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**Becoming Canadian:  
Folk Literary Innovation in the Memoirs of  
Yiddish-Speaking Immigrants to Canada**

## Abstract

*This article considers the ways Yiddish-speaking immigrants to Canada creatively adapted folklore that they learned in “the old home” in order to make it fit their new Canadian contexts, and in doing so created new hybrid folklore and identities. To do this, I discuss the autobiographical texts of three people who migrated between 1900 and 1930, J.J. Goodman’s Gezamelte Shriften (Collected Writings) (Winnipeg: 1919), Michael Usiskin’s Oksn un Motorn (Oxen and Tractors) (Toronto: 1945), and Falek Zolf’s Oyf Fremder Erd (On Foreign Soil) (Winnipeg: 1945). I argue that these personal narratives offer important insights into how the first major wave of Eastern European Jewish immigrants to Canada formed and expressed Canadian–Eastern European Jewish culture.*

## Résumé

*Dans le présent article, nous explorerons la créativité avec laquelle les immigrants yiddishophones ont adapté au contexte canadien le folklore qu’ils ont appris dans l’« ancien monde », créant, de ce fait, un folklore hybride, ainsi que de nouvelles identités. À cette fin, nous examinerons les textes autobiographiques de trois individus qui ont immigré au pays entre 1900 et 1930, à savoir les Gezamelte Shriften (Œuvres complètes) de J. J. Goodman (Winnipeg, 1919), Oksn un Motorn (Les bœufs et les tracteurs) de Michael Usiskin (Toronto, 1945) et Oyf Fremder Erd (En sol étranger) de Falek Zolf (Winnipeg, 1945). Nous défendrons la thèse suivant laquelle ces récits offrent d’importantes pistes pour comprendre la contribution de la première vague d’immigrants juifs d’Europe orientale à la création et l’expression de la culture judéo-canadienne est-européenne.*

Near the end of his memoir, *Oyf Fremder Erd* (Winnipeg: 1945), Falek Zolf considers the life he established for himself and his family in Winnipeg, a little over a year after immigrating from Zastavich (Zamostia), Poland.<sup>1</sup> While proudly surveying his apartment, Zolf recalls a segment of the Biblical forefather Jacob’s prayer when leaving his self-imposed exile in Padan-Aram, in which Jacob describes how God has blessed him: “I crossed the Jordan with my stick, and now I am two camps.”<sup>2</sup> Zolf follows this quotation with the explanation: “Yes, with my stick I crossed the Jordan—I swam across the great ocean with a little sack and a little pack and now I’ve become ‘woven through and covered’ with all that is good!”<sup>3</sup>

Zolf immigrated to Canada, via the Halifax port, in 1926.<sup>4</sup> He was one of the thousands of Eastern European Jews who immigrated to Canada before 1930, leaving the Russian Empire for a variety of reasons, in his case, poverty.<sup>5</sup> During this period, Eastern European Jews established new communities in cities, towns, and farming colonies across Canada, and expanded the pre-existing communities in Montreal, Toronto,

and Winnipeg. A number of migrants, like Zolf, were tempted by the prospect of farming in Canada, others came to join family who had settled there a few years before. Some of them did not pay attention to the practical distinction between Canada and the United States before arriving, and a number, like J. J. Goodman, whose work I discuss below, crossed the border between the two countries in search of work or to join family.<sup>6</sup> Upon their arrival in Canada, these migrants had to adjust to unfamiliar, unexpected, and often unwelcoming social, economic, and environmental situations. The challenges posed by migration and the need to adapt led to an outpouring of creativity by these Eastern European Jews. One of their well-recognized creative means of adaptation can be seen in the many associations they participated in and established, such as synagogues and mutual aid societies.<sup>7</sup> Another, less discussed, area in which they expressed their creativity was their folklore. The migrants created distinct folklore through which they expressed their new, hybrid Canadian-Eastern European Jewish culture(s) and identity(s).<sup>8</sup>

Yiddish-speaking migrants creatively adapted folklore which they learned in their Eastern European Jewish communities of origin as a means of adjusting to their new Canadian environment. In doing this, they created new folklore which maintained their connection to the Eastern European communities from which they came while addressing their Canadian experiences. Stories of initial contact, for example, the first group of tales I will discuss, allowed both tellers and audience members to process anxious migration experiences.<sup>9</sup> In this paper, I consider how these migrants created new folklore content based on traditional models and ethnopoetics as well as innovated the symbolic meaning of existing folklore. Through their new folklore, members of the community tied Eastern European Jewish traditional knowledge to Canadian place(s), creatively incorporating Canada into their cultural worldviews. To illustrate the forms and functions of adaptation I will use examples from three Yiddish autobiographical works written by people who immigrated in this period:<sup>10</sup> J.J. Goodman's collection of writings, *Gezamelte Shriften (Collected Writings)* (Winnipeg: 1919), Michael Usiskin's memoir of living in the Jewish farming community in Edenbridge, *Oksn un Motorn (Oxen and Tractors)* (Toronto: 1945), and Falek Zolf's autobiography *Oyf Fremder Erd (On Foreign Soil)* (Winnipeg: 1945).<sup>11</sup> I will argue that studying these works provides us with a unique opportunity to examine how people make sense of their early immigration challenges and adapt culturally to their new home.

## Point of Departure

There is an appreciable body of academic research which addresses this wave of Jewish Eastern Europe immigrants and their establishment of communities in Canada. Gerald Tulchinsky, for example, dedicates a complete section of his historical overview of Jewish life in Canada *Canada's Jews: A People's Journey* (2008) to the period

of 1890–1919. Other examples can be found in Ira Robinson’s edited volume, *Canada’s Jews in Time, Space, and Spirit* (2013) which includes articles on this period as well as articles that discuss Yiddish literature in Canada. Indeed, there is a respectable amount of research on Yiddish literature in Canada, including the Yiddish bibliography *Hundert yor yidishe un hebreyshe literature in kanade (A hundred years of Yiddish and Hebrew literature in Canada)* (1980) by Haim Leib Fuks, Rebecca Margolis’s *Jewish Roots, Canadian Soil: Yiddish Culture in Montreal, 1905–1945* (2011), as well as numerous articles by Margolis, Pierre Anctil, and others. These are just some examples of the sizeable body of work on Canadian Yiddish literature and early Jewish Eastern European immigration to Canada.

Jewish folklore in Canada has not received as much attention as the study of history or literature, with only a couple of scholars considering it as such. Recent research has been conducted by Jillian Gould. Her work on Jewish folklore, for example, her article, “A Nice Piece of Cake and a Kibitz: Re-inventing Sabbath Hospitality in an Institutional Home” (2013), focuses on contemporary Jewish folk practices. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, the first scholar to work on Canadian Jewish folklore, discusses the folklore of Jewish Eastern European immigrants to Canada in the inter-war period in her article “Culture Shock and Narrative Creativity” (1978), which I will refer to several times in this article. The article grew out of her unpublished dissertation, “Traditional Storytelling in the Toronto Jewish Community: A Study in Performance and Creativity in an Immigrant Culture” (1972), a more detailed, in-depth analysis of folk literature in this community. Both researchers apply folkloristic approaches to the practices and cultural expressions of specific Canadian Jewish communities in order to achieve a greater understanding of the community, their practices, and their understandings of themselves.

My discussion, like the works of Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Gould, will apply folkloristic methodology to the cultural expressions of a Canadian Jewish community in order to provide insight into the community, their identities, and their practices. In doing so, this work will both deepen our understanding of the Eastern European Jewish immigrants to Canada before 1930, adding to the historical, social, and literary research on this element of Canadian Jewish history, and offer new ways of approaching the development of migrant folklore, contributing to the current work on migrant folklore in general.

## **Migrant Folklore**

The early studies of migrant folklore considered the lore of immigrant communities to be survivals, remnants of folklore from the communities of origin. Folklorists collected this material in an “11<sup>th</sup>-hour” manner, believing that they were documenting these traditions before they disappeared due to acculturation and/or the fact that

this folklore no longer had a role to play in the communities.<sup>12</sup> For example, in the seminal book *Life is with People*, first published in 1952, Elizabeth Herzog and Mark Zborowski, used interviews with migrants as a source for recreating of the pre-war Eastern European Jewish life. This, the first ethnographic study conducted among Eastern European Jews in North America, specifically New York City, was at least partially motivated by the fear that this information was at risk of disappearing in the wake of the Holocaust.<sup>13</sup> In the 1970s, as folklorists began to recognize the role context and innovation play in folklore practices generally, folklorists such as Robert A. Georges and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett challenged the perception of migrant folklore as endangered survivals. They argued that migrant folklore is its own unique lore, created by the migrant community to fit its particular needs and contexts.<sup>14</sup> In this paper, I take a similar approach to Georges and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and apply innovation and performance-sensitive approaches in order to understand a corpus of Canadian Jewish migrant folklore.

In “Culture Shock and Narrative Creativity,” Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues that immigration places migrants in a situation of culture shock due to “radical sociocultural change and considerable trauma when individuals, separated from their families and communities, suddenly found themselves in totally foreign surroundings.”<sup>15</sup> In Europe, the Jewish communities were surrounded by, and to a greater or lesser extent involved in, other cultures and languages, but those encounters were ones of slow adjustment and adaptation. In the case of their migration to Canada, in contrast, the contact with other unfamiliar languages and cultures was new, sudden, and immersive.<sup>16</sup> Recognizing that Eastern European Jewish immigrants to Canada, including Goodman, Usiskin, and Zolf, were operating within situations of culture shock is essential for understanding and interpreting the folk literary elements of their autobiographies.

Members of Eastern European Jewish Canadian migrant communities worked creatively and artistically in order to adapt and provide folklore which was relatable and fit the new needs of the group. In his seminal work *Competence in performance*, Charles L. Briggs demonstrates how skilled performers connect text and context through interpretation in order to communicate folklore in a compelling and relevant way. The combination of text, context, and interpretation becomes the folklore performance.<sup>17</sup> Creative folkloric adaptation is an organic cultural response to the reality of migration, which occurs in all migrant communities.<sup>18</sup> In the case of Eastern European Jewish immigrants to Canada, folklore performers mobilized traditional knowledge and their own artistic skills in order to address culture shock and Canadian social and political realities in meaningful ways. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes four stages of cultural adaptation among migrant groups: emigration, the period of initial contact, transitional phase, and ethnic phase—the ethnic phase being when the migrant community has created a somewhat stable identity for itself

in the new context. For migrant folklore to be productive and to have staying power, the community, or majority of the community, needs to be at the same stage of the immigration process together.<sup>19</sup>

The authors quoted here all moved to Canada between the 1900s and 1920s, in the central period of the first major wave of Eastern European Jewish immigration. All these authors settled and were active in Jewish communities, and all of them wrote segments for Yiddish language newspapers, communicating with a much larger Yiddish language community than in their immediate vicinity.<sup>20</sup> Thus, Usiskin, Zolf, and Goodman were in key positions for creating and communicating folklore to members of their migrant community(s).

The material that I am presenting was intentionally chosen by individual authors and written for publication as part of literary texts. In this article, I have chosen selections from each author's autobiography which exemplify both the ways they use specific types of folklore and the author's own style. These stories do not have the face-to-face communication that is often associated with folklore. On the other hand, the authors' ways of composing their life stories, the narrative structures, and specifically their use of discrete genres, reflect storytelling traditions in their migrant Canadian Eastern European Jewish communities.<sup>21</sup> The similarities between the autobiographies underscores the popularity and circulation of these story elements. In other words, although as autobiographies these texts are part of a Western written literary tradition, they contain many folk elements and can be analyzed in a fruitful way using folkloristic methodologies. By analyzing written texts with folkloristic methodologies, I am engaging in discussions started by Galit Hasan-Rokem in her work on Hebrew texts from Antiquity.<sup>22</sup>

### **Mobilizing the *Schlemiel* in Canada**

Michael Usiskin immigrated to Canada in 1911 from the village Loshvida, in the Vitebsk province of Czarist Russia, via London's sweatshops.<sup>23</sup> He was well read, having received a basic Jewish education which he expanded by reading any literature he could—in Yiddish, Hebrew, and Russian. His readings and dissatisfaction with the exploitation he experienced both in Russia and England fed anarchist ideologies. This ideology combined with a love of nature led Usiskin to join the Jewish farming colony of Edenbridge in Saskatchewan.<sup>24</sup>

In *Oksn un Motorn* Usiskin describes his first Canadian experiences in a few humorous episodes. Unlike many other migrants, before moving to Canada he had been in touch with people who were already living in his final destination, including his brother who moved there a year previously.<sup>25</sup> Despite this preparation, Usiskin was extremely surprised when he disembarked the train in Star City, Saskatchewan, his first destination after leaving the immigration offices in Quebec.<sup>26</sup> Usiskin was first

struck by the gloom of being alone at 4 a.m. under an overhang which shockingly constituted the train station and stood “in the middle of a dead-quiet forest.”<sup>27</sup> He also did not understand why his brother was not there to meet him since he had sent a letter in advance of his arrival. He writes, “I wasn’t familiar with the kind of civilization, in which if the way is bad, the person who delivers the mail to each post office, miles apart one from the other, puts it off for another week—not today is next week.”<sup>28</sup> Usiskin had understood that he was moving to rural Canada in order to join a new farming community. He had not, likely could not, imagine the implications of that decision—the difference of his new environment from either Loshvida or London.

Usiskin continues his story by describing the first person he encountered. It took some time for Usiskin to realize that the creature across from him was indeed a person and to puzzle out the man’s outfit—stained overalls and a pelt, it seemed, except that he did not understand why someone would wear a pelt in May.<sup>29</sup> His confusion over what should be prosaic, familiar things highlight how completely different the entire “civilization” was for him. Usiskin’s description of his cluelessness, essentially, when first encountering Canadian realities, gives a humorous twist to an otherwise anxious situation. With his use of the term “civilization,” he brings an anthropological cast to his experiences, as he tries to understand the “native” culture and behaviour, self-consciously participating in an ethnographic moment.<sup>30</sup>

Usiskin’s confusion and misjudgments continue over several days. These include his decision to walk through the bush in his city shoes, which one farm wife describes as “only fit for dancing.” After completely wearing his shoes out, the farm wife convinced Usiskin to borrow a pair of her husband’s shoes, which are so big on him that he writes: “It’s a shame that Charlie Chaplin wasn’t there, he would definitely have taken them from me.”<sup>31</sup> Chaplin, who first appeared in films in 1914, was a favourite comedic actor among Jews of Eastern European background, many of whom identified with him. His main persona, “The Tramp” is very similar to a *schlemiel*—a luckless hero who is caught up in the world in his head and out of step with the world around him.<sup>32</sup> Chaplin’s character was also known for his physical comedy and worn, ill-fitting clothing, making him an apt, and endearing, parallel for Usiskin’s own physical foolishness.

In the stories of his first days in Canada, Usiskin portrays himself going forth with the best intentions but at odds with his immediate situation, and coming out looking like a fool—in some cases, literally. The *schlemiel*, unlike some other fool characters, usually makes it out of a situation alright, and Usiskin was able to finish his journey.<sup>33</sup> In her discussion of immigrant folklore, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett observes that the humorous personal stories about initial contact are one of the most productive, elaborate types of migrant folktale.<sup>34</sup> In such stories the tellers, “draw from

the resources of two conflicting cultures and mediate between them.”<sup>35</sup> These first encounter stories contain the motif J1731 “*The city person ignorant of the farm*” in the Thompson motif index.<sup>36</sup> The subject in stories using this motif come out looking like a fool because they are ignorant of information that the locals in the stories take for granted. Usiskin does exactly that, trying to use his previous knowledge from life in Czarist Russia and England to interpret his current Canadian realities. In recounting his difficulties and blunders, he turns himself into the fool and his lack of understanding into a self-effacing, relatable joke that his readers, who have suffered similar humiliating blunders, can laugh along with. At the same time, these stories underscore Usiskin’s perseverance and resourcefulness as a migrant.

While Usiskin’s style of initial contact stories tends towards numerous brief episodes, Falek Zolf writes more elaborate stories, reflecting his more expansive style in *Oyf Fremder Erd*. Zolf immigrated to Canada from Poland in 1926, hoping to become a farmer in Manitoba. Unfortunately, unlike Usiskin but like many others, his plan to be a farmer was unsuccessful. After trying his hand at various different jobs, Zolf became a teacher at the Jewish school in Winnipeg. He published *Oyf Fremder Erd* in 1945, almost twenty years after he arrived in Canada. He originally composed it in response to a call from YIVO in the early 1940s for submissions on the topic of, “Why I left the old home—what have I achieved in America.”<sup>37</sup> Zolf’s was one of the nine Canadian immigrant memoirs out of over 200 submissions.<sup>38</sup> His response took him several years to prepare and was two bound volumes upon completion. Shortly after submitting these volumes to YIVO, he published them as his autobiography through *Dos Yiddishe Vort* (*The Yiddish Word*), a Winnipeg-based Yiddish language publishing company and newspaper. Zolf wrote his autobiography with a large, Yiddish-speaking population in mind. By the responses from YIVO to his submission and his popularity in the newspaper, it is clear that Zolf’s content and style were appreciated by his fellow migrants.<sup>39</sup>

One of Zolf’s elaborate stories of initial contact occurred during his first week in Canada, when he travelled to Niagara Falls. Like Usiskin, Zolf was supposed to be met at the train station by a relative—his cousin who had already been living in Canada for some time. But his relative never arrived. Zolf decided to try and find his way on his own, and this was what he encountered upon entering the city:

As soon as I started walking in the streets, a huge gang of masked men, women, and children started coming toward me, all covered in costumes: the men in bright, feminine petticoats, the women in masculine trousers. On their faces they were wearing all kinds of grotesque masks in different colours [. . .] It seemed like the entire world of monsters, ghosts, devils, demons, and werewolves had suddenly arrived here [. . .] I remained standing, stunned, and did not know what to do. I was afraid that soon the whole pack of devils, God help me, would suddenly grab me and drag me God knows where.<sup>40</sup>



Zolf made it out of the disorienting situation safely: he saw one other person who was not in costume and correctly guessed that this was a fellow Jew. His new acquaintance explained to him that it was Halloween, and there was nothing to fear, “this isn’t Poland” and Jews did not need to worry about being attacked.<sup>41</sup> This fellow Jew brought Zolf safely to his cousin. The humour in the story comes from the contrast between Zolf’s fear and the lightheartedness that the situation actually required. The main theme of the story is the shock and lack of understanding upon a new arrival’s encounter with Canadian culture balanced by Zolf’s quick thinking in locating help, much like Usiskin’s reaction to Saskatchewan.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes the central element of initial contact stories succinctly: “the immigrant protagonists are bunglers who are without culture because they are between cultures [ . . . ]”<sup>42</sup> Indeed, Zolf and Usiskin were bunglers and used those experiences to create stories which recall the familiar *schlemiel* character in order to express immigrant realities and anxieties. In creatively retelling anecdotes from their personal experiences, they combined Eastern European Jewish traditional narrative styles with Canadian specific elements, producing new immigrant tales. Instead of retelling *schlemiel* stories located in Chelm or Odessa, these stories take place in Niagara Falls, Star City, and Edenbridge. As tradition bearers, Zolf and Usiskin engage in what the eminent folklorist Lauri Honko called “tradition-morphological adaptation,” a form of ecotypification<sup>43</sup> in which individuals rework new cultural elements so that they are meaningful and can be incorporated into the lore of the community.<sup>44</sup> By doing this reworking, by interpreting their Canadian experiences using Eastern European Jewish worldviews, they incorporate Canadian spaces in their and their audience’s imaginary map, “possessing” parts of Canada.<sup>45</sup>

## Relocating the Jewish Religious Canon

J.J. Goodman, who immigrated slightly earlier than Zolf and Usiskin, also employs Jewish Eastern European folk literary styles and ethnopoetics in his writings. Joseph J. Goodman was born c. 1863 in the Russian Pale of Settlement.<sup>46</sup> Sometime between 1882 and 1891, he immigrated to the United States.<sup>47</sup> In about 1901, Goodman moved to Canada with his nuclear family where he, interestingly, worked as a naturalization commissioner (immigrant inspector) and was very involved in Jewish community organizations, until he returned to the United States in 1930.<sup>48</sup> As a naturalization commissioner, Goodman travelled along the Canadian Pacific Railway line, which allowed him to visit a number of different Jewish communities in Western Canada. He wrote about these visits and other topics for various Yiddish newspapers.<sup>49</sup> In 1919 a collection of Goodman’s writings, poetry, short stories, and essays, was published in Yiddish under the title *Gezamelte Shriften*, in Winnipeg. Unlike Zolf and Usiskin, Goodman did not write a lengthy autobiography, but his collected writings include many pieces informed by his lived experiences. Goodman’s brief style is reflected in

the pithiness of the examples below.

In many of his writings, Goodman is preoccupied with the plight of Jews in the Russian Empire. For him, it was of utmost importance for the Jews who made it to Canada to help fellow Jews who were trying to leave Russia or had just arrived in Canada. In the vignette “*In a finsternen keler (a Purim erinerung)*” (“In a dark cellar [a Purim memory]”) Goodman describes a Purim he celebrated in Winnipeg. During the Purim feast at his house, he and his guests discuss the news from the “Old Country” (as is common when immigrants from the same place gather): “We were all strongly immersed in a heated discussion about events in Russia, about the war with Japan, and mostly about the enormous stream of immigrants coming from the old country to find shelter here.”<sup>50</sup>

Goodman specifically blamed Czar Nicholas II (1868–1918) for the terrible reality that Jews faced in Russia. He expressed this conviction and his belief in the extremity of Jewish suffering using Biblical allusion. In this same vignette, Goodman recounts hearing recent Jewish refugees from Russia singing a song with the lines, “The current Haman/ he is a dog[...],” and in another vignette, Goodman writes, “Nicholas, the second Haman, the ruler of modern Egypt.”<sup>51</sup>

Haman is the villain from the *Book of Esther*, the Biblical text read on Purim, who plotted to murder all the Jews of Persia. The line “ruler of modern Egypt” is a clear reference to the Biblical Pharaoh who attempted to decimate his Hebrew slaves through cruel treatment and the murder of their sons. There are many *Midrashim* (homiletical explanations) which expand on the cruelty of both these figures.<sup>52</sup> The oppression by these characters and their miraculous defeat are integral Jewish stories, built into Jewish holidays and retold in other contexts as well. Thus, when Goodman draws a parallel between Nicholas II and Haman and Pharaoh, he is claiming that Nicholas II is among the greatest villains in Jewish history, in the same ways that these analogies were applied a relatively short time later to Hitler.<sup>53</sup>

Through these parallels, he also claims that, like the Biblical villains, Nicholas II’s actions threaten the existence of the Jewish people. And according to Goodman one of the ways to save the Jewish people is to bring as many as possible to Canada and help them settle there. Goodman’s *Gezamelte Shriften* reveals that he believed the best way to convince his Canadian readers of the extremity of the Russian Jewish plight and the need to help was by alluding to villains from Biblical and *Midrashic* stories. Goodman understood that these stories still had a powerful resonance among Canadian Eastern European Jews, despite no longer being in the same contexts in which these tales were created or originally told to his readers.

One of Goodman’s many vignettes about visiting remote Jewish communities in

western Canada, “*Di kolonye zonenefeld*” (“The Sonnenfeld Colony”) is a description of a visit to the Sonnenfeld colony in Saskatchewan during Chanukah.<sup>54</sup> Goodman fills the vignette with his delight in the energy, friendliness, and Jewish engagement of the members of the colony, especially the children. One highlight was meeting the ritual slaughterer, *shoykhet*, of the community. Goodman was shocked that this person looked so different from his expectations. Goodman expected someone with “[. . .] a matted beard on a skinny, dried-up face; deeply recessed and dull eyes; heavy, large eyebrows; a sunk-in chest; a thin, long body [. . .].”<sup>55</sup> Instead, he was faced by someone with “[. . .] a handsome, combed beard, of stately appearance, with eyes full of life and energy, with a healthy colour in his face, a well-developed body, a pair of wide temples, and an intellectual forehead, which gave him an aristocratic appearance.”<sup>56</sup>

Goodman attributes the *shoykhet*'s healthful appearance and the general robustness of the community to the advantages of living as farmers in Canada. He underscores and supports his opinion by quoting: “[. . .] the Talmudic expression, “The land elevates the person.”<sup>57</sup> Although this line does sound like it could be a Talmudic expression, particularly due to the fact that he quotes it in *loshn-koydesh*, (“the holy language,” i.e., Biblical Hebrew and Talmudic Aramaic) it is a misquote, not actually appearing in the Talmud or any of the common Biblical or Talmudic commentaries.<sup>58</sup> The line is likely referencing the popular interpretation of *Numbers* 13:18, in which Moses gives specific instructions to the scouts he sends to inspect Canaan before the Hebrews conquer it. The ubiquitous Biblical commentator Rashi expands on this verse: “*The land what is it*: there is land which raises strong [people] and there is land which raises weak [people. . .].”<sup>59</sup> This interpretation of the verse as a general statement about the connection between the health and strength of the population and the land that they live on can be found, sometimes expanded upon, in several Jewish religious texts and commentaries, including *Midrash Tanchuma*.<sup>60</sup> The explanation suggests a cosmic connection between the divine, the earth, and people—God decides the inherent qualities of the earth which then affect the people who live on that segment of it. The phrase that Goodman quotes in the original is “כי הארץ מגדלת את בעליה” (*ki ha'arets migadelet et ba'aleyha*).<sup>61</sup> This quote is much shorter than the explanations provided in exegetical texts and has a rhythmic similarity to a section of verse in *Numbers* 13:32: “[...] ארץ אכלת יושביה הוא” (‘*erets okhelet toshveyha hi*). The rhythm, use of *loshn-koydesh*, similarity to an actual verse, and brevity of Goodman's phrase all contribute to the poetic qualities which make his misquotation both aesthetically pleasing in context and plausible as originating in a Jewish canonical text, i.e., the Talmud.<sup>62</sup>

It is impossible to determine whether Goodman is intentionally misquoting in order to make his statement more culturally and artistically pleasing, made a mistake, or is quoting something he learned orally but is misattributing it. More important for us is that Goodman included a (seeming) quotation from the Jewish canon in order to support his position that living in the Canadian countryside is positive for Jews.

In doing this, Goodman also effectively states that Canada is a land that is divinely blessed, a piece of earth that will nourish the people who live on it. This type of argumentation—reinforcing one’s arguments by tying them to Jewish text—is a style common in Eastern European Jewish discourse, as well as among many other Jewish communities.<sup>63</sup>

Goodman provides readers with canonical support for his own views about Jewish settlement in Canada, just as he argued for the need to help Jews in Russia by referencing the Jewish canon. Goodman’s style and vignettes reveal that he considered the ethnopoetics common in Jewish Eastern European communities to still be an effective way to reach his audience, even though he discussed issues that were relevant in their new context. Goodman’s use of canonical reference and allusion also incorporate Canada in Jewish religious understanding of place and cosmology. In writing about their experiences in Canada, Goodman, Usiskin, and Zolf combine stylistic elements from Eastern European Jewish ethnopoetics with material from their new contexts to create Canadian Eastern European Jewish lore.

### **Expanding the Jewish Imaginary Map**

Another type of migrant folklore adaptation I would like to discuss is symbolic ecotypification. By this, I mean the mobilization of traditional folk literature in a new context in such a way that the teller either finds new meaning in the traditional literature or makes the secondary or tertiary meaning of the tale the primary one.<sup>64</sup> Symbolic ecotypification is intrinsically tied to communicative competence as defined by Briggs—the ways skilled performers [...] interpret both traditions and their social settings, actively transforming both in the course of their performances.<sup>65</sup> This type of reworking is a more extreme version of Honko’s “functional adaptation,” a form of ecotypification which “seldom produces dramatic changes,”<sup>66</sup> because as we will see below, the changes in meaning are dramatic. But as with functional adaptations, they are not necessarily stable.

On the second page describing his arrival in Canada, before reaching Niagara Falls, Zolf quotes the “*Po-lin*” legend, which was, and still is, a popular legend among Polish Jews.<sup>67</sup> This legend tells the story of the first Jewish settlement in Poland. Zolf recounts the “*Po-lin*” legend when he describes his experience taking the train from the port in Halifax to Montreal, his first destination in Canada. As he passed forests and mountains, he thought about how far he was from where his ancestors lived. This experience made him think of the legend, which he then quotes:

That’s how it was once, a thousand years ago, the “exiles of Ashkenaz” went looking for a new land. And when they arrived at a forested steppe, as the legend says, they found a paper on the ground with the words “*Po-lin*,” rest here,

make this your harbour. The exiles immediately settled on the new, raw land and with their blood and sweat built up the Jewish settlements of Poland.<sup>68</sup>

The first Jewish residents of Poland, like the early Eastern European Jewish residents of Canada, went through a process of culture shock and creative adaptation, one expression of which was this legend. The Jews of Poland used the “*Po-lin*” legend in order to fulfill an emotional need “to convert the alien to the known”—to incorporate this new place into a Jewish worldview, to creatively possess it.<sup>69</sup> Through the motif of divine intervention and the use of *loshn-koydesh* to explain the origins of the name of the country, the legend offers spiritual and theological justification for Jewish settlement in Poland.<sup>70</sup>

The “*Po-lin*” legend, when told in its original Polish context, the context in which Zolf learned it, is about Jewish belonging in Poland. Zolf places the legend in a new context when he mobilizes it as part of his description of arriving in Canada. He shifts the primary symbolic meaning of the “*Po-lin*” legend from belonging in Poland to Jewish wandering. Zolf accentuates this interpretation of the legend by adding a sort of coda afterward: “And now the children of those Jewish builders wander about humiliated, expelled, and looking for a new *Po-lin* . . . apparently, that is our path in history. . .”<sup>71</sup>

Zolf’s ancestors, the characters in the legend, were forced to leave Germany and they found a place to settle. They worked hard to build communities in a wild country, but a thousand years later their children face the same fate: they are expelled from Poland and settle in a new, wild country, Canada. Zolf uses the legend of Jewish arrival in Poland to say, ‘We (Jewish Polish immigrants to Canada) are settling in a foreign, wild country just like our ancestors did.’ This pattern of exile, wandering, and settlement, as Bar-Itzhak shows, alludes to the archetype of the Exodus.<sup>72</sup> Zolf is mobilizing a familiar folk tale in order to incorporate a new experience, immigration to Canada, into an Eastern European, specifically Polish, Jewish realm of knowledge. As the Polish Jews used the popular name-*Midrash* tale type to make Poland a Jewish space, Zolf uses the popular “*Po-lin*” legend to make Canada a Jewish space. He “possesses” it by interpreting his encounter with the place through a Jewish legend and worldview. In doing this, Zolf expresses a part of the new Eastern European Jewish Canadian folk identity. This identity is tied to experiences of expulsion and resettlement, contending with nature, and is deeply connected to Eastern European Jewish forms of knowledge.

Zolf mobilizes another Eastern European Jewish folk genre in his autobiography, Biblical stories and quotations, an expanded version of Goodman’s uses of canonical references. Retelling *Midrashim* was a popular tool for Jewish religious educators, as Galit Hasan-Rokem has shown in other contexts.<sup>73</sup> As mentioned above, Zolf became a teacher in Jewish schools in Winnipeg. In *Oyf Fremder Erd* he references *Midrashim*

in the context of teaching Canadian–Eastern European Jewish children—either children who immigrated with their parents or children born to migrant parents.

When he first began teaching at the Jewish school in Winnipeg, Zolf was told by the previous religious studies teacher that the children were wild and unteachable.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, when he first walked into the classroom, the children were completely out of control. In an attempt to settle the class, Zolf decided to tell them a story. He chose the story of the life and death of Moses, *Moyshē-rabeyne* (lit. Moses our Teacher) as he is referred to in Yiddish. At first, only a couple of girls listened, but slowly the entire class sat down with rapt attention. Zolf describes his experience telling the story: “I saw plainly *Moyshē-rabeyne*’s difficult life and his tragic death. I illustrated all this for the children. But it wasn’t simply a story, it was a full dramatic performance, which I acted out especially for them.”<sup>75</sup>

Zolf’s retelling of Moses’s life attests to the fact that *Midrashic* tales popular in the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe continued to be told in Canada. Zolf’s personal story also demonstrates that the performative context and at least some of the functions of this type of homiletic tale were also maintained—to educate and entertain children. For Zolf, this incident is at least partial proof that Jewish Eastern European culture can survive and remain relevant in Canada, as he writes when reflecting on this episode, “[w]ith that self-same power from artistic folk-creativity [. . .] one can now and always kindle the little soul of every Jewish child, wherever it might be, without distinction between countries or continents.”<sup>76</sup> The fact that Zolf felt the need to relate the story and directly comment on its implications indicates that the perseverance of Jewish education and practice in a new country was a concern for the early migrants which he wished to address. They did not know how or what aspects of their culture, especially their religious culture, would remain relevant in the new context.

Another use of Biblical tales in *Oyf Fremder Erd*, is Zolf’s direct paralleling of his life with episodes from the Hebrew Bible, an example of which, from the end of Zolf’s autobiography, I used to open this article: “Yes, with my stick I crossed the Jordan—I swam across the great ocean with a little sack and a little pack and now I’ve become ‘woven through and covered’ with all that is good!”<sup>77</sup> As I mentioned above, Zolf draws a parallel between himself and the Biblical forefather Jacob, *Yankev-avine* (in Yiddish, lit. Jacob our Father), who returned to Canaan after living and working in Padan-Aram for many years.<sup>78</sup> Jacob left Canaan poor and alone and returned surrounded by his family and cattle. Zolf takes this quotation out of the context of Jacob’s story and uses it to illustrate his own. Despite decontextualizing the quote, he maintains and even reinforces the parallel he is creating between himself and this Biblical character. In doing so, he suggests that his success is a blessing from God, demonstrating God’s approval for his choices, the same way Jacob’s success is understood in the Bible.<sup>79</sup>

Even more significantly, by referring to this story Zolf creates a parallel between Biblical geography and Canada. Zolf connects his move from Poland to Canada with Jacob's move from Canaan to Padan-Aram. This parallel has significant implications in terms of the Eastern European Jewish ideas of place. In referencing Jacob's sojourn in Padan-Aram, Zolf overlays the Canaan/Padan-Aram binary on Poland/Canada. Before the Jews were given the Land of Israel by God, the forefathers dwelt in Canaan.<sup>80</sup> Canaan was not the Holy Land, but it was close to it, its precursor. Padan-Aram, on the other hand, was far from the future Holy Land both physically and in terms of sacredness. Yet, Jacob managed to build a life there, marry (twice) and have children whom he raised in the ways of God.<sup>81</sup>

Poland was the home of Jewish communities for hundreds of years. Poland, at the time Zolf left, was considered an important site of Jewish settlement, history, and religious activity. Canada, in contrast, was almost entirely unknown to the Jewish Eastern European world. Religiously observant Eastern European Jews considered it an unwelcoming, irreligious place.<sup>82</sup> In other words, Eastern European Jews considered the Land of Israel to be the central point where the sacred is manifested in the world, the *axis mundi*. Poland was conceptualized as a microcosm of the Land of Israel. That country was understood as connected distantly to the sacred centre, part of the Jewish Eastern European mythic geography. Canada was outside this geography.

Through his use of Jacob's story, Zolf brings Canada into the Eastern European Jewish imaginary map. If Poland is like Canaan, a temporary Jewish home with some level of the sacredness of the Holy Land, then Canada is like Padan-Aram. It is further from the Jewish homeland and a less welcoming environment. With God's blessing, though, Jewish life can flourish—if perhaps only temporarily—in Canada.

Zolf mobilizes stories familiar to his audience from their “Old World” context and adjusts the focus of their meaning. In doing so, he declares that, despite being an unfamiliar country, Eastern European Jewish life and culture can exist in Canada. By mobilizing the Biblical story and the “*Po-lin*” legend within his story of migration, he normalizes and incorporates the new location. In retelling all of these stories while locating his performance and interpretation of them squarely in Canada, Zolf forcefully demonstrates that Eastern European Jewish cultural traditions are relevant in the Canadian context.

This paper considered some examples of the Eastern European Jewish Canadian folk literature that appear in the Yiddish language works of authors Falek Zolf, J.J. Goodman, and Michael Usiskin. These authors were among the first Yiddish-speaking Jews to settle in Canada and contend with creating and expressing a Canadian-Eastern European Jewish identity. They did this in a number of ways, including: by mobilizing “Old World” tales in the “New World” context, and therefore shifting their

symbolic meaning; by using the Eastern European discursive style of allusion and quotation of canonical works in order to make arguments relevant to the Canadian context; by adapting familiar genres in order to tell new, migrant tales; and by connecting Canada to the Eastern European Jewish understandings of place.

The fact that Goodman, Usiskin, and Zolf were published and praised authors suggest that their expressions of Canadian Eastern European Jewish identity and culture were considered relevant and appropriate by other members of the community. They were not just expressing their individual identities, they understood and artistically expressed the cultural needs of their fellow migrants. There are only a few autobiographies by the early Eastern European Jewish immigrants to Canada, but each text presents a different voice, style, and experience. These autobiographies provide us with important insights into how this first major wave of Eastern European Jewish migrants formed and expressed their identity and culture, how they creatively adapted to the Canadian context. Through telling their own life stories, these migrants make Canada a Jewish space and make themselves Canadian.

By reading these life stories with a folkloristic eye, we can see ways Jews who emigrated from different places in Eastern Europe and settled across Canada established, intentionally or unintentionally, some sense of a group identity, which influenced and was influenced by their activities—the creation of community institutions, literature they produced, economic activities, etc. This discussion raises further topics for investigation, such as how these and other migrants adapt additional elements of folk culture, including folk belief, folk art, and vernacular architecture. Another line for future investigation would be into how this identity was developed and expressed in specific communities, the nuances of difference, and how the Canadian Eastern European Jewish culture established at this stage interacted with cultures and identities of later waves of Jewish immigration. Through more investigation of Canadian Jewish folk culture, we can hopefully reach a better understanding of the varying identities and cultural expressions which belong to the individuals implicated, in one way or another, by the term Canadian Jews.

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**1**

Falek Zolf, *Oyf fremder erd bletlekh fun a lebn* (Winnipeg, Canada: Israelite Press, 1945), 9.

**2**

*Genesis* 32:11. (Translation is my own.)

**3**

Zolf, *Oyf fremder erd*, 520. (Translation is my own.)

**4**

Zolf, 470.

**5**

Zolf, 425.

**6**

Gerald Tulchinsky, *Canada's Jews: A People's Journey*, 1st edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 2008), 4; Joseph J. Goodman, *Collected Writings: Poems, Stories and Essays on the Canadian Jewish Immigrant Experience*, ed. Harriet Goodman Hoffman, trans. Hannah Berkiner Fischthal, Ebook (Bloomington: Xlibris Corporation, 2011), sec. Foreword.

**7**

For a discussion of how and why such organizations developed, see: Tulchinsky, *Canada's Jews*, chap. 4 Travails of Urbanization.

**8**

I use bracketed plurals here to underscore the fact that although I am writing about specific aspects and expressions of Canadian-Jewish Eastern European culture and identity, I recognize that there was never such a single cohesive, static culture or identity. Culture and identity, in general, are constantly shifting within, along, and between boundaries and are mobilized in specific ways in each unique performance. For discussions of the changing nature of culture and identity, see: Dorothy Noyes, *Humble Theory: Folklore's Grasp on Social Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), chap. Group; Charles L. Briggs, "What We Should Have Learned from Américo Paredes: The Politics of Communicability and the Making of Folkloristics," *Journal of American Folklore* 125, no. 1 (2012): 91–110.

**9**

A full discussion of the social functions of personal narratives is beyond the scope of this paper, but listening, or in this case, reading someone else's artful life story is a way of

"[...] hearing] our own lives [...] told back to us in ways that provide us with increased understanding." Steven J. Zeitlin, *The Poetry of Everyday Life: Storytelling and the Art of Awareness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 9.

**10**

Though the authors I discuss in this article all happen to be men, there are a few personal narratives by women from the period that warrant closer analysis, including Esther Shechter's *Di Geshikhte fun Mayn Lebn* (Winnipeg: Dos Yidishe Vort, 1951), and Minnie Kusnitz's memoir, which is included in Jocelyn Cohen and Daniel Soyer (eds.) *My Future Is in America: Autobiographies of Eastern European Jewish Immigrants* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

**11**

There are English versions of all of these books, but the English versions of both Usiskin and Zolf's works are not direct/complete translations. Therefore, all the English translations of Usiskin's and Zolf's works quoted in this article are my own. The English versions of the texts are: Goodman, Joseph J. *Collected Writings: Poems, Stories and Essays on the Canadian Jewish Immigrant Experience*. Edited by Harriet Goodman Hoffman. Translated by Hannah Berkiner Fischthal. Ebook. Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2011; Usiskin, Michael. *Uncle Mike's Edenbridge: Memoirs of a Jewish Pioneer Farmer*. Translated by Marcia Usiskin Basman. Winnipeg, Canada: Peguis Publishers, 1983; Zolf, Falek. *On Foreign Soil*. Translated by Martin Green. Winnipeg, Canada: Benchmark Pub., 2000.

**12**

Robert A. Georges, "Research Perspectives in Ethnic Folklore Studies," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore* 4 (1983): 12.

**13**

This book came out of a research project overseen by Ruth Benedict in collaboration with Margaret Mead, which was titled "the Columbia University Research in Contemporary Cultures Project." Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Introduction," in *Life Is with People: The Culture of the Shtetl*, by Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog (New York: Schocken, 1995), 13. Although YIVO New York did run a contest to collect North American immigrant autobiographies in 1942 (which I mention below), at the time no analysis and very few of the texts

themselves were published. Therefore, Herzog and Zborowski's project stands as the first ethnographic research on the topic. (Jocelyn Cohen and Daniel Soyer, *My Future Is in America: Autobiographies of Eastern European Jewish Immigrants* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 9.

**14**

See: Georges, "Research Perspectives in Ethnic Folklore Studies"; Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Culture Shock and Narrative Creativity," in *Folklore in the Modern World*, ed. Richard M. Dorson, World Anthropology (The Hague : Chicago: Mouton ; distributed in the USA and Canada by Aldine, 1978).

**15**

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Culture Shock and Narrative Creativity," 110.

**16**

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 110.

**17**

Charles L. Briggs, *Competence in Performance : The Creativity of Tradition in Mexican Verbal Art*, University of Pennsylvania Press Conduct and Communication Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 21.

**18**

For example, for discussion of folkloric adaptation among three different migrant groups in Israel see: Haya Bar-Itzhak, *Israeli Folk Narratives: Settlement, Immigration, Ethnicity* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005).

**19**

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Culture Shock and Narrative Creativity," 113.

**20**

Goodman, Usiskin, and Zolf all contributed articles to Yiddish language papers, specifically *The Israelite Press – Dos Yidishe Vort*, published in Winnipeg. For Goodman, see: Goodman, *Collected Writings: Poems, Stories and Essays on the Canadian Jewish Immigrant Experience*, sec. Foreword. For Zolf, see: Zolf's series, "Shtimungen un ayndrukun fun an imigrant" published in *The Israelite Press-Dos Yiddishe Vort* regularly in 1927. For Usiskin, see: his reports on life in Edenbridge, Saskatchewan published in *The Israelite Press-Dos Yiddishe Vort* 1921-1934.

**21**

The influence of folk literature on "high" literature has been well recognized in discussions of Yiddish literature generally, for example in: Dan Miron, *A Traveler Disguised: A Study in the Rise of Modern Yiddish Fiction in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Schocken Books, 1973); David Roskies, *A Bridge of Longing: The Lost Art of Yiddish Storytelling*, New edition (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1996).

**22**

For example, see:

**23**

Y. Gershman, "Forvort," in *Oksn un Motorn*, by Michael Usiskin (Toronto, Canada: Vochenblat, 1945), 7.

**24**

Gershman, 7–8.

**25**

Michael Usiskin, *Oksn Un Motorn* (Toronto, Canada: Vochenblat, 1945), 26.

**26**

Usiskin, 28–29.

**27**

Usiskin, 29. (Translation is my own.)

**28**

Usiskin, 29. (Translation is my own.)

**29**

Usiskin, 30.

**30**

Greg Dening, "Possessing Tahiti," *Archaeology in Oceania* 21, no. 1 (1986): 105.

**31**

Usiskin, *Oksn Un Motorn*, 41. (Translation is my own.)

**32**

Holly A. Pearce, "Charlie Chaplin: Jewish or Goyish?," *Jewish Quarterly* (blog), November 26, 2010, <https://jewishquarterly.org/2010/11/charlie-chaplin-jewish-or-goyish/>.

**33**

Ruth R. Wisse, *The Schlemiel as Modern Hero* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 14.

**34**

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Culture Shock and Narrative Creativity," 115.

**35**

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 118.

**36**

Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1958).

**37**

American-Jewish Autobiographies 1942-1970's, RG102, YIVO Archives, New York, USA.

**38**

For a discussion of the contest as well as a broad sense of the themes covered in the collections see: Cohen and Soyer, *My Future Is in America*, chap. Introduction.

**39**

American-Jewish Autobiographies 1942-1970's, RG102, "#218 Falek Zolf", YIVO Archives, New York, USA, 1.

**40**

Zolf, *Oyf fremder erd*, 475. (Translation is my own.)

**41**

Zolf, 476.

**42**

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Culture Shock and Narrative Creativity," 113.

**43**

Ecotypification refers to processes through which groups adapt new folklore. For an excellent discussion of the term and understandings of these processes see: Galit Hasan-Rokem, "Ecotypes: Theory of the Lived and Narrated Experience," *Narrative Culture* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 110-37.

**44**

Lauri Honko, "Four Forms of Adaptation of Tradition," ed. Pekka Hakamies and Anneli Homko, *FF Communications*, 151, no. 304 (2013): 177.

**45**

Denig, "Possessing Tahiti," 117.

**46**

Goodman, *Collected Writings: Poems, Stories and Essays on the Canadian Jewish Immigrant Experience*, sec. Joseph J. Goodman.

**47**

Goodman, sec. Joseph J. Goodman.

**48**

Goodman, sec. Joseph J. Goodman.

**49**

Goodman, sec. Foreword.

**50**

Goodman, sec. In a Dark Cellar (A Purim Memory).

**51**

Goodman, sec. In a Dark Cellar (A Purim Memory), Prohibition.

**52**

E.g. The belief that Pharaoh bathed in the blood of Hebrew children, see Rashi's commentary on *Exodus 2:23*; or the *midrash* that Haman captured Mordechai while he was teaching and placed all of Mordechai's students in chains, see: Emil G. Hirsch, M. Seeligsohn, and Solomon Schechter, "Haman the Agagite - JewishEncyclopedia.Com," accessed January 31, 2019, <http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/7124-haman-the-agagite#1>.

**53**

Although the historical reality of Pharaoh and Haman as portrayed in the Jewish canonical literature is doubtful, their role in Jewish mythic history (the history that Goodman is referencing) is not. Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, "Who Was 'Hitler' Before Hitler? Historical Analogies and the Struggle to Understand Nazism, 1930-1945," *Central European History* 51, no. 02 (June 2018): 255, 264.

**54**

Joseph J. Goodman, *Gezamelte Shriften* (Winnipeg, Canada: Kunst un literatur gezelschaft, 1919), 124-27.

**55**

Goodman, *Collected Writings: Poems, Stories and Essays on the Canadian Jewish Immigrant Experience*, sec. The Zonenfeld Colony.

**56**

Goodman, sec. The Zonenfeld Colony.

**57**

Goodman, The Zonenfeld Colony.

**58**Goodman's misquotation is reminiscent of the Tevye's constant religious misquotations in *Tevye the Dairyman*.**59**Rashi, commentary on *Numbers* 13:18 (Translation is my own.)**60**See: Midrash Tanchuma, *Parshat Shalach*, Siman Vav, [13,14]; Private correspondence with Rabbi Eryn London, Jan 31, 2019.**61**Goodman, *Gezamelte Shriften*, 125.**62**Community members use formal elements such as length, rhythm, and language in different constellations to identify, define, and innovate emic genres. For a discussion on the interplay between formal poetics and genre see: Amy Shuman and Galit Hasan-Rokem, "The Poetics of Folklore," in *A Companion to Folklore*, ed. Regina F. Bendix and Galit Hasan-Rokem (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 63–65.**63**Benjamin Harshav, *The Meaning of Yiddish* (California: Stanford University Press, 1999), 100.**64**

The only clear textual examples that I have found of this so far in Canadian Eastern European Jewish memoirs are in Zolf's work. I believe that this is a direct reflection of a difference in narrative style; of the 3 authors Zolf has the most elaborate and expansive style and therefore is willing to give himself the space to quote other tales within the framework of his own.

**65**Briggs, *Competence in Performance*, 7.**66**

Honko, "Four Forms of Adaptation of Tradition," 182.

**67**In *Jewish Poland: Legends of Origin*, Haya Bar-Itzhak undertakes an extensive dis-

cussion of this legend, which she classifies as a "name-midrash" tale type: "[...] a Jewish archetype whose most conspicuous expressions involve the Judaization of place names by means of homiletical explanations (midrashim) of the alien-sounding names." (Haya Bar-Itzhak, *Jewish Poland--Legends of Origin: Ethnopoetics and Legendary Chronicles*, Raphael Patai Series in Jewish Folklore and Anthropology (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001), 28.) There are several attested versions of the "Po-lin" legend, both in literary works and collections of folklore. The earliest recorded version is in a 17th century Hebrew religious poem, "Elegy on the Massacre in Polonia" by Jacob ben Moshe Halevy, first printed in Venice. (Bar-Itzhak, 31.) This legend holds such a significant place in Jewish-Polish culture that it is used as the first gallery of the core exhibit in the groundbreaking POLIN Museum of Jewish history in Warsaw. ("Forest," POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, accessed January 23, 2019, <https://www.polin.pl/en/forest>.)

**68**Zolf, *Oyf fremder erd*, 471. (Translation is my own.)**69**Bar-Itzhak, *Jewish Poland--Legends of Origin*, 28.**70**

Bar-Itzhak, 28.

**71**Zolf, *Oyf fremder erd*, 471. (Translation is my own.)**72**Bar-Itzhak, *Jewish Poland--Legends of Origin*, 38–40.**73**Galit Hasan-Rokem, "Narratives in Dialogue: A Folk Literary Perspective on Interreligious Contacts in the Holy Land in Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity," in *Sharing the Sacred: Religious Contacts and Conflicts in the Holy Land First-Fifteenth Centuries CE*, ed. Arieh Kofsky and Guy G. Stroumsa (Jerusalem, Israel: Yad Izhak Ben Zvi, 1998), 110.**74**Zolf, *Oyf fremder erd*, 509.

**75**

Zolf, 511. (Translation is my own.)

**76**

Zolf, 513. (Translation is my own.)

**77**

Zolf, 520. (Translation is my own.)

**78**

Zolf, 520.

**79**

*Genesis* 28:15

**80**

*Genesis* 12:7

**81**

Jacob had to travel for some time to reach Padan-Aram, and in the story of his stay there, there are references to his father-in-law being an idol worshipper, as well as not keeping his promises. *Genesis* 28:10-32:3

**82**

In fact, this is Zolf's explanation of why his father refused to join him in Canada. (Another episode of his life in which he uses interesting Biblical parallels.) Zolf, *Oyf fremder erd*, 517-18.