

March, 8, 1989
109542 Moscow,
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Dear David:

I have received your letter of Feb. 9, but have not yet received the package. I hope it will arrive soon, because the letter came astonishing quickly, only for 18 days. As soon as I receive the package, I shall let you know. Many thanks for the letter and the article on Anna Akhmatova's poem. I did not know this variant of it before.

From Feb. 14 I am working as editorial assistant in the staff of "Sovjetish Heymland". I am in charge of the supplement to the journal, which ought to be published bimonthly. It is a small brochure of size about 160,000 typographical units. The supplement is addressed to young people in order to stimulate their interest in Yiddish language and literature. The idea is similar to "Yugnturf", but on the governmental base because Yiddish is officially recognized as mother-language of Soviet Jews. Now due to some changes in the general national policy there are some opportunities to revive nearly forgotten Yiddish. I am rather pessimistic at this point, but I shall try to do what is possible.

As you can imagine, "Sovjetish Heymland" does not represent the best level of literature and journalism but as regards the language, it may be a good school. I am very interested to have good connections with Jewish editions in the West and in Israel. Now we receive very few of them and are practically cut off from the world.

Thank you for your willingness to send me publications on Jewish-Russian literary relations. My friends in Moscow have contacts with Simon Markish and I hope to be able to communicate with him. It would be very important to me also to discuss some ideas with you because I cannot find anyone here who is concerned with similar subjects.

Now I am interested in the image of religion in the secular Jewish literature, in particular, I would like to investigate some analogies in approach to religious problems in Der Nister's "Family Mashber" and in Dostoyevsky's novels. The influence of Dostoyevsky on Der Nister is mentioned by Nachman Meyzel; I guess it was studied more closely, but do not know where. Maybe by Khone Shmeruk?

I would like to formulate the problem in more general terms. It seems to me that Jewish (Yiddish and Hebrew) literature has revealed for itself the realm of contemporary religious experience to some extent under the influence of the Russian literature. I do not insist on the direct influence, but surely we may speak about interesting parallelism. In Russian literature before Dostoyevsky the religious consciousness was represented in its "pure" biblical form (I speak about intentions of the authors and do not discuss whether it was really pure form; examples are poems "Prephet" of Pushkin and Lermontov). Gogol made an attempt to incorporate the reality of Russian Orthodox religion in the realm of his fiction but he failed (the second volume of the "Dead Souls").

Dostoyevsky was very strong influenced by the elders-monks of famous Russian monastery "Оптина Пустынь" (hermitage). This monastery played important role in Russian culture and literature. Many Russian writers (Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Leo Tolstoy, Nikolay Leskov and others) visited it and some of them used to spend much time there.

I guess that this phenomenon of discovering of contemporary religious life and making it a fact of literature had influenced also Jewish literature. At the beginning, in works of Maskilim (e.g. Abraham Mapu), it recognized only biblical forms of religion. Only close to the turn of the 20-th century did the contemporary religious life appear in the works of Jewish writers (as Peretz in Yiddish, Yehuda Steinberg and Mica-Joseph Berdichevsky in Hebrew). Mendele and Sholem-Aleichem had no special interest in religion as object of literature. As I understand, very important role in the process of "literaturisation" of religious life played Braslav hasidism due to it's specific. I hope to discover some similarity in literary features of "Оптина Пустынь" and Braslav and their influences correspondingly on Russian and Jewish literatures. Especially important seems to me the comparing of "Brothers Karamazov" and "Family Mashber" from this viewpoint. I understand that all it may seem confused, but if, nevertheless, it is of some interest to you, please write me some lines about your opinion. Maybe you can recommend me some works on this subject (especially on the representation of hassidism in the modern Jewish literature).

I have received the first issue of "Proof texts" and enjoyed very much your small essay and the essay of Bashevis Singer. There is a small inexactitude in the essay of Malka Magentza-Shaked: the second part of the "Family Mashber" was published not in New York in 1947 but in Moscow in 1941 (with the first part; "Der Emes", printed in Vilno).

Please send me the first and the third issues of "Proof texts" for last year if they are still available. Many thanks,

Yours sincerely *M. Krutikov*

Michael Krutikov