**Sutzkever, Avrom (1913-2010)**

Avrom Sutzkever was one of the greatest Yiddish poets of the twentieth century. A true virtuoso of words, he revolutionized and enriched the language of his ancestors, introducing new terms into Yiddish. Characteristic is his own innovative style and creative approach to the language: he carefully chooses his words and arranges them in a multi-layered, intricate fabric of meanings.

Notable is his role in keeping Yiddish alive: He consistently created in Yiddish; he fought for this language when living in Israel after World War II.

Avrom Sutzkever was born on July 15, 1913, in Smorgon near Vilna.

He began writing poetry at age 13, initially in Hebrew. He made his debut in Yiddish in 1932. A year later he joined the Yiddish writers’ and artists’ modernist group Yung Vilne, which had a huge impact on Yiddish literature in Poland in the 1930s. Sutzkever’s neoclassical modernism and joyful poems, which celebrated nature, beauty and language, did not quite fit into the conceptions of this group- the left-oriented members believed poems should fulfill a useful socio-political role, an idea which was foreign to Sutzkever.

Since 1935 his poems were regularly published in the New York journalof modernist Yiddish poetry *In Zikh*. Sutzkever's first poetry collection *Lider* (Poems) stand out for their poetic originality, receiving critical acclaim and the second, *Valdiks* (Sylvan), a celebration of nature, was a masterpiece of Yiddish poetry.

During his time in the Vilna Ghetto (1941-1943), Sutzkever wrote more than eighty poems. In July 1942 Sutzkever received a literary prize by the Ghetto Writers Union for his dramatic poem about a child born in a grave, *Dos keyver-kind* (The Grave Child) and his poem *Unter dayne vayse shtern* (Beneath the Whiteness of Your Stars) was set to music by Avrom Brudno. The terrible experience of the ghetto is reflected very strongly also in his postwar works. Immediately after the war he wrote a chronicle *Fun vilner geto* and *Geheymshtot* (Secret City), an epic poem about Jews hiding in the sewers of Vilna. Many years afterwards Sutzkever collected his Holocaust period poems and his later poems on the Holocaust into an anthology called *Lider fun yam-hamoves* (Poems from the Sea of Death).

Sutzkever escaped from the Vilna ghetto in September 1943 with a unit of the Federated Partisan Organization (FPO) and joined a Jewish partisan group. After the Holocaust he emigrated to Tel Aviv, where he founded and for decades edited the literary quarterly magazine *Di Goldene Keyt* (The Golden Chain).

He remained loyal to his primary source of inspiration, nature, but after the Holocaust he – as a poet and survivor– felt responsible to write for the sake of the collective and his poetry came to represent a mission of moral responsibility.

Avrom Sutzkever became the most important Yiddish writer of the post-Holocaust generation, an advocate of  Yiddish in Israel and throughout the world, a major figure of modern Jewish culture.

He was awarded the Israel Prize in 1985. He died on 20 January, 2010, in Tel Aviv.

**List of works**

Sutzkever, A. (1963) *Poetishe verk*, [collected works 1934-62] Tel Aviv: Yoyvl-komitet.

------ (1937) *Lider*, Warsaw: Biblyotek fun yidishn PEN-klub.

------ (1940) *Valdiks*, Vilna: Yidisher literatur-fareyn un PEN-klub.

------ (1945) *Di festung*, New York: YKUF-farlag.

------ (1946) *Lider fun geto*, New York: YKUF-farlag.

------ (1946) *Fun Vilner Geto*, Moscow: Ogiz melukhe-farlag ‘Der emes’ .

------ (1948) *Geheymshtot*, Tel Aviv: Fraynd funem mekhaber.

------ (1952) *In fayer-vogn*, Tel Aviv: Di goldene keyt.

------ (1953) *Sibir*, Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik.

------ (1955) *Ode tsu der toyb*, Tel Aviv: Di goldene keyt.

------ (1957) *In midber Sinay*, Tel Aviv: Farlag Perets-biblyotek.

------ (1960) *Oazis*, Tel Aviv: Farlag Y. L. Perets.

------ (1961) *Gaystike erd*, New York: Der kval.

------ (1968) *Lider fun Yam-hamoves*, Tel Aviv/New York: Farlag Bergen-Belzen.

------ (1968) *Firkantike oysyes un moyfsim*, Tel Aviv: Farlag Di goldene keyt.

------ (1970) *Tsaytike penemer*, Tel Aviv: Farlag Y. L. Perets.

------ (1974) *Di fidlroyz*, Tel Aviv: Farlag Di goldene keyt.

------ (1975) *Griner akvarium*, Tel Aviv: Hebreisher Universitet in Yerusholaim, Yidish-opteylung, Komitet far yidisher kultur in Yisroel.

------ (1977) *Lider fun togbukh*, Tel Aviv: Farlag Di goldene keyt.

------ (1979) *Dortn vu es nekhtikn di shtern*, Tel Aviv: Farlag Yisroel-bukh.

------ (1979) *Di ershte nakht in geto*, Tel Aviv: Farlag Di goldene keyt.

------ (1982) *Fun alte un yunge ksav-yadn*, Tel Aviv: Farlag Yisroel-bukh.

------ (1986) *Tsviling-bruder*, Tel Aviv: Farlag Di goldene keyt.

------ (1989) *Di nevue fun shvartsaplen*, Jerusalem: Magnes Press.

------ (1992) *Der yoyresh fun regn*, Tel Aviv: Farlag Di goldene keyt.

------ (1992) *Baym leyenen penemer*, Jerusalem: Magnes Press.

------ (1996) *Tsevaklte vent*, Tel Aviv: Farlag Di goldene keyt.

**Bibliographies, references and further reading**

Harshav, B. (1991) *A. Sutzkever: Selected Poetry and Prose*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/Oxford: University of California Press.

Kac, D. (2003) *Wilno Jerozolimą było. Rzecz o Abrahamie Sutzkeverze*, Sejny: Wydawnictwo Pogranicza.

Mark, Y. (1974) *Avrom Sutskevers poetisher veg*, Tel-Aviv: Farlag Y. L. Perets.

Nowersztern A. (1976), *Avrom Sutskever-bibliografye,* Tel Aviv: Yisroel-bukh.

Nowersztern A. (1983), *Avrom Sutskever bi-melot lo shiv'im: ta'arukhah / Avrom Sutskever tsum vern a ben-shivim: oysshtelung*, Jerusalem: Bet-ha-sefarim ha-le'umi ṿeha-universita'i.

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