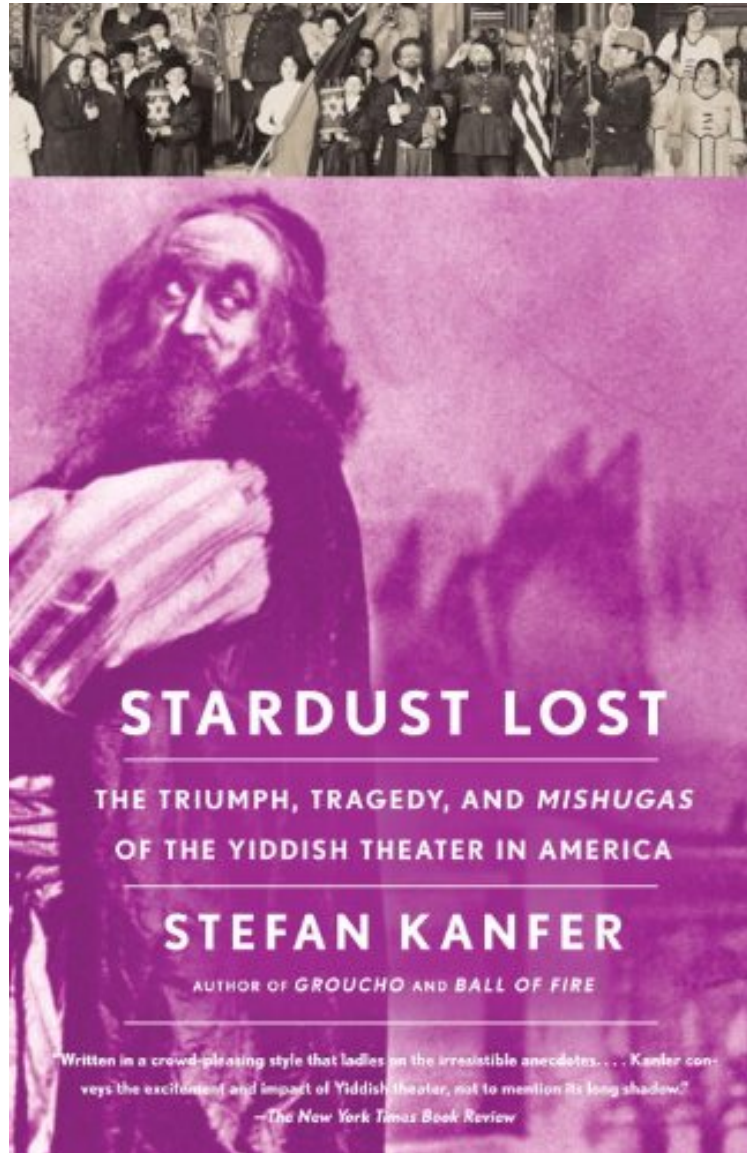


(Pdf free) Stardust Lost: The Triumph, Tragedy, and Meshugas of the Yiddish Theater in America

Stardust Lost: The Triumph, Tragedy, and Meshugas of the Yiddish Theater in America

Stefan Kanfer

*ePub | *DOC | audiobook | ebooks | Download PDF*



[Download](#)

[Read Online](#)

#2262371 in eBooks 2009-03-10 2009-03-12 File Name: B001V7U6M8 | File size: 75.Mb

Stefan Kanfer : Stardust Lost: The Triumph, Tragedy, and Meshugas of the Yiddish Theater in America before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Stardust Lost: The Triumph, Tragedy, and Meshugas of the Yiddish Theater in America:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Great read.By Barry F.This book provided a fascinating look at the history of the yiddish theater, the many individuals involved and the events that shaped it. I ordered it despite the two

reviews that focused on a few factual discrepancies. They seemed quite petty. To be sure there could be a name misstated, etc., but the bigger picture is a book that gives the reader a terrific feel for its subject matter. I would recommend this book for anyone wanting to learn about the Yiddish theater.⁶ of 7 people found the following review helpful. Entertaining But Beware of the Facts By Mark A. Stein This book contains an astonishing number of factual problems. Here are some of the most blatant from just the first 75 pages. 1) The original backer of Yiddish actor Jacob Adler is identified, even in the index, only as "Rosenberg." His full name (which isn't difficult to discover) was Israel Rosenberg. 2) An influential 1887 book called *The American Metropolis* is incorrectly identified as *The Great Metropolis*. 3) Abraham Cahan's famous novel, *The Rise of David Levinsky* is, at one point, called *The Education of David Levinsky*. 4) A reference is made to a "hate-monger named Rector Ahlwardt." The man's name was Herman Ahlwardt; he had previously been a rector (principal) of a school in Germany. 5) The reason cited for General Ulysses S. Grant's notorious order restricting the movement of Jews is completely incorrect. 4 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Full of errors indeed! By Boris Ibsen Thomas Mark Stein astutely notes several major errors in the book, and there are many others. Kanfer knows little about the Yiddish theater, and understands even less. He also leans heavily on other, better commentators, often without acknowledging his debt to them. To paraphrase a brilliant critic, what's written by Kanfer here isn't good, and what's good here isn't Kanfer's.

In *Stardust Lost*, Stefan Kanfer brings the colorful Yiddish stage roaring back to life. Born of ancient traditions stretching back to the drama of the Old Testament, the Yiddish theater was a vibrant part of the immigrant experience. Kanfer invokes the energy, belief, and pure chutzpah it took to establish and run the thriving, influential theaters. He reveals the nightly drama and comedy that played out behind the scenes as well as onstage, and introduces all the players—actors, divas, playwrights, directors, and producers—who made it possible. A richly evocative chronicle of its brief but dazzling existence in America, this is both an elegy for and a tribute to Yiddish theater—lost, but not forgotten. From the Trade Paperback edition.

Written in a crowd-pleasing style that ladles on the irresistible anecdotes. . . . Kanfer conveys the excitement and impact of Yiddish theater, not to mention its long shadow. . . . The New York Times Book Review; A lively history, capturing the spirit of the times and the sensibilities of the actors, writers and impresarios who, with great energy, passion and no training created an altogether new art. . . . In stylish prose that's a pleasure to read, Kanfer fuels the narrative with anecdotes and insights. . . . The Jewish Week; Kanfer must be commended for conveying his narrative in such vivid, sensual and often hilarious terms. . . . More than worth the price of admission. . . . Los Angeles Times Book Review; Kanfer's prose is clear, breezy, and entertaining. . . . Rivalry. Jealousy. Sabotage. Histrionics. Then as now, that's entertainment. . . . The New York Sun From the Trade Paperback edition. About the Author Stefan Kanfer is the author of *The Eighth Sin*, *A Summer World*, *The Last Empire*, and *Serious Business*. He was a writer and editor at *Time* for more than twenty years. A Literary Lion of the New York Public Library and the recipient of numerous writing awards, Kanfer is currently in the Distinguished Writer program at Southampton College, Long Island University. He lives in New York City and on Cape Cod. From the Hardcover edition. Excerpt. copy; Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. CHAPTER ONE THE FOUR INGREDIENTS For almost five thousand years the Jews needed no theater to relate their story. They saw themselves as participants in an epic teeming with conquests and enslavements, revelations and miracles. A burning bush that speaks, the parting of the Red Sea, a rod turned into a snake, a woman turned into a pillar of salt—where was the playwright that could match God's imagination? Even the setbacks were of a grand scale: expulsions from Eden and Egypt, lost wars, subjugation. What stage could reproduce these incidents? The scholar Max I. Dimont was so impressed by the theatrical quality of Jewish history that he divided it into three acts. "When the curtain rises on the first 2,000 years," he wrote in *The Indestructible Jews*, "we will note that it proceeds like a Greek predestination drama, with God seemingly the author and divine director." But there was a difference. In the classic Greek plays, the characters remain unaware of their destinies. In the Jewish predestination drama, Jehovah gives them their parts and tells them of His expectations—expectations that will require martyrdom and perseverance. The Old Testament's pivotal scene is the essence of dramatic tension. Abraham, the man Kierkegaard dubbed the Father of Faith, makes ready to offer up his son Isaac—until Jehovah reprieves him. A covenant is struck between man and Jehovah: if this true believer remains obedient to the divine will, he and his descendants will be the Chosen People: "I will make of thee a great nation," promises the Voice, "and I will bless thee and make thy name great." From then on, human sacrifice is no longer necessary in this tribe; worship and a moral life are sufficient unto the day. Unlike the multitude of pagan gods who surrender to temptations and war amongst themselves, Dimont observes, "the God of Abraham acts with a moral purpose and a preconceived plan. He is not a capricious god who acts on a day-to-day basis. The Jews know what God expects of them and can therefore make long range plans." By the time Abraham's descendants settle in Egypt, they are suffused with the idea of monotheism. It will not be relinquished in the presence of their enemies. There will be many such adversaries over the course of history. Often these enemies come from without, like the Philistines; but sometimes they come from within, irresistible temptations that change the individual

and threaten his people. Those enticements become an integral part of the melodrama. The gods of the Hittites, the Assyrians, the Egyptians, the Greeks and Romans are subject to follies, passions, and mistakes. Jehovah never exhibits such weaknesses. He leaves the scandals to his all-too-human followers, who never experience a shortage of family violence. Cain murders Abel. Jacob betrays his brother Esau. Absalom rebels against his father, dies in the field, and King David's cry resounds through the eons: "Would God I had died for thee, O, Absalom, my son, my son!" Joseph is cast out by his jealous brothers, who rend his coat of many colors and falsely report his death. And should the reader's attention flag, sexual adventures are there to pique it. Sodom is destroyed because of the uncontrolled lives of its citizens. David is so besotted by Bathsheba that he sends her husband off to war so that he can disport with her. The mighty Samson, seduced and weakened by Delilah, is destroyed for lust. The elders leering at Susannah, the ruinous fleshpots of Gomorrah, and, on a higher plane, the explicit love songs of Solomon ("My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and I was moved by him") all speak of the pleasures and snares of carnal desire. And this is only the beginning. After the Holy Writ comes the second part of the Jewish saga, when Jehovah can no longer be seen in a burning bush or heard on Mount Sinai. Twice the great Temple in Jerusalem is destroyed, first by the Babylonians in 587 B.C. After it has been rebuilt and the city regained by the Hebrews, Roman troops raze the Temple and slay thousands of Jewish men, women, and children. This catastrophe in A.D. 70 marks the end of the Jewish state and the beginning of the Diaspora. "Without Zion," remarks historian Nathan Ausubel, the Jews are "like children deprived of their mother." Wherever they disperse, they remember Jerusalem, setting up scrolls of the Torah; the first five books of the Bible; in their makeshift temples, nourishing the hope of a Messiah who will deliver them from their exile, endlessly poring over the scriptures in search of meaning, speaking in prayer; and sometimes in one-sided conversation with a silent Jehovah. This monological style, popularized by the "Tevye" short stories of Sholem Aleichem, and musicalized in *Fiddler on the Roof*, can be heard to this day: "Dear God, why did you have to make my poor old horse lose his shoe just before the Sabbath? That wasn't nice. It's enough you pick on me, bless me with five daughters, a life of poverty. What have you got against my horse? Sometimes I think that when things are too quiet up there, You say to Yourself, 'Let's see, what kind of mischief can I play.'" The going out from the Middle East is only the first of many such sorrows. In the early Christian era, the Jews are singled out for refusing to accept Jesus as the Messiah. Preachers find a ready target: Gregory of Nyssa sees Hebrews as "Murderers of the Lord, assassins of the prophets, rebels and detesters of God." Saint John Chrysostom thunders, "Brothel and theater, the synagogue is also a cave of pirates and the lair of wild beasts." The legend of the Wandering Jew, whom Jesus condemned to roam the earth endlessly, though mentioned nowhere in the New Testament, is related by Christian speakers and takes root from the thirteenth century on. By the Middle Ages this antipathy hardens into doctrine. Pockets of tolerance exist throughout Europe; the Jews enjoy an unprecedented economic and religious freedom in the Arab-Christian culture of Spain. Yet a sword dangles over them at all times. Some nations force them into ghettos; others make them wear special clothing and caps to identify them as outsiders. In Germany they are forced to swear an oath of fealty on the carcass of a pig. The Passion Play at Oberammergau features Jews in horned hats to suggest their connection to Satan, and Jewish religious figures are portrayed as evil and sadistic. The sights and sounds affront rabbis; they condemn theater as "the seat of frivolity." Jews are considered the devil's allies whenever a plague surfaces. Martin Luther excoriates them when they fail to embrace his doctrines. "Therefore be on your guard against the Jews," he warns, "knowing that wherever they have their synagogues, nothing is found but a den of devils." Spain turns from oasis to killing ground during the Inquisition. Jews are burned, murdered, tortured, and finally expelled from the country in 1492, just as Columbus sets sail for America. For centuries they're forbidden to live in England. The absence of Hebrews makes no difference; anti-Semitism without Jews is all the rage during the Elizabethan era. In *The Jew of Malta*, Christopher Marlowe makes his villain a scheming, outspoken Jewish merchant named Barabas: "Now I will show myself to have more of the serpent than the dove." Shakespeare, in his turn, seizes on the incident of Dr. Rodrigo Lopez, a visiting Spanish convert who has been supplying information about his native country to the queen. Lopez runs afoul of the Earl of Essex. The aristocrat dislikes foreigners who have greater royal access than he has, and attempts to frame the doctor for espionage. At first Elizabeth will have none of it; but Essex persists and eventually gets his way. En route to the block, the crowd shouting with excitement, the executioner's sword glinting in the sun, Lopez protests that he loves Elizabeth even more than he adores Jesus Christ. It does no good; the converted Jew is publicly hanged, castrated, his carcass pulled into pieces by four horses, to the amusement of the crowd. Shakespeare follows the incident with his own contribution. The Bard, states Anthony Burgess in his biography, "was not above exploiting the general bitterness towards Jews by writing a play in which a Jew is the villain; not a treacherous one, however, but a usurious one. Barabas is a Machiavellian monster; Shylock merely, and literally, wants his pound of flesh." Shakespeare, of course, is incapable of creating a two-dimensional character, and the man is immortalized by his famous plea: "Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions?" All very well for the modern playgoer, but in the Bard's time and long after, audiences would see only a beaky moneylender rubbing his hands, alternately purring at his Christian enemies and planning their destruction. On rare occasions the Jews find a welcome. The city of Vilna is created by Gedymin, ruler of the grand duchy, when he ventures out on a hunt for game. He sleeps where one of his arrows falls, and dreams of a big wolf wearing an iron

shield and howling as loudly as a pack of a hundred wolves. Awakening in fright, he asks his priest for an interpretation. The wolf, says the holy man, represents an important place that will rise where he stands, and the roar indicates its future reputation. Accordingly, Gedymin builds a city on the site and names it for the river Vilia flowing through it. Anxious for a population to fill his new streets, he invites all newcomers regardless of their religion, and Jews...