IN MEMORY OF AUGUST 12, 1952
GINGER MOTELE by Joseph Utkin

For a long time there has been one poem on my conscience. I had not translated it, as I promised the author, and then he was killed accidentally during the war. His name Joseph Utkin, his poem The Story About Ginger Motele, Mr. Inspector, Rabbi Isaac and Commissar Bloch.

He was of Jewish extraction, but assimilated. He wrote in Russian, was mainly a lyric writer, not considered in the top bracket of his contemporaries. Mayakovsky made fun of him— as a "guitarist" poet.

But one work raised him to the top bracket; a poem he never surpassed. And during the Stalin period it was never reprinted. For Ginger Motele recounted how the Revolution came to Kishinev, a Jewish shtetl in the Ukraine, famous or infamous for terrible Russian and Ukrainian pogroms that had been committed there. In this poem Utkin recounts the varying reactions to the success of the Bolsheviks amongst the Yiddish community. For—against—neutral. The Communist Party that had then seemed to be the only liberators of Jews from oppression eventually became the opposite. In this poem the liberators include a Jewish tailor, who becomes a Bolshevik Political Commissar, and the Red Squad of the Communist revolutionaries which marches into the Kishinev carrying not only the Red Flag, but the Mogen David (the Jewish and now Israeli emblem—the six-pointed star of David).

Today any one who did that would be at once arrested, accused of Zionism and imprisoned in GULAG. Even as I write I have just read a report of what recently happened in that very same one-time Jewish shtetl liberated by the Bolsheviks. It reads (I translate from the Russian) "In Kishinev M. Schwartzman wanted to found an amateur Jewish Theatre. He was arrested, accused of 'Zionism' and condemned to five years in a Communist prison camp."

And here is the optimistic poem of dear Joseph Utkin, whom I remember as a gentle soul, very kind to a lone Englishman and who, luckily died a 'natural' death. For he too would no doubt have been rounded up in the Communist Party pogrom against the Yiddish intelligentsia that began twenty-five years ago on August 12th on Stalin's orders. From that time over 230 Yiddish writers, 87 Jewish painters, 99 actors and 19 musicians were imprisoned in GULAG. Some were executed, some died of torture or privation, some survived to tell the truth. How all the gains of the Jews in the Revolution were wiped out, with their synagogues, theatres, printing presses, publications, books, plays and even the very Hebrew-type faces—so that nothing should remain of Yiddish culture in the Communist party State.

But, of course, the oppressors failed again—as they have done throughout the two millenia of anti-semitism. But that is another story. Read this unique poem with its—now—ironic overtones. I have kept the Yiddish words when they have been used in the Russian original.
TO WITHOUT THE TSAR
AND A LITTLE LATER.

Both dad and grandad worked as well.
So why’s he better than me and you?
Well, little Ginger Motele
did the work of two.
What he wanted—he didn’t get
(Though his dream remained)
He thought he’d learn in a Kheder.*
But a tailor he became.
So what? Should he cry and complain?
Not on your life. Oh no.

And so on one little waistcoat
ten patches he sewed.
And...
(But it’s long ago that happened
and the past isn’t all one would wish.)
On Fridays Motele davened.**
But Saturdays ate gefilte fisch.***

ONCE UPON A TIME.

How much have houses passed through.
How much has passed thru our land.
Each house one’s ocean,
one’s Motherland.

And under each frail little roof,
no matter how frail it may be,
one’s own joy,
one’s own mice,
one’s own destiny...

And rarely, oh so rarely,
two mice to one little hole.
While Motele patches waistcoats,
the Inspector
bears a portfolio.

* A Yiddish religious school.
** Yiddish, to pray.
*** Yiddish dish made of stuffed, chopped fish.

And every one knows in our town
One need has a tailor in life.
While the Inspector has a beautiful beard
and a beautiful wife.

Happiness comes in different ways,
it differs where one meets it:
Motele dreams of a chicken,
But the Inspector eats it.

Yes, happiness is so playful!
Catch it as it goes by.
For Motele loves Riva
But...Riva’s father’s
a Rabbi.

And the Rabbi keeps repeating
for ever the same monotone:
“She needs a great big happiness
and a great big house
of her own.”

So little he has that the heart howls,
like an engine hooter blows.
If Motele owns something big and great
its only his own big

So what? Should he cry and complain?
Not on your life, Oh no.

And so on jackets and pants
patches he sews...
Yes, under each frail little roof
no matter how frail it may be,
one’s own joy, one’s own mice,
one’s own
destiny.

CENTER FOR SOVIET AND EAST EUROPEAN STUDIES
Herbert Marshall, PRSA, Director
Michael Glenny, Research Associate
RESEARCH AND PROJECTS, ACADEMIC AFFAIRS
Director. Dr. Michael R. Dingerson
ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Dr. John Hawley, Chairman
Dr. John King
Dr. Paul Merrill
Dr. Olga Orechko
Dr. A. Strumonis
Dr. Byron Raisiz
But no matter how stubborn life is, 
less than nothing life doesn't give. 
And so Motele had a momma—
his Yiddisher Momma still lived.

She was beloved, like all Mommas, 
Ehh... of that nothing is said... 
She was good at cooking tshimmes.*
And good
at pregnancies.

* A sweet camerole of carrots and raisins usually made on Friday for the Sabbath.

The one-year-olds & half-year-olds
he remembered with misgiving... 
For Motele lived in Kishinev
where many policemen were living.

Where many public prayers were recited
for God to save the Tsar's life, 
Where Mr. Inspector resided
with his beautiful beard & wife... 

It's hard to talk about much
when your up to your neck in the same.
Just two pogroms he recalls... 
And an orphan
he became.

So what? Must one cry and complain?
Not on your life. No, sir!!
And so he went on patching
waistcoats instead of trousers... 

But someone drives the days,
and in the sky senselessly rolling
hang the buttons of the stars
and a moony yarmola.*

And in the dreamy stingy stillness
the mice were scared by a creak.
And someone
sewed
for someone
a takhrikh.**

** A Traditional skullcap.
*** A shroud.

"CONCERNED" AND "UNCONCERNED"

That day was so suddenly new,
as young as the morning star!
For the first time then in Kishinev
they sang not "God Save the Tsar."

There aren't many days like these,
but like this only one!
For that day into the Synagogue
the Rabbi did not come!

Trousers and waistcoats!
Laugh and rejoice!
Oh day of mine, all hail!
For today the Police Inspector
himself was put in jail!
My, that's really very, very...
God in heaven above us!

But why is it
Mr. Policeman
isn't laughing with us?

From Ilya the Cobbler
came wisdom rare indeed:
"This has nothing to do with Jehovah.
It has to do with you and me..."

Like the Merchant Med
the days babbled and flowed,
and the Jews argued
"Yes" or "No"?

So much wisdom uncovered, 
wise words agog,
the head of every man
became a Synagogue.

In the present the past is tiny:
groans to moans are wed.
"No"—
the Inspector decided;
"Yes"—
the tailor said...

But someone drives the days,
and in the skies senselessly rolling,
hang the buttons of the stars
and a moony yarmola.

And in the dreamy stingy stillness
a dog howled sick.
And someone sewed steadily
for Nicholas—a takhrikh!

That day was so suddenly new,
as young as the morning star.
For the first time then in Kishinev
they sang not
"God Save the Tsar."
CHAPTER II

KISHINEV MIRACLES.

MIRACLE ONE.

Med’s
in a state
at the market.
All
the stalls
and not just Med:
along the street
to a station
a squad
marches ahead.

But that’s not
the main cause of it,
heading the squad
(may he choke!)
holding a mogendovid*
marches Motka Bloch?!

Along main street he marches,
like a General on parade . . .

And Med’s upset at the market,
and all the stalls
in a state.

* The six-pointed Star of David.

MIRACLE TWO.

Everyone, thank God,
no matter what yardstick’s used,
his very own road,
his special door to use.

And so—little by little.
thru slush, thru snow,
each their particular pathway,
men of all ages go.

Happy’s the path of a few,
not all (compote-like):
some break their legs,
others—
Just the opposite. . . .

Echoing the Rabbi’s lament,
the wind thru the outskirt’s whining.
The Rabbi prays by the Torah,
by the Torah the Rabbi’s divining.
He touches the ginger fringes
of the faded Tallis** shawl.
“How soon will all this finish”
How much will still befall?”

The candles emerge in the murr,
flare and fade in the room.
Until it seems a catafalque
over the Rabbi looms.
This is indeed chastisement!
D’you hear?
Hein Bez is one
who refuses to let the Rabbi
circumcise her son! . . .

** A special shawl donned for prayers.

STILL MORE ABOUT MIRACLE TWO.

Where are they hurrying to,
those strange clocks of time?
Oy, how their hearts are beating!
Oy, their moustaches swing like scythes!
Shall not you they’re chasing.
So please just stand aside.
But the clocks, like cavalry racing,
forward and onward fly . . .

People complain
in the queue,
groan and moan
impatient:
“The sugar’s
long since due.
Why no sugar ration?”
“It seems,
he’s too lazy
to serve.
Doesn’t care what we need.”

“Lenin should lead such a life,
the good life
that we lead!”
“What’re you queuing for,
Sarah?
A blind man's retailing?
When
the Commissar here
is some kind
of tailor?
He should be mending
shirts,
instead—he's a Commissar......
People queue till it hurts,
moaning and pressing hard.

MIRACLE THREE.

Those were days impossibly wise
not just days but Tsadiks!*
Locks of golden flax
into silver mixed.

Each month new wonders amaze!
There's no need to laugh:
The Inspector's wife weighs
not a hundred & fifty
but half!

And Motele—also amazing—
don't laugh, it's a fact:
Motele shaved off his payess**
took off his lasperdak***

Motele's completely re-tailored
(He's tasted soup that's better!)
Motele speaks 'to-the-point' now
and gets
'to the heart of the matter'.
Each month new wonders amaze!
There's no need to laugh:
the Inspector's wife now weighs
not a hundred & fifty
but half!
And her nose is almost powderless,
and her eyes no longer blaze......

Those were days impossibly wise,
Tsadiks, and not just days......
So many roads, so many.
Yet still not enough to be trod.
And if here it's
"God will punish!"
Somewhere else it's—
"Thanks be to God!".

* Seers, wise holy men.
** An Orthodox Jew's side-curls.
*** A long gabardine coat, typical in the ghetto.

A NON-MIRACULOUS MIRACLE.

The wind on the outskirts quietens,
listens, and then abates:
The Inspector prays not for himself,
for others the Inspector prays.
The voice of prayer is even.
Words for sighs are exchanged:
"God give good health to my wife!"
"God give to Bloch the plague!"
God give this and that, in turn.
God must give lots, it's clear:
God let the Soviets burn,
let its Deputies disappear......
Change winter to summer's shift,
smooth that which is rough......
This and that God must give,
God must give lots, clear enough.

A MIRACLE NOT ON A KISHINEV SCALE.

Much too noisy and much too fast
those years many-gamma'd roaring.
Oy, this the Rabbi didn't know,
and neither, it seems, did the Torah.

Who'd have believed, who'd have thought,
who could believe it is so?
The mice have mixed up the very doors,
mixed up the thread of the roads.

In a hundred eras,
certainly no less
(it had hardly been seen by Noah):
Like a tailor,
timid is happiness
but, like happiness,
the tailor's timid no more!

Manny gamma'd that hubbub of wisdom.
Could Inspector Bobrov ever dream,
that someday the town of Kishinev
could be happy without a pogrom?

Who'd have believed. Who'd have thought,
who could believe it is so?
The mice have mixed up the very doors,
mixed up the thread of the roads.

CHAPTER III
NEW TIMES—NEW SONGS.
SYNAGOGICAL.

In the synagogue
hubbub—dismay.
Jews are agog:
"Oy!"
"Vey!"
Reb Abram's monologue.
Hubbub
in the synagogue,
"Oy Gewalt!" . . .
Reb Abram said:
"Oh, My God!"
The Jews said:
"We're helpless!"
Reb Abram said:
"Look what we've got!"
The Jews said:
"Yes", . . .
And moaning quietly, restrained,
the Rabbi sat in a shock,
But then exclaimed:
"Bad, that's a fact!"
Remembered and exclaimed:
"BLOCH!"

ALMOST A NUPHTIAL.
The swan dreams in Autumn
of lakey places green and sweet.
Those who have tasted poultry
are not very fond of meat.

Rabbi Isaac is wise!
Wise is his status.
He has almost memorised
the Talmud, almost that is.

But still he looks pretty sick—
like a pike in shallows caught. . . .
I was called to Commissar Bloch.
He was brought by an escort.

One must have somewhere to go.
To Hell! Or to the stars!
"I've some business to propose,
Comrade Commissar.

For every Jew, of course
has a daughter, for certain,
and every Jew, of course,
must quickly have her courting. . . .

You are a handsome fellow;
a son-in-law, let's say.
So why shouldn't my Riva
be the one you take?

It's not for a father to flatter,
and, reproaching no one,
I say:
My own maiden daughter
Is a maiden to this day."

White, white, soot gleams!
Maytime snows.
To the Rabbi it already seems
that Bloch. . .
has a shorter nose.

"A SONG OF CURRENT AFFAIRS." . . . . .

And where are they fleeing to
those strange clocks of time!
Oy, how their hearts are beating.
Oy, their moustaches swing like scythes.
Sha!

It isn't you they're chasing,
So, please, just stand aside.
But the clocks, like cavalry racing,
forward and onward, fly! . . .

That day like heaven's thunder surged,
quaking earth's very base.
Med saw how the Inspector emerged
without a beard on his face.
"He's shaved it off! What a day!"

Thousands of words.
And Kishinev's "Oy, Vey!"
the whole of Kishinev heard.

Even a dog is able to cry,
Cry like humans perhaps.
But just suppose you try
to strike its paw and snap!

Yes, it happens: a dog will cry.
Then what should a human do?
How many bitter tears of brine,
How many rivers of rue.
But tears are no use on the eyes.
And man said finally: "N-Nul" to life.
So the Inspector lost, in a trice,
Both his beard
and his wife.

He didn't lose his wife altogether,
but the chicken wasn't worth picking.
So let us say,
his Katy
became a tailless chicken.

Happiness is playful.
Happiness's a madcap!
So he waited with patience:
"No doubt it will come back!"

But. . . naked in the frost
smoke only warms for a bit
and his head drooped down lost,
a beardless head, that is.

So, finally broken,
as never before, in timid distress,
the Inspector went to the Tailor
in order to say
"Yes", . . .
A weak little table hunches
(only three legs are there)
The Inspector sits and punches
the file of "Current Affairs."
The path of a secretary's heavy:
Serious words enough!
So many serious papers—
on everyone: Bloch, Bobrov.
Every step is under control,
a Commission's just been there. . . .
The Inspector punches holes
in the files of "Current Affairs."

Just one dream now holds him:
(Nothing else will avail!)
How to get into Poland
and not get into jail. . . .

IN GENERAL ABOUT HOCUS-POCUC.

What does it mean: man desires?
As if its men that decide!
We want, all our lives,
on a river of gold to glide.
None of us want the chaff.
all of us want the wheat;
Yes, if you want
  to laugh—
you will most certainly weep.

But give life ........
a new era's span—
another flat-iron,
another roof—
and that very same man
will be a head taller
than you.

For a bird—the nest's most important.
The sun brightens any orifice.
Here's Motele! "From" until "To"
he sits in an angry
office.

Sits like the very first man!
and just "No!" here isn't said.
The trick? The secret? .......
A new era began—
another flat-iron,
another roof overhead ......
O-o-o, t-i-m-e!
Bad .... Good.
Like this and that it revolves.

And if a new
time is due,
Then, it means, it's death
to the old ... .

**FUNERAL**

The room .
dusty .
broods.
The ticking
of the alarm-clock—
The room. evening . blue.
Tick-tock. tick-tock . .
tick-tock .

The hour of death—comes quietly.
So quiet, you won't even perceive it.
And happiness leaves as silently,
And the mice
also leave it.

Only sorrow's immutable.
The Passover tea-pot's rusted.
And the walls are inscrutable,
and
silence—
musty.

At midnight the wind's white-handed,
it sweeps, & it howls so,
and now completely unneeded
are both Talmud
and trousers.

Quiet. Hovering twilight.
No supper served, no prayers said .
Let the table, Isaiah,
serve you a new style instead.

Then to another sphere turn,
of course—
to paradise.
Quiet!
The candles burn
Quiet!

Sarah cries...
O-o-o-o t-i-m-e!
Bad. . . good,
it revolves
until it's
curtains.
And if a new
time is due—
death to the old
is certain . . .

Yes, if a new
time is due,
it means, the old is fertig.*

* Finished.

**EPilogue.**

To Cracow it's exactly forty
and to Warsaw it's also forty.
One's own native city,
but better than any city.

Can palaces be overthrown
by little, patched, inept—
d'you know them?—cottages,
where one laughed and wept?

Here is both less and more so . . .
To each his Messiah.
The Inspector needs Poland,
the Tailor—Russia, desires.

How much he's gone thru with her and
how much yet to be.
Our dear, bright Motherland!
Motherland of the free!
Gold is worse than copper plate,
if you can trust your hands . . .
And Motele
doesn't emigrate—
even to America's land.

No, not for nothing he marched
in step with the troubled era.
Let him be no Commissar,

he's a h-u-m-a-n b-e-i-n-g!
One can still arrive at a given place
without a gallop or spur:
And Motele will go on mending
our splits and rents
and worn. . . .
Dear, bright Motherland!
Motherland of the free!
How much he's gone thru with her and
how much is yet to be.
1924-5 Moscow—Irkutsk.

PAUL ROBESON — AFTERMATH III
(See Bulletins 17, 18 & 19)

In 1962 Herbert Marshall founded the first all Black theatre
company in Great Britain called the IRA ALDRIDGE
PLAYERS. He devised, designed and directed its first produc-
tion DO SOMETHIN' ADDY MAN, an adaptation of the
Greek classic play ALCESTIS, with a West Indian composer,
a Zulu singer and African-West-Indian-Black-American-British
cast.

Here is a poster of that event and a letter from Essie Robe-
son, who came to the show. Note the date—1962.

45 Connaught Square, London, W.2
Saturday, Sept. 16, 1962

Dear Cast and Company of DO SOMETHIN' ADDY MAN!!

I was deeply disappointed, but not at all surprised when I
read the criticisms of your play. With my long experience
personal and indirectly, I must tell you that critics just don't
know what they are talking about at times when they see some-
thing different. There have been so many copies, most of
them poor imitations of your quality and vitality, that cor-
ruped critics just don’t recognize the REAL THING, THE
ORIGINAL THING when they see it. And I feel sure, espe-
cially after thinking over my experience at your dress rehearsal,
that you have the REAL THING, in fact, YOU ARE THE
REAL THING. It's best interesting, and heartening,
is that you can't fool AUDIENCES. THEY recognize the Real
Thing when they meet up with it, and our job now is for you
to polish up your jewel and for us to get an audience to you.
This I will start on right away, opening my big mouth every-
where, and often, saying what I think about your play. I told
you what I thought of it when I saw you all back stage the
other evening.

Perhaps you will feel a bit better about Critics, when I tell
you that when my Paul first sang, all the critics said he had a
beautiful natural voice, but the Negro Songs, and Folk Songs
were just not enough for Big Time Concert audiences. That's
all they knew. We didn't waste any time learning the formal
French, German and Italian music formal concert audiences
demanded in those days. Paul said the French, Germans and
Italians could do them much better, and were a dime a dozen.
But very few could, and did, the Negro songs, and beautiful
Folk Songs. And since he was brought up on them and knew
what they were all about, he would stick to them. And look
what happened. There is even a Folk Song Revival throughout
the world now. And Paul DID get into Big Time, and stayed
there.

So be of good cheer. You've got something. Just polish it up
and the audiences will come and appreciate it, and you. I feel
sure of this, and I mean to do my damnedest to help it happen.

With greetings and best wishes from Paul,
Very sincerely,
Eslinda Robeson

(Mrs. Paul Robeson)

P.S. I must tell you that I think you have a very fine producer
in Mr. Herbert Marshall. My husband, Miss Flora Robson,
and many other stars and just actors think so, having worked
with him over the years. So Hold on, Carry on, and More
Power to you all.

CENTER FOR SOVIET & EAST EUROPEAN
STUDIES
College of Communications and Fine Arts
Southern Illinois University at Carbondale
Carbondale, Illinois 62901
U.S.A.

Mr. David Koch
Acting Librarian - Rare Books
Morris Library
Campus