



GUTHRIE  
THEATER

McGuire Proscenium Stage / Feb 17 - Mar 24, 2018



# Indecent

by PAULA VOGEL

directed by WENDY C. GOLDBERG

PLAY GUIDE

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Play guides are made possible by



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The Guthrie creates transformative theater experiences that ignite the imagination, stir the heart, open the mind, and build community through the illumination of our common humanity.

## Guthrie Theater Play Guide

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The Guthrie Theater receives support from the National Endowment for the Arts. This activity is made possible in part by the Minnesota State Arts Board, through an appropriation by the Minnesota State Legislature. The Minnesota State Arts Board received additional funds to support this activity from the National Endowment for the Arts.



## Synopsis

When Sholem Asch wrote his play *The God of Vengeance* in 1906, he was twenty-six years old. Dedicated, like many other Jewish authors of his time, to preserving and fostering the Yiddish language, his first stop when trying to give the play life was a salon at the home of I.L. Peretz, a Yiddish writer and scholar. Peretz famously told the young Asch to destroy it, “Burn it, Asch, burn it.” Asch’s play tells the story of Yekel, a brothel owner who lives with his wife (a former member of the brothel) above the brothel. Yekel’s life’s desire is to preserve his daughter, Rifkele, from any harm; to mold her into the perfect maiden, a spotless candidate for marriage to a scholar (“A sweetheart, — a golden one. A

wonderful student, of a fine family.” Sarah, *The God of Vengeance*). To that end, he commissions the writing of a Torah scroll – a sacred and expensive task – so that he can hang it in his daughter’s room for protection. What Yekel doesn’t count on is the developing love between Rifkele and Manke, one of the prostitutes in his brothel.

Paula Vogel’s *Indecent* tells the story of the original productions of *The God of Vengeance*, ranging from its premiere at the respected Deutsches Theater in Berlin in 1907, through celebrated European productions and finally a staging in the United States. It is only with a production in English in 1923 on Broadway that the trouble begins.

After complaints filed by a local respected rabbi, the play is shut down and the producer, director and some of the actors are charged with obscenity. *Indecent* merges fact and fiction around a theater company, their personal stories, and ultimately their sacrifice for the art they hold so dear. A play with music, *Indecent* combines the high entertainment of Yiddish theater with the heartbreak of the loss of art and culture for an entire people.

Photo: Ben Cherry as Lemml (Dan Norman)

# Characters and Setting

## THE DEAD TROUPE

The troupe plays everyone.

The Stage Manager, LEMML

## THE ELDERS:

“the founding members of our troupe, Vera Parnicki and Otto Godowsky. They play all of the fathers, all of the mothers, the sagest of our characters, or the ones who remain fools at any age.” (Lemml, *Indecent*)

### The Elder, VERA, also:

Sarah  
Mrs. Peretz  
Immigrant  
Esther Stockton  
Madje, the older

### The Elder, OTTO, also:

Yekel  
Peretz  
Schildkraut  
Immigrant  
Judge McIntyre  
Asch, the older

## THE MIDDLES

“The members of the troupe who are in their prime! Halina Cygansky and Mendel Schultz! They play all of the vamps and all of the vice, the scarred, and the schemers.” (Lemml, *Indecent*)

### The Middle, HALINA, also:

Manke  
Immigrant  
Freida  
Dorothee Nelson/Dine  
Dr. Hornig  
Bagelman Sister

### The Middle, MENDEL, also:

Nakhmen  
Immigrant  
Harry Weinberger  
Officer Benjamin Bailie  
Rabbi Joseph Silverman

## THE INGÉNUES

“And our ingénues! Chana Mandelbaum and Avram Zederbaum. All the brides, all the grooms, the writers, the socialists. So ardent in their beliefs, so passionate in their lovemaking.” (Lemml, *Indecent*)

### The Ingénue, CHANA, also:

Rifkele  
Madje, the younger  
Elsa  
Immigrant  
Ruth/Reina  
Virginia McFadden  
Bagelman Sister

### The Ingénue, AVRAM, also:

Asch, the younger  
Immigrant  
Morris Carnovsky  
Eugene O’Neill  
John Rosen

And

**MAYER BALSAM, Clarinet**

**NELLY FRIEDMAN, Violin**

**MORIZ GODOWSKY, Accordion**

## PLACES

Warsaw, Poland, 1906, to Bridgeport, Connecticut, 1950s and everywhere in between.

## SET

A wrecked theater, perhaps bombed out, ancient and out of use except for an occasional squatter. The space is filled with broken set pieces and props and suitcases.

# Inspiration for *Indecent*

When Paula Vogel was 23 years old, she was advised by a professor to read Sholem Asch's *The God of Vengeance*. She was astonished that a play touching on all of the subjects it does could have been written in 1907 by a 27-year-old man. "Sholem Asch was brave enough to write that Jews are no different than Catholics or Buddhists or people of any religion, in terms of having people in the tribe who may sell religion for a profit, or who are hypocrites. That's a very hard thing for a man to do, especially in a time of burgeoning anti-Semitism. Then add in the play's compassionate understanding of the powerlessness of women in that time and place — Asch is a young married man, in a very early work, writing the most astonishing love story between two women — and it

makes a pretty compelling play to read and perform."

**"An Interview with the Playwright: Paula Vogel on *Indecent*," Vineyard Theatre, 2016**

Many years later, Rebecca Taichman was searching the Yale Library collections for a subject for her MFA Thesis at Yale when she discovered the archived works and transcripts of the 1923 obscenity trial against the play in New York: *People of the state of New York, respondents, against Harry Weinberger, Rudolph Schildkraut, Esther Stockton, Virginia MacFadden, Marjorie Stewart, Irwin J. Adler, Mae Berland, Sam Jaffe, Morris Carnovsky, Dorothee Nolan, Aldeah Wise, Lillian Taiz and James Meighan, defendants-appellants : case on appeal*. It would become her performance thesis: *The People*

*vs. The God of Vengeance*.

But after the staging of her thesis play, Rebecca Taichman contacted Paula Vogel to see if Vogel would be interested in collaborating on a fuller play around the topic.

The play was seven years in the making and stemmed from a time in American history when Vogel noted that hate speech was on the rise. "I don't think playwrights can choose their time," she says. "That's something Sholem Asch said at the end of his life. Art matters when we're in political danger; art matters when we're in the middle of division."

Paula Vogel quoted in *Playbill*, Broadway production of *Indecent*, 2017

Photo: the cast of *Indecent* (Dan Norman)



# Responses to *Indecent*

In Vogel's elegant script and Taichman's evocative production, the power of Asch's original play, as well as the power of theatre, are presented in profound ways. This is a play about a play in which people are transformed in "a blink in time," as the ownership of a piece of art transfers from playwright to audience. In Vogel's version, the impact of *The God of Vengeance* lingers to their very last moments, offering deep comfort, sometimes under terrible circumstances.

Frank Rizzo, "Back with 'Vengeance': Sholem Asch's contested Yiddish classic is grist for Paula Vogel and Rebecca Taichman's meditative new play-within-a-play" *American Theatre*, May-June, 2016

"Indecent" is, above all, decent, in the most complete sense of the word. It is virtuous, sturdily assembled, informative and brimming with good faith. The territory it covers in its one hour and 45 minutes is immense. "Indecent" presents a thorough history of Asch's masterwork, from its inception in Warsaw in 1907 to the World War II era, when it was performed as an act of artistic affirmation in an attic in the Lodz ghetto of German-occupied Poland.

Ben Brantley, "'Indecent' Pays Heartfelt Tribute to a Stage Scandal," *The New York Times*, April 18, 2017

Photo (left): Gisela Chipe as Halina and Miriam Schwartz as Chana (Dan Norman); (right): Hugh Kennedy as Avram and Miriam Schwartz as Chana (Dan Norman).

# Responses to *The God of Vengeance*

[Sholom Ash's] narratives and plays are alive with a spirit of poetic realism, with a stronger leaning toward the poetic than toward reality, perhaps, but always throbbing with dramatic force and beauty. Sholom Ash's passion for color and melody manifests itself as much in his rich, ravishing style as in the picturesque images it evokes. The "jargon of servant maids" becomes music in his hands. His "God of Vengeance," which is his strongest play, is one of the best things he has written in any form. Absorbingly interesting and instinct with human sympathy, it mounts to a natural climax of cataclysmal force and great spiritual beauty. Himself a creature of the gutter, Yekel Tchaftchovitch, the central figure of "The God of Vengeance," is stirred by the noblest ambition known to a father in the world of orthodox Judaism. Imbedded in the slime that fills Yekel's soul is a jewel of sparkling beauty. But the very income by which he seeks to secure his daughter's spiritual splendor contains the germs of her loathsome fall and of this own crushing defeat. The clash between Yekel's revolting career and his paternal idealism, and the catastrophe to which it inevitably leads form one of the strongest and most fascinating situations known to the modern drama.

Cahan, Abraham. "Preface."  
*The God of Vengeance: Drama in Three Acts*, by Abraham Cahan and Sholom Asch, Stratford, 1918

It is interesting to consider Ash's "The God of Vengeance" in connection with a play like "Mrs. Warren's Profession." To be sure,

there is no technical resemblance between the two dramas; nor, despite an external similarity in backgrounds, is there any real identity of purpose. Shaw's play is essentially sociological, and is a drama of disillusionment. Ash's piece glows with poetic realism and recounts an individual tragedy not without symbolic power. Yet the essentially (though not conventionally) moral earnestness of both Shaw and Ash brings the circles of their themes in a sense tangent to each other. (p. ix) "The God of Vengeance," despite conclusions too easily drawn, is not a sex play. When Ash wishes to deal with sex as sex he is not afraid to handle the subject with all the poetry and power at his command. Such a play as his "Jephthah's Daughter" treats the elemental

urge of sex with daring, beauty and Dionysiac abandon. Here, too, a golden symbolism wafts through the piece. Again, in his powerful novel "Mottke the Vagabond," Ash has given us scenes from the underworld of Warsaw that are unparalleled for unflinching truth to detail. "The God of Vengeance," however, despite the sordid environment in which the play takes place, possesses a certain moral beauty,—a beauty much dimmed, perhaps, by the repellent human beings who are its carriers, but a beauty none the less. Its symbolism and its poetry lift it far above the brothel in which it takes place. And what a strong conception is the Holy Scroll, itself one of the chief characters, and how frightfully eloquent in the mysterious, religious power that the dramatist has woven around it! (p. xi)

Goldberg, Isaac. "Introduction." *The God of Vengeance: Drama in Three Acts*, by Isaac Goldberg and Sholom Asch, Stratford, 1918





## On Paula Vogel

Paula Vogel has written *How I Learned to Drive* (Pulitzer Prize, New York Drama Critics Award, Obie Award, Lucille Lortel, Drama Desk, Outer Critics Circle and many more.) Other plays include *A Civil War Christmas*, *The Long Christmas Ride Home*, *The Mineola Twins*, *Hot 'n' Throbbin*, *The Baltimore Waltz*, *Desdemona*, *And Baby Makes Seven* and *The Oldest Profession*.

Her plays have been produced by Second Stage, New York Theatre Workshop, the Vineyard Theatre, Roundabout, and Circle Repertory Company. Her plays have been produced regionally all over the country at the Center Stage, Intiman, Trinity Repertory, Woolly Mammoth, Huntington Theatre, Magic Theatre, The Goodman Theatre, American Repertory

Theatre, Dallas Theatre Berkeley Repertory, and Alley Theatres to name a few. Harrogate Theatre and the Donmar Theatre have produced her work in England.

Her plays have been produced in Canada, Great Britain, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand as well as translated and produced in Italy, Germany, Taiwan, South Africa, Australia, Romania, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Poland Slovenia, Canada, Portugal, France, Greece, Japanese, Norway, Finland, Iceland, Peru, Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Brazil and other countries.

John Simon once remarked that Paula Vogel had more awards than a “black sofa collects lint.” Some of these include Induction into the Theatre Hall of Fame, Thornton Wilder Award, Lifetime Achievement from the Dramatists Guild, the William Inge Award, the Elliott Norton Award, two Obies, a Susan Smith Blackburn Award, the PEN/Laura Pels Award, a TCG residency award, a

Guggenheim, a Pew Charitable Trust Award, and fellowships and residencies at Sundance Theatre Lab, Hedgebrook, The Rockefeller Center’s Bellagio Center, Yaddo, MacDowell, and the Bunting. But she is particularly proud of her Thirtini Award from 13P, and honored by three Awards in her name: the Paula Vogel Award for playwrights given by the Vineyard Theatre, the Paula Vogel Award from the American College Theatre Festival, and the Paula Vogel mentorship program, curated by Quiara Hudes and Young Playwrights of Philadelphia.

**Official biography:**

<http://paulavogelplaywright.com/about/>

# Paula Vogel on *Indecent*

I don't think of this as a grim play; I think about it as a love story in terrible times. If we love music and theatre and the arts, if we take solace in people sitting beside us in the theatre, if we do what is in our hearts, I think there is light for us. I think the power of us being together in a community gives us light through the darkness. I'm writing this play because, regardless of what I've witnessed in my life, I've never been sorry that I've spent my life in the theatre. I think the power of art is the power to wound our memory. I think the power of art is a way for us to change our world view. I think art is our spiritual bread that we break together.

**"An Interview with the Playwright: Paula Vogel on *Indecent*,"**  
Vineyard Theatre, 2016

Paula Vogel, whose father was Jewish, says she first decided to write *Indecent*, part of which depicts a theatre troupe during the Holocaust, when she realized that young people today may never meet a survivor. Those young people, she explains, represent "a generation that is now growing up that doesn't have that direct access to memory." Yet over the

course of the show's mountings so far, beginning in 2015 in a co-production at Connecticut's Yale Repertory Theatre and California's La Jolla Playhouse and followed by a 2016 Off-Broadway run prior to its Broadway bow last year, she has seen audiences' relationship to the piece change.

"As every day goes by into the Trump administration, the parallels—which seemed at first perhaps a little pat, a little convenient—between the Weimar Republic and what's happening to our democracy don't seem as metaphorical anymore," Vogel says. "The rise in hate speech, the white nationalism that we're witnessing now, is something no one is ignoring." These developments, Vogel says, mean the play affects younger theatregoers more than she anticipated, in particular "how much it resonates with current first-generation Americans, who may be Latino/Latina, Asian—in other words, audiences who really are the first generation to be called American."

**Russell M. Dembin, "Outsiders of Long Standing,"** *American Theatre*, March, 2018.

Photo: the cast of *Indecent* (Dan Norman)



# Paula Vogel on Sholem Asch

Born in Kutno, Russian Poland in 1880, Sholem Asch was the youngest of his Hasidic parents' 10 children. Traditionally educated and a talented student, he began teaching himself German with the aid of Moses Mendelssohn's translation of the Bible. Since his parents disapproved of these secular studies, he moved in with relatives in a nearby village, where he became a Torah instructor and for the first time encountered the lives of Polish peasants. Asch earned his living writing letters for illiterate people, an experience he appreciated for the insights it offered into human needs and longings.

Stimulated by his wide reading in European literature, Asch began writing himself, and in 1900 traveled to Warsaw where he received encouragement from Y. L. Peretz and his advice to work only in Yiddish. Having settled in Warsaw, Asch wrote his first Yiddish story, "Moyshele," at the end of 1900; he followed this with a volume of Hebrew stories in 1902 and one of Yiddish stories in 1903. These early works reflected the poverty and deprivation the young Asch suffered in company with his Warsaw roommates. Peretz assisted these young men where he could, and was able to gain exemption from military service for Asch.

Asch's marriage in 1903 to Mathilde (Madzhe) Shapiro, the daughter of the well-to-do Hebrew teacher

and poet Menahem Mendel Shapiro, brought Asch a measure of financial security, enabling him to devote himself wholly to writing. In 1904, he serialized the first of his major works, *A shtetl*; its idyllic tone of sensuous vitality immediately placed him in the vanguard of new Yiddish writers. Though written on the eve of the 1905 Revolution, this prose poem gave no indication of the upheaval to come; its dominant mood is of harmony and peace. In a time of violent change, Asch preferred to recreate what he saw as the certainties of a traditional Jewish way of life.

In 1904, his first play, *Mitn shtrom* (*With the Current*), dramatizing loss of faith among contemporary youth, was staged in Polish in Krakow, and was followed by two additional plays with similar themes which were performed in both Polish and Russian as well as in Yiddish. In 1907, Asch completed his most sensational play, *Got fun nekome* (*The God of Vengeance*), first produced in a German version by Max Reinhardt in Berlin, with Rudolph Schildkraut in the leading role. Depicting a brothel keeper's attempt to strike a bargain with God to keep his daughter pure, this play created scandal wherever it was performed, particularly in New York, and Asch later withdrew it from public performance.

In 1909 and 1910, Asch made his first visit to the United States, gathering impressions that he later

incorporated into his fiction. By 1913, the eve of World War I, he emerged into productive maturity, publishing five major works in one year.

When World War I broke out in 1914, Asch settled in New York, became an American citizen, and started building a collection of Jewish art. In autumn of that year, he became a salaried, regular contributor to the *Forverts*, at the time the most widely read Yiddish newspaper in America, and thus began a fruitful and lucrative association that was to last for nearly 25 years. Apart from his prolific literary output, Asch also began to involve himself in public life, becoming one of the founders of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC).

After the war, Asch returned to Europe, primarily on a fact-finding tour of Lithuania for the JDC, and was profoundly shocked and emotionally disturbed by what he found. In 1923, he returned to live in Warsaw, but made frequent trips to Weimar Germany.

By this time, Asch's work had made him famous. In 1920, on the occasion of his fortieth birthday, a New York committee headed by Judah Leib Magnes published his collected works in 12 volumes. In 1932 Asch was elected honorary president of the Yiddish PEN club. At that time Polish Jewry faced increased persecution, a situation in which the Polish government

played a role. Asch's acceptance of the Polish Republic's Polonia Restituta decoration from Marshal Józef Piłsudski's regime triggered a controversy in the Jewish world.

His conservative ideology notwithstanding, Asch's novels created a new trend in Yiddish literature: they used European literary models to satisfy an increasing demand among both Jewish and non-Jewish readers for representations of undisturbed rural idylls in reaction to the anxieties of radical change.

Troubled all his life by what he regarded as the senseless dichotomy between Judaism and Christianity, Asch persuaded himself that by retelling the story of Jesus and portraying him as an observant Jew, he would repudiate the calumnies heaped on Jews for centuries. He articulated these beliefs in *The Nazarene*. While there had been Christological subject matter in some of Asch's earliest stories, this new novel's uncritical depiction of Jesus as a Jew, which started its serialized appearance in Yiddish just as Hitler was institutionalizing Jew-hatred in Germany, shocked Asch's Yiddish readers. *The Forverts*, to which he had hitherto contributed regularly for decades, not only refused to continue publishing the work but also attacked Asch for encouraging conversion, a condemnation repeated by virtually the whole of the world's Jewish press. In 1939, Asch arranged for the novel to be published in English both in the United States and in Britain. The result was an estrangement between Asch, Yiddish literature, and the Jewish community. The Yiddish text appeared in full only in 1943.

Undeterred, though deeply hurt by

this torrent of negative criticism, Asch went on exploring the origins of Christianity, reading deeply and widely before writing *The Apostle*, a novel about the life of the apostle Paul which, never published in Yiddish, appeared in English in 1943. The fanatical tirades against Jews that Asch put into Paul's mouth further alienated Asch's detractors and brought even stronger accusations of apostasy against him, which he attempted to counter in an essay entitled "One Destiny: An Epistle to the Christians" (1945), before turning to portray Jesus' mother in his novel *Mary* (1949).

In the last 10 years of his life, Asch returned to Jewish themes and settings. *East River*; (1946), another realistic social novel about the assimilated metropolitan Jews of New York, attempted to harmonize the realities of American life with idealized memories of the lost shtetl. *The Burning Bush*; (1946), a collection of short stories dealing with Nazi atrocities, was followed by *Moses*; (1951), a novel drawing extensively on traditional sources to present a psychologically sympathetic portrait of Moses as prophet and revolutionary. Asch's last completed novel was *The Prophet* (1955) about Deutero-Isaiah, a humble man forced by an importunate voice within him to preach God's word. Like all of Asch's works, these last books continued to display his gifts as a superlative storyteller who clothed romantic idealism in a realistic style.

Prolific and continually expanding the range of his themes, Asch brought Yiddish literature into the mainstream of European and American culture, while he himself remained deeply attached to the legacy of the Jewish past. At



The Asch family at home in New York, circa 1918, with three of their four children - (left to right) Ruth, John, and Moe, photograph source unknown.

the end of his life, Asch lived in Bat Yam, a suburb of Tel Aviv. In accordance with his wishes, his house there was converted into a museum. Part of his lifelong collection of Jewish objets d'art is housed in Los Angeles, while the bulk of his library — including rare Yiddish books and manuscripts, including the originals of some of his own works — is at Yale University. Sholem Asch died in 1957.

The YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, [http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Asch\\_Sholem](http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Asch_Sholem)

# Glossary: Concepts, Words and Ideas

## Klezmer

[AND THEN THE TROUPE EXPLODES IN A JOYOUS KLEZMER SONG AND DANCE.]

The term **Klezmer** derives from the Hebrew words klei meaning “vessel” and zemer meaning “song,” literally meaning “instrument of song.” Klezmer is a musical tradition of Ashkenazic Jews of Eastern Europe. Klezmer musicians were professional musicians. A standard Klezmer band could include at least two violinists, backed by a bass or cello. Other common instruments were the clarinet, flute, and other brass instruments.

[SONG: “ALE BRIDER.”]

This Yiddish song from the early 20th century was popular in Bundist (BUND (abbr. of Algemeyner Yidisher Arbeter Bund in Lite, Poyln un Rusland; “General Jewish Workers’ Union in Lithuania, Poland and Russia”), Jewish socialist party founded in Russia in 1897; after a certain ideological development it came to be associated with devotion to Yiddish, autonomism, and secular Jewish nationalism, envisaging Jewish life as lived out in Eastern Europe circles.

## I.L. Peretz

*I feel like a prostitute every time I have to pander to*

**Mr. Peretz** to get a reading in his salon.

-Asch

I.L. Peretz, Yitskhok Leybush or Isaac Leib Peretz (May 18, 1852 - April 3, 1915). A Jewish writer in Hebrew and Yiddish who was influential in raising awareness for and quality of Yiddish literature. Peretz wrote short stories, drama, poetry, humor and satire. His home in Warsaw became a gathering place for young Jewish writers, who called Peretz “the father of modern Yiddish literature.” Sholem Asch was one of these writers; in 1900, the young Asch traveled to Warsaw to show Peretz his writings, at which time Peretz encouraged Asch to write only in Yiddish. Afterwards, Peretz said, “From fire comes ash, but from this Asch will come fire.”

## Rudolph Schildkraut

*Rudolph Schildkraut is a sensation in Berlin right now with his Merchant of Venice.*

-Madje

Rudolph Schildkraut was a German actor who was a star in both American and European theater in the late 1800s until his death in 1930. In 1905, he began performing with Max Reinhardt’s theater company in Berlin and received critical acclaim for his portrayal of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*. In 1911, Schildkraut performed in the Yiddish theater in America for a season, after which he continued doing theater in English and German.



Rudolph Schildkraut in *God of Vengeance*. Photograph by Maurice Goldberg. 1923. Collection on Yiddish Theater, Museum of the City of New York. 30.170.4B

## Łódź

*Does anyone mind if Lemml sits in? He’s my third cousin from Łódź.*

-Nakhmen

Łódź: Capital city of a province in central Poland, the second largest city in Poland. At the beginning of the 20th century, Łódź experienced a boom due to its thriving textile industry, resulting in a population of 500,000 by 1913, around the time that Lemml would have lived there. Nearly 30 years later, on April 30, 1940, the Łódź ghetto was established after the German invasion of the city.

## Shtetl

## Balut

*Well, a little **shtetl** outside **Balut** actually ...*

*-Lemml*

**Shtetl:** The Yiddish term for town, shtetl commonly refers to small market towns in pre-World War II Eastern Europe with a large Yiddish-speaking Jewish population. The word “shtetl” is Yiddish, and it means “little town.” Shtetls were small market towns in Russia and Poland that shared a unique socio-cultural community pattern during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Shtetls ranged in size from several hundred to several thousand residents. Forests and fields often surrounded these small towns. Gentiles tended to live outside of the town, while Jews lived in the town proper. The streets were, for the most part, unpaved, the houses constructed of wood. Public spaces included synagogues (often wooden), the beit midrash (study house), shtiblekh (smaller, residential houses of prayer), a Jewish cemetery, Christian churches (Russian Orthodox or Roman Catholic, depending on the location), bathhouses, and, of course, the marketplace.

**Balut** (Bałuty) Yiddish name for a district of Łódź, which would become the site of the Łódź Ghetto.

## Oy vey iz mir

**Oy vey iz mir.** *This is a play written by a Jew who hates Jews!*

*-Nakhmen*

Oy vey iz mir – Yiddish – Woe is me

## minyan

*Do you know what a minyan is? It's ten Jews in a circle accusing each other of anti-Semitism.*

*-Asch*

**Minyan:** quorum of 10 men over the age of 13 required to worship publicly in Orthodox Judaism. The biblical source for the requirement of 10 men to complete a minyan (lit., “count” or “number”) is Numbers 14:27.

Moses sent spies to scout the land of Canaan. Ten of them returned and issued a report concluding that it was not a conquerable land. God was extremely disappointed with their lack of faith in God's abilities. God turns to Moses and Aaron, telling them: “How long will this evil ‘assembly’ provoke [the Jewish nation] to complain against Me?” From here it is deduced that an “assembly” is comprised of 10 men.

## Morris Carnovsky

*She's asking where the beautiful young lady might go.*

*Morris Carnovsky ... I play  
Shloyme, one of the pimps.  
-Carnovsky*



### **Morris Carnovsky -**

American actor who excelled in dialectal character roles and who was acclaimed on both stage and screen in his portrayals of thoughtful, troubled men. After making his New York stage debut in *The God of Vengeance* (1922), Carnovsky joined the Theatre Guild's acting company (1924) and appeared in such plays as *Uncle Vanya*, *Saint Joan*, *The Brothers Karamazov* and *The Doctor's Dilemma*. He helped found the Group Theatre (1931), which specialized in dramas, and he earned acclaim for his portrayal of Mr. Bonaparte in *Golden Boy* (1937). After the Group Theatre disbanded, he went to Hollywood and made his motion-picture debut as Anatole France in *The Life of Emile Zola* (1937). In some of his other notable supporting roles, he played a priest in *Edge of Darkness* (1943), a father in *Rhapsody in Blue* (1945), and an evil nightclub owner in *Dead Reckoning* (1947).

His screen career abruptly ended during the 1950s when he was blacklisted by the House Un-American Activities Committee for refusing to testify. He was, however, invited by actor John Houseman to join the American Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, Conn., where he appeared in such parts as Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* and as Lear in *King Lear*. He later made two more motion pictures, *A View from the Bridge* (1962) and *The Gambler* (1974). He was inducted into the Theatre Hall of Fame in 1979.

## geht

Now. **Geht.** -Lou

Geht: Yiddish/German – Go

## Mr. Harry Weinberger

*Ladies, gentlemen, I give you our producer at the Greenwich Theatre: **Mr. Harry Weinberger!***  
-Schildkraut

Harry Weinberger: The producer of *The God of Vengeance*'s Broadway run, Weinberger was also a civil libertarian and a prominent attorney who made name for himself defending free speech and radical activists such as Emma Goldman. Also a copyright expert, Weinberger successfully defended playwright Eugene O'Neill in a plagiarism lawsuit. Weinberger served as the defense attorney for the obscenity trial of *The God of Vengeance*. After the play was indicted in 1923 and Weinberger and Rudolph Schildkraut fined, Weinberger began an appeals process that was ultimately successful.

## potchkying

## goyim

## shanda fur die goy

*We are **potchkying** wid' a masterpiece. God forbid the goyim think ladies who work the street are human beings! God forbid the **goyim** think that Jewish ladies love each other as human beings! **A shanda fur die goy!** We could let the original script speak for us.*

-Lou

Potchkying (potschke – Yiddish)

To fuss or “mess around” inefficiently and inexpertly.

Goyim: plural of goy

shanda fur die goy(im) Yiddish - literally means 'a shame before the nations'. Used colloquially to describe any embarrassing or compromising behavior performed by a Jew where a non-Jew can observe it.

## farshtinkeneh

*... let's just say the **farshtinkeneh** word: Among the intelligentsia lesbians sell tickets. Uptown, for Mr. and Mrs. Smith, prostitutes in a brothel is all the excitement they can take*  
-Esther

Farshtinkeneh: (Yiddish - farshtinken(e)). literally 'stinking'; contemptible.

## American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee

*He was the head of a delegation for the **American Jewish Joint Committee**. A fact-finding trip to Europe.*  
-Madje

Founded during World War I, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) was established in the wake of increasing numbers of violent pogroms against Jewish communities abroad. The JDC was the first Jewish organization in the United States to provide large-scale funding for international relief efforts. Specifically, the JDC was key in rebuilding devastated Jewish communities in Eastern Europe and Palestine after the first World War. In the 20s, when Asch would have been working with the JDC, the organization created programs for providing financial, medical, and even educational assistance for Jews abroad.

## pogroms

*He was investigating **pogroms**. Vilna, Kiev.*  
-Madje

Pogrom: A mob attack or riot, either approved or condoned by authorities, against the people and property of a religious, racial, or national minority. Usually used in reference to the attacks on Jews in the Russian empire in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Many Jews were massacred and still more were left homeless from these riots. Pogroms were carried out in the towns of Vilna (now part of Lithuania) and Kiev (the Ukraine) during this time.

### Polish pogrom in Vilna, April, 1919

The pogrom in Vilna lasted three days, during Pesach, 1919. The Polish Army entered Vilna on April 19. The



Kiev Pogrom survivors, 1919

number of Vilna Jews murdered during that pogrom has never been firmly established. According to the Vilna registry of the WWI years, in the suburb of Lopuvka alone 67 victims died; the English-Yiddish encyclopedia discloses that 80 Jews were murdered in the pogrom. The pogrom was marked by barbaric murders and terrifying violence; several victims were forced to dig their own graves prior to execution, while others were buried alive. The number of people taken during the mass arrests filled up two prisons, the railway station, the post-office courtyard, several private houses, and the local bank. According to a Vilna community report, between January 1, 1919 and August 15, 1920, hundreds of Jews, irrespective of age and gender, were viciously beaten either in their homes or on the streets and they were then thrown in jail. They were held without food or drink and were submitted to gross humiliation, physical and mental.

### KIEV POGROM, 1919

The Kiev pogroms of 1919 refers to a series of anti-Jewish pogroms in various places around Kiev carried out by White Volunteer Army troops. The series of events concern the following districts:

- Skvira, June 23, 1919: a pogrom in which 45 Jews were massacred, many were severely wounded, and 35 Jewish women were raped by army insurgents.
- Justingrad, August, 1919: where a pogrom made its way through the shtetl with an unspecified number of Jewish men murdered and Jewish women raped.
- Ivankiv Kiev district, October 18-20, 1919. In the pogrom carried out by Cossack and Volunteer Army troops, 14 Jews were massacred, 9 wounded, and 15 Jewish women and girls were raped by units under the command of Struk in three days of carnage. [2]

### Immediate reactions

The leaders of the White Army issued orders condemning the pogroms, but these were largely unheeded due to widespread anti-Semitism. Lenin had spoken out against pogroms in March, and in June, the Bolsheviks assigned some funds for victims of pogroms. However, the events received little coverage in the Bolshevik press.

### Escalation of hostility

The Kiev pogroms of 1919 proved the first of many such events. There were a total of 1,326 pogroms across Ukraine around that time, in which between 30,000 and 70,000 Jews were massacred. The pogroms were marked by utmost cruelty and face-to-face brutality. Thousands of women were raped. Hundreds of villages were pillaged, and Jewish neighborhoods were left in ruins. According to some estimates, overall, in the pogroms of 1918-1921, half a million Jews were left homeless.

## sqelching

## Katubah

No **sqelching** once the **Katubah** is signed.

-Sarah

sqelching: used like “welching:” to renege on something, to not honor a contract or debt

Katubah: Or ketubah. A formal marriage contract which also provides a financial clause for the wife in case of her husband’s death or a divorce

## Fin itzt un bay unz in shtib, nor Mame-lushn.

Reina? **Fin itzt un bay unz in shtib, nor Mame-lushn.**

-Dorothee

Yiddish: At home, from now on, only

Mame-lushn: literal translation – mother tongue

# For Further Reading and Understanding

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