

DISENCHANTED TAILOR IN “ILLUSION”

**SHOLEM ALEICHEM BEHIND THE SCENES OF EARLY JEWISH
CINEMA, 1913–16**

BER KOTLERMAN

Bloomington, Indiana, 2014



CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Acknowledgments | ix |
| About the Method of Translation and Transliteration | xi |
| List of Abbreviations | xiii |
| Reel One: Sequence, Cameo, Prologue | 1 |
| Sequence | 2 |
| Cameo | 4 |
| Prologue | 9 |
| Reel Two: Birth of the Idea | 25 |
| Scene 1: A Wiesbaden Summer, 1913, Grandiose Plans | 28 |
| Scene 2: The Proposal of the Riga Yiddish Actor Mendel Vorkel | 32 |
| Scene 3: The German Jewish Actor Rudolph Schildkraut: <i>Shylock from Krakow</i> | 37 |
| Reel Three: From Symbolic Iconography to “Insider” Cinema | 45 |
| Scene 1: Unsuccessful “Match-Making” with the Berlin Film Company “Union”: <i>The Bloody Jest</i> | 48 |
| Scene 2: “Cinema-Fantasy”: <i>The World Is Going Backward</i> | 53 |
| Scene 3: The “S. Mintus” Cinematographic Company of Riga | 62 |
| Scene 4: “Fantastic Pictures”: Tevye and Chava on the Screen | 69 |
| Scene 5: Little Willie of the French “Éclair” Company as the Cinema Kinsman of Motl | 75 |
| Scene 6: “Movement with Meaning”: <i>Ashmedai, or The Enchanted Tailor</i> | 78 |
| Reel Four: Dreams about Genuine Jewish “Cinemo” | 83 |
| Scene 1: The Moscow Film Director Aleksandr Arkatov and His Project for a Jewish Film Studio | 86 |
| Scene 2: The New York Yiddish Actor Jacob Adler: <i>Michael Strogoff</i> Instead of <i>The Bloody Jest</i> | 100 |
| Scene 3: The Warsaw “Kosmofilm” Company, the Odessa “Mizrakh” Film Company, and the Zionist Producer Meir Sokolovsky | 108 |
| Scene 4: Sholem Aleichem between Sokolovsky and Mintus during His Russian Tour | 121 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| Reel Five: Shimele Soroker's Bad Business Deal | 135 |
| Scene 1: <i>The Afterworld</i> and the Fiasco of the Russian Cinema Projects | 138 |
| Scene 2: <i>The Bloody Jest</i> and <i>Motl</i> Go to America: American Vitagraph Company and Consumers Film | 148 |
| Scene 3: Shimele Soroker's Bad Business Deal: Fox Film, Lasky Feature Play, Universal Pictures | 154 |
| Scene 4: Sholem Aleichem and Charlie Chaplin: <i>The Final Word</i> | 163 |
| Epilogue | 175 |
| Original Film Scripts (Russian, Yiddish, English) | 179 |
| <i>The Bloody Jest (Krovavaia shutka)</i> | 181 |
| <i>The World Is Going Backward (Di velt geyt tsurik)</i> | 209 |
| <i>Resilient Tevye (Neunyvaiushchii Tevel')</i> | 215 |
| <i>Chava, Tevye's Daughter (Khava, Teveleva doch')</i> | 231 |
| <i>Ashmedai, or The Enchanted Tailor (Asmodai ili Zakoldovannyi portnoi)</i> | 247 |
| <i>The Afterworld (Zagrobnyi mir)</i> | 265 |
| <i>The Dangerous Jest</i> | 273 |
| <i>Little Motel Goes to America</i> | 303 |
| Sholem Aleichem's "Cinematographic" Correspondence (Yiddish, Russian, Hebrew, German, English, French) | 311 |
| Bibliography | 355 |
| Index of Names and Places | 373 |
| Index of Cinema Productions, Film Scripts, and Film Companies | 379 |