

Introduction

The beginnings of modern Jewish literature are rarely said to have been much before the 1880s, when eastern European authors such as S. Y. Abramovitsh (1835–1917), writing under the pen name Mendele Mocher Sforim, began to put Hebrew and Yiddish literature on the map in new ways. Indeed, both Hebrew and Yiddish literature came to achieve international prominence over the course of the twentieth century, boasting Nobel Prize laureates such as Isaac Bashevis Singer (1978) and S. Y. Agnon (1966). Singer, a Polish Jew who spent much of his adult life in the United States writing in Yiddish, and Agnon, a native of Poland who settled in Mandate Palestine as a young man and who wrote in Hebrew, are but two examples among many. In the aftermath of the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel, the postwar period witnessed a dramatic expansion of modern Hebrew literature. It also saw an explosion of Jewish literature written in English, with writers such as Philip Roth, Cynthia Ozick, Michael Chabon, and Jonathan Safran Foer enjoying—like Singer and Agnon before them—a wide readership of Jews and non-Jews alike.

As the literature collected in this volume makes clear, envisioning the history of modern Jewish literature as a development that begins in eastern Europe in Hebrew and Yiddish and develops to fruition in Israel and North America in Hebrew and English runs the risk of obscuring as much as it illuminates. Modern Jewish literature had a long and complex history before the 1880s, and not just among those figureheads of the Jewish Enlightenment who, starting in the late eighteenth century, inaugurated the auspicious project of reviving Hebrew as a viable literary language. In central and eastern Europe—the areas where the vast majority of European Jews lived—Jews typically used

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Hebrew for ritual, prayer, and study while speaking Yiddish as their daily vernacular. With its understanding of Torah and Talmud study as a commandment and ritual to be performed publicly, premodern Jewish culture knew no equivalent to either the notion of reading as a private act of contemplation that gained ascendancy in the Christian Middle Ages or the concept of “reading for pleasure.”¹ From the sixteenth century on, nevertheless, central and eastern European Jewish culture favored Torah and Talmud study and privileged Hebrew literacy at the same time as it developed a rich tradition of epics, romances, legends, fables, and chapbooks written in Yiddish, many of which survived well into the nineteenth century.² Indeed, in the early modern period, Yiddish literature became a fixture in the central and eastern European Jewish world, sanctioned reading material for women that was doubtlessly enjoyed by men as well, if only as a guilty pleasure acknowledged to occupy a lower cultural plane than the sacred texts men were enjoined to study.

Starting in the era of the French Revolution, large numbers of Jews across central and western Europe began to experience dramatic social, economic, and political change. Both internal Jewish reform efforts and government initiatives promoting greater integration brought about a radical restructuring of Jewish life, and Jews began to engage with, and feel part of, the non-Jewish world in ways their medieval ancestors could not have fathomed. Historians have typically described this process of integration with both the ideologically fraught term *assimilation* and the more neutral *acculturation*. During the nineteenth century, Jews experienced modernity in a variety of ways. They migrated to urban centers and took advantage of new economic opportunities, increasingly abandoning what had been traditional Jewish

1. See Daniel Boyarin, “Placing Reading: Ancient Israel and Medieval Europe,” in *The Ethnography of Reading*, ed. Jonathan Boyarin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 10–37; also see Jeffrey Veidlinger, “Reading: From Sacred Duty to Leisure Time,” in *Jewish Public Culture in the Late Russian Empire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 67–113. [Unless otherwise noted, all footnotes to texts are the editors’.]

2. Jean Baumgarten, *Introduction to Old Yiddish Literature*, ed. and trans. Jerold C. Frakes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 38–71; also Dan Miron, *A Traveler Disguised: The Rise of Modern Yiddish Fiction in the Nineteenth Century* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 1–3; and Stephen Lowenstein, “The Yiddish Written Word in Nineteenth-Century Germany,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 24 (1979): 179–92.

professions of peddling and small-scale trading. In keeping with the ethos of nineteenth-century liberalism, they often came to privilege the individual over more communal forms of social organization. As they did so, they—like others in the nineteenth century—faced the challenge of reconciling rational and scientific worldviews with traditional religious beliefs. For Yiddish-speaking Jews in regions such as Alsace in eastern France, acculturation inevitably meant adopting a new vernacular. And just as French Jews in the nineteenth century came to speak French as their mother tongue, Jews in the German-speaking world adopted German as the language of everyday life, often identifying strongly with German language, literature, and culture. In eastern Europe, the pace of social transformation was different; clearly defined nation-states with national languages often did not emerge until after World War I; and the sheer numbers of Jews enabled Yiddish to survive well into the twentieth century. An analogous dynamic is apparent in the case of Ladino, the form of Judeo-Spanish spoken by many Jews in the Ottoman empire.³ For Jews in central and western Europe, however, acculturation typically meant linguistic assimilation, and by the mid-nineteenth century Jews in these countries tended no longer to be versant in Jewish vernaculars.

As this anthology demonstrates, when it came to literature, Jews who grew up speaking French, German, or English in the nineteenth century hardly sought complete assimilation. To be sure, there were some prominent Jews who left Judaism behind, such as the celebrated Berlin salonière Rahel Levin Varnhagen or the writer Heinrich Heine, who famously described baptism as the “entry ticket to European civilization.” The most famous English “Jew” of the era—Benjamin Disraeli, writer and prime minister—was baptized as a teenager. For the vast majority of Jews during the nineteenth century, nevertheless, modernity meant not abandoning Judaism but finding new ways of connecting with and grappling with Jewish tradition, and it is here that Jewish literature came to play such a crucial role. Recent scholarship has brought to light the existence of a dynamic world of specifically Jewish forms of

3. See Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Making Jews Modern: The Yiddish and Ladino Press in the Russian and Ottoman Empires* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); and Olga Borovaya, *Modern Ladino Culture: Press, Belles Lettres, and Theater in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).

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literature in the nineteenth century—fiction by Jews, about Jews, and in some cases designed largely for Jews. This literature contains fascinating insights into the process of Jewish acculturation and provides a vital framework for understanding developments in Jewish belles lettres during the twentieth century in central and western Europe and beyond. By offering a strategic selection of texts written in French, English, and German mostly between the 1830s and 1900, this volume gives students of Jewish literature access to an understudied chapter in modern Jewish literature.

Based on what we know about both early modern Jewish culture and nineteenth-century literature, it should come as no surprise that many of the authors whose work we present in this volume were women. Traditionally, Jewish women were much closer to vernacular literary culture than Jewish men, and the popular genre of the novel that achieved such preeminence in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe was often seen in gendered terms as well, as a literary form consumed largely by women. Much of the literature presented here was first published in serialized form, in new periodicals targeting Jews, and much of it bears the markers of the other tear-jerking romances, witty social satires, sentimental melodramas, and colorful adventure tales we have inherited from the nineteenth century. Within the Jewish world of the nineteenth century, however, this literature was not seen merely as a legitimate activity for women's leisure time or as a subordinate current in Jewish life. Indeed, many of the authors whose work appears here were themselves respected rabbis and leaders of the Jewish community. The literature they wrote, like the novels by pioneering women writers such as Grace Aguilar, was typically recommended as suitable reading for men, women, and adolescents alike. In Germany, the Modern Orthodox rabbi Marcus Lehmann, who launched *Der Israelit* (1860–1938), the most significant German-Jewish orthodox newspaper of its era, regularly marketed his own collection of tales as an ideal bar mitzvah present, the perfect choice of reading material to mark Jewish boys' entry into adulthood. By the late nineteenth century, secular literature had clearly become a fixture in modern Jewish life, achieving a prominence and respectability that would have been unthinkable just a century before in a culture that had traditionally privileged men's study of sacred texts.

The texts collected in this volume were all written originally in English, French, or German, and the volume is organized according to topic and genre rather than national context in order to underscore some of the common ways in which Jewish literature grappled with the challenges of modernity. In France, England, and the German lands, the production of Jewish literature began in earnest in the 1830s and 1840s, and many of the works collected here enjoyed a particularly long shelf life. Many were translated into any number of languages and thus were consumed by a wide, international readership. The German translation of Aguilar's historical novel *The Vale of Cedars* (1850), to cite one example, went through multiple editions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Like so much German Jewish literature, Aguilar's novel was translated into Hebrew, Yiddish, and numerous other languages. Eugénie Foa's novel *La Juive* (The Jewess) appeared in a German translation in 1835 just months after its French publication. Leopold Kompert's popular German-language ghetto tales were also translated into many languages, including Czech, Dutch, English, French, Hebrew, Italian, Romanian, and Yiddish. The Jewish literature presented in this volume is important, in other words, because it was a transnational phenomenon, one that both accompanied the process of integrating the Jews into the system of nineteenth-century nation-states and also transcended national boundaries.

Of course, no selection can be comprehensive. Indeed, Jewish literature was produced in many other centers of Jewish life as well. Even before the late nineteenth century, there were Russian Jews who wrote literature in Russian.⁴ In the Ottoman empire, by the 1840s Ladino-language newspapers were already dominated by novellas and novels, many of which were creative adaptations of foreign material, particularly French and Hebrew sources.⁵ The Danish-Jewish writer Meir Aron Goldschmidt earned international recognition for his 1846 novel *En Jøde* (A Jew), which was translated into any number of European languages in the nineteenth century. In the Netherlands there were writers

4. Maxim D. Shrayer, *An Anthology of Jewish-Russian Literature: Two Centuries of Dual Identity in Prose and Poetry*, 2 vols. (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 2007).

5. See Stein, *Making Jews Modern*, 60; and Olga Borovaya, "The Role of Translation in Shaping the Ladino Novel at the Time of Westernization in the Ottoman Empire," *Jewish History* 16 (2002): 263–82.

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such as Estella Hijmans-Hertzveld (1837–81), known for her poems on biblical themes. And even before mass immigration from eastern Europe brought large numbers of Jews to America, starting in the 1880s, periodicals such as Isaac Mayer Wise's *The Israelite* (launched in 1854 and called *The American Israelite* after 1874) began to publish fiction, particularly Wise's own novels. Journals like *The Occident* (1843–69) and the *American Jewish Advocate* (1843–68) also published a great deal of literature, especially by women such as Grace Aguilar, and were read widely on both sides of the Atlantic.⁶ Particularly before the rise of Hebrew and Yiddish literature toward the end of the nineteenth century, however, it was in France, England, and the German lands where Jews had the most developed literary spheres. Our decision to limit this volume to texts produced in French, English, and German reflects the fact that for so many modernizing Jews in the nineteenth century, French, English, and German served as the dominant languages.

By means of the themes they invoke and the forms they take, the texts collected in this volume offer a window into the rich diversity of nineteenth-century Jewish literature. Jews during this period, of course, did not confine their reading to Jewish literature, and historians and literary critics alike have long since pointed out the importance that reading played in Jewish encounters with the non-Jewish world. For German Jews in particular there was a long tradition of claiming an elective affinity with European high culture. Part of what this volume aspires to do is to make it easier for students, scholars, and lay readers alike to enter the complex landscape of nineteenth-century literary culture to gain an understanding of the workings of popular Jewish literary forms. By focusing our attention on popular literature, much of which was originally published in Jewish newspapers and monthly journals, we gain a fresh perspective on the ways Jews used fiction to grapple with the challenges of the modern world. This volume seeks to open our eyes to the ways in which literature served Jews in the nineteenth century less as a path away from Judaism than as a new way to revisit and reinvent Jewish tradition and history,

6. See Diane Lichtenstein, *Writing Their Nations: The Tradition of Nineteenth-Century American Jewish Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); also Lance J. Sussman, *Isaac Leeser and the Making of American Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996).

a crucial venue for reflecting on the nature of Jewish modernity. The texts in this volume hardly represent a singular birthplace of modern Jewish literature; like any complex cultural phenomenon, Jewish literature boasts multiple birthplaces. But as we continue to think about the forms and functions of Jewish literature today, it can be instructive to dwell on the unique role that fell to literature in the nineteenth century as a site for reflecting on Jewish identities. The texts collected here should offer scholars, students, and lay readers alike an excellent place to start.

The conditions under which the texts in this volume were produced differed considerably from place to place: from Aguilar's native London, to the small town in Moravia (modern-day Czech Republic) where Sara Hirsch Guggenheim penned her novellas, to the cosmopolitan world of Paris to which Alexandre Créange (Ben Baruch) emigrated from the French province of Lorraine. Moreover, the pace and form of modernization with which writers engaged differed across national contexts. In France, Jews gained equal rights in 1790 and 1791, during the revolution. Napoleon spread emancipation to the lands he conquered, but whereas most German states withdrew citizenship from the Jews after Napoleon's defeat in 1815, French Jews never lost their civil rights. Indeed, in 1831, the French state assumed financial responsibility for Jewish religious expenses, as it already had for the Catholic and Protestant churches. In England, Jews were free to organize worship as they wished, but were restricted from some professions and ineligible for election to Parliament until the mid-nineteenth century. Jews in the German lands, meanwhile, saw their political status improve more gradually, in fits and starts over the course of the nineteenth century. Within Jewish communities change was also registered differently. The impact of the German reform movement was felt much more lightly in both France and Britain. Among Jews in France and Britain, conversion to Christianity was negligible as a social phenomenon. In the German lands, baptism could promise greater social advantages, and conversion rates were slightly higher, although Jews there never converted in large numbers in the nineteenth century.

These various circumstances naturally produced different contexts for the production and consumption of print culture among European

Jews. While the earliest works of French-Jewish fiction were produced in the 1830s and 1840s by the first generation of Jews to be born as French citizens, German-Jewish literature emerged against the background of an ongoing public debate about the question of Jewish emancipation. Attracted by the ideology of *Bildung*, German Jews used literary culture as a means of balancing their multiple identities and allegiances, and to sustain a sense of their successful integration into the bourgeoisie.⁷ In France, Jewish writers used fiction to reconcile Jewish tradition with the legacy of the French Revolution.⁸ In England, Jewish literature emulated bourgeois cultural values. Writers sought to combat the perceived threat of conversion, to provide cultural uplift to the poorer classes, and to inspire sympathy and understanding in gentile readers; later in the century they came to articulate the complexities of social mobility.⁹ In order to clarify the specific circumstances in which the stories in this volume were published, each is prefaced by an introduction that helps situate the text and its author locally and nationally, in terms of both literary and social history.

What is immediately apparent, however, is that the different motives and concerns that generated Jewish literature in different national contexts frequently overlapped. All the writers included here, in fact, grapple with global issues of Jewish modernization, and they often do so in strikingly similar ways. Nowhere is this more apparent than on the level of language choice. The very act of writing fiction in German, French, or English represented a major sign of acculturation. Most of the authors in this collection were writing in their native language when they wrote in German, French, or English, even if they also spoke Yiddish and used Hebrew as a liturgical language. In some instances, they belonged to the first generation of their families to speak a non-Jewish language as their daily vernacular. Writing fiction in these languages not only implied linguistic proficiency; it indicated a deep

7. Jonathan M. Hess, *Middlebrow Literature and the Making of German-Jewish Identity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).

8. Maurice Samuels, *Inventing the Israelite: Jewish Literature in Nineteenth-Century France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).

9. Bryan Cheyette, "From Apology to Revolt: Benjamin Farjeon, Amy Levy and the Post-Emancipation Anglo-Jewish Novel, 1880–1900," *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 24 (1982–86): 253–65.

familiarity with the national literary traditions to which the authors were contributing.

These authors did not simply write “Jewish” literature in German, French, or English. They produced literature that reflected the literary codes and styles of these majority cultures. The French writer Ben-Lévi, for example, displayed a confident knowledge of the French literary tradition and explicitly borrowed plot structures from his fashionable contemporary, the realist writer Honoré de Balzac. Even his orthodox counterpart, Ben Baruch, would cite the seventeenth-century French Catholic theologian Jean-Baptiste Massillon in order to make his case for a return to the Jewish religious tradition. In the Austrian empire, the Bohemian-Jewish writer Kompert did not just produce tales from the ghetto; he drew on the work of a whole host of gentile contemporaries interested in crafting new forms of German national literature with regional content. Guggenheim, writing for a modern orthodox readership in the German-speaking world, was no less entrenched in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature than her Jewish and non-Jewish peers; those familiar with Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s bourgeois tragedies will find numerous echoes of dramas like *Miss Sara Sampson* or *Emilia Galotti* in Guggenheim’s “Aurelie Werner.” And Aguilar in England, like David Schornstein in France and Ludwig Philippson in Germany, composed historical fiction that owed much to Sir Walter Scott, whose historical novels caught Europe by storm in the early nineteenth century.

The texts collected here thus illustrate just how well a certain segment of European Jewry had adopted European culture as its own in the nineteenth century. Yet these texts do not merely epitomize the modernization process; they also thematize it. Like their real-life counterparts, the Jewish characters in these texts are on the move, migrating from rural villages to urban centers. Daniel Peyser in Israel Zangwill’s “Transitional” moves from Germany to Portsmouth to London, while his counterpart Solomon Cohen in “Anglicization” migrates from Russian Poland to London via the provincial English town of “Sudminster.” When David Blum in Ben-Lévi’s “The March 17th Decree” returns from the Napoleonic Wars, he finds his Alsatian village so transformed by industrialization as to be unrecognizable, so he makes his way to Paris. The great tragedy of a tale like Kompert’s “The Peddler” is that its protagonist finds himself painfully caught between two worlds, torn

between the lures of bourgeois life in Vienna and the family ties to traditional Jewish life in his native Bohemia. Some of the characters in these texts engage in traditionally Jewish forms of economic activity, such as peddling and small-scale money lending, or devote themselves to traditional religious pursuits (rabbi, cantor, scribe). Others, however, take up more modern occupations, becoming lawyers, writers, soldiers, bankers, or department store owners.

Even as they illustrate the social and demographic changes that were transforming the Jewish communities of central and western Europe, these writers explore the controversies such changes ignited. Many of these texts show how a family's rapid assimilation produces generational conflict. The father in "Anglicization" cannot countenance his son's decision to join the British army and risk his life in the Boer War. The parents of the Yeshiva students in Weill's "Braendel" fear that their children will convert to Catholicism. Other stories describe the struggle over religious reform that divided the German-Jewish community in this period. While France and England largely avoided the kind of religious schism that took place in Germany, they also experienced pressures from the reform movement as well as a rising tide of religious indifference. In these texts, we discover how nineteenth-century Jews experienced these controversies as well as the various strategies they proposed for dealing with them.

The question of intermarriage recurs frequently. Many of the characters, particularly the female characters, find themselves caught between conflicting duties, between parents who want them to marry a Jew and a desire to assert their independence through romantic self-determination. Though increased interaction between Jews and gentiles in the nineteenth century certainly made intermarriage an issue of genuine concern, the recurrence of the theme suggests that it also provided a symbolic means of exploring a more general struggle between the desire for individual freedom and the pull of religious and cultural tradition. Significantly, the authors included in this collection do not all fall on the same side of the debate. While Guggenheim and Samuel Gordon depict the negative consequences that intermarriage entails for the Jewish spouse, Foa proves much more amenable to the proposition of marrying a non-Jew, even if she stops short of depicting an actual interfaith union. For some of the women authors collected here, rebelling against

Jewish law was bound up with a larger feminist challenge to a tradition seen as patriarchal and repressive.¹⁰

These texts provide interesting insights into the ways that nineteenth-century Jews defined Jewishness at a time when increasing numbers were leaving traditional Jewish religious practice behind. While the pseudo-scientific racial theorizing we associate with the Nazi era did not really appear until the late nineteenth century, some Jews in the early to mid-nineteenth century were already beginning to employ what appears to be a biological or racial definition of Jewishness to express a notion of difference that was not purely religious. Jewish writers in Germany, France, and Britain often borrowed representational conventions from non-Jewish writers (such as Walter Scott) and painters (such as Eugène Delacroix) to endow their Jewish characters with a distinct physiognomy. The narrator of Foa's story "Rachel," for example, guesses at the Jewish identity of the eponymous heroine because of her long, curly black hair and pale, oval face. Similarly, the narrator in Sara Guggenheim's "Aurelie Werner" introduces this novella's Jewish protagonist by stressing her dark black hair and rich locks, which are cause for notice in the case of a woman who is otherwise a perfect example of classical beauty.

When Jewish writers in the mid-nineteenth century employed stock physical tropes to describe their Jewish characters it was often to express a sense of Jewish solidarity and to argue for Jewish political equality. As Lisa Moses Leff explains, Jewish writers in 1830s and 1840s France, particularly those associated with the Saint-Simonian movement, argued that Jews constituted one of several races found in France, each with its own distinctive physical and moral qualities, and hence deserved inclusion in the national body along with the Gauls and the Franks.¹¹ In Britain, at a time in which most Jews were striving to define themselves as a purely religious minority, the novelist and statesman Benjamin Disraeli used the rhetoric of race as a marker of positive Jewish traits and argued that Jews should be especially welcomed into the nation because of their noble lineage. By the late nineteenth century, in contrast, some Jewish writers re-

10. On Germany, see also Marion A. Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class: Women, Family, and Identity in Imperial Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

11. Lisa Moses Leff, *Sacred Bonds of Solidarity: The Rise of Jewish Internationalism in Nineteenth-Century France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 98–99.

sorted to racial descriptions to underline their critique of contemporary Jewish urban life. In Amy Levy's fiction, for example, awkward Jewish bodies inhabit a world of social unease and crass materialism.¹²

While many of these texts are set in an identifiably modern present, others take place either in a remote historical period or in a rural space that seems almost outside of history altogether. And yet even these unmodern settings offer important insights into the process of Jewish modernization. While the Jewish tradition had always venerated its history, returning through ritualized forms of remembrance to events such as the exodus from Egypt, only in the nineteenth century did Jews begin to show an interest in their recent, diasporic past.¹³ The sudden outpouring of historical fiction in the nineteenth century was part of a larger undertaking by the historians associated with the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement in Germany to write the modern history of the Jewish people. These Jewish historians sought out a useable past, one that would help solidify a sense of communal affiliation in the present, at a time when traditional forms of communal identification were waning. The great advantage of fiction in this context was the tremendous liberty it enjoyed in imagining the past, whether this was the noble legacy of Spanish Jewry before the tragedy of the Inquisition or the world of traditional Jewish village life that was quickly receding from view in the nineteenth century. Very much like Moritz Daniel Oppenheim's mass-produced prints of traditional Jewish family life that circulated widely in nineteenth-century Europe and North America, Jewish literature also manufactured a Jewish past that helped serve present-day interests. In this context, literature took on new roles as an agent and medium of historical memory.

These texts tell us about the politics of Jewish modernity, but their messages are different and not always transparent. Crucial here is the way that plot and narrative commentary are either aligned or brought into counterpoint. Many of the writers collected here, for example, use

12. See Nadia Valman, "The Shadow of the Harem: *Fin-de-siècle* Racial Romance," in *The Jewess in Nineteenth-Century British Literary Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 173–205.

13. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), 86.

stories of the particularity of Jewish life as an opportunity, paradoxically, to affirm their patriotism as citizens of their respective nation-states. Thus Schornstein follows his model Aguilar in ending his tale of escape from the persecutions of the Spanish Inquisition with a paean to France, the land of “justice” that has granted asylum to the crypto-Jewish refugees. In “The Stolen Son,” even more dramatically, Salomon Formstecher attributes the resolution of the plot and the restoration of order to a single individual, the brave Prussian consul, the “representative of the court of tolerance and intelligence” amid czarist barbarism and corruption. (The Damascus blood libel of 1840, which Formstecher’s plot recalls, was in fact refuted through the intervention of an international consortium of Western notables.) But plot and narrative commentary are not always so neatly aligned. Ben-Levi’s searing chronicle of the cruelties endured by one Jewish family following the Napoleonic decree of 1808, for example, ends with an extraordinary and unexpected affirmation by the suffering survivor of republican patriotism, whose values, in his view, endure despite this momentary flaw. In contrast, Zangwill’s “Anglicization” ends on a note of despairing cynicism, with the Anglo-Jewish hero mourning his patriotism as an unrequited love affair. These last two examples suggest a relationship between Jews and state authority that is contradictory, unmutual, even mysterious.

These works of fiction thus shed light on many of the ideological and historical divisions that characterized the transition to modernity for Jews in central and western Europe. In doing so, they also tell us something about how nineteenth-century Jews used popular literature as a means of shoring up identities that modernity had made newly problematic. Seen together, they helped create forms of Jewish culture that were both national and transnational, a distinctly Jewish literary sphere that allowed modernizing Jews to debate the meaning of their Jewishness but in so doing bound them all the more closely to it.

With their various insights into the modernization of central and western European Jews in the nineteenth century, these texts are clearly of great historical value. But what do they offer students of literature? And what do they offer general readers? In other words, how good are they? In many ways, these writings fit squarely within the dominant generic conventions of the time—the sentimental romance, the histori-

cal novel, the adventure tale, the study of manners, and so on. By and large, they do not seek to innovate on an aesthetic level but rather affirm their adherence to the conventions of the genre in question. This makes them often predictable and occasionally trite. And yet, when we read these texts within their generic horizon—which is to say, with and against the other forms of genre fiction they resemble—we begin to appreciate the often quite witty or subtle ways in which they vary conventional structures. We also begin to appreciate the radical nature of their appropriation of the literary forms of the dominant culture for specifically Jewish ends.

These are not great writers in the way that Proust or Kafka or Bellow or Roth are great writers. For the most part, they are not very linguistically inventive. Their use of German, French, or English is with some exceptions quite standard. Aside from the occasional interjection of a Yiddish or Hebrew word or phrase, they generally write just as most of their non-Jewish contemporaries did—in a language that may strike twenty-first century readers as quaint or outdated. (The translations of French and German texts presented here strive to preserve the feeling of the original through the use of a nineteenth-century vocabulary, syntax, and cadence.) Indeed, one often has the feeling that these writers are performing their sense of belonging to the linguistic community in question through the very conventionality of their language.

Beneath these surface similarities, however, lies a highly innovative project of adapting European literary forms to fit new Jewish needs. These texts have important lessons to teach us about German, French, and English literature precisely because of their knowing, responsive, and imaginative use of elements of contemporary style and genre. This volume is structured, accordingly, to foreground the creative ways in which Jewish writers recast contemporary fashions in literature to address issues of specific interest to a rapidly changing Jewish community. Despite significantly varying local contexts, a number of key themes and forms preoccupied Jewish writers across England, France, and the German-speaking world. Each of the four sections of this volume focuses thus on a different mode of Jewish literary engagement with contemporary European literature.

The first two sections bring together Jewish versions of two extremely popular fictional genres of the period: the village tale and the

historical novel. In different ways, both are the literary stepchildren of Sir Walter Scott, the dominant influence on fictional attempts to grapple with the upheavals of modernity in the nineteenth century. Scott's novels, set in the British past but widely read throughout Europe, depicted the difficult struggle toward national unity through the reconciliation of ethnic or religious differences. In continental Europe, however, these texts tended to be read for their detailed representations of local or regional folklore, custom, and dialect facing the threat of state-imposed modernity—and it was in these terms that Scott's influence was most strongly felt.¹⁴

The genre of the village tale, which was later to be used to such famous effect by George Sand and George Eliot, was in fact pioneered in German by the Jewish writers Berthold Auerbach and Alexandre Weill in the 1840s. Auerbach and Weill did not focus exclusively on Jewish life, however, but on the tolerant environment of the villages of the Black Forest and Alsace respectively, where Christians and Jews lived and worked together amicably, both equally resisting the encroachment of metropolitan regulations and attitudes. While subsequent writers in this genre were more explicitly antimodern, Jewish writers in the village story and “ghetto story” tradition, observes Josephine Donovan, “notably Auerbach, Weill, Kompert, and Franzos . . . evinced a desire to preserve local ethnic particularity while embracing the emancipatory ideals of modernity.”¹⁵ Several of the texts in our selection embody the particularly Jewish adaptation of the village tale that became known already in the 1850s as the ghetto tale. These texts encompass precisely such contradictory impulses, including themes like the appeal of secular education in “Braendel” and “Daughters of Shem,” the small-mindedness of village gossip in “The Tithe,” and the complex representation of “The Peddler” who is both narrow in his theology and boldly generous in his dealings with his gentile peasant clients. Formally, the narratives shift between recording the detail of Jewish familial and communal life and imaginatively evoking the ghetto as an otherworldly, fantastical place. While Kompert's educated protagonist observes his traditional

14. Josephine Donovan, *European Local-Color Literature: National Tales, Dorfgeschichten, Romans Champêtres* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 97–137.

15. *Ibid.*, 104.

family with ethnographic detachment, other stories move their readers through more mystical plot devices (such as the miraculous lottery win that restores social harmony in “The Tithe” or Braendel’s self-identification as biblical prophetess).

Ghetto nostalgia would go on to become a major theme in modern Jewish literature, and it served a complex function for Jews in the throes of acculturation. It is not a coincidence that Sholem Aleichem’s stories about life in the eastern European shtetl, which were adapted as the 1964 Broadway musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, would have such an appeal for American audiences in the middle of the twentieth century, at just the moment that the children of eastern European immigrants had finally begun to feel fully American. These sanitized and idealized visions of the Jewish past helped assimilating Jews to mourn for a lost world as well as to ensure that that world was safely dead and buried. The Jewish writers in France, Germany, and the Austrian empire who pioneered this modern form of Jewish nostalgia—such as Kompert, Weill, and Schornstein—faced the same paradoxical longing for a past they hoped to leave behind but did so several generations before their eastern European and American counterparts.¹⁶

While the invention of the ghetto created a Jewish space seemingly outside of time, the stories in the second section of this book seek to place Jews at the center of historical change. In these tales, crypto-Jews escape the oppressions of an archaic regime—Inquisition Spain—for modern liberal states or modernizing projects. Grace Aguilar, the English progenitor of Sephardic historical fiction, drew from late eighteenth-century Gothic fiction the titillating tropes of the persecuted heroine, jealous suitor, torture dungeon, and corrupt clergy, and her Jewish versions of the genre were well placed to appeal to popular anti-Catholicism as well as Jewish readers in early Victorian England.¹⁷ In writing historical novels, Aguilar, Philippson, and Schornstein drew heavily on popular forms of sentimental melodrama typical of the his-

16. On the phenomenon of “ghetto nostalgia,” see Richard I. Cohen, “Nostalgia and ‘Return to the Ghetto’: A Cultural Phenomenon in Western and Central Europe,” in *Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Jonathan Frankel and Steven J. Zipperstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 147–50.

17. Nadia Valman, “Women of Israel: Femininity, Politics and Anglo-Jewish Fiction,” in *The Jewess in Nineteenth-Century British Literary Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 85–129.

torical romance. But they were also participating in one of the key forms of philosophical fiction of their age. Inspired, like the village tale, by the example of Walter Scott, the historical novel resonated with the impulse in Romantic nationalism to look to the past to provide narratives of struggle, triumph, or martyrdom that could authorize newly emerging identities. In Scott's novels, as Murray Pittock argues, "writers across Europe could find analogues for the historic struggles of their own societies, and . . . develop a fictional articulation of the anteriority of the national self for the first time in their history."¹⁸

For Jews too, this genre represented a popular, accessible form of the new historical consciousness that proposed Jewish history, rather than revelation, as the basis for modern Jewish identity. Jews creatively adapted the forms of historical fiction—a genre often linked to nineteenth-century projects of nation-building—to the needs of a minority within the nation-state and beyond it. Indeed, in each of these stories, Jewish destiny following the flight from Spain entails not just finding a new home but embracing a world-historical mission—whether as emissaries of tolerance, in the case of Aguilar and Schornstein, or, much more strikingly in the case of Philippson, as agents of religious, economic, and military progress both among and beyond Jewish communities. Just as importantly, Scott's pan-European bestseller *Ivanhoe* (1819) had helped establish a set of conventions for depicting Jews—and especially for depicting Jewish women—that we find repeated in many of the texts collected here. But these Jewish writers also responded to Scott by reversing some of his key assumptions about the place of Jews within the modern European nation-state. Whereas Scott's novel has its Jewish characters leave England for Muslim Spain, where in the twelfth century Jews still enjoyed greater freedom, all of the literary texts here show Jews escaping from Spain to find new adoptive homelands. If Scott's historical novel attempted to forge a sense of national identity through the exclusion of the Jew, the Jewish writers who imitated him argued that Jews belonged in their European homelands.¹⁹

18. Murray Pittock, "Scott and the European Nationalities Question," introduction to *The Reception of Sir Walter Scott in Europe*, ed. Murray Pittock (London: Continuum: 2006), 6.

19. On Scott's female Jewish imitators in England, see Michael Galchinsky, *The Origin of the Modern Jewish Woman Writer: Romance and Reform in Victorian England* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996).

The usable past that Jewish historical fiction created by focusing on the Jewish experience in Spain was also a traumatic past. With their fixation on the bloody period of the Spanish Inquisition and on the horrible suffering it inflicted on Jews for being Jews, Jewish writers of historical fiction adapted dominant tropes in contemporary European literature and used them to underscore Jewish suffering. In doing so, they created a type of Jewish fiction that is in many ways still with us, a literature that channels past trauma into justification for modern affiliation—a role played by much Holocaust fiction today.

The third section, “Experiments in Jewish Realism,” showcases the variety of fictional forms deployed by nineteenth-century Jewish writers. Formstecher’s “The Stolen Son” recasts recent events in European Jewish history, the Mortara kidnapping case of 1858 and the Damascus blood libel of 1840, within the plot structure of a Dickensian melodrama, involving concealed identities, coincidence, and dramatic reversals of fortune. In “Anglicization,” Zangwill likewise adapts the form of social satire used by Charles Dickens and Anthony Trollope to reflect on the social ambition of Anglo-Jews and the confusions of identity it produces. But Jewish subjects also push some of these writers to the limits of narrative form. In 1886 the Anglo-Jewish writer Amy Levy claimed that the Jew was an unduly neglected but especially interesting subject for the novel because of “his surprising virtues and no less surprising vices; leading his eager, intricate life; living, moving, and having his being both within and without the tribal limits.”²⁰ The complex double consciousness of the Jew that Levy identifies here is evident in the fiction collected in this volume. Kompert’s “The Peddler,” for example, is structured through a dual narrative, in which the third-person narration recounting Emanuel’s observations of the ghetto household to which he returns incognito is repeatedly intercut with an epistolary narrative where he documents his inner turmoil. By contrast, Foa’s and Levy’s stories, with their unreliable narrators, suggest the enigmatic and ultimately unknowable nature of the unhappy Jewish protagonists.

The texts in the final section, “Fictions of Religious Renewal,” indicate that, alongside their new explorations of Jewish pasts and places, nineteenth-century Jewish writers continued to foreground questions of

20. Amy Levy, “The Jew in Fiction,” *Jewish Chronicle*, 4 June 1886, 13.

religion. Religious controversy remained a vibrant resource for literary fiction, whether in the form of Ben Baruch's parable, Ben-Lévi's philosophical dialogue, or Guggenheim's and Zangwill's sentimental romances. These stories engage directly with the spiritual challenges facing Jews across Europe in the nineteenth century from both inside and outside Jewish communities: how or whether to reconcile religion and rationality, Christianity and Judaism, individual desire and kinship loyalty. In using literature as a forum for theological debate, these writers gave ordinary readers access to the arguments articulated more abstractly by religious leaders and pamphleteers. In turn these texts, read together, give us a sense of European Judaism in the nineteenth century, not as moribund, but as a continually evolving, living tradition in which literature was beginning to take on roles that would have been inconceivable a century earlier.

The texts collected in this volume all attest to the vibrant and seminal nature of the Jewish literature that was produced by nineteenth-century Jews writing in English, French, and German. In its intense and dynamic engagement with general European culture, this literature opens our eyes to the complexity of an understudied chapter in modern Jewish literature. It arguably also constitutes an early example of minority or ethnic fiction in the European tradition, analogous to the Scottish and Irish "national tale" genre of the early nineteenth century that was widely read beyond the British Isles. Writing in major European languages but from the perspective of a minority group, these writers show how dominant languages and cultural registers could be used to express the needs, desires, and longings of the marginalized. Moreover, the themes that we find repeated in this nineteenth-century Jewish literature—the conflict between generations, the struggle of women against patriarchal tradition, the attractions and dangers of assimilation—clearly foreshadow many of the concerns of postcolonial or immigrant writers from a wide variety of cultural traditions today. While we are not arguing that these Jewish writers offer an example to follow, or that the solutions they propose to the problems facing minority groups are still valid, they do represent an important historical precedent for minority writers seeking to express themselves within a dominant, hegemonic literary tradition.

What did reading Jewish literature mean for Jews in the nineteenth century? Like so much of the literature we have inherited from the

period, many of the texts collected here reflect on this issue explicitly. The young impressionable minds of Weill's Joël and Gordon's Zillah are opened up to possibilities outside their traditional Jewish worlds by their secular reading, generating a fear that was often expressed in eastern European Jewish literature as well.²¹ Foa's tragic heroine Rachel, forced to fend for herself after her husband abandons her, is, as if in self-punishment, gradually killing herself through writing.

Perhaps the most haunting story of reading, however, is that recounted in Kompert's "The Peddler." As an inset narrative, offered by Channe, the mother, as a reward for her young son's diligent Talmud study, the story holds an ambiguous aura of pleasure and threat, and it is tantalizingly withheld from the reader until the very end of the text. In the event, however, it is related by the narrator himself, Emanuel, who uses it to reveal his own identity as the prodigal son, a new incarnation of the boy in the story. In the story, a boy who loves reading is led away to a distant city and to conversion to Christianity by the lure of finding the ending to a book (presumably a New Testament) that he has been given. As a result, his mother dies, but at the moment of her death he sees a vision of her, in which she demands: "Do you think that if you had stayed with me you wouldn't have found out the end of that book? Stand up and repent!"

With its combination of reason and high emotion, this parable holds within its cryptic form the same paradoxes that produce the moving dramas in this volume. It powerfully suggests the danger, seduction, and pain associated with reading and the new horizons to which it leads. And yet, in her chastisement of her apostate son, the ghostly mother does not advocate the prohibition of reading. On the contrary; what she challenges is his assumption that Judaism is inadequate—in capable of providing spiritual closure. Her words also recall him to his youthful days spent illicitly reading fragments from the community *genizah* (the repository for sacred texts that have been damaged but cannot be destroyed). However partial the text, the boy's brilliance always enabled him to reconstruct the whole narrative. The mother's

21. See, for example, Iris Parush, *Reading Jewish Women: Marginality and Modernization in Nineteenth-Century Eastern European Jewish Society* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2004), esp. chap. 7, "'A Hebrew Maiden, Yet Acting Alien': Women Who Read European Languages," pp. 207–26.

words thus call him back to Judaism and to her, but crucially they also remind him of the powers of his own analytic mind, which can figure out endings for himself without needing to be given them. The texts collected in this volume offered acculturating nineteenth-century Jews the chance to experience the thrill of fiction—the encounter of other minds, the exploration of other destinies, the experience of other worlds—but without leaving Jewish culture behind. Like a *genizah*, these texts emerge from the archive of the nineteenth century to provide modern readers with the equal thrill of reconstructing a crucial moment in the Jewish past.