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The Jewish World of Yurii Shevelov (Based on Memoirs and Essays)

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Abstract

The article deals with the intellectual biography of Yuri Shevelov (1908–2002); in particular, it covers and analyzes the contacts of this Ukrainian Slavic scholar and writer with representatives of the Jewish nation in the Kharkiv period of his life. In his memoirs and essays, he repeatedly uses the expression “Ukrainian Jews,” forming an author’s unique and axiologically marked concept of “his Jews” (spiritually close Jews or “svoji jevreji” in Ukrainian in these texts). Yu. Shevelov found his “spiritually close Jews” in Kharkiv in the 1910s and 1930s. He called them so because he felt their closeness as carriers of those moral principles and psychological and intellectual qualities that were important to him as a Ukrainian by his conscious choice. The aim of the article is to clarify the specifics of the phenomenon of Yu. Shevelov’s Jewish world as a specific part of his social and intellectual environment before World War II. Yu. Shevelov’s “Jewish World” is considered a phenomenological construct reflected in the scholar’s memoirs and essays describing his relations with Jews and their role in shaping his intellectualism, critical thinking, moral principles, and worldview in general. The components of Yu. Shevelov’s “Jewish World” are his relations with Jews in everyday life described in his memoirs and reflections on the Kharkiv performances of the Jewish theatre staged by Alexis Granovsky in Yiddish. The authors of the article emphasize that “spiritually close Jews” were an important component of Yu. Shevelov’s existential project, the implementation of which provided for the creation of modern Ukrainian culture as a basis for establishing historical justice – Ukraine’s understanding of its independent development without Russian pressure. The existential nature of cultural communication with “his Jews” is underlined by the fact that Yu. Shevelov was not a supporter of their linguistic and cultural assimilation that was consistently implemented by the governments in tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union.

Key Words: Yuri Shevelov, “his Jews,” Kharkiv, identity.



“A Millennium of Co-Existence” of Ukrainians and Jews¹ had certain responses in academic, journalistic, archival, documentary, artistic, and, eventually, in many hybrid narratives of recent decades. However, not all topics have been fully explored, and the controversial issues caused by the neighborhood of the two nations are far from being resolved. On the one hand, Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern stated that there is no scholarly

1 Quote from *Jews and Ukrainians: A Millennium of Co-Existence* by Paul Robert Magocsi and Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern (University of Toronto Press, 2016).

verified list of texts “that might fall under the rubric ‘Ukrainian-Jewish’ or tried to explain what the ‘Ukrainian Jew’ implied.”² On the other hand, few texts would reflect not only the economic or pragmatic reasons for the rapprochement of Ukrainians and Jews but also the nature of their intellectual and cultural relations. The same researcher outlined the need and perspective for the scholarly understanding of the problem area as follows, “we know very little about those Jews who, preferring to be part of the colonial rather than the imperial, chose to integrate into what appeared to nineteenth-century thinkers a non-historical nation, predominantly peasant, powerless, and bereft of statehood.”³ This study is also important as there is an obvious lack of thorough criticism of “the dominance of conflict narratives that have cast each [Ukrainians and Jews. – *T. Sh., N. T.*] as the brutal Other.”⁴ Thus, in our opinion, it is necessary to take into account the individual experience of Ukrainians, whose contacts with Jews are psychologically comfortable and have a creative and intellectual orientation, that is, they reflect a certain request of the individual for a communicative environment to develop and meet their spiritual and cultural needs. The focus on the texts representing such experience will contribute to the harmonization of the multicultural environment of modern Ukraine and the creation of correct optics for the coverage and interpretation of particular complex conflicts in the history of inter-ethnic relations.

The literary heritage of Yurii Shevelov (1908–2002), a Ukrainian Slavist, cultural researcher, and writer, represents contacts with Jews quite widely. He repeatedly uses the expression “Ukrainian Jews” in his memoirs⁵ and essays,⁶ developing in these texts a unique axiologically marked concept of “his Jews.” The value-based semantics of this concept is verbalized through the possessive pronoun “his,” which similar to other pronouns of the same group (e.g., “our,” “their”), emphasizes not only the belonging of something or somebody to a person or creature but also their resemblance in something important and significant or their kinship with someone (something) considered to be their own. Such similarity (kinship) makes it impossible to submit the “otherness” of the Other to the totality of “We” in Levinas’s sense⁷ and, at the same time, prevents its transformation into the Stranger.

2 Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, *Anti-Imperial Choice: The Making of the Ukrainian Jew* (NewHaven & London: Yale University Press, 2009), 6.

3 Ibid.

4 Myroslav Shkandrij, *Jews in Ukrainian Literature: Representation and Identity* (NewHaven & London: Yale University Press, 2009), 5.

5 Yurii Shevelov, *Ya – mene – meni... (i dovkruhy): Spohady [I – Me – to Me... (and Around): Memoirs]*, vol. 1, *V Ukraini [In Ukraine]* (Kharkiv: Publisher Oleksandr Savchuk, 2017), 30.

6 Yurii Shevelov, “Triuizmy (v holovnomu) i troie liudei zamuchenykh” [“Truisms (Mainly) and Three People Tortured”], in *Z istorii nezakinchenoi viiny [From the History of the Unfinished War]*, ed. Oksana Zabuzhko and Larysa Masenko (Kyiv: Vydavnychi dim “Kyievo-Mohylianska akademiia,” 2009), 402.

7 More on this: Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and Other (and Additional Essays)*, transl. by Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987).

Yu. Shevelov found “his Jews” in Kharkiv in the 1910–1930s. They received this status due to the moral principles, psychological qualities, and intellectual traits important to him as a Ukrainian by conscious choice. Until now, this interesting aspect of Yu. Shevelov’s literary heritage has not been the object of study. Thus, this paper aims to outline his Jewish world and clarify the specifics of Yu. Shevelov’s relationships with “his Jews” who were a significant part of his social and intellectual environment before World War II and characterize the correlation of his Jewish world as a cultural phenomenon with his choice of the Ukrainian identity.

The “human world” concept is borrowed from cultural anthropology (Kulturanthropologie). According to the German philosopher Erich Rothacker, “human worlds” differ from objective reality as they are related to the person’s worldview and environment and reflect the value system determining their life.⁸ Vladimir Abushenko writes, “People always belong to certain communities that create their environment and self-realise in very concrete cultures (ethnic and linguistic with their unique traditions and principles). Culture defines ‘styles of life’ as forms of the person’s self-expression based on the differences identified by them... In them the person... realises as a creative historical personality who makes ‘their worlds.’”⁹

Shevelov’s memoirs show that there were a lot of Jews among his friends in educational and professional communities in the 1910–1930s. Among them, he was in “his world” and in later life, he interpreted it as the environment of his personal, cultural, and professional development.

The historical and cultural foundation of this research were the works by Gennady Estraiikh,¹⁰ Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern,¹¹ Myroslav Shkandrij¹² focused on the Ukrainian and Jewish cultural ties; by Ella Tsyhankova,¹³ who wrote about activities of

8 On this: Vladimir Abushenko, “Rothacker Erich (1888–1965),” in *Istoriia filosofii. Entsiklopediia [History of Philosophy. Encyclopaedia]*, ed. by Aleksandr Hritsanov (Minsk, Interpresservis, Book House, 2002), 910–1.

9 Ibid., 911.

10 Gennady Estraiikh, “From Yehupets Jargonists to Kiev Modernists: The rise of a Yiddish literary Centre, 1880–1914,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 30, no. 1 (2000): 17–38; Gennady Estraiikh, “The Kharkiv Yiddish literary world, 1920s–mid-1930s,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 32, no. 2 (2002): 70–88; Gennady Estraiikh, *In Harness: Yiddish Writers’ Romance with Communism* (N. Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2005).

11 Petrovsky-Shtern, *Anti-Imperial Choice*.

12 Shkandrij, *Jews in Ukrainian Literature*.

13 The activities of the Hebraist Historical and Archaeological Commission at VUAN (1919–1929) headed by Illia Halant, the Jewish Culture Chair, where the historian of Yiddish language and literature Nakhum Shtif, linguist Eli Spivak, historian Saul Borovyi, the State Jewish Academic Institute (1930–1936), and the Office for the Study of Jewish Soviet Literature, Language and Folklore (1936–1948) are presented in her research: Ella Tsyhankova, *Skhodoznavchi ustanovy v Ukraini: Radianskyi period [Oriental Studies Institutions in Ukraine: The Soviet Period]* (Kyiv: Krytyka, 2007), 66–83, 119–39.

Soviet academic institutions in Ukraine studying Jewish history and culture.¹⁴ Notably, G. Estraikh indicated the reasons for the appearance, spread, and popularisation of Yiddish language literature in Ukraine in the first half of the twentieth century and stated that “Yiddishism” relying on Yiddish language and Yiddish culture (alongside “hebraism”) was a method of modernist cultural self-understanding of Jewish intellectuals, especially in Kyiv and Kharkiv.¹⁵ Ukrainian historical and cultural realities in the researcher’s narrative are rather the background for the development of “Yiddishism,” although the author also notes that “Kyiv Yiddish-speaking writers were influenced by the development of Ukrainian literature at that time.”¹⁶

Paul Magosci and Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern claim in a popular publication supported by facts that the attitude of Jews and Ukrainians towards each other as “others” and even “strangers” living nearby is rooted in the social memory of several centuries and stereotypes of each other’s perception.¹⁷ Additionally, George Grabowicz characterized this type of relationship using many literary texts as an example.¹⁸ In his monograph, Y. Petrovsky-Shtern suggests a new perspective for discussing the Ukrainian-Jewish relationship. If we go beyond the political and socio-economic contexts into the cultural one, it will acquire more meanings, as then, “Ukrainians and Jews transcend their differences and share the same pool of ideas, concepts and images.”¹⁹ M. Shkandrij uses literary material to show that “any image operates by recalling accumulated examples that have arisen as responses to specific circumstances and pressures”²⁰ and objects to the opinion that Ukrainians and Jews interacted only for economic purposes. Therefore, the foundation of this research is the idea of culture as a wide space of self-identification, self-representation, and self-realization of people of both national communities.

Thus, the issue of Yu. Shevelov’s ‘Jewish world’ is caused by the need to comprehend the nature and grounds of the spiritual closeness of this intellectual with

14 There is a shortage of substantive research on the presence and activities of Jewish intellectuals in Soviet-era science in Ukraine. In addition to the mentioned works of G. Estraikh and E. Tsyhankova, some information about the Jewish academic life is given in: Liudmyla Hrynevych and Vladyslav Hrynevych, “Yevrei v Ukraini” [“Jews in Ukraine”], in *Entsyklopediia istorii Ukrainy [Encyclopaedia of the History of Ukraine]*, vol. 3 (Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 2005), 72–88; Liudmyla Hrynevych, “Yevreiske natsionalno-kulturne vidrodzhennia 1920-kh – 1930-kh rr. v USRR u ‘prokrustovomu lozhi’ bilshovytskoi ideolohii” [“Jewish National and Cultural Revival of the 1920–1930s in the USSR in the ‘Bed of Procrustes’ of the Bolshevik Ideology”], *Problemy istorii Ukrainy: fakty, sudzhennia, poshuky* 12 (2004), 225–233.

15 Estraikh, “From Yehupets Jargonists to Kiev Modernists,” 24.

16 Ibid., 34.

17 Magosci & Petrovsky-Shtern, *Jews and Ukrainians*, 2.

18 George Grabowicz, “The Jewish Theme in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Ukrainian Literature,” in *Do istorii ukrainskoi literatury: Doslidzhennia, ese, polemika [Toward the History of Ukrainian Literature]* (Kyiv: Osnovy, 1997), 238–58.

19 Petrovsky-Shtern, *Anti-Imperial Choice*, 10.

20 Shkandrij, *Jews in Ukrainian Literature*, 232.

some of the Jews in his Kharkiv environment, whom he called “svoji jevreji” or “his Jews.” Some Jews he wrote about and called “his” chose the Ukrainian language and culture for their life, profession, and creativity in contrast to the dominant Russian one. It is true to say that, in particular, Mykhailo Tetievsky and Lev Dohadko (they will be discussed in this article) “were sensitive toward the repressed nationhood of Ukrainians and whose very marginality fueled their sympathy for the fledging Ukrainian cause.”²¹ At the same time, the “Jewish world” as the object of memories and cultural reflections of the writer is not made up of outcasts but rather talented, educated, highly moral people. Yu. Shevelov describes their natural character traits, knowledge, and results of their activities, which later bolster and add to his “lifestyle” of a humanist, an intellectual, and a Ukrainian by conscious choice. So, we shall understand Yu. Shevelov’s “Jewish world” as a phenomenological construct, is reflected in the scholar’s memoirs and essays about his contacts with Jews and their role in forming his moral-ethical principles and life values, intellectualism, critical thinking, and his worldview in general.

Yu. Shevelov’s questions to himself and about himself can be called basic in the interpretation of his works, “Despite my interest in the contemporaries that I met, I was most impressed, surprised and encouraged to find out what *I* was, yes, I myself. How this *I* appeared, how it was formed, and what it consists of.”²² In his memories, his relations with Jews are included in the reconstruction of the key components of the personality – its cognitive, value-based, and ideological meanings. This formulation of the question correlates with Martin Heidegger’s phenomenological ideas, 1) “any existential project is eventually a question of Being,” 2) “being-with” is a “fundamental existentials of Dasein,” it projects itself “as an exchange of possibilities as a result of which Self assimilates, makes the kinds of being of the Others its own and vice versa.”²³

In this paper, we shall consider those elements of the Jewish world that are in Yu. Shevelov’s focus when he recalls Kharkiv of the 1910–1930s, including “his” Jews, who stand out in his environment,²⁴ and the Jewish theatre performances in Kharkiv at

21 Petrovsky-Shtern, *Anti-Imperial Choice*, 1.

22 Shevelov, *Ya – mene – meni*, 26.

23 Anatolii Zemlianskiy, “Liudynovymirnist istorii u fenomenolohichnii filosofii M. Haideggera” [“Human Measurement of History in Phenomenological Philosophy of M. Heidegger”], *Humanitarnyi visnyk Zaporizkoi derzhavnoi inzhenernoi akademii* 56 (2014): 105.

24 These are Yu. Shevelov’s words about the ethnic composition of the staff of Khemvuhillia (a Soviet bureaucratic organisation in Salamandra building where the Shevelov family had an apartment before the revolution of 1917) in 1925 when he began to work there, “Then I disregarded the fact, but now, when I recall that time in line with American national and racial conflicts, I see that the employees of my institution were all Jews, starting with Pietvsov himself [director of the institution. – *T. Sh., N. T.*], and the head of the largest Accounting Department – chief accountant Vyshnevskiy. The secretary Ravdel was a Jew, as well as his deputy Mirer, head of the Statistics Department, my first boss Fridman, head of the Supply Department with the last name Makler and so on up to the dark-haired fifteen-year-old delivery boy Kurivskiy. Our

that time. Importantly, the Jewish world presented in the author's texts is closely connected with the Ukrainian world that Yu. Shevelov defines it as a space of his spiritual being or, according to M. Heidegger, Dasein. That is why the paper reflects the meanings of the Jewish world through the mirror of the Ukrainian agenda and represents them as varieties of Heidegger's phenomenon "Dasein" – being-in-the-world, being with a kindred spirit.

Kharkiv was Yu. Shevelov's home city. He writes that his parents were of German origin,²⁵ but his mother was born in Kharkiv.²⁶ Both parents were educated in the heart of Russian culture – Saint Petersburg – and belonged to the "service nobility" of the Russian empire.²⁷ Russian culture was dominant for their children. Yet, Kharkiv combines Russian, Ukrainian, and Jewish origins in Yu. Shevelov's memories about his childhood and family.

As an adolescent, Yu. Shevelov slowly (albeit not without conflict²⁸) discovered Ukraine, its language, and culture.²⁹ He felt "the roots of Ukrainianness" "doomed to

typists were the only exception. Apparently, it was typical for that time as there were no workers among Jews except for some professions like printing press workers, for example, but they did prevail in administration." Cited in: Shevelov, *Ya – mene – meni*, 157–8.

25 Shevelov, *Ya – mene – meni*, 132. Earlier (p. 60 of the cited publication), Yu. Shevelov writes only about his mother's "half-German" origin. The authors of this article are not aware of any documentary evidence of her (half) German origin. His father, obviously, had no sentiments for his German roots and did not feel a deep connection with German culture, which turned him into a loyal military servant of the Russian Empire; at the beginning of World War I he responded to the change of his real surname "Schneider" to the Russian "Shevelov" in a practical way ("so as not to change towels, napkins, handkerchiefs"). Shevelov, *Ya – mene – meni*, 60.

26 Yu. Shevelov wrote about the parents of his mother, Varvara Volodymyrivna Meder, the following, "What my grandfather was – I do not know. Most likely, he was a civil servant. My grandmother Liudmyla was from the Nenarochkin family..." (Shevelov, *Ya – mene – meni*, 55). Also, on page 60 of the cited memoir he states that his mother was of "half-German" origin, "because only her father was from Ukraine." We do not have any more accurate proof of Yu. Shevelov's Ukrainian roots.

27 Shevelov, *Ya – mene – meni*, 55–7.

28 Philologists know well that there was a conversation about the "unbeauty" of the Ukrainian language between Yurii, an adolescent, and his older cousin, anthropologist, Anatolii Nosov, in 1923–1924, which aroused his first uncertain desire to understand and prove his Ukrainianness. Later, it turned into Yu. Shevelov's human world, became a "nail knocked into the heart." On this: Shevelov, *Ya – mene – meni*, 129.

29 Yu. Shevelov strongly resisted the superior attitude of Russians towards Ukrainians as colonisers towards the colonised, "Guess, I subconsciously felt that even before my conversion to Ukrainianism, and I knew it very well after it." Cited in: Shevelov, *Ya – mene – meni*, 108.

dry up” in his mother.³⁰ Historian, philologist, and Ukrainian patriot Dmytro Yavornytsky was her teacher at the orphanage institute in Saint Petersburg. She loved the performance of the Ukrainian actress Maria Zankovetska. In 1941, she easily switched from Russian to Ukrainian. Before her death, semi-conscious, she spoke Ukrainian. Varvara Shevelova had a “Ukrainian string,”³¹ however, she did not show it to her children openly. Yet, when Yurii and his sister Vira felt a spiritual kinship with Ukraine, she delicately supported them.³²

The city itself revealed its Ukrainian essence through the genes of its Ukrainian founders,³³ chats on the streets, debates about the future of Ukrainian culture, the literary debate of 1925–1928, and the city park that imitated the natural groves of Slobozhanshchyna, and the life of a peasant market. Yu. Shevelov said, “Germans have the word *Sein* – being, and a nice untranslatable word *Dasein* – being in a certain time and place, being there, being around, surrounding. And – I will add – being loved, being close, being someone’s. Ukraine was close and mine, with its landscapes, people, and white (at that time!) houses.”³⁴ Pre-revolutionary Kharkiv was not Ukrainian politically, but it was such historically and psychologically.

Yu. Shevelov’s Jewish world correlates with the Jewish history of Kharkiv in its ordinary and unique features. Recalling the 1910–1930s, he constantly describes routine³⁵ and deeply intimate, personally significant aspects of this world (new friends,³⁶ first erotic feelings,³⁷ a wish to get married,³⁸ etc.). The Jewish people lived in Kharkiv starting in the 12th century.³⁹ At the beginning of the 20th century, they found their way into almost all areas of city life. These were craftsmen, soldiers, moneylenders,

30 Shevelov, *Ya – mene – meni*, 133.

31 *Ibid.*, 134.

32 His memoirs read, “I am convinced that she was extremely afraid for me when being Ukrainian became a state crime. Still, I do not remember any one case when she would try to me to a much safer Russianness” (Shevelov, *Ya – mene – meni*, 135).

33 Svitlana Potapenko, “Why is Kharkiv Ukrainian?”, *Ukrainskyi tyzhden*, October 5, 2014, <https://tyzhden.ua/chomu-kharkiv-ukrainskyj/>.

34 Shevelov, *Ya – mene – meni*, 132–3.

35 *Ibid.*, 108–9, 115, 157–8, 184–5, etc.

36 *Ibid.*, 108, 228.

37 *Ibid.*, 105.

38 *Ibid.*, 269.

39 The Jewish history of Kharkiv began in the 18th century when Jewish people settled there. The attitude of the city authorities and the governorate towards them, in general, was mostly repressive and assimilating. On the one hand, the authorities restricted their rights forbidding them to live in the city from time to time. On the other hand, Jews were forced into military service (starting in 1827) and baptised. Anti-Semitism intensified under Alexander III and Nicholas II. On this: Oleksandr Kalian, “Pravovyi status yevreiskoho naseleattia ta antyievreiska polityka rosiiskoho samodержavstva v Ukraini (1880–1907)” [“The Legal Status of the Jewish Population and the Anti-Jewish Policy of the Tsarist Autocracy in Ukraine (1880–1907)”], *Aktualni problemy polityky* 41 (2011): 323. Conversion to Christianity was the only way to overcome the restrictions set for Jews by the state. As a result, the number of baptised Jews increased.

employees and owners of printing houses and banks, engineers, doctors, musicians, actors, teachers, scholars, and politicians. There were Jewish social, religious, and cultural organizations in Kharkiv. The Kharkiv Governorate – Sloboda Ukraine – was the only province in the Ukrainian territories that was beyond the Pale of Settlement of Jews until 1917, yet Kharkiv itself was the only city in Ukraine that did not have any Black Hundreds' pogroms from the 1880s until the Bolsheviks' victory.

The structure and activities of the Jewish society in Kharkiv changed significantly after the establishment of Soviet power in 1919. A lot of wealthy, influential, and talented Jews emigrated. Those who stayed had to adapt to the ban on private business. The Zionist movement became semi-clandestine or clandestine. Some Jewish public activists and politicians cooperated with the Communist Party to preserve Jewish theatre studios, work clubs, arts and literature journals, socio-political publications, and school and professional education. Interestingly, in 1920, Kharkiv Ukrainians and Jews constituted nearly equal ethnic groups: 21% of Ukrainians and 20.5% of Jews.⁴⁰ Almost 270,000 people of various nationalities have lived, studied, and worked in Kharkiv since 1920.

The experience of studying under two “Jews-apostates,” Mark Yeletskyi and Leonid Bulakhovsky, was significant for Yu. Shevelov personally.⁴¹ He gratefully remembered the former as a gymnasium tutor, whose “apolitical and non-ideological” teaching method made it easier to “liberate” from the “framework” of the Soviet “political doctrine.”⁴² Studying under the latter at Kharkiv Institute of People's Education / Kharkiv Pedagogical Institute of Vocational Education (the names of Kharkiv University during the 1920s – early 1930s), Yu. Shevelov called the institution his “school of honesty” and highly appreciated “reasonable” thinking, factual accuracy, and loyalty to the selected methods and principles of the linguistic studies of its scholars.⁴³ Decades later, Yu. Shevelov fondly recalled the trust Bulakhovsky, “THE TEACHER,” had in him in those days and retained when his student found himself in exile, “In response to Bilodid-Jacobson's slander, he sent me regards from a Western scholar (Henrik Birnbaum) and a book with his signature through a mutual acquaintance

40 Maryna Kostiuchenko, “Etnichniy sklad naseleennia Kharkova u 20–30-kh rokakh XX stolittia” [“Ethnic Composition of Kharkiv Population in the 20–30s of the 20th Century”], *Piatnadtsiati Sumtsovski chytannia: Zbirnyk materialiv naukovoï konferentsii ... 17 kvitnia 2009 r.* [Fifteenth Sumtsov Readings: Collection of Materials from the Scientific Conference on April 17, 2009] (Kharkiv: Oryhinal, 2009), 30–1.

41 Shevelov, *Ya – mene – meni*, 85. Leonid Bulakhovsky (1888–1961) – a Slavic linguist who established the Ukrainian school of Slavic studies. He is an author of fundamental research on the old and new Ukrainian literary language, history and current issues of the Russian literary language, and accentological studies in the West and South Slavic languages. More on him: Tetiana Lukinova, “Bulakhovsky Leonid Arseniiovych,” in *Encyclopedia of Modern Ukraine* [Online], ed. by Ivan Dziuba, Arkadii Zhukovskiy, Mykola Zhelezniak etc. (Kyiv: The NASU Institute of Encyclopedic Research, 2004). <https://esu.com.ua/article-37866>.

42 Shevelov, *Ya – mene – meni*, 103.

43 *Ibid.*, 197.

in Lviv. I know that he believed in me to the end.”⁴⁴ In school, Yu. Shevelov learned Ukrainian from the textbook of Olena Kurylo,⁴⁵ a Jew (“her original name and surname are unknown”⁴⁶). In 1954, Yu. Shevelov wrote a thorough work about her and Vsevolod Hantsov, returning the memory of the scholars repressed by the Soviet authorities to Ukrainian linguistic studies.⁴⁷ After Ahapii Shamrai, whose professional expertise fascinated Yu. Shevelov, Volodymyr Koriak⁴⁸, a Jew who “knew as much about literature as a pig knows about pineapples,”⁴⁹ went on lecturing Ukrainian literature to him.

The short period of the Soviet “korenizatsiia” policy of the 1923–1930s⁵⁰ contributed to the strengthening of contacts with Jews, “The Soviet slogan ‘friendship of peoples’ is, of course, nothing more than a propaganda hoax, but during my twenty years in the Soviet Union, the barriers between Jews and others were really removed, or at least pushed aside, and nothing separated me from my Jewish friends.”⁵¹ “I was one of them, we were close,” Yu. Shevelov writes about his Jew friends Zunin, Barmas, Finkel, Tetiievskiy, Dohadko, Marek and himself.⁵² Basically, it was the bond of young people shaped by the city. “Just like them, I never “grazed the lambs,”⁵³ the author

44 Ibid., 199.

45 Olena Kurylo (1890–1946) studied the norms of the Ukrainian literary language, Ukrainian terminology, and Ukrainian dialects; she was a phraseologist and syntactist; she stood at the origins of the studies in general phonetics and phonology.

46 Velvl Chernin, *Viriu, shcho ya ne pasynok: Ukrainski literaturni yevreiskoho pokhodzhennia [I Believe I'm Not a Stepson: Ukrainian Writers of Jewish Origin]* (Lviv: Publishing House of the Ukrainian Catholic University, 2016), 49.

47 Yurii Sherekh, *Vsevolod Hantsov. Olena Kurylo* (Winnipeg: Ukraine House Toronto, 1954). Collecting fragments of Olena Kurylo’s intellectual biography for his work, Yu. Shevelov mentioned her Jewish origin and stated, “Embracing national romanticism from Potebnia and directly from his teacher W. Humboldt, Kurylo also took over Potebnia’s second feature, which always limited his romanticism – his sober assessment of facts, his honesty as a scholar.” Cited in: Yurii Shevelov, *Portrety ukrainskykh movoznavtsiv [Portraits of Ukrainian Linguists]* (Kyiv: Vydavnychi dim “Kyievo-Mohylianska akademiia,” 2002), 58, 67. Allegedly, the fact of Olena Kurylo’s Jewish origin was unknown to the general public during her life and decades later. Thanks to that, her *Remarks on the Contemporary Ukrainian Literary Language* were published in the Ukrainian Publishing House in Lviv during the German occupation in 1942; and examples from her works were widely used in the Ukrainian-German Dictionary by Zenon Kuzelia and Jaroslav Rudnytskyj, published in Otto Harrasowitz’s publishing house in Leipzig in 1943. If the censorship of that time had the relevant information, these projects would hardly have been implemented.

48 Chernin, *Viriu, shcho ya ne pasynok*, 40.

49 In Ukrainian: “rozumivsia na literaturi, iak svynia na pomaranchakh.” Shevelov, *Ya – mene – meni*, 243.

50 See: Yurii Shapoval, “Korenizatsiia,” in *Encyclopedia of Modern Ukraine [Online]*, ed. by Ivan Dziuba, Arkadii Zhukovskiy, Mykola Zhelezniak etc. (Kyiv: The NASU Institute of Encyclopedic Research, 2014). <https://esu.com.ua/article-3553>.

51 Shevelov, *Ya – mene – meni*, 109.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.

wrote about one of the reasons for their closeness.⁵⁴ In Yu. Shevelov's perception, "his" Jews embodied urbanism, cosmopolitanism, quickness of responses, and interest in the cultures in which they existed.⁵⁵

He mentions two classmates as "the first in his *long list of the closest Jewish friends* [our italics. – T. Sh, N. T.]." The first one, Tosia Zunin, "exceptionally gifted," and "quick-minded," disappeared from Yu. Shevelov's life after school and, in his opinion, was repressed just because he was too bright for the grey Soviet reality.⁵⁶ The second one, Misha Barmas, was "reserved and consistent," with "calm irony and common sense." After school, Misha helped Yu. Shevelov to collect a unique library of Russian romanticism, which was later used by L. Bulakhovsky for studying the Russian language of the first half of the 19th century.⁵⁷ The names of the "best" and "closest" friends of his student days, the Jews Finkel, Marek, and Tetiievskiy, appear in the memories of the Kharkiv University (Kharkiv Pedagogical Institute of Vocational Education in 1927–1931). Mykhailo Finkel, "light," "more agile, small, fast, and smart" according to Yu. Shevelov, had a good taste for Russian and Ukrainian literature and a sharp eye of a caricaturist.⁵⁸ Finkel was likely to spark Yu. Shevelov's interest in capturing the essence of the phenomenon in grotesque cartoons or caricatures. Later, the writer will use this approach in verbal portraits of some characters in his life.⁵⁹ Post-graduate student Marek, just like Finkel, "read a lot and had a literary taste," and also "knew how to ask questions and think systematically." Marek's intellectualism was complemented by high moral virtues: "humanity" and "abhorrence of illegal actions."⁶⁰ At the Ukrainian Institute of Journalism, Yu. Shevelov met a colleague, Ukrainian teacher, Lev Dohadko, whom he calls "a bigger Ukrainian patriot than many of his Ukrainian fellows,"⁶¹ "a person of trust," "witty," "honest to goodness," and "ill-adapted to the Soviet system of denunciation and lies."⁶²

54 Russian culture also had a status of a city one, but Yu. Shevelov never thought of it as "his" culture. His memories prove that: Shevelov, *Ya – mene – meni*, 108, 245. Moreover, the intellectual considered "independence and eradication of the Russian from Ukraine" the only salvation from the destruction of Ukraine by Russia in the near or distant future (ibid., 245).

55 Shevelov, *Ya – mene – meni*, 108–9.

56 Ibid., 104–6.

57 Ibid., 106.

58 Ibid., 184.

59 More on this: Tetiana Shestopalova, "Krytychne myslennia yak chynnyk intelektualnoi biohrafii Yurii Shevelova" ["Critical Thinking as a Factor in the Intellectual Biography of Yurii Shevelov"] in *Literator-intelektual u mihratsiinykh protsesakh: vyklyky dlia pam'ati ta identychnosti* [An Intellectual Writer in Migration Processes: Challenges for Memory and Identity], ed. by Oleksandr Pronkevych (Mykolaiv: Publishing House of Petro Mohyla Black Sea National University, 2018), 49–76.

60 Shevelov, *Ya – mene – meni*, 353–4.

61 Ibid., 276.

62 Shevelov, "Triuizmy," 398.

When, in the early 1930s, the policy of “korenizatsiia” was canceled, and large-scale Stalinist repressions began, a paradoxical situation arose when Jews were sued not only on charges of “counter-revolution,” but also “Ukrainian nationalism.” That is what happened, for example, with Kharkiv lawyer Z. Marholis and historian Y. Hermaize. Yu. Shevelov also communicated with the Jews who were declared “Ukrainian nationalists.” Lev Dohadko and Mykhailo Tetiievskyyi were among them.

Positive ethical and moral principles, cognitive abilities and worldview values attributed to “his” Jews, shape an existential landscape of a future “Ukrainian by choice,” according to Yu. Shevelov. He consciously took a defensive position regarding Ukraine and its culture in 1930, “Ukrainians have now been turned into what English-speaking peoples describe by the word *underdog*, and moving away from what I admired in the twenties would be a shame and a crime against myself.”⁶³ Ukrainians were “being trampled, yet, standing up. The former evoked sympathy, the latter encouraged you to move together. No matter how strange and illogical it may seem from the outside, my [Shevelov’s. – *T. Sh., N. T.*] Ukrainianness fully developed at that time.”⁶⁴

German blood and Russian noble culture created a distance between Yu. Shevelov and rustic Ukrainianism⁶⁵ but nurturing Ukrainianness as a personal resistance to political enslavement formed high expectations for modern Ukrainianism. Yu. Shevelov wrote about himself as a university graduate, “My long-standing internal rejection of the Soviet Union became an intricate psychological game associated with the state of Ukrainian culture: it is chased and persecuted, so we are accomplices. These were not logical considerations, I probably did not realize it at the time, but somewhere in the subconscious some strings were stretched, some bridges were thrown.”⁶⁶ Using A. Smith’s terminology, we can talk about the “anti-colonial” intention of Yu. Shevelov’s social behaviour, which is the prerequisite for his advocacy of the “Western” model of the civic and territorial nation.⁶⁷ “His Jews,” “people from towns and cities, not from villages”⁶⁸ matched the inner mood and modern Ukrainian beliefs of the young Yu. Shevelov. Like him, they were free of sentimentality and romantic piety for the land typical for Ukrainians. On the other hand, Jews did not have the sorts of colonial traumas and immanent complexes generally described by Yu. Shevelov as *provincialism*

63 Shevelov, *Ya – mene – meni*, 132.

64 Ibid., 245.

65 Ibid., 244. His final self-perception as a Ukrainian – not rural or urban, rustic or modern – happened later, during World War II. More on this: Tetiana Shestopalova, “Natsionalna kultura yak stratehiia samozberezhennia osobystosti: Yurii Shevelov and druha svitova viina. Chastyna druha” [“National Culture as a Strategy for Self-Preservation of Personality: Yurii Shevelov and World War II. Part II”], *Synopsys: tekst, kontekst, media* 27, no. 2 (2021): 63–9, <https://doi.org/10.28925/2311-259X.2021.2.4>.

66 Shevelov, *Ya – mene – meni*, 258.

67 Anthony Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 80–1.

68 Shevelov, *Ya – mene – meni*, 244–5.

and *Kochubey-style attitudes*.⁶⁹ Thus, communication with them could additionally direct him to the modern format of Ukrainian culture and later to the modern Ukrainian identity. Y. Shevelov revealed the topic of searching for “his” people when explaining Hryhorii Skovoroda’s environment: “He respected the peasants... but he was not kin to them. He was not looking for the rich people, either - he was looking for the well-educated.”⁷⁰

Living next to Ukrainians for centuries, Jews showed a dissimilar similarity with them in the stories of persecution, pressure, social and national oppression, and hostile warnings of one towards others.⁷¹ Both peoples were patient, able to start from scratch in exile and forced resettlement, and persistent in business. In fact, Jews and not Russians or Poles were the closest Ukrainians’ internal neighbors in nearly every region of our country for many years. They were the closest, but not recognized and not known in the meaning and consequences that their intimate closeness to the indigenous people can have. Jews knew the habits, way of life, strengths and weaknesses of the Ukrainian character well. It enabled them to at least survive among people adherent of a different faith, successfully applying their entrepreneurial spirit⁷² in relations with them and keeping an eye on the pragmatics of their own existence.

The knowledge about Ukrainians, obtained by Jews as *others* out of vital necessity, was important for Ukrainians themselves because Dasein provides a place for the Other, with whom the exchange of “existential possibilities” takes place. As a result, the Self assimilates, making the “kinds of being of the Others its own and vice versa.”⁷³ It is in this way that we tend to understand Yu. Shevelov’s outwardly provocative thesis about Jews as an element of the “chemical composition of the very blood of our nation.”⁷⁴ Also, this thesis has direct connotations related to Mykhailo Tetiievskiy’s stories (*Musiia* [*Mosaic*], *z-yevreiska-Moiseia* [*from-the-Jewish-Moses*])⁷⁵ and Lev Dohadko: the three of them passed the exam for spiritual brotherhood. When arrested

69 Yurii Shevelov, “Moskva, Maroseika” [“Moscow, Maroseika”], in *Z istorii nezakinchenoi viiny* [*From the History of the Unfinished War*], ed. by Oksana Zabuzhko and Larysa Masenko (Kyiv: Vydavnychi dim “Kyievo-Mohylianska akademiia,” 2009), 70.

70 Yurii Shevelov, “Poperedni zauvahy do vyvchennia movy ta stylu Skovorody” [“Preliminary Notes on Learning Skovoroda’s Language and Style”], *Zapysky Naukovoho tovarystva imeni Shevchenka* CCXXXIX: Works of the Philological Section (2000): 204.

71 Petrovsky-Shtern, *Anti-Imperial Choice*, 7–10.

72 In the memoirs, Jews are given as an example of a successful “incarnation of private initiative,” which they retained in the first decades of Soviet power in Kharkiv longer than representatives of other nationalities. See: Shevelov, *Ya – mene – meni... (i dovkruhy)* [*I – me – to me... (and around)*], 161.

73 *Anatolii Zemlianskyi*, “Liudynovymirnist istorii,” 105.

74 Shevelov, “Triuizmy,” 403.

75 *Ibid.*, 400.

in 1938, Tetiievskyi did not go wrong to slander Shevelov; and Shevelov did not do that for Dohadko when interrogated in 1941 by the State Policy Department.⁷⁶

In his essay “Truisms (Mainly) and Three People Tortured” (1996), Yu. Shevelov described Tetiievskyi as a Jew who met all the anthropological parameters of a Ukrainian, “Ukrainian was his native language. He was a villager altogether. The medical commission that collected anthropological materials about Jews in Ukraine was surprised to find that his body measurements did not have any Jewish features; they were all Ukrainian. I asked Myshko if there were non-Jews in his family. He did not know any of them.”⁷⁷

Ukrainian philologist Tetiievskyi worked at the Institute of Linguistics under the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR. He was repressed twice in the 1930s, first, for his Ukrainian and then Jewish nationalism. Yu. Shevelov remembered him as a person who consciously supported the Ukrainian language and culture despite all the dangers of his decision in a totalitarian state. Such behavior can be explained only by the fact that his Jewish and Ukrainian worldviews were part of his existential project.

Yu. Shevelov’s colleague from Ukrainian Institute of Journalism in Kharkiv, Lev Dohadko, is also a protagonist of “Truisms.” The essay presents Dohadko as a teacher who inspired love and professional interest in Ukrainian culture in the famous Ukrainian literary critic Leonid Novychenko. This story seems to be an episode of the mystified biography of Novychenko as Yu. Shevelov unites two worthy people in one memory, contrary to the historically documented data, which claims that Novychenko could not meet Dohadko in his school years. Yet, the idea of the discovery of a new talented student by a Jewish Ukrainianist fully corresponds to one of the key narratives of the mature Yu. Shevelov that Ukrainian and Jewish cultures share a common genetic code. Yu. Shevelov’s emphasis on the peasant origin of both protagonists also supports this thesis.⁷⁸

We should note that Yu. Shevelov finally freed himself from the internal opposition of “rustic” Ukrainians to “urbanized” representatives of other cultures, particularly, Jews, during his stay in Halychyna in 1943. Then, for the first time, he got into the environment of Ukrainians who combined a modern cultural worldview and the “eternal transcendental peasantry.”⁷⁹ Then the moral act of uniting with Ukrainian “underdogs” that took place in the early 1930s transformed into a full-fledged modern Ukrainian national identity, advocated by Yu. Shevelov throughout his subsequent life. Presumably, as was stated in one of T. Shestopalova’s previous studies, “due to them, the Jewish children of Ukrainian villages, Yu. Shevelov later reflected on the organic, personified peasantry, a layer of Ukrainian identity

76 Ibid., 399, 401.

77 Ibid., 400.

78 Shevelov, “Triuizmy,” 398, 400.

79 Shevelov, *Ya – mene – meni*, 509.

absolutely necessary for the emergence of a modern Ukrainian nation and its culture.”⁸⁰

Yu. Shevelov’s idea about the Jewish component of the Ukrainian world in no case meant an apologetic and uncritical attitude towards Jews. Complete *strangers* to him (although he does not use this word as opposed to the pronoun “his”) were the “Jews of Russian culture,” Naum Kahanovych, Oleksandr Finkel (Roman Jacobson in the USA) who fought in every possible way against the “independence in Ukrainian linguistics and language policy;”⁸¹ Musii Faibyshenko, an agent provocateur who worked for NKVS (his denunciation forced Yu. Shevelov to agree to a short formal compromise with the Soviet system).⁸² The memories of his first trip to Lviv in 1940 contain the image of a “commissar from Kyiv” who divided the books of the Shevchenko Scientific Society in Lviv into “kosher and non-kosher,” i.e., those available for readers, and those that would go to the special fund of the NKVS (“Probably a Jew,” Yu. Shevelov writes about him⁸³).

The multitude of random references to different Jews of the Kharkiv era even more clearly reflects the concept of “his” Jews, with whom he established a high degree of spiritual and intellectual kinship.⁸⁴ “Talks and walks” with Jewish friends are among the most important events of his student years,⁸⁵ together with his study under Oleksandr Biletskyi, Leonid Bulakhovsky, and Ahapii Shamrai, his visits to the modern Les Kurbas Theatre, and his acquaintance with the Boychukist art.⁸⁶ The lack of regular meetings with “his” Jews in Kharkiv, occupied by the Nazis, is mentioned as the greatest problem of his environment. All these are eloquent narrative gestures pointing to the Jewish world of Y. Shevelov as a demand of his spirit. He emphasizes the Jewish origin of his teachers and academic mentors, Yeletskyi, Hopp (his school tutor), and Bulakhovsky, for a reason. Moreover, he traces the beginning of the academic career of the young Ukrainian scholar Leonid Novychenko to a Jew, a teacher of Ukrainian, Lev

80 Ibid., 509. More on this: Shestopalova, “Natsionalna kultura yak stratehiia samozberezhenia osobystosti,” 64–5.

81 Shevelov, *Ya – mene – meni*, 286.

82 Ibid., 375–6.

83 Ibid., 386.

84 Ibid., 228.

85 Ibid., 239.

86 “Boychukists” are followers of “Boychukism” (named after the artist Mykhailo Boychuk). Boychukism is Ukrainian avant-garde art of the 1910–1930s that combined national traditions (church art of Byzantium, Ukrainian primitive art) with the trends of the contemporary European artistic process. Boychukists aimed at creating a national style that would appeal to national consciousness and contribute to the national education of society. More on this: *Tetiana Bereziuk*, “Boichukizm,” in *Encyclopedia of Modern Ukraine* [Online], ed. by Ivan Dziuba, Arkadii Zhukovskiy, Mykola Zhelezniak etc. (Kyiv: The NASU Institute of Encyclopedic Research, 2004). <https://esu.com.ua/article-36203>.

Dohadko⁸⁷ – “the person who knew the taste of a real Ukrainian poem.”⁸⁸ Also, for a reason, Yu. Shevelov mentions together those people who meant a lot to him like Bulakhovsky, Biletskyi, Shamrai, and his Jewish friends.

Thus, based on M. Heidegger’s thesis about co-existence with the Other as an essentially necessary moment of Dasein’s existence, we believe that Y. Shevelov’s Jews met his inner demand for a like-minded environment, in which the key opportunities for his self-identification and self-realization matured.

Theatre performances were the source of Yu. Shevelov’s whole new perception of himself and the world.⁸⁹ Actually, the theatre also imitated the locus of Dasein – being in one’s own world, protected from others.⁹⁰ Yu. Shevelov called Fernand Crommelynck’s “Golden Guts,” Les Kurbas’s performance at Berezil Theatre in Kharkiv (1926), “one of the peaks” of his biography. Seventy years later, it echoed in Yu. Shevelov’s memory with “dizzying and ecstatic delight” caused by its external effectiveness and a brilliant ideological synthesis, “Avarice led to death, and the topic of death was also picked up to discuss immortality... non-life, the immortality of death.”⁹¹ The novelty of the performance was in offering the audience “full” and “rich” spectacular theatre that replaced the asceticism of stage design, popular at the time. L. Kurbas created a synthetic “theatre of theatrical thinking or thinking in the costume of theatricality.”⁹² Yu. Shevelov had a similar encounter with the “synthetic theatre and something very theatrical” at the performance “Trouadec” of the State Jewish Theatre under Alexis Granowsky, “Moscow GOSET.”⁹³

87 There is almost no information about Lev Yukhymovych Dohadko. The website *Open List of Victims of Political Repressions in the USSR* states his date and place of birth – born in 1906 in the village of Rivne, Novoukrainskyi district of Kirovohrad region, a Jew ([https://ua.openlist.wiki/Догадъко Лев Юхимович \(1906\)](https://ua.openlist.wiki/Догадъко Лев Юхимович (1906))). There is a note that he lived in Poltava and worked as a teacher at a pedagogical institute. He was arrested on June 25, 1941, and convicted by the Special Meeting of the NKVD of the USSR on December 11, 1941, under article 54-10, part 1 of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian SSR and sentenced up to 8 years of imprisonment. We cannot verify this information. Yu. Shevelov writes in the mentioned essay that Lev Dohadko was repressed for “Ukrainian nationalism” and executed by shooting in the summer of 1941.

88 Shevelov, “Triuizmy,” 399.

89 Yu. Shevelov’s mental “I/Self” had a complex of “not being with people,” but only “surrendering” to them. On this: Shevelov, *Ya – mene – meni*, 102. Acting, aimed at creating an illusion of reality, matched this peculiarity of the author’s mental organisation.

90 Yu. Shevelov wrote, “...my, in those years illogical and abnormal, addiction to the theatre reveals, perhaps, another deeper feature of my second desk complex: the desire not to get involved in life, to watch it as a spectator, to have a psychological barrier between oneself and life.” *Ibid.*, 331.

91 *Ibid.*, 174.

92 *Ibid.*, 175.

93 *Ibid.*, 232.

This theatre was among the four,⁹⁴ the impression and influence of which on Yu. Shevelov was equal to the impression and influence of Kurbas's Berezil. Yet, GOSET was remarkable in its own way. Yu. Shevelov mentioned eight GOSET performances in the notebook where he wrote down all the plays and films⁹⁵ he saw. Two of them, "Trouadec" by Jules Romains⁹⁶ and "The Travels of Benjamin III" by Mendele Mocher Sforim, were modern Western European plays, and, in Yu. Shevelov's opinion was a brilliant, albeit unusual, "stylization of European through Jewish."⁹⁷ Yiddish, the language of Granowsky's theatre, added a special emphasis to this stylization. Yu. Shevelov admitted that he did not know the language and details of Jewish life,⁹⁸ but admired the rhythm of the performances he visited, shades of the mood, and noted broad generalizations in grotesque images.

In Granowsky's theatre, Yiddish embodied the ideological position of mass theatre. The everyday language of Jews scattered throughout Europe (and then America) was brought to the stage. Such a creative attitude fundamental for this theatre embodied the symbolic secularization of the beginnings of Jewish existence, marked by migrations and wanderings. Vladislav Ivanov, author of a monograph about GOSET in 1919–1928 wrote that performances in Yiddish meant the theatre's acceptance of diasporic existence as the historical destiny of Jews. It determined the choice of typical plays to be staged – about the life of towns where Jews lived together in diaspora groups. A. Granowsky showed this life and at the same time its dying, caused by the disappearance of Jewish settlements. The tradition of Jewish shtetls demonstrated on the stage affirmed Jewish collective identity based on cultural and religious unity and suggested that the traditional way of town life not only protected Jews but also inhibited and limited their participation in the dynamic and highly changing reality of the first decades of the 20th century.

To present this complicated ideological complex, "Alexis Granowsky had to search for his non-verbal stage language, the source of which was the low spectacular culture."⁹⁹ As a result, the theatrical style of GOSET and A. Granowsky became recognizable thanks to the "tragic grotesque" (Vladislav Ivanov), even though the

94 In addition to A. Granowsky, this "four" included the Rustaveli National Theatre in Georgia under the direction of Sandro Akhmeteli, Meyerhold State Theatre and Alexander Tairov Chamber Theatre.

95 George Y. Shevelov Papers, 1922–2001. Series II: Writings. Subseries II.6: Draft, Notes and Research Materials, 1930s–1990s. Theatre. Box 27, folder 15. Rare Book & Manuscript Library Collections. Columbia University Libraries.

96 Trouadec is a character of Jules Romains's plays "Monsieur le Trouhadec Saisi par la Debauche" (1921) and "Le mariage de Le Trouhadec" (1925). The name of Trouadec appears in Shevelov's memories and in the mentioned theatre notebook (under no. 316).

97 Shevelov, *Ya – mene – meni*, 232.

98 *Ibid.*, 168. Having a good command of German, he could certainly get a general idea of what was said on the Jewish stage.

99 Vladislav Ivanov, *GOSET: politika i iskusstvo. 1919–1928* [*GOSET: Politics and Art. 1919–1928*] (Moscow: GITIS, 2007), 8.

grotesque is, without exaggeration, a common way of representing the world in Jewish culture.

Yu. Shevelov emphasized the “grotesque and mockery of traditional life” as something unique that he learned from Meyerhold and Granowsky.¹⁰⁰ Shevelov characterizes three plays – “Golden Guts” by L. Kurbas, “Trouadec” and “The Travels of Benjamin III” by A. Granowsky – as “obviously national, yet, belonging to the modern theatre.”¹⁰¹ Among the tools used by the latter were Cubo-Futurist images of space and man, the richness of music and colours, and experiments with folklore. Conceptually, the grotesquely presented everyday life acquired anti-domestic, metaphysical properties.

Vadym Meller and Isaak Rabinovich were responsible for the artistic side of “Golden Guts” and “Trouadec” correspondingly. In the late 1910s, V. Meller and I. Rabinovich belonged to the avant-garde art community formed around Aleksandra Ekster. Jews Oleksandr Tischler, Isaak Rabinovich, Nisson Shifrin, Ukrainians Oleksandr Khvostenko-Khvostov, Les Kurbas, etc. complimented the artistic atmosphere in her Kyiv apartment.¹⁰² On the one hand, these artists relied on the experience of various European art schools in Munich, Paris, and Geneva in their work. On the other hand, they expanded the audience’s perception of the modern national style, using the elements of ethnicity and “traditional visual Ukrainian culture” close to them in theatrical experiments.¹⁰³

Thus, the European discourse on the productions of L. Kurbas and A. Granowsky had specific Ukrainian and Jewish ethnic and cultural codes. Yu. Shevelov thought the “search for a synthesis of the national and national-traditional with the means of

100 Shevelov, *Ya – mene – meni*, 169.

101 Ibid., 232.

102 More on this: Myroslav Shkandrij, “Henii Vadyma Mellera: tanets ta dekoratyvne mystetstvo v ukrainskomu avangardi” [“The Genius of Vadym Meller: Dance and Decorative Art in the Ukrainian Avant-garde”], *Kurbasivsky chytannia* 7 (2012): 124–5. http://www.kurbas.org.ua/projects/almanah7/11_shka.pdf; Tetiana Rudenko, “Vadym Meller – misioner stsenohrafichnoho avanhardu” [“Vadym Meller: Missionary of Avant-Garde Scenic Design”], in *Staging the Ukrainian Avant-Garde of the 1910s and 1920s*, ed. by Myroslava Mudrak, Tetiana Rudenko (New York: Ukrainian Museum, 2015), 53, 55; John E. Bowl, “Stsenichni transformatsii ta ukrainskyi avangard” [“Scenic Transformations and the Ukrainian Avant-Garde”], in Ibid., 83.

103 Myroslava Mudrak, “Vid molbertu do konu: maliarskyi avangard i teatr” [“From the Easel to the Stage Set: The Avant-Garde Painter and the Theater”], in Ibid., 33, 35, 43; Dmytro Horbachov, *Avangard. Ukrainski khudozhnyky pershoi tretyny XX stolittia* [Avant-Garde. Ukrainian Artists of the First Third of the 20th Century] (Kyiv: Mystetstvo, 2017); Dmytro Horbachov, “Uchyteli i uchni: ukrainski avangardysty Ekster i Bohomazov ta kyivska hrupa kubofuturystiv (Epshtein, Shor, Shyfryn, Rabynovych, Lysytskyi), 1918–1920” [“Teachers and Students: Ukrainian Avant-Garde Artists Ekster and Bogomazov and the Kyiv Group of Jewish Cubo-Futurists (Epstein, Shor, Shifrin, Rabinovich, Lissitzky), 1918–1920”], *The Jewish World of Ukraine*, <http://ju.org.ua/ru/publicism/148.html>.

modern theatre” that he observed in the performances to be an important factor in developing his culture of thinking.¹⁰⁴ Innovative productions taught people to see *other*, supranational *meanings* in national phenomena. This is how he saw “The Travels of Benjamin III,” “the international topic of Don Quixote in the Jewish national refraction.”¹⁰⁵

Both theatres, Ukrainian under Les Kurbas and Jewish under Alexis Granowsky, understood modernity as a historical chance for their peoples and their cultures, as both overcame provincialism and marginality and tested the universalism of European art through the history and modernity of their peoples. Both were close to the symbolic character type of Don Quixotes, “hopelessly lost” “in every unjust society,” and always untimely idealists. It can be the reason why Yu. Shevelov was fascinated by the connections he saw between Ukrainian and Jewish performances, and their ability to symbolize world phenomena. He compares “Trouadec” with “Golden Guts,” and “People’s Malachi” with “The Travels of Benjamin III.” There is a memory about the last two plays, “The topic of the Ukrainian Don Quixote shown by Granowsky with the help of the talented actors Mikhoels and Zuskin in his ‘Benjamin III’ appealed to my heart.”¹⁰⁶

L. Kurbas theatre, with its anti-rustic guidelines, creative freedom, spectacular generalisations and theatrical accents on the Ukrainian reality, built the intellectualism and cultural identity of the “Ukrainian by choice,” according to Yu. Shevelov. L. Kurbas provoked thinking, combining a rich palette of theatrical techniques and tools into a “higher unity” of “philosophical thought and the anatomy of human passion.”¹⁰⁷ M. Shkandrij wrote that “Kurbas’s system required ‘transformations’ or concentrated images, which were a symbolic generalization of the understanding of an event, situation or phenomenon.”¹⁰⁸ It was the theatre that rejected centuries of colonial dependence and focused on the era of national freedom.

Granowsky’s theatre was “his” theatre first because it defended the right of the Jews, swept away by the winds of history, to speak about the modern world in their language and to present their historical experience in concentrated imagery. The Jewish theatre was remembered for its theatrical riot embodied in a grotesque gesture. It was a rebellion against the urban lifestyle and the cult of the shtetl, which fixed the fate of historical marginals for the Jews. In addition, “*European*” shown through Jewish, had to confirm its status as a universal cultural discourse under radical geocultural, geopolitical, and socio-economic changes characteristic of the first decades of the 20th century.

In our opinion, the performances of the Ukrainian theatre under L. Kurbas and the Jewish theatre under A. Granowsky gave a creative impulse to the appearance and development of Yu. Shevelov’s critical approaches in journalism and cultural essay

104 Shevelov, *Ya – mene – meni*, 232.

105 Ibid.

106 Ibid., 236.

107 Ibid., 175.

108 Shkandrij, “Henii Vadyrna Mellera,” 134.

writing. In particular, the theatrical culture of grotesque visualization of the man and the world turned into one of the expressive means of Yu. Shevelov's critical thinking.¹⁰⁹

Reflecting on the Jews of pre-war Kharkiv, Yu. Shevelov praised their willingness to integrate into the circumstances and environment where they were, "There was something in them that brought them closer to cosmopolitanism. They easily learnt the elements of Ukrainian culture, and they felt at home in the Russian one. Young Jews in those years in the Soviet Union were not carriers of exclusivism or, even less, of messianism."¹¹⁰ Openness and readiness to interact with others serve as an injection against provincialism, which, in Yu. Shevelov's opinion is one of three main enemies of the "Ukrainian Renaissance" in the 20th century.¹¹¹

"His" Ukrainian Jews¹¹² managed to go beyond their world and find themselves in the culture of their neighbours. Consciously choosing Ukrainian culture, they remained Jews, giving others an example of overcoming the provincialism of their nation, as if predicted for it by the history of pursuit, persecution, captivity, and destruction. Here is a telling quote,

We consider the Pervomaiskyis, ¹¹³ Dohadkos, Tetiievskyis to be ours, but we do not at all want the Jews of Ukraine to stop being Jews, to lose their self... Here we have a programme... There is a unity in difference, in the sum and interaction of difference and differences. The nation of our time is a nation when it wants to be together, and not when it is forced to live in a single 'harmonious' herd..."¹¹⁴

109 More on this in the mentioned paper: Shestopalova, "Krytychne myslennia yak chynnyk intelektualnoi biohrafii Yuriiia Shevelova," 49–76.

110 Shevelov, *Ya – mene – meni*, 108.

111 Shevelov, "Moskva, Marosieika" [Moscow, Maroseika], 70.

112 Yu. Shevelov refers to Ukrainian Jews as those who nurtured the "second" – Ukrainian – nationalism in themselves as an awareness of their belonging to the creative, intellectual and spiritual dimensions of the Ukrainian world and did not attach to it by chance or through a career. Also, Yu. Shevelov names the second most important "component of Ukrainian blood," and that is Polish culture, "Rylsky, Antonovych, Antonych, Lypynsky, in different ways, but known to everyone, Poland gave us the gold of creative mind and heart. Yet, we are not in hopeless debt of them either." Cited in: Shevelov, "Triuizmy," 403.

113 Author Leonid Pervomaiskyi (Illia Shlomovych Hurevych). Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern wrote an essay about this writer (Petrovsky-Shtern, *The Anti-Imperial Choice*, 165–227) where he drew attention to common aspects of the national tragedies of Jews and Ukrainians in the artistic presentation of L. Pervomaiskyi.

114 Shevelov, "Triuizmy," 403.

So, the desire to be together arises out of mutual knowledge and trust. Any modern culture devoid of prejudice against *others* should be built on this.

Ukrainian Jews, if they are truly Ukrainian, spiritually, and not based on the mark in their passport, and if they are spiritually rich, and there are a lot of such people, they are wanted and welcomed not because or not only because of their talent, but also because they are different in some ways, and being Ukrainian they go beyond the stereotypes of granny Paraska or uncle Taras (of Mykola Kulish's *Mazailo...*).¹⁵

Thus, the phenomenon of Yu. Shevelov's Jewish world appears as a result of the intellectual's comprehension and textual conceptualization of his contacts with Jews in Kharkiv in the 1910–1930s. Yu. Shevelov's Jewish world contains a system of moral principles that are significant for him (mutual trust, the ability to take the side of the unjustly oppressed Ukrainian culture and support it despite rational warnings, integrity, and faithfulness), psychological features (responsiveness), practical skills (entrepreneurial spirit), intelligence (willingness to learn new aspects of life), creative abilities (successful transformations of traditional motifs and images in modern theatre, talented criticism of one's provincialism using the grotesque).

The concept of "his Jews" in the selected works by Yu. Shevelov relates to that of "his Ukraine." Both refer to the intellectual's existential project, the realization of which involved the creation of modern Ukrainian culture as an important basis for establishing historical justice – comprehension by Ukraine of its independent development without Russian interference. Yu. Shevelov's immanent world – Ukraine – within Heidegger's meaning of *Dasein* must be enhanced through opportunities, abilities, and obligations due to which it will transfer from the natural to cultural (in other words, modern) way of existing. "His Jews," considering the aspects of their life and behavior, emphasized and elevated by Yu. Shevelov, represent the desired and required, in his opinion, space for revealing the hermetically sealed (rustic) world of Ukraine and increasing its chances for historical success. That said, communication with "his" Jews (some were Ukrainian philologists like Shevelov) can be regarded as a prerequisite for the real and open formation of the modernist intellectual's self. The existential nature of cultural communication with "his" Jews also emphasises the fact that Yu. Shevelov did not support their linguistic and cultural assimilation consistently imposed by the government of tsarist Russia and the Soviet authorities. This conclusion offers itself after considering the theme of theatre in Yu. Shevelov's Kharkiv reality: not knowing Yiddish, he perceived the Jewish performances he attended at the level of their cultural dialogism and artistic rhythm; he admired them, and perceived and appreciated their uniqueness.

115 *Ibid.*, 402.

Outlining the prospects for further research, it is worth paying attention to the following understudied aspects of the Jewish discourse in the life and work of Yu. Shevelov: the opposition of “his” and “strange”¹¹⁶ Jews in the worldview of the Ukrainian intellectual, the thematic range of his correspondence with Israil Kleiner, Moisei Fishbein and other Jewish thinkers and cultural figures, content horizons and the scope of Jewish issues raised in “Suchasnist” magazine in 1979–98¹, when Yu. Shevelov was the editor-in-chief of this publication.

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¹¹⁶ It cannot go unnoticed that the episodes of Yu. Shevelov’s personal history connected with the “strange” Jews Naum Kahanovych and Roman Jacobson represent its crisis moments that generate controversy and conflicts among intellectuals and in Ukrainian society. On this: Shevelov, *Ya – mene – meni*, 284–7; Yurii Shevelov, “Moi zustrichi z Romanom Yakobsonom” [“My Meetings with Roman Jacobson”], in *Z istorii nezakinchenoi viiny [From the History of the Unfinished War]*, Oksana Zabuzhko, Larysa Masenko, eds. (Kyiv: Vydavnychiy dim “Kyievo-Mohylianska akademiia,” 2009), 255–320.

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