

Essay

Dan Laor (1944–2023)*

When Sammy Gronemann Met Nathan Alterman: The Story of Israel's Most Successful Comedy

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Abstract: The essay delves into the intricate German-Jewish authorship and enduring legacy of the iconic Israeli musical, “King Solomon and Shalmi the Cobbler,” which premiered in Tel Aviv in 1943. Following its success, a contentious debate arose, overshadowing Sammy Gronemann’s rightful credit as the playwright, subsequently replaced by the prominence of his Hebrew translator, Nathan Alterman. This essay meticulously examines Gronemann’s pivotal contribution, illuminating his collaborative journey with Alterman from the vibrant cabaret scene of pre-state Tel Aviv to their lasting impact on contemporary Israeli culture and theater.

The essay is based on the Hebrew lecture delivered by Prof. Dan Laor (1944–2023) at the Leo Baeck Institute Jerusalem, marking the conclusion of the international conference on the Life and Works of Sammy Gronemann: “Jewish Wit, Zionist Satire, and Humane Humor,” organized by the Rosenzweig Minerva Center at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (June 5–6, 2022). Originally published in Hebrew without the author’s footnotes, the essay appeared in two installments in the literary feuilleton of *Haaretz* (ed. by Benny Ziffer) under the titles “Who Composed the Musical ‘King Solomon and Shalmi the Cobbler’” (October 4, 2022) and “A ... a ... a ... a miracle has happened!” (October 9, 2022). The English translation, commissioned by Prof. Laor, was accomplished by Ori Weissbaum and Jan Kühne. Kühne also assumed responsibility for the editing process, which encompassed the addition of the subtitle, abstract, and chapter titles, alongside incorporating further references and comments on the original footnotes. While Prof. Laor was unable to review the translation and edits, every effort was made to maintain fidelity to the original text, clearly distinguishing later additions (denoted by square brackets and indicated by an uppercase star: *[...]). In lieu of Prof. Laor, his literary executor, Dr. Almut Laufer, meticulously reviewed the essay, for which her cooperation is gratefully acknowledged. Grateful acknowledgment is also extended to Prof. Thomas (Tom) Lewy for his invaluable advice and guidance. The original Hebrew version is dedicated, “in friendship and affection,” to Illy Gorlitzky – a distinguished Hebrew Israeli actor renowned for his portrayal of both King Solomon and Shalmi the Cobbler in Gronemann’s play of the same name, the genesis and reception of which this research essay explores.

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By dissecting their creative partnership, it becomes evident that while Gronemann's playwright prowess shone brightly and set new standards, Alterman's adept translation skills bolstered the play's success, thereby etching its indelible mark in Israeli theatrical history.

Keywords: Hebrew theater; German Jews/Yekkes; Palestine; Israel; translation

1 Introduction

If asked who wrote *King Solomon and Shalmal the Cobbler*, the most successful Israeli musical of all time, many Israelis will most likely err by responding promptly and without hesitation: Nathan Alterman. However, it is well established that Alterman is not, in fact, the author of this charming comedy of errors between a biblical king and a look-alike shoemaker – Alterman does not deserve the credit he still occasionally receives.¹ Instead, the play's author is, of course, Sammy Gronemann (1875–1952), a German-born Jewish writer, who emigrated to Mandatory Palestine in 1936 after he fled the terror of the Nazi regime – at first from Berlin to Paris, where he spent three years, before boarding the ship for Tel Aviv, which became his new home for almost two decades.

Sammy Gronemann was a polymath of remarkable vigor and versatility. As the son of the neo-orthodox rabbi Selig Gronemann, Gronemann received a traditional education. Intended to become a rabbi himself, he spent some time at the Rabbinical Seminary in Berlin before pursuing a law degree and professing as a lawyer. He was also a prolific writer who wrote satirical novels and feuilletons, critical works and comedy plays. As a Zionist activist, he served many years as president of the Court of the Zionist Congress.² His first novel, *Tohuwabohu*

¹ On September 21, 2021, a radio program dedicated to “King Solomon and Shalmal the Cobbler” was aired on “Kan 11” (ed. by Kobi Barkai) in honor of Illy Gorlitzky's 86th birthday, the lead actor in the play's successful musical version, honoring his pivotal role as the lead actor in the play's acclaimed musical rendition. Remarkably, throughout the entirety of the two-hour broadcast, Sammy Gronemann, despite being the author of the play, was not once mentioned. * [For an examination of Gronemann's conspicuous absence as the play's creator in the Israeli public consciousness, s.a. chapter 1.4.5: “Die Alterman-Gronemann Debatte”, in: Jan Kühne, *Die zionistische Komödie im Drama Sammy Gronemanns. Über Ursprünge und Eigenarten einer latenten Gattung*. (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 67–82.]

² * [For further exploration of this facet of Gronemann's life, refer to the article “Dreaming of a Jewish Democracy: Sammy Gronemann as High Judge and Chief Architect of the pre-State Zionist Judiciary (1911–1946)”, featured in this issue.]

(“Utter Chaos”) – an amusing but poignant portrait of German Jews at the beginning of the twentieth century – received much acclaim after it appeared in Berlin in 1920.³ After his migration, Gronemann was in Tel Aviv. He continued to practice law as an arbitrator in the Jewish settlements of Mandatory Palestine (*Yishuv*) and later Israel, where he spent most of his time writing drama for the Hebrew theater. Although he had a broad Jewish education and knowledge of Hebrew, he continued to write only in German.⁴ In this respect, Gronemann was a citizen of that small, but undoubtedly important republic of German writers and intellectuals who came to Palestine and Israel under the circumstances of the time and continued their literary activities there in the German language, along with figures such as Max Brod, Werner Kraft, Arnold Zweig, Else Lasker-Schüler.⁵ Some found themselves completely cut off from the culture of the *Yishuv*, and some nevertheless found a way to break through the language barrier while seeking to reach Hebrew readers – the most successful of which, in this respect, was Sammy Gronemann, whose work is receiving increasing academic interest since the late 1990s.⁶

3 *[For the discussion on this novel, refer to the essays by Jakob Hessing and Penny Milbouer featured in this issue.]

4 *[For comprehensive explorations of Gronemann's biography in English, refer to César Augusto Merchán-Hamann's dissertation *Life and Works of Sammy Gronemann* (University College London: Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies, 2002); Jan Kühne, “Of the Two the Jew is ... (Curtain falls.)” – Sammy Gronemann's Dramaturgy of the German-Jewish Encounter in Mandate-Palestine/Israel (1936–1952),” *Jewish Culture and History* 17: 1 (2016), 254–74.]

5 Yoav Gelber, 1933–1948 מולדת חדשה: עליית יהודי מרכז אירופה וקליטתם [*New Homeland: Immigration and Absorption of Central European Jews 1933–1948*] (Jerusalem: Leo Baeck, Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1990): 462–465. * [S.a. Jan Kühne, “Deutschsprachige Jüdische Literatur in Palästina/Israel,” in *Handbuch der deutsch-jüdischen Literatur*, ed. Hans Otto Horsch (Berlin/Boston: DeGruyter, 2015): 201–220; Idem., “1933–2017) (ספרות יהודית גרמנית בתקופת היישוב ובמדינת ישראל) [German-Jewish Literature in Mandate Palestine and Israel (1933–2017)]” *Chidushim* 19 (2017): 121–44; Sebastian Schirrmeyer, *Begegnung auf fremder Erde: Verschränkungen deutsch-und hebräischsprachiger Literatur in Palästina/Israel nach 1933* (Berlin: J.B. Metzler, 2019).]

6 A critical edition of Gronemann's collected works, edited by Jan Kühne, commenced publication in 2018 and is slated to encompass seven volumes upon completion. Titled, “Sammy Gronemann, Kritische Gesamtausgabe” [*Critical Edition of Collected Works by Sammy Gronemann*]. * [The edition is part of the *Conditio Judaica* Series by Hans Otto Horsch (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter 2018–2026), herein after referred to as: GKG. To date, four volumes have been released: * [GKG, Vol. 1 – *Gesammelte Dramen* [Collected Drama]; Vol. 2 – *Tohuwabohu* [Tohuwabohu/Utter Chaos]; Vol. 3 – *Hawdolo und Zapfenstreich: Erinnerungen an die ostjüdische Etappe 1916–1918* [Havdolo and the Grand Tattoo: Recollections of the Eastern Jewish Front, 1916–1918]; Vol. 6 – *Kurzprosa und Nachlasstexte* [Short Prose and Texts from the Estate]. Vol. 7 – *Briefwechsel* [Correspondences] is anticipated for 2024.]

2 Three Prologues

2.1 The Matate-Cabaret

When Gronemann arrived in Israel, Alterman, only 26 years old, had already established himself as a poet whose writing flooded local periodicals. He regularly published a rhyming column on current affairs for *Haaretz* under the title “Moments,” and authored dozens of lyrics for popular songs, mainly for the Matatē (“Broom”) Theater, a venue for humor and satire that had operated in Tel Aviv since 1928.⁷ This is where Gronemann and Alterman met, at Matate’s Hebrew “Stage for Comedy and Operetta,” where, on September 11, 1937, Gronemann’s comedy of errors, entitled *Jacob and Christian*, premiered. The three-act play reflects 1930s’ German society in which the Nazis rose to power. Its plot, which antedates the idea behind Charlie Chaplin’s *The Great Dictator*, revolves around the mistaken identities of a Jew and a Nazi: The son of a Jewish mother grows up in a German family and adopts a German, Aryan, and even pro-Nazi identity. This confusion of identities creates a series of comic situations that present a satirical critique of Aryan race theory and unflattering aspects of German Jewry. The play was translated into Hebrew by Avigdor Hameiri, a Hungarian-born writer and poet well versed in the devices of satirical theater by having founded the Kunkum (“Kettle”) Theater, the Matate’s forerunner.⁸

It wasn’t long before Gronemann established himself with the Matate, which renewed its program every few months, and always included skits and musical numbers in the finest traditions of European cabarets. These venues were sources of fun and entertainment and carried social and political criticism. Thereby, the Matate commented on contemporary social realities in Mandatory Palestine and events in

7 Dan Laor, ביוגרפיה, אלתרמן [Nathan Alterman. *A Biography*] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2013), 101–149.

8 Hanni Mittelmann, “מחזורי של סמי גרונמן – שילוב בין ישן לחדש” [Sammy Gronemann’s Theater Plays – A Meeting of Old and New], *בין המולדות: היקפים במחזורותיהם* [Between Two Homelands: The “Yekkes”], edited by Moshe Zimmermann and Yotam Hotam (Jerusalem, Zalman Shazar Center 2006), 159–166. About the production of *Jacob or Christian?*, see the Israeli Center for Documentation of Performing Arts, Tel Aviv University, sign. 15.2.6 (henceforth ICDPA). I thank Dr. Boris Yentin, Sophia Zilber, and Shai Markus for assisting me in finding the materials needed for this research. * [S.a. Hanni Mittelmann, “Das Theater von Sammy Gronemann: Vermittlung zwischen Alt und Neu,” in *Zweimal Heimat. Die Jeckes zwischen Mitteleuropa und Nahost*, edited by Moshe Zimmermann and Yotam Hotam (Frankfurt a.M.: Beerenverlag, 2005), 172–81. For the drama text of *Jacob and Christian*, see GKG, Vol. 1: 55–102, and 472–476 (for the commentary on the play’s genesis and reception)].

the international arena.⁹ Gronemann was well versed in and accustomed to this type of theater, since he had lived in Berlin for many years. As a student, he showed interest not only in the repertory theater but also in the work of small theatrical troupes and cabaret performances that were popular in the city. As a humorist and a writer of satirical columns, he was naturally drawn to cabaret venues and comedy stages like these.

At this point, Alterman enters the picture. Since it was founded, the Matate had brought in writers and performers who still held the status of new immigrants and thus required translators. Alterman, who had been the leading composer of satirical couplets at the Matate from 1934, also assisted the theater by translating manuscripts of non-Hebrew writers. For example, he translated Yiddish skits by Yitzhak Nozik, who came to Tel Aviv from Warsaw's Azazel Theater, and German skits by Martin Rost (pen name of the German-Swiss playwright Maximilian Rosenkrantz). He also translated Sammy Gronemann's work. Henceforth, Alterman became known as an active and talented translator for the theater, including German plays written by authors such as Curt Goetz, Franz Molnar, and Karl Schönherr for various theaters.¹⁰ Alterman acquired his German in Kishinev, the city of his youth, where he studied at the Hebrew "Magen David" Gymnasium. Its curriculum included the study of languages such as Latin, French, German, and Romanian, due to the unification of Bessarabia with Romania. From a certain point on, also English was taught.¹¹

Gronemann wrote his first one-act play for the Hebrew stage in the framework of the Matate's "Cold & Hot" program (No. 47), which premiered on November 16, 1938.¹² Unlike the aforementioned play *Jacob and Christian*, which still took place in

9 Ilana Kleimann, "המטאטא. התאטרון הסאטירי הא"י" [Hamatate. The pre-State Israeli Satirical Theater], M.A.-Thesis, (Jerusalem, Hebrew University 1991). * [S.a. Thomas Lewy, היקים והתיאטרון העברי – במאבק בין מערב למזרח אירופה] [The German Jews and the Hebrew Theater. A Clash between Western and Eastern Europe] (Tel Aviv: Resling 2016), 165–205; Idem., *Zwischen allen Bühnen. Die Jeckes und das hebräische Theater 1933–1948*. Translated by Sebastian Schirrmeister (Berlin: Neofelis, 2016), 161–196.

10 Nathan Alterman's theatrical activities are extensively covered in Deborah Gilulah's book: מול תגמול מחיאות כפיים – נתן אלטרמן והבמה העברית [Nathan Alterman and the Hebrew Stage]. (Israel: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2008). Especially, see pages 61–38; 164–153. S.a. Idem., "Nathan Alterman's Contribution to the 'Matate' Theater," *Bama* 120 (1990): 52–43. Many of Alterman's contributions to the Matate will be found in the book: *Nathan Alterman, פזמונים ושיירי זמר* [Songs and Ballads], edited by Menachem Dorman, Vol. I (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1997), primarily pages 306–289.

11 The 1926-curriculum of the Hebrew Gymnasium "Magen David" in Kishinev (Moldova) is preserved in the Archive for the History of Jewish Education at Tel Aviv University.

12 See the file for the program "Cold and Hot: With Everything from Everything at 9 Degrees" at the ICDPA (Sign. 26.1.9). The text of the play "In the Tel Aviv Court of Arbitration" was located with the assistance of Dr. Ilan Barkovich in the Alterman Archive, Kip Center, Tel Aviv University (File 15: 2–12).

the German diaspora, the skit that Gronemann wrote this time – and which was translated into Hebrew by Nathan Alterman – dealt entirely with Jewish life in Mandatory Palestine: A legal dispute between the members of a local synagogue (played by Shmuel Rodansky, Bezalel London and Zalman Lavyush), and the cantor they hired for Yom Kippur, is brought before a gentile British judge who had just arrived the previous day (played by Yosef Oxenberg). A chain of errors and misunderstandings stemming from the cultural and linguistic gaps between the judge and the litigants produces the skit's hilarious effects. In the machine-printed manuscript preserved in the archives of company member Yaakov Timan, the translation bears the title: "In the Tel Aviv Court of Arbitration". However, in the Matate's program, the play appears under a significantly different title: "What Does a Gentile Care About Synagogal Music?" It is not surprising that Gronemann, a jurist well-versed in the way of the courts, even if mainly in Germany, chose the "Tel Aviv Court of Arbitration" as the setting for the first skit that he submitted to the Matate's.¹³

Gronemann later participated in three additional programs at the Matate's with Alterman serving as his translator, in: "Threads & Knots" (No. 48), "Australians in Town" (No. 53), and "Lights in the Dark" (No. 54). These programs were presented between February 1939 and August 1940, on the cusp of World War II and into the war itself. Sammy Gronemann's name features prominently on the covers of these programs, alongside those of the staff writers, including H. Avichanan (Hillel Bergman), Leah Goldberg,¹⁴ Martin Rost, Yitzhak Nozik, Natan Alterman, and the musical composers Moshe Wilensky and Marc Lavry. The skits written by Gronemann bear attractive titles such as "What Goes Around," "Thus, Instill Your Fear!" "Marriage Chaser," and "Robbery in Broad Darkness."

Two of these – "What Goes Around" and "Thus, Instill Your Fear!" – were hitherto known only by their title, while all original versions of Gronemann's plays for the Matate's went missing.¹⁵ However, a copy of one of these two lost plays could be found in the archives: "Thus, Instill Your Fear!" opened the program "Australians

¹³ Alterman's Hebrew translation of the play was published by Deborah Gilula in: Sammy Gronemann, "מה ענין גוי אצל חזאננים?" [What Does a Gentile Care About Synagogal Music?], *Bamah* 35, no. 163 (2001), 29–40. * [For a retranslation into the original German text and comments on its origins in Gronemann's prose writings, as well as Hebrew reception, see "Jom Kippur vor Gericht", GKG, Vol. 1: 104–115, 478–479.]

¹⁴ * [Lea Goldberg considered Gronemann the only capable writer of satirical one-act plays in the Yishuv; she saw his plays as defining the desired standard of the Matate. Lea Goldberg: "קור וחום במטאטא" [Cold and Hot in the Matate], *Davar* (20.11.1938), 6; s.a. cf. GKG, Vol. 1, 479; s.a. 474, 477.]

¹⁵ * [For references to the Hebrew translations and the text of the retranslated German versions, in the absence of the lost German originals, see, along with critical commentaries on genesis and reception: GKG, Vol. 1, 103–144, 477–481; Kühne, *Die zionistische Komödie* (fn. 2), 24–31, 263–273.]

in Town,” immediately following the opening musical number by Alterman and Lavry. This one-act play also takes place on the seam between the *Yishuv* and the British authorities. In an urban settlement somewhere in the country, local dignitaries are summoned by British soldiers to gather at a meeting point. Arriving with fear and trembling, these Jews – refugees from Europe – recall, one after another, the horrors of the pogroms and riots they had experienced, suffering taken hostage in collective punishment for the deeds of other Jews. Then, suddenly, a British Major enters and opens a box from which he takes out a prayer shawl and a prayerbook, declaring: “I’ve summoned you chaps here today because I’m marking a *Yortzeit*, [anniversary of a relative’s death] and I do need a *Minyan*, you see [prayer quorum of 10 devout Jews].” Immediately afterward, he intones the afternoon service’s opening words: “Happy are those who dwell in Your house.”¹⁶

2.2 The Papillon Cabaret

After Sammy Gronemann integrated into the theater scene of the *Yishuv*, he joined the Papillon Cabaret, an initiative of the actress Stella Kadmon, assisted by Martin Rost as artistic director.¹⁷ The Papillon was announced as a “tiny theater” (one of the numerous entertainment and comedy venues appearing in tiny Tel Aviv like mushrooms after the rain). Papillon opened its doors on April 8, 1940, in a café called *Shalosh Kushim* (“The Three Moors”) at 4 Bialik Street, with the almost self-evident participation of Natan Alterman and Sammy Gronemann as lyricists and scriptwriters. Other writers who contributed literary material included J. Avichanan, Leah Goldberg, Avigdor Hameiri, and Yaakov Horowitz. Moshe Mokadi painted the sets, and Marc Lavry composed the music. In total, the new theater put on two programs, and it was the second one specifically that earned praise from Uri Kesari, who covered Tel Aviv’s entertainment scene in his newspaper *Tesha Ba’erev* (“9 pm”): “This time we leave the miniature hall on Bialik Street in a completely different

¹⁶ See the following folders at the ICDPA: “Threads and Knots: ‘Shulchan Aruch’ in 10 Dishes” (56.3.5), “Australians in Town: A Sightseeing Tour with 9 Stops” (9.6.40), and “Lights in the Dark: Snapshots in 12 Pictures” (16.4.8). The text of the program “Thus, Instill Your Fear!” (alternative title “The Minyan”) is preserved in the Altman Archive, Kip Center, Tel Aviv University (15: 2–17). *[for a comprehensive overview and discussion, s.a. the references in fn. 12.]

¹⁷ D. Gilulah, Alterman and the Hebrew Stage (fn. 8), 13. S.a. Lea Gilulah, “העיקר הוא העשייה: שיחות עם נתן כהן,” [The Main Thing is the Action: Conversations with Nathan Kogan], *Bamah* 170 (2003), 15–61. For material on the Papillon-Cabaret see the ICDPA (sign. 12.5.1). *[Originally, Martin Rost was mentioned here mistakenly as the Cabaret founder. For a history of the Papillon-Cabaret and that of its founder, the Austro-German Jewish immigrant Stella Kadmon, s.a. Henriette Mandl, *Cabaret und Courage. Stella Kadmon – Eine Biographie* (Wien: Universitätsverlag, 1993); s.a. Lewy, The German Jews and the Hebrew Theater, 276–280; Idem, *Zwischen allen Bühnen*, 258–263.]

mood: after its managers and directors had strayed from the path, they found it again this time, and it is even possible to say, with great success.” He particularly praised Gronemann and Alterman, whom he admired as a “refined lyricist” (פייטן מעודן). Later in the same paragraph, he described Gronemann as having “thrown upon us handfuls of his blessed ‘esprit’ – deep thoughts glittering in light words.” He wrote further that “the sharpness of the writer of *Jacob and Christian*’ has presented here an ensemble of thought and language.”¹⁸

2.3 The Wooden Troupe

Gronemann and Alterman’s paths intersected yet again in Dr. Paul Loewy’s Wooden Troupe, a marionette theater active in Mandate Palestine, which was founded in Carlsbad (Karlovy Vary, Czechoslovakia) by Loewy, who had been, like Gronemann, a jurist by profession.¹⁹ The Wooden Troupe won great acclaim, and in 1938, Loewy was invited to represent Czechoslovakia at the World’s Fair in Chicago. However, in September 1938, the Sudetenland was annexed by Germany. Instead of traveling to the US, Loewy traveled with his family and puppets to Palestine, where he continued the artistic endeavors of his theater until 1943. None other than Yosef Milo (“Papo”), born as Yosef Pasovsky in Prague, who would go on to found the Cameri Theater, provided the voice-over for Loewy’s marionettes. Alterman also lent his hand to this theater, along with Gronemann. An announcement published in the press on behalf of “Dr. Paul Loewy’s Wooden Band” informed the public about the premier of a musical play entitled *Sounds and Shades*, featuring “texts and couplets translated and adapted by Natan Alterman and Dr. S. Gronemann.”²⁰ The attached program mentioned that the first part of the evening would include a show called *The Industrious Clerk*, described “as a one-act comedy by Courteline,” adapted by Gronemann and translated into Hebrew by Alterman.²¹ Georges Courteline was one of the famous modern French literary satirists. (The second part would stage vignettes from *The Marriage of Figaro*).²²

¹⁸ Cf. Uri Kesari, 9 pm (6.6.1940).

¹⁹ Dorit Yerushalmi, “פּלֶשְׁתִּינָה אֵינָה אֶרֶץ בְּשִׁבִּיל מִינֵי קֶרְקָסִים פּוֹרְחִים בְּאוֹוִיר – לְהַקֵּת הָעֵץ שֶׁל פֶּאוֹל לֹוִי”, *Between Two Homelands* (fn. 6), 167–177. These informations are also based on archival material found at the ICDA (sign. 17.5.6, 60.2.3). * [S.a. Dorit Yerushalmi, “Palästina ist kein Land für alle möglichen Luftzirkusse”. Die Geschichte der Hölzernen Truppe von Paul Löwy, in *Zweimal Heimat* (fn. 9), 182–93.]

²⁰ See *Haaretz*, 7.1.1943.

²¹ * [On Gronemann’s adaptation of Courteline’s “Client sérieux”, s.a. GKG 1, XVIII.]

²² Around that date, Alterman also translated the play “La paix chez soi” (“Peace of Mind”) by Georges Courteline, as part of a program presented by “The Sketch Ensemble” under the direction of Yosef Milo (October 1944), which laid the foundation for the Cameri theater. See: Laor, Alterman, 302–300.

3 King Solomon and Shalmal the Cobbler

In retrospect, it appears that the early collaborations between Alterman and Gronemann on the three stages of the Matate, the Papillon, and the Wooden Troupe were like appetizers before the grand feast: the play *King Solomon and Shalmal the Cobbler*, written by Gronemann and translated by Alterman. In 1942, 6 years after immigrating, Gronemann finished writing a play titled *The Wise and the Fool: King Solomon and the Cobbler* (*Der Weise und der Narr: König Salomon und der Schuster*). This new play was in rhyming verse (*Versspiel*) with three acts and seven scenes. The plot unfolds a dialectics of role-switching between King Solomon, the mythological wisest man, and a simple shoemaker from the Jerusalem market. They resemble each other strikingly in appearance, to the point of being virtually indistinguishable.²³ Gronemann drew this dramatic quid-pro-quo technique of mistaken identities and its infinite potential for comic situations from the European drama tradition, including Shakespeare's plays (esp. *Twelfth Night*).²⁴ Another model was in the 1881 novel *The Prince and the Pauper* by the American writer Mark Twain.²⁵ These served as his chief sources of inspiration. Unsurprisingly, for an educated Jew with a traditional rabbinic education like Gronemann, the kernel of his plot was inspired by a Faustian legend from the Babylonian Talmud: Tractate Gittin (28a-b) includes the tale of King Solomon, the king of wisdom, being replaced by Ashmedai, the king of demons, after Solomon required Ashmedai's services to construct the Temple.

In the German original, the cobbler is called "Schemadai," a name Gronemann derived from the Talmudic "Ashmedai." That the name "Shalmal" appears only in Alterman's Hebrew translation is no coincidence, considering that this neologism results from its phonetic resemblance with the Hebrew name for Solomon: "Shlomo."²⁶

23 * [For an analysis of Gronemann's dramaturgy of dialectical role switching with regard to his plays *Jacob and Christian* and *King Solomon and Shalmal the Cobbler*, s. Kühne, "Of the Two" (fn. 5).]

24 * [For Gronemann's impression of Habima's production of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, which informs the dramatic blueprint for his *Queen of Sheba*, see: Kühne, *Die Zionistische Komödie*, 323–324.]

25 * [Cf. Dorit Yerushalmi, "The Utterance of Shoemaking: Cobblers on the Israeli Stage," in *Jews and Shoes*, edited by Edna Nahshon (Oxford: Berg, 2008), 181–94, here: 184. For Gronemann's inspirations in humorist world literature, s. Sammy Gronemann, "Jüdischer Witz und Humor (1945)", in GKG, Vol. 6, 300–313.]

26 See: H.N. Bialik, Y.H. Ravnitzky: "ספר האגדה" [*The Book of Legends*] (Tel Aviv: Dvir Publishing 1987), Section 30 ("שלמה – מלך והדיוט") [Shlomo – King and Commoner]], Subsections 122–124. Sources cited: Tractate Gittin 68, Tanchuma HaKadum, Tanchuma Va'era, Shemot Rabbah 6. * [In this manner, the character of the fool, which Shalmal embodies was also located in the tradition of the Shlemihl. For a discussion of the protagonist's name change in Alterman's translation, see: Dov Sadan, "בין שמדי לשלמי" [Between Schemadai and Shalmal], in *מחברות אלטרמן* [*Alterman's Writings*], (Tel Aviv: Kibbuz Hameuchad, 1977), 230–45. For the historic role, which Gronemann's comedy plays in the Shlemihl-tradition, refer to Sidra DeKoven's Essay in this Naharaim issue.]

The premier of *King Solomon and Shalmal the Cobbler* (*Melekh Shlomo veShalmal haSandlar*) took place at the Ohel Theater, the Jewish workers' theater of Palestine, on January 7, 1943.²⁷ Prior to the performance, the play was published in German and Hebrew in two separate booklets by the *Mo'adim* publishing house, founded by Margot Klausner, who specialized in the publication of theater plays.²⁸ Thereby, the German subtitle (*König Salomo und der Schuster*) became the title of the Hebrew version.

A comparison between these two versions reveals, on the one hand, Grone-mann's talent and skill as a playwright, able to carve out a well-made comedy from the Talmudic legend and imbue it with a critical spectrum of social and philosophical messages. On the other hand, it exposes Alterman's thoughtfulness as a translator with an inexhaustible talent for poetic innovation, witty, playful dialogs, and couplets. Alterman's style drew much from the Hebrew Bible, primarily from the books featuring King Solomon, as well as from rabbinic literature, traditional commentaries, and the style of medieval liturgical poets. In this manner, he could root Gronemann's German text in the linguistic realm of traditional Hebrew literature in which the plot also takes place.²⁹

3.1 The 1943 Ohel Production

The person responsible for the play's production was Moshe Halevi, the founder and director of the Ohel-Theater, which worked to promote biblical drama and was as a crucial stage in the development of Hebrew theater in Palestine. In his book *My*

²⁷ For material on the performance, see ICDPA (sign. 18.3.9). *[S.a. GKG, Vol. 1, 482–486.]

²⁸ For the original publications, see: Sammy Gronemann, *Der Weise und der Narr. König Salomo und der Schuster. Ein heiteres Versspiel in sieben Bildern*. (Tel Aviv: Moadim, 1942); Idem. *שלמה המלך ושלמי הסנדלר* [King Solomon and Shalmal the Cobbler]. Translated by Nathan Alterman (Tel Aviv: Moadim, 1942). The Hebrew version is introduced by the following statement: "To mark the Ohel-premiere of 'King Solomon and Shalmal the Cobbler' by Sammy Gronemann, 'Moadim' publishing is presenting this play, which is an interesting attempt to integrate a new kind of entertainment [pleasantness] into our dramatic literature." It should be noted that the original German play was republished in the first volume of the German edition of Sammy Gronemann's collected writings (see above, Note 2): Sammy Gronemann, "Der Weise und der Narr", GKG, vol. 1. With a foreword by Jakob Hensing; introduction and commentaries by Jan Kühne, 145–194, 482–486. *[For a comparison between the different forewords, to the German and the Hebrew version of the play respectively, see Kühne, *Die zionistische Komödie*, 68–69, s.a. 81.]

²⁹ See in this context the comprehensive article by Dov Sadan, "Between Schemadai and Shalmal" (fn. 22). Also, refer to Deborah Gilula's article: "עיונים ב'שלמה המלך ושלמי הסנדלר': אלטרמן, המתרגם: עיונים ב'שלמה המלך ושלמי הסנדלר'", in *Hebrew – A Living Language (II.) Studies on the Language in its Social and Cultural Contexts*, edited by Rina Ben-Shahar and Gideon Toury (Tel Aviv: Hidekel, 1999), 59–74.

Ways on the Stage, Halevi wrote: “I have always loved from the bottom of my heart biblical plays pure and faithful to their source.” Although Gronemann’s play “was not a pure biblical play, but a modern comedy in biblical clothing,” he found a solution in producing it as “a contemporary musical comedy.” According to his account, Alterman, the translator, greatly assisted him in this endeavor and “not only translated the play as it was, but also added successful couplets in biblical spirit and style.”³⁰

Halevi’s other collaborators in the 1943 production were the composer Emanuel Amiran-Pougatchov, the set designer Genia Berger, and the choreographer Ruth Motes, all of whom were prominent figures in the theater world of the pre-state period.³¹ The Serbia-born, celebrated character actor Simcha Chekhalov – among the founding members of the Ohel and infamous also for his love affair with Avraham Shlonsky’s wife Lucia – played the complex double role of the main protagonist. It consisted of playing two roles: that of Solomon and Shalmi, thus, at times, encompassing in fact four roles.

The play *King Solomon and Shalmi the Cobbler* premiered at the height of the Second World War and the Holocaust, at an unprecedented historic low point in the history of the Yishuv: two months before, at the end of November 1942, terrible reports of the Holocaust reached Palestine, that in Europe the systematic annihilation of the Jewish People was underway. These reports arrived through Reuters and were fully accredited by the Jewish Agency. The estimated number noted by the newspapers assumed that more than a million Jews were immediately affected. On November 24, *Haaretz* published a front-page article under the headline “Annihilation,” and the Yishuv leadership declared a national mourning. On November 27, Alterman published in the “Moments” section of the newspaper a poem titled “Of All the Nations,” which was the fiercest protest heard in the Yishuv in the face of the horrors of this genocide. It must be noted that none of this interfered with the preparations at the *Ohel* to produce Gronemann’s musical comedy, including actors, musicians, and dancers. And so, in juxtaposition to the dire news, Alterman appeared as a bold poet protesting, expressing the world’s acceptance of the death of the Jewish people.

You, who have chosen us of all children
to be slaughtered before the throne of Your glory,
You are the one to collect our blood in jugs –
for there is none other,
none to collect it but You.

³⁰ Moshe Halevi, דרכי עלי במות [My Ways on the Stage]. (Tel Aviv: Masadah, 1954), 202.

³¹ The manuscript of the score composed by Emanuel Amiran-Pougatchov is located in the Israeli Music Archive at Tel Aviv University. There are no recordings available of the music included in the performance.

At the same time, in his song written for Gronemann's play, Alterman, as the translator, prophesies before that same audience in an entirely different style:

Such a thing has not been seen,
such a thing has not been heard,
such a thing has never been,
a scandal this absurd!
And yet, it is not too subtle:
Solomon has a double.³²

The play was warmly received by critics, who lauded the performers, but highlighted the accomplishment of two individuals in particular – the playwright Gronemann and the translator Alterman, mentioned almost in the same breath. Haim Gamzu, theater critic for *Haaretz*, notes that Gronemann succeeded in creating the desired fusion between entertainment and educating socio-philosophical ideas, whereby “through laughter the spectator learns many truths and gains insight into the heart of various problems.” But Gamzu was surprised by Alterman's contribution: “Natan Alterman greatly contributed to the play's success with his translation [...] Alterman rendered the text colloquially, less philosophical, and more entertaining. After comparing the translation to the original, it can be argued that this is a new creation, more than just a free adaptation.”³³ Leah Goldberg wrote in *Davar* that Gronemann embodies three qualities that make this play successful: “practical wisdom, knowledge of the stage, and witty humor.” Further on she described the play as an event that is “soulfully spirited, wittily amusing and very pleasantly entertaining,” while “much of this feeling owed to Alterman's brilliant translation.”³⁴ But more than anyone else, Sharia Shapira, theater critic for the *Haboker* newspaper, viewed the duo Gronemann/Alterman as one single appearance: “Natan Alterman translated Sammy Gronemann's composition carefully by combining linguistic finesse and flashes of humorous wordplay,” he wrote, and added: “One wonders where Gronemann's wise humor ends and Alterman's sharp wit begins.”³⁵

32 Nathan Alterman: *הטור השביעי [The Seventh Column]*, (Tel Aviv: Am Oved 1948), 9 (and in subsequent editions); Gronemann, “King Solomon and Shalmal the Cobbler” (fn. 24), 10. S.a.: Laor, Alterman (fn.), 288–284. *[Transl. J.K.]

33 Haim Gamzu: “King Solomon and Shalmal the Cobbler,” *Haaretz* (15.1.1943). *[S.a. GKG, Vol. 1, 485. For a discussion of Gamzu's statement, its origins, transformations, and consequences, see the chapter “Die Alterman-Gronemann Debatte”, in: Kühne, *Die zionistische Komödie*, 67–82 (Ch. 1.4.5).]

34 Lea Goldberg: “‘King Solomon and Shalmal the Cobbler’ at ‘Ohel’”, *Davar* (15.1.1943).

35 S. Shariyah (Shariyah Shapira): “‘King Solomon and Shalmal the Cobbler’ at ‘Ohel’”, *Haboker* (19.1.1943). S.a.: A. Feuerstein, “King Solomon and Shalmal the Cobbler”, *Gazit* 5: 6 (February 1943), 36. *[S.a. GKG, Vol. 1, 498–499.]

King Solomon and Shalmal the Cobbler was performed night after night, at times twice the same evening, first at the Beit Arlozorov in Tel Aviv, which was the permanent home of the Ohel from January 1940, but also in other cities and settlements throughout the country. The theater traveled from Tel Aviv to Netanya, Hadera, Kfar Saba, Haifa, and Ness Ziona in the week of the premiere. Later, it was performed almost in every part of the Yishuv – in Jerusalem, Haifa, Ramat Gan, Petah Tikvah, Raanana, and in the labor settlements, in the valleys and the Galilee, and came even to Nahalal and Kfar Masaryk.³⁶ On June 19, 1943, the Ohel arranged a special program to celebrate the 100th performance. The play ran until April 1944, totaling 300 performances, thus becoming a rival to another play presented by the Ohel that refused to step down from the stage, namely “The Good Soldier Švejk.”³⁷

In his book on the *Ohel Theater*, Yehuda Gabbai mentions that “King Solomon and Shalmal the Cobbler” also toured abroad, but without noting where exactly and when.³⁸ Yet we know that the play was staged, for example, at the New York-based Hebrew theater *Pargod*, which was run by the Hebrew Labor Federation of America, indicating that the ripples of the Ohel’s production reached far. This American premiere of *King Solomon and Shalmal the Cobbler* by Sammy Gronemann, translated by Natan Alterman (as advertised), took place on May 13, 1945, at the Master Theater in New York (103 Riverside Drive West) just days after the official end of the Second World War. The new production was directed by Erwin Piscator, one of the greatest directors of the period, with the assistance of Raikin Ben Ari, who was among Habima actors who quit the company while visiting New York, where he founded the *Pargod* Theater. Ben Ari would later become a mentor to actors such as Marlon Brando, Tony Curtis, and Walter Matthau.³⁹

36 This is based on advertisements by the theater, published in the daily newspapers during 1944–1943.

37 The play “The Good Soldier Švejk” by Jaroslav Hašek, adapted for the stage by Max Brod and translated by Avigdor Hameiri, was staged at the Ohel Theater starring Meir Margalit, and run a total of 850 times. See: “Margalit Again in the Role of Švejk,” *Davar* (29.7.1971). *[S.a. Sebastian Schirrmeyer, *Das Gastspiel. Friedrich Lobe und das hebräische Theater 1933–1950*. (Berlin: Neofelis, 2012), 57–88.]

38 Yehuda Gabbai, סיפור המעשה – “אהל” תיאטרון [The “Ohel” Theater – The Story of its Making], (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Culture and Education 1983), 61.

39 On the “Pargod”-Theater, see: Edna Nahshon: “A Hebrew Take on Shylock on the New York Stage”, *European Judaism* 51: 2 (Autumn 2018), 159–164. S.a. the advertisement in *Hadoar* 25: 26 (11.5.1943). *[For a documentation of the activities of the Hebrew Art Committee and the Pargod Theater, especially regarding Piscator’s New York production of Gronemann’s play, see Central Zionist Archives (CZA, sign. A135/57).]

3.2 A Sequel: *The Queen of Sheba*

The success of the “biblical comedy” – as *King Solomon and Shalmi the Cobbler* was advertised by the Ohel – encouraged Gronemann to try the same formula again, which turned out to be successful. This time, Gronemann chose to focus on the story of the Queen of Sheba, whose visit to King Solomon is hinted at in the seventh and final scene of *King Solomon and Shalmi the Cobbler*. Like the previous play, *The Queen of Sheba* (*Die Königin von Saba*) was written as a rhyming comedy (“Versspiel”), with the action taking place entirely in King Solomon’s palace in Jerusalem, where the Queen arrives to challenge him with riddles. The play premiered at the Cameri Theater on August 25, 1951. The translation task was entrusted to Haim Hefer, the music was composed by Alexander Abramovich, later known as Sasha Argov, and the director was Gershon Plotkin. The renowned Israeli actress Hannah Meron played the role of the Queen of Sheba. Nevertheless, the spark that had ignited the success of *King Solomon and Shalmi the Cobbler* failed to light the same flame, and the play was staged only 28 times. Although the reviews were generally enthusiastic, the critics, one after another, were estranged by the translation: “Though, there’s a sense that Haim Hefer’s translation is lively, but too tenuous and thin,” wrote Y. N. Neiman, the theater critic for *Davar*. Also Dr. Emil Feuerstein, the critic of *Hatzofeh*, judged it unfavorably: “Haim Hefer’s translation is occasionally brilliant, but inconsistent. It seems to us that his command of German is insufficient to capture Gronemann’s subtle nuances and thrusts.”⁴⁰

It turned out to be the last play by Gronemann produced during his lifetime. He died age 77 in Tel Aviv, at the Danziger hospital, on March 6, 1952, and was buried in a widely attended funeral at the Nahalat Yitzhak cemetery. “Our much-beloved personality – Sammy Gronemann – has left us,” wrote Haim Shorer on *Davar*’s front page the next day, the article accompanied by an illustration of Gronemann’s round face and pleasant expression, as he held a cigar in his mouth. In the list of his plays mentioned in the article, *King Solomon and Shalmi the Cobbler* was, of course, included, but no mention was made of *The Queen of Sheba*.⁴¹

3.3 The 1964 Cameri Production

Gronemann’s death did not end his ongoing encounter with Alterman. On February 19, 1960, the Artistic Committee of the Cameri Theater convened to make several

⁴⁰ Quoted in: Moti Zeira, סיפור חיים, חיים כאן: [Here I am: The Life of Haim Hefer], (Ben Shemen: Keter 2021), 118. S.a. Mittelman, Sammy Gronemann’s Theater Plays (fn. 6), 164–166; ICDPA, sign. 8.4.6.

⁴¹ Haim Shorer, “סמי גרונמן,” *Davar* 7.3.1952.

decisions about the theater's production plans. The first item in the meeting's protocol indicates that the theater had requested the production rights for two plays: Berthold Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and Gronemann's *King Solomon and Shalmal the Cobbler*. After Gronemann's passing, the rights to the play were held by the publishing house Moadim, which had published the play both in German and Hebrew and was owned by Margot Klausner.⁴² More than a year later, the Cameri's Artistic Committee discussed the play again. A meeting protocol dated July 21, 1961, notes under point 8 that Shmuel Bunim would direct his choice of one of two plays: *The School of Gossip* or *King Solomon and Shalmal the Cobbler*. Point 10 notes, "it was decided that Gershon (Plotkin) will have to adapt 'King Solomon' in collaboration with Alterman." At the same meeting, according to point six, the cast and first reading of Alterman's *Kinneret Kinneret* was determined, whose production that year was intended to mark the completion of the Cameri Theater's new building at the intersection of Frischmann and Dizengoff streets.⁴³

However, the decisions of the artistic committee took time to implement. The Cameri first staged two original plays by Alterman: *Kinneret Kinneret* and *The Ghosts' Inn*. Only then did preparations begin to produce *King Solomon and Shalmal the Cobbler*. Alongside Shmuel Bunim as director, Sasha Argov was chosen to be the composer, Anna Sokolov was hired as the choreographer, Arie Navon painted the sets, and a talented young twenty-nine-year-old actor named Illy Gorlitzky was cast in the leading role, replacing the legendary Simcha Chekhalov, who was already 42 at the time of the production. The plays' text was also amended, mainly through the addition of nine completely new couplets to the previous version, in addition to expansions and supplements. The objective was clear: In 1964, the Giora Godik Theater in Jaffa opened with "My Fair Lady," which alerted theater financiers to a pressing commercial demand for musicals, which enjoyed immense popularity at the time but lacked local Hebrew-Israeli musicals. Thus, *King Solomon and Shalmal the Cobbler* emerged as the first Israeli musical, seemingly the joint creation of Gronemann and Alterman.

42 * [On Margot Klausner, especially concerning her relationship to Gronemann, see: Jan Kühne and Shelly Zer-Zion, "The German Archive of the Hebrew Habima: Bureaucracy and Identity." *Naharaim* 7: 1–2 (2013): 239–60; Shelly Zer-Zion, "The Archive of the Habima Secretariat: Margot Klausner and the Making of a National Stage." *Dubnow Institute Yearbook XVII* (2018): 497–516; Lewy, *Zwischen allen Bühnen* (fn. 7), 336; GKG, Vol. 1, XVII, 475–476, 483–490.]

43 The protocols of the artistic committee are kept in the administrative archives of the Cameri theater at the ICDPA. Also, the Alterman Archive at the Kipp-Center (sign. 7.5.6) contains a legal agreement dated 15.2.1964 between the Cameri Theater and Moadim Publishing, which grants the theater permission to stage "King Solomon and Shalmal the Cobbler", definitely indicating that the rights were in the hands of Moadim Publishing. * [For legal documents and correspondences by Moadim concerning Gronemann's play, s.a. CZA (sign. A493/135).]

But was it really a “joint creation”? Indeed, in the early advertisements leading up to the production, the Cameri marketed the play as a collaboration between Gronemann and Alterman, primarily for commercial considerations. As original Hebrew plays enjoyed public funding at the time, emphasizing Alterman’s role as one of the play’s creators rather than as a mere translator increased the theater’s chances of obtaining such support. Perhaps the intention here was also to enhance Alterman’s reputation, as he was the Cameri’s playwright in residence at the time. In her research, Deborah Gilulah cites a letter sent to the Public Council for Culture and the Arts, explicitly stating that in addition to his translations, Alterman contributed about 40 percent of the play by his writing – a claim with no apparent basis, as Gilulah’s philological comparison of both versions has shown.

Moreover, Gilulah unearthed a letter sent to the Cameri on July 16, 1964, on behalf of Moadim, demanding that the theater immediately cease misleading the public, since “Mr. Alterman is the translator and author of the songs, but not, indeed, the author of the play.”⁴⁴ The letter was signed by Manfred Geis, the theater critic of the German language daily *Jediot Chadashot*, who, by virtue of his occupation, was close to Gronemann and a loyal supporter of his. The implicit threat of legal action for intellectual property theft did its job, and from then on, all subsequent publicity accompanying the production emphasized a clear distinction between Gronemann as the playwright and Alterman as the one who translated it into Hebrew.⁴⁵

3.4 Reception and Legacy

The new musical version of *King Solomon and Shalmai the Cobbler* premiered in Tel Aviv, in the Cameri’s new auditorium on September 12, 1964.⁴⁶ The response was sensational: Critics spared no praise, audiences flocked in droves to see it, and the newspapers were filled with front-page articles adorned with portraits of the show’s

⁴⁴ Both letters are quoted in: Deborah Gilulah, *Alterman and the Hebrew Stage* (fn. 8), 25–27. My attempts to locate the original letters did not yield any results. * [Cf. CZA, sign. A493/135].

⁴⁵ The Alterman archive (Kipp-center, sign. 15: 5–28) contains a 11-page, typewritten document of the Cameri, into which all of the couplets of 1964 version were copied, including comments such as: “in the original”, “addition not contained in the original”. This could support the claim that Alterman was not just a translator but a co-author. * [Cf. Gilulah, “Alterman, the Translator” (fn. 25), whose meticulous comparative study shows that Alterman’s creative contribution – in addition to his loyal translation – was limited to the couplets he composed for the 1964 musical version. The mentioned document is significant, because it raises the question of the extent to which Gronemann has provided Alterman with ideas and drafts for the latter’s couplets, too.]

⁴⁶ The premiere was preceded by four performances staged by the Cameri as part of the Third Israel Festival for Music and Drama, in August 1964.

stars – Ili Gorlitzky, Yona Atari, and Rachel Atas.⁴⁷ Soon after, the music label *Hed Artzi* quickly produced a recording of Alterman's couplets set to the enchanting melodies of Sasha Argov, one of the great composers of the modern Hebrew Folksong:

Solomon on his throne in his majestic place,
Oh, my lonely nights, and oh, my lonely days,
Everyone knows his own well-being,
But, alas, no one asks how I am feeling.⁴⁸

In that same year, the Cameri won the award for the best original performance of 1965, awarded by the Public Council for Culture and Arts for this production, with the prize explicitly stating that the play was written “by Sammy Gronemann, adapted and translated by Natan Alterman.”⁴⁹

Performances abroad followed soon after *King Solomon and Shalmay the Cobbler* was featured at the international Theater of Nations festival held at the Sarah Bernard Great-Hall at the Théâtre de la Ville in Paris (1965), at the festival “The World Season in Theater” held at the Aldwych Theatre in London (1967), and the Théâtre Port-Royal in Montreal, as part of the “Expo 67.”⁵⁰ Photographs by Yaakov Haramati recently uncovered in the Cameri archive show President Zalman Shazar with his wife and entourage arriving to watch the much-talked-about performance while mingling backstage with Alterman and the actors. When the president, who was amazed by the show, asked how all this happened, Alterman replied (according to the testimony of Gorlitzky): “A ... a ... a ... a miracle happened!”⁵¹

47 See, for example: Emanuel Bar-Kadma: “המלך והסנדלר”, [The King and the Cobbler], *Yedioth Ahronoth* (4.9.1964); Moshe Natan: “מעשה בלמך מלך ומדומלך” [The Story of a Foolish King and a Fake King], *Davar Hashavua* 33 (14.8.1964); Michael Ohad: “המלך וכפילו” [The King and his Double], *Haaretz* (7.8.1964).

48 The full version of the play as performed by the Cameri cast appeared a decade later edited and with an afterword by Menachem Dorman as part of the edition of Alterman's writings. See: Sammy Gronemann: *שלמה המלך ושלמי הסנדלר* [*King Solomon and Shalmay the Cobbler*], translated and added songs by: Natan Alterman (Tel Aviv: Kibbutz HaMe'uchad, 1975). See page 25–26 for the quoted passage (שיר השיכור (The Drunkard's Song)). *[Transl. J.K.] The record of the 14 couplets sung by the Cameri ensemble was published by Hed Artzi, 1964. **שלמה המלך ושלמי הסנדלר* – *The King and the Cobbler* (Ramat Gan, Hed Arzi Label 1964)].

49 For archival material on the 1964 Cameri production, see ICDPA (sign. 7.5.6). *[S.a. Gilulah, Alterman, the Translator (fn. 25); Kühne, Die zionistische Komödie, 74–80.]

50 For information on the theater's foreign productions, included in the internal document of the Cameri from April 16, 1967 (fn. 41), see Alterman archive (sign. 15: 5–27).

51 My thanks go to Yoram Amir, the director of the Cameri archive, who exposed me to these photographs. I heard about President Shazar's statement also from Ili Gorlitzky.

Particular attention should be paid to a review by Haim Gamzu about the 1964 version of *King Solomon and Shalmal the Cobbler* in *Haaretz* newspaper on September 25 that year. In a somewhat didactic manner, Gamzu explains to his readers that the musical was the successor of the operetta and that in this production, we witness the beginning of the Israeli musical, even if it is still doubtful whether this production did qualify as a musical. As someone who had seen and reviewed the 1943 production, Gamzu asserted that Gronemann's "comedy in rhymes and seven pictures" retained its refreshing charm, appearing almost untouched by the passage of time. But the gist of his words was directed at Alterman: "Nathan Alterman's 'translation for the theater' [quotation marks in the original] is essentially a measured adaptation considering its wittiness, flexibility in verbal inventions, and discovery of unexpected interconnections. This adaptation is more than a mere reproduction. It is a recreation." He concludes: "From here, we may understand the greatness of [Alterman's] contribution to the theater – as a translator and arranger."⁵² This sentiment carries significant weight, particularly considering Gamzu's recent aloofness towards Alterman, the dramaturge, evident in his icy remarks regarding *Kinneret Kinneret*. Moreover, his decisive critique, aimed squarely at *The Ghosts' Inn* and the Cameri, sparked a public scandal and ignited numerous debates on the boundaries of criticism. This incident marked the demise of the once close and intimate bond between Alterman and Gamzu, who had shared a profound camaraderie for years.⁵³

And what do the numbers say? During the years 1964–1965, the Cameri staged *King Solomon and Shalmal the Cobbler* 400 times. The play was revived in 1966 and performed 109 times. In 1971, the same play was staged, with a slightly different cast, and ran for 121 performances under the auspices of the Lilac Theater. In 1982, as part of free open-air summer performances held at Park Hayarkon, the play was performed 15 times. In 2005, the play was renewed at Habima Theater, directed by Ilan Ronen, starring Avi Kushnir in the title role, and was performed 287 times. In 2019, the Beit Zvi School for the Performing Arts in Ramat Gan announced that "the beloved Israeli musical is returning to the stage in a new, fresh, and multi-participant production," marking the school's 58th year opening.⁵⁴ The director of the play was Zviki Levin. In a general calculation of plays (including productions abroad), Gronemann's work, in Alterman's translation, has been staged slightly more than 1000 times. This number, thus, appears to be responsible for the recognition of *King*

⁵² Haim Gamzu: "שלמה המלך ושלמי הסנדלר – ב'קאמר'" [King Solomon and Shalmal the Cobbler in the Cameri], *Haaretz* (25.9.1964). All newspaper excerpts and reviews that appeared on the occasion of the Cameri production are preserved at the ICDPA (sign. 7.6.5.).

⁵³ Laor, Alterman, 610–611, 639–647.

⁵⁴ According to the website of the Beit Zvi School for performing arts.

Solomon and Shalmai the Cobbler as the most successful Israeli theater production of all time, as acknowledged in numerous publications.⁵⁵

While the production was still running its first round, Alterman signed a contract with the Cameri for another play, *Queen Esther*, which premiered on February 2, 1966.⁵⁶ Whether knowingly or not, Alterman attempted to replicate what he was experiencing at the time – a comedy in rhymes based on a story from biblical sources (the book of *Esther*), following the proven method of Gronemann, accompanied by the music of Sasha Argov. However, *Queen Esther* was a resounding failure and was taken off the stage after 36 performances.⁵⁷ This serves as evidence of Gronemann's prowess as a playwright – a talent distinctively characteristic of him, setting him apart from Alterman.

4 Conclusions

Even though, Alterman was the ultimate translator, arranger, and couplet writer – as described by Gamzu – he was not the playwright. A similar experience occurred with *The Queen of Sheba*, where, in Alterman's absence from the production (the translator, as remembered, was Haim Heffer), the show lasted for a short period of only 28 performances, despite Sasha Argov being in charge of the music. This indicates that the partnership between Gronemann and Alterman was a unique formula for success, one that neither could achieve individually. Both benefited from their combined forces: Thanks to Alterman, the Tel Aviv-based author Gronemann, who wrote in German, became an inseparable part of the legacy of Hebrew theater. Thanks to Gronemann, Alterman's stature as a playwright was enhanced. Yet, despite the facts laid out above, the Israeli public tended to appropriate *King Solomon and Shalmai the Cobbler* for Alterman's contribution, in contrast to his other theatrical works

55 These figures were provided by Yoram Amir from the Cameri archive, Rami Samo from the Habimah archive, and the Beit Zvi secretariat. Additionally, refer to the document cited in note 49. Haim Hefer's archives at the National Library (ARC.4* 1938 04 48) contains two distinct scripts authored by him in the late sixties, both deriving from *King Solomon and Shalmai the Cobbler*. One of these scripts was intended for a film production, to be directed by Menachem Golan. The script's introduction, composed in English, states: "Noah Films Ltd. has initiated pre-production for 'The King and the Cobbler,' a new Israeli film based on one of the country's longest-running stage productions." This serves as yet another testament to the enduring impact and widespread recognition garnered by the play. * [For Haim Hefer's movie script, s.a. Jan Kühne, "Das schönste Theater bleibt doch das Gericht": Todesstrafe und Talion im Drama Sammy Gronemanns," *Aschkenas* 24: 2 (2014), 305–23, here 319–320; GKG, Vol. 1, 483.]

56 Natan Alterman, "אסתר המלכה" [Queen Esther], *Plays* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad 1973), 261–415.

57 Laor, Alterman, 695–703.

staged successively between 1961 and 1966 (*Kinneret Kinneret*, *The Ghosts' Inn*, *The Pythagoras Trial*, and *Queen Esther*) that were not received with great success.

Ultimately, we reap the rewards of this achievement: *King Solomon and Shalmi the Cobbler* stands as a cornerstone of Israeli performing arts and culture, arguably the most beloved and celebrated Hebrew musical ever staged. Its significance can be likened to iconic musicals like *Oklahoma* and *West Side Story* in American culture. This was achieved by these two, whose paths had crossed at the Cabaret of the Matatē: Sammy Gronemann and Nathan Alterman.⁵⁸

Translated by Ori Weissberg and Jan Kühne

⁵⁸ Without, of course, belittling the major role of the composer Sasha Argov.