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Not by bread alone: Lev Vygotsky's Jewish writings

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Abstract

On the basis of both published and unpublished manuscripts written from 1914 to 1917, this article gives an overview of Lev Vygotsky's early ideas. It turns out that Vygotsky was very much involved in issues of Jewish culture and politics. Rather surprisingly, the young Vygotsky rejected all contemporary ideas to save the Jewish people from discrimination and persecution by creating an autonomous state in Palestine or elsewhere. Instead, until well into 1917, Vygotsky proposed the rather traditional option of strengthening the spiritual roots of the Jews by returning to the religious writings. Socialism was rejected, because it merely envisioned the compulsory redistribution of material goods and 'man lives not by bread alone'. It was only after the October Revolution that Vygotsky switched from arguments in favour of the religious faith in the Kingship of God to the communist belief in a Radiant Future.

Keywords

Jewish writings, notebooks, socialism, Lev Vygotsky, Zionism

Introduction

Lev Vygotsky is now recognized as one of the most influential psychologists of the 20th century (Haggbloom *et al.*, 2002), but our knowledge of his life and work still shows surprising lacunae. We know very little, for example, about his years as a student at

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Moscow State University and Shanyavsky People's University (1913–1917). The most complete bibliographies (Vygodskaya and Lifanova, 1996; Yasnitsky and Van der Veer, 2016) list about 15 brief reviews and one longer manuscript (*Hamlet's Tragedy*) for this period. Although this is quite impressive for a young man who studied at two universities and took part in additional seminars and workshops in the field of philology and philosophy, it is likely that some of his writings were not published (such as *Hamlet's Tragedy* and, later on, *The Psychology of Art*). This makes it especially important to study Vygotsky's notebooks in the family archive,¹ because they reveal what was on his mind in this period.

Fortunately, we now have access to a large number of these notebooks. The recent annotated edition of Vygotsky's notebooks, based on years of extensive and painstaking analysis of the manuscripts, provides much new material that has not been published in English before (Zavershneva and Van der Veer, 2017, 2018). The volume presents new findings about many periods of Vygotsky's life and work, including 5 chapters about his 'pre-psychological' period. Remarkably enough, the manuscripts from this period are almost fully dedicated to the Jewish question. Until now, and in contradistinction to the case of Vygotsky's close acquaintance and colleague Kurt Lewin (Lück, 1992), we had little information about Vygotsky's involvement in Jewish issues. Eight longer works (the size of a large paper) about Jewish matters have been discovered, plus about 20 short notes, several notes in Hebrew and a list of Hebraisms in Russian. These documents enrich our idea about Vygotsky's attitude to traditional Jewish culture, to Judaism and to the Jewish political currents of his time. They reveal 'another Vygotsky': a student of the Torah and the Talmud, who worried about the fate of the Jewish people in the troubled times of the civil war and who, possibly, envisioned a future as an author writing about issues of national politics. The case of Vygotsky is a remarkable example of the transformation of a member of the Russian-Jewish intelligentsia into a Soviet researcher and social activist (Maslov, 2015). In the present article we use material from Zavershneva and Van der Veer (2017, 2018) but also other archival material that was not published in English before.

The Jewish question in Vygotsky's life and work:

A brief overview

Lev Semyonovich (Simkhovich) Vygotsky² was born in to the family of the successful businessman Semyon L'vovich (Simkha Leybovich) Vygotsky and received the upbringing and education typical of his social class, with a mixture of the culture of the Silver Age and the Jewish culture with its ancient traditions, language and religion. Semyon L'vovich, who headed a department of the United Bank (*Pamyatnaya knizhka*, 1910: 166),³ was also the leader of the local section of the Society for the Spreading of the Enlightenment among the Jews of Russia (OPE) and the founder of a public library created under the auspices of this organization, which was located on the first floor of the mansion where the Vygotskys lived (Kotik-Friedgut and Friedgut, 2008: 18). The main slogan of the Society, 'be a man in the street and a Jew at home', was taken from a poem by Yehudah Leyb Gordon⁴ and perfectly characterized the situation in which Vygotsky grew up (Zavershneva and Van der Veer, 2018). As Kotik-Friedgut and Friedgut

(2008: 28) have argued, 'This was neither a moral double standard nor a splitting of the Jew's personality but a means of integration into Russian society without a loss of the particular Jewish identity, a goal shared by many of the modern, educated Jewish intelligentsia of Russia'. Semyon L'vovich's house also formed the headquarters of the Gomel section of the Jewish Colonization Association (JCA), a philanthropic organization founded by Baron Maurice de Hirsch⁵ that facilitated the mass emigration of Jews from Russia and other Eastern European countries by settling them in agricultural colonies on lands purchased by the committee, particularly in North and South America (e.g. Canada, Argentina). With the Association's help, several thousands of Jews from the Gomel region were able to emigrate to countries where there was less institutional discrimination (*Gomel' i ego uezd*, 1913: 136).

Vygotsky's parents read several languages and Vygotsky himself supposedly read 6 languages, including Biblical Hebrew, the language of the Torah and the prophets. As a boy, he studied the Torah out of interest, but also to prepare for the Bar Mitzva ceremony, during which he discussed a Torah issue in Biblical Hebrew. A special tutor acquainted him with the fundamentals of Judaism (Feigenberg, 2000: 24). Vygotsky knew the major prayers and the traditions of Judaism; he studied not just the Torah, but the Talmud as well, plus – as archival research showed – other religious writings, such the Haggadah (a text that stipulates the order of the Passover Seder), treatises by Torah students, and so on. Also, the tremendous influence on his worldview of the Jewish philosopher Spinoza should be mentioned, as well as the fact that Vygotsky in his youth became infatuated with Chaim Nahman Bialik's poems, which were primarily written in Hebrew. Although the Vygotskys identified with the Jewish identity and history, Vygotsky's biographers agree that they were not orthodox believers and that Vygotsky grew up in a more or less secular environment (Kotik-Friedgut and Friedgut, 2008: 33; Van der Veer and Valsiner, 1991: 6). Knowing Vygotsky, however, it is quite possible that he considered various worldviews without making a clear choice.

Vygotsky's publications from 1915 to 1917 reflect his interests during that period. Half of his literary reviews were dedicated to Jewish issues (Feigenberg, 2000: 74–98; Vygotsky, 1916, 1916b, 1916c, 1916d) and his columns were connected with significant dates of Jewish history or responded to political events in the country (Vygotsky, 1916e, 1917a, 1917b, 1917c, 1917d, 1917e). These writings partially reflected Jewish life in the Pale of Settlement with its restrictive laws and constant discrimination and humiliation. Vygotsky knew all too well about the virulent Russian anti-Semitism: Gomel witnessed pogroms in 1903 and 1906, universities used quotas for Jewish students, positions as a civil servant (e.g. teacher at a state school or college) were not open to Jews, and so on (Feigenberg, 2000: 17–19; Van der Veer, 2007: 15–16). At the university, Vygotsky first opted to study medicine, but soon switched to law; options that were dictated by the fact that these studies and the corresponding professions were open to Jews. It is possible that these choices were also aimed at pleasing his father, whereas the study at the Historical-Philosophical Faculty of the unofficial Shanyavsky People's University more reflected his personal interests (Kotik-Friedgut and Friedgut, 2008: 22). Like his hero Hamlet, the young Vygotsky faced difficult choices: to follow the will of his father, on the one hand, or to find his own life course, on the other. He often was confronted with external conditions that frustrated his aspirations and forced him into inactivity, and felt at times

both desperation and strong impulses to realize his potential and overcome physical, legal and mental barriers.

Vygotsky's cultural proselytism, his image of a society of equal opportunities that would create the 'new man' (or 'superman'), his active social position and his wish to fulfil his ambitions for the public interest can be clearly viewed in the pre-psychological period of his life. That is why his transition from Jewish Enlightenment to secular Enlightenment, from the possible religious faith in the Kingship of God to the communist belief in a Radiant Future, looks almost logical. Vygotsky was inclined to regard the revolutionary reforms as that very renaissance about which he had written in the Gomel and Moscow editions of *Novyy Put'* and *Letopis'*,⁶ but now it did not just apply to the Jews but to all people. This is illustrated by several passages from his writings.

The solution to the problem of the future of the world must be found in the depths of Jewish history, Vygotsky argued, and this is why the Jewish question is extremely important. In his review of Andrey Bely's novel *Peterburg* he remarked:

Anti-Semitism is, of course, the deeply distorted and false, but remarkable and incomprehensible reflection of Israel's secret. Jewish history cuts world history at too great a depth and anti-Semitism is not the foam on the current's surface, but the interior, deep fluctuations and currents in the abysses that are hidden from the eye. For anti-Semitism is the perpetual traveling companion of the perpetual people, and already its eternity alone compels us to consider it as the reflection *sub specie aeternitatis* of the secret of the eternity of the Jewish people. (Vygotsky, 1916a: 328)

The passivity of the Jewry, Vygotsky claimed, was rooted in its past:

Our history is built on defeats and external decline, on destruction...The helpless Jews became weak-willed, they not only lost power over the system of national will... but subordinated everything to another will. (Vygotsky, 1916f: 28)

He did see a gleam of hope, however:

There is an exciting and surprising legend, full of profound and hidden meaning, a tale according to which on this day of grief and mourning, precisely on the day of av 9 [May 9 of the Hebrew calendar], the Messiah was born. In the invisible beams of pure grief, which reflect the eternal in time, in the bright pain of particular days and scattered minutes, in the helplessness of infirmity, disease, loss, and harm, there is the guarantee of the birth of the Messiah. It is difficult to speak about this, but the ultimate truth of the defeats, the infirmity and disease must be felt in the wound of these days. For in the darkness of this day's sorrow the *paamei Moschiah* [footsteps of the Messiah, Hebrew] are already audible. (Vygotsky, 1916f: 30)

Despite all their ambiguity, the changes in national politics raised hope, which was accompanied, however, by what Vygotsky saw as the Jews' constant inactivity. In his notes about the elections for the City Council (July 1917) and the Constituent Assembly (September 1917), Vygotsky commented upon the distribution of the places on the list of candidates and remarked that the social-democrats and the Bundists⁷ did not express the mood of the majority of the Jewish population, which remained indifferent to the

political games: 'The general impression is that indecisiveness rules everywhere and that the question of the Constituent Assembly will not be decided locally, but in the centre. The partyless mass does not manifest itself at all and let the forthcoming congress determine its position itself' (Vygotsky, 1917b: 31). In his 'Provincial notes' ('Provincial'nye zametki') Vygotsky pointed out the same symptoms:

It seems to me that the classic statement? 'the people are speechless [Pushkin in *Boris Godunov*]' best diagnoses the genuine state of affairs in the province...A substantial part of the provincial Jews...is not just politically deeply indifferent, not involved in the revolution, and aloof from politics, but even internally the Jews have not made their choice, have not revealed their attitude to the various currents. But they do have the decisive word. Perhaps a great divide is maturing in their silence, but so far they are unanimous in their inactivity and silence. They still have a feeling of confusion and deep perplexity. (Vygotsky, 1917b: 29)

In his paper 'Avodim hoinu',⁸ published in March 1917, Vygotsky observed that the 'deep decadence through which the Jews are going must be replaced by a renaissance of the people's consciousness: only then shall the people's will come alive' (Vygotsky, 1917a: 10). In the autumn of 1917 this expectation of a renaissance became projected onto the Revolution, and the tragic tone within the references to the Messiah and the Torah soon disappeared from Vygotsky's texts. His new mood was similar to Mayakovskiy's mood of the time as the latter described it in his autobiography: 'My revolution. I arrived in Smol'nyy. I worked. I did everything I had to do' (Mayakovskiy, 1978: 54).

The criticism of Zionism, autonomism and socialism in Vygotsky's manuscripts

We shall return to the archival documents dedicated to the Jewish question and consider them more or less chronologically. Several notes were written in 1914, but the first larger text dates from April 1915: in three exercise books (numbered from III to V; the beginning of the manuscript is missing) the political situation of the Jews during World War I was discussed (cf. Zavershneva and Van der Veer, 2018: ch. 2). The text largely summarized other people's views, but Vygotsky mentioned one idea that he would return to later on. He ascertained the deep crisis of the very idea of the Jewish people as a unified whole and claimed that none of the existing currents – whether Zionism,⁹ autonomism¹⁰ or territorialism¹¹ – could lead the Jews out of the crisis. Vygotsky emphasized that Jewish history had a special, non-Euclidian logic, 'irrational and unfit for any formulas', and criticized these currents as superficial and fruitless attempts 'to shine on the dark and deep abysses of Jewish history with the paltry flashlight of cheap sociology'. Vygotsky agreed with the philosopher Nikolay Berdyaev¹² and observed that:

the Jewish question is a mystic question, not a positive one, and the attitude to the Jewish question can only be religious...it is not a mundane or political or racial issue. On every Jew lies the sign of not just his personal fate, but also of the suprapersonal, global, mysterious fate of Israel...The fate of the Jews is a fate that is inscrutable, that is rationally

inexplicable, that perpetually points to the mystic meaning of history...Suffering is not the sign of the living God. You say that the Jews are *doomed* and *condemned* to perpetual suffering. I say the Jews are *chosen* and *predetermined* to perpetual suffering.¹³

From its very first pages the manuscript manifests the tragic and prophetic tone characteristic of almost all of Vygotsky's pre-revolutionary writings. In this connection it should be mentioned that one of Vygotsky's friends in Gomel, the artist Aleksandr Bykhovsky, nicknamed him 'the prophet'. In the autumn of 1917, Vygotsky predicted the following radical global changes:

History is created before our eyes, a forward movement of the historical process takes place, one feels the movement of history. It is clear that now willy-nilly all values must be reassessed, that all principles and slogans must be tested and verified in practice...It is worth remembering at the threshold of which events we are and what are the possible consequences of this war (after all, it can start a horrible emigration with radical changes in the course of Jewish history...). They are immense! But it is not up to us to turn the helm of the ship of history...We do not create our history with our own hands, but as obscure slaves we fulfill someone's Will.¹⁴

In Vygotsky's pessimistic view none of the suggested solutions by the new Jewry achieved their goals – they were no more than makeshift attempts. In his criticism of Zionism in the paper 'The Zionist movement',¹⁵ Vygotsky again turned to the Bible: 'Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build'.¹⁶ In the paper 'About Zionism', which had a line from Aleksandr Pushkin's novel in verse *Eugene Onegin* as its epigraph ('Was he a parody?'), Vygotsky came to the conclusion that Zionism could be written off as a irrelevant historical movement. The Jews always felt that the diaspora had a special, hidden meaning, 'above both unhappiness and happiness one reads a blessing (ברכה)' and the end of the diaspora does not at all signify the Jews' common territory, the comfort, or the satiety that Zionism aspires for. While trying to avoid new hardships, Zionism leads the Jews into a spiritual desert.¹⁷

The attempts to revive the national spirit were in vain, for the heart of the Jews was dead, Vygotsky argued in his paper 'Spiritual Zionism (about Ahad-Gaom)'. Its living force – Judaism – had degenerated into religious ritualism, and no politics of colonization, enlightenment or the creation of Jewish fractions in the Parliament could change this situation. One would think that the future founder of cultural-historical theory sympathized with spiritual Zionism, which preached the cultural renaissance of the nation, the creation of a new system of national education, the active assimilation of Jews in Europe and Russia, the study of the Russian language, the development of a national literature, and so on. Its leader, Ahad-Gaom, argued that Palestine could not harbour and feed all the prosecuted Jews, that is, that a state could not be created for primarily economic reasons, and that one had to create a sort of spiritual centre in Palestine, which would function as a model for the Jewish way of living. However, spiritual Zionism was also criticized by Vygotsky, who stated that the core of Ahad-Gaom's teachings was correct and that a renaissance indeed was essential, but that it should be achieved in another way.

Vygotsky argued that we should first of all distinguish between the Jewish 'hungry mass' and the Jewry:

The point is that the teachings of Moses *never* exclusively concerned the people's wellbeing on the historical earth. Likewise, religion's concern for the person's fate...is not that superficially simple. What is individual does not exist in the Jewish prayer book. The concern for the people remains the centre of everything. But in another sense...Precisely *the place, the nature* of this concern changes.¹⁸

Vygotsky characterized Ahad-Gaom's ideas as 'ethnolatry' and opposed the obliteration of the spiritual basis of Judaism, although this obliteration was incomplete: 'he shares his ideal with everybody else: it is reduced to the earth...But his paganism (his idolatry) is spiritual: like the adoration of a logical or other principle – spring, the rebirth of nature, the phenomenon of the human spirit, the stars – is more spiritual than adoring a stone'.¹⁹

In his polemics with Ahad-Gaom, Vygotsky argued against the sociologizing of Jewish history, against the obliteration of its profound secret and therewith its national identity:

spiritual Zionism is...the organization of the Jewry on a new, secular basis. At its basis is, Darwin...normality...This consciousness *destroys* Jewish consciousness. The construction of Jewish history on that basis of nature, science and free thought, which carries Darwin's name, compelled Ahad-Gaom to give another form to Messianism as well. *Only*: he replaced its supernatural form by a natural one. A legitimate longing for...normality...Like everybody, Ahad-Gaom wishes to change 'the people of the Book' into 'the people of literature.' A normal people, normal history, normal laws, normal life, a normal connection between history and religion, Messianism is even the highest degree of normality. But...[according to] the testimony of the historian Turaev 'in Jewish history and religion everything is extraordinary'.²⁰

Thus, we see that the young Vygotsky rejected both Zionism and spiritual Zionism, which is remarkable given that his own father played an organizational role in the territorialist movement. Even more remarkable is that he was also very critical of Marxism. From the text 'Judaism and socialism', written not before 1916, it becomes quite clear that Vygotsky did not sympathize with the socialists at all and cannot have been a member of the Bund or other pro-Marxist movements as one might have suspected. Its conclusion is given here in full, because it is particularly interesting:

First of all, Judaism provides a religious solution to a social problem. It is in each and every part directed to God...[it is] not human society, left to itself, but a society before God. Hence, the commandment – the earthly task – 'be holy'. Each community stands firmly in the name of God, but only in the name of God. That is, human society cannot be realized as an anthill. Socialism is the mechanical leveling and equalizing of a human society that is left to itself. It is entirely in the plane of sociology. It calls for organization, for planning: the 'proletarians of all countries, unite' it sets against the commandment about holiness: whereas Judaism creates *something new*, which did not yet exist either in [the teachings

about] the sabbath, or in chiliasm, or in holiness, socialism provides nothing *fundamentally* new. According to Berdyaev, its ideal is the same bourgeois life, but then just, progressive, and egalitarian. Socialism is inanimate, its movement is the mechanics of the society; in Rozanov's words, it is 'mineralogical'. Judaism goes through the heart and soul of the person. Socialism is an 'anthill', because it satisfies the natural, animal nature of man; Judaism is not about bread; it satisfies man's paradisaical nature. Socialism is the positivistic and abstract-rationalistic solution to a social problem: a self-contained, restricted social problem, it has no solution and develops in isolation; its 'orientation is sociological and not cosmic'. In the teachings about the sabbath the social problem is connected 'with other worlds'. And the call of the pauper – the pathos of Judaism, is dead in socialism... Socialism is permeated with optimism, it believes that organization cures all of humanity's concerns, it promises that humanity will be arranged in such a way that satiety, justice and equality form the basis of human wellbeing on earth. But Judaism, according to the prophets' pledges, waits for the 'the great and dreadful day of the Lord'.²¹

Referring to the rabbinical writings, Vygotsky further argued that socialism's dream to eradicate inequality will not come true, because social inequality is inevitable. Poverty, he wrote, is inherent to every society and, moreover, it fulfils a particular function:

According to the Talmud, poverty will not disappear in the days of the Messiah (Sabbath, 151b). Rabbi Ishmael compares poverty to a wheel that revolves in the world. Rabbi Chiya told his wife to give to the poor, for her children might become beggars. She asked – do you really want the children to be beggars? No, but poverty is a wheel (ibid.)...Poverty belongs to Israel, because it softens the heart and curbs pride (Hagiga, 9b). We should not try to get rid of poverty. When two scholars became very poor and wanted to stop with the Torah and engage in trading, they heard a voice that said: let us throw down this wall upon them, because they leave the Torah to do trading. (Ta'anith, 21a).²²

According to the rabbinical writings, poverty forces people to live according to their conscience. It is poverty, and not the obligatory equal distribution of goods, that makes people equal before God: 'if we do not give *as much as is needed*, we rob the poor man, he *has a right* to our property; what is in your houses was stolen from the poor. The rabbinical texts teach us that God himself could help the beggars, but that it is His will that we shall do it (Chinuch, Mishpatim)'.²³

Such considerations may seem somewhat insensitive or selfish. After all, in 1916 Vygotsky had not yet known times of economical hardship, but, as we have seen, he did no more than follow the traditional rabbinical teachings, which always accentuated that spiritual poverty is far worse than material poverty. From the viewpoint of the young Vygotsky, socialism just dreamed about material satiety, albeit general satiety, whereas Judaism aimed at spiritual equality before God. Of course, the idea of social inequality as a moving force of history was expressed both before and after Vygotsky, but Vygotsky may have been among the first to use it as an argument against the communist ideal. At any rate, it is remarkable that Vygotsky already raised the issue in 1916, when the effects of the levelling tendencies in a communist society were not yet evident. Much later, Claude Lévi-Strauss, in his booklet *Race and History*, developed the idea that any cultural inequality, including material inequality, creates the impulse for further

development. It is precisely diversity, the ‘unity of unlikes’ (Aristotle), that creates a cumulative effect, the possible appearance of civilization as a ‘coalition of cultures, each of which would preserve their own originality’ (Lévi-Strauss, 1952: 46). Nevertheless, among the factors creating such diversity, poverty is a rather special one. From the viewpoint of the sympathetic member of society it is an evil that needs to be fought, but this can be done in various ways: by legal means, according to the principle ‘take what was taken’, or by voluntarily giving to those in need. Or, in modern terms, a more equal income distribution can be reached through income politics or through charity. In this respect, Vygotsky claimed on the eve of the 1917 revolutions, Judaism had a clear advantage over socialism.

Thus, until at least 1916 Vygotsky was a young thinker, who polemicized with the new ideas about the resurrection of a Jewish state, about repatriation, enlightenment, etc. and his criticism was as debatable as it was partial. Moreover, time showed that Vygotsky was mistaken in his assessment of Zionism’s attractiveness and feasibility. His emphasis on spiritual means of salvation, rather than material ones, perhaps found its continuation in his later psychological writings, which emphasized the need to reach freedom by making free rational choices based on cultural means. Of course, claiming Judaism’s superiority did not solve the problem of the Jews’ self-determination on earth. Here the young Vygotsky had no other solution to offer than to accept the wrath of the Lord and to wait for the coming of the Messiah (cf. Jovanovic, 2015).

‘Such as are for death, to death; and such as are for the sword, to the sword’: Vygotsky’s pre-revolutionary view of the Jewish future

Vygotsky’s ideas about the death of Jewry, about retribution and the apocalypse, are present in the most remarkable manuscript found in the family archive, ‘The book of fragments’ (cf. Zavershneva and Van der Veer, 2018: ch. 4). The text dates from the summer and autumn of 1917 and it was primarily created during his brief stay in Samara (a small part was written earlier, in Gomel in the summer of 1916). The manuscript consists of a collection of short chapters, or sections, written in an impressionistic style and meant for a book about the Jewish question that was never finished. More than a hundred fragments with a length of one half to two pages have been found; about a quarter of them have a complete text, for others Vygotsky just wrote down the title and left an empty space. Vygotsky set two epigraphs at the beginning of the text: 1. ‘And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land’ (Jonah 1:9); 2. ‘The fool hath said in his heart: There is no God’ (Psalms 53:1). Vygotsky considered two titles for the book: ‘Without title’ (with the subheadings ‘Jewish stuff’ and ‘I am a Jew’) and ‘The book of fragments’.

In a sense the book is reminiscent of the Haggadah, which combines such literary genres as the parable, the fable, and allegoric and hyperbolic stories, in which the narrator directly addresses the reader. ‘The book of fragments’ has abundant quotations from the Torah, the prophets and the literature about the Jews, in particular, by Fyodor Dostoevsky, Vasiliy Rozanov, Vladimir Solov’ev,²⁴ and other authors whose works

Vygotsky intensively studied in his youth. The analysis of the manuscript shows that even after the February Revolution Vygotsky did not believe in socialism, but in the impending catastrophe that would strike the world. Thus, in the section 'About optimists' (Samara, spring 1917), the following truly prophetic words about the impending chaos in the country can be read:

Daily life causes muddy waves in the stream of optimism. He who does not bring confidence to the solution of a problem cannot claim attention. We just need those who give hope for prosperity, an answer, a development. Who needs non-soothing words? They may drive you crazy. There are enough bad things in reality. Who needs them in theories and books? That is what a *theory* is for, to improve reality. The first and last word of all theories is: it will be okay. You think this is a vulgarization of the current theories? Absolutely not. It even inadequately reflects the divine optimism by which all live in these cold days. It will be okay. Will it? No. It will be very bad. And I even think it will be worse than ever. True, the times of the inquisition have passed, but they will seem like paradise compared to what is still to come. Can we concretely imagine the form this evil will take? The hatred of enlightened and civilized people is worse than the hatred of brutes and fanatics. All sorts of deaths and horrors are impending. The punishment and wrath of God are dreadful. All that happened will seem insignificant compared to what is happening, is on its way, is near. Everything goes down into the abyss. Doom is impending. Then you will search for words and will not find them. And perhaps then this will remind you of Ezekiel: And when I looked, behold, a hand was sent unto me; and, lo, a roll of a book was therein; And he spread it before me; and it was written within and without: and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe.²⁵

In the section 'About human strength and comfort', Vygotsky quoted Nietzsche's aphorism about God's death and accused the Jews of the murder of God, implying that the Jews became a godless people, replaced the Creator with common sense, and comfortably lived with their artificial, toothless god, which became just another 'cultural habit'.²⁶ 'Who needs a lantern in the clear daylight of atheism?' Vygotsky exclaimed rhetorically, and he predicted that this daylight wouldn't last long. God must resurrect and punish the unrighteous, he argued in the section 'Who created whom?': 'The Jews killed their God; this means they created him as well. And if God created the Jews let Him kill them'.²⁷

Vygotsky ascertained the death of the Jews: their days were gone, they renounced their God, fell into paganism. The loss of the highest meaning of the Jews' existence leads to their disappearance as a nation, but the death of the Jews was like a purgatory bonfire: 'And beyond that limit, where a living people dies, the dead old God rises from the dead, for what kind of human strength and comfort can exist if there is expulsion, punishment, and death...'²⁸ In the sections 'How will it all end?' and 'Whither?' Vygotsky wrote that it was impossible to hide from retribution and quoted the prophet Jeremiah: 'If they say unto thee, whither shall we go forth? then thou shalt tell them, thus saith the Lord: Such as are for death, to death; and such as are for the sword, to the sword; and such as are for the famine, to the famine; and such as are for the captivity, to the captivity' (Jeremiah 15:2).

Thus, in these early writings the young Vygotsky remained quite close to the orthodox rabbinical writings. In his eyes, all attempts to unite the nation – other than the renaissance of Judaism – were doomed to fail. In the section ‘Frolicking’, Vygotsky gave his verdict on the reformist movements among the new Jewry:

This is an expression by Rozanov that I heard about Jewish literature. It seems to him that with Sholem Asch and Sholem Aleichem Jewish literature is frolicking behind the Russian, the European one. Does not this expression also define almost all new Jewry? Frolicking. This is not just about literature, it is broader: it is about national politics.²⁹

And while the leaders of the new Jewry sought salvation in the imitation of Europe, the majority of the population continued their inertia. It permeated their life despite the misery and suffering. In the section ‘M. Chagall’, Vygotsky stated:

The most terrifying thing he ever painted was *death*. Where did he see it? Among the Jews. In the painting of this name we see a dead man. A stocking or a boot is hanging somewhere. Daily life. A woman tilted her head backward. On the roof is a violinist. Jews. The same death we see in his red and green Jews... ‘A living death’ is the most horrible. The *Dead Souls*, the ‘living relics’ of Russia are nothing compared to Jewish life, which ‘died a long time ago’. From the paintings they look at us as corpses.³⁰

In the last section, ‘Who is wise?’, Vygotsky offered his explanation for the silence and impotence of the Jews and also answered the pivotal question ‘what to do?’:

The Jews knew more about not knowing. What is secret is just for God and what is revealed is for us and our children. But do not ask, because ‘thou doest not enquire wisely of this thing’. Thus: do not enquire. What to do? You know the Jewish virtue: ‘blessed is he who waits...’ What is commanded? To wait, fear God, multiply and breed, do not kill; it is not a small matter...a whole life is not enough for that. And, after all, the most important is: do not ask about birth, about death. Why enquire: God did not answer <his sons>, question him (Ezekiel 20). But answer all questions with a question and thereby expose their vanity.³¹

The truth of anti-Semitism: Tracing the unknown manuscript ‘Against the new Jewry’

In another archival document (‘The unsent letter to R. E.’; cf. ch. 4 of Zavershneva and Van der Veer, 2018) from Vygotsky’s stay in Samara in 1917 we find a unique testimony of his mood in the pre-revolutionary period:

The impracticability? Is everything I will do repulsive to me? No, this is not all either. There is pain in what is most important and most essential. I do not know in what I believe because it touches on a basic pattern in my destiny, my life, and everything connected with it (even superficial thoughts) is pain. Gogol’s parting words are addressed to me. Wait for defeats, quite unexpected ones. Pray to receive mental strength (strength = to be a warrior = to act) and be worthy.³²

For Vygotsky the chapter ‘Parting words’ from Nikolay Gogol’s (1847/1969) book *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends* had a special personal meaning and it is mentioned repeatedly in his notes. He seems to have seen ‘Parting words’ as a source of inspiration for his future book about the Jewish nation, which he called his spiritual testament:

The book must be as much about *me* as it is about others. Its preface must be if not a *testament* then something in that spirit. On the whole, Gogol (I just read this one idea, *nothing* else) gave me much for the book: his superior view on the present, the link with himself, the spirit, style, tone, form of the book. Even its form is very instructive... But most important is the *spirit*. In general, make the book more concise, as usual – its content elementary, logical – I have no *other* strength. But the essence, the author’s confession about *himself*, must be put in a few sparing, concise and sound words in the preface.³³

Unfortunately, we only have limited information about this book and to this day a complete manuscript has not been found. Among its sources of inspiration, Vygotsky mentioned the circle about Jewish history, which he led in his *Gymnasium* years, his family, conversations with Emma (probably, Emma Vygodskaya, the children’s writer and wife of David Vygotsky³⁴), and his own life:

The book is in some sense an autobiography. Our language (Russian), meaning, spiritual life, psychological stuff (the triviality of our means of passing the time, our interests, tastes, aspirations, ‘judge’ oneself), the talks with Emma. Make mention of the circle, which was inspired by reflecting about the fate and meaning of the Jews, about our generation, oneself, the searching for one’s destiny. This is the spirit of the book. It brought *me many things*.³⁵

For some time we assumed that the above-mentioned ‘Book of fragments’ was this fundamental work about the Jewish nation, but doubts remained because there were no autobiographic details, no mention of the study circle, and so on, and because its length resembled more that of a brochure. By sheer accident, while searching the family archive we came across another brief document, which confirmed our doubts and which seems to describe the book about the Jewish nation we were looking for.

This document contains a brief plan for a book with the title ‘About the new Jewry’ (see Zavershneva and Van der Veer, 2018: ch. 4) and is signed with the initials R. E. and L. V., in that order. The identity of the first author has not yet been established, although we were able to reconstruct that she was a woman who was considerably older than Vygotsky (Zavershneva, 2013). The epigraph for this book was the quote from Ezekiel 20 given below. In view of the fact that the book plan contains the only description we have available, we will quote this document almost entirely:

31. And shall I be enquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live, saith the Lord God, I will not be enquired of by you. 32. And that which cometh into your mind shall not be at all, that ye say, ‘We will be as the heathen, as the families of the countries, to serve wood and stone.’ 33. As I live, saith the Lord God, surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out, will I rule over you...37. And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant. [38.] And I

will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me...39. As for you, O house of Israel, thus saith the Lord God; Go ye, serve ye every one his idols, and hereafter also, if ye will not hearken unto me...(Ezekiel 20)

The meaning of the epigraph: (a) the new Jewry – to become like other peoples, (b) to worship wood and stone, (c) will not be realized according to their ideas, (d) God will exercise dominion – the whole transcendence of this dominion: not the Jews as a religiously talented people, [not] the search for God, religious creativity, mystical experience, [but] ‘the Jews created their God’, (e) the hand, the muscle. Divine Providence in Jewish history, (f) by the outpouring of fury – in contrast with the optimism of the new Jewry – the expectation of a catastrophe, of fury, (g) not the Jews will return to God, but God will return the Jews, (h) the purging of the unruly, (i) general framework. A time, when there are no instructions, no answers from God, anti-proselytism. ‘Go ye, serve your idols, if you will not hearken unto Me’, (j) in the chapter is the whole history of Jewish paganism. It is a particular case of paganism.

The preface (together). The practical side, the goal, the nature of the work. Not literature, the imperfection, incompleteness, the hasty release.

- I. About the new Jewry (against). The individual, the family, biographical Jewry. The general paper and everything that does not go into the separate paragraphs.
- II. Jewish stuff (classic).
- III. Politics and the community. (a) Zionism, (b) socialism, (c) nationalism, (d) autonomy, (e) political parties, (f) the community (what kind of community they want to accomplish). The so-called intelligentsia. The older Jewish society. The *person* in the new Jewry.³⁶

There is yet another document that might form part of the book ‘About the new Jewry’. The text is called ‘III. The Zionist movement’ and seems thematically connected to the plan for the book ‘About the new Jewry’. In the text Vygotsky criticized the leaders of Zionism, Herzl and Ahad-Gaom, and called them false Messiahs. The Talmud, he argued, warns against such false Messiahs, who urge us to seek a secure, comfortable and normal life (one of the epigraphs of the chapter was: “Zionism aims at establishing a legally assured home in Palestine” (from the Basel convention)).³⁷ The true Messiah is incompatible with a comfortable existence: ‘The Son of David will not come before people despair of their salvation’ (the chapter’s second epigraph).³⁸ Zionism argued for a rational settlement on earth, but in Vygotsky’s eyes this was not the right path: ‘the Jews do not see Messianism in history or evolution, but in miraculous and supernatural conditions. The Jews have an eschatology, a belief about the end of the world: “about a new heaven and a new earth”. But in Zionism we have: “Viennese coffeehouses, English hotels, comfortable houses, and European comfort”’.³⁹ Vygotsky claimed that Zionism can only come true as part of a collapse, a catastrophe: ‘The Lord keeps Jerusalem (Psalms 127)’, but destroys the comfortable world of the new Jewry.⁴⁰

Finally, there is a third document that forms indirect proof for the existence of the book ‘About the new Jewry’. It is the manuscript ‘The problem of the new Jewry’ (see Zavershneva and Van der Veer, 2018: ch. 4). In a note to its title Vygotsky wrote: ‘The present article is a chapter from the book “About the new Jewry” that has been

prepared for publication. It was somewhat modified and reworked for publication in this journal'.⁴¹ The manuscript presented a concise plan for an article that basically discussed Dostoevsky's anti-Semitic views. Vygotsky suggested analysing Dostoevsky's anti-Semitism in order to find its essence, its rational core, ignoring the 'rubbish'. In his view, there was some truth to Dostoevsky's position, which the Jews had to understand in order to realize how far the general degeneration of the national spirit had progressed. Gogol's book quoted above was also mentioned in this document: 'Gogol's "Parting words" (correspondence) – about the "despised of the despised", "honor", and human dignity. Acceptance of the truth of anti-Semitism – we'.⁴²

The scarcity of documents and their fragmentary nature make it difficult to tell whether the book about the new Jewry was actually completed or not. In this respect we should keep in mind that Vygotsky tended to republish his papers in books (e.g. *Thinking and Speech*) and may have intended to re-use the Jewish papers written before 1917 for a later book publication.

Criticizing Judaism: Marx and Vygotsky

Below we will show that Vygotsky's Jewish writings, both published and unpublished, stopped abruptly after the October Revolution, and that some time afterwards he wholeheartedly embraced the Marxist worldview. We also give some possible reasons for this radical change. However, given that the later Vygotsky repeatedly showed an intimate knowledge of Marx's writings, one might wonder whether Marx's views on Judaism may not have been decisive.⁴³ Although Marx was of Jewish descent – his father was the first of his family to adopt the Christian religion – he wrote just one piece about Judaism. This was a critique of two articles of his contemporary Bruno Bauer (Marx, 1843). In that critique Marx argued that in his first article Bauer was mistaken in his assumption that in a secular state religion will no longer play a prominent role in social life and that Jews will have to renounce their faith to become emancipated citizens. In Marx's analysis, the secular state (unlike the Christian state, for example) does not oppose religion but disregards it: citizens are citizens regardless of their religion or material wealth and can exert their political rights independently of them. In that sense citizens in the secular state are religiously free. Hence, political emancipation is not the same as human emancipation (e.g. from the Jewish religion). However, citizens of the secular state remain bound by economic constraints. In his criticism of Bauer's second article, Marx identified Judaism with self-interest and their God with money, and pictured the Jew as a money-seeking individual, an egoist, a merchant; in sum, a capitalist, who just defends his own interests. He concluded that the social emancipation of the Jews requires the emancipation of society from Judaism (where Judaism was equated with capitalism). Not surprisingly, the latter analysis received much criticism because of its alleged anti-Semitic purport.

We have no evidence that Vygotsky ever read this essay, and at first sight his and Marx's views have little in common. After all, in most of his Jewish writings Vygotsky adopted an orthodox view and explicitly rejected Zionism and socialism, whereas Marx advocated renouncing Judaism as a mercenary religion. If there was any influence at all

on Vygotsky's views about the Jews, it must have been on his view of Jewish daily life. Judging by his outline of the book on the new Jewry, Vygotsky too planned to condemn everyday Jewish life with its petty rules and regulations, and even planned to find the rational core in anti-Semitism. But the solutions proposed by Marx and Vygotsky radically differed, and the few similarities in content and even style allow no definite conclusions. In sum, Vygotsky may have read Marx's analysis but it is not apparent in his unpublished and published writings.

Conclusions

Our archival research shows that Vygotsky's main theme in the period from 1914 to 1917 was the Jewish question. On the basis of a thorough study of the available writings, Vygotsky rejected all solutions proposed by Zionism, autonomism and other political currents. In these early writings he demonstrated his knowledge of the Torah, the prophets and the Talmudic literature, and quoted the Holy Scripture in practically all of his notes and articles. Prophesying the near end of the world, Vygotsky suggested turning to Judaism as the only source of wisdom that allows us to survive the apocalyptic times. He called for the renaissance of the true faith not just in 1915–1916, but also after the February Revolution of 1917. Knowing that in 1925 Vygotsky would write that 'Russia is the first country in the world. The Revolution is our supreme cause...I speak on behalf of the Revolution' (Van der Veer and Zavershneva, 2011: 466), one can only speculate about the reasons that made him switch from fierce anti-socialism to the camp of the fighters for a radiant future (cf. Maslov, 2015). It reminds us of the conversion of Paul but in the opposite direction: from now on Vygotsky rejected the 'flashlight' of Judaism and described the Jews as a people developing 'under the influence of religious prejudices' (Van der Veer, 2007: 16). It is difficult to say whether these changes reflected a religious crisis, as some biographers have claimed, or an identity crisis. That it reflected a religious crisis seems questionable as in none of Vygotsky's writings, not even in those that are very private, do we find references to his personal religiosity, and the appeals to confession and the renaissance of Judaism may well rest upon considerations about the general good or historical necessity. That Vygotsky accepted the revolution is not difficult to understand: the revolutionary government abolished the Pale of Settlement and the ban on certain professions, which provided Vygotsky with new and unexpected opportunities to realize his ambitions. Perhaps the transition to a new ideology was also facilitated by Vygotsky's fascination with the ideas of the Jewish intellectual and politician Leon Trotsky. Trotsky's socialist ideas, phrased in Nietzschean terms, his calls to 'remould' man, to create a new type of man, who masters his own nature and is not ruled by it, were ultimately creatively used by Vygotsky in his design of cultural-historical psychology.

And, finally, there may be some truth to the observation of Vygotsky's contemporary Maksim Vinaver,⁴⁴ one of the leaders of the Jewish liberal movement:

So many Jewish young men, who had just torn themselves away from the Bible and the Talmud, went to fight and die for the peasant people for whom, it would seem, they just

knew that they labored and suffered. They deeply believed in the soul of these people just because they were prepared to believe in truth and good, in the ultimate triumph of justice. It was the interaction with the prophets, with the great commandments of the whole Jewish culture that prepared them for it. (cited in Budnitskiy, 1996: 28)

Vygotsky was one of these Jewish young men who sought justice and the general good in every historical circumstance. As a man of his time, he acutely felt the atrocities committed by various regimes and having found the ‘bright light of atheism’, he continued to search for the truth – no longer in Judaism but in Marxist science, in which he invested hopes that did not come true in his youth.

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Notes

1. Many of the citations in this text are from this archive, which is located in the private apartment of Vygotsky’s granddaughter, Elena Kravtsova, in Moscow and can be visited at her discretion. The archive contains a set of relatively unordered manuscripts and notes with unnumbered pages. Hence the absence of exact references and call numbers. All citations have been translated by the authors and are cited as Vygotsky Family Archive, Moscow. The authors would like to express their gratitude to Elena Kravtsova who permitted the first author to work in the archive.
2. For reasons that have never been fully clarified, but possibly to avoid confusion with his equally prolific cousin David Vygotsky, Vygotsky changed his family name.
3. The commemorative booklet of the Mogilev district which discusses prominent former citizens gives his religion, education and address: ‘J[ew], priv[ate] educ[ation], Rumyantsevskaya [str.], Gintsburg’s house’.
4. Judah Leyb Gordon (1830–1892) was one of the best Hebrew poets of the Jewish Enlightenment.
5. Baron Maurice de Hirsch (1831–1896) was a German Jewish financier and philanthropist.
6. *Novyy Put’* (*The New Path*) was a weekly journal for the Jewish intelligentsia. *Letopis’* (*Chronicles*) was a leftist literary, scientific and political journal co-founded by the proletarian writer Maksim Gorky.
7. The Bund or General Jewish Labor Bund (Yiddish: Algemeyner Yidisher Arbeter Bund) was a secular Jewish social-democratic party in the Russian empire.
8. Slaves we were. (Hebrew).
9. Zionism emerged in the late 19th century as a national revival movement. Zionism had no uniform ideology, but the common denominator was the claim to Eretz Israel as the national homeland for the Jews. Among its leaders were Asher Ginsberg (pseudonym: Ahad Ha’am, called Ahad-Gaom in Vygotsky’s manuscripts) (1865–1927), Theodor Herzl (1860–1904), Ze’ev Jabotinsky (1880–1940) and Chaim Weizmann (1874–1952).
10. Jewish autonomism was proposed by Semyon Markovich Dubnov (1860–1941), a Russian Jewish historian, in the late 19th and early 20th century. Dubnov claimed that the survival of the Jews as a nation depended on their spiritual and cultural strength and rejected assimilation.

Unlike the Zionists, Dubnov believed that Jewish self-rule, based on secular values, was possible in the diaspora.

11. The Jewish Territorialist Organization (JTO), founded in 1903 by the British writer Israel Zangwill (1864–1926), proposed the creation of a Jewish colony outside the Middle-East and considered many countries for its establishment (e.g. Angola, Argentina, Ecuador, Uganda). The Jewish Colonization Association (JCA), mentioned in the text, was one of the many private territorialist initiatives.
12. Nikolay Aleksandrovich Berdyaev (1874–1948) was a Russian religious and political philosopher who was expelled from Russia in 1922.
13. Exercise book III, Vygotsky Family Archive, Moscow.
14. Exercise book V, Vygotsky Family Archive, Moscow.
15. The Zionist movement, Vygotsky Family Archive, Moscow.
16. Psalms 127:1.
17. About Zionism, Vygotsky Family Archive, Moscow.
18. Spiritual Zionism (about Ahad-Gaom), Vygotsky Family Archive, Moscow.
19. Spiritual Zionism (about Ahad-Gaom), Vygotsky Family Archive, Moscow.
20. Vygotsky Family Archive, Moscow. Boris Aleksandrovich Turaev (1868–1920) was a historian-orientalist, the founder of Russian Egyptology and specialist in the history of Assyria, Iran, Palestine and Abyssinia. Vygotsky quotes his *History of the Ancient East* published in 1913 (see also Turaev, 1935: 67).
21. Vygotsky Family Archive, Moscow. Chiliasm is the belief that there will be a paradise on earth in which Christ will reign for 1000 years prior to the final judgement. Vygotsky implicitly refers to Deuteronomy 8:3 and Malachi 4:5.
22. Vygotsky Family Archive, Moscow. Vygotsky refers to Tract Sabbath ('Rabbi Chiya once told his wife to run to a poor person and bring him sustenance so that people will do so to her children. She asked, 'Are you cursing us that our children should be poor?' He answered, 'The wheel of fortune constantly turns'); Tract Hagiga ('Poverty becomes Israel as a red leather trapping a white horse'), and Tract Taanith ('Ilpha and R. Johanan studied the Law together. They were in very poor circumstances and were in want of food. So they said: 'We will lay aside our studies and engage in some remunerative occupation, thereby carrying out what is written [Deuteronomy 15:4]: "Indeed, there should be no needy man among thee"'). In the meantime they sat down to eat beneath an unsafe wall. So two angels appeared, and R. Johanan heard one of them say to the other: 'Let us throw this wall down upon them, for they are about to leave the pursuit of the future life in order to obtain a worldly livelihood'.
23. Chinukh is the teaching of Judaism to one's children. Mishpatim is that part of the Torah that is read in the 18th week of the yearly cycle and consists of Exodus 21:1 to 24:18.
24. Vasilii Vasilyevich Rozanov (1856–1918) was a Russian literary critic, journalist and philosopher of religion. Rozanov's writings were often paradoxical and sparked controversy. He readily passed from praise of Judaism to unabashed anti-Semitism. Although Rozanov himself denied that he was an anti-Semite, Vygotsky analysed his writings in this context. Vladimir Sergeyevich Solov'ev (1853–1900) was a Russian religious philosopher, poet and literary critic, who fought anti-Semitism.
25. Vygotsky Family Archive, Moscow. Vygotsky refers to Ezekiel 2:10.
26. The book of fragments, Vygotsky Family Archive, Moscow.
27. The book of fragments, Vygotsky Family Archive, Moscow.

28. The book of fragments, Vygotsky Family Archive, Moscow.
29. Vygotsky Family Archive, Moscow. Solomon Naumovich Rabinovich (pen name Sholem Aleichem) (1859–1916). Ukrainian Jewish novelist and playwright who later moved to the USA and one of the founders of modern Yiddish literature. Sholem Asch (1880–1957). Polish Jewish novelist and playwright who wrote in Yiddish and eventually became an American citizen.
30. Vygotsky Family Archive, Moscow. Vygotsky refers to Marc Chagall's (1887–1985) paintings 'The death' (1908), 'Jew in bright red' (1915) and 'Jew in green' (1914). The other references are to Gogol's novel *The Dead Souls* and to Turgenev's story 'A living relic' in *A Sportman's Sketches*, Vol. 2 (1874).
31. Vygotsky Family Archive, Moscow. Vygotsky refers to Ecclesiastes 7:12, Daniel 12:12 and Ezekiel 20.
32. The unsent letter to R. E., Vygotsky Family Archive, Moscow.
33. The book of fragments, Vygotsky Family Archive, Moscow.
34. Vygotsky's cousin, David Isaakovich Vygotsky (1893–1943), a philologist and translator from German, French, Hebrew and Spanish. He was arrested on the basis of preposterous charges in 1938 and died in a concentration camp.
35. The book of fragments, Vygotsky Family Archive, Moscow.
36. Vygotsky Family Archive, Moscow. Vygotsky probably meant to write the preface together with R.E. With 'general paper' he referred to a book chapter.
37. The first Zionist Congress was held in Basel, Switzerland in August 1897 and chaired by Theodor Herzl. Vygotsky refers to the following statement of the program that was adopted, the so-called Basel Program: 'Zionism aims at establishing for the Jewish people a publicly and legally assured home in Palestine'.
38. See Tract Sanhedrin: 'The redeemer will come when men despair of the redemption'.
39. III. The Zionist movement, Vygotsky Family Archive, Moscow.
40. III. The Zionist movement, Vygotsky Family Archive, Moscow.
41. The problem of the new Jewry, Vygotsky Family Archive, Moscow.
42. III. The Zionist movement, Vygotsky Family Archive, Moscow.
43. We would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.
44. Maksim Moiseyevich Vinaver (1863–1926) was a Russian Jewish lawyer and politician who opposed the bolshevist regime and emigrated to France.

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Author biographies

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René van der Veer works at the Department of Education of Leiden University in The Netherlands. His topics of interest are the history of childcare advice, attachment theory and Russian psychology. He has published numerous articles and several books about Vygotsky, for example, *Understanding Vygotsky* (with Valsiner, 1991) and *Lev Vygotsky* (2007).