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The Literary Culture of Russian-Speaking Israel. Disputes Around the “Nationality” of Literature

Until 1989, the Soviet government, despite the fact that its representatives signed many international agreements on the issue, did not allow Jews to emigrate to Israel. Of course, there were individual cases, but until Moscow officially recognized Israel as the historical homeland of its citizens of Jewish descent in the late 1980s, repatriation was virtually impossible.¹ This is evidenced by numbers. The largest wave of repatriation of Russian Jews occurred between 1990 and 2003 and resulted in the emigration of about one million people to Israel (earlier in the 1970s, after the Six-Day War, there was a brief rapprochement in Russian-Israeli relations and about 200,000 Russian Jews departed for Israel).²

There is no doubt that a significant part of these two waves of Jewish repatriation from the USSR were representatives of the intellectual elite

¹ Я. Рои, “Еврейская эмиграция из Советского Союза,” 1948–1967, in: *Еврейская эмиграция из России 1881–2005*, ред. О. Будницкий, Москва 2008, p. 187.

² See: M. Tolts, “The Post-Soviet Jewish Population in Russia and in the World,” *Jews in Russia and Eastern Europe* 2004, no. 1 (52), Справочник Союза русскоязычных писателей Израиля 1990 год, 1999 год, Издание Союза русскоязычных писателей Израиля и Федерации Союзов писателей Израиля, Слово писателя, Осень 2002, Зима 2002, Зима 2004.

and of the cultural and literary world. Although the literary culture in Israel is gradually declining, it is still of great importance in the lives of Russian-speaking Jews today and requires thorough research.

This claim is confirmed by the fact that the State of Israel is now home to more than a million Russian Jews, of whom more than 200 persons are listed as members of the Israeli Union of Russian-Speaking Writers. In the early 2000s, 300–500 Russian titles³ appeared in print in Israel each year.

Of course, the quality of this literature varies, but certainly the opportunity to interact with literary works has allowed Russian Jews to engage in a dialogue with the past, and subsequently to create their own little homeland in Israel, which will probably lead to complete assimilation in the future.

The uneasy situation of artists in Soviet Russia, which for many of them was the main reason for leaving the Russian homeland, gave the historical-literary process in Russia a special character. Researchers of literature, but also authors themselves, have frequently been preoccupied with reflections on the classification of literature created outside the homeland. The complexity of the problem of “nationality” of literature created under conditions of split between two homelands, is evidenced by the multiplicity of formulations used to name this phenomenon. The works in question were referred to as “émigré literature,” “émigré sleeve of Russian literature,” “foreign branch of Russian literature,” “literature in exile,” “literature of the Russian abroad,” “literature of the diaspora,” and finally “Russia outside Russia,” as well as “Foreign Russia,” “Other Russia,” and “Free literature.”⁴

In April 1978, Geneva hosted an international Slavic symposium on Russian literature created outside the country. The participants were pondering the classification of metropolitan and foreign writing – literature created “here” and “there.” Georges Nivat, a French historian and Slavicist,

³ From my correspondence with the secretary of the Union of Russian-Speaking Writers in Israel, Leonid Finkel (June 2015).

⁴ See: L. Suchanek, “Literatura rosyjska jest tam, gdzie znajdują się pisarze rosyjscy” [Russian literature is wherever Russian writers are], in: L. Suchanek, ed., *Emigracja i tamizdat. Szkice o współczesnej prozie rosyjskiej* [Emigration and tamizdat. Essays on modern Russian prose], Cracow 1993, p. 54.

opened the conference with a question that, in a way, set the agenda. It was as follows: “Is there one or two Russian literatures?”⁵ The symposium participants attempted to solve the problem of the affiliation of Russian literature abroad and its relation to the domestic literature.⁶ They were more inclined to support the claim that there is one literature and if the literature is divided into two, as Yefim Etkind said, it is usually a long process that takes into account specific conditions.

To begin our discussion, I will cite the positions that unequivocally define Russian-language literature in Israel as part of Russian literature. I will refer to the account of the trip of Russian writers to Israel, which took place in 2003. At the time, writer Valery Popov, chairman of the Writers’ Union in St. Petersburg, traveled to Israel with other writers to see how Russian literature was doing there⁷ (other participants of the trip were Mikhail Ayzenberg, Vasily Aksyonov, Anatoly Nayman, Andrei Bitov, and Lyudmila Ulitskaya). Popov, stressing the enormous, even life-giving importance of this literature, writes:

Кончается, что ли, русская литература, а вместе с нею – и наша жизнь? Вот, думаю, главная тревога, главный вопрос, ради которого мы поехали. Ведь жизнь каждого из нас, из нашей литературной группы, несмотря на разницу талантов, судеб, возрастов, национальностей, питается только русской литературой, больше ничем.⁸

Concern for the fate of literature, as is evident from the cited quote, applies not only to literary scholars, but also to writers themselves. Popov’s observations, contained in Mark Zaychik’s anthology *В Израиль и обратно. Путешествие во времени и пространстве* [To Israel and back. A journey in time and space], show that the literary culture of the Russian diaspora was

⁵ Ж. Нива, *Одна или две русских литературы? Симпозиум в Женеве (1978)*, Женева 1981, p. 3.

⁶ See: L. Suchanek, “Literatura rosyjska” [Russian literature], pp. 54–55.

⁷ В. Попов, “Жизнь чужая и моя,” *Нева* 2005, no. 4, pp. 137–149.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 140. “Is Russian literature dying, and with it also our lives? I think these concerns were the main reason for our departure. After all, the life of each of us, of our literary group, without looking at the difference of talents, fates, age, and nationality, feeds only on Russian literature, nothing else.”

at a high level at that time. Popov noted with satisfaction that Russian-language literary life in Israel was functioning very well and rooms where authors met with readers were filled to the brim, which did not indicate a rapid decline of literature written there by Russian Jews (some researchers say that such a situation will last two generations, then it will naturally die out).⁹ The view that literature written in Israel is a part of Russian culture was expressed by the representative of Russian Jews living in Israel, Dmitry Segal, the participant in the Geneva conference mentioned earlier. However, this researcher, who is a literary theorist, points out that literature written abroad constantly needs to be carefully analyzed and treated on a par with the literature of the metropolis. In Segal's opinion, writers who have the possibility to write under conditions other than the reality in their homeland are successfully enriching the domestic literature with new literary trends. The literature of the metropolis, on the other hand, gradually "tames" the experience of émigré prose, drawing "new blood" from it. As for the heterogeneity of literature, this is a natural phenomenon that is characteristic of many national literatures. Segal argues that all the works of "Russian-speaking Israel" are part of Russian culture.¹⁰ Citing statements by Thomas Mann and Victor Nekrasov, we might be tempted to say that "Russian literature is where Russian writers are."¹¹

Let us consider then the question of self-identification of Russian-language literature written in Israel. There is no doubt that the works of representatives of the Russian diaspora complicate the already complex situation of self-identification of Russian literature written abroad; after all, it concerns writers who returned to the homeland of their ancestors. The process of the mass exodus of Jews from the Soviet Union, especially in the 1970s and 1990s, is part of a phenomenon called in literature studies the "third wave" of Russian emigration.¹² Also the authors of Russian anthologies, specifically Vladimir Agienosov and Sergei Chuprinin, include

⁹ See: Л. Черкасский, "Судить обо всем предвзято," *Слово писателя*, Осень 2002, p. 92.

¹⁰ See: Ж. Нива, "Одна или две русских литературы?," pp. 43, 86.

¹¹ Quote after: L. Suchanek, "Literatura rosyjska" [Russian literature], p. 55.

¹² See: A. Wołodźko, "Wstęp" [Introduction], in: eadem, *Pasierbowie Rosji* [Russia's stepchildren], Warsaw 1995, p. 28.

the names of authors of Russian-language Jewish literature in chapters on Russian literature abroad.¹³ Jacek Leociak's arguments would rather support calling Russian Jews living in Israel Israelis, citizens of Israel, which puts into question the accuracy of referring to their works as "exile literature."¹⁴ The multitude of interpretations of the phenomenon, which has been studied by Benedict Sarnov, Vladimir Kunin, Vladimir Lazaris, Leonid Kogan, and Lazar Berenson, among others, once again indicates its multifaceted nature. In literary criticism, literature written in Russian in Israel is described as Russian literature, Israeli literature, Jewish literature, literature that is a province of Russian literature, as well as "forced anomaly" and "foreign body" (such terms were used by Abraam Chernyak).¹⁵

There are many opinions on this issue and it is certainly impossible to find a term that will satisfy everyone. That is actually is not the point here; instead, our goal is to outline the complexity of the problem, which stems from the richness of the complicated identity of Russian-speaking artists of Jewish descent. Karolina Famulska-Ciesielska in her "Introduction" to the lexicon *Polish Literature in Israel* writes about the "dual affiliation" of literature written in Polish in Israel. According to the author, that literature "alongside domestic and émigré literature – constitutes a third physical state."¹⁶ Following the researcher's lead, the works of Russian Jews-Israelis, should be classified as Russian literature, as it draws on the richness of the Russian language, tradition, and culture. In addition, that literature bears clear traces of the Soviet mentality.¹⁷ There is no doubt, however, that

¹³ See: В. В. Агеносов, "Племя младое, незнакомое...", in: idem, *Литература Русского зарубежья*, Москва 1998, pp. 509–510.

¹⁴ See: J. Leociak, "Na obu brzegach" [On both shores], *Nowe Książki* 1994, no. 3, p. 70.

¹⁵ See: С. Бломберг, "Путеводитель по объединениям русскоязычных литераторов Израиля," <http://www.jerusalem-korczak-home.com/np/np58.html> (accessed in: June 2015).

¹⁶ K. Famulska-Ciesielska, "Wstęp" [Introduction], in: K. Famulska-Ciesielska, S. Żurek, eds., *Literatura polska w Izraelu* [Polish literature in Israel], Cracow–Budapest 2012, p. 5.

¹⁷ Cf. also: "Литературная эмиграция 1960–1990-х годов (третья волна)," in: *Литература русского зарубежья*, под общ. ред. А. И. Смирновой, Москва 2006, pp. 444–445.

Russian Jews in Israel are Israelis. So, citing the opinion of Jacek Leociak, one must conclude that they also represent Israeli literature.¹⁸

The term “Russian literature in Israel” is also questionable. After all, the decision of Russian Jews to leave for Israel, often treated as a “return to the homeland,” for many of them was associated with the awareness of being “non-Russians,” “stepchildren,” “with a sense of semi-orphanhood, harm, and loneliness.”¹⁹ A significant number of Russian Jews – including novelists and poets – did not so much leave for Israel as flee the Soviet Union, the motherland – stepmother, full of persecution and acts of anti-Semitism, one that also deprived them of freedom, did not allow them to be *homo humanus*, exist for themselves and for the society, and finally sentenced them to wandering, often taking away the achievements of their previous lives. So it is not without reason that Efraim Bauch, chairman of the Union of Russian-Speaking Writers in Israel and president of the Israeli branch of the PEN Club, in an article written on the thirtieth anniversary of the union, when discussing the situation of artists in the Soviet state, called literature “part of the government, the backyard of the nomenclatura.”²⁰

For many, the choice of Israel as their new homeland provided a sense of relative independence, and often was also an irrevocable declaration that involved the loss of passport and citizenship. For many, too, the trip had a creative, missionary character.²¹ Alicja Wołodźko writes about this in her monograph *Russia's Stepchildren*, citing the words of Yefim Etkind: “Russian writers did not flee the country – they wanted only one thing: to be writers, to be engaged in literature, but in the USSR this path has been or was being closed for them.”²² For many Russian-speaking artists, leaving

¹⁸ See *ibidem*.

¹⁹ Cf. A. Wołodźko, “Wstęp” [Introduction], pp. 32–33.

²⁰ Э. Баух, “Скромная дань апологии. К 30-летию Союза русскоязычных писателей Израиля,” *Слово писателя*, Осень 2002, no. 1, p. 3.

²¹ See: Г. Костырченко, “Политика советского руководства в отношении еврейской эмиграции после XX съезда КПСС (1956–1991),” in: *Еврейская эмиграция из России 1881–2005*, Материалы международной научной конференции (Москва, 10–12 декабря 2006), отв. ред. О. В. Будницкий, Москва 2008, p. 205.

²² Quote after: A. Wołodźko, “Wstęp” [Introduction], p. 41.

the USSR, and later also Russia, was undoubtedly an escape from censorship. Emigration offered the hope of being able to express one's thoughts unhindered, to write real literature, to freely proclaim undeniable values. An important reason for leaving Russia was the lack of hope for changes in the functioning of the state.

This is expressed in the words of Pyotr Chaadayev, quoted by Russian-language writer Dina Rubina, who has lived in Israel since 1991: "I did not learn to love my homeland on my knees, with my eyes closed, and my mouth gagged."²³ The decision made by the writer and her family to leave Russia was a reaction to the oppressive Soviet reality and the rising tide of nationalist and anti-Semitic behavior. Rubina felt that under similar circumstances she would not be able to write anything more, she was leaving, in her own words, a country of incapacitation, pressure, disrespect, and humiliation. "Leaving in 1990, completely voluntarily, I laid both my citizenship and my apartment at the feet of the Soviet authorities. It was my own choice,"²⁴ said the writer.

The situation of Russian artists was very complicated, and the literary profession involved great risks. The proof of this claim is, for example, the statement of Grigory Kanovich, a Jew who spent his youth in Lithuania and now lives in Bat Yam. Kanovich recalls that his parents were very concerned about his writing talent; from his childhood, they instilled in him that the pen was a treacherous tool, often the cause of arrest and persecution.²⁵ Independent literature could exist in Soviet Russia thanks to dissident movements, underground publications, and the enormous commitment of the authors themselves. The publication in Italy of Boris Pasternak's novel *Doctor Zhivago* initiated the so-called *tamizdat*, i.e. the publication abroad

²³ From my correspondence with the writer, May 2010.

²⁴ "Уезжая в 90-м, я, само собой, сложила к ногам Советской власти и гражданство, и квартиру... Это был мой собственный выбор." This is what Rubina said about her reasons for leaving the USSR during a meeting with readers at the Jewish Cultural Center in Cracow on October 24, 2008 (a recording from a private archive). The main reason for leaving Russia cited by the writer was the manifestations of anti-Semitism in the form of anti-Jewish inscriptions visible on the streets of Moscow.

²⁵ Г. Канович, "Штрихи к автопортрету," *Иерусалимский журнал* 2008, no. 27, <http://magazines.russ.ru/ier/2008/27/ka11.html> (accessed in: June 2015).

of works banned in the USSR. The possibility of publishing in the West, which complemented *samizdat* – underground publications – allowed by-passing the strict rules of publication in *Gosizdat* (state publishing houses) and breaking the monopoly of censorship, as a result of which that many Russian-language literary and journalistic works could finally see the light of day.²⁶ Writers, including those with Jewish roots, fought with dedication for creative freedom and for the quality of literature. However, it should be mentioned that there are also critical statements about Russian Jews who have decided to leave the country. Alicja Wołodźko calls it a “biased” position.²⁷ Mikhail Nazarov cites the desire for a “better life” as the main reason for the mass exodus of Jews at the end of the 20th century, and accuses Jewish artists of cosmopolitanism and lack of patriotism.²⁸

Leonid Cherkasskiy writes about the phenomenon of Russian-speaking Israel in an article featured in the magazine *Slovo Pisatela* on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the Union of Russian-Speaking Writers in Israel. The article extensively discusses the issues of the national affiliation of writers and Russian-language literature written in Israel, but it rather indicates the complexity of the problem than provides clear answers to the questions at hand. In a section titled *Великий и могучий...* [Great and powerful...], Cherkasskiy writes about the power of language as an undeniable element of a person’s self-identification, but also, referring to the complicated situation of Russian-speaking Jews in Israel, as something that is also a stigma that marks a person throughout life.

Cherkasskiy does not dispute the need to learn the language of the country of residence, especially when it comes to the country of the ancestors. However, the author adds, the historical circumstances caused the Russian language to remain the language of communication for some time to come for a sizable group of Russian Jews living in the country to

²⁶ See: L. Suchanek, “Literatura rosyjska” [Russian literature], pp. 53–54.

²⁷ See: A. Wołodźko, “Wstęp” [Introduction], p. 29.

²⁸ See: М. Назаров, *Миссия русской эмиграции*, т. 1, Ставрополь 1992, p. 11. See also: A. Wołodźko, “Wstęp” [Introduction], p. 29.

which they “returned.” It was also naturally the language of the literature they created.²⁹

Я всегда был убежден в необходимости изучения языка страны проживания, тем более – “страны возвращения.” Тут нет предмета для дискуссий. Речь идет об исторически сложившейся ситуации, приведшей к тому, что русский язык еще долгое время останется языком общения и культуры для значительных групп граждан, а тоже языком русскоязычной литературы. Явление естественное и закономерное.³⁰

In the next section of the article, titled “Как нас теперь называть?” (What should we be called now?), the author writes about the many attempts to define the social and creative status of writers writing in Russian. Disputes over the self-identification of Russian Jew – writers or Russian writers – Jews, he says, are legitimate, but they are also part of the formation of the Israeli nation and its culture. Cherkasskiy cites a 1916 statement by Hebrew literature classic Chaim Bialik on the “nationality” of a literary work. According to Bialik, it is not the language of a literary work that is most important, but the atmosphere, the spirit in which it is written. According to the bard of Jewish literature, the affiliation of literature is determined by more subjective factors: the attachment of the author to a particular nation, the unity of the writer’s soul with the soul of the nation, with its culture, and finally the care of its history – the past, the present, and the future:³¹

²⁹ Л. Черкасский, “Судить обо всем предвзято,” р. 92.

³⁰ Ibidem. “I have always been convinced of the need to master the language of the country of residence, especially the ‘country of return.’ This is beyond dispute. The matter concerns a historically conditioned situation, which has meant that Russian will continue to be the language of communication and culture for a significant part of the population for a long time to come, as well as the language of Russian-language literature. It is a natural phenomenon.”

³¹ Ibidem. Cf. also: В. Львов-Рогачевский, *Русско-еврейская литература*, Москва 1922, pp. 44–46; В. Жаботинский, *Еврейский легион*, Москва 2013, pp. 15–18. В. Чернин, “Многого реб Хаим-Шулим и не разобрал... Идиш как субстрат русского языка Осипа Рабиновича,” *Лехаим*, декабрь 2006 Кислев 5767–12 (176).

Национальность литературного произведения определяется не языком, на котором оно появилось, а господствующим настроением автора, его тягой к определенному народу, сродством души автора с душой родного народа, с его культурой, устремлением к прошлому, настоящему и будущему этого народа; определяется ответом на вопрос, для кого он работает и чьи национальные интересы защищает.³²

A similar concept was also popularized by Shimon Dubnov, a Jewish historian and writer at the turn of the 20th century, who – citing the work of Shimon Frug, a Crimean-born Jewish poet who initially wrote only in Russian, then in Yiddish, and later in Hebrew – argued that Jews had spoken all the languages of the world over the centuries, which had influenced the formation of the many linguistic layers of their literature. Fortunately, as Dubnov states, this fact did not deprive Jewish literature of its internal unity and national identity:

Еврейство, на своем долгом историческом пути пользовалось всеми языками культурного мира от древне-греческого до нынешнего русского, только, как орудиями своего духовного творчества, вследствие чего образовались большие иноязычные пласты нашей литературы, но от этого последняя не утратила своей внутренней цельности и национальной самобытности.³³

Russian-Jewish literature, according to the historian, which also suffered for the Jewish people, shows the soul of a migrating nation, reflects Jewish attitudes, Jewish understanding of the world, and Jewish mentality. And all this is also done through Russian literature:

³² В. Львов-Рогачевский, *Русско-еврейская литература*, p. 49. “The nationality of a literary work is determined not by the language in which the work appeared, but by the author’s dominant mood, his closeness to a particular community, the affinity of the author’s soul with the soul of the indigenous people and their culture, his longing for the past, and his view of the present and future of that nation; it contains the answer to the question of for whom he works and whose national interests he protects.”

³³ *Ibidem*, pp. 44–50. “On their long historical path, Jews used all the languages of the civilized world, from ancient Greek to the contemporary Russian, exclusively as tools for their spiritual creativity – as a result of which extensive foreign-language layers of our literature developed, and yet it did not lose its internal continuity and national originality.”

В русско-еврейской литературе, также страдавшей за еврейский народ, отразилась душа народа – странника, [...] еврейское мироощущение, мирочувствование и миропонимание, определенный душевный ритм, еврейский образ мыслей, еврейская культура, еврейский быт... Все это прошло сквозь призму русской литературы.³⁴

Russian writers in Israel, despite all the immigration and acclimatization difficulties, are thus in a fairly comfortable position. First, as Ephraim Bauch constantly emphasizes, they have returned to their roots, and second, they can speak the widely spoken Russian language, which resounds in the streets of Israeli cities and towns, allowing the writers to participate in the daily life of their new homeland and inspiring their work.³⁵ Language, which Dina Rubina calls a stigma that haunts a person throughout life, for Grigory Kanovich represents “a homeland – fortunately, one that you can take everywhere.”³⁶

Writer Yakov Shechtior, chairman of the Writers' Club in Tel-Aviv, confirms the complicated identity of Russian artists in Israel in an interview with the *Vesti* newspaper. In his opinion, Jewish writers in Israel are in a constant conflict between the culture of the language and the language of the culture. In her monograph *Russia's Stepchildren*, Alicja Wołodźko emphasizes the problems faced by Russian Jewish writers who write at the crossroads of cultures. According to Wołodźko, the stigma of nationality was the cause of many conflicts reflected in the writings of authors of Jewish descent and in the lives of the authors themselves: “Jews by descent, Russians by upbringing, education, language, and culture.”³⁷ However, according to Shechtior, such a situation also has a positive side, as it affects the particular color of the literature created in Israel:

³⁴ Ibidem. “The Russian-Jewish literature, which also suffers for the Jewish people, reflects the soul of the nation-wanderer [...], the Jewish sensitivity, perception of the world, worldview, characteristic spiritual rhythm, the Jewish way of thinking, the Jewish culture, the life of Jews... All this was done through the lens of Russian literature.”

³⁵ Э. Баух, “Скромная дань апологии,” p. 3.

³⁶ From my correspondence with the writers.

³⁷ See: A. Wołodźko, “Wstęp” [Introduction], p. 29.

Пишущий по-русски еврейский писатель пребывает в перманентном конфликте между культурой языка и языком культуры. Возможно именно поэтому [...] эта литература особенно интересна. Искусство ради искусства в масштабе целой страны.³⁸

Like many other Russian-speaking writers in Israel (specifically Dina Rubina, Grigory Kanovich, and Igor Guberman), Shechtior stresses that there will be an uninterrupted close bond with Russia and that he will always feel the weight of his cultural heritage and attachment to the Russian language, the only one in which he can create. “С Россией меня связывает груз культурного наследия и язык, единственный, на котором я могу писать,”³⁹ Yakov Shechtior admitted in an interview with *Vesti*.

Anatoly Muchnik, too, when considering the essence of literature created in Israel, points out the great importance of the Russian language in building and consolidating a national consciousness – very complex, but certainly unique:

Современные теоретики, придают огромное значение роли языка как основного инструмента национального сознания. Они ссылаются на то, что многие европейцы видят в родном языке и литературе залог своей национальной целостности, даже создают академии по защите языка и порой ведут настоящую войну за сохранность языковых границ.⁴⁰

³⁸ Д. Клугер, “Искусство ради искусства в масштабе целой страны, Вавилонская библиотека,” *Вести*, November 26, 2008, http://sunround.com/club/prensa/kluger_shehter.htm (accessed in: April 2011). “A Jewish writer writing in Russian is in permanent conflict between the culture of the language and the language of the culture. Perhaps this is why [...] this literature is particularly interesting. Art for art’s sake on a nationwide scale.”

³⁹ *Ibidem*. “I am bound to Russia by the weight of my cultural heritage and language, the only one in which I can write.”

⁴⁰ А. Мучник, “Проблемы языка в еврейской литературе и русско-еврейская литература. Еврейская литература или литература евреев?,” http://samlib.ru/m/muchnik_a_m/01lit.shtml (accessed in: June 2015). “Modern theorists emphasize the great role of language as the primary tool of national consciousness. They cite the fact that many Europeans see their native language and literature as a guarantee of their national identity, and even create language protection academies and sometimes wage a real war to preserve linguistic boundaries.”

Some critics emphasize the universalism of Jewish literature. After all, the multiple languages used by Jewish artists create its proper character. An Israeli writer, as Leonid Kogan, among others, says, if he or she is not simply a Russian writer who has chosen Israel as his homeland, is, after all, a Jewish writer.⁴¹ And Jewish writers write not only in Yiddish or Hebrew, but also in Russian, Romanian, German, and Bulgarian. The Jewish writer's works are filled with "Jewishness," Kogan continues. Jewish culture constitutes his or her past and future, fills his or her history and life, and sets his or her aspirations and priorities. The most important determinant of the "nationality" of literature, is, according to the author, the way a writer perceives the world and people, as well as the motifs that dominate his or her work. The author's place of residence is irrelevant, in Kogan's opinion.

Quoting Kogan's views, Leonid Cherkasskiy also cites the opinion of Professor Aaron Chernyak, an activist dealing with the matters of Russian Jews and foreign affairs.⁴² The scholar has often stressed the importance of language as one of the most reliable criteria for defining the terms "Jewish literature" and "Jewish writer." Although Chernyak also accentuated the prominence of Jewish literature written in non-Jewish languages, including Russian, experts in his theory cite his opposing views, such as the aforementioned terms "foreign body" and "forced anomaly" used by Chernyak, which testify to the complexity of the problem of a literature that is "ours" in terms of content, but "foreign" in terms of language.⁴³

The phenomenon of Russian-language literature in Israel, as Leonid Cherkasskiy emphasizes, is undoubtedly part of the history of Israeli literature, which, despite its strong roots in the Russian culture, is gradually becoming a product of cross-cultural reception and acquiring an Israeli color.

As Ryszard Kapuściński once wrote,

⁴¹ Quote after: Л. Черкасский, "Судить обо всем предвзято," p. 93.

⁴² See: Ю. Систер, М. Пархомовский, "Памяти Арона Яковлевича Черняка, Мы здесь. Публикации," <http://www.newswe.com/index.php?go=Pages&in=print&id=8179> (accessed in: October 2015).

⁴³ Cf. Л. Черкасский, "Судить обо всем предвзято," p. 93.

one pays a high price for being uprooted from one's culture. That is why it is so important to have one's own clear identity and a sense of its strength, value, and maturity. Only then can a person boldly confront another culture. Otherwise he or she will hide and fearfully separate from others. All the more so because the Other is a mirror in which people view themselves or in which they are viewed; it is a mirror that unmask and exposes people, which they would prefer to avoid.⁴⁴

There is no doubt that, in the words of David Markish, the work of Russian-speaking writers in Israel is just such a mirror, a mirror that verifies, exposes, and unmask their identity, but also allows them to live in the uneasy reality of emigration, while protecting them from becoming savage. Russian literature in Israel, Leonid Finkel emphasizes, is a memoir of the past, a guide that becomes an inspiration for a deeper search for knowledge about humanity.⁴⁵ Not surprisingly, attempts by researchers of literature and writers themselves to determine the status of Russian-language literature written by Jews in Israel are often rejected, criticized, and deemed unnecessary. Dina Rubina categorically speaks in defense of a culture created at the border of cultures and in favor of rejecting all divisions in literature. Referring to Bakhtin's theories, it can be said that the writer creates prose that unites various traditions; however, in her opinion, there is only one literature.⁴⁶ Efforts to systematize the literature under study perhaps intensify the writers' sense of semi-orphanhood and loneliness. Grigory Kanovich said this in one of his interviews:

I am a lonely writer. Completely lonely – in both the human and the literary sense. I have said many times that I am not a Jewish writer, because I write in Russian. I am not a Russian writer because I write about Jews. I am not a Lithuanian writer, because I write about Jews and in Russian, and now Russian

⁴⁴ R. Kapuściński, *Spotkanie z Innym jako wyzwanie XXI wieku* [Encountering the Other. The challenge for the twenty-first century], Cracow 2004, p. 12.

⁴⁵ From my correspondence with Leonid Finkel, August 2010.

⁴⁶ Э. Ф. Шафранская, *Мифопоэтика "иноэтнокультурного текста" в русской прозе Дины Рубиной*, Москва 2007, p. 230. See: L. Liburska, "Emigracja" [Emigration], in: eadem, *Kultura i inteligencja rosyjska. O pisarstwie Lidii Czukowskiej* [Russian culture and intelligentsia. On the writings of Lidia Chukovskaya], Cracow 2003, p. 329.

is treated in Lithuania like other foreign languages, on a par with Swedish, English, and Swahili. So I am a foreign writer in my own homeland.⁴⁷

Kanovich felt foreign in his homeland of Lithuania. He also felt foreign in Israel, for which he left in 1993. The Russian language is what Kanovich, as we recall, calls a kind of stigma. The writer also calls his unspecified literary affiliation a stigma, which, however, in his opinion, also has a good side: it results in a certain independence, understood in this case as creative freedom. On the other hand, however, it burdens the writer with a perpetual sense of alienation.

Leaving the disputes over the classification of literature written by Russian authors in Israel without a clear answer, I will conclude my deliberation by recalling the words of Dmitry Kanovich. Grigory Kanovich's son emphasizes the universalism of his father's prose in a press statement. He talks about the values his father proclaimed, which, after all, have no nationality.⁴⁸ Perhaps the situation is similar with the affiliation of Russian-language literature created in Israel. According to Leonid Cherkasskiy, it is a temporal phenomenon, a "short stop" on the path of a long historical and literary process.⁴⁹ Efraim Bauch says that this literature reflects the enormous process of "nomadism," but also, in some cases of gaining a homeland, reveals the magic and at the same time the tragedy of this phenomenon, which contributes to its undoubtedly unique character.⁵⁰

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<https://apcz.umk.pl/AE/article/view/AE.2014.006>

⁴⁷ See: "Pisarz samotny. Z G. Kanowiczem rozmawiał A. Koziół" [A lonely writer. An interview with G. Kanowicz by A. Koziół], *Dekada Literacka* 1993, no. 12/13 (72/73).

⁴⁸ "В Вахтанговском театре пройдет премьера спектакля Улыбнись нам, Господи, 7 марта 2014," <http://tass.ru/kultura/1027609> (accessed in: March 2014).

⁴⁹ Cf. Л. Черкасский, *Судить обо всем предвзято*, p. 93.

⁵⁰ See: Э. Баух, "Скромная дань апологии," p. 3.