

## *Introduction*    The Western Wall of Russian Literature

The representation of Jews by European artists and thinkers is monotonous and repetitive. For almost two millennia, it has drawn on a fixed imaginative lexicon with little variation or originality, suggesting the existence of a common *model* that generates the Jewish image in theology, philosophy, literature, visual arts, and folklore across European cultures. The concept of *stereotype* does not convey the durability and continuity of Europe's imaginary Jews; whether connoting mechanical reproduction or implying the cognitive representation of social environment, it evokes prejudice, inflexibility, and exaggeration.<sup>1</sup> As a result, it diverts attention from the Jewish image under scrutiny to the ethical evaluation of its carriers, obfuscating the fact that the conceptualization of ethnocultural otherness is not a matter of fully independent personal choices—our culture shapes us as much as it is shaped by us. In my opinion, the concept of stereotype does more harm than good when applied to the examination of Jewish difference in artistic texts. Clashing with the popular view of art as the domain of individual geniuses who are above the bias of their historical age, it puts many a reader on the defensive, effectively turning the study of the Jewish image in art into an exercise in the interpretive exculpation of art's creators.

For these reasons, I find the concept of *generative model* to be a more productive analytical tool whose axiological neutrality does away with moralizing value judgment, allowing us to focus on the mechanisms behind the genesis and dissemination of the Jewish image. In addition, and contrary to the idea of stereotype as an unchanging imprint, the *generative model* accounts for the predetermined historical evolution

of the Jewish image and reflects the fact that the human imagination is both culturally conditioned and not always contingent on empirical knowledge. To my mind, when it comes to the issue of cultural modeling, any quest for understanding requires the recreation, rather than the anachronistic criticism, of the religious and social attitudes that have conditioned the imagination of the producers and receivers of the European discourse about Judaism and Jews.

I base my argument for the existence of the common European model generating the Jewish image on the findings of those scholars who, in the wake of the Second World War, radically rethought the phenomenon of anti-Jewish animus. The pioneers of this effort, James Parkes and Jules Isaac, see Jew-hatred as a unique expression of group prejudice arising out of a unique cause—the teaching and action of the Christian Church. They postulate the essential difference of Christian Jew-hatred from anti-Jewish hostility in pagan antiquity, arguing that the former shows “no break in the line which leads from the beginning of the denigration of Judaism in the formative period of Christian history, from the exclusion of Jews from civic equality in the period of the Church’s first triumph in the fourth century, through the horrors of the Middle Ages, to the death camps of Hitler.”<sup>2</sup> The next cohort of historians and theologians elaborates and nuances this argument. They show that anti-Judaism is an intrinsic need of Christian self-affirmation and a basic element of Christian exegesis, while anti-Christianity is not proper to Jewish exegesis. They further argue that Christian attitudes toward Judaism and its adherents, unlike the pagan ones, express a theological and existential need rather than political or cultural bias; and that biblical hermeneutics, theology, and the patristic *adversus Iudaeos* tradition shape the legal and social status of Jews in Christendom by affirming the identity of the Church through the invalidation of Jewish identity. Crucially, these scholars show how anti-Jewish heritage thrives independently from the physical presence of Jews in European countries; and how the initial religious rationale for the image of the Jew assumes a number of secular guises.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, despite the passage of time, the generative model of the imaginary Jews remains stable, assuring the continuity of the image’s inner logic. As a result, the Jewish persona’s evolution expresses itself

not so much in narrative or descriptive changes as in motivational recoding. The Jews of the European imagination maintain their cultural role of the paradigmatic Other after Christianity loses its legal and social hold on European societies. Enlightenment thinkers divorce the image of the Jew from its theological justification and give it an Orientalist *raison d'être* couched in the novel terms of the secular nation-state. In this reinterpretation, the imaginary Jews become a foil to burgeoning secular identities—a negative referent needed by all those unsure of their “Germanness,” “Frenchness,” “Britishness,” and so on. By the mid-nineteenth century, the imaginary Jews receive a pseudoscientific grounding at the crossroads of biology, medicine, sociology, and linguistics, becoming a “Semitic race” that is opposed to the “Aryan” one whose habitat coincides with what used to be known as Christendom. This racial and Orientalist recoding culminates in the ideology of antisemitism, which despite its secular guise, draws on the logic and rhetoric of Christian anti-Judaism and the concomitant tradition of sociocultural Judeophobia, down to the very terms *Semite* and *Semitic*, coined a century earlier by German theologians.<sup>4</sup>

The ecclesiastic dogma of Jewish immutability since the age of Jesus reassures Christians that their own religious praxis retains its original quality despite the passage of time and informs the historical continuity of the imaginary Jews. That is why European religious and secular authorities, mediaeval and modern, are profoundly disturbed by the existence of rabbinic Judaism, symbolized for them by the Talmud, a fact clashing with their idea of the ossified Jewish worship. In the nineteenth century, the trope of Jewish religious immutability morphs into its new secular guise of ethnocultural immutability. And if, as late as 1835, a Russian historian still argues that “the Jews have kept their religious beliefs and primordial character intact for many centuries,” Robert Knox’s 1862 treatise on *The Races of Men* already postulates that Jewish immutability is, above all, racial, thus replacing religion with biology as the primary motivation of the imaginary Jews.<sup>5</sup>

My study proposes to explore the representation of Jews in literary fiction by placing them within the continuity of the Jewish vocabulary of difference not only in Christian but also in post-Christian Europe, to use the term by which C. S. Lewis designates the age of cultural

secularization beginning with the Enlightenment.<sup>6</sup> In other words, my analytical approach presumes that most narrative and descriptive peculiarities of the Jewish literary type are traceable to the theological and mythical sources informing the generative model of Europe's imaginary Jews. This investigation, then, is not primarily concerned with Jewish individuals living in Christian and post-Christian societies. Its main interest lies with the cultural model generating the image of "the jews" whose *literary* life is my preoccupation.

I borrow the jarring term "the jews" from Jean-François Lyotard's essay *Heidegger and "the jews,"* in which this signifier's definite article, lower case, plural form, and quotation marks indicate that it does not refer to real people or groups in any historical period. And while my use of this unconventional term and its derivatives ("jewish," "jewishness") may run counter to good style, I am happy to sacrifice stylistic felicity for the sake of the estranging effect this artificial usage produces on the reader, reminding us of the similarly contrived nature of the cultural models that inform the human imagination.

With some exceptions, Gentile artists and thinkers did not acquaint themselves with authentic rabbinic Judaism or Jewish life. Their idea of Jews would seem to go against the most elementary verisimilitude were it not for the function of "the jews" as the Christian psyche's symbolic trope—a rhetorical figure with mythical connotations to which Jews in their historical situation are often incidental. Thus, John Chrysostom's influential *Homilies Against the Jews* (387–89) have been deemed a "glorious reading for those who love eloquence and zeal untempered by knowledge." Secular authors fare no better. Walter Scott's Isaac (*Ivanhoe*, 1817) enters the hall of Cedric the Saxon and "turns eagerly to the smoking mess which was placed before him, and eats with haste" a meal that cannot be kosher, although we are told that Isaac is strictly observant. And to top this culinary mess, "the jews" of Scott's Russian contemporary cook *tzitzit* (prayer shawl fringes) and *tefillin* (phylacteries) identified by the writer in a learned footnote as favorite "jewish" dishes.<sup>7</sup>

But even those Gentile authors who do have a grasp of the Jewish tradition and the life of contemporary Jews hold on to the image of "the jews." Catholic and Protestant Hebraists, as well as such a connoisseur of the Talmud as Russian philosopher Vladimir Solov'ev, study

Judaism for the sake of Christian exegesis and view Jews, at best, as objects of conversionary ambition. Official experts traveling in Russia's Pale of Settlement to study Jewish life, from Gavriil Derzhavin to the emissaries of the Imperial Geographic Society, only recycle and rationalize their preexisting idea of "the jews."<sup>8</sup>

In their obsessive monologic dialogue with Judaism, Christian writers and thinkers rarely allow Jews to argue on their own terms, instead advancing what they think "the jews" should say or do as a religious symbol and a marker of cultural difference. The physical presence of Jews within the reach of Christian observers has never been a defining factor for the "jewish" image. English writers in the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries, and French writers in the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries, are intensely preoccupied with "the jews" despite the expulsion of Jews from both countries in 1290 and 1394, respectively. Shylock rises to fame at a time when no observable Jewish community has lived in the British Isles for hundreds of years. A similarly keen interest in "the jews" is manifest in Russian culture from the eleventh century on, with virtually no Jews in open sight in Kievan Rus', Muscovy, or the Russian empire until the first partition of Poland in 1772.<sup>9</sup>

Such examples abound. They alone suffice to place Jewish-Christian economic rivalry among those explanations of Jew-hatred that Martin Buber describes as "superficial and transitory" thanks to their failure to account for the continuous influence of religious patterns on the cultural imagination. They also put a nail into the coffin of the Marxist analysis that presents anti-Jewish animus as a by-product of class struggle. This approach, rigidly adopted by Soviet ideologues and promoted with more finesse by Hannah Arendt and Jean-Paul Sartre, treats Jews as the scapegoats of the ruling classes, who thus channel the fury of the exploited masses. Yet this explanation fails to account for unremitting Judeophobia under communist dictatorships, which supposedly do away with economic exploitation. The same failure to appreciate the role of religious patterns in the cultural—particularly secular—imagination informs, albeit to different ideological ends, Edward Said's exclusion of Jews from his study of *Orientalism* (1978) despite the fact that as a method for describing cultural alterity, Orientalism crystallizes in the process of the "jewish" image's secular recoding.<sup>10</sup>

Past experience teaches that a scholarly inquiry into “the jews” does not get far if it is predicated on their comparison to Jews. The focus on this comparison among the early students of “the jews” in artistic texts did little to clarify the image’s fuller meaning. Such pioneering works as B. Gorev’s *Russkaia literatura i evrei* (Russian literature and the Jews, 1917–22), M. J. Landa’s *The Jew in Drama* (1926), Joshua Kunitz’s *Russian Literature and the Jew* (1929), and Manya Lifschitz-Golden’s *Les Juifs dans la littérature française du Moyen Âge* (Jews in medieval French literature, 1935) rarely go beyond “an oddly parochial (as well as un-historical) sense of astonishment that novelists and playwrights could have strayed so far, in their portrayal of Jews, from the biological or physiological or behavioral actuality.”<sup>11</sup> The main contribution of the early critics resides in positing “the jews” as a valid subject of scholarly inquiry. But even today, a theoretically updated version of the same approach—“exploring the ways in which literary treatments of Jews in nineteenth-century Russia reflected the realities of Jewish life”—yields few analytical insights.<sup>12</sup> Background research and commentary on Jews or Judaism, which hold together such sociologically inclined studies, appear to miss their mark because the subject under investigation requires attention, above all, to Christians and Christianity. A product of cultural modeling often reveals more about those who invoke it than those it describes.

Let me make clear that I do not deny links between real life and cultural imagination; nor am I intent on arguing that the behavior of Jewish individuals or groups has nothing to do with the European discourse about “jewish” difference—after all, the Jewish rejection of Christianity is at the core of this discourse. But convinced as I am in the preeminence of cultural conditioning over empirical knowledge in the human imagination, I challenge the traditional view of the relationship between fact and fiction in the construction of the “jewish” Other. In this book, I argue that most historical facts of European Jewish experience are not the sources of the “jewish” image. Instead, they are enlisted to support the image’s preexistent structure. For example, the concept of “jewish” carnality, elaborated by the Church Fathers, finds many embodiments, among them—medieval Jewish moneylenders and modern Jewish capitalists. Similarly, “jewish”

demonic seditiousness, as defined in patristic literature, is later confirmed in the eyes of the Gentile majority by a professional specialization of Polish Jews (alcohol-farming) and by the visibility of Jews in radical left-wing politics—historical facts that through the prism of the generative model, acquire the same symbolic function as “jewish” well-poisoning, ritual murder, and aid to the Antichrist.

Many critical studies further suffer from the desire to define this or that author’s personal attitude toward Jews on the basis of “the jews” in their works, a desire that tends to blur the lines between literary and extra-artistic discourses and often abuts anachronistic moral judgment. But even if the scrutiny of a given author’s personal attitudes is justified by extra-artistic documentary evidence, the usefulness of this evidence in the interpretation of art as a mirror of personal feelings remains problematic. For instance, does the depiction of Jankiel the tavern-keeper in Adam Mickiewicz’s *Pan Tadeusz* (1832–34), frequently touted as a Judeophile work of art, reflect the author’s true feelings or is it a bow to literary fashion, especially considering the manifest anti-Judaism and Judeophobia of Mickiewicz’s *Books of the Polish Nation and the Polish Pilgrimage* (1832) and of his lectures at the Collège de France (1842–44)? And how can we be sure that extra-artistic Judeophile statements reflect an author’s innermost beliefs and do not just pay lip service to current ideological fads? Consider, for instance, the 1858 protests against the Judeophobe ethos of the Petersburg newspaper *Illustratsiia* signed by many Russian and Ukrainian writers whose own artistic depiction of “the jews” would shock today’s reader.<sup>13</sup>

Most crucially, as they speculate about an author’s personal attitude, critics unjustly presume that an artist should feel something or other for an abstract, heterogeneous, and heterodox group by virtue of utilizing an eponymous stock literary type. This presumption homogenizes a diverse community whose membership is continuously questioned and redefined from within. To admit the very possibility of an artist’s “feelings for Jews” is to reduce the latter to a common denominator in an echo of the Christian procedure of turning Jews into “the jews.” One thinks of the bitter French joke—*Un philosémite est un antisémite qui aime les Juifs* (A philosemite is an antisemite who loves the Jews)—which, as I will show in the third part of this study, is applicable to

the Judeophile discourse in *fin de siècle* Russian literature. By trying to reconstruct an artist's personal attitude, critics unwittingly adopt the basic premise of the language of "jewish" difference, which has been recently dubbed *allosemitism*, "the practice of setting the Jews apart as people radically different from all the others, needing separate concepts to describe and comprehend them." This practice hails from Christian theology for which "the jews" are the Christ-bearing and -killing chosen people of God, as Russian theologian Sergei Bulgakov argues in 1941—a view that makes the positive and negative "feelings for Jews" two sides of the same coin.<sup>14</sup>

For these reasons, my study will sidestep the issue of artists' personal attitudes on the assumption that, before the Second World War, a non-Jewish European author could not have been free from the narrative and symbolic logic of Christian anti-Judaism or the concomitant allosemitism, be it expressed in Judeophobia or Judeophilia. As iconoclastic as they may be in their art and thought, it is naïve to expect artists and intellectuals to defy the symbolic and narrative patterns instilled in them from childhood, especially without a major shift in cultural attitudes in their lifetime, like the one brought about by the slow realization of the full extent of the Nazis' destruction of Europe's Jews and of its moral and spiritual implications for Western civilization. True, this is difficult to admit in the case of authors elevated to the status of cultural institutions. Yet the critics who project the iconoclasm of a Dostoevskii, a Solov'ev, or a Rozanov on their writings about "the jews" unwittingly or deliberately obfuscate the unoriginal and derivative nature of these writings.<sup>15</sup>

This is not to say, of course, that assimilated Jewish writers and readers did not internalize the generative model of "the jews" as part of their acculturation in European societies. This phenomenon, ignored by the pioneers of the study of the "jewish" image in artistic texts, makes the assimilated Jewish intelligentsia a necessary part of any inquiry, including the present investigation, into "the jews" of the European cultural imagination.

Marginalizing the issue of authorial attitudes, we also reduce the importance of the thorny question of terminology applicable in the study of "the jews." The term most often used and abused in the course of



many such studies is *anti-Semitism*. This term was coined by Wilhelm Marr to denote a (pseudo)scientific ideology in contrast to traditional anti-Judaism and Judeophobia. The anachronistic use of this term in reference to attitudes predating Marr's Antisemitic League (1880) is counterproductive because it draws on the vocabulary of "jewish" difference in order to describe that same vocabulary. This fallacy is only partially undone by the change in the term's spelling—*antisemitism*—recently proposed as a way of showing the senselessness of the concept of "Semitism."<sup>16</sup>

Thus, throughout this study, I will speak of *anti-Judaism* when theology appears to be the primary motivation of the imaginary "jews" (from the Church Fathers to Nikolai Berdiaev to Jacques Maritain). *Judeophobia*, in its dual sense of hatred and fear, will denote social, political, and cultural attitudes engendered by Christian anti-Judaism, even if their religious sources are no longer apparent. *Judeophilia* will designate those intellectual trends that espouse the image of "the jews" but advocate their moral improvement and elimination as the religious and cultural Other through favorable social treatment in the hopes of converting (for example, young Martin Luther, the English Puritans, Vladimir Solov'ev) or assimilating them into the modern nation-state (Enlightenment-inspired liberalism). Such terminological distinction is all the more important for my study because Judeophobia and Judeophilia have been the preferred terms in Russia both before and after the birth of antisemitic ideology. Characteristically, as late as 1916 a Russian commentator treats the term *anti-Semitism* as novel and sees its meaning as different from that of Judeophobia. I will therefore use the term *antisemitism* in its modified form when the image of "the jews" seems to appeal primarily to racial theories, even if its initial religious motivation remains important.<sup>17</sup>

To sum up, the present investigation is not concerned with Europe's so-called Jewish question or with various authors' putative opinions of Jews as expressed in "the jews" of their literary fiction. My interest lies elsewhere. I explore the meaning and function of "the jews" as a literary type within the economy of artistic texts; and the reasons for which authors invoke this particular type. These reasons, as I will show, reside with writers' psychological and intellectual idiosyncrasies that are articulated in the imaginative lexicon of Christian and post-Christian

cultures. “The jews” loom large in the European code of cultural otherness as the object of projection that reveals more about the personality of its users than about Jews and Judaism.<sup>18</sup> This approach, I hope, precludes the marginalization of the inquiry into “the jews,” too often relegated to the periphery of cultural and literary studies by virtue of focusing on phenomena that today may appear as parochial (Jewish experience) or anomalous (antisemitism). It is my conviction that when writers and artistic texts are treated on their own terms, the scrutiny of “the jews” stops being a Jewish matter and becomes an indispensable tool for reaching better insight into the imaginative universe of a Gogol, a Turgenev, or a Chekhov, to cite a few names at the center of my investigation.



The Christian narrative’s basic story, embodied in the Gospels (and especially in their Passion parts), conveys the myth of redemption more effectively than theology, whose outreach is limited to learned elites. This basic story casts “the jews” in a mythical and archetypal role that leaves a profound impact on the receivers of the Christian narrative—so profound, in fact, that “the jews” continue to perform the same role in the post-Christian imagination. This mythical and archetypal dynamic makes “the jews” a perfect candidate for the narratological analysis developed by Vladimir Propp and Algirdas Greimas, as well as for the psychological analysis informed by Carl Jung’s theory of the archetypes of the collective unconscious, which like structural narratology is grounded in the study of myth and folklore.

Scrutinizing the Russian folktale, Propp proposes a set of invariant functions whose combination constitutes a mythical narrative and which are embodied by different *dramatis personae* in different narratives. Greimas, in turn, addresses the redundancy of Propp’s list of invariants, reducing it to six narrative functions: Subject/Object, Sender/Receiver, Helper/Opponent. These narrative functions, or *actants* in Greimas’s terminology, constitute the immanent level of any given mythical narrative. On the apparent level, these actants are personified by various *dramatis personae*, or *actors*. Greimas shows that each actant can have any number of actors in a given narrative; and, inversely,

an actor can personify several actants.<sup>19</sup> Proceeding from Propp's descriptive typology to the elaboration of a deep structure common to all mythical narratives, he postulates the possibility of a single model generating several narratives. Finally, Greimas's vision of actant pairs with opposite functions echoes Jung's idea of psychological archetypes as having two faces, positive and negative, impersonated by different characters in different narratives. Drawing on this theoretical framework, I will argue that Christian narratives employing the actor called "the jews"—be they ecclesiastic, folk, or artistic narratives in nature—are informed by this actor's role as the simultaneous personification of two actants, Helper and Opponent, in the basic Christian story, which thus sets the narrative principles of the generative model of "the jews."

A question immediately arises. Can "the jews" ever act out the Subject, especially at a time when cultural secularization seems to challenge Christian imaginative patterns? Consider modern Judeophile artistic narratives: these ideologically motivated works tend to preserve the actor's traditional function and descriptive lexicon, simply banishing the Opponent and stressing the Helper in the image of "the jews" as meek and defenseless do-gooders who persist in their secondary role of a litmus test for the religious or secular virtues of the Gentile actor(s) playing the Subject. Hence the ease with which, from the early days of political liberalism, European authors shuttle between "jewish" villains and saints.<sup>20</sup> In fact, even if all but "jewish" characters vanished from a Judeophile text, its saintly "jews" would still not embody the Subject in the eyes of the Gentile reader, because this function belongs to the authorial persona implicitly present in the text and whose exhibition of liberalism challenges the majority opinion. But what about assimilated Jewish writers? Can "the jews" play the Subject in their artistic texts? Theoretically, this is possible; but in practice, as I will argue in the last part of this study, such cases are hard to come by.

It follows that the study of "the jews," whose narrative function is secondary by definition, may very well distort authorial intent and consequently amounts to the deliberate violation of a literary text's semantic structure. We commit interpretational fallacy by the very fact of focusing critical attention on those literary personages who are relegated to the circumstantial roles that are fully contingent on the role

of the narrative Subject. A case in point is the modern treatment of *The Merchant of Venice* as a play about Shylock, although the merchant in the title is not Shylock, who is originally conceived by Shakespeare as a character auxiliary to the play's Christian heroes and, in keeping with his narrative function, exits the stage long before the play's end. Likewise, Gogol' could not have imagined that the character of Iankel' in his "Taras Bul'ba" would one day overshadow the Cossack whose name appears in the story's title. Embracing nonetheless the interpretational fallacy that makes "the jews" the focus of literary analysis, my study will make every effort to keep this critical procedure from becoming more anachronistic than it already is. To this end, I will consistently analyze "the jews" of Russian and Russian-Jewish writers against the backdrop of the original cultural and historical circumstances of the texts in which this actor appears.



The elaboration of "the jews" from an *actor* embodying a narrative function to a stock type in European art and folklore is mediated on several discursive levels. If the basic Christian story instills in the minds and psyche of its recipients the narrative role of "the jews," theology provides the rudimentary vocabulary to describe this actor. Beyond the Gospels, clergymen propagate the image of "the jews" in didactic tales (exempla), sermons, hagiographies, apocrypha, and anti-Judaic tracts (the *adversus Iudaeos* genre). Their effort is paralleled in the church drama and visual arts of Latin and Byzantine Christianity, and in the school drama and quasi-religious puppet theater (*vertep*, *betleika*, and so on) of east Slavic lands. Anti-Judaism and Judeophobia are disseminated, first and foremost, by the learned elite: written or commissioned by clerics, the verbal and visual vehicles of the imaginary "jews" ensure the transformation of a theological abstraction into a stock figure of folklore. Filtered through folklore, "the jews" often re-ascend to the level of the elite, as in the cases of the blood libel legend in Western Europe; or of the Cossack songs composed in seminaries but cited by seventeenth-century Ukrainian scribes as folk traditions.<sup>21</sup>

Secular authors add another dimension to this dynamic. For instance, Chaucer's "Prioress Tale" simultaneously draws on the blood libel leg-

end recently minted by an English cleric and on the folklorized Miracles of the Virgin, thus consecrating the novel motif of ritual murder by the force of artistic persuasion and the prestige of the written word. And if after the decline of ecclesiastical culture the generative model of “the jews” retains its hold on the European cultural imagination, it does so owing largely to the combined impact of folklore and secular art, which convey the narrative and descriptive peculiarities of the actor called “the jews” as effectively as exegetic and didactic religious genres.<sup>22</sup>

Early students of “the jews” in art typically adopted a diachronic approach: they wrote histories of the “jewish” image, favoring a comprehensive chronological survey over a selective analysis. This approach presumes that over time the image undergoes changes meaningful enough to warrant an exhaustive account of its manifestations in a given national artistic tradition, historical period, or literary genre, often at the expense of the comparative rapprochement of texts from unrelated historical, cultural, or generic series. Yet such a comparison reveals the image’s remarkable lack of change. And it is precisely this continuity that renders most diachronic studies of “the jews” in the European artistic and cultural imagination dishearteningly monotonous and repetitive.

A study informed by the idea of art history as a cumulative progression focuses on the evolution of artistic forms and is predicated on the concept of change. But a lack of change is also significant and requires explanation. Since the human imagination is subject to cultural conditioning, artistic expression is rooted in social conventions and may defy authorial intent by appealing to the collective memory of a given author’s culture. As a result, the diachronic logic dictating that an artistic event in period C is shaped by homologous events in periods A and B tends to overlook the possibility that all three might draw on the same implicit model in the imaginative vocabulary of their culture. This model can be revealed by bringing to a common denominator chronologically, geographically, and generically disparate instances of “the jews,” as I attempt to do in the present study. By adopting this comparative approach, I hope to clarify the “jewish” image’s fuller implications in modern literary, philosophical, and political discourses—implications that are not always apparent even to the image’s contemporary

carriers and consumers—against the backdrop of the pan-European generative model, which has been producing this image for centuries.



While the life of “the jews” in Western ecclesiastic, folkloric, and artistic discourses has been adequately described, it remains poorly elucidated in the Russian cultural sphere. Few methodological equivalents to the post–Second World War scrutiny of “the jews” in Western European literatures and cultures exist in Russian studies. The notable exceptions are all very recent and include such work as Alexander Pereswetoff-Morath’s monograph on the *adversus Iudaeos* tradition in medieval Russian literature; Mikhail Vaiskopf’s survey of Russian Romanticism; Leonid Katsis’s and Henrietta Mondry’s studies of modern Russian art and thought; and Ol’ga Belova’s explorations of east Slavic folklore. Such relative paucity is not surprising if we consider the failure of Russia’s intellectuals to grasp the larger significance of the Shoah, in part due to Soviet ideological pressure and in part to their own unreadiness to face the harsh truths of Christianity’s role in casting Jews as Europe’s paradigmatic Other—witness the resistance to post-Auschwitz theology manifest among Russian theologians who persist in the millennia-old one-way dialogue with Judaism and in its concomitant denigration to the ends of Christian self-affirmation.<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, the extant studies of the “jewish” persona in Russian letters, including recent work by such Western Slavists as Gary Rosenshield and Elena Katz, ignore some eight hundred years of the image’s development on the Russian soil and view it as a modern importation from the West.<sup>24</sup> But even though secular art in Russia is a late bloomer, it takes a leap of faith to explain the ubiquity of “the jews” in nineteenth-century Russian literature by foreign literary influences alone. Since the introduction of Christianity in Kievan Rus’ (988), the Russian cultural imagination has been haunted by “the jews” despite the virtual absence of Jews in Russia until the late eighteenth century. Western influences, even when they were stimulated by interest in the empire’s recently acquired Jewish minority, could not have been the only, or even the defining, factor in fostering the persistent attention to “the jews” as a *literary type* manifest among modern Russian writers.