

Overlooked and Underanalyzed Source Material on Jewish Life in the
Ghettos and Camps: Yossi Wajsblat's *Dos Gezang fun Lodzsher Geto/*
La Ballade du Ghetto du Lodz

I r e n a K o h n

In 1994, some two decades after one-time Lodz Ghetto street singer Yankele Herszkowicz died by his own hand on March 25, 1972, Yossi Wajsblat, published in Paris the limited edition *Dos Gezang fun Lodzsher Geto, 1940-1944/La Ballade du Ghetto du Lodz*. This thin volume whose publication was funded by Wajsblat - a friend of Herszkowicz's from Lodz Ghetto, and later, a close companion in the concentration camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau and Braunschweig- appeared in print just two years after Gila Flam's *Singing for Survival: Songs of the Lodz Ghetto, 1940-1945*¹. Acting as a kind of coda to the findings of Flam's research, gleaned from ethnographic interviews with survivors of the Lodz Ghetto on their memory of songs and singing in the ghetto, Wajsblat's publication solicits a decidedly different audience. Wajsblat's introduction to the volume "Yankl Herszkowicz un zayne lider" (see English translation from the Yiddish, below) addresses not the English-speaking scholarly types who might come across Flam's pioneering work in the context of research on Jewish life under Nazi occupation, but rather Yiddish speakers and survivors themselves who may have once had the good fortune to have crossed paths with Herszkowicz in a courtyard in the Lodz Ghetto. Wajsblat's publication is a *yiskor* book of sorts - a loving memorial for a remarkable man and dear friend who, in the course of his years in the Lodz Ghetto, touched so many, yet died in relative obscurity and despair decades after liberation in a city nearly bereft of its once-thriving Jewish community, where Herszkowicz had tried to make a life for himself and his family after the war.

Wajsblat's volume features thirty-three songs written and sung by Yankele Herszkowicz in the Lodz Ghetto - songs that Herszkowicz himself transcribed from memory after the war after surviving Lodz Ghetto and several concentration camps, and returning to the city of Lodz. Wajsblat explains how these transcriptions came into his possession in his introduction to the volume, translated from the Yiddish below. What is remarkable about this collection is both the way in which it corroborates the memories of survivors (those whom Flam interviewed in Israel in the late 1980s, some forty years after the events and the songs that comment on them occurred) - a testament to power and resonance of Herszkowicz's lyrics, to the memory of survivors and to the importance of Flam's research) and the fact that it contributes material that was not remembered by the informants that Flam interviewed. Of the thirty-two songs written and sung in the Lodz Ghetto² in the Wajsblat collection, sixteen appear in Flam's collection

¹ Flam, Gila, *Singing for Survival: Songs of the Lodz Ghetto, 1940-1945*. Urbana and Chicago; University of Illinois Press, 1992. The book is the published version of Flam's doctoral dissertation, and a pioneering work on the study of song and singing in the Lodz Ghetto.

² One song, "Shtubn-Eltste" ("Block Elder" or "Kapo") (the final Herszkowicz song included in Wajsblat's collection), was written and sung by Herszkowicz in Auschwitz, in an ironic "tribute" to the kapo of his cell block.

in identical or variant form, while another sixteen offer previously undocumented material. Unlike Flam's collection, Wajsblat's collection of Herszkowicz songs includes the lyrics, but not the melodies for the songs it transcribes (the notable exception to this is the song "Ikh bin geven", reproduced below in Yiddish and in English translation, and analyzed briefly – which, Wajsblat's volume notes is to be sung to the melody "Belz"). As Wajsblat's introduction suggests, Herszkowicz was not a "musician" *per se*³; his incarnation as the most recognizable street singer of the Lodz Ghetto was a phenomenon that coincided with ghettoization. Like the majority of street singers in the ghettos and camps, his songs were primarily "contrafact" – that is, they involved the composition and setting of new lyrics about ghetto events to existing melodies. This permitted street singers to spend their energy on coming up with compelling original lyrics, rather than having also to supply original melodies. In addition, this permitted the new songs to be infused with contrast and parody as older, more familiar songs seeped into the memories of listeners⁴.

Thanks both to the scholarly ethnographic efforts of Gila Flam, and the lifelong loyalty and dedication of his friend, Yossi Wajsblat, we are fortunate to have a large repertoire of songs from the Lodz Ghetto that can serve as significant research material for contemporary social and cultural historians. Flam's research on songs from the Lodz Ghetto has been critical in restoring to contemporary collective memory some of the most emblematic songs of the Lodz Ghetto⁵ – most of which were penned and performed by none other than Herszkowicz himself. It is my belief that the songs documented in Wajsblat can be used in conjunction with Flam's research and other documentary sources to access not only ghetto inmate reappropriations of social reality and the ways in which they organized their experience, but also to sketch out some of the lesser-known details of Herszkowicz's life. The song from Wajsblat's 1994 *Der Gezang fun Lodzsher Geto* that I have selected to translate and analyze below is significant for the ways in which it offers contemporary researchers a very kinetic picture of the relationship between Herszkowicz the songwriter and his songs, between the folksinger's voice and its attempted silencing. This song, and another in Wajsblat's volume that I consider to be its counterpart and coda ("Vos di shishkes veln ton nokh der milkhome" – "What the Big-Shots Will do After the War"), bear heavily on Herszkowicz's biography – on his inventiveness, his adaptability to changing circumstances in the ghetto, his refusal to be silenced, and his ultimate powerlessness against censoring forces in the Lodz Ghetto.

Through my interviews with Yankele Herszkowicz's son in October 2002, October 2003, and June 2005, I learned that "Ikh bin geven..." ("I was...") narrates the tale of Herszkowicz's temporary incarceration in a ghetto church on Lagiewnicka Street for "disturbing the peace." A tailor before the war, Herszkowicz had never sung publicly prior to ghettoization – nor would he again after surviving the ghetto and several concentration camps⁶. Aleks informed me that his father began writing lyrics based on his own critiques of current events in the ghetto, and he sang these to his friends, who were very amused by them. They encouraged Yankele, who was impoverished and unemployed, to try singing these compositions in the streets for audiences. People gave him money, and he became so popular that this

³ Hence it is unlikely that Herszkowicz would have known how to provide musical annotations for the melodies he transcribed.

⁴ See Bergovski 1982:34 (Flam 1992:37).

⁵ Other than Isaiah Spiegel's "Nisht keyn rozhinkes, nisht keyn mandlen" ("No more raisins, no more almonds") and "Makht tsu di eyegelekh" ("Close your little eyes") – songs that were performed in the Lodz Ghetto's House of Culture, Herszkowicz's songs appear to rank among the most memorable in the minds of survivors of the Lodz Ghetto.

⁶ The notable exception to this would be Herszkowicz's 1965 radio performance for Polskie Radio for a radio documentary on songs in the ghettos and concentration camps of Nazioccupied Europe. Of the 11 songs that Herszkowicz recorded for that program, only one was aired. There is no known surviving copy of this radio program, however, Aleksander Herszkowicz deposited a cassette copy of the 11 recorded songs in the YIVO Institute in New York, where it is available for listening. Henia and Nochem Reinhart have provided transcriptions of the Yiddish lyrics, and have translated them into English.

pastime eventually became his main source of income. The song “Ikh bin geven” is set to the melody of the familiar nostalgic song “Belz” (music by Alexander Olshanetzky, lyrics by Jacob Jacobs), and demonstrates not only Herszkowicz’s virtuosity as a storyteller and humourist, but underscores also his ability to adapt to even the most strange and unfortunate of ghetto circumstances:

Ikh bin geven...⁷

(Gezungen loyt der melodie fun “Belz”)

Ikh bin geven, a shnayder geven,
Haynt iz alts fardreyt, vos iz geshen,
Gevorn arbetsloz un gelitn noyt,
Geshtorbn far hunger, far a shtikele broyt...
Nisht far keyn shpas
Gevorn a zinger in gas,
Biz me hot mekh dervisht,
Politsay mikh farknest,
Oyf Lagiewnicka gas, gekhapt dort dem yat
Un gefirt mikh glaykh
in dem Komisariat...

I was...

(Sung to the melody of “Belz”)

I was, a tailor I was,
Today everything is a mess, what happened,
I have become unemployed and suffered distress,
Dead of hunger, for a piece of bread...
Not for any joke
I became a singer in the street,
Until I was caught,
Bethrothed⁸ to the police
On Lagiewnicka Street⁹, caught there a chap
And took me directly to
the commissariat¹⁰...

Refreyn:

Khapt a zinger a khvat
Un firt im glaykh
In komisariat.
Az m’tor nisht shmuglen keyn pekl, keyn lid...
A shver lebn – ikh bin shoyrn mid,
Nishto keyn groshen, s’iz groys di noyt,
S’iz a lebediker gehenem, dos iz a
langzamer toyt.
Az m’tor nisht shmuglen, vi ken zayn gut,
Az m’tor nisht shraybn, farfasn keyn lid...
Keyn oysveg tsum lebn, fartsveyflt, fartrakht,

Refrain:

Catch a singer, a dapper (dashing skillful young) chap¹¹
And escort him directly
To the commissariat.
If one must not smuggle any package, no song...
A hard life – I am tired already,
Without a penny, but the need is great,
It is a living hell, this is a slow
death.
If one must not smuggle, how can one be good,
If one must not write, compose any songs...
Without a way to live, desperate, pensive,

⁷ Transliteration and translation by I. Kohn.

⁸ Herszkowicz’s word choice here is lovely and captures the irony with which he (and other ghetto inmates) highlight the absurdity of such ghetto scenes through the Yiddish language. Here, the acrimonious image of the captured criminal singer being led away in handcuffs by the angry police is rendered as a sort of absurd betrothal.

⁹ See *Kronika getta lodzkiego, tom I (stycen 1941 –maj 1942)*, red. Danuta Dabrowska I Lucjan Dobroszycki, Wydawnictwo Lodzkie, 1965:253. “From the beginning of the ghetto’s existence, Lagewniecka Street has been a central place of trade, and the large square abutting it, the so-called Jójne Pilzer Plac, was the central marketplace, where food, clothing, haberdashery, ceramics and all kinds of second-hand goods were available. There were kiosks and stalls there, and the trade kept going all day long; a whole army of sellers filled Lagiewnicka Street, stopping traffic and causing a constant disorder with their shouting. In mid-September, Mr. Chairman decided to clean the street of the sellers for the sake of safety and order.”

¹⁰ *Komisariat* – from the Polish = police station. I have retained the word “commissariat” above, although it has a different meaning in English (in English it refers to the food and supplies department of an army) as it retains some of the sense of the rhythm and rhyme scheme of Herszkowicz’s original composition, conveying the humour with which he relays a gravely serious event in the ghetto – his having been sent to jail.

¹¹ While the Yiddish word “khvat” need only refer to one of the adjectives I have provided in English, it captures dimensions of all of them, and I have included all to capture the irony with which Herszkowicz would likely have boasted his many “assets” to further emphasize the injustice of the apprehension of such a charming fellow by the ghetto police.

Vos iz geshen? Ver hot es gemakht?
 Haynt bin ikh in kas,
 Ikh zing haynt in gas,
 Tsulib noyt,
 Oyf a shtikele broyt.
 Di arbet iz dokh shver,
 Vi ken es zayn gringer?
 Ven kh'zing nisht, volt ikh geshtorbn far hunger.

Refreyn:

Khapt a zinger, a khvat
 Un firt im glaykh
 In komisariat.
 Farnakht iz gekumen Rumkowski aleyn:
 Me darf dem zinger tsu gebn a shayn¹².
 Er zogt mit oyfregung, mit fil kas,
 Az m'vet di zingers nisht shtern in gas.
 "Itst hob ikh gezen, az politsay hot a toes –
 Ir redt un ir redt un ir veyst nisht vos."
 Alts vos ikh dertseylt aykh, alts iz vor,
 Rumkowski zol aynnemen a shvarts yor*.

Refreyn:

Khapt a zinger, a khvat
 Un firt im glaykh
 In komisariat.
 *Oyb moyr far Rumkowski flegt der
 zinger di letste shureh endern azoy:
 "Rumkowski muz lebn gantse hundert yor."

What happened? Who caused this?
 Today I am angry,
 I sing today in the street,
 Because of poverty,
 For a piece of bread.
 The work is hard,
 How could it be easier?
 If I didn't sing, I would die of hunger.

Refrain:

Catch a singer, a dapper (dashing skillful young) chap
 And escort him directly
 To the commissariat.
 At dusk came Rumkowski himself:
 One should give the singer a deportation notice.
 He speaks with excitement, with great rage,
 That there shall not be singers in the way of the street
 "Now I have seen that the police made a mistake
 You talk and you talk and you know not what."
 All that I have told you, everything is true,
 May Rumkowski have a black year¹³.

Refrain

Catch a singer, a dapper (dashing skillful young) chap
 And escort him directly
 To the commissariat.
 *If he feared that Rumkowski might come
 the singer would end the last verse thus:
 "Rumkowski must live for a whole hundred years."¹⁴

¹² A "shayn" translates literally as a "light." However, in the Lodz Ghetto *shayn* was one of several words used to indicate a "deportation notice" (oral history interview with Henia Reinhartz, May 21, 2007). Another perhaps equally ironic term for deportation notice was a *khasene karte* – or "wedding invitation" (Cf. Rosenbaum, I and M.I. Feigenbaum, "Expressions Used in the Ghetto of Lodz," in *From the Last Extermination: Journal for the History of the Jewish People During the Nazi Regime*. Ed. Israel Kaplan. Munich: Tsentraler Komisi baym tsentraler komitet fun de bafreyten yidn in ere Amerikaner Zone No. 3 (Oktober – November 1946, pp. 68-71). For ghetto inmates, the word *shayn* may have captured the black irony with which they understood the significance of deportation, as an indication of better things to come (good news, or brighter days). For more on the black humour of Yiddish terms in the ghettos and camps see Shapiro, Robert Moses. "Yiddish Slang Under the Nazis." *The Book Peddler 11-12*, 31-32.

¹³ "May Rumkowski have a black year" – this malediction might also be expressed as the follows: "May Rumkowski die a violent death." In other words, then intent is to curse Rumkowski, in contradistinction to the Polish blessing (insert the Polish) "May Rumkowski live one hundred years."

¹⁴ The notation beside the asterisk was made by Wajsbilat. Herszkowicz's ability to think on his feet is made apparent through this notation. However, Herszkowicz's willingness to compromise his song for the sake of his own safety is not wholehearted if one notes his deliberate shortchanging of the traditional Yiddish benediction *Biz hundert tsvantsik yorn* ("May you live to be one hundred and twenty years old") for the traditional Polish benediction *Sto lat* ("Until one hundred"). However, the alternate lyric "May Rumkowski live one hundred years" could pass as sincere if detected by lurking authorities, while the direct malediction *Az aynnemen zol er a shavarts yor* ("May Rumkowski have a black year") would have constituted an act of public treason, and therefore be grounds for deportation.

This song, and its haunting counterpart to which I shall come presently, give us a perspective on the ways in which studying Herszkowicz's songs makes it possible to grasp the ways in which ghetto inmates "were – or could become – *simultaneously* both objects of history and its subjects" (Ludtke 1995:6). Here, Herszkowicz has transformed the story of his incarceration for "disturbing the peace" with his songs, into another song, which he performed in public after his release¹⁵. The song describes (and performs) the ways in which Herszkowicz's appearance in the streets of the Lodz Ghetto began as a struggle to find new and inventive ways to secure food, but came to mean much more to himself and the audiences for whom he performed. Rendering the content of this song more powerful would have been Herszkowicz's presence in the streets, and the presence of listening crowds around him, in defiance of the very orders that Herszkowicz was given by both the ghetto police and Rumkowski himself.

The nostalgic, saccharine melody of "Belz," to which the singer sets this song mocks the earnestness with which Herszkowicz presents his regrets for his alleged crime. Unlike the narrator of "Belz" who longs for his innocent boyhood in a pastoral *shtetl* where he had "so many beautiful dreams," Herszkowicz waxes nostalgic for the days before he was "betrothed" to the ghetto police, caught, and jailed for singing a song critical of the ghetto administration. The fact that Herszkowicz expresses this regret in the act of defying and mocking the ghetto administration obviously belies the purportedly earnest tenor of the song, and any profession of remorse he may claim to have. One can imagine the excitement with which ghetto inmates would have received Herszkowicz's post-incarceration performance of this song. Indeed, Herszkowicz's ability to think on his feet becomes apparent in Wajsblat's notation at the bottom of the transcription "Oyb moyre far Rumkowski flegt der zinger di letste shureh endern azoy: 'Rumkowski muz lebn gantse hundert yor.'" ["If he feared that Rumkowski might come, the singer would end the last verse thus: 'Rumkowski must live for a whole hundred years.'"]

"Vos di shishkes veln ton nokh der milkhome," ("What the Big Shots Will Do After the War"), for which no melody is provided, might offer somewhat of a coda for the incident that "Ikh bin geven" narrates. Judging by Wajsblat's notation at the end of the transcription of the uncompleted song ("Dos lid nisht derzungen, vayl zayendik in lager hot Herszkowicz fargesn a bisl"—"This song was unfinished because having ended up in Auschwitz, Herszkowicz forgot a little"), this is the song that finally got Herszkowicz deported from the Lodz Ghetto on May 11, 1944, some three and a half months prior to the final liquidation of Lodz Ghetto in August 1944. The song begins with an unambiguous attack on Rumkowski himself (["Der Prezes vet handlen beygl in gas.." — "The President will deal bagels in the street..."]), and names no fewer than forty-two ghetto dignitaries – mostly directors and managers of the various factories and departments in the Lodz Ghetto, assigning each his or her own circle in a Dantesque kind of hell. In this lengthy and detailed song, what is as visible as Herszkowicz's ironic wit is his rage at ghetto conditions. In this song, those he names (all of them members of the ghetto elite, and hence the so-called accused) are not spared in a scathing inferno of poetic justice – where they are doomed postwar to repeat forever and in ridiculous fashion the action that best encapsulated their contribution to ghetto life and their character in the ghetto. Hence, here "Guterman [manager of the shoemaker's plant in Marysin] will become a shoemaker / And glue with adhesive / Itzshbitzki [assistant manager with Guterman of the shoemaker's plant] the apprentice, / Zonabend [technical director

¹⁵ According to Aleksander Herszkowicz, his father was put on the deportation lists for his transgression at the time, but due to the intervention of friends and family members, he was eventually taken off and released. Poets and artists in the ghetto put themselves in danger by creating works that presented an unflattering picture of the ghetto or its administration. Similar to Herszkowicz, the writers Isaiah Spiegel and Rachmil Bryks were put on the deportation lists for their public performances (Spiegel after a public performance "Makht tsu di eyegelekh" at which Rumkowski was present, and Bryks after a public reading of his poem "Ghetto Factory 76"). Bryks and Spiegel were removed from these lists thanks to the intercession of influential friends in the ghetto.

of the felt-shoe factory], the craftsman.”¹⁶ Zashoyer, a dignitary mentioned in the third line of this song (for a time, director of the Department of Social Aid in the Lodz Ghetto, and a purported “yes-man” of Rumkowski’s (cf. Trunk, 2006:315) is prophesied to run a brothel after the war [or fuck-*ressort* according the colourful Yiddish slang which is expressed by Herszkowicz¹⁷] “with beds of turtle doves”¹⁸. “Vos dishishkes vel ton...” is a scathing indictment of the privilege that the elite arrogated in Lodz Ghetto, while the vast majority of ghetto inmates worked themselves to death, fell ill, struggled to survive, and starved. The song reflects Herszkowicz at his angriest and most frustrated – he had to have known that the public performance of such a song could only result in his deportation. Perhaps at this point in the history of the ghetto, he was prepared to give up the familiar drudgery of ghetto life for something different – even if it meant a worse fate.

While Herszkowicz’s survival of the Lodz Ghetto, Auschwitz, and Braunschweig are events that have permitted us some invaluable documentation on the street singer’s activities and his eyewitness testimonies to and commentaries on life in the Lodz Ghetto, there are still many details of his life that we need to tease out by using a range of sources in concert and in contrast with one another. Herszkowicz’s tragic suicide in Lodz in 1974, and more recently his son Aleksander’s untimely death in 2006, make it still more difficult to get some details of his life that might permit an enriched exploration of the significance of some of his songs. However, Wajsblat’s simple tribute to Herszkowicz, in the act of publishing his transcribed songs, stands as a loving eulogy and *yiskor*, a coda to Gila Flam’s ethnographic research on songs and their significance in Lodz Ghetto, and an invaluable resource for studying the history of everyday life in the Lodz Ghetto through the eyes, hearts, and minds of its inhabitants.

Yossi Wajsblat’s *Dos Gezang fun Lodzsher Geto/La Ballade du Ghetto du Lodz*

Yankele Herszkowicz and his Songs

A Translation of Wajsblat’s Introduction by Irena Kohn

With Yankele Herszkowicz, the ghetto singer, I was connected in the kind of friendship that only joint misfortune can sow. I remember only too well our first encounter. I was just a young lad when for the first time I beheld him in our courtyard in the ghetto – it was Shabbos – and in the yard I can imagine him: “Children, I have for you a serving of cholent¹⁹.” The “cholent” was his song “Rumkowski Chaim,” that had become in the ghetto the most well-known and most often sung song. I never imagined then that I would become so close to this Jew who was so much older than me.

Yankele Herszkowicz was born in Opatov, in the region of Kielce on July 22, 1910. His father was a tailor. Yankele did not have any formal education. Before the war, he travelled with his father and helped him to sell the suits he had made. In the workshop, he would also help out. He was brought into the ghetto when all of the Jews of different

¹⁶ “Guterman vet vern shuster/ Un klebn mit klaster/ Izshbitzki dos lern-yingl / Zonabend der mayster.” (Wajsblat 1994:69)

¹⁷ I thank my Yiddish informants Nochem and Henia Reinhartz for capturing the vividness of obscenity of Herszkowicz’s wording here.

¹⁸ “Zaschoyer vet hobn a tren-*ressort*/ Mit terkloybns betn” (Wajsblat 1994:69)

¹⁹ *cholent*: a stew made from potatoes, barley, beans, carrots, garlic cloves, mushrooms and onions and usually associated with Shabbos. In shtetls in Poland in the interwar period, cholent could be prepared on a Friday and brought uncooked to the baker before sunset, to be picked up, cooked on Saturday morning and eaten for Shabbos meals.

shtetlekh²⁰ were rounded up into one big city.

I don't know how much and what Yankele Herszkowicz sang before the war. I know that he was introduced to singing as a tailor and as the son of a tailor, and that in his life he had heard a lot of melodies, having been living surrounded by the humming of songs in the workshop at work. And perhaps, through that experience, he alone was able to sing something for his friends. And of course he was an expert balladeer²¹, as it was fitting for a faithful craftsman. Like this, we were matched. But in the ghetto, I knew: there Yankele Herszkowicz became the renowned singer. People were soon captivated by his songs and snatched them up, in them we ghetto Jews alone recognized ourselves, our wretched lives, miserable and short, rarely joyful. In a time when we so seldom had joys or consolations, Yankele's songs played an important role.

Yankele had the inborn ability to be able to sing out those ghetto burdens that were known, and those that would be heard. He instinctively understood how to cloak protest in the guise of popular simplicity. Gentle irony, as it was, amiably. Through his songs, the Lodz Ghetto expressed a little its bitter heart, and at the same time, did all it could to stay alive, to survive. For example, in the song "Rumkowski Chaim," he expressed a few candid critical words. Therefore the Jewish police arrested Herszkowicz. In answer to this he replaced "Our king has grey hair / May he live to be one hundred and twenty years." The offending words were omitted. With the song he made himself a reputation in the ghetto. Of any important event he could make a song: "a theft in the bakery, the queue for food in the ghetto, the approaching winter... He was our singing newspaper, a singing daily chronicle that brought a smile to the distressed ghetto Jews. And so I heard him singing in the streets until 1944.

As fate would have it, when I was brought to Birkenau, I met Yankele Herszkowicz there. There once again I heard him sing the only song that he composed in the camps – "Shtubn-eltster" (Room-master / Kapo). After that, we went together as metal-workers on the same transport to Braunschweig. We worked to repair used cars in the factory "Parts Plant". There we became closer. During the Allied firebomb bombing, I ran into the burning buildings and gathered clothing, food, whatever I could and later I shared it with Yankele, and in turn, he re-sewed for me a too-big shirt. Until liberation, we stayed together, helping each other, sharing with each other what we had.

When we were liberated, on the 2nd of May, 1945, each of us went his own way. And I lost contact with Yankele Herszkowicz. We first found each other again eighteen years later, when I came to Lodz to erect a gravestone in memory of my parents. Then I discovered that in post-war Poland my friend had settled down as well as he could, created a family and for a long time was fully active in the cultural renewal of Jewish settlement in Poland. But after the end of the year 1956, when a lot of the Jewish intelligentsia and artists emigrated from Poland, he stayed, alone. And that made him deeply despondent, although for personal reasons, he would not leave the country. We renewed our previous contact without any more interruption. For years we carried on our correspondence with one another: through the mail we refreshed our memories of years gone by, now replaced by fresh worries; through the mail I strove to reassure and encourage him in any way I could. But his desolation was invincible. We now understand this period as the last anti-Semitic wave of 1967 with the last emigration of the Jewish creative element in Poland, and after that his outlook became jaded far worse. In 1972, Yankele's son wrote to me that his father had taken his own life on the 7th of March. Through gassing himself at his workplace. In this way altogether had the singer of the Lodz Ghetto, after

²⁰ *shtetlekh*: plural of *shtetl*, the Yiddish word for small towns with large Jewish populations in pre-Holocaust Central and Eastern Europe.

²¹ Here Wajsblat speaks of Herszkowicz's skill in constructing (and performing) narrative songs – songs that told a story, and usually had a refrain that could be repeated by an audience.

so many years full of struggle, joined his longed-for people.

Surviving him there are several score ghetto songs that his son entrusted to me. And surviving also through the living witnesses from Lodz Ghetto is the memory of those bitter years when Yankele Herszkowicz's street songs were the first relief for our anguished spirits. Now those songs come out in book form as a spirited memorial. On behalf of those who would keep alive the modest prowess of a true folk hero, who in our darkest hours rewarded us with a little smile, with a human word, as an emissary of our collective cry.

Yosl Vaysblat

Ikh bin geven...
Sung to the tune of "Belz, Mayn Shtetele"

Lyrics by Yankele Herszkowicz
Music by Alexander Olshanetsky
Transliterated by Irena Kohn

Moderato

1. Ikh bin ge - ven, a sh - nay - der geven Haynt iz alts far - dreyt, vos iz ge -
 2. Az m' tor ni - sht sh - mu - gLEN keyn pekl, ke - yn lid, A sh - ver
 3. Hay - - - nt bin ikh in kes, Ikh
 4. Far - nakht iz ge - ku - men Rum - kow - ski ale - yn: Me darf

shen, Ge - vorn ar - bets - loz un ge - li - m noyt, Gesh - tor - bn far
 lebn, ikh bin sho - yn mid, Nish - to keyn groshen, s'iz groys di
 zing hay - nt in gas, Tsu
 dem zin - ger tsu ge - bn a sha - yn Er zogt

hun - ger, far a shti - kele broyt... Ni - sht far ke - yn sh -
 noyt S'iz a lebe - diker gebenem, dos iz a langzamer toyt Az m'tor nisht
 lib noyt, Oyf a shti - ke
 mit oy - fre - gung, mit fil kes, Az m' - ke

pas shunglen, Ge - vorn a zinger in gas, Biz me
 vi ken zayn gut, Az m'tor nisht shray - bn, far - fas - n keyn
 le broyt, Di ar - bet iz do
 vet di zin - gers nisht sh - tern in gas. "Ist hob ikh

hot mikh der - vis - ht, Pol - it - say mikh far - kanst Oyf Lagew - ni - cka
 lid... Ke - yn oys - veg tsum le - bn, farts - vey - fit, far - tra -
 kh shver, Vi ken es zayn gringer? Ven kh'zing
 gezen, az politsay hot a toes Ir redt un ir redt un ir veyst nisht vos.' Alts vos ikh dert -

gas, ge - khapt dort dem yat Un gefirt mikh glaykh in dem Komi - sa - niat...
 kht, Vos iz ge - shen? Ver hot es gem - ak - - ht?
 nisht, volt ikh gesh - tor - - - bn far - hum - ger.
 seyit aykh, alts iz vor, Rum - kow - ski zol aynemen a sh - varts yor.

Ikh bin geven...

Dm Gm Dm Gm F Gm
Refrain After 1st, 3rd, and 4th verses

Khapt_____ a zin-ger a khvat_____ Un firt_____ im_____ glay -

Dm Gm Dm A7 Dm Gm Dm

kh In komi - sa - riat._____ Khapt_____ a zin-ger a kavat_____

Gm F Gm Dm Gm Dm C7 F Bb

Un firt_____ im_____ glay - - - kh In komisa - riat._____

F Bb F C F F Gm G Bbm F Gm

A7 Dm Gm Dm Gm F Gm

Khapt_____ a zin-ger a khvat_____ Un firt_____ im_____ glay -

Dm Gm Dm Dm

kh In komi - sa - riat._____ riat._____

Permission to reprint the sheet music to "Belz, Mayn Shtetele" composed by Alexander Olshanetsky as it appears in *Pavls of Yiddish Song*, compiled by Eleanor Gordon Mlotek and Joseph Mlotek.

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