



Yoysef Bovshover

(1873–1915)

Y. Bovshover reading to a young poet, A. Mintz.

BORN IN LUBAVICH, BYELORUSSIA.

Received a religious education but left at an early age for Riga, where he learned German and knew Heinrich Heine's poetry by heart. In 1891 came to America, invited by his brothers who had immi-

grated previously. Worked as a furrier in a sweatshop. Joined the anarchist movement and began writing poetry. At first, Bovshover was influenced by Edelshtat and other Yiddish proletarian poets, but around 1894 he developed his own style, influenced by American poetry, especially by Walt Whitman. Lived in New Haven, Connecticut, learned English, and published poetry in English in the anarchist *Liberty* under the pseudonym of Basil Dahl (for example, "To the Toilers," March 7, 1896, with the editor's enthusiastic endorsement). His English poems were subsequently translated into Yiddish in the Soviet Union. Also wrote prose and essays, published critical biographies (including verse translations) of Heine, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Whitman, and Edwin Markham in Yiddish. His translation of Shakespeare's "Merchant of Venice" was performed by Jacob Adler in the Yiddish theater in New York. Poverty and mental illness led to his incarceration in a mental hospital in Poughkeepsie, New York, where he spent the last fifteen years of his life, to the dismay of Yiddish literary critics. After his death, Bovshover was included among the four founders of Yiddish proletarian poetry, alongside Rosenfeld, Edelshtat, and Morris Vinchevsky.

Sing, Stranger

A Century of American Yiddish Poetry

A Historical Anthology

Edited by Benjamin Harshav
Translated by Benjamin Harshav and Barbara Harshav

Stanford University Press
Stanford, California 2006