

Between Traditionalism and Assimilation. Views on the Galician Jewry in Nathan Samuely, Karl Emil Franzos and Saul Raphael Landau.

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Most works of secondary literature dealing with the above-mentioned authors employ a work-immanent approach of analysis and apply the methodology of German and Slavic literary criticism. While recent years saw the publication of numerous studies and doctoral theses on the life and work of Karl Emil Franzos, which very much contributed to an “academic popularization” of the author and the problematic thematic complex of Galicia, Nathan Samuely and Saul Raphael Landau remained relatively unknown. Only a small number of papers deal with them or mention them in passing. However, certain biographical details, which up to now have not been considered by critics, are worth having a closer look at because they illustrate paradigmatic aspects in the development of Austrian-Jewish relations as well as the era’s zeitgeist.

My thesis is essentially based on the methods of comparative text analysis and literary imagology. Moreover, it contains elements from the field of the history of ideas and mentalities and draws on methods from cultural transfer research.

The more recent research approaches in the field of cultural studies make it possible to analyze the complex of the Haskalah, assimilation and Zionism in Galicia in a very detailed manner. In the given context, an analysis based on cultural transfer theory seems most suitable to demonstrate the transcultural dimensions of these ideological orientations.

In my thesis, I will thus show how cultural transfer took place from west to east, both at the micro and macro level. This will be exemplified by pointing out essential ideological structures and character constellations in the authors’ texts. Cultural transfer processes can be seen in the texts at the level of ideas, where we find a recurring scheme of antagonistic characters, which is characteristic of many ghetto stories and travel accounts. In these texts, we encounter, on the one hand, the prototypical enlightened human being who represents “western” thought and is eager to fulfill his civilizing mission and, on the other hand, the ignorant follower of obscurantism symbolizing eastern backwardness.

Haskalah, Assimilation and Zionism in Galicia

Nathan Samuely, Karl Emil Franzos and Saul Raphael Landau are among those authors who received strong interest from both Jewish and non-Jewish readers towards the end of the nineteenth century. Samuely, Franzos and Landau each contributed to the ideological spectrum of Jewish thought in the latter half of the nineteenth century, while at the same time their writings pointed forward to the political and cultural options for Galician Jews after 1900. The authors will be presented in a wider historical context as representatives of three distinct ideological orientations, i.e. the Haskalah, assimilation and Zionism.

The comparative treatment of these ideological currents which existed in the Habsburg Empire (including Galicia) illustrates the time-space dynamics of Eastern European modernization processes around the middle of the nineteenth century.

Taking this as a basis, it is possible to analyze the social, religious and language-related conflicts that existed within Galician Jewry at the time. The difficult issue of how to deal with the ever-accelerating transformations “the right way” led to contradictory and highly differentiated attitudes, which were not always maintained consistently.



Nathan Samuely (1846, Stryj – 1921, Baden bei Wien), first became known as an author of literature written in Hebrew. It was only later that he came to be received as a German-language author. Samuely has widely fallen into oblivion, although his two-volume *Cultur-Bilder aus dem jüdischen Leben in Galizien* (1885/1892) paints an impressive picture of the wretched conditions under which most Jews in Galicia lived.



The work of **Karl Emil Franzos** (1847, Czortków – 1904, Berlin) will serve to demonstrate the collapse of the old structures and the search for new identity models, with a special view on assimilative processes in Jewish society. Franzos’ writings offer a critical analysis of the situation of Eastern Jewry. In his opinion, the difficult situation of Galician Jews was a cultural issue that could be solved by complete assimilation.



Saul Raphael Landau (1870, Krakow – 1943, New York), a close collaborator of Theodor Herzl, deserves special mention in this context. The 1880s were marked by political and ideological transformation in Europe. It was during those years that the discourse about “national identities” became rather dominant in the public debate. In consequence of this, European anti-Semitism and the failure of Jewish assimilation efforts led to the rise of Zionism as a Jewish national movement.

Approaches

In which way are Galician Jews depicted in the literary and journalistic works of Nathan Samuely, Karl Emil Franzos and Saul Raphael Landau, who were Jews themselves?

Which perspectives and dimensions are discernible in their writings? Could we consider this as an external view, i.e. a view from the outside? Although the three authors were Jewish, they did not grow up in a ghetto environment. They received an enlightened and secular education, through which they were able to develop a critical view on traditional and Chassidic Jewry.

Which narrative intentions can be identified and at which readership did the authors aim their works?

The Haskalah, assimilation or Zionism – three distinct solutions to improve the wretched situation of Galician Jewry? To what extent did Galician Jews join these movements?