

W y g O T S k R

AN INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHY

ANTON YASNITSKY

ROUTLEDGE



VYGOTSKY

- The most famous Russian psychologist, whose life and ideas are least known?
- A pioneer of psychology who said virtually nothing new?
- A simple man who became a genius after he died?

This fundamentally novel intellectual biography offers a 21st-century account of the life and times of Lev Vygotsky, who has long been considered a pioneer in the field of learning and human development. The diverse Vygotskian literature has created many distinct images of this influential scientist, which has led many researchers to attempt to unearth ‘the real Vygotsky’. Rather than join this quest to over-simplify Vygotsky’s legacy, this book attempts to understand the development of ‘the multiple Vygotskies’ by exploring a number of personae that Vygotsky assumed at different periods of his life. Based on the most recent archival, textological and historical investigations in original, uncensored Russian, the author presents a ground-breaking account that is far from the shiny success story that is typically associated with ‘the cult of Vygotsky’.

This book will be an essential contribution to Vygotskian scholarship and of interest to advanced students and researchers in history of psychology, history of science, Soviet/Russian history, philosophical psychology, and philosophy of science.

Anton Yasnitsky, Ph.D., is an independent researcher who specializes in the Vygotsky-Luria Circle. He has coedited (with René van der Veer et al.) *The Cambridge Handbook of Cultural-Historical Psychology* (2014), *Revisionist Revolution in Vygotsky Studies* (2015), and *Vygotski revisitado: una historia crítica de su contexto y legado* (2016).

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VYGOTSKY

An Intellectual Biography

Anton Yasnitsky

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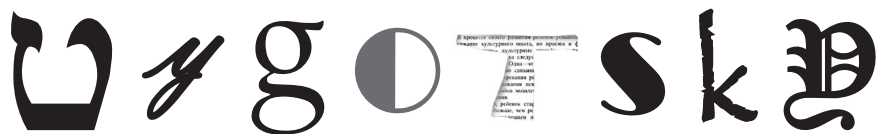
Только змеи сбрасывают кожи,
Чтоб душа старела и росла.
Мы, увы, со змеями не схожи,
Мы меняем души, не тела.








Николай Гумилев

Only serpents shed their skins forever
So that their souls would age and grow.
We are not like serpents, all that clever,
We change not our bodies, but our souls.

Nikolai Gumilev

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-  – Jewish “Prophet” at the outskirts of an Empire
-  – student in gymnasium and university
-  – Godless daydreamer without a job or profession
-  – Bolshevik activist at the time of avant-garde, jazz and “new men”
-  – repenting doubter, furious critic, and criticized scholar
-  – holist, dissenter, and self-destructing revisionist
-  – “Genius”

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OVERTURE

Each great man's life story is simple unless one wants to make it great.

Each simple man's life story is great unless one wants to make it simple.

This story is about a genius. So they say. But the person did not become genius until after his death. So, this story is simple and great at the same time.

The name of the protagonist is Lev Vygotsky. He is the most famous and the most admired Russian psychologist. He lived a short life and died young. Some people love him and his ideas. Other people don't know him. In fact, neither those who love him, nor those who have never heard of him really know him. This is why the story of his life had to be typed up, carefully proofread, corrected for spelling errors, and published as a book. This is the book.

This book is a *biography*. So, this is a life-story of a man. I want you to know Vygotsky as well as I know him, and to love him, for he was a really nice guy. As happens with legendary and much admired people, while reading the memoirs of his affectionate friends and former colleagues it is difficult to learn what kind of person Vygotsky was. Those who knew him well described him as tall and small, precise and unpunctual, sharp-minded and superficial, erudite and unschooled, a systematic thinker and an academic failure, a brilliant genius and an unoriginal borrower. Well, nobody's perfect. One might wonder how it is possible that there were so many people hidden within one man. At least, I, the author of this book, did wonder. And this was probably the main reason why this book was finally typed up, carefully proofread, corrected for spelling errors, and published.

Yet, while reading the book one needs to keep in mind that this is, as the title of the book says, an *intellectual biography*, or more or less a history of ideas. All of us have lots of ideas about life, the world and our place in it. More often than not, none of these ideas are our own but have been borrowed from somebody else at some point or another. But this means that I had to be highly selective in my work. One of the toughest challenges I faced while writing this book was the

problem of making a choice of the points to discuss, always on guard for those that I believe are the most important and essential for this story. Somebody will certainly disagree with my choice. Well, nobody's perfect.

Finally, this is a biography – an intellectual biography – of an *historical figure* of a man who lived in a country that was very different from the ones we are all living in now, and who died a very long time ago. This means that it is difficult to understand the man, his life and work, unless we know really well the time, the country, and its history. Not only is nobody perfect, but also nobody can know everything. *Nemo nostrum possit omnia scire*, as those old Romans would say, and we can only hope they did not die out because of this. In any case, in order to write this book – and to do this best – I had to read a great many other books. And I did. I borrowed a lot from these great books especially when I had to tell the reader about *what we need to know* about the country and the history, and the culture of Russia and the Soviet Union of the 1920s and the 1930s. In fact, this is the time and the place in which Lev Vygotsky lived most of his life. The list of the titles and the names would be too long, so I would like to thank all those great authors, the so-called *revisionist* and *post-revisionist* historians, who wrote their thick, meticulously researched and well-thought-out books. I owe a lot to them. Probably, my book can count as a revisionist one too, because of all this.

Finally, I need to confess that I do not believe that a *definitive biography* of a man is possible as such. We hardly know who we are ourselves, not to mention how little we know of who all these people around us are. Even less do we know of the people who we have never personally met, with whom we have not talked nor even looked into their eyes. Any person who ever lived or who is yet to be born is so vast, irrational, and amazing that a biography – and even the best researched and the most beautifully written life story – is bound to be selective, fragmentary, and superficial. This book is not entirely a work of fiction: this is a scholarly book. It emerged out of thinking about the piles of obscure archival documents, memoirs, and other publications. Yet, the book that you are holding in your hands now is, nevertheless, a subjective *construction* and *reconstruction* of the life of a man who happens to be its main character.

This means that history is never done. It keeps being written all the time – even right now as you are reading these lines – and new books might come out some day that far surpass this story. As with any good book, this story must start with “in the beginning”. So it does.

In the beginning there was Gomel. In fact, more precisely, in the beginning there was Orsha – a small town at the western outskirts of the Russian Empire, now in Belarus – where Vygotsky was born. Yet, within a year of his birth the Vygotsky family left Orsha for another larger town, about two hundred and fifty kilometres to the south – about three or four hours' drive in our days, depending on how fast one drives. And that was Gomel, a relatively small provincial town of roughly forty thousand inhabitants at the end of the 19th century. It was populated mostly by Jews (over half of those who lived there), Russians, and Belarusians. But, as confusing as it appears, Vygotsky was not Vygotsky yet, in any sense. Well, let us start all over again ...

1

PROPHET

The Gomel years (1896–1913)

In the beginning there lived the Vygodskii family in the western province of Russian Empire that is nowadays known as Belarus.¹ Yet, back then, at the end of 19th century this was all Russia. Furthermore, these territories would not become part of Belarus – more precisely, Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic – until the mid-1920s, which means that the Vygodskiis virtually always lived in Russia.²

The Vygodskiis were Jewish, by nationality and religion. They were, first and foremost, Simkha Leibovich (1869–1931) – alternative, Russified, name Semen L’vovich – and Tsetsilia (Tsilia) Moiseevna (1874–1935). The Vygodskiis were a wealthy family, a bank manager and his wife, who moved to Gomel in 1897 with their two small children – their daughter Anna-Haia (born in 1895) and son Lev (born in 1896) – and occupied the whole two-floor building with a five-room apartment on the second floor. The father’s office – a private insurance company – was on the ground floor. The Vygodskii family quickly grew in numbers and eventually another six children were born, which was, according to the memoirs of their contemporary, quite unusual and impressive even by the standards of their time.³

Gomel, a relatively small town with a population of about 40,000 people (as of 1897), was located within the borders of the so-called *Jewish Pale of Settlement*. This was the western and south-western part of the territory (roughly four percent of the country) where officially discriminated Jewish populations of the Russian Empire were allowed to settle without any limitations. Major restrictions on Jewish residency were imposed in the rest of Imperial Russia, including its capital St. Petersburg and major cities, such as Moscow, Kiev, Kharkov, or Kazan. Gomel was very densely populated by Jews: according to the Russian Imperial Census of 1897, more than one-half of the population of the town was Jewish. The Vygodskiis were among them.⁴

2 Prophet

Russia, the largest country in the world (then and now), in the Imperial times occupied most of the territory of the contemporary Russian Federation (and well above that) and in many ways resembled the Russia of the 21st century. Yet, there were also a few features that made it very different from contemporary Russia and the industrially developed countries of our days.

First, Russia at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries was a *monarchy*: the Greek word meaning the “power of one”. The one was the Emperor (from the early 18th century Russia was an Empire), more commonly known as the Tsar. Furthermore, the regime of the Russian Empire was an *autocracy*, from the Greek word meaning “ruling by himself”. This means that not only was the Tsar the supreme ruler of the state, but also that he (or she, as occurred in a number of instances during the long history of Russia) was the sole and virtually unrestricted ruler of the country. The autocratic rule was carried out through the whole class of state bureaucrats, the topmost of which were appointed personally by the Tsar. Unlike other European monarchies of our time, the Russian Empire had no Constitution or a Parliament even in the early 20th century. No other democratically elected body of power existed that could counterbalance the power of the Tsar and his chief appointees in the Imperial Ministries, Councils, and other administrative bodies of power. The concentration of so much power in the hands of one person (and, indirectly, members of his family and their formal and informal advisors) created numerous acute problems.

Second, the Imperial power and the Church (as a social institute) were not separated in Russia, and the slogan of unity – “Autocracy, Russian Orthodox Church, and the People” – was the core of the official, conservative ideology of the state.

Third, the Russian Empire, despite its proclaimed ideology – faith, culture, language, people, etc. – was in fact a multi-nation state. Only half of the country’s population was composed of Russian nationals. It included over a dozen contemporary independent states such as Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, a part of Poland, and semi-autonomous Finland in the West; the countries of the Caucasus region between the Black and Caspian seas – Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia; and the whole of Central Asia with its contemporary independent republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

Fourth, despite rapid industrial development and increasing modernization of Imperial Russia, the country remained mostly *agrarian*. This means that the overwhelming majority of its population – four in five of its citizens – were peasants who lived in village *communes*, the peasants’ villages with collective ownership over the land. The main items of the country’s export were grown in the field, mainly grains. The Russian village commune was very traditional and conservative. Despite a few reforms and efforts to break down economically backward communes and establish a class of independent land-owners (individual farmers), the modernization of the early 20th century virtually never reached the Russian countryside.

The early 20th century was the era of the Silver Age, the economic and cultural “Renaissance” of Russia. However, this was also the time of major social and political unrest with frequent violent campaigns against the Jewish population (the so-called *pogroms*), a range of social movements, and intense illegal political activity. These tensions within national politics, the economy, demographics, culture, and ideology eventually led to the First Russian Revolution of 1905–1907. The revolution triggered the release of the Tsar’s Manifesto of October 1905 that for the first time officially gave the green light to the legal establishment of political parties in Russia, the first ever national elections, and first Russian Parliament (called the *Duma*).

It is hard to say how the combination of these multiple social and cultural events, forces, and processes impacted the personal and intellectual formation of the Vygodskii family children and their peer friends in Gomel. For instance, some of them might have witnessed the famous Gomel pogrom of 1903 that was followed by another one, in 1906. No doubt, that would have been a traumatic experience. What we do know, though, is that the oldest boy, nicknamed among his friends and family members as “Beba” Vygodskii, was a child of his time and can be described as a somewhat dreamy, art-minded, and ethnically aware youth with interests in literature and poetry, languages, history, and Jewish cultural tradition. For unclear reasons he did not attend elementary school and received elementary education with a private tutor at home. Yet, the diploma of a secondary school, a *gymnasium*, was a prerequisite for university admission. In early 1911 he was admitted at a private Jewish gymnasium, passed through the sixth, seventh and eighth years of studies, and successfully graduated with excellent grades and a gymnasium gold medal, awarded to him in 1913.⁵

A Jew admitted to the Imperial Moscow University

Graduation records of the applicant virtually guaranteed him admission to the famous Imperial Moscow University. The main problem for Vygodskii – as with any other university applicant of Jewish origin – was the so-called “Jewish quota” that had been introduced in the Russian Empire at the end of the 19th century. The Jewish population constituted roughly four percent of the total population of the Empire, but their representation in universities in the second half of 19th century considerably exceeded this figure. The quota was imposed under the pretext of providing equal opportunities for the representatives of different ethnicities, according to the proportion of specific minority within the make-up of the entire population of the country. In effect, it limited primarily the number of Jewish students accepted to the state universities and other state educational establishments of higher learning. Thus, for instance, in 1886, just a year before the ruling on the Jewish quota was issued by the Imperial Ministry of Education, Jewish students constituted twenty-eight percent of all students of one of the most prestigious universities outside the Jewish Pale of Settlement, the Imperial Kharkov University. Moreover, their numbers at the Medical Department of this university remarkably exceeded forty percent of all students. As a general rule, for the Imperial capital

4 Prophet

St. Petersburg and the second largest city (and the old capital of the country before the 18th century) Moscow, the quota constituted three percent of the total number of those admitted. For a few large cities outside the Jewish Pale like Kharkov or Kazan this was five percent. Finally, for the educational establishments within the borders of the Pale the quota was established at ten percent. Yet, the rules of the game would be different and kept changing all the time, depending on the specific institution, concrete circumstances and the historical moment. Needless to say, the introduction of the quota was a major blow to Russian Jews' hopes and aspirations, significantly cut their numbers in Russian universities and, thus, curtailed their career opportunities in the Russian Empire.

For the teenager Lev "Beba" Vygodskii his gymnasium gold medal meant quite a lot. It meant that young Beba would fit the discriminatory "Jewish quota" of three percent and allowed him admission to one of the country's oldest and most prestigious universities. This was the Imperial Moscow University, established in the middle of the 18th century by its founder Mikhail Lomonosov. Yet, to his utter disappointment, the basic principle and the entire logic of future students' selection had changed right before his planned entrance to the university. The merit-based system of selection that took into consideration academic excellence was substituted with a blind ballot, in other words, mere chance. This made his gold medal irrelevant and considerably undermined the reality of his admission. And yet, as the fate would have it, Lev Vygodskii did apply and, to his enormous surprise and excitement, was one of those randomly picked for admission to the University.

In Imperial Russia Jews were discriminated in a number of ways. They had no legal right to join the ranks of state bureaucracy or occupy other administrative positions without having first denounced the faith of their fathers and converting to Russian Orthodox Christianity. This meant that only a few middle-class vocations were available to them. These jobs would entail a private practice. Typically, these were the professions of a university-trained medical doctor or a lawyer that were – after the jobs in finance and business that did not necessarily require prior university training – perhaps the two most profitable occupations in Russia accessible to Russian Jews.

In the fall of 1913, following his father's expectations of his older son eventually getting a decent and well-paid job, Lev Simkhovich Vygodskii⁶ started his studies at the age of seventeen in Moscow as a student of the Faculty of Medicine. Yet, the future vocation of a medical doctor did not appear very fitting to the humanities-minded teenage Vygodskii. Within just a few months of his admission, he transferred to the Faculty of Jurisprudence. And yet, something was apparently missing. This explains his next major life choice. From 1914, in parallel with his full-time course of studies at the Imperial Moscow University as a future lawyer, Vygodskii started attending courses at the Historical-Philosophical Faculty of the first Russian private (non-degree-granting) Moscow City People's University, named after its chief sponsor and founder, an industrialist A. L. Shaniavskii (1837–1905).

The University was founded in 1908 as one of a great many other privately funded educational establishments of higher learning in Imperial Russia. These

private educational institutions flourished in the country from the end of the 19th century – frequently despite considerable resistance of the Imperial bureaucracy. They would eventually allow these new educational projects due to immense pressure of the middle-class representatives of the rapidly developing civil society in Russia. Shaniavskii Moscow City People’s University was the first *university* (as opposed to various *societies, stations, museums, courses, or institutes*) that was established in Russia as a private – although necessarily state-endorsed – enterprise. The Shaniavskii University was well known for its democratic admission policy that gave access to education to the many, regardless of the applicants’ social origin and status, gender, ethnicity and religion, in the spirit of freedom of thought, conscience and faith. It was popularly considered as a “progressive” undertaking that attracted numerous students from diverse strata of society. By the time Vygodskii started his studies at the Shaniavskii Moscow City People’s University its history was extremely short. Yet, in 1911, following a major conflict between the politically conservative Imperial Minister of Education, Lev Kasso, and the elite of the Imperial Moscow University (the so-called “Kasso case”) over one hundred of the University’s professors and privat docents resigned.⁷ Subsequently, many of these academically prominent and politically liberal Russian scholars of the time found employment and taught at the “progressive” Shaniavskii Moscow City People’s University.

In the summer of 1914 the First World War broke out, and, in August Imperial Russia entered the War on the side of the United Kingdom, France and their numerous allies and against Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and their allies, such as the Ottoman Empire. Subsequently, the Imperial Russian Army got deeply involved in the military action in Europe. These developments had no direct impact on Vygodskii, who was not drafted, but continued his university studies without any interruption until the fall of 1917.

Literary criticism (1914–1916)

As a student at the Department of Jurisprudence of the Imperial Moscow University, Vygodskii studied for a future career in Law and Legal Studies, but was apparently considerably more interested in literature, history and related disciplines that he was taught at the Shaniavskii University. His earliest surviving completed written work – unlike other drafts or even book projects – was a study that Vygodskii the student produced in 1915–1916 as a research paper for some of his courses at Shaniavskii University. Quite possibly this paper was prepared as an assignment for a course taught by his teacher at this university Yulii Aikhenval’d (1872–1928). This was a major critical essay on Shakespeare’s “Hamlet” that constituted his largest known work on literary criticism.

In this essay Vygodskii followed Aikhenval’d and contemporary Russian literary scholar Arkadii Gornfel’d (1867–1941), who were strong advocates of a highly subjectivist approach to art and literature. According to these scholars, depending on the genre (theatre, music, or literature) the individual observer, the member of the audience, and the reader are co-creators of the piece of art. Obviously, the

reader is not entirely free to interpret art in any way they wish: they are restricted by the plot, the characters' development, the style, etc. And yet, the act of personal interpretation of a written story equals the act of individual creation of the story anew, but within certain limitations that are imposed on the reader by the author. From this perspective a life story of the author or the social context of artistic creativity are irrelevant and unimportant to a literary scholar. What matters for research, as such, is text. The method is a close reading of a literary text and the meticulous analysis of its style, vocabulary, and structure. When we read fiction, the text provokes the individual reader's feelings and associations, and leads the reader's interpretations. Therefore, the goal of a literary analysis is the search for those cues and unique characteristics of a particular book – a novel, short story, fable, or poem – that trigger the subjective reactions within the reader and cue his or her individual interpretations. Vygodskii analysed Shakespeare's "Hamlet" using this method that he referred to as "the reader's critique" (*chitatel'skaia kritika*). In his essay on "Hamlet" the young Vygodskii advocated for the individual reader's freedom of interpretation and enthusiastically supported symbolist mysticism and irrationalism that were characteristic of a number of literary and artistic movements of the so-called "Russian Silver Age".

Vygodskii's student essay on "Hamlet" was never published during his life time. His first publications were brief notes, book reviews and short essays that came out in 1916–1917 in a few newspapers and journals in Moscow and Petrograd. A couple of his book reviews appeared in late 1916 in "Letopis'" (Chronicle), a Petrograd leftist and pacifist monthly journal of Russian intellectuals interested in the topics of culture, science, and contemporary society. Several other reviews came out in this publication in early 1917.⁸ The last, the fifth, paper that the novice literary scholar submitted for publication in this journal was scheduled to come out at the end of February 1917. This would be his first experience of a theatrical review, but the publication did not happen. Only the proofs of the paper survived.⁹ An event of an enormous magnitude in terms of its role in the history of the entire Russian Empire prevented this journal issue from being released – the Russian Revolution of 1917–1918.

Beba Vygodskii: the "young Jewish prophet"

The interests of the teenage Vygodskii (1909–1915) were diverse and, in addition to the arts, literature and history, included collecting stamps, playing chess and corresponding worldwide in Esperanto – the artificial language created in the second half of the 19th century with the hopes of introducing a new means of international communication. Yet, perhaps the most long-lasting and all-embracing passion of the young Vygodskii was the culture and the history of Jews, their identity as a nation and their future as a cultural entity. During his two years of study in Gomel gymnasium Vygodskii led a group – a *kruzhok* (circle) – of his younger, mostly female, peers from local Jewish youth, enthusiastic about the issues of national history and culture. The meetings and group discussions of the circle were interrupted by their leader's departure to Moscow in 1913.

Subsequently, in Moscow in 1916–1917 Vygodskii continued his involvement with the Jewish cultural movement when he was employed as a “technical secretary” at the journal “Novyi put” (New way),¹⁰ a Moscow Russian-language journal of and for Jewish intellectuals. The edition was secular and promoted the agenda of the so-called *Haskalah* – the Jewish movement for the Russian Jews’ enlightenment and involvement in the political and cultural life of the contemporary society.

Apart from administrative duties, Vygodskii contributed a dozen essays on the issues of Jewish life and culture. Vygodskii’s publication record reflected the editorial policy. His publications included several articles that creatively combined his two passions – the arts and the Jewish culture. Apparently, the interest in Jewish issues prevailed in the young man’s mind. Unlike his brief one-page reviews for “Letopis”, his essays that came out in “Novyi put” are longer, detailed papers that reveal their author’s genuine involvement with a wide array of topics and problems of Jewish life and identity in Imperial Russia. Even his analyses of the classics of Russian literature and modern authors were presented through the lens of Jewish issues. In 1916 he published a couple of literary criticism essays, three essays on the topics of Jewish culture and identity, and a Russian translation of a short story in Hebrew.¹¹

Lev Vygodskii’s active participation in these editions in Petrograd and Moscow might deceive and mislead one into thinking that he would associate himself with the leftist socialist ideas or Jewish enlightenment movement. His published articles present only the tip of the iceberg, though. Vygodskii’s personal archive contains a wealth of various writings of the time that give us a perspective on what was on his mind at the time. Perhaps it may seem unusual for our contemporary, a teenager of his age, but Vygodskii was a prolific and very daring – albeit somewhat unsystematic and hardly disciplined – author and thinker from his youth. He started writing relatively early and his first known manuscript to survive – *Tragikomediia iskanii* (“Tragicomedy of strivings”) – is dated 1912, the year when Vygodskii turned sixteen. A number of other manuscripts were mostly drafted in 1915–1917.¹² With the only exception being his literary essay of Shakespeare’s “Hamlet”, none of these were finished – at least not to the extent that they could be submitted for publication – and all of them were entirely devoted to the search for the solution to the “Jewish question”. These documents reveal Vygodskii as an ambitious young author, who audaciously attempted writing, one after another, major speculative – theoretical and philosophical – books of immense scope and importance. The titles of these book projects included “The Book of Fragments”, and “On the New Jewry”, and a few smaller works were entitled “Judaism and socialism”, “Spiritual Zionism (on Ahad ha’Am)”, and “On Zionism”.

In these invariably unfinished manuscripts their author characterized the state of the culture of contemporary Jewry in Russia as a deep cultural and historical crisis. He unhesitatingly shrugged off the option of Jewish cultural assimilation and overviewed the three ways of the solution of the problem of Jewish identity that were fiercely debated among the Jewish intellectuals of the time:

First, Zionism and the idea of Jewish immigration to the “historical motherland” in the Middle East leading to the eventual formation of the national state (i.e. what

would later become the contemporary State of Israel). Second, Jewish immigration to other potentially attractive and promising territories outside the Middle East (for instance, to some countries of South America, Africa, or other localities that allowed the establishment Jewish ethnic settlements or colonies there). Third, the greater involvement of Jews in the social life in the countries and territories of their actual residence and participation in legal political struggle for their rights as an ethnic minority.

Quite characteristically, the young Vygodskii severely criticized all these and radically rejected the three options as only partial or superficial solutions. He advocated for the fourth way, instead. He envisioned the only possible way to restore Jews as a cultural and historical entity: the return to the historical Judaism and its original, immaculate values and mystical revelations as opposed to formal, rationalist and dogmatic treatment of God's word in Orthodox Judaism and its everyday practice in the Jewish Pale. The critique of left-wing political movements occupied a special place in Vygodskii's thinking and writings of 1916–1917. As strange as it may seem for an author with a record of publications in liberal and leftist editions, Vygodskii in his unpublished writings fiercely criticized socialism and preached for the Judaism in its archaic forms:

First of all, Judaism provides a religious solution of a social problem. It is in each and every part directed to God ... 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 not yet existed either in [the teachings about] the sabbath, or in chiliasm, or in holiness, socialism fundamentally provides nothing new. ... 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 of 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 great and dreadful day of the Lord”.

Vygodskii, quoted in Zavershneva (2012a), pp. 87–88.

The elevated and ornamental style of his writing is apparent here. Such manner of writing is generally very characteristic of Vygodskii's style of his meditations on the topics of Jewish culture and history. A remarkable feature of Vygodskii's thought is notable in this fragment, too. He proclaimed Judaism as the only pathway for Jewish survival as a distinct and unique socio-cultural entity. Yet, he never concerned himself with the explication of how exactly these ideas could be practically implemented in concrete social reality.

Not really a philosopher or a pragmatic social thinker, but rather Vygodskii the "prophet" emerges in these writings on the fate of the Jewish people, in his criticisms of the "New Jewry", socialism, and his messianic call for the Jewish return to the traditional values of the nation. Indeed, his inflammatory writings are highly elevated in style and abound with biblical allusions, references and quotes (including those in Hebrew, which he knew well enough to read in the original). Against this background, it is understandable why his Gomel friend would astutely – although somewhat ironically – describe Vygodskii the teenager as "Beba the young prophet".¹³

The Russian Revolution (1917–1918)

In Russia, the first major change took place in early 1917. A series of military failures during the First World War, age old social conflicts and tensions, increasing wartime pressure on the national economy, and the growing dissatisfaction with the power within Russian society eventually led to the major social turmoil of early 1917. These events were subsequently termed the *February Revolution* in Russia. Following the social unrest, mass protests, popular uprising, and the conspiracy of the national civil and military elites, in early March 1917, Russian Tsar Nicolas II abdicated. He officially resigned in favor of his younger brother Mikhail, who, in turn, refused to assume the responsibilities of the new Russian Tsar. As a result of the Tsar's abdication, the Russian monarchy fell and the Russian Empire ended. The monarchy was replaced with a strange combination of the dual power of the centrist-liberal-socialist Provisional Government that was nominated by the Russian parliament, the *Duma*, and the democratically elected workers' councils, the *Soviets*. Yet, despite such a tectonic change in the makeup of the former Empire, the state borders of the country remained largely intact (except for the territories populated mainly by the Polish and Lithuanian nationals that the Empire lost during the war in 1915). This was remarkable, given the growing tension between the two branches of political power in the country and the nationalist sentiments of the non-Russian ethnic minorities, which at the beginning of the 20th century constituted roughly one-half of the Empire's population.

The major social cataclysm came about a few months later. The Provisional Government in Russia's capital, Petrograd (formerly known under the "foreign" name of St. Petersburg, but renamed soon after the beginning of the First World War), was ousted in a coup launched by the ultra-left Bolshevik faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party in what was to become widely known as

the *October Revolution* of 1917.¹⁴ The coup effectively ended the dual power in favor of the Bolshevized Soviets and a few of their governing bodies such as the All-Russian Congresses of Soviets, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee (the VTsIK, the highest legislative, administrative, and revising body of power), and the Council of People's Commissars (the SNK, the highest executive body).

The logical conclusion of this truly dramatic year in the history of Russia followed soon. In November 1917 the All-Russian Constituent Assembly was freely and democratically elected in to establish the legislative foundation of the new Russian state and create the first ever Russian Constitution. The Party of Bolsheviks was anticipating that the election would demonstrate an increase in their popular support, but the results of the election were definitely not in their favor. Although the Bolsheviks finished second, the outcome was really disastrous for their aspirations to hold legitimate power: the agrarian Socialist Revolutionary Party (the SR) surpassed them in a landslide victory with well above one-half of the seats and outnumbered the Bolsheviks roughly two to one in the newly elected Constituent Assembly. For the Bolsheviks, who had just violently seized power and even started ruling the country by issuing their first Decrees immediately after the coup, this situation definitely posed a tremendous challenge. Unwilling, and possibly unable, to give up power, they could not tolerate the newly elected Constituent Assembly.

In mid-January 1918 the Constituent Assembly was finally summoned for its first meeting, but did not last more than one day: under the pretext that "the guard is tired" the meeting of the Assembly was closed down at the end of a very long session that continued well after midnight. Never again did it reconvene. A few days later the Ukrainian People's Republic (declared in June 1917 as a part of post-Imperial Russia) proclaimed its independence – from Russia or any other state. This happened precisely at the time when the Third All-Russian Congress of Soviets – led by the alliance of the overwhelming majority of the Bolsheviks (the workers' party) and the left faction of the Socialist Revolutionary Party (the peasants' party) – proclaimed the previously unrecognized state the sovereign "Republic of the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers', and Peasants' Deputies", or, in brief, the Soviet Russian Republic, and legitimized the new regime and its new institutes of power.

These events between February 1917 and January 1918 constitute the Russian Revolution of 1917–1918. The Revolution, in turn, directly triggered the collapse of the state, the formation of a number of independent states on the territory of the former Russian Empire, and the brutal Civil War. In the fear that Russia's capital, Petrograd, located within dangerous proximity to the country's north-western border, would be occupied by rebels or foreign intervention, the Bolsheviks transferred the capital to Moscow in March 1918. Also in March 1918 the Russian Socialist Democratic Labor Party (Bolsheviks) was renamed the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks). The last episode of this Revolution, extended over a year and a half, is dated July 1918, when the only non-Bolshevik political party that remained legal by that time, the members of the Left Socialist Revolutionary Party (the Left SR), organized an uprising in Moscow. The revolt failed, the leadership of the

party was arrested, the party members were ousted from the power, and eventually the Left SR was banned. Since then there has been no opposition to the Bolshevik (Communist) Party in the country. A one-party political system was established.¹⁵ The country's first Constitution was adopted by the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets on 10 July 10 1918. This Constitution renamed the country the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (the RSFSR).

Lev Vygodskii during the Russian Revolution

The revolutionary events of 1917 caught off guard the entire country, which only four years before had gloriously celebrated the 300th anniversary of the dynasty of the Romanovs, the Russian Tsars from 1613. In 1917 the royal dynasty fell.

Vygodskii, then a twenty-year-old student of the Department of Jurisprudence at the Imperial Moscow University, was also hardly prepared for this course of events. His first ever theatrical review was scheduled to appear in the forthcoming February issue of the "Letopis'" (Chronicle), but due to the onset of the Revolution it did not. Somewhat later in the year another half a dozen of Vygodskii's publications in the Jewish weekly "Novyi Put'" came out against the background of the First World War and major social transformations in Russia. Vygodskii's publications of the period clearly reflect this major social shift (see above).

The publications of 1916 and early 1917 are mostly essays on the topics of literature and culture. In contrast, between March and September 1917, Vygodskii published— a handful of brief reports on social and political topics, all in Jewish periodical "Novyi Put'". These included his impressions of the changing Moscow and the news from Gomel (March); the celebratory paper on the abolition of the Pale of Settlement in March 1917,¹⁶ characteristically entitled in Hebrew "*Avodim hoinu*" (We were slaves—April); and the "provincial reports" on the elections to the Gomel municipality (July) and the local conference of the social-democratic party (September).¹⁷ The shift in the themes of Vygodskii's publications reflected the change in popular demand and the editorial policy rather than their author's thinking and mindset: the readers were concerned about social issues such as the political parties and their activities, elections, or the situation in the close to the frontline western provinces of the country. His unpublished notes and manuscripts, on the other hand, reveal that Vygodskii was apparently not so much involved in the political life of the country. He continued meditating on the greater issues of the Russian Jewry's destiny and human history *sub specie aeternitatis*, that is, from the perspective of eternity. The elevated, biblical style of his writing betrays his unshaken "prophetic" stance throughout the revolutionary years of 1917–1918.

For unclear reasons, in the fall of 1917 Vygodskii spent some time in the Russian city of Samara, located several hundred kilometres to the east of Moscow.¹⁸ He later returned to Moscow and, in December 1917, he obtained the travel document that allowed him as a student of Moscow University to legally make a trip back home. Without this document, he would have been denied such a trip under the old Imperial laws and according to the University's regulations. Thus, in late 1917

or early 1918 Vygodskii left Moscow and returned home to his family in the post-Revolutionary Gomel under the rule of local Soviets.

The First World War (1914–1918) and its aftermath

Vygodskii was admitted to the major national university in 1913 in a somewhat backward, but peaceful, economically fast-developing and prosperous country. Just a year later everything changed. The First World War started in August 1914 and continued for over four years, until November 1918. The war itself and its end brought about major changes in the world, in Russia, in Gomel, and in the life of Lev Vygodskii.

For Russia, the victory of the Bolsheviks' *October Revolution* of 1917 meant the inevitable end of the country's involvement in the war. Indeed, the first Decree of the Bolshevik Government issued the day after the successful coup was the Decree on Peace that declared the immediate withdrawal of Russia from any military actions. This Decree meant the launch of the negotiations that, in theory, would lead to a fair peace in the interests of toilers and laboring classes of all countries. In practice, though, it triggered a series of hardly predictable events. These included a few months of separate peace talks between Russia and Germany; an ambiguous negotiation strategy adopted by the Russian delegation under the leadership of one of the most prominent Bolshevik leaders Leon Trotsky; the Bolsheviks' miscalculations and diplomatic mistakes; a German ultimatum and rapid military advancement to the East; further occupation of the western regions of the former Russian Empire (in addition to those that Russia lost to Germany during the disastrous campaign of 1915); and, eventually, the so-called "shameful peace" of early March 1918. As an outcome of these events, the Bolsheviks had to agree to peace at the cost of the territorial losses that included a part of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, the western regions of Belorussia, and the whole of Ukraine, which they then recognized as an independent state, the Ukrainian People's Republic (the UNR). Thus, for Soviet Russia, the "Great War" was – painfully and expensively – over in early 1918. For the rest of the belligerent nations, the war effectively ended in November 1918 with the fall of the alliance of Germany, Austro-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, and Bulgaria.

In the rest of the world, the major outcome of the war was the collapse of four Empires in Europe and the Middle East: the Russian Empire (in early 1917), and the German, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires (all three fell following the end of the war in late 1918). Subsequently, as a result of a series of peace treaties and partitioning of the former empires the whole map of Europe and Asia was redrawn. Several new states emerged. These included the five truncated republics out of the four Empires – Russia, Germany, Austria, Hungary, and Turkey – and a number of new internationally recognized states, such as the Republic of Finland, the Ukrainian People's Republic (shortly thereafter renamed the Ukrainian State), the Republic of Czechoslovakia, the Republic of Poland, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, the Republic of Armenia, the Azerbaijan Democratic

Republic, and the Democratic Republic of Georgia. The existence of some of these independent states was short-lived: under different circumstances Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan were invaded by Soviet Russia in 1919–1921, turned into Socialist Soviet republics, and subsequently, in December 1922, along with Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic and Belorussian Socialist Soviet Republic joined together as the founding members of the newly formed state: the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (the USSR).¹⁹

In Ukrainian Gomel in 1918

In retrospect, the *October Revolution* was often described by the later generations as an enormous historical rupture and the decisive break between the “Imperial Past” and the “Socialist Future”. Yet, in reality for the contemporaries this was not quite so. The Bolshevik governance was established at the end of 1917 in the two Russian capitals – Petrograd and Moscow²⁰ – and some fraction of the European part of the country. The rest of the territory of the former Russian Empire was divided between various, almost countless, forces and local governments such as foreign military rule and a wide range of monarchist, nationalist, socialist and anarchist armies, movements and provisional governments. The Civil War started in late 1917 and lasted until late 1922 with continuous military action between these numerous forces and the Bolshevik Red Army fighting their enemies in order to finally get control over the vast expanses of the former Empire and put full power in the hands of the new revolutionary government. Fortunately, Gomel never saw the whole range of the horrors of the Russian Civil War.

In late 1917 the Bolsheviks and their Soviets instituted themselves throughout the former Empire, including Gomel. Yet, this time the power of the Bolsheviks in the town did not last long. It was in February 1918 that a considerable amount of territory along the western borders of the former Russian Empire was occupied by the German Army. A peace treaty between Soviet Russia and Germany that was signed in early March 1918 officially established the status of German occupied lands until the end of the First World War in November 1918 when the German Empire ceased to exist as a state. Under the German occupation a part of the territory of contemporary Southern Belarus, including Gomel, was merged into the newly established Ukrainian State and remained relatively stable under the local German-supported Government for another eight months.

The life of Lev Vygodskii – as probably the life of virtually any person in the times of historical events of such magnitude – appears minor and insignificant against this background. Not much is known about Vygodskii during this period. There is anecdotal evidence that he made a trip south across Ukraine with his mother and sick younger brother David (Dodik). This trip’s ultimate goal was to get to Crimea in order to bring the boy to the Black Sea with its healthy climate that would help them cure (or at least alleviate) his tuberculosis. Yet, the journey turned out too risky for the child’s fragile state and, after a medical consultation and treatment of the boy in Kiev, the capital of the Ukrainian State, the Vygodskiis

had to return home. In Gomel the younger Vygodskii boy soon died. Soon the family lost Lev Vygodskii's other brother, according to a family legend, due to the outbreak of typhus. It seems that it was during this time that Lev Vygodskii himself contracted tuberculosis, the nemesis that would torment him until his very last days.

And yet, family tragedy notwithstanding, the year of 1918 appeared relatively stable and uneventful, especially against the background of the turmoil of the early months after the *October Revolution* in Gomel and the large-scale historical processes that unfolded in the rest of the territory of the former Russian Empire. The Civil War manifested itself in state-sponsored terror, the Bolshevik policy of "war communism", private property confiscations, hunger, strikes, and the depopulation of the two capitals of Russia – Moscow and Petrograd. In contrast, in Gomel as well as in the rest of the territory of the Ukrainian State, all private property that had been taken away by the revolutionary government in the first months after the Revolution was duly returned to their owners after the German occupation. All private businesses and the jobs in the private sector of the economy were restored. Thus, after the brief shock of the dramatic change in their social status after the Revolution, the Vygodskii family returned to their more or less normal life after the Bolshevik Government was gone.

For Lev Vygodskii, though, this was not entirely the return to his life as it was before the Revolution. Indeed, in 1913–1917 he mostly lived in the large city of Moscow with all its metropolitan glitter, social opportunities and temptations of various sorts. His return to the traditional and, in all senses provincial, Gomel was definitely a major "downshift" to him. Then, his social status dramatically changed after the move. During his Moscow years he was a busy student of two universities, an activist of Jewish journalism, a theatregoer and an eager participant of the cultural life of the second largest city of the Russian Empire. In Gomel, none of these was available to him. Even worse, his studies in both universities were finished, but neither brought him a desired status of a university graduate. He finished the course of studies at the Shaniavskii Moscow City People's University, but this was a private educational establishment that was not entitled to officially grant a university degree in the Imperial system of higher learning. In contrast, the Imperial Moscow University did award degrees, but Lev Vygodskii apparently failed to formally graduate: he left the university in December 1917 with a statement of his unfinished course of studies there, and there is no evidence he graduated from the Faculty of Jurisprudence.²¹

Nevertheless, in 1918 Vygodskii, full of energy and career aspirations, was destined to stay away from Moscow, outside of Russia, in the Gomel of his youth, but a part of the Ukrainian State then. With no university degree, under the sort of regime of the older, pre-Revolutionary type (such as that of the German-supported Ukrainian State) his career opportunities were limited. Employment with local periodical press²² and private lessons seemed to be the main career options available to him at the time. The friend of his youth Semen Dobkin remembered this period as a difficult time for Vygodskii. Dobkin described Lev Vygodskii in 1918 as a person frustrated by the inability to apply his knowledge in any meaningful and

productive way, surrounded by incidental and not particularly bright young men of roughly his age, and immersed in endless and pointless conversations during their regular meetings. Not a single piece of Vygotskii's writing was published in 1918. Frustration, boredom, and the feeling of wasted time seemed to last forever.²³

And then, quite suddenly, everything changed. That was the beginning of a new era, at least for Lev Vygotskii and his peers in Gomel.

Notes

- 1 Generally, the sources on this period of Vygotsky's life (i.e. before 1918) are relatively scarce. The main and the most reliable source is the memoir of Lev Vygotsky's childhood friend from Gomel, Semen Filippovich Dobkin (1899–1991) whose reminiscences were recorded in early-mid-1980s and published under the names of the editors, Karl Levitin (1982) and Iosif Feigenberg (2000). Another important source was a series of works by Ekaterina Zavershneva, who did archival research and published Vygotsky's previously unpublished documents. These documents in many ways considerably changed our view on Vygotsky's intellectual development as a teenager and in his early 20s. For an overview and a couple of representative publications see Yasnitsky & van der Veer (2016) and Zavershneva & van der Veer (2017). All these materials were used in this book and were trusted as relatively reliable first-hand sources on the history of Vygotsky's life of the period of 1900–1918.
- 2 Lev Vygotsky left Gomel in early 1924 and settled in the capital of the country, Moscow. All members of his extended family did the same in 1920s and moved either to Petrograd (renamed Leningrad in 1924) or Moscow, too, so that by the late 1920s none of them lived in Gomel.
- 3 In sum, the Vygotskii family children included Anna-Khaia (born in 1895), Lev (born in 1896), Zinaida (born in 1898), Ester ("Esia", born in 1899), Klavdia (born in 1904), David (born presumably in 1905, died in 1917 or 1918) and, the youngest, Maria (born in 1907). Another Vygotskii boy was reported by the memoirist Semen Dobkin, but no known documents were preserved or have been discovered that could reveal either his name or the year of his birth. Given that, according to Dobkin's memoirs, their mother would deliver a child every one to two years, it is relatively safe to assume that another Vygotskii boy was born in the interval between 1900 and 1903. In all likelihood, the child died (allegedly of typhus) hardly ever reaching adolescence.
- 4 For the distinctly Jewish aspect of cultural life in Gomel and its impact on the formation of Vygotsky see Kotik-Friedgut & Friedgut (2008).
- 5 See Udostoverenie ob okonchanii gimnazii. LSV-FA, published in Vygotskaya & Lifanova (1996), p. 34.
- 6 This is exactly how his name was indicated on his graduation record issued in Gomel at the Jewish gymnasium of A. E. Ratner in 1913 and his student's card issued at Moscow University in 1914 (Vygotskaya & Lifanova, 1996, pp. 34, 36).
- 7 The official title was "ordinary professor". The two academic ranks, "ordinary professor" and "privat docents", were established following the German model and were roughly equivalent to contemporary "full professor" and "assistant professor" in North America.
- 8 These are: Vygotskii, L. S. (1916). [Review of] V. Ivanov, *Borozdy i mezhi*. *Letopis'*, 10, pp. 351–352; Vygotskii, L. S. (1916). [Review of] A. Belyi, *Peterburg*. *Letopis'*, 12, pp. 327–328; Vygotskii, L. S. (1917). [Review of] L. Merezhkovskii, *Budet radost'*. *Letopis'*, 1, pp. 309–310; Vygotskii, L. S. (1917). [Review of] I. S. Turgenev, *Pop'*: *Poema*. *Letopis'*, 5–6, pp. 366–367.
- 9 The paper was not published until one hundred years later. See the 16 February 1917 publication of "Letopis'" proofs in Vygotskii, L. S. (1917). *Teatral'nye zametki (pis'mo iz Moskvy)*, cited in Sobkin (2015).

- 10 GARF, f. A-2306, op. 42, d. 49, l. 11a. Anketnyi listok, Narkompros, 1924; GARF, f. A-482, op. 41, d. 644, l. 7. Lichnyi listok po uchetu kadrov, Narkomzdrav, Insitut okhrany zdorov'ia detei i podrostkov im. X-letiiia Oktiabr'skoi Revoliutsii, 1931.
- 11 Vygot'skii, L. S. (1916). Traumnye stroki. *Novyi Put'*, 27, pp. 28–30; Vygot'skii, L. S. (1916). M. Yu. Lermontov (k 75-letiiu so dnia smerti). *Novyi Put'*, 28, pp. 7–11; Vygot'skii, L. S. (1916). Vykup (Iz knigi Khadisov M.I. Berdichevskogo). *Novyi Put'*, 39, pp. 37–40; Vygot'skii, L. S. (1916). Literaturnye zametki. [Review of] A. Belyi, Peterburg. *Novyi Put'*, 47, pp. 27–32; Vygot'skii, L. S. (1916). Mysli i nastroeniia (Stroki k Khanuko). *Novyi Put'*, 48–49, pp. 49–52.
- 12 Representative titles include: *Iudaizm i sotsializm* (Judaism and socialism), *O sionizme* (About Zionism), *Kniga fragmentov* (The Book of fragments), and *Protiv novoevreistva* (Against new Jewry). For the texts and the discussion of these archival manuscripts see Yasnitsky & van der Veer (2016) and Zavershneva & van der Veer (2017).
- 13 From the letter by Aleksandr Bykhovskii (LSV-FA); see Zavershneva (2012a) p. 85.
- 14 The Bolshevik uprising took place in early November 1917, but due to the differences in calendars in Imperial Russia and the rest of the industrially developed world, this was still the end of October in Russia. Soon after the Revolution, the new Government launched a reform process and adopted a new calendar, synchronized with that of the country's neighbors.
- 15 Strictly speaking, all opposition parties were legally prohibited in 1921. Yet, a de facto one-party system existed in Russia (later, in the Soviet Union) from mid-1918.
- 16 On 20 March 1917 (2 April, new style calendar), the Pale and the discrimination against non-Orthodox populations was abolished by the Provisional Government Decrees on the Abolition of Confessional and National Restrictions; it was soon followed by the Decree on the Freedom of Conscience of 14 July 1917.
- 17 Vygot'skii, L. S. (1917). Na ulitsakh Moskvy: Vpechatleniia. *Novyi Put'*, 9–10, pp. 19–23; Vygot'skii, L. S. (1917). Otkliki provintsial'nykh tsentrov. *Novyi Put'*, 9–10, p. 39; Vygot'skii, L. S. (1917). Avodim hoinu. *Novyi Put'*, 11–12, pp. 8–10; Vygot'skii, L. S. (1917). Vybory v Gorodskuiu Dumu. *Novyi Put'*, 24–25, pp. 30–31; Vygot'skii, L. S. (1917). Provintsial'nye zametki. *Novyi Put'*, 29, pp. 29–31; Vygot'skii, L. S. (1917). Konferentsiia s.-d. *Novyi Put'*, 29, p. 31; Vygot'skii, L. S. (1917). L. O. Gordon (K 25-letiiu so dnia smerti: 1892–1917). *Novyi Put'*, 30, pp. 29–32. For the most updated bibliography of Vygot'sky's published works see Yasnitsky & van der Veer (2016).
- 18 See Zavershneva & van der Veer (2017), pp. 73–74)
- 19 Strictly speaking, there were four founding members of the Soviet Union. These included the Soviet republics of Russia, Ukraine, and Belorussia and the unified Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic. In December 1936 it was divided into three Soviet republics within the Soviet Union: the Armenian, Azerbaijan and Georgian Soviet Socialist Republics.
- 20 In early 1918 the capital of the country was moved from Petrograd (formerly St. Petersburg before 1914, later renamed Leningrad after the death of the Bolshevik Party and Soviet Government leader Vladimir Lenin in 1924) to Moscow.
- 21 Furthermore, there is evidence to the contrary. Thus, a document issued in Gomel in 1923 unambiguously stated that Lev Vygot'sky "finished" (*okonchil*) his studies at Shaniavskii University and "audited" (*proslushal*) a course of studies at the Department of Jurisprudence of the Moscow University; LSV-FA, Udostoverenie 1600, Gomel'skii pedagogicheskii tekhnikum, 8 November 1923, published in Vygodskaya & Lifanova (1996), p. 64. For further discussion see Zavershneva (2012a).
- 22 According to Vygot'sky's own statement, in the period before the restoration of Soviet rule in Gomel (i.e. between the German occupation of the town in February 1918 and early 1919 when the Bolshevik forces retook it) he was employed at the local newspaper "*Poles'e*"; GAGO, Anketa Gomel'skogo gubernskogo otdela narodnogo obrazovaniia, dated 11 October 1920.
- 23 See Dobkin's memoirs in Feigenberg (2000), pp. 36–37).

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