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Intercultural Aspects in Eastern European Jewish Literature

The study deals with literary works of Eastern European Jewish authors and their relation to various cultural traditions. On the basis of comparativism, postcolonialism and hermeneutics I will analyze the phenomena of the existence of an individual among different cultures, cultural hybridization, ethnic and cultural identity, as they are present at the thematic and aesthetic levels of the texts.

The research focuses in particular on the Jewish literature which was written in the regions of East Prussia and so called "Jewish Lithuania" (current Baltic States and Belarus). The extraordinary existence of Jews in the Diaspora was the reason for their constant thinking about other cultures and their own cultural identity. In this aspect the multicultural region of East Prussia (comparable to Prague or Bucovina) is unique in its own way. For hundreds of years German, Baltic, Slavic and Semitic ethnicities lived next to each other in this area, whereby German language and culture dominated.

In general German-Jewish relationship has been discussed a lot and is characterized by the controversial concepts as "German-Jewish symbiosis", "German-Jewish synthesis" or "German-Jewish dialog", describing the acculturation of the Jews into the German culture. East Prussia could be called birthplace of Jewish emancipation and acculturation, as starting with the period of Immanuel Kant and Johann Jacoby the ideas of Enlightenment have taken roots there. So first of all the Jewish authors of East Prussia were acculturated into the German culture, but other cultural traditions like Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian, Prussian and Russian have influenced them too.

On the other hand, the Jewish writers from the right side of the Neman river, which has divided East Prussia and "Jewish Lithuania", are known because of their traditional point of view: The special interest for Talmudic studies, cultivation of Shtetl culture and Yiddish language was an important part of their life and work.

In my thesis I will examine the manifestations of these two concepts, acculturated and traditional Jewishness, in the literary texts of August Lewald (1792-1871), Fanny Lewald (1811-1889), Abraham Mapu (1808-1867), Salomon Maimon (1753-1800), Walther Heymann (1882-1915), Leib Naidus (1890-1918), Arnold Zweig (1887-1968), Max Fürst (1905-1978) and other authors from the region.