

Moyshe Levin. Three Vilna Stories

<https://doi.org/10.51554/Coll.21.48.16>

The translations that follow, the first appearance of Moyshe Levin's fiction in English translation, reveal a writer whose literary universe is intimately tied to local material and political realities. As we shall see, it is a world where a droshky driver picks up a prostitute arrested by police officers, only to realise that the detainee is his estranged daughter, or a glazier is accused by his fellow Jews of profiting from the destruction wrought by a pogrom. The stories prioritise the experience of the city's Jewish underclass, so often ignored in



Bentsye Mikhtom, 'Moyshe Levin',
Yung Vilne, 1935, No 2, p. 39.

formulating a mythopoetics of Jewish Vilna. All were published in the 1930s, a period in which economic disparities, competing political allegiances and external threats led some younger writers to question the viability of Vilna as a Yiddish literary centre. 'A Memorial by the River', which was published as part of a short booklet series for older children, provided a counter-vision (despite its tragic ending) of a common civic identity that transcended religious and national divisions, at a moment when Polish-Jewish relations were increasingly tense.

JUSTIN CAMMY