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Battling for Self-Definition in Soviet Literature: Boris Eikhenbaum's Jewish Question

BRIAN HOROWITZ

(TULANE UNIVERSITY, NEW ORLEANS, USA)

In the late 1920s, Boris Eikhenbaum began to identify himself as a Jew; not by religion certainly, but as a member of a different ethnos than Russians. Despite his foreign-sounding name, until that point there had been few clues that Eikhenbaum had a Jewish background. He made this declaration in "Moi vremennik" (1929), the part autobiography, part notebook, and part chronicle of his life and times. Although his identification as a Jew was short-lived, still it is surprising. Eikhenbaum was already one of Russia's leading literary scholars, a central figure with Viktor Shklovsky, Roman Jakobson, and Yury Tynianov of the Formalist movement at a time when Formalism was coming under intense criticism from the Soviet literary establishment. Moreover, rather than emphasize one's ethnic difference, the wise thing would have been to try to underscore one's class identification and proletariat background. Instead, Eikhenbaum invoked the memory of his Jewish grandfather, a Hebrew poet in the mid-1800s, and underscored his difference with native Russians. The goal, the author argues, was part of Eikhenbaum's battle with the Soviet literary establishment that was becoming increasingly intolerant of diversity of voices. Eikhenbaum tried to show that he had just as much right to membership in Russian literature as the Proletarian writers, just as his grandfather was part of the literature of Russia, although he wrote primarily in Hebrew.

Keywords: Boris Eikhenbaum, Jewish identity, Jews and formalism in Soviet Russia, Ya'akov Eichenbaum, the Haskalah, literary culture in early Soviet Union.

In the late 1920s, Boris Eikhenbaum began to identify himself as a Jew; not by religion certainly, but as a member of a different ethnos than Russians. Despite his foreign-sounding name, until that point there had been few clues that Eikhenbaum had a Jewish background. He made this declaration in *Moi vremennik* (1929), the part autobiography, part notebook, and part chronicle of his life and times. Although his identification as a Jew was short-lived, still it is surprising. Eikhenbaum was already one of Russia's leading literary scholars, a central figure with Viktor Shklovsky, Roman Jakobson, and Yury Tynianov of the Formalist movement at a time when Formalism was coming under intense criticism from the Soviet literary establishment. Moreover, rather than emphasize one's ethnic difference, the wise thing would have been to try to underscore one's class identification and proletariat background. Was a discussion about the contributions of his Jewish grandfather and sense of his own "otherness" really necessary?

A study of Eikhenbaum's announcement of his Jewish background in the context of Soviet culture leads one to speculative conclusions. Eikhenbaum seems to have employed

his announcement as part of his literary battle with the Soviet literary establishment and he apparently had personal reasons too. However, the subject itself is fascinating: one of Russia's leading literary scholars expressing Jewish roots in a raucous and transformative time in Soviet life. What does this tell us about the idea of Jewry, the Jewish past and future in Soviet times?

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Most people probably think that the Jewish question among the Formalists would perhaps be formulated best by not being formulated at all. Although Eikhenbaum, Tynianov, Shklovsky, and Jakobson each had at least one parent of Jewish origin, it is a fact that the members of ОПОИaZ did not view their Jewish backgrounds as significant or in need of an explanation. Moreover, the culture in which they operated did not seem to draw attention to it either; at least not until the ad hominem attacks of the late 1920s and the 1930s. However, that people of Jewish background would be accepted in Russian culture as equals should by no means be taken for granted. Jewish integration in Russian life had been restricted in tsarist times and certain challenges still existed in the early Soviet period. By joining Russian culture as full members without drama, suffering, and anxiety about the Jewish question, the Formalists represented a huge advancement, although, as we all know, new forms of discrimination arose. In the new Bolshevik state, a label such as bourgeois, not sufficiently Marxist, or a rootless cosmopolitan could be lethal.

To be sure, full integration came at the cost of membership in the Jewish collective. But the members of ОПОИaZ had long before broken with the Jewish world and decided to link their fate to Russian society. In seemingly every case it was the generation preceding that had made the tumultuous break with Jewish life. In the early Soviet period, Formalism, with its emphasis on devoting one's life to the understanding of literature, or rather "literariness," represented by default a striving toward assimilation. In fact, Formalism should be viewed in its historical context as part of a general social trend toward the total integration of Jews in all arenas of cosmopolitan European and Russian culture. This history of Jewish assimilation in the Soviet Union has found an eloquent historian in Yury Slezkine, the author of *The Jewish Century*, who recounts the experience of the elite, although by no means the majority of Soviet Jews (Slezkine, 2006).

In terms of Eikhenbaum's assimilation it is interesting to compare him to his father, Mikhail and his teacher, Semyon Vengerov. His father traveled the difficult road from a distinctly Jewish life to a Russian life, studying medicine at Moscow University and, converting to Russian Orthodoxy, married Nadezhda Dormidontovna Glotova, the daughter of a Russian admiral. Vengerov similarly left a distinct Jewish world behind in his path to become a scholar of Russian literature. In fact, Vengerov apparently converted to Russian Orthodoxy to get closer to the Russian spirit and gain the authority he needed to become the leader of Russian literary studies in late-tsarist times. In contrast to Eikhenbaum who was never actually Jewish in the sense of religion, Vengerov's conversion deeply wounded his mother, Pauline Vengeroff, the author of memoirs that detail her tragic pain (Wengeroff, 2010)ⁱ.

Obviously, the success of the Formalist critics rested upon the formation of a social and intellectual environment in which neutrality reigned with regard to the religious and ethnic identity of the writer or criticⁱⁱ. In particular, the story of the Soviet government's attitude toward nationalities generally and to Jews in particular is complicatedⁱⁱⁱ. The repression of Jewish religious life and the promotion by the Evseksia of a secular and Communist Yiddish culture and education accompanied by the (at times forced) use of Yiddish, reflects the con-

tradictory processes of official government support for Yiddish and the repression of Jewish religious and national cultural life independent of Bolshevik control (Shneer, 2004).

In the countryside Jews were often still objects of opprobrium, but in St. Petersburg (where Eikhenbaum lived) and other capital cities Jewish had positive connotations in the 1920s. According to Ilya Brauder, a famous lawyer from St. Petersburg, “It was prestigious being Jewish then”^{iv}. In his book on Stalin and the Jews, Arkady Vaksberg warns not to confuse the treatment of Jews in the late 1930s with the earlier time. “And yet we would not be mistaken in calling the period of the twenties and the first half of the thirties one of state protection for Russian Jewry” (Vaksberg, 1994: 59–60).

Recent scholarship on the Jew in Soviet times confirms the idea that Jew often had positive connotations (Shneer, 2004; Idish ... , 2009). Overshadowing traditional portrayals of the shtetl Luftmensch, new images were born in Soviet Russia, including the muscular Jew, Commissar, and technician (Slezkine, 2006: 105–203). Many Jews joined the Soviet bureaucracy and found the state provided opportunities for “upward mobility” (Bemporad, 2013: 34). In fact, many thousands of Jews moved from the small towns and villages to the large urban centers of Minsk, Kiev, Odessa, Leningrad and Moscow. For some, the ability to find work even in tough conditions saved them from starvation in their previous homes. Some of these images had appeared in nineteenth-century literary fiction, but others were new additions (Veidlinger, 2000: 155–159)^{vi}.

Despite his Russifying at tremendous speed, speaking Russian and becoming more involved in Soviet-Russian culture, nonetheless Jews were not supposed to draw attention to themselves as Jews. One danger was that the term, “Jew,” was too multivalent; a person risked that he might be misunderstood. It could mean enemy in the case of the Jewish religion or national movement. In ethnic terms it was also redolent of separation, a distinct caste, secret relationships that were hidden to the wider public. When the assertion was too forceful, it was likely to signal a conflict with Soviet ideological hegemony^{vii}.

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The image of the Jew in Eikhenbaum’s writings first appears in 1924, when Formalism was being loudly and repeatedly derided by its powerful Marxist opponents in the literary press. Eikhenbaum raised the stakes by making a strategic decision to publish an article on Formalist theory on enemy turf in the Marxist journal, *Press and Revolution* (Eikhenbaum, 1924b, see also Eisen, 1996: 78). By publishing in a highly visible Marxist publication, he was deliberately calling attention to himself and embracing the role of standard-bearer for Formalism, an approach to literature — the Russian holy of holies — that the regime regarded as intolerable. In the midst of this shouting match in the pages of the press, Eikhenbaum published a book review in *Russkii sovremennik* discussing his Jewish grandfather in admiring terms (Eikhenbaum, 1924a: 268). The impetus for that act was apparently a chance sighting in a bookstore window of a new book entitled *An Ancient Poem about a Chess Game*, purportedly by an unknown Russian author, discovered in manuscript form from the first half of the nineteenth century and now published for the first time (Any, 1994: 8–9). Eikhenbaum easily recognized the poem as a Russian translation from the Hebrew original translated by Osip Rabinovich^{viii}. Eikhenbaum wrote his review to set the record straight, drawing attention to the Hebrew original and that the poem’s “author was my grandfather, [Ya’akov] M. Eichenbaum (1796–1861), a mathematician, chess player and poet” (Eikhenbaum, 1924a: 268). In 1929, Boris Eikhenbaum published a highly personalized one-man literary magazine, *Moi vremennik*, devoting a significant part of it to an autobiographical sketch in which he highlights his Jewish grandfather^{ix}. He even reproduces

a long segment of his grandfather's poem, whose title, *Ha-krav* (The Battle), about a chess game, serves as a leitmotif for the entire work.

The basic details of Ya'akov Eichenbaum's biography can be found in encyclopedias and histories of the *Haskalah* (G. K., 1972; Raisin, 1913: 318, 321; see also Baron Tarnegol', 1860: 823). He was born in 1796, in the town of Kristianpol in Ukraine, The sources agree that Ya'akov was a child prodigy proficient in Hebrew and Talmud while still in childhood. Married at age 11, he divorced when his father-in-law "suspected him of secular leanings"^x. By this time he was already reading secular books. He married again in 1815 and moved to Zamość (Zamoshch), where he "developed an interest in mathematics and translated Euclid from German into Hebrew" (G. K., 1972: 516–517). In 1818, when Tsar Alexander I offered all Jews to change their surnames, Ya'akov switched from Gelber to Eichenbaum apparently to rid himself of an unpleasant-sounding name (such, at least, is the reason biographer James Curtis gives (Curtis, 2004: 291).

As his biographer in the Russian-language *Jewish Encyclopedia* of 1913 explains, "Unfavorable conditions of a transitional epoch did not give Eichenbaum opportunities for the normal development of his unique gifts" (Tsinberg, 1913: 186). In 1819, he translated Euclid's *Elements* into Hebrew, but could not find enough money to publish it (Zinberg, 1978: 105). Similarly, he translated Franker's Course in Mathematics, but it too was not published. Eichenbaum published another long poem, "Ha-Kossem," in 1860, which was published in the Hebrew newspaper, *Ha-Meliz*. He ultimately became well known in Europe thanks to his debate with Samuel David Luzzato regarding Abraham Ibn-Ezra and also for his dispute with Franker on a math problem in which Eichenbaum [Eikhenbaum's grandfather's name had a different spelling than Boris'] was pronounced the winner (Tsinberg, 1913: 187). Eichenbaum authored *Hokbmat ba-Shi'urim (Science of Measurements)* "an adaptation of a French arithmetic book in 1857" (G. K., 1972: 516–517). Although he had originally worked as a private tutor, traveling from place to place, he finally settled in Odessa, where he established a private school in 1835. Appointed director of the Kishinev Jewish school in 1844 by the Russian government, in 1850 he became inspector of the newly established government Rabbinical Seminary in Zhitomir (For a discussion of state Jewish schools in Russia, see Horowitz, 2009).

In *Moi vremennik* Boris Eikhenbaum retells part of Ya'akov's biography, weaving facts, family legends, and his own imagination. At the same time Boris overtly and covertly evokes the Jewish theme. An example of his overt treatment is the homage to his Jewish grandfather: "Ya'akov was endowed generously by nature with unusual gifts and already as his earliest childhood amazed everyone who knew him with his extraordinary development. He already could read Hebrew at age two. Here we believe it is not excessive to mention one fact that in essence is unimportant, but nonetheless startling. As a two-year old little Ya'akov was sick with smallpox and he pointed out to his amazed father the various punctuation signs of Hebrew writing (segol, zereh and so on) in the incidental group of pox marks... He was already acquainted with the Bible at age four and read the weekly portion each Friday with the proper intonation. At age six he had mastered twenty folios of the Talmud" (Eikhenbaum, 1929: 28).

This anecdote about Hebrew letters forming out of the pockmarks predicts the boy's talent as a Hebraist. Eikhenbaum continues about Ya'akov's adolescence: "Since then he began to appear in many synagogues as a cantor. After the [high] holidays, Ya'akov stayed with the parents of his fiancée, who took care of him in shifts at their home or in the close shtetl of Orkhov with the local Talmud scholar, who was extremely strong in Kabbalah and was considered at that time nearly a saint. The young man continued his studies with his

teacher and had all kinds of success” (ibid: 29). Eikhenbaum continues, “Here he found the works of modern Hebrew literature on which he threw himself with passion, as a hungry man throws himself on food after a long fast. The new literature made a powerful impression on Ya’akov: from that time he began to write in Hebrew. We see that fate and circumstances led the young man onto the path that his soul was heading” (ibid).

Ya’akov Eichenbaum devoted himself to the study of non-religious literature and this love forced him to break with the religious community. Finishing the discussion of his grandfather’s legacy, Boris describes the book that was passed to him containing his grandfather’s famous poem, “Ha-Krav,” “The Battle”: “The family had only one copy of ‘Ha-Krav’ from grandpa. For many years it lay in my father’s writing table, then it passed into my writing table. It was the old Odessa edition with the author’s portrait and the translator’s preface. Now another, new, Moscow copy has joined it, without a portrait, published according to an anonymous manuscript that was found by chance in the archive of the poet Slespushkin” (ibid: 31)^{xi}.

Although the books have become Boris’ material legacy, the story of his grandfather ends in the writer’s present when, finding himself on a train platform in Zhitomir, he recalls his progenitor. “Two years ago I had returned from Odessa to Leningrad through Zhitomir. There was a clean, quiet station that had been built recently. I stood on the platform, bought fruit from an old woman and rode on. There was no one to ask about the ‘ancient poem’ and its author” (ibid: 33).

Boris portrays his grandfather’s book as a kind of rare antique, stored in his writing table. He values the patrimonial, keeping two copies of the Russian translation; he cannot read the original written in Hebrew. At the same time the book symbolizes a broken link between his present and the family’s past. The Jewish world of his grandfather is portrayed as a way station, a momentary stop between desired destinations.

It is important to note that “Ha-Krav,” serves as an example of a narrative poem that reiterates the message of artistic freedom. The poem, and especially the long passages that Boris Eikhenbaum quotes, emphasize (as you might expect) the formal dimension of the poem. He notes that the translation is weak because it does not remain faithful to the “concentrated character, intensity, and wit” of the original. In addition, the translator uses often used phrases recognizably from Pushkin and Lermontov “complicated by additions from an Odessan dialect” (ibid: 47–48). Nonetheless, Eikhenbaum acknowledges that as a young man he was ignorant of these aspects and concentrated on the story. He particularly enjoyed this stanza:

Вперед, вперед, не унывай,
 Рассказ мой, скромный сын преданий!
 Развейся смело, не скрывай
 Подробностей невинной брани.
 Читай нам повесть старины,
 Куда кто шел, за кем гонялся;
 Как жребий кончился войны,
 Кто пал со славой, кто остался.
 Не унывай, когда упрек
 Нечистых уст тебя коснется:
 Тебя лишь слушает знаток,
 В его душе лишь отзовется
 Понятный звук твоих речей
 И чудный смысл иносказаний;

Так лейся ж плавно, как ручей,
Рассказ мой, скромный сын преданий!

(ibid: 48–49)

According to one critic, because of its “elegant form” and “vividness of the images,” “Ha-Krav” signaled a new stage in the development of Hebrew poetry in Russia (Zinberg, 1978: 105–106). A talented professor of our day, Olga Litvak, however, regards the Russian translation as much more significant than the original, about which she writes that, “In fact, Eichenbaum’s poem is a striking example of studied maskilic medievalism, the conservative tendency to derive justification and precedent for cultural experiments from the philosophic and linguistic achievements of Iberian Judaism. Poems about chess had appeared first in the secular repertoire of Jewish poets of medieval Christian Spain” (Litvak, 2006: 56).

However, according to Litvak, the translation serves as the first salvo in Osip Rabinovich’s literary attack against the Jews of the North and reflects his quest to invent a Southern Jewish literature. “Embarking on his literary career with a Russian translation of a Hebrew poem about chess <...> Rabinovich expressly sought to point acolytes of Jewish enlightenment away from the Lithuanian Jerusalem” (Litvak, 2006: 56)^{xii}.

Boris Eikhenbaum underscores as something positive the fact that the poem serves no ideological message. Although the chess game between black and white (white wins) symbolizes Europe and Asia — Europe wins — for Boris-the-Formalist it embodies the idea of poetry for its own sake. In that spirit, Eikhenbaum focuses on the poem’s formal aspects, particularly the way in which the poem reflects an attempt in Russian to transmit “Eastern” poetry. Not coincidentally, the poem appeared in 1840, the same year that Lermontov’s “Demon” was published.

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In addition to the descriptions of his grandfather, Eikhenbaum also expresses Jewish qualities in coded language in which he refers to the Jew through an evocation of the “other”. In depicting his youth in Voronezh, Eikhenbaum underscores his alienation from his surroundings, in particular contrasting the names of bourgeois Vitebsk with his own: “Surnames beautify the language of the city with a special local color, create something akin to a dialect. The city of Voronezh’s language sounds like its people’s names: Tyriny, Khaliutiny, Cheremisiny, Cherkovy, Klochkovy, Malininy, Chigayevy, Selivanovy, Khrushchevy, Fedoseyevskiy, Pereleshiny. To be sure there is the pharmacy Vol’pian and Miufke, the butchery Gekht, but these aren’t so much names as much as titles — like the bakery ‘Zhan’”.

The listing of the Russian names as the authentic Voronezh intensifies Eikhenbaum’s perception of his difference and discomfort. He also alludes to his home as a sign of his outsider status. “We not only had a strange name, but our life was also strange: no flowers in the windows, no cats, no bottles with liqueur, no evenings by the samovar, no guests, no gossip — nothing that is *a propo*s for Voronezh and creates a home” (Eikhenbaum, 1929: 35–36).

Expressing a degree of ambiguity about his ethnic origins, Eikhenbaum describes his identity in Voronezh: “My life was full of insanity and stubbornness. I didn’t have an automobile or a prostitute. I was a representative of a particular nationality, not encountered either in China, or in Europe. I am a Russian youth of the beginning of the twentieth century, occupied with the question of why man was made and searching for his purpose. I am a wanderer who was carried by the wind of the pre-revolutionary epoch, the epoch of Russian symbolism, from the Southern steppes to the attic apartments of Petersburg” (ibid: 44).

As a statement of identity, the passage oozes with ambiguity. He says that he is a Russian youth, but the images refer not to a Russian, but to something else. It is not only the phrase, “representative of a particular nationality,” that draws the reader’s attention to a potential Jewish background, but also his confession of not having a prostitute. Jews in the nineteenth century were associated with sexual moderation (and sexual deviation, one may note). In addition, “strannik” is another metonym often used to signify Jews—the wandering Jew. In a passage in proximity to the one above, Eikhenbaum describes being forced to learn the violin, which reminds one of Isaac Babel’s discussion about the Moldovanka, where parents make their progeny play in the hope of discovering another Heifets^{xiii}. However, one should be careful about concluding anything from his music lessons. Even his childhood lessons on violin, the instrument of choice for young Jewish prodigies, but which for Boris was an embarrassment — he felt self-conscious and ungainly holding the violin under his chin — came about not through traditional Jewish choices in musical training, but by chance: it was his Russian mother who selected violin for Boris while assigning the piano which Boris longed to play, to his younger brother, Vsevolod.

The Jewish theme nevertheless may also be a coded way of discussing his youth, which was a very difficult time in his life. His mother openly preferred his younger brother, Vsevolod, and was abusive to Boris^{xiv}. According to Lidia Lotman, a close friend and the wife of Eikhenbaum’s student, Eric Naidich, there was a time that Boris even contemplated suicide as a way to escape his situation. (Lotman, 2007: 122–123. Another version of the story can be found in Curtis, 2004: 44–45). In any case, he may have identified with his father and his father’s side of the family as a way of distancing himself from traumatic memories.

However, while it is tempting to see Eikhenbaum’s otherness as stemming from his Jewish background, we should be careful about advancing such a hypothesis. It is true that he was always keenly aware of his foreign-sounding surname, which in his schoolboy days made him uncomfortably self-conscious. Growing up, however, he seems to have associated his personal sense of difference not with his Jewish father who was responsible for the awkward surname, but with his Russian Orthodox mother. Carol Any explains, “The medically sterile ambiance of his childhood home, bare of flowers, samovar, alcoholic libations, and guests was the creation of his Russian physician-mother, not his Jewish physician-father. Nor can we even characterize the household as a Jewish one: Boris had been baptized and attended Russian Orthodox Church services”^{xv}.

In his biography of Boris Eikhenbaum James Curtis argues that Russian culture replaced a Jewish way of life. Although one can certainly generalize this way about the first generation of acculturated Jewish intellectuals, such an explanation is overstated for the second generation. Eikhenbaum never had access to Jewish culture, nor did it play a major role in his life. Therefore, it was not something that he could surrender or offer. At the same time Eikhenbaum’s biography does not lend itself to the productive interpretive strategy of David Roskies about Jews who as youngsters left Jewish life, but “returned” in a later period (Roskies, 1992). Unlike Shimon Ansky, about whom one can say that he returned to the Jewish people, Eikhenbaum had different reasons for using the image of the Jew to present his biography as a struggle for individuality and creativity.

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It seems obvious that Ya’akov Eichenbaum is meaningful to Boris as a symbol for his own life. Apparently the mid-1920s were crucial to Boris Eikhenbaum’s own sense of self and marked a time of self-reflection and charting of the future. His student and the well-known

literary scholar, Lidiia Ginzburg, explains, “In 1926, Eikhenbaum had his fortieth birthday. He experienced it as an event and spoke with us about the need for a biographical break. Biographical here is contrasted with historical. ‘Creativity <...> is an act of recognizing oneself in the march of history...’ Eikhenbaum wrote in his article on Nekrasov” (Ginzburg, 1989: 357). Although this passage is filled with details about literary theory, my main point in the context here is that Eikhenbaum became deeply conscious of his own public and private behavior. He looked at other writers and at himself and realized that he needed to consider his own biography and fashion it according to the needs of his own time. Ginzburg writes again, “‘I must solve the problem of behavior,’ Eikhenbaum wrote Shklovsky in 1929. The partial publication of Eikhenbaum’s diaries and letters showed that the problem of behavior as a scientific subject and living problem always remained the most essential thing for him” (ibid: 352). She continues, “In the preface to [*Moi*] *Vremennik* he wrote, ‘In the 18th century several writers published such journals, filling it up with their own writings.’ The author counts himself among the *writers*” (ibid: 354).

Eikhenbaum apparently wanted to write his biography in a new way, conceive of himself and portray himself as a writer. This is an important fact because Ginzburg began to study literary life and the role of the writer, the behavior of the writer, in relation to society. It is intriguing to consider *Moi vremennik* is connected with Eikhenbaum’s personal crisis in the 1920s and especially his new concern about his own biography and his own place in Soviet society. By declaring Ya’akov Eichenbaum a forerunner of art-for-art’s-sake, Boris features the modernist aspects of the work almost a century after “Ha-Krav” appeared. Moreover, he asserts the right of the Hebrew-language author of the poem status in the country’s literary tradition. In contrast to a national literature, Eikhenbaum emphasizes his allegiance to a true Soviet culture, one that is open to diverse voices and influences.

Although it may have been lawful and even unexceptional to allude to one’s Jewish background in the 1920s, actually he would have a good reason to hide his grandfather on his mother’s side. Dormidont Mikhailovich Glotov was an aristocrat and an admiral in the tsarist navy (Maslennikov, 1986: 274). Moreover, his brother, Vsevolod, a well-known anarchist, was in and out of Soviet prisons in the 1920s. Allusions to these two figures would be more dangerous and indeed Eikhenbaum avoids them.

Boris describes his grandfather’s coming of age story apparently as a means of explaining his own evolution and literary prowess, emphasizing the link between his grandfather and himself, fortifying the idea that his own literary talent has roots in Jewish genealogy. “The law of inheritance which my parents for some reason didn’t consider (Professor Lesgaft rejected it categorically) led me to the building with the twelve departments — the historical-philological faculty of Petersburg University” (Eikhenbaum, 1929: 50). This passage reflects ideas of development that Eikhenbaum promulgated in his theory of literary evolution. In contrast to Darwinism or evolution in the natural sciences, Eikhenbaum attributes his desire to study literature to his grandfather. Thus, evolution in literature jumps generations (Viktor Shklovsky said the evolutionary path led to uncles or, in other words, was indirect from one generation to the other) (see Herman, 1996: 151).

At this time at the end of the 1920s, Eikhenbaum turned to the study of literary life (byt). Eikhenbaum devoted his work to studying Mikhail Lermontov and Lev Tolstoy. In both these books Eikhenbaum broke from Formalism by acknowledging the need for the inclusion of supra-literary reality—psychology, biography, history — to understand the author (Erlich, 1965: 159). Marietta Chudakova explains: “The problem of social status and professional self-consciousness was analyzed by Eikhenbaum with great penetration thanks to his experience with countless people who entered literature now, but before the revolution had

been professionally distant from it. A new army was recruited and a generation of already established writers reevaluated their situation. Eikhenbaum began to emphasize that ‘literature is dependent [on reality] and that its evolution depends on conditions outside itself’ (*Literaturnyi byt*, p. 51) and there is no need to explain further — so dramatic was the declaration of the OPOIaZ theorist” (Chudakova, 1986: 110).

It is perhaps not by chance that the same problems that Eikhenbaum discovered in his literary subjects he acknowledged in his own life. For example, in Eikhenbaum’s treatment a central characteristic of Lermontov and Tolstoy was their struggle with society; each fought with the literary values of his time and demanded special rights for art. In addition, each belonged to in-between generations — Lermontov between Pushkin and Gogol; Tolstoy was neither part of the Belinsky group nor close to aristocratic writers such as the Slavophiles or Herzen, Nekrasov and Ogarev. Rather, he felt distant from literary life in the capitals. As a result Tolstoy was attacked for not fulfilling the social demands (*sotsial’nyi zakaz*) of his time.

Not only Boris, but also his grandfather, his alter-ego, Ya’akov, felt at odds with the reigning literary institutions of the day (at least that is how Boris Eikhenbaum depicted him). Ya’akov couldn’t find proper work as a writer (in fact there were no steady newspaper jobs in Hebrew until *ba-Meliz* was established in 1860). Ya’akov had to lobby friends in order to acquire the position as head of the government’s rabbinical seminary in Zhitomir. He too is described as disinterested in fulfilling social demand. Valorizing the autonomy of literature, he selected themes that emphasized formal and aesthetic dimensions of texts—such as a chess game. One cannot help feeling that the image of the alienated outsider, the apostate from Communist orthodoxy and the persecuted scholar in Soviet times is somehow related to the grandfather and his break from Orthodox Jewry. Boris Eikhenbaum-creative thinker is related genetically to Ya’akov Eichenbaum, another Jew of extraordinary literary talent who was in concert with part of his society and in conflict with another part.

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This study of Boris Eikhenbaum tells us some rather surprising things about the image of the Jew in the first two decades of Soviet life. For a start, we see the appearance of children of intermarried Jews who felt either a weak Jewish identity or in many cases no identity at all. Secondly, we see the paradox that an individual in the artistic elite could employ his Jewish background as a banner of artistic independence and at the same time ignore real issues facing Jews in society. In other words, Eikhenbaum could laud his Jewish grandfather, while ignoring the persecution of Jewish religious and national institutions.

One can acknowledge that Eikhenbaum’s portrait of his grandfather stands above all for diversity as opposed to the Party monolith that Soviet culture was about to become in 1929. In this context Ya’akov Eichenbaum stood in for Boris. In his grandfather Boris perceived a creative source for his own talent as an artist and saw an individual who, despite the many compromises necessary for survival, was ultimately accountable to himself alone. The integrity of the artist facing society became the bridge between his Formalist and Structuralist periods — Ya’akov-the-Jew helped reinforce this theme and, having served his purpose, disappeared from Boris’ later writings. Neither attitudes during World War II, the Doctors’ plot, or the establishment of Israel ignited any deep feeling of Jewish identity.

In conclusion, one may return to the tolerance and multi-national, multi-cultural themes that seem inherent in Eikhenbaum’s celebration of his grandfather’s poem. In particular, the publication of grandfather’s poem as an “ancient Russian work” suggests a hid-

den Jewish identity streaked through Russian culture. You never knew what ideas or behaviors might have an unsuspected Jewish component. But in contrast to a reaction of fear, Eikhenbaum was proud that Russian culture was aligned with as rich and ancient as Jewish culture and that his own biography was linked somehow with such a fine poet as Ya'akov Eichenbaum.

ПРИМЕЧАНИЯ

ⁱ See also Horowitz, 1995. Jewish assimilation even in Soviet Russia was by no means painless. Such books as Arkady Zeltser's *Evrei sovetskoi provintsii: Vitebsk i mestechki, 1917–1941* and Mikhail Beizer's *Evrei Leningrada. Natsional'naia Zhizn' i Sovetizatsiia: 1917–1939* follow Zvi Gitelman's *Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics* to show that acculturation was a difficult and gradual process with periods of regression and renewed discrimination (see Gitelman, 1972; Beizer, 1999; Zeltser, 2006).

ⁱⁱ According to Jacob Katz, integration depends first and foremost on what one could call a neutral public sphere (Katz, 1973).

ⁱⁱⁱ See Gitelman, 1972. The *Evseksiia* stands for the *Evreiskaia sektiia* (Jewish Section) of the Communist Party.

^{iv} Conversation with Mark Tolts transmitted to me by email on December 21, 2011.

^v For statistics on internal Jewish migration in the Soviet Union see Tolts, 2008: 1436–1437.

^{vi} One should not forget that later the image would grow negative. Frank Gr?ner claims that the term “cosmopolitan” always had a negative dimension that got worse as the Soviet state relied on Russian nationalism for its legitimacy (Gr?ner, 2010).

^{vii} It is important to recall that anti-Semitism was already present at the start of the Soviet power. Although the highest officials condemned anti-Semitism, on the local level Jews were still objects of discrimination and considered embodying a variety of natural and supernatural evils. For some people the upheavals of the war years could only be explained by the nefarious activity of Jews. Others were imbued by ideas of a Jewish conspiracy (in the form of Communism) that was foretold in the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

^{viii} The edition is probably Eichenbaum, 1874.

^{ix} About the unique genre Lidiia Ginzburg has written, “A year later Boris Mikhailovich published his unique book, *Moi vremennik*, structured like a literary journal with sections: literature (including an autobiography), science, criticism, mixture” (Ginzburg, 1989: 353–354).

^x Judah Leib Lilienblum was also forced to divorce his wife for “free-thinking”.

^{xi} On Fyodor Nikiforovich Slepushkin (1783–1848) see *Antologiiia poezii pushkinskoi pory*, 1984.

^{xii} Professor Litvak points to an article on this issue: Shatskii, 1952.

^{xiii} See Isaac Babel's “Odessa Stories”. *Moldovanka* is the neighborhood in Odessa where the city's poorest Jews live.

^{xiv} Incidentally, Vsevolod Eikhenbaum (1884–1945) took the pseudonym Vsevolod Volin and became a famous anarchist who lived a colorful life. See Avrich, 1988.

^{xv} Carol Any, personal communication with the author. According to Hugh McLean, Roman Jakobson had also been baptized and considered himself an Orthodox Christian. Professor McLean says that he saw Jakobson cross himself in church when he and some friends went to an Easter service. E-mail from Hugh McLean, Jan 22, 2014.

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БОРЬБА ЗА САМООПРЕДЕЛЕНИЕ В РУССКОЙ ЛИТЕРАТУРЕ:

"ЕВРЕЙСКИЙ ВОПРОС" БОРИСА ЭЙХЕНБАУМА

Б. ХОРОВИЦ

(УНИВЕРСИТЕТ ТУЛЕЙН, НОВЫЙ ОРЛЕАН, США)

В конце 1920-х годов, актуализировалась еврейская идентификация Бориса Эйхенбаума — еврейская не в религиозном смысле, а как причастность к этносу, отличающегося от русского. Хотя его имя звучало как иностранное, до тех пор Эйхенбаум почти никак не проявлял свою еврейскость. Филолог заявил об этом в «Моем современнике» (1929) — книге, в которой сочетались черты автобиографии, записной книжки и хроники жизни Эйхенбаума и современной ему реальности. Еврейская самоидентификация Эйхенбаума оказалась недолгой, но все же это удивительный феномен. К тому времени Эйхенбаум уже стал одним из ведущих российских литературоведов и одной из центральных фигур «формальной школы», наряду с Виктором Шкловским, Романом Якобсоном и Юрием Тыняновым. Именно в этот период формализм и формалисты попали под огонь критики советского литературного истеблишмента. Разумным считалось не подчеркивать этническую особость, а ставить на первый план пролетарское происхождение и классовую идентичность. Эйхенбаум, напротив, обратился к памяти деда — поэта, писавшего

на иврите в середине 1800-х годов, подчеркивая свое отличие от этнических русских. Мы полагаем, что целью этого была полемика с литературным истеблишментом, который становился все менее терпим к культурному разнообразию. Эйхенбаум пытался показать, что он имеет такое же право быть причастным к русской литературе, как и пролетарские писатели. Точно так же его дед вошел в историю литературы в России, хотя и писал главным образом на иврите.

Ключевые слова: Борис Эйхенбаум, еврейская идентичность, евреи и формализм в СССР, Яков Эйхенбаум, Хаскала, литературный мир раннего СССР.

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Horowitz Brian, PhD, Sizeler Family Chair Professor, Tulane University, Member of Association of Jewish Studies. Tel.: +1 (504) 862-30-75. E-mail: horowitz@tulane.edu

Хоровиц Брайан — доктор философии (PhD), профессор кафедры им. семьи Сайзлер Университета Тулейн, член Ассоциации иудаики США. Тел.: +1 (504) 862-30-75. Эл. адрес: horowitz@tulane.edu