

THE SHOLEM ALEICHEM LIBRARY IN ENGLISH

A Project of the Sholom Aleichem Memorial Foundation, Inc.

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Under the Editorial Direction of **Prof. David G. Roskies**

Rationale

Sholem Aleichem (1859-1916) wrote the world's great comedy of dissolution. In his world, as in our own, the stock market plunges, a new scandal is exposed in Russia, Jews battle each other in full view of the *goyim*, and parental dreams are dashed by the rebellion of the young. "The World of Sholem Aleichem" is indeed just that. A world in which Tevye the Dairyman stands alone in the face of personal and historical catastrophe; the world of Menakhem-Mendl the perpetual *luftmentsh* who will never return to his hardnosed, hysterical wife; a world in which a whole community uproots itself lox, stock, and bagel, and is transplanted in America. If ever there was a time when all this, and so much more cries out to be transformed into a source of laughter, that time is now.

The Jewish world that Sholem Aleichem described is inseparable from its language. But the speakers of Yiddish are becoming ever fewer. The loss of Yiddish as a living language will leave the Jewish people without a direct link to their immediate past and without a voice for their deepest fears and aspirations. Who, by the middle of the next century, will know Sholem Aleichem's intimate wordplay of Yiddish, Hebrew and Slavic, or his unique way of mixing and matching folklore, history, and language, at their source?

Fortunately, there is still time to carry out a multipronged rescue operation, and to do so in English, the closest thing we have to a universal language. The time is now to launch a coherent plan designed to meet the present and future needs of a worldwide reader of Sholem Aleichem's vast oeuvre.

Scope

The following international team of scholars shall constitute the Editorial Board of the Sholem Aleichem Library in English Translation:

Janet Hadda (UCLA)

Mikhail Krutikov (University of London)

Anita Norich (University of Michigan)

Abraham Novershtern (The Hebrew University)

Lawrence Rosenwald (Wellesley College)

David G. Roskies (Jewish Theological Seminary)

Jeffrey Shandler (New York University)
 Joseph Sherman (University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg)
 Seth Wolitz (University of Texas, Austin)
 Ruth Wisse (Harvard University)

Their task will be twofold: (1) To select, edit, and publish the first representative English-language edition of Sholem Aleichem's mighty corpus; and (2) to advance the study of Sholem Aleichem's life and work.

The translation of Sholem Aleichem's oeuvre into English is woefully incomplete, but it is by no means stillborn. The landmark *Treasury of Yiddish Stories* edited by the late Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg in 1954 contains a few brilliant translations by Saul Bellow and Isaac Rosenfeld. In the past decade alone, Aliza Shevrin has translated four major novels plus selections from Sholem Aleichem's *Children's* and *Holiday Stories*. Curt Leviant's earlier translations run into several volumes, and Hillel Halkin has captured the cultural specificity of Tevye's the Dairyman's monologues for the first time. Therefore, the Editorial Board will begin its work by selecting from among the existing translations those that are deemed still excellent.

We envision a Sholem Aleichem Library comprising 25 volumes. To launch the Library, we shall begin with those of Sholem Aleichem's works that have never appeared in English before, that appeared so long ago as to have been forgotten, or appeared in random, arbitrary fashion:

- 1-2. *Menakhem-Mendl*
3. *Motl the Cantor's Son*
- 4-5. *The Complete Tales of Kasrilevke*
6. *The Complete Holiday Stories*
7. *The Complete Children's Stories*
- 8-9. *The Complete Plays*
10. *Wandering Stars*
11. *The Selected Letters*
12. *Essays on Jewish Literature & Culture*
13. *Sender Blank and his Family*
14. *The Early Satires and Epistolary Novels* (including translations from the Hebrew)
- 15-16. *The Collected Short Stories* (including "Tales of 1001 Nights")
17. *The Complete Monologues*
18. *Stempenyu. Yosele Nightingale*
19. *Marienbad, In the Storm,*
20. *From the Fair* (Sholem Aleichem's Autobiography)
21. *The Bloody Hoax*
22. *Political Writings*

23. *My Father, Sholom Aleichem & Other Memoirs*
24. *Sholem Aleichem in the Twentieth Century: A Critical Reader*
25. *A Complete Bibliography of Sholem Aleichem's Oeuvre*

All volumes will appear in a standard format, comprising a critical introduction, a carefully edited translation, and explanatory notes. Some of the volumes, such as *The Selected Letters*, which requires an intimate knowledge of Yiddish, Hebrew, and Russian, will be collaborative efforts.

The success of these translations depends in large measure not only on the talents of the individual translators, but also on the **state of our knowledge about Sholem Aleichem's life and work**. Without ongoing critical debate, without the most advanced level of scholarship, we will be right back where we started from: patronizing and partial translations that paraphrase, bowdlerize, and distort the original.

Part of the Editorial Board's mandate, therefore, will be to generate new scholarship and to disseminate the best of what is available. To this end, the Board will convene an International Scholar's Conference on Sholem Aleichem, to be held on 9-11 April 1999, at the National Yiddish Book Center. The Conference Committee will consist of: Janet Hadda, David G. Roskies, and Jeffrey Shandler.

Implementation

It is important to note that two models for this project already exist. One is the Library of Yiddish Classics, launched in 1987 at Schocken Books, and recently acquired by Yale University Press. Because Yale has already contracted with Hillel Halkin to translate volume one of *Menakhem-Mendl* and *Motl the Cantor's Son*, we might wish to enter into a copublishing agreement with them for these two volumes alone. Henceforth, Yale will stay clear of Sholem Aleichem.

A second initiative is the Martin Buber Library being published at Syracuse University Press in collaboration with the family of Martin Buber. Syracuse is buying up the rights of all existing translations, commissioning new translations, and republishing Buber's entire oeuvre in a nicely designed multivolume edition. Each volume is published concurrently both in hardback and paperback. Both Yale and Syracuse are committed to keeping their respective Libraries in print **in perpetuity**.

In order to publicize the project and to increase the pool of available translators, the Sholem Aleichem Memorial Foundation is sponsoring a contest for the best translation of Sholem Aleichem. Two chapters from the novel *Stempenyu* have been chosen to test the translators' mettle. The winner will be awarded \$1000 and a book contract. The contest is

soon to be announced in the Jewish press, the *Pakn Treger*, and on the Internet (the Sholem Aleichem Website and Mendele). Translations are to be submitted by September 1, 1998. The judges will be: Lawrence Rosenwald, Jeffrey Shandler, and Bel Kaufman.

Timetable

Summer, 1998. Submitting our proposal to the major university presses and trade publishers in the United States.

Fall 1998. Commissioning the first volumes of the series.

March 8, 1999. A fundraising event to be held in New York City. This event will also launch the 140th anniversary celebration of Sholem Aleichem's birthday.

9-11 April, 1999. International Scholar's Conference on the Life and Work of Sholem Aleichem to be held at the National Yiddish Book Center. The winner of the translation contest will be announced at this conference. The Conference Coordinator will be Debra Braverman, a research assistant recently hired by Prof. Roskies.

1999. Publication of *Menakhem-Mendl* and *Motl the Cantor's Son*.

January 2000. Volume 3 rolls off the press.