashel Khin (1861–1928). Hetényi does mention her work for the Russian stage later in the book but does not discuss her prose. The first Jewish-Russian female author of note, Khin regarded Ivan Turgenev as her mentor, published in major Russian journals such as *The Messenger of Europe*, and had plays staged by Moscow’s Maliy Theatre. One also misses a discussion of Avraam-Uria Kovner (1842–1909) and, arguably, Simon Frug, who wrote not only poetry but also colourful prose in Russian.

The First Zionist Congress marks the beginning of the next section in Hetényi’s history, “‘At a Crossroads’ – Choosing Paths.” It covers the period between 1897 and 1917. A section on S. An-sky is followed by a discussion of Aleksandr Kipen. In Hetényi’s framework, Kipen is another “second-rater,” a kind of cross between a Yushkevich in a minor key and a lightweight Yaroshevsky. Along with the earlier section on Rombro, the section on Kipen truly fills a gap in Jewish-Russian literary history and deserves applause. Much of Hetényi’s thoughtful analysis of David Aizman’s work focuses on his treatment of pogroms and anti-Jewish violence, thereby continuing Hetényi’s exploration of this topic in Jewish-Russian fiction (which focuses on Yaroshevsky, Kipen, and later Yushkevich). One may be disappointed not to find any discussion of Aizman’s finest early stories, “In a Strange Land” (“Na chuzhbine”) and “The Countrymen” (“Zemliaki”). Composed in France and published in 1902–03 in *Russian Wealth*, a leading Russian monthly with a *narodnik* stance, these exilic tales established Aizman’s reputation as a Jewish-Russian Chekhov. The next section offers a fairly extensive and illuminating interpretation of Semyon Yushkevich’s career. It is one of the best in the book, and my only regret is that Hetényi did not reference the work of Ruth Rischin, currently the most authoritative scholar working on Yushkevich in the West. The Yushkevich section logically leads to an intriguing coda, “Pogrom in literature: strategies between the documentarian and the emotional approach.”

One may agree or disagree with some of Hetényi’s judgements, but her pre-1897 sections are sufficiently balanced and representative. Things get messier once we cross over into the twentieth century and find ourselves not only in the historical terrain of the first Russian Revolution and the pogroms of 1905–07, but also in the cultural territory of the

Russian Silver Age. The absence of the Silver Age in Hetényi's account is especially puzzling because in the chapter covering the period between 1897 and 1917 she discusses the predicaments and artistic choices of Jewish-Russian writers in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Granted, the most notable Jewish-Russian prosaists of the time, such as Aizman or Yushkevich, were aligned with the narrative aesthetics of the neorealists. Granted also that for the Russian Silver Age a Jewish presence is much greater in the realm of high poetry (and, one might add, satirical verse) than in prose. Yet, even if one follows Hetényi's conceit and only examines prose at the expense of poetry or theater, it is difficult to understand how the final two sections of Hetényi's history can fail to acknowledge the legacy of the Silver Age in Jewish-Russian writing of the two decades following the revolutions of 1917. When applied to the second and third decades of the twentieth century, her exclusive focus on prose deprives us of the poetry of Ilya Ehrenburg, Osip Mandelstam, Boris Pasternak, Sofia Parnok, Ilya Selvinsky, Eduard Bagritsky, Matvey Royzman, Semyon Kirsanov, and others. Even on its own terms, though, Hetényi's presentation truncates the history of Jewish-Russian prose. The late 1910s and early 1920s, with their explosion of Jewish creativity in the Russian (and Soviet) cultural mainstream, call into question the idea of second- or third-rateness that Hetényi's history advances well beyond the historical boundary of 1917. Hetényi's own evidence suggests that her principal protagonist, Isaac Babel, defies this notion of Jewish-Russian second-rateness in a post-Silver Age Russian mainstream. Some of the omissions from Hetényi's history of Jewish-Russian prose in the 1920s and 1930s also render the notion of second- or third-rateness highly problematic. Even the briefest of histories clamors for the prose of Ilya Ehrenburg, Ilya Ilf and Evgeny Petrov, Vera Inber, Yuri Libedinsky, Osip Mandelstam, and Viktor Shklovsky. Ehrenburg in particular is a towering figure, and certainly the most visible and enduring one: a Jewish writer for all Soviet times. Yet Hetényi only touches on Ehrenburg's *The Stormy Life of Lazik Roitshvanets*. How a historian of Jewish-Russian literature can do without *Julio Jurenito* (1922) is incomprehensible.

The first two decades of the Soviet era are sweepingly treated in the opening pages of Hetényi's chapter, "'Motherland' and 'Cemetery' – Climax and Endgame" (covering the period from 1917 to 1940). She pauses to examine three major issues as they were reflected in the literature, culture, and media of the 1920s: the "Jewish revolutionaries"; "De-Judaization" and "Yiddishization"; antisemitism and the early Soviet rhetoric on the Jewish question. Hetényi's excellent section on Babel is subsequently extended in the final chapter of the book, to which I shall return. The relative weight of Babel in this book is very high, reflective of his unique place in Jewish-Russian literary history. One senses that Hetényi privileges *Red Cavalry* over much of the rest of Babel, owing to its "special tension of the attempt to connect Jewish roots and Soviet convictions" (188). It is not entirely clear what Hetényi means when she suggests that "Babel's Soviet identity probably consisted to a large extent of the Russian language and of Soviet literature, to the elite of which he belonged" (185). Why would such an argument lead Hetényi to conclude that "the reader discerns false notes also in another work from the early 1930s, the final passage of the story 'Karl-Yankel' (1931)"? Babel's later stories are treasures precisely in their quest, driven at times by irony and at other times by concealed fears of rising antisemitism, for a synthetic, Jewish-Soviet identity.

The section on Lev Lunts is very good, containing a very fine analysis of his major story, "Native Land" (1922), set partly in Lunts's Petrograd and partly in an exilic Babylon of his imagination. Perhaps my only regret is that Hetényi did not engage further Lunts's dialogue with Veniamin Kaverin, to whom the story is dedicated. Given Lunts's untimely death, the folding of the Serapion Brothers literary group, to which both he and Kaverin belonged, and

also Kaverin's long survival in Soviet literature, their personal and artistic dialogue is a high point in the history of Jewish-Russian letters. In a brief section on Andrey Sobol, Hetényi devotes only a fleeting paragraph to the short autobiographical novel *Salon Car* (1922), which some critics consider his best work, and chooses to overlook what is arguably his most memorable work about Jews in the Revolution and Russian Civil War, the tale "When Cherries Blossom" (published in 1925). I am grateful to Hetényi for granting Sobol a spot in her concise history, especially because after his suicide in Moscow in 1926, no books by him were reprinted until 1989. Yet Sobol's literary legend lived on, and contemporaries conjured up his image in their memoiristic fiction (Konstantin Paustovsky in *The Golden Rose* of 1955; Valentin Kataev in *Werther Has Been Written*, published in 1980). Since the publication of Hetényi's Hungarian book in 2000, new scholarship on Sobol has sprouted up in Russia, and the work of Diana Gantseva comes to mind in this connection.

The section on Semyon Gekht is truly valuable, not only because he is very rarely discussed, but also because he best fits Hetényi's notion of third-rateness. Even so, her analysis of Gekht's novel, *The Steamship Sails to Jaffa and Back* (Moscow, 1936), is based on the chapters reprinted in the 1993 volume of Gekht's writings published in Jerusalem. It is slightly puzzling how Hetényi, without having perused the entire work, speaks of it "from an artistic point of view" as a "step backwards" as compared to Gekht's earlier works.<sup>7</sup> I am less enthusiastic about Hetényi's section on Mikhail Kozakov (father of the well-known contemporary actor Mikhail Kozakov). Of Kozakov, Shimon Markish wrote that his "mercilessness of vision ranks him together with Isaac Babel." Hetényi takes Markish's words to heart when she suggests that Kozakov's short novel, *A Man Is Brought to His Knees* (written in 1928 and published in 1930), is "the only attempt after 1917, but also in the whole of Russian-Jewish literature, to show anti-Semitism for what it is ... without vindication, assertions, justifications and analysis" (210). It is almost impossible to substantiate such claims. Yet I agree that *A Man Is Brought to His Knees* is particularly important in its dissection, in the context of a marriage between a Jewish man and an ethnic Russian woman, of both the residual pre-Soviet antisemitism and of a new, Soviet antisemitism in the late 1920s. Hetényi's section on Vladimir Jabotinsky as a writer of prose features a compelling reading of his novel, *The Five* (which was recently published in Michael Katz's English translation). Once again, though, I find myself wondering why little credit is given to other literary and cultural historians who have written about Jabotinsky's Russian literary work (specifically Alice Stone Nakhimovsky and Michael Stanislawski).

While Hetényi aptly speaks of a "first climax" when describing interwar Jewish-Russian writing up to the late 1920s, her argument for viewing the 1930s as the "endgame" of Jewish-Russian prose is not convincing. In order to uphold this argument she places her discussion of Jabotinsky in the section on the early Soviet period – even though in many respects it does not belong there. The literary history of the 1930s – Shimon Markish's endgame in Jewish-Russian literature – now also constitutes Hetényi's endgame with its double vortex, in 1940, of Jabotinsky's death in America and Babel's execution in Moscow. Hetényi writes: "The history of Russian-Jewish literature began with the advocates of assimilation, and ends symbolically with two authors, one an opponent of assimilation (Jabotinsky), and the other its victim (Babel)" (219). Like Shimon Markish, Hetényi treats 1940 as the endpoint of Jewish-Russian literature. As a result, World War II, the Shoah, the Stalinist terror and Soviet Jewry's dark postwar years, the Thaw, the late Soviet decades, and the Exodus of Soviet Jewry all lie beyond the remit of her history. It would be entirely legitimate, of course, to present a survey of Jewish-Russian literature with a cut-off line in or before 1940, leaving the period after 1940 for a later treatment or for others to discuss. To suggest that Jewish-Russian history (or any cultural history of a living tradition, for that

matter) comes to an end, however, is another matter altogether. This notion of a critical-historical endgame disregards a vast body of texts produced between the 1940s and 1980s and in the post-Soviet years, both inside and outside the Soviet Union. I sense that Hetényi herself is in fact not entirely comfortable with her endgame scenario. Take her forward-looking glance at the career of Friedrich Gorenstein (1932–2002), who spent his last two decades in West Berlin. Her decision to include Gorenstein is highly welcome, not only because of the significance of Gorenstein's contribution but also because it takes her account of Jewish-Russian literary history beyond 1940 and beyond the Soviet borders. Yet in some ways her engagement of Gorenstein only throws all the more sharply into relief the problems created by the exclusion of the entire literary output produced after 1940. The creation – against all odds – of Jewish-Russian literature in the Soviet Union throughout the post-war era, and especially in the 1970s and 1980s, challenges Hetényi's assertion that Gorenstein's "life is proof to the fact that Russian-Jewish literature could not be continued in the Soviet Union" (227).

The final section of the book carries the title, "A Pattern of Narrative in Jewish Assimilation Literature. The Child's Eye View – Isaac Babel in a Russian-Jewish, American, and European Literary Context. A Comparative Conclusion." It makes a contribution to the structural analysis of Jewish narrative arts. Hetényi identifies, convincingly, a "peculiar feature, a phenomenon which seems, at the same time, to be the most outstanding achievement of the Jewish literature of assimilation: the narrative method of the child's eye view, reflecting the dual identity of generations of assimilation" (229). As I see it, this Jewish child's eye view represents doubly the Shklovskian estrangement. It is not only a naïve and authentic point of view (as in Vladimir Nabokov's programmatic short story, "A Guide to Berlin," where a bartender's son perceives and records the world as a "future recollection"). It is also an aesthetic, historical – and sometimes a metaphysical – perspective simultaneously rendered both from within and without.

The subject of Hetényi's earlier work, Isaac Babel, has continued to preoccupy her. In seeking to map out "Babel's successors and followers ... in world literature," Hetényi fashions an influence-governed dynamic of Jewish literary history, one of grandfathers, fathers, sons, and nephews. Among the most fascinating aspects of this final section, two deserve special mention: a section on Babel and Michael Gold and a section on Babel and Henry Roth. Both represent Hetényi as an original cultural historian. Hetényi's may well be the first comparison of Babel and Mike (later Michael) Gold (1894–1967; born Itzok Isaac Granich), the American radical publicist and author of *Jews without Money* (1930).

The book is rounded off by short biographies of the 18 Jewish-Russian authors whom Hetényi showcases and a rather uneven bibliography. In the short biographies, it would have been very helpful to list the titles of works in the original Russian, and also to differentiate between books and individual short stories and novels, currently all listed chronologically and in italics. I suspect that a good and attentive editor would have spared Hetényi and her translator, János Boris, a number of infelicities of language, style, and format. The transliteration, said to follow the Library of Congress system, is a bit of a mess (on page 209 we find "obnazheniie priioma"). All the quoted literary passages are retranslated from the Hungarian into English, and not directly from the Russian; this is odd and unwarranted. Finally, entire phrases or passages are occasionally repeated (compare, for instance, the discussion of Babel's "Karl-Yankel" on pages 185 and 219 and the remarks on Babel's language and imagery on pages 234–5 and 255).

This very important work has become accessible to the larger academic community with a considerable delay. The story of this book's publication in some ways mirrors the melancholy tale of the study of Jewish-Russian literature – in Russia after the 1920s and before

the 1990s, and in the West prior to the 1980s. I have the greatest respect for Professor Hetényi for having produced a groundbreaking book on Jewish-Russian literature in the Hungary of the late 1990s, at a time when the conditions for either Russian or Jewish scholarship must have been far from ideal in her home country. The present publication still echoes much of the project's initial originality, but it is no longer a scholarly landmark in its own right. I hope very much that Professor Hetényi will go on to publish a larger book-length study on Isaac Babel which would undoubtedly make a substantial scholarly contribution. And above all, I hope that Zsuzsa Hetényi will eventually write a detailed, balanced, and comprehensive history of Jewish-Russian literature. Our field still needs one, perhaps more than ever.

### Notes

1. I employ the term "Jewish-Russian literature" to refer fundamentally to the same body of texts as the one Zsuzsa Hetényi and Shimon Markish call "Russian-Jewish literature": literary works written in Russian by Jews and displaying some Jewish/Judaic thematic and formal characteristics.
2. Her survey includes detailed discussions of Osip Rabinovich (1817–69), Lev Levanda (1835–88), Grigory Bogrov (1825–85), Yakov Rombro (pseud. Philip Krantz, 1858–1922), Ben-Ami (1854–1932), N. Naumov (Kogan, 1863–93), Sergei Yaroshevsky (18??–1907), S. An-sky (1863–1920), Aleksandr Kipen (1870–1938), David Aizman (1869–1922), Semyon Yushkevich (1868–1927), Isaac Babel (1894–1940), Andrei Sobol (1888–1926), Lev Lunts (1901–24), Semyon Gekht (1903–1963), Mikhail Kozakov (1897–1954), and Vladimir Jabotinsky (1880–1940).
3. Consider the example of Simon Frug (1860–1916). Frug was revered by his Jewish-Russian contemporaries as a "national poet" (Shimon Markish's subsequent assessment), but his verses have left no trace in the history of Russian poetry.
4. The 2008 edition does cite post-2000 books, which means the bibliography has in fact been updated.
5. The conspicuous omissions include the contributions made by Kornei Chukovsky in the first decade of the twentieth century, by Iosif Kleinman, and Joshua Kunitz in the 1920s, by I. Kisin, and Marc Slonim in the 1940s, by Vera Alexandrova, Grigory Aronson, Sofia Dubnova-Erlich, and Andrei Sedykh (Yakov Tsvibak) in the 1960s, by Danilo Cavaion, Viktoria Levitina, and Ilya Serman in the 1980s and by Vladimir Khazan, Aleksandr Kobrinsky, and Roman Timenchik in the 1990s.
6. It should be noted that the translator's genderless rendering of the English title, *Pioneer*, hardly does justice to the Russian title, *Pionerka*, referring to Yaroshevsky's female Jewish-Russian protagonist.
7. Gekht's cardboard treatment of Zionism in the novel, incidentally, would have provided an ideal juncture to speak of a more complex and artistically compelling novel about Jewish-Russian *halutzim*, *Scorched Land* (*Opalennaia zemlia*, published as a book in 1933–34) by Mark Egart (1901–56).

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