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# Tevye's Daughters:

## No Laughing Matter

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This eBook is dedicated to Chaya Esther Rabinowitz, Rachel Yampolsky, Olga Loyeff, and Marie Waife-Goldberg. Without these four women—his mother, his mother-in-law, his wife and his youngest daughter—the name “Sholem Aleichem” would not have the worldwide resonance it has today. May their memories be for blessing.

## **Preface:** **The “Me Search” in the Research**

**Date: Saturday, May 20, 2000**

**Time: Approximately 7 AM**

**Place: A balcony on the 9<sup>th</sup> floor of Hotel Le Meridien in Nice**

I had arrived in France on Thursday evening with my husband Richard and my mother-in-law Juanita. We were there to celebrate Juanita’s 75<sup>th</sup> birthday. (“Why should we have a party in Florida,” she’d said, “when we can use this opportunity to go somewhere else?”) I was a health care computer consultant exhausted by Y2K projects, and all I wanted was a stress-free vacation. After much discussion, we picked a tour called “The Riviera’s Artistic Legacies.”

Friday morning, we boarded a bus and headed off to our first stop: the Matisse Museum in Cimiez. Four delightful hours later—with one stop for a brief but delicious lunch—we arrived at the Marc Chagall National Biblical Message Museum. I walked through the door, and suddenly everything turned serious.

Abraham preparing Isaac for sacrifice! Jacob wrestling with the angel! Moses parting the Red Sea! And look: there’s Jesus on the cross—wearing a tallis as a loincloth!

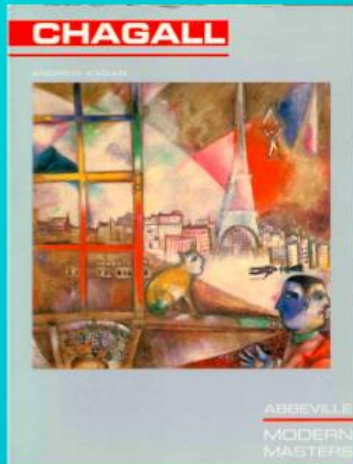
I had walked in thinking I already knew everything I needed to know about Marc Chagall (“kitsch,” nu?), but I fell headlong into these huge, dynamic canvases. There is a name for what happened to me that day; scholars call it “aesthetic arrest.”

When our guide started herding us back to the bus, I ran into the gift shop and quickly purchased one of the English picture books: *Marc Chagall* by Andrew Kagan.

Back on the bus, I listened quietly as folks around me discussed the day. Such vibrant colors! Such wonderful food! But nothing I heard matched the buzz in my head. That’s when I suddenly realized that I was the only Jew in our group. Like most Jewish Americans, I live in a world filled with Christian iconography, but I knew I was seeing—really seeing—“biblical messages” from the brush of a Jewish artist for the very first time in my life, and Chagall’s imagery had pierced something deep in my soul. I kept my thoughts to myself. This was no time to discuss weighty matters. We were in a rush. We had dinner reservations at the Hotel Negresco!

The next morning I got up early, ordered breakfast, and took a quick shower. When the room service waiter arrived, I steered him quietly past my sleeping husband and onto the balcony, and after he left, I poured myself a cup of coffee and began reading. Chagall’s *The Green Musician* actually appears opposite the title page in this particular book, but I flipped right past him. I read and read with growing fascination until I reached page 48: “In the allegory of music, a theme Chagall repeated in the animated *The Green Musician*, appears once again his fiddler on the roof, that stock character preserved from the world of the shtetl by Chagall and Sholem Aleichem.” I turned back and looked at the image of *The Green Musician*. “Oh, my God,” I said out loud. “It’s **THE** fiddler on the roof!”

# CHAGALL by Andrew Kagan



“In the allegory of music, a theme Chagall repeated in the animated *The Green Musician*, appears once again his **fiddler on the roof**, that stock character preserved from the world of the shtetl by Chagall and Sholem Aleichem.”

Chagall’s Fiddler on the Roof—we all know him, right? Of course right! He appears regularly on book jackets, catalogues and coloring books, CD and DVD covers, note cards, art stickers, and all kinds of tchotchkes... But how well do we really know him?

*Fiddler on the Roof* had always been “there” in the background of my life, so much so that I can’t even tell you when or how any of it first embedded itself in my consciousness; all I can say for sure is that it was never prominent in any way. The Broadway embodiment of Sholem Aleichem’s characters and Marc Chagall’s images was simply a part of my cultural heritage, and since I was a serious-minded young lady with high intellectual aspirations, I barely gave it a second thought.

I was born in 1951, and I grew up in northern New Jersey, so I am sure I saw *Fiddler on the Roof* on Broadway, but I have no memory of it. (On the other hand, I have vivid memories of the day my mother took me into Manhattan to see *Man of La Mancha* in 1965.) I am also certain that I saw the film version of *Fiddler on the Roof* when it was released in 1971, but I have no memory of that either. (On the other hand, I can provide specific details about the first time I saw *Funny Girl* in 1969.) It’s quite likely that I saw Chagall’s *The Green Musician* at the Guggenheim Museum, but all I remember now is the dramatic staircase. (On the other hand, I can picture a teenage me at New York’s Museum of Modern Art standing in awe before Picasso’s *Guernica*.) There is only one thing about my early encounters with *Fiddler on the Roof* that I can say with absolute certainty: we owned a copy of the Original Cast Recording. After my father died, I took that well-worn LP home with me; it is sitting right now on a shelf in my office.

But I have just described the exact moment—on May 20, 2000—that I became obsessed with all things *Fiddler*. Something I had always taken for granted suddenly became the focal point of deep mysteries, and my life turned inside out. Scholars have a name for that too; they call it a “paradigm shift.”

We flew home on Sunday, May 28. The next day was Memorial Day, and the day after that I went back to work. When I told people that the trip to France had “changed my life,” they were ready to listen, but I was tongue-tied. Even my husband, who certainly knew “something” had happened, wouldn’t have been able to tell you what—although he certainly knew I was suddenly buying a lot of old books on Amazon—books about Marc Chagall, books by Sholem Aleichem, and books on the history of Broadway. I learned on the internet that other people also wondered why the popular musical about Tevye and his family was called *Fiddler on the Roof*. Was the title connected to the Chagall painting and, if so, what was the significance of the connection? Mysteries multiplied; every new thing I learned raised a new set of questions.

On Tuesday morning, September 4, 2001, I quit my consulting job. Lots of little things had happened in my life between May 20, 2000 and September 4, 2001, and something very big happened to all of us exactly one week later on September 11, 2001. So I am not saying that I quit my job just to devote myself to *Fiddler on the Roof*, but clearly the fact that fourteen years later I am still obsessed with all things *Fiddler* is proof enough that my life really did change that Saturday morning in Nice.

The daily life I live now bears almost no resemblance to the daily life I lived then. I have carved out a third act for myself in the evolving world of new media. I write articles for print and online editors, I post on several websites and blogs of my own creation, and I spend way too much time on Facebook. The eBook which follows presents a summary of one line of *Fiddler* research pertaining to Tevye’s daughters. I have much more to say on this topic, and I plan to publish a full book on May 13, 2016 (the date of Sholem Aleichem’s 100<sup>th</sup> Yahrzeit). But I could not let September 22, 2014—the date of the first Broadway performance of *Fiddler on the Roof*—go by without offering my personal tribute to the creators of this great cultural achievement.

My work on *Fiddler on the Roof* has moved along two tracks which I call “Sources” and “Synergies.”

Sources are deliberate references intended by—and readily acknowledged—by the creators. In this case, the creators of *Fiddler on the Roof* have been very clear about their sources. Many of the words—in the lyrics written by Sheldon Harnick as well as in the libretto written by Joseph Stein—come directly from one of eight *Tevye* stories written over two decades by Sholem Aleichem—eight separate stories which are now typically collected and published as one “novel” called *Tevye the Dairyman*. Most of the images in the original set which Boris Aronson designed for director Jerome Robbins in 1964 echo Chagall canvases (not just *The Green Musician*, but *I and the Village* and others as well).

Synergies are more allusive and therefore more controversial. They also carry more historical weight. Something that might have been “common knowledge” at the time of creation might

well be deeply buried fifty years later. When I began my research in earnest in 2002, I had a long list of people I wanted to talk to, but over time, as my interest in archival research grew, my interest in what people thought they remembered steadily decreased. In part this was because the people I most wanted to talk to—first and foremost Jerome Robbins, Mark Chagall, Boris Aronson, and Marie Waife-Goldberg—were long gone. Also the more I searched, the more discrepancies I found between what people “remembered” and what I found in the archives. When push comes to shove, I will always choose original documentation over memory.

Now that I am a writer myself, I have also had opportunities to interview a great many creative people in the past decade, and most of them will readily admit that their own work is full of synergies. Allusions are not always conscious, and when I probe, these artists typically respond with warmth. One day, I asked Deborah Kampmeier—an American filmmaker—if she had intended to make deliberate references to *The Scarlet Letter* when she wrote her *Virgin* screenplay. Her reply: “I hadn't consciously thought of it, but I like it.” On another day, I asked Nir Bergman—an Israeli filmmaker—if he was consciously thinking about the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin when he wrote his *Broken Wings* screenplay. He reacted with surprise: “In the first scene that I wrote for the script, before I knew what the whole script would be about, a family lost their dog on the day that Rabin was murdered. Eventually, that scene just got dropped. The script was going different places. But that was the first scene.” How did I know? In both cases I knew—or to be more accurate I guessed—because I shared deep common frameworks with these two filmmakers. In each case, I could feel the resonance as I watched their films.

I am a graduate of St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland (“the Great Books School”), and at St. John's we were taught to think about the authors of the Great Books as participants in a Great Conversation. This is not “plagiarism.” Educated people always find their nourishment in the intellectual work of others. Our hearts and our minds absorb the ideas of those who came before us just as much as our bodies absorb the protein in the eggs we ate for breakfast.

Ultimately, whenever I doubt myself—which is often—I console myself with this thought: *Hamlet* was first performed sometime between 1599 and 1602, and yet today, over 400 years later, people are still arguing about it. No one alive today can ask William Shakespeare for his input. All scholars can do is make their best case.

Do I really mean to compare *Fiddler on the Roof* with *Hamlet*? Yes, I do! I think *Fiddler on the Roof* is a great work of art. I think the creators of *Fiddler on the Roof* were participants in a Great Conversation about fathers and daughters that stretches all the way back to the Hebrew Bible. I think that *Fiddler on the Roof* is now part of that Great Conversation, and people will still be arguing about *Fiddler on the Roof* in 100 years... and maybe even in 400 years. I think the sources of its power are fairly well-known, but most of the synergies which made *Fiddler on the Roof* such a phenomenal—and unexpected—success way back in 1964 have yet to be fully appreciated.

In what follows, I may be 50% correct or 75% correct or 25% correct. My goal is to engage you in a Great Conversation about the sources and synergies of *Fiddler on the Roof*, and if I succeed, then everything I have done since May 20, 2000 will have been worth it.

## **Introduction: From Seven to Five to Three?**

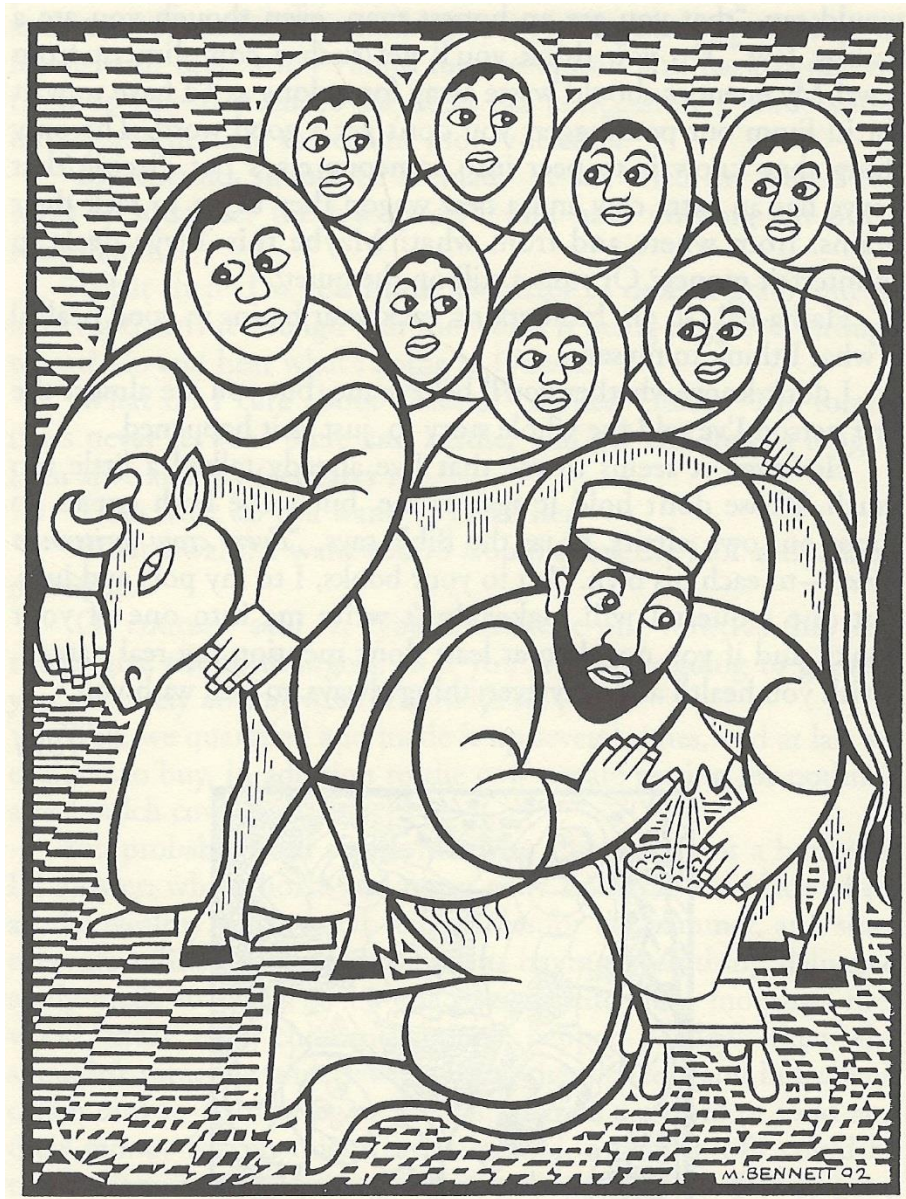
Just before Season Three of the popular British series *Downton Abbey* began airing in the USA, several articles appeared in various publications explicitly comparing *Downton Abbey* to *Fiddler on the Roof*. The mostly widely read was a piece in the January 23, 2012 issue of the *New Yorker*, in which television critic Emily Nussbaum said this:

"I prefer to think of *Downton Abbey* as an experimental take on *Fiddler on the Roof*. Just think of the Earl of Grantham as Tevye with his three rebel daughters, plus a much better roof. L'chaim, m'lord."

Nussbaum was on to something. There is indeed a thread that links *Downton Abbey* to *Fiddler on the Roof*, a connection much deeper than Nussbaum likely knew when she penned her clever bon mots. Yet with so many stories about fathers and daughters to choose from—Shakespeare's *King Lear* being the most obvious one—it is a tribute to the pervasive hold *Fiddler on the Roof* has on the popular imagination that a critic in 2012 would use it as a reference point for a new media darling like *Downton Abbey*.

But everyone who has ever seen *Fiddler on the Roof* knows that Broadway's Tevye had five daughters, not three. And everyone who has ever read *Tevye the Dairyman* knows that Solomon Rabinowitz—the author best-known today by his pen name Sholem Aleichem—gave Tevye seven daughters, not five. So how do we go from seven to five to three? That is the subject of this eBook.

## Sholem Aleichem's Daughters: The Family of "Yiddish Tevye"



"Tevya, Golda, their Seven Daughters and the Cow" © Manuel Bennett (1992)  
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*Fiddler on the Roof* is based on a series of stories by the Yiddish author, Solomon Rabinowitz—best known by his pen name Sholem Aleichem. Although these eight stories were written between 1895 and 1916, they are typically published today in one book with eight chapters. One hundred years later, *Tevye the Dairyman* occupies a unique place in the history of world literature. Because it was written in real time, this “novel” reflects the actual changes occurring in Eastern Europe from the time that Solomon Rabinowitz was a recently-married young man living in Kiev (Ukraine) until the time he died in the Bronx (New York) in 1916.



Like all of the stories in *Tevye the Dairyman*, Chapter One (“The Great Windfall”) is a monologue in which a working man named Tevye tells his life story to a writer named Sholem Aleichem. The character “Sholem Aleichem” never speaks, he just listens. It is Tevye who does all the talking.

Tevye’s seven daughters are first introduced in an aside. While telling Sholem Aleichem how poor he was before “The Great Windfall” enabled him to become a dairyman, Tevye quotes his wife Golde’s lament: “I had to bear him children, and seven at that!” Several pages later, describing his reply to a question from his benefactor, Tevye says: “Children? I can’t complain... Daughters I have. And if you have daughters, it’s no laughing matter. But never mind, God is our father and He prevails.”

Why did Rabinowitz choose seven for the number of daughters? In his 2013 book *The Worlds of Sholem Aleichem: The Remarkable Life and Afterlife of the Man Who Created Tevye*, Jeremy Dauber suggests an explanation which resonates with the actual way Aliza Shevrin chose to translate the passage above in 2009:

“*Fiddler on the Roof* viewers may be wondering where the extra daughters got to,” says Dauber. “The reason to *start* with seven daughters is clearer, though: an old Yiddish saying that *zibn tekhter is keyn gelekhter*, seven daughters is no laughing matter, because, of course, of the seven dowries the father must come up with. Sholem Aleichem seems to have tossed in the detail to simply indicate the kind of financial woes that Tevye has, clothing the proverbial in actual flesh, blending the worlds of imagination and reality.”

Dauber’s concern ends there, but the question remains: why seven? Wouldn’t the “financial woes” be just about the same if the number of daughters were six or eight...? Seven is, of course, the number of days in a week; therefore the proverb is a reference to the Jewish Sabbath. God finished His work of creation on the sixth day, and on the seventh day He rested. Then He commanded man to rest on the seventh day as well: “Remember the seventh day and keep it holy.” But the father of seven daughters, where is his rest? Even if he does no work on the Sabbath, surely his worries will continue to work on him.

And so, Tevye—a character now beloved by many generations—began his literary life in 1895 with seven daughters. Over time, in subsequent chapters, as Tevye’s life unfolded and he told Sholem Aleichem new stories, six of his seven daughters got names (Bielke, Chava, Hodel, Shprintze, Taybele, and Tzeitel), and five of them got stories in which they played lead roles (first Tzeitel, then Hodel, then Chava, then Shprintze, and finally Bielke). The names of three daughters even became story titles (“Hodel,” “Chava,” and “Shprintze”). But, alas, poor Taybele never got a story, and the seventh daughter never even got a name.

Later in this eBook, I will discuss the members of the real Rabinowitz family and ask how life impacted art, but first, let’s look at two other fathers each of whom had five daughters...



TEVYEH AND HIS DAUGHTERS

DEWDNEY

From *Sholem Aleichem Panorama*  
© Jewish Observer (1948) ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

## Joseph Stein’s Daughters: The Family of “Broadway Tevye”



Original Cast Members from left:  
Austin Pendleton (Motel), Bert Convy (Perchik), Zero Mostel (Tevye), Maria Kamilova (Golde),  
Joanna Merlin (Tzeitel), Julia Migenes (Hodel), Tanya Everett (Chava), Marilyn Rogers (Shprintze), and Linda Ross (Bielke).  
“Sabbath Prayer” scene from *Fiddler on the Roof*  
© Eileen Darby Images, Inc. (1964) ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Prior to the Broadway debut of *Fiddler on the Roof* in 1964, several different adaptations of the *Tevye* stories appeared on stage and screen, in America and beyond. The earliest screen version was an American silent film called *Broken Barriers*. *Broken Barriers*, based on Rabinowitz’s own theatrical treatment, was released in 1919 (just a few years after Rabinowitz died). IMDb (the Internet Movie Database) also lists a German film called *Tevya und Seine Tochter* (*Tevye and His Seven Daughters*) from 1962. After *Fiddler on the Roof* became a Broadway sensation, an Israeli film called *Tuvia Ve Sheva Benotav* (also *Tevye and His Seven Daughters*) was released in 1968, as well as two Russian versions *Tevye Molochnik* (*Tevye the Milkman*) in 1985, and *Izydi!* (*Get Thee Out!*) in 1991. I have never seen any of these films myself, and to the best of my knowledge, no one else I know personally has either.

The pre-*Fiddler on the Roof* adaptation most readily accessible is Maurice Schwartz’ film *Tevye*, originally released in 1939, re-released a few years ago by the National Center for Jewish Film, and based on the popular stage version Schwartz created for his Yiddish Art Theatre (starring Schwartz himself—of course—as Tevye). The Schwartz version—which is very likely close in

content to *Broken Barriers*—focuses primarily on Chava. The only other daughter in the cast is Tzeitel. Perhaps Tevye and Golde are meant to have additional children, but, if so, they are never seen or referred to in Schwartz' version.

Also available in script form from the Dramatists Play Service is Arnold Perl's play *Tevya and His Daughters*, first produced in New York in 1957. According to Alisa Solomon's book *Wonder of Wonders: A Cultural History of Fiddler on the Roof, Tevya and His Daughters* "closed after a six-week run" in New York, nor did it "thrill the provinces as [Perl's earlier play *The World of Sholem Aleichem*] had done."

In all these years since May 2000, I have never heard of anyone reviving *Tevya and His Daughters*, although if the Dramatists Play Service still carries it, then I suppose people somewhere must still consider it as an option. For purposes of this discussion, what is most important is that Perl's script explicitly calls for seven daughters. Tzeitel, Hodel and Chava all have speaking roles in Perl's script, and then, when Tzeitel marries Motel, "four small daughters enter, carrying a home-made chuppa, or marriage canopy."

For legal reasons beyond the scope of this discussion, CD copies of *Fiddler on the Roof* cast albums continue to carry the words "Book by Joseph Stein (based on Sholem Aleichem's stories by special permission of Arnold Perl)," even though Stein has always denied that he drew on Perl's version. So why did two of the daughters holding up Perl's chuppa simply vanish between 1957 and 1964? It is not enough to say there were already too many people on the stage. If Perl could fit them on a tiny Off-Broadway stage, then why couldn't Stein fit them on a much bigger Broadway stage?

The answer must be that Stein made a deliberate decision to give Tevye five daughters instead of seven, but as far as I know, no one ever asked Stein about this. And even if he had been asked, Stein might have shrugged off a direct question (much as his son Harry Stein did when I asked him this question in September 2013). In the absence of evidence to the contrary, this mystery becomes an instance of "artistic alchemy;" five just "felt right," even if Stein couldn't say why. But we don't have to reach too far to find another famous father who also lacked dowries for his five daughters: Meet Mr. Bennet of Longbourne!



Theatre at the Center Cast Members from left:  
Amy Olsen (Tzeitel), Audrey Billings (Hodel), Alyssa Trasher (Chava), Jessica Fisher (Shprintze),  
Kailey Snider (Bielke), Lee Peltz (Tevye) and Iris Lieberman (Golde).  
“This is mine and this is mine...” scene from *Fiddler on the Roof*  
Courtesy of Bill Pullinsi (Artistic Director) & Richard Friedman (General Manager)  
© Greg Kolack/Theatre at the Center; Munster, IN (2007) ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

## Mr. Bennet's Daughters: The Family in *Pride & Prejudice*



Promotional Shot for *Pride and Prejudice*

BBC '95 Cast from left: Julia Sawalha (Lydia), Jennifer Ehle (Elizabeth), Susannah Harker (Jane), Lucy Briers (Mary), and Polly Maberly (Kitty), plus Alison Steadman (Mrs. Bennet) and Benjamin Whitrow (Mr. Bennet).

© BBC (1995) [bbc.co.uk/drama](http://bbc.co.uk/drama) ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Tevye has five daughters in *Fiddler on the Roof*, and Mr. Bennet—the head of the Longbourne household in Jane Austen's much-loved novel *Pride & Prejudice*—also has five daughters. But why assume Stein either knew or cared? In fact, there is a missing link.

In 1959, a new musical called *First Impressions* opened on Broadway. Based on *Pride & Prejudice*, *First Impressions* was the creation of Abe Burrows, best-known today as the man behind *Guys and Dolls* and *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*. The cover of the French's Musical Library edition published in 1962 calls *First Impressions* “a Musical Comedy adapted by Abe Burrows from Helen Jerome's dramatization of Jane Austen's novel *Pride & Prejudice*, with music and lyrics by Robert Goldman, Glenn Paxton, and George Weiss.”

For the record, when Jane Austen wrote her first novel, a novel about the Bennet family of Longbourne, she called it *First Impressions*, but she couldn't find a publisher. However, once *Sense & Sensibility*, Austen's second novel, became a popular success, T. Egerton of Whitehall,

the publisher of *Sense & Sensibility*, agreed to release *First Impressions* with a new name: *Pride & Prejudice*. In this early instance of successful branding, a novel called *First Impressions* went nowhere, but given a new title, *Pride & Prejudice* quickly became one of the great classics of Western literature.

Nevertheless, despite Burrow's track record and the participation of well-known stars of the day such as Polly Bergen as "Lizzie," Farley Granger as "Mr. Darcy," and Hermione Gingold in the starring role of "Mrs. Bennet," *First Impressions* was a flop. Passionate Austenites will no doubt cringe at the thought of building an adaptation of *Pride & Prejudice* around the character of Mrs. Bennet (!), but sometimes truth really is stranger than fiction. Immediately after the overture, Mrs. Bennet sings an opening number called "Five Daughters," and here is how it begins:

Five daughters  
How did it happen?  
How could I have managed  
To produce five of a kind?

After enumerating all her problems, Mrs. Bennet concludes:

Five maidens  
Waiting to be mated  
Jane's too shy, too easily hurt  
Lydia's just a frivolous flirt  
Kitty keeps on tagging along  
Mary sings that horrible song  
Lizzie... And Lizzie...

Dear Lord (*Spoken.*)  
We need extra help with Lizzie...  
So much needs to be done.  
And if you possibly can  
Please keep her mouth closed.  
Thank you.

(*Sung.*)  
Daughters help a home to thrive  
And I've got  
Five!

Who is Mrs. Bennet addressing here in her spoken recitative? Mrs. Bennet is speaking directly to God ("Dear Lord"); Mrs. Bennet is asking God to personally manage her daughter Lizzie's assertive behavior.

So that's Act One Scene One. In Act Two Scene Two, Mrs. Bennet gets another big solo. It's called "A House in Town," and here is how it begins:

My poor, poor family... my little dears  
How we've suffered, struggled through the lean lean years  
But I know  
The hand of Providence will one day turn the tide  
And I will be granted  
That wonderful dream  
I've always kept inside

A house in town  
A house in town  
Just a tiny MMM spectacular  
House in town  
Nothing very much  
Just a smashing house in town

And off Mrs. Bennet goes, fantasizing about life in her new house. And here is how Mrs. Bennet ends her reverie:

There'll be dancing  
There'll be drinking  
There'll be caviar  
By the ton

Ach du lieber  
What a triumph  
And the evening's  
Just begun

Excitement is growing  
Tension is mounting  
The glorious moment is here

*(Spoken.)*  
A hush falls over the crowd  
A delicate fanfare, not too loud, not too soft  
All eyes will turn to see  
There, poised at the top of the stairs... me

Gad, she's beautiful!

When I first read these words, I was startled. Who could have predicted way back in 1959 that one day Tevyes all around the world would sing about a stairway “leading nowhere just for show”?

Listen to the Original Cast Album, and there is something even more evocative about the songs Mrs. Bennet sings in *First Impressions* than the words, namely the vocalizations indicated by the



“MMM.” Five years before Zero Mostel began doing the “deedle-deedle-dums” that punctuate “If I Were a Rich Man,” Mrs. Bennet was talking to God and then adding her own “MMM” vocalization while fantasizing about a new house.

To recap: In 1959, Mrs. Bennet, the main character in a Broadway adaptation of Jane Austen’s novel *Pride & Prejudice* called *First Impressions*, talked directly to God, vocalized in nonsense syllables, and dreamt about showing herself off at the top of a staircase. All this in a musical about beleaguered parents who have no money for the dowries of their five daughters.

Can I tell you definitively that anyone on the *Fiddler on the Roof* team even knew about *First Impressions*, let alone saw a live performance at some point during the three month Broadway run? I cannot. But we must remember that all of the members of the *Fiddler on the Roof* team were established Broadway figures by the time they began collaborating on *Fiddler on the Roof*. According to the Internet Broadway Database (IBDb) page for *First Impressions*, Abe Burrows is credited with “Book and Direction,” and the musical was produced in association with The Jule Styne Organization. Could consummate professionals like the members of the *Fiddler on the Roof* team have been totally oblivious to a new work by such major competitors? Not likely.

Now, you may ask: Given the legions of passionate Jane Austen fans, why has *First Impressions* vanished from popular consciousness? I’ll tell you: I don’t know. But here are a couple of speculations.

First of all, even though Hermione Gingold had just won the Golden Globe in the Best Supporting Actress category in 1958 for her role in the film version of *Gigi*, building an adaptation of *Pride & Prejudice* around the character of Mrs. Bennet was probably ill-advised from the start. And Polly Bergen, who played Lizzie, was a very beautiful woman, but she really wasn’t much of a singer. That said, I think the real reason it disappeared so fast is because *Gypsy* opened right behind it.

*First Impressions* opened while *My Fair Lady* was in the middle of a very lengthy run. (*My Fair Lady* opened in March, 1956 and it closed in September, 1962.) Clearly both of these shows were high-pedigree adaptations of British classics. My guess is that the success of *My Fair Lady* helped investors warm to the idea of doing another show somewhat like it, and that gave the *First Impressions* team a leg up.

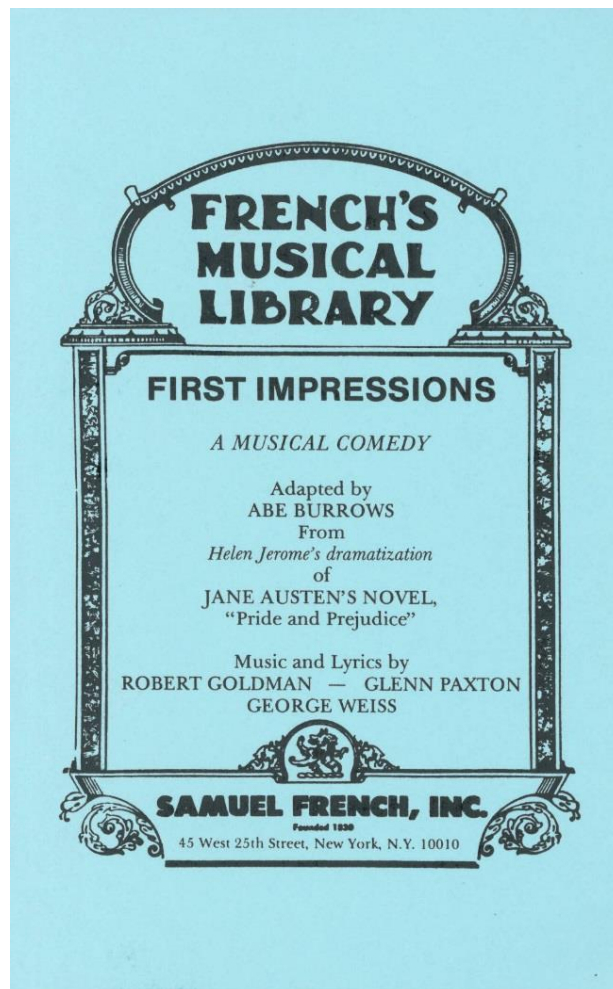
But then *Gypsy* opened on May 21, 1959... and *First Impressions* closed soon after (on May 30). Coincidence? I don't think so. However good Hermione Gingold might have been in *First Impressions*, the reviews for *Gypsy* were extraordinary, and *Gypsy* is now considered one of the greatest musicals in Broadway history. So if you wanted to go British, you likely chose Julie Andrews in *My Fair Lady*, and if you wanted to see a mother singing about her daughters, you likely picked Ethel Merman in *Gypsy*. When *Gypsy* opened on May 21, *First Impressions* was done.

Now accept for a moment that the number five “felt right” to Joseph Stein if only because he knew that *Pride & Prejudice* was a popular novel that had already been adapted for both stage

and screen, so he sensed—consciously or not—that a story about five daughters in a new musical might resonate with his own potential audience members.

Why did Jane Austen choose the number five? The answer is in the Bible.

The *Book of Numbers* is the fourth of the five Books of Moses which comprise the Hebrew “Old Testament.” By the end of the *Book of Numbers* right before the start of the *Book of Deuteronomy*, Jacob’s descendants have wandered in the desert for forty years. But before they can take possession of the Promised Land, they must first deal with the issue of allocation: who will settle where?



Cover image of *First Impressions* © Samuel French Inc.

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*First Impressions* (1959):

Lizzie Bennet (Polly Bergen) is offered consolation by her sisters Jane (Phyllis Newman) and Kitty (Lauri Peters).  
Photo by Friedman-Abeles © Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts  
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*First Impressions (1959):*

Mrs. Bennet (Hermione Gingold), Mr. Darcy (Farley Granger), Lizzie Bennet (Polly Bergen), and Captain Wickham (James Mitchell).

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*First Impressions* (1959):  
Lizzie Bennet (Polly Bergen) with Mrs. Bennet (Hermione Gingold) and Mr. Collins (Christophe Hewett).  
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*First Impressions* (1959): Mrs. Bennet (Hermione Gingold) with Jane (Phyllis Newman),  
Mary (Lois Bewley), Kitty (Lauri Peters), and Lydia (Lynn Ross).  
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## Zelophehad's Daughters: The Family in the Biblical *Book of Numbers*



THE DAUGHTERS OF ZELOPHEHAD

48" x 84" 3 Panels Oil on Canvas (2006)

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The Israelites have been divided into twelve tribes for each of the twelve sons of Jacob, and the clans of each tribe are to receive one share. Descended from Jacob's son Joseph through the line of Joseph's son Manasseh is Zelophehad, but "Zelophehad, son of Hopher, had no sons, only daughters." (Chapter 26 Verse 33)

"The daughters of Zelophehad, of Manassite family—son of Hopher son of Gilead son of Machir son of Manasseh son of Joseph—came forward. **The names of the daughters were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah.** They stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the chieftains, and the whole assembly, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, and they said, 'Our father died in the wilderness... Let not our father's name be lost to his clan just because he had no son! Give us a holding among our father's kinsmen!'" (*Numbers 27 Verses 1-4*)

"And Moses brought their case before the Lord; and the Lord said to Moses, 'The plea of Zelophehad's daughters is just. You should give them a hereditary holding among their father's kinsmen; transfer their father's share to them.'" (*Numbers 27 Verses 5-7*)

"Further speak to the Israelite people as follows: 'If a man dies without leaving a son, you shall transfer his property to his daughter. This shall be the law of procedure for the Israelites in accordance with the Lord's command to Moses.'" (*Numbers 27 Verses 8-11*)

Of course there is some subsequent pushback from Zelophehad's kinsmen and a few new restrictions are placed on his daughters.

“Moses, at the Lord's bidding, instructed the Israelites, saying: ‘This is what the Lord has commanded concerning the daughters of Zelophehad: They may marry anyone they wish, provided they marry into a clan of their father's tribe. No inheritance of the Israelites may pass over from one tribe to another, but the Israelites must remain bound each to the ancestral portion of his tribe. Every daughter among the Israelite tribes who inherits a share must marry someone from a clan of her father's tribe, in order that every Israelite may keep his ancestral share. Thus no inheritance shall pass over from one tribe to another, but the Israelite tribes shall remain bound each to its portion.’” (*Numbers* 33:1—36:13).

What is most significant to me in this story is that the five daughters of Zelophehad—Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah—are all listed by name—as individuals—first in Chapter 26 and then again in Chapter 27. And they are all mentioned by name once more in Chapter 36, just before the *Book of Numbers* ends with one final line:

“These are the commandments and regulations that the Lord enjoined upon the Israelites, through Moses, on the steppes of Moab, at the Jordan near Jericho.” (*Numbers* 36:13)

Did Jane Austen know the story of the Daughters of Zelophehad? Did she know about these five bold women who “stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the chieftains, and the whole assembly, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting,” five women who are known to us by their own names—as individuals—and therefore not just as a group known collectively as the daughters of their father Zelophehad? How could she not? This is not some obscure prophet speaking; this is in the climax to the *Book of Numbers*, in a part of the Bible that every well-educated person in her time would be expected to know.

Jane Austen was the bookish daughter of an Anglican Rector, and references to the Bible appear in all recent books about her. Even the readers of *Jane Austen for Dummies* know this: “As the daughter of an Anglican clergyman, Austen read the Bible in the King James Version and the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England. These books were practically required reading for all young people of the gentry class (particularly if your father was a clergyman).” So why are there almost no references to Zelophehad's Daughters in books about Jane Austen? I attribute this to the very same patriarchal pushback Moses encountered from Zelophehad's kinsmen, augmented by a lack of familiarity—in our own time—with the Biblical text.

Why did Zelophehad have five daughters? Only God knows the answer to this question. But we can be sure that both Jane Austen and Solomon Rabinowitz had read the story of Zelophehad's five daughters, and it is highly likely that Joseph Stein had read it at one time too. The number five is the right number; it gets its resonance from the very top. And as we will see below, five daughters—or to be exact, five dowries—is the same number God also bestowed on Solomon Rabinowitz.





THE FIVE DAUGHTERS OF ZELOPHEHAD

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<http://judithklausner.wordpress.com/2010/08/27/the-five-daughters-of-zelophehad/>



THE DAUGHTERS OF ZELOPHEHAD

*The Bible and its Story Taught in One Thousand Picture Lessons* Edited by Charles F. Horne and Julius A. Brewer (1908)  
Source WikiCommons: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daughters\\_of\\_Zelophehad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daughters_of_Zelophehad)



DAUGHTERS OF ZELOPHEHAD  
Oil Paint on Stretched Canvas (1985)

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## Solomon Rabinowitz's Daughters: The Family that once lived in Kiev

### Madame Sholom Aleichem

A romance which began when Olga Loyev was fourteen and her tutor, Sholom Rabinowitz, eighteen, blossomed into marriage and a happy wedded life.

by  
REGINA  
MANTELL



SHOLOM RABINOWITZ



OLGA LOYEV RABINOWITZ

(LAST PORTRAITS)

From *Sholem Aleichem Panorama*  
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As I explained earlier, the eight *Tevye* stories, when collected and published together, become a “novel” written in real time. The author who wrote “The Great Windfall” in 1895 witnessed many momentous world events in the course of his life, but amidst the wars, pogroms, and Zionist Congresses, he also lived a “real” life. Sholem Aleichem was an author, but Solomon Rabinowitz was also a son, a husband, and a father. However, even with all the interest in this man since his death in 1916—a death which occasioned an outpouring of grief all across the Yiddish speaking world and lead to one of the largest funeral parades ever seen in the city of New York—there has been amazingly little examination of his family life.

“I have 5 daughters,” brays Tevye in the opening moments of *Fiddler on the Roof*. “I have 5 daughters!” And yet, even having heard these four words (“I have 5 daughters!”) dozens of times, it wasn’t until August 2011 (just before my third annual lecture on *Fiddler on the Roof* for the Chicago YIVO Society), that I suddenly thought to ask myself a very simple question: “Mmmm, I wonder if Solomon Rabinowitz had any daughters?”

Perhaps people assume that with such a flood of literary treasures, Rabinowitz didn't have time for much else, but the reality is quite different. Marie Waife-Goldberg laid out all the details in her book *My Father, Sholom Aleichem* (published in 1968). Nevertheless, even recent books like Jeremy Dauber's *The Worlds of Sholem Aleichem* (which is 448 pages long) continue to minimize the importance of Rabinowitz's family life. However, with Marie Waife-Goldberg as our guide, a fairly coherent story is readily available about the Rabinowitz family... and the historical record clearly shows that for the purposes of a *Fiddler on the Roof* aficionado like me, **Solomon Rabinowitz... had... five... daughters!** And here is how it all came to be.

Solomon Rabinowitz was born into a relatively prosperous family. His father was a scholar and his mother ran the business, which was typical for a Jewish family in that place at that time. They had many children (some have said as many as 11 or 12), and Mama Rabinowitz—Chaya Esther—raised them all while Papa Rabinowitz—Reb Nochem Vevik—did his thing.

Then Papa Rabinowitz made some bad business decisions and basically bankrupted the family. They were forced to leave their home and soon after that, just after Solomon's Bar Mitzvah, Mama Rabinowitz—Chaya Esther—died. Papa Rabinowitz—Reb Nochem Vevik—was not able to care for his many children, so he dispersed them, calling the children back home, one-by-one, after he remarried. But his second wife was none too pleased about this, and she basically forced them all out again.

And so at the very young age of 14 or 15, Solomon Rabinowitz was making a living as an itinerant teacher—and it was a very marginal living indeed. In his autobiography *From the Fair*, Rabinowitz tells stories about his various adventures—most of which are heartbreaking—as he wandered alone in the world.

Then one day Rabinowitz met a young man named Joshua Loyeff. Joshua was the son of a very wealthy man named Elimelech Loyeff and after talking with Rabinowitz for a while, Joshua arranged a meeting. Once Elimelech Loyeff met Rabinowitz, he decided to bring him back to his estate in Sofievka. In the daytime, Rabinowitz was to work as a children's tutor, and in the evenings Rabinowitz was to help with correspondence and other things that might need doing to manage the large Loyeff estate.

Who did Rabinowitz find on the Loyeff estate in Sofievka when he arrived there in 1877 at the age of 18?

Elimelech Loyeff had two wives. We don't know the name of his first wife. All we know is that she gave birth to two sons—Israel and Joshua—and then she died. Sometime after his first wife died, Elimelech Loyeff married a woman named Rachel Yampolsky. In the fullness of time, Rachel gave birth to a daughter named Olga.

Israel and Joshua eventually married too; they each had one daughter and then they both divorced. The mothers of these two little girls—also nameless—disappeared, so alongside her own daughter Olga, Rachel also cared for Manya and Natasha (who were technically her step-granddaughters).

So when Solomon Rabinowitz arrived in Sofievka, the children in the household were in fact three girls:

- Olga (age 15)
- Manya (age 9)
- Natasha (age 5)

Eventually Olga's parents realized that their daughter had fallen in love with her tutor, so Rabinowitz was turned out. Elimelech Loyeff made sure that Rabinowitz was denied access to Olga, confiscating all the letters Rabinowitz tried to send to her. But Olga refused to marry anyone else, and eventually she found him again. Solomon and Olga married in 1883.

Sadly, both of Olga's step-brothers were dead by this point, so Elimelech Loyeff accepted Solomon Rabinowitz into his home as a son. Then, in 1885—two years after the marriage—Elimelech Loyeff died. According to Russian property laws, women could not inherit, and so his vast fortune went to Solomon Rabinowitz, and the two teenage girls—**Manya** and **Natasha**—who were probably once his students—became his legal wards.

Solomon and Olga had their first child, a daughter named Ernestina in 1884. (They called her **Tissa** at home.) Daughter **Lyala** was born in 1887, the same year that Manya died of tuberculosis at age 19. A third daughter—**Emma**—was born in 1888. In 1889, Olga finally gave birth to a son. They named him Elimelech—after Olga's father—but at home they called him **Misha**. Marusi—who would one day publish *My Father, Sholom Aleichem* under her married name **Marie** Waife-Goldberg—was born in 1892. A final child, a son named Nochum after Solomon's father—but called **Numa** at home—was born in 1901. (Numa became a well-known painter in America under the name Norman Raeben.)

Technically Solomon and Olga Rabinowitz had six children—four daughters and two sons—but the full reality is that Rabinowitz was responsible for the dowries of five girls: Natasha, Tissa, Lyala, Emma, and Marusi. Calling himself “Your Loving Uncle” in subsequent letters to Natasha—after her marriage to a much older man—likely did little to lessen the emotional burden he carried. This was definitely “no laughing matter,” because in 1890, Rabinowitz lost all of Elimelech Loyeff's money in a stock market crash. He was rescued by his mother-in-law—Rachel Yampolsky—who pawned all of her jewelry and other household possessions to pay off his creditors—and he worried about the fate of “his children”—including Natasha—for the rest of his life.

Putting all of this together, I kept asking myself: “Can this really be right?” If yes, then why hadn't anyone connected these dots before? After all, all of this information is in *My Father, Sholom Aleichem* (which Marusi had published under the name Marie Waife-Goldberg way back in 1968). This family history is also encapsulated in *Our Sholem Aleichem*, a biography published in 1946 “on the occasion of the centenary of the birth of Sholem Aleichem” by Kinderbook Publications in New York. Most of it is also contained in *Sholem Aleichem Panorama* published by the Jewish Observer in Canada in 1948.

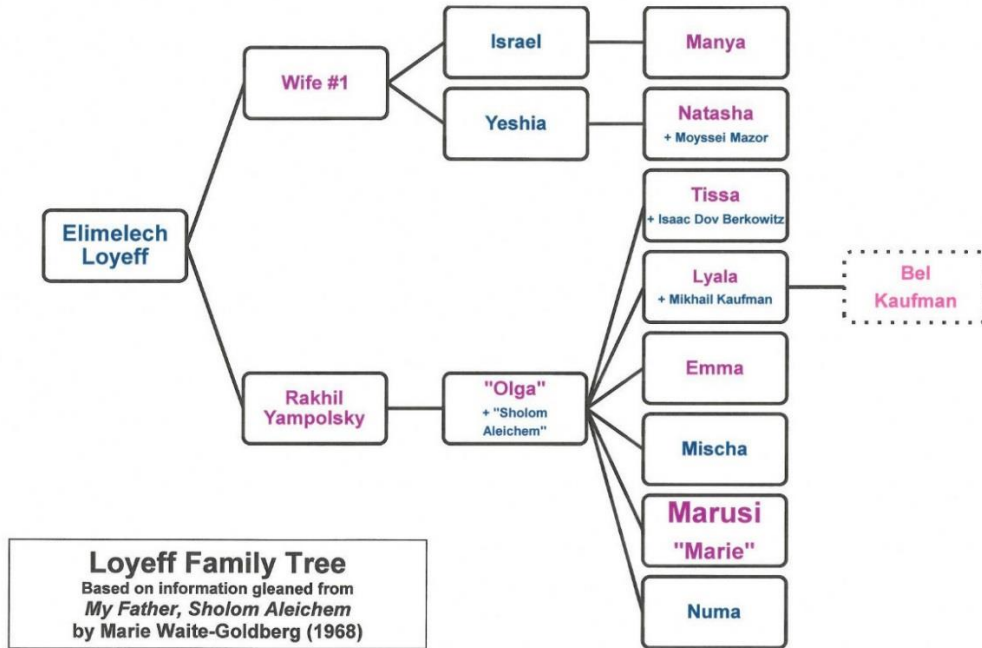
This gorgeous tribute—which is over 400 pages long—is filled with photographs and sketches, and also includes first-person reports by Lyala (writing under the name Lala Kaufman), Marusi (writing under the name Marie W. Goldberg) and Tissa’s husband Isaac (writing under the name I.D. Berkowitz). *Sholem Aleichem Panorama* even includes a piece called “Madame Sholom Aleichem” by Regina Mantell. (Olga Loyeff Rabinowitz had passed away in 1942.) Regina also mentions Olga’s Yiddish name in her piece, repeatedly referring to her as “young Hodl.”

“In the history of literature there are instances of the wife who serves as a continual source of stimulation and inspiration to the genius of her writer husband. Such a wife was Olga-Hodl. Not only did she inspire and stimulate the youthful Sholom Rabinowitz, but in later years as Madame Sholom Aleichem she created the proper atmosphere around the great Sholom Aleichem.”

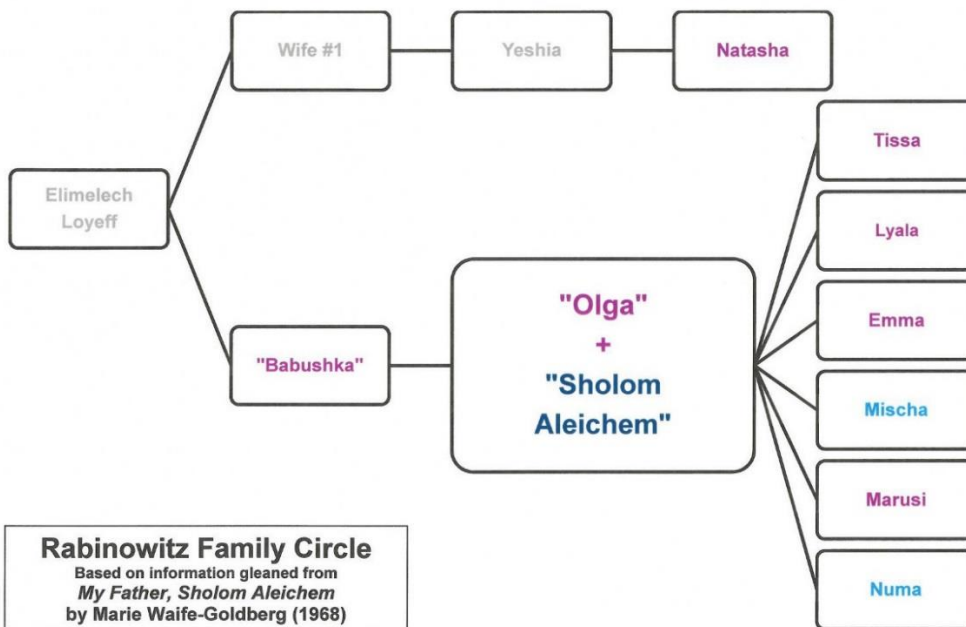
Nevertheless, these family details fly right by Jeremy Dauber, whose book *The Worlds of Sholem Aleichem*—which includes extensive quotes from *My Father, Sholom Aleichem*—was published in October 2013. Looking in Wikipedia today—yet again—I see that none of the daughters are named except Lyala (and only because she is the mother of the recently-deceased writer Bel Kaufman). And the Yiddish name given for Olga today, in Wikipedia, is... Golde! No one but me, it seems, has any interest in the role women played in the real Rabinowitz family.

But suddenly, knowing what I know now, I re-read *Tevye the Dairyman* with new eyes, and I find that a master storyteller has embedded pieces of his own life into the plot points of his most famous stories. Am I implying that what we know about Solomon Rabinowitz’s family life can be mapped onto the plot of *Fiddler on the Roof*? Yes!

The “conventional wisdom” is that the *Fiddler on the Roof* team got it all wrong. But when Joseph Stein decided that the number of daughters had to be five, I think he got closer to the core of Sholem Aleichem’s art than anyone has ever realized.



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## The Earl of Grantham's Daughters: The Family living at Downton Abbey



Downton Abbey 2010 Cast from left:  
Laura Carmichael (Lady Edith), Michelle Dockery (Lady Mary), and Jessica Brown Findlay (Lady Sybil).  
“Downton Abbey” Sisters (2010) Credit: Masterpiece Theatre/Courtesy NEA  
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We have now made our way from the seven unnamed daughters alluded to in the first *Tevye* story (“The Great Windfall”) down to the five named daughters seen on stage in *Fiddler on the Roof*. We have also met the five daughters of Zelophehad (from the Biblical *Book of Numbers*) and the five Bennet daughters in *Pride & Prejudice* (as well as the five daughters in the Broadway adaptation of *Pride & Prejudice* called *First Impressions*), all of whom also have names. So why are there only three daughters in *Downton Abbey*?

When I ask people why *Tevye* only has five daughters in *Fiddler on the Roof* even though he says he has seven daughters in “The Great Windfall,” they usually tell me the change must have been driven by dollars: it was easier—and cheaper—to have five girls on stage rather than seven. But that answer has never satisfied me. As I have already said, Arnold Perl managed to fit all seven girls on a tiny Off-Broadway stage, so Joseph Stein could surely have fit them somewhere on a Broadway stage too if he felt his libretto required them. (In Act One of *The King and I*—which opened on Broadway in 1951—Rogers and Hammerstein brought a whole gaggle of kids onto the stage for “The March of the Siamese Children,” and they’ve been part of every production ever since.)

But the truth is that only three of the daughters in *Fiddler on the Roof* actually take on active roles that drive the plot forward. Shprintze and Bielke are presented as children, too young to be

fully individuated. Is it a coincidence that in film versions of *Pride & Prejudice* (as well as in *First Impressions*), Mary and Kitty—the middle Bennet daughters—also live on the sidelines?

Therefore to tighten the plot—and make room for all of the action they wanted to add down in the servant’s quarters—the creators of *Downton Abbey* decided to give the Earl of Grantham three daughters—Lady Mary Crawley, Lady Edith Crawley, and Lady Sybil Crawley—instead of five. And no one writing about the parallels between *Fiddler on the Roof* and *Downton Abbey* seems to have noticed anyone missing.

But the widely-televised depiction of Lady Mary’s vulnerability as the eldest daughter of a titled father who has no sons has hit England hard. There is now a group called “The Hares” campaigning for The Equality (Titles) Bill, “a change in the law to end male primogeniture and bring equality to women in the peerage.”

The Hares sprang into action as soon as Parliament passed the Succession to the Crown Act of 2013 “a landmark bill to end the centuries-old discrimination against women in line to the British throne.” (This happened right after Prince William’s wife Kate Middleton—aka the Duchess of Cambridge—announced her pregnancy, and before she gave birth to the newest Prince George.) In its December 9, 2013 issue, the *New Yorker* referred to “The Equality (Titles) Bill now being debated in the House of Lords” as “the so-called Downton Abbey law.”

Thus we have come full circle, from *Downton Abbey* to *Fiddler on the Roof* to *Pride & Prejudice* through *First Impressions* to the Biblical *Book of Numbers*, and from the complicated personal life of the real Solomon Rabinowitz back to the lords of the manor who live in today’s England.

And if we were to remind members of the House of Lords that in Chapter 27 of the *Book of Numbers* “the Lord said to Moses, ‘The plea of Zelophehad’s daughters is just,’” what would they say? That I can answer in one word: Tradition! Lady Mary Crawley be damned. Jane Austen be damned. Moses be damned. Primogeniture is our English Tradition.

## Concluding Thoughts about “Tradition”



Benjamin and Marie Waife-Goldberg circa 1965.  
Family photo courtesy of Wendy Marcus Lebson.

Marie Waife-Goldberg—aka Maroussia Rabinowitz—was born in Odessa in 1892. She was the fourth daughter of Solomon and Olga Rabinowitz, and the fifth of their six children. Maroussia received her degree from the University of Lausanne in Switzerland before joining her parents in New York in 1914. She died in New York in 1985 at the age of 93. In 1968, Marie Waife-Goldberg published *My Father Sholom Aleichem* which continues to be the most reliable source of information about the personal life of this beloved Yiddish writer. Wendy Marcus Lebson is the granddaughter of Marie Waife-Goldberg.

“Tradition.” Tradition! Tradition? At the beginning of *Fiddler on the Roof*, during what is called the musical “prologue,” everyone sings about “Tradition.” But that is the beginning of *Fiddler on the Roof*, not the end.

Here is one example of the complexity inherent in the word tradition: How should Jews celebrate Hanukkah?

What are the “traditional” foods of Hanukkah? For most American Jews (most of whom come from Ashkenazi families), the answer is latkes. For most Israeli Jews (most of whom come from Mizrahi families), the answer is donuts. But the people eating donuts and the people eating latkes, they are all still Jews. So what are the “traditional” foods of Hanukkah? If you are Jewish, then the “traditional” foods of Hanukkah are probably the ones your grandmother made.

And what are the “traditional” songs of Hanukkah? For Jews living in the USA (which is an Anglophone country), the favorite song is probably “Oh Hanukkah, Oh Hanukkah, Come Light the Menorah” (which is based on a Yiddish song). But for Jews living in Argentina (which is a Hispanophone country), the favorite song is probably “Ocho Kandelikas” (which is in Ladino). But the people singing “Oh Hanukkah, Oh Hanukkah” and the people singing “Ocho Kandelikas,” they are all still Jews. So what are the “traditional” songs of Hanukkah? If you are Jewish, then the “traditional” songs of Hanukkah are probably the ones your grandmother sang.

When it comes right down to it, Jewish Americans don’t even agree on how to spell this Hebrew word in English. But if I spell it H-A-N-U-K-K-A-H and you spell it C-H-A-N-U-K-A-H, we can still eat fried foods and sing holiday songs together.

“Tradition” is not an answer with a capital “t” at the beginning; “tradition” is a question with a small “s” at the end. There are many Jewish traditions, and they are all valid Jewish traditions. So that means individual Jews have choices to make. If you choose cards that spell the holiday H-A-N-U-K-K-A-H in English, that doesn’t make you any more Jewish—or any less Jewish—than choosing cards that spell the holiday C-H-A-N-U-K-A-H.

The creators of *Fiddler on the Roof*—all of whom were Jewish—grew up in a syncretic American world, so they picked out various Jewish traditions and then they dramatized them. But that does not mean they picked out the “best” Jewish traditions, and when it suited their dramatic purposes, they even made up “traditions.”

For example, when I told you about Solomon Rabinowitz’s Daughters—“The Family that once lived in Kiev”—you never heard me mention the word “matchmaker,” did you? That’s because matchmakers were not as ubiquitous as the creators of *Fiddler on the Roof* would have you believe.

Here are the daughters’ lyrics from the musical Prologue:

“And who does Mama teach  
To mend and tend and fix,  
Preparing me to marry  
Whoever Papa picks?”

For fifty years now, we have been led to believe that these lyrics are an accurate representation of “Tradition!”—with a capital “t” and an exclamation point—as lived in the Russian Jewish world at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. But when we look at the actual lives of the two men who created the source material for *Fiddler on the Roof*, we find that it just wasn’t so.

The man known as “Sholem Aleichem”—the man whose real name was Solomon Rabinowitz—was married to a woman named Olga Loyeff. Olga Loyeff’s father, Elimeleh Loyeff, was very wealthy; Solomon Rabinowitz was penniless. Elimeleh Loyeff hired Solomon Rabinowitz as a tutor, and he also expected him to assist with various secretarial tasks. So Solomon Rabinowitz lived on the Loyeff estate in a service role. He wasn’t washing dishes, but he was still an employee.

Elimeleh Loyeff undoubtedly had grand designs for his daughter Olga. Elimeleh Loyeff emphatically did not want Solomon Rabinowitz as his son-in-law. But Olga Loyeff fell in love with Solomon Rabinowitz, and even though her father separated them, she found him. Olga Loyeff and Solomon Rabinowitz got married on May 20, 1883, and they remained together until the day he died on May 13, 1916.

Furthermore, there is no Yente-the-Matchmaker in any of the eight *Tevye* stories! There is a matchmaker named Ephraim, but he plays a very limited role in the *Tevye* stories, and he has no power or influence whatsoever. So there is no pivotal matchmaker either in the life of Solomon Rabinowitz or in the stories of Sholem Aleichem. (Note that my thoughts on the character of Yente-the-Matchmaker—which are voluminous—must wait for another day.)

And what about Marc and Bella Chagall? Like Olga Loyeff, Bella Rosenberg came from a prosperous family, whereas Marc Chagall—like Solomon Rabinowitz—was penniless. In his autobiography *My Life*, Marc Chagall tells stories of his father carrying barrels of herring. His family had nothing, but Marc Chagall won a scholarship to go to art school. Then he met Bella Rosenberg, a well-educated young woman who wanted to be an actress.

Once again, this was not the match that Bella Rosenberg's father had imagined for his daughter. But Bella Rosenberg fell in love with Marc Chagall, and in addition to becoming his wife and the mother of their daughter Ida, she was also his muse. There are many iconic paintings of her—often in a striking black dress with a bright white collar—and famous paintings of them together—head-over-heels in love with one another—flying high above their home town of Vitebsk. Bella Rosenberg was Marc Chagall's wife. She was his muse. She was the mother of his child. She traveled with him everywhere. She kept him going even in the darkest days of the Holocaust.

Did either of these two couples have a matchmaker? In one of the monologues Joseph Stein wrote for Act Two of *Fiddler on the Roof*, Tevye says: “Did Adam and Eve have a matchmaker? Yes, they did. Then it seems these two [Hodel and Perchik] have the same matchmaker.”

Stein's words will not be found in any of the *Tevye* stories, but they are true to the married life of Olga Loyeff and Solomon Rabinowitz, and also true to the married life of Bella Rosenberg and Marc Chagall. Coincidence?

So what is tradition? Who makes the matches? Should people who want to marry each other be allowed to make that choice? Of all the principal members of *Fiddler on the Roof's* original creative team—including Boris Aronson, Jerry Bock, Sheldon Harnick, Joseph Stein—only one person was unable to marry for love. So where would Jerome Robbins stand on the issue of “traditional marriage” if he were alive today? I doubt he would be waving any banners for “tradition.” In fact, every time I hear someone talking about “traditional marriage,” I can see Jerome Robbins do another flip in his grave.

The literal words of the Hebrew Bible favor the marriage of choice: “Moses, at the Lord's bidding, instructed the Israelites, saying: ‘This is what the Lord has commanded concerning the

daughters of Zelophehad: They may marry anyone they wish...” Of course some restrictions follow, but even so, these radical words—**they may marry anyone they wish**—were first written down over 2,000 years ago. And they continue to be read every year whenever a Jewish congregation anywhere in the world observes Shabbat Mattot/Mas’ei (*Numbers* 33:1—36:13).

I believe that Jane Austen and Solomon Rabinowitz both knew what the Lord had commanded concerning Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah—the five named daughters of Zelophehad—and I think Joseph Stein did too (even if he had no conscious memory of the daughters themselves). I feel certain that they all rejected backward—and in this context non-Biblical—traditions. In each case, they took their own characters forward into a world of ever more expansive personal choice.

Tradition! Tradition? “Tradition” does not end the story of Tevye and his daughters; traditions were just the beginning.



Benjamin and Marie Waife-Goldberg with Marc Chagall circa 1955.  
Family photo courtesy of Wendy Marcus Lebson.

Maroussia Rabinowitz married Benjamin Waife in 1917. He became a well-known author, writing under the name B.Z. Goldberg. The Waifes had two sons (Solomon and Mitchell), and four grandchildren (Robert, Ronald, Sandra and Wendy). Benjamin Waife died in Tel Aviv in 1972. According to their granddaughter Wendy Marcus Lebson, many Yahrzeit Celebrations honoring Sholem Aleichem were held at her grandmother’s New York apartment, and Marc Chagall participated on some occasions when he was in town. The annual Yahrzeit Celebrations are now held at the Brotherhood Synagogue in Gramercy Park. My husband Richard and I attended in 2012 at Wendy’s invitation. We also attended in 2013 and 2014.



With Aliza Shevrin at the 97<sup>th</sup> Annual Sholem Aleichem Yahrzeit Celebration at the Brotherhood Synagogue in Gramercy Park. Shevrin is currently the most prominent translator of Sholem Aleichem from Yiddish into English. She lives in Ann Arbor, MI.  
Photo Credit: Richard Bayard Miller (5/19/13)

## Brief Note about Names

Just like in the case of C-H-A-N-U-K-A-H versus H-A-N-U-K-K-A-H, there are choices to be made. Is the English name of this great Yiddish author “Sholem Aleichem” or “Sholom Aleykhem”? Was his real name Solomon Rabinowitz or Sholom Rabinovich? Was his second daughter’s name “Lyala” or “Lola” or “Lala”? In all cases, someone has before them a name that was originally written in either Cyrillic characters or in Hebrew characters, but in a world of search engines, where does one look for the “right” English translation? I have looked everywhere!

In general, for the sake of consistency, I have chosen whatever name was used by the creators of *Fiddler on the Roof* because these are the English names which are most familiar to us now. But when I am quoting someone else, I don’t change the actual text of the quote. And so, for example, when I quoted from the Regina Mantell essay in the 1948 *Sholem Aleichem Panorama*, I kept the names the way she spelled them: “Madame Sholom Aleichem” and “Hodl.”

## Acknowledgements

Counting just from May 20, 2000, I have seen almost two dozen live performances of *Fiddler on the Roof* on stages from West Palm Beach, Florida to Regina, Saskatchewan. Since I lived in Chicago for most of this time, many of these performances were in Metro Chicago—from national touring companies who made stops at big theatres in the Chicago Loop to local companies spread all across the region, from Lincolnshire in the northern suburbs to Aurora in the western suburbs to Munster in the southern suburbs. I also flew in from Chicago to see the 2004 Broadway revival. It was controversial... so I saw it twice before writing my review for the *World Jewish Digest*, and then I saw it a third time after major changes were made to the cast.

I have seen some very famous actors play Tevye on stage—including Theodore Bikel, Harvey Fierstein, Alfred Molina, and Chaim Topol—and I have seen some actors in supporting roles who were not well-known then but are fairly well-known now (such as Erik Liberman, Sally Murphy, and Robert Petkoff). I know for sure that many of these actors were Jewish, but most of them probably weren’t.

I owe each and every one of these performers—the known and the novices—a huge debt of gratitude. Every single stage performance of *Fiddler on the Roof* has been a source of inspiration to me. No matter how many times I see it, I am never bored. It is always different. Seeing the actors stretch—as they step into the TRADITION of *Fiddler on the Roof*—is always thrilling. I have learned more from watching Anatevkans do their thing on stage than I have learned from all the books, articles, reviews or interviews in my queue. And the same goes for the people working behind-the-scenes—directors, designers, choreographers, musicians—they all work tirelessly to make their own *Fiddler on the Roof* memorable and they always succeed.

Next I thank family members of the creators who gave me valuable insights and offered encouragement, particularly Marc Aronson (the son of Boris Aronson), Wendy Marcus Lebson (the granddaughter of Marie Waife-Goldberg and the great granddaughter of Sholem Aleichem), Bella Meyer (the granddaughter of Marc Chagall), and Harry Stein (the son of Joseph Stein). I



also include Frank Rich in this category. He was Harry Stein's friend long before he was a theatre critic for the *New York Times*, so he attended several performances of *Fiddler on the Roof* before the Broadway debut in 1964. Rich gave me lengthy, generous feedback on a very early draft way back in 2003, and he also connected me with the Aronson family so I could post examples of Aronson's set design on my Blog.

Next I thank all of the people who have assisted me at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center for over a decade now, including desk clerks, experts in Special Collections, and all of the security guards who make sure that these priceless documents remain intact. To produce this eBook, I owe special gratitude to Photograph Librarian Jeremy Megraw and to Thomas Lisanti in "Permissions." In this category, I also include Christopher Pennington (Executive Director of The Robbins Rights Trust and a Director and Treasurer of The Jerome Robbins Foundation), and all the people who agreed to permit use of the precious images to which they now own copyrights.

Next I thank all of the editors who have published my work over the years, most especially Aaron Cohen, Cindy Sher and Stefanie Bregman (*JUF News*), Alana Newhouse (*Forward*), Martha Richards (*WomenArts*), and Simona Fuma Weinglass (*World Jewish Digest*). In this category, I also include all of the artists, authors, filmmakers and musicians who granted me time for an interview.

Next I thank all of the teachers who saw "something" in me and guided me forward. This list is incredibly long but here are some of the teachers—many of whom are long gone—who filled me with wonder: George Doskow, Leon Goldstein, Janellen Huttenlocher, Simon Kaplan, Amy Kass, Leon Kass, Theodore Mischel, Louis Paul, Jane Platt, Nathaniel Stampfer, Manley Thompson, and Stephen Toulmin. In this category, I also add people who have been true mentors—and not just "bosses"—including: Kim Benziger, Ben Escobar, Karen Geisler, Bruce Mahon, Christine Malcolm, Jacob Morowitz, Bart Neuman, Iris Sepe, and Dolores Williams.

Next I thank all of the people who have provided feedback on one or more of my many Metro Chicago presentations. This list is huge so for now, let's just say you know who you are. I also thank all of the people who have provided feedback on presentations given since my move to Brooklyn. This is a relatively short list but it is definitely growing. Many of the people in these two categories are fellow congregants with whom I have worshiped at KAM Isaiah Israel and/or Kol Ami (in Chicago), or at Temple Beth Emeth (in Brooklyn). Many more are friends made through shared struggle in various progressive organizations over the years including (but not limited to): American Association of University Women, Chicago YIVO Society, Hadassah, Illinois Woman's Press Association, International Women Associates, and ORT. My father—Eddie Huttner—was a member of Painters District Council #10 of Great Essex County, NJ, and I was raised to be "a joiner."

Next I thank all of the people who have worked in various capacities to help me complete production on this eBook, including Sylvia Franklin and Elisabeth Sowerbutts (production managers), plus Alma Garcia (research assistant), Brigid Presecky (editorial assistant), Dana Sinn (transcriptionist), Bettina Stammen (photo editor), and Melissa Wilks (graphic artist). In

this category, I also include my two writing coaches Sharon Lynn Bear (in Manhattan) and Bonnie Kustner (in Evanston).

My parents—Helene and Edwin Huttner—and my in-laws—Juanita and William Miller—are not gone. They live on—in my mind and in my heart—with every breath. In this category, I also include my grandmother—my mother’s mother—Sophie Slotnick Hecht. When I ask myself about the source of my own “traditions,” my thoughts dance merrily back to the sights and sounds and smells of her kitchen.

And finally a few words spoken directly to the two people—my husband, Richard Bayard Miller and my BFF Dorthea Juul—who keep me grounded on Planet Earth: Your patience, your forbearance, your encouragement and your love... without both of you... well, I don’t know where I would be, but I would not be “here” today.

## About Jan Lisa Huttner



Huttner Lecture on Marie Waife-Goldberg in honor of  
Women's History Month at KAM Isaiah Israel in Hyde Park (Chicago).  
Photo Credit: Richard Bayard Miller (3/11/12)

I am a graduate of St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland (“the Great Books School”), and I hold Masters Degrees from Harvard University (Ed.M. in Educational Psychology), the State University of New York at Binghamton (MA in History & Philosophy of the Social & Behavioral Sciences), and the University of Chicago (MA in Human Development). As a graduate student, I published my Master's Thesis (“Egocentrism: a Defense of Pre-reflexive Experience”) in *International Studies in Philosophy*, and I gave three different presentations at annual meetings of the Jean Piaget Society. I received an Affirmative Action grant while at SUNY-Binghamton, and fellowships from the Thomas J. Watson Foundation and the G.D. Searle Foundation.

From 1984 to 2002, I worked as a healthcare computer consultant for two “Big Eight” accounting firms—Coopers & Lybrand (now PriceWaterhouseCoopers) and Peat Marwick Mitchell (now KPMG)—as well as Superior Consultant Company (a boutique healthcare firm). During those years, I carved out a niche for myself as a nationally recognized expert on Behavioral Health, Home Care, and Long Term Care, publishing regularly and making frequent

appearances at professional conferences. I left consulting in 2002 to attend to family health issues.

I began writing professionally in 2003, quickly amassing local and national awards for my print pieces and online posts. I received three “Silver Feathers” for writer-of-the-year from the Illinois Woman’s Press Association in 2005, 2006, and 2010. Several of my submissions were also sent up from IWPA to the National Federation of Press Women, where I won further recognition in 2005 and 2010 in their national contests.

In 2004, when I was Director of College & University Relations for AAUW-Illinois, I started the WITASWAN project (Women in the Audience Supporting Women Artists Now). In 2007, I began collaborating with Martha Richards of WomenArts (the Fund for Women Artists) to turn WITASWAN into an international holiday called SWAN Day. In 2011, I published *Penny’s Picks: 50 Movies by Women Filmmakers*, with introductory chapters on the history of WITASWAN and International SWAN Day as well as reviews of fifty films by women directors and screenwriters. The first International SWAN Day was held in 2008. Since that time, International SWAN Day has been celebrated at more than 1,200 separate events all around the world.

I relocated from Chicago to Brooklyn in September 2012 when my husband made a job change. This proved to be a happy occurrence which enabled me to spend unlimited time doing archival research—especially in the extensive collection of Jerome Robbins papers—once I lived just a train ride away from the New York Public Library’s Library of the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center.

All I had wanted way back in May 2000 was a relaxing vacation; I had no idea my life was about to take such a profound turn.

“Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.”



Presentation to the Sisterhood of Temple Beth Emeth (Brooklyn, NY).  
CD = Recording of *Fiddler on the Roof* in Yiddish.  
Book = *My Father Sholom Aleichem* by Marie Waife-Goldberg.  
Photo Credit: Gerard Soffian (11/9/13)



With Susan Lynn Stone after my lecture for the Chicago YIVO Society at Wilmette Public Library (Wilmette, IL).  
Poster was a gift from Susan—purchased in Warsaw—which announces a new production of *Fiddler on the Roof* in Polish.  
Susan is a popular speaker and storyteller, committed to preserving the Yiddish Oral Tradition.  
Photo Credit: Richard Bayard Miller (8/19/14)

## Selected Bibliography

The purpose of this eBook is to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Broadway performance of *Fiddler on the Roof* and whet the reader's appetite for more. My plan is to release a full book with detailed chapters on all of the major characters in *Fiddler on the Roof*—including Tevye, Golde, Tzeitel, Motel, Hodel, Perchik, Chava, Fyedka, and Yente-the-Matchmaker—on May 13, 2016 (which will be Sholem Aleichem's 100<sup>th</sup> Yahrzeit).

What follows is a brief bibliography of some of the materials I have read since 2002 when I first began to do serious research on *Fiddler on the Roof*. Included here are only the materials that pertain to this eBook. A full bibliography with footnotes will be prepared prior to print publication in 2016.

### Key Texts

Sholem Aleichem's eight *Tevye* Stories

- 1948 English translation by Frances Butwin
- 1996 English translation by Hillel Halkin
- 2009 English translation by Aliza Shevrin

*Fiddler on the Roof* (1964)

- Book by Joseph Stein
- Music by Jerry Bock
- Lyrics by Sheldon Harnick

*First Impressions* (1959)

- Adapted by Abe Burrows from Helen Jerome's dramatization of Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice*
- Music & Lyrics by Robert Goldman, Glenn Paxton & George Weiss

*The Book of Numbers* as it appears in the Jewish Publication Society's *JPS Tanakh*

- Shabbat Pinchas: *Numbers* 25:10 – 30:1
- Shabbat Mattot/Mas'ei: *Numbers* 33:1 – 36:13

### Selected Primary Sources

Chagall, Marc; *My Life* (1922) → 1994 English translation by Elisabeth Abbott

Chagall, Bella; *Burning Lights* (1946) → English translation by Norbert Guterman

Grafstein, M.W. (Melech); *Sholem Aleichem Panorama* (1948) → with specific attention to the contributions of I.D. Berkowitz, Marie W. Goldberg, Lala Kaufman, and Regina Mantell (sic)

Rabinowitz, Solomon; From the Fair → English translation *From the Fair: The Autobiography of Sholom Aleichem* by Curt Leviant (1985)

Waife-Goldberg, Marie; *My Father Sholom Aleichem* (1968)

## **Selected Secondary Sources**

With all due respect to the authors of the secondary sources listed below, very little of what they wrote was actually helpful to me. While I learned a great deal about the “who what when where,” they rarely addressed the “why.” Therefore the main benefit of all their hard work for me was to keep me digging ever deeper for answers to my own specific questions.

Altman, Richard & Kaufman, Mervin; *The Making of a Musical: Fiddler on the Roof* (1971)

Dauber, Jeremy; *The Worlds of Sholem Aleichem: The Remarkable Life and Afterlife of the Man Who Created Tevye* (2013)

Isenberg, Barbara; *Tradition: The Highly Improbably, Ultimately Triumphant Broadway-to-Hollywood Story of Fiddler on the Roof, the World’s Most Beloved Musical* (2014)

Hillman, Jessica; *Echoes of the Holocaust on the American Musical Stage* (2012)

Solomon, Alisa; *Wonder of Wonders: A Cultural History of Fiddler on the Roof* (2013)

## **Additional Relevant Secondary Sources**

Dabundo, Laura; *The Marriage of Faith: Christianity in Jane Austen and William Wordsworth* (2012)

Johnson, Claudia L.; *Jane Austen’s Cults and Cultures* (2012)

Kagan, Andrew; *Marc Chagall* (1989)

Kruckman, Herbert; *Our Sholem Aleichem* (1946)

Meyer, Franz; *Marc Chagall* (1964)

Ray, Joan Elizabeth Klingel; *Jane Austen for Dummies* (2006)

Rich, Frank (with Lisa Aronson); *The Theatre Art of Boris Aronson* (1987)

Rodi, Robert; *Bitch in a Bonnet: Reclaiming Jane Austen from the Stiffs, the Snobs, the Simps, and the Saps* (2011)

Wolf, Stacy; *Changed for Good: A Feminist History of the Broadway Musical* (2011)

Yaffe, Deborah; *Among the Janeites: A Journey through the World of Jane Austen Fandom* (2013)



## Links to Additional JLH Materials

### Articles on *Fiddler on the Roof* Published &/or Posted by Others

- Everybody's Fiddler: A Researcher Finds a Link—Long Denied Between Chagall and Sholom Aleichem (Jewish Daily Forward, 9/5/03)  
<http://forward.com/articles/8071/everybody-s-fiddler/>
- In the Eye of the Beholder: New Revivals of *Fiddler on the Roof* open in Chicago & New York (World Jewish Digest, 7/1/04)  
[http://www.films42.com/columns/columns\\_fiddler.asp](http://www.films42.com/columns/columns_fiddler.asp)
- Schwartz' *Tevey* Receives the Royal Treatment from NCJF (World Jewish Digest, 12/1/04—Picked up & distributed internationally by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency)  
<http://www.films42.com/columns/TEVYE.asp>
- *Tevey's* Family Adjusts to Life in America (All About Jewish Theatre, 8/1/06)  
[http://www.jewish-theatre.com/visitor/article\\_display.aspx?articleID=1511](http://www.jewish-theatre.com/visitor/article_display.aspx?articleID=1511)
- *Fiddler*: Stage versus Screen (JUF News, 11/14/11)  
<http://www.juf.org/news/blog.aspx?id=413176&blogid=13573>
- *Shylock & His Daughter* Opens in Oak Brook Tonight (JUF News, 7/26/12)  
<http://www.juf.org/news/arts.aspx?id=416229>
- *Anatevka* is Alive and Well on the Fox River (JUF News, 3/20/13)  
<http://www.juf.org/news/arts.aspx?id=420160>
- Jerome Robbins, Norman Jewison & *Fiddler on the Roof* (JUF News, 7/29/13)  
<http://www.juf.org/news/blog.aspx?id=422165>
- *Wonder of Wonders* to play Chicago Area Nov.22 (JUF News, 11/20/13)  
<http://www.juf.org/news/arts.aspx?id=424404>

### Posts about *Fiddler on the Roof* on My Website &/or Blog

- From Halsted Street to Broadway: Jan Chats with Chicago Actress Sally Murphy (4/1/04)  
[http://www.films42.com/chats/chats\\_murphy.asp](http://www.films42.com/chats/chats_murphy.asp)
- Who was Boris Aronson? (7/12/04) <http://www.films42.com/faq/aronson.asp>
- Jonathan Wilson's "Jewish Encounter" with Marc Chagall (3/1/07)  
<http://www.films42.com/columns/Wilson-on-Chagall.pdf>
- Munster's *Fiddler* (4/1/07) <http://secondcitytzivi.com/2010/07/22/fiddler-on-the-roof/>
- Sholem Aleichem's *Stempenyu* newly reissued & available in paperback! (12/20/08)  
<http://www.films42.com/fiddler/MelvilleStempenyu.asp>
- Jan Chats with Klezmer Musician Steve Greenman about *Stempenyu's Dream* (2/15/09)  
<http://www.films42.com/fiddler/StevenGreenman.asp>
- Chaim Topol's Farewell Tour (6/10/09)  
<http://www.films42.com/fiddler/TopolFarewellTour09.asp>
- Marriott Lincolnshire's *Fiddler* (4/1/10) <http://secondcitytzivi.com/2010/07/01/apr-10-spotlight/>
- Congregation Beth Emeth Sisterhood Lecture (11/9/13)  
<http://secondcitytzivi.com/2013/11/26/119-todah-rabah/>
- Park Slope Hadassah Lecture (6/24/14) <http://secondcitytzivi.com/2014/06/25/624-fiddling-in-brooklyn/>

- Congregation Beth Emeth D'var Torah (7/11/14)  
<http://secondcityzivi.com/2014/08/02/5774-shabbat-pinchas/>
- Chicago YIVO Society Lectures (8/13/14 – 8/19/14)  
<http://secondcityzivi.com/2014/09/11/my-kind-a-town/>

**Additional Huttner Posts Specifically Referenced Above**

- Interview with Nir Bergman (2004): <http://www.films42.com/chats/nir-bergman.asp>
- Interview with Deborah Kampmeier (2005):  
[http://www.films42.com/chats/deborah\\_kampmeier.asp](http://www.films42.com/chats/deborah_kampmeier.asp)



Gravesite of Solomon and Olga Rabinowitz  
Mount Carmel Cemetery; Queens, NY (2011)

Source = WikiCommons: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sholem\\_Aleichem\\_Grave\\_Stone.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sholem_Aleichem_Grave_Stone.jpg)