

Title: Babel, Bezmosgis and a Theory of Cultural Interface

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Isaac Babel is known in Russian literature as a complicated figure. His first collection, *Odesskie rasskazy*, presents dramatic pictures of Jewish life in prerevolutionary Russia. The powerful images from this collection – dense scenes involving his neighbors and family – provide a vivid testimony of the author's identity. However, as his hero grows older and becomes a champion of the Bolshevik revolution and everything it represents to him he develops a twofold identity. Babel's second collection, *Konarmia*, gives a compelling display of his painful and continuous search for a new self.

Often compared to Babel is David Bezmosgis, whose debut collection of short stories, *Natasha*, is another example of *literature of cultural interface* convincingly represented recently by a wave of new Russian-Jewish émigré writing. Just in the past five years the number of Russian-Jewish names in contemporary American literature – Gary Shteingart (*The Russian Debutante's Handbook, Absurdistan*), Lara Vapniar (*There are Jews in My House, Memoirs of a Muse, Broccoli and Other Stories of Food and Love*), Sana Krasikov (*One More Year*) and Ellen Litman (*The Last Chicken in America*), to name only a few – has expanded considerably. How are we to determine the cultural identity of these authors? Are they Jewish, Russian, American? More importantly, how do they see themselves and what cultural identity do they give to their characters? This paper offers a new theoretical term, *Literature of Cultural Interface*, to describe and investigate this multicultural phenomenon and illustrates the latter through works of writers of such different geographic, literary and generational milieus as Isaac Babel, Irene Nemirovsky and David Bezmosgis.