

Cross-Cultural Narration in the Nineteenth Century: Jewish Folk Narratives Transcribed by a Polish Author

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The authoress discusses “The Miracle in the Cemetery” (“Cud na kirkucie”) by the Polish author Klemens Junosza and uses it to examine an important topic related to folk literature and the circumstances of its narration. Considered are the basic theoretical issues in the study of folk literature, specially cross-cultural narration and its influence on the text created in such a situation.

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Klemens Junosza, the pen name of the Polish author Klemens Szaniawski, was born in Lublin in 1849; he died of tuberculosis in March 1898. Junosza wrote stories, novels, plays, and sketches; for a time he supported himself by journalism. Some Polish literary historians view his novels as among the most important works in the language during the second half of the nineteenth century (Nofer-Ładyka 1985, 422). Junosza, like other Polish authors of his time, was attracted to ethnography and folk art, which both romanticism and Polish nationalism placed at the center of nineteenth-century cultural studies. In 1880 he published and produced *Folk Art in Five Scenes, with Song and Dance*. He excelled at describing life in the villages and small towns. Junosza’s attraction to the people and folk characters led him to Jewish themes as well. He translated works by Mendele Moikher Sforim into Polish (1885/6)¹ and wrote extensively on Jewish topics.² Some perceive traces of antisemitism in his work, but Alina Nofer-Ładyka (*ibid.*) rejects this view, chiefly because it is contradicted by his sympathetic portrayal of several of his Jewish characters. It was evidently his attraction to the Jewish world that brought him to the Jewish folk narrative that is the focus of the present article. “The Miracle in the Cemetery” is the title story in a volume of Jewish folk narratives published posthumously in Warsaw in 1905. The transcription clearly dates to the last years of the nineteenth century; some of the other stories in the book had been published in periodicals in the 1880s (Shmeruk 1981, 225).

¹ On the translation see Prokop-Janiec 1997, 407.

² We should remember that Polish literature and art evinced an interest in Jewish themes in the nineteenth century even before there was any serious ethnographic research. Important Polish authors of the nineteenth century, such as Eliza Orzeszkowa and Bolesław Prus, dealt with Jewish themes in their work (Goldberg-Mukiewicz 1989, 9). Another example of the transcription of a Jewish folk tale by a Polish author is the legend about Abraham Prochownik, recorded by Roman Zamarski (Zamarski 1854). This is a single story, not an entire book. For a discussion of Zamarski’s version of the legend of Abraham Prochownik, see Bar-Itzhak 2001, 93-100.

The book, as Junosza attests, documents his encounter, as listener and transcriber, with a Jewish storyteller, the tailor Berek, to whom he gives a lift in his wagon from one of the small towns near Lublin to the city and back again the next day.

The book includes a close description of the circumstances of the narration and of the emerging bond between the Jewish narrator and his Polish listener. It mentions eight stories that Berek told or wanted to tell, namely: (1) how the fetus learns Torah in its mother's womb; (2) the disaster that Berek foretold for his city, or Berek and the demons; (3) David and Goliath; (4) the 36 Righteous Men; (5) the prophet Elijah at the Lubartów fair; (6) Esther, the Jewish queen of Poland; (7) Jacob and Esau; (8) the miracle in the cemetery.

Not all the stories are fully developed. Some, like that of the prophet Elijah at the Lubartów fair, are merely alluded to in passing, for reasons to be discussed below.

At the end of the book, the transcriber notes that he wrote down the details "as they were recounted, with no additions, with no changes, and with no literary embellishments" (Junosza 1905, 36). Of course the question of how accurate a transcription of this sort can be will always remain. Several points, however, support Junosza's claim:

(1) A comparison of the main story, that of the miracle in the cemetery, with other Jewish versions of the tale (see below), and especially that published by the historian Meir Bałaban in his book on the Jews of Lublin (Bałaban 1919, 97–98), does not reveal any alterations in the spirit of the story.³

(2) The tale of Esterke, reputed to have been queen of Poland, is also faithful to the Jewish tradition. As Shmeruk puts it, "there is no room to doubt the accuracy of what is reported in Junosza's story about the main points of the Jewish tradition" (Shmeruk 1981, 225).

(3) The Jewish storyteller speaks bad Polish spiced with Yiddishisms and Hebraisms. For example: "Proszę pana to właśnie jest cała zguba, od tego miasto upadło a my wszyscy skapcianieli" (12) ("Please, sir, this is the entire destruction, from this the city fell and all of us were beggarized"). Or again: "Jak sie panu zdaje, czy żydek, taki zwyczajny żydek, mały bachórek przychodzi na świat mądry czy głupi" ("How does it seem to you, sir, that a Jew, a simple Jew like this, a little fellow, comes into the world wise or foolish") (6). Yiddish words like *kahal*, *pinkt*, *more/morejne*, *mecyja* [= *metzia*], *feler*, *git*, and *recht* are sprinkled throughout the text.

As noted, alongside the tales themselves the book also documents the process of communication between Berek and the listener. This process, and its effect on the tales being told to a listener from a different culture, constitute the core of the present analysis.

Context has become a key variable in modern folklore studies. The first method to stress the importance of context in folklore studies was the functional approach. Back in 1954 William Bascom maintained that a functional analysis of folk literature (or of folklore) requires a description of its social context, including the time and place for the narration of specific genres, the identity of the storytellers and audience and the relationship between teller and text, the folk classification of the traditional genres, and people's attitude toward them (Bascom, 1954, 334). Today the invocation of context is no longer limited to a particular method in folklore studies, although its use is influenced by various

³ Shmeruk goes even further, stating that "Junosza's version is in practice identical to the Jewish version" (Shmeruk 1981, 226).

branches of knowledge—anthropology, sociolinguistics, psychology, philosophy, cultural studies, and literary theory—depending on the approach of the specific scholar and his or her attraction to those subjects (Ben-Amos 1993; Duranti and Goodwin 1992).

Dan Ben-Amos defines folklore as artistic communication within a small group: “There are two essential social conditions for folklore activity to take place: the performers and listeners must be in the same situation and must be part of the same affinity group” (Ben-Amos 1971, 7–8). He agrees that, in both theory and practice, stories can be told to strangers, but a story is faithful to its own nature only when it is recounted within the same group (*ibid.*). Following Ben-Amos, I apply the term “natural context” to a story that is told in an intracultural situation, that is, a story told in a situation where the narrator and audience belong to the same affinity group. We can further illustrate this by using Malinowski’s notion of the “cultural context” and “situational context” (Malinowski 1965 [1935]). By “cultural context” (*ibid.*, 18) Malinowski means the speakers’ shared knowledge, including their conventions, belief systems, metaphors and genres, historical awareness, and shared moral and legal principles. In folklore studies “cultural context” refers to the broadest framework for understanding and interpreting folklore (Bauman 1983; Ben-Amos 1993, 215–17). On the other hand, the “situational context” is the closest and most limited. The emphasis on the importance of the situation for folklore performance in general and for folk literature in particular emerged in folklore studies in the 1960s, when, following Roman Jakobson, it was no longer viewed as a passive element but as the arena of interaction between the speakers and their utterances (Ben-Amos 1993, 217; Jakobson 1960, 353).

In “intracultural narration,” the participants in the storytelling situation share the same or similar cultural context. “Cross-cultural narration” occurs when the participants do not share the same cultural context and come to the storytelling situation with different cultural systems. This is the case noted by Ben-Amos in which stories are told to strangers (see above). From a scholarly perspective, it is interesting to investigate what happens to a story when it is told in cross-cultural narration. How does the storyteller react to a listener from another culture? How do the listener and his reactions affect the stories?⁴ Junosza’s book offers us a glimpse of this process or, more precisely, of the communication that develops between the Polish listener, an educated man of his place and time, shaped by contemporary ideas and with a penchant for historical accuracy, and the poor Jewish tailor who tells him stories. This study links up with the broader topic of cross-cultural communication and the role of the folk narrative as a vehicle for such communication (Bar-Itzhak 2001, 92–100; Bar-Itzhak 2004).

Elsewhere I have attempted to build a semiotic model of the narrative process in oral literature (Bar-Itzhak 1994), starting from models of written literature, chiefly that of Chatman (1978). I noted that in oral tales the concrete narrator takes the place of the author and the concrete listener that of the reader. But whereas in written literature author and reader stand outside the direct process of communication and are represented by textual instances, their counterparts in oral tales are part of the communicative process that shapes the text itself. Here a two-way flow of information is unavoidable, with both sides (storyteller and listener) constituting addresser and addressee at the same time and jointly shaping the text.

⁴ Dan Ben-Amos, in his exhaustive article on context, writes that “context is a value-free concept, and no one contextual situation is privileged over any other” (Ben-Amos 1993, 219).

In our case the situation is even more complex because the narrator, Berek, is not telling wonder tales. All of his stories can be classified as some type of legend, most of them sacred legends, and one of them as a demon legend told as personal narrative. As a genre, the legend presents a value system with which the storyteller identifies. Severe problems are caused if the listener rejects or challenges these values. Every society considers its legends to be an essential part of its authentic life.⁵ Hence one can understand the emotional resistance stirred up when their veracity is questioned. This resistance stems from the feeling that the sacred value system is in danger: “The degree of belief in what is told plays a decisive role in determining the genre of the folk narrative, which is by no means stable, because a legend can turn into a wonder tale or a joke or be diminished to a rumor. Everything depends on the elements of the storyteller’s transmission and his audience’s reaction” (Werses 1987, 232–33).⁶

What will happen to a story, then, when the listener comes from a different culture, with a worldview totally alien to that of the storyteller, and, with a proclivity for free inquiry and accuracy, expresses his doubts about the content of the tale? The book we are discussing offers many examples of this. To permit readers an immediate encounter with the text I will present extensive excerpts from the text.⁷

The first tale that Berek wants to tell his listener is how the fetus learns Torah in the womb.⁸ He starts telling it after an exchange with his Polish companion about wisdom and luck. Berek argues that you do not have to be smart to succeed in business, just lucky; the brain is for scholarship and study.

Following his listener’s skeptical question he begins his tale:

“True. True, but look, sir, one head is different from another. I’m not speaking about all heads. But I will talk about Jewish heads. How does it seem to you, sir, that a Jew, a simple Jew like this, a little fellow, comes into the world wise or foolish?”

“What a question!”

“Ha! You think he’s a fool, sir! Ha ha. No, I beg of you, sir, he is not foolish at all, because before he was born he was not idle. He wasn’t wasting his time...”

“What the devil was he doing?”

“He was learning. There was an angel with him who explained the text to him, teaching him everything just like the most learned rabbi. He gave him all knowledge, filled his head with it.” (6)

When his listener asks, “so why do you send children to school?” (ibid.), Berek continues his story and explains how a blow on the nose at the moment of birth causes the child to forget his prenatal learning. Of course he points to the philtrum—the indentation above the lip produced by this blow.

⁵ In this context the term “legend,” which is an analytical category applied to the genre in the early days of folklore studies, is problematic. The use of analytical categories in the infancy of folklore studies ignored the way in which scholars may distort the culture being studied when they apply a concept that suggests fiction and a contradiction of the “truth” to stories that the narrative culture considers to be part of its existential truth. It was this problem that led Ben-Amos to suggest the use of ethnic categories (Ben-Amos 1969).

⁶ Cf. Dégh 1976, 89–96.

⁷ The translation incorporates Yiddishisms and Hebraisms.

⁸ For the source of the legend see: BT Niddah 16; Tanhuma *Pequdei* 3; Jellinek, *Beit hamidrash* 1, 153ff. For a discussion of the story of the development of the fetus see Urbach 1976 217–220.

But this detail, which serves an etiological function in the storyteller's culture, does not persuade his listener: "So what?" he asks (7).

The storyteller mobilizes his full powers of persuasion, but his remarks about his listener's reaction make it plain that all is in vain: "You are laughing, sir, you don't believe it is true. I know, you gentlemen have your own superstitions" (7).

Berek cuts short the tale of the fetus, because the listener's reaction reduces this sanctified story into a sort of joke, a fate he cannot accept.

Instead he chooses to talk about the time when he himself saw a demon, a portent from which he inferred the impending collapse of his town. It is no accident that he chooses a tale in which he himself is the hero, so that his testimony should be accepted without challenge.⁹ As he says, "perhaps, sir, you would say that the demon does not exist? Oy, if so I won't see a disaster, as I saw it with my own eyes!" (9).

But here too Berek's hope is frustrated, as we learn from the fact that he repeatedly admonishes his listener, "don't laugh" (*ibid.*).

Berek, realizing that all of his stories arouse skepticism and amusement, retreats into suspicion. He clams up and stops talking to his interlocutor.

So when Junosza asks him what he read in his textbook he hedges his answer:

"What need is there for me to tell this? I read—it should be enough that I read ..."

"So you won't tell me?"

"Nu, why should I have to tell? Not everything is meant to be told, not everything can be repeated, and not every person is fit to talk about such matters. You gentlemen have your beliefs and we Jews have ours. Why should we peer into each other's heads?" (15)

The transcriber understands that if he wants to hear other stories from Berek he has to appease him:

"Nu, my Berek, you're exaggerating. Among us, even small children study the Old Testament, about the Creation, about Lot, about Egypt, about the Patriarchs, the Jewish kings and the prophets."

"I know, I hear about that—but if you will forgive me, sir, that is not Jewish learning and there is always something wrong with it."

"There's nothing wrong with it."

"What's there to talk about. ... Let each stick to his own."

"Yet we don't learn that Goliath killed David, but the opposite." (*ibid.*)

This maneuver brings results. "You know the story, sir?" asks Berek with interest. In the end he agrees to tell the story of David and Goliath. But even here he seeks a justification, which he finds in the fact that he will tell the true story, as it really happened. For it goes without saying that, from his gentile education, his listener does not know what really happened.

Berek has no inhibitions concerning the story of David and Goliath. The transcriber has already indicated that he knows and believes the story. Mainly, however, the tale allows

⁹ For an extensive discussion of the storyteller as a participant and character in the folk narrative see Bar-Itzhak 1994, 261–81.

him to display his pride in the distant Jewish past and to depict a confrontation between Jews and Gentiles without mixing in the contemporary conflict between Jews and Poles. As he says, “you certainly know, sir, that once the Jews were not all paupers and beggars as they are today, but they had a Jewish king, Jewish officials, a Jewish army. ... And what an army! Ha ha” (16).

At the end of the tale the storyteller returns from the glorious past to the present tribulations: “Ay, there was, there was a reason in the world. There was honor and there was an army. Today what is there? Today the Jews have sinned before God, and that’s why they’re in such a *tzimmes* [mess]. ... Now it’s bad, totally bad, and if there weren’t thirty-six righteous men among the Jews, who support the world with their prayers, I don’t know what would happen to us” (18).

But when he states this existential truth of the Jewish world Berek again exposes himself to his listener’s skeptical inquiries. “Why only thirty-six?” “Where are these righteous man?” And, finally, “you’re just babbling and don’t know what it’s all about yourself” (ibid.).

This reaction riles Berek and keeps the story from emerging. Something similar happens next, when Berek says that the prophet Elijah had visited the Lubartów fair the previous year. In both cases the narration of the stories is stifled by the listener’s skeptical and ironic reaction. Berek, furious, refuses to continue. “I could have told you a lot, sir, but it’s better not to talk, because what’s the purpose of talking if someone doesn’t believe?” (19).

Another example of how the listener’s attitude affects the narration involves the tale of the Jewess Esther and Casimir the Great. This story, too, remains untold, although, unlike the prophet Elijah at the Lubartów fair, the essence of the Jewish tradition is conveyed.

The story of Esterke and Casimir is one of the most important in Polish Jewish folk literature (Shmeruk 1981, 113–32; Bar-Itzhak 2001, 113–132). The story is also found in Polish folklore and has inspired a number of Polish writers, as Shmeruk showed (Shmeruk 1981, 113–32). One of the differences between the two traditions has to do with the heroine’s status. According to the Jewish tradition Esterke was the king’s wife; according to the Polish version, his mistress.

Berek starts telling the story of Esterke when they pass the ancient Jewish cemetery on the outskirts of Lublin. The two talk about the cemetery. “Great men are buried there,” notes Berek, “great minds! There is even one stone there that bears only a single name. Do you know what name, sir? Oh, Esther. And do you know who that is, sir? She was a Jewess from the lower classes, the daughter of a poor tailor, but she became a Jewish queen” (24).

Junosza is a man of his own time and place. He is not a listener who will allow the storyteller to recount his tale if the latter’s tradition does not correspond to what he himself knows, so he has no hesitation about contradicting Berek:

“A Jewess? Your information is faulty, my Berek, because she never was queen.”

“What! Perhaps you will say, sir, that this king wasn’t a king, and the Jewess wasn’t Jewish. That he never sat next to her, and that she was never next to him. Everything is upside down for you gentlemen!”

“But absolutely, I do acknowledge that she existed, that she sat next to the king.”

“Nu, and who can sit next to the king?! This is a comedy, may the Lord help us! Next to a tailor sits the tailor’s wife, and next to the king—a queen. Even a small child understands that.”

“She is buried not far from Krakow, that’s a known fact.”

“So be it! I wasn’t at her funeral. For me it’s enough that people say that there is a stone like that and that the name Esther is engraved on it. And this Esther was a Jewish queen. Why do I have to know more? That’s enough for me. Anyone who wants to can believe, and if you don’t want to you don’t have to. There is no necessity, no compulsion about it.” (24)

As noted above, the main points of the Jewish tradition are conveyed in this dialogue. But the full story that Berek wanted to tell when he mentioned the tombstone inscribed with the name “Esther” is not told, because of the disparity between his tradition and that of his listener, which the latter does not hesitate to display.

On the basis of what we have seen thus far it is not astonishing that the defining elements of Berek’s attitude toward his listener are suspicion, an attempt to avoid telling his stories, isolation from the Gentile world, a sense of anger and hurt—but also superiority and occasionally appeasement of the Gentile world (as we shall see below). His suspicion is manifested in many places; we have already noted some of them, such as: “What need is there for me to tell this? I read—it should be enough that I read ...” (15). “Nu, why should I have to tell? Not everything is meant to be told, not everything can be repeated, and not every person is fit to talk about such matters” (*ibid.*).

His sense of superiority also emerges more than once—for instance, in the passage quoted above or in what he says about the gentiles’ learning: “I know, I hear about that—but if you will forgive me, sir, that is not Jewish learning and there is always something wrong with it” (*ibid.*). Because of the gulf between their worldviews, the storyteller is always vigilant, always suspecting that his listener is mocking him. “Don’t laugh!” he keeps telling his listener throughout the book.

The only fully developed tale, which is also the last one that Berek tells, when he and his listener are returning from Lublin the next day, is “the miracle in the cemetery,” from which the story and book take their title. As we shall see, it is very hard for Berek to tell this story—this time not because of his listener’s outbursts or interruptions, but because it deals with a conflict between Jews and Poles caused by the proximity of the old Jewish cemetery and the church. For a Jew to tell a story of this nature to a Christian in Poland in the nineteenth century was excruciatingly difficult and problematic.

The more that Berek attempts to wriggle out of telling his story about the strange neighbors, the church in the valley and the Jewish cemetery on the hill (see below), the more his listener truly and sincerely wants to hear it. The reason is obvious. All of the stories that the Jewish storyteller has told or referred to thus far, except for that of Esterke, are set wholly within Jewish society and have nothing to do with the non-Jewish world and landscape. Even the story of Esterke, which does link the two peoples, is well known in Polish tradition and refers to the distant past. By contrast, the story about the awkward neighbors relates to the shared local space of storyteller and listener, with which both are quite familiar. Nevertheless, Junosza picks up from Berek’s remark that the Jews’ tradition is very different from the one he knows. When he calls Berek’s attention to the cemetery and adjoining church he says that the cemetery is 300 years old. Berek objects vigorously:

“Whoever told you that, sir, should give you back your money! Who can count so many years? Who can remember things that are so old” (21). When Junosza replies that it is all written down in books, Berek, unable to restrain himself, allows the main points of the Jewish tradition to come out: “Ay, what does that mean? Does every book tell the truth? No doubt the books also report that the hill has always been there and the place where the church stands has always been there” (ibid.). When his listener says that the books are based on historical documents, Berek responds heatedly: “May my enemies have such support, as much as that is true. Books write that there was a hill here and a valley. And I tell you, sir, that there was no hill and no valley here” (ibid.).

We are not surprised that, despite Berek’s attempts to avoid telling the story, which he manages successfully that day because their journey is almost over, the transcriber renews his efforts the next day, when Berek wants to go back home with him. “What about the hill?” he presses his passenger (23). But Berek, deeply wounded by his listener’s skepticism about the story of Esterke, continues to dodge: “I thought that you had already forgotten, sir, by my conscience! The hill is a hill, let it stand there, because it is a hill. And we are traveling because we are human beings. A hill cannot travel, nor is it appropriate for us to stand still” (ibid., 23). Moved by his intense desire to hear the tale, the transcriber realizes that he must appease the storyteller. Junosza resorts to irony to express his awareness that Berek has been offended by his skepticism about the Jewish tradition about Esterke, while sketching how he is evidently seen by the Jew:

Evidently Berek was cross. How could anyone possibly doubt his word? He is not an ignorant man, he is not a boorish man, but an educated man who has read much and heard even more, and has heard not only about normal adventures and events, but also about various miracles and doings of the sort that no human mind, not even the strongest, can grasp and explain. He has heard what various angels look like, and what traps are laid by demons. ... He has heard so much, so much, and now here is someone who doesn’t believe him. And who is that? Tfu, may God will it. So the learned man had to be mollified. (25)

Nevertheless, it is clear from this passage that even though Junosza is able to penetrate Berek’s world and understand how the latter sees him, he cannot reckon with his own part as a skeptical listener, always interrupting and criticizing, in keeping the story from being told. In the dialogue that ensues, with its attempt at reconciliation, the extent to which his listener’s skepticism wounded Berek rises to the surface:

“Light yourself a cigarette, Berek, and keep your promise.”

“A cigarette? Why shouldn’t I light myself a cigarette? I will light one. And as for my promise, I don’t know what promise you’re talking about, sir ...”

“I was supposed to hear something about the hill.”

He waved his hand, as if to say that there was no point in scattering words around for nothing.

“What’s there to talk about here?” he said. “There’s no point in it... You don’t believe, sir. You say, sir, that none of it is true.”

“You’re not being fair. When you told about King David, didn’t I agree? About the 36 righteous men—did I say that was false?”

“Nu, true.” (25)

The listener's last question, in which he denies rejecting the truth of the story of the 36 righteous men, illustrates the depth of the gap between the perspectives of the transcriber and the storyteller. Junosza does not think his question about that story—"Why 36?"—expresses doubt or alleges that it is not true. Clearly he does not understand that it was precisely such a question about an existential verity of the storyteller's world that kept him from hearing the story about those 36 righteous men. Nevertheless, the transcriber's awareness of how deeply the Jew has been hurt and his strong desire to hear the story produce an interchange of a new sort between the two characters.

"There are some things that everybody knows about, and there are books in which what happened is written down and no one can argue that it didn't happen. Certainly, Berek, you've heard that there have been famous rabbis in Lublin in the past."

"Ha ha! And what rabbis, pious scholars!"

"Do you think, Berek, that they haven't been written about in books?"

"I know, I know, it's found in various Jewish books."

"Not only in Jewish books. In Polish books, too ..."

"Can't be!"

"But it's so, and why not? The world will always know about and respect great scholars."

"That's true! You're right, sir! I myself saw once, when a rabbi came to the province, not a great rabbi, just a regular rabbi, and they set up a chair for him to sit on. The officials understood that a man of God deserves a chair..."

"So why are you astounded that people have information about really great rabbis? You have certainly heard about Rabbi Solomon Luria, Rabbi Solomon son of Judah?"

"Oy vey, who hasn't?"

"He was a rabbi from Lublin. A great scholar. He died in Lublin more than 300 years ago. I imagine that his bones are resting in the old cemetery. And Rabbi Joel?"

"Joel, oy vey, I know, I have heard about all of them. Why shouldn't I have heard?"

"Rabbi Joel Sirkes son of Solomon."

"Sirkes, who hasn't heard of Sirkes?! A great mind, a great and pious man. He too is buried in the old cemetery."

"No, he's buried in Cracow."

"Perhaps in Cracow. I won't argue. But I don't think so. How could the Jews of Lublin let such a person leave?"

"But they did. It was more than 200 years ago. He went to Cracow, where he became the rabbi, and he died there and was buried next to the famous Rabbi Moses Isserles. You hear, Berek, next to that famous rabbi, who is known as the Remo."

"The Remo? Who doesn't know about the Remo! It's hard to believe that such things are found in Gentile books! Nu, nu ... But I think that has to be a different kind of book."

"Yes, and Rabbi Judah Vega, Rabbi Meir ..."

"Now I will tell you, sir! I will tell you everything, sir. And why? Tell me, sir, do you know any tradesmen who make non-Jewish books?"

"I do."

"But not regular books, but those, you know, sir, of the quality kind, that deal with rabbis?"

"I know some."

“That’s good, because what I’m going to tell you, sir, should be written in books like that. I will tell you, sir, everything just as it happened, the whole truth. . . . Let them write it. You will hear, kind sir, what happened in the old cemetery. What I want to tell you, sir, was a big story. It was such a thing, such an event. . . . Nu, you’ll see, sir. You’ll be convinced, sir, what a rabbi is, what powers he has in him, what powers. (25–27)

In this exchange the two characters finally open up to each other and bridge the gulf between them and between their respective prejudices. When Junosza begins telling what he knows about Polish Jews and their rabbis his immediate motive is to placate Berek. But as he continues he himself opens up to these figures; his esteem for those rabbis, about whom he had certainly read and studied considerably, is genuine and sincere. When a Polish intellectual speaks respectfully of Jewish rabbis to a man of the people like Berek he obtains the desired results. It seems to me, however, that it is not simply that the naïve Berek is being manipulated, but rather that he perceives the sincere admiration in Junosza’s words. This is what sparks Berek’s enthusiasm and stills the suspicions that have bothered him throughout this encounter. Now he can trust that, thanks to this Polish listener, what he is going to say—his most important cultural assets—will be recorded in a non-Jewish book “of the quality kind,” thereby demonstrating the greatness of the Jewish rabbis. Was Junosza being sincere? Or was Berek manipulated by a more sophisticated person, eager to achieve his goal? It seems to me that the book we have in front of us, published in the Polish language by a Polish author, and bearing as its title that of a Jewish folk narrative that was so dear to the storyteller, provides a clear answer to this question.

The book and its stories, along with the description of the intercourse between the Jewish storyteller and the Polish listener, are proof that folk literature can be an important vehicle of cross-cultural communication—communication that seems to be virtually out of the question at the start of the encounter between an impoverished and ethnocentric lower-class Jew and a Polish intellectual held captive by the concepts of his own age and culture, a stickler for historical accuracy, argumentative and no less ethnocentric than the storyteller. The Jew’s great love for his stories and esteem for the Jewish folk tradition, which he sees himself as bearing and propagating, ultimately lead him to recount a complete Jewish folk narrative—and precisely one that is extremely difficult to tell to a Polish Catholic. He is moved by his desire that this tradition be written down, that it be preserved and revered by the members of the host nation among whom he lives and with whom he has only superficial and utilitarian contact in daily life. From the other side, his curiosity about everything associated with the Jewish world and his love for folk art enable the Polish intellectual to overcome his prejudices, to listen carefully and transcribe the Jewish folk narratives, and, finally, to keep his promise to the storyteller and publish them in a book.

As noted previously, it is excruciatingly difficult for a Jew to tell a Pole the story of the miracle in the cemetery. This is clear from a comparison with other versions of the story, recounted in a purely Jewish cultural context. I have found seven such versions. One, transcribed by the An-Ski expedition (1912–1914), told about the town of Ostróg, was recorded in Yiddish and published by Rechtman (Rechtman 1958, 72). Another version was published in German in Bałaban’s volume on the Jews of Lublin (Bałaban 1919, 97–98). A third, in Yiddish (but transcribed in Latin characters), was published in Olsvanger’s anthology *Rozhinkes mit mandlenn* (Olsvanger 1931, 24–25). Four versions, from the YIVO archives, were transcribed and published in Yiddish by Cahan. Of these versions, one is

set in Ludmir (Inv. C, 1784; Cahan 1938, 158); the second in Ostróg, like that recorded by the An-Ski expedition (Inv. C 36.091; Cahan 1938, 157); the third, in a village near Lublin (Inv. C 46133; Cahan 1938, 157); and the fourth near Amdur (Inv. C 50724; Cahan 1938, 157–58).

All of these stories are etiological in nature, an attempt to explain the local topography—specifically, the existence of a deep pit next to a Jewish cemetery, the presence of the Jewish cemetery on a steep prominence or on a hill, with a church in the valley below (in Bałaban's version and our own).

In two of the stories—both set in Ostróg—the holy rabbi who causes the church to sink into the ground is a historical figure: Rabbi Samuel Eliezer Edeles, known as the “Maharsha” (1555–1631) and Jacob Joseph b. Judah, known as “Yeivi” (1738–1791). These stories take the form of saints' legends. Here is one of them.

In the time of Rabbi Yeivi there was a Jew-hating priest in Ostróg. The path to the Jewish cemetery passed close to his church. During the funeral of Rabbi Yeivi the priest decided to ring all the church bells. He knew this would aggravate the Jews. They say that when the men who were carrying the bier came near the church Rabbi Yeivi sat up suddenly and recited the verse: “Utterly detest and abhor it; for it is an accursed thing” (Deut. 7:26). The church began to sink slowly into the earth until it was totally buried. Then Rabbi Yeivi lay back down on his bier and was carried to his eternal rest. (Cahan 1938, 157)

The holy man praised in this legend is Rabbi Jacob Joseph, known as Yeivi, a disciple of Dov Baer, the Maggid of Mezerich, rabbi and preacher in his native town of Ostróg, and author of the eponymous *Sefer Rav Yeivi* on the book of Psalms. A *beit midrash* in Ostróg bore his name. The tale is a legend set after the rabbi's death¹⁰ and recounts the miracle he performed in the context of a religious-national confrontation.¹¹ His antagonist is a priest, whose ringing of the church bells is explicitly described as meant to annoy the Jews. The miracle transpires and the church is swallowed up by the earth when the rabbi recites a biblical verse. In Deuteronomy it refers to the Canaanites: Moses enjoins the people not to be afraid of them, because the Lord will expel them from the land, and reiterates the obligation to destroy them and their idols. The rabbi's use of this verse implies a clear analogy between the Christian church and the accursed pagan cult, while his power corresponds to the mythical strength of the warriors who conquered Canaan—both having their source in the divine will and precepts. There is no element of mercy in the story; the church is swallowed up and leaves no trace behind, with all the associated connotations.

Five of the tales do not name the rabbi, like the version transcribed by Junosza (as we shall see below). Here is one of them.

¹⁰ For an extensive discussion of character in the saints' legends see Bar-Itzhak 1990. For a study of the period in the holy man's life in which the story is set, see Noy 1967, 106–31; Noy 1976; Bar-Itzhak 1987, 190–95; Alexander 1992.

¹¹ On ethnoreligious confrontations between Jews and Poles in Jewish Polish folk narratives, see Bar-Itzhak 1991.

The Church That Sank into the Ground

In our town there was a church. Every funeral procession had to pass right in front of it. What did the Gentiles do? Whenever the Jews carried a corpse near their church they started ringing the bells. This was a great insult to the Jews, but what could they do? The Jews are in exile!

Once a righteous man died in our town. They were carrying his body to the cemetery and passed by the church. When the procession reached the church the Gentiles had no shame and began ringing the bells. The Jews' grief knew no bounds. Suddenly everyone saw the holy man sit up on his bier and gesture to the beadle to approach. They all stood stock-still while the beadle went over to the holy man, who instructed him to go bring a book from his house. The beadle didn't know which book, but since the rabbi had commanded he had to go.

As he approached the rabbi's house, two doves flew out and brought him the book. The beadle took the book and went back and gave it to the rabbi. The rabbi opened at a certain page, read it, and folded back the leaf. After that he lay back down on his bier and ordered the procession to continue. They took him to the cemetery and buried him. While they were doing this they saw the church begin to sink into the ground. The bells kept pealing and the church kept sinking deeper and deeper until it was totally covered up by the ground, as it remains to this day. (Olsvanger 1931, 24-25.)

In this version, like most of the others, the righteous man is anonymous. The ringing of the church bells during a funeral is understood in no uncertain terms as a "great insult to the Jews"—and all the more so during the funeral of a righteous man. The Gentiles who do so are described as brazen: "When the procession reached the church the Gentiles had no shame and began ringing the bells."

In most of the versions, as in this one, the righteous man requests a book. Here he asks the beadle to bring it to him; in others it is a young boy who is sent on the errand. Here two doves bring the book to the beadle; in other versions (but not Junosza's, as we shall see below) it jumps into the messenger's hands of its own accord. Here—as in all versions except for that of Rabbi Yeivi—we are not told what verse the rabbi read out.¹² Finally, here too the story ends with the church totally buried in the ground "as it remains to this day."

In all the stories told by and for Jews, including the examples just cited, the ringing of the church bells during the Jewish funeral is interpreted as a sign of disrespect for the deceased. In some of them the tolling bells are accompanied by other forms of disrespect, such as cursing and stone-throwing. The ringing of the church bells is not described as an innocent act but a provocation, sometimes by a vicious antisemite who is deliberately seeking to humiliate the Jews.

¹² Elsewhere I have pointed out that secret language is a classic hallmark of holy men. The fact that the storyteller, instead of quoting the rabbi's words, uses stock phrases like "he said what he said" or "he uttered a spell," as well as the fact that he does not quote the verse employed by the holy man, but refers only to "a certain verse," reflects his sense of inferiority to the rabbi. He knows in general terms what his hero did, but only the holy man knows the actual words, which characterize him as being on a higher plane than even the storyteller, who is the most important narrative instance (Bar-Itzhak 1990, 215-18).

How can all of this be presented in a cross-cultural context, with a Jewish storyteller and a Polish Catholic listener? No less problematic is the punishment. In all but one other version (Bałaban's), which is also set in Lublin, the retribution is unambiguous and irreversible—the church sinks into the ground, where, as one version has it, “it remains to this day.” That is, the stories establish a regime of measure for measure. Those who were showing their contempt for a dead person about to be buried in the ground will themselves be buried alive in the ground.

How can a Jew tell this story to a Polish gentleman? What strategy can he adopt so that he will not be accused, heaven forbid, of himself showing disrespect for the Christian religion? Let us listen in and find out:

“What rabbi do you want to tell about, Berek?”

“What rabbi? I don't know his name and, to tell the truth, I don't have to. He was a rabbi—that's enough. And whether he was a great rabbi or an ordinary rabbi, you will soon see, sir. We tell about it, tell about it a lot. And what we say about it is the whole truth. Did you see the hill, sir?”

“I saw it.”

“And you saw the church, sir?”

“Of course.”

“The church is all the way down in a valley. You told me, sir, that it struck you as strange. But it's not at all strange. In the past there was neither hill nor valley here.”

“So what was there?”

“Just a small knoll, of the type that you see lots of around Lublin, sir. The entire knoll, or almost all of it, had belonged to the Jews forever. Only a small part of it belonged to others. The Jews built their cemetery on the knoll, and the Catholic who had the other part of the area ...”

“Father Zuziewicz.”

“Father Zuziewicz, let his name be Father Zuziewicz, it's enough that he built the church. So there were a cemetery and a church on the same knoll. What harm is there in that? You have certainly heard, sir, that God created 70 nations and 70 religions and that all the nations and all the religions derive from God. Everyone has to respect his own beliefs. I'll tell you something else, sir. For example, when I'm on the road, and I'm on the road frequently, I may find myself traveling in a wagon with a peasant, sometimes in the evening and sometimes at night.”

“But you're supposed to be talking about the hill, Berek.”

“Wait, sir, I'm not just babbling away. Every word I'm saying has to do with the hill. That's where it's headed. So when I'm sitting in some peasant's wagon, I'm a little bit afraid. I'm afraid, because there are strange people around today, and it's hard to judge from what a peasant looks like whether he's a quiet man or a scoundrel. So I look at him. Along the road there are icons. If the peasant takes off his hat when he passes an icon, I'm not afraid of him and keep riding with him. But if he doesn't take his hat off I'm terrified and run away, because in my heart I know that a peasant like that is not a good person. I think he's a scoundrel and maybe even a robber. Now do you know which way the story is headed, sir?”

“Not particularly.”

“Ha. Well, it's heading for the hill. Why shouldn't there be a cemetery next to the church, or a church next to the cemetery? Both of them were on the knoll. The Jews buried

their dead there. They went to weep over the graves, to pray the way you're supposed to, the way you're supposed to according to the Jewish religion. According to our religion you are supposed to pray for the dead, and the dead person's merits before the Holy One Blessed Be He are very important for the Jews who live in this world. The living Jews and the dead are partners and help one another. So I say that it was perfectly fine, fine, perfectly fine. The Jews were doing their thing, the Catholics theirs. Neither bothered the other. But sometimes there was a problem."

"What sort of problem?"

"Perhaps not a problem. Just unpleasantness. Look, sir, every church has bells. They ring them in the morning, ring them in the evening, and on festivals they ring them a lot. ... So when they rang them in the church, and just then they were burying a Jew in the cemetery, it was unpleasant for the Jews. To tell the truth, it caused them great distress."

"Why?"

"A lot could be said about this ... and I don't know whether you will understand it the way it's meant, sir. There are all sorts of things. Do you think, sir, that a dead person doesn't suffer? A dead person does suffer. His soul suffers, too. It is terrified. Why does it have to be terrified? Why ring for it? I tell you, sir, there were plenty of worries. God-fearing and learned Jews said that some disaster would result from it, but it didn't happen. I'm not surprised that nothing happened as long as they were burying ordinary Jews, simple tailors, shoemakers, merchants. But once it happened that an important rabbi, a very important rabbi, passed away."

"Do you know his name, Berek?"

"On my conscience, I don't. It's enough that he was a rabbi, an important rabbi. When he died the Jews had to bury him at once, because as you know, sir, it is not proper to leave a dead person unburied. You have to bury him in the ground quickly. And of all times, this happened on a Sunday morning. You understand what that means, sir? Ha."

"That is just when we hold our services and the bells are ringing in every church."

"That's precisely the entire calamity. Just as they were bringing the rabbi to the cemetery the church bells began tolling. You understand, sir, all the Jews were terrified. They shivered and trembled with fear, because they knew that something was going to happen. And you know, sir, that whatever happens in this world is always bad for the Jews. They were afraid. Do you know why they were afraid, sir? It's a very simple. A rabbi is a rabbi. If the bells disturbed him, the bells might be damaged, they might crack, they might become unusable. And if something goes wrong with the bells, people will say that the Jews are sorcerers, nu, and you know, sir, that an outcry would begin at once, *gevalt* and *gzeroys*."¹³

"What are *gzeroys*?"

"You don't know, sir? *Gzeroys* is like a law forbidding the Jews to sell brandy, or a law that they can't bury their dead for three days. *Gzeroys* is evil, it's *tfu*. The Jews knew this, so they were afraid and didn't know what to do. Whether to stand there, or to keep walking, or to wait. ... But some unseen power pushed the Jews to keep walking. So they walked on, while the bells pealed more loudly, pealed the way they always do on Sunday. Everyone was waiting for something to happen. They couldn't imagine what would happen, but they knew that something would happen."

"Nu?"

¹³ The narrator uses the Hebrew word in the Ashkenazi pronunciation.

“And something did happen. Ay, what happened! Listen, sir. In their great fear the Jews weren’t walking anymore, but flying like birds. ... Suddenly everything fell silent— utter silence. No one knew who did it. It was enough that even the little birds on the branches were quiet. But the bells kept ringing. The rabbi sat up on his bier, sat up straight, and said: ‘Stop here. Stop here.’ Do you hear that, sir? They all stopped in their tracks as if they were dead, as if someone had buried them in the ground. Do you think it a paltry matter, sir, when a dead man talks? Everyone stood still. The rabbi thought and thought and finally gestured to a young fellow, a little tyke of five or six. ‘Come here,’ he told him. The boy came up to him. Why shouldn’t he? An old man is afraid, but a kid like this isn’t afraid, because he doesn’t understand. He went over and stood next to the bier, waiting to hear what the rabbi would say. ...”

“And what did he say?”

“Very little. He said, ‘Dear one, please go to my house, where there is a cupboard. In the cupboard there are books. But be careful. Take a footstool, so you can reach the top shelf. When you see books there count them from right to left, the direction we read in. Count “one, two, three, four, five, six.” When you get to “six” take down the seventh book and bring it here. But remember, don’t make a mistake, remember well! The child didn’t walk, he flew like the wind. The Jews stood there, terrified, unable to utter a sound. The bells grew quieter, but not for long. Soon they began ringing even louder. Oy. Do you know, sir, how the Jews’ hearts were thumping ... as they stood there like stone, not breathing. ... The boy didn’t take long and soon brought back the book. The rabbi took it in his hand, opened it exactly in the middle and began to read. Then, then, sir, something happened that is hard to grasp, hard even to imagine. ...”

“What happened?”

“The entire knoll began to move.”

“That’s impossible!”

“I’m not telling it right. Half of the knoll. I said it wrong—half. The part with the church on it. As the rabbi kept reading the entire plaza with the church, with the bells, and with the people sank slowly, slowly, down, down, down. Slowly, but always lower and lower, while the Jews in the cemetery were afraid to move, because all of them were seized by terror as if the end of the world had come, as if all the ground everywhere was going to sink, may God protect us, sink into the depths, into the abyss, as if the end of the world had come. ...”

“And after that, what happened after that?”

“What could happen? They were screams, *gevalt* and keening. Who wouldn’t wail? Who wants to sink into the ground when he has a wife, children, a business? That’s what all of them were thinking, nu—and do you know what happened, sir?”

“What?”

“Nu, the gentlemen, the nobility, the counts and princes led the way to the cemetery, to the rabbi, and said what they said! ‘Please, sir, rabbi, don’t cause such unpleasantness to anyone. Please calm down, sir! Why does there have to be any misunderstanding between us?’ As you know, sir, in something like this you cannot argue. ... You have to plead.”

“And what next? Did the rabbi let them mollify him?”

“Ha? The rabbi? There was no need to ask for his forgiveness, because even before they were about to bury him, even before he passed away, he knew what would happen. While he was still alive he knew, he knew everything! And because he knew they didn’t

have to beg him a lot. Had he done a little? He thought it was enough. When they started pleading with him he didn't say a single word, but only stopped reading. And precisely when he stopped reading the ground stopped moving, too, and the place with the church and the people and the entire structure remained just where it is today. Nu, you saw it, sir."

"And the rabbi?"

"The rabbi called back the same boy who had brought him the book. He told him to take the book back where it belonged and to put it back in the same place it had been before. And after that, after that the rabbi lay back down on the bier and was dead again. The same force that had glued the Jews to the spot now pushed them to move, and they did. They buried the rabbi with a great grief, with wailing and lamentations... After that everybody went back home and told his children what had happened. And when those children grew up they told their children, and in this way it was passed on and on and will continue to be. Do I know for how long? Certainly until the end of days." (21–32)

The preface, about the 70 nations and 70 religions created by God, with which Berek chooses to introduce the story, strikes his listener as irrelevant. The listener's sense that the storyteller is trying to weasel out of telling the promised story is reinforced when Berek begins to talk about his rides in peasants' carts and how he decides whether they can be trusted; namely, you can know they are honest if they take off their hats when they see an icon along the road. The link between this and the promised story seems irrelevant to the listener. He wants to hear about the hill. Berek's reply—that everything he is saying is related to the hill—makes sense only against the background of the narrative situation—the awkwardness of telling this story to a Polish listener. The introduction is an attempt to establish a certain impression and prevent the listener from alleging that Berek is slighting the Christian religion or a Christian church.

How could a nineteenth-century Jew tell a Polish gentleman that the proximity of a Jewish cemetery and a Christian church is problematic for the Jews without risking the serious charge of insulting the dominant creed? So Berek begins with a rhetorical question, "Why shouldn't there be a cemetery next to the church, or a church next to the cemetery?" and the affirmation "it was perfectly fine, fine, perfectly fine." Only then does he add, as if an aside, "But sometimes there was a problem." Of course Berek will not mention disrespect for the dead and the pealing of the bells in the same breath, as is found in versions told by Jews to Jews. To express their pain he chooses softer expressions, "unpleasantness" and "distress." But the listener, wanting to get to the root of the matter, demands to know why. This pushes Berek against the wall and forces him to find a way to explain the situation in a way that will not offend his listener. The storyteller's fears and misgivings are manifested in the sentence that introduces the explanation: "A lot could be said about this ... and I don't know whether you will understand it the way it's meant, sir." The explanation he finally chooses—"Do you think, sir, that a dead person doesn't suffer? A dead person does suffer. His soul suffers, too. It is terrified. Why does it have to be terrified? Why ring for it?"—can be understood by the listener as some bizarre Jewish belief, but at the same time it does not contradict Berek's truth and allows him to proceed with the narrative.

Like any folk storyteller, Berek includes his listener in the storytelling process. But Berek chooses to do this when a statement might be taken amiss if he said it himself. He maneuvers his listener into supplying that link in response to rhetorical questions. When

he mentions that the rabbi's funeral took place on a Sunday morning, he asks his listener what this means, and Junosza replies, without hesitation, "That is just when we hold our services and the bells are ringing in every church." Then Berek offers a description of the Jews' reaction to the situation. This detail—the Jews' terror—is not found in any of the intracultural versions of the story. The entire passage focuses on the intensity of their fear. It is possible that Berek's description of the Jews' fright as they carry out a dead man who comes back to life and is about to punish those who are desecrating what is sacred to them is a projection of the storyteller's own dread at his audacity in recounting a tale that might anger his listener. But the description of the Jews' fear achieves something else, too. The Jews as a collective are not painted as the adversary of the Christians who are about to be buried alive. On the contrary, it forges an identity of sorts between the two groups, which the storyteller will continue to develop.

When Berek explains why the Jews are terrified he touches on an important point he wants to convey to his Polish listener, as an existential truth of Polish Jewry; namely, that the Jews are blamed for everything that goes wrong and that such allegations lead to restrictions on their ability to live their lives in peace.¹⁴

The account of the actual miracle is not very different from that in the other versions. Once again, however, the storyteller is at pains to emphasize the Jews' fear. This element is not found in the other versions: "The Jews in the cemetery were afraid to move, because all of them were seized by terror as if the end of the world had come." This reiterates the point made above about the identification of the two groups—the Jews in the cemetery and the Poles in the sinking church. Certainly there is no gloating here over the fate of the doomed Christians.

Another key difference between this story and the internal Jewish versions (except for Bałaban's) is that the church is not totally swallowed up. This makes it possible for the Christians to beg forgiveness and for the rabbi to accede. In our story, the Christians express their remorse and the church stops sinking. In other words, they are punished for their presumption, but the church is not destroyed and the worshipers inside it do not die. Berek notes that the rabbi was mollified easily, because "even before he passed away, he knew what would happen. While he was still alive he knew, he knew everything! And because he knew they didn't have to beg him a lot." This detail allows the storyteller to enhance the rabbi's supernatural powers by ascribing preternatural knowledge of the future to him, instead of through a description of the annihilation of the church.

In addition to the storyteller's desire not to hurt his listener's feelings and to avoid unpleasantness, the anomalous conclusion of this version may be a function of the topography and layout of Lublin. When the story is told about other places it refers to a depression in the ground or to a Jewish cemetery with a deep gully alongside it. Here we have a Jewish cemetery overlooking a ruined church in the valley below. In an etiological account that seeks to explain this phenomenon, the church could not vanish completely. Bałaban's version, which refers to the same cemetery, has a similar ending.¹⁵

¹⁴ Here Berek may also be reflecting an internal Jewish social confrontation between the Jewish elite—in this case the deceased rabbi—who are beyond the reach of Polish decrees, and the simple Jews who will be hurt.

¹⁵ Nevertheless, in this case too one may argue that the story, published in German, was intended for a non-Jewish readership. Bałaban presents the story as one told within the Jewish cultural context but does not offer any documentation of the storyteller or the situation in which the story was told.

Thus the intercourse between the Jewish storyteller and Polish listener, each with his own personality, creates a unique version, one characteristic of cross-cultural narration. The very fact of the intercultural communication mediated by a folk narrative in this specific situation, an exchange that seemed hopeless at the start of the encounter, reflects the power of folk narratives to overcome and bridge cultural gulfs. But can a folk narrative do more than that? Does the communication that takes place change anything? At the end of the story Junosza himself summarizes the problematic nature of writing down stories told by a Jew:

The class of people from which Berek comes possesses countless traditions and legends, but their imagination and nature are different. The supernatural and mystical elements preponderate. The collector of such legends faces an extremely difficult task if he wants to draw them not from books but from living words. The suspicion and reticence, and finally the almost unintelligible manner of speaking, are a permanent obstacle. Although the spiritual homeland of these Bereks is intriguing and fascinating, its borders are closed to an outside observer. (35)

The self-segregation and strangeness remain. The sophisticated transcriber who got the storyteller to talk is not aware that his own behavior influences the storyteller's unwillingness to tell his tales. He is aware of the other's ethnocentricity, but not of his own. He remains a prisoner of his stereotype of the Jew:

And this world really is interesting, full of qualities that are quite unfamiliar to us. Its inhabitants are not moved by the beauties of nature. They do not know the vast open spaces, or picturesque mountains, or the sound of bubbling water or the secret rustlings of the forest. They were born in filthy houses where they spend their childhood. Sometimes they never go outside their own town. The filthy class, the filthy school, the filthy synagogue—this is their entire world. And in this hermetically sealed world they live in isolation and meditate. ... Diverse spirits, thousands of the angels and demons, enter this narrow world on the wings of imagination. ... Its inhabitants tell themselves traditions and legends, racing in their thoughts to the glorious past. (35–36)

Does this mean that nothing has changed? We cannot say this, either. Junosza, a critic of what he denigrates as the Jews' "pseudo-scholarship," is enthralled by the charms of the Jewish folk narratives. His emotional experience and sense of wonder stand out clearly in the passage just quoted. Berek is persuaded to tell his last story in full, despite the awkwardness involved, because he wants to give the people among whom he lives a higher estimation of the Jews, despite the estrangement between them, through a Polish book of the "quality kind." Junosza kept his promise, despite the gulf, estrangement, and prejudice. The book, a collection of Jewish folk narratives transcribed by a Polish author, in the Polish language, a book whose title is that of a Jewish folk narrative, lies before us. Its recording in Poland at the end of the nineteenth century bears witness to cross-cultural communication through a folk narrative, despite its problematic nature.

This article has used Junosza's "Miracle in the Cemetery" to consider a basic theoretical issue in the study of folk literature, namely, cross-cultural narration and its influence on the text created in such a situation. Even though the relations between Jews and

Poles were not my primary focus, they have been illuminated by the text in question, with its anchor in a specific sociocultural context. A deeper scrutiny of what we can conclude about these relations and a comparison with what we know from other studies of Jewish-Polish relations¹⁶ remain a topic for further investigation.

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¹⁶ This issue has been studied extensively from various perspectives—historical, literary, ethnographic, and folkloristic—and there is no room to list them all here. I note only that many of the articles in Shmeruk and Werses collection on interwar Jewish Poland (Shmeruk and Werses 1997) deal with this topic.

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**Medkulturna pripoved v 19. stoletju:
Judovske ljudske zgodbe, ki jih je zapisal poljski avtor**

Haya Bar-Itzhak

Obravnavana je knjiga z naslovom *Cud na kirkucie* (Čudež na pokopališču), katere avtor je Poljak Klemens Junosza. Na tem primeru avtorica podrobno raziskuje pripovedi, ki so pripovedovane v okoljih, kjer se stikajo različne kulture – tako imenovane medkulturne pripovedi. Analiziran je vpliv različnih dejavnikov, ki delujejo na besedilo v takih okoliščinah.

V knjigi najdemo natančen opis okoliščin pripovedovanja in porajajočih se vezi med židovskim pripovedovalcem in njegovim poljskim poslušalcem. Navedenih je osem zgodb, ki jih je ali pa jih je želel povedati pripovedovalec v knjigi. Zgodbe so sledeče: 1. Kako se je fetus naučil 'Torah' v trebuhu svoje matere, 2. Nesreča ki jo je Berek napovedal za svoje mesto, ali Berek in demoni, 3. David in Goljat, 4. Šestintrideset pravičnih mož; 5. Prerok Elija na semnju v Lubartówu, 6. Estera, židovska poljska kraljica, 7. Jakob in Ezav, 8. Čudež na pokopališču.

Avtorica obravnava osnovna teoretska vprašanja, ki se navezujejo na raziskave ljudskega slovstva, še posebej na medkulturno pripoved in njen vpliv na besedilo, ki nastaja v takih okoliščinah.