

Obsessed with the Theater: The Translator and Amateur Author Rafael Farin*

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In the Ottoman Empire, Judezmo newspapers in the 1860s were already dominated by novels and novellas, many of them creative adaptations of foreign material, particularly French and Hebrew sources. As Olga Borovaya has shown, this new genre of secular fiction involved the adaptation of an original work from another language, entailing the translation of instructive texts without even mentioning the possibility of producing original works. In all these literary contexts, language played a key role in determining how Jews negotiated their identities in fiction.

All these so-called Judezmo translations or adaptations of various kinds, including those that claim to be original works, borrowed lexical elements from the foreign-language texts and thus depended on them to varying degrees. These texts are described by Olga Borovaya as “rewriting” literature and their authors as “rewriters”.¹ A thorough study of the source language-texts and their translated, adapted, or rewritten versions would help to show how translators or “rewriters” overcome the linguistic problems and the social-cultural difficulties in practice. Unfortunately, no systematic research has yet been carried out.²

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1 Olga Borovaya, *Modern Ladino Culture: Press, Belles Lettres, and Theater in the Late Ottoman Empire*, Indiana University, Bloomington 2012, p. 140; idem, Olga V. Borovaya, “The Serialized Novel as Rewriting: The Case of the Ladino Belles Lettres”, *Jewish Social Studies* 10 (2003), pp. 30-68.

2 For example, see Michael Studemund-Halévy and Gaëlle Collin (eds.), *La Boz de Bulgaria. Bukyeto de tekstos en lingua sefardi. Livro de Lektura para*

Judezmo Theater

Judezmo theater did not emerge until the second half of the nineteenth century as a so-called “adopted genre”, first as an expression of holiday celebrations, such as Passover, Hanukkah, and Purim, and later as a medium of instruction that was performed in schools or for literary or charitable associations. Three languages were employed by most of the Jews in Europe—Hebrew, Yiddish and Judezmo—in addition to the language of the host country.

The basic largely negative attitude toward theater diminished when Jewish life was affected by the Jewish Enlightenment movement and the movement for Jewish emancipation. Even if Judezmo theater always sought to provide entertainment, it was meant to be a venue of moral education and enlightenment, a school open to everybody.³ The idea of creating a Judezmo theater was appealing to the Westernizer because it seemed to be a good means of teaching morality and religion. These plays and sketches often appeared in periodicals, sometimes in serialized form, and quite of a few of them were not even meant for staging.

Judezmo theater emerged as plays on Jewish life, written in Judezmo by named authors or created by a member of the local Sephardic community, and staged by a group of actors of the Sephardic community for a Sephardic audience, very often for religious purposes, charitable propaganda, and fundraising. Sephardic dramatists were rabbis, local literati, intellectuals, or publicists involved in Sephardic journalism as publishers, editors, translators, or contributors to one or several newspapers.

When Sephardic literati were putting together a repertoire for the new theater, they did not have any domestic texts to utilize. They had to import French theater for material to borrow, such as works by Racine, Molière, Delphine de Girardin, Scribe, Eugène Labiche, Octave Mirbeau, Henry Bataille, or Georges Courteline. Other literati created original plays, turning to biblical stories and episodes of Jewish history (stories about Queen Esther or Joseph and his brothers), and later, to the local

estudiantes, vol. 1: *Teatro*, Tirocinio, Barcelona 2014. See also Dov Cohen, “ארון הספרים בלאדינו: מחקר ומיפוי”, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan 2011; Gaëlle Collin and Michael Studemund-Halévy, *Entre dos Mundos*, Tirocinio, Barcelona 2007.

- 3 Olga Borovaya, “New forms of Ladino cultural production in the late Ottoman period: Sephardi theater as a tool of indoctrination”, *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 2, no. 1 (2008), pp. 65-87 [here: p. 67].

situation. Zionist authors favored dramatic and violent episodes where Jewish heroes and heroines demonstrated their patriotism and dedication to Judaism by saving the land and the people of Israel, for example, the stories about Jephthah, Debora, David and Goliath, Queen Esther, the Binding of Isaac, Bar Kochba, and so on. In the early twentieth century, the repertoire of Judezmo theater included more plays on Jewish life (“return to the ghetto”), especially in Eastern and Central Europe and Palestine, mainly translated from Hebrew, Yiddish, German, Dutch, and Russian—most of the latter via Hebrew. These texts showed traditional Jewish life between nostalgia and modernization, allowing Jews to reconnect with the past. The preferred Jewish authors were, along with Sholem Aleichem, the Yiddish writers Shalom Asch (1880-1957) and An-ski (1863-1920), the author of the *Dibbuk*, translated into many languages, including Judezmo.⁴

The languages of the theater performances were predominantly Hebrew, Judezmo, and French. In Bulgaria, one key center for the Jewish theater was the city of Shumen, whose most outstanding representative was the amateur stage director Rafael Farin.

Sephardic Theater in Shumen

The northeastern Bulgarian industrial and university town Shumen, earlier called Shumla, and from 1950 to 1965 renamed Kolarovgrad in socialist Bulgaria, lies on the eastern slopes of the Shumen Plateau, some 60 miles from the port city of Varna. The town, bordering the southern Dobrudzha region, had a large Turkish population; in 1869 there were also approximately 400 Jews living there. In 1905 about 200 Jewish families resided in Shumen, and in 1912 the Jewish population numbered 1,200, declining to 842 in 1926. A clear majority of them, more than 80% according to the latest census we have, spoke Judezmo as their mother tongue.⁵

- 4 The classic interpretation of the story of the *Dibbuk*, which inspired various artistic and musical treatments, is a play by Shalom An-Ski (alias Zainwil Salomon Rappoport). *Der Dibbuk* was translated, adapted, and published by Jacques Cappon (*Entre 2 mundos or HaDybuk. Legenda dramatica en 4 actos*, Sofia ca. 1930); see Collin and Studemund-Halévy, *Entre Dos Mundos* (Note 2), p. 29, no. 47; see also Elena Romero, “Nueva bibliografía de ediciones de obras de teatro sefardíes”, *Sefarad* 66, no. 1 (2006), pp. 183-218 [here: p. 207, no. 88].
- 5 Binyamin Arditti, *Jews of Bulgaria – The Shumla Community* (Hebrew), Va’adah Tsiburit, Tel Aviv 1968; Aksel Erbahar, “Shumla (Shumen)”, in Norman A. Stillman

Probably unknown to most, the municipal library of Shumen possesses a small number of Hebrew and Sephardic books, mostly grammar books, including some unique or highly rare items, such as a book published in Judezmo and in Rashi characters in 5684/1924: *Traduksyon libro [!] de las poezias ebraikas de Rosh haShana i Kipur traido ala estampa por Ya'akov Rafael Maestro shohet i hazan sheni de la komunidad israelit-sefaradit de Shumla en Bulgarya*.⁶

This book, printed by the well-known “Estamparia Targovski”, is—at least according to the *Bibliography of the Hebrew Book*⁷ and to Dov Cohen—the only known volume in Rashi script published in Shumen. In addition, the municipal library has books in Hebrew that were used especially in the Jewish schools. Almost all the Jewish inhabitants of the city at the end of the nineteenth century were proficient in Judezmo, Turkish, and Bulgarian, and in addition a number had a good knowledge of French.

In Shumen, a bitter battle over languages was also waged in the early 1870s. According to an article published in 1870 in the Viennese periodical *El Koreo de Vyena*, the traditionalists were vehemently opposed to the battle cry of the Alliance Israélite Universelle “*Ondi ay frances, non ay fes*” (“where French is learned, no fez is worn”), and when the school was dedicated, they demonstratively donned their fez headcover and spoke in Judezmo.⁸

This enthusiasm for the theater, which was progressively integrated into everyday Jewish life, also spread to the provincial town of Shumen, where the beginning of Bulgarian theater is usually identified with two performances in 1856 in a coffee house. Plays were also performed at the Bet Sefer, the elementary school of the Alliance Israélite Universelle,⁹ founded in 1870, where Rabbi Baruch Mitrani, a Hebrew reformer and noted precursor of Zionism, was active for a short time as a

(ed.), *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2010, vol. 4, p. 367.

6 Collin and Studemund-Halévy, *Entre Dos Mundos* (Note 2), p. 130, no. 129.

7 See www.hebrewbook.org

8 In the *El Koreo de Vyena*, in its January, February, March, and April issues, 1871, a lengthy polemic ensued between Abraham Rosanes of Ruse and Matitayahu of Shumen on the issue of change in education, *El Koreo de Vyena*, June 28 (Sivan 5630); see also Vicki Tamir, *Bulgaria and Her Jews*, Yeshiva University Press, New York 1979, p. 136.

9 Today this beautiful school building has been converted into a home for the aged; see Tamir, *Bulgaria and Her Jews* (Note 8), p. 108.

Hebrew teacher¹⁰ as was the teacher Eliezer Behor Ya'akov (died 1933 in Sofia). Probably before 1915, Ya'akov staged the play *Ya'akov i sus ijos* (Jacob and His Children)¹¹ together with his students at the school. He also translated the play *Musiu Güillom* (Mister William) from French to Judezmo.¹²

According to Binyamin Arditti, a Revisionist Zionist,¹³ the Jews in Shumen were “obsessed with the theater” in the true sense of the word.¹⁴ Almost all associations and societies, with the exception of charitable organizations, felt obliged to include theatrical presentations, with or without music, in their events. Aside from some early mention of theatrical performances, the veritable heyday and flowering of the Jewish theater in Shumen was in the 1920s, and is closely associated in particular with the name of Rafael Farin. This period of flowering, however, was to last but a decade.¹⁵

Regarding Shumen, we have more or less certain knowledge of the following theater performances:

1. Before 1915, *Ya'akov i sus ijos* (Jacob and His Children), directed by Eliezer Behor Ya'akov.
2. In 1919, an amateur group enthusiastic about the theater performed Shalom Asch's (1880-1957)¹⁶ stage play *Im hagal* (*Mitn Strum*, 1904), translated into Bulgarian by Lazar Daniel.¹⁷

10 Michael Studemund-Halévy, “Ivri, daber ivrit! Baruch Mitrani, un maskil turko-sefardí en Viena”, in idem et al. (eds.), *Sefarad an der Donau. Lengua y literatura sefardiés en tierras de los Habsburgo*, Tirocinio, Barcelona 2013, pp. 175-202.

11 Arditti, *Jews of Bulgaria* (Note 5), p. 106.

12 Arditti, *Jews of Bulgaria* (Note 5), p. 106; Elena Romero, *La creación literaria en lengua sefardí*, MAPFRE, Madrid 1992, p. 277.

13 Binyamin Arditti (1897-1982), born in Vienna, was an Israeli politician who served as a member of the Knesset for Herut and Gahal between 1955 and 1965. He also published several books: *The Role of King Boris in the Expulsion of Bulgarian Jewry* (1952), *Bulgarian Jews under the Nazis* (1962), *Bulgarian Jewry – the Shumla Community* (1968), and *Famous Bulgarian Jews* (1971).

14 Arditti, *Jews of Bulgaria* (Note 5), pp. 105-107.

15 See Elena Romero, *El teatro de los sefardíes orientales*, 3 vols, CSIC, Madrid 1979, vol. 2, p. 758, no. 360-361.

16 Shalom Asch, a celebrated writer in his own lifetime, wrote initially in Hebrew, but I. L. Peretz convinced him to switch to Yiddish. His works were never translated into Judezmo.

17 Arditti, *Jews of Bulgaria* (Note 5), p. 106-107; Romero, *Teatro de los sefardíes orientales* (Note 15), vol. 2, p. 758, no. 360-361.

3. In 1919, *Yehuda Makabi* was performed in Bulgarian by the theater troupe “Mikra”, founded 1918.¹⁸
4. In 1920, there was a performance of *La ija kazamentera*, by the Hebrew poet Abraham Razin (Abraham Rosen/Rosenzweig, 1889-1974), and performed by the theater troupe “Mikra”.¹⁹
5. In 1925, *Don Yosef de Castilla* was staged in Judezmo by the “Sosyedad Makabi”.²⁰
6. In 1926 in Shumen, *Dreyfus*, by Jak Loria (1860-1948), was performed in Judezmo.²¹
7. In 1926, *Dreyfus*, by Aharon Menahem, was staged and directed by Rafael Farin.²²
8. In 1926, *Don Isak Abravanel*, by Aharon Menahem, was staged and likewise directed by Rafael Farin.²³

- 18 Arditti, *Jews of Bulgaria* (Note 5), p. 106; Romero, *Teatro de los sefardies orientales* (Note 15), vol. 2, pp. 757-758, no. 359. The Bulgarian National Archive in Sofia (Ladino Collection) possesses a copy of the theatrical play “*Yehuda Makabi, trezladada del bulgar por Abraham Menahem*” in Solitreo Sephardic script.
- 19 Abraham Razin was an author of serialized novels; see also Arditti, *Jews of Bulgaria* (Note 5), p. 106; Romero, *Teatro de los sefardies orientales* (Note 15), vol. 1, 299, no. 304; vol. 2, p. 761, no. 376.
- 20 Arditti, *Jews of Bulgaria* (Note 5), p. 107; Romero, *Teatro de los sefardies orientales* (Note 15), vol. 1, p. 248, no. 202; vol. 2, p. 776, no. 442.
- 21 *Dreyfus. Drama en sinko aktos i un apoteoz*, Sofia 1902-1903; reprinted in Studemund-Halévy and Collin, *La Boz de Bulgaria* (Note 2), pp. 38-89; Romero, *Teatro de los sefardies orientales* (Note 15), p. 86, no. 137; p. 88, no. 144; 94, no. 160; Elena Romero, *Repertorio de noticias sobre el mundo teatral de los sefardies orientales*, CSIC, Madrid 1983; Nitsa Dori, *The Dreyfus Affair and Its Registration in Ladino Literature* (Hebrew), Bar-Ilan University 2000; see also Yosef Avraam Papo, “Dreyfus” (MS), Archivo Histórico (Sofia). See also Nitsa Dori, *The Dreyfus Affair and Its Registration in Ladino Literature* (Hebrew), Bar-Ilan University 2000.
- 22 Arditti, *Jews of Bulgaria* (Note 5), p. 106; Romero, *Teatro de los sefardies orientales* (Note 15), vol. 1, p. 251, no. 213; vol. 2, p. 776, no. 443; Romero, *Repertorio de noticias* (Note 21), pp. 50-51, no. 65; Romero, “Nueva bibliografía de ediciones” (Note 4), p. 193.
- 23 *La Verdad* (Ruse), c. 1900. Along with Aharon Menahem, Behor Azaria (1874-1911), Jak Loria, and Sento Semo, who also wrote stage plays about the philosopher of religion and minister to the Catholic kings, Isaac Abravanel; see also Arditti, *Jews of Bulgaria* (Note 5), p. 106; Romero, *Teatro de los sefardies orientales*, vol. 2, p. 777, no. 444; Romero, *Repertorio de noticias* (Note 21), pp. 50-51, no. 65; Romero, “Nueva bibliografía de ediciones” (Note 4), pp. 183-218 [here: p. 191, no. 24]; *Bibliography of the Hebrew Book* (www.hebrew-bibliography.com).

9. In 1926, there was a performance of *El Avaro* by Molière in Bulgarian.²⁴
10. In 1926, *La suegra la kaza arevuelta*, probably based on Anton Todorov Strashimirov's (1872-1937) well-known satiric comedy *Svekurva* (Mother-in-Law)²⁵ and now considered one of the best comedies of morals in Bulgarian, was staged in Judezmo and directed by Rafael Farin.²⁶
11. In 1926, Sholem Aleichem's play *Desparsidos i Dispersados* was put on in Judezmo and directed by Rafael Farin.²⁷
12. In 1927, *Messhasheah hana'alayim*,²⁸ a stage play and musical translated from French to Bulgarian by Isaac Hayim Shelomoh Eshkenazi (Ashkenazi) was performed.²⁹

24 Avare de Moliere, pp.1-15 (Archivo Histórico, Sofia); Arditti, *Jews of Bulgaria* (Note 5), p. 106; Romero, *Teatro de los sefardies orientales* (Note 15), vol. 1, pp. 165-175, no. 27; vol. 2, p. 777, no. 445. See also *El hazino imaginado. Komedia en tres aktos de Molyer, trezladado de el fransez por Sh. Ataf*, Sofia 1903.

25 Anton Todorov Strashimirov (1872-1937), founder of the dramatic literature in Bulgaria, published his first poems in the journal *Iskra* (The Spark) in Shumen; the start of his active creativity was linked with the theater in Shumen and Varna. He published in Bulgarian the novel *The Salonica Terrorists* (see Jacques Eskenazi and Alfred Krispin, *Jews in the Bulgarian Hinterland: an annotated bibliography*, Sofia 2002, no. 1520) and the preface to the poems of Youliy Rosenthal, Sofia 1904 (Eskenazi and Krispin, *Jews in the Bulgarian Hinterland*, no. 1893). He published his satiric comedy *Svekurva* in 1906. Violeta Menahem Levi-Samardzhieva remembered a presentation in Dupnitse, 1921, apud Kristina Tosheva, "El teatro y los judios en Bulgaria: Con esbozo historico", *Annual / Godishnik* 26 (1991), pp. 244-257 [here: p. 250]; see also M. A. Nikolov, *Anton Strashimirov*, Sofia 1965.

26 Arditti, *Jews of Bulgaria* (Note 5), p. 106-107; Romero, *Teatro de los sefardies orientales*, vol. 1, p. 427, no. 631; vol. 2, p. 777, no. 446.

27 *Desparcidos i dispersados. Espektakulo en tres aktos, El Djudyo* (Varna), 15, (1925)-16 (1926); reprinted in Studemund-Halévy and Collin, *La Boz de Bulgaria* (Note 2), pp. 147-183; Romero, "Nueva bibliografía de ediciones" (Note 4), pp. 183-218 [here: p. 204, no. 73. However, Farin translated the play from German, as is clearly evident from a comparison of the Yiddish with the German version and from the manuscript version.

28 Arditti, *Jews of Bulgaria* (Note 5), p. 107; Romero, *Teatro de los sefardies orientales* (Note 15), vol. 1, p. 341, no. 360; vol. 2, p. 778, no. 449.

29 Romero, *Teatro de los sefardies orientales* (Note 15), vol. 2, p. 778, no. 449; Arditti, *Jews of Bulgaria* (Note 5), p. 107. There is very little information on the use of music in Sephardic theater, and even less is known about the staging of Sephardic plays.

13. In 1927, *Mojeret hogafrurim (Seller of Matchboxes)*, a stage play and musical operetta translated from French to Bulgarian by Isaac Hayim Shelomoh Eshkenazi (Ashkenazi) was put on.³⁰
14. In 1929, there was another performance of *Don Izhak Abravanel*.³¹

This naturally incomplete list is based principally on the studies by Binyamin Arditti, Elena Romero, and Kristina Tosheva. If we supplement this list of the Sephardic theater from Bulgaria by the Judezmo books published in Bulgaria, and if we then complete this tableau by our still insufficient knowledge of Sephardic literature from Vienna, Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Serbia, we can readily see that the number of translations from Yiddish and German into Judezmo is far greater than what numerous researchers have previously assumed and that many translations were via detour, so to speak, of a German version then translated into Judezmo.

Brothers in Spirit: Sholem Aleichem and Rafael Farin

As a passionate lover of the theater, according to the memoirs of his friend Binyamin (Buko) Arditti, the pharmacist, journalist and translator Rafael Farin, who was born in Shumen in 1889 and died in 1951 in Lod, was greatly enamored of the writings of Sholem Aleichem, still popular today in Bulgaria, because like Sholem Aleichem, “Rafael loved life and surrendered himself to it”.³² Farin shared this love with the Sephardic public, which between 1919 and 1931 repeatedly asked for stage plays and dramatic sketches by Sholem Aleichem. At least four of his works were translated into Judezmo during those years, simultaneously with the translation of a far larger number of Sholem Aleichem’s works into Bulgarian.³³

Based on the unfortunately inaccurate data given by Binyamin Arditti, Rafael Farin presumably translated three books by Sholem Aleichem into Bulgarian between 1918

30 Arditti, *Jews of Bulgaria* (Note 5), p. 107; Romero, *Teatro de los sefardíes orientales* (Note 15), vol. 1, p. 347, no. 371; vol. 2, p. 778, no. 450.

31 Arditti, *Jews of Bulgaria* (Note 5), p. 107; Romero, *Teatro de los sefardíes orientales* (Note 15), vol. 2, p. 785, no. 484; Romero, “Nueva bibliografía de ediciones (Note 4), p. 191, no. 24.

32 Arditti, *Jews of Bulgaria* (Note 5), pp. 106-107.

33 Rosa Brantz, “Sholom Aleichem in Bulgaria”, *Godishnik/Annual* 22 (1987), 223-236.

and 1928.³⁴ In 1925-26, the journal *HaShofar* published a Bulgarian translation of *Menahem Mendel* without, however, mentioning the name of the translator.³⁵ Rafael Farin is also believed, at least in the view of the Bulgarian local historian Niko Mayerov from Shumen, to have translated a further classic text by Sholem Aleichem, *Tevje the Milkman*,³⁶ but likewise we have not been able to locate a copy of this translation.³⁷ In addition, he is supposed to have translated sections of *Don Quichote* into Judezmo.³⁸

In his short bibliography on the Judezmo theater, Abraham Yaari mentions three works by Sholem Aleichem:³⁹

- (1) *Desparcidos i Dispersados. Spektakulo en tres aktos, trezladado del alman por R. Farin.*
- (2) *Mazal bueno. Para mazal bueno. Komedia en 1 akto. Trezladado del ebreo por Abraham Matarasso.*
- (3) *Para mazal bueno (Komedia en un akto) i syertas notas sovre Sholem Alehem rekojidas por [Izhak David Florentin], Saloniko 1931.*

Rosa Sánchez lists three or four works by Sholem Aleichem, including *Desparcidos y dispersados; El médico/A Doktor; Mazal Tov/Enhorabuena/Para mazal bueno*.⁴⁰

34 Arditti, *Jews of Bulgaria* (Note 5), p. 105.

35 *HaShofar* 17 (1925), no. 11, pp. 5-8 (14.12.1925); no. 12, (1925), pp. 4-9 (25.12.1925); no. 14 (1926), pp. 4-12 (15.1.1926); no. 16 (1926), pp. 5-8 (29.1.1926), no. 18 (1926), pp. 4-9 (12.2.1926).

36 Niko Mayerov, *Evrejskata mahala v moite spomeni*, [s.n.], Shumen 2011, p. 28.

37 According to the handwritten catalogue deposited in Yad Vashem of the collection of books of Benjamin Arditti, there is only one book by Rafael Farin in his library, namely *Menahem Mendel*; see Gaëlle Collin and Michael Studemund-Halévy, “Le fonds judéo-espagnol bulgare de la Bibliothèque de Yad Vashem (Jerusalem): le fonds Benjamin Arditti”, *Miscelánea de estudios árabes y hebraicos/Sección de Hebreo* 56 (2007), pp. 163-179.

38 Mayerov, *Evrejskata* (Note 36), p. 28. Nissim Farhi, a pharmacist living in Shumen, still recalls Farin and his passion for the theater very well, as well as his translations for the theater, including also parts of *Don Quichote*, as he told me in a conversation in Shumen in 2011.

39 Abraham Yaari, “On the History of Israeli Drama: Dramas in Ladino” (Hebrew), *Bamah* 3, no. 21-23 (1934), pp. 11-14.

40 Rosa Sánchez, “Para mazal bueno: la comedia Mazal tob de Shólem Aléjem en judeoepañol”, *ARBA* 16 (2005), pp. 125-132; idem, “Dos versiones judeoespañoles

Finally, the magnificent *Bibliography of the Hebrew Book* lists four of his works in Judezmo translation:

1. *Para Mazal Bueno/Mazal Tov*, in: *El Makabeo* (Salonica, 1919), trezladado del ebreo por Abraham Matarasso.
2. *Mi kapo de anyo*: Broshura muy divertyente, kontenyendo la [...] pyesa [...] El Mediko, del grande eskribano [...] Sholem Alehem, consejos a las mujeres, maksimas i proverbyos, Saloniko, c. 1920, in: *El Djudyo* (1920).
3. *Desparcidos i Dispersados*, Spektakolo en tres aktos, trezladado del alman por R. Farin, in: *El Djudyo* (1925-1926).
4. *Para mazal bueno i syertas notas sovre Sholem Alechem*. Rekojidas por I[zhak] F[lorentin], Saloniki (1931).

Rafael Farin, who in Shumen not only directed Jewish stage plays for a Jewish theater-going public and also adapted numerous plays for the stage, shared his lifelong enthusiasm for Sholem Aleichem with translators and authors such as the journalists Abraham Matarasso and Isaak David Florentin, who translated plays by Sholem Aleichem into Judezmo.

It is thus not surprising that the first book publication of Farin we know of, which appeared in Shumen in 1925, was the first book in the series (probably founded by him) entitled “Jewish Humorous Library”, namely the epistolary novel *Menahem Mendel* by his favorite writer Sholem Aleichem.⁴¹ It was published by the Jewish youth organization Mikra Makabi and printed by the well-known printer Spas Popov.⁴² According to the title page, this is a translation from German, a language that Rafael Farin, linguistically gifted, knew well, since he had learned German while studying for two years at the Leipzig College of Management (Handelshochschule). Later he also taught German at the commercial school in Shumen.

de la comedia Mazal Tob de Shólem Aléjjem”, M.A. thesis”, M.A. thesis, University of Basle 2005; idem, “Difusión y recepción de obras teatrales de Shólem Aléjjem en ámbitos sefardíes”, *Theatralia* 7 (2006), pp. 175-185.

41 *Menahem Mendel*, translated from the German Language, R. Farin, Mikra – Makabi, Shumen 1925.

42 Brantz, “Sholom Aleichem” (Note 33), p. 228. On the bibliography of the works of Sholem Aleichem in Bulgarian, see Hristo Yordanov, “Shalom Aleichem’s Books Translated and Distributed in Bulgaria”, *Godishnik/Annual* 22 (1987), pp. 236-238 [here: p. 235].

Farin's second book in Bulgarian is likewise a translation of the collection of novellas by Sholem Aleichem published in Berlin in 1925, entitled *Di Ershte Yidishe Republik*, which Farin brought out in Shumen in 1927 in Bulgarian as *Parvata Evreiska Republika/Spored Istinskoto odisanie/na edin Otcheviden/Prevel: R. Farin/Knigata i skladiran i prevodatcha be Shumen 1927 (The First Jewish Republic. An Authentic Description of a Witness)*.⁴³ Along with these two works in Bulgarian, Farin may well have translated a third by Sholem Aleichem, which appeared in the periodical *HaShofar* without mention of the translator's name.⁴⁴ The first two translations can be found today in the Shumen municipal library.

In 1924, Farin translated one of the most popular Yiddish plays by Sholem Aleichem, *Tsezeyt un tsheshpreyt (Scattered Far and Wide)*, which appeared in Varna 1925/26 in the periodical *El Djudyo* entitled, *Desparsidos i Disparsados, spektakulo en tres actos, trezladado del alman*.⁴⁵

This "Dramatic Play in Three Acts" deals with a family that is falling apart, in which all of the dramatis personae espouse and represent an idea according to which they organize their life: the daughter Hanna represents a life of study and education; the son Haim is a Zionist, another son is a Social Democrat. The mother Malke is pious but too weak to stand her ground against her children, and to some extent does not take what they say seriously (*Se yo lo que los crios van dahtaniando?*).⁴⁶ Central here is the married couple Schalant, who see themselves, forced by the catastrophes that occur (their eldest daughter Flora elopes, their son is arrested, their daughter Hana's engagement is dissolved), to finally come to terms and deal with their children. When at the end of the play the husband asks his wife about their children, she answers

43 Brantz, "Sholom Aleichem" (Note 33), p. 228.

44 *HaShofar* 17 (1925), 11, pp. 5-8 (14.12.1925); 12 (1925), pp. 4-9 (25.12.1925); 14 (1926), pp. 4-12 (15.1.1926); 16 (1926), pp. 5-8 (29.1.1926); 18 (1926) pp. 4-9 (12.2.1926).

45 Written in 1903, it describes the conflict of generations and was performed many times on stage with great success *El Djudyo*, 15, 1925, [1], 16.10, 38, pp. 3-4; [2] 39, 23.10, pp. 3-4; [3] 40, 30.11, pp. 3-4; [4] 6.11, 41, pp. 3-4; [5] 13.11, 42, pp. 3-4; [6] 20.11, 43, pp. 3-4; [7] 27.11, 44, pp. 3-4; [8] 4.12, 45, pp. 3-4; [9] 11.12, 46, pp. 3-4; [10] 47, 18.12, pp. 3-4; [11] 25.12, 48, pp. 3-4; 16, 1926, [12], 1.1.1, pp. 3-4; [13] 2, 8, reprinted in Studemund-Halévy and Collin, *La Boz de Bulgaria* (Note 2); see Romero, *Teatro de los sefardies orientales* (Note 15), p. 227.

46 Studemund-Halévy and Collin, *La Boz de Bulgaria* (Note 2), p. 151,

him: “scattered and dispersed over all the seven seas” (*desparcidos y dispersados por todas las ciete partes del mundo*).⁴⁷ An analysis both of the manuscript and the printed version shows that Rafael Farin stuck very close to the German translation of the Yiddish original and that he had a masterful touch in rendering Sholem Aleichem’s linguistic virtuosity in Judezmo translation.

The only theatrical play we know of authored by Farin is the comedy *El Amor victorioso*, of which there is only a typed manuscript version extant.⁴⁸ This witty play is animated by the spirit of Sholem Aleichem, and in its language it resembles that of the characters in Farin’s translated work *Desparisidos i Disperados*. The play is full of Turkish expressions, which is not surprising: despite the language reforms, there are thousands of Turkish and Balkan Turkish words in Bulgarian, and more than half of the inhabitants of Shumen were ethnic Turks; Farin himself had a good knowledge of Turkish. Along with Turkish and Hebrew words, there are a number of Gallicisms and Italian words, as well as lexemes from Bulgarian and German. We do not know as yet whether this captivating comedy, playful with metalinguistic registers, which is set in a “contemporary small provincial town” (*se passa en noestros dias en una sivdad de provincia*),⁴⁹ was written by Rafael Farin himself or is one of his many unpublished translations. But since Farin, as a rule, notes if a work is translated, and in this case has not included such a note, we assume that he is the author of this play.

As a poet, translator, or journalist, Rafael Farin used the nom de plume “*Nirlafar*” or “*Niraf Leafar*” (anagrams of the author’s name), and as journalist the pseudonym “*Alkolombrie Meshofistra*” and “*Nirlafar*”, under which he published witty satirical *pismos* (letters) in the leading Bulgarian Zionist weekly *Razvet* (Sofia) and in the Judezmo-Bulgarian weekly *haShofar* (Plovdiv).⁵⁰ Despite considerable effort, I have

47 Studemund-Halévy and Collin, *La Boz de Bulgaria* (Note 2), p. 183. This is similar to the Yiddish expression on which the title of the play is based, “*Tsezeyt un tsheshpreyt oyf ale shive yamim*”; see Benjamin Harshav, *The Meaning of Yiddish*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA 1990, p. 37.

48 Studemund-Halévy and Collin, *La Boz de Bulgaria* (Note 2), pp. 117-146.

49 Studemund-Halévy and Collin, *La Boz de Bulgaria* (Note 2), p. 157.

50 On Jewish journalism in Bulgaria, see Gad Nassi (ed.), *Jewish Journalism and Printing Houses in the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, Isis Press, Istanbul 2001; Salvator Israel, “*Evreiski periodichen pechat na ladino i ivrit v Balgarija*”, *Annual/ Godishnik* 1 (1967), pp. 139-167.

to date been able to find only two solitary example of these letters. But he was not only a gifted writer, but also a fervent supporter of Revisionist Zionism and an admirer of the Revisionist Zionist leader, author, and orator Vladimir Jabotinsky (1880-1940). It is not surprising that Farin ran as a candidate in Shumen for the Revisionist Zionists (without success).

The work of Sholem Aleichem in Judezmo

Sholem Aleichem (alias of Shalom Yaakov Rabinovich), who was born in 1850 in Pereyaslav (a village 95 km south of Kiev in Ukraine), and died in 1916 in New York, is considered alongside Mendele Moicher Sforim and Yizchak Leib Peretz (also known as Yitskhok Leybush Peretz) one of the most important classic author of Yiddish literature. Translated into many languages, he enjoyed great popularity especially with German, American,⁵¹ and Bulgarian readers.⁵² Among them, Rafael Farin was one of his most keen and enthusiastic readers, who not only translated Sholem Aleichem's works into Bulgarian and Judezmo, but also wrote as an author "in the spirit of Sholem Aleichem".⁵³

For Farin, the polyglot and linguistically witty amateur writer from Shumen, Aleichem's subtle and complex mix of languages from earthy Yiddish, combined with German, Hebrew, and Slavic elements, represented a huge linguistic challenge. After all, in the grotesque picture gallery of Jewish characters he created, each one of the *dramatis personae* is assigned the role of a bearer of a social-political idea and a distinctive and unmistakable language, giving rise to the most ludicrous kinds of

51 Louis Friedhandler, *Index to the Yiddish Work of Sholem Aleichem and Their English Translations*, New York 1907.

52 The first translations of Sholem Aleichem in Bulgarian appeared at the beginning of the twentieth century, when in 1910 the newspaper *Vesti* published a few stories translated from German into Bulgarian. According to Hristo Yordanov, more than 17 of his stories and books were published between 1918 and 1985 in Bulgaria. See Yordanov, "Shalom Aleichem's Books" (Note 42), pp. 236-238.

53 It should be noted that the first Bulgarian translations of Sholem Aleichem were from German, not from Yiddish or Russian, see Brantz, "Sholom Aleichem" (Note 33), p. 225.

confusions. Provincial *bon vivants* and loudmouthed parvenus alternate with religious Jews and worldly Zionists, small-town belles in their frippery, and ironically resigned married women, traditionalists and modernists. In addition, there appear jealous old fools and dubious merchants, cheeky domestics, sleazy marriage brokers of both sexes, fathers and mothers crazy to get their daughters engaged, and daughters fanatic to be wed.

The translator Rafael Farin characterizes and caricatures his *dramatis personae* with a special linguistic wit, giving each one of them a distinctive linguistic repertoire. Farin succeeds in weaving together different registers that he correlates with different social characteristics and linguistic surfaces, including social factors such as age, gender, occupation, origin, and the like. This creates a sort of theatrical heteroglossia in which multiple languages, dialects, or registers are used for the traditional motives of verisimilitude or humor.⁵⁴ Farin was successful in this not only due to his exceptional command of Judezmo but also by his skillful employment of non-Spanish (often rare) words from Hebrew, Turkish, Romanian,⁵⁵ German, French, and Italian.

Rafael Farin also introduces several proverbs (*riflanes*) in these comedies, which can all be found in the Bulgarian proverb collections known to us:

coando vas mesclando las colis con las letchougas
el consejo di la moujer es poco i el que no lo toma es loco
el loco gasta el savio se lo come
el que ijas tiené con perros cosfoegra
ijo mio si tomas haver assouvi escalon, si tomas moujer abacha escalon
la manzana mo caye lejos del arbol
segun el padre ansi y los crios
vestido à la trenta i ouna alfoneti

Rafael Farin invested and lost much money in his passion for the theater, and he managed to finance this as a druggist by the sale of salves, albeit meagerly, paying the

54 See also Beatrice Schmid et al., *Zwischen Tradition und Moderne: Eine corpusgestützte Untersuchung zur Sprache der südosteuropäischen Sepharden (1880-1930)*, <<http://pages.unibas.ch/sefaradi/tradmod/index-de.html>>

55 The Farin family maintained close family and personal ties to Romania; see the memoirs of Karolina Farhi (“Memoirs”, MS).

printers with its proceeds.⁵⁶ His family supported him, at least morally, and in any case was proud of him. In her memoirs (in Bulgarian), his sister Karolina wrote:

*My brother Buko (Rafael) was very well-read and gifted musically. He was also very smart. My father often asked him for advice, and he wrote some satires that we preserved in the family. He played the guitar and mandolin. We often sat on the stairs, he played and we sang. He had a beautiful voice, loved to tell jokes (MS).*⁵⁷

If that is all that is extant of his work, the question arises as to what happened with his posthumous papers, especially the manuscripts that his sister Karolina mentions in her memoirs. At the moment, we can only answer this question with some hesitation. But in our search for Judezmo books, periodicals, and manuscripts in Bulgaria, during numerous trips to the country, we have located more than two dozen manuscripts of stage plays, all unknown, most in Solitreo script, and a small number in Rashi and Latin script. A publication of these texts would substantially expand our knowledge of Judezmo literature, not just in Bulgaria.

56 Arditti, *Jews of Bulgaria* (Note 5), pp. 105-107.

57 Karolina Farhi, "Memoirs", MS.