

Chulyot

Journal of Yiddish Research

No. 2

Summer 1994

University of Haifa

Tel-Aviv University

Faculty of Humanities

Table of Contents*

The Chicken and the Egg – An Editorial	5
S.L.: On the Treasures of Our Literature	7
Mendele Mokher Seforim: Der Beibak (Original Yiddish)	9
Mendele Mokher Seforim: "The Marmot" (<i>Der Beibak</i> , in Hebrew translation)	19
Shmuel Verses: Isaac Meir Dik's Yiddish Translation of Erter's <i>Gilgul Nefesh</i>	29
Yoav Elstein: The Yiddish Story of the Birth of the Baal Shem Tov: A Forgery or an Authentic Tradition?	51
Sofi Grace-Pollack: Shomer's First Yiddish Stories	69
Zelik Kalmanovitch: A Festive Evening Dedicated to Sholom Aleichem in the Vilna Ghetto in 1942	89
Sholom Aleichem: <i>Alemen Glaykh</i> (Original Yiddish)	91
Sholom Aleichem: "Equal All Around" (<i>Alemen Glaykh</i> in Hebrew translation)	111
Seth Wolitz: Sholom Aleichem's 'Menachem Mendel' and Ilf and Petrov's 'Twelve Chairs'	127
Yehiel Szeintuch: <i>Di Yidishe Melukhe oder Weizmann Der</i> <i>Tsveyter</i> : An Anti-Zionist–Utopian Comedy by Aharon Zeitlin	141
Shalom Luria: A Magical Mini-Myth (An Analysis of Der Nister's <i>Mayslekh in Ferzn</i>)	151
Michael Zlotin: A Poetic Greeting from Avraham Reizen to a Friend	169
Biliah Rubinstein: Narrative Constructs in the Works of Bashevis Singer and their links to the Kabbala	173
Heather Valencia: Siberia in Two Poems of Avraham Sutzkever	181
Rina Lapidus: The Metaphor-in-the-Riddle Genre: Sub-Categories in the Yiddish Riddle	197

* Edited and translated by Nitza Ben-Dov

From the Bookshelf

Leonard Prager: The Fifth Book of the Collection *Field of Yiddish* 211

Haya Bar-Yitzchak: 'A Trip in the Footsteps of a Story'

On Sarah Zfatman's *Between Ashkenaz and Sepharad*, The
Jewish Tale in the Middle Ages 219

Shalom Luria: 'An Impressive High Quality Anthology' (A Review of
Yiddishe Literatur in Neintsentn Yorhundert, selected and with an
introduction by Khone Shmeruk, edited by Hava Tomyansky) 225

Document

'Bund' Passover Haggada, Geneva 1900, original Yiddish text and
translation 233

Haya Bar-Yitzchak: Notes on the 'Bund' Passover Haggada 255

Abstracts*

Mendele Mokher Sforim's "The Marmot"

Mendele Mokher Seforim's Yiddish story *Der Beibak*, 'The Marmot,' is narrated by 'Crazy Yisrulik,' who is also the narrator of Mendele's *Di Klyatshe*, 'The Mare.' The story was intended to be part of a 'madman's library,' and the appearance of Yisrulik, the second of the various narrative figures employed during his career by Mendele, signals a shift in Mendele's aesthetic orientation from a realistic to a more imaginative mode.

In this story Yisrulik is granted his request to be metamorphized into a marmot, in which form he encounters the archangel Gabriel and has a conversation with him. The text of the story has been copied from the Soviet Yiddish newspaper *Shtern*, Volume 1, pp. 6-12 (1936), where it is introduced by A. Vorobeichik with the explanation that it was found in the Mendele Museum in Odessa. Unfortunately, the museum and its contents were destroyed in World War II.

Shmuel Verses

A.M. Dik's Yiddish translation of Erter's *Gilgul Nefesh*

This article examines Isaac Meir Dik's 1869 translation, published under the title *Der Gilgul* ("The Transmigrated Soul"), of Yitzchak Erter's 1845 Hebrew story *Gilgul Nefesh*. Attention is paid to the difference between the two texts and to the translator's additions and omissions. Dik's translation emphasizes the story's realistic elements at the expense of its allegoric ones, and fleshes it out with various details of Eastern-European Jewish life. The biblical allusions that abound in Erter's prose, generally with satiric or parodic intent, were deleted by Dik. Dik's version of Erter's *Gilgul Nefesh* stresses its story line, thus aiming it at the level of sophistication and biblical knowledge possessed

by the average Yiddish reader. The article also investigates Dik's incorporation of Hebrew words and phrases into his Yiddish prose, distinguishing between those that were part of the spoken Yiddish of Lithuanian Jewry and those that derive solely from Erter's Hebrew text.

Yoav Elstein

The Yiddish Story of the Birth of the Baal Shem Tov: A Forgery or an Authentic Tradition?

This paper deals with a Yiddish story recounting the birth of the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism, that was discovered in the "Kherson Genizah." This was a collection of documents formerly in the possession of Rabbi Israel of Ridzin that was confiscated upon his arrest by the Russian government and stored in the State Archives in Kherson. After the communist revolution, these archives were broken up and dispersed in various places. Although scholars who have examined the documents in question have questioned their authenticity, the Hasidic movement of Habad has continued to consider them remnants of an esoteric and profound Hasidic tradition.

The intricate fabula of the story can be summarized as follows: Once upon a time there lived in Safed a hidden zaddik who studied Torah with Elijah the prophet. When the zaddik died and ascended to heaven, his soul was ordered to return to this world and "restore" it, which it did by entering the newborn body of the Baal Shem Tov. The tale thus underlines the Baal Shem Tov's twofold nature as a reclusive kabbalist and a public figure.

This article discusses the bipolar tension between invisibility and revelation and demonstrates that this bipolarity is rooted in the kabbalistic approaches of Elkabatz and Cordovero and underlies a parallel story about the Baal Shem that is incorporated in the *Shivhei ha-Besht*. (This story, which has appeared in both Hebrew and Yiddish, was interpreted in a quite different manner by Abraham Rubinstein.)

These parallels are important, for they suggest that even if the text in

question is a late forgery, it retains the poetic conventions and kabbalistic residues of earlier Hasidic tales. This article does not attempt to determine whether or not the story was forged. Rather, it proposes to distinguish between the historian's insistence on authentic evidence and the literary critic's interest in formal literary criteria. Indeed, the same work that is rejected as inauthentic by a historian may be perfectly authentic from a literary point of view. Our story is a test case of this proposition and provides us with valuable insights into the genre of the Hasidic tale.

Sofi Grace-Polack

Shomer's First Yiddish Stories

The best-selling Yiddish writer Shomer is most commonly thought of today as the author of *shund* or popular potboilers, and perhaps also as the subject of Sholom Aleichem's broadside *Shomer's Mishpet* ('Shomer's Trial'), which called for expelling him from the ranks of Yiddish literature. Although adored by his readers, he was universally attacked by the critics.

This article is an attempt to analyze Shomer's first ten stories, written in Vilna in 1876-78. It discusses the author's language and style, and the ways in which he used both realism and humor to attract and entertain his readers.

Zelik Kalmanovitch

A Festive Evening Dedicated to Sholom Aleichem in the Vilna Ghetto in 1942

On the 26th anniversary of Sholom Aleichem's death, an evening was given in his honor in the Vilna Ghetto. In the introductory remarks

addressed to the audience, it was stressed that:

1. Sholom Aleichem is a national author who wrote for the Jewish people with no attempt to put on intellectual airs;

2. That he is at the same time a classic writer of high artistic standards who combined humor, delicate lyricism, and a sure feel for language.

This article describes an unusual gathering, held under trying circumstances, for the best-loved of all Yiddish writers.

Sholom Aleichem

Alemen Glaykh

Sholom Aleichem subtitled this story: 'My Private Utopia.' First serialized in the Warsaw weekly *Yiddishe Folkstsaytung* in 1903, it deals with the revolutionary ideas permeating Jewish society in the Czarist Empire in the years before the 1905 Revolution. The story was republished in various editions of Sholom Aleichem's stories until 1914, but it does not appear in the canonical 28-volume edition of his work.

Alemen Glaykh or 'Equal All Around' is a satirical fantasy about a society that decides to eliminate the gap between wealth and poverty by an equal redistribution of resources, especially money. The result is the disappearance of the incentive to work and the collapse of all vital social services, followed by conflict and bloodshed. Written with Sholom Aleichem's characteristically delicate and teasing humor, the story appears here both in Yiddish and in the Hebrew translation of Aryeh Aharoni.

Seth Wolitz

Sholom Aleichem's 'Menachem Mendel' and Ilf and Petrov's 'Twelve Chairs.'

Sholom Aleichem's comic epistolary novel 'Menachem Mendel' (1892-1909) was a major influence on Ilf and Petrov's Soviet novel 'The Twelve Chairs' (1928). The Yiddish story suggested to Ilf and Petrov not only the possibility of writing a picaresque tale of comic luftmentshn scrambling to make a fortune under the communist economic system, but also that of narrating the characters' adventures through letters written home to their wives. Ilf and Petrov's resort to a Russian Orthodox priest, Father Fyodor, in place of the Jewish Menachem Mendel was consistent with Soviet literary theory of the 20s, which opposed to national cultural typologies the universality of the human condition - in this case, bourgeois greed and get-rich fantasies. 'The Twelve Chairs' marks the first clear evidence of the direct influence of Yiddish literature on a major non-Jewish literary culture and on one of its significant accomplishments, thus demonstrating the recognition and acceptance of Yiddish literature in the early years of the Soviet era.

Yechiel Szeintuch

Di Yiddishe Melukhe Oder Weizmann Der Tzveyter (1934) - An Anti-Zionist-Utopian Comedy by Aharon Zeitlin

In this Yiddish play, the Zionist dream of a Jewish state that gathers the world's Jews together in one country is strongly satirized. Aharon Zeitlin (1898-1973), a major bi-lingual Hebrew-Yiddish writer of this century, himself had an imagination rooted in the Jewish literary tradition of redemption and messianic ideals, and in this thoughtful

comedy he imagined a Second World War five years before it broke out, one in which Hitler proved victorious and compelled the Jews to concentrate in Palestine and create their own state there. Yet by the drama's end this state has proven a failure, and the Zionist anthem *Hatikvah*, 'The Hope,' is being sung by *yordim* emigrating back to the Diaspora.

Zeitlin's criticism of the inability of his contemporaries to commit themselves to a Zionist utopia was by no means a denial of the vitality of the Zionist idea. Rather, it was a condemnation of its superficiality and lack of historical perspective in neglecting the age-old values of the Jewish cultural tradition and its pursuit of social justice. These values are embodied in the drama by the minority of genuine pioneers remaining in Eretz Israel after the debacle - who, the play's ending suggests, may yet prove to be the basis of a genuine new Jewish reality.

This paper presents a literary analysis of Zeitlin's play.

Shalom Luria

A Magical Mini-Myth

Pinchas Kahanovitz, better known by his pen name Der Nister, was an author with symbolistic and even mystical tendencies. He wrote in Yiddish in the Soviet Union and died in the anti-Yiddish Culture Campaign of 1950.

This article deals with one of Der Nister's rhymed children's tales. The story, 'The Kitten's Tale,' was published in the poetic collection *Mayselekh in Ferzn* ('Little Tales in Rhymes') that first appeared in 1918 and subsequently went through three more editions. The third edition (Warsaw, 1918) was illustrated by Marc Chagall.

Through an analysis of 'The Kitten's Tale,' the article seeks to study Der Nister's creative method and the way in which his fertile imagination makes use of miniature myths that leave his readers surprised and baffled.

'The Kitten's Tale' owes its artful tone to its irony and the charm of its miniature figures. The 36-stanza text is given here both in Yiddish and in the author of the article's Hebrew translation, and is illustrated by the author's grandson David Luria.

Michael Zlotin

A Poetic Greeting from Avraham Reizen to a Friend

In a philatelic exhibit relating to the early 20th-century Czarist postal system, the author of this article discovered a Yiddish postcard written by the poet Avraham Reizen and dated October 5, 1906. On this card appear two love poems, each containing two quatrains. The article identifies the recipient of the card, A.L. Yakobovitz, a Hebrew and Yiddish author and poet in his own right. The text of the Yiddish poems is presented alongside a Hebrew translation.

Bilhah Rubinstein

Narrative Constructs in the Works of Bashevis Singer and Their Links to Kabbala

Isaac Bashevis Singer's strong affinity for kabbalistic and folkloristic materials from the world of Jewish mysticism anchors his writing in the social and cultural existence of Polish Jewry. His free use of these materials and assimilation of them into his work is a part of the Yiddish tradition of interpretive translation (*teitsh*). Both when using an existing narrative core and in developing narrative constructs based on kabbalistic symbolism, Singer succeeds in creating something new.

The works of fiction discussed in his article provide examples of how such artistic transformations relocate kabbalistic figures of speech from the symbolic realm to the real world. Through his concrete realization of kabbalistic erotic images, Singer's characters act out

sexual imagery originally intended by the sources he took it from to be purely metaphorical and spiritual.

Heather Valencia

Siberia in Two Poems of Avraham Sutzkever

This essay examines Sutzkever's poem about Siberia, *Shtern in Shney* (1937), and his substantially altered version of it *Sibir*, which he worked on during World War II while in the Vilna Ghetto. Although many critics have regarded the second poem as simply a revision of the first, this essay demonstrates that it was essentially a new creation. Whereas *Shtern in Shney* was an impressionistically presented collage of remembered scenes from childhood, *Sibir* rejected the perspective of adult memory for the mind of the child himself, which is given us in all its immediacy. An analysis of the themes, structure, and imagery of *Sibir*, using *Shtern in Shney* for the purpose of contrast, reveals that the former is Sutzkever's first great metapoetic work, the essential theme of which is the development of poetic consciousness in the self. In this poem, which opens a period of tension between aesthetic and ethical impulses ultimately resolved in *Ode tsu der Toyb*, many of Sutzkever's subsequently recurring images and motifs were first introduced. *Sibir* is thus a seminal work of Sutzkever's early period.

Rina Lapidus

The Metaphor-in-the-Riddle Genre: Sub-categories in the Yiddish Riddle

The article examines sub-categories in the genre of the Yiddish Riddle.

Most riddles, Yiddish ones, too, are constructed according to a fixed pattern whereby the objects described in the question part of the riddle are related by metaphor to their parallels in the solution. Yiddish folklore, however, includes two additional types of riddle less

commonly found elsewhere.

In the first type, called the enigmatic riddle, the metaphor is only partial. Such riddles deal with subjects considered too rude or erotic to be discussed in good company. The partial metaphor signals the listener that the riddle has a grosser or more risqué meaning than what appears on the surface.

The second type is the riddle-joke. Here there is no metaphor at all. These riddles focus upon poking fun at people and accepted values through parody, paradox, irony, and the grotesque and macabre. The absence of metaphor in them serves to emphasize their comic content.

Haya Bar-Yitzchak

Notes on the Bund Passover Haggadah (Geneva 1900)

The Passover Haggadah published by the Jewish Bund in 1900 in Geneva, three years after the party's founding, constitutes a rewriting of the traditional seder in an ideologically secular and socialist mode.

The Geneva Haggadah is published here in a Hebrew translation. It is emphasized that it is not an entirely fresh creation, since it was preceded by two similar attempts: a socialist Haggadah published in London in 1887 (though it bears the imprint of the Ramm Brothers publishing house in Vilna and even the imprimatur of the Russian censor, dated January 23, 1886), another that appeared in New York in 1896. The London Haggadah, apparently the first of its kind, was composed, according to Zalman Reizen's 1928–29 lexicon, by Leon Zolotkoff and Benjamin Feygnboym. The most acerbic of the three, it is openly hostile and contemptuous toward the "brutal oppression" of the capitalist system.

The author of this article compares the texts of these three late-19th-century socialist Haggadahs, analyzes their diversions from the traditional liturgy, and comments on the ways in which they influenced the subsequent development of non-traditional kibbutz Haggadahs in Palestine.