

“Shloyml-Boyml mitn Mazdikn Dreydl” by Yale Strom
A review by Shoshke-Rayzl Yuni

Among 1st, 2nd, and 3rd generation American Jews, many of us have an urge and intention to catch the waves of cultural richness from our ancestry, to carry it on into modernity. It’s rare, but once in a while a creative person’s work, perhaps unknowingly, echos and carries on a cultural tradition from long ago with a sincerity and lack of pretention that makes the continuity seem magical. Take this:

Over a hundred years ago, starting in 1911 to be exact, a Galitsyaner writer living in NYC using the pen name B. Kovner, created an enduring style, a sub-genre of Jewish humor, when he crafted and popularized characters that resonate even now: Yente Telebende, Moyshe Kapoyer, and Kalman Zalman der Alman. So now, Yale Strom, with the authenticity of his musical and general cultural connections between the past, present, and future of our people has intuitively and creatively crafted the character Shloyml Boyml! Hooray!

You don’t need to know Yiddish already to enjoy this book because each copy contains the entire text in both English and Yiddish. Both versions, read separately or together, are absolutely delightful. The gorgeous illustrations are by Emil Singer-Fuer, originally from Budapest, Hungary, now in Manchester, England. Yale Strom, the author, lives in California with his wife, Elizabeth Schwartz. If you aren’t already familiar with their heartfelt extraordinary performances of Ashkenazic Jewish and Romani music that they record and perform worldwide, both separately and together, you are seriously missing out. Nu, back to Shloyml-Boyml.

Yes, it’s a Hannukah story – but I found it just as delightful when I first read it off-season. *Boyml* is Yiddish for Oil and so the name is just perfect for a Hannukah story. On the one hand, the story is an allegory for the well known ancient story of Hannukah. On the other hand, it’s a story of the challenges of life when we must coexist with many people, some of whom may be a bit, or more than a bit, unsavory. It’s a story of getting along, in a most unusual way, simultaneously difficult and yet natural. Yet, it’s also a culturally rich story with accurate portrayals of Jewish life long ago in the area north of Odessa—real places, a real river, and an elaboration of local legends. Both children and adults can enjoy this book – truly something for everyone.

As stated in the below referenced article in the Forward, Kovner’s “most iconic character, Yente Telebende, known for her loud mouth and meddling ways, even spawned the creation of a new term in the vernacular: a ‘yente’ meaning a gossip.” Nu, I predict that Shloyml-Boyml will also become iconic, representing a persevering, good hearted musician and altruistically meaningful community leader!

To order the book – for Hannukah gifts and for yourself – go here:

https://www.etsy.com/listing/896262481/shloyml-boyml-bilingual-hanukkah?ref=yr_purchases

To read and hear more of Yale Strom, go here:

<https://yalestrom.com/>

To learn more about Jacob Adler, the writer (not the Yiddish actor of the same name) and his many pseudonyms including B. Kover:

1. (in Yiddish) – “Pinkas Galitsia” p.214-215
<https://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/collections/yizkor-books/yzk-nybc314144/pinkes-galitsye-aroysegebn-tsum-20-tn-aniversar-zayt-der>
2. (in English) – in Josh Fogel’s unofficial lexicon:
<https://yleksikon.blogspot.com/2014/05/jacob-yankev-adler.html>
3. NY Times 1975 Obituary (at age 101):
<https://www.nytimes.com/1975/01/01/archives/jacob-adler-yiddish-humorist-and-prolific-writer-dies-at-101-a.html?searchResultPosition=1>
4. English translation of a Yente story, translated by Itzik Gottesman:
<https://old.forward.com/articles/10455/index.html>