

Maxim Shrayer:

Welcome to this afternoon's event, the second fall event in our series in the seminar on Russian and Eurasian Jews, here at the Davis Center. I'm Maxim Shrayer, and I'm very, very happy to welcome you, and to welcome professor Roman Katsman who is here visiting with us from Israel, from Bar-Ilan University. And we're really grateful that you're here. I will just briefly introduce professor Katsman, and he has a very, very exciting presentation for us. He is originally from the former Soviet Union, and is part of that great outflux of Jews from the Soviet Union that happened in the late 1980's, early 1990's. And I think, you all know that Israel benefited tremendously from that. And it really changed the texture of everyday life in Israel, where Russian is now spoken everywhere, and almost a million Russian speakers are Israelis.

Maxim Shrayer:

It's a phenomenal, phenomenal situation that even 30. 40 years ago probably could not have been imagined or anticipated. In fact the visits I've made to Israel over the years are evidence of that. In other words really there was a time the Russian wasn't as omnipresent as it is today. Professor Katsman until recently chaired the department of literature of the Jewish people at Bar-Ilan University, which I actually I believe the only such department in the world, if I'm not mistaken. It's a department that offers courses in Jewish literatures, not only in Hebrew and Yiddish and Ladino, but also in non Jewish languages. And it's really fascinating.

Maxim Shrayer:

He is the author of six books, and many, many important articles on Hebrew and Russian literature, on Jewish-Russian and Russian-Israeli literature and thought. He's both a textualist and a theorist, and that's very important. He's written on theoretical problems of mythopoiesis, chaos, nonverbal communication. And I also can brag a little bit by saying that his most recent book, *Nostalgia For a Foreign Land*, came out last year in a book series that I edit here in Boston with Academic Studies Press. And it's really exciting. We'll also mention some of Roman's other books, *Literature, History, Choice*, the principal of alternative history in literature, *At the Other End of Gesture*, anthropological poetics of gesture in modern Hebrew literature, and *The Time of Cruel Miracles*, *Mythopoiesis in Dostoevsky and Agnon*. Agnon is one of Katsman's great protagonists.

Maxim Shrayer:

And as I was mentioning before to our colleagues, he is also a practicing translator into Hebrew from Russian and into Russian from Hebrew. And Roman, I just want to tell you how delighted we are to have you, and also to mention that your visit has been made possible by our seminar, by the Seminar in Literature and Culture, and also by the Center for Jewish Studies. Please help me welcome professor Katsman.

Roman Katsman:

Thank you very much. And I really would like to thank to professor Shrayer and to the Davis Center to the seminar for this invitation. It is great to be here. And indeed the subject of Russian, or Russophone literature in Israel is very exciting for many of Russian specialist or Russophone literature specialists and experts in the world. And there are few questions that must be asked, and today's subject even, the marginalization of contemporary Russophone literature in Israel. So let's begin.

Roman Katsman:

Okay. I'll read my lecture from the paper, but after that we could discuss the subjects and I could answer your questions if you'd like. In the modern world of global networks and open borders, virtual geography substantially restructures physical geography. Thanks to the internet, imagined communities become real, albeit micro sociological objects. Splitting the relations between people and the products of the creativity into small unstable dissipative systems is not perceived anymore as an attribute of crisis and decay, and is normalized within the framework of the theory of chaos that is gaining ever greater currency.

Roman Katsman:

It was these profound changes, and not only the influence of the theories of post colonialism, that should have changed the role and meaning of such concepts as periphery diaspora and [foreign language 00:05:49] and minor literature, which were relevant as recently as the 1970s of the past century. But this took place only partially, and only in relation to the most obvious instances. For example, few today can doubt that the relocation a writer from Russia to Europe or to Israel can be considered immigration only in the technical sense. And yet Russian literature written in Israel is conferred the label of peripheral.

Roman Katsman:

Mikhail Femov's note about Alexandra Goldstein, published recently in the journals [Visdan 00:06:28] Star can serve as an example. In it he writes with great sympathy about the opportunity that has emerged for the writer, Alexander Goldstein, a quote, "To breathe oxygen on the periphery." Goldstein was the immigrant writer, Russian writer who immigrated to Israel. On the other hand, the Israeli literary scholar, Adium Anderson examines Russophone-Israeli literature as part of Israel's, "marginal literature," alongside Arab-Israeli literature, and the Hebrew literature of refugees from the countries of the middle East and North Africa.

Roman Katsman:

Since such definitions, even though they seem intuitively and sociologically founded, obviously contradict the vector of contemporary cultures development. I would like to examine in greater detail here the questions of the marginal character or Russophone Israeli literature. It seems to me that the term marginal can be used today in one sense only, from its opposite specifically in conjunction with the concept of the process of demarginalization. More generally, partially as a result of the shift in the foundation of scholarly paradigm, the concept of demarginalization reflects the process of the transformation of literary geography as a whole in the direction of it's conversion from a two dimensional map corresponding either to the political or to the geographical map of the world, into a multidimensional cognitive map of multiple cultural universes.

Roman Katsman:

Process of demarginalization refer, as the term itself suggest, not to central, but to peripheral phenomenon changing the status of the latter, but not necessarily changing the status of the former and totally not encroaching upon the dichotomy of the center and the periphery. And the experience of the 3D case of postmodernism has shown this dichotomy is quite tenacious in spite of the huge philosophical and political work on it's deconstruction. The question rather should be about changing the cultural and scholarly paradigm dealing with the hierarchy that exists in reality, and is apparently immutable.

Roman Katsman:

What changes is not the hierarchic structure itself, but than material that constitutes it and the objects found in its vortex, as well as the types and properties of the connections between them. I would like to focus here on the two basic paths along which the demarginalization of the contemporary Russophone Israeli literature proceeds- deminorization and devictimization.

Roman Katsman:

The first one: deminorization. The most important symptom of the transformation being examined here can be considered to be the noticeable diminishing of the effectiveness of the extremely popular theory of minor literature pronounced by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. This concept designating the politicized and collectively oriented writing of a national minority in the language of the majority, maybe applicable to some parts of Russian Jewish literature in pre-revolutionary Russia, in the USSR, and the emigre circles of the post-Soviet period, but it loses its sense in current day reality.

Roman Katsman:

The unique characteristic of Russophone Israeli literature consists in the fact that in it the writer Jew appears geographically as part of the Jewish national majority, but belongs mentally and linguistically to the majority within the Russophone community, both on the global and on the micro social levels, family, friends, readers, the circles of users of flight journal and Facebook and so forth. Moreover, the latter turns out to be significantly more important, both practically and psychologically. In Israel, Russian-Jewish Israeli literature, if this term is still relevant, stops being minor and becomes B major. This not quite usual term describes the passing from the political world in which literature no longer measures itself by the degree of the politicization of the writing, it more than likely does not even feel guilty for doing so.

Roman Katsman:

The new writing inter arises in an equally major fashion, both the Russian language and Russian culture, as well as Israeli reality in its languages. Paraphrasing Deleuze and Guattari, one can say that it does not dig a den within a language like a mouse, disrupting and undermining it, but rather like a beaver it adds on layer after layer strengthening and expanding the dam, intensifying his resistance to the current of the ideological and political unconsciousness.

Roman Katsman:

The history of this transformation requires detailed study as well as a comparison with corresponding processes in world literature. Here pointing to several characteristic examples will suffice. Avraham Wissotsky, one of the first Russophone writers in mandate Palestine published three novels, Saturday and Sunday, Tel Aviv, and Green Flame. The first of this is a typical Russian-Jewish novel about the fate of the Jews in Russia during the pre-revolutionary years and the years of the Russian civil war. The first of Wissotsky novels published in immigration, it still reflects the writer's minor experience, and is the continuation and evolution of the themes that occupied him even before his departure from Russia.

Roman Katsman:

Majorization, let's call it this way, takes place in his two subsegment novels. And is connected with two fundamental changes. The first one is obvious and is the move to Palestinian themes, but this is still not enough. It is impossible to speak of a Jewish majority, or of any national majority in mandate Palestine.

It is for this reason that the second ideological change becomes decisive, when the basic access of the conflict moves from the religious cultural sphere, symbolized by the very title of the novel, the first novel is called Saturday and Sunday, to the philosophical political sphere, problems of Jewish settlement activity in Palestine.

Roman Katsman:

In other words, it is not belonging to a majority community that makes a literature major, but its inclusion in what the author sees as the longterm vision of historical creation, of setting down roots in a historical soil with or without a nativist ideology. Israeli literary scholars usually emphasize the significance of the connection between men and the soil for purposes of creating a new Jewish-Palestinian ethos; a new Jew, a new mentality. But what is important is not this connection, which is itself is trivial, but the new historical consciousness that it in genders. The Jewish minority in a Christian world was above all not quantitative, but religious dogmatic. Jews were seen as the dying bearers of a dying religion, as already almost not existing, vanishing and thus more minor than any other small community.

Roman Katsman:

Minority denotes an annihilation from the historical task, in Herman Cohen's meaning. Or speaking semi-ironically in back instance from the means of historical production. It is the striving to overcome this alienation to work within history, always creatively and individually, that constitutes the goal of minor literature, and the mechanism for its transformation into a major literature. In this sense, there is no more majority writer of modernism than Kafka, and there is no greater misunderstanding than the presentation of his other using the concept of minor literature.

Roman Katsman:

But let us return to Russophone literature in Israel. Decades separate Wissotzky novels from the literature of the field's great Aliyah from the USSR of the late '60s and early '70s which can be considered to be a continuation of Soviet nonconformist underground unofficial literature. What is more, in many respects this is what it remained even when the writers took up Israeli themes. The change in themes as mentioned earlier, did not necessarily denote their minorization. For political reasons the Israeli literary community was perceived as a kind of Ant-Soviet unofficial subculture within the majority all powerful language of the Soviet regime.

Roman Katsman:

This situation is in some way reminiscent of the situation with official literature in the countries of the social camp although with a minus sign. In this conditions this literature not yet fail to be perceived as being a minor literature. Such for example, was David Markish series of novels, A new world of Simone Ashkenazy, [foreign language 00:16:07], 1978, or Eddie [Luksenburg's 00:16:12], The 10th hunger, [foreign language 00:16:16], in 1985. The generic similarity of these novels to Wissotzky, Saturday and Sunday, consists not so much in the theme of antisemitism, and in the spirit of standing up to the political and spiritual power of arrow, as in the fact that this power is presented as an obstacle of the past of the historical task, and the self realization of the heroes.

Roman Katsman:

In this sense, Russophone Israeli novels differ a little from Russian-Jewish novels, such as Felix Rosinger's, A Certain Thinking Mire, Yuri Karapievski, Life of Alexander Zilber, or David Shrayer Petrov's,

Herbert and Nelly. The great Aliyah of the 1990s changed everything. If we look in the author of one of the most recognized writers of this Aliyah Alexandra Goldstein, who was very active in the second half of the 1990s and the beginnings of the 2000s, we will discover a substantial difference between two of his novels that were published one right after the other.

Roman Katsman:

Remember Famagusta, [foreign language 00:17:27], 2004 with all its thematic, complexity is subordinate to the issue of power. And moreover is concentrated on religious historical context, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Israel. The second novel of Goldstein, Peaceful Fields [foreign language 00:17:46] in 2006, is a Universalist, lyrical and metaphysical novel. And not maintaining that in this instance we can be talking about the evolution of the authors worldview, unfortunately Goldstein died having barely finished working on this last novel in 2006, it is difficult to say how his work would have developed subsequently had he lived. But the distinction symbolically embodies the deminorization that Russophone Israeli literature is undergoing.

Roman Katsman:

Another vivid example of this same process taking place in the work of one writer is Mikhail [Yulsten's 00:18:32] novel, The Letter to the Cabinet, [foreign language 00:18:35], Mikhail Yulsten. After the biography of the author, the novel developed two stages. The first version, which included two parts about the adventures of the hero in Russia and Germany came out in 2003. The second version, which also included the third Israel part, came out in 2010, 13. The general difference between the first two parts and the third part should first be noted. Russia and Germany appear as an anti-utopia, a nightmare. Whereas Israel is depicted through a fantasy philosophical parable that is critical, but not anti-utopian.

Roman Katsman:

In other words, while in the first two parts, the hero's profound alienation from the political social here now, and the only thing concerning him is surviving in an impossible reality and fleeing from it. In the third part the hero goes subsequently through an ordeal by growing into various field of Israeli society presented as gnarly and grotesque with bewilderment, but without alienation. As a result the basic model for the hero socialization in a world new to him turns out to be an apprenticeship. His own former pupils from Russia, where he had once been a teacher, initiate him in his new life. This symbolizes the deminorization, not only in the Israeli context, but also in the context of their relationship, if only mental, psychological, to Russia.

Roman Katsman:

Another author, Nicote Zinger's first novel, Tickets at the Box Office, [foreign language 00:20:32], Nicote Zinger, 2006. Some elements of minority can be discerned in this novel, primarily Russian Jewish topics and the marginalization of language largely through the glossier. But in his second novel, Drafts of Jerusalem, [foreign language 00:20:51], 2013, they disappear almost completely. And moreover, the nature of the literary game that is characteristic of this novel allows one to perceive the first novel differently. That is to take it out of this fear of the collective political, and that means, of the minor.

Roman Katsman:

Both novels are a kind of heterogeneous solution of world culture. In the first, it is dissolving in the Russian Jewish Soviet mentality, and in the second, in the special temporal continuum of Jerusalem. As a

consequence a carnival reversal of minority and majority takes place in Drafts of Jerusalem. The various cultures and literatures of the world turn out to be minority components of the fantasy to Jewish Jerusalem majority. The author explains the main message of his book, all the cities of the world turn out to be drafts of Jerusalem. In this literary game the texts of world classics turned out to be notes in the margins, the magnaia of a single Jewish text by analogy with the Torah, or the Talmud.

Roman Katsman:

In this concept of Zinger's one cannot fail to note not only the accompanying, but also the intentional demarginalization of the Jewish discourse within the Jerusalem text. The mythopoietic nature of the latter only strengthens this intention. The Patter's book text fulfill the similar function in Russian literature, with the one difference that it's nucleus was political imperialism, while Zinger's novel is characterized by imperialism that is aesthetic, ludic, and fragmentary. The imperialitization of politics is not replaced by the politization of the aesthetics as Walter Benjamin required in his day, but his [paradide 00:22:56]. The literary process itself is subject to aesthetization. The old Imperial geopolitics is replaced by the new literary geography.

Roman Katsman:

It is in this key that the two novels of another author, Dennis [Sogorev 00:23:13], can be seen. Jerusalem is his first novel published in 2005, and Legends of Mount Carmel [foreign language 00:23:25], 2006, Dennis Sogorev. Okay. Each one of them can serve as the model of Russophone Israeli literature as it's inner structure. They consist in individual fragments, tales, legends, or narratives of the magical realistic type. Many of which were published in journals long before the novels came out. At first glance, they are unified by place.

Roman Katsman:

In the first instance it is Jerusalem, and in the second it is Haifa and its suburbs. However, more than by place, the fragments are united by what in chaos theory is called dissipative structure, a newly arranged pattern of behavior arising in the chaos system with increasing entropy. In this instance, chaos is the historical and cultural reality surrounding the heroes. And the dissipative structure, the linking of signs and symbols in the gray zone between sense and nonsense. An example would be meeting of the hero with the eternal Jew in chapter [foreign language 00:24:31] in the novel Jerusalem, or the meeting of the Israeli teenager, lost in all respects, with a Russian intellectual in the chapter, The Girl and the Sheep, in the novel Legends of Mount Carmel.

Roman Katsman:

The new reality is thus aligned in three phases. The existing order of things and ideas is subjected to radical doubt, its place is taken by chaos. And finally chaos is transformed into a cloud of possibilities or probabilities in which islands of new structures of meaning arise, as in the fantasy mist of Solaris. Processes of both physical and semiotic and ideological space are drowned into this process of the reemergence of the meanings, but language itself is excluded from it. As a result Sogorev's novels acquire a philosophical character while cardinally changing the orthodox hierarchies of meaning generating zones, living not a single idea and ideology outside the zone of skepticism without generating doubt about the ability of language to self realize the transcendental subject of this very skepticism.

Roman Katsman:

We must assume that here we are dealing with a unique method characteristic of intellectual literature of overcoming minority through philosophical work within the cloud of the possibilities of Gunter marginal thinking. In other words, an Israeli writer can avoid minority by becoming a conservative philosopher. And also as in the case of Sogorev, a culturalogist. See for example his culturalogical magnum opus, *The Jews and Europe*. And I hope Dennis [inaudible 00:26:19] will forgive me for classifying him as conservative philosopher. Okay.

Roman Katsman:

And the second part of this discussion, devictimization. Another extremely important mechanism of demarginalization is devictimization, transforming the hero from a victim to an actual participant of the conflict. This transformation turns out to be possible thanks to the replacement of the narrative of victim and executioner, or of sacrifice and heroism, characteristic of Jewish, Russian, and Jewish, European literature, and deeply connected with it's minority. It is a narrative of abortive violence. I use the terms of Eric Gans, the anthropological philosopher from UCLA. He's talking about an abortive gesture of appropriation, abortive violence. He is a student of Renard Girard, et cetera.

Roman Katsman:

The arrested gesture of the hero's violence is one of the basic narratives, myths in the contemporary Russophone literature in Israel. The scene of the having of the violent gesture that serves as a mechanism for generation of the sign language and culture, the generative scene, to use Gans term, constitutes one of the most important chronotopes of the Israeli text. These generative scene is precisely that reality so repulsive and attractive that serves as the home, the mobilization point for Russophone Israeli literature. It is on this stage that the Russian Israeli creative mentality expresses itself, its finite living experience. It's facts of the real in the concerns, its relation to the symbolic and the imagined culture, ideology, politics, ethics, with all the sincerity accessible to it.

Roman Katsman:

Violence as part of the Israeli reality, with it's terrorist attacks, wars, and military operations makes a deep imprint on the creativity of Israeli writers. And in some instances even serves as a meaning-making and plot making principle. There is however, a difference between Russophone-Israeli discourse and Hebrew-Israeli discourse. The latter, that is Hebrew-Israeli discourse, since the 1970s is constructed on an ideological model at who's basis lie ideas of pacificism and humanization of the image of the enemy as a historical double of the philosophical concept of the other.

Roman Katsman:

For the sake of literary pacification the other is assigned the status of victim, while the Jewish Israeli subject takes on the responsibility of the executioner, which was for so long imposed on him by the surrounding world, both enemy and friend. Moreover, the executioner's violent gesture, whether real or imagined is blocked thanks to the imagination of the victim, "Remember that you too were once a victim, and for this reason or the strength of the Kantian imperative, do not become an executioner yourself." At double effect is thus achieved, the subject immerses himself into victim consciousness and also blocks himself from receiving... Syncopates, as Brian Masavic put it, the political present the real victims of the present, himself and his doubles as victims.

Roman Katsman:

Dichotomous thinking, one must become, imagine oneself to be the victim so as not to be the executioner, turns out to be a dead end since it consists symbolically of two mutually exclusive predicates, you are the executioner, you are the victim. Such an ambivalent statement which does not allow the subject to take any action without incurring punishment serves, as Gregory Bateson shown, as an obvious feature of authoritarian power of hegemony manipulating its subjects through ambiguity and unpredictability, which requires this model to be considered ideological. It turns a greater part of the contemporary Israeli literature into being didactic and partisan, serving the interests of the intellectual hegemony.

Roman Katsman:

Russophone literature in Israel in some sense continues the traditions of the literature of Soviet nonconformism battling against the mechanics of ideological and intellectual hegemony, develops a different model. It can be called anthropological due to its independence of political fashion and related by Israeli elites to the right wing only owing to the misunderstanding. Its essence is to free itself from both predicates, from both parts of the executioner-victim dichotomy. Unlike the ideological model it does not presuppose a fixation on victim hood, or in general on prior division of social roles. It overcomes both colonial and post-colonial discourse since it is not prepared to attribute the role of the center either to the subject of violence or to its object. Both of these discourses have been consigned the role of marginal, while the generative anthropological model affects the demarginalization of the discourse and of the cultural mentality in general.

Roman Katsman:

Let us trace this dynamic on the example of a small group of literary texts. The change in the paradigm that can be observed in the most recent Russophone literature in Israel, that we'll now discuss, is a totally distinct and to some degree unique phenomenon. The victimary breakout in Newtonian paradigm dominates in Russophone Israeli literature of previous periods starting with the novels of Avraham Wissotzky in the 1920s and 1930s, and up to the recent novels of Dina Rubina, if you want.

Roman Katsman:

The basic intellectual effort is directed here at the creation of a myth of transforming the victim into a warrior. In the spirit of the Jewish literary traditions of glorifying Spanish Jews, Halutzim Sabras as the founders of a new proud and independent Jewish identity. This image inhabits the pages of world Jewish, Israeli and Russophone Israeli literature, particularly starting with the epoch of the Jewish enlightenment of the 18th and 19th centuries, right up to Daniel Kluger Musckitor, and Dina Rubina's, *White Dove of Cordoba* [foreign language 00:33:26]. And there are other novels that maybe mentioned in this context, but we can skip it.

Roman Katsman:

The image of the Jewish pirate, for example, as demonstrated by Edward Kritzer in his book, is distinct development of this image. In Wissotzky's story, *The First Answer*, in 1946, a young Jew chased out of medieval Saragossa takes a weapon in hand and kills the bandits that attacked him. Zahar Cordoba from Rubina's, *White Dove of Cordoba*, a descendant of Spanish Jews who doesn't part with his pistol, hopes to exact revenge on the bandits that killed his friend. Yet Zahar rather than committing his act of violence himself becomes a new victim. The dichotomous victim-warrior pair inhabits the novels of David Markish, Andre Sakova, Nina Varanelle, Daniel Kluger, Felix Scandle, as well as Rubina's trilogy, *A Russian Canary*, published two years ago.



Roman Katsman:

Against the background of the dominating victim paradigm, writers stand out who have been able to overcome it and who could serve as examples of a new paradigm in which, this has already been said, a generative myth, often unrealized gesture of violence has been formulated that eliminates the dichotomy of the victim and warrior. Overcoming the old paradigm and generating the new one takes place in those contexts in which focuses of the greatest strain in relations of potential victim hood emerge. This above all is the context of the historical fate of the Jewish people.

Roman Katsman:

A few examples, in Alex Turn's novel, Protocols of the Elders of Zion, Alex Turn, [foreign language 00:35:40], which came out in 2003, the hero attempts to avenge the death of his wife and daughter in a terrorist attack, but the vengeance remains a fiction, fantasy, an unrealized gesture. At the same time, the fiction becomes a reality. The literary character he invented, a special agent and hero of action movies, acquires flesh and blood. It turns out that the conspiracy of the elders of Zion consists in the reproduction of a generative scene, individual roles and the relations of victims and others have not yet been determined.

Roman Katsman:

The basic myth of the unrealized gesture of violence was embodied in the Jerusalem novels of Elizaveta Mikhail [Chenka 00:36:28] and [Yurinasis 00:36:29], A Nobleman of Jerusalem, [Yerusalem Skividarian 00:36:33] 1997, [foreign language 00:36:37] 2004, and Preempting Revenge, 2006. In Russian the novel is named Z. In each of them one can observe the moral of overcoming victim hood and heroism simultaneously. Of blocking the gesture of violence or of rendering it meaningless. The frustrated heroes and warriors, the soldiers fighting mythological political monsters suffer defeat in battle, but win the war against a victim mentality.

Roman Katsman:

In the first of the novels mentioned, A Nobleman of Jerusalem., the anti-Semitic slogan, Jerusalem nobleman, is recorded into spiritual and intellectual aristocratism. In second novel, depersonalizing victim hood is overcome by hyper humanism, by radical personalism as a paradoxical image embodied in a web based thinking in the internet model of virtual reality, in which roles and names change continuously. In the third novel Z, the frustrated heroes unrealized gesture of violence is directed at the ideologists of contemporary victim hood. By the same token, they turn out to be vanquished in the best possible battle; the one that did not take place.

Roman Katsman:

In all three Jerusalem novels acts of violence inevitably take place as in the reality itself, but they don't become an integral part of the chronotope of the heroes, even when they themselves become victims. And in the last novel Mikhail Chenki and Yurinasis are thus able to conceptualize the catastrophic nature of what takes place with intellectual honesty, without at the same time allowing it to be reduced to dichotomous victim hood. Okay. How many time?

Maxim Shrayer:

We're doing great.

Roman Katsman:

It's okay. So in a moment I'll dwell in somewhat greater detail on some of the works of two other writers in the mid 2000s who are quite remarkable on today's Israeli Russophone stage. The theme of violence has a central significance in their works, and bears the deep imprint of the complex and profound crisis of the victimary paradigm. I'm referring here to Yakub Schechter and Anna Fine. In Yakub Schechter's novel, *There Was No One Around Me*, [foreign language 00:39:23], 2004, two women, Laura and Tatiana, who have undergone the initiation rite of two different marginal mystical sects where... Okay. That was what was in the center or the plot. In Laura's case, the sect turns out to be nothing but part of a large scale financial scam, the goal of which was Laura's husband. Tatiana on the other hand turned out to be drawn into [Mizar Kimbadbayev 00:40:00] and Abai Borubayev sect. It was very famous, again, sadly famous for the murder of actor Talgat Nigmatulin in 1985, this is a real story.

Roman Katsman:

Both women join the sects voluntary, and according to their statements, the rites made them feel very spiritually uplifted. Tatiana was in love with Abai, and continued to love him even after the murder and it's exposure. Being intelligent and educated women, they both believed for a long time that they had found true spiritual teachers, masters, and they did not perceive their experience in this sects, in large part consisting of sexual relations with the masters and their assistants, as violence against them.

Roman Katsman:

To the protagonist and the writer, the psychometrician, read cabalist, who comes to Odessa for Rehovot in Israel, they seem broken by faith but still exceptionally strong personalities. In spite of his persistent attempts to convince them that they had simply been raped, the women refuse to see themselves as victims. The hero looks for the catch, or hidden objective in their revelations, and he finally finds it when everything that happens to him during his trip to Odessa turns out to be a test or initiation at the end of which he disappears, or ascends into the heavens like the prophet Elijah.

Roman Katsman:

Readers are left to come to their own conclusions about the meaning of the truth of the spiritual mystical experience that is suddenly revealed to the hero. On the other hand, though raising the issue of violence turns on its head, the novel describes a kind of militant community of psychometricians, which had blossomed in Poland during the Cossacks wars and stood in opposition to the traditional positions I call traditional position of psychometrics in relation to the surrounding world, that was formulated by their founding fathers, "those who start a war always lose. The one who avoids battle wins."

Roman Katsman:

The members of this community enter the world and every last one perished. Combining this episode with the proceeding ones, one can conclude that the author deconstructs the concept of violence, but not in trial in the spirit of ethical humanism, since the concept of victim is deconstructed along with it. True, the narrative attempts to convince his interlocutors that true teaching is always ethical, but he's not very successful. And later goes so far as to criticize himself for his psychometric incompetence. His self realization takes on the form of non being as already mentioned, by which of the subject himself that is the source of authoritative ethical maxims of know it all, bankrupt is deconstructed.

Roman Katsman:

Violence in Schechters novel thus doesn't have a dogmatic or ideological character, rather it develops at that primordial anthropological stage of sign creation where roles are not given a priori in the executioner-victim, a position in the first case, or in the hero-victim, in the second case. Just as the gesture of violence of the supposed master does not in itself turn its object, that is the neophyte who believes in the lofty motives of the master, into a victim, so also the gesture of violence of true masters full of good intentions does not achieve its goal. And even on the contrary turns them into victims.

Roman Katsman:

In both cases the gesture is made meaningless in spite of its seeming realization, and even its deliberate excessiveness. Laura's and Tatiana's sexual experience become too great and varied, and the temporary victory of the militant psychometrician too total. They manage to put the entire enemy army sleep. The most important mechanism of this deconstruction is decentralization, to which the place of the sacrifice, the narrative of violence, the narrative voice, and the image of the author of the novel are subjected. The heroes circle a vacant center just as Deruda's hero circles the ruins of the tower of Babel.

Roman Katsman:

To the degree to which the mimetic desire loses its central object, the object of desire on the internal generative stage of violence ceases to be a victim. The gesture aimed at it lost its functional unity, instrumentality, and consequently its transparency, and it itself becomes an object. Its place of sacrifice occupies a flexible multipolar continuum that develops among the many misaligned and unrealized gestures of appropriation. Okay. One of the most important mechanisms of de centering is departure from the present time, from the current political moment, can also be observed in Anna Fine's text. If we have some more time to talk about Anna Fine. Yeah. Okay?

Maxim Shrayer:

We have a little time.

Roman Katsman:

Anna Fine's included in the collection, *Chronicles of Third How to Father, Chronic 3G After Party*, 2004, rolls against the background of the second Intifada, which started in 2000 and reached its apogee in 2002, when 452 Jews died at the hands of Arab terrorists in Israel. But his collection defines the genre of chronicles, nonetheless doesn't make violence as such the object of representation, rather it delves into the stage of its origination, where roles are not yet fully defined. That the author also blocks your gesture of appropriation in relation to the symbolic center and the main object of desire in this conflict is a place of victim.

Roman Katsman:

Thus for example, in the story *Fly Higher Than The Sun*, [foreign language 00:46:49], the generative scene is moved to the distance pioneer childhood of the narrator, where the justification for the chaotic indefiniteness of roles is blissful childhood ignorance, or lack of understanding of the essence of the conflict explained both realistically, the realities of Soviet upbringing and psychologically, the playful nature of childhood perception. Thus, the political self of the present is taken out of the equation. The pain and anger, and with them an ambiguity of judgments are sublimated into the series of sketches, plays, games, and rituals that serve as a replacement for violence and shift attention away from the victim center to the fractal multiplicity of gestures of appropriation.

Roman Katsman:

The narrator appears in her vis-a-vis from that point in space-time in which neither she nor they have yet become victims of executioners. At the same time, such a view is no way a figure of omission, syncope a dark spot in the discourse, or the contrary a sorrowfully distinct position of protest against violence is expressed in it, but it consists not in pacifistic rhetoric that eliminates the distinction between the sides of the conflict, but rather in the philosophical anthropological modeling of the generative scene of the conflict.

Roman Katsman:

We find the same thing in the story [foreign language 00:48:31]. There is no exact translation of this game of words. Which serves as a kind of continuation or extrapolation into the future of the conflict that was presented in the story Fly Higher Than The Sun. This miniature anti utopia depicts Israel is blazing in a terrorist fire. Israelis have stopped fighting against terror in keeping with a certain theory according to which, I quote, if the number of suicide bombers continues to rise as it is now in a geometrical progression, then the entire population of the Palestinian authority will have committed suicide by 2050, end quote. And in order to be able to survive this, the entire population of the country takes a tranquilizer that deprives people of memory and suppresses fear.

Roman Katsman:

The real drama although, develops not in the flames of explosions, but on the generative scene of the conflict in the center of which the battle for victim does not cease. The first hint at this appears in the name of the narrator and heroine of the story, Mary. Her interlocutor then explains the indifference of the world to the murder of Jews. 'The Christian world has always waited for the opportunity to sacrifice us. Jews to them are a collective Jesus trudging to Golgotha for the sake of someone's else salvation.' This explanation, however, is replaced by another concept expressed analogously in the competition between scientific communities that are occupied with pedagogical and educational activity, and that create virtual travel guides to Judea. 'They have been competing with us for 2000 years already, but we are still hanging on.'

Roman Katsman:

What follows is a reference to Alexander Ivanov's painting The Appearance of Christ Before the People, from Tretyakov Gallery. Jews thus turn from victims to the competitors of Christian, and the image of Christ merges with the image of the Jewish Messiah. The old Testament identification of Jesus on Ivanov's painting is strengthened when the narrator, getting her words mixed up under the influence of the tranquilizer, calls him Mosesiah. [foreign language 00:51:16]. The mix of Moses and Messiah.

Roman Katsman:

It is not only the place of the victims that turns out to be in question, but also its identity. The story comes to its culmination at this moment, the setting of the narration change to a hypothetical generative state of pure possibility. The course of history turns to the point of bifurcation, and against the background of the horrors of the anti-utopia an attendant alternate history emerges, the choice of which depends totally on Mary. A little boy who was lost in one of terrorist attacks and for whom she has so long been searching, comes along with Mosesiah quote, 'The boy is ready, says Mosesiah. If you let him go, the bus will not fall. Then there will be no Intifada. There will be no first Intifada, there will be no second antifada, and there will be no Tretyakov autofada either. This side Mary. Eyes go down burying my nose in the child's sunny hair bushes and hug him close.' End quote.

Roman Katsman:

With these words the story ends when the choice in this hypothetical point of the past is not yet made. It concludes with the iconic image of the Madonna embracing the child. This story is repeated over and over. Moses himself brings the little Messiah, and Mary always has the choice either to let him go to his self-sacrifice, or not. This choice is as impossible as Karamazov's dilemma with the child Tear. At the same time it is empirically obvious because it has been made multiple times in the real historical past in countless Wars, pogroms, Holocausts, intifadas, and blood libels.

Roman Katsman:

From the formal generative point of view however, what is essential is that the thought and imagination of the writer does everything possible to reduce real violence, which seems unavoidable to the hypothetical stage of possible to choose to the indefiniteness of the place and identity of the victim. The text's born of this imagining has the features not of an ideological poster, but of a philosophical parable. This is moreover a parable, not so much about the conflict between Judaism and Christianity, or between Israelis and Arabs, as about the pre conflict drama of defining the role of the victim. Mary's appropriating gesture towards the boy, on the other hand blocks the inevitable violence given in conflict.

Roman Katsman:

But on the other hand, it is this that turns the scene into an icon of the Madonna and child, if not predetermining, then foretelling the choice. The problem of the grand inquisitor is repeated, how would people behave if Christ appeared again? However, contrary to Dostoevsky parable, the responsibility for making a decision is here placed on the heroes of biblical myth themselves who are indistinguishable from the history now in the process of becoming. In this I see the essence of the mythopoietic experiment of Anna Fine, whose vision is focused on the centuries of history and victim hood from Judea. Seven now is 2000 years ago as a generative stage of European civilization.

Roman Katsman:

And conclusion, summarizing this brief survey, I would like to mention several facts in support of what I have called the demarginalization of Russophone Israeli literature from the point of view of the sociology of the literary process. First evidence from the past should be mentioned, Russophone literature was not able to become a full fledged member of the Israeli literary Republic. The efforts of many, although not all, authors, translators, editors, and publishers turn out to be futile. To be more precise, the success of this force is so disproportional to the scale of the phenomenon itself, that of Russophone literature in Israel.

Roman Katsman:

Then the conclusion that offers itself is the initial error of this supposition, a focus on marginalization within the framework of the multicultural concept, which as we know, did not fully live up to the expectations. The focus on regional or neo-diaspora theory, as for example, in Goldstein's and [Barash's 00:55:56] Mediterranean note, [foreign language 00:56:00], or in [Gally Danazinger's 00:56:03] concept of the Jerusalem school has changed little in the perception of Russophone Israeli literature, either by itself or by others. It has remained largely marginal in the provincial segregation of Jewish-Russian literature.

Roman Katsman:

If you add this, the internal Israeli marginality, then it is trice marginal. Consequently, in order to evaluate Russophone Israeli literature accurately, we are left with nothing but to acknowledge the fact that it's equidistant from three poles, the Russian, the Jewish, and the Israeli is not the flaw, but a virtue, and the source of its unique vitality and fertility. The striving to shorten the distance from one of these poles inevitably leads to intensification of marginality. A reflection of this striving so noticeable, beginning in the second half of the 1990s, and especially in the 2000s is expressed in the persistent demarginalization.

Roman Katsman:

Judging by the social political tendencies, both in Israel and in Russia, and the world, an example, which is the so-called Putin Aliyah, this marginalization will only intensify. In conclusion. I should mentioned the 75th issue of the periodical Ecclesiastic, number one 2017, published in Germany has a characteristic symptom. It was devoted almost entirely to Russophone Israeli writers. The assistant editor in chief, Yelena Maldovina, writes in forward to the issue, I quote, "The Holy land gives birth to amazing authors and amazing texts. Many can object that the majority of the authors of this issue were not born in Israel, and that they brought into the Israeli discourse the experience of that primary culture in which they were born. I beg to differ with this statement. Many of them were born as authors here in the promised land. These are original. They landed authors who may possibly not have discovered with them themselves, this air, this ability to create a new world if they had not shown up in Israel, if they had not happened up on its role, but fruitful soil." End quote.

Roman Katsman:

The editor-in-chief of the Jerusalem journal, Yerusalimsky Journal, Egar Biansky, who contributed to the editing of this issue adds, and I quote, "In my view, the three decades that have passed since the great Aliyah have convincingly demonstrated the existence of this literature as a separate phenomenon. Its roots are of course connected above all to Russian literature, but with biblical heritage, a Jewish tradition, and Israeli contemporary culture." End quote. I would add that to an equal degree it is connected and not connected. To an equal degree it is close to, and distant from the cultural and literary traditions mentioned here.

Roman Katsman:

The assertion of originality and separated-ness coming from Maldovina and Biansky is a conceptual trap that quickly leads to marginalization. Editors, critics, and literary scholars should be more circumspect in their appraisals, for the very conception of borders and soil is today changing propitiously along with the literature itself and those communities and media in which it exists. I maintain that it is this inclusion into the process of demarginalization that today makes Russophone Israeli literature fully current, universal, and at the same time unique. Thank you very much.

Maxim Shrayer:

Thank you.