

From: Joseph Sherman and Gennady Estraiikh, eds,
David Bergelson: From Modernism to Socialist Realism.
London, UK: Legenda, 2007.

CHAPTER 6



In Search of Readership: Bergelson among the Refugees (1928)

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Kein Ostjude geht freiwillig nach Berlin. Wer in aller Welt kommt freiwillig nach Berlin? Berlin ist eine Durchgangstation, in der man aus zwingenden Gründen länger verweilt.

JOSEPH ROTH¹

In a diary entry dated 8 July 1922 and published in his memoir *Kniga zhizni* (A book of life), historian Shimon Dubnov notes:

Worries about relocating to Berlin, about moving there everything necessary for work from Russia, Kovno, and Danzig. Difficult, worrisome thoughts given contemporary economic collapse, borders, and visas. The catastrophic condition of Germany is embarrassing, too: the political confusion after [Walter] Rathenau's murder, unchecked decline of the Deutschmark, and costs that grow daily. And I am going up on a volcano and I must go, for there is a printing press, and I must fulfil the vow of my life [...]²

Dubnov's confession betrays part of the reason for the emigration of numerous intellectuals from Russia to Berlin in the years following the October Revolution. The same unrestrained inflation that gave Dubnov cause for concern about his new abode in Germany also made printing costs negligible in relation to the rate of economic collapse, and a great number of publishing houses sprouted as a result.³ Berlin was a publishing paradise not only for Dubnov, whose memoirs of the time are filled with minute details about the publication of his monographs on Jewish history in German, Hebrew, and Yiddish translation as well as in their original Russian. Émigré publishing activity of all stripes was booming in a city that hosted thousands driven into exile from post-Great War and post-revolution Eastern Europe. In the Russian literary imagination, Berlin became known as the 'stepmother' of Russian cities. As numerous publishing opportunities in Yiddish also existed there, Berlin became a favoured destination for many Yiddish writers as well.⁴

Yiddish-language publishing occupied a markedly different niche from any other in Berlin, and in Dubnov's memoirs we are allowed a fascinating glimpse into how one writer — albeit a writer of history whose work was published in several languages — viewed the attempts of another, one of many aspiring Yiddish literati

in Berlin, to compete for success in the same geographical locale. Dubnov writes:

At the beginning of 1926, I was still completing additions to the third volume [on 'The Eastern Period' in his *History of the Jews*] and was reading proof pages, but by March I had already switched from the East to the West and had begun the revisions of the fourth volume [...]. Between this volume and the next, I allowed myself only one week's rest in the environs of Berlin, in Fichtergrund, where in the period between winter and spring I communed with the forest. A young belletrist Samuel [Shmuel] Lewin (1890–1959) accompanied me on my walks there and read me his dramas and novels about Hasidic life [*byt*] in Yiddish with a Polish accent. This poor emigrant had a natural [*samorodnyi*] uncultivated talent and was consumed by a writer's fever; he had already been granted time to publish a couple of novels in Yiddish and in German translation, but his bitter lot [*gor'kaia dolia*] in a foreign land [*na chuzhbine*] did not give him an opportunity to develop his talent and to occupy a place that befits him in literature.⁵

The author of this paragraph is a successful professional historian engaged in multiple projects for assured publication who permits himself to make somewhat condescending remarks about a younger writer who, as seems evident, reads his works to the well-established Dubnov in hopes of advancing them toward public recognition. As a writer of history, of course, Dubnov's principal language could continue to serve him even 'in a foreign land', a place that supposedly thwarts the development of a belletrist whose allegiance is to a language that can truly thrive only in its native milieu. The linguistic *chuzhbina* — foreign land — to which Dubnov consigns this struggling Yiddish writer is a barren space where, despite ample opportunities to publish, any creative endeavour exudes a whiff of something 'with an accent', of something provincial, of something that prevents a 'foreign' author from full-fledged participation in literary life.

In his famous analysis of any given speech act, the linguist Roman Jakobson (1896–1982) distinguishes the necessary presence of the following six factors: (1) an addresser who conveys (2) a message to (3) an addressee; (4) a context to which the message refers, (5) a code shared by the two parties involved in a speech act, and (6) a contact — a channel of mental or physical connection between them.⁶ William Todd reinterprets the Jakobsonian model of language as a model of the literary process thus:

In a modern literary situation these terms translate into familiar roles and situations [...] the addresser, a professional author whose addressee is some segment of the reading public, contacts it through the medium of the printed page. The modern author's context spans a seemingly inexhaustible range of subject matter (including, of course, literature itself), selected and shaped, however, according to the relatively enduring codes of language, genre, and culture together with the temporary codes of fashion, codes which the author and the competent reader will share, if not always respect.⁷

In the context of Yiddish-language literary activity in Berlin, the matter of the addressee is the most crucial in this literary equation. The addressee is connected to the addresser through context, message, contact, and code — that is to say, the four central aspects of the literary process that actually involve the written and published text depend on the presence of the reading public. In a situation in which

all elements are present, but in which the presence of the addressee (the reading public) is in doubt, the entire literary process stands on shaky ground.

Writing about *Milgroym* (Pomegranate), the Berlin-based literary journal for which, together with *Der Nister*, Bergelson worked briefly as a literary editor, Arthur Tilo Alt notes that 'there was no market sufficiently large to support a Yiddish intellectual journal in Germany despite an overall Yiddish-speaking population of about 100,000. The marketplace for Yiddish publications emanating from Berlin was the United States and Eastern Europe'.⁸ There was insufficient local readership for much of the Yiddish literary output that found a temporary home in Berlin during the inter-war years. Delphine Bechtel is right to point out that a modified version of this readership could — and did, in fact — exist among German Jews who could no longer read Yiddish itself, but who read Yiddish works in translation. However, as Bechtel adds, most of these translations were of poor quality that actually diminished the value of the original works:

[German translators from the Yiddish] had in fact committed the crime of a misreading, a misprision of the text, dictated [to them] by prejudices about Yiddish literature that were widespread among most German Jews. They looked back to the world of Yiddish literature and culture as to a place of origin tinged with sentimentalism and nostalgia, because they needed to romanticize it in order to define their identity. They did not want to make the effort of really understanding its modernist, avant-garde aspects. No wonder, then, that they ignored the uprooted, modernist Yiddish writers who lived among them.⁹

A number of literati who made Berlin their home in the 1920s recalled the Romanisches Café, near the Berlin Zoo, as a place where the city's émigré Yiddish writers occupied a few tables in a sea of tables occupied by others. This café functioned as a literary institution of sorts — a place for those who were considered writers by vocation — but it provided no real connection to any readership, and, in turn, did not stimulate much productivity among the writers who frequented it. Israel Rubin, for example, has given a glimpse of what went on there in a series of sketches published in *Literarische bleter*:

Hot men shoybn bay di yidishe shrifshaeler-tishlekh in Romanishn oysgenishtert ale meglekhe temas [...] oysgekibetst un durkhgerekhilest alemen, alemen, mamesh loytn alef-beys-seyder fun Zalmen Reyzens 'Leksikon', oysgeshtelt ale literarish-gezelshaftlekhe dialogn un prognozn, un es kumt shoybn oys onkumen amol tsu iberkhazerung.¹⁰

[At the tables of the Yiddish writers in the Romanisches Café all possible topics have already been exhausted [...] everyone has been denigrated and slandered, all, quite literally in the alphabetical order of Zalmen Reyzen's *Lexicon* [of *Yiddish Literature, Press and Philology*, 1928–29]. All literary and social dialogues and prognoses have been outlined, and matters are now approaching the point of repetition.]

Though the café was a microcosm of the literary sphere, in 1920s Berlin it was reduced to little more than a mockery of the literary process. The space of the café — and, in a larger sense, the space of Berlin — was infused with that sense of futility in the course of a literary exile during which writers felt that they had been com-

pletely separated from their natural readership: 'Although Berlin became the home of the most important Hebrew and Yiddish writers and publishers, their audience remained in the East, or had emigrated to Palestine and the United States'.¹¹

This essay seeks to examine the self-creation and subsequent self-refashioning of one writer, David Bergelson, in the context of the émigré Yiddish literary scene in Weimar Berlin, bearing in mind Bergelson's status as a professional writer. One way to define writing as a profession is to consider it as a vocation that is pursued 'as a principal means of livelihood', in addition to the author's participation in the 'institutions' of literature, such as, for example, addressing a specific readership.¹² By the time Bergelson left Moscow for Berlin in 1921, he was already a recognized and respected professional author, who had published a number of major works, the importance of which was recognized when the Berlin-based publishing house Wostok issued his collected writing to date in six elegant volumes in 1922.¹³ In one of his first meetings with Soviet readers and critics during his return trip to the Soviet Union in 1926, Bergelson reportedly demanded respect in a speech defending himself against doctrinaire criticism, asserting, *Ikh bin Bergelson, nisht keyn onfanger*, 'I am Bergelson, not some beginner!'¹⁴ Since an immediately recognizable authorial name is itself one of the 'institutions' of literary process, Bergelson's self-presentation to his new Soviet reading public is an important marker of professionalism.

A number of critics have commented on Bergelson's reorientation towards Moscow, most of them sceptical of Bergelson's affirmations of allegiance to the Soviet literary cause, made most explicitly in his 1926 essay 'Dray tzentren' (Three Centres). Joseph Sherman, for example, offers a nuanced reading of the way in which Bergelson's decision to tout the Soviet 'Party line' in his works was perceived by his contemporaries on different sides of the political divide.¹⁵ Other critics wonder whether Bergelson's ideological preachments were matched by his fictional practice. I seek an explanation for Bergelson's return to the Soviet Union not in his journalistic writing alone but also in reading so programmatic an essay as 'Dray tzentren' in conjunction with some of his Berlin fiction. I wish to follow the direction suggested by 'Tsvishn emigrantn' (Among refugees), arguably the most interesting story of Bergelson's Berlin period, in order to uncover a possible source of inner conflict that Bergelson might have experienced in Berlin, and to which his fiction might bear witness. Beneath the surface of 'Tsvishn emigrantn' lurks the author's concern with his non-existent readership. 'Dray tzentren', along with Bergelson's other doctrinaire pronouncements, is not so much an ideological statement as an element in what I would call the 'narrative space' of texts concerned with self-retooling for the sake of relocation to an environment in which the idealized reading audience is thought to exist.

Of all Bergelson's stories in which the city of Berlin functions as a setting, 'Tsvishn emigrantn' has received the most critical attention.¹⁶ This is not surprising because, of the seven Berlin stories, 'Tsvishn emigrantn' offers, in the words of Dafna Clifford, 'a study of different forms of existential crisis precipitated by exile'. Such a study, in turn, draws on Bergelson's ability to illuminate difficult facets of human character and results in a narrative more refined than most stories of the Berlin period which, as Clifford argues, 'are strangely flat and un compelling'.¹⁷

Simply summarized, the story concerns a Yiddish writer in Berlin — the tale's frame narrator — who is visited one day by a young man who introduces himself as a Jewish terrorist. This young man proceeds to tell the writer of his longing to assassinate his boarding-house neighbour, a notorious pogromist responsible for the murder of the young man's family in Ukraine.¹⁸ Acting alone, the young man is primarily concerned with finding a weapon to do away with the murderer, and he describes his approach to his *landsmen*, Berel Zhum, with pleas for help to find such a weapon. Instead of keeping his promise to help, however, Berel brings the would-be terrorist before a panel of prominent members of the émigré community. Unwilling to permit the vengeful youth to compromise their hard-earned standing in the German community, the members of this panel offer to pay for his psychological treatment in a sanatorium, and in desperation he comes to the writer to relate his story and to seek help. In part, the young man's plea sounds like an accusation:

Shrayber, hob ikh getrakht, zaynen vi der gevisn fun folk. Zey zaynen zayne nervn, zey shteln for zeyer folk far der velt [...] un vibald ikh hob aykh alts oysdertseylt, zayt ir shoyrn farantvortlekh tsuglaykh mit mir un nokh mer fun mir, vayl ir zayt a shrayber [...] (Y 198)

[Writers, I thought, were the conscience of the nation. They are its nerves. They present their nation to the world [...] And now that I've told you everything, you are as responsible as I am, and even more than I am, because you're a writer [...]] (E 42)

The tale ends with the writer's discovery of the young man's suicide note, which concludes: *Ikh hob farshtanen di gantse zakh: ikh bin an emigrant ... tsvishn emigrantn ... ikh vil es mer nisht ...* (Y 199), 'I understand everything now: I'm a refugee ... among refugees ... I don't want to be one anymore...' (E 43). In this way, as Heather Valencia has noted, Bergelson spares his narrator the need to choose whether 'to align himself either with the old world, by acceding to the ideas and demands of the stranger, or with his role in the assimilated Jewish society of Berlin, by rejecting the stranger's plea'.¹⁹

The young man's assertion that the writer is 'the conscience of the nation' has prompted most comment from scholars who have written about 'Tsvishn emigrantn'. It is the very uncertainty of the writer's status in the aftermath of the violent civil war pogroms in Ukraine that David Roskies draws out of this passage when he suggests that

[t]he elite group of Jewish intellectuals [...] had no one to attack and no one to lead. And since their own identities were none too secure, these dangling men caught between tradition and a thousand versions of modernity, between loyalty to parents and past and an unfulfilled craving for love and life, could barely hope to save themselves, let alone any larger constituency.²⁰

Roskies sees the narrator of the story as a *talush*, a 'dangling' man incapable of making choices. Delphine Bechtel offers a more far-reaching reading in which Bergelson himself is identified with his narrator's inability to fulfil the task:

When the writer is reminded of his function as the conscience of the people,

the gloomy terrorist can also be interpreted as a shadow figure [*Schattenfigur*] (in a Jungian sense) or as a bad conscience of the writer (Bergelson's alter-ego) that reminds him of the tragedy of his people in Eastern Europe.²¹

Using these two comments, I propose a further re-reading of the story that seeks to unearth the implication of Bergelson's identification both with the narrator of the story and with the figure of the young terrorist, as well as his concern with the nature of the relationship between the two. 'Tsvishn emigrantn' is a powerful example of meta-fiction, in which the projected indecision and uncertainty about the writer's professional standing are very much Bergelson's own.

At the beginning of the story, the frame narrator's professional status is established: he is a writer, returning to his home from an afternoon stroll around Berlin, informed by his family that an unknown young man is waiting for him in his study. The writer's living conditions are comfortable by contrast with those of the young man who, like many Berlin exiles, is renting a room in a boarding-house.²² This relationship — an established literary figure visited by someone asking him for advice — is a commonplace device in Yiddish literature. In Sholem Aleichem's 'Di eytse' (Advice), for example, a nervous young man comes to consult the writer-narrator about whether or not he should divorce his pretty, rich, and flirtatious young wife.²³ The narrative details imparted suggest the comfortable lifestyle of a highly successful professional writer: for example, he learns from his family about his visitor's importunate visits *beshas ikh bin gekumen eynmol tsu forn fun veg aheym*, 'upon arrival once from one of my trips away' (Y 73/E 59); when he finally receives his garrulous caller, their one-sided conversation takes place in a separate study where *bay mir oyfn shraybtish shteyen oysgeshtelt farsheydene zakhelekh, raritetn, tsatskes* (Y 80), 'I keep a collection of handsome *objets* and pretty little curios set out on display on my writing table' (E 64). Details of this kind deliberately suggest a relationship between a worldly, practised *littérateur* and an unsophisticated guest about whom his reluctant host condescendingly concludes:

A tip fun a kleynshtetdikh maskil, a mekhaber. A yungerman mit a blas ponem, mit groyse shvartse rakhmones-oygn, dos heyst, azelkhe oygn, vos betn zikh: 'Hot rakhmones oyf an einte, a farblondzhet neshome'. Ikh hob nisht lib azelkhe oygn. (Y 74)

[Your very type of a provincial Jewish gentleman of letters. Your author. Your pale sort of young person, with great saucer-like [beseeching] black eyes, always begging compassion, pleading with you: 'Oh, please, please, kind sir, take pity on a poor lost soul'. I do not like eyes of that sort.] (E 59)

In another Yiddish story, from a later period, Isaac Bashevis Singer shows his Jewish émigrés in New York preoccupied with concerns akin to those raised by Bergelson. In 'The Cafeteria',²⁴ the writer-narrator encounters Esther, a woman who has survived both Nazi and Soviet concentration camps, who tells him that she has seen Hitler and his henchmen alive and meeting in one of New York's cafeterias. Here, too, the writer-narrator enjoys a comfortable and established lifestyle, asserted in the tale's opening words:

Even though I have reached the point where a great part of my earnings is

given away in taxes, I still have the habit of eating in cafeterias when I am by myself [...] I meet there the *landsleit* from Poland, as well as all kinds of literary beginners and readers who know Yiddish.

If this were not enough to set the narrator worlds apart from his displaced countrymen, he continues:

I cannot spend too long with these Yiddishists, because I am always busy. I am writing a novel, a story, an article. I have to lecture today or tomorrow; my datebook is crowded with all kinds of appointments for weeks and months in advance. [...] But meanwhile we converse in the mother tongue and I hear of intrigues and pettiness about which, from moral point of view, it would be better not to be informed. (E 287)

The remarkable feature common to all these stories is the way the writer-narrator undermines his interlocutor from the very beginning, making each visitor who comes to tell a personal tale an unreliable raconteur. In each case, the writer's professionalism is asserted as a weighty assurance of his own credibility that allows him to discredit the trustworthiness of the one speaking to him. In Bashevis's 'The Cafeteria', Esther's story is called in doubt because of her apparent madness. In Sholem Aleichem's 'An eytse', the caller's question is so petty and so vague that, losing all patience, the narrator yells at his visitor to silence him. In the same way, the narrator in Bergelson's 'Tsvishn emigrantn' draws a disconcerting picture of his interlocutor:

Un zayn linke bak iz geven a krume; zi iz geven vi zayne un nisht zayne. Zi hot oysgezen vi a bak vos iz tsekrigt mit der velt — dos lebn hot gevorf'n oyf ir an umkheyn, hot zi deriber gevorf'n an umkheyn oyf'n lebn. A dank der linker bak hot der yungerman oysgezen heslekh, nor, vi mir hot zikh gedakht, iz er geven dafke oyf der zayt fun der linker bak [...] (Y 175)

[His left cheek, however, was crooked; it looked as though it were his and yet ... It was like a cheek at war with the world — it had fallen out of favour with life, and therefore life had fallen out of favour with it. The left cheek made the young man look ugly, but apparently he had sided with it.] (E 22)

But there seems to be another clue in all these stories. Sholem Aleichem identifies his visitor as a *kleynshtetldik*, 'provincial', writer, even though this visitor's story is narrated in precisely the same way — with many digressions, and with the gist delivered only in a single punch line — as any typical monologue written by Sholem Aleichem himself. Is 'An eytse' then a kind of comment by Sholem Aleichem on the possibility of his own 'provincialism' as a writer? Bashevis's Esther is not identified as a writer, but the writer-narrator encounters her and hears her story in the context of what he calls 'petty Yiddishists', to whose stories he is averse from the start. But her tale is more gripping than the usual sort: even her madness is somehow justified by the fact that she is a survivor. This, in turn, might speak to Bashevis's own moral qualms about having made a timely escape from Europe shortly before the war, and to his own lack of credibility as a writer when the subject at hand is the psychology of a survivor of both the Holocaust and of the gulag.

I propose that Bergelson's story contains a similar clue to re-reading. Though the young man in 'Tsvishn emigrantn' is not identified as a writer, at the heart of his

conversation with the narrator lies a story that he [*hot*] *fartrakht* [...] *nisht vegn mir, nor vegn an andern* (Y 182), 'thought up [...] not about me, but about someone else' (E 28). This story within a story concerns a Jewish pauper in his home town who goes begging for alms at the houses of rich Jews who live in the Gentile neighbourhood. A Jewish pauper is an unwelcome intrusion into the assimilated lifestyles of these rich Jews, and his frequent appearances threaten to expose the insecurity of their status in the town's wider, non-Jewish society. The pauper's arrival is a theatrical affair: instead of knocking on the door of each Jewish house, *blaybt er deriber shteyn in mitn gas un heybt on tsu hustn, kedey di shkotsimlekh zoln im derzen un onreytsn oyf im di hint* (Y 183), 'he halts in the middle of the street and starts to cough so that the children will see him and set their dogs on him' (E 29). After the young man has interpreted this anecdote as a story about himself, and the beggar's quest for alms as his own personal desire to indulge his spite, the following narrative interpolation slips virtually seamlessly into his description of encountering the Ukrainian pogromist in his Berlin boarding house:

Un ot in yener tsayt, ven ikh hob azoy getrakht (ikh bin nisht geshlofn a nakht nokh a nakht), hob ikh in eynem a frimorgn derhert a kleynem geroysh in koridor fun mayn pansyon — der geroysh iz oysgemisht mit a sharfn Ukraynish. Ikh hob in koridor derzen frier a dinst fun pansyon, vi zi trogt tsvey shvere tshemodanes, un nokh dem hob ikh derzen 'im' aleyn mit di freylekh fardreyte vontses. Im iz mit derekh-erets nokhgegangen nokh eyner a yungerer.

— A yak? — hot er gefregt bay ot dem yungern un hot gegebn a shmek di luft mit di noz, — a tut tovo ... zhividiv-to nima?

Ikh bin geshtanen lebn mayn tir. Ikh hob gekukt, vi men firt im punkt akegn in tsimer num. 5. Ikh bin geven vi fartshadet. In tshad iz tsu mir plutsem gekumen aza laykht gefil, glaykh ikh bin mer nisht eynzam. Tsu mir iz tsugekumen epes a shtik. Mir iz gevorn fil gringer, khotsh in vos bashteyt di dozike gringkayt hob ikh nokh alts nisht gevust. Ersht shpeter hob ikh zikh gefregt:

In vos iz do di simkhe? ... Ha? (Y 183–84)

[And in those days, when I'd thought such things (I couldn't sleep night after night), I'd heard a faint noise in the rooming house corridor early one morning, and the noise was mixed with the sharp sounds of Ukrainian. I looked out into the corridor, and first I saw a chambermaid. She was carrying two heavy valises; and then I saw *him* in the flesh, with his cheerfully twirled moustache. He was respectfully followed by some younger man.

'Oh, yes?' he asked the younger man in Ukrainian, and he sniffed the air, 'Aren't there any Jews here?'

I was standing by my door. I watched the chambermaid take him right across from me, to room number five. I was stupefied. And suddenly a feeling of lightness came to me in my daze, as though I weren't alone anymore. Some portion of me had arrived. I felt so much lighter, though I still didn't know what this lightness was. It wasn't till later that I asked myself: 'Just why do I feel so joyous? Why?'] (E 29)

The story that the young man thinks up in 'Tsvishn emigrantn' functions, in Viktor Shklovsky's formalist terms, as *obnazhenie priema*, the 'laying bare of the device': the story-in-miniature contains elements of the larger narrative, suggesting the way in which the whole is to be read. The pauper, whom the young man feels he

has invented in his own likeness, is concerned not so much with receiving alms as with embarrassing the assimilated Jews of his home town by forcibly reminding them of the pariah status they have only recently (and tentatively) transcended. The killing of the pogromist, which the young man 'thinks up' out of the parable that he also invents, is less an act of revenge for the murderer's crimes than an act of spite against the would-be terrorist's former *landslayt*. He wants to mortify these former countrymen — exemplified by the wealthy Pinsky family, one of whose daughters he had unsuccessfully attempted to court while they all still lived in Ukraine — and, in a larger sense, all those wealthy Russian Jews who enjoy a far more comfortable Berlin exile than he does. Spite drives the young man: his displacement in the alien city of Berlin intensifies this spite even as those towards whom it could justifiably be directed grow fewer in number as he increasingly finds himself isolated from any community. Thus, when the pogromist appears, a *raison d'être* is swiftly provided: a murder is now contemplated not so much for its own sake as for the sake of those Jews whom the young man perceives as having wronged him in the past. Still toying with the idea that this deed might be regarded as heroic, the young man summarizes both his narratives — the one about the Jewish beggar and the other about his own intentions — to the frame-narrator:

Er hot gezogt:

— Akegn vos-zhe ikh hob es aykh ongehoyn tsu dertseylen? Kedey aykh zol zayn farshtendlekh ver ikh bin ...

Itst vet ir mir gloybn, vayl aza geshikhte trakht men nisht oys fun kop. Ikh hob, dakht zikh, gornisht nisht durkhgelozt, a? ... Vegn Zorakh Pinski un vegn zayn meydil hob ikh aykh dertseylt? ... Yo, ikh hob aykh dertseylt ... Dos iz alts, alts, vos mit mir hot pasirt biz yener tsayt, biz ikh hob derfilt, az ikh vel 'im' hargenen. Ir farshteyt? Fun tsvishn azoy fil yidn dafke ikh, mit vemen es hot pasirt di gantse geshikhte. Trakht zikh ayn: ver den, az nisht ikh? (Y 184-85)

[The young man] said: 'What was my purpose in telling you these things? I want you to understand who I am Now you'll believe me, because no one could make up such a story out of thin air. I don't sense I've left anything out, have I? I've told you about Zorah Pinsky and about his daughter, haven't I? Yes, I have. That was everything, everything that happened to me back then, until I felt I was going to kill him. You understand? Among so many Jews, I, of all people, I, to whom the entire story happened. Just think: Who else if not I? (E 30)

Which of these stories could not have been made 'out of thin air', as the young man claims? The story of the beggar certainly has. What about the supposed meeting with the infamous pogromist? Heather Valencia rightly suggests that in the young man's narrative, the figure of the pogromist is seen only through the eyes of the unsuccessful terrorist, that 'it is never clear to either reader or narrator whether his identity is purely a figment of the obsessed man's imagination'.²⁵ What if, after all, the pogromist is not only a figment of the young man's imagination, but also an element in the story that he admits to having made up? The figure of the pogromist has clear narrative worth in the young man's story: he is his excuse for articulating long-felt and well-described resentment. Is then the story itself not a kind of fiction,

and the young man a hapless writer who comes to consult an established author about the plot he has crafted? Moreover, the young man's concluding phrase in the above admission — 'Who else if not I?' — does not appear to conform to everything else he has said. Is this not perhaps a clue that he has written himself into the plot of a story that might earn its protagonist — himself — the title of hero for the sake of the community?

The way in which the young man in 'Tsvishn emigrantn' comes to write himself into his narrative resembles the way in which the poet Max Wentzl in Bergelson's story 'Mit eyn nakht veyniker' (One night less)²⁶ writes himself into the poem that he is composing. As Wentzl — another of many refugees in Berlin and a poor poet whose work is not recognized by critics — wanders the dark streets of the city, the loneliness of his displacement and that of the other solitary figures towards whom he gravitates, conjures up poetic thoughts in him:

Er iz farnakht antdremelt gevorn mit groys tsar, mit groys benkschaft tsu epes an umbasheydn hartsik lid, vos zol mit zikh oysgish dem gantsn tsar un di gantse benkschaft funem dikhter Maks Ventsl; — eynmol farnakht bay zun-untgang, ven fun tsvishn di zayln, vos untern hoykhn Brandeburger toyer zenen in fil rayen eyns nokh eyns, vi oysgeshosene, gelofn di yontevdiker avtomobiln, hot er dort baym ershtn groysn denkmol gezen, vi a blas meydil shteyt tsugetuliet tsum kaltn marmor un brekht fun nokh trinken oder fun nokh a greserer aveyre, vos vakst bay ir ineveynik untern hartsn — zi brekht, vi far der gantser umgehayer-groyser shtot Berlin ...

Iz ot:

... mit dem, eygentlekh, zoln onheybn di ershte ferzn fun zayn lid ... (Y 192)

[In the evening, he dozed off amid great sorrow, amid great yearning for an immodest, sentimental poem that would pour out all the sorrow and all the yearning of the poet Max Wentzl. One evening, at sunset, when, amid the columns under the high Brandenburg Gate, the holiday buses came shooting out, one by one, in rows, Wentzl, at the first large monument, sighted a pale young girl standing there, hugging the cold marble and vomiting after drinking or after a greater sin that was growing inside her, under her heart — she was vomiting as if for the tremendous metropolis of Berlin...

And that should actually form the opening lines of his poem ...] (E 106)

This image gradually transforms itself into Wentzl's *idée fixe*, exposing both the way in which he internalizes Berlin's landscapes and his own poetic limitations which, in the course of his nocturnal wanderings, do not permit any other inspired thoughts to enter his mind. As Wentzl meets a prostitute on the street, he regurgitates the image, this time in the first person:

— Ot aza meydil, vi du, — zogt er tsu ir, — vel ikh itst moln in mayn groyser poeme 'Berlin'. Ikh hob eynmol farnakht, bay zun-untgang gezen punkt aza blas meydil, vi du. Zi iz geshtanen tsugespart tsum ershtn groysn denkmol, vos tsvishn Ziges-alee un Brandeburger toyer, un hot gebrokhn mit neshome, mit harts, gebrokhn far gants Berlin ... ot azoy vet zikh onheybn mayn poeme ... (Y 199)

['I'm now going to depict a girl like you,' he says, 'in my great poem "Berlin".

Once, during sunset, I saw a girl as pale as you. She was leaning against the first big monument between Siegesallee and the Brandenburg Gate and she was vomiting with her soul, with her heart, vomiting as if for the whole of Berlin ... That's how my poem will begin ...'] (E 113)

The prostitute notices that Wentzl cites only the beginning of an unwritten poem; when she asks him about how the poem ends, he replies:

— Der sof [...] iz nisht interesant, ekelhaft, mies. [...] Der sof iz keynmol nishto un deriber iz er an oysgetrakhter, a lign. Mayne lider, zogt men mir, toygn nisht, vayl zey hobn keyn sof nisht. M'vil, ikh zol zogn lign, vet men mikh onerkenen. Nor Ventsl zogt keyn lign nisht far keyn prayz in der velt, afile nisht far onerkenung. (Y 200)

'The end [...] the end isn't interesting, it's ugly, disgusting [...] The end doesn't exist, and that's why it's an invention, a lie. My poems, people say, are worthless because they have no end. People say that if I tell lies, I'll be recognized. But Wentzl won't lie for all the money in the world. Not even for recognition.' (E 113-14)

On the other hand, however, does the poem have no end because the poet is incapable of bringing this work — or any other work — to completion? In moralistic language, Wentzl comes to regard his unfinished poems as the only truthful ones and to think that *er aleyh, Ventsl, onem palto, mit di hent farrukt in di hoyzn-tashn iz der emes fun Berlin — er aleyh iz yents meyd, vos brekht oys dem lign fun ot der shtot* [...] (Y 200); 'He himself, Wentzl, with no overcoat, with his hands thrust into his trouser pockets, is the Truth of Berlin, he himself is that girl who vomited the lie of that city [...]' (E 114).

Bergelson's hallmark style of repetition here, much as with the terrorist in 'Tsvishn emigrantn', exposes the level of obsession that both young men have with a limited number of vivid images that assume a life of their own. By rehearsing the ideas that lead them to understand themselves as something much larger than they are — 'the Truth' of Berlin and the self-appointed judge of Ukrainian pogromists — the poet and the terrorist respectively appear primarily as unsuccessful weavers of literary tales in which one grand idea dominates but nothing else is present that could facilitate any notion of a successfully executed plot. Both — Wentzl explicitly so, and the terrorist by implication — stand for similar unsuccessful models of authorship that exist outside the framework of the institutions of communal and literary life.

Wentzl's status as a poet is very much in doubt because he is neither known to an established readership nor published in literary journals. He goes so far as to admit to himself that he, indeed, is not a poet, but *ale frimorgn faln im banays arayn in di hent frische tsaytungen un zhurnaln un er zet: di lider, vos m'drukt in zey, zenen hundred mol erger fun zayne, toyznt mol erger fun zayne* (Y 195), 'every morning, fresh newspapers and journals fall into his hands again and he sees: the poems they publish are a hundred times worse than his, a thousand times worse than his' (E 109). In part, Wentzl's thoughts are self-aware and not always delusional — when he speaks of newspapers and journals, he is clearly mindful that to be a recognized poet one needs to be a participant in those institutions of literary life. Only two people respect Wentzl's

work — *der horiker moler*, 'the hairy painter', Babo, who is Wentzl's neighbour, and the critic Dr Mer who praised them as *geoynish*, 'brilliant'. While a model of readership is set up in this story, it is a mockery of what is usually understood by 'readership':

Nor der horiker moler Babo iz aleyn oykh, punkt vi Ventsl, nisht onerkent nisht fun kolegn moler un nisht fun kritiker; er hot keynmol gornisht oysgeshtelt un gornisht farkoyft. Ale zayne bilder hengen oyf zayn boydem, vi meysim, vos viln nokhn toyt esn... Anshtot tsu gebn zey esn, shmirt zey Babo ale mol iber mit naye farbn.

Un der kritiker, doktor Mer, iz nokh tsurik mit a yor dray geshtorbn fun a poplektsye. Akhuts dem, vos er hot zikh fun tsayt tsu tsayt basheftikt mit kritik, hot er nokh gehat a bakteriologicalshn kabinet un iz in lebn geven a filosof. (Y 196)

[But Babo the hairy painter is also alone, just like Wentzl. Babo is not recognized — not by his fellow painters and not by critics. He has never exhibited his work and never sold anything. All his paintings are in his garret, like corpses that want to eat after death... Instead of feeding them, Babo keeps smearing more pigments over them.

And the critic, Dr Mer, died of a stroke some three years ago. Aside from writing criticism every now and then, he'd had a bacteriological lab and he'd been a philosopher in life.] (E 109-10)

Wentzl is, as a Russian saying has it, famous in narrow circles, which provide nothing that is necessary for one to be recognized as a writer. Though not stated in terms as strictly literary as in 'Mit eyn nakht veyniker', the young terrorist's struggles to achieve what is usually meant by recognition are as clearly implied in 'Tsvishn emigrantn'.

There, Berel Zhum, the terrorist's *landsmen*, serves as a kind of reader for the young man's tale about the pogromist.²⁷ As the young man sees it, he needs something that can only be provided by a like-minded person, someone with whom he shares a language as well as a history of living in the same geographical locale, far from hostile and inhospitable Berlin. But Berel, on to whom the young man initially projects these expectations of faithfulness and understanding, ends up more closely resembling the wealthy Jews in the young man's parable, betraying his trust and trying to screen him from the eyes of others so that he does not become a threat to Jews like himself and the Pinskys who are rapidly acculturating to German society. Translated into the terms of literary institutions, the young man's authorial intentions are not met by his readership: the Berlin reader is no longer the same reader known to the author back home. On foreign soil, accepted communication codes between author and reader break down to the extent that the former no longer produces any work meaningful to the latter; the reader, once familiarly imagined and sound of understanding, is simply no longer there.

Read this way, 'Tsvishn emigrantn' permits us to see Bergelson's Berlin as a space of uncertainty in which familiar models of interaction between displaced persons — and between displaced writers and readers — fail. On the surface, the frame narrator is the figure that appears most identifiable with Bergelson himself, who dispassionately observes the disintegration of these relations but remains unwilling

to engage with the task of reintegrating them. In reality, however, the frame narrator's fear — and the fear of Bergelson himself — is that this story is driven by identification with the figure of the terrorist. The fact that only such unreceptive people as Berel Zhum are left of his once-familiar familiar readership must have been disconcerting to Bergelson, who had always been acutely aware of wishing for a certain kind of public to engage with his texts. Lurking beneath the surface of the story is Bergelson's own dread, projected on to his protagonist, of one day slipping from his hard-won status as a successful professional author to the level of a mad vagabond who creates stories that he foolishly believes to be useful to people. Above all else, the suicide of the young man in the story is the artistic suicide of a writer who realizes that his language no longer serves him, that his works are no longer read, that he has been left isolated and alone. But while Bergelson's frame narrator in 'Tsvishn emigrantn' can impassively observe this kind of termination of an implied literary career and a literary imagination, Bergelson himself seeks other creative ways out of the mire of interminable displacement.

At the end of Viktor Shklovsky's experimental epistolary novel *Zoo, ili pis'ma ne o liubvi* (*Zoo, or letters not about love*), written in Berlin in 1923, comes a dramatic break in the pattern of letters exchanged between the narrator and Alya, the woman he is in love with. The addressee is no longer Alya, the disguised Elsa Triolet — Shklovsky's love interest during the time of his Berlin exile — but the Central Committee of the Communist Party:

Don't be surprised that this letter follows some letters written to a woman. I'm not getting a love affair involved in this matter. The woman I was writing to never existed [...] Alya is the actualization of a metaphor. I invented a woman and love in order to make a book about misunderstanding, about alien people, about an alien land. I want to go back to Russia [...] I raise my arm and surrender.²⁸

Doubting that Shklovsky's letter should be taken at face value as a direct appeal to the Party for forgiveness and permission to return, Peter Steiner none the less notes that 'if from the aesthetic standpoint *Zoo's* erotic discourse turns out to be merely the motivation connecting its smaller segments (the letters) into a unified work, from the political standpoint the whole novel might be viewed as a pretext for mercy'.²⁹ Numerous critics, Steiner included, warn against such reading of the text. Svetlana Boym cautions the reader who is likely to be led astray:

In the last letter of *Zoo*, addressed to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Shklovsky declares that the addressee of his prior correspondence, Alya, was not a real person, but only 'a realization of a metaphor'. The 'woman of European culture' is killed in fiction. But the vertiginous ironies and metamorphoses of the text leave us wondering whether the 'Central Committee of the Communist Party' is also only a metaphor.³⁰

The letter to the Party embedded in a fictional narrative becomes, on one hand, a kind of alibi for the writer's departure from Russia while on the other hand, it calls attention to itself as a manifesto that questions the author's stated intention to return to the Soviet Union. For most of the book, Shklovsky's self-imposed moratorium on writing about love fails as the work itself becomes, in Steiner's words, 'the most

typical work of world literature. For according to Shklovsky's theory, artistic works are conglomerates of devices — irreducible monads of artistic form that migrate freely from work to work'.³¹ Shklovsky's letter to the Party, both fictional and non-fictional at the same time, then forms part of something similar to letters intended, but also not intended, to be about love. The letter to the Party, too, is not merely a literary text, but also a text at the core of which, as in the love letters, is the displaced writer's relation to his exile, a space in which his loneliness and disconnectedness from his language and country fuse into a longing for return. 'Alya' may have provided a formal motivation for writing the letters not about love; 'the Party' is the new addressee that provides a motivation for a much-desired return.

The key to reading such texts, it seems, lies in the flexibility of defining what constitutes the notion of text in the first place. Roland Barthes famously observed in his essay 'From Work to Text' that

[...] work is concrete, occupying a portion of a book-space (in a library, for example); the Text, on the other hand, is a methodological field [...] While the work is held in the hand, the Text is held in language: it exists only as discourse. The Text is not the decomposition of the work; rather it is the work that is the Text's imaginary tail. In other words, the Text is experienced only in an activity, a production. It follows that the Text cannot stop, at the end of a library shelf, for example; the constitutive movement of the Text is a traversal: it can cut across a work, several works.³²

In Shklovsky's *Zoo*, the ambivalent attitude to the city of Berlin, the discomfort of exile, and the wish to return to Russia constitute 'the Text', while the letters (not) about love, as well as the letter addressed to the Communist Party, are works that are 'the Text's imaginary tail[s]'. The addressees are mixed, and so are the fictional and non-fictional modes of the letters. The Text of exile and longing traverses many constitutive elements linked together by the larger motivation of wishing to return to an abandoned homeland.

Bergelson's decision to support the Soviet cause through his art has been perceived by critics as not genuine. Seth Wolitz, for example, writes that

In style and content [...] Bergelson's art was not for the working classes; it spoke to the children of the Russian-Jewish bourgeoisie in a staid and affluent world, and when that world collapsed, Bergelson had in fact lost his readership. He was undone in his desperate bid to find a new identity as a writer, since all his attempts were never really successful.³³

However, to avoid, after Michael Bernstein, the problem of foreshadowing the writer's demise — one that that could not have been foreseen during Bergelson's Berlin exile — it is sideshadowing, attentive to multiple possibilities of the text, which appears important here:

Sideshadowing's attention to the unfulfilled or unrealized possibilities of the past is a way of disrupting the affirmations of a triumphalist, unidirectional view in which whatever has perished is condemned because it has been found wanting by some irresistible historico-logical dynamic. Against foreshadowing [...] sideshadowing stresses the significance of random, haphazard, and inassimilable contingencies, and instead of the power of a system to uncover

an otherwise unfathomable truth, it expresses the ever-changing nature of that truth and the absence of any predictable certainties in human affairs.³⁴

I suggest in conclusion that Bergelson's 1926 essay 'Dray tsentren'³⁵ can be read as part of his larger Berlin text. I should like to read Bergelson's essay in a manner akin to Shklovsky's letter to the Communist Party — as a work striving to be at one and the same time a non-fictional narrative that defines itself on the basis of stating a newly accepted ideology, and a work that solves the larger concerns of the exilic Berlin text in a kind of concealed fictional form that only pretends to be non-fiction.

In 'Dray tsentren', Bergelson dismisses the American centre of Yiddish letters as unviable because it is in the hands of 'allrightniks' and is subject to assimilation. In Poland, Bergelson argues, neither Zionism nor Orthodoxy is concerned about the immediate problems of Polish Jewry. Only in Soviet Russia, he claims, does the Jewish intelligentsia have the closest connection with the Jewish working class: *fun azelkher mamoshediker un gliklikher farbindung mit yidishe masn hot der beserer yidisher intelligent yornlang nor gekholemt*, 'for years, the superior Jewish intellectual could only dream of such a substantial and fortunate union with the Jewish masses'.³⁶ However disingenuous these words might sound to those who enjoy the comfort of critical hindsight, I propose that they be understood as part of the same narrative space in which the writer-narrator of 'Tsvishn emigrantn' doubts the ability of the Yiddish writer to exist in exile, and appears to witness the complete collapse of his purpose in an environment without a dedicated reading public. The author of 'Dray tsentren' who professes faith in the new state and its ideology that would permit him to continue as a published writer and an active participant in the literary process is not all that different from the writer-narrator of 'Tsvishn emigrantn' who exists in the volatile space of exile, in which all familiar frameworks have failed and all allegiances need to be questioned anew.³⁷

Notes to Chapter 6

1. 'No Eastern Jew goes to Berlin out of his own free will. Who in the world goes to Berlin voluntarily? Berlin is a through-station, where, given worthwhile reasons, one might stay longer.' Joseph Roth, 'Die westlichen Gettos — Berlin' in *Einmal Ku'damm und zurück. Das große Berlin-Lesebuch*, ed. by Holger Wolandt (Munich: Knauer, 2003), p. 204, my translation.
2. S. M. Dubnov, *Kniga zhizni. Vospominaniia i razmysleniia. Materialy dlia istorii moego vremeni* [The book of life. Reminiscences and contemplations. Materials for the history of my time] (St Petersburg: Peterburgskoe vostokovedenie, 1998), p. 488, my translation.
3. Heather Valencia, 'Yiddish Writers in Berlin, 1920–1936' in *The German-Jewish Dilemma From the Enlightenment to the Shoah*, ed. Edward Timms and Andrea Hammel (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1999), p. 196.
4. For comprehensive information on Yiddish publishing in Weimar Berlin, see Leo Fuks and Renate Fuks, 'Yiddish Publishing Activities in the Weimar Republic, 1920–1933', *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book 33* (1988), 417–34.
5. Dubnov, *Kniga zhizni*, p. 515.
6. Roman Jakobson, 'Linguistics and Poetics', in *Language in Literature* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 66.
7. William Mills Todd III, *Fiction and Society in the Age of Pushkin: Ideology, Institutions and Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 48.
8. Arthur Tilo Alt, 'The Berlin Milgroym Group and Modernism', *Yiddish 6.1* (1985), 35.

9. Delphine Bechtel, 'Berlin as Center of Jewish Modernism', in *Insiders and Outsiders. Jewish and Gentile Culture in Germany and Austria*, ed. by Dagmar C. G. Lorenz and Gabrielle Weinberger (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), p. 121.
10. Israel Rubin, 'Bay di tishlekh fun Romanishn kafe', *Literarische bleter*, 10 January 1930, 28, my translation.
11. Michael Brenner, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 202.
12. William Mills Todd III, 'Dostoyevsky as a Professional Writer', in *The Cambridge Companion to Dostoyevsky*, ed. by W. J. Leatherbarrow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 66–67.
13. Fuks and Fuks, 'Yiddish Publishing Activities', p. 431.
14. Avrom Novershtern, 'Hundert yor Dovid Bergelson: materialn tsu zayn lebn un shafn', *Di goldene keyt*, 115 (1985), 57.
15. Joseph Sherman, 'From Isolation to Entrapment: Bergelson and the Party Line, 1919–1927', *Slavic Almanac: The South African Year Book for Slavic, Central and East European Studies*, 6.9 (2000), 195–222.
16. The story was first anthologized in *Shturemteg*, vol. v of David Bergelson, *Ale verk* (Vilna: Kletskin, 1929), pp. 173–99. All Yiddish citations in this essay are from this edition, to which page references in parentheses, after the letter Y, refer. An English translation of the story is included in David G. Roskies (ed.), *The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1988), pp. 263–74. The most recent English version appears as 'Among Refugees' in *The Shadows of Berlin*, trans. by Joachim Neugroschel (San Francisco: City Lights Press, 2005), pp. 21–43, from which all translations are taken, and to which page numbers in parentheses, after the letter E, refer.
17. Dafna Clifford, 'From Exile to Exile: Bergelson's Berlin Years', in *Yiddish and the Left*, ed. by Gennady Estrakh and Mikhail Krutikov (Oxford: Legenda, 2001), p. 253.
18. The story reads particularly interestingly in the light of the assassination in Paris of Symon Petliura, a Ukrainian nationalist thought to be indirectly responsible for the devastating pogroms of 1919–20, by a Jew, Shalom Schwarzbard, in 1926, a few years after Bergelson's story was written. Another of Bergelson's seven Berlin stories, 'Tsvey rotskhim' (Two murderers), deals with the aftermath of the pogroms in Ukraine by providing a sketch of a former pogromist, Anton Zarembo, who has escaped to Berlin and makes his living there by performing in a Ukrainian band. In Bergelson's short story, Zarembo is compared to the second murderer of the story — his German landlady's vicious dog Tel, who kills a small child. See David Bergelson, 'Tsvey rotskhim', in *Ale verk*, vi: *Velt-oys velt-ayn* (Vilna: Kletskin, 1930), pp. 203–12; English version as 'Two Murderers' in Joachim Neugroschel, *The Shadows of Berlin*, pp. 1–8.
19. Valencia, 'Yiddish Writers in Berlin', pp. 198–99.
20. David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse. Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 147.
21. Delphine Bechtel, 'Dovid Bergelsons Berliner Erzählungen. Ein vergessenes Kapitel der jiddischen Literatur', in *Jiddische Philologie. Festschrift für Erika Timm*, ed. by Walter Röhl and Simon Neuberger (Tübingen: Max Niemer Verlag, 1990), p. 263, my translation.
22. For a memorable portrayal of émigré life in Berlin boarding-houses in the 1920s, see Vladimir Nabokov's first novel, *Mashen'ka* (*Mary*). Although the protagonists of that novel are Russian-speaking exiles, at least one of them can be read for her implied Jewishness. Bergelson himself sets one of his seven Berlin stories inside a boarding-house: David Bergelson, 'In pansyon fun di dray shvester', in *Ale verk*, vi: *Velt-oys velt-ayn* (Vilna: Kletskin, 1930), pp. 99–111, English translations as 'The Boarding House of the Three Sisters' in Neugroschel, pp. 45–55 and 'In the Boardinghouse', trans. by Joseph Sherman in *Beautiful as the Moon, Radiant as the Stars*, ed. by Sandra Bark (New York: Warner Books, 2003), pp. 247–58.
23. All Yiddish citations from this story, with page numbers after the letter Y in the text of this essay, refer to Sholem Aleykhem, 'An eytse', in *Ale verk fun Sholem Aleykhem*, xxiv: *Monologn* (Vilna-Warsaw: Kletskin, 1926), pp. 73–91. English translation as 'Advice' in Sholem Aleichem, *Nineteen to the Dozen. Monologues and Bits and Bobs of Other Things*, trans. by Ted Gorelick

- (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1998), pp. 59–72, to which page numbers in parentheses after the letter E refer.
24. Isaac Bashevis Singer, 'The Cafeteria', *The Penguin Collected Stories of Isaac Bashevis Singer* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982; 1988), pp. 287–300. Page numbers in parentheses refer to this edition. Since Singer's stories are most readily accessible in their official English translations, I refer only to the English text.
 25. Valencia, 'Yiddish Writers in Berlin', p. 198.
 26. David Bergelson 'Mit eyn nakht veyniker', first collected in *Ale Verk*, vi: *Velt-oyt velt-ayn* (Vilna: Kletskin, 1928; 1930), pp. 187–202; English translation 'One night less' in Neugroschel, pp. 103–16. Citations from these two texts appear in parentheses after the letters Y and E respectively.
 27. The Yiddish word *zhum* means 'buzz, hum', the irritating and (to humans) meaningless sound made by insects; as an onomastic it is chosen to emphasize the character's lack of receptivity as a potential 'reader'. Additionally Berel Zhum is also a figure connected to professional letters. We learn that the character's real name is Boris Blum, and that 'Zhum' is a nickname given to him because back in the terrorist's home town *er hot fun tomid on gezhumet bay di tsionistn un hot geshribn in zeyere rusishe tsaytungn*. [...] *er hot do in oysland zikh shoyn tsugeshart tsu a por daytshishe tsaytungn un shraybt in zey* (Y 190), 'he was always buzzing around the Zionists and writing for their Russian newspapers. [...] He's already ingratiated himself with the editors of a few German gazettes, and now he's writing for them' (E 35). Berel Zhum is presented as a character who easily switches political allegiances for the sake of professional employment as a journalist and for monetary gain.
 28. Viktor Shklovsky, *Zoo, or the Letters Not About Love*, trans. and ed. by R. Sheldon (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971), pp. 103–04.
 29. Peter Steiner, 'The Praxis of Irony: Viktor Shklovsky's Zoo', in *Russian Formalism: A Retrospective Glance. A Festschrift in Honor of Victor Erlich*, ed. by Robert Louis Jackson and Stephen Rudy (New Haven: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1985), p. 33.
 30. Svetlana Boym, 'Estrangement as a Lifestyle: Shklovsky and Brodsky', in *Exile and Creativity: Signposts, Travelers, Outsiders, Backward Glances*, ed. by Susan Rubin Suleiman (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 249.
 31. Steiner, 'The Praxis of Irony', p. 32.
 32. Roland Barthes, 'From Work to Text', in *Textual Strategies. Perspectives in Post-structuralist Criticism*, ed. by Josue V. Harari (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), pp. 74–75.
 33. Seth L. Wolitz, 'The Power of Style. A Tribute to David Bergelson', *Jewish Affairs*, 52.3 (1997), 131.
 34. Michael André Bernstein, *Foregone Conclusions. Against Apocalyptic History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 3–4.
 35. David Bergelson, 'Dray tsentren', *In shpan*, pp. 84–96. An English translation appears as Appendix B in the present volume.
 36. Bergelson, *In shpan*, p. 91.
 37. I should like to thank Gennady Estraikh for contributing valuable bibliographical information at the early stages of this project, and Marc Caplan, Ruth R. Wisse, and Joseph Sherman for reading versions of this essay and contributing their comments. I am grateful to William Mills Todd III in whose seminar 'Literature as Institutions' the earliest idea of this project originated. I thank Steven J. Zipperstein for suggesting that Dubnov's memoirs would contribute valuable details about the Russian-Jewish scene in inter-war Berlin. Many additional ideas about the project emerged in conversations with Harriet Murav during the Association for Jewish Studies conference in December 2005 and the Russian-Jewish Studies workshop she organized at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in June 2006. I am grateful to Liora Halperin for her editorial help and support.

David Bergelson
From Modernism to Socialist Realism



EDITED BY

JOSEPH SHERMAN AND GENNADY ESTRAIKH



David Bergelson, Kiev, 1915



LEGENDA

Studies in Yiddish 6

Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing

2007

London, UK

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