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A SOVIET YIDDISH POET

Following my note on the poets of the national minorities of the USSR in Bulletin No. 5, I am now presenting a couple of poems translated from the Yiddish. They are by Samuel Halkin. He was not only a poet but also a dramatist and famous in the Soviet Union for having translated into Yiddish the great Shakespearean Dramas, "Richard III" and "King Lear" for performance by Solomon Mikhoels, Moscow State Yiddish Theatre.

In theater history, the production of "King Lear" by Mikhoels, who also played the lead together with Zuskin, as the clown, was one of the highlights of world theater in the 30's. Halkin was born in 1897 and died in 1960. As the *Soviet Literary Encyclopedia* says, "In relation to the violations of socialist legality in the period of the cult of the personality of Stalin, in 1950 he was repressed. He survived imprisonment, he was rehabilitated." Alas he died soon after release and unfortunately just before we arrived in the Soviet Union after 23 years absence. So, tragically, we were not able to see him in the later years of his life. However, here are two of his poems, one prewar and the other after his imprisonment, which speaks for itself.

H.M.

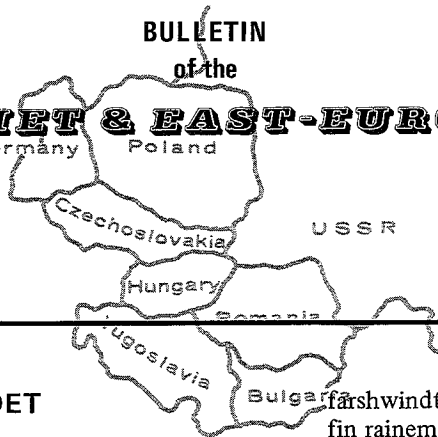
FIRST POEM*

Original Yiddish

לל יאָסא נאָר נאָר יאָל יאָר נאָר
 נאָר אַל לאַל אַרעט יאָל יאָר לאַר —
 אַל לאַרעט יאָל יאָר אַרעט יאָל
 אַרעט יאָל אַל יאָר יאָר יאָר אַל
 אַל יאָרעט יאָר יאָר אַרעט יאָל —
 אַל יאָרעט יאָל יאָר יאָר יאָל יאָל
 יאָל אַל יאָרעט יאָר יאָר אַרעט יאָל
 יאָל אַל יאָרעט יאָר יאָל אַרעט יאָל
 יאָל יאָרעט יאָל יאָל יאָר יאָל
 יאָל יאָרעט יאָל יאָל יאָר יאָל —

Transliteration

Dos gloz is durchzichtig un rain
 du zehst durch dem di gantse velt:
 Ver es vaint un ver es kvelt.
 Nor vi du host ain zait farshteilt
 mit zilber-farb, vos hot di vert
 a groshen gelt, tsi etvos mehr—



farshwindt fin oig di gantse erd,
 fin rainem gloz a shpigl vert,
 un vi der shpigl zol zain rain—
 du sehst in im nor sich alain.

Literal Translation

The glass is transparent and clear—
 you see through it the whole world:
 those who weep and those who laugh.
 But having covered one side
 with silver paint worth
 a farthing or slightly more—
 then disappears from sight the whole world,
 clear glass turns into a mirror,
 and no matter how clear the mirror—
 you see in it only yourself.

Final Translation

Transparent is the glass and clear,
 through it you see the whole world wide;
 how it laughs and how it cries.
 But having covered up one side
 with silver paint, what is its worth?
 A copper farthing, more or less,
 but lost to sight is all the earth,
 transparent glass a mirror is—
 and in the mirror clearly shown
 you can but see yourself alone.

A Russian Translation*

СТЕКЛО

Прозрачное стекло блестит в руке твоей,
 Ты видишь сквозь него и землю и людей,
 Весь мир перед тобой отчетлив и открыт —
 Кто радостен, кто зол, кто весел, кто скорбит.

Но если у стекла любую из сторон
 Покроешь хоть слегка грошовым серебром, —
 Вмиг исчезает с глаз все то, что в мир влекло,
 И зеркалом простым становится стекло.

Пусть чисто зеркало, пусть гладь его ясна
 И нет на нем нигде малейшего пятна,
 Но, радуясь и злясь, ликуя и скорбя,
 Ты сможешь видеть в нем лишь самого себя.

1933

*Russian translation of Dos Gloz from *Stikhi Ballady Dramy*, by Samuel Halkin. Gosizdat Khud. Lit., Moscow 1958. Page 9.

*S. Halkin. "Contact" Publishing House EMES, Moscow, 1935. Page 7.

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SECOND POEM*

Yiddish Original

רוצען ס'קומט און אונזערע זאגן און זיין באזעצער וואָס
 דאָס אומרעכט מיך באַפאַלט — צו זיך אַרײַן אײַך זאָגן:
 וווּ ענעמט מען זײ, ודי אַקראַפֿט, אונזערע זיין געווענעכט,
 אַף וויפֿעל ס'איז פאַרגלייבט דאָס אומרעכט אײַך זיין רעכט?..

1959

*From "Moi Vklad" by Samuel Halkin (Published in Yiddish by Soviet Writer's Publishing House, Moscow, 1966. Page 138.)

Ven s'kumt ah shverer tog in mit zain
 gantzer vog
 Dos umrecht mich bafalt—tsu zich alain
 ich zog:
 Vu nemt men zi, di Kraft, azoifil
 zain gerecht,
 Of vifil s'iz farglaicht dos umrecht
 in zain recht?

When comes a hard difficult day, and
 with its whole weight
 Injustice on me falls—to myself alone
 I say
 Where to take it, the strength, so much
 to be just,
 Of (as) much (as) it is possible compare the injustice
 in being just?

When by human injustice I am crushed,
 to equal their strength, how can I be strong?—
 They, who're so convinced—as if indeed just—
 of the unquestioning rightness of their wrong.

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ON TRANSLATING POETRY

Following the Translators Conference held by the International P.E.N., Professor Marshall, together with an S.I.U. preliminary committee consisting of Dr. William Cohen, Dr. Vernon L. Anderson, Dr. Ildazio Tavares, and Dr. Tony O'Meara, are now preparing the first number of a magazine devoted entirely to poetry in translation, which they are calling *Poetry Trans-World*.

Sporadic attempts to do some of the things such a magazine wants to do have been made in various journals throughout the world, but only one or two have concentrated primarily and only on *translating poetry*. This is probably the most difficult sphere of translation but is also highly concentrated, allowing therefore its work to be printed in a limited page journal.

The intention of the editors is that this magazine shall show various versions of the original in the English language, and if possible in other languages, so that comparisons can be made as to what happens to a poem in translation. There will be a fundamental analysis of the original text with transliteration, phonetic transcription, literal translation, and any necessary explanation, so that even a non-reader of the original language will be able to get a better idea of what the original intended than just a text of hieroglyphs of which he can understand nothing. Various journals print the original text next to the translation but, as no human being can know all the languages of the world and quite clearly only a tiny percentage receive any value from this juxtaposition, a necessary part of a serious journal then is to have as much of an explanation of the original as possible, so that a wider public can now study and perhaps arrive at some conclusions as to the validity of the translation.

There is also, today, a conflict between two basic schools of thought. Perhaps one might consider Nabokov a leading exponent of the opposite point of view to that of Marshall and his collaborators. This is the school that says to attempt to translate poetry into poetry is impossible, and therefore nonsense. As the texture and material of the original work of art is words, to change completely the words, to substitute words of another language, means there can't be any approach to the texture and material of the original.

On the other hand, there are those, of whom the present S.I.U. group is one, who consider that *prose* should be translated into *prose*, though the words are of a different material and texture, and that *poetry* should be translated as far as possible into *poetry*, and not vice-versa!

There are forms of poetry that have no equivalents in English, and one must do one's best with them; but there are many, particularly European languages, in which the forms are the same. Therefore, if Yevtushenko is writing in rhymed couplets, or rhymed quatrains, and English poetry has been writing this way for nearly a thousand years, why shouldn't Yevtushenko's original be put in the same form as it has in Russian?

Leading Russian experts in translation are, at times, utterly astounded by what happens to their poets in translation, particularly in the English speaking world. Voznesensky and Yevtushenko are often translated in free verse or as if they were writing like Ginsberg or the Beat poets, and of course they aren't doing anything of the sort. So that is more than a travesty to translate them as if they were writing in a form that is so fashionable at the moment in the U.S.A. or England, but hardly used at all in Russia!

But what is worse, there are certain English versions that are published alongside the original, as if they were translations, but then at the bottom is written, "Adapted by . . ." and then when there was an outcry against this, it was sub-titled "Imitations of . . ."

To give an example of this, we will be publishing one famous poem, by a famous Russian poet, which has been "translated" into an "adaptation" that quite simply has nothing to do with the original whatsoever; and the Russian poet herself, who knew English well, was bitter and angry at what had been done to her work: a poem that had been written with her heart's blood.

However, a special bulletin will be issued relating to *Poetry Trans-World*, and meanwhile we would ask all translators of poetry, no matter from what language, to send their contributions; preferably shorter poems, not long epics; but we do need the original, we need a phonetic transcription of the original, a literal translation of the original, and what the translator considers to be his final version, with any notes. We shall choose from these poems to be published, and the world will be our oyster.

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE YIDDISH THEATER

In the history of world theater the Yiddish Theater, strangely like its people, has a unique role. It arose from the culture that the Jews developed in Eastern and Central Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries and the creating of a special language from Germanic origins and Hebrew origins known as Yiddish and the creation of a culture around this language which found, at one time, brilliant expression in the theater. Its main support came from those enclaves where Jews were concentrated, usually by laws that prevented them living "outside the pale," and in those areas in Eastern Europe where they were able, they thought, at last to live a life in which they could freely carry out their traditional, religious and national rites and traditions. But history again disappointed them as it continues to do, eternally, it seems, and today we are witnessing the death throes of the Yiddish Theater.

In fact, it seems to have started somewhere about 1876 in Jassy, Romania. Although the first written Yiddish play is dated 1574, the foundation drama of the Yiddish Theater was "Serkele" by Dr. Solomon Ettinger, written about 1860 and produced in 1862. The last official State Yiddish Theater virtually died in Warsaw in 1968 when Ida Kaminska and her family had to emigrate.

Other lingering remnants are also dying; only a few weeks ago we heard from an old friend, Meier Tselniker, the last stalwart of the Yiddish Theater in London, that his theater in the East End had also closed down in the summer of 1970. Maybe there are remnants of other theaters performing still in South America and elsewhere and attempts are still being made to resurrect it in Russia and in U.S.A.; one still performs in Romania and as the Yiddish Theater dies in Europe, it finds its resurrection in Israel. Though, whatever may be the merits of the Yiddish as a language, it appears that it is dying, for Hebrew is the official language of the Jews in Israel. What will happen to the others, we cannot tell.

However, it seems appropriate that now a proper history should be made of the rise and fall of the Yiddish Theater. Appropriate because, otherwise, those who participate in it may soon disappear from the world and the last living contact with this kind of theater be broken.

First of all, we are lucky that Ida Kaminska and her husband, Herman Melman, the pioneers of the Polish Yiddish Theater, chose America as their refuge. They brought with them archives and they are ready and willing to participate in what will be a monumental task: the researching and investigating into all the ramifications of the development of the Yiddish Theater both in Europe and in North and South America.

Professor Herbert Marshall, the progenitor of this conception, has himself been associated with the Yiddish Theater over many years. It began, first of all, by his studying the great Russian State Yiddish Theater in the thirties, where he was proud to become the friend and translator of Solomon Mikhoels, the great Jewish actor and director of that Theater. Marshall was lucky to be present during rehearsals and the premiere of the production of "King Lear," which was considered one of the finest theater productions of the ages. The play was translated by the great Yiddish poet, Halkin; it was designed by the great Yiddish artist, Alexander Tyshler; it was directed by a great Russian director, Sergei Radlov; and was acted by two of the great Yiddish actor geniuses of that theater, Solomon Mikhoels as the King and Zuskin as the Fool.

Marshall, at that time, was appointed to be the interpreter for the famous English Theater producer and writer, Gordon Craig, and was present with him at the "King Lear" premiere. This became an epoch-making moment in his life for he heard Craig, at the end of the performance say, in tears, "This is the most ironic moment of my life. Here I have seen the finest production of 'Lear' I could conceive of in the world and it was produced in Moscow, in Russia, and in the Yiddish Language! I myself was never able to produce the play and here I have seen it at its supreme best."

When Solomon Mikhoels and Itzik Pfeffer came to England during the war, Marshall was again their interpreter in discussions with great English actors like Sir John Gielgud and Sir Ralph Richardson and others and he remembers how Mikhoels was saying that, under the Soviet regime, his great theater was flourishing and that he could show them in the repertoire his great roles as 'Lear' or 'Richard III' whereas "poor" John Gielgud was not in a permanent company and could not show Mikhoels his great 'Richard' or 'Hamlet' which Mikhoels desperately wanted to see! And he remembers Mikhoels commiserating with Gielgud on his poor situation in England compared to that of the Yiddish Theater in Moscow!

A few years later in the Stalinist Period Mikhoels was arrested together with Itzik Pfeffer and other members of the International Anti-Fascist Council and accused of being traitors and spies for British Imperialism and Zionism, etc.! And the Yiddish Theaters, schools, newspapers, etc. closed down. But following the 20th Party Congress, attempts have been made to revive Yiddish culture in the USSR. There are various active groups performing Yiddish songs, sketches, extracts of plays etc. in Moscow, South Russia and Lithuania. From 1956 a "Collective of Yiddish Artists" with a mixed choir, drama and dance group played in Vilna and Lithuania. Little is known of these Yiddish revivals and it is hoped that our researches will reveal their extent.

In America there was the famous Adler family, the great actor Thomashevsky, the Maurice Schwartz Theater, and others who were the bulwark of the Yiddish theater in America. There were other theater groups throughout the States and in other parts of the world. From the Yiddish theater came many great actors and actresses: such as Paul Muni, Joseph Schildkraut, Molly Picon and many others.

It is proposed, therefore, that under the general editorship of Professor Marshall, the finest experts will be gathered to specialize in their particular sphere.

It will be necessary for those who are working on research to know, first of all, Yiddish, and in certain cases Russian and other Slavic languages, as well as other European languages for the groups that once existed in other European countries. Already Marshall has received help from YIVO and from the Jewish Academy in Connecticut and has also received via YIVO a complete biography of all the printed works dealing with the Yiddish Theater in the pre-Soviet and Soviet periods in Russia and its associated republics.

However, it is a serious and massive task of research and will take probably two or three years to complete.

The archives for the Center for Soviet and East European Studies in Performing Arts has certain amounts of material it has been collecting over the years and other material is coming in from time to time. But funding is necessary in order to start off the proper work on translating material and researching further material.

WORLD UNIVERSITY AFLOAT

At a recent important conference at SIU on "Mankind in the Universe," one of the panels under the Chairmanship of Professor Marshall was dedicated to the conception of a World University Afloat. Following the success of the conference, a permanent committee has now been set up to propagate the concept of a world university afloat and the following preliminary notice has been issued: "With the convergence on one S.I.U. conference panel of the man largely responsible for the World University plan moving successfully through the United Nations General Assembly (Ambassador Glenn Olds); the representative of the prime U.S. agency responsible for maritime affairs (Gilven Slonim, representing Mrs. Helen Bentley, Chairman, Federal Maritime Commission); the man largely responsible for the international education legislation approved before the U.S. Congress (Dr. Oliver Caldwell); the man largely responsible for the design of an environment for learning which would put students on ships to get them in harmony with the ecological rhythms of their planet (Dr. R. Buckminster Fuller); and the man who has been a lifetime intercultural exchange student and scholar giving him a world citizen's view of the educational experience (Professor Herbert Marshall); the time is obviously ripe to move on the panel's recommendations to establish the United Nations World University on board an ocean-going vessel. If it moves quickly and with deliberation, S.I.U. can take the initiative to play a large part in this endeavor.

To pursue these objectives, Southern Illinois University established the following committee to pursue such a World University objective and to develop its curriculum:

1. John Anderson, Chairman, Dean of International Education, S.I.U.
2. Herbert Marshall, Director, Center for Soviet & East European Studies, S.I.U.
3. Oliver Caldwell, Professor of International Education, S.I.U.
4. William Perk, Chairman, Department of Design, S.I.U.
5. Thomas B. Turner, Executive Director, Fuller Projects, S.I.U.
6. Ambassador Glenn Olds (member in extension), U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Economic & Social Council.
7. Barbara Hubbard (member in extension), Organizing Director of Committee for the Future.
8. Gilven Slonim (member in extension), Director, Oceanic Educational Foundation.

9. Hon. Richard Nolte (member in extension), Institute of Current World Affairs.
10. Mark Victor Hansen, Graduate Student, S.I.U.
11. Alan Ladwig, Graduate Student, S.I.U.

Anyone interested please contact Mr. Tom Turner, The World Game, at S.I.U.

ARCHIVES

It is with pleasure the Center acknowledges the generosity of that great Yiddish Actor Meier Tselniker, who is donating his archives as a contribution to this monumental project. Already he has given Professor Marshall personally the following:

In Yiddish:

BOOBE BOONTSE a short play by Abraham Goldfaden.
Printed by J. Saphirstein, New York. 1889.

HUNGERMAN & KABZENSON Play by A. Goldfaden.
Printed by J. Saphirstein, New York. 1893.

AHASUERUS Play by A. Goldfaden. Hebrew Publishing Co. New York, 1908.

YIDDISH ACTORS ON TOUR: Play compiled by A. Kaminsky.
Publ: "BICHER-FAR-ALE" Dolgaya No II, Warsaw, Poland, 1908.

Various Press Cuttings, Programmes, etc., some photographs and more to come.

Already in Marshall's archives are the following:

BOOKS:

In Yiddish:

THE YIDDISH THEATRE IN LONDON 1902-1942. by Morris Myer. London. Inscribed by the author.

ALMANAC OF YIDDISH THEATRE: London 1939-1943.
Published by Mark Markov. London. E. I. With ill.

In Yiddish & English:

CENTENARY OF YIDDISH THEATRE by Joseph Leftwich.
Pub. by Jewish Cultural Society, London, 1962. With ill.

In English:

THE ILLUSTRATED THEATRE MIRROR: journal issued by the New Yiddish Theatre, Folk House (Beth Am Ltd.) Adler Sn. London E. I. Vol I. Nos 7, 9/11, 12/13, 14, 15/16. Oct. 1946 to July 1947. Vol II

PLAYBILLS:

4. YIDDISH THEATRE GROUP, Princess's Theatre, Glasgow, Scotland, April/May 1916. Headed by Mdme Fanny Wax-

man. Repertory includes *Uriel Acosta*, *King Lear*, and various operettas.

1. USSR MOSCOW: "TOURING COMPANY" (under the Ministry of Culture) A Concert-Dramatic Performance in YIDDISH: "WANDERING STARS" from Sholom Aleichem. Starring Laureate Anna Guzik. 1964.

1. POLAND: Lodz Yiddish Theatre: 'MERELE EFROS' by I. Gordin starring IDA KAMINSKA 196?

BOOKS:

Poland:

"IDA KAMINSKA: 50th Anniversary Volume;" In Polish & English. Pub. Yiddish Books, Warsaw. 1968.

USA:

The Detroit Yiddish Theater (1920-1937) J. A. Miller. Wayne State Univ. Press. 1967.

Tales of the Yiddish Realto (Yiddish Theatre, New York, 1900's) by Louis Lipsky. Pub. Thos. Yoseloff. N.Y. 1962.

Germany:

Das Moskauer Judische Akademische Theatre by Ernst Toller, Joseph Roth, and Alfons Goldschmidt. Verlag die Schmiede, Berlin. 1928.

BROCHURE:

USSR:

Vilna, Lithuanian S.S. Republic. PROGRAM of a CONCERT dedicated to the 10th Anniversary of the JEWISH NON-PROFESSIONAL COLLECTIVES. 1966. Under the Direction of Honoured Worker of Art L. E. Lurye. Program includes dramatic episodes from Sholom Aleichem; CHOIR, DANCE ENSEMBLE & FOLK ORCHESTRA.

CORRESPONDENCE:

Letters to and from the MOSKAUER JUDISCHES THEATER, Malaya Bronnaya 2, Moscow. Between Huntley Carter and Alexis Granowsky. 1926 etc. (Unsorted).

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

1. Collated by O. I. Lubomirsky, listing 452 entries of books, articles, reviews and news reports on or about Yiddish Theatre in the U.S.S.R. In Yiddish, Russian, Ukrainian, German, etc.
2. Card-Index of all works dealing with Yiddish and Byelo-Russian theatre and Culture in the Library of the Jewish Academy, Cincinnati.

TAPE RECORDING:

Meier Tselaaiker reminisces of his life work in the Yiddish theater, from Romania to England.

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