

Guide to the Lev Lunts Papers

GEN MSS 104



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January 1992

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
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CALL NUMBER: GEN MSS 104

CREATOR: Lunts, Lev, 1901-1924

TITLE: Lev Lunts papers

DATES: 1896-1931

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 3.5 linear feet (5 boxes)

LANGUAGE: Russian

SUMMARY: The papers contain correspondence of Lunts and his father, Natan Lunts, writings, and personal papers of Lev and Natan Lunts.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.lunts>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.lunts>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to beinecke.images@yale.edu.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

The Lev Lunts Papers were purchased by Yale University in 1965 from Lunts's sister, Mrs. Genia Hornstein. The papers were discovered at Mrs. Hornstein's home in London in 1964 by Gary Kern. Mr. Kern identified the material and made the initial sorting.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Restricted Fragile Papers in box 5 may only be consulted with permission of the appropriate curator. Preservation photocopies for reference use have been substituted in the main files.

Conditions Governing Use

The Lev Lunts Papers are the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Preferred Citation

Lev Lunts Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Processing Information

Slavic names, titles, and quotations in their original languages have been transliterated in accordance with Library of Congress guidelines.

LEV LUNTS (1901-1924)

Lev Natanovich Lunts, the promising but short-lived playwright, critic, and author, was born in St. Petersburg on May 2, 1901 (April 19, old style), into a family of Jewish intelligentsia. His father, Natan Iakovlevich, was a provisor and importer of optical instruments; his mother, Anna Efimovna, had been a concert pianist. He graduated from the St. Petersburg gimnasia (high school) in 1918, with honors, and enrolled in the department of Romano-Germanic Languages and Literatures of the St. Petersburg University, where he studied under professors Dmitrii Petrov, Georgii Lozinskii, and others. He was considered an outstanding student and, upon graduation in 1922, was asked to remain on the faculty of his department as a post-graduate fellow. He began publishing his first articles of literary criticism in the St. Petersburg periodical *Zhizn' Iskusstva* in 1919-20.

While at the university, Lunts also attended lectures at "Dom Iskusstv," which was organized as part of Maksim Gorky's project, "Vsemirnaia Literatura," for the encouragement of young writers and poets, and which served from 1920 to 1923 as a place for meetings and lectures, and as a residence. The lectures and seminars there inspired him and his friend Mikhail Slonimskii, on the advice of Victor SHklovskii, to found the literary group known as "Serapionovy brat'ia" (Serapion Brothers). Its first meeting took place on February 1, 1921 in Slonimskii's room at Dom Iskusstv, where it continued to meet in its first years. Those present were: Il'ia Gruzdev, Veniamin Kaverin, Lev Lunts, Nikolai Nikitin, Elizaveta Polonskaia, Vladimir Pozner, Victor SHklovskii, Mikhail Slonimskii, and Mikhail Zoshchenko. Konstantin Fedin, Vsevolod Ivanov, and Nikolai Tikhonov joined the group that spring. Others who attended the meetings were the "Serapion maidens"-- Musia Alonkina, Zoia Gatskevich (Nikitina), Ida Kaplan, and Lidiia KHariton, as well as "guests," who included Evgenii Zamiatin, Olga Forsh, IUrii Tynianov, Anna Akhmatova, and Osip Mandel'shtam. The group was characterized by a deliberate lack of a single literary or ideological tendency and a common belief that the artistic claims of literature should not be subjugated to social agenda or political ideology. Lunts belonged to the left, "westernizing" wing of the Serapions, as he indicated in his article "O rodnykh brat'iakh" and the speech "Na zapad!", which was published in the Berlin periodical *Beseda* (number 3, 1923). The group came under attack by Marxist critics who accused its members of being "apolitical." Lunts responded to these criticisms in his articles "Pis'mo v redaktsiiu" and "Ob ideologii i publitsistike."

In June of 1921 Lev Lunts joined the All-Russian Professional Writers Union. In the same summer, his parents left Russia and moved to Germany. Lunts remained in St. Petersburg to finish his studies at the university. During the years 1921-23 he lived in the "obez'iannik" at Dom Iskusstv, along with other young writers, artists, and poets including Aleksandr Grin and Vladimir Piast. It was then that Lunts wrote and published the greater part of his works. By the end of 1922, beginning of 1923, he became known in St. Petersburg for

his literary criticism, his plays *Vne zakona* and *Bertrand-de-Born*, and his controversial polemical articles "Pochemu my serapionovy brat'ia," and "Na zapad!".

In 1922 Lunts's health began to deteriorate. From his correspondence with his parents we learn that he originally decided to remain in Russia, although they repeatedly urged him to join them in Germany. By 1923, however, he was making every effort to obtain permission to travel abroad. With the help of Maksim Gorky, he procured an academic leave from the university and an exit visa for a literary-research trip to Spain. He left Russia on June 1, 1923. By the time he reached his parents in Hamburg, he was too sick to continue and went instead to a sanatorium in Koenigstein. It is there that he wrote the chronicle "Puteshestvie na bol'nichnoi koike." Lunts spent the last year of his life in sanatoriums and hospitals in Germany. For most of this time he was bedridden, at times partially paralyzed; at one point, after what was probably a stroke, he lost the ability to read and write and was obliged to teach himself again. Among his writings from this period was the second of his two screenplays, *Vosstanie veshchei*, and the play *Gorod pravdy*, which he sent to the Serapions. Lev Lunts died in the hospital in Eppendorf on May 9, 1924 at the age of 23. *Bibliography* Lunts, Lev. *Rodina i drugie proizvedeniia*. Ed. with an afterword and commentary by M. Vainshtein. Jerusalem: Pamiat', 1981. ---. *Zaveshchanie TSaria*. Ed. with an introduction by W. Schriek. Munich: Sagner, 1983. *Novyi zhurnal*. Number 79, New York, 1965: 44-79; Number 82, 1966: 136-92; Number 83, 1966: 132-84; Number 90, 1968: 39-57.

Scope and Contents

The Lev Lunts Papers consist of correspondence, writings, and personal papers that document the short career of the Russian playwright. Most papers date from between 1922 and 1930, but the collection spans the years 1896-1931. Except where indicated, all the papers are in Russian.

The papers are divided into three series; *Correspondence* (Box 1), *Writings* (Box 2-3), and *Family Papers* (Box 4), plus on box of *Restricted Fragile Papers*.

[Series I, Correspondence](#), consists primarily of letters to Lev Lunts, some letters and drafts of letters written by him, and the personal correspondence of his father, Natan Lunts. Lev's correspondence covers two periods in his life. The first is the year after his parents' departure from Russia in the summer of 1921. This period is documented in the letters of Natan Lunts to Lev and in Lev's letters to his family, which are filed with the *Outgoing* correspondence. The second period is from June 1923 to May 1924, from the time that Lev left Russia and joined his parents until his death. In the last year of his life, Lunts corresponded actively with people in Russia, as well as friends from St. Petersburg who were already abroad. The correspondence of Natan Lunts dates, for the most part, from after Lev's death.

Among the items in the *Incoming* correspondence are letters from prominent literary figures such as Kornei Chukovskii, Maksim Gorky, Il'ia Erenburg, and Evgenii Zamiatin, as well as a number of letters from Nina Berberova, who befriended Lunts when he lived at Dom Iskusstv. Berberova writes from Berlin, then Marienbad, and finally from Venice, where she and Vladislav KHodasevich stopped briefly before moving to Paris. For the most part, these are letters of friendship and concern, but they deal also with literary issues, such as plans for the production of the German translation of *Vne zakona* in Berlin, and the publishing of Lunts's articles and other works in *Beseda*.

Other incoming letters are from Lunts's colleagues and personal friends, the fellow members of the Serapion Brothers. Most extensive are the correspondences of Lidiia KHariton and Ida Kaplan, two of the Serapion maidens, and of Vladimir Pozner, who was one of the first and youngest members of the group, but who had by this time emigrated to Paris with his parents. The correspondents relate the news of the group and its members and comment on their latest work. Another subject is Lunts's work, the publication and production of his writings and plays in Russia, including the fate of *Vne zakona*, and an account (L. KHariton) of the reactions of the Serapions to the play *Gorod pravdy*. These, and the letters from other Serapions, provide an insight into the spirit of youthful friendship in the group, the members' relationships to each other, and the characters of these young writers, who were later to have very different fates, some adjusting and becoming mainstream Soviet writers, some repressed, and some exiled. Taken together, these letters tell the story of a year in the life of the Serapion Brothers--their literary successes and failures and the developments in their personal lives, all against the background of the extraordinary historical

events of the time. Also of note are a letter from Elizaveta Polonskaia with an autograph poem and one from Aleksandr Slonimskii, written collaboratively with Samuil Marshak, containing a humorous poem composed by the two. Some of these letters have been published in various issues of *Novyi Zhurnal* and in the collection *Zaveshchanie TSaria*. Also part of the *Incoming* correspondence are letters from Dmitrii Umanskii, Lunts's German translator, which discuss his work on *Vne zakona*, and his attempts to get it published and produced in German.

Most of the outgoing letters are written by Lev Lunts to his parents in the years 1922-23. He discusses his university studies, his literary success, his material circumstances, and, in the later letters, his health and his plans to leave Russia. There are also two letters to his sister Evgeniia; a draft of a letter to Gorky, in which he expresses despair at being chronically ill in the prime of his life and talks about the Serapions and his play *Gorod pravdy*, and a draft of a letter to Nikolai Nikitin and his wife Zoia, which is a humorous response to their letters of September 25, 1923 (Box 1, folder 17).

The correspondence of Natan Lunts is filed under its own heading. After Lev's death, his father kept in touch with some of his friends, including Nina Berberova, Ida Kaplan, Lidiia KHariton, Elizaveta Polonskaia, and Mikhail Slonimskii. At first his father and his friends share the pain and shock of their loss; later they discuss the care of his possessions, his manuscripts, and the plans (never materialized) by the Serapions to put out a two volume edition of Lunts's works, including some articles and obituaries by his friends. Also included is Natan's correspondence with translators Dmitrii Umanskii (German) and F. O. Dempsey (pseudonym, John Silver, English) regarding the publication and production of Lev's plays and Natan's personal correspondence with friends and relatives, including R. Jakobson and M. IArblum. The series concludes with three folders of condolence letters, telegrams, and cards to the family.

[Series II, Writings](#) is divided into four sections: *Drama*, *Screenplays*, *Articles*, and *Shorter Works*. Translations comprise a significant portion of this series. Items of particular interest are holograph originals of the unpublished screenplay *Zaveshchanie TSaria*; the humorous short story "KHozhdeniia", a parody of the Serapions which Lunts sent to them to be read at the group's anniversary celebration and which incited much commentary in the correspondence; and the chronicle "Puteshestvie na bol'nichnoi koike." Other holograph originals include a first draft of the play *Gorod pravdy* and a draft of the article "O rodnikh brat'iakh."

[The third and final series, Family Papers](#), contains documents such as a birth certificate, educational and identification records; documents related to Lev Lunts's death and burial; and newspaper clippings with obituaries and posthumous articles by his friends, including Konstantin Fedin, Nina Berberova, and Mikhail Slonimskii. Other items include photographs of Lev, Ida Kaplan, and others; Lunts's wallet and its contents; and some newspaper clippings. One clipping, a short resolution, signed collectively by the Serapion Brothers and published in *Leningradskaia Pravda* on January 27, 1924, became the cause of the group's break with Nikolai Nikitin (see also Lidiia KHariton's letter of March 2, 1924). Also found in the series are some personal papers of Natan Lunts.

Collection Contents

Series I: Correspondence, 1922-31

0.5 linear feet (1 box)

The correspondence is divided into three alphabetically arranged subseries: *Incoming*, *Outgoing*, and *Natan Lunts*. The third subseries contains the incoming and outgoing correspondence of the Natan Lunts. Unidentified correspondence has been placed at the end of each subseries.

INCOMING

b. 1, f. 1	Alekseev, Gleb	1923 Jun 29
b. 1, f. 2	Berberova, Nina	1923-24
b. 1, f. 3	Chukovskii, Kornei	1924 Jan 7
b. 1, f. 3	Chukovskii, Nikolai	
b. 1, f. 4	Erenburg, Il'ia	1923 Jul 25
b. 1, f. 5	Fedin, Konstantin	1923-24
	See also: Lidiia KHariton, Box 1, folder 11	
	See also: Serapion Brothers, Box 1, folder 21	
b. 1, f. 6	Gorky, Maksim	1923 Dec 22
	Gruzdev, Il'ia	
	See: Serapion Brothers, Box 1, folder 21	
b. 1, f. 7	Gurvich, Boris	1924 Jan 14
b. 1, f. 8	Kaplan, Ida	1923-24
	See also: Serapion Brothers, Box 1, folder 21	
b. 1, f. 9	Kaplun, S.	1923 Nov 22
	See also: Dmitrii Umanskii, Box 1, folder 29	
b. 1, f. 10	Kaverin, Veniamin	1923-24
	See also: Serapion Brothers, Box 1, folder 21	
b. 1, f. 11-12	KHariton, Lidiia	1923-24
	See also: Serapion Brothers, Box 1, folder 21	
b. 1, f. 13	Lozinskii, Grigorii	1923
b. 1, f. 14	Lunts, Evgeniia	1923 Sep 30, n.d
b. 1, f. 15-16	Lunts, Natan	1922-23
	Marshak, Samuil	
	See: Aleksandr Slonimskii, Box 1, folder 23	
b. 1, f. 17	Nikitin, Nikolai	1923

INCOMING (continued)

b. 1, f. 17	Nikitina, Zoia	1923-24
	Peshkov, Aleksei See: Maksim Gorky, Box 1, folder 6	
b. 1, f. 18	Petrov, Dmitrii	1923
b. 1, f. 19	Polonskaia, Elizaveta See also: Serapion Brothers, Box 1, folder 21	1923-24
b. 1, f. 20	Pozner, Vladimir	1923-24
b. 1, f. 21	Serapion Brothers	1924 Feb 2, n.d.
	SHklovskii, Victor See: Serapion Brothers, Box 1, folder 21	
	SHvarts, Evgenii See: Ida Kaplan, Serapion Brothers, Box 1, folder 8	
b. 1, f. 22	Slonimskaia, Faina See also: Nikolai Slonimskii, Box 1, folder 25	1923-24
b. 1, f. 23	Slonimskii, Aleksandr	1923-24
b. 1, f. 24	Slonimskii, Mikhail See also: Lidiia KHariton, Box 1, folder 11 See: Serapion Brothers, Box 1, folder 21	1923-24
b. 1, f. 25	Slonimskii, Nikolai	[1923]
b. 1, f. 26	Theaterverlag Otto Eirich (German)	1923 Oct 20
b. 1, f. 27	Tikhonov, Nikolai See also: Serapion Brothers, Box 1, folder 21	1924 Feb 2, n.d.
b. 1, f. 28	Tynianov, IUrii	1924 Jan 14
b. 1, f. 29-30	Umanskii, Dmitrii	1923-24
b. 1, f. 31	Vygodskii, David See also: Serapion Brothers, Box 1, folder 21	1923 Sep 27
b. 1, f. 32	Zamiatin, Evgenii See also: Serapion Brothers, Box 1, folder 21	1923-24
b. 1, f. 32	Zamiatina, Liudmila	1923-24
	Zelënaia, Ekaterina See: Lidiia KHariton, Box 1, folder 11	
	Zoshchenko, Mikhail See: Serapion Brothers, Box 1, folder 21	

INCOMING (continued)

b. 1, f. 33	Unidentified	1924, n.d.
OUTGOING		
b. 1, f. 34	Gorky, Maksim	1923 Dec 28
b. 1, f. 35	Lunts, Evgeniia	1923
b. 1, f. 36-37	Lunts, Anna and Natan	1922-23
b. 1, f. 38	Nikitin, Nikolai	1923 Oct 12
b. 1, f. 38	Nikitina Zoia	
b. 1, f. 39	Unidentified	n.d.
NATAN LUNTS		
b. 1, f. 40	Berberova, Nina	1923, 1925
b. 1, f. 41	Dempsey, F. O. (English) See also: Box 2, folders 72, 79-80	1930 Apr 7
b. 1, f. 42	Grinberg, Roman	1926 Dec 29
b. 1, f. 43	Jakobson, Roman	n.d.
b. 1, f. 44	IArblum, M.	1924
b. 1, f. 45	Kaplan, Ida	1924
b. 1, f. 46	Kaplun, S.	1924 May 10
b. 1, f. 47	Kaverin, Veniamin	1923 Oct 15
b. 1, f. 48	KHariton, Lidiia	1924
b. 1, f. 49	Levy, Felix	1931 Jul 17
b. 1, f. 50	Lunts, Anna, Evgeniia, Lev	1923 Oct 10
b. 1, f. 51	Lurie (English)	1924
b. 1, f. 52	Polonskaia, Elizaveta	1924
	Silver, John See: F. O. Dempsey, Box 2, folder 41	
b. 1, f. 53	Slonimskii, Mikhail	1924
b. 1, f. 54	Umanskii, Dmitrii	1924
b. 1, f. 55	Unidentified	1923-25, n.d.
b. 1, f. 56-58	Condolence letters (Russian, German, English, Yiddish)	1924

Series II: Writings, 1922-30*0.75 linear feet (2 boxes)*

The writings are divided into four subseries: *Drama*, *Screenplays*, *Articles*, and *Shorter Works*. Within each subseries, the papers are arranged alphabetically by title and then in the following order: holographs, typescripts, printed versions, publication/production notices, publicity, reviews, and then translations in the same order.

DRAMA

Bertrand-de-Born

b. 2, f. 59	Typescript, carbon	1922 Sep 14
b. 2, f. 60	Printed, proof	n.d.

Gorod pravdy

b. 2, f. 61	Holograph, first draft, corrected, bound with "KHozhdeniia" and "O rodnykh brat'iakh"	n.d.
b. 2, f. 62	Holograph, corrected	n.d.
b. 2, f. 63-65	Typescript, carbons, entitled <i>Kontsa net</i>	1924
b. 2, f. 66	Review	n.d.

City of Truth (English tr. by John Silver)

b. 2, f. 67	Typescript, carbon	1929
b. 2, f. 68	Printed, first edition	1929
b. 2, f. 69-71	Publication notices	1930
b. 2, f. 72	Rejection notices from theaters	1929-30

Die Stadt der Gleichheit (German tr. by Erich Bohme)

b. 2, f. 73	Typescript, original	1929
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Obez'iany idut!

b. 2, f. 74	Printed, proof	n.d.
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Vne zakona

b. 2, f. 75	Printed, proof	n.d.
b. 2, f. 76	Production announcement, annotated	1924 Jun 8

Outside the Law (English tr. by John Silver)

b. 2, f. 77	Typescript, carbon, with holograph coverletter by translator	1929
b. 2, f. 78	Typescript, carbon, bound	1929
b. 2, f. 79	Rejection notice from publisher	1930 Jan 10

DRAMA > Vne zakona > Outside the Law (English tr. by John Silver) (continued)

b. 2, f. 80	Rejection notices from theaters	1929-30
	<i>Vogelfrei</i> (German)	
b. 2, f. 81	Printed, in <i>Der Querschnitt</i>	1925 Jan
b. 2, f. 82	Theater program	1926 Dec 4
SCREENPLAYS		
	<i>Vosstanie veshchei</i>	
b. 3, f. 83	Holograph, draft I	n.d.
b. 3, f. 84	Holograph, draft II	n.d.
	<i>Zaveshchanie TSaria</i>	
b. 3, f. 85	Holograph	n.d.
ARTICLES		
b. 3, f. 86	"Das Herbende russiche Theater": printed, newspaper clipping (German)	1924 Aug 10
b. 3, f. 87	"Na zapad!": printed, proofs, two copies	n.d.
b. 3, f. 88	Publicity (photocopies)	1923-24
	"O rodneykh brat'iakh": holograph draft See: Gorod pravdy, Box 2, folder 61	n.d.
SHORTER WORKS		
	"KHozhdeniia": holograph, draft See: Gorod pravdy, Box 2, folder 61	n.d.
b. 3, f. 89	"Puteshestvie na bol'nichnoi koike": holograph, draft, corrected	n.d.

Series III: Family Papers, 1896-1927*0.5 linear feet (1 box)*

These materials are divided into two subseries: *Biographical Materials*, and *Other papers and effects*. This last is further divided under two headings: *Lev Lunts*, and *Natan Lunts*. Within these, papers are arranged alphabetically by subject. Miscellaneous papers and empty envelopes are placed at the end of the series.

BIOGRAPHICAL MATERIALS

b. 4, f. 90	Birth certificate	1902 Oct 21
b. 4, f. 91-92	Death and burial documents	1924
b. 4, f. 93	Death notices (photocopies)	1924
b. 4, f. 94	Educational records	1918-23
b. 4, f. 95	Medical bills, receipts	1924
b. 4, f. 96	Obituaries, necrologies (photocopies)	1924
b. 4, f. 97-98	Vital records (passport, etc.)	1921-23

OTHER PAPERS AND EFFECTS

Lev Lunts

b. 4, f. 99	Newspaper clippings	1924-27
b. 4, f. 100	Photographs	n.d.
b. 4, f. 101-04	Wallet and contents (miscellaneous papers, currency, stamps)	n.d.

Natan Lunts

b. 4, f. 105	Diploma	1895 Dec 20
b. 4, f. 106	Newspaper article by N. Lunts (German)	n.d.
b. 4, f. 107-08	Newspaper clippings (Russian, Hebrew, Yiddish)	n.d.
b. 4, f. 109-11	Miscellaneous papers	n.d.
b. 4, f. 112	Empty envelopes	1924-30, n.d.

Restricted Fragile Papers

Restricted Fragile Papers in box 5 may only be consulted with permission of the appropriate curator. Preservation photocopies for reference use have been substituted in the main files.

b. 5, f. 113	Box 2, folder 66
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b. 5, f. 114	Box 3, folder 89
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b. 5, f. 115	Box 4, folder 94
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b. 5, f. 116	Box 4, folder 97
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Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

Authors, Russian -- 20th Century
Dramatists
Dramatists, Russian -- 20th Century
Russian drama -- 20th Century
Russian literature -- 20th Century
Sanatoriums -- Germany

Geographic Names

Soviet Union -- History -- 1917-1936
Soviet Union -- Intellectual life -- 1917-1970

Names

Berberova, N. (Nina), 1901-1993
Chukovskii, Kornei, 1882-1969
Érenburg, Il'ia, 1891-1967
Fedin, Konstantin, 1892-1977
Kaplan, Ida
Kaverin, V. (Veniamin), 1902-1989
KHariton, Lidiia, 1899-
Lozinskii, Grigorii, 1886-1955
Lunt's, Lev, 1901-1924
Lunt's, Natan
Nikitin, Nikolaï, 1897-1963
Petrov, D. K.(Dmitriï Konstantinovich), 1872-1925
Polonskaïa, Elizaveta Grigorévna, 1890-
Pozner, Vladimir, 1905-1992
Shklovskii, Viktor, 1893-1984
Slonimskii, Mikhail Leonidovich, 1897-1972
Slonimskii, A. L.(Aleksandr Leonidovich),
1884-1964
Tikhonov, Nikolaï, 1896-1979
Umanskii, Dmitrii
Zaïiatin, Evgenii Ivanovich, 1884-1937