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THE LIFE AND THE "DIARY" OF OSIP DYMOV

Introduction

On February 23, 1948 an old man in his seventies sat at the desk in his apartment on the West End Avenue, Manhattan. He opened a blank page of his notebook and started writing in Russian: "When I was 6 or 7 years old ...". He pondered over this line for a while, then struck out "or 7" and continued with his writing:

When I was 6 years old I told fairy tales to my elder brother German and sister Anna before we went to bed ...

— You will grow up to become a writer, — said German.

Next morning Anna complained of my behavior to my mother and I was punished by standing in a room corner. It was a beginning of my true career: first comes acknowledgment, then — criticism.¹

This is the first passage of the manuscript titled "Dnevnik" (Diary) by Osip Dymov (1878—1959), a prominent Russian and Yiddish writer and dramatist, who spent nearly half of his life, from 1913—1959, in the United States.

On February 17, 1948, a week before Dymov wrote the first passage of his "Diary", his seventieth birthday was celebrated at a jubilee gala and concert in Barbi-zon Plaza, New York. A committee for publication of Dymov's collected works was formed. It included distinguished American Yiddish writers, public and cultural figures with the founder and chief editor of "Forverts" Abe Kahan among them.

Dymov carefully clipped an article on this celebration along with his portrait published in "Forverts" and pasted it to the first page of his "Diary". He continued to write:

I am 14 years old. I am a fourth grade pupil at Bialystok school. Moscow journal "Around the Globe" just published my "Captain's Story" ...²

During more than 50 years since his first publication appeared (1892) Osip Dymov published over 25 plays³, a collection of short stories ("Solntsevorot" [Sun

¹ YIVO Archives, New York, RG 469 — Dymov Osip, folder 92, Osip Dymov *Dnevnik* [Diary — hereafter *The Diary*], p. 1.

² *The Diary*, p. 2.

Cycle], St. Petersburg, 1905), a collection of selected works ("Dramen un Ertseilungen" [Dramas and Stories], New York, 1943), two volumes of memoirs ("Vos Ikh Gedenk" [What I Remember], New York, 1943 and 1945), dozens of essays and articles (mostly published in Yiddish newspapers "Tog" and "Forverts" in New York).

Dymov's prolific work for Yiddish literature, theater and press secured him a place among remarkable figures of American Jewish history and culture. It was acknowledged as early as 1928, 15 years after he first entered the US, when biographical article on Dymov appeared in the directory "Who is Who in American Jewry"⁴. Now his is found in almost all major reference works on Jewish history and culture: "Biographical Encyclopedia of American Jewry"⁵, "Encyclopaedia Judaica"⁶, "The Concise Dictionary of American Jewish Biography"⁷.

After Dymov's death was noted by a brief obituary in "American Jewish Year Book"⁸, his life and work have been almost forgotten by the public and for decades remained unnoticed by scholars of American Jewry⁹. Although in the 1970s his name and plays were briefly mentioned in the monograph study of the Hebrew theater "Habima"¹⁰ and in a book on the history of Yiddish theater¹¹, the literary legacy and amazing biography of Osip Dymov deserve to be a focus of a special study¹².

Source material for study of Dymov's life and work along with its historical and cultural context may be retrieved from his published writings — memoirs, plays, stories and press articles. Some important documents on Dymov are found in ar-

³ "Osip Dimovs Dramatishe Verk" [Osip Dymov's Plays], Osip Dymov *Dramen un Ertseilungen* (New York, 1943), pp. 206—207 and Nahma Sandrow *Vagabond Stars. A World History of Yiddish Theater* (Syracuse University Press, 1996), p. 193.

⁴ *Who is Who in American Jewry* (New York, 1928), p. 146.

⁵ *Biographical Encyclopedia of American Jewry* Edited by Leo M. Glassman (New York, 1935), p. 108.

⁶ *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem, 1971), Vol. 6, clmn. 331.

⁷ *The Concise Dictionary of American Jewish Biography* Edited by Jacob R. Marcus (New York, 1994), Vol. 1, p. 125.

⁸ *American Jewish Year Book* Vol. 61, p. 416.

⁹ There is no reference to Dymov in *An Index to American Jewish History Quarterly / American Jewish History: Vols. 51—80 (1961—1991)* (New York, 1995). He is mentioned three times in *Index to the American Jewish Archives: Vols. I—XXIV* Edited by Paul F. White (Cincinnati, 1979), however all references are made to the manuscripts of his plays listed among the acquisitions of the American Jewish Archives.

¹⁰ Emanuel Levy *The Habima — Israel's National Theater. 1917—1977. A study of Cultural Nationalism* (New York, 1979).

¹¹ Nahma Sandrow *Vagabond Stars. A World History of Yiddish Theater* (New York, 1977).

¹² Besides this paper this task is proved to be relevant by English translation of Dymov's play "Bronx Express" included in the forthcoming publication of *God, Man, and Devil. Yiddish Plays in Translation* Translated and edited by Nahma Sandrow (Syracuse University Press, 1998).

chival repositories of Russia¹³. Significant archival material was accumulated in Dymov's collection at the archives of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York¹⁴. Dymov's collection at YIVO includes mostly manuscripts of his literary works — outlines, drafts, prooftexts in Russian, English and Yiddish — with some of them never published.

This paper seeks to provide a basic survey of Dymov's life and work with special focus on those events and personalities which shaped his creative activity and placed him in the context of Jewish history and culture. The study is based on the manuscript of Dymov's "Diary" and other materials of Dymov's collection at YIVO. It also employs miscellaneous data retrieved from publications of Dymov's contemporaries and scholars of American Jewish culture.

Biographical survey of Osip Dymov

In 1943 Yiddish journalist B.I. Belostotsky concisely and vividly expressed his perspective on Dymov's personality and his place in culture: "When I look at Osip Dymov ... I see more than simply a good writer. I start to reflect and reminiscences come to mind ... Dymov and beyond Dymov. In Osip Dymov, in his personality come together threads, paths, images and details of the whole epoch"¹⁵.

Indeed, the early years of Osip Dymov in Russia coincided with the remarkable period in Russian and Jewish history. The years from the 1880s—1900s framed a period of extreme political reaction in Russia when legal limitations upon the Jews increased significantly and shocking pogroms of 1881—1882, 1903—1905 broke out. These same years witnessed an outburst of the Jewish political and cultural activity manifested in the rise of Zionism, Bundism, Jewish national historiography, modern Yiddish and Hebrew literature and theater. In history of Russian culture this period is known as "Silver Age" for unprecedented flourishing of literature and art. The most innovative art forms emerged in creative endeavors of Chekhov, Gorky, Stanislavsky who introduced Russian culture to the world and won international acknowledgment of Russian art.

¹³ Material on Dymov is found in the Russian State Archives of Literature and Art (Moscow) and the Institute for Russian Language and Art (St. Petersburg). These archives preserve collections of Russian theaters where Dymov's plays were produced and personal papers of Dymov's friends and colleagues. Materials related to the censorship of Russian plays on Jewish theme by different authors including Dymov in the Russian State Historical Archives (St. Petersburg) were recently surveyed in Viktoria Levitina ... *I Evrei — Moia Krov. Evreiskaia Drama — Russkaia Sisenia* [And the Jews are My Blood. Jewish Drama on the Russian Stage] (Moscow, 1991), pp. 338—342.

¹⁴ A short description of Dymov's collection of over 100 folders was published in *Guide to the YIVO Archives* Compiled by F. Mohrer and M. Web (New York, 1997).

¹⁵ B.I. Belostotsky "A Bagegenish mit Osip Dimov" [An Interview with Osip Dymov], *Osip Dymov Dramen un Ertseilungen* (New York, 1943), p. 167.

This epoch and this country embodied the milieu that shaped the personality of young Iosif Perelman (Dymov's real name) born in provincial city of Bialystok, who later became a writer Osip Dymov.

1878—1896: Childhood in Bialystok

Iosif Perelman was born in 1878 in the city of Bialystok in the North-Eastern Poland, then a part of the Russian Empire. Bialystok possesses a remarkable place in modern Jewish history. This city with its considerable proportion of Jewish population (70% in the late 1870s) was a birthplace for proto-Zionist group "Hovevei Zion" in 1880 and a major arena of the Jewish socialist movement in the late 1890s when nearly all Jewish workers employed at the numerous textile factories of Bialystok supported the Bund.

Isidor Perelman, Iosif's father, apparently was a clerk or salesman involved with the city's trade and industry. He spent most of his life far away from the family — in frequent and lengthy business trips. Iosif's reminiscences of his father were very short and scarce because Isidor Perelman deceased when his son was 4 years old. Only one detail became ingrained in Iosif's memory — his father's black hat with a yellow railroad ticket put behind its silk band¹⁶. Iosif's mother was a school teacher. After the sudden death of her husband she alone raised their five little children — German, Iosif, Anna, Yakov and Sonya.

In his autobiographical writings Dymov often mentioned severe limitations for Jews in Russia — *numerus clausus* at Russian universities, restriction of free settlement — experienced by him and his family during his years as a student and a novice writer in St. Petersburg. But in the passages describing his childhood in Bialystok either general references to Jewry or any distinct features of the Jewish lifestyle are almost absent. Recollecting his childhood Dymov wrote: "I and everybody around me speak German"¹⁷. He was extremely brief speaking about his parents: "He [father] was a German citizen born near Koenigsberg. Mother was Russian from Kovna"¹⁸. This limited evidence suggests that Dymov's parents completely abandoned their Jewishness. The fact that grandparents are also absent in Dymov's memoirs, suggests that possibly Iosif's parents were not close with the older traditional generation.

Contemporary events and figures of Jewish life however found their way into Iosif's childhood memoirs. His pre-school home tutor was a Jewish student Rubinshtein. It was Rubinshtein who first introduced Iosif, then 10, to Russian literature, books of Tolstoy and Gogol. "Who was he — nihilist, socialist, anar-

¹⁶ YIVO Archives, New York, RG 469 — Dymov Osip, folder 68, Osip Dymov *Minuvshee Prokhodit Predo Mnoi* [The Past is Passing Before My Eyes — hereafter The Past], p. 2.

¹⁷ The Past, p. 1.

¹⁸ The Past, p. 3.

chist?" — reflected Dymov many years later¹⁹. He responded himself: "The youth ... of my epoch certainly knew this vanishing sort of people"²⁰. Iosif's tutor Rubinshtein was *narodnik* (a populist), follower of the Russian democratic movement with considerable Jewish component, including prominent Jewish figures like S.An-sky and Yakov Gordin. In the late 1880s the movement was vanishing because of its ideological crisis and the government persecution.

Once Iosif and his friend were assigned to take care of their neighbor — an old widow Zamengof. The boys spent a long night in the house of the bed ridden old woman listening to the stories about her son, eye doctor Ludvig Zamengof²¹. Before Dr. Zamengof moved to Warsaw Iosif often met on the streets of Bialystok this remarkable man — the creator of the "international" language Esperanto and one of the founding members of "Hovevei Zion".

Iosif's family physician was another remarkable doctor — Khazanovich. Dymov wrote: "Dr. Khazanovich became a Zionist long before Herzl. The money he earned ... he almost entirely spent on establishing of the book repository that eventually became ... the Jewish National Library in Jerusalem ... His dream came true but he did not live to see it. In 1921 (or in 1922) someone killed him on the violent streets of Elizavetgrad ..." ²².

1896—1905: Beginning of Literary Career in St. Petersburg

Eight years of study at the Bialystok high school ran fast for Iosif. In fact, the full course of study in the school was seven years, but accidentally he received insufficient grade for his misbehavior and spent another year in the fifth grade. Yet during his years in the school Iosif used to be a good pupil and finally graduated with honors in 1896.

At the request of his mother Iosif Perelman spent the first year after the graduation in Bialystok working as a home tutor and supporting his family. Later Dymov recalled: "My weekdays... During eight years at school I did not see any people except of teachers and students. Yes, I saw other people before I had entered the school. Now I saw them anew"²³. These were ordinary city dwellers of Bialystok — chimney-sweep, glazier, water carrier, city's madman Ioshke-musician. A lot of new faces appeared too: "Weavers, many young workers — I knew them as kids. Now they behave differently, they speak restlessly, they conspire about something, on *mayuvke* [celebration of the First of May] they sing new songs ..."²⁴. Later these faces — Jewish artisans, young Bundist workers, even the in-

¹⁹ The Past, p. 17.

²⁰ The Past, p. 17.

²¹ In Dymov's manuscript his name was by mistake indicated as Yakov (The Past, p. 19).

²² The Past, pp. 26—27.

²³ The Past, p. 46.

²⁴ The Past, pp. 47—48.

sane Ioshke-musician — seen on the streets of Bialystok in the late 1890s by young Iosif Perelman would appear in the plays of Osip Dymov. Dymov recalled his last year in Bialystok with warm feeling: "My weekdays ... I am cherishing them now!"²⁵

An autumn of 1897 came. "The time has come to go to St. Petersburg and enter a university. What university? It really does not matter — if only I can enter any. The admission [of the Jews] is too limited!" — recalled Dymov²⁶. Iosif targeted three most liberal institutions of higher learning in the Russian capital — the Institute of Technology, the Academy of Arts and the Institute of Forestry — known for their acceptance of Jewish applicants. Finally he successfully went through the exams and was accepted to the Petersburg Institute of Forestry. Happy Iosif found himself among 6 other Jewish applicants admitted out of 800 young Jews who applied to the institute in 1897²⁷.

In St. Petersburg Iosif Perelman lived in the apartment of his mother's half-brother Yakov Erlikh. Uncle Yakov happened to be a young man, four years older than Iosif. He was a student at the department of philology of the St. Petersburg University and also attended classes on theory of music at the conservatory. His teacher there was a prominent Russian composer Rimsky-Korsakov. Young Iosif Perelman, who started his "literary career" at the age of 6 and published his first story at 14, was eager to develop and employ his writing talent in the Russian literature despite his studies at the Institute of Forestry to acquire an earthly occupation of a landscape planner. Evidently Iosif's ambitions were encouraged by Yakov who was a distinguished figure among young St. Petersburg literati, musicians and artists. Wrote Dymov: "Our apartment was frequented by young people: musicians, composers, writers. Many of them were coming for his [Yakov Erlikh's] guidance and advice"²⁸. Iosif Perelman brought to uncle Yakov his first literary endeavor in St. Petersburg — a novel "The Home Tutor".

Money paid by newspapers and publishers for stories and reviews was another impetus to continue as a writer for Iosif, a needy student, who was trying to survive in the expensive capital city. However, sometimes a reward for an accepted manuscript would never be paid by the publisher. For example, to the author's great disappointment his novel "The Home Tutor" accepted by Petersburg Russian-Jewish periodical "Budushchnost" (The Future) had never been published and paid for because the authorities closed the journal²⁹. In these circumstances Iosif Perelman gladly accepted a job with steady monthly wages offered by Alek-

²⁵ The Past, p. 49.

²⁶ The Past, p. 49.

²⁷ The Diary, p. 3.

²⁸ The Past, p. 60.

²⁹ The Past, p. 60. It is not clear from the manuscript when the novel was written. The journal was published from 1899 to 1904. However it was frequently punished by interruption by the censorship committee.

sandr Kugel, the editor and publisher of the journal "Teatr i Iskusstvo" (Theater and Art).

The young writer first met Kugel in St. Petersburg in 1898. The next two years of his life Iosif wholly devoted to the "Theater and Art". Personal contact and collaboration with Kugel contributed a lot to Dymov's maturing as a writer. Kugel's influence was of particular significance for Dymov's progress as a playwright and theatrical critic. Hence, Kugel's identity and beliefs deserve here a special account. Dymov wrote recalling his first meeting with Kugel:

I am 20. Looking for money to support myself as a student
I left an article on Dostoevsky at the office of the "Theater and
Art". A few days later I was met by shaggy-haired man with a wild
beard, a son of a rabbi from Mozyr. He asked me:

— Do you want to be my assistant? I will pay you 40 roubles a month ... Do you agree?

This man was Aleksandr Kugel, Homo Novus, a renowned critic.³⁰

Aleksandr Kugel (1864—1928) was born in a family of a rabbi in a small town of Mozyr, Belorussia. In 1886 he graduated from the department of law of the St. Petersburg University. In the late 1880s the Russian government imposed severe limitations upon Jewish graduates of Russian universities. Independent professions like lawyer and physician that bore higher social status in Russia were made almost inaccessible for Jews. Some of Kugel's classmates like prominent Russian-Jewish lawyer and public figure G.Sliozberg nevertheless made their way through the restrictions and succeeded in a professional career. Others, including philosopher and writer Akim Volynsky and Kugel himself, chose another way. This way led them to a recognition and even a celebrity status in Russian culture, it also led them to complete assimilation.

Kugel began his literary career in 1882 when he, then a student, started to submit theater reviews to newspapers of Moscow and St. Petersburg under the pen name Homo Novus. His contemporaries asserted that Kugel's brilliant style, deep and sophisticated analysis, exceptional knowledge and comprehension of theatrical art made Homo Novus an unparalleled authority as a critic. At the beginning of the 20th century Kugel acquired a distinguished place among the most celebrated Russian journalists — A.Amfiteatrov, V.Doroshevich and others³¹.

In 1897 Kugel started his own journal "Theater and Art" dedicated to modern literature, drama and theater. Dymov testified to the significance of the journal in

³⁰ The Diary, p. 2.

³¹ YIVO Archives, New York, RG 577 — Trotsky Ilia, folder 10, Ilia Trotsky *Homo Novus* (*Pamiati A.R.Kugelia*) [Homo Novus (In Memory of A.R.Kugel)], p. 2.

Russian culture: "There were other comparable periodicals before Kugel ... But without Kugel Russian theatrical life would be undoubtedly poorer ... "Theater and Art" played a key role in the history of the Russian theater. Kugel contributed a lot to the development of more sophisticated tastes and to the advancement of the status of the theatrical art"³².

Kugel's writings indicate his ardent dedication to the principles of the traditional Russian theater with the primacy of actor, as a star and the focus of any production, as its most basic element. Homo Novus fought severe battle against novelties introduced to Russian theater by Stanislavsky, Meierhold and Vakhtangov. He rigidly denied his expert endorsement of any attempt to submit actor to the vision and control of the stage director.

This vision is explicit in Kugel's passionate words: "The soul of the theater is an actor, not director ... Do not kill actor's insight and talent by director's drill. Do not deprive an actor of his soul, do not extinguish the spark of God in him ..."³³. Kugel judged drama by the same criterion. In his perspective, drama was a major source of actor's creativity. Hence it was important for a playwright to contribute material beneficial for actor's performance — plays of a true tragedy value, plays built around the most bitter contemporary conflicts. Kugel considered the Jewish question, "generous source for tragic conflicts", as fertile theme for playwrights. Wrote Kugel: "The "Jewish tragedy", in terms of pure art, not politics, is extremely useful for playwrights"³⁴.

Evidently, Kugel's vision was absorbed by Osip Dymov and shaped him as a playwright. Dymov went beyond Kugel's aesthetic understanding of the "Jewish tragedy". He came a long way from the indifference in the beginning of his career to the deep concern with his people and personal involvement in bitter conflicts of the Jewish life portrayed in his plays. Kugel was far remote from the Jewish art and the broader problems of Jewish life. However, a dim sense of Jewishness still resided in his heart. According to a contemporary account: "Sometimes, when recalling in the intimate circle of friends his childhood, he in trembling voice spoke about Mozyr and old Mozyr synagogue ... The Russian writer Homo Novus completely dissolved a Jew Aleksandr Kugel"³⁵.

In 1903 Osip Dymov was as distanced from the Jewry as did his teacher. Dymov was so unconscious as a Jew that he had his first play "The Voice of Blood" produced by the Maly Theater in St. Petersburg³⁶. Maly Theater was owned by

³² YIVO Archives, New York, RG 469 — Dymov Osip, folder 88, Osip Dymov *Milye Prizraki: Kugel* [Dear Shadows: Kugel], pp. 2, 7.

³³ Trotsky *Ibid.*, pp. 3—4.

³⁴ *Teatr i Iskusstvo*, 1906, □ 3, p. 45.

³⁵ Trotsky *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³⁶ Viktoria Levitina ... *I Evrei — Moia Krov. Evreiskaia Drama — Russkaia Stsena* [And the Jews are My Blood. Jewish Drama on the Russian Stage] (Moscow, 1991), p. 196.

A.S.Suvorin who was also an owner and publisher of the major Russian newspaper "Novoe Vremia" (New Times) known for its open antisemitism. Dymov's play won the first prize of the playwright's contest by "Novoe Vremia". The play was produced in Maly Theater by the director of Imperial theaters Karpov.

Dymov wrote about his debut as a playwright:

When my play "The Voice of Blood" won the contest, Suvorin of "Novoe Vremia" handed me a prize, 300 roubles, and said:

— What a nonsense is the play you wrote ...

The opening night in the theater turned to be a stunning failure of my play.³⁷

Later, in his memoirs, Dymov provided an explanation of his collaboration with Suvorin's theater. Though Suvorin was proven reactionary and antisemite in politics and journalism, for Dymov it was more important that Suvorin was a generous benefactor of Russian literature and art. Dymov insisted that Russian culture was a real passion for Suvorin, contrary to Russian nationalism that was far less important for him. This won him a friendship of leading Russian writers and intellectuals, many of them hostile to the conservative standpoint of Suvorin's "Novoe Vremia"³⁸.

It was also a matter of ambition for a novice playwright to have his play produced on the stage of Maly Theater, one of the best private theaters in Russia. Dymov acknowledged this saying: "What attracted me most to the Maly Theater was its high standard of dramatic art"³⁹. The young author was warmly met and encouraged by the troupe: "They all received me very friendly, though they very well knew who I was. So — what other feelings could I have towards these people except deep gratitude?"⁴⁰

It was of importance for Dymov that his teacher Aleksandr Kugel used to direct a few productions at Maly Theater⁴¹. Furthermore, Dymov was not alone among the Jewish dramatists in his decision to submit his play to Suvorin's theater. It was Vladimir Zhabotinsky who in 1902 submitted his Russian play "Ladno" (All right) to Maly Theater⁴².

³⁷ The Diary, pp. 4—5.

³⁸ YIVO Archives, New York, RG 469 — Dymov Osip, folder 52, Osip Dymov *Chapter 9* [hereafter *Chapter 9*], p. 2.

³⁹ *Chapter 9*, p. 15.

⁴⁰ *Chapter 9*, p. 15.

⁴¹ *Chapter 9*, p. 15.

⁴² Levitina *Ibid.*, p. 240.

The opening night of Dymov's first play was a failure. The performance was not even finished because disappointed audience left the theater. Dymov explained that unsophisticated spectators were unable to grasp his major novelty — repetition of the first act at the end of the play. Later the reworked version of the play (without the last act) under a new title "Kain" was successfully performed throughout Russia⁴³.

The Jewish theme was absent in Dymov's first play "The Voice of Blood" as it was in his other early writings. Dymov's interest in Jewish problems increased dramatically after 1905. The story about pogrom was included in the collection of Dymov's essays "Solntsevorot" (The Sun Cycle) published in 1905. In 1906 Dymov confided in a letter to a friend: "I am writing a new play about the Jewish life"⁴⁴.

1906—1913: Return to His People

The period between two Russian revolutions (1905—1917) was known in Jewish history for bloody pogroms, Beilis affair and mass emigration. These events gave rise to concern with Jewish problems in the Russian society. It was 1905 when the Jewish question came out of the government offices and entered the public domain through the press and literature. The democratic changes and pogroms, the outbursts of medieval barbarianism, paradoxically coincided in Russia. This antagonism became a major theme in the contemporary drama that brought external and internal Jewish conflicts to the Russian audience.

Plays dealing with Jewish topics started to appear literally in hundreds. From June 1907 to February 1917, 1400 of these plays were submitted for censorship⁴⁵. However, antisemitism of the government and of the "Black Hundred" were not the only reasons that produced the enormous interest to Jewish themes. That decade witnessed a considerable growth of the liberal opposition towards the autocracy in Russia. The liberal agenda was aimed at the broad democratization of the Russian society including Jewish emancipation as its essential component. Thus the interest to the plays with Jewish themes was by no means accidental. Russian theater produced these plays not for their artistic value, but for their contents that was a focus of public concerns⁴⁶.

In 1905 — 1917 Russian theaters performed plays by Yiddish playwrights Sholom Ash and Yakov Gordin (in Russian translation) as well as plays by dramatists who wrote in Russian — David Aizman, Semen Yushkevich, Osip Dymov. The productions were mostly successful, they were welcomed by the

⁴³ Chapter 9, pp. 36—37.

⁴⁴ Levitina *Ibid.*, p. 197.

⁴⁵ Levitina *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁴⁶ Levitina *Ibid.*, p. 211.

public and greeted by critics. However the overflow of Jewish plays on Russian stage was considered negative by some contemporaries of opposite persuasions. On the one end of the spectrum there were antisemites with their routine complaints about "atheism and cosmopolitanism" governing the Russian stage where plays like "Mirra Efros" were produced⁴⁷. Some liberal intellectuals pointed to the lack of artistic value in many Jewish plays and considered the Jewish theme a temporary fashion. This perspective was best exemplified by distinguished Russian critic Amfiteatrov in his letter to Aleksandr Kugel. In 1906 Amfiteatrov wrote: "I do not like ... these infinite "Jewish" plays with pogroms, etc., which are in vogue now. They are useful and necessary, but just as anything produced on popular demand they have little in common with the true art"⁴⁸. Kugel's journal "Theater and Art" recorded commercial success of the fashionable Jewish theme: "The most fashionable themes are Jewish themes. The most profitable plays are plays with Jewish content"⁴⁹. However, both the fashion and the box office profits basically testified to the growing concern of Russian public about Jewish problems.

In this cultural milieu the first play by Osip Dymov dealing with Jewish theme was written. This play was a turning point in Dymov's life and creative activity. It was Dymov's first step on the way back to his people. It is clearly manifested in the play's name "Shma Israel". The play was written by Dymov under direct impulse from the Bialystok pogrom. During this pogrom from June 1—3, 1906 70 Jews were killed in Bialystok. In August 1906 Dymov wrote that he was working on the "play about Jewish life". Early in 1907 the play went through the censorship and was published in St. Petersburg. In March 1907 it was chosen for production by Petersburg Contemporary Theater⁵⁰.

Dymov's "Shma Israel" does not portray pogrom itself. It focuses on traumatic consequences of pogrom for a Jewish family. Its characters are literally overloaded with "tragic conflicts" of Jewish issues once noted by Kugel. The father of the family suddenly realized that his son Leon, killed during pogrom, had been baptized. The father then committed suicide. Leon's sister Anna, who suffered a lot from pogrom, is trying to make a choice between assimilation and revolution. Enman, who was engaged to Anna, feels himself a stranger in Russia and tries to express his strong yet indefinite longing for Palestine... Thus Dymov's play attempted to embrace all major problems and conflicts of the Jewish life.

Russian critics mostly welcomed the play and its production. Some of their Jewish counterparts had a different perspective. Dymov wrote in his "Diary":

⁴⁷ S. Durasovich *O natsionalnom Teatre* [About the National Theater] (Moscow, 1913).

⁴⁸ Levitina *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁴⁹ *Teatr i Iskustvo*, 1913, □ 43, p. 870.

⁵⁰ The play was selected for production by the repertoire director Akim Volynsky — assimilated Jew and Kugel's classmate at the Petersburg University.

I am 25. My play "Shma Israel" dedicated to the victims of
Bialystok pogrom was produced in St. Petersburg ...

— This is an awkward, pointless and harmful play.

S.An-sky⁵¹

This strongly worded opinion might be understood from An-sky's criticism of other Jewish playwrights. In 1906 discussing the plays "The Times of Messiah" by Sh.Ash and "Family Tsvi" by D.Pinsky An-sky pointed to the authors' zeal to bring on stage "all tragedy of the Jewish life, to embody *all* ideological trends within the Jewry and to portray *all* suffering of the Jewish people"⁵². An-sky argued that this zeal to comprehend the entire spectrum of the Jewish life is the major shortcoming of the plays on Jewish theme. He maintained that the overload of characters, conflicts and ideas downgraded significance of the theme and often turned the serious drama into farce.

Dymov's zeal to embody the entire Jewish tragedy by means of drama is clearly manifested in "Shma Israel". Obviously it was caused by the strong impetus of Bialystok pogrom that forced the young author to deal with his Jewishness. As a result, the overload of Dymov's thoughts about his people poured out on the pages of the play.

The play "Eternal Wanderer", written by Dymov in 1912, was the next point in his return to the Jewish people. Its setting — Galicia of the mid 19th century. Its plot — deportation of Jews from the border areas ordered by the government. Dymov reasoned the major theme of the play: "In the particular event of the departure and emigration I attempted to grasp and emphasize the eternal unrest of the people. I wanted to embody a feeling of the infinite way"⁵³. This play tied Dymov to his people even stronger. He recorded it in the "Diary":

I am a Jew. Osip Dymov = יוסף פערעלמאן

In summer 1912 I wrote the "Eternal Wanderer". I read the manuscript to my friends ...

— Do you really think that you are a Russian writer? Do not forget that above all you are a true Jew from Bialystok, — [said] Vladimir Zhabotinsky.⁵⁴

In 1943, when asked what had brought him back to Jewish literature, Jewish theater and Yiddish, Dymov replied: "I was brought back by Zhabotinsky and Bialystok"⁵⁵. He recalled:

⁵¹ The Diary, pp. 8—9.

⁵² *Voskhod*, 1906, January 19, p. 43.

⁵³ *Birzhevye Vedomosti*, 1913, March 25, p. 5.

⁵⁴ The Diary, p. 12.

Vladimir Zhabotinsky accomplished a lot in his effort to "nationalize" the Jewish intelligentsia in Russia ... In 1905 he told me:

— Listen to me, the son of Bialystok! Indeed, Russian art and Russian language are wonderful things. But what are you going to give to your own people? ... Who will write for *Bialystoker*? Who — except you — could embody our national protest, our pains and hopes? You must turn to the Jewish theme, you must be one of us!

Zhabotinsky did not mention the language, he just mentioned the theme. Zhabotinsky instructed to think as a Jew who thoroughly perceived and sensed the Jewish tragedy.⁵⁶

Zhabotinsky's passionate demand addressed not only Dymov. It appealed to those of his Jewish contemporaries who toiled for the sake of Russian art and paradoxically combined their devotion to Russian culture with vague feeling of belonging to the Jewish people. B. Belostotsky pointed to this ambivalence identifying it as a major distinction of the epoch personified by Dymov: "When I look at Dymov I understand the break in heart of a Jewish *intelligent*, in heart of an alienated Jewish artist ... I understand feelings deeply buried in their hearts — the feelings that drive them back to their people"⁵⁷.

The production of the "Eternal Wanderer" opened in March 1913 in the Russian Dramatic Theater of St. Petersburg. The play and its production disclosed Dymov's intimate reflections and feelings about his Jewishness and his people. The play produced earnest response among the "alienated Jewish artists". Distinguished Russian sculptor Ilia Gintsburg wrote to Dymov immediately after the opening night of the "Eternal Wanderer": "Your play provoked a storm of feelings and thoughts in my mind, and I think I am not alone ... This brilliant play would become a challenge for other "eternal wanderers" — Jewish artists; it may encourage them to express in their creativity what they are attached to deeply in their souls"⁵⁸.

Early in the 1910s Dymov's plays entered the Jewish theater. They were produced in Hebrew translation by amateur actors directed by Nahum Zemach, founder of "Habima", later the national theater of Israel. In 1912 he staged "Shma Israel" in Vilna. In 1913 the audience of delegates of the Zionist Congress was at Zemach's production of Dymov's "Eternal Wanderer" in Vienna⁵⁹.

⁵⁵ Belostotsky *Ibid.*, p. 168.

⁵⁶ Belostotsky *Ibid.*, p. 169.

⁵⁷ Belostotsky *Ibid.*, p. 168.

⁵⁸ Levitina *Ibid.*, p. 202.

⁵⁹ Like Dymov Zemach spent his young years in Bialystok working as a home tutor (Emanuel Levy *The Habima — Israel's National Theater. 1917—1977* (New York, 1979), pp. 3—4).

Hebrew

In summer 1913 Dymov led the troupe of Russian actors to a tour through Russia with their production of "Eternal Wanderer". Performing in Lodz Dymov was approached by Boris Tomashefsky, celebrated star and successful producer of American Yiddish theater. Their meeting opened a new period in Dymov's life. Dymov's "Diary" recorded this event ironically:

— I will give you 1000 dollars and three *shifskartn* in the first class for you, your wife and daughter. Do you want to come to America? — [asked] Boris Tomashefsky.

Yes, I did wanted. But actually I got the second class.⁶⁰

1913—1959: Emigration

In the beginning of the century administrators and producers of American Yiddish theaters used to be frequent visitors in Eastern Europe. They sought new talents, the fresh blood essential in highly competitive environment of the booming American Yiddish theater. They targeted, seduced and brought to America many of the most talented stars from Yiddish troupes of Poland, Romania and Russia. They looked impressive and trustworthy in their fashionable garb with many golden accessories and big wallets filled with dollars. This appearance alone would persuade any provincial actor to move to America.

Many contemporaries were surprised: how did the glitzy appearance of Tomashefsky — "American entrepreneur with heavy golden rings on his fingers, thick golden watch-chain on his belly, two leather purses filled with ten-dollar coins" — could decoy Osip Dymov — "the young promising writer with the great future in Russian literature"⁶¹. Dymov himself remained silent on this issue. His friend and colleague, Yiddish theater critic Dr. A.Mukdoyni explained Dymov's decision to move to America by misconception of American Yiddish theater common for Russian-Jewish intelligentsia. They believed that American Yiddish theater was short of talented dramatists, hence Dymov would be a certain success in America⁶².

Mukdoyni maintained that later his bitter experience of Yiddish theater critic proved this optimistic forecast to be a mistake. Too often he witnessed American Yiddish theater rejecting serious dramatists, "dropping genuine pearls in order to pick up glass beads". Mukdoyni argued that it was true not only for the theater of *shund*, notorious for its low artistic standards, but also for the "so called art thea-

⁶⁰ The Diary, pp. 12—13.

⁶¹ Dr. A.Mukdoyni "Osip Dimov", Osip Dymov *Dramen un Ertseilungen* (New York, 1943), pp. iii—iv.

⁶² Mukdoyni *Ibid.*, pp. iv—v.

ter". Thus Dymov, "a jewel", stolen from Russia by Tomashefsky happened to be "a jewel" for no one in America⁶³.

American debut of Dymov's plays caused the sensation with headlines in New York Times: "A new genius came from Russia"⁶⁴. Yet this sensation did not live long. It was soon replaced with other sensations "constantly demanded by American public with a mad appetite", as Mukdoyni put it. Dymov's circumstances were common for serious Jewish playwrights coming to America — H. Leivik, Fishel Bimko, Hana Gottesfeld and others. They were coming to American Yiddish theater for a short while only to leave it forever looking for other opportunities. Mukdoyni with bitter irony described this common destiny as a "tradition of the American Yiddish theater"⁶⁵.

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In 1914, after his first year in America Dymov, unaware of Mukdoyni's bitter observations made 30 years later, was still full of optimism, hopes and plans. He wrote to friends in Russia with a great excitement: "I am fortunate here in America: I am a bit futuristic and America as a whole is futuristic. My play "Eternal Wanderer" has a great success here"⁶⁶. In 1914 he wrote a new play "The Singer of His Sorrow" ("Ioshke-muzikant"). The play was based on the plot borrowed by Dymov from the city lore of Bialystok. This is a story of Jewish street musician Ioshke who went mad because of an unhappy love. In this play Dymov did not touch upon big social problems of the Jewish life unlike in his previous plays. He approached the Jewish theme with a more humane perspective. The play was built around interpersonal psychological conflict. By means of genre it is melodrama, not a tragedy. Dymov's attempt to adjust himself as a playwright to the demand of American Yiddish theater is evident in the distinctive qualities of "Ioshke-muzikant". *

During his first decade in America Dymov productively worked as a playwright experimenting with diverse genres of drama. In February 1927 he wrote to a friend in Russia that he had written and produced ten new plays and "learned to write good comedies"⁶⁷. Indeed, Dymov studied and learned a lot in America trying to integrate his creativity into the new and unknown cultural environment. He was taught everyday lessons by the new life itself when working for Yiddish theater and press. Dymov's resourcefulness and ability to learn and appreciate new culture helped him to integrate smoothly into American Jewish culture with-

⁶³ In the "Diary" Dymov exemplified it by an anecdote:

During rehearsals of "Eternal Wanderer" in New York:

— Tomashefsky, what for did you bring here this junk?! — said David Kesler. (Instead of "junk" Kesler actually used a four letter word). (The Diary, p. 13).

⁶⁴ The Diary, p. 15.

⁶⁵ Mukdoyni *Ibid.*, pp. vii—viii.

⁶⁶ Levitina *Ibid.*, p. 203.

⁶⁷ Levitina *Ibid.*, p. 203.

out losing his creative identity. He recalled one of these lessons in the "Diary" regarding a play with New York subway as its major setting:

In summer 1919 ... I wrote a comedy called "From Bleecker Street to Prospect Avenue". Leon Crystal told me:
— The name is awkward. Call it "Bronx Express".
I could hardly imagine any better advice.⁶⁸

The comedy "Bronx Express" first produced in Yiddish by the Rudolph Schildkraut theater extended Dymov's reputation beyond the stage of Yiddish theater. In 1927 Dymov wrote to friends in Russia that his "American satire "Bronx Express" was named the best comedy in America"⁶⁹. English translation of "Bronx Express" was produced on Broadway by Astor Theater.

During his first decade in America Dymov learned Yiddish for the first time and started to contribute to New York Yiddish daily "Tog". Previously he had his manuscripts translated from Russian⁷⁰.

Early in the 1920s Dymov joined the effort of American Jewish intellectuals for development of Yiddish art theater as an antithesis to the mercantile theater of *shund* prevailing in America. In November 1923 many Yiddish writers, journalists, dramatists, critics and public figures gathered in New York for a symposium titled "Whither Tends the Trail of the Yiddish Theater". The participants endorsed a proposal of A.Gideon, P.Hirshbein and L.Crystal to establish the Yiddish Theater Society. The Society's agenda included institution of schools to train actors and directors, improvement of the conceptual base for Yiddish theater, integration of Yiddish art theater into the broader context of the American art theater by joining the Little Theater Movement. In 1924 the Society instituted the Yiddish Drama Guild and Dramatic School. The School employed 9 faculty members (including renowned Russian ballet director Michael Fokine who taught scenic movement and dance) and had 46 students enrolled. According to the School's principal its teachers and students toiled to reach "a remote possibility for several generations to come: 1) to give a lesson in art to English stage by Yiddish stage, 2) to produce real Jewish stars"⁷¹.

There is no evidence of Dymov's formal affiliation with the Yiddish Theater Society. However Dymov obviously shared the Society's agenda in his work for development of Yiddish art theater in America. In early 1920s Dymov led the Dramatic School at the Yiddish Art Theater of Maurice Schwarz in New York. Dy-

⁶⁸ The Diary, p. 15.

⁶⁹ Levitina *Ibid.*, p. 203.

⁷⁰ Levitina *Ibid.*, p. 204 and Belostotsky *Ibid.*, p. 170.

⁷¹ *The Jewish World* (Philadelphia, 1923).

mov's students combined learning with participation in current productions of Schwarz's theater⁷².

X Dymov's collaboration with Schwarz did not live long. Dymov explained it by his refusal to accept and follow Schwarz's artistic methods and the mode of his productions. Schwarz liked and widely used in his productions an expensive scenery, big effects and mass scenes. Dymov believed that in order to survive and fulfill its mission Yiddish art theater should be moderate and intimate. Dymov argued that "greatness" of Schwarz's expensive productions finally led his theater to considerable losses both in terms of the box office and in terms of artistic accomplishment. According to Dymov such "greatness" is unnecessary in Yiddish art theater. Its repertoire of "simple, warm, intimate productions" should not address only sophisticated audience of Jewish intellectuals but ordinary Jews. Dymov maintained that only Yiddish art theater of this kind could survive in America and it might even be profitable⁷³.

contra
Schwarz 2

In 1926 Dymov attempted to fulfill his vision of Yiddish art theater. Together with prominent actor Rudolph Schildkraut Dymov opened the Rudolph Schildkraut Theater in New York. The Schildkraut theater produced many Dymov's plays including his celebrated "Bronx Express" and "The Last Love" ("Di Letste Gelibte").

In 1926 the Yiddish Theater Society dissolved due to its financial collapse. The Rudolph Schildkraut Theater has only lived to survive the Society for one year...

Back in 1923, when the Yiddish Theater Society was formed, there appeared a few skeptical voices in American Jewish press. They argued: "The Yiddishists are fighting a hopeless battle, for Yiddish has no future whatever in America. It is indeed a pity that such precious energy should go to waste"⁷⁴. In 1927 Dymov echoed this perspective in his letter to Aleksandr Kugel. He commented bitterly: "Once booming, Jewish life here is now declining significantly and fast. The major cause is the quota. There is no influx of the new immigrants from Europe, and masses here are: 1) dying out, 2) americanizing fast because of the fast mode of life. In 15--20 years the Yiddish press and Yiddish theater will either completely disappear here or will exist as scarce remnants. You can see it even now: serious Yiddish theater has no audience, it is almost boycotted: vulgar operetta is flourishing where actors perform 30% in English and dance in American style"⁷⁵. This dark perspective was obviously caused by Dymov's recent failure with the Schildkraut Theater.

⁷² Sandrow *Ibid.*, p. 272.

⁷³ Belostotsky *Ibid.*, pp. 171—172.

⁷⁴ *The Chicago Sentinel*, 1923, December 7.

⁷⁵ Levitina *Ibid.*, p. 204.

In autumn 1927 Dymov left for Germany where his plays were rehearsed for production in Max Reinhardt theaters.

Max Reinhardt (originally — an Austrian Jew named Max Goldman) was a central figure of European theater in 1920s—1930s. Talented actor and accomplished director he was also a remarkable theater administrator. He owned and managed several theaters in Austria and Germany including the most renowned stages of Kammerschpille and Deutsches Theater in Berlin. Many great stars of European theater considered Reinhardt their teacher. Rudolph Schildkraut was among his favorite students. Reinhardt used to say about him: "Schildkraut played great roles as well as any great actor could, but he played small roles better than anyone"⁷⁶.

The repertoire of Reinhardt's theaters encompassed a wide variety of dramatic material — from the Greek classic to the contemporary avant-garde. The new plays from around the globe were coming to the offices of Max Reinhardt theaters literally in hundreds. To review and select the material for production Reinhardt hired a special aide Arthur Kahane who read manuscript after manuscript for his twenty five years with Reinhardt⁷⁷. In 1905 Kahane's attention was caught by a German translation of story about a pogrom by young Russian author Osip Dymov published in "Berliner Tageblatt". Kahane brought the story to Reinhardt. "Who is this Osip Dymov? — asked Reinhardt — Judging by this story ... he must possess true playwrighting talents. Can you tell me whether he has written any plays?"⁷⁸ Since this first encounter Dymov and Reinhardt collaborated closely for several decades. Many Dymov's plays, including "Shma Israel", "Eternal Wanderer", "Bronx Express" and others, were successfully produced by Reinhardt's theaters. The years 1927—1932 spent in Germany with Reinhardt left in Dymov warm feelings to the great German director and deep admiration of his art.

The great esteem of Reinhardt's art, however, did not prevent Dymov's criticism of particular components of Reinhardt's style. A disciple of Aleksandr Kugel, Dymov could not approve authoritarian methods used by Reinhardt as a stage director. He also could not agree with Reinhardt's treatment of actors who were for him mere instruments for the fulfillment of the director's vision. In his memoirs Dymov angrily exemplified Reinhardt's methods by numerous anecdotes. Once, looking at a portrait of actor at an exhibition Reinhardt remarked: "Yes, that is an actor ... he has a low forehead and a big mouth"⁷⁹.

The rich scope and the deeper meaning of Reinhardt's art was still of paramount importance for Dymov. In 1940s after the decade of war and destruction of

⁷⁶ Sandrow *Ibid.*, p. 276.

⁷⁷ YIVO Archives, New York, RG 469 — Dymov Osip, folder 50, Osip Dymov *Reinhardt and Moissi* [hereafter Reinhardt and Moissi], p. 4.

⁷⁸ Reinhardt and Moissi, p. 3.

⁷⁹ Reinhardt and Moissi, p. 11.

Europe Dymov wrote on the significance of Reinhardt's legacy: "Quietly and unaware himself of what he was doing, Great Max spoke through the medium of his art, he, the Austrian Jew Goldman, made himself immortal under the name of Max Reinhardt. His activity was more than merely art, deeper than only theater, more beautiful than merely beauty. It was a solemn memorial for Europe, the secret wailing of the Central European Jew who is the first to be destroyed"⁸⁰.

After Nazis came to power in Germany, Reinhardt as a Jew was expropriated of his theaters and exiled from the country. He spent a few years touring Europe as director and finally settled in the US. He founded theatrical school in Hollywood and taught there up to his death in 1943.

Feelings of a deep sorrow and nostalgia manifested above all in Dymov's memoirs about his years in Europe. This is nostalgia of a man who in the late 1940s already knew the disastrous fate of European culture during the Second World War. By no means it is a nostalgia of a bystander, but of a man who had closer and stronger ties to European culture than to American or Jewish culture.

Almost the same uneasy feelings permeated Dymov's attitude to Russian culture. As many of his contemporary Russian-Jewish intellectuals Dymov obviously felt the "break in his heart", as Belostotsky put it, that is his double consciousness, a sense of belonging both to Russian and Jewish culture. This sense manifested in many curious instances of Dymov's biography described in his memoirs. In spring 1923 the Moscow Art Theater toured America. On the first night of Passover Dymov met the troupe in Chicago and invited Russian actors and directors, many of them his close friends, to join him for a seder at a local Jewish restaurant. He recalled: "It was far from a traditional Jewish ceremony. But believe me, on that night of Passover I was as proud as any Emperor of India ... I think it was the finest Seder I have ever eaten at"⁸¹.

Leaving Russia in 1913 Dymov planned to visit America and to return soon. The First World War and the Russian revolution changed his plans. He preferred to live in America and to tour Europe. Late in the 1920s he did not choose yet between America, Europe and Soviet Russia. In 1927 in Berlin Dymov received a letter from Anatoly Lunacharsky, his close associate at Kugel's "Theater and Art" who was then the People's Commissar of Enlightenment in the USSR. Lunacharsky wrote: "It is time to return home. You will be greeted in Moscow as a prominent Russian writer"⁸². In the early 1930s the dramatic events in Europe and the USSR — emergence of Hitler and Stalin — left no more choice for Dymov. In 1932 he returned to New York.

⁸⁰ Reinhardt and Moissi, pp. 15—16.

⁸¹ YIVO Archives, New York, RG 469 — Dymov Osip, folder 50, Osip Dymov *Glimpses of the Moscow Art Theatre*, pp. 9—10.

⁸² The Diary, p. 13.

After his return to America Dymov continued to work a lot as a playwright. The frightening events of the contemporary Jewish history gave him new topics. His play "The Tragedy of My People", partly based on his personal encounter with Nazism in Germany in early 1930s, was produced by the Yiddish Art Theater in New York.

The late 1930s—1940s witnessed a fulfillment of the Dymov's observation made in 1927 about the decline of the Yiddish culture in America. The events in Europe — the war and the Holocaust — intensified the feeling of the universal disaster. In 1943 A. Mukdoyni wrote: "The Jewish artist was always the first victim of any universal trouble. But Osip Dymov ... took it philosophically. He always remained ironic philosopher in his writings and in his life"⁸³. Indeed, in these years Dymov mostly wrote comedies — "Shadows Over Harlem", "The Bride Escaped" and others. Some of these comedies were produced by New York Yiddish theaters — The Second Avenue Theater and Artef. Other Dymov's plays — "Henrich Heine" and "The Vanished Generation. The End of Epoch" — were written for production on the radio. Possibly, Dymov did not hope to see them performed on Yiddish stage at the time when Yiddish theater in Europe was destroyed and Yiddish theater in America was vanishing.

Mukdoyni remarked bitterly, that in the years of the destruction of Yiddish theater the least thing to do is to mourn the fate of Yiddish playwright. Dymov's fate should not be lamented too: "Dymov left America, later he returned, now this talented writer toils for the Yiddish press"⁸⁴.

Many Dymov's writings — essays on literature and theater, literary profiles of his contemporaries, short stories — appeared during 1930s—1940s mostly in New York Yiddish daily "Forverts". This newspaper also published fragments of his extensive memoirs "Vos Ikh Gedenk" (What I Remember). The full version of the memoirs, an account of the early years of Dymov as a Russian writer prior to his departure to America, was published in two volumes (1943 and 1945) in New York.

Ironically, in 1944 Dymov who just finished his memoirs suddenly lost his ... memory. In May 1944 Dymov underwent a successful complicated surgery. However on the third week of the recovery period Dymov was struck by amnesia — a complete loss of memory, possibly caused by deep anesthesia during the surgery.

Dymov was physically fully sound but his mind was blank. He, who had been so earnestly attached to his family and friends, could not recognize anybody. He, who had spoken fluently a few languages, could neither speak himself nor under-

⁸³ Mukdoyni *Ibid.*, p. ix.

⁸⁴ Mukdoyni *Ibid.*, p. viii.

stand others. Seasoned writer, who had lived long and fulfilling life, could not even know who he is. Later Dymov attempted to recollect what he had felt during the illness. Dymov wrote: "I am a corpse, because I have no memory. A body without a soul. What is a soul? ... [it] is a disciplined memory ... and memory is the past ... It is real, because it cannot be destroyed or changed. Our soul is history, religion, morality, culture, art — the God within! I had lost my God — how could I regain Him?"⁸⁵

Gradually Dymov started to improve. For him it was a painful process that lasted many months. Dymov suddenly realized how much he lost because of the illness. He feared that he would not be able to "regain his soul", to extract the memory from the deepest depths of his mind and to express it in words and letters⁸⁶. Possibly, out of this anxiety he started to recollect and to record everything meaningful he could recall from his past. This effort resulted in Dymov's "Diary" of 1948.

Regained memory prompted him with dates, events and names. These were the most distinguished names in Russian, European and Yiddish culture. Many of them were Dymov's friends, the people he closely knew and loved. In his highly decorated manner Dymov called these people stars on the darkened skies of his half-century-long career — the stars that illuminated with their genius his path in art⁸⁷. Among them — the stars of Yiddish theater: Maurice Schwarz in the production of Dymov's "Broit", Jacob Ben-Ami in "Eternal Wanderer", Jacob Adler in "Velt in Flamen" and Joseph Buloff of Vilna troupe performing in "Ioshke-muzikant". Dymov did not choose among them to pick his most favorite star. He was happy enough to regain this part of his soul. "I do not compare anybody, — wrote Dymov, — all stars are equally beautiful for me"⁸⁸.

Obscure profiles and mundane events of his life were also of great importance and value for Dymov. They, "the stars on spiritual skies", composed another part of his soul. Among these "stars" was his Bialystok girlfriend's daughter who visited him struck by amnesia in hospital. It was also repairman Mordke from Bialystok who did not accept the payment for his work from the widow, mother of six year old Iosif Perelman⁸⁹.

Trying to put together the details of his past in the "Diary", Dymov finally came close to his goal of regaining the soul. Looking back at his life he now felt its integrity and deeper meaning beyond the multiple events and profiles. Deeply impressed by this feeling Dymov tried to record it in the "Diary". The pen held in

⁸⁵ YIVO Archives, New York, RG 469 — Dymov Osip, folder 51, Osip Dymov *How I had Lost and Regained My Soul*, pp. 8—9.

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 9—10.

⁸⁷ The Diary, p. 17.

⁸⁸ The Diary, p. 21.

⁸⁹ The Diary, pp. 23—25.

weak fingers of the old man could hardly follow his thought:

They shine, live and breathe for us these stars of spiritual skies. In years of our childhood, maturity and in old age they nurture our souls, educate and motivate us. In them the blessed name is manifested:

Religion.
Amen!⁹⁰

Feeling excited, Dymov read this last passage in the "Diary". He pondered over it for a short while, then added the word "amen" in Hebrew letters, recorded the date, March 4, 1948, and closed his notebook.

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[illegible]

OSCAR D'ORNOY, internationally known Jewish author and playwright, a contributor to the Forward, whose 70th birthday anniversary will be celebrated in a gala stage show and concert in the Eastman, Grand Central Station, New York, next month.

1. Dymov's portrait and announcement of his 70th jubilee celebration --- clipping from "Forverts"



Николай (А. Р. КУГЕЛЬ).
Рис. И. Шахлис.

3. Aleksandr Kugel

Stiles with

Target Thompson

Когда мне было ~~около 7 лет~~ я уже
 стал размышлять над вопросом о
 Гитлере и считал, что победил его
 как ~~врага~~ ~~не~~ ~~по~~ ~~каким~~ ~~прави-~~
 лам и в то время по обещан-
 -ию ~~Гитлера~~ ~~его~~ ~~победит~~ ~~победит~~
 СССР.

~~Handwritten notes, mostly illegible due to heavy scribbling and crossing out.~~

Итак что же такое политическое
и наша социальная жизнь в год
этой войны? ~~Вот мы~~
какие люди? ~~мы не знаем~~ ^{мы не знаем} сейчас
пытаюсь а затем — критика.

2. The first page of Dymov's "Diary"



4. Dymov before his departure to America