

Utter Chaos (Jewish Literature and Culture)

By Sammy Gronemann

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Published in Germany in 1920, Sammy Gronemann’s satirical novel set in 1903 at the time of the Sixth Zionist Congress follows the life of a baptized Jew, Heinz Lehnsen, as he negotiates legal entanglements, German culture, religious differences, and Zionist aspirations. A chance encounter with a long-lost cousin from a shtetl in Russia further complicates the plot and challenges the characters’ notions of Jewish identity and their belief in the claims of the Zionist movement. Gronemann's humor and compassion slyly expose the foibles and contradictions of human behavior. With deep insight into German society, German-Jewish culture, and antisemitism, Utter Chaos paints a highly entertaining portrait of German Jews at the beginning of the twentieth century.

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Editorial Review

Review

"First published in 1920 and set 17 years earlier, Gronemann's newly translated novel blends satiric humor and an eerie sense of foreboding in relating the efforts of European Jews to assimilate at a wildly contentious and confusing time...A free-wheeling Jewish comic novel before its time, this artfully contained commentary on Jewish life in Europe in the early 1900s makes a welcome reappearance." ?Kirkus Reviews

"Sammy Gronemann's 1920 German-language novel is an important literary and historical document of the Jewish experience in early twentieth-century Central and Eastern Europe. Penny Milbouer has produced a high-quality, highly readable translation." ?Jonathan Skolnik, author of Jewish Pasts, German Fictions: History, Memory, and Minority Culture in Germany, 1824–1955

"Sammy Gronemann is a forgotten classic among German-Jewish authors." ?Michael Brenner, American University

About the Author

Sammy Gronemann (1875–1952) was a lawyer, Zionist, and writer in Germany. He coedited a satirical Zionist magazine and served as a translator in Europe during World War I. He was the son of rabbi and an observant Jew, though he attacked many aspects of the ultra-Orthodox movement. He emigrated to Palestine in 1936. His play, The King and the Cobbler, was a smash hit in Tel Aviv in 1943.

Penny Milbouer is translator of Michael Wieck's A Childhood under Hitler and Stalin: Memoires of a "Certified" Jew and Maria Roselli's The Asbestos Lie: The Past and Present of an Industrial Catastrophe.

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