

אונדזערע פארפייניקטע קינסטלער
[Oondzereh Farpeinikteh Kinstler]
*Our Tortured/Tormented Artists*¹

By Hersh Fenster² (with a forward by Marc Chagall³)

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Pages 136–140 translated into English from the original Yiddish.

Editor's notes:

Individual translations from Yiddish to English were commissioned from two professional translators, both native Yiddish speakers and published Yiddish scholars, Rivka Schiller (currently (2019)) a doctoral student at Graduate School of Jewish Studies, Touro College) and Khane-Faygl Turtletaub, Ph.D. A third translation was made by Samson Munn, M.D.⁴ The three translations of Schiller, Turtletaub and Munn were later merged and edited by Munn.

Thus, this final translation is a perfect reflection of none of the three translations, but rather is an amalgamation edited to include the most precisely translated diction, syntax, etc., with important contributions from all three translators. In essentially all cases, more precision in translation from Yiddish was preferred by the editor over fluency of English syntax; this approach was felt to retain more of the flavor of the author's written Yiddish.

Parentheses appear in the English translation just as they appeared in the original Yiddish chapter. On the other hand, brackets indicate insertions by the editor. Also, the original, Yiddish chapter included neither footnotes nor endnotes.

Not all of the commas used by Fenster would have been necessary, nor perhaps even proper, in written Yiddish. Fenster's Yiddish gave the sense that he wrote as though he were speaking; commas suggested momentary pauses in speech. The editor endeavored to retain Fenster's apparent pace. In most such instances, commas were likewise placed herein in English as Fenster had placed them in his written Yiddish.

In reading Yiddish or Hebrew names, place names or words with "a" as the key vowel in a syllable (e.g., not applicable to words with "ay"), please remember that few (if any) languages have the "a" sound of "ant" or of "bank" in American English. Yiddish does not. Such words usually carry the vowel sound of "aunt" in British English, or of the "ha" or "ma" in any variant of English. For instance, *Kabbalah* contains three instances of "a" in which the vowel sound rhymes with "ma." The vowel sound of *Yank'l* is the same as that of "ma," not that of "yank" in American English.

When "K" or "k" appears in this translation (or "K" or "k" if the word is otherwise italicized), it should be taken to mean that the sound at that point in the word should have

a decidedly guttural articulation, the same as that of the letter *Khet* (כּ) in modern Hebrew, more harshly throaty than the *ch* sound in the *Hochdeutsch* pronunciation of the German word “Bach.”

The editor utilized three dictionaries endlessly:

- *Yiddish–English–Hebrew Dictionary*, by Alexander Harkavy, published by Schocken Books and YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, second edition, 1928, reissued 1987, ISBN 0 8052 4027 6;
- *Comprehensive Yiddish–English Dictionary*, Editors-in-Chief Solon Beinfeld and Harry Bochner, Associate Editors Barry Goldstein and Yankl Salant, published by Indiana University Press [based on *Dictionnaire Yiddish–Français*, published in Paris by Bibliothèque Medem, 2002, by Y. Niborski, B. Vaisbrot and S. Neuberg], 2013, ISBN 978 0 253 00983 8; and,
- *Modern English–Yiddish Yiddish–English Dictionary*, by Uriel Weinreich, published by YIVO Institute for Jewish Research and Schocken Books, first published 1977, ISBN 0 8052 0575 6.

Yakov Montshnik⁵
Jacob Macznik⁶
1905–1945



Standing in sight of our eye is the quiet, serious young man. He is of average height. His rather long, Sephardic-Jewish face is covered with a thin, bluish skin. His hair black and wavy. The eyes reddish

as though not well rested, weary. He always talks in quiet speech and before he utters a word, it is well thought-through.

I became acquainted with him and his wife, the saintly Sonia (Sarah), in the year 1929. He said that he is a painter and came from Łódź⁷ to Paris in order to pursue his artistic development⁸ here, and that his wife works in a leather coat factory.

They lived in a hotel room in one of the old, densely populated, poor, worker quarters.

The walls of his hotel room were hung with his oil paintings. Here and there, in a little vase or water glass — a couple of fresh, little flowers.

Laid before the open window of the room, spread out high and low, was a landscape entirely of roofs. Indeed, from there, the hotel room, originated the artist's depiction, "Parisian Roofs," that he later exhibited with still more of his artwork in Paris and in Łódź.

The thoughts that he uttered were the expression of his struggles and searches.

A little later, they moved into an artist studio at Rue Perrel 2⁹, in a building in which the famous painter the *Douanier*–Rousseau¹⁰ had lived¹¹. This was a studio filled with pictures¹² on the walls and shelves of books about art, and literary works in Yiddish and French.

There, a couple of little canary birds flew, singing in the cage, at times flying out of it and filling the studio hollow with their singing.

Up high, in the mezzanine¹³ of the studio, there was the kitchen, which was also the dining room. Also there, at the sewing machine, his wife worked clothes that she had taken [home] from a factory¹⁴, singing a Jewish folk tune while sewing on the machine. Her husband, the artist, who often stood by a board and pressed¹⁵ the clothes, also often used to hum a cozy¹⁶ melody along.

* *
*

Sonia, the daughter of a poor, Łódź, Jewish tailor, looked like a rabbinically descended daughter. She loved to dress in black silk, in velvet. She was very musical, and used to perform at concerts of the Łódźer "HaZmir"¹⁷, singing in Beethoven's "Ninth"¹⁸ Symphony" in Hebrew.

She very much loved to sing Yiddish folksongs. Her husband Yank'¹⁹ also sometimes used to sing Saturday nights²⁰. But his songs were mostly sad, gloomy. Songs of Jewish poverty, of Jewish grief²¹. He used to, while seated at the table, suddenly make a stroke with his right hand over his bony knee and switch to a cheerful note, as he would himself have wanted to be freed from the sorrowful, haunting tenor²², and proceeded to relate tales, aphorisms, and in doing so often used to laugh heartily.

He was born the fourth of December 1905 in Łódź. His father, the Aleksander Khasid, *Reb*²³ Israel²⁴, was a laquerer of furniture. He gave his son Jacob a Jewish-traditional upbringing, sent him to study in *kheder*²⁵, and also [he] himself [Israel] studied *khumash*²⁶ and *Rashi*²⁷ with him [Jacob].



J. Mącznik's wife, the martyress Sonia, photo

During the First World War, his father and his [the father's] household left Łódź and traveled to his relatives in the village Potok²⁸, near Kielce²⁹.

There, Jake loved to wander around, to walk to the village river, where he used to form³⁰ all kinds of small animals. His parents later moved [house] with their children to Kielce and there continued their poor livelihood of baking little baked goods³¹ that their young child Jake used to carry half-days across Kielce's taverns to sell. The other half-days he occupied himself with study, drawing and reading.

Driven by a deep impulse to devote himself to painting, he traveled, without means, in the year 1922 from Łódź to Warsaw and entered the local art academy.

By day he studied in the academy, and by night he worked until in the late hours on adorning albums with all kinds of motifs, in order to have a little something [to eat], a piece of bread.

He was wed in 1928 and in the same year came with his wife to Paris to pursue his artistic development⁸.

Once, in the spring of 1937, he came to me, his head as he often used to hold it, a little bowed downward, and said to me in nearly an entreating voice, “Let us both travel to Poland. I will paint there and you will write.”

And my unforgettable friend proposed to paint our generations-old synagogues on Polish soil. “There will come,” he said with a tremulous voice, “a storm and there will not remain any traces of



Mącznik in the year 1937, during the period when he painted the Jewish *shuls*³⁵ in Poland

them, of the Jewish monuments³².”

With his artist-soul, he anticipated³³ and grew anxious over³⁴ the fierce storm.

“We will travel, Jake.”

Not having any money with which to lead his noble mission to immortalize the old Jewish *shuls*³⁵ in Poland, now as a remnant of generations of Jewish life in that country, before they will be destroyed by the storm, he knocked on the doors of all Jewish organizations and spoke about the importance of salvaging Jewish monuments³² as long as there is still time. (In Germany, there had already been burnings of Jewish *shuls*³⁵.)

With his little artist’s case, paints and paintbrushes, he left for Poland, deviating first to Prague, in order to paint the Old-New Synagogue³⁶.

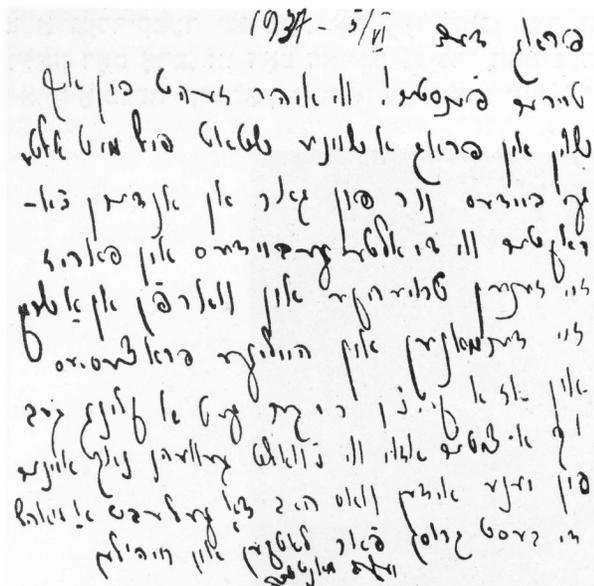
“The buildings here,” he wrote from there, “are sad ones and burdened with dread. They bring to mind holy processions. And as a kind of church bell provides a peal, I react with a start³⁷, as if I would have been one more of those Jews, who lived there.”

Later, we met each other in Tarnów³⁸. With great pleasure, he took out of his artist-portfolio³⁹ the *shuls* of Przeworsk⁴⁰ and Rzeszów⁴¹, that he had painted, and showed them to me.

Thereafter, we both traveled to my birth-*shtetl* Baranów⁴² to my father on *Shabbat*⁴³.

Shabbat after dinner [likely referring to supper Friday night supper, but possibly to luncheon Saturday], he held a lecture about art for the Baranów Jewish youth.

We left by steamship for Tsoizmer (Sandomierz), the Old Town⁴⁴, the Polish city being situated on



1937-5/11 פתח תקוה
טוב מאוד שמעתי שאתה בא לביקור
בפראג. פראג היא עיר יפה מאד
אך היא שונה מאד מפרס. הבתים
העתיקים שם הם כהנים וקרים
ועוברים על הרוח. הם נראים
כאילו הם עוברים על הרוח. הם
נראים כהנים וקרים ועוברים
על הרוח. הם נראים כהנים וקרים
ועוברים על הרוח. הם נראים כהנים
וקרים ועוברים על הרוח. הם נראים
כהנים וקרים ועוברים על הרוח.

Prague, June 5th, 1937

Dear Fenster! As you can see, I am already in Prague, a beautiful city full of old buildings, but of a completely different character than the old buildings in Paris. They are gloomy and give you a scare. They remind one of holy processions and if a church bell rings, I react with a start now as if I were still one of those Jews who lived here long ago.

Best regards for Latke and Khayele

Yaakov Mącznik

Copy of a postcard of Mącznik to H. Fenster

the Vistula river.

We visited the streets, the monuments³² of the said city.

When we also took a glimpse into the local little cathedral, our eyes were immediately struck with a large oil painting. The said “artwork” represented, how two Jews, with long beards and strange facial appearances tapped blood from a Christian child into a vessel on Pesakh⁴⁵ ...

With a dejected mood and disgust, we immediately left the place, where the said “painting” hung in such a respectable place, so that they who pray to the God of love, mercy and forgiveness, should be able therefrom during prayer to inspire themselves ...

We set off onto cozy Jewish lanes. The windows of the small homes stood open. We went to one of the lower, open windows: at a low, small cobbler’s table with a little yarn and a reddish, small piece of wax sat a gentle old man with a snow-white beard. He appeared like one of the patriarchs. He sat up,

approaching the window saying: “Peace be upon you⁴⁶, Jews. Where are you fellows from? And what are your names?⁴⁷”

When we told the old man, our names and from where we come, he answered with a smile,

“And I, my name is Layb Las. *Las* indeed means *forest*⁴⁸ and I am young and fresh like a forest.”

A spring of warmth soon poured on the young artist’s face.

He long held the *Reb*’ Layb’s hand in his [hands] during leave-taking.



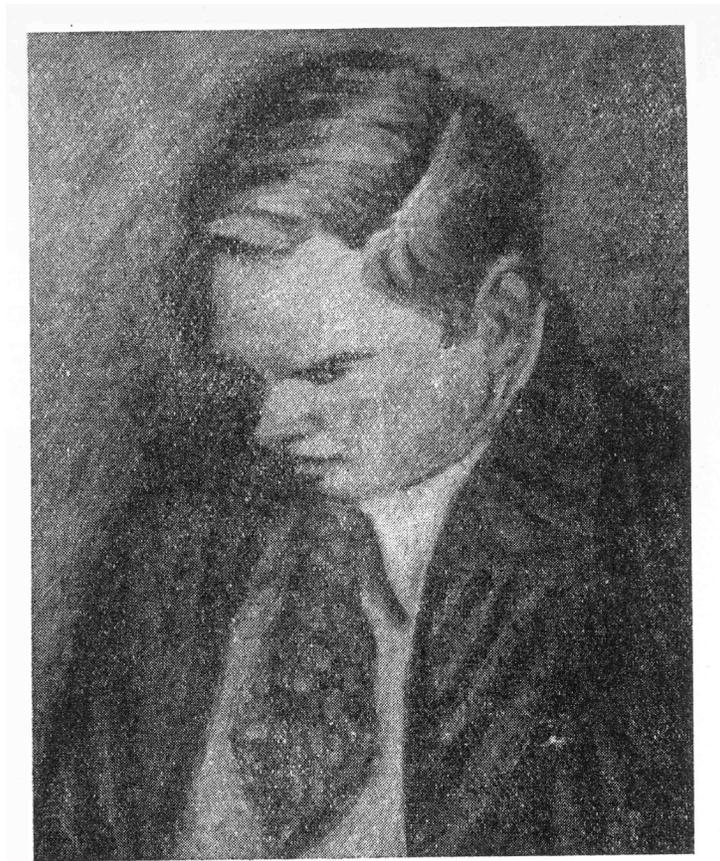
J. Mącznik

Jews of Przedbórz, oil painting

Collection of Miss Esther Miedzinski Paris

The same day, we left by night toward Kurów⁴⁹, where Jake wanted to paint the *shul*-fortress.

When we entered the *shul*, we became surprised by the magnificently carved holy ark, by the pulpit and almemar, that we immediately set to photograph, on account of their beauty⁵⁰. But we were no less enthused by *Reb*' Yoskeh Sofer, who was the cantor of the *shul*, for his finely chiseled face, for his discreet, aristocratic gait.



J. Mącznik, portrait of the poet Leib Malach, oil painting
[pseudonym of Leib Salzman]

Reb' Yoskeh regaled us, amongst other stories, about the king-for-a-day, King Saul Wahl⁵¹. Thereafter, we visited the little village of Zawichost⁵², with its touching Jews, with its idealistic, Jewish worker-youth. My friend went with the youth, spoke with them into the late, starry night.

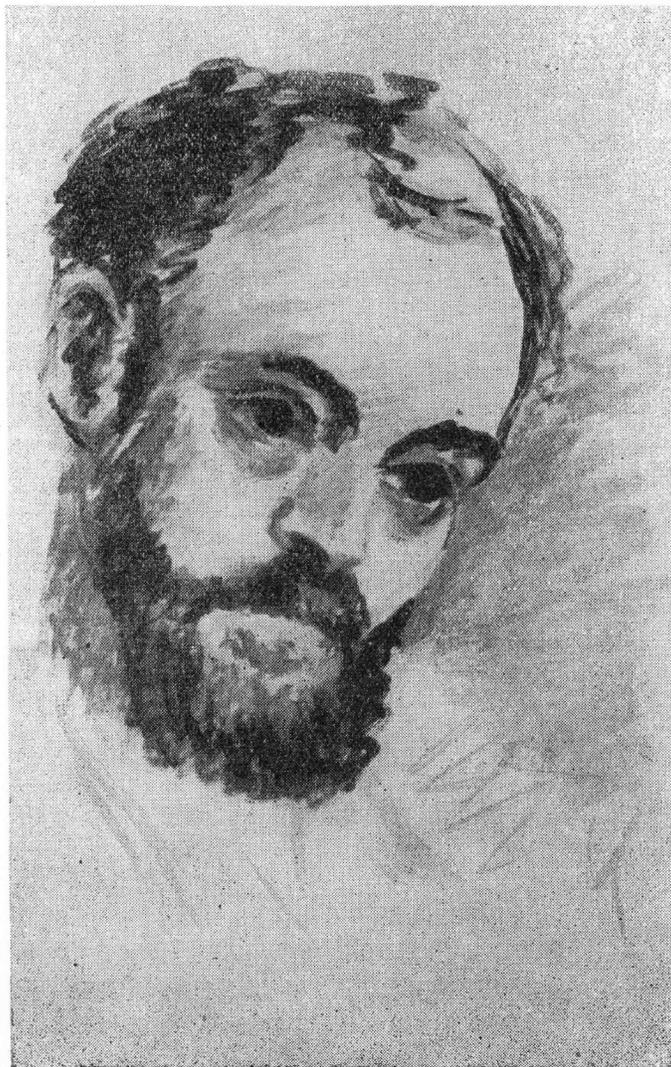
In the *shul*, the rabbi's assistant showed us beautiful, old torah ark curtains.

The next morning, we found the lively village completely different: disquietude⁵³ lay poured onto the faces of the Jews. There was a widespread rumor that two Jews had been found slain in a neighboring

forest, that became manifest a little later as untrue, and this little village soon regained its prior physiognomy⁵⁴.

Jake set to painting the *shul*. Young and old looked on. We wandered farther through other Jewish settlements, submerged ourselves in *Yiddishkeit*⁵⁵.

In Łódź, he led me around, showing the “Ba-lut,” where the Jewish poverty was housed⁵⁶, to which he was bound. He led me to the *Khasidim*²³-*shtibeleKh*.⁵⁷ A strong impression was made on him of the *shtibel* of the “Dead *Khasidim*”⁵⁸ — so one called them, the *Khasidim* of Reb²² *Nakhman* of Bratslever⁵⁸. After *Minkha*⁵⁹ and *Mayrev*⁶⁰, Jews sat at a long, not brightly lit table and listened to the Jew who, holding in his hand a *sefer*⁶¹, studied with them, saying: “The Rabbi, may his merit protect us, said ...”



J. Mącznik, portrait of the writer Wolf Wieviorka, oil painting
Collection of H. Fenster

We parted ways. Some days later, I received a letter from him, that he wanted very much to paint certain other⁶² synagogues, but he had no money. He didn't even have expenses to travel to Paris, where the Jewish culture-congress is supposed to take place soon, at which there will also be a paintings-exhibition of Jewish artists.⁶³

He returned to Paris with ten painted synagogues. He ought to have painted over 40...

In Paris, he took to his work. The subjects that he painted were the deepest expression of his soul, of his deepest emotional experiences. We encounter in him, who appeared like one of those, who arrived from the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, a very warm, heart-felt relationship to his subjects. To cast a glance at his painted, "Pzshedbuzsher Yidn" [*"Jews of Pzshedbuzsh" (Przedbórz)*]⁶⁴ is enough for us soon to feel this: the heartfelt warmth and strength of bond to his people.



J. Mącznik

self-portrait, oil painting

The same [applies] when we consider his very successful portrait of the writer and martyr Wolf Wieviorka⁶⁵, painted during the war in Toulouse⁶⁶.

And with what fondness he painted two small, little fish. How he enveloped them in light and shadow!

When the war broke out, he and his wife found themselves, in the mountains, in a little village of Auvergne⁶⁷. But he left it rather soon and arrived in Toulouse on the run [i.e., fleeing], in order to be with the Jewish refugees.

There, he used to go into the small, local, little *shul*, to meet Jews, and which/whom⁶⁸ he had, incidentally, also intended to paint.

In Toulouse, in that terrible period, he delivered a lecture for Jewish youth about art among Jews.

He attached himself to [i.e., joined] the Jewish combat-organization and sought to discover Jewish young adults for it.

Meanwhile, one received assignments for compulsory residence from the authorities; the artist and his wife went to Loures-Barousse⁶⁹, in the Pyrenees. He lived in the neighboring little village of Sarp⁷⁰.

We met there a year and a half later. To paint further was difficult for him. He had endeavored to travel to Spain and from there to come to London to the “Free French Militant Forces.” He dreamt of living to create a particularly Jewish formation near⁷¹ it/them.

He, on whose face gloom lay poured, appeared not to be the same. He was very uneasy and stirred up.

Once, walking with him a summery morning over the wide, spacious country roads, he said to me especially riled up, literally crying out:

— “The danger is great. One must do this and that. If necessary — one must even force Jews! The time demands responsibility. There is no place here for neglect,” he cried out, “one must tell the non Jewish world that not we alone will perish, that we can also drag others with ourselves!”

When he calmed down a bit, he stopped moving and began to talk about the great personages of the Jewish people, of the golden ages in Spain and Portugal⁷²: about Reb’ Yehuda Halevi⁷³ and Reb’ Shlomo ibn Gebirol⁷⁴. [He] spoke, how they must have appeared and what sort of attire they must have worn.

He always created in me the impression, that he would have come from some far away sun-lit places and fell into, against his will, a colder world, that was not his world. Thus, the ever-present gloom [that was] poured out onto his face.

He tried to save himself and his wife and two sisters-in-law, Fela and Esther, traveling to Nice. From there, they were all removed, driven to Drancy⁷⁵.

Four weeks later, the first of November 1943, he was transported from there.

In the camps (as related by a friend Melekh Tenenboim, who made it through the path of torment with him and miraculously remained alive), he evidenced unusual self-sacrifice. He held the Jews in a strong and encouraged [state]. He himself accepted everything [stoically].

The 18th of January 1945, as the Germans retreated from Oshpitzten (Auschwitz), [they] led him and thousands of Jews, during a dreadful blizzard⁷⁶, to Mauthausen, Austria, and from there to Ebensee, the worst camp, where, the 5th of May 1945, one day before the entrance of the Americans, his noble soul⁷⁷ [was] exhaled⁷⁸.

¹ This book was written and titled in Yiddish. The French title by the author/publisher was *Nos Artistes Martyrs*. The book title is sometimes translated from that French title into English as *Our Martyred Artists*, but the Yiddish title of this Yiddish language book is more properly translated as *Our Tortured Artists* or *Our Tormented Artists*.

Yiddish is the historical language of European (Ashkenazi) Jews. It originated during or near the Middle Ages, depending on how that is defined, primarily in Jews migrating eastward from Germany. It is composed mostly of old German grammar (including the double-negative) and of old German vocabulary, but with many words derived from Hebrew, from Slavic languages, and from other languages (including French, for example). Over the centuries, some words have retained their original meaning, while the meanings of others have changed. Yiddish is written with Hebrew letters.

“Yid” means “Jew,” so that “Yiddish” means “Jewish.” In some circles and at some times, the language has indeed not incorrectly been formally and informally called “Jewish.”

Prior to the Holocaust, about twelve million people spoke Yiddish, reportedly. About 85% of the Jews murdered in the Holocaust were Yiddish speakers. Today, there are probably fewer than two million Yiddish speakers, worldwide.

² Art critic, writer and poet Hersh Fenster wrote in the Yiddish, French and Polish languages; was born in Galicia in 1892 and settled in Paris in 1922; and, worked for a time as secretary of Sholem Asch (the Polish-Jewish novelist, dramatist and essayist). Fenster was personally close to many artists of the École de Paris and began as early as 1945 to collect documents particularly about those murdered by the Reich. He investigated at the internment camp in Drancy, visited the surviving families, questioned them, returned to the scenes of arrests by Nazis, interrogated the buildings' concierges, and consulted with great difficulty the files of the involved prefectures' police departments.

³ Born משה זאהארעוויטש שאגאל, or Moïse Zaharovich Shagal, Chagall was a Russian-French-Belarus-Jewish, world-renowned artist. According to art historian Michael J. Lewis (“Whatever

Happened to Marc Chagall?" *Commentary*, October 2008 pp. 36–37), Chagall was considered to be the “the last survivor of the first generation of European modernists.” He was also famous as an artist of Jewish themes. Picasso is quoted to have said in the 1950s (Wullschlager, Jackie. *Chagall: A Biography* Knopf, 2008), “When Matisse dies, Chagall will be the only painter left who understands what colour really is.” Some divide the École de Paris into two periods with different styles, that before World War I and between World Wars I and II; others consider the École de Paris simply to have developed and evolved over those two combined periods. Those in the École de Paris prior to World War I included Modigliani, Chagall, Matisse, Bonnard, Picasso, Mondrian and others. Chagall’s contribution to Fenster’s book is a long (3½-page), mournful, in places regretful, Yiddish poem as the book’s forward, printed in Chagall’s hand-written cursive Yiddish in Paris in 1950.

⁴ Jacob Mącznik was the eldest of seven children. Next eldest was the sole daughter, Yenta/Jenta, who was also murdered by the Reich (as was her infant daughter, Frimit). Next eldest after Yenta was Ben/Bendet/Beniek, born 1912 (who preferred the other family spelling, *Moncznik*^{5,6}). Ben, then a sculptor, lived with Jacob and his wife at Rue Perrel⁸ in Paris for two years in the mid 1930s. Ben was later wed in the Łódź ghetto; his wife did not survive the Holocaust. Ben survived the Łódź ghetto and murder and slave-labor camps (Auschwitz and Görlitz (see several citations within, and his in-camp, self-portrait on the cover of, Seidel, Niels, *Die KZ-Außenlager Görlitz und Rennersdorf 1944/45*, Neisse Verlag (Dresden), 2008)) of the Reich, to immigrate to New York in December 1946. There, he wedded a German, Jewish, murder camp survivor April 1948, Grete Samson (see *Le Monde / Le Siècle*, 7 May 1999, *Horizons: Portrait: 1933–1939: la mémoire infernale d’une victime de la Shoah*), who had immigrated to New York in March 1947. Approximately 1947–50, Ben returned to France to acquire as many Mącznik paintings and drawings as possible (which were in the possession of a cousin of Mącznik’s wife); he acquired perhaps half or so. Ben, who had owned small galleries in Warsaw and in Łódź, founded and led what became a truly premier picture framing company in New York (with two galleries) serving renowned artists, wealthy individuals, famous figures and some of the most prestigious museums in the U.S. (see *Picture Framing Magazine*, April 2004, pages 20–22, *Industry Mourns Ben Munn*). He shared the acquired Mącznik artworks with his other four brothers, and framed/protected his share well, and also had his canvases conserved/restored when necessary. Ben and Grete had two children; the second was Charles Samson Moncznik. His *Moncznik* was changed to *Munn* in July 1952, retroactive to birth by court order, in conjunction with the awarding of U.S. citizenship to his parents, Ben and Grete; the name change applied to the whole family of four. In the mid 1990s, Charles began being called by his middle name, Samson. Samson Munn was the beneficiary of many stories related to him by his father, including some about Jacob, his wife, their life in the mid 1930s in Paris, etc. Ben died in 2004 and Grete in 2014. Samson, a physician and medical school professor, first became involved in projects and the author of publications related to the Holocaust, to genocide and to similarly heinous human behavior in 1992. His work in that arena later led to his being honored with the designation *Fulbright Specialist* (in *Peace and Reconciliation Studies*). His curriculum vitae / résumé / Lebenslauf, including genocide-related work, may be found at <http://www.nach.ws/radiologycv.pdf> [last accessed 9 March 2019]. Those Mącznik artworks possessed by Ben, acquired after the Holocaust in France, were gifted to Samson, who has since

endeavored to acquire and restore/conservé many more. Samson also created the web site <http://www.macznik.org> [last accessed 9 March 2019].

⁵ Transliterated from the written Yiddish version of the name just as it appears at the heading of the entry. This Polish family name and word means *flour-man*, or *miller*, in English from older Polish. In Polish, it is essentially pronounced midway between *Mōn'tchnik* or *Mōn'tshnik* on the one hand, and *Moōn'tchnik* or *Moōn'tshnik* on the other. That is, in the first syllable, there is a slightly rounded “o” ending with a faint “w” sound, as in “tow” or “sew” in general American English, when spoken carefully, very slowly and somewhat in elite, British manner.

⁶ Reproduced here just as it appears in French at the heading of the entry. This spelling often suffices in English, as well, noting that neither French nor English has the “ą” letter. A more correct spelling of the artist’s Polish family name is *Mącznik*, which will be utilized throughout the remainder of this translation. His family also used the spelling *Moncznik*.

⁷ The city of Łódź is located about 75 miles southwest of Warsaw, Poland. It was (and still is) the third largest city in Poland, known for manufacturing. The Jews of Łódź formed the second largest Jewish community in prewar Poland, after Warsaw. In 1931, almost one-third of the population of Łódź (604,000) was Jewish (192,000). In 1939, the Jewish population was reportedly as high as 233,000.

⁸ The Yiddish word includes subtleties that may in this instance be taken from *development*, *training*, *furtherance*, *growth*, *education*, *improvement* and *advancement*, for example.

⁹ Equivalent to 2 *Perrel Street*. The street no longer exists as such. For map and aerial images, see this web page: <http://www.macznik.org/Perrel.htm> [last accessed 9 March 2019].

¹⁰ Henri Rousseau, the post-impressionist painter, was also known as *Le Douanier* (the customs officer), a humorous description of his occupation as a toll and tax collector.

¹¹ The same building, but not the same *atelier* (studio). This corrects a small error in the fine book and useful resource, *Pientres Juifs À Paris*, by N. Nieszawer, M. Boyé and Paul Fogel, Éditions Denoël, 2000, on page 223, and in other publications, where the two studios were reported to be one and the same, based on a misunderstanding of this Yiddish sentence in a reading of the Fenster chapter. Also, by personal communication received directly from a still living (2018) contemporary source (Lydie Marie Lachenal), a resident of the building at the same time as Mącznik (and who knew him well), the daughter of the artist Léon Weissberg, confirmation was received by the editor that the two *ateliers* were indeed not the same.

¹² Undoubtedly meaning paintings (not photographs).

¹³ A partial, additional level or loft of the flat/apartment that did not extend over the whole floorspace of the flat/apartment, apparently up a flight or half-flight of stairs

¹⁴ taken home from a factory, presumably to work on further at home

¹⁵ Could also be translated as *ironed*.

¹⁶ Could also be translated as *homey* or *comfy*.

¹⁷ “The Nightingale,” a choral society.

¹⁸ The word as printed in Yiddish appears to have no meaning. It appears to contain a single typographical error (a letter missing); if so, the intended word would mean *Ninth*.

¹⁹ A nickname in Yiddish for *Jacob*, interpretively equivalent to *Jake* or *Jack*. It could of course have many spellings with English letters, such as Yank’l, Yankl or Yankel; in addition, there are other variations, such as Yankev, Yankov, etc.

²⁰ Could less likely be translated as *Sabbath-nights*, but certainly not referring to Friday nights (the beginning of Sabbath), but rather clearly referring to Saturday nights.

²¹ Could also be translated as *sorrow*.

²² Referring to the general tone, mood or nature.

²³ *Khasidim* (or *Khasids*) are members of many particular, orthodox, Jewish, religious groups. As opposed to Modern Orthodox believers, *Khasidim* generally believe in stronger adherence to scripture and less involvement in secular life, often even avowedly fearing and explicitly shunning secular life.

Khasidism was founded in the 1700s in western Ukraine (based largely on a then modernist reinterpretation of *Kabbalah*²⁴) and quickly spread through eastern Europe. *Khasidism* espouses the views that God encompasses and/or is manifest in the material world, including in everything mundane (the opposite of the belief that God transcends the material world); that one must bind to God at all times; that the belief aspects of religious practice(s) are highly important; and, that the belief aspects of bodily activities and mundane acts are also highly important. Their groups tend to follow a particular leader with great focus and adherence to his (noting that such leaders are always male) views.

The Aleksander *Khasidic* movement flourished in Poland from 1880 until it was largely destroyed by Nazi Germany during World War II. This branch is named after the town of its origin, Aleksandrów Łódzki, Poland, about forty-five kilometers from Łódź, which was called *Aleksander* in Yiddish. Prior to the Holocaust, Aleksander *Khasidism* composed the second largest *Khasidic* group in Poland — second in size only to Ger. Aleksander *Khasidism* attracted artisans, merchants and ordinary folk rather than elite Talmudic scholars and richer people who were attracted to Ger. Almost all Aleksander *Khasidim* were killed in the Holocaust.

As of 2016, there were over 130,000 *Khasidic* households worldwide, reportedly about 5% of the global Jewish population. Today, *Khasidim* are considered ultra-orthodox by most other Jews (and non Jews), a term many *Khasidim* find objectionable, since their view is that their practice of Judaism is simply more authentic.

Khasidim adhere strongly both to orthodox Jewish practices and to traditions of primarily erstwhile eastern European orthodox Jews, mostly those who were then poorer and more rural. Today's *Khasidim* generally reserve Hebrew for religious matters and still speak Yiddish in daily life, whereas Yiddish is largely unknown and certainly not spoken by nearly all other Jews of European descent today (and was never spoken by Jews of other descent).

Khasidim are known for their religious conservatism and social seclusion. They dress in certain older, eastern European Jewish styles; have particular beliefs; and, practice particular customs; together, these elements differentiate and indicate to which subgroup — known as a sect, court or “dynasty” — of *Khasidism* they belong. There are still several courts with many thousands of member households each, and hundreds of smaller ones.

Rebbe is a Yiddish honorific meaning *master, teacher or mentor*, such as rabbis and other pious men — then traditionally men (the word is masculine) — who are especially learned in Judaistic scripture, law, etc., typically formal Jewish scribes, ritual slaughterers (kosher butchers), and select others. *Reb'* is a transliteration of the short form as spoken, and *R'* the counterpart as written in Yiddish; *Reb'* is also used as the simple equivalent of the English “Mr.” when referring to a man.

The *rebbe*s of Aleksander formed their own unique emphasis on the service of God and a person's relationship with his or her fellows. That, taken together with the nature of its followers (with fewer elite Talmudic scholars), may account for a somewhat lesser degree of rigidity in following *all* traditional acts and *every detail* of procedure in scripture. The founder was Rabbi Yechiel Dancyger (1828–1894). His son, Yerachmiel Yisroel Yitzchok Dancyger (or Danziger, 1853–1910), was even more famous and accumulated a large group of followers. He was later succeeded by his brother, Shmuel Tsvi Dancyger (1860–1923). The teachings of the *rebbe*s who followed stressed ethics, mysticism and ecstatic religious forms, remaining as religious as other *Khasidic* groups yet putting somewhat less emphasis on study of the Talmud (the central text of Rabbinic Judaism and the primary source of Jewish religious law and theology, over 6,200 pages long, and containing the teachings and opinions of thousands of rabbis) and perhaps more on Kabbalah and practical, societal implementation of belief.

For example, in writing about the *Khasidim* of Przedbórz⁶², the *Przedborzer Association In Israel and U.S.A.* wrote,

... it was a Chassidism noted for its emotions and virtues, joy, brotherhood among the Chassidim and the love of the Torah. The Alexanderer Chassidim in Przedborz, contrary to the wit and fervour of the Gerer Chassidim, were known for their moderation and restraint, though they were quite fond of drinking which had the power of bringing people together. Any pretext was used to organize a "Kidush"; be it on the Shabbath after the prayers, the "Melaveh Malkah" (a gathering on the conclusion of the Sabbath), a "Yorzeit" meal (a meal on the anniversary of the dead) or religious ceremonies. Sometimes they drank "Lechaim" even on a week day, between the afternoon and the evening prayers. There was always someone who undertook the organization of these festivities. In his time, it was Reb Berish Maltz, who was himself a member of the Amshinover Chassidim, but since there was not a sufficient number of Amshinover Chassidim in the town to support a separate Shtibel⁵⁶, they joined the Alexanderer Chassidim and were members of the latter.

Reb Yankel Maltz, the brother of Reb Berish, was one of the town's wealthy citizens and supported generously the Shtibel of Alexanderer Chassidim. He donated great sums of money to cover its expenses.

The followers of the *rebbe*s from Aleksander were especially from Warsaw, but also Łódź, where there were approximately 35 houses of prayer and study. A third brother, Betsalel Yoir Dancyger, began to serve as rebbe in Łódź in 1914, thus starting there a second branch of Aleksander *Khasidism*.

²⁴ Editorial addition: his full name was Israel/Yisrael Kalmen/Kalman/Kalmaḡ Moncznik/Mącznik, and in addition to being an Aleksander *Khasid* rebbe, he was also a practitioner of Kabbalah (קַבְּלָה), renowned as such in Poland and nearby territories. (Kabbalah is an ancient Jewish tradition of mystical interpretation of the bible, a set of esoteric teachings

meant to explain the relationship between an unchanging, eternal and mysterious infinity on the one hand, and the mortal and finite universe of God's creation on the other.)

²⁵ An orthodox religious, Jewish school for boys, in many places just one room, then common in eastern Europe. Typically, *kheder* began at age 5 with learning Hebrew, followed directly by learning Torah, then Mishnah (which means repetition/study, the first major portion of the so-called "Oral Torah") at around 7 years of age, and finally Talmud (see endnote 23). Reading aloud to each other and memorization were the main techniques used. The end of a boy's studies would be marked at age 13 or 14 by his *bar mitzvah*. After *kheder*, those who wished to become formal religious scribes or rabbis would go on to a Talmudic university, known as a *yeshiva*.

[Ben Moncznik⁴ was accepted to a/the prestigious yeshiva in Vilna (Vilnius), Lithuania, one of very few accepted from Łódź, reportedly the only one accepted that year, or from anywhere outside Vilna; however, he chose to sculpt rather than to travel a strictly religious path in life.]

²⁶ Torah (the first five books of the Hebrew bible's (i.e., the Tanakh's) 24 books, "the five books of Moses") in book form (rather than scroll), also known as the *Pentateuch*.

²⁷ Rabbi Shlomo Yitzkhaki (1040-1105), better known by the acronym *Rashi*, was a medieval French rabbi and author of a comprehensive commentary on the Talmud and another on the Tanakh. Acclaimed for his ability to present the basic meaning of the text in a concise and lucid fashion, Rashi appeals to both learned scholars and beginner students, and his works remain a centerpiece of contemporary Jewish study. His commentary on the Talmud has been included in every edition of the Talmud since its first printing in the 1520s. His commentary on Tanakh serves as the basis for more than 300 "supercommentaries" which analyze Rashi's choice of language and citations, penned by some of the greatest names in rabbinic literature.

²⁸ Potok is a village 36 km (22 miles) southeast of Kielce.

²⁹ Kielce is a city in south-central Poland, 127 km (79 miles) southeast of Łódź.

³⁰ Could also be translated as *knead, shape, fashion* or *mold*, presumably out of riverbed or river beach, sand or mud.

³¹ Could also be translated as *pastries*.

³² Could be translated as *memorials* or *monuments*.

³³ Difficult to translate precisely; literally, the Yiddish word used means more like *became aware forward* or *became aware into the future*. Could also have been translated as *foresaw*.

³⁴ Difficult to translate precisely; literally, the word means more like *felt forward* or *felt into the future*.

³⁵ Literally *schools*, but usually (including here) taken to mean *synagogues*. Although essentially redundant, *Jewish shuls* is a phrase not uncommonly heard in Yiddish.

³⁶ According to Wikipedia (31 August 2018), currently Europe's oldest active synagogue, and the oldest surviving medieval synagogue of twin-nave design, completed in 1270. The older, original Old Synagogue of Prague was demolished in 1867 (replaced by the Spanish Synagogue), leaving the synagogue known today at the Old New Synagogue as newly the oldest.

³⁷ Or *give a start* or *react by trembling*. (Literally, the translation would be *provide a tremble*.)

³⁸ A city in southeastern Poland and a major Polish rail junction.

³⁹ The author used a decidedly Germanic word, rather than usual Yiddish, a word not present in the Yiddish dictionaries consulted. Regardless, it means artist's portfolio or case, here.

⁴⁰ A town in southeastern Poland.

⁴¹ The largest city in southeastern Poland.

⁴² Baranow Sandomierski is a small town or large village in southern Poland, lying near the Vistula river.

⁴³ The Jewish sabbath.

⁴⁴ Tsoizmer is the transliterated version of the Yiddish name for Sandomierz (in Polish), a town in southeastern Poland known for its Old Town, a tourist attraction. Sandomierz was growing fast during the 1930s. The city spans the Vistula River.

⁴⁵ Pesakh is the major Jewish holiday known in English as *Passover*, the commemoration of the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in ancient Egypt by God and their freedom as a nation under the leadership of Moses, including the story of Exodus. *Blood libel* is the name given to the notorious, centuries-long, anti-Semitic canard in which Jews were/are accused of kidnapping and murdering Christian children to use their blood in religious rituals. In remote and modern history, blood libel (and other lies) have been used to persecute Jews in Europe, including their murder. In the most common version of blood libel, it is claimed that the blood of Christians, particularly of children, is used in the baking of matzoh for Passover. (Matzoh, sometimes referred to as unleavened bread, has the consistency of a cracker and is typically composed simply of flour and water.)

Photographs of the painting in Sandomierz:



from the left-most portion of the painting



from the left-middle



⁴⁶ *Sholem Aleikhem* is a very common greeting in Yiddish (from Hebrew), meaning *peace be upon you* (equivalent to the cognate phrase *Salaam Aleikum* (or *As Salaam Aleikum*) in Arabic).

⁴⁷ Literally, “Sholem Aleikhem, Jews. From where do Jews come? And what are Jews called?”

However, once it had been established in his mind that he was talking to Jews, as it apparently had already been, the greeting and two questions would have been meant and taken in informal and friendly tone, and as translated herein, rather than literally.

⁴⁸ So far as the editor can discern, *las* (transliteration of the word used in the original text) has no meaning in proper Yiddish, but it means forest in Polish.

⁴⁹ A village in southeastern Poland.

⁵⁰ Could also mean *quality*.

⁵¹ Saul Wahl Katzellenbogen, a wealthy and influential Jew, was said in the Yiddish narrative to have been temporary king of Poland one day, reportedly 18 August 1587, or perhaps a few days. In the story, *Wahl* as an appellation appended to his name, based on the Yiddish word meaning “elect”; the story goes that he was temporarily elected king during which an existing deadlock

amongst electors regarding who should become king (between the Zamoyski and Zborowski families) could be resolved. Some historians dispute the story on the whole, noting that a different historical series of events may be true and, because of similar themes, may account for the Yiddish narrative.

⁵² A small town in southeastern Poland, on the west bank of the Vistula River.

⁵³ Could also be translated as *restlessness*, *unease* or perhaps *anxiety*.

⁵⁴ Presumably meaning its actual physical appearance, likely referring to the people themselves.

⁵⁵ Literally translated as Jewishness, in this setting meaning European Jewishness, particularly in its concrete manifestations, such as culture and language.

⁵⁶ In Łódź in the 1850s, Jewish entrepreneurs developed housing in the Polish city of Bałuty (Yiddish, *Balut*), just outside the Łódź city limit. Balut/Bałuty grew haphazardly, without running water or sewer lines. It was annexed to Łódź in 1915, at which time half of Łódź's Jews lived in Balut/Bałuty. Its name connotes poverty.

⁵⁷ Small houses — often simply one-room houses — of prayer by Khasidim or other orthodox Jews.

⁵⁸ The Dead Khasidim were those who continued believing after the death of their rabbi, Rabbi Nakhman of Breslov, 1772–1810, who sought God through solitude and simple, unadorned belief and joy, uncluttered by philosophy and theology. A Kabbalist²⁴, and the grandson of the Baal Shem Tov (the founder of Khasidism), Rabbi Nakhman became a renowned storyteller during the last four years of his life. Transliteration of the version of the name used by the author might better be *Brats'l-ever*. It refers to the city of Bratslav, Ukraine (not to be confused with what was then called *Breslau* in German (now Wrocław, Poland) – then pronounced the same in Yiddish, nor with Bratislava, Slovakia).

⁵⁹ Jewish afternoon prayer(s).

⁶⁰ Jewish evening prayer(s).

⁶¹ While the word *sefer* can have a wider meaning, in this context it meant a book of rabbinic literature related to Torah study.

⁶² It was hard to translate with confidence the precisely chosen Yiddish words. Literally, the words would translate as “... a which synagogues, but ...” One translator provided “... whatever which synagogues, but ...” Two other reasonable translations might be “... some additional synagogues, but ...” and “... certain [*more* or *additional* implied] synagogues, but ...”

⁶³ What was undoubtedly meant here was the First World-Wide Jewish Culture Congress (*Erschter alweltlecher jidischer kulturkongres*), that took place 17–21 September 1937 in the Pavilion for Modern Jewish Culture at the World's Fair in Paris (also known as the International Exposition of Arts and Techniques in Modern Life) which took place 25 May to 25 November 1937. The Fair drew 34 million visitors. See

<https://ia800204.us.archive.org/9/items/nybc208020/nybc208020.pdf> [last accessed 23 January 2020].

In the 1930s, about two million immigrants lived in Paris. About 150,000 of them were Yiddish-speaking Jews from eastern Europe.

⁶⁴ Pshedbuzsh is a town 94 miles south-southwest of Warsaw. At the time, its population was 60% Jewish, and it was in the Kielce province of Poland, but it had been part of Russia prior to World War I. *Pshedbuzsh* is the precise transliteration of the name as written in Yiddish by the author; others have transliterated the name from Yiddish as *Pshedbozsh*. Its name is Przedbórz

in Polish and Pshedbuzh in Russian, acknowledging that several other spellings exist. It is now in Radomsko County, Łódź Voivodeship, Poland, with 3–4,000 inhabitants, situated on the Pilica River. Before the Second World War, tourists would travel to Przedbórz to visit the architecturally notable, wooden Przedbórz synagogue.

⁶⁵ Wolf Wiewiorka (also written Wewyorqe) was born in 1898 in Żyrardów, Poland (44 km west-southwest of Warsaw), and was a Yiddish writer active in Paris from the time of his settling there in 1923. He authored books, poetry, short stories and literary criticism, including in *Der parizer haynt* (Paris Today) and *Di parizer bleter* (Paris Pages) in Paris; in *Di folkstsaytung* (The People's Newspaper) of Warsaw; in *Der Forverts* (*The Jewish Daily Forward*) in New York; and, in *Di prese* (The Press) in Buenos Aires. During the German occupation, he fled to Nice with his companion Gitele with two of Gitele's daughters. They were ultimately arrested by the French militia in 1943 and deported by the Germans to Auschwitz. Wolf died in January 1945 on a death march from Auschwitz.

⁶⁶ The capital of the French department of Haute-Garonne and of the region of Occitanie. The city is on the banks of the Garonne River, 93 miles from the Mediterranean Sea, 420 miles from Paris in the south of France, approximately 58 miles from the Spanish border. It is the fourth-largest city in France. In France, Toulouse is called the "Pink City" (La Ville Rose).

⁶⁷ A rural, mountainous region in central France, well known for skiing and hiking.

⁶⁸ It is not entirely clear in the Yiddish sentence whether the author feels that Mącznik incidentally intended to paint the Jews or the little, local small synagogue; likely, he meant the Jews.

⁶⁹ Loures-Barousse is a township in the Hautes-Pyrénées department (a level of administration below regions and above townships) in southwestern France. Barousse is a region composed of two valleys, with two main cities, one of which is Loures-Barousse.

⁷⁰ Sarp is also a township in the Hautes-Pyrénées department. Sarp is under 0.2 miles in diameter, and is about one mile away from Loures-Barousse. They are in the extreme south of France, in the Pyrenees Mountains (separating France from Spain). Sarp is about 12 miles from the Spanish border.

⁷¹ The Yiddish word used means *near* or *next to*. In this fighting/military/resistance context, it is unclear if the author meant physically *near* or *next to* versus figuratively *near* or *alongside*, such as *allied with* or even simply *similar to*.

⁷² Referring explicitly to the Sephardic Jewish world.

⁷³ Judah Halevi (also Yehuda Halevi and Judah ben Shmuel Halevi) was a Spanish Jewish physician, poet and philosopher. He was born in Spain around 1080 and died shortly after arriving in the Holy Land in 1141, at that point the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem. Halevi is considered one of the greatest Hebrew poets, celebrated both for his religious and secular poems, many of which appear in present-day liturgy.

⁷⁴ Solomon ibn Gabirol (also Solomon ben Judah and Shlomo Ben Yehuda ibn Gabirol) was an 11th-century poet and Jewish philosopher of then Muslim Iberia. He published over a hundred poems, as well as works of biblical exegesis, philosophy, ethics and satire. He is well known in the history of philosophy for the doctrine that all things, including soul and intellect, are composed of matter and form, and for his emphasis on divine will.

⁷⁵ The Drancy internment camp was an assembly and detention camp for confining Jews who were later deported to concentration, slave labor and murder camps during the German

occupation of France of World War II. It was located in Drancy, a northeastern suburb of Paris. Between 22 June 1942 and 31 July 1944, during its use as an internment camp, 67,400 French, Polish and German Jews were deported from the camp in 64 rail transports, including 6,000 children. Only 1,542 remained alive at the camp when it was liberated 17 August 1944. Drancy was under the control of the French police until 1943 when administration was taken over by the SS, who placed officer Alois Brunner in charge of the camp. In 2001, Brunner's case was brought before a French court, which sentenced Brunner in absentia to a life sentence for crimes against humanity.

⁷⁶ The death march these starving victims endured was probably about 35 miles to a train transit point, and from there by train to Mauthausen.

⁷⁷ Literally translated, the kernel Yiddish expression would be “exhaled the noble soul” (noting the author used an expression the translation of which would include “noble,” as per Beinfeld and Bochner (see *Editor’s notes*)). The expression is akin to the English expression, *to give up the ghost*. In old English, “ghost” meant *soul* or *spirit*. To give it up meant to release it from one’s body, the final and certain determinant of death, thus to die. The Yiddish expression appears here to mean that his body exhaled his soul, thus expressing richly and elegantly his death, and perhaps also suggesting the element of certainty or finality, one might say.

⁷⁸ In fact, Mącznik died several days *after* the arrival to, and takeover of, the Ebensee division of Mauthausen by the Americans. His body is still at Ebensee and the site of his burial known and noted at the memorial site there. He is buried in a dual grave with another Nazi victim.