

INDECENT



BY
PAULA VOGEL

DIRECTED BY
SHEILA DANIELS

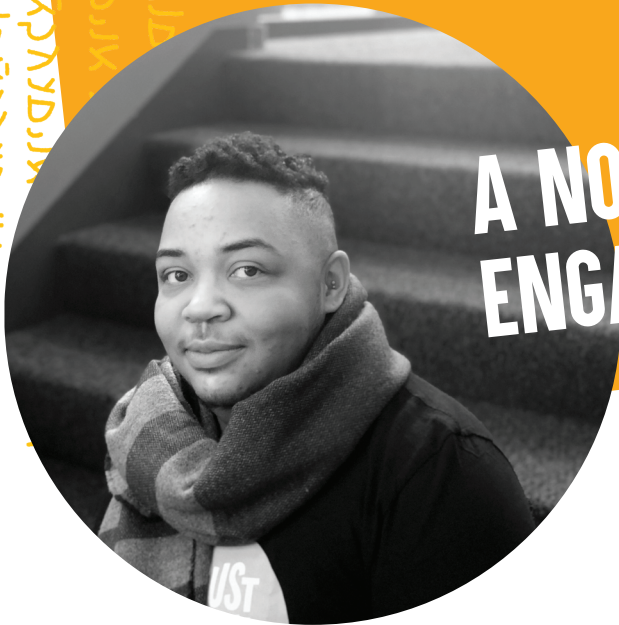
Play Guide

REP
SEATTLE

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A NOTE FROM OUR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT DEPARTMENT



Dear Theatergoer,

As an educator, artist, and social justice advocate, I can't emphasize enough my excitement in introducing young people to theater that is challenging in a multitude of ways, and Paula Vogel's *Indecent* is just that. For many, it is an introduction to the world of Yiddish theater. For some, it is a grave history lesson. For others, it may be their first time seeing a queer relationship portrayed genuinely onstage. But for all of us, *Indecent* is a love story about the power of art to provide solace and light through the darkest times.

This Play Guide aims to offer insight into the development of the play, provide historical context, and shed light on the perspective of what it means to be Jewish in America today. We hope you will take this opportunity to use this history to help understand the present and to plan for the future. Ultimately, that is the responsibility of each and every one of us: to ensure we don't perpetuate the mistakes of the past.

See you at the theater,

Alex Lee Reed
Youth Engagement Manager
Seattle Rep

P.S. Teachers, look out for links between each section of this Play Guide with EALR and Common Core Standards!

THEATER

HISTORY

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MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT

PAULA VOGEL



A prolific playwright, 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), *A Civil War Christmas*, *The Long Christmas Ride Home*, *The Mineola Twins*, *Hot 'n' Throbbing*, *The Baltimore Waltz*, *Desdemona*, *And Baby Makes Seven*, and *The Oldest Profession*.

Her plays have been produced by Second Stage, New York Theatre Workshop, Vineyard Theatre, Roundabout, and Circle Repertory Company. She's also produced regionally all over the country at the Center Stage, Intiman, Trinity Repertory, Woolly Mammoth, Huntington Theatre, Magic Theatre, Goodman Theatre, American Repertory Theatre, Dallas Theatre Berkeley Repertory, and Alley Theatres to name a few.

Paula has also been produced internationally 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, among other countries.

John Simon once remarked that Paula Vogel has 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 Vineyard Theatre, the Paula Vogel Award from the American College Theatre Festival, and the Paula Vogel mentorship program, curated by Quiara Alegría Hudes, and Young Playwrights of Philadelphia.

AN URGENT TRUTH

*A Conversation Between Playwright
Paula Vogel and Director Sheila Daniels*

SHEILA DANIELS

My first question is one I've wanted to ask you for some time now, in relation to the miniscule amount of writing I have been able to find about the women in *Indecent*. Why is there such a lack of information in the world about women? How has that affected your writing about women?

PAULA VOGEL

We have to leap over a certain step that I feel like women writers are held to. Which is: I'm creating a play, so it's okay that it's fiction. Very early on in this process, I had to realize that I'm going to have to make up some of these women characters. The fact is, this [*Indecent*] is based on a true story. It's just not based on true women characters because we simply don't have access to that information.

SHEILA DANIELS

It's a play! If you look at any good movie or play that's about a historical event, if it had no part in the artist's imagination, it would not bring the audience into the story as well. It's personalization that makes stories really exciting.

PAULA VOGEL

That's right. I think as a woman, I've been held to a veracity test, as if it's not enough to tell emotional truth. You have to tell historical truth. Therefore, it has to be a history, which I'm not interested in writing. But I wanted the women characters to feel absolutely as truthful and lifelike as, say, Sholem Asch. And this is a longer conversation that dates back for me to the 1970s. As I've said: Whenever a male character enters the stage, he's trailing clouds of Hamlet. But when a woman character treads onstage, she is trailing clouds of Ophelia or Gertrude. And that's a very different legacy. Women characters exist in the canon to be functional only, and not to be three-dimensional.

We have a lifetime of working with actresses – incredible, complex women who have peopled our stages. The only person that's going to bring your writing to life is going to be the actors. So this is a play that really bets on the theatrical process. I'm betting on my collaborators. I'm betting on you. To make it feel like an urgent truth. And I feel it is an urgent truth.

SHEILA DANIELS

It is, absolutely. So I've read a lot and we've talked a lot about the whole creation process. For you, I'm wondering how the piece surprised you in the process of making it. Were there moments of "I didn't see that coming"?

PAULA VOGEL

Each character sort of takes me by the hand and surprises me. I don't do that kind of plotting on an outline. I follow them in the scenes, and they lead me where they go. When I talk about the fact that actors really kind of write the characters – I've learned you have to tailor the role to the actors.

SHEILA DANIELS

Yes, it definitely was a wonderful audition process. In this one, it really was who was able to step into the skin without much help from me.

PAULA VOGEL

The connective tissue, always. It's you translating it into three-dimensionality.

SHEILA DANIELS

Absolutely. You've talked about this before, but what's sticking with you right now the most, in terms of how *Indecent* is uniquely meaningful to you?

PAULA VOGEL

It's really me looking at my Jewish heritage. It's really me following through on something my brother Carl said when he was dying of AIDS. While he still had his sight, he started reading Holocaust material and he said, "Do you realize one half of our family has always been killing the other half of our family as far back as we can trace?" You know, I'm German-Catholic, German-Protestant, German-Jewish, Russian-Jewish, Spanish, and French-Catholic. So, seriously, he's right! That's the kind of thing that the second you hear it, it's burrowing deep under your skin. So I think in a way, this is the play that's working that out.

SHEILA DANIELS

For many of us, the first play that we knew of yours was *Baltimore Waltz*, and it's so moving to hear you connect this play to that play in so many ways.

ACTIVITY

In this interview, we hear from both the director and the playwright on what truth they've found in the play *Indecent*. They explore the concept of indecency and how they portray that in their work. For this activity ask yourself, "what is my truth?" Meaning what about you might be labeled as "indecent"? Create a small presentation for your class sharing your truth and have it heard. Then as a class, discuss the importance of having your truth heard and acknowledged and how it can change perspectives on a community.

PAULA VOGEL

Here's the thing that I feel that as women we may not always get the opportunity early in our careers to do, and I'd love to hear you speak to this. In order to get a play produced when I was in my late 30s, I had to bring a world onstage that could be produced for less than \$1,000 and with free actors.

SHEILA DANIELS

Absolutely, and still, to this day, so much of that work is the work I'm most proud of.

PAULA VOGEL

Right. And now, we're finally allowed to open up the camera lens and we're allowed a wider screen shot. Towards the very end of our careers, we're allowed, instead of playing a duet, to use an orchestra. Hopefully, *Indecent* now allows me to look at a larger, more ambitious stage. And, I have not yet had the privilege of working with a director who's done so much research!

SHEILA DANIELS

You mean going to Poland? I felt like I had no choice, you know? I definitely felt – especially not being Jewish myself – the need to understand on a more visceral level. And then going to Auschwitz and Birkenau was just leveling.

SHEILA DANIELS

So because we're both teachers and we both love teaching, what's one piece of advice you'd give to a theater artist just entering the workforce?

PAULA VOGEL

Don't wait for permission.

TRAVELOGUE

Indecent director Sheila Daniels took a research trip to Poland in preparation for the show. Be a part of her experience through her written travelogue.

January, 2019



Sheila, Marcin, Łukasz, and Misha at Survivors' Park in Łódź

It began with Łódź. In between reading the play and doing research on it, the other locales were familiar. Places I could grasp. Yet Łódź was elusive. I found myself craving to know it, and then to walk other places these characters had trod in Poland, a country I'd always been fascinated by, but never even thought of actually going to. **To feel the ground beneath my feet. The ground of Auschwitz-Birkenau, where so many were murdered, but also the ground in Kraków and Warsaw and Łódź where they lived and loved** and gave so much to our world in the arts and social justice and philosophy and so many other areas.

What we could never have planned was the generosity of the people we met along the way – whether it was Wojtek, Marcin, Łukasz, Inés, Paul, and Ilona – who each gave us hours of their time – or the woman at the bus stop who showed us a remaining portion of the ghetto wall in Warsaw, or other people we met in passing.

Warsaw

On our first night in Warsaw we met Paul Bargetto, an ex-pat friend of a friend, and his fellow artist, Ilona Binarsch. Arrangements were made to meet at the Bar Studio in Pałac Kultury (Palace of Culture), where the state theater companies reside: a huge, Soviet Era building “gifted” to the Polish people by Stalin.

The next day we were scheduled to meet with Wojtek Zrałek-Kossakowski the next day for lunch: what we expected was a 1-2 hour lunch, but received an email that night from him the next day that made it clear that he was planning on being with us all day.

TIME WITH WOJTEK We met at the same Bar Studio we'd been at the night before: **Wojtek was described by the person who connected us with him as “knowing everything and everybody there is to know in the theater in Warsaw.”** He took us on a tour of the smaller of the state theaters and its many spaces, including watching a show in rehearsal – with an enormous puppet and on a turntable – from the catwalk of the main space. His favorite space is a black box with flexible seating – a soulmate!!!



The outside of the State's Children's Theatre.

Political discussions arose again, particularly around racism in both of our countries, and the shared hope that we can create change. After leaving these new friends, and with great hopes we would all stay in touch, we headed back to our Warsaw home, stopping for some divine pierogis and pivo (beer).



Divine pierogis.



A photo of a young Sholem Asch, writer of God of Vengeance.



Photos of Isaac Leib Peretz, Yiddish author and playwright.

The POLIN Museum, Moscow

Our third day, in Moscow, was devoted in large part to POLIN – a relatively new museum of the history of the Jewish people in Poland from the Middle Ages up to current times.



Projected trees at the entrance of the POLIN museum.

It quickly became clear that, like any broad-ranging museum, I had to pick and choose what I paid closest attention to.

It is important to note that there are very few photos of the portion of the museum devoted, and powerfully so, to the Holocaust. This was one of several instances on this journey where I was either simply too overcome with emotion to take a photo, or felt that the photos I did take did any kind of justice to what I was experiencing.

That evening we returned home to an email from Marcin (who Wotjek, from Warsaw, connected us with):

Hello!

I ask my friend, to guide us thru the Ghetto. He grew up in this area. If it's not problem for You, please take a cab and come to my place. I live within the borders of former Ghetto. Lukasz (my friend) promised to spend about 2 hrs with us. Then I can show you cemetery, and would give you some directions for more explorations.

Regards

Marcin

Łódź

True to his word, Marcin met us at his apartment the next morning along with Łukasz and Misha, Marcin's wonderful dog. Marcin is a musician, Łukasz a photographer and an activist who was born in Łódź. **Both are deeply committed to preserving and keeping alive the memory of the Ghetto and the people who lived there.**

The Ghetto was in the district of Bałuty – which at the beginning of our play (1906) Lemml refers to as a village near his shtetl. It was incorporated into Łódź in 1915. According to Łukasz “it was the poorest district then, it is where they put the Ghetto, and it is still the poorest district.” **Łukasz's pride in being from here is palpable, as is his outrage as what has been done – and not done – to people living here over time.**



Street art depicting children.

SURVIVORS' PARK After 2 hours walking through Bałuty, we arrived in Survivors' Park – a gorgeous and soothing stretch of green with many trees planted.

Each tree is planted by or for a survivor from Łódź. “Planting memorial trees by the survivors of the Litzmannstadt Ghetto was one of the important elements of this event. The idea was brought forth by one of the survivors – Halina Elcewska/Centrum Dialogue Website



Much of Łódź remains the same as it had been, with beauty among the peeling walls.



In Survivors' Park, a mound in tribute to Jan Karski – a Polish citizen who, at great risk, notified the Polish government in exile and its Western Allies about what was actually happening to the Jewish people and others held in the Nazis' purported Work Camp.



An original street sign.

THE JEWISH CEMETERY

“the largest Jewish cemetery in Europe, covering more than 40 hectares. About 230,000 Jews are buried here. During the war, an estimated 45,000 people were interred in the so-called Ghetto Field.”

Down a long narrow street, you enter through a metal door in a lime green wall.



The entrance to the Jewish Cemetery in Łódź.

From there we began walking through the old part of the cemetery. Again the sound of wind everywhere – it is a peaceful place to begin with. Green and filled with beautiful trees. Row upon row of headstones, most in disrepair. Then comes the moment where you realize they are in disrepair and you can hear the wind and nothing else, because no one is left to take care of them. **From that moment forward what was peaceful becomes empty, becomes haunting.**



Old graves in disrepair.

Also here we looked at many plaques on the wall memorializing Łódź Jews who died in the death camps.

Upon leaving the cemetery we parted from Marcin. There are no words to express our gratitude for him.

RADEGAST STATION: HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

"From this place, tens of thousands of people were herded off to the death camp at Chelmno-nad-Nerem in the years 1942-1944 and then to Auschwitz in August 1944."

There are no signs that we could see guiding our Uber driver to Radegast station: it was a sobering moment of understanding the size of Justine, Marcin, and Łukasz's task to remember and to create dialogue.

The main memorials were outside: a train car, a memorial of giant gravestones with the names of the camps humans were shipped to, and one more I will describe later.



Gravestones with the names of camps people were shipped to.

The weight of the precious human beings lost was piling up on us throughout this day.

Outside of the museum, a long and dark cement hallway greeted you. As you walked down it, lights would pop on illuminating the stories of deportations. Impossible to catch in a photo. At the end of the hallway lies a bright room, and carved into its walls are all the places from which the Nazis shipped their victims. You then look up and realize you are looking up through a smokestack, echoing the burning of these human beings' lives.



A smokestack in the museum.

As we stepped outside of this memorial, we turned to look back and carved into it on the outside are the words “Thou Shalt Not Kill.”

Łódź is in a time of rebirth, and part of that is the work of the activists and artists there striving to memorialize, to remind, to activate dialogue and change. Their obstacles are formidable, with a powerful Nationalist party in power, but no more so than our obstacles here.

Auschwitz/Birkenau

There is little I can say about this day to convey how devastating it is to spend a day here. Emotions and sensations course through you rapidly – horror, grief, disbelief, rage. And also a determination to fight. **This is where Never Again comes home.**

AUSCHWITZ: THE PERSONAL. Block 15: Extermination museum.



A sign noting Block 15 in Auschwitz.

Rooms of photos, of piles of clothes and prosthetics and glasses and teacups and prayer shawls. I attempt to take photos but find the lens to be a barrier.

We stop outside a room, dimly lit. Our guide instructs us to take no photos in the room, as its contents are fragile. In this room are two long glass cases filled with piles of the hair of an estimated 140,000 victims. **The hair of those I love who are of Jewish heritage flashes through my mind: Lisa, Sarah, Jason, Libby, Tina, Tonya.** Everything becomes deeply and irrevocably personal. You feel the difference in your entire group from this moment forward. Even the crematorium you walk through later cannot touch the impact of this moment.

Implausibly, the beautiful song of a robin reaches you. The many stories of birds and their songs as hope for freedom, as relief from terror, settle into you.

BIRKENAU: THE VAST After walking for about 10 minutes in relative silence, our guide shares with us that Birkenau is often called the largest graveyard in Europe. You realize in an instant that the ashes of over a million human beings lay beneath your feet. **Every step thereafter it is as if people are crying out beneath your feet.**

THE OTHER STATION On leaving Birkenau, our guide tells us we have one more stop. We arrive at a train track with one train car standing alone. Our understanding from our driver is that here is the original place people were shipped to, and from here they walked to Auschwitz I. Note the stones laid upon the step to the car and along the tracks.



A stone with an inscription on the train track.

Kraków

Return to the present, into the future

ARCHITECTURE Our last few days in Poland were spent exploring Kraków by foot, largely in the Old Jewish Quarter, Kazimierz. As I mentioned at the beginning, much of Kraków survived the second World War. It is a beautiful city: cobbled streets, lovely old buildings, and dynamic newer architecture as well.

Stara Synagogue: The oldest standing synagogue in Europe. Despite the Nazi's attempts to ransack and totally destroy it, the Stare Synagogue – originally built in the 15th century—was renovated in the 1950s and stands today as a museum honoring the history of the Jewish people.



MUSIC AND FOOD I would be remiss to not acknowledge the food and the music we experienced in Kraków. To be to the point – all the food we had was delicious!



Street food – kielbasa in Kraków.

Musically, street musicians could be found throughout Kraków.

Throughout Kraków is street art – a huge variety from small pieces hidden near drainpipes to giant murals.



Street art in Kraków.

The below famous mural honors the Bosak family, whose descendants lived in the building for 400 years before the Nazi occupation and creation of the ghetto. The building is on the border of the Kraków Ghetto.



A mural of the Bosak family, who lived in the building for 400 years before Nazi occupation.

The below pieces by Bartolomeo Koczenasz are scattered throughout Kraków, titled “1932-2019: Beyond the Past and the Present.”



These capture the feeling of renewal I experienced in our return to Kraków.

The truth is, no words or photos can ever express what it is to experience a place and a people, and in this case, the haunting sense everywhere of all the people and their histories lost through genocide. **My hope for the future of Poland lies in the people we met, who welcomed us into their lives.**

- Sheila Daniels, Director of Indecent

ACTIVITY

On her trip to Poland, director Sheila Daniels found herself in the past, connecting with the time and place through the people who lived there. For this activity, think of a place you consider home. Do some research on it and find out who called that place home before you. Ask yourself, “how am I similar or how am I different from these people?” When you have collected this information, create a chart that displays your findings. Make sure to include who they were, how they inhabited the space, and how the space came to be your home. Present this to your class. As a class, try to determine what makes a place home for you.

QUOTAS FOR IMMIGRATION

The U.S. limits by nationality the number of immigrants who may enter the country each year. The table below outlines these U.S. immigration quotas.

NORTHWEST EUROPE AND SCANDINAVIA		EASTERN AND SOUTHERN EUROPE		OTHER COUNTRIES	
COUNTRY	QUOTA	COUNTRY	QUOTA	COUNTRY	QUOTA
Germany	51,227	Poland	5,982	Africa (other than Egypt)	1,100
Great Britain & Northern Ireland	34,007	Italy	3,845	Armenia	124
Irish Free State (Ireland)	28,567	Czechoslovakia	3,073	Australia	121
Sweden	9,561	Russia	2,248	Palestine	100
Norway	6,453	Yugoslavia	671	Syria	100
France	3,954	Romania	603	Turkey	100
Denmark	2,789	Portugal	503	Portugal	100
Switzerland	2,081	Hungary	473	New Zealand & Pacific Islands	100
Netherlands	1,648	Lithuania	344	All others	1,900
Austria	785	Latvia	142		
Belgium	512	Spain	131		
Finland	471	Estonia	124		
Free City of Danzig	228	Albania	100		
Iceland	100	Bulgaria	100		
Luxembourg	100	Greece	100		
TOTAL (NUMBER)	142,483	TOTAL (NUMBER)	18,439	TOTAL (NUMBER)	3,745
TOTAL (%)	86.5	TOTAL (%)	11.2	TOTAL (%)	2.3
(Total Annual immigrant quota: 164,667)					

Source: Statistical Abstract of the United States (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1929), 100.

*Note that “Africa” is listed as a “country” and that while we speak about discrimination against Jews and Muslims, we must not forget that the original sin of the United States – racism, dehumanization, and slavery against African humans – remains alive, unhealed, and primary.

REFUGEE ADMISSIONS BY RELIGION

YEAR	MUSLIM	CHRISTIAN	OTHER
2009	16,394	36,065	22,195
2010	19,862	34,570	18,879
2011	10,397	26,440	19,587
2012	14,749	24,790	18,699
2013	25,785	29,036	15,105
2014	28,149	28,537	13,301
2015	28,399	32,042	9,492
2016	38,555	37,938	8,501
2017	22,629	25,633	5,454
2018	3,312	16,012	3,167

Source: U.S. Department of State

GLOSSARY

Concepts, Words, and Ideas

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED BY GUTHRIE THEATER

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: ÁLE 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.

LÓDZ

“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 was an 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

The producer of *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 *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 (a non-Jew)

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 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.

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.

SQUELCHING/KATUBAH

“No squelching once the Katubah is signed.” – Sarah

Squelching: 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-IUSHN.

“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”

Original Source:

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