

A NOTE ON THE TRANSLATIONS

FISHKE THE LAME WAS INITIALLY PUBLISHED AS A YIDDISH SHORT story in 1869. When S. Y. Abramovitsh resumed his literary activity in the late 1880s, after a hiatus of several years, he worked simultaneously in Hebrew and Yiddish. From 1886 until the end of his life, he wrote Hebrew stories and worked on Hebrew versions of his prior Yiddish novels. Since Abramovitsh never merely translated his fiction, the new editions are actually new books. As he produced his Hebrew narratives, Abramovitsh also revised his Yiddish texts.

Ted Gorelick's translation of *Fishke the Lame* is based on the second, greatly expanded edition of Abramovitsh's *Fishke der krumer*, published in Odessa by Varshaver in 1888. This was the first volume of what was intended to be a complete edition of Abramovitsh's Yiddish works, but only one subsequent

volume—containing *The Nag* (Di klyatshe, 1889)—was printed. The Hebrew version, entitled *Sefer ha-kabtzanim*, was initially translated by H. N. Bialik and printed in *Ha-dor* 1 (1901); Abramovitsh later retranslated his work for the Jubilee edition of his Hebrew writings (1909–12). The subtitle of the present translation, “A Book of Jewish Poorfolk,” is drawn from the Hebrew version.

The narration of Fishke’s tale is as important as the story itself. Mendele narrates the opening chapters, which describe his chance meeting with Alter; then Alter recalls his match-making fiasco. Mendele picks up the narrative thread, telling what he has heard about Fishke. Finally, Fishke himself takes over and, prompted by Alter and Mendele, continues his story up to the present. This creates a striking multivoiced effect, in which the three different narrators convey distinctive levels of Yiddish speech and Jewish society.

Abramovitsh presents serious problems for the translator because even a century ago his Yiddish had an archaic flavor. Ted Gorelick’s rendition of *Fishke the Lame* conveys the intricacies of Abramovitsh’s Yiddish diction by echoing the dialects found in English novels of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by such authors as Laurence Sterne and Charles Dickens, whose works influenced Abramovitsh. The twists and turns of this translation approximate the leisurely pace of Abramovitsh’s Yiddish while highlighting the contrasting voices in the telling of Fishke’s tale.

HILLEL HALKIN’S TRANSLATION of *The Brief Travels of Benjamin the Third* strikes a balance between archaic and modern elements of style. This translation is based on the first edition of S. Y. Abramovitsh’s *Kitser masoes Binyomin hashlishi*, published in Vilna by the Romm publishing house in 1878. Although the

title page indicates that this is only Book One, no continuation was published. The Hebrew edition was printed as a supplement to the Odessa-based journal *Pardes* 3 (1896). The Epilogue has been translated from the Hebrew text.

The Brief Travels of Benjamin the Third is the last original work dating from Abramovitsh's first Yiddish phase. He had previously published *The Little Man* (Dos kleyne mentshele, 1864–65), the original versions of *The Magic Ring* (Dos vintsh-fingerl, 1865), *Fishke the Lame* (Fishke der krumer, 1869), a play called *The Tax* (Di takse, 1869), and *The Nag* (Di klyatshe, 1873). These four novels and one play, together with *The Brief Travels of Benjamin the Third*, represent the crux of Abramovitsh's Yiddish fiction.

The Brief Travels of Benjamin the Third employs vigorous satire and parody, satirizing the everyday life of Jews in the shtetl at the same time that it parodies prior works in literary history. The first Benjamin was the twelfth-century Benjamin of Tudela; Benjamin the Second was Israel ben Joseph Benjamin (1818–64), who wrote travel books. Apart from referring back to these previous travelers, Abramovitsh's novel parodies Cervantes's *Don Quixote*—itself a parody of chivalric romances. Moreover, it pokes fun at Hasidic accounts of pilgrimages to the Holy Land.