Chapter 7

Russian Jews as the Newest Cosmopolitans

Rooted German Cosmopolitans?

If the models of Jewish cosmopolitanism (as well as the more covert ones of Jewish nomadism) truly have national and cultural variations over time, then the mid- to late-twentieth-century diaspora of Russian-speaking Jews should be the best litmus test for the limits of their flexibility. Are they cosmopolitan, postcolonial, hybrid, transcultural, or merely nomads, refugees, or exiles? Indeed how do they understand themselves? As Russians and as Jews, or indeed as Jewish Russians or Russian Jews? What happened to their identity as Soviet Jews, so very politically important in the 1970s and 1980s? What happens when they become German- or English-speaking and -writing members of a new imagined community where the cosmopolitan is a prized if contested category?

Russian-speaking Jews left for Western Europe, Israel, the United States, and Canada in growing numbers beginning with the refusniks (in Russian otkaznik)—Jews who applied for exit visas to leave the USSR after the 1967 Six Days’ War in the Middle East. This exodus continued in starts and spurts through the end of the Cold War and sped up following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. During the 1970s, only about 7,000 Jews left for political or religious reasons (which were often the same), a number that grew to 250,000 over the following decade. In 1989, although the USSR required departing Jews to declare their intention to immigrate to Israel, only 12,117 of the 71,000 who officially left followed through on that declaration. By the time of the Soviet Union’s collapse, more than 1.1 million Russian Jews had emigrated to Israel, and 500,000 had moved to the United States. Germany and Austria received at least 250,000. Some were religious Jews, some ethnic, some were Jews simply because their Soviet passports listed them as of Jewish (inner-Soviet) nationality. Some were transformed by the move into categories of
Jews that they could not have imagined while living in the USSR or its successor states.

All became cosmopolitan Jews by dint of having left the homogenous identity politics of the Soviet Union and the hegemonic power of a Russian cultural identity. This was the underlying power of an imperial notion of a Russian literary culture grafted on to Homo Sovieticus, the “social type molded by State Socialism over its seventy plus years of ideological indoctrination and meager living conditions. Usually implies such features as social dependency, lack of initiative, and compliance with social control, along with manipulation of the state bureaucracy at all levels (‘working the system, bending the rules’) as a survival tool.”

To this one can add the complexity of being Jewish, however defined, under such circumstances. But being Jewish, even in the sense of belonging to a religious minority in such contexts, had a very different ambiance:

Indeed, for the Russian-speaking Jews, socialized into a society that is Eastern Orthodox and once Communist, the idea of communal Jewish life is unfamiliar. Many could not, upon arrival, understand paying for membership in a synagogue, and even wearing a yarmulke was seen by many immigrants as shameful. The Russians would not speak of their religion (*religia*), as American Jews do, but rather spoke of their faith (*vera*); to Russophones, *religia* connotes tiresome rituals, whereas *vera* refers to individuals contemplating their fate.

Only in the context of attempts at integration are such views. According to social scientist David D. Laitin, this integration into a religious identity begins with the children of the immigrants, who become exposed to and then accept the strictures of an Orthodox Jewish religious education and then move their parents into what is for Americans and Germans a more familiar identification of Judaism as religious belief and religious practice (L/D, 32). But such a transformation was rarely the norm.

For many of these Jews, however defined, high culture (*kulturni*) became the residue that continued to define them during and following their physical move from the USSR. Gogol was also much more central to their understanding of culture than was Sholem Aleichem, their schooling in Russian culture and language more central than their fragmented Yiddish past. In an odd way, the portability of Russian culture as a defining quality of Russian Jews (even with the limitations of the Russian language beyond the USSR) mirrors a central trope of Jewish identity. The written word has a special sense within the Jewish tradition, as Arnold Eisen points out: it became a mobile holy space replacing
the concrete rooted place of the Temple. Russian Jews brought Gogol, Tolstoy, and Pushkin rather than Torah, but in the new cosmopolitan diaspora, the written word gave them status and meaning, serving as a secular Torah.

Russian Jews were certainly cultured in the old Soviet sense of the word, “especially considering the discussion of what Jewishness meant in the context of the former Soviet Union, this view of ‘others’ fit directly into the traditional perception of self as an ‘urbanized’ and ‘cosmopolitan’ ethnic group.”7 Indeed, these immigrants at least initially showed “a stronger detachment from the home-country on the one hand, and a certain sense of cosmopolitanism and self-perception as a ‘European’ or even a world citizen on the other hand, as many of the younger respondents commented on considering educational or professional opportunities in other European countries or in the US, or on having already made arrangements for such plans” (I, 189). Being Russian and Jewish thus already defined one as a member of the cultured world, both cosmopolitan and very Russian, as “the Jewish minority in the former Soviet Union could be seen as the most acculturated ethnic group, becoming an active consumer and even producer of Russian culture” (I, 299). Being Jewish thus “came to be defined by a specific set of social and cultural characteristics rather than exclusively by the ones conventionally associated with ethnicity” and was “defined according to a certain life style and social position, while the most prominent attributes of Jewishness in the Soviet and post-Soviet context centered around the notions of being ‘able,’ ‘talented,’ or ‘cultured’” (I, 299).

The Germans, whether Jewish or Christian, did not share such views. They saw Russian Jews as Russians, and that stereotype of the drunken peasant did not contain any commitment to high culture.8 As Italian-born Canadian academic Arianna Dagnino evokes in her diaries from a 1985 trip to the USSR, the world from which these Soviet Jews came was a “humid subterranean world of mechanics who read Gogol, of poet-engineers, of incognito intellectuals, of non-declared Jews. Vodka, Marina Tsvetaeva’s poems and cigarettes without filters.”9 Are they cosmopolitans traveling the world or merely migr, émigrés, exiles, just like the White Russian exiles in Weimar Germany after 1919?

What does it mean then to speak of a new Jewish rootedness or cultural cosmopolitanism in light of the movement of a large minority of Russian-speaking Jews not only into a global Jewish diaspora but specifically into a complex Israeli, German, and American Jewish context? Each setting demands that we rethink and redefine the models of the cosmopolitan and how Jews enter into these cosmopolitanisms as self-defined exiles, diaspora Jews, Russians, or new Israelis, Americans, or Germans. Cultural objects enable us to trace the trajectory of the new cosmopolitanisms and their reception, but we
also must begin to recognize that such notions of nomadism and cosmopolitanism have an absolute link between nomadic experience and aesthetics, as Eva Aldea has noted. Literary works are the space, a thought experiment, in which the double bind of movement across space as cosmopolitan and/or as exile is worked out.

**In Germany, Gogol Is Not Sholem Aleichem**

The mass relocation of Jews from the former Soviet Union to the Federal Republic of Germany provides a unique set of literary examples of cosmopolitan thought experiments about being an Eastern European Jew and a German. The status of the Eastern European Jew in Germany ran the gamut from being the focus of German Jewish anxiety as the “cause” of German antisemitism, as in the views of Weimar figures such as the Jewish theologian Hans Joachim Schoeps, who as late as the 1930s saw Eastern Jews as a grave danger to the social standing of German Jewry to representing a romanticized transcendental Jewry, as in the pre–World War I literary work of Martin Buber, which created the German fantasy of an authentic East European Jewry. Residues of such images remained in the German literary imagination after the Holocaust and even became part of the German Jewish cultural legacy among many Jews whose Eastern European parents and grandparents had remained in the various German “zones” after 1945. Hannah Arendt’s postwar question about the relationship of exiled German Jews to Germany—or, indeed, the status of any people driven from their homeland and seen as exiles rather than as cosmopolitans—remained valid: “To what extent do we remain obligated to the world even when we have been expelled from it or withdrawn from it?”

In today’s Germany, with its official designation of the Jews as one of the four state-sanctioned religious communities, being Jewish is officially defined by the state as a religious status. It seems to be free of undertones, without any sense of the outsider or the sojourner, the exotic cosmopolitan or the rooted national. Yet it is more than being a “Jewish fellow citizen,” to use Konrad Adenauer’s clichéd term from the 1960s. If anything, these new German Jews, most of whom come from the former Soviet Union, perpetuate an ethnic identity for the Jews (in the older vocabulary a “national” identity as inscribed on their passports) as the internal Other. Such an identity is malleable in that it enables the Jews to focus on transforming themselves into Jews in Germany. Indeed, they believe that they can become Jewish by becoming German. Many of the Russian Jews were not Jewish by Orthodox standards—that is, they nei-
ther have a Jewish mother (and grandmother) nor have undergone Orthodox conversion.\textsuperscript{14} Even into the twenty-first century, a large number have not joined the official Jewish community, yet they also set themselves apart from other communities of Russian-speaking immigrants.

However, after February 1991, being Jewish was an important qualification for permission to settle in Germany. The category of \textit{Kontingentflüchtlinge} (quota refugees) had previously encompassed primarily Vietnamese boat people and a few Albanian officials but was expanded to include those whose papers labeled them as of a “Jewish nationality” or as having a least one “Jewish” parent.\textsuperscript{15} Thus, anyone who possessed an internal Soviet passport that used the label “Jewish” as a nationality or who had a parent with such a passport was guaranteed admission to Germany. This label had been disadvantageous in the USSR and its successor states as well as in other communist countries, so many Jews had transformed themselves into Russians (or members of other Soviet nationalities), meaning that if they sought to move to Germany, they had to draw on their parents’ national identities. German Jewish authorities consequently were confronted with “Jews” who did not fulfill any religious definition of Jewish identity, much less the official Orthodox definition. This tension that echoes in much of the cosmopolitan literature written by “Russian” Jews, whose collective identity is shaped much more by their shared high Russian culture.

After the economic downturn of 2008, Jews from the former Soviet Union faced new legal barriers to entry into Germany as the federal government turned immigration matters over to the states and to various Jewish communities. Earlier immigrants matured as Germans, taking an increasingly caustic view of their new country, in large part as a result of their sense of uniqueness. In addition, new immigrants had to have at least one “Jewish” parent and could not be active members of any other religion; some of the ethnic Jews from the former USSR had been Russian Orthodox. Moreover, those with Jewish fathers could be admitted as immigrants but would not be defined as Jewish in the official religious community. Because the new regulations also stated that immigrants must be “accepted into a Jewish Community by the Central Welfare Office for Jews in Germany,” some would-be immigrants were caught by a built-in contradiction. Moreover, immigrants had to also have a working knowledge of the German language and, and this was vital, had to have a “positive prognosis for integration.” That meant that the German government must judge them as fulfilling the cultural and social expectations of being “German” prior to coming to the country.\textsuperscript{16} Thus, post-2008 arrivals were perceived as the best of the new migrants, ripe for integration not only into German culture but also into the German economy. (In contrast to recent claims of many Germans,
especially those supporting the new Alliance for Germany Party, that asylum seekers from the Middle East and North Africa lacked any desire to integrate into German society.) The older model of the Jews as cosmopolitan agents of capitalism had morphed into the notion of the ability to achieve economic integration as a positive quality of these Jewish migrants.

These shifts in what it means to become German are reflected in the changing debates about cosmopolitanism in the literary products of these new Jewish arrivals. The central question reflected in their work is their integration into a new but not very cosmopolitan Germany. Indeed, the debate about Germany remains the debate about rootedness in geographic as well as cultural senses. Yet all of these narratives center on the cosmopolitan tradition of representing Jews on the move, where the experience of spatial mobility serves as a metaphor for social and cultural cosmopolitanism. 

The hottest of the cool mobile cosmopolitan Jewish writers to come out of the newest Russian Jewish diaspora in the new Germany is Wladimir Kaminer. Born in 1967 in Moscow, he was released from the Soviet army in 1989. He arrived in the German Democratic Republic with the first wave of young “Jews” invited by the dying East Germany in 1990 when officials conceived some type of coming to terms with “world” Jewry and Israel as allies in preserving the “transforming” socialist state. Kaminer noted, “I was young—twenty-two—so nobody was really calling for me. I had friends there that I had met in Moscow. This was 1990; you didn’t need a visa, not even a passport. All you needed was an invitation. And it was inexpensive.” By the end of the 1990s, he had become a cabaret and club performer (as a DJ spinning Russian club music, ska-punk), and he published his first volume, *Russendisko* (Russian Disco), in 2000. It was an immediate and hugely popular as well as economic success. It generated six musical recordings between 2003 and 2013 as well as a 2012 film by Oliver Ziegenbalg.

*Russendisko* questions the notion of being Jewish as a unitary category. Kaminer accounts for the emigration of Jews—who are Russians claiming to be Jews—to East Germany in 1990. These “Jews” were the ultimate cosmopolitan conglomeration: “They could be Christians or Muslims or even atheists, blond, red-haired or black, with a retroussé nose or a hook nose. The only unifying factor was that their passports said they were Jewish. It was enough at the [refugee camp] at Marienfelde if one in the family was Jewish or a half or quarter Jew” (K/R, 13). Here, the ironic tone of the postmodern reflects a German sensibility about what it means to be Jewish. A rabbi asks a woman what Jews ate at Easter: “‘Pickles and Easter cake.’ ‘Well,’ she said, ‘I know what you mean. We Jews eat matzos.’ Do you actually know what matzos are, the
rabbi asked. ‘But of course,’ the woman answered gleefully, ‘they are the cook-
ies that are baked from an ancient recipe out of the blood of small children.’
The rabbi fainted dead away” (K/R, 14). Are these Jews without knowledge of
being Jewish or Jews who know well what is expected of them and ironically
resist their transformation into members of a religion from members of an
ethnicity? The Jews in the community take many of the new immigrants to
heart but insist, for example, that uncircumcised males undergo the procedure
in a gesture that redefines being Jewish in purely ritual terms (K/R, 15). At
least one complies.

After this opening chapter, any confrontation with the question of a Jew-
ish identity in Kaminer’s first book vanishes. Kaminer seems to become a Rus-

ian, similar to the hundreds of thousands of Spätaussiedler (late resettlers)
from the former USSR and Central Europe who returned to a virtual German
fatherland from which their ancestors emigrated in the seventeenth and eight-
teenth centuries. Indeed, after reunification, members of both groups were
treated identically as immigrants from the former USSR. Coming to Germany
defines Kaminer as a Jew because of the German reader’s expectation of what
it means to fulfill a missing link in the superficially multicultural world of
Germany, a Germany “robbed” not so much of its Jews but of its connection
with what is imagined to be authentic Jewry—the world of klezmer, the world
of the East, the world of Fiddler on the Roof. That this eastern world is totally
Russified by the 1990s seems lost on the Germans but not on Kaminer, who
becomes a Jew only by becoming a German and quickly finds this transforma-
tion discomfiting. The volume quickly becomes the tale of a young man adapt-
ing to a German multicultural ambiance in which he is part of the new German
“multi-kulti” world as a Russian émigré.

Kaminer’s biography makes up the stuff of his literary work and therefore
offers a window onto the claims of Germany’s cosmopolitanism or at least onto
its fantasies of the displaced Soviet now as new citizen in a Western cosmo-
politan world. Kaminer thinks about being a Jew only when he represents his
life in the USSR. Antisemitism is a feature not of Germany but of the USSR.
In Militärmusik (Military Music, 2001), being Jewish is seen as a potential
disadvantage.20 Jewish actors and choreographers such as his employer, Stein,
who had worked at the Moscow Jewish Theater, had been persecuted as dissi-
dents (K/M, 40–41). Indeed, when Kaminer joins Stein in a dissident action—
urinating on the stage at the Majakowski Theater—it is denounced officially as
a “Zionist conspiracy” (K/M 49). Indeed, many hoary antisemitic myths are
recycled, meaning that Jewish scientists and engineers are accused of having
poisoned Lake Baikal with a “Jewish cancer” that destroyed it (K/M, 88).
Kaminer never saw himself as “a real Russian, because the word ‘Jew’ stood in my passport, I was a member of the Komsomol, a bit of a hippy and a passive dissident” (K/M, 54). As an outsider, he moves elegantly to Germany, where all of the things that excluded him now enable him to function on a relatively high cultural level. Already in his next memoir Die Reise nach Trulala (The Trip to Trulala, 2002) the entire residue of things Jewish vanishes from his forced memories of the USSR. His German audience wants happy memories of the Russian past that are just primitive enough to warrant an exaltation of the Berlin present.

The antisemitism that defined Jewishness for Kaminer in the USSR seems to be missing in his 2001 account of the cosmopolitan world of Schönhauser Allee (Schönhauser Avenue), the working-class neighborhood where he lives. In this volume, which focuses on his life in the Germany, all of the Jewish references vanish. Russians, Vietnamese, Germans show up in various combinations and colors in the apartment blocks that make up this quarter of Berlin. Even after seeing someone on the street who reminds him of Albert Einstein (K/S, 51), Kaminer does not think about himself or the fictive world he now creates as more than multi-kulti, with Jewishness simply an invisible quality. Indeed, this may be one of the very few mentions of Einstein in a modern literary work that does not evoke his role as the Jewish genius. This is Kaminer’s most successful creation of a utopian Berlin cosmopolitan world in which all of the ethnicities and nationalities blur into a Russian-colored world that displaces any negative Jewish identity. In this hybridity, the solvent is vodka. Kaminer finds it necessary to supply a bit of a philosophical afterword, noting that “group interests manifest themselves, human beings create various units, and exchange experiences with one another, attend yoga courses, and at some point can do virtually everything” (K/S189). Schönhauser Allee comes to be the “real” setting, according to the author, of his newer, safer multicultural Berlin. It is the place in which individual difference exists but is not pernicious, not destructive, not Jewish.

In 2002 Kaminer collaborated with photographer Helmut Höge on Helden des Alltages: Ein lichtbildgestützter Vortrag über die seltsamen Sitten der Nachkriegzeit (Everyday Heroes: A Slide Lecture about the Unusual Habits of the Postwar Period). The photographs are banal, recording moments in the daily life of Germans and self-consciously presented without any aesthetic pretensions. The volume includes an essay, “People in a Park,” in which Kaminer ruminates about the meaning of public art. The protagonist and his children pass a monument with an open book and two hands in the Arnimplatz. They theorize about what the monument could be: a writer who always told the truth.
in his books and who was rewarded by having his hands cut off; merely a pair of gloves and a book left by a child on the way to kindergarten. Kaminer’s youngest child has no theory but shakes the hand/glove each day as they pass.

Kaminer knows Germany now and understands that “this monument, as with all of the others in the capital city, actually has to do either with the German reunification or with the expulsion of the Jews” (K/H 27). Such public sculptures are often illegible to those who live in the area. Thus there are Holocaust monuments that seem to have no meaning: “The giant chair that lies tipped over in the Koppenplatz, which should remind one of the expulsion of the Jews, and which the artist has labeled ‘the abandoned room’” (K/H 28). No Shoah, no murder of the Jews, only an expulsion: the term is evocative but in no way condemnatory, as his memories of Soviet antisemitism are. These public arenas, according to Kaminer, have lost any sense of the aesthetic message. The parks are full of drunks who appear in the morning and “form a living monument of the newest age” (K/H 28). But this monument is no longer German. “German” monuments are those understood now as reflecting the combination of the “expulsion of the Jews” (not their systematic murder) and the reunification.

Any new monument must reflect Kaminer’s world of the new immigration. One of the drinkers has carefully deposited a glass in one of the trees. Earlier, the drunks simply mixed their beer and whiskey in their guts. “Through the merging of international customs the alcoholics have achieved a new quality of life, new perspectives are open to them. It even smells better” (K/H 29). Here, the “Jewish” aspect of the world is subsumed in the rhetoric of German monuments to the past; the new immigrants (Russian Jews included) have added a new layer to the public experience and created their own monument. The glass in the tree is their monument to the cultural hybridity of the new multicultural world, which even smells better.

In light of his construction of a cosmopolitan Germany, Kaminer’s weakest book is the most revealing. Mein deutsches Dschungelbuch (My German Jungle Book, 2003) is his account of a lecture tour across the country. He leaves the confines of his self constructed Schönhauser Allee and enters the small towns and byways of the Federal Republic. He is announced as “the Russian” or “the German Writer of Russian Descent” or “A Jewish Writer” (K/D 117). He answers, as he observes, to any and all of these labels. In Fulda he learns of the town myth that a Jew, filled with hate after being driven from the town, was responsible for its bombing during the war: his family’s house, seized by the National Socialists, was hit six times (K/D 127). Kaminer also finds older Germans suffering under the burden of the guilt that they believe that no one will allow them to avoid: “In spite of everything, this fact will al-
ways be my burden” (K/D 195). In Heidelberg, a Russian band plays antiwar songs, bringing to mind Kaminer’s father, who warned that within everyone a soldier is hidden, as well as Kaminer’s half-brother in Israel, where he is under attack by Saddam Hussein’s Scud missiles (K/D 225). In Germany, unlike in the multikulti fantasy of Berlin, the past is present in ways that pierce the utopian notion of any hybrid or rooted cosmopolitanism. Kaminer claims that while his work seems autobiographical, “I wouldn’t say my prose is autobiographical. It isn’t about Wladimir Kaminer, it’s about others. The narrator is transparent, a cipher. The reader doesn’t learn any intimate details about the narrator’s life; the focus is on the surrounding world, the past, the future, encounters. Dialogue is hugely important, because communication is.”

The Jewishness of Kaminer’s self-representation in Germany is on the very edges of how he needs to see and sell himself. It is part of the German past, yet he is anxious not to exploit the German philosemitic desire to love all Jews, even the new immigrants, if they are “Jewish” enough.

By 2004 Kaminer had become the “representative Russian” in Germany. His Ich mache mir Sorgen, Mama (I am Concerned, Mama) has only one reference to a Jew—the publisher of Berlin’s daily Russian newspaper. Kaminer’s personal life forms the center of this volume, in which his father, unable to attain his professional goals in the USSR because of his Jewish identity, has become a Russian pensioner in Berlin. All references to being Jewish are deleted from Kaminer’s family portrait. Most striking is the inclusion of an icon of the Virgin Mary on the “memory shelf” compiled by his wife. The question of a hyphenated identity remains but is transmuted into that of the Russian in Berlin, much like the hero of Montesquieu’s Lettres persanes (1721) or Samuel Johnson’s The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia (1759)—the exotic who comes to Europe and is amazed at the antics of its inhabitants. But these antics no longer contain any reference to antisemitic comments. Indeed, by 2003, Kaminer had come to believe that “the Soviet Union is my homeland. Berlin is my home. Russian is my mother tongue. German writer is my profession.” The Jewish Kaminer had vanished completely.

In his 2005 book, Karaoke, Kaminer recapitulates his initial celebrity role as a DJ in Russendisko and provides the reader with an elaborate riff on the role of music in creating his newfound Russian identity. The role of global popular music and the anxiety of the new German Left about pop culture frames his image of the Germany in which he is a citizen (K/K, 29). His position is, of course, contrarian in that he advocates the totality of contemporary music, a perspective that is not only truly cosmopolitan but also oddly conservative. The advocacy of Americanism in music was, of course, oppositional during Ka-
miner’s youth, both in the USSR as well as in East Germany (K/K, 53). His claims that “Russendisko” was the medium by which “Russian punk rock” (and other Russian pop cultural manifestations) were made available for Russians and Germans alike in the new Berlin is not at all tinged with irony. Many contemporary Russian and Chinese artists take a different position, recycling Soviet or Maoist cultural representations in an ironic mode. The seriousness of Kaminer’s claims can be found in his evocation of a memory of Jim Morrison’s lyrics sung in a mixture of Russian, English, and German in Berlin in 1990 (K/K, 83). For Kaminer, the musical “world cultural inheritance” is the “Ramones, Sex Pistols, the Clash” (K/K, 101). German music is reduced to the band Rammstein, which was initially popular in Russia because Russian skinheads saw it as a “Nazi” band (K/K, 107). Only with a false sense of history, Kaminer implies, can the “German” be elided with the “Nazi.” What is striking about Kaminer’s use of music as the universal, cosmopolitan language is what is missing: given Berliners’ two-decade-long obsession with klezmer, the complete absence of any reference to “Jewish” music (often in Berlin played by non-Jews) is telling. This musical memory chest has no space for anything Jewish but accommodates only the global, the universal, the cosmopolitan.

By 2006, Kaminer joined his wife, Olga, in presenting his Küche totalitär (Socialist Cookbook), a rather rapid tour of the states of the former USSR accompanied by “authentic” recipes. From Armenia to Tartestan, the memories of youth are tied to the world of food. Like music, food is used based on its universal as well as particular claims to shaping identity. Beginning with the celebration of Kaminer’s father’s birthday in a Russian restaurant in Berlin (K/O, 12), the ripples of food and memory spread across the former USSR as a “magic door” to the past (K/O, 16). Evocations of the exotic are matched with the mundane, as Armenians and Georgians, Ukrainians and Siberians in Berlin are sought out as the parallels to Kaminer’s need for an authentic cultural experience. And after each confrontation, a set of “authentic” recipes enables readers to at least vicariously taste the reality depicted in Kaminer’s diasporic world. As with the search for an authenticity of world music, Kaminer here represses anything and everything Jewish. Alice Nakhimovsky has chronicled the resurgent interest in “Jewish” foods in contemporary Russia even though there is little sense of the religious bounds that defined that cuisine. This has truly vanished in Kaminer’s evocation of the former USSR: it would be too Jewish and not “Russian” enough.

The final transformation of the Russian Jew into the Berlin celebrity Wladimir Kaminer comes in his 2007 Ich bin kein Berliner (I’m Not a Berliner), playing off of John F. Kennedy’s oft-quoted 1963 declaration, “Ich bin
To be a member of the club, to become a German, one has to be beyond the national, beyond the local. That is precisely the claim of German cosmopolitanism as well as the ultimate national and local claim. Following the same format as the cookbook, Kaminer provides snapshots of aspects of Berlin life from dialect to shopping to criminality to weddings, each followed by suggested tourist tips. The volume concludes with a guidebook-like list of addresses and opening times and blurbs for all of the “sights” mentioned. Here the odd chapter out is “Nazis and Other Sights.” As with virtually all Kaminer’s evocations of the National Socialist past, it is ironic and distanced. He tells the story of a Russian avant-garde artist who shows up on his doorstep wearing an Iron Cross as jewelry and who wants to explore the National Socialist underground. He sends her to a “former” SS bar where her jewelry elicits a sad (but perhaps also threatening) comment that the Führer would not have approved (K/I 72). Kaminer’s suggested tourist stops here include the Jewish Museum, but he notes that only the “British and American tourists” with their false consciousness who want to visit “Göring’s barber’s shop or Hitler’s sock knitter’s establishment” (K/I 72). Kaminer thus equates those tourists with the Russian skinheads who seek out “neo-Nazi” German bands. The Holocaust is someone else’s problem and someone else’s interest, even as a tourist. But the Holocaust appears only in an ironic comment on foreign Holocaust tourism—unlike the more serious comments on the “Turkish” sites that Kaminer sprinkles through the volume. The Holocaust is no longer the Germans’ problem, especially for Germans such as himself.

Kaminer arrived in East Germany as a young adult with a sense of autonomy that enabled him to believe that he could shape himself as well as the world he comes to inhabit. And in complex ways, given the remarkable success of his work, he is quite right. Yet the question of his “Jewish” perspective in the Federal Republic of Germany remains part of his public persona. For him, Germany is very different than Austria: “An awareness of what took place, and vigilance to ensure it never happens again—I mean, it took so little to unleash that madness—permits the Germans to consider the past with some remove, makes it possible to envision a future. It’s totally different in Austria. I heard this joke about Austria recently. There’s a documentary on television about concentration camps, and two old ladies on the bus are talking about it. ‘What horror!’ they’re saying. ‘You would never have something like this [on TV] under the Fuhrer.’ There’s absolutely no national remorse, no soul-searching at all.”

Kaminer had by this point become a landmark on the German cultural map, publishing a book each year, with good if not great sales. And the tensions between the Russian, the now virtually invisible Jew, and the German
cultural hero remain. In 2012 he returned to his autobiography, rewriting it in a manner appropriate for the times. In Onkel Vanya kommt: Eine Reise durch die Nacht (Uncle Vanya Is Coming: A Journey through the Night), the central conceit is that his grandfather’s brother, now ill and aged, wishes to finally visit his great-nephew in Berlin. The narrator is the author or the author’s ghost, seeking his work in the train station bookshop between Franz Kafka and Heinz Konsalik, whose bodice-ripping romances of Russia color the Germans’ fantasy in Kaminer’s world. He sees himself trapped here, yet his works are not on the shelves. In reality, however, cheap paperback copies of Kaminer’s works are available in virtually every train station bookshop.

The quest for Russian high culture is captured in the book’s title, since Uncle Vanya is of course the title of Anton Chekov’s 1897 drama. Ivan Petrovitch Voynitsky, the title character, struggles to preserve the tradition of Russia as he is confronted by crass demands to sell the farm that he has struggled to manage. In the third act, Vanya curses its owner, raging that he should not have wasted his life: had he tried, he could have become another Schopenhauer or Dostoevsky. Kaminer is a sort of reverse Uncle Vanya in this tale. He is perhaps the young writer mocked in the account of how Ivan Turgenev, old and ill in Paris, complained to a young writer about no longer being able to write anything sensible and received the reply, “I am now writing extensively and very well” (K/V, 36). More likely, however, Kaminer is the cosmopolitan Turgenev, who spends much of his life moving among London, Baden-Baden, and Paris, a member of the pantheon of a mobile Russian literary culture. Indeed, the mention of the old Turgenev signals that Kaminer belongs to those with kulturni. That Kaminer desires to be associated with such Russian high culture is evidenced by his 2008–14 production of radio programs (subtitled “Berichte aus den Tiefen der Russischen Literatur” [Reports from the Depths of Russian Literature]) that became audiobooks on Leo Tolstoy, Mikhail Bulgakov, Anton Chekhov, and Soviet-era satirist Daniil Kharms. Kaminer’s newest account of his life recapitulates each moment, telling the tale in reverse, from his present-day life in Berlin back through his time in the army to his childhood.

His uncle was always the odd one out in the family, the lovable but idiosyncratic member hidden when guests came to visit. He is the barely visible one in the forty-four black-and-white family photos, hidden in a corner, only his elbow showing. He is a presence, a ghost who provides the narrator with frozen memories of his Soviet past (K/V, 5, 7). His uncle is the litmus test for the re-creation of lost memories from the fragments of the past.

His uncle arrives on the night train from St. Petersburg; unable to find a taxicab, he and the author walk across multicultural Berlin. The narrator retells
his life through his uncle’s appearances. They walk while unraveling his life backward. They stop for drinks in a pub with other night visitors from Russia—tour agents who had been on the same train on their way to a convention to tout their regional attractions, most of which center on killing and stuffing animals. The drinkers are told that taxis are available across from a kebab stand, where they meet drivers from Syria and Afghanistan—former professionals, doctors, and engineers who drive cabs in the new multicultural Berlin. But although there are drivers, there are no cabs.

They continue their walk and the narrator spins the tale of his life back to Odessa, where he visited his uncle during a summer vacation. This is a Russian narrative, repeatedly stressing the displacement of Russians in a world in transition from the old Soviet Union to Putin’s Russia, “where good and evil have merged, socialist braggadocio and capitalist cleverness” (K/V, 5), reinforcing the wisdom of the narrator’s flight to East Germany. But the tales told about and by his uncle contain a hidden agenda.

His uncle is the Russian Jewish wanderer, moving from house to house, from room to room across the old Soviet Union, from Moscow to Grodno to Krasnodar, always trying and failing to find the appropriate “home” (K/V, 13–14). Lost in the sense of rootlessness in the geography of the space he is in, he heralds its socialist sense of community. In Berlin, he bemoans the loss of Soviet camaraderie, the “mustard sandwich communism” where at least one could get free bread, mustard, and tea in the poorly functioning restaurants (K/V, 59). In capitalist Berlin, nothing is free and things Russian have been reduced to a bad joke, a comic dressed as Ivan the Terrible (K/V, 1). Berlin is a city of tourists, like his uncle, easily tricked into buying bits of the Berlin Wall just as they buy bits of the Great Wall when visiting China (K/V, 112). Berlin in this sense is only a simulacrum of a city, contrasting with the real spaces of the socialist past. It is certainly not a “Jewish space” in the sense that Anna Lipphardt and Julia Brauch evoke it, a space where the Jewish diaspora allows multiple inner Jewish comparisons as well as comparison with other diasporas, including this new “Russian” one, which can (but need not) be simultaneously Russian and Jewish. Yet given Berlin’s intense preoccupation with the Holocaust, with multiple moments, museums, and institutes, it is a haunted Jewish space in the present.

As the narrator unravels his past and his present, he recedes into his past, where his Jewish past is hidden in an odd, fossilized manner: “I managed to avoid as a child and as a youth the problem of religion. I had no inkling of a religious education, and I begin to stutter when asked about Judaism or Christianity and any other-ity. My parents weren’t even atheists. They were always
concerned with the daily grind of existence and had no time to concern themselves with the greater questions of conscience. Therefore they simply live without any depression, happily and without worries” (K/V, 129–30). The question of a Jewish identity in the Soviet Union—and in Berlin, with its reinvigorated Jewish community of Russian Jews—has nothing really to do with religion any more than it did in the USSR. The narrator sees the reappearance of religion in Russia a sign of a shift in emphasis but not in an increase in piety. Where the parents of his neighbors in Moscow become Russian Orthodox after the collapse of the USSR, their children become Buddhists (K/V, 131). Kaminer’s grandmother now uses the holy water from the spring behind the local church to treat her ailments without any confession of faith (K/V, 140).

At fourteen, another manifestation of the narrator’s identity as a Soviet Jew reappeared—a political and ethic definition that dominated Kaminer’s first autobiographical volumes. He casts this manifestation in the conceit of recognizing that the USSR had borders, since he had always lived thousands of miles from any border and could not even imagine that such a thing existed. He spends a summer visiting his uncle in Odessa, pleased because his girlfriend, Ella, is also there (K/V, 157). She is about to leave the Soviet Union: her parents had “applied for an exit visa and were preparing their emigration” (K/V, 157). She did not want to leave, but “her parents could not succeed in socialism. Both were doctors and as such they were convinced that they would have a much better life in the West. She already was homesick even before she emigrated” (K/V, 157). They are refusniks, waiting for visas to Israel but imagining their future in Europe. She points out that the Turkish border lies just over the horizon, on the other side of the Black Sea. Never before had the narrator been aware of these borders, but they are clear references to his sudden awareness of his identity as the new cosmopolitan, able but yet unwilling to travel. They are startled by the guard walking along the beach. The “halfway friendly soldier” confronts them; though they do not have their papers, he simply tells them “to go home” (K/V, 159). But where is home for the Jew about to leave the USSR either as a quota refugee or, in Kaminer’s case, as a visitor to the East Germany, whose “worthless coins littered the ground” when he first visited the newly reunited Berlin (K/V, 28).

The wanderers through the night arrive at the narrator’s apartment, where he takes stock of his memories and the objects that fix them. His grandmother is long dead, her cuckoo clock silent and frozen on his wall. “The silver cross that his father had obtained from a gypsy in trade for a case of beer” is on a shelf. The objects, he observes, “are created not for the moment but for eternity” (K/V, 190). They are frozen memories, “for our planet is a museum. The
visitors come and go, the objects remain” (K/V, 190). At this moment his uncle is telling him a joke, constantly interrupted by the narrator’s memories. “The Orthodox priest says, the flood is coming in three days, let us drink up all our vodka” (K/V, 188). “The imam says to his flock, the flood is coming in three days, let us finally roast a pig” (K/V, 190). And finally, the point of the joke: “The rebbe says: brothers and sisters! We have three days to learn how to live underwater” (K/V, 190). Thus the narrator concludes the volume “with a broken clock, a cracked cup and a joke that is not told to its conclusion, whose laughter is lost in the waves of time” (K/V, 191). Kaminer’s second bite of the autobiographical apple is now nostalgic, in the worst sense of the word. This nostalgia is what Vladimir Nabokov in his study of Gogol mocks as poshlost, “not only the obviously trashy but mainly the falsely important, the falsely beautiful, the falsely clever, the falsely attractive.” Nabokov later extends the idea to include “corny trash, vulgar clichés, Philistinism in all its phases, imitations of imitations, bogus profundities, crude, moronic and dishonest pseudo-literature.” Kaminer has become the wanderer, the cosmopolitan, truly at home only in memory, not in the night passages of multicultural Berlin; his work, however, leaves a false sense of its own importance.

An alternative set of “Russian” voices is also present in today’s German culture. Gender plays a role here, but so does the author’s age at his arrival in Germany. As Adrian Wanner notes, “In Germany . . . emergent ‘Russian’ writers such as Lena Gorelik . . . stress their difference from Wladimir Kaminer” (W/O 189). Gorelik’s first highly autobiographical novel recounts her 1992 move from the USSR to Germany and her acclimatization there as a Jew. Born in Leningrad in 1981, Gorelik creates a protagonist who mirrors of her imaginary image of the new Germany, which she entered at the age of eleven. She spends an early chapter depicting the struggle of her protagonist’s somewhat older brother for a Jewish identity in Germany. He is sequentially a Buddhist, a Jew for Jesus, and an Orthodox Jew. All are answers to what Gorelik labels the struggle of Russian Jewish emigrants without any religious identity whatsoever for some type of orientation in the new Germany. “He is an emigrant, seeking a spiritual home” (G, 41). His Jewish orthodoxy is a phase through which he passes, including keeping the kosher laws and going to Israel to learn Hebrew, the litmus test for a Jewish religious identity in Germany. The Hebrew classes at the Jewish Center in Berlin are offered in Russian. The brother seeks not a secular Jewish identity in Israel but a religious one that transforms his body. When he reappears in Berlin, his grandmother sees his long beard and responds that such a man will never find a bride. But once he develops an interest in a left-wing fellow student who decries religion, his religious fervor lapses. After her
comes a nice Russian Jewish immigrant, whose only flaw is that she believes in Jesus. Gorelik notes in an aside that this struggle for a religious identity is not a German anomaly: many Russian Jews in the United States become Scientologists (G, 45). Religious identity as a Jew is here truly a performance that is rooted in the struggle for a new Western identity.

“Religious” identity defines the Jew, but the Jew’s ability to be understood as part of “German” culture retains an older and still valid association. The Jew must speak German. In Germany, the role of the non-English writer writing about the diaspora experience in his indigenous language is always suspect. For whom does he write? Why does he not address me, the German- or English-language reader? The notion of a “German” literature rejects works written in German in America or in English in Germany. (The debate about the status of Spanish-language writing in the United States or Turkish writing in Germany is equally fraught.) Thus, “religious” identity is paired with the ability to function bilingually. The figure of the Russian Jewish writer mediates between two cultures: a real one of the reader’s experience and a fictive one, given the claim of authenticity of the world reflected in the writer’s representation of his or her experience of the East or of the eastern image of the West.

Language determines what defines a German as German and has remained central in the most recent transformation of eastern Jewish writers into German writers. Survivor-author Jurek Becker, a native Polish-speaker, saw command of the German language as defining him as a “better German” than his classmates (and competitors). He became a German, rooted, rather than a displaced person, the term used for the “wandering Jew” in immediate postwar Europe. Like Becker, Russian Jews in the second decade of the twenty-first century are reinventing themselves in German and in Germany. Like Becker, they must find their way into a new language and a new culture that many find inferior to Russian culture. For the older generation of Russian Jewish immigrants (as for most immigrants in Germany), language adoption continues to pose a major barrier to social and economic integration. It is little wonder that Germany’s Central Jewish Organization strongly suggested that “a good knowledge of German” (and not a more stringent religious definition) serve as a litmus test for limiting further immigration of Jews after 2005 and that this suggestion has become state policy. For these youngest writers, among them, Gorelik, “speaking Russian” comes to be negatively coded by her German compatriots. It is “speaking too loudly, speaking in a confused manner” (G, 63). That is, as she notes, “simply speaking” (G, 63). Language and audience are vital to these writers, but they see themselves as the conduit for the Russian Jewish experience for their German-language readers.
By 2013 such an identity as a migrant comes with a rather different quality ascribed to the language of the cosmopolitan. In her screed *Sie können aber gut Deutsch! Warum ich nicht mehr dankbar sein will, dass ich hier leben darf, und Toleranz nicht weiterhilft* (My, You Speak German Well! Why I Am No Longer Grateful That I Am Allowed to Live Here and Why Tolerance Doesn’t Help).\(^41\) Her sense of being rooted rather than simply a migrant (the term that has replaced *displaced person* in the discourse of Russian Jewish writers, is contested constantly. The Germans bemoan the high rate of criminality among those “Russian descended, so many problems: they remain among themselves, can’t speak good German” (G/W, 9). Yet for her, the reality is quite different. The “migrants” root for German football teams and speak virtually no Russian; they can’t, in many cases, even read the Cyrillic alphabet (G/W, 9). Their teachers think of them as “Russians” with a Russian mentality quite different from the German. She imagines a Venn diagram of her own mentality: “White—Russian. Black—German. Gray—Jewish” (G/W, 11). The “Russians” about whom she speaks may well be Russian-speaking Jews from the former USSR, but they could also be the Russian-speaking descendants of the Swabian Germans. She stresses, as do the characters that people her account, that they are Russians, and that that are integrating themselves into the new Germany as Russians. Here she falls very much in line with the St. Petersburg Club’s competition for Russian writing in German. A jury headed by Kaminer selected and published twenty texts by Russian Jews and Russian Germans under the title *Neuer Hafen: Migrantenerzählungen* (New Port: Migrant Tales, 2007) (W/O, 50). These are the new collective Russian migrants in the eyes of the new Germany. They share a lost language and the adaptation of their culture to the dominant Russian cultural model, as Vera Irwin notes: “Both [groups] have almost completely lost their ethnic languages—German and Yiddish—throughout history, and have become speakers of Russian. After migration to Germany, both communities acquired German as a second language” (I, 1). In addition, they retain their fantasies of cultural integration.

Religious identity for Gorelik remains a vague and contested concept. Zvi Gitelman has pointed out that for Jews in the Soviet Union who defined themselves as Jewish, “Judaism no longer defines the content or boundary of Jewish identity. This is quite logical: if Jewishness is ethnicity only, then one should be able to practice whatever religion one wishes without affecting one’s ethnicity.”\(^42\) Yet Gorelik’s memory of her process of becoming rooted is colored by her Jewish identity, as when she notes when attending the compulsory religious instruction in school, “I, as a Jewess, sometimes attended the evangelical; sometimes the catholic” (G/W, 17). She begins to be integrated into the school
only when a teacher of German stops seeing her as a “little, eleven-year-old person from Russia” (G/W, 19) and asks her simply to write a story. But is she a “‘person speaking a non-German language,’ or a ‘person of foreign origin’ or a ‘member of an ethnic minority settled in Germany?’” (G/W, 32). She seeks to integrate herself into Germany but realizes that trying to do so poses a barrier to her integration. In the camp, she changes her hairstyle and buys “German” clothes (G/W, 44) yet still feels that she appears different. She continues to feel that she is a “Russian—with the Jewish bonus” (G/W, 65). That makes her life in a Germany now filled with migrants from throughout the world more tolerable. Perhaps, she notes, because “the old Nazi object of hate the ‘Jew’ has now been replaced by a new object of hate ‘the Muslim’” (G/W, 155). Thirty-two times she evokes the debate about integration caused by the popularity of Deutschland schafft sich ab (Germany Does Away with Itself, 2010), Thilo Sarrazin’s best-selling screed against German multiculturalism. A prominent member of the German Social Democratic Party, minister of finance for the state of Berlin from 2002 until 2009, and at the time of the book’s publication a respected member of the executive board of the Deutsche Bundesbank, Sarrazin “showed how in each of us an anxiety resides” about social integration (G/W, 14). Gorelik’s critique rests in Sarrazin’s claim that “no integration can occur without assimilation” (G/W, 236). The keyword is integration (G/W, 85). She still does not feel herself in any way integrated. She does not mention Sarrazin’s claim that unlike present-day Muslims, the Jews were the ideal example of social assimilation before National Socialism. He decries the dilution of twenty-first-century “German” society by the reproductive capacity of a permanent and unassimilable underclass of “Muslim immigrants” in Germany.43

Gorelik reads to a women’s group a chapter from her first book about how greedy German dentists remove teeth from immigrant children to replace them with expensive bridges, provoking an angry response from her hosts: “You need to think about what you write when you write in our language. A bit of thankfulness would be expected” (G/W, 199). Though she is perfectly at home in German, she never feels at home in Germany. Yet her account is missing the key reference that perhaps made her hosts most uncomfortable: the greedy removal of migrants’ teeth in the camps where they have been concentrated (Asylbewerberwohnheim) evokes the removal of gold teeth from Jewish prisoners in the National Socialist death camps. The new camps, with “twelve-square-meter rooms that housed Russian Jews” and where “they came, they brought us things, that we actually did not need, where they taught us German” (G/W, 206), haunt her memories of Germany and her own transition. She knows that “families such as ours were a present for such helpers. Jews from
the former Soviet Union” (G/W, 2016). Here the Germans had a “bonus;” as they were helping Jews.

Gorelik’s new status as a German-speaking writer means that she is now at least virtually integrated into a society that found such integration difficult to comprehend. Her sense of this is coded in her Jewishness, a factor that is less visible in her account than her Russianness. Jewishness is both foreign and homely, unlike the exoticism of the Russians:

When I recognized that I had not assimilated myself, I always thought of the Jews of the 1920s, the so-called Western Jews, who were the opposite of the Eastern Jews. The Eastern Jews were those with their black caftans and their long, gray beards, who among themselves retained their Yiddish, that unusual German, who stood in their synagogues that they called shul and ran there to pray, and who remained what they had always been in the eastern lands, now in this new land. The Western Jews looked down on the Eastern Jews, embarrassed, and distanced themselves from them and were self-conscious and proud to be assimilated. . . . Being assimilated carried with it the promise of a better life, to be seen as better, to become a better human being. (G/W, 235)

Gorelik has become both and is discomfited by that fact. She sees a Germany that has radically changed but that cannot itself recognize the alteration of a fantasy homogenous culture into a cosmopolitan one in which Gorelik feels both comfortable and ill at ease. She remains most comfortable among “Russians,” with their food and their friendship. This is the odd feeling of being at home in the fantasy Russia that she presented in her 2008 guidebook to St. Petersburg for Germans, Verliebt in St. Petersburg (In Love in St. Petersburg), where she attempted to introduce the dos and don’ts of her birth city to an ideal but oblivious German audience. She finds this on her return trip to the “motherland,” a return to the familiar, to the world of her parents and her childhood. In Russia, “there is always more on the table than one can eat in an evening. . . . I feel happy and find to my amazement how relaxed I am” (G/W, 160). It is the relaxation of the familiar rather than the staged, of the experienced rather than the performed. Gorelik has moved far from what Wanner called her “personae of the female ‘immigrant overachiever,’ [that] fit neatly into the utopian projection of the New Germany as a happy multicultural community” (W/O, 191). She has become a frustrated cosmopolitan in a Germany never multicultural enough.
Cosmopolitanism as depicted in writings by Russian Jews in twenty-first-century Germany can be compared with works by Russian Jews of the same generations who migrated to Brooklyn, New York. Though different sources provide widely varying numbers based on differing definitions of Jewish, by 2014, the United States was home to as many as 750,000 Russian-speaking Jews.44

As in Germany, America’s Russian Jews are culturally, ethnically, and religiously mixed. Indeed, the late-twentieth-century Russian Jewish immigrant community was distinctly more secular and less religious than the Central and Eastern European Jews who migrated to New York nearly a century earlier.45 Unlike their counterparts in Germany, however, Russian Jews in the United States become more Jewish the longer they write. According to Morris Dickstein, “Once these writers arrived in North America, they all turned more Jewish, as if licensed by the strong Jewish presence in American literary culture, but also by a multicultural environment that equates ethnic identity with personal authenticity.”46 Or as real estate agents say, what is important is location, location, location. Ironically, more than any other feature, location defines modern cosmopolitanism.

As with the confluence of Jewish and non-Jewish Russians in Germany, teasing out the differences is complex. Yet among Russians Jews in the United States, the boundaries were clear. Even those who were neither religiously Jewish nor ethnically Jewish set themselves apart from non-Jewish Russians, who clearly defined themselves as not Jewish. In Germany, this process was more complex, as both groups immigrated at roughly the same time and most of the non-Jewish Russians were of ethnic German descent. In the United States, the staggered arrival made the boundaries sharper but no less contentious. One Russian Jew interviewed by Laitin rationalized [the divide] by stipulating that the Russians who came to Brighton Beach after 1991 were different. These mostly non-Jewish Russophones were poor and came to the United States for financial reasons, she explained, while the earlier wave, mostly Jewish Russophones, was well to do and came for political reasons. The more recent immigrants, therefore, were having more problems assimilating, while the earlier ones had assimilated easily. . . . Another third-wave interviewee made the same argument. She did not “blame” the members of the fourth wave for their failure to connect with third-wave immigrants, but she found little in common with them. (L/D, 19)
Bound together by a common language and putatively by a common cultural heritage, the Russian Jews remained too cosmopolitan in the eyes of their Russian compatriots. Unlike the Russians, Russian Jews quickly became a voice on the American cultural scene.

Kaminer’s rise to fame in Germany was very much paralleled by Gary Shteyngart’s rise in New York City. Like Kaminer, Shteyngart quickly became a media darling: according to Wanner, “Shteyngart emerged as a sort of iconic Russian-American personality. A full-page photograph in the New York Times Magazine in summer 2002 showed him in a melancholic pose behind a glass of vodka in the Manhattan restaurant Russian Samovar” (W/O, 95). A star as a Russian Jewish writer, Shteyngart’s experience was of the Russian child growing up in America.

Shteyngart’s family immigrated to New York City in 1978, when he was six, yet he turned his “American Jewish” experience into his first novel, The Russian Debutante’s Handbook (2002). His account stresses the impossibility of integration. The protagonist, Russian Jew Vladimir Girshkin, is employed (in a Henry Miller sort of manner) by the Emma Lazarus Immigrant Absorption Society, a position that his middle-class professional parents find well below his potential. (The American Jewish poet Emma Lazarus (1849-87) wrote “The New Colossus,” the text that appears at the base of the Statue of Liberty: “Give me your tired, your poor, / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, / The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.”) Each week is a different “cultural week” at the Emma Lazarus Society: “Chinese Week,” with “tea and a stuffed panda. . . . Although Vladimir was taught to foster multiculturalism, he looked blankly into the sneering faces of his countrymen, stamping his way through their mountains of documents” (S/R, 65). The Russians (read: Jews) claim that they are kulturni, cultured, unlike the other immigrants: “Vladimir [hoped] his childhood excursions to the Kirov ballet and the Hermitage had made him kulturni enough” (S/R, 70). This defines the new migrants as members of an elite. And this Russian cultural elite is analogous to the fantasy of a German high cultural elite defined by Goethe and Schiller, two writers whose translations into Russian belonged as much to Russian high culture as German and defined German Jewish high culture of the early twentieth century.

While his parents have integrated themselves into suburban American (in their own fantasy), Vladimir never can. America is a multicultural hell called Brooklyn, which according to one Russian character comprises: “A studio apartment. Spanish people everywhere. Oh, the plight of the poor.” But though the Russian immigrant in question “. . . was happy to be reunited with his pa-
patchka, but he was still a young man. He wanted to bring a girl over, to screw her thoroughly from top to bottom. It wasn’t easy on him, believe me. And there was no work around that really took advantage of his natural intelligence. Maybe a few Greeks hired him to blow up their diners for insurance purposes. He was proficient in these matters, so boom boom—” (S/R 20). America, at least Brighton beach, is a place from which to escape—where else but to Eastern Europe, perhaps to “Prava? Vladimir perked up. The Paris of the 90s? The stomping ground of America’s artistic elite? The SoHo of Eastern Europe?” (S/R, 20). In Prague he comes across a world of American Jews, exemplified by the “writer Perry Cohen” from Iowa. In Prague, that most Jewish of cities and now the city of Kafka, whose visage has become the logo for Prague tourism, Cohen “discovers” himself. In Prague there is a hotel where “Kafka took an important crap in 1921. . . . See the plaque by the door” (S/R 279). But Vladimir is not impressed with Cohen’s seemingly tortured acknowledgment of his new Jewish identity: “In the end what determines your fate is the size of your trust fund, the slope of your nose, the quality of your accent. At least his daddy wasn’t accusing him of walking like a Jew” (S/R, 207–8). Prague is the “waiting room to the West” (S/R, 267), where mindless violence defines daily life, where identity is one of the objects available for exchange. Indeed Prague became exactly such a space for the American Jewish imaginary in works such as Philip Roth’s The Prague Orgy (1985), the epilogue to his trilogy featuring his alter ego, the exemplary American Jewish writer Nathan Zuckerman. Between 1972 through 1977, Roth actually travelled to Prague every spring for a week. Valdimir was following in impressive literature footsteps.

Vladimir—nose, walk, and all—eventually realizes that Prague has become the new multicultural city, with Cohen now typical of its inhabitants. One could have “a kale-and-cabbage lunch at the new Hare Krishna joint, or head for the Nouveau where they drank Turkish coffees and became awake and animated, played footsie to the quick time of Dixieland jazz” (S/R, 308). Populated by young Americans from the Midwest, Prague slowly takes on the qualities of a simulacrum of that world.

The protagonist remains too Russian (and therefore too Jewish) for a cosmopolitan America, even a cosmopolitan America transplanted to the East. His mother had noted that unlike American Jews, his difference is written on his body: “Look at how your feet are spread apart. Look how you walk from side to side. Like an old Jew from the shtetl. . . . How can a woman love a man who walks like a Jew” (S/R, 44). His mother endeavors to walk like a “normal” American and urges,
You, too, could walk like a gentile. You had to keep your chin in the air. The spine straight. Then the feet would follow. (S/R, 46)

But Vladimir never quite learns this lesson. He is unable to transform himself into a gentile, even in the world of Prague.

Vladimir’s autonomy as a Russian Jew separates him from all other groups, each of which is also defined as physically different. His adventures in New York City as well as those in Central Europe, where he becomes the Russian Mafia’s “American Jew,” illustrate his sense of never really belonging. Prague is the “New, Proved & Euro-Ready Prava” (S/R, 324). Vladimir remains what he is—an incomplete hybrid, neither Jew nor Russian, nor American gentile. Yet one thing does define him—the Holocaust as a space, a place. He travels to Auschwitz in a convoy of (German) BMWs taking Cohen and his Prague acquaintances to “confront” their virtual past. Vladimir’s family had been spared the Holocaust because his grandmother had negotiated a move from the Ukraine to Leningrad before the Germans came. At Auschwitz, the “rootless” Vladimir “if he possessed even the trace of doubt of an agnostic, now would be the time to mumble what he remembered of the Mourner’s Kaddish. But with Hebrew school resolving the last enigmas of the empty heaven above, Vladimir could only smile and remember the feisty Grandma he once knew as a child” (S/R, 405). Again, the Enlightenment image of Jewish education as destructive is evoked to acknowledge Vladimir’s “ethnic” (or in Soviet terms “national”) identity as a Jew even at Auschwitz. Only when he attempts to leave the new Russia with his criminal collaborators from the Russian Mafia and is confronted at the airport with the violence of the new world does he moan: “‘Oh, my poor people,’ said Vladimir suddenly as the violence commenced. Why had he said this? He shook his head. Stupid heritage. Dumb multicultural Jew” (S/R, 446). In the end, the “multicultural” returns to define Vladimir’s humanity, a humanity put into question, as in Henry Miller’s world, but never quite abandoned. And the name for this compassion is multiculturalism. The novel’s last line offers a utopian imagining the America of Vladimir’s imagined son, who lives in Cleveland, one of “the most ignominious parts of the earth” (S/R, 451): “An American in America. That’s Vladimir Girshkin’s son” (S/R, 452).

The Russian Debutante’s Handbook is in many ways the exemplary cosmopolitan novel in its evocation of the impossibility of being rooted in a cosmopolitan America. Yet at the end, biological hybridity marks the goal of the New Jewish writer. To become an American, one must—the theme is one from
the nineteenth century—physically merge with America. Only in that way can one stop walking like a Jew. Shteyngart’s literary antecedents lie more in the Russian tradition of Goncharov’s *Oblomov* than in such North American immigrant novels as Abraham Cahan’s *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917) and Mordechai Richler’s account of the second generation in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1959). Shteyngart’s second novel, *Absurdistan* (2006), is a self-consciously “literary” novel rather than an autobiographical one wrapped in literary cloth, as he noted in 2009: “*The Russian Debutante’s Handbook* (2003) was a very autobiographical book in many ways, whereas *Absurdistan*, my second book, obviously, was not. *Absurdistan* was based on a lot of things—on a lot of literature: Goncharov’s *Oblomov*, or *Confederacy of Dunces*, or even *Candide.*”

The cloth in its essence is that of a reader of Russian high culture or at least someone who aspires to Russian high culture at one generation removed.

Shteyngart felt isolated in his new cosmopolitan America and captured that sense of failure in what became a very successful novel. When Shteyngart (like his protagonist Vladimir) returns to Russia, he seems pleased that his accent is seen not as American but as Jewish: “After I’m in Russia for a while, I lose it. The key is to inflect your voice in a way that makes you sound like you’re completely furious and depressed.”

His accent—the mark of his hybridity—vanishes, and he becomes neither American nor Jew, just another exiled Russian. Contrast this with the obsession of Russian Jewish writers in German about the claim that no matter how perfect their German they remain permanent outsiders. The brave new frontier of multiculturalism uses Jewish difference but does so in ways that often contrast with those of Jewish writers who feel that they have achieved cultural success as “mainstream” authors rather than marginal voices. Yet doing so of course requires them to be more multicultural than the self-proclaimed multicultural authors. They must fit in everywhere by not fitting in anywhere. This is, then, the transition to their transformation. This “cool” Jewish cosmopolitanism in America certainly has analogies elsewhere.

Shteyngart’s identification with twenty-first-century cosmopolitanism, embodied in his fantasy of New York City, is the focus of “The New Two-Way Street,” where he claims “today people like myself, Russians by birth and Americans by education, don’t need to choose a single, exclusive identity. Equally at home (and equally homeless) in both cultures, we are global citizens of an increasingly borderless world.” Wanner notes that “the concept of being equally at home and homeless in multiple countries may come dangerously close to the old stereotype of the rootless cosmopolitan (interestingly, the word
“Jew” never comes up in the essay)” (W/O, 126). Being Jewish is simply easier in America. The old Soviet-era split between belief and faith gives way to the notion of American Jewish ethnicity as a quality of the melting pot. Jews are simply in and of New York. According to Shteyngart,

Being Jewish is being Jewish, of course, and being in a diaspora is being in a diaspora. Well, you know, it’s different. I think American Jews are—and I won’t speak for all of them—but I think those that are several generations behind feel certainly more American than anything. Now there are organizations, of course, for every ethnic group that try to keep the spirit going because it’s in their own interest to perpetuate. But, American Jewishism isn’t religious, and it’s really, maybe, a euphemism for feeling out of place.52

Indeed the key here is his neologism. For a writer supremely attuned to the nuances of language, the word Jewishism may well summarize his sense of the function of the Jew in the new cosmopolitan world.

Like Kaminer, Shteyngart followed his debut with other very successful books, including not only Absurdistan but Super Sad True Love Story (2010). And also like Kaminer, Shteyngart then returned to the autobiographical world of his initial success.

Little Failure: A Memoir (2014), traces the trajectory of the protagonist, Gary Shteyngart, from the USSR to Oberlin to New York City and back to St. Petersburg, through the prism of his long-term psychoanalysis, which is one of the book’s touchstones.53 The book ends with him “back on my psychoanalyst’s coach trying on the words I have taught myself. I am not a bad son” (S/L, 319). And the volume is dedicated to this therapist, in spite of or perhaps because of his father’s response to the news that Gary has begun psychoanalysis: the older man is full of the “post-Soviet distrust of the practice—mental hospitals were used by the Soviet state against its dissidents” (S/L, 321). But the father also fears distrust that psychoanalysis may give Gary the ultimate weapon against his father—silence (S/L, 321). The book is ultimately about Oedipus, his unknown father, and their competition not for Shteyngart’s mother but for the motherland, for Leningrad, for the Russia of memory, and for his “preimmigrant father. . . bathed in his untrammeled love for me” (S/L, 9). Gary was a disappointment, a “Failurchka, or little failure” (S/L, 4), in the odd neologism of his mother, neither English nor Russia yet both. Constantly ill with asthma as a child, Igor (later transformed into the American Gary) is a sad sack in his own memory. He is terrified of life because, as his mother explains when he is an
adult, “you were born a Jewish person” (S/L, 25). His memory of his youth is crystalline, “attuned, vibrant, and frighteningly perfect” (S/L, 46).

His father of memory looks Jewish: “the big brows, the near-Sephardic skin tone, the harried expression of someone to whom life had been invariably unkind” (S/L, 8). His father had been a refusnik, “a designation that brought with it a kind of jobless state-sanctioned purgatory” (S/L, 16). His mother is “from a good family and not merely another Jewess you can informally insult” (S/L, 20). She “looks half-Jewish, which given the place and time, is too Jewish by half” (S/L, 21). When the family is about to leave Leningrad, she finally works up the nerve to confront the Soviet system in the form of the servers at the gastronom, the local grocery store, who constantly sold her only the fat of the ham. The server “in the stained white smock” shouts at her that “when you move to Israel they’ll slice the ham for you without the fat!” And she with “unkosher absurdity” responded, “In Israel I’ll have the fatless ham, but all you will ever have is the fat” (S/L, 47).

If such a fantasy of Israel dominates his parents’ idea of the golden pavements awaiting them, Shteyngart’s image of Russia at the opening of the volume is self-consciously full of “the vulgar nostalgia, the ‘poshlost’ Nabokov so despised” (S/L, 7). Even as a nineteen-year-old, Gary had been full of “the nostalgia that Nabokov thinks is vulgar poshlost” (S/L, 263) at Oberlin. Vladimir Nabokov—nobleman, exile, and very much not a Jew—is in complex ways the spiritus loci of this memoir. Gary returns to St. Petersburg “to be carried away by a Nabokovian torrent of memory for a country that no longer exists” (S/L, 15). Shteyngart puts himself in “Nabokov’s Speak, Memory, in which Vladimir Vladimirovich’s nobleman father is being ceremonially tossed in the air by the peasants of his country estate,” the same treatment Gary receives from his fellow Oberlin students (S/L, 261). When interviewed about the novel in the New York Times Shteyngart again evoked the world of the cosmopolitan exile: “I’ve read Nabokov’s Pnin so many times the book no longer has a spine. Has there ever been a better novel written about a fumbling Russian migré? I mean, like, why do I even bother?” But Gary’s father in the novel is not a landed nobleman, not exiled for his politics, not assassinated in error in Berlin in 1922; Gary is not the cosmopolitan, trilingual Nabokov (with his own Jewish mother) in Berlin, Boston, Ithaca, and Montreux; he is merely the damaged Jewish son of his damaged Jewish father.

Gary’s parents view his decision to become a writer as tinged with a sense of failure in America, and they want him not to “write like a self-hating Jew” (S/L, 29). Gary should neither mention the names of his relatives in his books nor delve into their relationship with him. But Gary, unsure of his identity as
American, Russian, and Jew, hears only his father’s whisper not to write like a self-hating Jew (S/L, 33). Gary eventually acknowledges that “there is nothing as joyful as writing, even when the writing is twisted and full of hate, the self-hate that makes writing not only possible but necessary” (S/L, 148) and comes to hear the pain contained in his father’s warning. This pain originated in Russia (S/L, 322).

Shteyngart’s ancestry is linguistically Russian, although his grandmother, who comes with them to America, had been raised in the Ukraine and struggled to learn Russian in Leningrad under siege and then in internal exile. In school “her instructor takes pity on her and helps her master the tongue of Pushkin and Dostoyevsky” (S/L, 35). Yet her grandson remembers that she “struggled against the despised Jewish accent,” although his father “says emphatically ‘Your grandmother never had a Jewish accent’” (S/L, 35). Yet in her confrontation with her husband over their sick child in 1979, his mother “retreats into the primordial Yiddish of her late grandmother from the Belorussian shtetl of Dubrovno” (S/L, 52). In America, Gary’s parents become masters of the hybrid languages of Brooklyn, while the fourteen-year-old boy “loses his Russian accent” (S/L, 178) and pretends “to be a good East German” (S/L, 277) at the Orthodox day school he attends.

In 2011, after the success of his first novels, Gary returns with his parents to Russia, to St. Petersburg. His mother had not been back since the death of her mother twenty-four years earlier, and his father had been away for thirty-two years, since he left as a refusnik. Their American son only hollowly echoes their Russian (S/L, 326). His father is intent to pass by the “two-hundred year old Mariinskaya Hospital,” where he offhandedly observes to his son “‘I spent time here . . . in the nevnoye otdeleniye.’ I run the Russian through my mind. . . . The Nervous Department. What exactly is he trying to say?” (S/L, 330). His father reveals that he suffered a seizure at age twenty-three and was diagnosed with “soldering of the vessels of the brain” (S/L, 331), resulting in an extended hospital stay during which he was subjected to horrific and unnecessary therapies. When he was finally released, he went into a severe depression and recovered only after a long visit to the countryside. His mother called him a failure, just as Gary’s mother had done to him: “You are an exact copy of your father” (S/L, 332), as a friend once told Gary.

Out of this revelation of weakness also comes the suppressed memory of his father’s lashing out at him, giving him a bloody nose on the street in Leningrad because “he started to behave rascally” (S/L, 343). Igor would not stop playing with a toy helicopter that they had flown from a neighboring church. The toy helicopter haunts the adult Gary’s dreams, and “when I came back to
Russia as an adult and walked by here I began to feel very scared” (S/L, 343). “I didn’t want to beat you,” his father relies, “it was by accident. I waved my hand and hit you in the nose” (S/L, 344). “In America,” Gary begins, but he cannot complete the thought: you could not, would not do that. Putin’s Russia, according to the advertisements, is against violence against children, at least in 2010 (S/L, 344). Russia has become sensitized to such actions, but it is also the Russia of the antisemites: “The Slavic Realm is for Slavs only,” reads another graffito (S/L, 342).

Gary and his parents go to the battlefield memorial to the defenders of Leningrad, a group that includes his father’s father. “‘Oh, son,’ he says to me, ‘why didn’t me and my mother come here earlier?’” “What I notice is that he has stopped calling me ‘Little Son.’ Now I am just his son” (S/L, 347). There, on the battlefield, his father asks him to say Kaddish for his grandfather: “The words coming out of my mouth are gibberish to me. And they can only be gibberish to my father’s ear as well. . . . I chant the gibberish backwards and forwards, tripping over words, mangling them, making them sound more Russian, more American, more holy” (S/L, 349). The novel closes with the final words of the Kaddish—“Let us say, Amen”—in Hebrew, English, and Russian (S/L, 349).

If Shteyngart is the American parallel to Kaminer, than the youngest Russian Jewish writer in English, Yelena Akhtiorskaya, continues the autobiographical vein of cosmopolitan Jewish narratives furthered by Gorelik. Akhtiorskaya was born in 1985 and moved with her family from Ukraine to Brighton Beach in 1992. The novel is set the Brooklyn and Odessa in the 1990s; it is the tale of the Nasmertovs and their errant brother and uncle, the poet Pasha, the last remaining family member in the Ukraine. Esther and Robert, professionals in the Ukraine (and before that in the USSR), have transformed themselves in America; their daughter, Marina, too, has become American, at least in the ironic eye of the narrator. Robert, a clinical neurologist in Odessa, has physically collapsed, and Esther has developed breast cancer. The novel focuses on Pasha and his two trips to Brighton Beach in the early 1990s. He had converted to the Russian Orthodox Church to marry his pregnant girlfriend at twenty, leaving “an open wound in the family flesh.” His wife is the antithesis of the narrator’s fantasy of Jewish femininity. She is the “cold, insane, pasty, pear-shaped, droopy-haired Northern Nadia, who didn’t even give off the good-in-bed aura” (A/P, 48). The family sees the conversion as “an elaborate theater of spite,” while “the priest practically apologized on God’s behalf, as if Pasha’s soul had ended up in the Yid pile by accident, in a forgetful or clumsy moment” (A/P, 11–12). He remains “Jewish” even while wearing a “conspicuous though not a garish silver cross around his neck” (A/P,
Yet his conversion is a sign of the cosmopolitan Jew, for at its heart, he thought, was "a appropriation of aesthetic symbols and traditions essential to his craft" as a poet (A/P, 12)—symbols of Russian Orthodoxy, of course, not Judaism. As in all of these novels, being Jewish is seen as a handicap, as when Pasha had attended "the gifted-and-talented high school (unhindered by the four layers of added hurdles, one for each Jewish grandparent" (A/P, 36). In Brooklyn the family is really not Jewish enough to be seen as Jewish: "They wouldn’t have hired Marina were she not Jewish, but neither did they consider her Jewish” (A/P, 92). She couldn’t even bring her own food in the house “because of their wacko laws! Kosher schmosher!” (A/P, 116). She is eventually fired after giving the child of the house some pepperoni pizza.

Pasha visits his semi-estranged family in Brighton Beach, where as a Jewish cosmopolitan, his command of language allowed him to fit partially in: “He knew English, but strangers in an existential hurry did not” (A/P, 34). Language, the tool of the poet, is his only currency. In America, “he’d be following in the steps of Conrad and Nabokov and transmuting his literary output to the only language now acknowledged” (A/P, 38). In the old Soviet Union, his poetic gift was acknowledged but was also coupled with the real terror of its implications, as when he burned all of the avant-garde literary magazines in his flat when he “found out that the KGB was on the way,” accidentally destroying his mother’s jewelry and savings, well hidden in the fireplace (A/P, 43). In his memory, however, the incident involved his mother destroying his work out of spite. In Odessa he is famous, at least according to his friends: he is “the Brodsky-of-our-time, dorogoy drug i vlikiy poet (a dear friend and poet), whose poetry built emotion through a fantastic accrual of detail” (A/P, 269). At home he is “a world-historical figure grappling with Dostoevskian forces. But outside world squinted and asked, Pasha who?” (A/P, 216). Brodsky is of course a reference to Russian Jewish poet Joseph Brodsky (1940–96), who was officially “encouraged to depart” from the USSR in 1972 for the United States and who, in 1986 received the Nobel Prize for Literature. There and in the USSR he often read his poetry with a large gold Orthodox cross prominently hung about his neck.

Unlike the cosmopolitan Brodsky, Pasha is stranded in Odessa, a provincial town where he is a star but no cosmopolitan; he is merely “an aging, bearded Russian-Jewish-Christian poet (though it is quite charming when you think about it); that he should’ve moved to New York or at least Moscow, cosmopolitan cities in which he had friends, readers, supporters . . . , where he could meet more like-minded people. . . .] [I]n Odessa he had only enemies” (A/P, 269–70). Moscow is the definition of the cosmopolitan. In New York his
friends are “youngish intellectual types who exhibited in equal measure Odessa humor, Petersburg interests (sans pretensions), Moscow cosmopolitanism (without the coarseness or hard consonants), and New York transit proficiency” (A/P, 215).

But America is crude and capitalistic and was and is not cosmopolitan in the same way as Odessa. His Jewish best friend from Odessa has made it and lives in Manhattan, where his family has acquired “the full American-dream package, which included a certificate of struggle completion, Park Avenue penthouse, tasteful collection of automobiles, new face for the wife even before the old one went to shit” (A/P, 37–38). In the latter half of the novel, Marina’s young-adult daughter, Frida, comes to Odessa for her cousin’s 2008 wedding, and Odessa is revealed to be just as parochial as is Pasha’s fantasy of New York. By that time, “the entire Jewish population had relocated to Brighton’s stinky hub” (A/P, 290). And Odessa seemed bereft. Her uncle seemed even less fixed: “The great Russian poet Pavel Robertovich Nesmertov . . . wasn’t really Russian considering he had never lived in Russia proper but only in Ukraine, only don’t dare to call him Ukrainian, and furthermore was Jewish, which in Russia qualified as a separate nationality if not species, though he wasn’t really Jewish having converted” (A/P, 290). He is surrounded by similar dislocated figures such as a woman “who saw logic in wearing a crucifix, a kabbalah bracelet, and a bindi simultaneously” (A/P, 257). If anything, such mixes do not reveal themselves to be either cosmopolitan or rooted, they are the mix of transitions between national and local identities. Yet they differ little from the complex mix and reestablishment of identities in both the USSR and the United States: when one is everything, one is either nothing or the newest cosmopolitan. Yet these cosmopolitans are in the business of generating complex texts about writers who are complex cosmopolitans. It is their theme as writers across and within cultures. What on the one hand recognizes confusion of identity as a legitimate examination of the past and its echoes in the present in the United States is on the other hand seen as a negation of the integration of the Russian Jewish writer into a complex if ephemeral German multiculturalism. In neither case does authenticity as a Jew trump performance as a cosmopolitan.

The movement of peoples is constant; their response varies. People articulate their sense of the meaning associated with such movement culturally, whether they do so from political or economic motivations and whether they move voluntarily or involuntarily. They experience and narrate such movement in terms of their interiority, not merely the external world. As E. O. Wilson has commented, “Homo sapiens is the only species to suffer psychological ex-
ile." Whether this acknowledgment of the presence of the self, of the environment, of decay and death is solely true of our species has and can be debated, but it is clear that we are the only species that documents such psychological exile in our cultural objects. Wilson continues, “The dominating influence that spawned the arts was the need to impose order on the confusion caused by intelligence.” Here, our fictions are the continuation of that imposition of order on our perception of reality, while our sense of displacement, our giving meaning to the displacement of others, has been a continuous part of this process from the Enlightenment to the present. It is indeed the emphasis on movement rather than space stressed by James Clifford, but it is also an analogous processing of the symbolic value of such movement by Jews, creating symbolic movements as thought experiments in a fixed world of high status, the world of fiction. Clifford stresses that “the language of diaspora is increasingly invoked by displaced peoples who feel (maintain, revive, invent) a connection with a prior home,” but for Russian Jewish writers in North America and Europe, it is not the actual language itself but the cultural artifacts that mirror it in the new cultural environment of rooted cosmopolitan in Germany and the United States. Germany and North America become “sacred spaces” in Amir Eschel’s sense of the search for the dichotomy between “cosmos” and “makom,” between the universal and the concrete notion of space in Jewish writing. These writers’ works become repositories of the memories of the Russian past and its seeming rootedness, as opposed to the nomadic nature the authors see in modern globalization. Cosmopolitans bear witness to this search as they seek their roots in a Russia of their imagination and write for a reading public in their new cosmopolitan world.