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THE RELATIONS BETWEEN JEWS AND CHRISTIANS AS REFLECTED IN THE YIDDISH SONGS BY MORDECHAJ GEBIRTIG*

I just want to make an introductory note: I – like Marcin Kula in his book on the “Stubborn question. Jewish? Polish? Humane?”¹ – am very well aware of the fact that the definitions “Jew” and “Christian” are not satisfactory. But as Gebirtig was a Pole and at the same time a traditionally raised and educated religious Jew, I decided to use this terminology in this article, which deals with Polish-Jewish relations before the Second World War and includes the relations with the Germans after the invasion of Poland in September 1939. As far as I can see, the topic of the relations between Jews and Christians has now shifted into the centre of academic interest in Poland, judging by the significant number of books and articles published on the subject. These relations, having, as I mentioned, also included the Germans, thus created a triangle full of tensions which are also a topic of research and discussion within the Polish literature of the last twenty years.²

The Polish poet Anna Kamińska (1920–1986), who wrote the moving poem “The Table of Mordechaj Gebirtig” in the memory of this great Jewish folk poet, hoped in the following verses, which also depict the total destruction of the world of Polish Jewry, for a time to come in which the murdered Yiddish language would be heard and sung again:

“No trace has remained, / Not a word on a stone, / Of all those generations /
Soaked into the soil of Poland. / Perhaps one day, from the depths, / A spring will
burst forth / Which will speak their tongue / And sing their song.”³

* This is a slightly revised version of my paper held at the international conference “700 Years of Jewish Presence in Kraków” organized by the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences and Department of Jewish Studies of the Jagiellonian University: Kraków, 26–28 September, 2005.

¹ *Uparta sprawa. Żydowska? Polska? Ludzka?*, Kraków 2004.

² Having had to leave Poland as a child because of anti-Semitism in 1957, I am pleased to see this change in the general attitude today, although, unfortunately, anti-Semitism has by no means totally disappeared in Poland, a country with a minimal Jewish population, judging by many anti-Semitic internet fora or the exemplary and deplorable case of “Radio Maryja” and certain political party programmes.

To the problem of this “triangle” I have devoted several essays: Grözinger 1991: 84–108; 1992: 109–133; 2000: 79–92; the same in Polish: Grözinger 2001: 177–190. Another essay of mine, shortly published, is dedicated to the painful question of the attitude of the exiled Polish Jews to their home country Poland: Grözinger 2005: 13–33.

³ English translation quoted after Vinkovetzky, Kovner & Leichter 1985: iii. These verses are here, however, very freely translated and attributed to the poem “The Table of Mordechaj Gebirtig”. Its complete English translation is printed in Vinkovetzky, Kovner & Leichter 1987: 53–58 with the following wording:

Mordechaj Gebirtig, a well-known son in his native city of Kraków, folk poet and singer, talented amateur actor of the Yiddish theatre⁴ and carpenter by profession, is now famous among all who deal with Yiddish folksongs. Today, due to the Klezmer revival and the popularity of Jewish and Yiddish folklore, the songs of Mordechaj Gebirtig are heard throughout the world, also in Kraków, during the Jewish Culture Festivals for instance. However, his fame is so far restricted to these circles only, although four of his songs were included by Arnold Ślucki and Salomon Łastik in their monumental *Anthology of Jewish Poetry* published in 1983: “Yes, I once had a home”, “In the Ghetto”, “Farewell, Cracow” and “The Singer of Misery”.⁵

Therefore, for general information, here are some biographical details about Gebirtig, albeit some which differ in certain of the sources. He was born as Mordechaj Bertig in Kraków-Kazimierz on May 4, 1877 and lived there almost all his life. Like the majority of Polish Jews, he did not survive the Nazi occupation of Poland. Gebirtig died in the Ghetto in Podgórze on June 4, 1942, shot down on the street – as was also the case with another Polish-Jewish writer who has subsequently become famous, Bruno Schulz, shot in Drohobycz – by a German guard during a so-called “Aussiedlungsaktion”, deportation, when the Jews of Kraków were sent off to the extermination camp at Belżec and elsewhere. Gebirtig’s life symbolizes the tragic life of the Kraków Jewry, its rich Jewish and Yiddish culture which blossomed within the Christian society and which was murderously put to an end by the Nazi occupants of Poland.

Gebirtig was raised in a Jewish merchant family, went to the elementary Jewish school, the *kheyder* (like most Jewish boys without much enthusiasm, though), had no musical education, and at nineteen wrote his first song lyrics. He also wrote theatre reviews. He suffered from poor health, living with his wife Blume, née Lindenbaum, and three daughters Khava, Shifra and Lea (or Lola)⁶ at no. 5 Berka Joselewicza Street, while his workshop was in the nearby Krakowska Street. He repaired old furniture and lived in poverty. As a song composer, Gebirtig became famous in the “yidishe gas”, the Jewish milieu, during his lifetime, and soon his fame spread overseas, when Jewish emigrants brought his songs to America and other countries. These songs were passed on orally and often anonymously so that they soon became genuine folksongs. The word is that Molly Picon, the famous star of the American Yiddish Stage, was a fan of his songs and visited him in the 1930s in Kraków. She was supposedly shocked at the poor conditions in which Gebirtig lived. But in spite of that, his songs were for many years lively, even merry.

He wrote love songs for his wife, lullabies for his daughters, and songs describing the daily life of the “normal” people like himself – they were humorous and melodious.

“Seeing that no trace has remained / Not even in writing / Although so many generations / have gone to earth here / That a spring might have welled up / Speaking their tongue”.

⁴ See Gross 1995: 115–123.

⁵ Łastik 1983: 87–91: “Tak, miałem kiedyś dom”, “W Getcie”, “Żegnaj, Krakowie”, “Śpiewak niedoli”. Since the anthology was prepared many years before – Ślucki was forced to leave Poland in 1968 – the introduction must have been written under circumstances in which the murder of the Soviet-Yiddish poets could not be mentioned. Thus, by the way, this book can also be regarded as an important document of the attitude of the post-war Communist regime towards Jews and Jewish culture.

⁶ Differing from Manfred Lemm (1998), Barry Davis in his article “Gebirtig, Mordkhe”, in: Sorrel Kerbel (ed.), *Jewish Writers of the Twentieth Century*, New York–London 2003, p. 171, calls the daughters Bashke, Shifre and Liola.

Gebirtig sang in the first phase about the *klezmerim* (the folk musicians), little children, the happy ones and the orphans – the “Moysheles”, “Moteles”, “Avremeles” and “Yankeles”, he wrote about his parents, loving couples, craftsmen, shepherds, the poor and the rich, and their longing for the utopian “golden land” (in Yiddish: *di goldene medine*). These are traditional topics of Yiddish folksongs, but they nevertheless “warmed the heart and the spirits”, as Menachem Kipnis described them.⁷ Yet as he could not write or read musical notes himself, his friends Julius Hoffman (a conductor) and Barukh Sperber (a music teacher) wrote the music down for him.

During the First World War, Gebirtig was a medical orderly in the Austro-Hungarian army. There he witnessed the horrors of war and the post-war misery of the invalided soldiers, which were echoed in his song about the blind invalid of war decorated with a medal but whose family is so poor that his son is now forced to beg in the streets of the Jewish quarter (“Krigsinvalid”):

“I beg you to help us, oh, children of Israel, / There’s nothing to eat in the house. / The mama is sickly, and papa’s a blind man; / Too long we’ve been doing without. / Find a nickel, you good people, or a dime / For a war invalid who’s blind / ... For a blindman – wounded in the war.”⁸

This type of post-war lyrics was published in the years after the First World War in many languages under the ironic motto “*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*”, and famous expressionist artists depicted the mutilated men in their paintings. But the situation of the Jews, who were denied patriotic feelings for their home countries by the majority of the local population, was thus even worse than that of the rest of the population in the countries involved. Between the two world wars, the political situation of the Jews in Poland deteriorated and aggravated, in spite of the law about minority protection signed by the Polish government. Accordingly, Gebirtig’s songs gradually lost their merry character and became melancholic, critical and even rebellious. His themes were now old age, unemployment, prostitution, tuberculosis, hungry and ill children, the proud *khalutzim*, i.e. Jewish pioneer settlers in Palestine, juvenile thieves, or the exploitation of the factory workers and poorly paid handicrafts. At the same time he depicted the life of religious Jews, with sympathy but not uncritically.

The social criticism went along with his political involvement. Gebirtig was a close friend of Mordechaj Erlich, a member of the Kraków-BUND, the Jewish Socialist Party, and the BUND-group (being part of the Yiddishist movement) in 1919⁹ published Gebirtig’s first 20 Yiddish songs. In 1936 another volume of his songs, *Mayne lider*, was printed by the collector and folksinger Menachem Kipnis¹⁰. Thus Gebirtig became famous among the Jewish masses.

The critical political tones came in again then in the mid- to late 1930s, during which both Polish fascists harassed and Soviet Stalinists persecuted the Jews, especially dur-

⁷ Lemm 1998: 33.

⁸ Leichter 2000: 175.

⁹ According to Lemm 1998: 20, it was published in 1920, in “*Dos bikhele*” and called “*Folkstimplekh*”.

¹⁰ Published in Vilna on the occasion of Gebirtig’s 30th jubilee of BUND-activity and reprinted in 1942, 1948 and 1986 by the Workmen’s Circle in New York, an edition to which his later and last songs were added.

ing the years of the “purges” 1936–1939,¹¹ when a pogrom took place in the small town of Przytyk. Out of protest, in 1938 Gebirtig wrote his most famous song, “Undzer shtetl brent” (Our little town is burning or “Sbrent” – It burns –):

“Our town is burning, brothers, burning, / And you stand looking with folded arms / And shake your heads. / You stand looking on, with folded arms / While the fire spreads! / ... Our town is burning, brothers, burning, / All now depends on you. / Our only help is what you do. / You can still put out the fire / With your blood, if you desire. / Don’t look on with folded arms, / And shake your heads. / Don’t look on with folded arms / While the fire spreads!”¹²

Here he condemned Jewish passivity and called his oppressed brothers and sisters to resistance. This song is considered to be prophetic, and shortly afterwards, during the Second World War, it became an anthem of the Jewish partisans fighting actively against the German-planned “Final Solution”.

When the Germans occupied Poland in 1939, Gebirtig sought refuge with a Polish farmers’ family in nearby Łagiewniki. There he wrote songs which sounded gloomy. From March of 1941 onwards the family was forced to move to the Ghetto in Podgórze, where he continued to write. Gebirtig’s songs are thus also a mirror of Ghetto life.¹³ Friends from the USA tried to help him but he refused to leave at his “old age”, although he almost starved. After he was murdered, his family was deported. His wife and the three daughters were last seen alive in the Płaszów concentration camp.

Mordechaj Gebirtig’s manuscripts had been miraculously saved during the Shoah by the daughters of his above named friend, Julius Hoffman, who survived on the “Aryan” side. After the war, Hoffman’s daughter-in-law¹⁴ brought them to Israel, from where, however, a certain amount of the material was sold to the YIVO Institute.¹⁵

Yiddish songs have only recently begun to be discovered and considered as historical documents. As there is practically no area of Jewish life which has not been dealt with in a song, they give us a deep and authentic insight into the daily life of the Jewish population of Eastern and Central Europe, as well as a picture of its history of ideas and mentality.¹⁶ Jews were always singing, from the cradle to the grave, men and women alike, in the synagogue, at work and at home. There is, therefore, a vast number of Yiddish songs collected in the meantime, and new ones are being continuously discovered since the archives of the ex-Soviet Union have opened up for the public. It is amazing how much can be found in these collections, despite the fact that these songs only started to be systematically collected at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Before that, Jewish secular folklore was fought against by the preservers of the liturgical musical

¹¹ The dates of the genesis of the song differ: 1936/37 as well as 1938, cf. in Lemm’s edition (1998: 20, 26) and in Peregis (2003: 129, note 300 and 181, note 435) while in Leichter (2000: xix) it is 1938.

¹² Leichter 2000: 233.

¹³ Also described in the Diary by Halina Nelken, *Pamiętnik z getta w Krakowie*, Toronto 1987.

¹⁴ Wife of his son Joseph.

¹⁵ Concerning information about the manuscripts, see Leichter 2000: xviii–xix. In 1992, according to Manfred Lemm (1998: 23), Hoffman’s other (?) son Jan, still lived in Kraków. Part is now in the archives of the YIVO in New York and part at the Israeli “Moreshet” Institute in Giv’at Haviva.

¹⁶ Grözinger 2004: 125–137.

tradition.¹⁷ Apart from that, Jewish folklore – both the theatre and music – was earlier of hardly any interest to researchers. My special focus of interest here are the relations between the Jewish and the non-Jewish population in Poland as mirrored in some of Gebirtig's texts.

These relations are a painful chapter in the history of both Poles and Jews. The history of the Jews in Kraków, as described by the annals, is just as tragic and bloody as in most of other European cities in which the Jews were often persecuted and from which they were repeatedly expelled. As is known, the main enemies of the Polish Jews throughout the ages were the Polish nobility, often financially indebted to Jews, and the Catholic Church, whose local leaders, as well as visiting ones, like the wandering Franciscan preacher John Capestrano (1386–1456), incited public opinion against the Jews, leading to their harm. The Polish patriotic historian Jan Długosz (1415–1480), for instance, who worked in Kraków and was not a friend of the Jews, describes the anti-Jewish atmosphere in his monumental writings. Another type of historical documents is the Jewish songs composed on various occasions in the history. Among the last Jewish such “historical” songs are those written by Mordechaj Gebirtig, who was both a witness and victim of the last chapters in the history of the Jews of Poland, where the mutual relations once more reached a negative climax.

One of his pre-war songs, “Motele”,¹⁸ is exemplary for the topic of the interaction between the Polish and the Jewish neighbours. It depicts the life of a young Jewish boy living in a mainly Jewish environment and brought up in the religious tradition, yet also with non-Jewish neighbours. His father is worried about Motele's insubordinate behaviour, as the boy is being rude to the Rebbe in the religious school, having fights with his friend Avremele, but worst – he is hanging around in the yard and playing with the pigeons belonging to the non-Jewish neighbour, Yanek. The song is a dialogue between the father and the son:

“What will become of you, Motele? Tell me:
The neighbours say, and I have to believe them,
The whole day long you're running around in the yard,
And are friends with Yanek's pigeons...
Is it appropriate for a Jew to chase pigeons?
Judge it by yourself.
And yesterday, Motl, you have again
Broken the neighbour's window with a stone!” [...]¹⁹

Motele is a lively, healthy, almost 13 year-old-boy. He is trying to live a “normal” life like his non-Jewish neighbour (which is indicated by the gentile name “Yanek”), rebelling against the restrictive rules of the Jewish quarters which for instance banished the little boys into the dark religious elementary schools (the notorious *kheyder*, mentioned above) from the age of three, where they were taught by and often beaten by inca-

¹⁷ Beregovski 1982: 22.

¹⁸ From *Mayne lider*, Kroke 1936.

¹⁹ In my translation with my italics. The English translation by Sol Liebgott, in Leichter 2000: 45, is not accurate and leaves out precisely the main point.

pable and overstrained as well as badly paid teachers. This type of education, by the way, usually continued in the religious middle schools.

Motele, a keen and bright youngster, likes the pigeons in the yard, which he observes accurately, admiring their elegant way of flying and their freedom of movement which he himself does not have. The fact that the neighbours spy on him and complain about his behaviour to his father shows the internal control machinery within the secluded Jewish society. Motele's father claims to have been an exemplary Jew who did not engage in foolish things at his son's age and studied the Talmud diligently. But the author sympathizes with the boy and lets him reply to his father with mild irony:

“Daddy, grandfather has told me things about you. You, too, chased pigeons when you were small. And your Rebbe also beat you. Don't worry, dear father, when I grow up, I shall be like you – I will both earn money and learn the Torah!”

These almost stereotype Jewish ideals were of course different in non-Jewish society at that time. Yanek was most probably a “proletarian” child, roaming the streets, and his father neither earned much money nor was a learned man. In those days, the Jewish children not only differed by their names from their Christian neighbours (Jews of Kazimierz were at that time, it seems, not emancipated and Germanized or Polonized, as they were given purely Jewish names, mostly adding the Yiddish diminutive “-le”), but they also differed by the upbringing, clothing and way of life. At thirteen, a Jewish boy after his *Bar Mitzvah* (religious confirmation) had to join the grown-up men as a part of the *Minyan* (the prayers' congregation) in the synagogue, etc., while a Christian boy of thirteen was still treated more according to his age.

In everyday life, the Jewish and the Christian boys and girls normally had little to do with one another, as their respective families were usually opposed to mutual contacts. The famous Polish-Jewish assimilated writer and physician Janusz Korczak (1878–1942), another victim of the Shoah, wrote about his experiences as a Jewish child in Warsaw²⁰ and later as an educator in the summer camps in his books: “Moški, Joški i Srule” (The Moyshesles, Yoseles and Sruls, 1910) and “Józki, Jaški i Franki” (The Józeks, Jasieks and Franeks, 1911–1914).²¹

But Jewish-Christian relations were of deep interest to Gebirtig, as is also shown by the fact that he adapted a Polish²² folk song, “Blumke, mayn zhiduvke” (Blumke, my Jewess). This is a love song about a Jewish girl called Blumke and the youngster Stakh. Stakh (a Christian, as the name indicates), a shepherd, keeping goats and cows, is in love with her, and his goats go astray while he's looking for and dreaming of Blumke. He asks her, “Blumke, my Jewess” (while the word “Zhiduvke” could also be used in the anti-Semitic sense as an insult which is not present here), to become his wife and is even ready to sell all his possessions, including his father's only cow. But although Blumke is also in love with him, as she calls him “my dear Stakh”, she refuses to marry him:

²⁰ Pelz 1985/1997: 7.

²¹ Grözinger 2003: 299.

²² By Sinai Leichter it is called Russian, but it definitely has Polish vocabulary: Zhyduvka (Jewess), krukva (little cow), bozhe (oh God!), sertse (heart) and the grammar in the appellative form of the Polish name Stach: Stakhu.

“Don’t be a fool, my dear Stakh,
Blumke is not meant for you [...]
And don’t sell the cow –
Find yourself a gentile girl in the village –
Since I am a Jewess.”

Stakh is romantic, a bit of a simpleton who laments sadly after her refusal. But Blumke is depicted as a mature, clever, realistically and practically thinking young woman. She implies that they cannot marry each other (unless one of them converts to the other’s religion). For Stakh, these things seem to be secondary at that moment; however, he is definitely not an anti-Semite. Here, Gebirtig again feels sympathetic with this poor innocent guy, a victim of the frequent conflict among young people of his time, when mixed marriages were still practically out of question. This shows that Gebirtig was a modern and tolerant man who did not stick to religious limitations or prejudice.

Peaceful coexistence between Jewish and Christian Poles has always been just a temporary phenomenon, as the long common Polish-Jewish history shows. Gebirtig hoped for it, but it was made impossible by the Polish enemies of the Jews during the pogroms as mentioned above. These were not the only anti-Jewish incidents in Poland. The German occupation of Poland has naturally given Gebirtig’s songs, written in the Second World War, an additional accent. These songs describe now above all the German enemies, such as the armed German soldiers who surround the synagogue during the Yom Kippur service, as in the song called “Erev Yom Kiper“ (The Eve of Yom Kippur), written on November 24, 1939, i.e. shortly after the invasion of and the victory over Poland by Hitler’s army. Gebirtig is alluding here to the “Marranos” – the Spanish and Portuguese “Conversos” – Jews who, under the pressure of the Inquisition, were forced to baptize themselves, live publically as Christians, but who were still performing Jewish rites clandestinely. They were called “pigs” by their enemies. Gebirtig implies the continuity of the Jewish history, which has to be remembered. Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is the highest Jewish holiday, but the enemies, like the Inquisitors before, do not respect it, on the contrary:

“Evening Yom Kippur / ... The enemy watches the small narrow streets / ... Accustomed to hearing / The singing of prayers / To soldiers boot march they hearken instead / To shots from the rifles / ... The lecterns the benches / Once crowded once filled / Today they are empty despondent and scorned / For years numbing hundreds, / The first time such shame must be borne.”²³

The German soldiers harassed Jews openly, they cut off the beards of religious men, etc., but not only the Germans were the enemies, as it turned out. Gebirtig, the tolerant, open-minded man, was now extremely hurt, disappointed and disgusted by the behaviour of the Polish neighbours who laughed while witnessing the Jewish physical suffering and baiting inflicted on the Jewish neighbours by the common German enemy. Gebirtig expresses his feelings in a song written in February 1940, “It hurts” (“S’tut vey”):

²³ Translation in Leichter 2000: 235.

“This pain! / This terrible pain! / Not because of hatred / In the enemy’s breast / Not even the beatings / At the enemy’s hands / ... When it’s not the invaders, / No, they! / But Poland’s sons and daughters, / Whose own land will rebuke / And turn from dismay. / Gleeful, they poke fun, with laughter / At what they see – / Jews harried and mocked / By our common enemy. / Old folks beaten, / Homes robbed with impunity. / Snip snap like sheep shorn – / Off with the beards, Jews! / And they! / Who dwell here and like us / Are deprived of a land, / Who feel as we do, / The enemy’s brute hand, / Laugh, snigger and laugh / At this moment / When Poland’s pride and honour / Are dragged down in shame, / When Poland’s white Eagle / Is trampled in the earth / With the beards, / Black or grey haired / Jewish beards. / Is it not shaming?...”²⁴

This was a new crisis in Polish-Jewish relations. Again, Gebirtig wrote this prophetically in view of the anti-Jewish acts performed by Poles, such as the Jedwabne massacre just one year later, or the Kielce pogrom in 1946. The fact that “Poland’s sons and daughters” of “whom their country will one day be ashamed” were betraying the Jews caused Gebirtig moral suffering, more torture than the physical pain afflicted to his kin. The Poles, a proud nation whom he so far respected and liked despite the occasional pogroms, were now behaving in a way unworthy of them. This was unbearable for him. Gebirtig cried out the pain which afflicted him in view of this openly shown anti-Jewish hostility by the Polish neighbours.²⁵

Gebirtig must have been a true Polish patriot. That he had strong feelings for his native Kraków with the “holy ground”, with his family’s graves, is shown by another tragic song “Blayb gezunt mir, Kroke!” (Be well, Kraków, take care!), written upon his expulsion from home in October 1940:²⁶

“Farewell to thee, Kroke!
... Like a dog I am chased
Out from here with much cruelty.
Farewell to thee, Kroke!
For the last time I see
All that has always been dear to me
... farewell to thee, Kroke!
Sacred is thine earth.
Father, mother, rest in thee my town...”

This poem again sounds prophetic, as Gebirtig was indeed not supposed to see the soil which he considered as “sacred” and which he loved ever again. These songs are thus documents of the life circumstances, the immediate personal reactions to them and commentary upon historical facts.

²⁴ A rather unsatisfactory translation, quoted according to Leichter 2000: 264.

²⁵ This song was printed after the war in Poland, on the third anniversary of the Kraków ghetto liquidation, shortly after the pogrom of Kielce, in the Polish translation but without the last two verses because the Polish printers refused to print the original version in which Gebirtig cries out his condemnation of the Polish anti-Semitism, cf. Gross 1993: 184–187.

²⁶ Again quoted according to the English translation in Leichter 2000: 242.

I will begin to conclude. The social differences between Jews and Christians, which Gebirtig did not previously consider as insuperable or very serious, judging by his often humorous tone, are also alluded to in his classic song, “Reyzele”. It was composed as a gift to his daughter Shifre and her fiancé Henekh Stamberger.²⁷ There Gebirtig refers, as usual with slight irony, to Reyzele’s strict mother, who criticizes the fact that her daughter’s fiancé Dovidl whistles in the street while he waits for her in front of the house. He makes Reyzele say:

“I beg you, Dovidl, my religious mother doesn’t like it. ***It is not Jewish to whistle***, she says. ***It fits just “them”...*** You must give me ***a simple Jewish sign*** when you’re here...”²⁸

“Them” meant the non-Jews, who seemingly had no manners in the eyes of a solid Jewish woman²⁹ And Dovidl promises his Reyzele not to whistle again, to become religious like his future mother-in-law and to attend the synagogue services regularly, a thing he probably did not practise so far. This song is another socio-historical document from our collection of Yiddish folksongs at the University of Potsdam. We have brought them over from St. Petersburg, where the collections of the Jewish musico-ethnographers, Sofia Magid (1892–1954) and Moishe Beregovski (1892–1961), survived both Hitler and Stalin. These songs, sung by lay singers, were recorded on wax cylinders in the Ukraine shortly before Hitler invaded the Soviet Union. This merry song by Mordechaj Gebirtig is sung according to the introductory information given by the ethnographer, by a young glass-maker, Yeshaya Korn, from the city of Auschwitz, Kraków district, in Kiev, on January 13th, 1940.³⁰

I hope that at least this young man could survive the war after he seemingly managed to get out of Poland after the German invasion. The fact that the young singer knew the song by heart indicates that it was a “hit” in Poland at that time and shows the standing of Gebirtig as a Yiddish superstar in the “yidishe gas”, the Jewish milieu. Now it is a hit at the Festivals of Jewish Culture. Mordechaj Gebirtig would certainly have been very happy to hear that...

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²⁷ From *Mayne lider*, 1936.

²⁸ My italics.

²⁹ But as Manfred Lemm writes (1998: 18), it was a concrete situation: Rafael Szarf from London told him that it was he who used to whistle in front of the house while waiting for the youngest Gebirtig daughter Lola.

³⁰ Cf. Grözinger & Hudak-Lazić 2008.

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