

Abstracts*

David G. Roskies

Ayzik Meyer Dik: The Storyteller as Enlightened Maggid

Contrary to earlier studies (the author's included) that focussed on Ayzik Meyer Dik as forerunner of all that was modern in Yiddish folk literature, the present essay begins with Dik's departure from politics and parody. For financial as well as ideological reasons, Dik began to address himself exclusively to his "dear female reader", to write in the cursed "Jargon" and to present himself as a staid scholar who, for a change, told stories. From among all the available Haskala genres - parody, satire, quasi-biblical novel, sentimental novel - Dik selected a middle path in which the fantastic clashed with other modes, and satire waged war on Jewish folly in Czarist Russia. Thanks to his phenomenal output, the insignificant *mayse-bikhl* ('chapbook') has become a register of historical progress and a permanent gallery of folk-types, from rabbis to robbers. And in one exceptionally successful work, "Boruske the Watchman," Dik discovered a substitute "I" in the person of his famous countryman, the Maggid of Dubno.

Ayzik Meyer Dik

The Impoverished One

An interesting tale, "The Impoverished One" tells of a Jewish merchant from Nicklesburgh (Yiddish: Niklsburg), Tsodek Pikante, who lost his property in a fire and became a pauper. He left his wife at home and went out into the world to gather donations.

* Edited and translated by Leonard Prager. Names are transliterated according to the YIVO system.

A famous rabbi, Reb Shmelke, to whom Pikante told his story, took pity on the merchant and provided him with a written recommendation. Pikante managed to collect a sum of money and sold Reb Shmelke's writ to another beggar. This beggar went abroad, where he died suddenly. Reb Shmelke's writ was all that was found on the dead man, and notice was sent to the widow that her husband was dead.

The widow remarried and gave birth to a son. On the day of the *bris* ('circumcision ceremony'), her former husband, Tsodek Pikante, came home - after having been robbed on the way. An acquaintance in Vilna paid his fare home. The wife recognized her husband and, grasping her tragic situation, fainted. Understandably, the tale did not have a happy ending.

Saul Ginsburg

On the Panic of 1835/1836

The historian Saul Ginsburg (1866-1940), who also did research on literature and folklore, discusses the historical background of Ayzik Meyer Dik's Hebrew story, "The Panic." The panic was caused by a supposed decree by Nicholas the First's minister forbidding Jewish minors to marry, so that the government could conscript them for military service. Word of that would-be decree of 1835 led to widespread panic. Jews hysterically married off virtually any unmarried child. The *maskil* Ayzik Meyer Dik mocks the panic, which he probably witnessed in the town of Nieśwież (Yiddish: Nyesvizh).

Ayzik Meyer Dik

The Panic

Ayzik Meyer Dik first printed this story in Hebrew in 1867 in *Hamelits* (nos. 41, 42, 43) and a year later, in 1868, in Yiddish in Vilna under the title "The Town of Havoc." (The original has "The Town of Heres." *heres* is

Hebrew for 'ruin, havoc' - it is used here as a characteronymic, like Kaptansk, etc.). We reproduce here the Hebrew version which appeared in the Petrograd journal *Heavar*, 1918: 34-44, since Saul Ginsburg notes in his introduction that he printed it from a manuscript.

The story recounts in a humorous vein the response of the Jewish community in the town of Havoc to the evil decree forbidding Jewish girls under the age of twelve and Jewish boys under the age of eighteen to marry. The community decided to follow their rabbi's advice and immediately arrange marriages. The panic is described as a mad whirlpool affecting one-and all, with parents running amok in the hope of "rescuing" their children.

Shalom Luria

"Table Talk" - Yehuda Leyb Gordon's Yiddish Poems

The renowned Hebrew poet and Haskala writer, Yehuda Leyb Gordon (YaLaG), who often vented his antipathy to Yiddish ("Jargon"), wrote poems in Yiddish and even assembled them into a booklet (20 poems, 104 pp.). The fourth edition of this booklet appeared in Vilna in 1899, seven years after the poet's death.

Gordon's Yiddish poems were popular among readers and their author surely deserves an honored place among the bilingual poets of his generation (Mikhl Gordon, Avrom Ber Gotlober, Eliezer Tsvi Hakohen Tsveyfl, and even Mendele Moykher Sforim). By analyzing several of his poems, the essay attempts to prove that Gordon's poetic achievement in Yiddish deserves the reader's interest and the critic's attention.

Avner Holtzman

A Source for Y.L. Perets's Biography in a Letter from Yankev Dinezon

The author discusses a letter in Hebrew that the Yiddish writer Yankev Dinezon wrote to Mikhe Yoysef Berditshevski in reply to the latter's request for information on Perets's life and work. Dinezon was Perets's closest friend and associate and Berditshevski could assume that he probably knew more about Perets than anyone else. In the first part of his letter, Dinezon writes about the earliest stages of Perets's life, starting with his childhood years in Zamość. He outlines Perets's artistic development to the time he becomes one of the central figures in Yiddish literature. In the second part of the letter, Dinezon expresses his own views about the linguistic and literary relations between Hebrew and Yiddish. In addition, he discusses some of his own ideas regarding the creative process, including the use of autobiographical material in his fiction. The author deals with the personal and literary relations between the three writers - Berditshevski, Dinezon and Perets - and places Dinezon's letter within its larger historical and cultural context.

Abraham Novershtern

The Dance of Death: On Perets's *A Night in the Old Market Place*

An analysis of the first critical response to Perets's drama - a 1908 article by the Bundist critic B. Vladék - helps place the play in the twilight atmosphere that dominated Yiddish literature after the failure of the first Russian revolution. In analyzing the figure and the speech of the *batkhn* ('jester'), one realizes how *A Night in the Old Market Place* reflects Perets's literary and spiritual inner struggle: An approach suggestive of the late Haskala, but at the same time an augury of Yiddish modernism. Both tendencies are intertwined in the text, by assigning a central place to the theme of death, to apocalyptic strivings and to the metaphysical wrestling with the flow of time.

Avidov Lipsker

The Tenth Muse

The four issues of Uri Tsvi Grinberg's *Albatros*, which appeared in Warsaw and Berlin in 1922-23, are a milestone in the integration of poetic, essayistic, graphic and typographic values. In the graphic configuration of *Albatros* one recognizes the character of Yiddish modernism, with its expressionistic and avant-garde features. The editor Uri Tsvi Grinberg cleverly adopted this new direction, and especially the graphic techniques familiar to him from the German periodicals (particularly *Die Aktion* and *Der Sturm*) and from publishing activities which emerged around them. The author tries to show what typographical ideas turned up in *Albatros* and how they underwent changes there, largely due to the contribution of the artist Henryk Berlewi, a student of El Lissitzky, who was a pioneer of avant-garde typography in Europe before World War II. The article discusses the esthetic and poetic approach of *Albatros*, which laid the foundations for Uri Tsvi Grinberg's artistic activity, not only as modern poet, but as innovator in the field of book and periodical design in Palestine from 1924 onwards.

Leonard Prager

On Avrom Sutskever's "To Poland"

Avrom Sutskever's "To Poland" is a deeply engaged poem, product of the poet's pain and disillusion at encountering renewed antisemitism in liberated Poland, which he visited on his way to Western Europe after leaving the Soviet Union. It is also the poet's lament cum celebration of the great moments in what often seemed like a Polish-Jewish symbiosis. Because of the few who sacrificed their lives saving Jews, the poet refrains from judging the entire Polish people and he does not cry out for revenge. But he understands that Jewish life in Poland belongs to the past. With grief at leaving the ancient cemeteries and joy at looking forward to a new life, the poet says good-bye to Poland.

Abraham Novershtern

Der Nister's Letters to Shmuel Niger

Thirty-four letters that Der Nister wrote to Shmuel Niger during the years 1907-1923 are given here. Together with one letter already published, this group encompasses Der Nister's entire correspondence of literary import contained in the Shmuel Niger Collection at YIVO. There emerges from this correspondence a picture of a complex relationship between the writer on the one hand, and his editor and critic on the other. Although Niger reacted negatively to Der Nister's first works, the writer highly valued the critic's opinion. It is quite possible that Niger's judgements significantly influenced the direction and character of Der Nister's art. From the notes to the letters one learns of several unknown pieces by Der Nister that appeared in the Yiddish press (among them an early translation into Russian), of reviews of his books in Russian-Jewish periodicals, and of publishers' offers that stimulated Der Nister's translations of children's literature into Yiddish and his own early writing in that genre.