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Marat Grinberg

Yan Satunovsky's Jewish Poems: Contexts, Poetics and the Sapgir/Driz Connection

Abstract: The essay analyzes the pervasiveness and centrality of Jewishness in Yan Satunovsky's oeuvre beyond clear themes and reactions to antisemitism. It examines Satunovsky's poems from the 1960s and 70s and their contexts as emblematic of his approach to Jewishness and reflective of his overall poetics. The essay's second part is devoted to uncovering Satunovsky's relationship with Genrikh Sapgir (1928–1999) and Ovsei Driz (1908–1971) as a missing link and a pivotal aspect of these poets' creative biographies and the connection between Soviet Yiddish poetry and Russian underground verse which refashions our understanding of Jewish creativity during the late Soviet period.

Keywords: Jewishness, Yiddish, Holocaust

In 1996, *The Jewish Street* (Evreiskaia ulitsa / Di Yidishe Gas), a successor to *Soviet Homeland* (Sovetish Heymland), the only Soviet Yiddish magazine, published a selection of Yan Satunovsky's poems in Russian, almost all of them united by a Jewish theme. The selection was accompanied by a short essay by German Getsevich (1961–2021), a poet, prose writer and translator in his own right, who stated: "The Jewish theme lies at the very core of Satunovsky's poetic worldview. He turned to it from one poem to the next, directly and indirectly" (Getsevich 1996: 45). This was a keen assessment, especially considering its early date among critical responses to Satunovsky. Indeed, Satunovsky's writings are a landmark on the map of Jewish creativity in Russian. His Jewish subject matter encompasses responses to the Holocaust and daily antisemitism, but it also goes beyond such clear expressions, themes, and immediacy. To untangle and illuminate for the first time in the emerging Satunovsky studies the complexity of his Soviet/ Russian/Ukrainian-Jewish voice and imagery, this essay will start

by examining how in the poems of the 1960s and 70s, Satunovsky positions himself, his family and native city vis-à-vis the breadth of Jewish history and Judaism, inviting parallels with other Jewish poets, from Boris Slutsky to Avraham Shlonsky. The essay's second part will unpack Satunovsky's dialogue with two other major Jewish figures of the late Soviet period: Genrikh Sapgir (who wrote in Russian) and Shike (Ovsei) Driz (who wrote in Yiddish). Satunovsky's personal and creative friendship with Sapgir and Driz created a fascinating fusion of Russian and Yiddish, marked by a dynamic exchange of borrowings, substitutions, and influences between their poetics and artistic identities. Thus, the essay will not only show the multidimensional significance of Jewishness in Satunovsky's poetry and the intricacies of his relations with other poets, but also begin to redraw the broader map of Jewish creativity in Russian and Yiddish during and after the Thaw and its relation to Jewish literature in the twentieth century at large.

A Jewish poet moving through time

Satunovsky's most conspicuous lyrical position is one of ironic yet sober acceptance of reality and of quiet resignation. I call it his philosophy of matter-of-factness, as is evident in the poem, "How do I live?":

Как я живу?
Живу наяву.
Давным-давно
было мне тяжело.
А сейчас всё равно.
Всё равно, ничего.
[39][1]

How do I live?
I live awake.
A long, long time ago
I had it rough.
But now it's all the same to me.
All the same, just OK.

1 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine. – M. G.

Presented as the speaker's internal dialogue – the super-ego interrogating the conscious or the id – these six lines place him straight in the here and now, awake and visible. He acknowledges the trauma of the past, likely alluding to the war, the Holocaust or the post-war antisemitic campaigns. There's the sense of submission to reality here: he neither dwells on it nor takes it too seriously. The last "just OK" – *nichego* – can stand as a sign of emptiness and depression, but also, and this is much more in tune with Satunovsky's sensibility, as stoic acceptance and a strategy of survival. The speaker here is a paradigmatic Jewish character – a *shlemiel* – who while being a perpetual weakling survives despite all odds.

With its folkloric connotations, the elusive "a long, long time ago" reveals Satunovsky taking a long view of history and inhabiting the persona of his ancestor or in fact his ancestor waking up in the Soviet present, which is corroborated by "I live awake". Satunovsky insists that Jewish history is always one and the same, which means that the past trauma can refer equally to the Holocaust or a turn of the century pogrom. There's a correspondence here between Satunovsky and Boris Slutsky, who was, as I have argued, one of his main Jewish and poetic interlocutors (Grinberg 2013: 355–376). In Slutsky's verse, "davnym davno" is a frequent marker of time, whose chronology is misplaced, which enables the speaker to transform the cataclysms of his age – the terror of the 1930s, the war, the Holocaust, and Stalin's post-war assault on the Jews – into new sacred archetypes. Satunovsky does not create such archetypes, but he moves easily in and through time as a Jewish figure.

His native city of Ekaterinoslav, the Soviet Dnepropetrovsk (now Dnipro), with its rich, often violent and traumatic Jewish history, is repeatedly a locus of such temporal transformations. Satunovsky was attached to this place, writing in his autobiographical fragment: "I was born in 1913 in Ekaterinoslav-Dnepropetrovsk. I studied in this city, finished the secondary school, the university there, left from there to fight 'the German'".[2]

The Jewish element is a main aspect of Satunovsky's envisioning and recollection of the city. The poem, "Here the fields used to be in stripes like a tales", dated August 30 1963, states:

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2 «Я родился в 1913 году в Екатеринославе — Днепропетровске. В этом городе я учился, окончил школу, Университет, отсюда пошёл „на немца“» [3].

Здесь были поля полосаты, как талес.
Здесь
даже кладбищ не осталось.
[138]

Here the fields used to be in stripes like a tales.
Here
there are even no cemeteries left.

Remarkably, Satunovsky presents this Ukrainian city in the Russian and later Soviet empire as a central element of Judaic practice: Jewish prayer shawls with their either black and white or white and blue stripes resemble plowed fields. Such imagining of fields – a paradigmatic Ukrainian/Russian/Soviet space – finds parallels in modern Hebrew poetry. Avraham Shlonsky (1900–1973), a key Hebrew modernist and translator of Russian poetry and prose into Hebrew, writes in his programmatic 1928 poem, "Toil": "My land is wrapped in light as in a / prayer shawl" (Carmi 1981: 534). Both Satunovsky and Shlonsky use the same word for prayer shawl; the only difference is that Satunovsky presents it as "tales" in the Ashkenazi version and Shlonsky provides "talit" in the Sephardic one.[3] Satunovsky's image, however, is more radical for while the Hebrew poet sacralizes the Land of Israel which he toils to fulfill the Zionist ethos, Satunovsky applies this central Jewish religious object to a non-Jewish space. Unlike Shlonsky who celebrates the Jewish revival, Satunovsky mourns the obliteration of Jewish presence and memory: "here/there are even no cemeteries left".

The rest of the poem turns desperately erotic, as the speaker recalls the city's flirtatious and deceiving native women. Upon his return, he ceaselessly and deliriously wanders the streets, silently pleading that at least one of them would look at him which would justify his return to the place he can no longer recognize. There's a sense of guilt and self-reproach in his encroachment into this foreign and sinful town, once a sacred Jewish realm.

Satunovsky's usage of *tales* complicates the little information we possess about his Jewish knowledge and upbringing. According to his younger brother Piotr Satunovsky, theirs was a typical assimilated urban family, where no Yid-

3 While the Sephardic version has been adopted for modern Israeli Hebrew, Shlonsky still writes with the Ashkenazi one in mind for his early poems.

dish or Hebrew were spoken (Bychkov 2010: 381). At the same time, he also notes that their father, Abram, was an observant Jew who turned away from God and tradition after his daughter died of scarlet fever in 1925. Thus, it's evident that Satunovsky grew up in a Jewish atmosphere with Jewish observance at least in the background and was unavoidably exposed to Yiddish and Hebrew. Historically, "Jews were the second largest religious and ethnic group in Katerynoslav" (Portnov 2022: 78). The city was also one of the centers of the Zionist movement in the Russian Empire. Satunovsky seems to have been fascinated with this Jewish past and its breach both by the pre-Soviet antisemitic violence and the Soviet erasure of Jewishness.

In the undated poem, "To live! – That's not for old men…", composed during the postwar antisemitic campaigns, Satunovsky again takes a long view of Jewish history, linking his experience with that of his predecessor:

Жить! — Не для стариков.
Им всё равно: а! скоро в гроб
самим.
И не потому, что СТРАШНО
помирать:
а жить, что, слаще?

Но как вы узнаете, когда я умру,
всё, что я думаю,
и никому не говорю, никому?
И что и не думаю,
а в себе имею?

«В давно прошедшие времена,
когда ещё на свете не было меня,
когда, как в морге иодоформом,
воздух пах юдофобством,
в это время
в Екатеринославе жил еврей.
Еврей, еврею,
под евреем, на еврее...»
[54]

To live! – That's not for old men.
It's all the same to them: ah, soon it'll be
our turn for the coffin.
And it's not because it's SCARY
to die:
to live is no picnic either, right?
But how will you find out, when I die,
everything that I'm thinking
and telling to no one, no one?
And what I am not thinking,
but have deep within?

"During the times that passed a long time ago,
when I was not even in this world,
when the air smelled of Judeophobia
like a morgue smells of disinfectant,
during that time
there lived in Ekaterinoslav a Jew.
A Jew, to a Jew,
under a Jew, on a Jew…"

Satunovsky's sense of dread amidst the terror directed at Jews is similar to Slutsky's assessment of it. Slutsky wrote:

> До первого сообщения о врачах-убийцах оставалось месяц-два, но дело явно шло — не обязательно к этому, а к чему-то решительно изменяющему судьбу. […] надвигалось нечто такое, что никакого твоего участия не требовало. Делать же должны были со мной и надо мной. […] Надежд не было. И не только ближних, что было понятно, но и отдаленных. О светлом будущем не думалось. Предполагалось, что будущего у меня и у людей моего круга не будет никакого. Примерно в это же время я читал стихи Илье Григорьевичу Эренбургу, и он сказал: «Ну, это будет напечатано через двести лет».
> (Slutskii 2005: 194)

> A month or two remained until the first announcement about the killer doctors, but everything was definitely moving – if not necessarily in that direction, still toward something life-shattering… Something was approaching that demanded no participation on your part. Things were going to happen to me and to be done to me. There was no hope. Not only no immediate hope, which was understandable, but also no remote hope. There was no thought of a bright future. It was presumed that for me and the people of my circle there wasn't ever going to be any future. Around that time I read my poems to Il′ia Grigor′evich Ehrenburg; he said in response: "Well, this will be published in two hundred years".

Satunovsky's earlier encounter with Ehrenburg at the end of the war in Prague contains a similar, though a more daring and explicitly Jewish intervention. While Ehrenburg liked Satunovsky's poems, he told him not to return to Russia, adding: "You're not a Party member and you're a Jew. And also the type of poems you write… They won't publish you". Satunovsky protested, "But they do publish you". "I'm a different matter; with my standing, there's nothing they can do but publish" was Ehrenburg's retort.[4]

The second section of the poem abruptly switches temporal register and is presented as a quotation. Do the words in it belong to the speaker who now addresses the reader from beyond the grave? The intent in the first line – "during the times that passed a long time ago" – is similar to "a long, long time ago" from "How do I live?" The speaker traverses years to convey the unity of Jewish history. Is a Jew who lived in Ekaterinoslav his father, grandfather or uncle or indeed his own previous self? All these options are plausible, since they're links in the chain of generations exposed to the same menace. Furthermore, in the last two lines, where Satunovsky declines the noun Jew, the Jew becomes an object to whom (dative case), as Slutsky put it, "things were going to happen…" He becomes an instrument of derision and oppression, like in an antisemitic ditty, and an actual part of speech, suggesting that antisemitism is woven into the very grammatical fabric of the Russian language.

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4 «Вам не надо ехать в Россию. Вас там ничего хорошего не ждет. Вы и беспартийный, и еврей. Да еще стихи такие... Печатать вас там не будут. — Но вас же печатают? — возразил брат. — Я — другое дело, — ответил Илья Григорьевич, — я уже в таком положении, что не печатать меня они не могут» (Bychkov 2010: 389).

Satunovsky revisits his family history in yet another poem:

Приснились
двоюродные дядьки — дядя Леопольд и дядя Му́лле
(оба с маминой стороны); они варили мыло
из ничего, — дивное было время!..

В будущем клубе швейников еще функционировала
хоральная синагога,
но мы не верили в Бога, —
мы, дети Карла Либкнехта и Розы Люксембург,
верили в Красную кавалерию и мировую Революцию.

Дядю Мулле
я знал только по фотокарточке, но дядя Леопольд
погиб ещё не скоро…
[334]

I dreamt
about my second uncles – uncle Leopold and uncle Mullya
(both on my mother's side); they made soap
out of nothing, – it was a marvelous time!..

In the future garment workers' club there still functioned
a choral synagogue,
but we did not believe in God, –
we, the children of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg,
believed in the Red Cavalry and the universal Revolution.

Uncle Mullya
I knew only from his photograph, but uncle Leopold
wouldn't be killed for a while…

Using the more conventional frame of a dream, Satunovsky transports himself to pre-Soviet Ekaterinoslav. His reimagining of it is detailed and familial. The temporal meandering in the poem is vertiginous, resembling the fluid nature of a dream. Past, present, and future exist here simultaneously. Consider the lines,

"In the future garment workers' club there still functioned / a choral synagogue", where the speaker recounts the events from within the past he never actually lived through, portrayed as the ongoing present ("still functioned"). The use of the bureaucratic "functioned" betrays the speaker's uneasiness about the religious past from which he feels estranged. At the same time, Satunovsky romanticizes pre-Soviet Jewish life, calling it a "marvelous time", which intensifies the bitterness of his – the future – generation's abandonment of it.

The poem's last three lines return to the beginning and the deeply familial. The temporal misplacement takes place here again with "but uncle Leopold / wouldn't be killed for a while", referring to his death during the Holocaust. Through "eshche" (wouldn't be) the past is presented once more as the ongoing present while "ne skoro" (for a while) delays the moment of destruction. As Viktor Ivaniv perceptively comments, "the recollections of uncles" remove their lives and deaths from linear time to momentarily "resurrect" and then abruptly "dissolve" back into a state of memorial non-being, as if washed away with soap (Ivaniv 2005). The soap is a multilayered image in the poem. It is a Holocaust referent due to the widespread belief that the Nazis made soap out of Jewish flesh. It is also a testament to Jewish inventiveness and family tradition. Piotr Satunovsky confirms in his memoirs that their father made soap during the Civil War (Bychkov 210: 382).

The poem, "Here they massacred aunt Liza…", written just a year and a half later, on the night of September 10, 1973, returns to the family history in the most painful fashion:

> Здесь расстреляли тётю Лизу, тётю Соню, тётю Лену.
> Полжизни спустя меня привели и ткнули носом в Место казни.
>
> *Ночь на 10 сентября 1973, Днепропетровск*
> [351]

> Here they massacred aunt Liza, aunt Sonya, aunt Lena.
> Half a life later they brought me here and shoved my nose
> into the Site of execution.
>
> *The night of September 10, 1973, Dnepropetrovsk*

The poem is situated in the precise time and place both in terms of its composition and the events it describes. Thus, along with the date, Satunovsky specifies that it was written in Dnepropetrovsk. The poem's grammar – the parallel third-person plural construction lacking a definite subject – is pregnant with many potential meanings. The unnamed "they" who take him to the place of the execution and shove his nose into the site may refer to family members or other members of the community, but precisely because they're unnamed there's a sense that the whole community, the living and the dead, forcefully brings him there. Conversely, because there's violence involved in the act, it's as if he's reliving the execution, dragged here by the perpetrators, which is intensified by the unnamed they who massacred the aunts in the first line. The speaker – a symbolic survivor – must experience guilt for not coming to the memorial spot all these years.

It is revealing that Satunovsky does not just note the date of the composition, but marks it as the night of. In other words, he demarcates the visit to the site of the murder as a sacred occasion, similarly to how Jewish holidays or the Sabbath begin after sundown on the day before. By capitalizing "mesto" (the Site), he also marks it as sacred. These choices convey Satunovsky's awareness of the Jewish calendar and how Judaism thinks about time and place.

Satunovsky does not indicate if there're any monuments at the site. According to Yad Vashem,

> Shortly after the liberation of the city, at the end of 1943, Jewish Red Army soldiers who had participated in the liberation of Dnepropetrovsk erected a memorial shield at the Krasnopovstancheskaya ravine, where Jews were murdered in October 1941. The inscription on the shield, in Yiddish and Russian, reads as follows: "Here many thousands of Jews: men, women, children, and infants, who perished at the hands of the Fascist murderers (in the autumn of 1941) were murdered and buried. Rest in peace on your death bed. May the earth rest lightly on you. We will take revenge on the Fascist villains for the blood they shed – this is our oath".
> (Dnepropetrovsk – Commemoration of Jewish Victims)

In accordance with Soviet practice to erase the specificity of Jewish victims of the Nazi occupation, this monument was replaced in 1945 with a new one that stated: "To the civilian residents <of the city> who were victims of fascism in

October 1941". Another monument was put up in the late 1960s near the Jewish cemetery which was demolished during the same decade; recall the line, "here/there are even no cemeteries left" in "Here the fields used to be in stripes like a tales". Satunovsky's sparse yet deeply evocative verse does not include these details, but its very meaning and symbolic weight feed off this context and the exchange of information between the poems.

As I will examine in the subsequent section, Satunovsky's engagement with the verse of Genrikh Sapgir deepens this exchange and his stance as a Jewish poet in Russian.

"The rhythm of conscious poetic speech": the Soviet Heine

The poem "Kholin speaks…" provides Satunovsky's sharp assessment of his peers in the Lianozovo circle: Igor′ Kholin and Genrikh Sapgir. To remind us of the literary history, in the early 1960s, Satunovsky began to frequent poetic gatherings in Lianozovo, a suburb of Moscow. These informal meetings formed the basis of what became known as the Lianozovo group, a center of the post-war Soviet literary and visual avant-garde.[5] The poem reads in full:

Холин говорит — никому:
кому-то, на кого ему,
в сущности,
абсолютно плевать.

Я говорю: сам себе;
без свидетелей;
с закрытым ртом.

Генрих — заговорил: всем.

Всем, имеющим уши.
Всем, не имеющим ушей.
Слушайте — не ухом, так брюхом!

5 For a detailed account of Satunovsky's relationship with the Lianozovo poets, see Danila Davydov's article in this volume.

Спинным плавником!
Панцирем!
Окаменевшим стволом!
Углекислым кальцием!

Странная,
непостижимая для меня вера:
в обреченность поэта —
быть услышанным!

20 мая 1965
(после чтения Псалмов
в Ялте, на ул. Фр. Рузвельта, д. № ...)
[502]

Kholin speaks – to no one:
to someone who,
in all honesty,
he cares absolutely nothing about.

I speak: to myself alone;
with no witnesses;
with mouth shut.

Genrikh – when he started to speak: to everyone.

Everyone who has ears.
Everyone who has no ears.
Listen – if not with your ear, then your belly!
The fin on your back!
Your shell!
Your petrified trunk!
Your calcium carbonate!

It's a strange
faith, incomprehensible to me:

that the poet is doomed –
to be heard!

May 20, 1965
(after the reading of Psalms
in Yalta, Fr. Roosevelt street, house #…)

Satunovsky delineates three distinct positions of the poet's reach toward the reader, which constitutes a major theme in Russian poetry in general. First, there's Kholin's open speech, predicated on not caring about reaching anyone. Indeed, as pointed out by Ainsley Morse and Bela Shayevich, "Among the poets of his circle, he was known for his particular crudeness, simultaneously respected and condescended to for his lack of education" (Kholin 2018: 6). This crudeness is reflected in "he cares absolutely nothing about" or the original *naplevat'* – spitting at what others make of him. Second, there's Satunovsky's own position, which betrays both privacy and fear: he speaks with his "mouth shut", which makes his poetry an internal dialogue and a secret recording. Finally, there's Sapgir's radically different stance: he reaches out to everyone and everything, believing that as a poet, he's destined to be heard. The speaker is in awe of this faith in the poetic vocation which he himself is incapable of grasping.

The poem's date is significant: "May 20, 1965, after the reading of Psalms in Yalta". Because the text is about Sapgir, the reference to the Psalms clearly points to Sapgir's cycle, *The Psalms* (1965–1966). The "reading" may denote Satunovsky's reading of the cycle on paper or perhaps Sapgir's reading of it to an audience. Satunovsky presents Sapgir as a psalmist – a poet of prophetic stature, steeped in the sacred and the truly universal in his embrace of the natural world and beyond.

There was a feeling of great personal and poetic camaraderie between Satunovsky and Sapgir, predicated, especially for Satunovsky, on their Jewish bond. In several allusions to Sapgir in his oeuvre, Satunovsky singles out Sapgir as a Jew [479]; addresses him as a fellow Jew with the Hebrew/Yiddish "sholom"; and creates a poem in Sapgir's style – a ditty about Jewish gangsters which includes Yiddish ("Five Poems about Poetry"; [485–489]). He prays that Sapgir can become the Soviet Heine, Heine being the paradigmatic modern Jewish poet in a non-Jewish language. Via Sapgir, Satunovsky also presents

Joseph Brodsky as a Jewish figure [167]. Thus, Satunovsky acts as a chronicler of Jewish literature in Russian and pinpoints the poets who, in his view, represent it.

Within this literature, as Satunovsky has it, the younger Sapgir discovers the older Satunovsky ("Five Poems about Poetry"). Revealingly, Sapgir's later definition of Satunovsky's poetry as containing "absolute unusualness" (absoliutnaia neobyknovennost') and "a flair for the Truth" (istina) would introduce a prophetic element into his portrait of the older poet (Sapgir 1992). In "Five Poems about Poetry", Satunovsky diverted, however, from the prophetic and defined Sapgir's method as making poetry out of an anecdote/joke. He elaborated most extensively on Sapgir's poetics in his essay on Sapgir's poem, "Stariki" ("The Old Men").[6] The poem was written in 1963 and the essay one year later.

In the essay, Satunovsky's task is "to figure out the phenomenon [of] the poet Sapgir" ("khochu razobrat'sia v iavlenii – poet Sapgir"; Satunovskii 2009: 45). In describing Sapgir's voice as "the intonation of a person who relates in a confidential manner what he is now intently listening to or examining with his eye what he's now describing",[7] Satunovsky seems to be in fact denoting his own poetic method. Sapgir, however, Satunovsky continues, takes this penchant for observation in another direction: like in a surrealist dream, he distorts reality. Satunovsky refuses to pigeonhole Sapgir as either a modernist or a surrealist. He emphasizes his rationality and via it his kinship with Satunovsky himself and the poets important to him. He writes:

> Несмотря на всю свою тягу к ирреальному — к деформации действительности, галлюцинациям, снам — Сапгир, в сущности, очень «умственный», рациональный поэт. Он как бы пропускает сквозь мозги, осмысливает ирреальное. Ирреальное служит лишь предметом для осознания, и в этом смысле Сапгир ближе к Ходасевичу, к Сельвинскому и Слуцкому, чем к Блоку и Пастернаку, или, скажем, к Ахмадуллиной и Вознесенскому. Вообще — его ритм — никакого шаманства, ни

6 This essay is also discussed in Mikhail Pavlovets' article on Satunovsky as literary critic in this volume.

7 «[…] интонация человека, доверительно рассказывающего о том, к чему он вот сейчас прислушивается, или присматривается, к тому, что он вот сейчас открывает» (Ibid.).

> намека на сомнамбузизм. Это ритм сознательной поэтической речи. Я лично тоже отношу себя к числу сознательных поэтов […].
> (Satunovskii 2009: 48)

> Despite all his drive toward the unreal – toward the deformation of reality, hallucinations, dreams – Sapgir, in essence, is a very "cerebral", rational poet. It's as if he processes the unreal with his mind, contemplates it. The unreal serves merely as a topic for contemplation and in this regard Sapgir is closer to Khodasevich, Selvinsky, and Slutsky than to Blok or Pasternak or, let's say, Akhmadulina and Voznesensky. In general, his rhythm has no shamanism, not a trace of somnambulism. It's the rhythm of conscious poetic speech. I personally also think of myself as a conscious poet […].

Satunovsky concludes that Sapgir's "conscious poetic speech" ultimately always remains in the present and functions like an anecdote/joke.

Satunovsky comments on the formal aspects of Sapgir's poetry as well, namely his switch from traditional versification to free verse. His detailed formalist analysis of "The Old Men" reveals how Sapgir "transformed poetry into prose" ("prevrashchaet prozu v poėziiu"; ibid.: 50) by creating a series of "associative chains" ("assotsiativnyi riad"; ibid.) which preserve the text's poeticity. For our purposes, it is significant that Satunovsky deduces the core of Sapgir's "phenomenon" by dwelling on "The Old Men" which integrates Jewishness into the non-Jewish traditions through weaving a conglomerate of images, from Greek philosophers to priests in the Jerusalem temple to Leo Tolstoy to rabbis to the "old philosophers of our time".

Satunovsky is particularly struck by the significance of the double image of a transparent rabbi and a wall in the following line, "a transparent half / is visible – of the rabbi / and the wall is/a dark alien back".[8] He explains, "This is a very significant image. Personally, it reminds me of the Wailing Wall, the statues by contemporary French masters, "full of holes", which I saw at the Moscow exhibit. It reminds me of the destroyed Jerusalem and Zadkine's Rotterdam".[9] Satunovsky puts the Jewish heritage (the Wailing Wall and the

8 «видна половина / прозрачная — раввина / и стена — / чужая темная спина» (Ibid.: 51).

9 «Очень значительный образ. Мне лично он напоминает и о стене плача, и о „дырявых" статуях современных французских мастеров, которые я видел на московской выставке.

destroyed Jerusalem) in dialogue with European modernist art, thus making the sacred Jewish realm and geography speak the cataclysmic modernist language; he judaizes the latter and makes the former one presciently relevant. In the Soviet context, which derided both Judaism and Israel, the inclusion of the Wailing Wall, at that point, a few years prior to the reunification of Jerusalem during the Six-Day War, not yet under Israeli control, is especially daring. Satunovsky uses the Wailing Wall, which he might have known through depictions in art, such as Vasily Polenov's painting in the Tretyakov gallery, "Jews by Solomon's Wall" (1881–1882), as a symbolic stand-in for Judaism and Israel. We shall yet return to the importance of Jerusalem for Satunovsky.

The mention of Zadkine's statue in Rotterdam is instructive as well. According to Ivan Akhmetiev's commentary to Satunovsky's poems, the lines in the poem, "I'm Moysha from Berdychev", "I'm a stinking kike stuffed with rot and dung. / A monument to me stands tall in Rotterdam",[10] refer to the French Jewish sculptor Ossip Zadkine's monument, *The Destroyed City*, a bronze copy of which was part of the Moscow exhibit of French artists mentioned by Satunovsky in the essay on Sapgir [649]. Created in 1951–1953, *The Destroyed City* depicts a man without a heart and commemorates the destruction of Rotterdam by the German air force in 1940. In light of this commentary, Lev Oborin notes in a conversation with Linor Goralik that a general war monument becomes for Satunovsky a symbol of Jewishness ("Mezhdu strok"; October 15, 2021).[11] Thus, like Sapgir, Satunovsky creates a series of his own associative links through which he renders the non-Jewish Jewish. Satunovsky's reading of Sapgir becomes an entryway not only into Sapgir's Russian Jewish poetics, but Satunovsky's as well.

I return now to the poems which began this section, Sapgir's *Psalms*, and Satunovsky's contemplation of them. There's a tension in Satunovsky's appraisal of Sapgir. While in parts of the essay and "Five Poems about Poetry", Satunovsky emphasizes the immediacy and anecdotal nature of Sapgir's poetry, in "Kholin speaks…", he marvels at Sapgir's unreachable prophetic/messianic stance. In the essay too, of course, Sapgir's imagery is hardly the stuff of an

Напоминает о разрушенном Иерусалиме и Роттердаме Цадкина» (Ibid.).

10 «Я Мойша з Бердычева»; «Я жид пархатый дерьмом напхатый. / Мне памятник стоит в Роттердаме» [141].

11 https://polka.academy/podcasts/807 (07.10.2025).

anecdote/joke, but the ancient/modernist Greek/Jewish/Russian mishmash, which sends Satunovsky in the direction of Jerusalem.

According to David Shrayer-Petrov and Maxim Shrayer, Sapgir's *Psalms* are a meeting point between the American Pop art aesthetics, on the one hand, and metaphysics, on the other. In Sapgir's own description, "In the Psalms, […] there are quotations from the Bible, my phone number, recipes, and side notes which I inserted into the text. This was a collage, which is what postmodernism is all about. It was the American Pop artists who taught me how to do this".[12] In the context of twentieth-century Jewish literature, Sapgir's *Psalms* should be seen as a postmodern midrash, an example of radical creative betrayal. As shown by David Roskies, via "creative betrayal", modern Yiddish writers "challenged the traditional values of the very traditions they were reclaiming" (Roskies 1996: 17). Similarly, Sapgir both destabilizes the canonical sacred text – drastically challenges it – and at the same time renders it indispensable and relevant for his poetry. He transplants the biblical Psalms' precepts and images, including their concept of the divine, onto Soviet reality with its Party meetings, communal apartments, and empty propagandism. He sovietizes the sacred and sacralizes the Soviet, but this ostensibly grotesque game does not nullify his earnest plea to God to be saved. Thus, in "Psalm 69", he begs that God literally phone him:

5. Боже! поспеши ко мне
253. 71. 47.
Господи! не замедли —
2 звонка
(Sapgir 2004: 154)

5. Dear God! Hurry – I'm waiting!
253. 71. 47.
Lord! Do not tarry –
2 rings

12 «В „Псалмах“ […] есть и цитаты из Библии, и мой номер телефона, и рецепты, и надписи, которые я вставил в стихи. Это был коллаж, который и есть постмодернизм. Но научили меня всему этому американские поп-артисты» (Sapgir 2004: 29).

We cannot know for sure which of the *Psalms* Satunovsky was responding to in "Kholin speaks…", since not all of them were written by May 1965. It is striking, however, that, as evidenced by this poem, he recognizes them precisely as products of creative betrayal: prophetic, messianic, and cosmic while at the same time absurdist and deeply personal. They convey sacredness almost in spite of themselves. Satunovsky's identification of Sapgir's voice in "Kholin speaks…" as transcending the human in its desire to contain the prehistoric and all parts of the natural and animal worlds corresponds most closely to "Psalm 150", which reads:

1. Хвалите Господа на тимпанах
на барабанах
… … … (три гулких удара)

2. Хвалите Его в компаниях пьяных
…… (выругаться матерно)

3. Хвалите Его на собраниях еженедельно
…… (две-три фразы из газеты)

4. Нечленораздельно
…… (детский лепет пра-язык)

5. Хлопая в ладоши
… … … (три раза хлопнуть в ладоши)

6. Хвалите Его по-собачьи
… … … (три раза пролаять)

7. По-волчьи
… … … (три раза провыть)

8. Молча ликуя
…… (молчание)

9. Все дышащее да хвалит Господа

…… (кричите вопите орите стучите —
полное
освобождение)
Алилуйя!
(12 раз на все лады)

(Sapgir 2004: 160–161)

1. Praise the Lord with timblers
with drums
… … … (three loud beats)

2. Praise Him in the assembly of drunkards
…… (swearing obscenely)

3. Praise Him in the weekly factory meetings
……. (two or three phrases from the newspaper)

4. Inarticulately
…….. (childish babble adamic language)

5. With a clapping of hands
… … … (clap hands three times)

6. Praise Him a like a dog
… … … (bark three times)
7. Like a wolf
… … … (howl three times)

8. Silently exulting
……. (silence)

9. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord
…… (shout cry wail knock –
Complete
Liberation

> Halleluiah!
> (12 times in all keys)
>
> (Shrayer 2007: 720)

The idea of "childish babble pre-language", "childish babble adamic language", in Gerald Janecek's translation, is at the core of Sapgir's poetics and his notion of Jewish language, in particular. In the later poem, "A Jewish Melody", he describes it through a series of sounds – "shur-shur-shur" and "svel-svol-sval" – and their variations which are produced by rubbing a polished wooden block against an unpolished one. Sapgir provides an explanation as part of the poem, which links it to Psalms: "This is a true Jewish melody / it was sung once by the young David in front of King Saul […]".[13]

Sapgir's notion of the exchanges between the sacred and the profane and of poetic language as in fact pre-language finds parallels in a seminal 1915 essay by national Hebrew poet Hayim Nahman Bialik, "Revealment and Concealment in Language". In it, Bialik formulates the basis of poetry as "the profane turns sacred, the sacred turns profane. Long established words are constantly being pulled out of their settings, as it were, and exchanging places with one another" (Bialik 2000: 25). He adds:

> So much for the language of words. But, in addition, "there are yet to the Lord" languages without words: songs, tears, and laughter… These languages begin where words leave off, and their purpose is not to close but to open. They rise from the void. They *are* the rising up of the void.
> (Bialik 2000: 26)

Sapgir's poetry seems to rise from the same void which reaches, in Satunovsky's formulation, "To all in possession of ears./ To all who possess no ears".

Throughout the *Psalms*, in a way evocative of the Futurist tradition, Sapgir plays with creating new words, both sound clusters and borrowings from Yiddish, Hebrew, and German. He does so most complexly and consequentially in "Psalm 136":

---

13 «Это настоящая еврейская мелодия / ее пел когда-то юный Давид перед царем Саулом […]» (Sapgir 2004: 471)

Овсею Дризу

1. На реках Вавилонских сидели мы и плакали
— О нори-нора!
— О нори-нора руоло!
— Юде юде пой пой! Веселее! —
смеялись пленившие нас
— Ер зангт ви ди айниге Нахтигаль
— Вейли башар! Вейли байон!
— Юде юде пляши! Гоп-гоп!

2. Они стояли сложив руки на автоматах
— О Яхве!
их собаки-убийцы глядели на нас
с любопытством
— О лейви баарам бацы Цион
на земле чужой!

3. Жирная копоть наших детей
оседала на лицах
и мы уходили
в трубу крематория
дымом — в небо
4. Попомни Господи сынам Едомовым
день Ерусалима
Когда они говорили
— Цершторен! приказ №125
— Фернихтен! Приказ №126
— Фернихтен! №127

5. Дочери Вавилона расхаживали среди нас
поскрипывая лакированными сапожками —
шестимесячные овечки
с немецкими овчарками
— О нори-нора! руоло!
Хлыст! хлыст! —
Ершиссен

6. Блажен кто возьмет и разобьет
младенцев ваших о камень.
(Sapgir 2004: 156–157)

For Ovsei Driz

1. By the streams of Babylon we sat and wept
– O nori-nora!
– O nori-nora ruolo!

– Juden juden sing sing! More joyfully! –
Our captors laughed
– Er zangt vid di einige Nachtigal.

– Veili bashar! Veili baoin!
– Juden juden dance! Hop-hop!

2. They stood with hands on automatics
– O Yahweh!
their dogs – the killers – looked at us
with interest
– O leivi baaram batsy Tsion
in a foreign land!

3. The fatty soot of our children
Settled on their faces
as we departed
up the crematory chimney
as smoke – to the sky

4. Remember o Lord against the children of Edom
the day of Jerusalem
When they said
– Zerstören! Order No. 125
– Vernichten! Order No. 126
– Vernichten! No. 127

5. The daughters of Babylon walked among us
scraping their lacquered boots –
six-month-old lambkins
with German shepherds
– O nori-nora! ruolo!
Whip! whip! –
Erschiessen

6. Happy the man who shall seize and smash
your little ones against a rock.
(Shrayer 2007: 718–719)

It's likely that Satunovsky had this text in mind when writing "Kholin speaks…" I would also argue that it bears an imprint of Sapgir's bond with Satunovsky. It is significant that in this, his most elaborate response to the Holocaust, Sapgir turns to Satunovsky, one of the very first to address the Holocaust in Russian (Grinberg 2020: 309–314). The lines, "The daughters of Babylon walked among us/ scraping their lacquered boots …" bring to mind Satunovsky's poem written in 1943. It takes place in the liberated Kharkiv, where the jubilant and also "liberated" women greet and ogle the Red Army soldiers and officers:

Приезжаем в Харьков.
Слезаем с машины.
Возле памятника Шевченко
смех и слёзы жизни.
Масса вольных женщин
гуляет по саду,
подсаживается на скамейку,
заводит беседу […]
[23]

We've just arrived in Kharkov.
Getting out of the car.
By the monument to Shevchenko
there is laughter and tears – life.
A host of liberated women

walks around the garden,
sits on the edge of a bench,
and starts to chat […]

Satunovsky's "liberated" Kharkiv women (recall their depiction in "Here the fields used to be in stripes like a tales" with its post-Holocaust devastation) are reminiscent of Sapgir's "daughters of Babylon" – the German women walking around the camp. Both are oblivious to Jewish suffering and in fact participate in the destruction of Jews, even if indirectly. Satunovsky's poem continues with the speaker asking the women, "Say, can it be / that / all the Jews have been killed?" to which they respond, "Oh, we've even forgotten/that they used to be here".[14] Both Satunovsky's and Sapgir's poems are permeated with bitter irony about first the murder of Jews and later the erasure of memory about them.

Whether Satunovsky recognized this reference to his own poem or not (or at least the similarity between the two), he, to reiterate, had Sapgir's "Psalm 136" in mind when writing "Kholin speaks…" I would propose that, struck by its play with Hebrew, he responded to it with his own psalm of a sort: a poem written just a few months later, in December 1965.

This poem provides a single explicit instance of the inclusion of a sacred Hebrew source into Satunovsky's verse:

Всё, что я пишу,
это, в сущности, комментарии.
Петит. От силы —
курсив (*курсив — мой!*)

А где же Канон?
Где — Борух Ато,
Адэной Элеhейнэ,
Ад<э>ной Эход?
[514]

14 «Скажите, а неужели / всех / евреев убили? / О, мы уже и забыли / когда они были» (Ibid.).

Everything that I write
is in essence commentaries.
A Petit font. At best –
italicized (*the italics are mine!*)

And where is the Canon?
Where is – Borukh Ato,
Adenoi Eleheine,
Adenoi Ekhod?

In departure from his usual stance as an observer of and commentator on the everyday, Satunovsky characterizes himself as a hermeneutic author. His poetic "commentaries" are in the petite font typically used for footnotes and annotations. Thus, they're literally a commentary to some other larger main text – the canon – or an italicized insertion into or under that text.

Satunovsky provocatively frames this canon through Judaism and thus, becomes what I would call a poet/rabbi. There is a parallel between Satunovsky's poem and "the most famous story in all of Rabbinic literature" in which "a certain heathen" asks the sages Hillel and Shammai to explain to him "the entire Torah" as he's standing on one foot. While Shammai chases the heathen away, Hillel says, "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. This is the entire Torah; the rest is commentary – go and learn it" (Holtz 1984: 11). The notion of commentary as a premier moral, intellectual, spiritual, and artistic activity links Satunovsky's and rabbinic imaginations.[15]

There's a good chance Satunovsky was familiar with this episode, since it was retold in Lion Feuchtwanger's novel about Josephus, *The Judean War*, though it appeared there without "the rest is commentary" coda (Feikhtvanger 1965: 235–236). Other places in the novel, however, did describe "commentaries" as the core of rabbinic Judaism (Ibid.: 385). As I have argued elsewhere, Feuchtwanger's works were the main installments within the "Soviet Jewish bookshelf" and functioned as the Soviet Jewish scripture, nourishing the Soviet Jews' identity and supplying them with knowledge about Judaism and Jewish history (Grinberg 2023: 13–29). *The Judean War* came out in 1965 in the seventh volume of Feuchtwanger's collected writings. Satunovsky's poem is

15 I'm grateful to Harriet Murav for first suggesting this parallel.

dated December 3–4, 1965. These correspondences are meaningful and enter Satunovsky into the specifics of Soviet Jewish cultural history, proving that "Feuchtwanger's types should be seen as often the main sources for the Soviet Jewish artistic imagination" (Ibid.: 23).

As Soviet Jewish literacy in general, Satunovsky's was fragmented and makeshift. Hence the poem's Hebrew quotation is imprecise and consists of two parts. First, there's the liturgical beginning of the blessing formula – *Blessed are You Lord Our God* – and second, the scriptural line from Shema, Deuteronomy 6:4–9 – "Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord is One"– of which Satunovsky presents the last two lines. Shema is also, of course, the main part of Jewish liturgy and as close as Judaism gets to a credo. It is what Jews are supposed to say when they wake up, go to sleep, and before they die. It's possible that these are the bits Satunovsky remembers from his childhood, but there seems to be also a more deliberate design. On the one hand, Satunovsky replicates the Hebrew words phonetically, how he heard them in his bastardized Ashkenazi rendering; on the other, his spelling of "eleheine" with the Latin -h- for the Hebrew -hey- indicates his actual familiarity with Hebrew. The only Hebrew-Russian dictionary of the Soviet era, edited by Felix Shapiro and published in 1963, presents -hey- as -he- with the Latin -h- (Shapiro 1963: 12). Thus, Hebrew literacy appears to have been part of Satunovsky's knowledge base and suggests at least some exposure to Jewish observance. His pulling of the quote from the liturgical and scriptural sources is purposeful and succinctly presents Judaism as both practice and text.

In the poem, Satunovsky spells out that his connection to the canon is missing. He does not specify where the canon is, leaving the reader to ponder: is it in the "no longer audible semi-legal / synagogue / clamor" ("ne slyshno i polulegal′nogo / sinagogal′nogo / galdeniia"; [126]), as he described in the earlier poem the barely remaining Jewish religious life in the Soviet Union? Or in Jerusalem? Or in Feuchtwanger's novels? Or in the type of associative links drawn by Sapgir in his *Psalms* and by Satunovsky in his commentary on Sapgir? Whatever the answer is, these remarkable eight lines, to reiterate my argument, are provoked in part by Satunovsky's dialogue with Sapgir, which appears in this case to be also polemical.

Unlike Sapgir, whose *Psalms* are both an elaborate and complex midrash on the Biblical Psalms and an actual rewriting of them, Satunovsky's posture is one of extreme humility and thus more evocative of the actual rabbis' reverence toward canonical authority. This explains why in "Kholin speaks…",

he found Sapgir's prophetic desire to be heard by everyone unfathomable. Satunovsky admires Sapgir's radical poetic inventiveness, but instead of his Hebrew-sounding gibberish of "– O nori-nora! / – O nori-nora ruolo!", he offers a literal sacred quote. Sapgir's "Psalm 136" is dedicated to Ovsei Driz which introduces another pivotal link in Satunovsky's relationship with Sapgir and Satunovsky's overall Jewish worldview. We will examine this link in the essay's next parts.

Living next to and mourning the Yiddish Orpheus

One of the very few writers to have survived Stalin's purge and essential demolition of postwar Yiddish culture in the Soviet Union, Driz was already a published Yiddish poet in the 1930s. While there wasn't anything subversive in his early poetry in terms of content, it was modernist verse with some formal experimentation. Driz continued to write all through the war – he served in the Soviet border troops – and began to publish again in the 1960s, when *Sovetish Heymland* began its run in 1961. A collection of his Yiddish poems came out in 1969 and another one posthumously (Driz 1978).

Similarly to Sapgir and Satunovsky, Driz's mature poetry is divided between poems for children, which retained the playfulness and inventiveness of his pre-war verse, and poems for adults, so to speak. Among the latter are the poems dealing with the Holocaust and the destruction of Yiddish culture. There's pathos in these texts as well as eeriness and detailed horror.

Sapgir befriended Driz in the early 1950s, when they both worked in the sculpture workshop of the Art Fund in Moscow. Sapgir eventually became the main translator of Driz's poetry, both children's and adult. Published in enormous print runs throughout the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, Driz's collections for children brought fame and success to the Yiddish poet. Sapgir's dedication of his "Psalm 136" to Driz is significant, especially in terms of its play with Hebrew and Yiddish. Driz frequented the gatherings at Lianozovo and was often the heart – the drunken heart – of the party. As pointed out by Klavdia Smola, "[t]he underground invented its own Jew, Driz" and "'translated' the Jewish poet into its own cultural language" (Smola 2018: 14). A fellow Lianozovo poet, Igor′ Kholin, wrote an ode to Driz, which reimagined Yiddish and infused its "sound" into late Soviet avant-garde Russian verse:

Шика бен Шика Дриз
Поэт
Патриарх
Иудейский царь Соломон
Поющий
Свои песни без слов
[…]

Стукнемся лбами
В честь
Великого еврейского Поэта
[…]

Оооо агауоооо
Силима шима
Силима шима
Агауоооооо
Лима о Лима
Ишута Осама
Шиоа шиоа шиииии

(Kholin 1994)

Shika ben Shika Driz
A poet
A patriarch
King Solomon of Judea
Singing
His songs without words
[…]

Let us bump foreheads
In honor
Of this great Jewish Poet
[…]

Oooo agauooooo
Silima shima
Silima shima
Agauooooooo
Lima o Lima
Ishuta Osama
Shioa shioa shiiiii.

Kholin presents Driz as an eternal Jewish figure, neither a fossil nor a relic, but someone constantly alive. His imitation of Driz's recitation of his poems in the original brings to mind Sapgir's "– O nori-nora! / – O nori-nora ruolo!" and his "Jewish melody". How do we square Sapgir's actual translations of Driz with this notion of Yiddish (or some essential Jewish speech) as primordial babble and language without words? The answer to this question leads us back to Satunovsky and his relationship with Driz.

Most likely, Satunovsky came to know Driz through Lianozovo; the Yiddish poet quickly became an important figure for him and the anchor of Satunovsky's sense of Jewishness and his Jewish knowledge. While Driz throws a large shadow over much of Satunovsky's oeuvre (Satunovsky even retroactively dedicated one of his earliest poems dealing with his Jewish identity and antisemitism to Driz, "In the country that has nearly forgotten…" ("V otvykshei bit′ zhidov strane…", 1939; see Shrayer 2007: 746), he references Driz explicitly in a few of his poems. Via Driz, Satunovsky reenters the lost Yiddish universe and becomes its idiosyncratic chronicler. One such poem, written in 1970, states:

Смотрюсь в это зеркало
как в подстрочник.
Глазомер жизни
оживляет глаза.

Да, старик Дриз
остался ребёнком.
Только замаскировался.
Только мохом оброс.
[303]

I gaze into this mirror
As if into a crib.
The life's eye gauge
livens up the eyes.

Yes, old man Driz
Has remained a child.
He just camouflaged himself.
He just grew moss all over.

Satunovsky contemplates his old age through Driz and the practice of translation. He imagines the mirror like a "podstrochnik", a "crib" or literal translation of a poem. These cribs, to be reworked into a literary version, were a key part of the Soviet translation industry, especially with "minor ethnic languages" like Yiddish. Satunovsky's reflection in the mirror appears as Driz's *podstrochnik* which contains the Yiddish poet's childish essence. The two poets are analogous to each other.

This poem was written almost a year before Driz's passing, which would devastate Satunovsky. In another poem composed just a month after Driz's death, at the end of the traditional Jewish thirty-day mourning period, Satunovsky writes:

Стою перед дверью,
стучу, кричу на всю лестничную клетку
— Овсей! —
Он был старше меня на пятилетку.
[316]

I'm standing in front of his door,
bang into it and yell through the whole floor
"Ovsei!"
He was older than me by a five-year plan.

Like an open wound, the four lines scream with the speaker's agony and closeness with Driz. Seven months after Driz's death, Satunovsky recasts this pain in different terms in the poem dated August 9, 1971:

Думал ли я,
что Дриз умирает?

Думал ли Дриз,
что он умирает?

Думал ли он,
что Дриз умирает?
[321]

Did I think
that Driz was dying?

Did Driz think
that he was dying?

Did he think
that Driz was dying?

Satunovsky is shattered by the loss of Driz in both texts, but if in "I'm standing in front of his door…", he thinks concretely through Driz's and his own life spans, presented through the Soviet economic calendar, in "Did I think…", he makes the Yiddish poet's death a puzzle and a surprise, which does not diminish the speaker's anguish over it.

Satunovsky persists in keeping Driz alive and outside of time's finitude. In a poem composed five years later, he muses:

Пока не меряешь давления,
ну да, пока не измеряешь,
здоровье вроде как в доверии,
и болен или нет — не знаешь.

Но листья жёлтые осыпались,
зелёных мало остается.
И Овсей, строфу дописывая,
с лишней болью расстается.
[405]

Until you start taking your blood pressure,
well, right, until you've taken it,
your health is as if under control,
and whether you're seriously ill – who knows.

But the yellow leaves have fallen,
there are few green ones left.
And Ovsei, finishing up his stanza,
departs from his unneeded pain.

Once again there's an analogous relationship here between the speaker and Driz, who continues to write in the present, overcoming his pain. He's unaffected by mortality – "his unneeded pain". It's hard to read "Ovsei" and not think of Orfei, Orpheus in Russian. I would suggest that Satunovsky paints Driz as the eternal Yiddish Orpheus who transforms the pain and passage of time into a completed stanza.

Translating Driz through Satunovsky

In translating Driz Sapgir required a *podstrochnik*, likely provided by Driz himself. According to one memoirist, the poet and writer David Shrayer-Petrov (who was Sapgir's friend), Driz would translate his poems into Russian right on the spot after reciting them in Yiddish. Shrayer-Petrov writes about one such occasion at Sapgir's dacha in 1965:

> Овсей Дриз читал свои стихи на идиш. И сразу же — по-русски. Давал свои версии переводов. […] Он читал и читал. Иногда останавливался, чтобы растолковать особый смысл той или иной метафоры или ситуации. […] Овсей читал неприглаженные подстрочники, как будто бы тесал камень могильных памятников. Тесал камень памяти.
> (Shrayer/Shrayer-Petrov 2004: 180)

> Ovsei Driz read his poems in Yiddish. And then immediately – in Russian. He provided his versions of translations… He read and read, sometimes stopping in order to explicate a special meaning of this or that metaphor or situation… Ovsei read his rough *podstrochniki* as if he was chiseling headstones for a cemetery. He chiseled the stone of memory.

At the same time, there are also Sapgir's translations done after Driz's death in 1971 as well as the translations which did not have a published Yiddish original, such as, most famously, the "Wise Men of Chelm" ("Khelemskie mudretsy") cycle, which raises the question of who the original author of these texts actually was (Dymshits 2008). This is where, I would argue, Satunovsky's role in his relationship with the two poets becomes especially important and intriguing. Yiddish, as I've claimed, was undoubtedly part of Satunovsky's life in Dnepropetrovsk. He inserts Yiddish words in some of his poems and, considering his familiarity with the Hebrew alphabet, it is possible that he could parse an actual Yiddish text, including Driz's poetry. There's one published translation of Driz's poem by Satunovsky, a playful children's verse, "Komu chto kazhetsia" ("Whatever anyone imagines") (Driz 1975: 125–126). Satunovsky mused on it in the following poem from 1967:

> Переводы — пересказы,
> перекройки, перифразы;
> сунься не умеючи —
> загубишь Стих — Овсеича!
> [534]

> Translations, versions,
> remakings, periphrases;
> if you dive in without the skills –
> You'll spoil the Poem – of Ovsei!

In order to possibly signal that Satunovsky is translating from the original Yiddish the poem doesn't mention *podstrochnik*.

In Sapgir's translation of the poem "At Dawn" (1941), it is as if Satunovsky and Driz merge in Sapgir's mind:

Огромный город —
Уснувший улей —
Молчал.
У настежь
Открытого
Окна
В легких челноках
Покачивались
Подсиненные сновидения.
Вдруг
Это глухонемое торжество
Прорезал
Надсадный крик:
— Ва-а-ньку за-ре-за-ли!
И сразу
Алым пожаром
Вспыхнул небосклон.
(Driz 1975a: 127)

An enormous city
that fell asleep like a beehive
kept silent.
By the wide
Open
Window
In light canoes
Swayed
bluish dreams.
Suddenly
an annoying scream
pierced
this deaf-mute celebration:
"Va-a-nka's be-en sta-b-bed!"
And at once
the sky flared up
With crimson fire.

There's no published Yiddish version of this poem. On the one hand, its image of "bluish dreams" seems to belong to Driz's poetic vocabulary, but, on the other, the immediacy and matter-of-factness of the horrifying situation depicted in it resonate with Satunovsky's poems, especially those written during the war. Think of the poem from 1942 with the following beginning:

Как я их всех люблю
(и всех убьют).
Всех —
командиров рот:
«Ро-та, вперед, за Ро-о…»
(одеревенеет рот).
Этих. В земле.
«Слышь, Ванька, живой?» […]
[19]

How I love all of them
(they'll all be killed).
All –
company commanders:
"Com-pany, forward, for the Mo-th…"
(the mouth will petrify).
All of them. In the ground.
"You hear, Vanka, you alive?" […]

The prolonged "com-pany" corresponds to Sapgir's prolonged "Va-a-nka", and there's, of course, Vanka in both, an ordinary Russian thrown into the horror of the war. There's Ivan also in another poem of the same period which contains a similar sentiment [21].

Another example of the link between the three poets is Sapgir's translation of Driz's "Babi Yar" (1953–1954), which Sapgir titles "A Mother's Song" in the 1975 publication (Driz 1975: 174–175) and "A Lullaby to Babi Yar (A Mother's Song)" in the later one (Driz 1990: 251). "Babi Yar" is one of Driz's most powerful poems. A lament over the massacre in the Babi Yar ravine in Kyiv in 1941,

it is also an indirect mourning of the destruction of Yiddish culture during Stalin's last years and condemnation of the regime's refusal to put up a monument at Babi Yar. The poem's speaker – the mother – describes the types of cradles she would fashion for her children – one cradle to be hoisted on her braids – and the impossibility of doing so, since her children had been killed and her house and possessions demolished. The poem ends with her devastating plea to all the mothers to rock the entire ravine with their song. The Yiddish original was included in the collection, *Di Ferte Strune* (The Fourth String), in 1969 (Driz 1969: 135–136).

Sapgir's masterful translation is largely faithful to the original, but he shortens the poem and alters the children's names: in Yiddish, it's two boys – Yankel and Shleymel – which he turns into a boy and a girl – Yankel and Elka. Why? The answer, I would argue, points to Satunovsky and his poem, "There's no one in the world…", dated March 1, 1965. One of Satunovsky's most poignant reflections on the Holocaust, it reads:

Нет никого на свете
желанней
этой дурнушки,
золушки нашей, Эльки.
Взял бы
и съел бы
изюмины-веснушки
с элькиной шейки.
А где её дом?
За бродом.
А чем она пахнет?
Мёдом,
Элька-Конопелька.

Играйте, жидовские дети!
На скрипке!
На флейте!
Ещё не зажгли
для вас

освенцимские
свечки.
[173]

There's no one in the world
more desirable
than this plain looking
Cinderella, our Elka.
I'd take
and eat
all the raisins-freckles
from Elka's little neck.
And where is her house?
Beyond the ford.
And what does she smell like?
Like honey,
Elka-hempla.

Play, Yid children!
On the violin!
On the flute!
The Auschwitz candles
have not yet
been lit
for you.

Sounding like a folkloric ditty, the poem seems to be an imitation of children's poetry and hence of Driz. Violin is a significant image for both Driz and Satunovsky. A number of Driz's poems feature a violin, including a 1944 eulogy for Driz's mother titled "Skripka" ("A Violin", translated by Sapgir) and the poem "Ballada o skripke" ("Ballad about a Violin", translated by A. Revich). The first collection of Driz's poetry in Russian translation (Driz 1961) had a black silhouette of a Jewish fiddler on the front page. There's also an earlier reference to the violin by Satunovsky as a sign of Jewishness in the poem, "How repulsive I must seem to them!.." (Kak ia im dolzhen byt′ otvratitelen!..), where the speaker contrasts his affinity with the "biblical boys with violins" –

the reincarnations of King David with his harp – with the antisemitic hatred toward him from the soldiers in his barracks [29].

If Driz writes a lullaby for the murdered children of Babi Yar, Satunovsky writes a ditty for the Jewish children who will perish in Auschwitz. He wants to preserve them in the pre-destruction present. The usage of the pejorative "zhidovskie" – Yids' – instead of *evreiskie* for Jewish children makes it more intimate and raw, canceling out the antisemitic intent. Sapgir's translation of Driz pays homage to both Driz's and Satunovsky's Holocaust responses.

Conclusion: Back to Jerusalem

The final Satunovsky text examined in this essay is a short poem which suggests another significant context for the dialogue between these poets and the overall parameters of Satunovsky's Jewish imagery and vocabulary. It reads:

…Голод не довод.
Надо быть сильным.
Музыка, принеси мне
могиндовид
из Иерусалима.
[333]

…Hunger is no reason to despair.
I've got to be strong.
Music, bring me
a mogindovid
from Jerusalem.

The ellipses at the start point to the missing context: this is a fragment, a thought or conversation beginning in *medias res*. The hunger here is clearly of an emotional or psychological nature – it's a hunger for someone or the feeling of traumatic emptiness because of the loss of someone dear. I would propose that this someone is Driz. The poem is dated February 11, 1972, almost a year after Driz's death on February 14, 1971. With this text Satunovsky marks Driz's Yahrzeit, the one-year anniversary of his demise.

The poem's images – music, the six-cornered Jewish star, *mogindovid* in Satunovsky's Yiddish rendition, and Jerusalem – point to Driz. In 1959, Nekhama Lifshits (Lifshitsaite), a legendary Yiddish singer, performed a song to the lyrics of Driz's "Babi Yar" in Kyiv. It was a daring act for which she was reprimanded by the authorities and prohibited from ever giving concerts in the Ukrainian capital again. Just a year prior, in May 1958 in Moscow, Driz took Lifshits to the composer Rivka Boyarskaya, who sang the poem to them. As Lifshits remembered:

> Ривка Боярская уже тогда была прикована к постели. Без надрыва, но с невыносимой глубиной, от которой окаменевают на месте, она «провыла» этот Плач. Я сидела […] в ее убогой квартирке […] напротив Московской консерватории […] Я не могла подняться с места. Дриз почти вынес меня на улицу.
> (Baukh 1981: 95–98)

> The bedridden Rivka Boyarskaya "howled" out this lament, without tears, but with the unbearable depth which turns one into stone. I sat in her tiny apartment across from the Moscow Conservatory, and couldn't get up. Driz almost carried me outside.

Lifshits saw the song as *kina* – a traditional Jewish lament, "neither a sound nor a word, but a continuous pain which only grows stronger with touch".[16] Satunovsky likely knew this story from Driz and perhaps even heard Lifshits's performance of it.

In 1969, Lifshits made aliya to Israel where she was greeted as a hero. On February 3, 1970, just a few days before Driz's death, the newspaper *Soviet Culture* (Sovetskaia kul′tura) published a piece, "Regarding Madam Lifshitsaite's 'Basic Decency'" (Grigorovich 1970). While berating Lifshits for selling her soul to the Zionists and decrying her life in the Jewish state, the article also quoted from her interview to an American Yiddish newspaper, where she described the Soviet Union as a "country of Jewish culture that grew silent" (stranu zamolknuvshei evreiskoi kul′tury). Thus, this propagandist piece man-

16 «Это невозможно назвать ни звуком, ни словом, это как сплошная боль, которая еще усиливается от прикосновения» (Там же).

aged to convey the truth about the Jewish condition in the Soviet Union which a reader like Satunovsky would have seized upon.

I have attempted to fill in the ellipses for this poem and reconstruct its contexts to show how Satunovsky returns sound to the "Jewish culture that grew silent". Devastated by his "hunger" for Driz, Satunovsky wants to persevere and wishes for Lifshits's music – her *kina* – now in Jerusalem to bring him a *mogindovid* – a symbol of Zion, Yiddishkayt and thus, of Driz. In mentioning Jerusalem, he might have also hearkened back to the Wailing Wall in his commentary on Sapgir's "The Old Men". Indeed, as this essay has striven to demonstrate, the depth of Satunovsky's Jewish identity and voice must be fathomed through the dialogue he creates around Jewishness with Sapgir and Driz: the Soviet Heine and the Yiddish Orpheus.

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