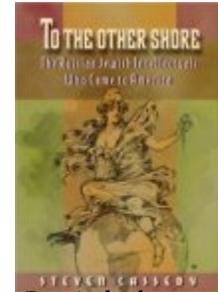


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Steven Cassedy. *To the Other Shore*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997. xxiii + 197 pp. \$47.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-691-02975-7.

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Much has been written on the generation of Jewish immigrants who fled Russia for America between 1880 and 1920. One need look no further than the numbers alone to account for this group's ubiquity in Jewish historiography. In 1880, the Jewish population of the United States numbered approximately 230,000. By 1930 that number had increased to 4,400,000. Of the estimated 2,885,000 Jewish immigrants who reached the shores of the United States between 1881 and 1930, 1,749,000 hailed from Russia. If the numbers alone fail to impress sufficiently, one can also cite the cultural and intellectual influence that this generation has had on the American landscape. One need only think of David Sarnoff, Louis B. Mayer, Emma Goldman and Abraham Cahan to remember the impact of these immigrants. Even more striking is the influence of their children: George Gershwin, Irving Berlin, Irving Howe, Lionel Trilling, Irving Kristol and Alfred Kazin, to name but a few.

Steven Cassedy's *To The Other Shore: The Russian Jewish Intellectuals Who Came To America* is the most recent attempt to explore the radical ideas and agitational politicking that came with these immigrants. Cassedy's innovation—and a significant one at that—is to highlight the role that distinctly Russian forms of political awareness played in both the identity and thought of the Russian Jewish Intellectuals. Whether they chose to write in Russian, Yiddish or English, Cassedy argues, their language was that of the Russian intelligentsia who came of age in the 1860s and 1870s and embraced a wide array of populist (and elitist) ideologies, generally subsumed under the rubric "nihilism." In terms of their intellectual heritage, Cassedy maintains, the Russian Jewish Intellectuals were "Russian first and Jews second, or, in some cases, Russian first and Jews not at all" (64).

It has long been recognized that Russia had a profound influence on the identity of the new immigrants. In her classic memoir, *The Promised Land*, Mary Antin dedicates half her work to her childhood in Polotzk, and Abraham Cahan's David Levinsky does not arrive in America until Book V of *The Rise of David Levinsky*. Most scholarly studies of the "mass immigration" have followed these two timeless classics by prefacing their work with a survey of life in the shtetl. Neither Irving Howe in his *World of Our Fathers* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1976) nor Ronald Sanders in his *The Downtown Jews: Portraits of an Immigrant Generation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969) could begin their study without first providing their readers with an account of the shtetl in which their subjects were reared.

Although Cassedy follows this tradition, the Russia he presents us is not the Russia of kheyders and pogroms, but the Russia of "critically thinking individuals" and "narodovol'tsy" (members of the radical party People's Will). Their only kheyder is "Chernyshevsky's kheyder." By focusing on the "Jewish radical immigrant intellectuals who became cultural and political leaders in the new immigrant community in America" (xx), Cassedy moves away from the stereotypical greenhorn who arrives in Battery Park and makes his way over to the Lower East Side in search of a synagogue and a sweatshop. Instead, he presents us with a collective biography of radical ideologues who come to America committed to establishing a labor movement, socialist press, and thick journals of literary criticism. Among the most prominent of his subjects are Abraham Cahan, Leo Deutsch, Jacob Gordin, Morris Hillquit, Philip Krantz, Aron Liberman, Morris Winchevsky, and Chaim Zhitlovsky.

As youth in Russia, his subjects all shared a strong de-

sire to assimilate into the Russian intelligentsia. All also shared a practical knowledge of the Russian language, gained either through clandestine study, or in the case of those whose parents subscribed to the Haskalah (Enlightenment), through a formal secular education. All also came of age in the 1860s, just as the Russian intelligentsia was reaching maturity. The decade was characterized by two very broad philosophies: nihilism, a rejection of anything not verifiable by science, and populism, a broad term referring to any of numerous philosophies that claimed to draw inspiration from the masses. Among the many writings that influenced the youth of this period were Nikolai Chernyshevsky's 1863 novel *What Is to Be Done?*, which inspired a generation of youth with visions of communal living and women's liberation; and Petr Lavrov's *Historical Letters*, which inspired thousands of students to flock to the countryside in order to impart their wisdom to the Russian peasants in a movement that culminated with the 1874 summer of "going to the people."

The Jewish radical immigrants, Cassedy argues, found their inspiration in Chernyshevsky and Lavrov as well. "The 'going to the people' campaign," he writes, "ultimately provided the Jewish labor movement, both in Russia and in the United States, with a model of political action, one whose basic inspiration may be found in Lavrov's *Historical Letters* and whose applications may be found in the unsuccessful campaign of 1874" (48). Certainly the Jewish intelligentsia, like their Russian counterparts, did look toward Chernyshevsky and Lavrov for inspiration. Cassedy's evidence for this is derived primarily from the testimony of the Jewish intellectuals themselves, who repeatedly recall their early infatuation with Chernyshevsky, Lavrov and others in their autobiographical writings.

Perhaps, though, Cassedy relies too much on autobiographical literature. The reader is often left craving more evidence of nihilist and populist thought in the theoretical writings of these Jewish intellectuals. The absence of such analysis can leave the reader wondering whether the Jewish intellectuals were not overstating the influence of their Russian counterparts in their memoirs. After all, among the Russian intelligentsia who were so idealized by the Jewish intellectuals, one could hardly be taken as a serious radical without paying the requisite homage to Chernyshevsky and Lavrov—whether or not one had actually bothered to read them. For instance, one wonders how well the poverty-stricken Jewish intellectuals could have identified with Lavrov's "critically thinking individuals." Lavrov, a wealthy member of the

landed gentry whose estate was visited by Alexander II and other luminaries, argued that those who have been able to enjoy the luxuries of leisure time and education by relying upon the labor of the masses to provide them with their physical needs owe a moral debt to the peasantry on whose toil they have profited. It is easy to see how this philosophy could have touched a nerve among the wealthy members of the Russian intelligentsia, many of whom had seen with their own eyes how their own serfs contributed to their economic status. But could the poor Jewish migrants like Cahan really have been so moved by the upper-class guilt inherent in Lavrov's call? Although he acknowledges this point, Cassedy could have addressed it with greater depth (103). Indeed, the act of conjuring the names of the Russian "men of the 60s" became a standardized refrain among the Jewish intellectuals that may have acted more to signify their inclusion within the radical intelligentsia than to represent a genuine intellectual influence. Even if the Jewish intellectuals did somewhat manufacture or exaggerate the influence of the Russian intelligentsia on their thought, though, the fact remains, as Cassedy correctly insists, that the Russian intelligentsia profoundly influenced the identity of the radical Jewish intellectuals in America.

The most important influence of the Russian intelligentsia on the Jewish intellectuals, Cassedy maintains, was in their practical work. Cahan, Deutsch, Krantz and Hillquit all shared the belief that it was their responsibility to channel the people's frustrations into appropriate action through education, and all shared the belief that the means of educating the people was through the written media. The newspapers they founded – *Forverts*, *Di Tsukunft*, and others – all sought to emulate similar papers in Russian that served as platforms for radical ideologues. The Yiddish press, writes Cassedy, "was created and run by an elite vanguard of intellectuals whose political stance continued to be defined by Russian models they had learned before emigrating" (77). There can be little doubt that Cassedy is correct in citing the Russian populist origins of this type of agitation.

In addition to the heritage of the Russian intelligentsia, however, the Jewish intellectuals Cassedy studies were also profoundly affected by the heritage of the Jewish enlightenment. This aspect of their pedigree, unfortunately, is largely overlooked in Cassedy's work. Indeed, it was no coincidence that Cahan, Liberman and Hourwich all learned the skills of political agitation among the Jewish workers of Vilna. As the intellectual center of the Russian Haskalah, Vilna possessed an unusually educated and sophisticated Jewish population

that proved particularly receptive to socialist principles. By appealing to the workers' immediate economic concerns, the predominantly Jewish activists in Vilna were able to motivate the masses with a degree of success that could only be envied by those who preferred the more elitist techniques of Lavrov. The worker circles of Vilna, led by Liberman among others, would serve as models for political activism throughout the Russian Empire and in the United States. After all, it was in Vilna that Iulii Martov and Aleksandr Kremer wrote *On Agitation*, a book that would serve as a handbook for worker motivation, and it was in Vilna that the Bund and Poalei Tsion would see their first successes. Cahan, Liberman and Hourwich learned just as much about agitation from the streets of Jewish Vilna as from the writings of Lavrov and Chernyshevsky.

To The Other Shore is an original and well-written study of an important group of individuals. Cassedy shows that the Russian Jewish intellectuals who came to America cannot fully be understood without an appreciation for the Russian tradition of social criticism. For those unfamiliar with the Russian heritage, Cassedy's work provides a useful survey. For those who are already able to navigate among the populists and nihilists, this book is equally beneficial, as it shows the far-reaching influences of Russian thought, and the debt that the American labor movement owes to the Russian intelligentsia.

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