

Faynberg, Leyb (February 6, 1897–January 22, 1969)

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LEYB FAYNBERG (LEON FEINBERG) (February 6, 1897–January 22, 1969)

His full given name was: Yude-Arye-Leyb. He was born in Kadima, Podolia Province, Ukraine, and until age seven he attended religious primary school; later, his parents brought him with them to Odessa and entered him in a high school. His father had to make his way to the United States, while he remained in Odessa where he graduated from the Iglitski-Rapoport high school in 1912 at age fifteen. He lived for a short time in the United States, where he met up with his father, and then returned to Russia. In 1915 he entered the University of Moscow from which he graduated in 1919. With the outbreak of the Russian Revolution in February, he was among the large number of Jewish students who took the officer training course for the army. After the Bolshevik Revolution, he joined the Red Guards and contributed to the battles against the Petliuras, Denikins, and other Whites. For a time he served as adjutant to the well-known Soviet Commissar Yan Gamarnik (the brother-in-law of H. N. Bialik). In the autumn of 1919, he was captured by Denikin's men, who threatened to have him shot, but Bialik interceded on his behalf and managed to save him. In November 1919, again with help from Bialik, he departed on board the *Ruslan* for Jaffa. He remained in the land of Israel but a year and was one of the founders of a new kibbutz "Kiryat Anavim" (near Jerusalem). He later made his way across the world as a sailor aboard ships, and in 1921 arrived in America where his father was living. He began writing and publishing Russian-language poems when still quite young. Using the pen name Leonid Grebniev, he joined the Imagist group of Sergei Esenin in Moscow. He published his work in a number of Russian and Soviet journals, such as *Niva* (Field), *Letopis'* (Chronicle), published by Maxim Gorky, and others. In 1918 he received first prize in a competition for his poem "Dusha Russiya" (The soul of Russia). He published four books in Russian: one in Odessa in 1914; one in Moscow in 1919; *Na paperti dorog, stikhi* (On the porch of the road, poems) (Berlin, 1923), 96 pp.; and *Evreiskaia poeziia, antologiia* (Anthology of Yiddish poetry) (New York, 1947), 240 pp. In America, he wrote for Russian newspapers in New York and Chicago, before

starting to write in Yiddish. He published poetry, journalistic articles, and translations from Russian and Anglophone literature in: *Feder* (Pen), *Fraye arbeter-shtime* (Free voice of labor), *Tageblat* (Daily newspaper), *Morgn-zhurnal* (Morning journal), *Amerikaner* (American), *Frayhayt* (Freedom), *Morgn-frayhayt* (Morning freedom), *Hamer* (Hammer), *Vokh* (Week), *Forverts* (Forward), *Tsukunft* (Future), *Kundes* (Prankster), *Idisher kemfer* (Jewish fighter), *Undzer veg* (Our way), *Yidishe kultur* (Jewish culture), and *Vayter* (Further) in New York; *Di prese* (The press) in Buenos Aires; *Literarishe bleter* (Literary leaves) in Warsaw; and *Di goldene keyt* (The golden chain) in Tel Aviv; among others. He published an anthology in Russian of Yiddish poetry in America, which included over 300 poems by over 100 Yiddish poets (New York, 1947 [see above])—from M. Rozenfeld to the youngest one in the United States. In 1926 he became a staff contributor to *Frayhayt* in New York, but in 1929 at the time of the Arab riots against the Jews in Israel, he left the newspaper. From 1941 he became a full staff member of *Tog* (Day) in New York, where he served for many years as news editor. Over the years 1943-1947, he edited the journal *Epokhe* (Epoch), which he edited with the writer Y. A. Vaysman. For his book, *Der farmishpeter dor, roman in fir teyln* (The doomed generation, a novel in four parts) (New York, 1954), 336 pp., he received the Hofer Prize in Buenos Aires, and in 1966 the Willie and Lisa Shore literary stipend through the World Jewish Culture Congress. In book form: *Erev shturem* (On the eve of the storm), poetry (New York, 1926), 63 pp.; *Groysshtot* (Metropolis), poetry (New York: Khaverim, 1931), 127 pp.; *Dovid blank, a roman in ferzn* (David Blank, a novel in verse) (New York: Signal, 1934), 160 pp.; *Khaver lebn, lider un balades* (Comrade life, poems and ballads) New York: Fraynt, 1938), 128 pp.; *In keynems land, poeme* (In no one's land, a poem) (New York: Bidermans bukh-gesheft, 1940), 44 pp.; *Di yorshim fun der erd, portretn* (The inheritors of the earth, portraits) (New York: Shklarski, 1941), 94 pp.; *Ben-azay in pardes, poeme* (Ben Azzai in paradise, poem) (New York, 1948), 95 pp.; *Rusishe poezye, antologye* (Russian poetry, anthology) (New York: Committee for "Rusishe poezye" with help from the Dovid Ignatov Literary Fund, 1950), 256 pp.; *Der farmishpeter dor*, a novel in verse about the Russian Revolution [see above]; *Got fun tsorn, historisher*

roman vegn elishe ben avuye (God of wrath, a historical novel about Elisha ben Avuya) (New York, 1957), 224 pp.; *Der gebentshter dor, roman in ferzn vegn dem dor, yos hot geleygt di yesoydes fun medines yisroel* (The blessed generation, a novel in verse about the generation that laid the foundations for the state of Israel) (New York, 1962), 256 pp.; *Der khorever dor, roman in ferzn* (The destroyed generation, a novel in verse), a novel about Jewish life in Russia after the revolution (New York, 1967), 256 pp.; *Fun revolutsye tsu tshuve* (From revolution to repentance) (Buenos Aires: Lifshits Fund, 1975), 276 pp. He translated into Yiddish: Dmitry Merezhkovski, *Peter der groyser* (Peter the Great), performed in the Yiddish Art Theater (New York, 1926); Maxim Gorky, *Yegor Bulychov* and *Dostigayev* (New York, 1934-1935), performed in the Artef Theater.

Faynberg was president of the Yiddish Pen Center in New York and vice-president of the Y. L. Perets writers' association. For many years he wrote under the pen name Leonid Faynberg (Feinberg); and his Russian pen name, Leonid Grebniev. He also penned journalistic pieces under the name L. Gorin, L. Senders, and the like. He died in New York.

As Shloyme Bikl noted: "From just twenty years ago, a sharp break transpired in L. Faynberg's ideological and social attitude, and the dominant motif in his poetry became that of repentance.... Faynberg's poetic pathway stands as a sign of verbal impetuosity, of linguistically dispersed wings, of a prayer leader's loud voice before the lectern, and not of a quiet voice groaning alone somewhere in a corner of the synagogue. The thunderous voice, sharpness, and the hunt for verse are attributes of Faynberg's poetry, and they are characteristic of the repentance experience of his heroes."

"Faynberg found his mode of expression," as Froym Oyerbakh put it, "and he worked with it from Russian poetry—beginning with Pushkin and all the way to Esenin.... He is one of the most stunning poets among us. On many an occasion, he is full of sparkle from the dozens of gems, among which is one, a profoundly flaming effervescence, that is engraved in the soul until it hurts. From his *Der farmishpeter dor*, I learned that he struggles to get to the bottom

of his own pain, and in this struggle there is a poetic contest and also poetic excessiveness.... There is in his poetry such impulsiveness, such a nervous shiver, that you feel like he is chasing after his own experience which the poem calls forth. Perhaps, herein lies his poetic content—the broad, impulsive-nervous stride over himself. There is no doubt that, with a vehement, vibrating chord of his poem, he would arouse in you a kind of vague startle of its own. There is also no doubt that he will dazzle you with the rapid word colorings and the cinematographic transformation of images.”

As Arn Glants-Leyeles wrote: “In the poem ‘Yidish’ (Yiddish), Leyb Faynberg so sensed the need at the contemporary moment to perpetuate and immortalize poetically the accomplishment of Yiddish and the works tied to Yiddish. An entire gallery of figures—Yiddish builders—traverse the poem, songs to and about them. They resound in the legendary Yiddish, like a blast of the ram’s horn, this is certainly something mature and necessary in our contemporary time. The poet Leyb Faynberg may loom larger with his achievement. He bears a love for Yiddish, as the wonder that is Yiddish itself, ensconced in a monument that will never disappear. The poem ‘Yiddish’ should often be read in Jewish homes. It would also be an inheritance such that it should be included in the textbooks for Jewish schools in the upper grades....

“It’s been a while, as I leaf through the pages and read his published volume, *Der farmishpeter dor*, this novel in verse by Leyb Faynberg. In addition to a considerable number of particularly good, exceptional poems which are included in the book, the entire novel is a treasure chest for Yiddish literature, for Yiddish poetry. Some individual Yiddish poets bite their lips against mockery and disparagement, against nonsense and ignorance, and—erect a full sounding, richly instrumented orchestra of Yiddish poetry. One must attribute this accomplishment as well to Leyb Faynberg’s course in our poetry and his daring challenge to write an autobiographical novel in verse.”



Sources: Zalmen Reyzen, *Leksikon*, vol. 3; Shmuel Niger, in *Tsukunft* (New York) (August 26, 1926); Niger, in *Tog-morgn-zhurnal* (New York) (March 14, 1955); A. Mukdoni, in *Tog-morgn-zhurnal* (July 24, 1931; December 8, 1934); Mukdoni, in *Di goldene keyt* (Tel Aviv) 25 (1956); Mukdoni, in *Morgn-zhurnal* (New York) (August 11, 1957); N. B. Linder, in *Tog* (New York) (January 18, 1938); Mortkhe Yofe, in *Hadoar* (New York) (May 23, 1947); Yofe, in *Der amerikaner* (New York) (July 4, 1958); Yofe, *Erets-yisroel in der yidisher literatur* (Israel in Yiddish literature) (Tel Aviv: Perets Publ., 1961); A. Indelman, in *Hadoar* (July 1, 1949); Avrom Reyzen, in *Di feder* (New York) (1949), p. 241; Elye (Elias) Shulman, in *Veker* (New York) (May 1, 1951; October 15, 1951); G. Aronson, in *Tsukunft* (February 1952); Y. Mestl, *70 yor teater-repertuar* (Seventy years of theater repertoire) (New York, 1954), see index; Froym Oyerbakh, in *Tog* (March 19, 1955); Oyerbakh, in *Tog-morgn-zhurnal* (March 11, 1957); Arn Leyeles, in *Tog* (March 19, 1955); Leyeles, in *Tog-morgn-zhurnal* (June 8, 1957; June 15, 1957; March 3, 1963); S. Kahan, in *Di shtime* (Mexico City) (March 26, 1955); N. B. Minkov, in *Tsukunft* (April 1955); Yankev Glatshteyn, *In tokh genumen* (In essence) (New York, 1956), pp. 329-34; Sh. Meltsner, in *Al naharot* (Jerusalem) (1955/1956), pp. 436-37, 441; Meylekh Ravitsh, in *Keneder odler* (Montreal) (May 6, 1957); M. Shenderay, in *Di yidishe tsaytung* (Buenos Aires) (October 4, 1957); Shloyme Bikl, in *Tsukunft* (March 1958); Bikl, *Shrayber fun mayn dor* (Writers of my generation) (New York, 1958), pp. 145-52; A. Meytus, in *Di goldene keyt* 31 (1958); Sh. Margoshes, in *Tog-morgn-zhurnal* (February 28, 1963); Yefim Yeshurin, *100 yor moderne yidishe literatur; bibliografisher tsushteyer* (100 years of modern Yiddish literature, bibliographical contribution) (New York, 1966), pp. 192, 479.

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[Additional information from: Berl Kagan, comp., *Leksikon fun yidish-shraybers* (Biographical dictionary of Yiddish writers) (New York, 1986), col. 440.]