

From the
Shtetl
to the
Stage

The Odyssey of a Wandering Actor



Alexander Granach

With a new introduction by **Herbert S. Lewis**

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CONTENTS

<i>Introduction to the Transaction Edition</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xxiii
<i>I I Bear the Name of a Friendly Man</i>	1
<i>II How I Came into This World on a Rainy Night</i>	6
<i>III How I Was Exorcised of a Little Toothless Goblin</i>	10
<i>IV My Big Brothers, or One Is Missing</i>	13
<i>V Mama Dreams</i>	17
<i>VI Two Families—Four Friendships</i>	21
<i>VII The First Victim</i>	26
<i>VIII He Could Not Read the Bible. But Neither Had He Heard the Sermon of the Village Priest</i>	29
<i>IX We Go Out into the Wide World, but It Wears the Same Face</i>	33
<i>X The Village Spits Us Out</i>	35
<i>XI The County Seat Horodenka—Fierce Competition</i>	40
<i>XII My Rabbi-Teacher, Schimshale from Milnitz, for Whom You Would Do Absolutely Anything</i>	46
<i>XIII Perhaps My First Part</i>	54
<i>XIV Moische, Does One Smash Windows?</i>	60
<i>XV Our Family Grows Smaller, Our Poverty Greater</i>	63
<i>XVI My Brother Schmiel, with the Rich Imagination, Comes Home</i>	68
<i>XVII Everyone Fights with the Weapons He Has</i>	72
<i>XVIII People and the Awakening of Love in Horodenka</i>	77

XIX	<i>Away from Home It Is Cold—but Instructive</i>	87
XX	<i>Curiosity</i>	95
XXI	<i>It Is Good to Have a Big Brother When You Are Far from Home</i>	102
XXII	<i>Mal'ka</i>	110
XXIII	<i>The Theater</i>	116
XXIV	<i>A Dog, a Cart, and a Woman</i>	128
XXV	<i>First Steps in Berlin</i>	137
XXVI	<i>The Word</i>	147
XXVII	<i>There Is Something in a Name</i>	158
XXVIII	<i>And the Crooked Shall Be Straight</i>	169
XXIX	<i>Alas for a Beautiful World!</i>	180
XXX	<i>Almost a Stranger in My Native Land</i>	187
XXXI	<i>The Prospect for the Common Man</i>	197
XXXII	<i>Let People See What People Are Like!</i>	204
XXXIII	<i>"We'll March Right into Sunny Italy!"</i>	212
XXXIV	<i>Roads Always Lead Somewhere</i>	219
XXXV	<i>Life Comes to Meet You Halfway</i>	227
XXXVI	<i>A Promise That I Shall Always Keep</i>	242
XXXVII	<i>"Home, Home—There's Where a Welcome Waits You!"</i>	251
XXXVIII	<i>A Man Is Not a Tree</i>	261
XXXIX	<i>Interrupted Rehearsals</i>	268
XL	<i>Shylock</i>	275

Introduction to the Transaction Edition

ALEXANDER GRANACH played on Broadway two decades before Tevye did and he started out in a very similar place. Unlike Tevye, however, Granach had been a baker rather than a dairyman. Although *From the Shtetl to the Stage* presents a much darker, coarser picture of life for Eastern European Jews than does the romanticized *Fiddler on the Roof* that wowed Broadway and theatergoers around the world, the beginning of the stories are similar. They start with an observant Jewish family, with lots of children, living in poverty in a village in one of the “backward” regions of the Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Alexander Granach [Jessaja Szajko Gronish] was born in 1893 as the ninth child of his family, and there were more children to come.

Granach’s book belongs, in part, to a well-known genre of Eastern European Jewish writing. These are accounts, sometimes fictional and sometimes autobiographical, of a young boy’s life (and it usually is a boy), from an orthodox Jewish family, and his struggle to break away into the wider “modern” world—culturally, intellectually, and perhaps politically. Solomon Maimon, the best-known pioneer of this tradition, was, like Granach, an impetuous young man who broke away from his powerful traditional religious upbringing. Unlike Granach, however, Solomon was learned and skillful in Talmud from an early age, and when he finally arrived in Berlin in 1780 it was with the dream of making his way in the world of science, philosophy, and Enlightenment learning (*haskalah*, as it has been known in Jewish history). (See Maimon 1957.) There were many young men who broke away in this manner from the late eighteenth through the early twentieth century, and numerous narratives of their struggles, but perhaps none as full, vivid, and self-revealing as Granach’s.

The novel most closely associated with Granach, one that he discovered and devoured when he was 17, is *Der Pojaz* [Poyats],

The Clown of Barnow. In Karl Emil Franzos' book, a poor young wagon driver with a passion and talent for mimicry and story telling discovers theater for the first time in the city of Czernowitz (near Granach's home district). He realizes on the spot that he has a calling as an actor! The protagonist, Sender (Alexander!) Kurlander, attends a Yiddish version of *The Merchant of Venice*, and the author creates a wonderful scene in which his young hero reacts to what is happening to Shylock. (This scene, that must have inspired a similar one in Granach's book, can be found anthologized in Ausubel 1967.)

But Franzos wrote fiction, and his hero is prevented from attaining his goal by illness and death. Granach, in contrast, succeeded and became one of the stars of his time. And for the most part Granach's book is autobiography, though with some fictional elements added. Alexander Granach was a brilliant storyteller and a sharp-eyed observer of life in those poor towns in which he and his family struggled to survive and make a living. The story he tells—usually realistic, humorous, and sometimes bitter—has pleased readers fortunate to encounter this book over the years. Granach was adventurous and he makes a point of the great curiosity that drove him on, leading him to run away from his family four times. (He was brought back twice by his father and once by his brother.) *From the Shtetl to the Stage* carries us far beyond the villages and towns of Galicia to the vital political, intellectual, and theatrical world of Berlin and Munich in the Weimar era, where he would make his mark. He also gives vivid accounts of the misery and idiocy of military life and trench warfare in World War I, and of his captivity as a prisoner of war in Italy and his daring escape across the Alps into Switzerland.

Who was Alexander Granach?

Alexander Granach died too soon; he was only fifty-two, beginning a new life, establishing himself in Hollywood and New York. He was a happy man at the beginning of 1945: his book was about to be published, World War II was coming to an end, and he hoped to be reunited with the woman he called his wife, his love, after years of separation during his various exiles (Granach 2008). But he died on March 14, 1945, the result of an embolism after an appendectomy. At the time he became ill he was acting on Broadway with the renowned American actor, Frederic March, in John Hersey's

hit play, *A Bell for Adano*. His book was published within months of his death, in English in New York and in German in Stockholm. Alexander Granach departed this world before he could make his name known in America as it had been in Germany and Eastern Europe before Hitler and the Gestapo drove him out, but in the years that were granted to him he had traveled a long way—geographically, culturally, and professionally.

Granach began life in a farming community in Galicia, in one of four Jewish families living among 100 Ukrainian Catholic families. By the time he died he had acted, lived, and loved his way through Galicia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Germany, Italy (as a soldier and a prisoner of war), Poland, the Soviet Union, Switzerland (twice: once escaping from the prisoner of war camp, later escaping both Hitler and Stalin), and the United States. From a childhood of poverty and toil--and fun and adventure--with only a few years of classroom education behind him, having escaped death or maiming on the front lines of World War I slaughter, Granach became a theatrical sensation in Weimar Germany. He was a prominent member of that company of actors, directors, and writers who captivated the theater-going public in Germany after the First World War.

Granach, whose roots in the poor and “alien” or “backward” culture of Eastern European *shtetl* Jewry he never would “or could” deny, became the working, partying, and intellectual companion of leading figures of Weimar culture. Among his many friends were writers like Heinrich Mann, Hermann Hesse, Lion Feuchtwanger, Else Lasker-Schüler, Franz Werfel, Arnold Zweig, David Bergelson, Alfred Döblin, Franz Pfemfert, Manfred George, and Theodor Adorno; playwrights Bertolt Brecht, Ernst Toller, Erich Mühsam; stage and film directors Leopold Jessner, Erwin Piscator, Leopold Lindtberg, Berthold Viertel, G. W. Pabst, William Dieterle, Fritz Lang, Ernst Lubitsch, and F. W. Murnau; among the legion of his actor friends were Gustav Von Wangenheim, Carola Neher, Ernst Busch, Marlene Dietrich, Leonard Steckel, Salka Viertel, Fritz Kortner, Conrad Veidt, Lotte Lenya, Peter Lorre, Helene Weigel (Brecht’s wife, previously a lover of Granach’s), and Granach’s one-time lover and life-long friend, Elisabeth Bergner (“the greatest draw of the Weimar theatre” [Willett 1988: 166]). Included in the list of his friends were two prominent Berlin rabbis, Joachim Prinz

and Emil Bernhard Cohn. He would later reestablish many of these connections in Hollywood and New York, where so many German artists, mostly Jewish, also took refuge.

In his book our hero narrates his journey from the village of Wierzbowce in a corner of the old Austro-Hungarian Empire as he makes his way through the towns and cities of Galicia as a baker's assistant and journeyman, often without his family, and arrives at the great capital, Berlin, when he is sixteen years old. He writes of his adventures during his training as an actor, at the school of Europe's leading theater producer, Max Reinhardt, and then of his service and terrible experiences in The Great War, which interrupted the start of his career. He ends his story in 1920, in Munich, when he is offered his "dream role" and prepares to play Shylock for the first time! Alas, he didn't live to relate the story of his life from 1920 to 1945 as he had intended. There is a lot to tell.

Although, like the hero of *Der Pojaz*, Jessaja had no idea until he was fourteen that such a phenomenon as theater existed, from the time he was taken to his first Yiddish play in Lemberg (Lwow) he wanted nothing else than to be an actor. He arrived in Berlin with hardly any formal education, almost penniless, with his only assets his baker's union card and his curiosity and chutzpah. He fell in with groups of left-wing workers, mostly from Russia, who shared his interest in Yiddish theater. These socialists and anarchists introduced him to politics, literature, philosophy, and art through their reading and discussion groups. These years gave him an intellectual awareness of the injustices and inequalities of the world with which he was so well acquainted more informally in his own life. His education was expanded greatly when, after having been tutored in the German language by "the greatest speech teacher of his time," he was accepted to the Max Reinhardt acting school—possibly the world's most prestigious.

He read widely in the canon of German and European literature, absorbing the culture and making it his own. Reinhardt encouraged this manner of study as an integral part of an actor's education. One of the basic principles of his school was that actors must receive not only technical training but also an intellectual grounding as men of culture, with the spiritual strength to become creative theatre artists. (Zer-Zion forthcoming: 12)

Later his education in the arts, politics, and philosophy would be honed by the hours he spent in such intellectual centers as “the old Café des Westens” (pp. 182-183, 272) and the Romanisches Café (Salka Viertel 1969: 101).

Having succeeded in learning German well, entering the elite theater school, undergoing a painful and dangerous operation to straighten his knock-kneed “baker’s legs,” (pp. 169-180) he began his acting career. “It was the season of 1913-14, the harvest time of the Reinhardt Theater, the high point in the development of that great artist” (p. 180), but not long after the season ended came the Great War, and Alexander’s career was set aside and his life put in mortal danger.

When he was able to return to the theater four years later, after the carnage and the confusion of the war years, there was a major change in German theater, and Alexander Granach was at the center of that development.

The first few years after the war was the great era of Expressionist art, theater, and film in Germany, and the stage assumed a leading position among the arts as the classic works were increasingly supplemented by the new plays of the disillusioned younger generation (see Patterson 1981, Willett 1988). Max Reinhardt had led the way through his production of the early expressionist plays of August Strindberg and Frank Wedekind, but after the Great War the German stage was flooded with new writers, directors, and actors creating a steady stream of critical, angry, rebellious plays. Granach writes,

The years that the war had taken from me were not lost: I was stronger, more mature now, but not quieter! I could not be quiet. I cried out and shouted bloody murder together with the whole young generation who had come home. We found ourselves in a world that was fat and cowardly and wanted to be left in peace. We cried out our disillusionment, our despair, our protest in its face. Youth cried out in art. With stiff stylized gestures, we in the theater cried out expressionistically against the older generation, against the old teachings, against the old traditions, against old customs, but especially against fathers! Hundreds of father-and-son dramas were produced..... Hundreds of plays accused and cried out and raved, and I cried out and raved with them. I could make good use of my experiences in my work (p. 273).

Granach, one “of the best-known Berlin actors of the 1920s” (Willett 1979: 71), was especially successful in roles that called

for the “Schrei”—cry, shout, scream, shriek, howl—that crying “bloody murder” that embodied this rebellion. With its “primitivism” (Patterson 1981: 51, 57), the scream was “designed to reflect the uncontrollable emotional depths of the subconscious, so as to appeal directly to the same pre-rational level in the spectators’ psyches” (Innes 2008: 188; cf. Kuhns 1997: 94). It was at the core of Expressionist drama. According to the actor and director Berthold Viertel, “the people’s favorites were character actors, not the handsome, well-proportioned leading men. It wasn’t only critics who preferred the villain to the dreamboat. In German aesthetics madness counted as nobler than common sense” (quoted in Willett 1988: 162). This was Granach’s forte! The Expressionist era and the “Schrei” lasted only a few years, however, to be succeeded by more explicitly Leftist political theater whose best-known proponents were Bertolt Brecht and Erwin Piscator, and Granach moved along with them.

He was a leading player in many of the key new dramas of the day, such as: *Earth Spirit*, by Wedekind, *Cain*, by Anton Wildgans, *From Morning till Midnight* and *Gas*, by George Kaiser, *The Depraved Mr. Chu*, by Julius Berstl, *Parricide*, by Arnolt Bronnen, *The Machine-Wreckers* and *Hoppla, We’re Alive*, by Ernst Toller, *Tidal Wave*, by Alfons Paquet, *For Reasons of State: Sacco and Vanzetti*, by Erich Mühsam, *Professor Mamlock*, by Friedrich Wolf, and several plays of Bertolt Brecht including *Drums in the Night* and *Man Equals Man*. He regularly drew excellent reviews from the leading critics as he performed many key roles in all sorts of plays, classical and contemporary, those calling for his skills as a comedian (Puck, Mephisto, Mosca in *Volpone*) as well as the heavy dramatic ones like Macbeth, Shylock, Danton (in Büchner’s *Danton’s Death*) and Franz Moor in Schiller’s *The Robbers*.

There is a long tradition of writing about Jews and the German theater, and it continues today. Writers from Arnold Zweig in 1928 to Galili Shahar (2004) and Shelly Zer-Zion (forthcoming, in Malkin and Rokem) investigate the various elements that feature in the prominent role of the Jews, and Granach figures in these discussions. Granach stands out not only because of his success with the “Schrei” and the way his short and once-misshapen legs and his movements may or may not have represented the imperfect “Jewish body” (Shahar 2004: 2-7; Zer-Zion forthcoming; Gilman 1991) but

because of his openly Eastern-European Jewish origins. The playwright Arnolt Bronnen wrote that the “immense vitality of Eastern Judaism streamed out of [Granach], out of his curious eyes and his emphasized movements, out of the words that poured in a raucous voice from a drunken mouth” (in Shahar 2004: 80). There were other Jews who had come to Germany from Galicia and succeeded on the stage but no prominent ones who epitomized the “Eastern Jew” as Granach was said to (Zer-Zion forthcoming: 27).

The predominant German and German-Jewish attitude toward “Ostjuden” was usually extremely negative: the “Galizianer,” especially, had been looked down upon for generations for their “backwardness,” their traditional (orthodox) religiosity, and perhaps their poverty. But just when Granach rose to prominence there was a trend for some Jewish intellectuals to *idealize* the wild Jew from the East, to see the Ostjude as the “real” Jew, the embodiment of tradition in contrast to the assimilated, “enlightened,” and denatured, German Jew. As the historian Steven Aschheim put it, “Even amongst Zionists... the cult of the Ostjuden was one important expression of the rebellion of German-Jewish youth against German Jewish bourgeois life” (1982: 191). Appropriately, the individual who Alexander credits with having “discovered” him and inspired him to seek a career on the German stage rather than be satisfied with Yiddish theater was Hermann Struck, one of those individuals who contributed to the “cult of the Ostjuden” through his art (p. 146). Struck’s drawings accompanied Arnold Zweig’s book, *The Eastern Jewish Countenance*, and portrayed faces that “[were] not hideous nor depraved but reflected beauty, hidden strength, and great sensitivity” (Aschheim 1982: 199). Granach was in the right place at the right time—but he was also a dedicated, disciplined, professional actor.

He also acted in many movies. He was most famous for his role in the first Dracula film, *Nosferatu*, in which he plays the mad real estate agent, Knock—the counterpart of Renfield in later Dracula movies. The director was the legendary F. W. Murnau, his fellow student and friend from the Max Reinhardt acting academy. Two other significant German films in which he played leading roles were *Schatten Eine nächtliche Halluzination* (*Warning Shadows*, 1923) and *Kameradschaft* (*Comradeship*, 1931).

When Hitler came to power in 1933 Granach had to flee Germany; he was not only a Jew but was also associated with the political Left. He spent 1934 and early 1935 acting with theater companies performing in the Yiddish language in Poland, and then joined a number of other prominent German left-wing writers and theater people in the Soviet Union. The Hungarian-born playwright Julius Hay knew Granach at that time and wrote of that “highly regarded and extremely talented actor,” who, “[s]peaking both Russian and Yiddish perfectly.... got one part after another with the major Soviet film companies and with the Jewish Theatre in Kiev” (Hay 1975: 177). But like many of his compatriots, largely innocent believers in the great Soviet experiment and glorious Communist future, Granach was caught in Stalin’s murderous purges and he was fortunate to get out alive. (See Hay 1975: 216-217; Pike 1982; Müller 2008.) He was imprisoned in Kiev for more than two weeks in 1937, a victim of a “denunciation,” accused by one of his colleagues of being a Trotskyite and an agent of German intelligence! Granach escaped because the prominent German-Jewish writer, Lion Feuchtwanger, who was held in high regard at that time by Stalin, sent a letter to Stalin on his behalf (Klein and Kruk 1994: 119-120).

Granach reached Switzerland, played Macbeth and Danton in Zurich, but the Swiss authorities would not give him asylum—their usual practice. He was fortunate to leave Europe in May of 1938 “aboard one of the very last ships to leave Lisbon for New York” (Gad Granach: 39). He had friends, two brothers, a sister, and his mother in New York, but no money and not a word of English. (He could speak Yiddish, Ukrainian, Polish, German, Russian, and Italian.) He worked hard learning the new language and in March of 1939 some of his old friends from the German film industry, now established in Hollywood, invited him to come west. He began his new film career auspiciously with the role of Kopalski in the popular film, *Ninotchka*, starring Greta Garbo, directed by Ernst Lubitsch.

Granach is credited with roles in another nineteen Hollywood films—most of them small parts. When given a part that permitted him to show his talent he got excellent reviews, most notably for his striking portrayal of Gestapo Inspector Alois Gruber in *Hangmen Also Die!* (1943), written in part by Bertold Brecht and directed by Fritz Lang. Those who write about “Weimar in Hollywood”

often note the painful irony that the Jewish expatriate actors were so often cast in the role of Nazis, but Granach—who played plenty of Nazis—took a different view. “I played a Russian for Lubitsch in ‘Ninotchka,’ a Pole in ‘So Ends Our Night,’ a German for Fritz Lang in ‘Hangmen Also Die,’ a Greek in ‘Half Way to Shanghai,’ [a Spaniard in ‘For Whom the Bell Tolls’], and in ‘Voice in the Wind’ an Italian. So I became international in Hollywood” (Klein and Kruk 1994: 201).

In his last few years, aside from his work in films, Granach was engaged in writing this book and acting wherever he could, including giving readings from the German version of his manuscript and doing scenes from classic theater roles before German speaking audiences. His last performance, on Broadway, was as Tomasino, the leader of the fishermen in *A Bell for Adano*, but he died during the run of the play and his journey ended in Montefiore cemetery in St. Albans, Queens, New York, in the section reserved for people from Kolomea, Galicia.

Granach’s book reveals much about himself but it is worthwhile getting the perspective of some of those who knew him. Miriam Rochlin, a dancer, choreographer and educator, daughter of Rabbi Emil Bernhard Cohn, who remembers him from her childhood in Berlin, had this to say: “Granach ate life with a big spoon! He was impulsive, noisy—he was terrific” (personal communication). From his book and from other stories about him it is clear that he was a risk-taker and he repeatedly makes the point that he was powerfully motivated by curiosity that drove him to take chances (see chapter 20). His generosity was famous; Julius Hay wrote that, “[someone... suggested] ‘Why don’t you touch Alex Granach for a small loan?’ ... He’s rolling in money, he loves helping people out, and it doesn’t really matter if you forget to pay him back” (1975:176-177).

Granach was a lover of people and parties and crowds and tumult. “He would play with us kids—roughhouse. We couldn’t get enough of it,” Miriam Rochlin recalls. He loved to act, he loved to tell stories, and he loved the stage. “Alex would steal the show at any gathering. Not on purpose—he was just being himself; he was such a powerful personality,” said Rochlin. Although he greatly enjoyed his fame he also believed in friends and friendship—the title of the first chapter is, “I bear the name of a friendly man.” And

he was no snob. Although he associated with the greats of Weimar Berlin and Hollywood, according to Leopold Lindtberg, a stage and film director who knew him well, “He was the most sociable and generous friend. . . . In his circle were numbered actors, mostly young and hungry, writers—schnorrers [free-loaders] and prominent ones—also respectable people, hand-workers, chauffeurs, and girls, all colors and social classes” (Akademie der Künste 1971: 15). Alexander Granach particularly loved women.

The German edition of his book, *Da geht ein Mensch* (“There Goes a Mensch” [a human being, a real man]) is subtitled “an autobiographical novel.” We can’t say what narrative bits in the book fall into the category of “novel” rather than “autobiography” but we know two significant facts that he does not mention in the book: at the time Alexander went off to war in 1915 he was married. And a son was born to his wife on March 19, 1915. We know this, for one thing, because his son, Gad (originally Gerhard) Granach, who lives in Jerusalem today, tells us so in *his* book *Where Is Home? Stories from the Life of a German-Jewish Émigré*.

Alexander Granach and Martha Guttmann met when they both “moved in Berlin’s anarchist-syndicalist circles” before the war (G. Granach 2009: 2): “They thought of themselves as oh-so-modern and progressive then—into nudist culture, homeopathy, and being vegetarians” (2). Alexander and Martha were married, Gad was conceived, and then Alexander left for his regiment in the Ukraine. As Gad tells it, his parents were not well suited to each other. His father was on a rapid rise—a great partygoer, bon vivant, a bohemian, participating in the heady social scene. As Alexander himself writes (273): “I got to know new circles, new people, there was a gay young set in Schwabing [the bohemian quarter of Munich], studio parties at a different place every night. . . . The young generation that had returned home disillusioned was sowing its wild oats in sexual orgies.” His son adds, “When he became famous, the Berlin papers were filled with his escapades, scandals, and affairs” (2009: 7) and this was not the life for Martha: “She was a woman from a respectable middle-class family engaged in political issues. Father, in contrast, was an artist moving up in his career, and my mother was holding him back. Politics and bohemia do not fit together well” (2009: 6).

Alexander maintained a close relationship with his son until they both fled Berlin in 1933. Granach often took Gerhard to rehearsals, to performances, and even to parties. He was instrumental in getting his son to safety, out of Germany before the Holocaust, through organizations that made possible his immigration to Palestine in 1936 when few Jewish refugees were permitted into the country. (Martha Guttman also emigrated from Germany while there was still time and lived out her days in Israel.)

Neither Alexander nor Martha married again, but Alexander had a great many affairs and many women in his life. Despite adventures with women (vividly portrayed by Julius Hay 1975: 177), Granach maintained a special relation with one person from whom he was separated by his forced exiles. The American-born Swiss actress, Lotte Lieven, whom he had met and acted with in Germany, was the woman Granach called his beloved and his wife. According to Hay,

Yet through it all Alex's heart remained true to a Swiss blonde who visited him—wherever he might be—at far from frequent intervals... Granach was most concerned that everyone should recognize the Swiss girl as his lawfully wedded wife. He introduced her as such when he was sober and he bellowed the fact to the four winds when drunk. ... Also for the duration of these visits from Switzerland he wore a wedding ring, and his visitor did likewise (1975: 177).

Much of what we know about Alex's life from 1934 through 1942 comes from the 279 letters he regularly wrote to Lotte Lieven during those years, which were recently published (Granach 2008).

Granach "was never ashamed of his Eastern European background, quite the contrary" (Gad Granach nd: 18). He was an unusual figure in the elite cultural life of Weimar Germany because of his open identification as an Ostjude. He would sometimes take his son to a restaurant in the Scheunenviertel, the quarter of Berlin associated with the Eastern European Jewish "proletarians," which Alexander vividly describes on page 139. Says his son, On Grenadierstrasse people came from all sides calling "Granach! Granach's here!" Everyone knew him and called him the "Koenig der Ostjuden" "King of the Eastern Jews. Father was in his element, and I sat like the successor to the throne" (Gad Granach 2009: 19; also Lindtberg in Archives der Künste 1971: 15). When groups of young Jews who

pioneered Jewish theater in Palestine came to Germany in the 1920s, Granach befriended them and introduced them to the German theater scene there, just as he welcomed visiting Yiddish theater troupes from Eastern Europe (Zer-Zion forthcoming: 18; Hamerow: 70).

Granach wanted to participate in Yiddish theater as well as to act on the infinitely more prestigious German stage and he performed with Yiddish troupes in Germany, Poland and the Soviet Union. When he came to New York he was frustrated because he wanted to do serious, uplifting works that would educate and “improve” people (Gad Granach personal communication; Zer-Zion forthcoming). But the New York audience, as those in Berlin, years earlier, only wanted more of “*A Drama with Singing and Dancing*” (p.140). When he performed with Maurice Schwartz’s company on a visit in 1931 he “was hooted off the stage by a wild mob shouting, ‘We want Michelesko’”—a musical comedy star (Kadison and Buloff 1992:103). As Gad Granach tells it, his father was performing Uriel Acosta’s stirring monologue, a classic of the Yiddish stage in which the tragic hero defends his right to seek and speak the truth, “as only he could do this monologue, with all his force and dramatics.” (Hitler would soon take power and the German consul was at the performance!) “... an older women in the first row, said, clearly audibly, ‘Young Man, don’t talk so much, sing a song already!’” (Gad Granach 1979: 144).

Granach started writing this book in California when a curfew for aliens of German origin forced him to stay home every night after 8 P.M. “It is not so much about myself as it is about my people and my homeland and my wanderings,” he told Ezra Goodman (1943). Elisabeth Bergner claimed, in a tribute to him after his death, that she and her husband had listened to his first stories and insisted that he had to write a whole book (Klein and Kruk 1994: 177-178). But more than a decade earlier, Arnold Zweig had sketched the outline of Granach’s life story in the chapter he devotes to Alexander in his book on the Jews in German theater (1928: 150-156), so his book must have had a long gestation as oral lore. By 1943 his readings from the manuscript had begun to cause a stir in the exile community and it was being touted to publishers. The West Coast representative for Doubleday, Doran & Co. wrote to his press: “Now for something hot. I learned last week that a man by the name of ALEXANDER

GRANACH had written a book which ... he read to Thomas Mann and Franz Werfel. Both those authors were so enthusiastic about it that Werfel immediately wired Viking, his publisher, telling him about the book." Werfel had written his agent calling it "one of the most remarkable and most talented productions of the German emigration..." (Koepke 1989: 1418-1420).

Doubleday, Doran entered into negotiations with Granach and the task of translation was undertaken by Willard Trask, a highly respected translator—who also translated the memoirs of Casanova! Granach finished the corrections shortly before his death. Wulf Koepke writes, "Werfel was certainly right: *Da geht ein Mensch* is one of the most alive autobiographies in this autobiography rich century" (Koepke 1989: 1421).

The continuing popularity of this book in Germany fifty-five years after its first publication is a testament to its staying power. I hope that contemporary readers of the English version will agree with Koepke and Werfel's judgment and will gain much pleasure and knowledge from Alexander Granach's wonderful work.

Herbert S. Lewis

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The German version of this book, *Da geht ein Mensch*, has regularly been in print in Europe in numerous editions since 1945, and the distinguished German actor, Mario Adorf, recorded it as an audio book. There have been two books devoted to Alexander Granach published in Germany (Akademie der Künste 1971, Klein and Kruk 1994), as well as the recently published volume of his letters to Lotte Lieven (A. Granach 2008). All of this literature is in German, but there are a growing number of articles in English that feature Granach and his place in the social and cultural history of theater in Weimar Germany and in shtetl and ghetto literature. See, for instance, Hubach, Schmidt, Stenberg, Shahar, Zer-Zion, and the Malkin and Rokem volume.

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Acknowledgments

THE REPUBLICATION of this book is the result of a happy coincidence. Several years ago, my late wife Marcia and I were staying with her cousin Anne on Cape Cod and I was trying to convince another cousin, Mark, that the Internet could be an invaluable aid for him when he teaches adult extension courses about movies at Dartmouth College. I told him that IMDB (International Movie Data Base) is especially useful for tracking the careers of actors, directors, and writers. Skeptical Mark said, “Bogart is easy! If you could find out about that cousin of ours—then I’d be impressed.” “What cousin?” I asked, and he told this story: “His name is Alexander Something-or-Other. I took my mother and father to see *Nosferatu* in Greenwich Village many years ago, and when this crazy character was climbing the walls and crying for spiders and flies to eat, my mother said, ‘Oh, that’s Cousin Alexander. He used to bounce Helen and me on his knees and sing to us in Kolomea.’”

A quick search for IMDB, then *Nosferatu*, and the cast list showed Alexander Granach in the role of Knock. A double click on Granach and there was a list of his fifty-five films, from *Camera Obscura* in 1921 until *My Buddy* in 1944—with the well-loved *Ninotchka* along the way, in 1939. A little googling revealed that Alexander Granach had also published an autobiography, *There Goes an Actor*, and the online library catalog of the University of Wisconsin-Madison affirmed that it owns that book. Upon return to Madison, we located it, and there, on the first page, was “Kolomea”—the name of the “legendary” city on the Prut River in which Eva, Helen, and Pauline Starer, the mothers of these three cousins, were born.

The Starer family—a widowed mother, Tova Starer, and her four daughters and one surviving son, immigrated to New York from western Galicia shortly after the First World War. There was no longer any life for Jews there, as Granach makes clear in his report of his return to the region after the war. It must have been at this time

that he stayed with the Starers; Mark remembers his mother, Eva, saying that Granach was acting with a Yiddish theater group in the area. Unfortunately Tova, Molly, Pauline, Eva, Helen, and Paul had all passed away by the time of our discovery, so we could not get any further direct information about the Granach connection.

Thanks are due to all of the Starer family, beginning with that older generation. Like Granach, they were great party people—though they were generally sober and monogamous—and we shared many wonderful times with them. Then there are the cousins, and especially Mark Lewis who started it all with his love of movies and his jaundiced view of much of modern technology. (That his last name is the same as mine is just another coincidence.) Marvin Starer, whose father, Paul, served in the same Kolomea regiment of the Austro-Hungarian army as Granach and was also captured at the battle of Gorizia, told us of his father's captivity in Italy. Special thanks are due to Anne and Vinnie Minotti, for their hospitality and enthusiastic interest. (Vinnie's father fought on the Italian side at the battle of Gorizia!). Steve Barbash, Marcia's brother, like Anne, was not only delighted to read stories of the shtetl that reminded him so much of what he heard growing up, but he also used to hang out with the book's translator, Willard Trask, about forty years before the discovery of the connection. Steve was teaching at Juniata College and Trask was there for a semester as artist in residence. And then there are cousins Lynn, Consti, David, and Miriam, all heirs to the Starer legacy, as are our children. And the Barbashes of Zbarazh, Marcia and Steve's father and his family, also contributed to our sense of the Galician past.

Above all my debt is to our beloved Marcia, who died too soon. She loved life, her family, and this book, and would have been so happy to recommend it to her friends in the book group who gave her so much pleasure in her last years. For more than fifty years Marcia read and improved almost everything I wrote, but before she died she told me that I should "get together" with our best friend, Francie. Happily, I followed her orders, and now Francie, my new wife, has taken on that onerous task, and I want to thank her as well.

There are many other people to acknowledge. I want to express my appreciation and pleasure to Gad Granach, Alexander's son, for the wonderful visit I had with him in Jerusalem in December 2008 and for the time he has spent with me on the telephone before and

since. He is a great entertainer in his own right. His book and my conversations with him have added greatly to my knowledge and appreciation of his life and his father's. My telephone conversations with Gad Granach's one-time neighbor from Berlin, Miriam Rochlin, have also been a pleasure.

Carol Bardenstein was the person who put me in contact with Gad Granach and I very much appreciate her continuing support and advice. David E. Lane, the translator of Gad Granach's book, has been very generous, sharing information and offering wise counsel. It is good to have friends so close to the material who share an interest in these remarkable people.

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1. I Bear the Name of a Friendly Man

THE EARTH IN EAST GALICIA is black and juicy and always looks half asleep, like a sleek good-natured cow standing still to be milked. Thankfully and a thousand times over, the earth of East Galicia gives back whatever it receives, and you do not need to bribe it with manure or chemicals.

The earth of East Galicia is prodigal and rich. It spouts forth black oil, and bears golden tobacco, and grain as heavy as lead, and old dreamy woods, and rivers, and lakes, and, above all, handsome, healthy men: Ukrainians, Poles, Jews. The three all look alike, despite their different manners and customs.

The men of East Galicia are slow and good-natured, a little lazy, and fruitful like their mother earth. Wherever you look, you see children, like litters of little kittens. Children in the farmyards, children with the animals, children in the fields, children in the barns, children in the stables, children!—as if they grew on trees every spring like cherries.

When spring comes to a Galician village, there are calves and foals and suckling pigs, and lambs and chicks and ducklings and those small whimpering human creatures: children.

The village in which I was born is called Wierzbowce in Polish, Werbowitz in Yiddish, and Werbiwci in Ukrainian. It is near Seroka. Seroka is near Czerniatyn. Czerniatyn is near Horodenka. Horodenka is near Gwozdziez. Gwozdziez near Kolomea. Kolomea near Stanislaw. Stanislaw near Lemberg. Lemberg became famous in the world through the Hollywood picture, *Hotel Stadt Lemberg*.

My parents lived in the village of Werbiwci and already had eight children. Life was hard, especially for my mama. She was everything to my father: wife, sweetheart, she gave birth to a child every year, kept the house, cooked and baked, did the washing, waited on customers in the shop, dug in the garden, where she raised, not flowers, but potatoes and cabbages and onions and cucumbers. And every other

minute a brat would come running up and pull at her skirt and demand food.

It is true that the older children helped her take care of the little ones—kept them busy, carried them around, fed them, washed them, dressed them, undressed them, put them to bed, and even spanked them. But all the burden fell on her, my little mama: she was here, there, and everywhere all day long. She got up with the chickens and was the last to fall into bed—oh, so tired! The whole household of ten souls was in her hands, and the chief worry was always: not enough to eat.

We baked bread of the cheapest, blackest, coarsest flour, but it tasted good to us even without butter. Yes, onions and garlic were kept hidden, because onions and garlic made us want to eat more. The newly baked bread was kept hidden too, not because it might spoil our little stomachs, but because fresh bread went down faster; and we never got to see it until it was several days old. We cooked huge pots of potatoes, we baked corn bread, we cooked polenta with bean soup—the polenta was always cut with a string—we cooked cabbage and carrots, and rice with peas, and often made dumplings with buckwheat, and even *piroushki* stuffed with potato, and we ate everything clean like locusts.

At the same time our childhood had wealth of adventure and play that we would not have exchanged for the prettiest, richest and gayest and best-equipped of nurseries. We dug in the garden, built houses out of straw and clay, wagons out of old chairs, sleds out of kindling, and the young of the neighbors' livestock had to join in. Calves and foals, even the ducks and hens, were harnessed to our wagons. We made lanterns out of pumpkins; the dogs had to take part in everything. Only the cats and geese were left out. The cats disappeared and the geese bit—the silly geese!

Whether the animals enjoyed it as much as we did, I do not know—we certainly were happy. The older children acted like grownups, but when no one was looking, they joined in too. Father especially enjoyed taking part in our games more than anyone else. But Mother—poor Mama!—was generally tired and cross. When we bothered her she struck out, distributing cuffs and shoves and pinches, and even kicked us when we got in her way. Poor little Mama! Things were hard for her. For the grown children loved Father much better. Though Father worked hard all day long too, somehow he always had

time for us. Especially on Sabbath morning—then most of us would creep into his bed and we were allowed to ride on him and braid his beard into funny pigtails. And he answered the little ones' questions as if they were grown-up, and had a wise word for everyone, always something different. Yes, Father knew how to treat us. He took us seriously.

So we grew to have a deep admiration for our father, and, because he was learned, knew the Talmud, could quote the whole Bible from memory and read and write—even Polish!—our neighbors and the peasants of the village revered him too. But in us, his children, there developed a blind love and veneration for him—and almost the opposite for our mother. Poor little Mama! She was very unhappy, mother and wife, sweetheart and housemaid, childbearer and nurse, poor thing, poor little thing! And she was only a child herself, an innocent, unsuspecting child, with no freedom and no joys; all that she knew was work and duties, duties and work.

One day she broke down, overwhelmed by weariness, and could not go on. She went to bed in the middle of the day and lay there weeping and shrieking and wanted either to die or be divorced.

When such things happened a poor relative of ours always came out from town—old Isaiah Berkowitz. He was even poorer than we were, and he came often to the village and spent a week or two in turn with each of the four Jewish families. He cleared up misunderstandings and quarrels, talked with the teacher, examined the children, scolded the men, advised the women, and everyone listened to him, everyone liked him, especially the Ukrainian peasants. Wherever he stayed, in the evening that house was full. The old peasants flooded him with questions, and he had an answer for everything, with a parable and a lively illustration.

He was in his seventies, short, and peasant-like. His face, tanned like leather by wind and rain, was almost smooth; there were only little white tufts of wiry hair on his upper lip, under his chin, and between his cheekbones and his ears. He dressed partly like a Ukrainian peasant, with a fur cap, summer and winter, for hot weather and cold. He had large, wise, kindly eyes, and the peasants called him "Shaiko Rozum"—that is, "Isaiah Wisdom."

He would often even pray and sing Hebrew psalms in Ukrainian, for he held that God understood all languages, if only those who prayed and sang were honest with Him. And he, Shaiko Rozum, was honest

with everyone. He spoke his mind to the rich and the respected, but always good-naturedly, with a joke and an anecdote. And another thing—he never had any money, and never touched any. Yet he loved eating and drinking, and on Friday evening or the Sabbath, when he had had a few glasses, he sang Yiddish and Ukrainian melodies, and told folk tales that were mixtures of Yiddish and Slavish legends with parables and instances and wise sayings.

So that was old Shaiko Rozum, who came to us now.

He sat down by Mother's bed like a doctor and sent everyone out, and listened to her and talked to her for a long time. Father waited outside, embarrassed, and began one piece of work after another. He milked the cow, winnowed grain, chopped straw, prepared the calf's food—as he always did; that day he even cooked. We children were always happy when Father cooked; he always did on High Holidays and when poor Mama brought forth a child; and our good Mama brought one forth every year.

Shaiko Rozum came out of the room, started to reason with Father, and together they went for a walk in the fields. The little ones were shouting and running about in the next-door neighbor's garden with the next-door neighbor's children; the grown children kept on with their work. The two men returned, serious and silent.

That day everyone went to bed early, and the next morning the horse was harnessed and Mother and Father and old Shaiko Rozum set off for the town. The older children looked after the house, the little ones disappeared with a troop of neighbors' children to rob someone's orchard, and no one knew what was going to happen.

The wise white horse, who was like a member of the family, something like a big brother, had been fed oats that morning, and he pulled with a will, strong and brisk as if he wanted to say, "Yes, if you give me oats, I'll show you what I can do!"

The three sat together on one rather narrow seat of straw and blankets. Father drove, and no one spoke.

Old Shaiko began to tell a story, about *his* uncle who had once gone to the rabbi with *his* wife for a divorce, and this is what happened:

"When my uncle and his wife came to the rabbi's house to be divorced, there was a neighbor standing by the door, and he took my uncle aside and said, 'Well, Chaim, you must be glad you're going to get rid of that old shrew at last.' But Uncle Chaim looked at his neighbor and said, 'Who gave you the right to speak like that about *my*