

S. AN-SKI'S "TSVISHN TSVEY VELTN (DER DYBBUK)"/"BEYN SHNEY OLAMOT (HADYBBUK)"/"BETWEEN TWO WORLDS (THE DYBBUK)": A TEXTUAL HISTORY

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1. Conception and Evaluation of the Play

An-Ski's play "Tsvishn tsvey veltn (Der Dybbuk)", translated into Hebrew by C.N. Bialik in 1918 and published in the Yiddish original in 1919, has generated a sizeable body of literature, in great measure due to its stage adaptations in the Hebrew and Yiddish theater. In addition, there are various memoirs laden with conflicting information and inaccuracies about the circumstances of the play's birth and translation into Hebrew.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, relatively little attention has been devoted to the play itself, beyond its theatrical and ideological significance. We have yet to see a synoptic overall examination of the different stages of textual development and attention paid to the many variations between the Yiddish and Hebrew texts -- though some important steps have been made in this direction. Furthermore, no one has investigated the play from the standpoint of the multi-linguistic network of Yiddish, Russian and Hebrew in which it was written. Also worthy of attention is the problem posed by folkloristic material incorporated in the text in its various linguistic guises. These phenomena demand our consideration outside the realm of theater (where acclaim has already been won), regardless of the literary critics' assessment of the play's dramatic or literary "worth".

To researchers, An-Ski's play poses fascinating questions about the formulation of the text and the possible links between the three linguistic versions. The problematic nature of the play seems to stem not only from the author's conception of genre but from the fact that it took so long to evolve. In its fluid state, new motifs, characters and textual elements were continually added, affecting the overall balance of the play. Bialik's Hebrew translation and the re-fashioning of the text

by enterprising stage directors also added to the play's constantly changing face.

It is not surprising then, that when "The Dybbuk" was put on public trial in Tel Aviv in 1926, critics defined its genre as follows: "It cannot be considered a fairy-tale or a realistic or a symbolic work in the full sense of the word, though it contains elements of all three".<sup>2</sup> An-Ski himself tried to clarify some of his intentions in a letter to a childhood friend, Ch. Zhitlowsky, in 1920.<sup>3</sup> He says that although it dealt with mysterious people, the play was basically realistic. It was about a struggle between the desires of the individual and the need of the community "to maintain its national existence".

Of particular interest among the first reactions to the play are the comments of M.J. Berdyczewski-Bin Gorion, apparently after reading Bialik's Hebrew translation.<sup>4</sup> This fact is important because it seems to have influenced his impressions and evaluation of the play. Unlike other critics of the time, Berdyczewski does not complain about the play's structural and philosophical disjointedness. In his opinion, the playwright "built foundation upon foundation and stone upon stone. We enter a temple with many rooms opening out in all directions... But this multiplicity does not disturb the reader at all. On the contrary, he is pulled forward, as if by magic strings". Berdyczewski sees no contradiction between realism and mystery: "We have before us a mysterious but realistic poem, a poem that draws its parts from the hidden recesses of the world". He finds the relationship between Chonon and Leah an embodiment of the two axes of the world: life and death. Thus he is attracted by the ecstatic, exalted nature of the play and remains oblivious to the function of the realistic/folkloristic elements that drew the attention of other critics. In his eyes, the play is



"בין שני עולמות: 'הדיבוק', בביצוע 'הלהקה הווילנאית', לכבוד 30 למותו של אריסקי, כ"ח כסלו תרפ"א

"a tragic song of songs, its color and language lifted from the world of Kabbalah and Hassidism, and its truthfulness penetrating every heart".

In contrast to Berdyczewski's emphasis on the play's mysterious, existential focus on life and death, the periodical Hatekufa, that same year, deals with the play's realistic significance.<sup>5</sup> Pointing out the influence of Peretz's play "Di goldene keyt" (The Golden Chain) about the crisis in the home of a zaddik, the anonymous author believes that "An-Ski's major strength is in the depiction of simple folk life". Even in this drama of mystery, "the scenes of simple life are more important to us". He does not attach great importance to the enigmatic elements, which he attributes to literary influence; it was not this that made An-Ski unique. Rather, "the portrayal of people engrossed wholly and naively in the spirit of mystery -- this was truly wonderful. Here An-Ski reached an artistic peak rarely attained by Jewish writers".

Shortly after the play appeared in Yiddish, Hillel Zeitlin, an author interested in Hassidism, decried the tendency of critics to associate it with "folk-realism" and label it a "symbolic work".<sup>6</sup> He describes the work "a real Hassidic mystery play". It is "an epic work full of lofty poetic innocence, which attempts to raise...the problems of the world and of life".

Zeitlin, who seizes upon some of Berdyczewski's insights and mentions him by name, examines the play's meaning in the light of the teachings of Hassidism: for example, the problematics of the soul in relation to the body, etc. After making these conceptual distinctions, Zeitlin goes on to criticize the lack of a convincing dramatic solution, particularly in the case of the "descent" and "ascent" of the soul.<sup>7</sup>

Our discussion of the varied body of criticism dealing

with "The Dybbuk", both as a drama in print and on the stage, would not be complete without mentioning the vehement protests of the religious extremists, who denounced the play without specifying it by name. For instance, the introduction to a collection of Hassidic tales about dybbuks and exorcism contains the following sentence: "Until a certain heretic arose (whose evil name shall go unmentioned) and made it into a play, to be clowned in theaters and circuses".<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Dramatic Integration of Folkloristic Material

The folkloristic and ethnographic material that serves as a basis and impetus for the action of the play, has evoked both criticism and praise from those who heard the play read by the author himself or watched it performed on the stage.

Ch.N. Bialik admired An-Ski's passion for collecting and studying folklore but he chided him even to his face for incorporating in his dramatic work folkloristic elements that in his opinion were not assimilated artistically. Ten years later, Bialik repeats some of his former complaints: "I have the impression that as a collector of folklore, you went around to all the rubbish heaps. There you collected fragments of folklore and pieced them together like a tailor who takes bits of clothing and rags, and makes of them a patchwork quilt".<sup>9</sup>

Possibly influenced by Bialik, Z. Voyslavski also pokes fun at the folkloristic elements, after viewing the Habimah production of the play in Berlin in 1927: "Take a Hassidic tune, the cry of a Jewess giving birth, a Jewish cemetery with crooked tombstones, an old shofar unfit for use, the curtain of an old ark embroidered in gold, a goblet for havdalah. Mix them with a little popular Hassidism and Kabbalah -- and you have a

nice batter for cooking".<sup>10</sup>

The Yiddish critic Sh. Niger, an acquaintance of An-Ski, expresses misgivings about the excess of folklore in the play on several occasions, initially during the discussions that followed play-readings by the author himself prior to its appearance in print. Niger expands on this topic later, after watching "The Dybbuk" performed in New York in 1921 under the direction of Morris Schwartz.<sup>11</sup> He speaks of the constant tension between the realistic, psychological element and the ethnographic, folkloristic, symbolic and legendary elements that never really come together. According to Niger, this conflict between An-Ski the genre writer and An-Ski the psychologist arose due to the intervention of the Russian stage director, Stanislavsky, while the text of the play was being formulated. He had no interest in the folkloristic aspects of the manuscript presented to him for staging -- only in its "mysteriousness". Niger goes on to say that "The Dybbuk" was intended to be a realistic work, almost a genre piece. However, it is so filled with practical mysticism, dreams, exorcism ceremonies and rituals with the deceased that the folkloristic-ethnographic ornamentation swallows up the psychological realism.

In his discussion of the play after watching it performed,<sup>12</sup> Niger distinguishes between three different elements: a) folklore and ethnography (legends, customs and folk beliefs); b) the private drama between Chonon and Leah; c) mystic allusions embodied chiefly by the messenger. Again he stresses the tension between the dramatic intentions and the ethnographic, folkloristic element that Morris Schwartz's staging depends upon so heavily.

Other sources are equally unhappy with the play's folkloristic material. The Yiddish critic, M. Vanvild, in his indictment of the play following its performance by the Vilna troupe in Warsaw in

1921, claims that the depictions of folklore are devoid of individual force and internal justification. The characters sometimes serve merely as an excuse and a vehicle for presenting material that has been collected.<sup>13</sup>

The integration of folklore was also focused upon during the public "trial" of "The Dybbuk" which took place in Tel Aviv in 1926. In this context, E. Steinman claimed that the play "was not an interaction between protagonists and plot but a 'clearance sale' of Jewish folklore. It was a layering of patch upon patch".<sup>14</sup> Steinman goes on to say the following: "What is folklore? It is bricks, sand, raw material scattered in different piles -- in oral traditions, pamphlets and folktales. Anyone can reach out and take some. The artist, however, must make of it a building... Here we have no building and all the bricks are falling apart".<sup>15</sup> A. Shlonsky also protested on this

occasion against the lack of cohesion: "'The Dybbuk' is not an artistic piece of genre theater but an ethnographic museum strewn with bits of folktales, religious rituals, etc. -- all of it devoid of literary or dramatic necessity".<sup>16</sup>

Another participant in this "trial", J. Fichman, offers the final indictment: "He may have done an important task by collecting folklore, but he has never been considered an author or an artist -- all he is, is a dilettant... And in his old age he assembled all this folklore and poured it into 'The Dybbuk'.... Here we have a landslide of folklore, and it is only thanks to the staging, that sorted out the rubbish, elevating and purifying the work, that one can watch it with any pleasure".<sup>17</sup>

Among the few who defended An-Ski at this gathering was Z. Rubashov (Z. Shazar), who praised the historical truthfulness of the work: "This folkloristic material is not fictitious; it was very much alive in Poland and other wellsprings of Hassidism

for hundreds of years. Here all of it has come together as a living body as yet untouched by the hand of art".<sup>18</sup>

A "counsel for the defense" on another occasion was the Yiddish critic B. Karlinius, who approved of the play's structure after seeing it performed for the first time by the Vilna troupe in Warsaw. In his opinion, "The Dybbuk" portrayed the most beautiful and intimate aspects of the spirit and life of the Jewish people in a poetic and well-dramatized manner.<sup>19</sup> The Yiddish critic Y. Entin of the United States, also thought highly of the folklore woven into the play, particularly the legendary aspects. He found here the refined intellectual reconstruction of an old legend to which An-Ski added a psychological, human dimension through the motif of love, and a didactic dimension through the motif of Kabbalistic justice.<sup>20</sup>

## 3. Structural Problems of the Play

Much has been said about the play's structure in the body of criticism that evolved following its publication and first staging in Yiddish and Hebrew. M. Weichert says the play is colorful but weak in composition: like individual pearls, not a necklace.<sup>21</sup> In his eyes, "The Dybbuk" is a tottering building, supported by only a few motifs. Nevertheless, he praises the legendary aspects, which he thinks are full of dramatic tension.<sup>22</sup>

In his assessment, which was much influenced by the impression made on him by the performance of the Vilna troupe, Weichert points out the polarity between earthliness and heavenliness, and realism and mysticism, which is never resolved.<sup>23</sup> He believes that An-Ski felt this polarity, and thus altered the personalities of his characters several times in an effort to bridge the gap between the two worlds. Be that as it may, the director, David Herman, was not successful in fusing the two despite the many changes

he himself introduced in the play's structure.

After watching the same performance, B. Karlinius comments on several peripheral motifs that mingle with the central plot.<sup>24</sup> An-Ski often developed parallel motifs that could stand on their own: rise and fall, love as strong as death, the zaddik of Miropol and his doubts. On another occasion,<sup>25</sup> the critic points out the lack of cohesion between the marvellous pearls of poetry, which distract us from the major dramatic plot.

The criticism levelled against the lack of coordination in motifs and typology also extended to the character of the mysterious messenger (the "meshulah"), devised by An-Ski at the advice of Stanislavsky. Some say this character does not fit naturally into the play and upsets its dramatic progression.<sup>26</sup> According to Weichert, this messenger, who symbolizes the conscience calling for justice to be done and the workings of blind fate, is extraneous: "It is a hard, dry allegory born in the mind of a maskil or borrowed from some foreign sphere of experience".<sup>27</sup> In his review of the play in New York in 1921, A. Koralnik asks: "The messenger -- who needs him? After all, he is only a 'symbolic' character in a legend that is all symbol".<sup>28</sup>

Some of those who thought the messenger superfluous considered him a duplication of similar characters in contemporary European dramaturgy. In this vein, Z. Voyslavski says: "And the messenger... with his esoteric manner... this mysterious character who briefly announces future calamity -- what do we need him for? He is none other than Andreyev's 'Someone in gray'".<sup>29</sup> An-Ski's possible association with this Russian play is also mentioned by Jacob Rabinowitz during the public trial in Tel Aviv: "Here I see a golem on the stage. The Russian playwright Andreyev's 'Man in gray'".<sup>30</sup> S. Niger says the

messenger reminds him of Maeterlinck's mysterious stranger.<sup>31</sup>

On the other hand, there were also those who saw the "meshulah" in a positive light and fully justified his appearance in the play. Y. Entin, for instance, writes: "Although he is outwardly a real person, a coarse messenger who travels from place to place on business errands and as a mediator, he is actually a symbolic emissary from the upper world. He is a character who senses and knows all, who appears at every crisis and predicts every obstacle that will arise or has arisen in the past. Nonetheless, he also functions as a seeker of justice."<sup>32</sup>

Other critics have bestowed upon the messenger more complex ideological missions. For example, he is said to embody the idea of falling or descending in order to ascend -- in other words, not fighting against sin but correcting and purifying it.<sup>33</sup> It is he who pulls the strings of the entire play and serves as An-Ski's mouthpiece. According to this view, the emissary is An-Ski himself, voicing his own ideology.

Much as it evoked negative criticism from others, the character of the messenger elicited nothing but praise from N. Sokolow. Although he has reservations about the general worth of the play and the degree of credibility of the Hassidic lifestyle it depicts, Sokolow says "the character of the 'meshulah' is the most fantastic artistic creation in the whole work."<sup>34</sup>

#### 4. Stages in the Evolution of the Text

In spite of the fact that we have various versions of "The Dybbuk" containing textual and linguistic differences, there are several links in the evolution of the play that are hazy or altogether missing. We can try to reconstruct them

using the many memoirs recalling An-Ski's life and work. The information these contain build up the picture bit by bit, but sometimes they contradict one another. Often as not, the reliability of the material is called into question, demanding selectivity and additional investigation. Sometimes the authors themselves confess that their memories of "The Dybbuk" and its creator have become blurred over time.<sup>35</sup>

The formulation of the play in its two original languages -- Russian and Yiddish -- extended over a long period of time. Gershon Levin, a friend of An-Ski's writes the following: "An-Ski worked on 'The Dybbuk' a long time. He used to make corrections and changes, and was constantly rephrasing. He talked about the play whenever he got the chance."<sup>36</sup> We may assume that these additions and revisions led to the creation of sub-versions of the text, and that there were differences between the Russian version (which was never found and probably no longer exists), and the Yiddish one. The change-over from one language to the other was surely the perfect opportunity to introduce changes, either by adding or omitting certain details.

The evolution of "Tvishn tsvey veltn -- Der Dybbuk" began in 1912 but was not yet complete by the time the Yiddish version was published in 1919. Stage directors who worked on the play continued to reformulate the text and do with it what they would: they dropped sections of dialogue and made structural combinations of their own, all in keeping with their ideological stance and staging ideas.<sup>37</sup>

Our discussion will relate mainly to the formulation of the text by An-Ski himself and his Hebrew translator, Ch. N. Bialik. The first phase of the work consisted of seven years during which the play was in a constant state of fluidity and change. At this time, An-Ski's enthusiastic activities as head of the expedition

of the Jewish Society for the Study of Folklore and Ethnography then established in St. Petersburg, led to the collection of folkloristic elements that found their way into the play.<sup>38</sup> These included whole episodes witnessed during the expedition, as well as legends, customs and Hassidic melodies.

We have at our disposal testimony about the early stages of the play's evolution which includes pseudo-memoirs in which the author's faded reminiscences of years gone by are mixed with the impressions he may have absorbed while reading the memoirs of authentic eye or hearsay witnesses. Some of this testimony is a blend of truth and fantasy that has turned into "absolute truth" with the passage of time, and must be used with caution.

Among the testimony to the correlation between the play and the travels of the Jewish Folklore Expedition, the observations of M. Tshudner and S.L. Zitron are of special interest. The former says he worked alongside An-Ski in 1912-1913, compiling

the material collected during the expedition.<sup>39</sup> Tshudner sometimes goes off on belletristic tangents, and his descriptions, written twenty or more years later, also include rumors and second-hand anecdotes, but we can usually see the process by which An-Ski refashioned the raw material he and his colleagues encountered into something entirely different.

Tshudner describes certain dramatic episodes that he saw and heard with his own eyes and ears in the course of the expedition. He says the Hassidic dance in Act I of the play actually took place in the village of Slavuta where a group of Hassidim were drinking brandy. The beggars' dance and the joining in of the bride, Leah, at her wedding, remind Tshudner of the daughter of a wealthy man in Brizdov, Volhynia, who did the same thing at her wedding. As for the core of the main plot -- a broken agreement and the subsequent punishment --

Tshudner recalls the visit of the members of the expedition to the town of Mezritch where Reb Shmaya, the rabbi's attendant told them the story of two Jews from Austra who swore to arrange a marriage between their children which never materialized. Tshudner goes on to reconstruct from memory the conversation that took place between An-Ski and the storyteller, who describes how the two Jews were finally brought to trial before the Rebbe of Mezritch. This tale apparently made a deep impression upon An-Ski, who according to Tshudner, went around a long time afterwards excited and preoccupied in thought.

In the same way that An-Ski absorbed events for the plot of his play, he accumulated background material of customs and stage props. This is true for the inscription on the tombstone of the bride and groom murdered in the days of Chmelnitzki which attracts Leah's attention and foreshadows the coming events. According to Tshudner, An-Ski visited the cemetery in the Volhynian town of Anapolia where he actually saw such a tombstone, and an old man there told him the story behind it.

In an emotional tone, Tshudner describes the way An-Ski looked and felt on this occasion: "It was already evening then, and in the mysterious darkness that shrouded the world, An-Ski stood beside the wonderous tomb in silence with eyelids down, listening to the voice of the old man, as if immersed in an ancient dream or the secrets of Kabbalah."<sup>40</sup>

To this testimony, Tshudner adds another story that he himself had not been witness to but had heard from An-Ski's artist nephew, Yudovin, one of the guiding spirits behind the expedition, and from the composer, Yoel Engel, who had also gone along on this trip. Apparently, when they were dining at the table of a wealthy Jew in Yarmolinetz with whom they were staying, they witnessed a silent, secret interchange between

the man's daughter and a yeshiva student who ate with them regularly. This "secret" romance was terminated by the decision of the money-hungry father to marry off his daughter to someone else. Tshudner claims that upon hearing the girl's sobbing in bed at night, "An-Ski got up and wrote feverishly in his notebook until dawn. This love must have made a deep impression on him".

It should be pointed out that Tshudner was already familiar with this story of the two lovers separated by a strong-willed father, which serves as a prototype for the main action between Chonon and Leah, from the memoirs of S.L. Zitron published in 1921. Zitron says he heard it directly from An-Ski during one of their long talks. But here An-Ski says he wrote in his notebook the day after his visit to Yarmolinetz. Are these two separate testimonies that confirm and reinforce one another, or is the later testimony based on the earlier one?

Evidence of An-Ski's incorporation of folkloristic material and impressions from real life into his play may also be found in the memoirs of S. Shriro, a participant in the 1912 expedition who guided An-Ski in the subject of Jewish customs.<sup>42</sup> Shriro points out that the prototype for Rabbi Azriel, the zaddik of Miropol and one of the central figures in the play, was formulated after the expedition's visit to this town, located between Rovno and Berdichev. He describes in detail the topography of Miropol, part of which was called Kaminka, also mentioned in the play. Apparently this town was famous for its stories of the miracles worked by a zaddik named Reb Shmuel whose special talent was exorcising dybbuks. According to Shriro, An-Ski collected these stories and used them in "The Dybbuk". On more than one occasion, An-Ski stated that "these stories have been waiting for their redeemer". As for his visit to Miropol-Kaminka, An-Ski reportedly told Shriro: "If these stories were all I had come



for, it would have sufficed".

The ritualistic-ceremonial basis for the untiring efforts of Rabbi Azriel and his associates to exorcise the dybbuk is also traceable to authentic material collected by An-Ski at a later date, when he visited the Jewish communities in Galicia in 1915-1916, ~~on~~ <sup>in</sup> the ~~time~~ <sup>months</sup> of World War I.<sup>43</sup> An-Ski combined his mission to provide assistance to the waning communities of Galicia with efforts to save valuable historical-ethnographic material such as Jewish ceremonial objects and other items associated with Jewish life.<sup>44</sup>

Zitron draws our attention to the precise description of a synagogue in Gorlitz which An-Ski visited in the days of destruction when the fighting between Russia and Austria took their toll on the Jewish communities. This synagogue, in all its shadowy secrecy, appears in "The Dybbuk" in Act I, set in a different territorial context. According to Zitron, An-Ski wrote this act while in Tarnow, which had been bombed by the Austrian army, and the second act some weeks later -- also while travelling in Galicia.

Based on his talks with An-Ski, Zitron says that the playwright made a brief visit to Kiev to meet with the Jewish Aid Committee and at this time, read out the first two acts of "The Dybbuk" to the engineer, M.N. Sirkin. The next two acts were completed later, in Moscow.

In his testimony, however, Zitron ignores the fact that we are speaking of a new version of the play written at that time. Memoirs and epistolary sources show that An-Ski had already composed the first version in 1912. Tshudner tells us<sup>45</sup> that upon his return from St. Petersburg, An-Ski presented the first draft of the play to the young assistants who accompanied him on the expedition, telling them excitedly how he had written

it: "And I sat there and wrote and erased and added and cut out, and I seemed to see hovering over me the disembodied souls from the tales and papers I obtained in various places, as if these souls were embracing me and seeking 'tikkun' (correction). For over three weeks I sat locked in my room and knew nothing but my work -- and today I have this little composition to show you".

One of the members of the expedition upon whom Tshudner bases himself claims that "throughout the trip An-Ski jotted down details for the work he was planning in a special notebook". When he was called back to St. Petersburg from Rovno to discuss the financing of the ethnography expedition, he made use of the opportunity to write the play on the basis of these notes -- working for three weeks straight, day and night".

This draft, which may have been either in Russian or in Yiddish, has never been found. Nevertheless, we can reconstruct its essence in terms of structure, characters and ideology. Tshudner says there was no aura of mystery in Act I and the opening song, "Why", intoned by the "batlonim" or professional prayermen, had not yet been devised.<sup>46</sup> There was no messenger, and Chonon, the meditative romantic-tragic hero, was not yet so involved in practical Kabbalah.

Important, and perhaps more reliable, testimony to the nature of the lost first draft may be found in the writings of An-Ski's childhood friend, Chaim Zhitlovsky, an author and philosopher.<sup>47</sup> Years later he describes this first draft, which An-Ski read to him in 1913, as a simplistic dramatization of primitive folklore. Fantasies and supernatural events were presented in a simplistic manner, in the words of simple folk.

Of course, this text continued to develop. At a later stage Zhitlovsky says that An-Ski began to describe, in addition to folk beliefs, the inner life of the community that produced such beliefs. Now the play was beginning to assume the dimensions of a realistic, psychological drama; all the fantasies could be explained in a rational manner by the well-known phenomena of self-hypnosis and mass hallucinations. According to Zhitlovsky, "nearly all the events in the play occur on the same borderline between reality and the supernatural in which the characters of the play believe".

While the play was evolving structurally and typologically, An-Ski continued to collect information about the belief in dybbuks. Pinhas Graubard, a collector of Jewish folklore, tells of An-Ski's special interest in the subject when they met in Warsaw in 1913. He would listen attentively to stories about exorcism in Hassidic tales. "Even then", says Graubard, "I realized that the subject of dybbuks was not just a collectors' item for him but a deep, intimate affair that would be incorporated in a work of his own".<sup>48</sup>

Structural and typological changes were made in the Russian version of the play in 1916, following intensive negotiations between An-Ski and the Russian director K. Stanislavsky. The newspaper Ruskiye Viedomostei, published in Moscow in 1915, carries a brief report that the Russian-Jewish writer, S. An-Ski, was working on a play called "Between Two Worlds" for the Theatre of the Arts in Moscow, which had been favorably received by Stanislavsky.<sup>48</sup> In fact, Stanislavsky had not yet consented to stage the play in its present form. He and An-Ski continued to discuss the addition or omission of characters, as well as the overall conception of the work.

These changes are mentioned by An-Ski himself, both while they were being made and at a later date. From a letter to his friend R. Monasson<sup>50</sup> on December 11, 1916, it appears that the version

of the play presented to Stanislavsky did not include the character of the messenger, which was added only later at the director's request. Stanislavsky felt that an important character was needed to bridge the two plots, which revolved on separate planes. An-Ski took this advice literally, and from the tone of the letter, Stanislavsky approved of the revision. "He found the character of the messenger clear and unifying", writes An-Ski. Nevertheless, Stanislavsky advised him to think about developing the final scene of the play further, since it still did not satisfy him. An-Ski and Stanislavsky also discussed the physical appearance of Chonon and his degree of presence in Act III. In the same letter, An-Ski writes: "In general, he said: we accept the play for presentation by the Studio (affiliated with the Moscow Theater of the Arts) but it will have to wait its turn...Tomorrow three of the Studio directors and several of the leading actors will be here to see me". These heartening events led An-Ski to say with relief: "That being the case, I see the issue of performing the play as solved once and for all".<sup>51</sup>

Later we read about this encouraging stage in the negotiations in the memoirs of B.Z. Katz, a writer and journalist, who says he knew An-Ski personally and was in touch with him in those days.<sup>52</sup> He was present when An-Ski came to the home of Y.A. Neiditch with the news of Stanislavsky's willingness to stage the play.

In the end, An-Ski's hopes were dashed. After many months of waiting, he discovered that the play was not included in the repertoire for that season.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, it seemed the chances of its being performed in the future were dim. From conversations with several Russian actors, who were confused and frustrated over the revolution then under way in Russia, An-Ski realized

that it was difficult for them to perform a typical Jewish play involving a world of tradition so foreign to them. On top of that, the person who was to direct the play became ill.

An-Ski's increasing disappointment and frustration is evident in a letter sent to a friend in Moscow on December 30, 1917 (in print erroneously 1915).<sup>54</sup> So many obstacles had arisen, An-Ski despaired of ever seeing the play on the Russian stage. He considers dropping the matter altogether. The delay in having the work performed in Russian seems to have led the way for its translation into Hebrew. As for the fate of the Russian manuscript in Stanislavsky's possession, we have no clear indications.

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