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ALOIS WOLDAN

NATHAN SAMUELY – A JEWISH WRITER FROM GALICIA

Introduction

Nathan Samuely (1846-1921) is among those Jewish authors from old Austrian Galicia who today are rather unknown and waiting to be rediscovered. During his lifetime he was quite popular, his works were widely read and discussed. Later he became a victim of Nazi propaganda which tried to erase all traces of Jewish writing. Samuely did not come back into the literary public's conscience until after the Nazi dictatorship ended. Today his name and titles of his works can only be found in specialized publications (cfr. Glasenapp, Horch 2005 II: 1034-1046; Blumesberger, Doppelhofer, Mauthe 2002: 1177). He has also been mentioned within the context of German written prose in Austrian Galicia (cfr. Kłańska 1985). Within the last years only one book has been published dedicated mainly to him and it introduced a great deal of new information on his biography (cfr. Solomon 2012: 27-115).

Samuely was born in the Galician province town of Stryj, but he spent the major part of his life in Lemberg (now L'viv), where he was a teacher at the German-Israelite secondary school ("Deutsch-Israelitische Hauptschule"), a progressive Jewish school in the spirit of the Haskalah, the Jewish enlightenment. Samuely published his early poetry and prose in Hebrew, becoming a pioneer of modern Hebrew literature. A few years later he began publishing German texts and at the same time he translated works of famous European authors into Hebrew (Schiller, Lessing, Shakespeare, Hugo). He is an example of Galician bilingual writing, using Hebrew and German all his life. His most famous work, the two volumes of *Cultur-Bilder aus dem jüdischen Leben in Galizien* (Cultural Impressions of Jewish life in Galicia) published in 1885 and 1892 were written in German. Some of these short stories he later translated into Hebrew. Most of these stories were first published in Jewish journals and then collected into

one volume which turned out to be such a great success that the author composed a second volume to satisfy the public's expectations. With the outbreak of World War I Samuely, like many other Jews from Galicia, fled to Vienna, where he remained for the rest of his life. He died in 1921 in the town of Baden near Vienna.

Samuely is regarded as a representative of the so-called "Ghetto-literature" (Glasenapp 1996: 153-177), and is said to be one of the masters of this genre at the height of its development (cfr. Ober 2001: 60-65). This literature covers a wide range of genres (cfr. Glasenapp, Horch 2005 II: 1105-1127), from novels, longer or shorter stories to sketches and pictures although short forms of prose dominate. This is illustrated by Samuely's *Cultur-Bilder* – they are short in terms of the number of pages, the description of the setting and characters prevail over the plot with a prominent narrator resembling an author presenting his stories. Ghetto-literature is not restricted to the Ghetto as such, it comprises every form of Jewish life; therefore Samuely's *Cultur-Bilder* can without any doubt be considered Ghetto-literature, although its genre has not been fully described or defined to date. The term itself brings to mind Karl Emil Franzos, a contemporary of Samuely, who possibly already invented this term in the 1870s to categorize his stories (cfr. Franzos 1878).

It is quite possible that Samuely, who was well acquainted with Franzos' texts, adopted this term from Franzos without mentioning him; both authors knew, but ignored each other. Franzos viewed himself as the only one whose works gave insight into Jewish life in Galicia. Samuely, who did the same, often quoted other Jewish writers, although he could easily have borrowed from Franzos without actually naming him (cfr. Glasenapp 1996: 195ff; Solomon 2012: 97). But it was Samuely who shaped the genre of *Cultur-Bilder* more than any other writer: in his works description in the sense of a static picture dominates over plot, while Franzos for his Ghetto tales prefers a strongly developed story.

Our investigation of Samuely's tales aims to sharpen the notion of the genre *Cultur-Bilder* by drawing attention to specific features of this genre. It tries to give an overview of themes and motifs preferred by the author, grouping these tales according to prevalent themes appearing in both volumes; by this way it enables us to draw conclusions on their poetics. Pointing out intertextual connections with similar texts

of Jewish and non-Jewish writers in Galicia, this investigation tries to mark Samuely's place in the larger context of Galician literature.

School Education in the Cheder

The main goal of Haskalah educational politics was a new, progressive school system, which was fundamentally different to the traditional education of Jewish boys in Cheders. Criticism of Cheders with programs far from meeting the needs of practical life and brutal methods of teaching is a leading theme in Ghetto-literature. The first of Samuely's works already contains this critique, but very moderately. In *Der Consens* (The Rabbi-diploma, Samuely 1885: 2-11) young Chajamel the hero is torn daily from his childhood environment to be taken to the Cheder for learning. The description of how the little boy is brought to that school every morning promises no good:

Allein, Tag um Tag erschien, wie ein Bote aus der Hölle, der lange hagere Belfer (Behelfer) und erinnerte ihn an seine zukünftige Ehren, riß ihn aus seinem kindlichen Paradiese, und wenn er sich sträubte, packte er ihn bei Händen und Füßen, lud ihn sich auf den Rücken und rannte mit ihm fort in's schreckliche Cheder.¹ (Samuely 1885: 2)

The brutal treatment in this school is not described, and this story takes a good end: the hero is freed from the Cheder by his uncle, who puts him in another, better school (probably one of the Israelite reform schools, which existed in Galicia as of the beginning of the 19th century – Samuely himself had been teacher at such a school (cfr. Solomon 2012: 39). Chajamel's education culminates in a degree from the Law Faculty of Lemberg University rather than the Rabbi-diploma – the good uncle managed to change the boy's career from the one his mother had dreamed of convincing her that both diplomas are of equal value. Compared with other more severe critics of the Cheder such as in the works of Leo Herzberg-Fränkell or other Ghetto-writers, Samuely's critique is

¹ "By himself, day for day, like a harbinger from hell, the gaunt lanky belfer appeared and reminded him of his future honor, ripped him from his infantine paradise and if he resisted, grabbed his hands and feet, loaded him on his back and ran with him to the dreadful cheder". All the translations are by the author of the article.

moderate (cfr. Solomon 2012: 81). At the same time his didactic intention becomes visible – his plea for a contemporary and better form of education.²

A much better picture of the Cheder is painted in the tale *Unser Cheder* (Our Cheder, Samuely 1885: 12-19). The school leader, a Rabbi, is strange but harmless and in the depths of his soul a good man, full of understanding for the children in his care. Still better characterized is his wife, the Rebbezin, who acts as a real mother not only for her own children, but for the whole class. All these people form one harmonic family. No critics of the methods of education are to be found, the situation in the Cheder bears an idyllic note.

But other tales from the two volumes of *Cultur-Bilder* show that critics of the Cheder cannot be integrated into a happy world of childhood. The tale *Erlebnisse einer Sylvesternacht* (Events of a New Year's Eve, Samuely 1885: 177-188) is based on the nightmares of a boy who was abused by his Rabbi in the Cheder and fears punishment the next day. But these fears turn out to be only a dream, the next day is a holiday and there is no need to go to the Cheder. Once more critique of the Cheder is retracted and compensated for with a happy end.

This critique is still more explicit in the tale *Das Rösel* (name for landscape paintings posted in the windows of Jewish houses on special occasions, Samuely 1892: 47-59). The hero, a boy highly gifted in painting, is mistreated by his teacher because he prefers painting to studying. A person with no Jewish origin, a Polish count, recognizes the boy's talent and frees him from the Cheder. He sends him to an academy in Cracow enabling the Jewish child to become a famous painter.³ In this tale Samuely picks up on the motif of the Jewish Wunderkind⁴ discovered by a foreigner, a motif found in texts from Hermann Menkes

² Already in 1897 an anonymous reviewer saw in this tale a tendency to show to the unenlightened fellow believers the path from “der Nacht der Vorurtheile und des Irrwahns den Pfad zu einem freieren, lichterem, glücklicherem Dasein” (“from the darkness of bias and delusions the path to a freer, brighter and happier existence”) (Glasesapp/Horch 2005 I: 646).

³ The Jewish boy Ahrele becomes the painter Arthur Liebgott – this could be an allusion to the famous Jewish painter Moritz (Maurycy) Gottlieb, to whom Samuely devoted another of his *Cultur-Bilder*, *Zwei Denkmäler* (Samuely 1885: 168-176).

⁴ “eine der vielen Varianten des Motivs vom jüdischen Wunderkind, dessen Genie von einem Außenseiter – in diesem Fall von einem Christen – erkannt und gefördert

(*Das Wunderkind*, 1906) to Joseph Roth (*Hiob. Roman eines einfachen Mannes*, 1930). The Polish count, helping poor Jewish persons, reminds us of a similar figure in Joseph Roth's works (cfr. Kłańska 1985: 185).

Not to be ignored is the criticism of the Cheder as well as the fanatic Chassid movement in the tale *Der Packenträger* (The travelling book merchant, Samuely 1892: 114-132). The hero and his son do not supply only permitted literary works, but also forbidden books – titles by Haskalah authors highly desired by Cheder students as a source of information to bring light into the darkness of traditional education. But the Melamed discovers this illegal reading and has the forbidden books burned in the synagogue and the merchant cruelly beaten. The light sparked by illegal books will nevermore be dispelled. Contemporary literary critics held this tale in high esteem regarding it as one of the best in the entire volume,⁵ an opinion also held by a modern-day scholar.⁶

Encounters with Non-Jewish Persons

The larger part of Samuely's *Cultur-Bilder* (and works of other Ghetto authors as well) shows interpersonal contacts only within the Jewish community with only a few of these stories also illustrating contacts between Jews and the non-Jewish population (in Galicia Poles or Ukrainians). This could be due to the fact that in Galician towns the Jewish population often formed the larger part of a town's inhabitants, but never the entire population. In larger cities like Lemberg, where Samuely lived and worked, the percentage of Jewish persons was not higher than 30 %. The small Galician town is a "Polish-Jewish contact

wird" ("one of the many versions of the motive of Jewish Wunderkind, whose genius is recognized and supported by an outsider, in this case a Christian") (Ober 2001: 62).

⁵ Eduard Münz, a Jewish journalist, in a review of the second volume 1892 argued: "Den Preis möchten wir dem 'Packenträger' zuerkennen, diesem unbewußten Apostel der Aufklärung..." (The price we would like to award to the 'Packenträger', this unconscious apostle of enlightenment) (Glasenapp/Horch 2005 I: 644).

⁶ "Samuelys wohl schönste Erzählung, 'Der Packenträger', erhebt bittere Anklage gegen die engstirnige, fanatische, zutiefst abergläubische chassidische Sekte und gegen die Brutalität, mit der sie die Bildung jüdischer Knaben bestimmte" ("Samuely's probably best tale, 'Der Packenträger' brings in a severe accusation against the narrow-minded and superstitious chassidic sect and the brutality in education of young boys") (Ober 2001: 63).

zone”, “a space of cooperation and competition [...] contact and conflict of groups” (Prokop-Janiec 2017: 58). Samuely, however, belongs to that part of Jewish writers in 19th Galicia who do not stress this function of the contact zone, giving only a few samples of such interrelations. This is the case as well in Herzberg-Fränkels stories, while on the opposite K. E. Franzos in the larger part of his tales describes contacts and especially conflicts between Jews and their non-Jewish partners, stressing the antagonism between groups coexisting in this zone. Last but not least, the intercultural character of Ghetto-literature (cfr. Glasenapp 2005 II: 1126) emerges from contacts between Jews and non-Jewish persons and cultures.

In the tale *Reb Leiser, der Haman* (Reb Leiser, the Haman – Haman is a negative character in a play performed at the Jewish feast of Purim – Samuely 1885: 96-111) the main hero, the rich Jewish merchant Leiser, has good contacts to the “Bezirkshauptmann”, the head of one of Galicia’s districts. This official and his wife are often guests at Leiser’s house and are trying to help reconcile Leiser with his estranged son. The title “Bezirkshauptmann” alludes to a city in Galicia, which was capital of a “Bezirk”, a certain district. Samuely does not explicitly name the towns and cities where his stories take place, he gives only initials.

Quite different to this harmonic co-existence between Jews and Poles or Austrians is the situation in another story, *Viel Lärm* (Much Ado, Samuely 1885: 126-135), where the author mentions a potential conflict between Jews and Christians quite explicitly. He describes the situation of a famous Rabbi at a high Jewish feast interrupting a procession to send away a Christian boy (his name Hawrelku shows that he is Ukrainian) to bring him something. Drunken Christian workmen, who notice this, spread the rumor that the Jews have kidnapped the boy to kill him in a ritual murdering and are considering a pogrom to take revenge on the Jews. But the situation clears when the boy comes back und brings a handkerchief for the Rabbi. Yet again this ending shows the author’s tendency to harmonizing conflicts – “classical” Jewish-Christian conflicts are mentioned, but not really dealt with.

In the tale *Sünder und Sünden* (Sinners and Sins, Samuely 1892: 191-204) the hero and narrator’s father is confronted with biased antisemitic attitudes in the person of his neighbor, who is an Austrian official. He had been betrayed by a moneylender, a supposed Jew, and therefore

hates all Jews. When the Jewish father helps him resolve his debts, it turns out that the moneylender was not a Jew, but rather a Christian thus showing that the neighbor's antisemitism was based on pure prejudice. From the point of view of morality, the Jewish partner in this constellation stands head and shoulders above his Christian vis-a-vis by not judging his neighbors according to their national, but rather their human qualities. It is remarkable, that in this tale a small girl, daughter of the Christian neighbor, enables the contact between both families – she loves her Jewish neighbors, regarding their home as her second one.

Confrontation between Jews and a non-Jewish environment does not always lead to good results, especially when Jews are confronted with state organizations such as the military. In the tale *Das verrückte Schneiderlein* (The mad tailor, Samuely 1892: 166-177) tailor Mendel's only son has been conscribed to the army although that does not accord with legal regulations since he is the only child in his family. The only thing Mendel can do is to ask the Emperor for mercy. The Emperor is travelling through Galicia and Mendel tries to attract his attention, but to avoid disturbance of the ceremonies he is put in jail as long as the Emperor is in the city. When he is released, the Emperor has gone, but Mendel keeps seeking him for the rest of his life, he has gone mad. In this tale Samuely picks up on the myth of the good Habsburg Emperor, widespread in Galician literature with similar scenes found in Polish and Ukrainian texts. Austrian officials may be hostile against Jewish inhabitants, but the Emperor is not. He is a defender of the Jews, although he is inaccessible.⁷

Jews fared badly when they get involved in political commotions that arose between different national groups in Galicia. The tale *Gotteshilfe* (God's help, Samuely 1892: 9-14) takes place with the Polish November uprising of 1830/31 as a backdrop although in the tale the date is incorrectly set in 1833: "Da kam das Jahr 1833. Die Polen bäumten sich gegen das Joch auf, das sie eine Zeit lang in Demut getragen und fingen an, laut mit ihren Ketten zu rasseln" („The year 1833 had come. Poles rebelled

⁷ The hero of K. E. Franzos' novel *Ein Kampf ums Recht* (Fighting for one's right, 1882) travels to Vienna to seek justice immediately at the emperor's throne, the same does the heroine of Marko Chermshyna's tale *Osnovyna* (Principle, 1900). The hero of Julian Strykowski's novel *Austeria* (The Hospice, 1966) is convinced that the emperor in Vienna is always helpful towards his Jewish subjects.

against the yoke the had beared for some time with devotion and began to rattle with their chains.”) (Samuely 1892: 9). The narrator’s grandfather, until then a loyal merchant delivering goods to the state army, is forced by a “Provisional National Government” to deliver goods for the army of the uprisers. After the uprising is struck down, the grandfather is sentenced to death for collaboration with the rebels. At the last moment a document is found proving that the grandfather was forced to supply the insurgents’ army, and his innocence is justified.

Once more Samuely introduces a happy end to a situation when a Jew has been drawn into state politics. What is of more interest is the way the author deals with historic facts. As a Galician he of course knew that the first Polish uprising in the 19th century took place in 1830/31, and not in 1833. But the depicted situation reminds one of the circumstances in Russia (the Russian part of Poland after the 3rd partition), where the uprising took place, and not Galicia. There was no “Provisional National Government” in Galicia, but in Russia; nor was the rebellion in 1831 struck down in Galicia, but in Russia, and followed by severe punishment. So why this contamination of Austria and Russia, why this alienation of historical facts? It can hardly be explained by Samuely’s sympathy with the Polish uprising,⁸ and rather seems to be an act of generalization: what could happen to Jews in Tsarist Russia, could even happen to them in Austrian Galicia.

A similar situation is found in the tale *Die Gäste in der Laubhütte* (Guests at the Feast of Booths/ Sukkoth, Samuely 1892: 205-219), where once more a non-Jew destroys the happy life of a young Jewish couple. A high state official persecutes Blümele, a Jewish girl engaged to her beloved Joseph. As she is not willing to become the official’s lover, he takes revenge using the situation of the Polish uprising. Blümele is denounced as having taken part in the rebellion and is arrested and punished by whipping. As a consequence of this punishment she dies. Her husband Joseph joins an underground organization to fight against the state administration that violated human rights. As he is about to be arrested at the Feast of Booths, he shoots the official responsible for the death of his wife, and then shoots himself. His

⁸ Glasenapp states that assimilated Jews felt sympathies with the Polish national movement (cfr. Glasenapp 1996: 159).

mother dies of shock so that nearly a whole Jewish family falls victim to a non-Jewish state official.

Once more the description of the historic situation is mysterious. The state against which the Polish uprising is directed is never named – yet according to the Galician setting of all these tales (cfr. the title – *Cultur-Bilder aus dem jüdischen Leben in Galizien / Cultural Impressions of Jewish life in Galicia*) this has to be Austria, but many of the mentioned details refer to Tsarist Russia. For example the official's title "Obernaczelnik" (from Russian "načal'nik", commanding official). The situation depicts the circumstances following the second, so called January-uprising 1863/64, which Samuely supported.⁹ The underground terror movements Joseph is part of are typical of the situation in Russia in the 1870s (among the revolutionists were many Jews):

Ebenso geheimnisvoll spielten im Lande sich schreckliche Dinge ab. Bahnen entgleisten zufolge platzender Dynamitbomben, man entdeckte unterirdische Pulverminen; mitten am hellen Tage und auf offener Straße sanken Beamte von einem Dolche getroffen hin, ohne daß man wußte, wen in Verdacht zu ziehen. Es existierten geheime Fabriken, geheime Druckereien und geheime Verbindungen.¹⁰ (Samuely 1892: 217)

Why is Russia, which is meant here, not explicitly named? Why this contamination with Galicia, which in the case of the January-uprising was even less involved than in the 1830 November uprising? Can we conclude that Samuely held pro-Polish sympathies despite the few positive statements on the Polish activities contained in this text? Is Joseph's activity in the Russian underground movement a plea for a Jewish-Russian cooperation in fighting tsarist autocracy? Questions like these, which until now have never been asked when interpreting this tale, cannot be answered in a definitive way. It seems that the transnational character

⁹ Samuely translated letters by Garibaldi in support of the Poles into Hebrew; this can be taken as a proof of solidarity with the uprising people (cfr. Solomon 2012: 44).

¹⁰ "Equally mysterious things happened in the country. Trains derailed due to exploding dynamite bombs, underground powder mines were discovered; in broad daylight and in public officials collapsed after being attacked with a dagger without the slightest idea of who to suspect. There were secret factories, secret printers and secret connections".

of such Ghetto tales (Glaser 2005 II: 1120) is stressed once more – Eastern Jewish fate is similar, be it in Galicia or in Tsarist Russia. We can find such fates in works by K. E. Franzos (*Moschko von Parma*, 1880) as well as by Joseph Roth (*Hiob*, 1930). Their aim is not to blur the differences between the Habsburg and Romanov Empires – there is no doubt that the situation of Jews in Austria was much better than in Russia –, but to show the suffering of Jews who got involved in state politics.

The Question of Assimilation

One of the main goals of Haskalah in Galicia was the assimilation of orthodox Jewry into modern European and especially German culture. Modern education was meant to be the means. But along with enlightenment a tendency to preserve Jewish tradition and religion as the basis of identity can be noted. In Samuely's *Cultur-Bilder* these two poles balance each other out; besides the demand for assimilation there is a tendency to define its boundaries, and to show the danger of how exaggerating the adoption non-Jewish customs can lead to a loss of religious morals and traditions. The idea of preserving religious Jewish traditions is typical for processes of modernization starting in Galician Jewish society already in the 2nd half of the XIX century (cfr. Prokop-Janiec 2008: 268f).

The already mentioned tale *Der Consens* contains a plea for moderate assimilation starting with attendance at a modern school and ending with a degree from a non-Jewish state university. Replacement of a Rabbi-diploma by an academic degree, a swindle probably also noted by the hero's mother, is again an indicator of the harmonizing of secular education with Jewish tradition: the young alumnus of Lemberg University marries his bride according to the Jewish wedding ceremony thus giving an assimilated professional career a happy end.

A strong plea against fundamental practice of Chassidic Rabbis is found in the tale *Das Tüpfel auf dem I* (Dotting your Is, Samuely 1885: 146-167), where a married Jewish woman has been left by her husband without the divorce papers, that would enable her to get married again to a former love. It takes great effort to get this document, but when it arrives, and the new wedding is due to take place, it is declared invalid by a Chassidic Rabbi because there is one small dot missing above a character of the Hebrew alphabet. The lovers cannot

marry, and the Rabbi's decision makes two persons unhappy for the rest of their lives. This tale contains an argument to emphasize the sense of a provision rather than its absolute literal meaning yet does not annul the provision as such. It is a plea for an interpretation of law in favor of people and not against them. This tale is held in high esteem by contemporary critics, who on the other hand have also discovered that the plot was taken from a poem by another Jewish writer, Juda Leib Gordon (cfr. Ober 2001: 62).

The already mentioned tale *Der Packenträger* does not only imply critique of orthodox fanaticism but is directed towards assimilation of Jewish intellectual life into German culture. In the final scene of the tale the narrator visits a book shop in the German city of F. (this could be Frankfurt, famous for its Jewish life). The shop is run by a young Jew from Eastern Galicia – the son of that merchant who at home was cruelly beaten. The bookseller's son left Galicia, but in his German shop he sells Jewish literature. By emigration and assimilation his fate has turned to the better, he has become wealthy without giving up the principles of Jewry.

In the center of Samuely's discussion of the problem of assimilation two tales can be found, both satires on the false understanding of assimilation, which are connected by the same protagonists: *Nur nicht jüdisch* (Everything, but not Jewish, Samuely 1885: 189-209) from the first volume, and *Die Goethetorte* (Goethe's torte, Samuely 1892: 238-256) from the second volume. The main character of both tales is Olga, a young and beautiful Jewish girl who has decided not to be Jewish anymore. Under her influence her parents, a rich merchant and his wife, decide to lead "a completely Christian house" although they cannot really deny their Jewish origins. Especially Olga's mother, Madame Jeanette, formerly Ester Jitte, falls back into old Jewish habits thus causing numerous ridiculous consequences essential for the satirical character (cfr. Kłańska 1985: 184) of the tales. Olga's failed assimilation is yet again a product of her upbringing:

Wer hat die Tochter erzogen? – Müßige Frage. – sie erzog sich selber. Kurze Zeit besuchte sie das Klosterkonvict, dort erlernte sie das Nöthige – enorm viel Judenhaß, ein bißchen Clavier klimpern und ein klein wenig französisch plappern.¹¹ (Samuely 1885: 189)

¹¹ "Who was responsible for the daughter's upbringing? – A futile question – as

The first tale's plot culminates at a Christmas party given for all the important local townspeople. An imposing Christmas tree is meant to demonstrate that there are no traces of Jewish culture in this house. Olga is most interested in one of the guests, the young businessman Alfons Epstein, whom she wants as a fiancé. Everything seems to be going well until the young man declares that he has to leave the party – to light Chanukah candles at home. In the figure of Epstein, who looks through this pseudo-Christian world and shows how ridiculous this kind of assimilation is, the author designs a contra model of assimilation – Epstein too is a child from a Jewish family but does not disdain his origins. It is once more upbringing, which has made him an example of successful assimilation:

Alfons Epstein – das war der Name des jungen Mannes – er war der einzige Sohn eines reichen, jüdischen Fabrikanten in Berlin. Alle Sorgfalt [...] wurde auf seine Erziehung verwendet. Mit einem auffallend schönen Äußeren verband er die manierlichsten Umgangsformen, eine reiche intensive Bildung, natürliche Begabung, viel Herz und Gemüth und war nebenbei die ganze Seele des großen Geschäftshauses seines Vaters.¹² (Samuely 1885: 194)

Olga is the central figure of the second tale, *Goethe's Tort*, which culminates once more at a feast given in honor of the great German poet. On that evening, after literary acclaim and songs to Goethe's texts performed by Olga, the Goethe-torte is to be presented – the German writer's preferred sweet dish. But when this torte is about to be revealed, it turns out that a special Jewish dish is on the platter, a "Sabbathkugel" (a cake prepared especially for the Sabbath ceremony). That does not only provoke the laughter of the assembled guests,

it was she herself. For a short time she was at the cloister boarding school where she studied the all the necessary – a lot of antisemitism, a bit of clinking on the piano, and enough French to babble a bit" (Samuely 1885: 189).

¹² Alfons Epstein – that was the young man's name – he was the only son of a rich, Jewish industrialist in Berlin. Utmost care [...] was given to his upbringing. With his strikingly handsome appearance he combined well-mannered social graces, a rich and intensive education, natural talents, lots of heart and good nature and was also incidentally the soul of his father's grand business (Samuely 1885: 194).

but a bitter replica in the regional newspaper the next day, where the term “Goethetorte” is replaced by “Ghettotorte”.

This satirical payoff with that kind of assimilation that consists of blind imitation of non-Jewish ways of living and of a complete resignation from inherited identity reaches its peak in this tale. What interpretations of this tale to date have not noticed is the double parody it intends: on the one hand a parody of the misinterpreted admiration of a poet, on the other hand as a parody of an existing Ghetto-tale, namely Karl Emil Franzos’ *Schiller in Barnow* (1877). It has already been mentioned that both authors knew but ignored each other; Franzos never mentioned Samuely but Samuely probably made use not only of Franzos’ genre *Cultur-Bild*, but also concrete motifs found in his works. If Franzos’ *Schiller in Barnow* is a homage to the great German writer, whose importance in Galician literary life was greater than Goethe’s influence, Samuely’s *Goethetorte* is a harsh criticism not only of Franzos’ adoration of a literary genius that fits into the pattern of mislaid assimilation, but with Franzos’ tale as well.

In terms of the larger context of both Samuely’s tales, they fit into the paradigm of Galician satire common in the writings of Polish authors. Jan Lam in his novel *Wielki świat Capowic* (The Great World of Zappowitz, 1869) and Michał Bałucki in his novel *Pan burmistrz z Pipidówki* (Mister Mayor of Pipidówka, 1887) depict a satiric portrait of the “high society” of small Galician towns (Jewish persons in these novels are characterized in a rather negative way). Intertextuality of Ghetto literature often pointed out in literary research (cfr. Glasenapp 2005 II: 1126) seems not to be restricted to the Jewish context.

Women Characters

The Jewish world portrayed by Samuely in his *Cultur-Bilder* is a patriarchal one, dominated by men; women fulfil only ancillary rolls. Nevertheless we can find a couple of female characters who transcend the role of the good Jewish “mame” (mom)¹³ noted for spending all her energy on her children. Jittel in the tale *Der Consens* is just this type of “mame” who loves her son more than anything in the world,

¹³ What concerns types of women in Samuely’s *Cultur-Bilder* cfr. Solomon (2012: 65-67).

but will not save him from the pain of the Cheder meant to provide him with the best options for his future. On the one hand she does not protest when her brother takes the boy's education into his hands. Jittel as a widow is not subordinate to a husband, but to her brother, another male authority.

A much more tragic female character is the mother of the small Jakob in the tale *Verstellt* (In masque, Samuely 1892: 268-283), who as a lonely woman and a stranger in the community is exposed to all the hardness of life. Through her character the author criticizes this community without mercy. For her son this woman is the most loving mother, who tries to reduce the severity of fate and is able to comfort him after he fails in earning money on his own.

The character of the loving mother is strongly criticized, if such a mother is not able to desist from religious norms in favor of her child. This is the case in the tale *Das Bußgeld* (Penitence fine, Samuely 1892: 70-83), where Debora, a widow, does everything possible to make her daughter Goldele's life beautiful, yet insists on cutting the girl's long hair before her marriage, as is Jewish tradition. Goldele is well known for her blond hair and does not understand why this beauty must be sacrificed. After having her hair sheared off, she falls into a delirium from which she never awakes. This tale presents in detail two female characters but adds a for the Haskalah typical critique of senseless rules that can destroy a person's life. Samuely was not the first to criticize such rules but has borrowed the plot from a tale by Eduard Kulke (cfr. Ober 2001: 62).

Another type of female character, not tragic at all, but successful and not subordinate to her husband is found in the tale *Mit gleicher Münze* (With the same coin, Samuely 1885: 86-95). The male hero, Josef, together with his wife Zila have moved from Galicia to Vienna in order to try his luck at the stock exchange. He becomes more and more involved in speculations, until he finds himself in insolvency. It is his wife who saves him; from his successful deals she always took a portion to deposit in a bank. As a Galician Jewish wife she is used to saving money. By doing so she is able to ensure the family's existence, and to preserve her husband from further speculations.¹⁴

¹⁴ Oder asserts that this tale – because of its setting in Vienna – is not a true

Zila represents that type of female character that is in accordance with an ideal from the Bible, sketched in the *Proverbia Salomonis 31,10*: “A good wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels”. This quotation is realized in the tale *Das Esches Chajil* (A virtuous wife, Samuely 1892: 133-149), where Rechele, wife of Rabbi Jakele, represents this ideal. She not only runs the household, but also manages the family’s business, so that her husband is free of such obligations and can devote himself to the study of the holy writings and teaching in the synagogue. But on Thursday evening both their duties come to an end, and both prepare for the Sabbath and live only for their family. This not only praises the virtuous woman, but also sketches an ideal Jewish family in which both partners have equal rights and obligations. The tale includes genre scenes from Jakele’s teaching in the synagogue, which have a really humorous character.

It is typical of Samuely to follow up on this ideal with a caricature of it in a tale of similar title *Auch ein Esches Chajil* (A virtuous woman too, Samuely 1892: 150-165), which picks up on the critique of falsely understood forms of assimilation. After the death of his first wife, Reb Schimschon gets married once more to a much younger woman, who is only interested in his material goods. Barbara, his new wife, forces him to cut off his beard and sidecurls as well as to change his name thus performing a pseudo-assimilation. A lot of foreign guests invited by his wife are in his house, which he himself is forced to leave. In the end the house belongs to his wife and he drops dead. The same marriage broker, who had arranged this marriage in the first place, then marries the young widow – they had been collaborating from the very beginning to get possession of Schimschon’s money. The national ‘affinity’ of these two betrayers is not clear – based on their names, the broker Schreivogel is most likely a Jewish person, while the young woman Barbara seems to be of non-Jewish origin.¹⁵ She is the central

Ghetto-story (Oder 2001: 61), but he overlooks the typical traditional “Galician” character of the female hero.

¹⁵ The husband has difficulties when pronouncing this name: “Er hätte sich’s gern leicht gemacht und sie kurzweg “Beile” genannt, aber er sah es ihr an, daß sie darüber in Feuer und Flammen gerathen könnte – er mußte also so lange daran würgen, bis er es herausbrachte: Bar-ba-ra” (Samuely 1892: 153) (He would have liked to make things easy and simply call her “Beile” but he could see that she might burst into flames – he had to choke on it so long until he managed to say: Bar-ba-ra). Barbara is

character of the tale – as a perverted ideal from the Bible doing damage to an honest Jewish man that cannot be compensated for.

Jewish Types

Samuely's impressions of the Jewish world would not be complete without descriptions of specific Jewish types, which enliven this world giving to it variety and fulness¹⁶ yet on the other hand also make its negative aspects visible. Stories devoted to such types often do not have much of a plot but are like descriptions of pictures starting with outer attributes such as hair and beards and moving on to the inner qualities of the person's character.

Usually these types are introduced in pairs consisting of contradictory or complementary characters like in the tale *Der verlorene Glaube* (The lost faith, Samuely 1885: 20-25), which combines the skeptical Jakele Pfeffersam and the imposter Arele Großkopf (his name already includes an allusion to his character – big headed). Despite his inborn skepticism Pfeffersam lends his money to Großkopf, who deceives all of his creditors and disappears with the money. A few months later he reappears in the figure of a Rabbi working wonders. It is Pfeffersam who debunks the Rabbi and forces him to return the money – but only in private; in public the Rabbi is still working wonders. This double constellation of Galician Jewish types demonstrates that the Jewish world has room for both – for the imposter and for the sceptic, who does not believe in wonders.

Another tale, *Zwei Nachbarn* (Two neighbors, Samuely 1892: 178-190), again based on two contrasting characters, does not end in such a harmless way. Here the contrast between poor and rich is drastically portrayed: the rich Sender Breitstolz, whose wealth is based on fraudulent business, is highly esteemed in society and appears to be a devout member of the synagogue. His neighbor, poor but honest Jakele Krämer, lives in deep poverty and has no standing in the Jewish

a Christian name, therefore this tale could be the only one where Samuely depicts a mixed marriage between a Jew and a Christian women.

¹⁶ According to Glasenapp, these types are a special phenomenon of Samuely's Jewish world, which distract from conflicts and problems in this world (cf. Glasenapp 1996: 173).

community. At the end of the tale the poor man is expelled from his flat by the rich man, who possesses the whole house. In this case two opposed characters serve to point out social tensions in a society that is not willing to equalize out these differences.

Some fates of these Jewish types end tragically, for example that of the hero of *Unser Dawidsohn* (Our Dawidsohn, Samuely 1885: 46-53), who has to learn how to be a jester, although he has no talent for such a job. At Jewish weddings he has to play a person who first dies but then is resurrected from death. He is always compared to the famous Berlin actor Dawidsohn, but only one time does he live up to this comparison: when he not only plays the role of a dead person but dies himself as he acts. Yet the feast goes on, with hardly anybody showing any respect for this outsider.

The Jewish community is much more harshly criticized in the tale *Der Sendik* (“Sendik” means a mad man, Samuely 1885: 112-126), that illustrates how every community needs a mad man and forces certain persons to take on the role of such a scapegoat. A slight slip of the tongue becomes a mistake that is never forgotten and intrusively imitated until a perfectly normal man becomes ill and is driven to death. Only at his burial ceremony is that recognition bestowed upon him that he was always denied when alive.

In the context of critique of the Jewish community, the already mentioned tale *Verstellt* may be regarded as the culmination of this critique. Young Jacob, living under the poorest of circumstances, is redlined from the town’s community because he and his mother are foreigners there. As he takes part in the masquerade organized for Purim-feast he experiences how other masked participants are given money, but he is not.¹⁷ The small sum that he nevertheless does receive is then robbed from him by a gang of street urchins. The “all forgiving love of one’s neighbor”, quoted by his mother to console him, stays a utopic dream with the Jewish community being far distant from such an attitude.

¹⁷ Contemporary critics of this masquerade have seen an allegory to Jewish behavior – too great an assimilation to the non-Jewish ambience. Cfr. the author of a review from 1892: “Die Geschichte, in der sich ein ‘Jakob’ am Purim als ‘Jacques’ verstellt, wäre man versucht als allegorische Einkleidung auf das Geschick des Jakob-Volkes zu bezeichnen...” (The story when ‘Jakob’ at Purim pretends to be ‘Jacques’ could be understood as an allegorical costume of the fate of Jacob’s people...) (Glasenapp/Horch 2005 I: 645).

From the Description of Cult to the Idyll

In Samuely's tales one can find numerous descriptions of Jewish traditions and cultic plots which the Jewish readers are familiar with but that are unknown and exotic for the non-Jewish audience. All these traditions are part of life in the community and encompass all realms of life, making knowledge of this background necessary to understand them. They are depicted in genre scenes emphasizing the idyllic character of Jewish life.¹⁸ The more these tales are dominated by description, the less important the plot becomes – a notable feature of the *Cultur-Bild* genre.

In the tale *Eine Million Dukaten* (A million ducats, Samuely 1892: 30-39) the birth of a male child is described including all the customs to be observed even before circumcision, which have either a ritualistic or folkloric character. Circumcision itself is not depicted, but rather described in paraphrases, which is in conformance with the narrator's harmonizing tendency:

Was man mit meinem kleinen Brüderchen in der Synagoge vorhatte, wird wohl einem Jeden der Leser bekannt sein, der arme Wicht mußte etwas von sich in der Synagoge zurücklassen, und daß er das nicht mit großer Freudigkeit gethan hat, bewies sein Zetern und Schreien, das den ganzen lieben Tag fort dauerte.¹⁹ (Samuely 1892: 38)

The tale *Der Schreckensmonat* (The month of horror, Samuely 1892: 60-69) expresses the feelings of anxiety and horror which take place in the Jewish community in the month of Elul, the time of remembering deceased relatives and becoming conscious of one's own death with expressions in Hebrew used to render the sound of the Shofar-horn. But this tale ends once more on an entertaining note: not the

¹⁸ According to Solomon, accentuation of religion and tradition serve as a counterpart to critics of Chassidism and fanaticism (cfr. Solomon 2012: 86).

¹⁹ "Every reader knew what was going to happen to my little brother at the synagogue. The poor little thing had to leave part of himself behind at the synagogue and it is clear that he didn't do that with great joy based on his ranting and crying that continued on for the whole blessed day" (Samuely 1892: 38). A contemporary critic saw in this description an uttering of bad taste (cfr. Glasenapp/Horch 2005 I: 645).

voices of the deceased are heard from the synagogue's loft, but the yowling of hungry cats.

A counterpart to this tale can be seen in *Der Freiheitsmonat* (The month of freedom, Samuely 1892: 95-113), where the joy raised by the coming of spring joins with the still greater happiness caused by the feast of Pesach; numerous preparations for Pesach are described, as well as the various evening ceremonies celebrated.

The already mentioned tale *Das Esches Chajil* contains a detailed description of the Sabbath ceremonies, the tale *Zwei Nachbarn* a description of the Jewish New Year and Feast of Reconciliation; and the tale *Verstellt* describes the customs connected with Purim. Especially in these last two tales, depictions of cult and customs serve as a kind of counterweight to the tragic character of the story.

An idyllic tendency in Samuely's impressions has often been mentioned by critics (cfr. Solomon 2012: 51; Glasenapp 1996: 174). With regard to this tendency one should take note of the tale *Verwandtenliebe* (Love between relatives, Samuely 1885: 210-223), based on a simple story: two rich female cousins of the poor heroine, Otilie, are willing to take the poor girl into their home, but only as a servant. When Arthur, a young good-looking relative, appears, the rich sisters see him as a bridegroom for their daughters, but he declares his choice – the poor but beautiful Otilie, the Cinderella. The close connection to the famous fairy tale is obvious, the solution of the conflict by a fairy prince differs categorically from the social contrasts and conflicts alluded to.

The story takes place in Otilie's garden, which already is a typical setting for an idyllic scene. The many descriptions of the natural surroundings as part of the narration emphasize its character – not to allow too much of tension:

Gott! Wie blühten und glühten auf einmal die tausend schwellenden Knospen in dem Rosenbusch, daß sie aus den grünen Blättern, die sie umgaben wie zauberhafte Flämmchen emporschlügen und sie die wunderholde Frühlingssonne, mit welchem rosigen, goldenen Lichte senkte sie sich über das liebestrunkenen Brautpaar.²⁰ (Samuely 1885: 222)

²⁰ “Oh my God! How the thousands of billowing blossoms flowered and glowed in the rose bush leaping up like magical flames through the green leaves surrounding

The inclination to create such an idyllic scene is in accordance with Samuely's already mentioned tendency of balancing out antagonisms, and by doing so creating a harmonic vision of the Jewish world in East Galician towns.

Final remarks

In his two volumes of German written *Cultur-Bilder* Nathan Samuely picks up all the essential themes and motifs known from the genre of Ghetto-literature. He develops a special variety of this genre, the *Cultur-Bild*, introduced probably by Karl Emil Franzos a few years earlier. Samuely's *Cultur-Bilder* show a tendency to a short volume sketch, where the story is reduced to an elementary plot and depiction prevails over action. The larger part of these stories is devoted to issues of pure Jewish characters and situated inside the Jewish community; interaction between Jews and members of a non-Jewish surrounding can be found, but do not dominate the range of depicted conflicts. The scale of stylistic devices used to depict Jewish life reaches from satiric to romantic and idyllic modes. Critique of the ugly sides of life in the Jewish community cannot be overheard, but it is not the last word spoken. Critical allusion towards the state or politics are rather veiled and not explicitly portrayed. A view of life of the so-called Ghetto that harmonizes contrasts and contradictions is typical for Samuely's *Cultur-Bilder*, and makes them stand out in contrast to similar texts by other representatives of Ghetto-literature.

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them. And that marvelous springtime sun with its goldenly rosy light dipping down over the love drunken bride and groom..." (Samuely 1885: 222).

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Nathan Samuely – a Jewish writer from Galicia

This article is dedicated to Nathan Samuely (1846-1921), a little-known Jewish author from Galicia, and his main work, the two volumes *Cultur-Bilder aus dem jüdischen Leben in Galizien* (1885, 1892), written in German. Samuely, who also wrote in Hebrew, was one of the most important representatives of so-called ghetto literature, which was intended to familiarise non-Jewish readers with the life of the Jewish community in the segregated area of the small Galician town, which was predominantly populated by Jews. In the numerous short stories from these two volumes, the author deals with all the important aspects of Jewish life, education, contacts with the non-Jewish environment, the question of assimilation and the insistence on Jewish traditions, Jewish women and types, cult and idyll. The political history of Galicia is only rarely addressed in these tales; they also draw on events from the history of neighbouring Russia, which leads to a contamination of different historical narratives. Where Samuely describes conflicts and tensions between Jews and non-Jews as well as within the Jewish community, there is a tendency to harmonise and balance the opposites; a happy ending to the plot serves to eliminate conflicts. However, this does not apply to those stories in which the author depicts the stark social differences within the Jewish community – the rich dominate society, the poor perish. In these stories, Samuely probably holds up a mirror to his own Jewish group.

Of particular interest is the question of the genre of the *Cultur-Bild*, which Samuely probably adopted from K.E. Franzos, but which is clearly different in his work: the tales only comprise a few pages, longer forms are missing. The story is reduced, with characters and genre scenes dominating. Both the genre and its form allow a comparison between Samuely and other important representatives of ghetto literature (K.E. Franzos, Leo Herzberg-Fränkell, Hermann Menkes), but they also reveal parallels to Polish authors from Galicia in the second half of the 19th century.

Keywords: Jewish literature in Galicia, Natan Samuely, Ghetto literature, Culture-Bild, themes and motives.

INDICE

SLAVI, TEDESCHI, EBREI: MIGRAZIONI, CONFINI, ESPERIENZE

A cura di Roberta Ascarelli, Ramona Pellegrino e Laura Quercioli

- Roberta Ascarelli, Ramona Pellegrino, Laura Quercioli
Slavi, tedeschi, ebrei: migrazioni, confini, esperienze. Prefazione
delle curatrici 7-15
- Roberta Ascarelli
Pregiudizi, avventure e silenzi. Intellettuali polacchi e Haskalah
berlinese 17-40
- Giovanni Gorla
Echi herderiani alle radici del pensiero etnografico di Shloyme
An-ski 41-64
- Piotr Laskowski
Jewish Anarchists in Eastern Europe's Melting Pot. The Case of
Max Nacht (Nomad) 65-93
- Alois Woldan
Nathan Samuely – A Jewish Writer from Galicia 95-116
- Stanisław Obirek
Rudolf Maria Holzappel and Stanislaw Vincenz, i.e. Crossing Not
Only Religious Borders 117-139
- Michaela Bürger-Koftis, Ramona Pellegrino
Riflessioni linguistiche sul tedesco e sul russo in Julia Rabinowich:
un confronto tra narrazione autobiografica orale e il romanzo
Spaltkopf 141-164
- Valentina Parisi
Fuori dai teatri della memoria: l'ebraismo plurale di Sasha Mari-
anna Salzmann 165-192
- Liliana Giacoponi
“Il paesaggio dal quale io giungo [...] era una contrada di uomini e
libri”. La ricezione dell'opera di Paul Celan in Ucraina 193-218

- Laura Quercioli
 Vom Zuviel war die Rede, vom Zuwenig. Paul Celan nell'opera
 di Mirosław Bałka 219-241

STUDI E RICERCHE

- Tarik Čušić
 Italijanske posuđenice u savremenom bosanskom jeziku ... 243-270
- Emanuel Klotz
 Die slawischen Namen der Gemeinde Nikolsdorf (Osttirol) – Slavia
 Tirolensis VII 271-295
- Arnold McMillin
 Hanna Komar at the Start of a Very Promising Career as Poet and
 Translator 297-328
- Giacoma Strano
Na Puti di Čechov: una storia nella storia 329-350
- Элина Свенцицкая
 Верлибр как герменевтика: Экспериментальные переводы М.
 Л. Гаспарова 351-377

IN MEMORIAM

- Irena Fedorowicz, Kinga Geben
 Wspomnienie o profesorze Algisie Kalėdziej (1952-2017), założy-
 cielu polonistyki na Uniwersytecie Wileńskim 379-385

RECENSIONI

- Velimir Chlebnikov, *Poesie*. Saggio, antologia e commento di Angelo
 Maria Ripellino. Intr. di Alessandro Niero. Nuova ed. a cura di
 Alessandro Niero e Riccardo Mini. Einaudi, Torino 2024 (Gabriele
 Mazzitelli) 387-390
- Autor und Subjekt im Gedicht: Positionen, Perspektiven und Praktiken
 Heute*. Hrsg. Peter Geist, Friederike Reents, Henrieke Stahl. Metzler,
 Heidelberg 2021 (Alessandro Achilli) 390-392

Olena Ponomareva, <i>Dizionario Hoepli Ucraino: Ucraino-Italiano</i> . Hoepli, Milano 2020 (Salvatore Del Gaudio)	392-395
Zuzana Nemčíková, Ivan Šuša, <i>Antológia súčasnej slovenskej literatúry / Antologia della letteratura slovacca contemporanea</i> . Istituto Slovacco a Roma, Roma 2023 (Josef Sikola)	395-398
Note biografiche sugli autori	399-403

