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## **THE DEVELOPMENT OF YIDDISH LITERATURE IN ODESSA IN THE 1920S – 1930S**

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### **Abstract**

*Soviet literature in Yiddish contributed to the education of the Jewish population of the Ukrainian SSR. The Yiddish literature supported the socialist education of Jewish workers. The education of Jewish workers needed literature in Yiddish to combat religious, nationalist and Zionist prejudices. At the same time, it contributed to an atheistic and internationalist worldview. Odessa Jewish writers in Yiddish found a certain freedom of expression in their expression of patriotic feelings, life-affirming lyric poetry, descriptions of their historical past and faith in a better future. Through such creative themes, Odessa Yiddish writers turned successful. Until the end of the 1930s, many of their works often followed the spirit of «socialist realism», while partially reflecting the reality. At present, these works document that period. Soviet Jewish Literature in Yiddish in the 1920s-1930s experienced a revival, yet many writers associated with this period either stopped writing during the Stalinist terror of the 1930s, died in World War II, or became victims of post-war repression. After that, many of them were under the control of the Communist Party and could only work along the «socialist realism». With few exceptions, some of them emigrated to other countries. This paper presents the most remarkable writers in Odessa during this decade; in order to provide this overview, I have used periodicals, archival sources and various scholarly contributions.*

**Keywords:** Soviet Jewish Literature; Yiddish; Odessa; proletarian writers; Jewish proletarian literary organizations.

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### **1. Introduction**

Odessa is one of the centers of Jewish literature, the traditions of which in the middle of the 19th century founded by Osip Rabinovich, continued by Semyon Yushkevich, Wolf Zhabotinsky, Isaac Babel and others. Jewish literature flourished in Odessa in two languages – Yiddish and Russian. The well-structured education system contributed to the emergence of a wide circle of active readers and made Odessa irresistibly attractive to intellectuals, including writers. The latter created literary circles, genuine centers of Jewish literature. The 1920s and 1930s were no exception, when young representatives of the Jewish literary guild started writing in Yiddish.

Many writers began their career in Odessa, having arrived in South Palmyra quite young in the 1920s – 1930s. Once they completed their education, they taught or engaged in social activities and then moved on to literature. They started writing, publishing their works in Yiddish. Most of the writers writing in Yiddish accepted the ideas of the socialist revolution, so their literary activity was closely

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connected with the ideology of the Soviet regime. When they joined proletarian writers, they supported the establishment of the Soviet system and their work impacted the Yiddish Soviet literature.

Yiddish literature experienced an unprecedented development in the 1920s – 1930s. In their works, young Soviet Jewish writers presented joyful scenes, and poets wrote patriotic lyrics; they showed genuine compassion for the fate of the Jewish people and sincere faith in the bright future of the working people. In the middle of 1930s, proletarian literary organizations, including Jewish ones, came to an abrupt end. In the late 1980s, the number of scholars interested in the study of Yiddish literature raised significantly, some of them being interested in the period of the 1920s – 1930s. Despite ongoing research by individual authors on the history of Soviet literature in Yiddish in Odessa, today there are no studies that would partially reflect some aspects of this topic. From this point of view, I aim to use various original materials from the funds of the State Archives of the Odessa Region, to highlight the main stages in the history of Soviet literature in Yiddish in Odessa with markers.

## 2. Chapter 2. Young Representatives of Soviet Jewish Literature in Yiddish

In general, the article concerns the biographies and works of the «Odessa» period of young representatives of Soviet Jewish literature in Yiddish, in whose lives the literary environment of Odessa in the 1920s – 1930s played an important role; however, today, many of these names are hardly familiar.<sup>2</sup>

### Subchapter 2.1

The writer *Sholom Alek* (real name Srolyuk, 1888–1956) was born in the town of Khorosh, Grodno province. In the early 1930s, he managed the editorial office of the Odessa newspaper “Дэр одэсэр арбэтэр” (“Одесский рабочий”) – “Der odeser arbiter” (“Odessa worker”). His first story “Шэйнэ традыцыес” (“Sheine traditions”) – was published in 1930 in “Проліт” (“Пролетарская литература”) – “Prolit” (“Proletarian Literature”) literary review. It was a chapter from the book “Фармэктэ вэґн” (“Зачеркнутые пути”) – “Farmekte vegn” (“Crossed-out Paths”), published in 1932, with the subtitle “Зихройнэс фун а гэвээзнэ анархист” (“Воспоминания бывшего анархиста”) – “Zihroines fun a gevezene anarchist” (“Memoirs of a Former Anarchist”). In 1931, his reportage series “Ибэргэбурт” (“Ibergeburt”) came out. In 1932, in parallel with “Фармэктэ вэґн” (“Farmekte Wegn”), the book “Ин онгли” (“В накале”) – “In Ongli” (“In the Heat”) was published with the same subtitle. As an editor of newspapers in Yiddish and the author of numerous articles, he contributed to reforming the language; was a supporter of its enrichment at the expense of Slavisms, but received a serious rebuff from the participants of the All-Ukrainian Language Conference (Kyiv, May 7–14, 1934). Perhaps this is what affected his loss of the post of editor and the subsequent closure of the newspaper “Дэр одэсэр арбатэр” (“Одесский рабочий”) – “Der odeser arbiter” (“Odessa worker”) (Encyclopedia Britannica).

The poet *Chaim Bader* (1920–2003) was born in the village of Kupel, Vinnytsia region. In 1933, he graduated from the local Jewish seven-year school and the next year he enrolled at the Odessa Jewish Pedagogical College, then transferred to the last year of the Zhitomir Jewish Pedagogical Workers’ Faculty. After graduating from the proletarian faculty in 1936, he joined the philological faculty of the Jewish sector of the Odessa Pedagogical Institute. In 1933, he made his debut with a poem in the central Jewish children’s newspaper “Зай грейт” (“Будь готов!”) – “Zai great” (“Be ready!”), then published in the newspapers “Юнге гвардие” (“Молодая гвардия”) – “Junge Guard” (“Young Guard”), “Дэр Штерн” (“Звезда”) – “Der Stern” (“Star”), “Дэр Эмес” (“Правда”) – “Der Emes” (“Pravda”), “Эйникайт” (“Единство”) – “Einikait” (“Unity”), in the magazine “Советиш геймланд” (“Советская родина”) – “Sovetish Gameland” (“Soviet Motherland”) and other publications (Kudish, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> I would like to thank for the permission granted to use photographs of the following Yiddish writers: Sholem Aleichem, Archives of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York; Shimon Goldenberg and Aron-Abram Katsev, Encyclopedia of Modern Ukraine; Aizik Huberman, website <http://odessa-memory.info/index.php?id=468>.

Jewish literature historian **Shloyme Bilov** (1888–1949) worked from 1924 as lecturer in the Jewish department of the Odessa Institute of Public Education (1924-1930), the Odessa Jewish Proletarian University (1926) and the Odessa Jewish Pedagogical College (1927). One of his lectures was on Jewish literature. In addition to his native language, he was fluent in Russian, Ukrainian and English (writing and speaking), French (writing and reading), Scandinavian languages (reading and translation) and German. At the Odessa Institute of Public Education, he conducted active scientific research on the history and culture of Jews. He was the head of an advanced seminar on the history of Jewish culture, opened in the 1927/28 academic year and a member of the Odessa section of the research department of Jewish culture of the All-Ukrainian Academy of Sciences at the Odessa Institute of Public Education. Since 1936, he worked at the Cabinet of the Jewish Language, Literature and Folklore of the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. There, he mainly studied the history of Jewish literature. The main object of research was the Jewish writer, playwright, one of the founders of modern fiction in Yiddish – Sholom Aleichem (Levchenko, 2009, 48-49).

The poet and prose writer **Iosif Bukhbinder** (1908–1993) was born into a carpenter's family in the town of Chernyakhov, Volyn province. In 1925, he completed secondary studies in a Jewish school for working youth for 7 years. Then, he worked for more than a year and a half as a shoemaker in a workshop in Zhytomyr. Based on registration via the shoemakers' trade union, he joined the Odessa Jewish Pedagogical College, from which he graduated in 1929. He published his first poems in 1927 in the Kharkov magazine “Ди роите велт” (“Красный мир”) – “Di roite velt” (“Red World”). He also published articles in Yiddish in Soviet periodicals. After graduating from a technical school, he was a teacher of Jewish language and literature in one of the schools in Kamenetz-Podolsk. The first book of poems, most of which was written in the “Odessa» period of life, was published in 1930 (Bukhbinder, 1991, 322–335).

The prose writer and literary critic **Irme Drucker** (1906–1982) was born in Chernobyl into a poor religious family. In 1923, he joined the vocal department of the Kyiv School of Music; then, in 1929 started the Odessa Institute of Public Education (the student's personal file was not found in the State Archive of the Odessa Region), from which, after reorganization, he graduated as the Odessa Institute of Social Education. He became the head of the literary part of the Odessa State Jewish Theater and he later moved to the newspaper “Дэр одэсэр арбэтэр” (“Одесский рабочий”) – “Der odeser arbiter” (“Odessa worker”) as the head of the literature department. From that moment, he decided to engage in literature even if his first publications dated back to 1926, when he created stories and essays, as well as biographical notes about Sholom Aleichem. In 1929, his first book of stories about Jewish settlers in the Kherson steppes, «В степи» «In the Steppe», came out in Kharkov. At the same time, he published several short stories about Mendel Moikher-Sforim and worked on the first part of the novel “Клезмер” (“Музыканты”) – “Klezmer” (“Musicians”), dedicated to the outstanding Odessa musician and teacher PS Stolyarsky. The book was published in 1940 (it was translated into Russian at the same time) and became the most famous work of the author (Melnichenko, 2001, 10-11).

The literary critic **Moishe Dubilet** (1897–1941) was born in the village of Dmitrovka, Alexandria district, Kherson province, in the family of a tailor. From the age of 6 he attended cheder, then he joined the yeshivot. From 1914, he went to pedagogical courses in Odessa. After the revolution, he moved to Elisavetgrad, teaching the Talmud Torah, and, then, from 1923, he taught at the central labor school in Vinnitsa. In the autumn of 1923, he enrolled at the Vinnitsa Institute of Public Education, which was dissolved in January 1924. Then, the Podolsky Provincial Trade Union decided that first year students of this institute were transferred to the Odessa Institute of Public Education. Therefore, in a statement on January 30, 1924, M. Dubilet asked to enroll him and other Vinnitsa fellow students as first-year students of the Jewish department of the Faculty of Social Education in the Odessa Institute of Public Education. In between June 23, 1924 to June 28, 1927, having successfully passed 14 tests (he got “A” grades only for three subjects – the theory of the universe, physiological psychology, Jewish language and literature), he graduated from the university (SAOR, file 2130). In 1928, he became a graduate student of the Odessa section of the Department of Jewish Culture of the All-Ukrainian Academy of Sciences. This section was operational from 1928 to 1930, while the Department of Jewish Culture of the All-Ukrainian Academy of Sciences ran in between 1926-1929. In 1930, the section was closed, so

he moved to the graduate school of the Institute of Jewish Proletarian Culture of the All-Ukrainean Academy of Sciences. He defended his dissertation in philological sciences, focusing on David Bergelson. He was a researcher at the Institute of Jewish Culture in 1930–1941. He prepared the works of the classics of Jewish literature for publication. In 1924, he began to publish articles on literature and reviews of the works of Jewish classics and contemporary writers. In the 1930s, his articles were published in the newspapers “Дэр Штерн” (“Звезда”) – “Der Stern” (“Star”) and “Дэр Эмес” (“Правда”) – “Der Emes” (“Pravda”), the journals “Фармест” (“Farmest”), “Советише литератур” (“Советская литература”) – “Soviet Literature” (“Soviet Literature”). In 1939, he worked at the Cabinet of the Jewish Language, Literature and Folklore of the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, where he was engaged in the study and publication of the literary heritage of the classics of Jewish literature. He published the collection “Критише артиклей” (“Критические заметки”) – “Kritishe Articles” (“Critical Notes”), which included articles “Исроэль Аксенфельд” (“Isroel Axenfeld”), “Основные черты реализма Шолом-Алейхема” (“The Main Features of Realism Sholom-Aleichem”), “Как работал Шолом-Алейхем” (“How Sholom Aleichem worked”) (Russian Jewish Encyclopedia). A collection of his articles was



published in Ukrainian in the 1970s, in

The poet and prose writer **Shimon Goldenberg** (1910–1941) was born in the town of Kupel, Volyn Province, into a large family of an artisan. In his youth, he was supported by sisters who worked as hatters. He worked part-time in Jewish reading huts as a cadet of the newspaper “Юнге гвардие” (“Молодая гвардия”) – “Junge Guard” (“Young Guard”). In 1927, he joined the Jewish department of the Faculty of Social Education in the Odessa Institute of Public Education without getting a certificate, because he completed his secondary education privately. He graduated from the institute in 1930, when, at the start of his fourth year, one day on May 30, 1930, he received grades for 11 subjects (SAOR, file 1766). By the end of the 1920s, he started writing his first poems in Yiddish.

He was a member of the Odessa literary group “Юнге гвардие” (“Junge guard”), he published poems in the newspapers “Дэр одэсэр арбэтэр” (“Одесский рабочий”) – “Der odeser arbiter” (“Odessa worker”), “Дэр бэрдичэвэр арбэтэр” (“Бердичевский рабочий”) – “Der berdichevar arbiter” (“Berdichevsky worker”), “Дэр Штэрн” (“Звезда”) – “Der Shtern” (“Star”), “Октябэр” (“Октябрь”) – “Oktyaber” (“October”), etc. After graduating in 1930 from the Odessa Institute of Public Education, he worked as a teacher in Balta. In 1931, he moved to Kharkov, where in 1932 the publishing house “Литератур ун кунст” (“Literatur un-Kunst”) published his first collection of poems “Ин умру гебойрене” (“В тревогу рожденные”) – “In Umru Gebeurene” (“Born in Anxiety”). In 1936, the collection “Лидер ун баладес” (“Стихи и баллады”) – “Leader un ballads” (“Poems and ballads”), and in 1938, the book of stories “Геймланд” (“Родина”) – “Heimland” (“Motherland”) [12]. All literary work expresses love for the motherland.



Playwright and literary critic **Oizer Goldesheim** (1900–1966) was born in Chişinău in the family of a watchmaker. He studied at a Jewish school, then at a Russian gymnasium in Berdichev, where from the age of 19 he worked as a teacher in a labor school. In 1924, he entered the Jewish department of the Faculty of Social Education of the Odessa Institute of Public Education (SAOR, file 1762). After graduation, he worked as a teacher in Kharkov and Kyiv. In 1935–1936, he was a researcher at the Institute of Jewish Proletarian Culture of the All-Ukrainian Academy of Sciences. During the “Odessa” period in his life, he made his debut in poetry in 1927, but he soon got interested in literary criticism, journalism and the study of the classics in Jewish literature and contemporary writers. He published articles on Jewish literature, folklore, and the works of Sholom Aleichem. His plays “А Идишер Солдат” (“Еврейский солдат”, 1938) – “A Yidisher Soldier” (“Jewish Soldier”, 1938), “Андэрэ Мэнчн” (“Другие люди”, 1948) – “Andere Manchn” (“Other People”, 1948) and one-act scenes were staged in Jewish and Ukrainian theaters (Russian Jewish Encyclopedia).

The poet and novelist **Avram Gontar** (1908–1981) was born in Berdichev into a family of a bricklayer. In the late 1920s, he graduated from the Jewish Department of the Faculty of Social Education of the Odessa Institute of Public Education and then continued with postgraduate studies at the Institute of Jewish Proletarian Culture of the All-Ukrainian Academy of Sciences. Then he went to work for the Kyiv magazine “Советише литератур” (“Советская литература”) – “Sovetish Literature” (“Soviet Literature”). He published his first poems in 1927 in the Berdichev newspaper “Ди вох” (“Неделя”) – “Di voh” (“Week”). In 1933, he was appointed member of the editorial board and executive secretary of the *Farmest* magazine and published the first collection of poems, “Аф рещтованиес” (“На строительных лесах”) – “Af Reshtovanes” (“On the Scaffolding”). In total, more than 20 collections of poetry and several books of prose were published (Russian Jewish Encyclopedia, 1994, 344).

The novelist and playwright **Ele Gordon** (1907–1989) was born into a peasant family in the Jewish agricultural colony Zelenopol, Yekaterinoslav Governorate. As his parents died, he was brought up in an orphanage in Berdyansk in 1920. In between 1923–1924, he studied at the Yekaterinoslav vocational school of metalworkers. As a representative of the Jewish section, he agitated the Jews to engaged in reforms. In 1924–1925, worked as an educator in a children’s colony in the village of Inhulets, Krivoy Rog district. In 1927, after graduating from the Jewish department of the working faculty of the Odessa Institute of Public Education, he enrolled in the Literary Faculty of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Moscow State University, from which he graduated in 1931. In 1931–1932, he was the head of the literary part of the Interdistrict Collective Farm Theater in the Dnepropetrovsk region. Since 1936, he switched entirely to literature.

His first story, “Вилдгроз” (“Бурьян”) – “Wildgroz” (“Weeds”), in the version of the translation into Russian “В степи” (“In the Steppe”), was published in the Kharkov magazine “Ди роитэ вэлт” (“Красный мир”) – “Di roite welt” (“Red World”). In 1930, the first two books “Вилдгроз” (“Wildgroz”), “Аф гринэр эрд” (“На зеленой ниве”) – “Af griner erd” (“On the green field”) were published. In his early works and a number of stories, he was one of the first to turn to the subject of Jewish farmers, which was almost never found in pre-revolutionary Jewish literature. He suggestively depicted the life, customs, psychology of Jewish peasants and described the social processes of development of the Jewish village (Gordon Ilya, 2013, 370-371).

The novelist *Yashe Grubian* (1911–1979) was born in the town of Yustingrad, Lipovetsky district, Kyiv province. From 1934, he studied at the Faculty of History of the Odessa Pedagogical Institute; from 1937, he worked as a teacher. He published his first story in 1935. He published comical stories and essays in the magazine “Советиш геймланд” (“Советская родина”) – “Sovetish Gameland” (“Soviet Motherland”). The collection of short stories “Нехтн ун гайнт” (“Вчера и сегодня”) – “Nekhtn un gaynt” (“Yesterday and Today”) was published in Moscow in 1981.

The poet *Motl Hartsman* (1909–1943) was born in Berdichev into the large family of an artisan. He began writing poetry from childhood. In the late 1920s, he studied at the Odessa Jewish Pedagogical College, from which he graduated with honors in 1931. In the same year, without exams, he was enrolled in the third year of the Jewish department of the Faculty of Literature of Moscow State University, from which he graduated in 1933, and in 1936 – postgraduate studies at the Institute Jewish proletarian culture of the All-Ukrainian Academy of Sciences. His first works came out in 1926. In 1929, his first collection, “Мы сильнейшие” (“We Are the Strongest”), was published. During his life he wrote 12 books. The poet’s works display a mix of of patriotic and love lyrics. In 1955, a book of poetry was published, translated into Ukrainian (Kostritsya, 2005, 132).

Poet *Shmuel Helmond* (1907–1941) at the Odessa Jewish Literary Olympus of the 1930s had a very modest place: his quiet voice was not very often heard at loud literary meetings. He was born in Vladimir-Volynsky in the family of a teacher. He was interested in poetry since he was a child. After graduating from the Pedagogical Institute, he worked as a teacher in Jewish schools in Zhytomyr and Odessa. In 1924, his poems were first published in the Moscow Jewish youth magazine “Юнгвалд” (“Поросль”) – “Jungvald” (“Growth”). Later, his works were published in the central Jewish periodicals, including the almanac “Советиш” (“Sovietish”). In 1926, his first book was published – the poem “Триполье” (“Трупилля”). Later, a collection of poems “Югнт ин ланд” (“Молодость в стране”, 1931) – “Jugnt inland” (“Youth in the country”), poems “Электре ин степ” (“Электрика в степи”, 1935) – “Electre in step” (“Electrics in the steppe”) and other works came out. Patriotic themes appear in his poems: the Civil War and the defense of the country from the enemy. In 1963, a book of poetry was published, translated into Russian (Russian Jewish Encyclopedia, 1994, 344).

The poet and playwright *Aizik Huberman* (1906–1966) was born in the town of Felshtyn, Proskurov district, Podolsk province. At first, he studied at home, learning Jewish and Russian, the history of the Jewish religion. He continued studies at a local proletarian school. In 1926, he entered the Odessa Jewish Pedagogical College; then, he worked as a teacher of Jewish language and literature at the Odessa Labor School and the Pedagogical College. Since 1928, he began to publish regularly in Jewish newspapers and magazines. In 1934, he was appointed head of the literary department of



the Odessa State Jewish College, responsible for its repertoire policy. In 1934, the first collection of poems and the poem “Подолье – родина моя” (“Podolia – my homeland”) were published. In 1939, he wrote the poem “Домик у реки” (“House by the River”) about Jewish youth going to work in cities. In 1939, he declared himself a playwright. The plays “Девушка из Москвы” (“The Girl from Moscow”) and “Гость с того света” (“The Guest from the Other World”), the comedies “Счастливые встречи” (“Happy Meetings”), “Стоит жить на свете” (“It’s Worth Living in the World”) and “Земля круглая” (“The Round Earth”) were successfully played in the Soviet Jewish theaters (They left a mark in the history of Odessa).



The poet **Aron-Abram Katsev** (1916–2000) was born in the village of Chernin, Kyiv Province, into a peasant family. In 1926, the family moved to the Kherson region to a Jewish agricultural colony. In 1932, he graduated from the Jewish school in Kherson, and in 1937 from the Jewish department of the Odessa Pedagogical Institute. He began his career in literature as a children’s author. He made his debut in 1931 with a poem in a Jewish children’s newspaper. The first collection of poetry, “Детские песенки” (“Children’s Songs”), which was published in 1940, is also dedicated to children. In the works, the usage folk humor, philosophical motives, reflections on human existence, and the beauty of nature stand out (I. M. Dzyuba, A.I. Zhukovsky, M.H. Zheleznyak and others, 2012).

The writer **Note Lurie** (1906–1987) was born in the village of Roskoshnoye, Berdyansk district, Taurida province, in the family of a rabbi. Between 1919 and 1923, he worked as a laborer in various factories. In the autumn of 1923, he entered the preparatory course of the Minsk Jewish Pedagogical College. In 1926, he entered the Jewish department of the pedagogical faculty of the Second Moscow State University. The first publication dates back to 1924, and the first book – the story “В ночном” (“In the Night”) – was published in 1929. As he completed his studies in 1931, he went to Odessa, where he taught Jewish language and literature in various educational institutions of the city. Gradually, teaching faded into the background, and in 1935 he finally switched to literature. The reason for this was the popularity of his first novel, “Дэр стэп руфт” (“Степь зовет”) – “Der Step Ruft” (“The Steppe Calls”), unexpected for a novice writer. This book was published in Moscow in 1932 and shows the life of a Jewish village, the problems of collectivization, and the fate of peasants. In 1934, the novel was translated into Ukrainian, and in 1936, Russian and Moldavian. In 1934, he was invited to Moscow to participate in the First All-Union Conference of Jewish Writers, where he was nominated as a delegate to the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers (Migdal Times, 2001, 8-9).

There is very little information available about the literary critic **Moses Notovich** (19??–19??). In 1935, once he graduated from the Jewish department of the Odessa Pedagogical Institute (the State Archives of the Odessa Region do not have his personal file), he joined the graduate school of the Moscow State Pedagogical Institute and prepared his dissertation on “Творчество И. И. Линецкого” (“Creativity of I. I. Linetsky”). During his studies, he published notes and reviews in the Jewish newspapers. He defended his thesis in 1938, shortly before the Department of Jewish Language and Literature at the Moscow State Pedagogical Institute dissolved. Then, he lectured on literature to students of the Moscow Jewish Theater School until its closure in 1949 (Jewish postgraduate studies at MSPI).

Literary critic **Gersh Remenik** (1905–1981) was born in the town of Monasteryshche, Lipovetsky district, Kyiv province, in the family of a laborer. In 1926, he moved to the Jewish agricultural colony Freiland, close to the village of Migaevo, Grossulovsky district, Odessa district. In September 1926, he joined the Odessa Jewish Pedagogical College. In April 1929 he successfully passed a test regarding

his social origin (SAOR, file 3928). Then, he graduated from the Jewish department of the Odessa Pedagogical Institute (documentary evidence of this fact was not found in the State Archive of the Odessa Region). In 1934, he started the postgraduate course of the Moscow State Pedagogical Institute. In 1937, he had his viva on “Творчество Шолом-Алейхема” (“Creativity of Sholom Aleichem”). Graduate student G. Remenik presented his research to Professor N. Oislander. Professors M. Viner and K. Barkhin, writers A. Gurshtein, I. Dobrushin and M. Wortman. He then taught Yiddish and Jewish literature at the Moscow State Pedagogical Institute. He started writing in 1927 for the journal “Дэр одэсэр арбэтэр” (“Одесский рабочий”) – “Der Odeser Arbeter” (“Odessa Worker”). He published articles about the work of Sholom Aleichem, I. Peretz, D. Bergelson, P. Markish, L. Kvitko and other Jewish writers (Jewish postgraduate studies at MSPI).



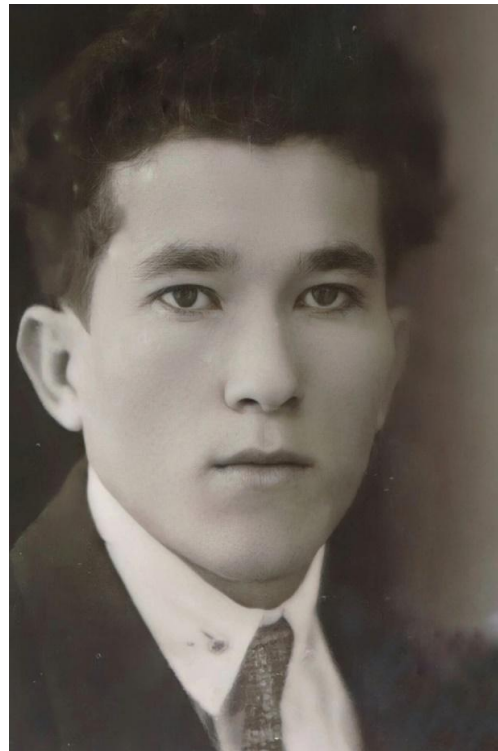
Novelist, poet and playwright **Fayvel Sito** (1909–1945) was born in Rivne in the family of a merchant. After the death of his father in 1914 and his mother in 1920, he was an orphanage. In the summer of 1929, as a member of the People’s Commissariat of Education of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (travel sheet No. 96), he joined the Jewish department of the working faculty of the Odessa Institute of Public Education, from which he graduated in 1931. As the newspaper editor of “Дэр одэсэр арбэтэр” (“Одесский рабочий”) – “Der odeser arbiter” (“Odessa worker”), he was one of the delegates to the All-Ukrainian Congress of Jewish Proletarian Writers (Kharkov, 1931) (SAOR, file 414). He supported the Odessa literary association “Юнге гвардие” (“Молодая гвардия”) – “Junge Guard” (“Young Guard”) being set up. In 1926, his first story “Ин форштот” (“Inforshtot”) came out in the newspaper “Дэр Штерн” (“Звезда”) – “Der Stern” (“Star”). He published stories, poems, feuilletons in the newspapers “Юнге гвардие” (“Молодая гвардия”) – “Junge Guard” (“Young Guard”) and “Зай грейт” (“Будь готов!”) – “Zai Great” (“Be Prepared!”), in the magazines “Проліт” (“Пролетарская литература”) – “Prolit” (“Proletarian Literature”), “Фармест” (“Farmest”), “Советише литератур” (“Советская литература”) – “Soviet Literature” (“Soviet Literature”), etc. His works reflect the personal experience of the author - the life of homeless children, imbued with bitterness and a sense of sorrow for a crippled childhood. His prose includes “Киндергойз нумер 40” (“Детский дом № 40”, 1929) – “Kindergois Number 40” (“Children’s Home No. 40”, 1929), “Дерцейлунген” (“Рассказы”, 1930) – “Derceilungen” (“Stories”, 1930), the novel “От дос зайнен мир” (“Таковы мы”, 1932) – “Ot dos zainen the world” (“That’s Us”, 1932), a collection of short stories “Вос из гешен” (“Что случилось”, 1935) – “Vos from Geshen” (“What Happened”, 1935), “Зумер” (“Летом”) – “Zumer” (“In the Summer”), “Ин а найер мишпохе” (“В новой семье”, 1939) – “In a Nayer Mishpohe” (“In a New Family”, 1939) and others. Together with the poet Moishe Khashchevatsky, he wrote the poems “Гебурт» (“Рождение”) – “Geburt» (“Birth”) and “Нахт” (“Ночь”, 1936) – “Nacht” (“Night”). He also published collections of dramatic poems, such as “Героика” (“Heroics”, 1936), “Бессмертие” (“Immortality”, 1938) and others. The Kyiv Jewish Children’s Theater stated his play, “Кантонисты” (“Cantonists”) (with actor Nehemiah Shmain), in 1940 (Khashchevatsky 1934, Mizhiritsky 1939, Silver I. Lakhndik, zogn dem emes, Stern, 1934).

homeless. In 1921–1925, he went into the Union of Printers managed by the

Literary critic **Aizik Rosenzweig** (1888–1934) was born in the town of Zabłudovo, Bialystok district, Grodno province, in the family of a rabbi. He had a traditional Jewish religious education. He studied at teacher’s courses in Grodno. He was a member of the United Jewish Socialist Labor Party. During 1912–1917, he taught at the Jewish Reformed Talmud Torah in Vitebsk. Then, in the same city, he taught at the 7<sup>th</sup> Jewish labor school (1917–1920), the evening school for adults (1918–1922), at the 10-month Jewish pedagogical courses (1920) and the 10<sup>th</sup> Jewish school of the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage (1920–1924). In 1921, he supported the foundation of Vitebsk Jewish Pedagogical College, where he taught and was in



charge of a pedagogical workshop for a long while. In 1924–1925, he ran the 1<sup>st</sup> Jewish school and in 1925–1926 he taught at an experimental school at the Vitebsk Jewish Pedagogical College. In all of the above educational institutions, he taught Yiddish and literature in Yiddish. From December 1921 to mid-1924, he was a candidate member of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks), but was not accepted into the party. His personal appeals to Minsk and Moscow with appeals to the Central Control Commission of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Belarus and the Central Control Commission of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) were unsuccessful. The verification commission noted he was a «petty-bourgeois element», «an ideologically alien element, not integrated during his time in the party» (SAOR, file 1762). In between September 16 to December 12, 1927, he was on a scientific mission at the Second Moscow State University. On October 13, 1929, according to a statement, he was voluntarily fired from the Vitebsk Jewish Pedagogical College (SAOR, file 1762). In October the same year, he enrolled as a teacher at the Odessa Institute of Public Education, where for one academic year he taught Jewish literature (Levchenko, 2010, 245-260) and then Yiddish and Jewish literature at the Odessa Jewish Pedagogical College. He published his first article in 1913 in the “Фрайнд» (“Freind newspaper», Warsaw). Since 1917, he published articles on literary topics in the newspapers “Дэр Ройтер Штерн” (“Красная звезда”) – “Der Reuter Stern” (“Red Star”), “Дэр Векер” (“Пробудитель”) – “Der Wecker” (“Awakener”), “Дэр Эмес” (“Правда”) – “Der Emes” (“Truth”), “Октябрь” (“Октябрь”) – “Oktyaber” (“October”), in the magazines “Аф ди вегн фун дер нает шул” (“Af di vegn fun der naet shul”), “Культур ун билдунг” (“Культура и просвещение”) – “Kultur un bildung” (“Culture and education”), “Дэр Штерн” (“Звезда”) – “Der Stern” (“Star”) and others. His books are: “Дэр радикалер период фун Перецес шафн” (“Радикальный период в творчестве Переца”, 1934) – “Der radicaler period fun Peretses shafn” (“The Radical Period in the Works of Peretz”), “Ди социале дифференциацие инем идишн фольклор-лид” (“Социальная дифференциация в еврейской фольклорной песне”, 1934) – “Di Social Differentiation Yinem Yiddish Folklore Lead” (“Social Differentiation in Jewish Folk Song”), “Менделе Мойхер-Сфорим» (“Mendele Moyher-Sforim”, 1936). He wrote extensive prefaces to the works of Mendele Moyher-Sforim and other Jewish classics (Russian Jewish Encyclopedia).



Following F. Sito, in the summer of 1929, People’s Commissariat for Education in the Ukrainian SSR sent the writer *Elya Shekhtman* (1908–1996) to Odessa (travel sheet No. 97). Born in the village of Vaskovichi, Veliko-Fosensky volost, Ovruch district, Volyn province, in a poor Jewish family. He had a traditional Jewish education in a cheder. In between 1924 to 1929, he worked in the editorial office of the newspaper “Дэр Штерн” (“Звезда”) – “Der Stern” (“Star”). In the summer of 1929, he joined the Jewish department of the working faculty of the Odessa Institute of Public Education, and in 1933, according to unconfirmed reports, he graduated from the Odessa Institute of Social Education. Before moving to Odessa, he was a member of the Kharkov literary group “Молодая гвардия” (“Young Guard”) (SAOR, file 5045). In 1933–1936, he lived in Kharkov, then moved to Kyiv. He has been a member of the Writers’ Union of the USSR since 1934. He published his first story in 1927. His first book, “Офн шейдвер” (“На распутье”) – “Ofn sheidweg” (“At the Crossroads”), was published in 1930, including seven short stories. In 1932, he published the first volume of the novel “Фаракерте межес” (“Вспаханые межи” – “Farakerte Mezhes” (“Plowed Borders”); in 1936 – the second volume). In 1940, the first book of the novel “Полесьер велдер” (“Полесские леса”) – “Polissier velder” (“Polesye Forests”) (Vorverts, 2006, 30-31) came out.

Writer and literary critic **Aron Vorobeichik** (1893–1942) was born in Riga in the family of a forest grader assigned to the town of Yurevichi, Polotsk district, Vitebsk province. In 1913, he completed his studies at the Riga gymnasium. He joined the Faculty of Physics and Mathematics of Yuriev University (1916-1918). Until 1924, he taught at the pedagogical courses of the Central Jewish School Organization of Latvia and at the Riga Jewish People's University. He participated in the activities of the educational society "Арбетергейм" ("Arbeterheim"), was a board member and worked on children's secular education in Jewish families. In the autumn of 1924, he accepted an invitation from the People's Commissariat for Education of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and settled in Kharkov. He taught Jewish language and literature at the local "October Revolution" Jewish Pedagogical College. He became interested in literature. He wrote and published two fairy tales for children in Yiddish: "Почему и доколе" (1926) ("Why and for how long") and "Снежинки – подружки" ("Snowflakes – girlfriends", 1927). He was later attracted by literary criticism. In the autumn of 1926, he moved to Odessa, where he taught Yiddish and Jewish literature at the Odessa Jewish Pedagogical College. In addition to teacher training, together with Sh. Bilov, he managed the "Юнге гвардие" ("Молодая гвардия") – "Yunge Guard" ("Young Guard") – literary association of young writers interested in Yiddish literature. When the Mendele Moikher-Sforim All-Ukrainian Museum of Jewish Culture opened in Odessa in November 1927, he worked as researcher and managed the department of literature. The range of scientific interests covered the work of the classics of Jewish literature: Mendele Moyher-Sforim, Sholom Aleichem and I. Linetsky. He reviewed the works of young writers Meer Alberton and Note Lurie. His first work in the USSR – "Шолом-Алейхем – художник и его произведения" ("Sholom Aleichem – the artist and his works") was published as a preface to the book "Sholom Aleichem. Selected works" (1926). Other works were published in collections and newspapers – "Дэр одэсэр арбэтэр" ("Одесский рабочий") – "Der odeser arbiter" ("Odessa worker"), "Проліт" ("Пролетарская литература") – "Prolit" ("Proletarian literature"), "Дэр Штэрн" ("Звезда") – "Der Shtern" ("Star"), etc. He was an elected delegate to the All-Ukrainian Congress of Jewish proletarian writers (December 1927). At a similar forum in 1931, he delivered a report that was included in a collection entitled "On the Combat Positions of Proletarian Literature". He was one of the authors of the collection "Менделе и его время" – "Mendele and His Time" (1940). He corresponded with Mendele Moyher-Sforim, this being part of his archeography work. When the manuscript was complete, in May 1941 it went to the Moscow editorial office of "Дэр Эмес" ("Правда") – "Der Emes" ("The Truth"), but the outbreak of war prevented its publication (Riga Jewish Secular School).

Poet **Hanan Weinerman** (1902–1979) was born in the village of Luginy, Luginsk volost, Ovruch district, Volyn province, in the family of a shoemaker, his mother being a baker. He studied at a cheder until 13, then completed primary schooling. Between 1919 and 1925, he worked as a painter in Kyiv; he then left it and, until 1928, he worked as a laborer in the agricultural commune of Ilyich in the Kalinindorf Jewish national region of the Kherson district. He also worked as hired laborer. In January 1928, following the directive of the People's Commissariat of Education of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, he went to Odessa to study at the Jewish department of the working faculty of the Odessa Institute of Public Education. Then, in 1933 he graduated from the Odessa Institute of Social Education. While studying, he received the Mendele Moyher-Sforim republican scholarship through the order of the People's Commissariat of Education of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. As of January 25, 1928, according to H. Weinerman, the first collection of his poems "На земле" ("On the Earth") was to be published soon, "...dedicated to the new labor processes of the Jewish people and the life of Jewish grain growers" (SAOR, file 348). He wrote his first poems in his native town in 1923. He published the poem "Шефы" ("Chefs") in 1926. He also started writing for newspapers. He worked for the Odessa newspaper "Дэр одэсэр арбэтэр" ("Одесский рабочий") – "Der odeser arbiter" ("Odessa worker") until 1936. From 1936, he worked for the newspaper "Зай грэйт" ("Будь готов!") – "Zai great" ("Get ready!"). In between autumn 1937 to 1941, he was a correspondent of "Дэр Штэрн" ("Звезда") – "Der Stern" ("Star"). He also published in state-owned and central Jewish periodicals. His works depict the life of the Jewish village, the work of its inhabitants. The first collection of poems "Ин барефтунг" ("В слиянии") – "In Bageftung" ("At the Confluence") was published in 1930, the second was children's tale, "Фишка" ("Fishka", 1931), then the collections "Эрд банайте" ("Земля обновленная", 1932) – "Erd Banaite" ("Renewed Earth", 1932), "Нахт" ("Ночь", 1933) – "Nakht" ("Night", 1933), "Голдене цвайгн" ("Золотые ветки", 1935) – "Goldene Zweign" ("Golden



Branches”, 1935), “Ин лебн фарлибт” (“В жизнь влюблен”, 1940) – “In lebn farlibt” (“In love with life”, 1940). His most famous poetic cycle is “Аф херсонер степес” («В херсонских степях») – “Af Khersoner Stepes” (“In the Kherson Steppes”) (Melnichenko, 2006, 164-169).

Poet **Yankl Yankelevich** (1905–1938) was born in the town of Gancheshty, Kishinev district, Bessarabian province. He studied at the cheder and folk school. In between 1925–1932, he lived in Odessa, studied at the Jewish department of the Odessa Institute of Public Education (confirmed data unavailable in the State Archive of the Odessa Region). Then, in 1932, he was assigned to Tiraspol, where he worked as a teacher of the Jewish language and literature until the end of his life. In 1925, he made his debut in the newspaper “Дэр одэсэр арбэтэр” (“Одесский рабочий”) – “Der odeser arbiter” (“Odessa worker”), after which he published poems, stories, children’s stories, articles and translations in newspapers and magazines “Юнгвалд” (“Поросль”) – “Jungvald” (“Growth”),

“Дэр пионер” (“Пионер”) – “Der Pioneer” (“Pioneer”), “Дэр Эмэс” (“Правда”) – “Der Emes” (“Truth”), “Дэр Юнгер бой-кланг” (“Молодой гул стройки”) – “Der Junger boy-klang” (“New construction site rumble”), “Юнге гвардие” (“Молодая гвардия”) – “Junge Guard” (“Young Guard”), “Ди ройтэ вэл” (“Красный мир”) – “Di royte welt” (“Red World”), “Проліт” (“Пролетарская литература”) – “Prolit” (“Proletarian Literature”), “Дэр Штерн” (“Звезда”) – “Der Stern” (“Star”), “Зай грейт” (“Будь готов!”) – “Zay Great” (“Get prepared!”), “Пролетарише фон” (“Пролетарское знамя”) – “Proletarishe Von” (“Proletarian Banner”), “Советише литератур” (“Советская литература”) – “Soviet Literature” (“Soviet literature”), “Вос гевен ун вос геворн” (“Что было и что стало”) – “Vos geven un vos gevorn” (“What was and what has become”), “Октябрь” (“Октябрь”) – “October” (“October”), etc. The first collection of poems “Зафтн” (“Соки”) – “Zaftn” (“Juice”) was released in 1931 in Kharkov. He then authored three other collections of poetry: “Лагерн» (“Лагеря”, 1934) – “Lagern” (“Camps”, 1934), “Хавејрим: дерцейлунген фар киндер” (“Друзья: рассказы для детей”, 1937) – “Haveyrim: derceilungen far kinder” (“Friends: stories for children”, 1937) and “Фрайнт” (“Родня”, 1938) – “Fraint” (“Relatives”, 1938). His poetry expresses deep lyricism and folkloric-drawn elements. He was more interested in Moldavian landscapes than in the construction of the socialist society, which explains why in the 1930s he was blamed for such an attitude. His poems were included in the anthology “Шлахтн: фуфци йор октябер ин дэр кинстлеришер литератур” (“Битвы: пятидесятилетие Октября в художественной литературе” – “Shlakhtn: fuftsn yor oktyaber in der kinstlerisher literatur” (“Battles: the fifteenth anniversary of October in fiction”, Moscow, 1932) (Redlich, 2013, 452).

Writer and playwright **Shneer Zalman** (real name Okun, 1892–1952) is the first from South Palmyra. He was born in the Jewish colony of Seliba, Minsk province, in the family of a farmer. He graduated from a cheder and studied at three yeshivas. He left for Warsaw to meet Yitzchok-Leybush Peretz, one of the three classics of Yiddish literature. He became interested in folklore: he wrote down fairy tales, legends, parables, proverbs, sayings, riddles, folk songs. He started writing on his own then. In 1919, he came to Odessa, where, at first, he worked in a bakery. In 1926, he graduated from the Odessa Institute of Public Education, open during 1920–1930 (Levchenko, 2010). He taught Yiddish and Jewish literature at the vocational school “Труд” (“Trud”) and the 5th vocational school “Металл” (“Metal”). He got interested in literature as soon as arrived in Odessa. The student theater staged his play “Провокатор» (“Provocateur”), and his first literary work appeared in the weekly “Комунистисе штим” (“Голос коммуниста”), “Komunistishe Shtim” (“Voice of a Communist”) in 1921. He re-worked old plays (by Abraham Goldfaden and other personalities) at the Odessa State Jewish Theater.

In between performances, he traveled around the Ukrainian SSR, lecturing, bringing Jewish household items from trips to former shtetls for the Mendele Moyher-Sforim All-Ukrainian Museum of Jewish Culture. He worked in the literary department there from 1938 to 1941. In 1939, the publishing house “Дэр Эмес” (“Правда”) – “Der Emes” (“Pravda”) presented his book “Сказки” (“Tales”). His plays, “Paradise Lost” or “Freilekhs”, were also staged. In 1939, the Ukrainian publishing house of literature in the languages of national minorities published a collection of original stories by Sholom Aleichem in Russian including his comments and preface (Gusev, 2008, 69-78).

### *Subchapter 2.2*

In addition to the listed 25 Jewish writers in Odessa in the 1920s–1930s, other authors could also match this series. Odessa was one of the centers contributing to the development of Yiddish literature in the USSR, along with Moscow, Kyiv, Minsk and Kharkov. It was primarily associated with higher education institutions such as the Odessa Jewish Pedagogical College (1922–1929), the Jewish section of the Odessa Institute of Public Education (1922–1930), the Jewish section of the Odessa Institute of Social Education (1930–1933) and the Jewish section of the Odessa Ukrainian Pedagogical Institute (1933–1938) (Levchenko, 2013). Yiddish was a medium for teaching and there were specialists in Jewish literature such as Shloyme Bilov, Aron Vorobeichik, Shneer Zalman and Eli Spivak. Eli Spivak (1890–1950) had a particular role. He was a leading specialist in Yiddish in the Ukrainian SSR, author of textbooks, anthologies and thematic dictionaries published by the People’s Commissariat of Education of the Ukrainian SSR.



Shloyme Bilov and Aron Vorobeichik organized the Odessa literary group «Junge Guards» in late 1926, which included novice writers Ele Gordon, Hanan Weinerman, Yankl Yankelevich and others. The meetings of the literary association took place in the Mendele Moyher-Sforima Odessa Jewish Academic Library. In December 1927, Shloyme Bilov, Khanan Weinerman, Aron Vorobeichik, Faivel Sito and others were invited to the All-Ukrainian Congress of Jewish Proletarian Writers in Kharkov; this meant a significant recognition of their works. The work of young Odessa Yiddish writers was highly appreciated by established authors. For instance, in May 1938, students of the Jewish sector of the Odessa Pedagogical Institute were visited by the famous Jewish Moscow Yiddish writers: literary critic Aron Gurshtein, writers Yehezkel Dobrushin and Peretz Markish, who were accompanied by the already well-known author of Yiddish literature, Irme Drucker.

### **3. Conclusion**

Soviet literature in Yiddish supported a higher status of this language among the Jewish population of the USSR. The education of Jewish workers needed literature in Yiddish to combat religious, nationalist and Zionist prejudices. At the same time, it contributed to an atheistic and internationalist worldview. Odessa Jewish writers in Yiddish found a certain freedom of expression in the presentation of patriotic feelings, life-affirming lyric poetry, descriptions of their historical past and in works about faith in a better future. It was in these creative themes that Odessa Yiddish writers turned successful. By the late 1930s, many works were published in Yiddish, mostly in the spirit of “socialist realism”; to a certain extent, they reflected the reality. While these works may appear unappealing nowadays, they are valuable documentary sources.

Soviet Jewish Literature in Yiddish in the 1920s–1930s experienced a revival; however, many writers associated with this period either stopped writing during the Stalinist terror of the 1930s (Yankl Yankelevich) (Levchenko 2016), died in World War II (Aron Vorobeichik, Moishe Dubilet, Shimon

Goldenberg, Motl Hartzman, Faivel Sito, Shmuel Helmond), or became victims of post-war repression (Shloyme Bilov, Shneer Zalman, Joseph Buchbinder, Irme Drucker, Elya Shechtman, Note Lurie, Sholom Alek). After that, the Communist Party practically controlled them so they could only author pieces of «socialist realism» (Hanan Weinerman, Oizer Goldesheim, Avram Gontar, Ele Gordon, Joseph Buchbinder, Aizik Huberman, Gersh Remenik, Irme Drucker, Note Lurie, Aron-Abram Katsev, Chaim Bader, Yashe Grubian). With few exceptions, some of them immigrated (Elya Shechtman, Aron-Abram Katsev, Chaim Bader) to other countries.

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