

## **The Marrano Phenomenon. Jewish ‘Hidden Tradition’ and Modernity (Popular)**

What we call here the ‘Marrano phenomenon’ is still a relatively unexplored fact of modern Western culture: the presence of the borderline Jewish identity, which avoids clear-cut cultural and religious attribution but nevertheless exerts significant influence on modern humanities. Our aim, however, is *not* a historical study of the Marranos (or *conversos*), i.e. mostly Spanish and Portuguese Jews of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century, who were forced to convert to Christianity, but were suspected of retaining their Judaism ‘undercover’: such approach already exists and develops within the field of historical research. We rather want to apply the ‘Marrano metaphor,’ first introduced by Agata Bielik-Robson in her book, *Jewish Cryptotheologies of Late Modernity: Philosophical Marranos*, to explore the fruitful area of mixture and cross-over which allowed modern thinkers, writers and artists of the Jewish origin to enter the realm of universal communication – without, at the same time, making them relinquish their Jewishness which they subsequently developed as a ‘hidden tradition.’

The ‘Marrano metaphor’ was for the first time used consciously by Hannah Arendt who, in her essay, “The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition,” compared the great European thinkers and writers of Jewish origin to the Marranos who were permitted to enter the realm of universality only on the condition of concealing their particular ‘bias.’ We, however, want to approach the ‘Marrano phenomenon’ in a more affirmative manner: as a liberating experience of ‘free thinking’ and ‘free writing.’ The main purpose of our ‘Marrano’ project is to offer a new view on modern culture, which can be accessed only via the ‘cryptotheological’ Marrano perspective: a ‘Marrano modernity’ which transforms our approach to the problem of universal communication as well as the modern – secret, hidden – life of religious traditions which manage to survive in the process of secularization, although merely in the form of ‘traces.’ First we will explore the dimensions of Jewish ‘hidden tradition’ in main thinkers of late modernity: starting from Jacques Derrida, who openly claimed to be a ‘Marrano of French Catholic culture,’ and then expanding on those who fit Arendt’s description of ‘concealed Jewishness’: Sigmund Freud, Melanie Klein, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, Ernst Bloch, Hans Blumenberg, and Hannah Arendt herself (to name just the most significant thinkers). Then, we will apply the elements of this new hermeneutic strategy to modern Polish literature which has never yet been approached in this manner. According to our analysis, a ‘Marrano’ is a complex subjective figure which plays out its Jewish identity only in the act of transgressing, contaminating and blurring the fixed dogmatic categories. The ‘traces of Judaism’ can thus be found in the works of the most original and outstanding Polish writers of Jewish origin, such as: Stanisław Jerzy Lec, Stanisław Lem, Bolesław Leśmian, Julian Tuwim, Leo Lipski, Teodor Parnicki, Bruno Schulz, Aleksander Wat, Józef Wittlin and Debora Vogel, as well as those fascinated with the Jewish tradition, as Leopold Buczkowski and Jerzy Ficowski.

Our ‘Marrano’ methodology, which we want to develop during this project, will be particularly sensitive to the strategies of encryption and camouflage, involving a complex interplay of ‘revelment and concealment.’ It can be detected in the rhetorical matrix of the text as the so called ‘tropes of evasion’: deformations, ellipses, paraphrases, catachreses, litotes, declensions and *clinamena* which ‘haunt’ the seemingly transparent prose. The ‘Marrano’ identity of the text is thus never a matter of *constatation*, i.e. an open statement – it is always a matter of a complex textual *performance*, which nonetheless shows what it does not say overtly. The ‘Marrano’ methodology could thus be regarded as a part of the deconstructive hermeneutics which reveals the hidden contents in order to reconstruct the integral meaning of the work. It is in the methodology, therefore, that the philosophical and the literary parts of our project come tightly together. What we expect in result are fully innovative interpretations of the main documents of late modern culture, which will allow to see them in the new ‘Marrano’ context and disclose within them the formative elements of the ‘hidden tradition.’