

Post Script: A Hundred Years since Sholem Aleichem's Demise

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The year 2016 was the centennial year of the death of the Yiddish greatest humorist.

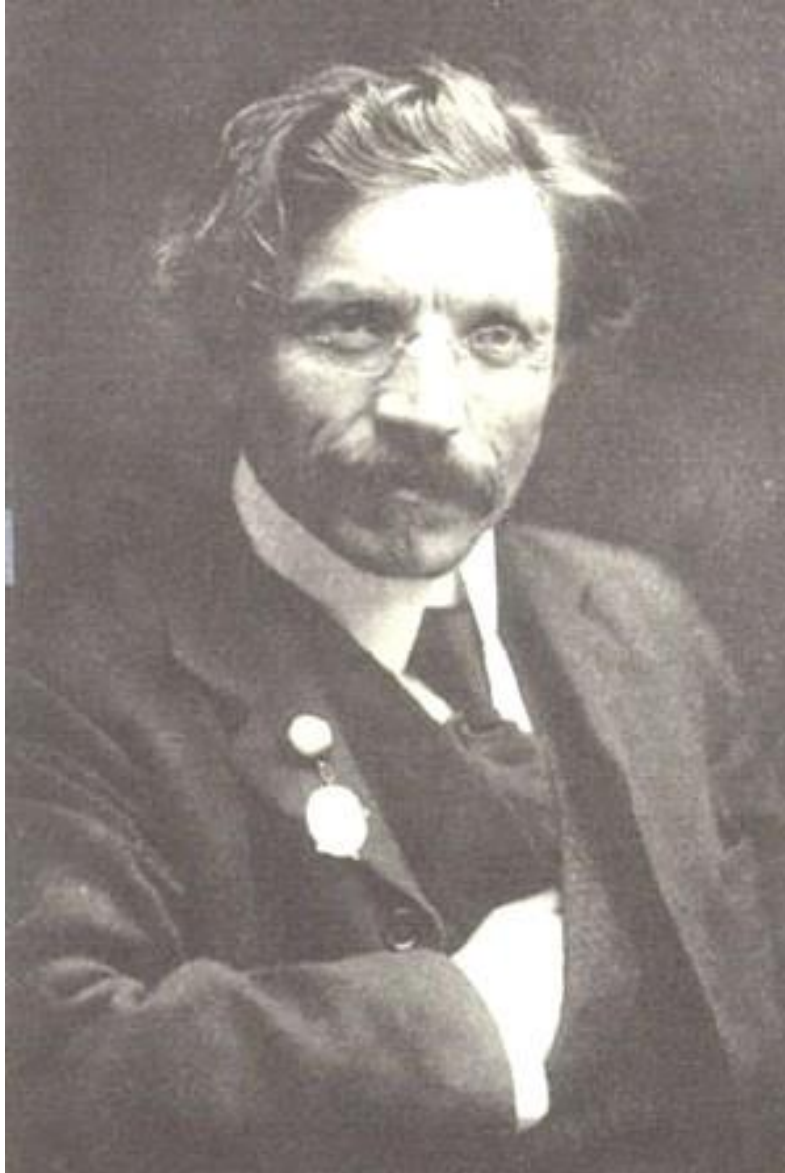


Figure 1. Sholem Aleichem.¹

The Yiddish writer Sholem Aleichem (1859–1916, by his Russian or Ukrainian name in real life, Solomon Naumovich Rabinovich or Sholom Nokhumovich Rabinovich) is easily the best-known Jewish humorist whose characters are Jewish, and the setting of whose works is mostly in a Jewish community. "The musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, based on his stories about Tevye the Dairyman, was the first commercially successful English-language stage production about Jewish life in Eastern Europe". "Sholem Aleichem's first venture into writing was an alphabetic glossary of the epithets used by his stepmother": these Yiddish

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Sholem_Aleichem.jpg

epithets are colourful, and afforded by the sociolinguistics of the language. "Early critics focused on the cheerfulness of the characters, interpreted as a way of coping with adversity. Later critics saw a tragic side in his writing".² "When Twain heard of the writer called 'the Jewish Mark Twain', he replied 'please tell him that I am the American Sholem Aleichem'". Sholem Aleichem's "funeral was one of the largest in New York City history, with an estimated 100,000 mourners". There exists a university named after Sholem Aleichem, in Siberia near China's border;³ moreover, on the planet Mercury there is a crater named *Sholem Aleichem*, after the Yiddish writer.⁴ Lis (1988) is Sholem Aleichem's "life in pictures".



Figure 2. Sholem Aleichem's funeral in New York.⁵

Translating Sholem Aleichem (Estraikh et al. 2012) is a paper collection (cf., e.g., Wishnia 1995). Anna Verschik's article in this journal issue (Verschik 2017) discusses how translators into Estonian and Lithuanian coped with their task. Nuances are important in texts by Sholem Aleichem, and contribute for example to characterisation. Let us consider an example of that. Quoted below, are some of Ken Frieden's comments (1989 p. 31), in his article "Sholem Aleichem: Monologues of Mastery", about a short story by Sholem Aleichem about a man who courts three widows inconclusively, and whose entire narration is through a monologue: that man

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sholem_Aleichem It is also the source of the next two quotations.

³ The Birobidzhan State University in the Name of Sholem Aleichem. See <http://pgusa.ru/>

⁴ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sholem_Aleichem_\(crater\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sholem_Aleichem_(crater))

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Sholem_Aleichem_funeral.jpg

receives the name "Cerberus": "They gave me the name 'Cerberus', a dog, that is, that stands at the entrance to paradise" (176). Inadvertently reversing the classical myth, possibly because for him the widows' home is a paradise, he betrays the fact that he has turned it into a hell for all other suitors.

"Three Widows" ends in a situation of charged ambiguity. The irascible narrator often refers to his inability to fulfill his desires, saying that despite his infatuation for the first widow, "I had no courage to tell her" (181). There is no way to test his honesty, because the fictional world exists only in the story he tells. Yet internal inconsistencies unsettle the surface effects. The monologist claims never to satisfy his longings for those he calls "my three widows", but he manages to completely dominate their lives, apparently spending most of his days and even some nights with them. [...] The narrator claims that he has never been able to express or enjoy his preferences. Why, then, does he haunt the widows house, deep into the night? There is no basis for further speculation on what "actually" happens between the narrator and his widows. He tells us that he has wasted his life — as a result of his timidity with regard to women. And yet in another sense he has victimized the three widows, constantly hovering nearby, a bourgeois Cerberus, always on the verge of proposing marriage and always delaying.

Frieden (1989, p. 37, n. 20) remarked about the nuances of the wording:

Curt Leviant's translation perhaps aims to spare innocent readers when it mistranslates the words that contribute most to our recognition of the speaker's unreliability. It translates "ikh kon mikh dort farzitsen biz tog oykh amol" (212) by "I'm liable to spend the whole day there" (*Stories and Satires*, op. cit., p. 213). Granted: given the narrator's equivocations, day is night and night is day. But "biz tog" does mean "until dawn". "Farzitsen" here means "to sit", although (especially when applied to women) it can also mean "to remain unmarried". This is exactly what the narrator does, summed up in a phrase: he stays with the widows night and day, and remains unmarried.

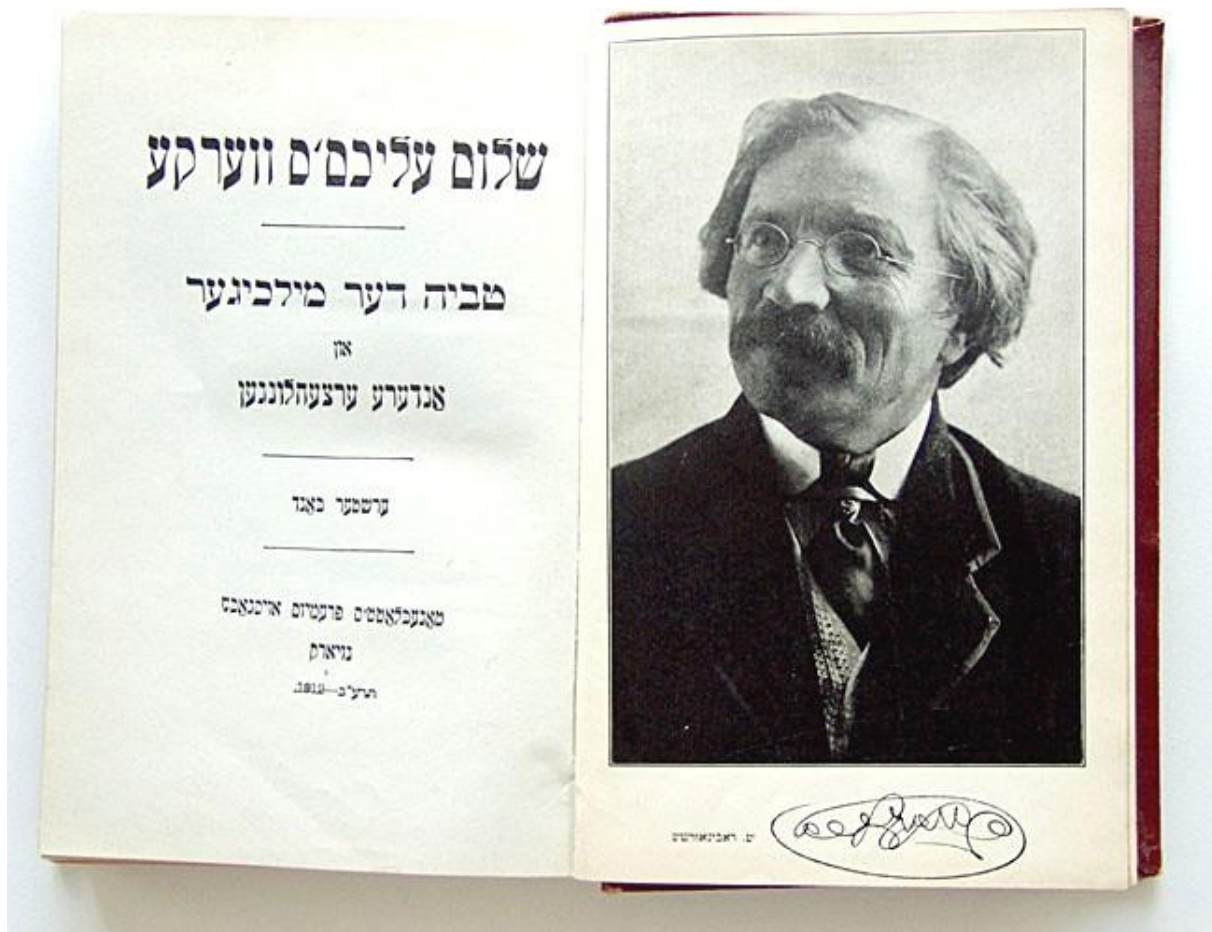


Figure 3. The frontispiece of Sholem Aleichem's *Tevye der milkhiker* (Tevye the Milkman).

In his short stories, Sholem Aleichem sometimes relates a tragedy, and yet he is able to describe it delicately, as a compassionate humorist. For example, Sholem Aleichem concludes with a quoted tagline, "Doctors prescribe laughter", at the end of a story that takes its hero beyond comedy into madness" (Wisse 2013, p. 25).⁶ Sometimes, a story by Sholem Aleichem is taken over by tragedy thoroughly, which is something one can see in his later writings, in relation to how events engulf Tevye the Milkman and his family. Tevye's daughter, Shprintse's suicide effectively kills her long-suffering mother, Golde, and the attempt on the part of [his daughter's] Beylke's husband — the cold-hearted, Russified Pedotsur — to drive Tevye from his home anticipates the expulsion edict of the Russian authorities in the final story of the cycle, 'Lekh-lekho' (Get Thee Out, 1914)" (Litvak 2009, p. 4). The title of that last story about Tevye, *Lekh-lekho*, is also the title of a particular weekly reading from the Pentateuch, the one in which Abraham receives the divine order to leave and embark on a journey. In Sheva Zucker's words (1992, p. 62, her brackets): "Sholem Aleichem's *Tevye der milkhiker* [Tevye the Milkman] is the story of Tevye, an Eastern European Job, who, continually tried by God, questions His ways but keeps his faith. Although the tales dealing with Tevye's daughters are the most interesting, Tevye, and not his daughters, always remains the protagonist of the work. The antagonist is, so to say, the changing times". Zucker suggests (*ibid.*, p. 71, fn. 6): "The twenty-one year period from 1895 to 1916, over which he wrote the *Tevye* stories, plus the too early climax, plus the fact that he mentions seven daughters but only names and writes about five, suggest to me that he did not" have an overall plan from the outset. "This does not mean that the work does not have a discernible structure. One can, if one wishes, see in the rapid progression towards modernity in the Tseytl, Hodl, and Khave episodes, followed by the reaction to modernity in the Shprintse and particularly the Beylke episode, a plan of rising action, climax, and denouement. This, however, may be as much the outcome of necessity as of design" (*ibid.*).

Chapter 2 in Wisse's book *No Joke* (2013) is entitled "Yiddish Heartland". Wisse begins by discussing Sholem Aleichem's 1905 story⁷ *Two Anti-Semites*. In a train compartment in the Kishinev⁸ area (there was a notorious pogrom in that city in 1903),⁹ a Jewish man disguises his identity by means of an antisemitic newspaper. Another Jew enters the compartment, and finds a man sleeping on the bench, with that newspaper not quite covering his face, as it had slipped off it. This other traveller,¹⁰ Patti, "steps out on the platform to buy his own copy of the *Bessarabian*. Once back in the compartment, he assumes Max's identical

⁶ "In deconstructing the image of the shtetl, for example, [the literary critic Dan] Miron taught us to distinguish between the Mythic, Mimetic, and Ideological planes. Most recently, when exposing 'The Dark Side of Sholem Aleichem's Humor', he focused on the simultaneous interplay of comedy/tragedy/hostility. Implicit in this triple-tiered structure was its hierarchy. While the first two levels were apprehensible by average readers and professional critics, the last and highest level of interpretation was the privileged domain of the Ideal Reader; in other words, Miron himself" (Roskies 2004, pp. 111–112). Dan Miron's work cited, and indicated by Roskies as not published yet, was Miron (2003, 2004), i.e., an article in English and a book in Hebrew.

⁷ 1905 also saw left-wing revolutionary violence in the Tsarist Empire. Olga Litvak (2009) looks at how those events affected Sholem Aleichem's writings, and in particular, at how he dealt with the characters of young Jewish women who left the Jewish fold.

⁸ That city is at present the capital of Moldova.

⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kishinev_pogrom

¹⁰ *Sholem Aleichem* authored *Railroad Stories* (Halkin 1987, Miron 1989). In her "Trains and Train Travel in Modern Yiddish Literature", Leah Garrett (2001) also discusses Sholem Aleichem. His "*Ayzenban-geshikhtes* is a collection of tales by a self-described traveling salesman recounting his encounters with fellow passengers on a third-class train car" (*ibid.*, p. 76). "At a time of profound personal dislocation for the author and the Jews he was describing, the railroad car became a setting for telling stories. The salesman-narrator seeks to make the stories heard in the car into *peklekh* (sob stories) that he can sell (matching Sholem Aleichem's original intent for the collection), whereas the collection as a whole functions as, David Roskies [Ruth Wisse's brother] writes, 'a vast panorama of dissolution' reflecting Sholem Aleichem's mature and dark vision after his own personal exile" (*ibid.*).

position on the opposite bench" (*ibid.*, p. 61). As Max slowly wakes up, Patti "smiles across at his fellow 'anti-Semite' and tentatively starts whistling a popular Yiddish tune. Soon they are both singing it aloud" (*ibid.*). From Sholem Aleichem's real life, consider that "[i]n August 1904, Sholem Aleichem edited *Hilf: a Zaml-Bukh fir Literatur un Kunst* ("Help: An Anthology for Literature and Art"; Warsaw, 1904) and himself translated three stories submitted by Tolstoy (*Esarhaddon, King of Assyria; Work, Death and Sickness; Three Questions*) as well as contributions by other prominent Russian writers, including Chekhov, in aid of the victims of the Kishinev pogrom".¹¹ David Roskies gave one of his papers about Sholem Aleichem the subtitle "Laughing Off the Trauma of History" (Roskies 1982).

Concerning Sholem Aleichem choosing that Hebrew salutation as a pen-name, David Roskies (1988) began a paper of his by stating: "What could be more obvious for a writer who called himself How-Do-You-Do than to place folklore and folk-speech at the center of his work?" (*ibid.*, p. 27).¹² On p. 31, Roskies (1988) remarked:

[...] Sholem Aleichem never abandoned his commitment to critical realism. Throughout his career, he stuck to observable reality and drew, wherever possible, on firsthand experience. Fortunately, during the period of his debut, a simple technique was introduced into Hebrew literature that allowed for a recreated-but safely distanced-world of fantasy. All one needed was to conjure up the experience of a child, for whom, presumably, marvelous things were an everyday occurrence. For Sholem Aleichem, the experiment proved that recreating the myth from a child's point of view was as difficult as from a Hasid's.¹³

One of the facets of Sholem Aleichem's humour is what Roskies (2004) has discussed as "Sanctified Parody" (*ibid.*, p. 118):

I locate the first instance of Sanctified Parody in the monologues of Tevye the Dairyman¹⁴ — not when Tevye first appeared on the scene in 1895, very much the country bumpkin, and not yet as the distant relative of Menakhem-Mendl and his get-rich schemes, but certainly by 1905–1906, when, through his daughters, the patriarch-without-sons faced off against revolution, apostasy, and free love. Through the figure of Tevye, Sholem Aleichem revived the art of exegetical parody, creating what Ruth Wisse has called a Comic Rashi, a natural Jewish comedian, whose "mistakes" were always calculated. Helpless in the face of historical catastrophe, Tevye fought back the only way he knew how. His trilingual wordplays, bilingual puns, scriptural malapropisms, and otherwise brilliant fusions of covenantal promise and chaotic present signaled that the main target of Sholem Aleichem's laughter were those in Tevye's world who were unable or unwilling to play along. The readers of this open-ended book were invited to recapitulate Sholem Aleichem's own journey over the course of a quarter-century, from laughing at Tevye to laughing with him.

¹¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sholem_Aleichem

¹² Olga Litvak remarks (2009, p.32, note 1): "The conventional spelling of Sholem-aleichem, the authorial 'presence' of S. N. Rabinovich, is Sholem (or sometimes Sholom) Aleichem. The capitalization of the second word is clearly misleading, since 'Sholem-aleichem' constitutes a single Yiddish phrase, meaning 'How-do-you-do?' Capitalizing 'aleichem' suggests that Sholem-aleichem is a pen name, an error derived from the 'nominal' correspondence between Sholem and the author's actual first name, an assumption that implicitly supports the notion, especially prevalent among nonspeakers of Yiddish, that 'Aleichem' is basically a pseudonymous last name. In fact, Rabinovich's first name, the name by which he was known in all official documents and to his colleagues, family members, and friends, rather than to his reading public, was the Russified 'Solomon' rather than the Yiddish diminutive, Sholem. Trivializing the distinction between Sholem Aleichem and Sholem-aleichem, we risk being taken in by Rabinovich's 'intentional hoax'".

¹³ "Myth, for Sholem Aleichem, came to mean two different but complementary things. (1) It was the belief system of the Jews, the stories they actually lived by, that structured their perceptions of reality. As he later developed it, that myth was accessible to all Jews, inasmuch as every Jew had once been a child, celebrated some festival or other in one way or another, and knew how to talk. Myth was the source of hope and of transcendence. (2) Myth was also the deep structure of Jewish experience, a fixed number of archetypal plots that were embedded not in one's individual psychology but in Jewish history itself. Myth was fate and it was inescapable" (Roskies 1988, p. 32).

¹⁴ This is also the protagonist of the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*. It opened on Broadway in 1964. See a discussion in Wolitz (1988).

One of the things Sholem Aleichem did was to recycle "peripheral" textual genres from recent Eastern European Jewish tradition. Roskies explains (1988, pp. 34–35):

In the typical dialectic of literary evolution, Sholem Aleichem sought to carry out his new agenda by looking to the "periphery" of the Jewish literary "system", that is, to those genres that he and the other innovators had heretofore considered hackneyed, conservative, and outdated. Unlike the others, however, Sholem Aleichem went back only one generation, to the discarded elements of Haskalah literature itself: the monologue, the epistle, and the *maskilic* [i.e., Jewish Enlightenment] chapbook. In his first Tevye story (1894), he revived a particular type of monologue — the pseudo-maggidic sermon, complete with scriptural epigraphs, a homiletic structure, and a dazzling array of proverbial sayings. In his first Menakhem-Mendl series (1892), he revived the whole *brivn-shteler* ("letter-writer") with its archaic formulae at beginning and end and its inflated diction throughout. For his first and only stylized chapbook, *A mayse on an ek* (1901), later retitled *Derfarkishefter shnayder*, he chose a *mayse-bikhl* written by Ayzik-Meyer Dik as his model, with its invented Hebrew captions, farcical plot, and grotesque characters.

What these three forms had in common was that they were "closed": closed by virtue of their stylized language, their rigid formal conventions, and their personal mode of narration. In all three there was a fixed, predictable structure that allowed only for repetition, not for significant change, and the human experience was conveyed through clichéd speech by a totally subjective and presumably unsophisticated narrator. [...]



Figure 4. Sholem Aleichem.

Early on in his career as a writer, Sholem Aleichem had, among the other things, a goal of raising the quality of Yiddish literature. He edited two volumes (Aleichem 1888–1889) of an anthology of modern Yiddish literature of a quality that met his satisfaction,¹⁵ but relatively, it did not sell well, and was a financial burden for him.¹⁶ "The dominance of the literary landscape by a fashioner of low-grade literature was not peculiar to Yiddish and, in fact, resembled the Russian popular literature market of the same period" (Quint 2005, p. 81). Alyssa Quint (2005) pointed out: "By the late 1860s, so it becomes clear, high-minded Yiddish readers adopted the high-minded literary standards they absorbed from other languages" (*ibid.*, p. 79). "As we approach the 1890s, Sholem Aleichem openly attests to such standards in his famous diatribe against the middling literature of Shomer, *Shomers mishpet* (*The Trial of Shomer*, 1888), in which he famously pronounced Shomer's romances to be a scourge on the Yiddish readership. In his eyes, his books were no more than facile translations of foreign stories that, he argued, dulled the tastes of the Yiddish-speaking public. And he backed up his words with pages of analysis of Shomer's novels. Scholars more or less agree with Sholem Aleichem's assessment" (*ibid.*). "The same elements that, in Sholem Aleichem's eyes, indicted his literature, Shomer knew were essential to his success as a writer of popular fiction" (*ibid.*, p. 80).

Eventually however, the quality of available Yiddish literature rose,¹⁷ and Sholem Aleichem's own short stories became much beloved by the Yiddish-reading public; he became iconic himself. He eventually moved to the United States, and America as a theme appears in his writings. I reproduce below Section 28 from Nissan (2015), which followed a section about a short story of 1910 from Brazil, *A Nova Califórnia* (i.e., *The New Eldorado*) by Afonso Henrique de Lima Barreto (1881–1922):¹⁸

Contrast to Lima Barreto's story from Brazil, Sholem Aleichem's Yiddish play *Di goldgreber* (*The Golddiggers*). It was written in Geneva in 1907, published in 1927, and set in an impoverished town, visited by an orphan who moved to America and has come back as an adult, "[t]he legend that Napoleon once buried thirteen barrels of gold in the old cemetery is revived, and the whole town rushes in a state of mass hysteria to find this treasure" (Bechtel 1991–1992, p. 71). In that play, the visitor who is an observer is from America, where he has become enlightened, in contrast to the people who have remained in the *shtetl* in Russia, and who are not rational. Delphine Bechtel remarks (1991–1992, p. 70):

Sholem Aleichem addresses the American-Jewish experience in many of his works, in which he most often describes the situation of the new immigrant on the American soil, the illusions and the disillusionment of the new immigrant in America, "the economic and social degradation of parts of the Eastern European Jewish intelligentsia and middle-class in America" (Shmeruk [1987]). In *Di goldgreber*, however, the situation is

¹⁵ "It is true that one of the goals of the *Folksbibliotek* was to circulate works of Yiddish that had been neglected by previous publishers and hold them out to the masses of Yiddish readers. Works by some of Yiddish's most prestigious pioneer authors had not yet made it into print by 1888. There was much to celebrate" (Quint 2005, p. 80). He did not kid himself about the sorry state of the audience, and referred to this sarcastically. "Have no doubt that in these lines Sholem Aleichem is describing the puerile state of the literature's audience. If his bitterness wasn't enough to defuse his colleagues' optimism, an accompanying ledger of books published during the previous year no doubt exerted its sobering effects. No comparison more tellingly reveals the gap between 'Odessa' readers and the rest of the 'literary marketplace': Sholem Aleichem published 3,200 copies of the *Folksbibliotek*, compared to the 96,000 copies of Shomer's works printed in the same year by various publishing houses" (Quint 2005, p. 81).

¹⁶ "And, though Sholem Aleichem invested a great deal of money in the *Folksbibliotek*, offering as he did substantial remuneration to its contributors, he was bankrupt before he could issue the third volume" (Quint 2005, p. 81).

¹⁷ "[...] Sholem Aleichem's proposal that a high-grade Yiddish literature be built in the late 1880s turned out to be redundant; such a literature had been in the making all along" (Quint 2005, p. 86).

¹⁸ In Lima Barreto's story, eventually the whole populace of the small town where it is set rushes to the graveyard, gripped by the lust for gold they expect to turn human bones into.

reversed: Beni, who left Europe as an orphan to go to America, is coming *back* to the *shtetl*, the East European Jewish small town, as an adult and a self-made man. He, as an American Jew, is confronted with the Jews of his home town, who, having remained behind in a state of economic deprivation, nourish the hope of being saved from it by finding a treasure. His predicament follows the pattern of the "traveler disguised" (Miron [1973]), a motif typical of the *Haskalah* [i.e., Jewish Enlightenment] literature of the nineteenth century, in which the hero comes back to the *shtetl* after his edification abroad, America here replacing Germany as the educating country. [...] In fact, the very structure of the *Haskalah* drama is fundamental to the play. The careful reader will notice that there is an incongruity between Sholem Aleichem's use of specific genre structure, that of the *Haskalah* drama, and his treatment in the play of the topic of messianic utopia, a content which, from the historical and ideological point of view, stands in radical conflict with a *maskilic* form. The confrontation between the *shtetl* and America will be explored in the interaction between those two models. In this, as in all *Haskalah* plays, the *shtetl* is described as an unhealthy society, totally impoverished.

The townspeople are after a treasure supposedly hidden by Napoleon at the cemetery. "In *Di Goldgreber*, it is Mozgovoyer, the chief representative of the *shtetl*-establishment, who launches the whole illusion, which comes to assume mythical dimensions" (Bechtel 1991–1992, p. 71). "Its discovery has been prophesied by Mozgovoyer's grandfather on his deathbed, and is supported by Mozgovoyer's superstitions, visions and dreams, in which his father appears to him. Yet, Mozgovoyer constantly claims not to believe in 'puste Bove-mayses,¹⁹ vayberishe pizmoynes', [empty fairy tales, women's litanies] and other superstition" (*ibid.*, Bechtel's own brackets). Bechtel explains (*ibid.*, p. 72, her brackets):

We also find the *maskilic* theme of the "genarte velt" [the deceived world]. The *shtetl* is presented as a world of lies and corruption. Everybody is cheating everybody for the sake of finding the treasure, including the finest *balebatim* [heads of household], the Polish nobleman and the Russian *gorodovoy* [police officer]. Sholem Aleichem uses exactly the same pattern as Aksenfeld does in his play *Di genarte velt* [The Deceived World]: the cheaters will be cheated by the young enlightened hero, he will use their superstitions about the treasure in order to realize his own goals, and, by deceiving them, defeat them with their own weapons. Beni, Sholem Aleichem's American hero, is staging a "comedy within the comedy", what Shtshupak, Aksenfeld's hero, calls "a *komedye fun der genarte velt*" [a comedy of the deceived world].

Delphine Bechtel (1990) detected influences by Gogol on some stories by Sholem Aleichem, but David Roskies (2001) was only partly convinced (for one instance of text he was, but not for another one). Roskies (2001) signalled that also an unpublished manuscript by Joseph Sherman had pointed out Gogol's influence on Sholem Aleichem.

Kenneth Wishnia remarked, at the end of a paper of his with, and about, his own English translation from *Mr. Boym in the Closet: A Comedy in One Scene*, authored in 1915 by Sholem Aleichem (Wishnia 1995, pp. 352–353):

Sholem Aleichem should not be seen as the chronicler of a dead culture in a dying language; his work also points toward continuity. Although much of his experience in the United States was in many ways just as bad as in Europe (poor critical reception of his plays, bad health, money troubles), he still saw hope in America for Jews—perhaps their only hope. After all, continuous change is better than death, isn't it? This is the transitional world American Jews come from. The work of Sholem Aleichem is a living transition that can illuminate our knowledge of both Yiddish and English. It is, in the words of Georg Lukacs, "a process . . . the concrete precondition of the present".

Sholem Aleichem and America is the subject of papers by Nina Warnke (1991), Chone Shmeruk (1991), and Delphine Bechtel (1991–1992). Concerning Sholem Aleichem's leaving

¹⁹ Literally, "Bovo tales". This is patterned after an epic in Early Yiddish from Renaissance northern Italy, Elye Bokher's (i.e., Elia Levita's) *Bovo-Buch*, or *Bovo d'Antona*, which was quite popular among Yiddish readers, and was patterned after Italian chivalric epic: Elye Bokher's source of inspiration was an Italian (Tuscan) version of *Buovo d'Altona*, itself based on the Anglo-Norman romance of Sir Bevis of Hampton.

Russia and emigrating to the United States, Olga Litvak remarks (1999, note 38 on pp. 34–35):

Despite the evidence of her own account, [Sholem Aleichem's daughter Marie Waife-]Goldberg insisted [in her memoirs of her father] that the precipitous "escape" from Kiev, orchestrated by her father, "saved his own family's life," justifying a move that, at the time, could be conceived only as a disaster. In fact, the great stress of dislocation and the physical effects of "homelessness" arguably hastened the deaths of three members of Sholem-Aleichem's family — his own as well as those of his mother-in-law²⁰ (in 1907) and his elder son, Misha (in 1914).

In March 1915, Sholem Aleichem envisaged making a film script (for which he needed an assistant in order to transcribe it into English while he was dictating it in Yiddish) out of his *Motl Peysi dem khazns* stories (Motl the Son of the Cantor Peisi). He did not live long afterwards, and was disappointed in his hopes for a film (Kotlerman 2015).

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²⁰ "[...] Sholem Aleichem was every bit as colorful a figure as the characters in his stories. He was one of 12 children whom his recently widowed father hid with relatives before remarrying, then introduced one by one to the dismay of his shrewish second wife. One of his earliest works was a glossary of his stepmother's curses. As a young man Sholem Aleichem, who was something of a dandy, took a job tutoring the daughter of a wealthy Jewish landowner. When a relationship between them was discovered, he was fired, and the lovers eloped. He was eventually accepted by her family. Upon moving to Kiev, Sholem Aleichem became rich from speculating on stocks, but he lost everything in 1890 and fled Russia only to be rescued financially by his mother-in-law, although she never spoke to him again. He was ruined but never learned his lesson, and he continued coming up with reckless, unsuccessful get-rich-quick schemes" (Holden 2011).

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