



כתב עת אלקטרוני
בהוצאת המכללה האקדמית לחינוך ע"ש דוד ילין, ירושלים

גליון מס' 3 נובמבר 2012

ניתן לקריאה באתר המכללה:
<http://www.dyellin.ac.il>

**Germinated Seeds: The Development of Vygotsky's
Psychology of Art in His Early Journalistic Publications
(1916-1923)**

Bella Kotik-Friedgut



Germinated Seeds: The Development of Vygotsky's Psychology of Art in His Early Journalistic Publications (1916-1923)

Bella Kotik-Friedgut¹

Abstract

Discussions regarding the biography and development of the psychological ideas of Lev Semionovich Vygotsky often erroneously commence from the year 1924, when he took up a position at the Psychological Institute in Moscow. The purpose of this paper is to analyze some samples of approximately 80 early less-known and untranslated journalistic publications of L. S. Vygotsky in order to trace the development of his principal ideas about art. In the course of writing these literary and theatrical reviews, Vygotsky's cultural and esthetic views gradually matured and later found expression in his *Psychology of Art* (1925).

In his weekly essays and reviews in 1922-23, he wrote about literature, cinema, and a proposed theatrical *technicum*, reviewing both local and visiting troupes, as well as about Jewish, Russian, and Belorussian theater. On the one hand, his sharp criticisms were aimed at forming a demanding, cultured audience, and on the other, at creating literature and theater that could rightfully be called art. These reviews clearly attest to the formation of Vygotsky's analytic methodology, which he later called the "objective-analytic method".

Key words: Vygotsky's biography, psychology of art, literary criticism, theatrical criticism.

Introduction

Lev Semionovich Vygotsky, the psychologist widely recognized throughout the world as a foremost theoretician of childhood development, was once called the "Mozart of Psychology" owing to his talent, his influence on ideas regarding human development, his early development, and his short life.

One of the reasons underlying the present publication is the fact that in recent biographical sketches published on the Internet, a single theme recurs: After submitting his senior thesis at the Shaniavsky Free University in Moscow, Vygotsky is said to have simply "disappeared from the field of creative activity". According to these opinions, his professional biography commenced only in 1924 when, following his impressive presentations at the Second All-Russian Psychophysiological Congress, he was invited to work in Moscow. He submitted his Ph.D. (*Kandidat Nauk*) dissertation, "Psychology of Art", in 1925. Vygotsky's alleged "disappearance" in 1916 and "reappearance" in 1924, according to the chronology of biographers and critics, is erroneous. It is completely incorrect to ignore the early period of Vygotsky's work.

¹ Prof. Bella Kortik-Friedgut is a lecturer at The David Yellin Academic College of Education.

In the years before his final move to Moscow in 1924, after which he concentrated on the development of a new psychology, Vygotsky published over eighty articles and notes. In 1916-1917, while he was completing his university studies in Moscow, these appeared in such publications as *Novyi Put'* (a Russian-language weekly of a liberal democratic complexion devoted to questions of Jewish culture and life in Russia that was published in Moscow from 1916 to October 1917 and edited by S. Kogan) and *Letopis'* (a literary journal published in Petrograd from 1915 to 1917 and edited by Maxim Gorkii). During his period in Gomel' (1917-1924), Vygotsky published literary and theatrical reviews in the local newspaper, *Nash Ponedel'nik* (from January 1922 to September 1923). From September 1923, after that newspaper was absorbed into the regional *Polesskaia Pravda*, Vygotsky's reviews appeared in the latter. To the best of our knowledge, none of these literary and theatrical reviews has been republished in Russian or analyzed by Vygotsky scholars, nor were any translated into English or other languages.¹

The main purpose of this paper is to furnish the interested reader with some less-known aspects of L. S. Vygotsky's biography and to trace the development of his central ideas regarding art in some of his early journalistic publications. In the course of writing his literary and theatrical reviews, Vygotsky's cultural and esthetic views gradually matured and later found expression in his *Psychology of Art* (Vygotsky, 1925/1986).

In this paper, we will analyze only a few of the more than eighty newspaper articles that were published in earlier periods (1916-1917, 1919, and 1922-1923) as well as one important paper, "Jews and the Jewish question in the works of F. M. Dostoevsky", which was not published during Vygotsky's lifetime. Some of his other publications of that period have already been reviewed in our previous studies (Kotik-Friedgut, & Friedgut, 2008).

Psychology of Art opens with the formulation of a methodology for developing a scientific approach to the analysis of art. Thus, after a critical analysis of different existing approaches, Vygotsky writes: "...we can now suggest a new method of art psychology, which ... is termed the 'objective-analytic method'. Accordingly, the work of art itself, rather than its creator or its audience, should be taken as the basis for analysis" (Vygotsky, 1925/1986, p. 38)². We can see that this principle was central to his approach to literary analysis in his earliest writings and is present to some extent in his theatrical reviews, where the analysis of a presentation inevitably has to include an evaluation of the actors and their performances as well.

It is noteworthy that Vygotsky began to think and write about "The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark",³ which is a major part of *Psychology of Art*, while he was still attending the *gymnasia*, and later presented this essay as his senior thesis for graduation from the Shaniavsky Free University in Moscow. We shall use this essay as a starting point because it represents both his early interests in literature and theater, and because when he presents the Hamlet essay as a chapter in the book, *Psychology of Art*, he already formulates his main ideas about what differentiates art from non-art and what makes a text into an artistic creation evoking an esthetic reaction. Other chapters in *Psychology of Art*

will remain beyond the scope of our present analysis, which focuses mainly on Vygotsky's lesser-known works.

Thus, while analyzing *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* in *Psychology of Art*, Vygotsky formulates his findings: "... We found a threefold contradiction on which the tragedy is based: *the contradiction involving the story, the plot, and the dramatis personae*. Each of these three factors develops in its own way, and it is perfectly clear that a new element is introduced into the tragic genre. ... Two conflicting levels recur in the tragedy – we have mentioned several times that *Hamlet* causes our emotions to move on two different levels. On the one hand, we perceive the goal toward which the tragedy moves, and on the other, we perceive its digressions as well. The new contribution of the protagonist is that *at any moment, he unifies both contradictory planes and is the supreme and ever-present embodiment of the contradiction inherent in the tragedy*. ... The two opposing planes of the tragedy are perceived as a single unit, for they merge in the tragic hero with whom we identify" (Vygotsky, 1925/1986, p. 243).

Vygotsky perceives a much more profound and serious duality in the tragedy, because of the fact that "not only do we view the entire tragedy through the protagonist's eyes, but we in turn look at the protagonist himself through our own eyes... And it is at this point of convergence that the two levels of the tragedy, which we had thought were leading in diametrically opposed directions, meet. Their unexpected convergence gives the tragedy its special character and shows its events in an entirely new light. The spectator is deceived. The death of Hamlet ultimately makes the spectator aware of all the conflicts and contradictions that besieged his conscious and unconscious self during the play" (Vygotsky, 1925/1986, p. 244).

Later he concludes: "...Any art is based on the unity of affect and fantasy" (Vygotsky, 1925/1986, p. 271). Throughout the entire book, the concept of contradiction is central, and we can see that whenever there is a contradiction, both thought and emotions are at work. In another chapter, he even speaks about a conflict of emotions (*противочувствие*) that constitutes the basis of fables (Vygotsky, 1925/1986, p. 157). It is evident that concepts of contradiction, conflict, and differing lines are the keywords of the entire book. Our goal now is to see if we can find these ideas – in either an implicit or an explicit form – in his earlier essays and journalistic publications.

We shall commence from an essay on Dostoevsky mainly because to the best of our knowledge, this is Vygotsky's earliest piece of literary analysis that has been preserved. Vygotsky's youth was a time of intense contemplation of Jewish culture, of the fate of his own people, and of his own place in a society that limited the possibilities of personal growth by means of the Pale of Settlement – the restricted areas in which most Jews were forced to live, and the various restrictions on higher education for Jews in the Russian Empire. It is therefore not surprising that the Jewish theme was central both to a remarkable Jewish History seminar that young Lev organized and led in the *gymnasia*, and to his compositions. While still in the *gymnasia*, he wrote a serious essay titled "Jews and the Jewish Question in the Works of F. M. Dostoevsky". (This text, which was first published in 1997 in the newspaper *Vesti* in Israel,

was based on a manuscript copied from a handwritten school notebook kept by Vygotsky's sister and later preserved by S. Dobkin, who also described the original text and provided a commentary⁴. Vygotsky may have written it in 1913, immediately prior to his departure for his university studies in Moscow, since he refers to a 1913 publication by V. Zhabotinsky).

During this period of intense contemplation of his own identity, it is not surprising that his analysis focused on the Jewish theme. Commencing with an analysis of the anti-Semitic tradition found in Russian and European literature, he notes that its “mortal sin is not against Jewry, of course, but against artistic truth (*перед художественной правдой*)” (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 24). It seems that in this text, he already applied the “objective-analytic method” that he later formulated into his main approach, demanding that “an analysis of the work of art itself rather than its creator or its audience should be taken as the basis for analysis”. In this paper, the young Vygotsky writes of a Russian literary tradition portraying “the despicable Jew” in a scornfully comic manner introduced by Derzhavin and Pushkin. “It is strange and incomprehensible that Russian literature, which advances the principle of humanism..., displays so little humanism in its depictions of the Jew, in whom the artist never senses the human being...” (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 24).

In this essay, it is evident that not only had the young Vygotsky already developed rigorous criteria for literary analysis, but he had also laid the foundation for his future work, *Psychology of Art*. He analyzes the text, applying his “objective-analytic method.” Thus he writes: “In Dostoevsky's works, we find a striking example of how artistic truth avenges itself”. He cites Dostoevsky's minutely detailed description in *The House of the Dead* of how a Jew prepares for the Sabbath on Friday evening by putting on *tefillin* (phylacteries). Vygotsky notes: “After such a description, the Russian reader will be shocked to discover that Jews never put on *tefillin* in the evening and never on the Sabbath eve... Furthermore, *tefillin* are never put on both arms, but only on the left arm... This absurd, completely unreal (Jews do not even have ‘tefillin’ for both arms and head!) description of how Ishay Fomich prays is very significant. It is characteristic of the artistic truth of the portrayal of Dostoevsky's protagonist. Oh, now you may not believe the description of the prayer during which ‘he suddenly went from weeping to laughter’. Nemezida of art does not forgive the illustration of the untrue: you do not believe in Dostoevsky's Jew, he is a fabrication” (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 25). Since Vygotsky also provides numerous citations from various literary works by Dostoevsky demonstrating the latter's overuse of all kinds of humiliating names and labels in his description of Jews, the fact that Vygotsky accuses Dostoevsky of anti-Semitism is not simply emotional, but rather based on an analysis of Dostoevsky's literary works. To the best of our knowledge, these two studies (about Hamlet and Dostoevsky) were Vygotsky's earliest works.

Themes related to his Jewish identity continue to be central to Vygotsky's early publications in *Novy Put'* in 1916-1917 when he was still a student in Moscow. He used parts of the essay on Dostoevsky (which was as yet unpublished) while discussing the anti-Semitic tradition of Russian literature in his literary reviews of works of M. Lermontov and A. Belyi. (For more about his publications on Jewish themes, see Kotik-Friedgut & Friedgut, 2008).

We know that during much of the German occupation of Gomel' (March 1918 –January 1919) and of the Civil War, when the town repeatedly changed hands, Vygotsky was preoccupied with the ill health in his family. Part of the time he stayed with them in Kiev, where the climate was milder and the medical services more developed than in Gomel' (Feigenberg, 1996). During this time, he also wrote at least two little-known essays on literary criticism. As Professor Roman Timenchik of the Hebrew University notes, they are of interest “for the study of the genesis and evolution of Vygotsky's system of esthetic appraisals” (Timenchik, 1995). One of them is a review of *A Rose and a Cross* by Alexander Blok⁵ published in the *Musical and Theatrical Herald*. It is worthwhile noting that while most of Vygotsky's later reviews, both literary and theatrical, were generally very sharply critical, this one contains numerous expressions of the highest appreciation.

“Truly beautiful things usually come to the world unnoticed.... The recent appearance of a new drama by Alexander Blok, *A Rose and a Cross*, went absolutely unnoticed by the general public and was almost ignored by the critics. The appearance of this drama is an important event in the world of art. Such a pleasant event is rarely afforded us by contemporary literature. ...Like all things that are truly beautiful, *A Rose and a Cross* will overcome indifference and lack of readers' attention without evoking noisy discussions... This drama will shine like a star of the first magnitude on the horizons of our literature”. After a description of the plot in which he points out various lines and contradictions in the development of events, conflicts between dreams and reality, and tragic encounters between romantic and erotic love, he progresses to an analysis of the poetry. He uses expressions to validate his prophecy concerning the future of the drama: “...depth of symbolic types, a treasury of poetry in this drama ... beautiful verses ... pearls of lyric poetry”. Here we can clearly see “the seeds” – namely, attention to contradictions – the idea that later became central to and explicit in his approach to art. Following are some examples: “The symbolic meaning of this drama is revealed in two songs – the song of Aliscan about the nightingale and the rose permeated with the languorous blessedness of earthly love, and the song of Gaethan about the joy of renunciation, the immutable laws of the heart, Happiness-Suffering, and the cross. These two symbols – of a rose and a cross – and the two fates related to them, two attitudes toward the world, are embodied in the types of heroes and dramatic action. *A Rose and a Cross* is simply one additional page in Blok's creative work and it is inseparably linked to his tense lyric of a modern rebellious soul” (Vygotsky, 1919, pp. 6-8).

In Kiev, Vygotsky also published an analytical paper titled “Theater and revolution” (1919) (signed VyoDsky), which is not included in any list of his publications⁶. This text demonstrates his general acceptance of the Soviet revolution⁷, even though he clearly expresses his emotional ambivalence; he expects positive changes, but is deeply concerned about the fate of culture, particularly theater.

“The Russian theater made no contribution to the revolution. Whether this is shameful or meritorious may be argued, but this is the fact...

“No other field of art reflects the decay of wartime as the theater does... But the revolution that caused such profound changes in the whole way of life – what did the revolution do for the theater? Nothing yet. Or almost nothing.

“First of all, it brought liberation, freedom from the censor’s bans. And the first who took advantage of this freedom was the naked Leda of Kamensky.⁸ Art is only a part of life and the artist is nourished by present reality as we all are – spectators of the lofty spectacles of crucial moments of the world”⁹.

Vygotsky further complains of the repertoire of theaters presenting mainly plays written by foreign authors about the French Revolution. “Both satirical and tragic portrayals of revolution were found in foreign plays (Vygotsky, 1919b). In this essay, Vygotsky deems only *Mystery Bouffe*¹⁰ by Vladimir Mayakovsky worthy of a critical analysis as “the most modern presence, ... which in its entirety, from beginning to end, was born out of the *zeitgeist*.” In the end, however, he indicates the failures and at the same time some memorable verses.

Обещали и делим поровну
Одному бублик, другому дырка
от бублика
Это и есть демократическая
республика
Translation by Guy Daniels:
We promised to share things equally
And we've done it
One man gets the ring of a doughnut
The other man gets the core
That's what a democratic republic is for.

It seems that Vygotsky's choices speak for themselves.

When Vygotsky returned from Kiev to Gomel' and life in the city began to revive, he was finally able to work. He taught at several institutions simultaneously and even took part in the founding and development of a publishing house (Feigenberg, 1996; Vygotskaia & Lifanova, 1996). He taught philosophy, literature, and logic, and most important for his future, he taught psychology and created a psychological laboratory in a teachers' college where he began his first psychological experimentation.

One article from this period is different from other reviews because it seems to contain some autobiographical hints. It is devoted to the novelist A. S. Serafimovich, whom Vygotsky considered to be a great popular writer: “Serafimovich is a consistent and sober realist. He writes as he sees and sees as it is.” But he begins with a discussion of a story by V. M. Garshin: “...The hero of this tale enrolls in a teachers' seminary. He believes that being a teacher of the people is more worthy than being an artist. But all the same, not everyone chose teaching. Not everyone rejected art... There were those who continued to create both on canvas and in books.

But they were only a few” (Vygotsky, 1923a). While ostensibly relating to Serafimovich, whom Vygotsky dubs “a people’s writer,” it appears that he was writing primarily about himself (for this is only the introduction to the essay about Serafimovich).

Here we see a repetition of his pattern of behavior from 1913, when he enrolled in two separate universities simultaneously so as to reconcile the conflict between his parents’ wishes regarding his course of studies and his own aspirations. Once again, faced with an “either–or” situation, he mobilized his enormous potential for creative work in order to attain a harmonious Spinozan synthesis from what appear to be irreconcilable opposites, engaging both in teaching and writing and in literature, art, and psychology simultaneously, eventually synthesizing them into his study of the psychology of art. Along with this intensive activity, he found time to visit the theater and publish weekly theatrical and literary reviews. Later on, we shall analyze his publications of 1922–1923. Until the very end of 1923, Vygotsky continued his intensive, manifold activities in Gomel’. These were mainly theatrical reviews, so in addition to the analysis of the play, they inevitably included his attitude toward the performance, the actors, and the stage settings.

In a theatrical review of a play by Lunacharsky, *The King’s Barber*, he gave both an analysis of the play itself and an analysis of the performance. We can see the same approach as in the analysis of *Hamlet*, namely, the search for contrasts and contradictions, is evident – except that in this case the criticism is sharper. “Using the old literary form of drama, Lunacharsky seemingly beams X-rays on it, rendering its inner springs and social roots visible. ...Two lines – one an ascending line of the development of a personal desire, and a blinding force of power, and the other a descending line of the exposure of the emptiness of this power – develop in parallel nicely, and lead persuasively and beautifully to a culmination, the nadir of the general resolution – a catastrophe of a mockingly and prosaically vulgar nature. The faulty side of the play is that there is too much of literature, it is prolix, with the heroes giving lectures explaining themselves and the meaning of the play” (Vygotsky, 1923b).

Occasionally, Vygotsky draws a contrast between the dramatic material and the actual performance, as in his review of Vlast’ T’my— *The Power of Darkness!* (Vygotsky, 1923c). “This highly ironic play was performed with false pathos” “The first presentation for the unions constituted a breach of the Sumbatovskii-Trachtenberg repertoire. Tolstoy – *The Power of Darkness!* This is one of the finest of Russian dramas. It contains, at any rate, everything of art and nothing of vulgarity. In its communicative power, the brilliance and boldness of its colors, this peasant tragedy was, and remains to this day, an unsurpassed example. There is a single hero in it – Truth, as Tolstoy himself declared, referring to another of his pieces. It is the most unembellished, unidealized, black, but mighty depiction of truths about the peasant, who until now has appeared on the stage and in literature only episodically and anecdotally or sugar-coated.

But to render the *muzhik* in all the reality of his essence as the subject of the heroism of the inner drama, that is, to show the universally human and great elements in the outburst of dark, peasant passions, this is an experience that literature has never yet undergone”.

After his enthusiastic introduction of the play's contents, however, Vygotsky provides a totally contrasting judgment of the performance: "...Only the external ethnographic side was presented in detail, but the general impression is of a falsification" (Vygotsky, 1923c).

He was always harshly critical, setting high standards. While some of his reviews were emotionally positive, he was always very sharp and focused on subtle features. Thus, in his review of the comedy *Unexpected Valor* (his review is entitled "Unexpected Enjoyment"), he writes: "Our theater craves a tragedy of true heroism, but it also needs a farce mocking the false overblown heroism that bursts like soap bubbles. For a long time now, we have been in need of both the heroic and the comic equally... the theme of a fool has been completely exhausted. Impossible to be more stupid, more worthless... It is some kind of shining stupidity, sparkling absurdity... pure nonsense. The joke is slightly weakened by a touch of vaudeville rubbish in the acting: an old lady's bonnet, a little bow tied under the chin, lispings tones of speech, etc. In the third act, there was more laughter on the stage than among the audience" (Vygotsky, 1923d).

In his psychological analysis of Victor Hugo's "A Queen and a Woman", he classifies it as romantic, but of a specific type: not detached from earthly themes as it usually is, but rather associated with life and nature. "His romanticism is of a particular type – in its melodramatic effects, its pathos-filled declamations, its fireworks, and its poetization of reality. Like savages and children, he loves the bright, the colorful, and the loud. The description of common factors is in his opinion an error of poets suffering from a lack of soul and a lack of vision. The fundamental principle of his drama he sees as the uniting of the elevated and the grotesque (the whimsical, the repulsive, and the disgusting); thus, from the lofty to the comic it is only a single step, and all of his dramas play out within the limited boundaries of that single step. In the mightiest they are weighted down by pathos – the tension of extreme feelings, the force of images and emotions, 'the overcoming of a weak flickering by bright light, and the light by a flame'. The comic is weighted down by rhetoric, dictated phrases, commonplaces, the illumination of learned figures of speech, the effects of melodrama. In our transitional repertoire, many suggest that melodrama should take the first place – because of its broad sweep and the simplicity of its experience. This opinion received unexpected reinforcement in one of the performances of this play I saw. Just before the end, when the audience remained as yet unaware of who was to be executed off-stage, the worker-hero or the upstart rascal, the melodrama plucked at every heartstring in the hall. The appearance of the worker was greeted by applause and even by shouts of 'Right on!' They were not applauding the actor who played the role, nor were they expressing their approval of the character, but they were celebrating the melodrama that had so truly guessed the desires of the viewers. Such (in truth not infrequent) experiences demonstrate without a doubt that the shot struck home, the play touched the viewer. And for the theater, this means a great deal" (Vygotsky, 1923e).

Vygotsky's extensive newspaper interview with V. K. Tatishchev is of particular interest. He describes the resurrection, following the Bolshevik Revolution and Civil War, of the "Red Torch" Odessa theater troupe, quoting extensively from its director, V. K. Tatishchev. After a fairly critical analysis of its performances, he notes: "These are historical events for a town that

has not seen a play as a complete theatrical production... These are brilliant lessons in modern theater...". The sympathy for the leader of this theater is evident throughout the interview. Tatishchev's approach and analysis are so similar to Vygotsky's own ideas on art and literature that the words might have been Vygotsky's own. He quotes Tatishchev: "I, as much as possible, tried to present a diagnosis of the reasons for the cheapening and decline of the theater. Once these causes had been defined, I was able to base the organization of the theater on a set of exactly opposing principles. Here they are in brief. An absolute familiarity with form. A full mental identification with everything that happens on the stage. A deep love and feeling for theater, for its existence, for the play, and for the role" (Vygotsky, 1923f). Vygotsky does not hide his sympathy toward the man and expresses to the readers the hope that there will be a continuation of the interview later on in order to follow the developments in this theater.

Another idea developed in *Psychology of Art* is that the difference between real art and non-esthetic creation resides in subtle differences in form: "...The difference between a great painter and an imitator is to be sought in those infinitely small elements of the art that belong to the category of formal elements. Art begins where 'subtlety' (*chut-chut*) starts, and this is equivalent of saying that art begins where form begins" (Vygotsky, 1925/1986, p. 52).

In his publications in Gomel' in 1923, such subtle details frequently constitute the focus of his attention. For example: "The faulty side of the play is that there is too much literature, it is prolix, loquacious" (Vygotsky, 1923b). Remarking on a Jewish operetta, Vygotsky has the same sharp criticisms that may be found in his reviews of Russian and Belorussian theater. "A trifle became decidedly heavy – with all sharing the weight. Jewishness was laid heavily on Silva..." (Vygotsky, 1923g). In another comment, he criticizes the Jewish operetta for losing the fine and subtle features that differentiate between art and non-art: "The Jewish operetta is not satisfied with a joke. It wants to be both tragedy and farce together, with a pinch of homespun philosophy, and something of the synagogue." At the same time he displays his knowledge of, and respect for, tradition. "The lyrical material in the everyday Jewish dance is not utilized fully". In another essay on the Jewish theater, he states: "This slapstick has the rudiments of pure theater. But 'slapstickiness', like theatricality, is intolerable and has the same relation to pure slapstick and to theater as vulgarization has to folk culture... A different way must be found" (Vygotsky, 1923h).

In another theatrical review, Vygotsky writes: "... Every comedy has the right to foolishness, but some exploit this right. *Dzentelmen* is of this sort... Human comedy is always a struggle with the simplicity of life, rising beyond the ordinary, doing away with the kitchen-sink life. 'It was just this way' does not justify a comedy. If a comedy loses laughter, it is like salt losing its saltiness. ... Human comedy becomes a comedy of boredom" (Vygotsky, 1923i) Again we can see from these citations that his critique is aimed precisely at subtle details, especially in the work of directors and actors – details that can spoil the whole impression if overdone.

It is clear that for Vygotsky, theater in the provinces did not necessarily have to be provincial. "One must not think that only a great and sophisticated theater can generate

excitement. Wherever there is life, excitement is to be found... Just as electricity is not only present in lightning, but is also present wherever there is a 25-candlepower light bulb. In the same way, poetry and art inhabit not only grand creations, but also the 16-candle stage of the provinces..." (Vygotsky, 1923j).

In his 1922-1923 newspaper articles, Vygotsky writes about literature, theater, and a proposed theatrical *technicum*; about both local and visiting troupes; and about Jewish, Russian, and Belorussian theater.

It is therefore apparent from Vygotsky's earliest essays that in his analysis of literature and theatrical performances, he already implicitly applied criteria that were later formulated explicitly in *Psychology of Art*. He already used the "objective-analytic method" that analyzed the creation itself rather than the author's motivations. Later he points to contradiction as an essential characteristic of art: in his early reviews, he scoured the presentation for contradictions that could trigger the emotional involvement of the audience. In an effort to resolve these contradictions, and emphasizing that "Art begins where 'subtlety' (*chut-chut*) starts" (Vygotsky, 1925/1986, p. 57). Vygotsky often found that there was a bit "too much" in the early post-revolution theater – too many details, speeches, explanations, etc. – and this marred the theatrical impression.

Here he assumed the role of educator. On the one hand, his criticisms were aimed at forming a demanding cultural audience, and on the other, at literature and theater that could justifiably be called art. As a rule, these reviews end with a recommendation, a wish, or a call followed by appeals such as "we must find another way"; "it is time for new themes, etc." (Vygotsky, 1923h, p. 3). Here the active stance of an architect of a new culture, new society, and new citizens is evident. He would shortly move to Moscow and start working on the development of new science: a new psychology of cultural and bio-social development – from the child to the fully developed human being. This, however, is a completely different story.

Notes

- 1 Only recently have some of these publications (which are not included in the present review) been republished in Russian. See <http://www.psyanima.ru/journal/2011/4/index.php>. Other early publications, scanned from original newspapers, can be found at http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Библиография_Выготского
- 2 This and further citations have been translated by the author from the Russian originals.
- 3 An English translation of this chapter can be found at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/vygotsky/works/1925/art8.htm>
- 4 The first part was written in a school notebook and took up all 32 pages. There were almost no corrections in the text, but the wide margins contained some important notes that may have been added later during the editing process (as evidenced by the different ink color). The second part consisted of 18 long narrow pages and seems to have been written later. In addition, there was a small page with a short plan.
- 5 It is signed L. ____sky and according to R. Timenchik was written by Vygotsky.
- 6 The collection, *Poetry and Prose of the Russian Revolution* (Kiev 1919) was published using the old-style alphabet. Today it is a rarity since it was removed from library shelves during the period of the repression of "enemies of the people".



- 7 In the spring of 1917, after the February revolution, he published an article “Avodim hoinu” (“Once We Were Slaves”), a paean to the abolition of the Pale of Settlement (which had limited the rights of Jews with regard to their choice of place of residence and profession) along with anxiety about whether the Jews of Russia were psychologically and morally prepared for their newfound freedom.
- 8 In 1906, A. P. Kamensky (1876-1941) published a novel titled “Leda” whose protagonist was a beautiful woman who used to walk around naked “of ideological ideas”. The novel created a sensation
- 9 In 1906, A. P. Kamensky (1876-1941) published a novel titled “Leda” whose protagonist was a beautiful woman who used to walk around naked “of ideological ideas”. The novel created a sensation throughout Russia, was turned into a play, and, after the 1917 revolution, was staged both in Moscow and in the provinces where it was awarded a triumphal reception.
- 10 A reference to the poem “Cicero” (1836) by Tiutchev (1803-1873). *Блажен, кто посетил сей мир в его минуты роковые* (Blessed is the one who visited this world in its most crucial moments).
- 11 It was written for the first anniversary of the October Revolution and was included in the list of holiday events by the Central Organizing Committee for the celebration. The premiere was held at the Theater of Musical Drama on November 7, 1918.

References*

- Feigenberg, I. M. (Ed.). (1996). *L. S. Vygotsky, Nachalo Puty: Vospominaniia S. F. Dobkina*. (L.S. Vygotsky: At the Start of the Road: The Recollections of S.F. Dobkin), Jerusalem: Jerusalem Publishing Centre.
- Kotik-Friedgut, B. S., & Friedgut, T. H. (2008). A man of his country and his time: Jewish influences on the personality and outlook of Lev Semionovich Vygotsky. *History of Psychology, 11*(1), 15-39.
- Timenchik, R. D. (1995). Zabytaja stat'a L. S. Vygotskogo (Forgotten paper of L. S. Vygotsky). *Journal "22"*, N 96, 209-211.
- Vygotskaia, G. L., & Lifanova, T. M. (1996). *Lev Semionovich Vygotsky, Zhizn', deatel'nost': Shtrikhi k portretu* (Lev Semionovich Vygotsky: Life, activity). Moscow: Smysl.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1919a). Roza i krest (A Rose and a Cross). *Teatralno muzykalnyj vestni*, 6-9.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1919b). Teatr i revoluzia (Theater and revolution) *Stichi i Proza o Russkoy Revoluzii*. Kiev.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1923a). Bol'shoi narodnyi pisatel': K iubileiu Serafimovicha (A great popular writer: To the anniversary of Serafimovich). *Polesskaia Pravda*, 12, 09, 3.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1923b). Korolevskij bradobrey (The King's Barber). *Polesskaia Pravda*, 10, 17.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1923c). Vlast' T'my (The Power of Darkness!). *Polesskaia Pravda*, 09, 29.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1923d). Nechajanaja radost (Unexpected enjoyment). *Polesskaia Pravda*, 11, 27.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1923e). Teatr: Koroleva i zhenshchina (A Queen and a Woman). *Polesskaia Pravda*, 10, 30.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1923f). Gastrili Krasnogo Fakela (The visit of the "Red Torch" company). *Nash ponedel'nik*, 06, 18.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1923g). Evreiskii teatr (The Jewish Theater) (a) *Nash ponedel'nik*, 03, 26, 3.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1923h). Evreiskii teatr (The Jewish Theater) (b). *Nash ponedel'nik*, 04, 16, 3.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1923i). Dzentelmen (Gentleman). *Polesskaia Pravda*, 09, 28.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1923j). K zakritiu sezona (For the closing of the season). *Nash ponedel'nik*, 03, 12, 3.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1925/1986). *Psichologija isskusstva* (Psychology of Art). Moscow: Isskusstvo.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1997). Evrei I evreiskiy vopros v proizvedenijach F.M. Dostoevskogo. (Jews and the Jewish Question in the Works of F. M. Dostoevsky) *Vesty*, 03, 13, 24-26.

* All sources except Kotik-Friedgut, B. S., & Friedgut, T. H. (2008) are in Russian