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Figures in Need of Rehabilitation: Helena Frank

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Figures in Search of Rehabilitation: Helena Frank

Jacob Glastein
translated by Aharon Varady

Introduction: “The following sketch records merely the impressions of a short excursion, undertaken about two years ago, into the land of Jargon, or Yiddish literature. I should be happy could I persuade others to make the journey for themselves. Partly for my sake, that I may have someone with whom to compare experiences. Partly for their own, because there must be many who would enjoy it as much as I, and profit by it more. Partly for the sake of the land, which is in great measure ignorant of its own treasures, and allowing its unique and fragile monuments to crumble away in the atmosphere of present-day civilisation.” (Helena C. Frank, *The Land of Jargon*, 1904)

As the founding director of the Open Siddur Project, I frequently prepare texts for exhibition in its libre Open Access archive of Jewish liturgy and prayer literature. For every prayer, prayer-poem, and song I transcribe, I do my best to prepare a short bio of its author and earliest translators. While searching for the original Yiddish text of Morris Rosenfeld’s ca. 1897 poem “דיא חנוכה ליכט” (later adapted as a popular Hanukkah song), I found two English translations, from 1914 and 1921, both by Helena Constance Frank (July 31, 1872 – February 18, 1954).¹ I learned from scattered published pieces that Frank was a pioneering figure in the history of modern Jewish literature, both Yiddish and Hebrew.² The little that I found about her piqued my curiosity, and I present here what more I was able to learn through subsequent research.

More than a translator, Helena Frank was a champion of Yiddish. Her 1904 essay, “The Land of Jargon,” communicates much of the same urgency that I hear among Yiddishists promoting the language today.³ Not only had Frank published the first

¹ The 1914 translation was made in collaboration with Rose Harriet Pastor Stokes (née Wieslander; 1879–1933) the socialist labor activist, birth control advocate, and feminist writer. Rosenfeld’s text with translations by Feiweil and Frank can be accessed at the [Open Siddur collection](#).

² This includes the discussion in Vol 11.002 of [The Mendele Review: Yiddish Literature and Language](#), published on 27 February 2007.

³ Helena Frank, “The Land of Jargon,” in *The 19th Century* (October 1904), pp. 652-667.

English translation of Rosenfeld, she literally introduced Rosenfeld, Y.L. Peretz, and other Yiddish and Hebrew poets and writers of the late 19th and early 20th century to an Anglophone audience. After Henrietta Szold discovered one of Frank's translations of a Peretz story published under the pseudonym "Golde" in the New York *Jewish Daily News*, Frank was selected by the Jewish Publication Society as the translator of *Stories and Pictures* (Peretz, JPS 1906) and her career in translation began in earnest.⁴ Just read the Table of Contents to her *Yiddish Tales* (JPS 1912): forty-eight works by Asch, Berdyczewski, Berkowitz, Bershadski, Blinkin, Braudes, Frischmann, Jehalel, Lerner, Libin, Naumberg, Perez, Pinski, Raison, Rosenthal, Schapiro, Sholem Aleichem, Spektor, Steinberg, and Tashbak – all with a short introduction for English readers who were hearing their names for the first time. While working on *Yiddish Tales*, Frank also founded an organization, the Anglo-Jewish Yiddish Literary Society, which provided Yiddish language reading materials to patients in London hospitals.⁵ In the year after Frank's death, in a review of Howe & Greenberg's *Treasury of Yiddish Stories*, Josef Leftwich wrote, "One should recall Helena Frank as the pioneer of English translation from Yiddish."⁶

Despite Frank's role as a pioneering translator and passionate advocate of the Yiddish language, a comprehensive biography and a full bibliography of her translations remains to be compiled. Among the longest existing discussion of Frank's work is an essay in Yiddish, written by the acclaimed Yiddish poet Jacob Glatstein (1896–1971). Not only does this essay elucidate Helena Frank's place (or lack of it) in the Jewish literary world, it is the last (and most recent) treatment of her among Yiddishists, and I share it in order to revive Glatstein's call to action to properly honor Frank's name and locate her final work. Up to that point, only a few short pieces about Frank had been written before and after she died alone in Haslemere, Surrey. Glatstein, writing sixteen years after Frank's death in 1970, might not have read them all but appears to be familiar with the same outline of her life that they describe. In the paragraphs that follow, I will attempt to sketch as complete a portrait of Helena Frank's life as can be drawn from these works.

One piece in particular, "Portrait of a Lady at Eighty," published in 1952 in the UK English periodical *The Jewish Chronicle*, a couple of years before Frank's death, provides crucial details on Frank's journey to Yiddish. Journalist Joseph Fraenkel writes that when Helena was "about twenty years of age she learned that she had a Jewish grandfather, and the discovery led her to take an interest in Jews and Jewish teaching. She became deeply absorbed in the people's history and literature, studied Hebrew in secret, and took an active part in the *Hovevei Zion* movement, at that time under the leadership of Colonel Goldsmid." Helena became close friends with the British-Jewish suffragette Henrietta Lowy (1866-1953), and connected with other high society Jews at the Bentwich Salons organized by Lowy's family. Before World War I, she traveled to

⁴ Jonathan Sarna, *JPS: The Americanization of Jewish Culture 1888-1988* (2021), p. 84, fn. 116.

⁵ Israel Abrahams, "The Anglo-Jewish Yiddish Literary Society" in *The Book of Delight and Other Papers* (1912), pp. 255-258.

⁶ Joseph Leftwich, "Book Review: A Treasury of Yiddish Stories (ed. Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg)," in *The Jewish Chronicle* (14 October 1955) p. 9.

Palestine to help establish a children's clinic with Henrietta Irwell (1869-1941).⁷ Back in England, Frank began traveling east across London to the Jewish Free Reading Room in Stepney, where she commenced learning Hebrew. Frank's studies led to her discovery of Yiddish, as described by Fraenkel: "Her Hebrew teacher was named Hilda Manville. Helena, who also spoke and wrote in Russian, Spanish, German, Italian, and French, soon made excellent progress. Miss Manville, visiting Whitechapel one day, bought some "*heimishe kuchen*," which she packed in a Yiddish newspaper and sent to Helena, who was then in France. In this way Helena learned of the existence of a Yiddish language. Considering herself to be a Jewess,⁸ she was anxious to absorb everything Jewish, and before long acquired a Yiddish teacher, Ephraim Hieger."⁹

Frank's Jewish identity and family history is a subject of continuous interest in the short pieces written about her. Here "Portrait of a Lady at Eighty" is again particularly informative.¹⁰ Frank's genealogy is rooted in a history of German-Jewish settlement in England on her paternal side, and British noble origins on her maternal side. Fraenkel explains: "There was in Germany a Jewish family, who, in gratitude to Napoleon, adopted the name of "Franzke," which was later changed to 'Frank.' In the late 1820s a member of this family, Myer Frank, of Salzwedel (Germany), settled in Manchester, where he became converted to Christianity and married a non-Jewess. His son, Dr. Adolf Frank, had one daughter, Helena, born on July 31, 1872. She was, naturally, brought up as a Christian." After Frank's death in 1954, her obituary in the *Jewish Chronicle* quotes Simon Hieger,¹¹ explaining further: "[Helena Frank] was a daughter of the late Lady Agnes Grosvenor,¹² one of the sisters of the First Duke of Westminster, and was thus related to many aristocratic English families. The fact, however, that her father, Dr. Philip Frank,¹³ at one time a physician to Prince Henry of Battenberg and to

⁷ Helena Frank in Solomon Grayzel's "A Talk with Helena Frank," *JPS Bookmark*, vol. 1 (1954), p.7. Her trip is also noted by Somech Phillips in "The late Helena Frank," p. 33, who refers to the clinic as a "Childrens Home." In 1920, Henrietta Irwell co-founded the Women's International Zionist Organization.

⁸ In Frank's initial obit in the *Jewish Chronicle* (26 February 1954), p. 15, Sir Leon Simon (1881-1965) states: "[Frank] was brought up as a Christian and never gave up or changed her religion." Joseph Fraenkel appears to have tried to correct the record in a follow-up published a couple weeks later: "When I asked her whether she considered herself to be Jewish or Christian, her reply was: 'I consider myself to be a Jewess'" (in "The Late Miss Helena Frank" in *The Jewish Chronicle*, (12 March 1954), p. 9, restating what he had already written previously in "Portrait of a Lady of Eighty" (1952).

⁹ Possibly this was Francis Ephraim Hieger (1861-1920), a Jewish watchmaker in Golders Green, originally from the Mazowieckie region or its capital Warsaw, in Poland, whose records can be found in the England and Wales Census, 1911 and the England and Wales Death Registration Index 1837-2007 on familysearch.org and ancestry.com, and is noted in Pam Fox's *The Jewish Community of Golders Green: A Social History* (2016).

¹⁰ Josef Fraenkel, "Portrait of a Lady of Eighty," in *The Jewish Chronicle* (1 August 1952), p. 13. Much gratitude to Hillary Einziger for locating this piece.

¹¹ Simon Samuel Hieger (1888-1977), portrait artist and son of Francis Ephraim Hieger (England and Wales Census, 1911).

¹² This detail is confirmed by Olga Somech Phillips, in "The late Helena Frank" *The Jewish Quarterly* (Spring 1954), p. 32-34.

¹³ In the same article, Josef Fraenkel recalls Helena's father's name as "Adolf," while Simon Hieger gives his name as "Philip." Nevertheless, it is quite possible that Adolf was an alternate name, for Fraenkel is otherwise reliable in his account of Frank's life, and Hieger and Fraenkel's accounts align in other ways.

the King of Bulgaria, was of Jewish extraction, undoubtedly determined the direction of her interests at an early age.”¹⁴ The crucial detail missing here seems to be that Helena’s birth was not officially recognized in the genealogical records of British nobility.¹⁵ Whether this was the result of endemic blood racism or antisemitic prejudice in Lady Grosvenor’s family, or something else, remains unknown.

Jacob Glatstein, in his essay "Geshtaltn vos zukhn tikn" [Figures In Need of Rehabilitation], also takes a strong interest in Frank’s Jewish background. Without mentioning Frank’s own self-identification as a Jew, he identifies her as a Christian albeit descended from Jews. Glatstein’s situating of Frank’s identity underscores the “mystery” of Helena Frank; her attention to Zionist causes and Hebrew and Yiddish literature suggests an aspirational Jewish identity which, for reasons unknown, were never fully realized or reciprocated as they might have been for a religious Jewish convert. Her lack of a straightforward Jewish identity is also used to make a sharper point – against those more recognizably Jewish writers who debase Yiddish for a cheap laugh. Glatstein presents Helena Frank’s "*heimishe kuchen*" wrapped in a Yiddish newspaper as the wholesome counterpoint to a Yiddish sullied in English by the likes of a young Philip Roth.

Writing in the year before his own death, Glatstein decries the unfair obscurity of Helena Frank. He contrasts the unjust treatment of Frank's legacy with the wild popularity of Philip Roth after the 1969 publication of *Portnoy's Complaint*. He also highlights a serious concern shared by Fraenkel and other friends at the time of Frank's death: the fate of her final manuscript, *Tales of Rabbi Nachman Bratzlaver*, completed only a day before her death. The very last thing Helena Frank is known to have written, according to Fraenkel's report, was this: “As to my modest literary work, I finished the two little books of Rabbi Nachman Bratslaver...If I never do anything more—never mind! I am pleased that I finished Rabbi Nachman—to the best of my ability...”¹⁶ Glatstein calls for a biographer to fully research Frank’s life story and locate her manuscript on Rebbe Nachman. I share this translation of Glatstein’s essay on Helena Frank in the hope that it will elicit more scholarly research into the life of Helena Frank, and the whereabouts of her final work of translation, the *Tales of Rabbi Nachman Bratzlaver*.

The birthdate Fraenkel provides for Helena Frank (31 July), for example, seems a reasonable one given the marriage date of Lady Agnes Grosvenor to a “Philip Frank” on 5 December 1871, according to genealogical details compiled in *Burke's Peerage, Baronetage & Knightage* (Mosley Charles, ed., 2003).

¹⁴ Simon Hieger quoted in "Miss Helena Frank" in *The Jewish Chronicle*, (26 February 1954), p. 15.

¹⁵ Lady Agnes Grosvenor’s genealogical record in *Burke's Peerage* includes a significant detail: that Philip Frank was Lady Agnes Grosvenor’s second husband, and that Lady Agnes Grosvenor died on 22 January 1909 “without issue” – namely, without heirs. This would appear to indicate that Helena’s parentage and nobility was not publicly acknowledged.

¹⁶ As quoted in "The Late Miss Helena Frank" in *The Jewish Chronicle*, (12 March 1954), p. 9. This statement is repeated in another letter by Helena Frank, published posthumously in the *Jewish Quarterly*, Spring 1954, p.34. Frank’s work on Rabbi Nachman is also mentioned by Solomon Grayzel in “A Talk with Helena Frank,” *JPS Bookmark*, vol. 1 (1954), p.7.

Figures In Search of Rehabilitation: Helena Frank

Once upon a time, someone wrapped a delicious Jewish pastry in a Yiddish newspaper and sent it as a gift to a Christian woman. And it was due to this—this little pastry—that Yiddish literature received one of its greatest gifts. What does a pastry, wrapped in the letters of the Yiddish alefbeyz, have to do with Yiddish literature? Listen here: this lady marvelled at the Yiddish letters on the pastry, and was so enthused by them that she decided to teach herself Yiddish and Hebrew.

Luigi Pirandello, the modernist Italian playwright, became well-known for a drama he called *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. We have enough neglected figures in the history of Yiddish and Hebrew literature who seek an author to revive them, to write a monograph about them, to describe and appraise them in the time in which they lived. It's also necessary to separate fact from fiction, though the stuff of legends does often take the truth and frame it in a more compelling manner. Maybe the story with the Jewish pastry wrapped in Yiddish letters is imaginary. Yet in the near-absence of other authentic records, this episode provides the best explanation for that historic moment when Helena Frank became the first translator of Yiddish literature into English. After all, this woman remains something of a legend, although her translations of I.L. Peretz, Avraham Reyzen, and other Yiddish writers were published only sixty years ago. Her life has still not been sufficiently explored. Even details about her Christian identity are not entirely clear.

Therefore we have before us a full, true phenomenon — the first English translator of Yiddish writers, in our own century, not too far removed from us, a figure who remains shrouded in mystery. To this day, Helena Frank seeks an author who will sit down and write her biography.

That's why I opened with the Jewish pastry, which was purchased in Whitechapel, London. Helena was still young then, when she unwrapped the London Jewish newspaper, ate the pastry, stared at the Yiddish letters and became inspired. This inspiration would grow into a deep and dedicated enthusiasm that resulted in her English translation of I.L. Peretz.

The fact that Helena Frank's life is still shrouded in mystery is even more surprising given that she died only sixteen years ago, at the age of eighty-two. There is not a single word about her in the English "Universal" Jewish Encyclopedia. Bits and pieces of her biography have appeared here and there, but there has been no serious study that explores the figure of this British woman who expressed her admiration for I.L. Peretz, the father of modern Yiddish literature, through such a significant undertaking.

After her death, people wrote that she was invested in Hebrew and Yiddish literature to her very last day. She also knew Hebrew, and this makes sense: she wouldn't have been

able to translate I.L. Peretz without it. Frank did for Yiddish literature (if to a somewhat lesser extent) what the American Constance Garnett did for Russian literature. Mrs. Garnett translated the works of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Chekhov and others. She was the first to open the seal of Russian literature for the English reader.

The renowned Zionist historian and chronicler of the world of the Jewish press, Josef Fraenkel, once wrote that Helena Frank had left behind a study on Rebbe Nahman of Bratslav. Where did this study end up? "I am glad that I have completed my work on Rebbe Nahman," the old woman wrote to Josef Fraenkel. The letter was written on February 17, 1954, and she died the next morning. The question arises: Where is this completed work that was left by Helena Frank?

The Jewish press wrote little about this romantic after her death. She elevated and promoted Yiddish literature, and yet her death went virtually unnoticed, unacknowledged.

Helena Frank was descended from Jews; her grandfather was a Jew. It is abundantly clear that the first English translator of Yiddish literature into English is worth more than a passing (if warm) mention — a thorough study of her life is needed. It's about time that a Jewish writer take on the task of using authentic documents to uncover the personality of this Christian — one who, in her own way, searched for, and partly found a way back to, her grandfather. She became interested in Hebrew and Yiddish as soon as it became clear to her that her grandfather was a Jew. It was then that she became drawn to Jews, and she found her way back to Hebrew and Yiddish through Bialik, Peretz, Reizen — in Hebrew and Yiddish. This in no way undermines the tale of the Whitechapel Jewish pastry, which was probably the first thing that whet her appetite for the Yiddish alefbeyz.

As we know from the introduction to her translations, Helen Frank admired Jewish spiritual treasures. It is fitting that, as I've said, her life ended with the completion of a work about the Bratslaver Rebbe.

In our time, there's a shortcut to fame: publish a piece in an English newspaper or magazine in which you don't just write, but rather proclaim that Yiddish is already extinct. If a young TV comedian pitches some messed-up Yiddish words, he becomes an instant celebrity—all the more so when he says that Yiddish was a jargon once spoken by the Jews. Having thrown this filthy stone into the the ever refreshing spring of Yiddish, the fellow feels that he's really done something. In the pornographic book *Portnoy's Complaint*, the shrewd author incorporated a dozen dirty adjectives that were supposed to demonstrate his knowledge of Yiddish. Instead he only exposed the pollution of the particular stream through which his own "Yiddish" words flow.

When such a young man—considered a "writer" in our time— throws a stone into our spring and his filthy words are in Yiddish...well then, as they say, not even ten sages could extricate that stone.

Among ourselves, we also have enough "experts" who "know" that Yiddish will soon be extinct. They arm themselves with statistics. They even give long, well-prepared Yiddish speeches about the sure demise of Yiddish and the hopeless destiny of Yiddish literature. But the essential outrage of this common sentiment is that the tossed Yiddish stone is now wrapped in English letters. Therefore, it is worth contemplating how Yiddish letters aroused Helena Frank's great admiration for Jewish treasures. When she introduced Yiddish literature to the wider world, the reputation of Yiddish was raised to new heights. It would be worthwhile to perpetuate the name of Helena Frank with a biographical work — an honor to her memory, and an honor for the future of Yiddish literature.

געשטאלטן וואָס זוכן תיקון: העלענאָ פֿראַנק

ס'האָט אַ מאָל געטראָפֿן, אַז מ'האָט אינגעוויקלט אַ ייִדישן געשמאַקן קוכן אין אַ ייִדישער צייטונג און מ'האָט אים געשיקט אַ קריסטין פֿאַר אַ מתנה. דערפֿון, פֿון אַט דעם קוכן, איז אַרויסגעקומען אַ גרויסע טובֿה פֿאַר דער ייִדישער ליטעראַטור. וואָס פֿאַר אַ שייכות האָט אַ קוכן, געוויקלט מיטן ייִדישן אַלף-בית, מיט דער ייִדישער ליטעראַטור? הערט זשע. די קריסטלעכע דאַמע האָט מיט גרויס ווונדער באַטראַכט די ייִדישע אותיות און זי איז געוואָרן אַזוי באַגייסטערט, אַז זי האָט באַשלאָסן זיך אויסצולערנען ייִדיש און העברעיִש.

לויִדזשי פֿראַנדעלאָ, דער איטאַליענישער מאַדערניסטישער דראַמאַטורג, האָט זיך באַרימט געמאַכט מיט אַ דראַמע, וואָס ער האָט אָנגערופֿן „זיבן כאַראַקטערן זוכן אַ מחבר“. מיר האָבן אין דער געשיכטע פֿון דער ייִדישער און העברעיִשער ליטעראַטור גענוג כאַראַקטערן, בעסער געזאַגט, געשטאַלטן, וואָס זוכן אַ מחבר, אַז ער זאָל זיי מתקן זיין, אָנשרייבן אַ מאַנאָגראַפֿיע וועגן זיי, זיי אויפֿקלערן און זיי אַרײַנרעמען אין דער צייט, וואָס אין איר האָבן זיי געלעבט. ס'גייט אויך אין אַפֿטיילן לעגענדע פֿון רעאַליטעט, כאַטש דער לעגענדאַרישער מאַטעריאַל גיט אַפֿט צו האַפֿט דעם אמת און שטעלט אים אַוועק אויף אַ באַדן פֿון גלייבלעכקייט. דער דאָזיקער עפיזאָד מיט דעם ייִדישן קוכן, געוויקלט אין ייִדישע אותיות, מעג זיך זיין אויסגעטראַכט, אָבער אויב מיר האָבן ווייניק אויטענטישן מאַטעריאַל, איז אַזאַ עפיזאָד דערווייל די בעסטע אויפֿקלערונג פֿון דער געשעעניש — העלענאָ פֿראַנק, וואָס איז געוואָרן די ערשטע איבערזעצערין פֿון דער ייִדישער ליטעראַטור אין ענגליש. די דאָזיקע דאַמע איז נאָך אַלץ אַ לעגענדע, כאַטש אירע איבערזעצונגען פֿון י. ל. פֿרץ, אַברהם רייזען און אַנדערע ייִדישע שרייבערס זײַנען דערשינען מיט אַ זעכציק יאָר צוריק. איר לעבן איז נאָך אַלץ נישט גענוג אויסגעפֿאַרשט געוואָרן. אַפֿילו איר קריסטלעכקייט איז אויך נישט אין גאַנצן קלאָר.

ובכן, האָבן מיר פֿאַר זיך אַ פֿולע רעאַליסטישע געשעעניש — די ערשטע ענגלישע איבערזעצערין פֿון ייִדישע שרייבערס, אין אונדזער אייגענעם יאָרהונדערט, גאַר נישט אַזוי ווייט אָפּגערוקט פֿון אונדז, וואָס איז געבליבן אַרומגעשלייערט מיט לעגענדאַרישן מאַטעריאַל, און ביזן היינטיקן טאָג זוכט אַט דאָס געשטאַלט אַ מחבר, וואָס זאָל זיך אַוועקזעצן און אָנשרייבן אַ גרינטלעך בוך וועגן העלענאָ פֿראַנק.

דערפֿאַר האָבן איך אָנגעהויבן מיט דעם ייִדישן קוכן, וואָס איז געקויפֿט געוואָרן אין ווייטשעפל, לאַנדאָן. העלענאָ איז נאָך דעמאָלט געווען יונג, ווען זי האָט אָפּגעוויקלט די לאַנדאָנער ייִדישע צייטונג, געגעסן דעם קוכן און באַטראַכט מיט ווונדער די ייִדישע אותיות, וואָס האָבן זי באַגייסטערט; און די דאָזיקע באַגייסטערונג האָט אָנגעהאַלטן אַזוי לאַנג און אַזוי שטאַרק, אַז ס'האָט זי געפֿירט דירעקט צו איבערזעצן י. ל. פֿרץ אויף ענגליש.

דער פֿאַקט, וואָס העלענאָ פֿראַנקס לעבן איז נאָך אַלץ אַרומגערינגלט מיט אַ סך רעטענישן, איז נאָך איבערראַשנדיקער דערמיט, וואָס געשטאַרבן איז זי ערשט מיט אַ זעכצן יאָר צוריק, אין עלטער פֿון 82 יאָר. אין דער ענגלישער „אָניווערסאַלער“ ייִדישער ענציקלאָפֿעדיע איז נישט פֿאַראַן קיין איין וואָרט וועגן איר. עטלעכע ביאָגראַפֿישע שטיקלעך און ברעקלעך זײַנען דערשינען אין פֿאַרשיידענע ערטער, אָבער אַלץ נישט קיין ערנסטע שטודיע, וואָס זאָל אויפֿקלערן דאָס געשטאַלט פֿון אַן ענגלישער דאַמע, וואָס האָט אויף אַ ממשותדיקן אָפֿן אַרויסגעוויזן איר באַוונדערונג פֿאַר דעם פֿאַטער פֿון דער מאַדערנער ייִדישער ליטעראַטור — י. ל. פֿרץ.

מ'האָט נאָך איר טויט געשריבן, אַז זי האָט זיך ביז איר לעצטן טאָג נישט אויפֿגעהערט צו אינטערעסירן מיט דער העברעיִשער און מיט דער ייִדישער ליטעראַטור. זי האָט אויך געקענט העברעיִש; און ס'לייגט זיך אויפֿן שכל, ווייל אַן העברעיִש וואָלט זי נישט געקאָנט איבערזעצן י. ל. פֿרץ. זי האָט — אין אַ קלענערער מאָס — געטאָן פֿאַר דער ייִדישער ליטעראַטור, וואָס די אַמעריקאַנערין קאַנסטענס גאַרנעט האָט געטאָן פֿאַר דער רוסישער ליטעראַטור. פֿרוי גאַרנעט האָט איבערגעזעצט די ווערק פֿון טאַלסטוי, דאַסטאַיעווסקי, טשעכאַוו און אַנדערע. זי איז געווען די ערשטע, וואָס האָט געעפֿנט די פֿאַרזיגלטע רוסישע ליטעראַטור פֿאַרן ענגלישן ליינער.

דער באַקאַנטער ציוניסטישער היסטאָריקער און רעגיסטראַר פֿון דער ייִדישער פרעסע אין דער וועלט יוסף פֿרענקעל האָט אַ מאָל געשריבן, אַז העלענאַ פֿראַנק האָט איבערגעלאָזט אַ שטודיע וועגן רבי נחמן בראַצלעווער. וווּ איז די דאָזיקע שטודיע אַהינגעקומען? „איך בין צופֿרידן, וואָס כּיִהאָב פֿאַרענדיקט מיין אַרבעט וועגן רבי נחמן“, האָט די זקנה געשריבן צו יוסף פֿרענקעלן. דער בריוו איז געשריבן געוואָרן דעם 17טן פֿעברואַר 1954, און אויף מאַרגנס איז זי געשטאַרבן. פֿרעגט זיך ווידער אַ מאָל: וווּ געפֿינט זיך דאָס דאָזיקע פֿאַרענדיקטע ווערק, וואָס העלענאַ פֿראַנק האָט איבערגעלאָזט?

אין דער ייִדישער פרעסע האָט מען וועגן דער דאָזיקער ראַמאַנטישער דאַמע, נאָך איר טויט, ווייניק געשריבן. זי האָט די ייִדישע ליטעראַטור דערהויבן און גרויס געמאַכט און פֿונדעסטוועגן איז זי אַרויסבאַגלייט געוואָרן כּמעט אַן אַ הספּד.

העלענאַ פֿראַנק האָט געשטאַמט פֿון ייִדן; איר זיידע איז געווען אַ ייִד. ס׳איז קלאַר, אַז די דאָזיקע ערשטע איבערזעצערין פֿון דער ייִדישער ליטעראַטור אויף ענגליש איז ווערט מער ווי אַ וואַרעם וואָרט — אַ גרינטלעך ווערק וועגן איר לעבן. ס׳וואָלט זיך געמעגט געפֿינען אַ ייִדישער שרייבער, וואָס זאָל אויפֿן סמך פֿון ראַיעלע דאָקומענטן קלאַר מאַכן פֿאַר אונדז די פּערזענלעכקייט פֿון דער קריסטין, וואָס האָט אויף איר אייגענעם אופֿן געזוכט און טיילווייז געפֿונען — אַ וועג צוריק, צום זיידן. זי האָט זיך אָנגעהויבן אינטערעסירן מיט העברעיִש און ייִדיש ווי נאָר ס׳איז איר קלאַר געוואָרן, אַז איר זיידע איז געווען אַ ייִד. ס׳האָט זי דעמאָלט געצויגן צו ייִדן און זי האָט געפֿונען דעם פֿאַדעם דורך ביאָליקן, פּרצן, רייזענען — צו העברעיִש און ייִדיש. דאָס לייקנט נישט אַפֿ די מעשה מיט דעם וויטשעפעלער ייִדישן קוכן, וואָס האָט איר אפֿשר געגעבן דעם ערשטן באַטעמטן שטויס צום ייִדישן אַלף־בית.

העלענאַ פֿראַנק, ווייסן מיר פֿון די אַריינפֿירן צו אירע איבערזעצונגען, האָט באַוווּנדערט די ייִדישע גייסטיקע אוצרות, און, ווי געזאָגט, פֿאַרענדיקט האָט זי איר לעבנסוועג מיט אַ ווערק וועגן דעם בראַצלעווער.

אין אונדזער צייט איז אַ קורצער וועג צו באַרימטקייט אַרויסצוקומען אין אַן ענגלישער צייטונג, אַדער אין אַן ענגלישן זשורנאַל, און נישט נאָר שרייבן, נאָר פּראָקלאַמירן, אַז ייִדיש איז שוין פֿאַקטיש אונטערגעגאַנגען. אַז אַ יונגער־מאַן ווערט גלייך אַ באַרימטקייט, אויב ער איז אַ טעלעוויזיע־וויצן־זאָגער און ער וואַרפט אַרין עטלעכע פֿאַרקריפּלטע ייִדישע ווערטער, און ער זאָגט נאָך, אַז ס׳איז אַ זשאַרגאָן, וואָס ייִדן פֿלעגן אַ מאָל רעדן, ווערט ער אַוואַדי באַרימט. אַז אַזאַ אַמוזירער גיט אַ וואַרף אַרין אַ שמוציקן שטיין אין ייִדישן מחיִה־נפֿשותדיקן קוואַל, שפּירט ער, אַז ער האָט עפּעס אויפֿגעטאַן. אין דעם פֿאַרנאָגראַפֿישן בוך „פֿאַרטנויִס קאַמפּליינט“ האָט דער פֿיפּיקער מחבר אַריינגעבראַקט אַ צענדליק שמוציקע אַפּטריטווערטער און דערמיט געפרוווט דעמאָנסטרירן זיינע ידיעות אין ייִדיש. אַבער געוויזן האָט ער דורך וואָסערע אַפּפּלו־קאַנאַלן די כּלומרשטע ייִדישע ווערטער זיינען צו אים דערגאַנגען.

ווען אַזאַ יונגער־מאַן, וואָס ווערט אין אונדזער צייט אָנגענומען פֿאַר אַ שרייבער, וואַרפט אַרין אַ שטיין אין אונדזער קוואַל און זיין ווערטערשמוץ איז ייִדיש, קאָנען דעם שטיין, ווי מען זאָגט, צען חכמים נישט אַרויסנעמען.

צווישן אונדז גופֿא האָבן מיר אויך גענוג „עקספּערטן“ אַזעלכע, וואָס „ווייסן“, אַז מיט ייִדיש איז שוין באַלד אויס. זיי זיינען באַקרעפּטיקט מיט ציפֿערן; זיי האַלטן אַפֿילו לאַנגע, גוט צוגעגרייטע ייִדישע רעדעס וועגן דעם זיכערן אונטערגאַנג פֿון ייִדיש און וועגן דער צוקונפֿטלאַזיקייט פֿון דער ייִדישער ליטעראַטור, אַבער דער עיקר־„דרך־אֶרץ“ רופֿט אַרויס צו זיך, ווען דער געוואַרפֿענער שטיין אויף ייִדיש איז געוויקלט אין ענגלישע אותיות. דערפֿאַר איז כּדאי צו געדענקען, אַז גראַד ייִדישע אותיות האָבן אַרויסגערופֿן גרויס באַוווּנדערונג ביי העלענאַ פֿראַנק פֿאַר ייִדישע אוצרות. ביי איר איז ייִדיש אויפֿגעגאַנגען מיט גרויס כּבֿוד, ווען זי האָט געפֿירט די ייִדישע ליטעראַטור אין דער ברייטער וועלט אַרין. וואָלט כּדאי געווען צו פֿאַראַייביקן דעם נאָמען פֿון העלענאַ פֿראַנק מיט אַ ביאָגראַפֿיש ווערק, וואָס וואָלט געווען אַ כּבֿוד פֿאַר איר געדעכעניש און אַ כּבֿוד פֿאַר דעם המשך פֿון דער ייִדישער ליטעראַטור.