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# Narratives of Fear and Shame: Jewish Childhood in Soviet and Post-Soviet Life Writing

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Oral Presentation O6.3

**NARRATIVES OF FEAR AND SHAME: JEWISH CHILDHOOD IN SOVIET  
AND POST-SOVIET LIFE WRITING**

Rosa Kleinman and Marina Balina\*

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This presentation will examine the childhood recollections of Russian/Soviet-Jewish authors Samuil Marshak and Dina Rubina. When Marshak recollected his pre-revolutionary childhood experience in his 1961 narrative, he was forced to write his memoirs from the Soviet vantage point, emulating the anti-childhood model of poverty, neglect, and unhappiness established in Maxim Gorky's childhood reminiscences. Marshak's task of writing about his childhood in happy terms was further complicated by the fact that he was Jewish. Anti-semitism, though officially condemned by the Soviet government, was still strong in the 1960s when Marshak wrote his memoir. His solution was to omit large sections of his narrative related to his Jewish experience, leaving conspicuous gaps for the compassionate reader to fill in. In contrast to Marshak, Dina Rubina wrote about her Jewish experience in the 1990s, purposely positioning her Jewishness at the center of her Soviet childhood recollections. Writing about her Soviet experience in post-Soviet times, however, allowed Rubina the freedom to reveal the necessary details of her childhood without forcing them through the anti-childhood filter. These different narrative approaches provide a complicated identity map which reveals the continued complexity and sensitivity of Russian-Jewish quest for self-identity.