



**University  
of Victoria**

Graduate Studies

**Notice of the Final Oral Examination  
for the Degree of Master of Arts**

of

**ETHAN CALOF**

BA (Dalhousie University, 2013)

**“New Men for a New World: Reconstituted Masculinities in Jewish-Russian Literature (1903 – 1925)”**

Department of Germanic and Slavic Studies

Wednesday, April 10, 2019  
10:00 A.M.  
Clearihue Building  
Room A207

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Serhy Yekelchyk, Department of Germanic and Slavic Studies, University of Victoria (Supervisor)  
Dr. Helga Thorson, Department of Germanic and Slavic Studies, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Lincoln Shlensky, Department of English, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Kenneth Stewart, Department of Economics, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies

## **Abstract**

This Master's Thesis explores Jewish masculinity and identity within early twentieth century literature (1903-1925), using texts written by Jewish authors in late imperial Russia and the early Soviet Union. This was a period of change for Russia's Jewish community, involving increased secularization and reform, massive pogroms such as in Kishinev in 1903, newfound leadership within the 1905 and 1917 Revolutions, and a rise in both Zionist and Revolutionary ideology. Subsequently, Jewish literary masculinity experienced a significant shift in characterization. Historically, a praised Jewish man had been portrayed as gentle, scholarly, and faithful, yet early twentieth century Jewish male literary figures were asked to be physically strong, hypermasculine, and secular.

This thesis first uses H.N. Bialik's "In the City of Slaughter" (1903) and Sholem Aleichem's "Tevye Goes to Palestine" (1914) to introduce a concept of "Jewish shame," or a sentiment that historical Jewish masculinity was insufficient for a contemporary Russian world. It then creates two models for these new men to follow. The Assimilatory Jew, seen in Isaac Babel's *Red Cavalry* cycle (published throughout the 1920s), held that perpetual outsider Jewish men should imitate the behaviour of a secular whole in order to be accepted. The Jewish Superman is depicted in Vladimir Jabotinsky's "In Memory of Herzl" (1904) and Ilya Selvinsky's "Bar Kokhba" (1920), and argues that masculine glory is entirely compatible with a proud Jewish identity, without an external standard needed. Judith Butler's theories on gender performativity are used to analyze these diverse works, published in Hebrew, Yiddish, and Russian by authors of varying political alignments, to establish commonalities among these literary canons and plot a new spectrum of desired identities for Jewish men.