



Efrat Gal-Ed

# No One's Language

Itzik Manger – a European Poet

Translated by Lawrence A. Rosenwald

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# Foreword

The story of Itzik Manger's life is about a world of language and history, and about political and cultural utopias that were later destroyed. Manger's life and work embody the unfolding and flourishing of Yiddish culture until 1939, the destruction of the inhabitants of that culture during the Shoah, and the tragic rupture of a culture that could not recover. The young poet lived in Jassy, Czernowitz, and Bucharest; his mature work came into being in Warsaw. The first stage of his exile was in Paris, he survived the war in London, and he encountered his public afterwards first in Montreal, then in New York and Tel-Aviv.

Manger's work has its genesis in Jewish Eastern Europe, with its Romanian, Galician, Polish, and Baltic landscapes. In that space, since the second half of the 19th century, a Yiddish secular culture<sup>1</sup> had been rapidly unfolding; the language of the Jewish workers' movement (the Bund), of most Jewish newspapers, and of Jewish theater was Yiddish. In Warsaw, a lively circle of culture activists had established itself around the writer Yitskhok Leybush Perets, and around the Yiddish publications he edited.<sup>2</sup> There were also several other Yiddish newspapers and journals.<sup>3</sup> In the interwar period Warsaw became the most important center of production for Yiddish books, plays, and films, and thus the metropolis of Yiddish culture in Europe.

Manger and most of his colleagues moved to Warsaw because in Warsaw one could, and in diverse ways, think, live, and create in Yiddish. They thought of culture as being "beyond the opposition between one's own culture and a foreign one,"<sup>4</sup> because Yiddish was at once the identity-constituting medium of a minority culture and the condition of one's belonging to the wider world. The polyglot Yiddish intelligentsia moved back and forth among the cultures of Europe. The non-Zionist socialists among them put their hopes in a common struggle for a liberated society, in which Jews in their various places could live in cultural autonomy. The motto was *doikayt* ("hereness"). It arose not only from

1 The notion corresponds to the then common formula, *yidische veltlekhe kultur*.

2 *Yidische bibliotek* ("The Yiddish Library," 1891–1895), *Literatur un lebn* ("Literature and Life," 1894), and *Yontev bletlakh* ("Festival Pages").

3 Among them: from 1906 on *Yidishes tageblat* ("The Yiddish Journal"), from 1908 on *Haynt* ("Today"), from 1911 on *Der moment* ("The Moment"), from 1924 on *Literarische bleter* ("Literary Pages").

4 Welsch 1995.2: 39.



a belief in Jewish life but also from a belief in the world, which in essence was Europe. The discriminatory conditions of their cultural ties to the European world required of them 'transversal' thinking,<sup>5</sup> a constantly new situating of minority culture, and finally a clarifying of the relations between the Yiddish, Jewish, and European paradigms.

Manger and his colleagues shared a world-citizen, cross-ethnic orientation, loved world literature, and held to an idea of 'Europe' at odds with the ideas of the dominant cultures. In increasingly nationalistic and antisemitic Poland, Yiddish Europe was a cosmopolitan blueprint, an imagined location in which Yiddish life was at home. The figures of thought constituted by 'hereness,' 'Europe,' 'culture nation without a state' were the contributions of the Yiddish world to a set of intended norms that the majority cultures did not in fact desire.

Manger was in his youth a tailor's apprentice, grew up as a secular Jew, and was unconventional and innovative in his artistic dealings with Jewish traditions. At the same time, however, he felt closely bound to traditional Jewish life; in that life he saw a world of small actions and gestures that provided warmth and closeness and signified *mentshlekhhkayt* ("humaneness," "fundamental decency"). In that world there were regular encounters between manual laborers and poets, folk songs and religious tradition, poverty and abiding faith, bitter need and creative joy, tradition and modernity, Zionism and transnational utopia. Manger and his poetry arise from that world, and it is to that world that he speaks in his songs, ballads, poems, stories, and essays. With the destruction of eastern European Jewry by the Nazis, Manger's *hey mish* world and its Yiddish-speaking residents were irretrievably lost. Itzik Manger the man survived in exile; not so the poet. He remained uprooted, with no prospect of return to the world his poetry came from. In the life he was coerced to lead abroad, without horizons of belonging – to language, to people, to geography – his poetry could not breathe.

Manger grew up in multi-ethnic Czernowitz, which until World War I was the capital of the Imperial and Royal province of Bukovina. Several other Jewish poets were born there too, among them Rose Ausländer, just Manger's age, and the somewhat younger Paul Celan. Like other young Jews, Manger took German literature and culture as his standard; but in 1918, just seventeen years old, he resolved to write poems in Yiddish. He thereby chose the vernacular of Eastern European Jewry as his language and workers as his principal audience. His choice was shaped by his conviction that Yiddish literature was an integral component of European literature.

5 Welsch 1995.1: 762.

Soon, however, Manger began to consider Yiddish and its culture as something *hefker* – something that belongs to no one, and is at everyone’s disposal. By 1925 he was calling his self-publishing venture “*Yidish iz hefker*,” Yiddish is unclaimed, Yiddish is no one’s language, no one’s literature, no one’s world. He was suggesting that Yiddish culture was unshielded and endangered amid the cultures of Europe, fair game for everyone. At the same time, however, he meant his statement as a critique of Yiddish literature itself: that it was prey to whim and caprice, without law or steadfast belief.

On Manger’s life and work we have some colorful but not always reliable memoirs (Davin 1975, Ravitch 1975, Panner 1976); a few critical essays (Sadan 1968, Shmeruk 1981, Roskies 1995); six dissertations (Gamzu 1976, Vaisbrot 1978, Alfa 1995, Beer 1998, Eyal 2009, Gal-Ed 2009); and Chaim S. Kazdan’s biographical papers of 1968 and 1973.

The present work is the first attempt ever made at a critical biography. It is based on extensive archival research in Jerusalem, New York, London, Czernowitz, and Warsaw. It provides accounts of documents not previously discussed in print and brought to light here for the first time, and communicates a picture of the Jewish cultural movement in which Manger was centrally involved.

Flight, exile, and the Shoah caused considerable gaps in the documents concerning Manger’s life and work; still, the material assembled in the Manger Archive of the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem provides an astonishing portrait. Not all the manuscripts are there; but most are, from the earliest creative period, around 1918, to the late work. The Archive contains numerous manuscripts and some typescripts, Manger’s correspondence, all his publications, and a comprehensive set of press clippings reflecting his career, artistic development, and public reception. The papers of the writer Melech Ravitch (National Library of Israel in Jerusalem) include Ravitch’s correspondence with Manger and with Rokhl Auerbach (Oyerbakh, Manger’s life-companion in Warsaw), and also Ravitch’s correspondence about Manger with colleagues in America. The material collected in the Sadan Archive (National Library of Israel in Jerusalem) was important for reconstructing Manger’s reception history, containing as it does announcements of his public appearances, photographs, and clippings from issues of newspapers that are otherwise unavailable.

YIVO in New York houses the papers of some thirty of Manger’s correspondents. Writers, editors, and publishers make up most of those he wrote to: from Warsaw until 1938; then, during his flight, from Paris,

Marseilles, and Algeria; then later, in exile, from London, New York, and Tel-Aviv. In the Bund Archive, also housed at YIVO, are all the manuscripts of the essayistic and memoiristic writing Manger published in the 50s and 60s in the New York magazine *Der veker* ("The Alarm Clock"). Manger's letters to Yankev Pat are in the archives of the Jewish Labor Committee (New York).

The Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw holds a large bundle of manuscripts and correspondence from Manger's Warsaw period, preserved in the Warsaw Ghetto by Rokhl Auerbach, a worker in the legendary Ringelblum Archive. Further documents are stored in the Rachel Auerbach Archive in Yad Vashem, in Jerusalem. I also discovered new biographical documents in the Czernowitz Regional Archive and the Archiwum Akt Nowych in Warsaw.

My attempts to contextualize Manger's life story, and to reconstruct the events, debates, perspectives and figures of thought belonging to it, were aided by reading Yiddish newspapers and magazines published in Czernowitz, Bucharest, Warsaw, Vilna, Riga, Kaunas, Paris, Montreal, New York, Buenos Aires and Tel-Aviv. Not all of the relevant publications are extant in their entirety; but even an incomplete reconstruction of Manger's life makes the reality of his world clearer, and the cultural exchanges, alterations, and mentalities of Yiddish daily life more accessible.

Jonas Rosner offered colorful accounts of Czernowitz between the wars (2004). Joseph Burg recounted his memories of meetings with Manger in that same city (2006). I received valuable information about Manger's time in London in conversations with Chimen Abramsky (2005) and Ilana Shmueli (2006). Sylvia Ary shared with me her memories of Manger's time in Montreal (2009). Her younger brother, Sacvan Bercovitch, supplemented these with his own childhood memories of Manger. Shalom Rosenfeld provided information on Manger's stays in Israel (2002). Yosl Bergner recounted his memories of Manger in Warsaw and Tel-Aviv (2004), Haim Hefer and Dov Seltzer their memories of the production of Manger's *Megile-lider*, "Purim-Poems" (2004, 2013). Some of my other interlocutors were too old to be able to respond to my questions in detail. Some friends of mine who had known Manger well, and could have surely have filled in a good many gaps, were no longer alive when I first undertook my research; among these are Ruth Kraft and her brother Gideon; this book is dedicated to them. They knew Manger in their childhood and youth in Czernowitz, and gave me first editions of his works. Their father Khayem Kraft – teacher of German, engaged Yiddishist, and chair of the Linke Poale Zion ("Left Zionist Worker") – was an important co-creator of the Yiddish cultural space in that city.

Despite the gaps, the extant material is abundant and fertile. Most of the documents drawn on in the book had not been consulted before. It has been possible to reconstruct Manger's life from these traces and indications.

A biography that understands "the path of a life as a chronologically depictable sequence of causally linked events"<sup>6</sup> was not my goal here, and not only because Manger's life has been transmitted to us in fragments. Rather I sought to portray the fragments as I found them, to make visible the correspondences in the historical and cultural context. Manger's fantasized anecdotes, which have been discussed and to some extent adopted in the secondary literature, are here read in connection with parallel motifs in his work; the work and its genesis are understood as forming part of the biography. The story of the life is told in linked fragments based on the traces found in the biographical material (manuscripts, typewritten notes, documents, correspondence, photos, contemporary criticism, interviews); verbal and graphic documents referring to places, persons, and constellations are made the subject of commentary.

My chief goal was to root Manger's life in the context of his history and culture; but doing that has in its turn brought to light for the first time important documents of the last great era of Yiddish culture in Eastern Europe. And perhaps this study of Manger's life both before the shoah and in exile after it, a study that points to, among other things, the relation between how power is constituted and how self is constituted, is important not just in Jewish spheres, but for the understanding of banishment and exile in the 20th century generally.

Trying to understand Manger as a European poet, not as an exclusively Yiddish one, raises several questions: about the transcultural character of his creative process, but also about the location of Yiddish minority culture. For that culture was formed in diverse political systems (e.g., the Russian and Austrian ones), in varied European landscapes, and in sometimes conflict-laden encounters with dominant European cultures.

Those who look on maps for the spaces of Yiddish lives will not find them. Rather those spaces were constituted by disjunct regions and politically antagonistic convictions, a language and what can be indicated or dreamed in it, tradition and zeitgeist, self-searching, the everyday and the normal, theaters and book production, the struggle against repression, social utopias and cultural programs. Yiddishland – the notion was already in circulation in the 1920s, and is now again in favor in the anglo-

6 Klein 2002: 12.

phone world – came into being without the support of a national state.<sup>7</sup> It embodied a transnational mode of thought and life, called in Yiddish *alvetlekh*, by which was meant the coherence of a heterogeneous culture across nations and national boundaries.<sup>8</sup> Yiddishland was a fragmented construct, the community of a minority scattered through Europe and America, which understood itself in several different ways as a culture nation. In his inaugural address at the Czernowitz language conference of 1908, Yitskhok Leybush Perets made a declaration that illustrates the presuppositions, needs, obstacles, promises, and horizons of modern Yiddish identity:

מיר זענען אַ יידיש פּאָלק און יידיש איז אונדזער שפּראַך, און אויף אונדזער שפּראַך ווילן מיר דורכלעבן און אונדזערע קולטור־גיטער באַשאַפן און שוין קיינמאָל נישט אָפּפּערן זיי צוליב די פּאַלשע אינטערעסן פּון „שטאַט“, וואָס איז נאָר דער באַשיצער פּון רעגירנדע, הערשערישע פעלקער און דער בלוטזויגער פּון אונטערדריקטע שוואַכע. [...]  
מיר ווילן זיך שוין נישט צעברעקלען און אָפּפּערן יעדן מולך־שטאַט זיין בראַקן. איין פּאָלק יידן; זיין שפּראַך איז – יידיש.  
און אין דער שפּראַך ווילן מיר אונדזער אוצר זאַמלען, אונדזער קולטור באַשאַפן, אונדזער נשמה ווייטער וועקן און קולטורעל זיך פּאַראייניקן צווישן אַלע לענדער און אין אַלע צייטן.

We are a Jewish people, and Yiddish is our language, and it is in our language that we want to fend for ourselves and create our own cultural goods, and never sacrifice these to the false interests of the “state,” which in fact is only the protector of ruling and domination-seeking peoples and the bloodsucker of the oppressed and weak.

7 The use of the term dates from 1927 and the founding of the Yiddish P.E.N-Club in Warsaw (cf. Gal-Ed 2015). Jeffrey Shandler reflects on the concept in his “Imagining Yiddishland: Language, Place and Memory” (2003) and in the introduction to *Adventures in Yiddishland* (2005).

In Chicago Dr. Chaim Zhitlowsky was called the President of Yiddishland (*Yidish* 1, January 1935); the same journal offers its readers in November 1936 “a greeting from Yiddishland.” Jankew Botoşanski writes in Warsaw about the capital of “Yiddishland” (*Literarische bleter* 12 [34], 23. August 1935: 543), an article by H. Leivick is called “With a Yiddishland Visa” (*Naye folksdaytung* [“The New People’s Newspaper”] 11 [310], 20. October 1936: 4), the newspaper *Haynt* publishes in 1937 “Impressions of the Yiddish Cultural Congress in Paris” under the title “Yiddishland” (24. September 1937: 4), Jizchok Grudberg reports on a “A Failing City in Yiddishland” (*Literarische bleter* 15 [2], 7. January 1938: 26). During and after World War II the concept turns up often in Yiddish journals in America: “In Yiddishland” (*Oyfsnay* [“Anew”] 4 [16], 1957: 3), “A City in Yiddishland” (*Svive* [“Milieu”] 23, October 1967: 56–58) etc.

8 I consider “transnational” a better translation of *alvetlekh* than “international”; the latter does mean “worldwide,” but chiefly suggests “intergovernmental.” Components of the multi-spatial, migration-shaped Yiddish minority were much in accord with our present understanding of transnationality: “feelings of belonging, cultural communalities, communication networks, work-related connections, and everyday practices [...]” (Pries 2002: 264).

We will not let ourselves be divided, we will not offer each Moloch-State its tribute. One Jewish people, and its language is Yiddish. And in that language we will gather our treasure, create our culture, awaken our soul, and unite ourselves culturally through all countries and all times.<sup>9</sup>

During the interwar period, the multispatial geography of Yiddish minority culture had its centers in Warsaw, Vilna, Kiev, Moscow, and New York; after the shoah, in New York, Montreal, Buenos Aires, and Tel-Aviv. At the center of the present work are certain arenas of Yiddish cultural space: in the first part (1901–1928), Czernowitz, Jassy, and Bucharest; in the second (1928–1938), Warsaw, Vilna, Riga, Kaunas, and Tallin; in the third (1938–1969), Paris, London, Montreal, New York, and Tel-Aviv. My specific consideration is directed to the destiny of an individual, to a poet who worked in these centers. The reconstruction of particular passages in the life of this dazzling poet – for whom moving from place to place was an integral part of his self-image, and who worked for the press, for theater, and for film – serves here as a net for capturing narratives of the Yiddish culture world. It is in connection with his life as an individual that Manger's relationships, cultural institutions and codes, power dynamics and status struggles become clear: cultural images, which reveal some facets of Yiddish Europe before its destruction.

The Galleria dell' Accademia in Venice houses Tintoretto's 1552 oil painting *Girolamo e Andrea* ("Jerome and Andreas"; 235 × 145 cm). The painting depicts the meeting of the two saints in the open air, under a shining azure sky. Jerome sits to the right, by a rock overgrown with vegetation. Andreas stands to the left. The two men, both largely unclothed, occupy the foreground; their gazes are focused on an open book, which lies behind them, in the center of the picture and on a lectern, and which constitutes the actual magnet of the painting, though that is not evident from the work's title. It is not just that the book attracts the two men's attention; it is also that Tintoretto sets all the other objects in the painting in relation to it: the crossbar of the massive cross that Andreas holds in his left hand points towards the left-hand page of the book; behind the book's inner margin, at the center axis of the painting, an olive tree rises; beneath the lectern is a lion; and a figtree branch spreads its leaves over the book.

Why is the book so important to the painter, and which book was his model? Though he reproduces no actual letters, he evokes the look

9 YIVO 1931: 76. In his second speech at the Conference Perets offered a practical plan for an "organizing office," which was to coordinate Yiddish cultural activity (ibid. 85–87).





Tintoretto, *Girolamo e Andrea*, (235 × 145), circa 1552, Galleria dell' Accademia, Venice

of a Hebrew book: he indicates initial letters at the right margins of paragraph beginnings, thus alluding to the direction in which Hebrew is written; and he represents, though not strictly, the unmistakable topographical configuration of Jewish commentaries, as they had been published in Venice some thirty years earlier, for the first time in book form.

The producer of these editions was the Venetian printing house of the ethnic German Flemish nobleman Daniel Bomberg (?–1553), from Antwerp. He came to Venice around 1513, a city that since the middle of the 15th century had been one of the most important European centers for printing – a fact that the city owed chiefly to the immigration of German printers. Between 1516 and 1539 Bomberg printed, among other things, several editions of the Bible, the first complete edition of the Talmud, collections of midrash, responsa, and liturgical works. His second publication of the *Rabbinic Bible*, edited by Jakob ben Chayim ibn Adoniyah, appeared in 1524–1525 and became the model for all subsequent Bible editions with commentaries. His *editio princeps* of the Babylonian Talmud (1520–1523) established both the unique typographical appearance of the work and its pagination, which is retained in all printings of the Talmud to this day.

Jacopo Robusti, called Tintoretto (1518–1594), must have seen Bomberg's print productions and been fascinated, even inspired, by the visual experience they offered. He would not have read Hebrew, yet would have recognized that Bomberg's text configuration opened up a new approach to the scriptures: surrounded by medieval interpretations, the old Jewish text is newly presented in the spirit of the Renaissance, of humanism, and thereby newly seen and positioned. Since antiquity Jewish scriptural tradition had arisen from the simultaneity of written and oral transmission, of text and scriptural explication. Talmud manuscripts document early implementations of this simultaneity in the configuration of their pages (cf. Cod. Heb. 95 in the Bavarian Staatsbibliothek). But it was only in the Gentile Bomberg's workshop, with the collaboration of Jewish colleagues, that the unmistakable typographical configuration was created that characterizes Jewish commentary to this day. A page of Talmud establishes a polyphonic, hypertextual discourse taking place among sages in diverse places and at diverse times. The chief text is in the middle of the page (i. e., a passage from the Mishnah, with the ensuing commentary of Talmud scholars); around it, in a different and smaller type, are discussions and interpretations from subsequent centuries. Each page has a different look, and is developed as an independent entity, with a central portion and surrounding textual fields. The polyphonic book preserves the autonomy of its various voices, admits parallels and disso-







מאימתי

קריין את שמע בערבים משע שהבנה נכנסים לאכול בתרומתן עד סוף האשמו' הראשונה

מאימתי

קריין וכו' פי רש"י ואנו היקרין מבוער יום וזמן אנו ממתיקין לבאת הכבדים



קריין את שמע בערבים משע שהבנה נכנסים לאכול בתרומתן עד סוף האשמו' הראשונה דבריו אליעזר וחכמים אומר עד חצות רבן גמליאל אומר עד שיעלה עמוד השחר מעשה ונאו בניו מבית המשטה אמרו לו לא קרינו את שמע אמר להם אם לא עלה עמוד השחר חייבין אתם לקרות ולא זו בלבד אמרו אלא כל מה שאמרנו חכמים עד חצות מצותו עד שיעלה עמוד השחר חלבי ואבר' מצותן עד שיעלה עמו' השחר וכל הנאכלים לוי' אחד מצותו עד שיעלה עמוד השחר אם כן למרה אמרו חכמים עד חצות כדי להרחיק אדם מן העבירה גמ' תנא היכא קאי דקתני מאימתי ותו מאי שנא דתני בערבי' ברישא לתני דשחרית ברישא תנא אקרא קאי דכתב בשבכך ובקומך והכי קרניו זמן שדשכב' אימתי משע שהבנה נכנסין לאכול בתרומתן ואי בעי' אימא יליף מבריתו של עולם וכתב וידוע ערב ודיו בקר ו' אחרו אי הכי סוף דקתני בשחר מברך שתי לפני' ואחת לאהר' ערב' מברך שתי' לפניו ושתי' לאהר' לתני ערב' ברישא תנא פתח בערב' והודר תני בשחרית עד דקאי בשחר' פריש מלי' דשחר' והדרפרי' מולי דערבית אמר מר משעת שהבנה נכנס' לאכול בתרומה מכדי כהנים אימתי קא אכלי תרומה משע' צאת הכבדים לתני מאי אורי' קמל' בהני' אימתי קא אכלי בתרומה משעת צאת הכבדים והא קמל' דכפר'

afugi cordiu' bis itant dans lectio' od Deutor VI scrip' ni Audi israel' de de' bor loro agitur' i' bora sit ruitada'

cydotum pany' a bora mishi' possim' aitor aut' de' sacro' i'bus contaminatis'

min' p'p'ro'ri' sor' ndovum id'ntro m' s' lopi' a sapient'ibus' fuerunt' ut' ce' lang' i' cono' trans'g'isio' ad' ins'

r' prius agit' de' rui' tima' ruitatione'

ratione' mundi' p'us' muntis' visio' q' r'vor' aut' dicit'

כראשכתן בתמיה רכסיה על בקר תחלה אי בני מיעא דקתני עמור' ברישא אי אמרת בטלמא דקמין אקרי רבסבך אם כן אינו מתקני קרא אלא אקרי' טועה אלא אי אמרת דקמין אקרי' דברייא על עולם אם קשירי אכל מני' וא' כן סופ' דקתני וכו' מברך הללתיך ולא קח חסדי ודאו עיניו רהיבא ברכה תקנו דבין כדי להמתין חובייהו בבית הכנסת ורוקח בית הכנסת מלהם סתיו עמיריס במרה והם ממכשנין מן המזון קאכל בתו' ככסותו סתיו איך כריסן להמתין לחבייהם אלא בלילה ווא קהל דכפר לא מעבדה וזתי' הא תבילי' דא זמנא בהעל' הערבי' פטמו' אכול בתרומה ולי' דלילות על משיית' לאמיעיני' בקורבן אף ליה משורם כבר

ברכות 110 א ב ג ד

Babylonian Talmud, Venice 1520, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich

nances, and calls on the reader to translate the text into the language of the present. There is no doubt: Bomberg's *Rabbinic Bible* was Tintoretto's model for the Bible that Jerome the translator is studying in Bethlehem 1,200 years earlier.

Yiddish books too adopted this layout, especially editions of the Hebrew Bible with Yiddish commentaries or Yiddish Bible translations with commentary. New interpretations of traditional material were not found only in religious literature; they also became a component of the literatures, in both Hebrew and Yiddish, that were at first simply non-liturgical and later became fully secular. Even when young, Manger saw in Jewish tradition an inexhaustible repertory of motifs, and modes of presentation, all of which he took pleasure in reaching back to. In his *Khumesh-lider* ("Torah poems") he saw himself as being part of the tradition of midrash, among whose interpretive methods are the translation of biblical material into one's own present place. Hence his calling a later edition of his Bible poems *Medresh Itzik* ("Itzik's Interpretation").

Manger's story is transmitted to us in fragments; the research for his biography brought forth only a few coherent sequences, and countless isolated shards. The material needed a mode of presentation adequate to it. I took my bearings from the Talmudic model, and chose a form that allowed me both to develop narrative passages chronologically, on the basis of visual and textual documents, and also – in a surrounding text – to sketch cultural, political, literary, and social fields, to direct my gaze at the relation between legend and the circumstantial facts, between work and the design of a life. The gaps in the biographical landscape remain; but the figure of the poet in its networks of relations and its ambient world becomes visible.

The typographical scheme illustrates the interdependence of text (the individual destiny) and context (cultural history), of a life and a culture space. It also permits one to put traces, indications, and the analysis of both in a relation to one another that is not only intellectual but also visual.

The reader will encounter on each page two parallel strands of text: in the inner column, set in Antiqua, the biography's first voice; in the surrounding column, set in sans serif font, its second. They belong together. The first, drawing on the materials found and assembled, narrates; the second interprets, provides background and context, weaves in cross-chapter themes and further personal histories. There is no narrative without interpretation, of course; but the two voices together preserve the

difference between what is found and what is devised, between document and commentary. Readers are invited to determine their own mode of reading, their own way of passing through the passages of the text. The voices may be read sequentially or alternately; in either case, it is only in the process of reading that the biography comes into being.

Köln 2015





Itzik Manger as drawn by Ber Horowitz, *Literarische bleter*, March 21<sup>st</sup> 1930 (NLI).

# Warsaw: Almost Happiness (1928–1938) I

**Pencil Drawing** On Sunday, November 24<sup>th</sup>, 1929, Manger and some other Yiddish writers are together in a Warsaw bar.<sup>1</sup> Among them is Ber Horowitz, poet, artist, and Manger's friend.<sup>2</sup> Drinking is going on, ideas are being

**Manger's Warsaw** The city embodies the Poland Manger traveled to for the first time in 1929, which he immediately made his elective home, and from which he was deported in the spring of 1938.

1 Manger came to Warsaw for a second visit in the middle of November 1929, intending to stay a month or so (postcard to Reisen, November 19th, 1929, YIVO, RG. 223, Box 35); but this time, unlike the previous time, he was able to stay.

2 See the photograph on p. 63. The friendship probably began in March of 1929, during Manger's first visit to Vilna. We do not know how long the friendship lasted. Ber Horowitz [Horovits] was born in Majdan, in East Galicia, in 1895, and died in Stanislaw 1942. He grew up in the Carpathian Mountains, received a traditional Jewish education from private teachers, attending at the same time the Ukrainian village school, and afterwards a Polish Gymnasium. In 1914 he was drafted into the Imperial and Royal Army, deployed in various places, and finally stationed in Vienna, where he began the study of medicine. A polyglot, he had begun even while a soldier to write Yiddish poems, among them poems about war and the senselessness of war. In Vienna he became part of the literary circle around Moyshe Zilburg, Avrom Moyshe Fuchs, and Melech Ravitch. In his first book of poems, פֿון בֵּרֶג מײַן הײַם אין די בערג ("Of my Home in the Mountains"), Horowitz struck a tone new in Yiddish poetry, and was praised by critics for the directness, naturalness, and simplicity of his language. By the middle of the 20s Horowitz was again living in Poland. He translated plays and poems into Yiddish, published his own poems and stories (about, among other things, the Baal Shem Tov and the Carpathian highwayman and folk-hero Oleksa Dovbus), drew, painted, and was also active from time to time as a schoolteacher of Yiddish literature. He was murdered in October 1942, during the German occupation of Stanislaw. See Ravitch 1945: 62 ff, Jizchok Turkow-Grudberg 1964: 70 ff, Cohen 2008.1 and the sources indicated there; also Bolbecher and Kaiser 2000: 323 f.

Looking back at the beginning of the 50s, Manger will tell Yankev Pat that these ten years were the "loveliest" of his life. During that time, he says, his self-awareness grew; during that time he belonged, as a Yiddish poet, to "a living Jewish people." In this environment he encountered Jewishness in all its diverse manifestations: in Yiddish-speaking simple people, in workers, in Polish-speaking assimilated Jews. It was also in Poland, he added, that most of his works were published, and thousand of young Yiddish-speaking people had listened to him "with inspiration and love." Nor did Manger receive recognition only from the young; the Bund, to which he was very close, honored him in 1937 with its literary prize: "I felt like a prince there, despite worn-out shoes and earning only 20 zloty a week." An image of happiness.<sup>1</sup>

A few years later he wrote in a more restrained way in an autobiographical text, "Warsaw was my true home. I became fond of

the cities and towns of Poland, as things that belonged to me, were close to me. I had the

1 Pat 1954: 187f.

feeling I had been born in Romania by mistake."<sup>2</sup>

What were the ingredients of Warsaw's promise, of Poland's promise?

In 1931, a fifth of all Jews lived in Poland, making up the second-largest Jewish community in the world. The largest Jewish community in a European city lived in Warsaw; the city was considered the Jewish metropolis, the culture metropolis of Yiddish par excellence.<sup>3</sup> In 1931, the Polish census counted 352,659 Jews living in Warsaw (30.1% of the population), and 3,113,933 in Poland generally (9.8% of the population): after the Ukrainians, Jews were the second largest minority in the country. 79.9% of Jews indicated Yiddish as their mother tongue. While 74% of Poles lived in rural areas, 76% of the Jews lived in cities, where they made up a good third of the country's urban population.<sup>4</sup> Approximately two million of them, a good two thirds of the entire Jewish minority, belonged to the petty bourgeoisie, another 700,000 to the working class, 300,000 to the intelligentsia and the upper middle class, 100,000 to the bourgeoisie proper.<sup>5</sup>

By the beginning of the 30s, it was already clear that the Second Polish Republic was not being what its Jewish minority had hoped it would be, and which had been partially stipulated in the context of the Treaty of Versailles: a multiethnic, multinational state with a Polish majority, providing to its minorities both political equality and national-cultural autonomy.<sup>6</sup> The Second Republic was instead a Polish national state, in which antisemitic agitation, boycotts, and riots were all tolerated, Jews were denied access to public service positions and state offices, and Poland's governmental ministries advocated the elimination of Jews from econo-

exchanged. In the course of the evening they create, spontaneously, a collective work on a sheet of paper; Horowitz draws a portrait of Manger, and the others each add some witticism to the drawing. On March 21<sup>st</sup>, 1930, the Warsaw Yiddish weekly magazine *Literarische bleter* publishes four of Manger's poems, accompanied by this same portrait.<sup>3</sup> The magazine is among the world's most highly regarded Yiddish liter-

כ'שטיי באַרוועס און, באַלאַדאַ עראַטיקאַ [“Erotic Ballade”], פֿאַרגאַבן מײַן געוויין [“I stand barefoot and brash”], די באַלאַדע פֿון דער זונה און דעם שלאַנגן, [“Buried My Weeping”], די באַלאַדע פֿון דער זונה און דעם שלאַנגן, [“The Ballad of the Whore and the Slender Hussar”]; see *Literarische bleter* 12: 21, March 1930, 223 f.

2 *Shriftn in proze* 445; it appeared first in *Der veker* 1, February 1961.

3 On the competition among the Yiddish literary centers in Warsaw, Moscow, and New York see Cohen 2003: 115–125.

4 Mendelsohn 1987: 23 f. Only 23.6% of all Jews lived in rural areas. In the cities they were often more than a quarter of the population: in Lodz, 202,497 (33.5%); in Lvov 99,595 (31.9%); in Cracow 56,515 (25.8%); in Vilna 55,006 (28.2%); in Brest 21,440 (44.3%); in Grodno 21,259 (42.6%); in Pinsk 20,220 (63.4%). These figures do not indicate exact totals; the parameters used for determining ethnic or national identity were imperfect (Marcus 1983: 17). On the history of Jews in Poland during the interwar period see Beyrau 1982, Marcus 1983, Mendelsohn 1987: 10–83, Shmeruk 1991, Wynot 1991, Hagen 1996, Friedrich 1997, Shmeruk and Werses 1997, Moseley 2001, Pickhan 2001, Fishman 2005: Part II, Bacon 2008.

5 Mendelsohn 1987: 27. The petty bourgeoisie consisted chiefly of small shopkeepers, artisans, and clerical workers. Jewish workers were preponderantly artisans (shoemakers, tailors, bakers etc.), active either in workshops at home or in factories (ibid.). On the demographic, social, and occupational structure of Polish Jewry see Pickhan 2001: 179–191.

6 The Second Polish Republic had a population of some 27 million people; approximately a third of them were ethnic minorities (Ukrainian, Jewish, White Russian, and German). On Polish ambivalence in the treatment of the Jewish minority see Silber 2011. On Jewish-Polish relations in the Warsaw City Council (1919–1939) see Kosinska-Witt 2011.

ary fora.<sup>4</sup> The collective document registers an event in which the 28-year-old Manger, though in the company of older and in some cases more renowned colleagues, and in the European metropolis of Yiddish culture, stands at the center.<sup>5</sup> Because of the coarse grain of the printing, the comments and signatures can be deciphered on-

4 *Literarische bleter: vokhnsbrift far literatur, teater un kunst-fragn* ("Literary Pages: A Weekly Journal of Literature, Theater, and Art") was founded in May 1924 by Melech Ravitch, Perets Markish, I. J. Singer, and Nakhmen Meisel. Meisel remained the editor until publication ceased in 1939. On the genesis and program of the journal see Meisel 1951: 141–165, Cohen 2003: 50 and 70. On the role and position of the weekly in Warsaw's Yiddish literary context see *ibid.*: 115–141.

5 To be portrayed in this way must have pleased Manger considerably. Hence his giving the editors the drawing, probably in place of a photograph, as a suitable image of the poet to accompany his poems.

reacted to the problems of Jewish existence and identity pluralistically and dividedly, with a lively set of associations, juxtapositions, and oppositions.

The strongest ideological polarization arose from questions of fundamental orientation: tradition versus modernity, religiosity versus secularism, diaspora versus Israel, transnationality versus national sovereignty, nationality versus attachment to class.<sup>10</sup> Special weight was laid on the question of language, since language determined after all both cultural field and social horizon: Yiddish, Polish, Hebrew?<sup>11</sup>

7 Official state facilities employed neither Jewish physicians nor Jewish lawyers (*ibid.*: 42). Jewish artisans were laid off as sectors of Jewish artisanal and factory work (tobacco processing, the making and distributing of spirits and oil, match production facilities etc.) were changed in the course of "Polishization" into state monopolies (Beyrau 1982: 224f). The rightward movement of Polish politics in the 30s made possible even the implementation of a prohibition on ritual slaughtering (cf. Weiss 2000: 65ff.). On the dealings of the Polish authorities with Jews holding Polish citizenship who had been expelled from Nazi Germany in 1938, see *ibid.*: 140ff, 195–210.

8 See Pickhan 2001: 295f.

9 "The Jew in Warsaw felt that he lived among his people in a completely Jewish environment, and that all aspects of life or work, with their attendant tribulations, were intimately bound up with the Jewish community" (Gutman 2003: 11).

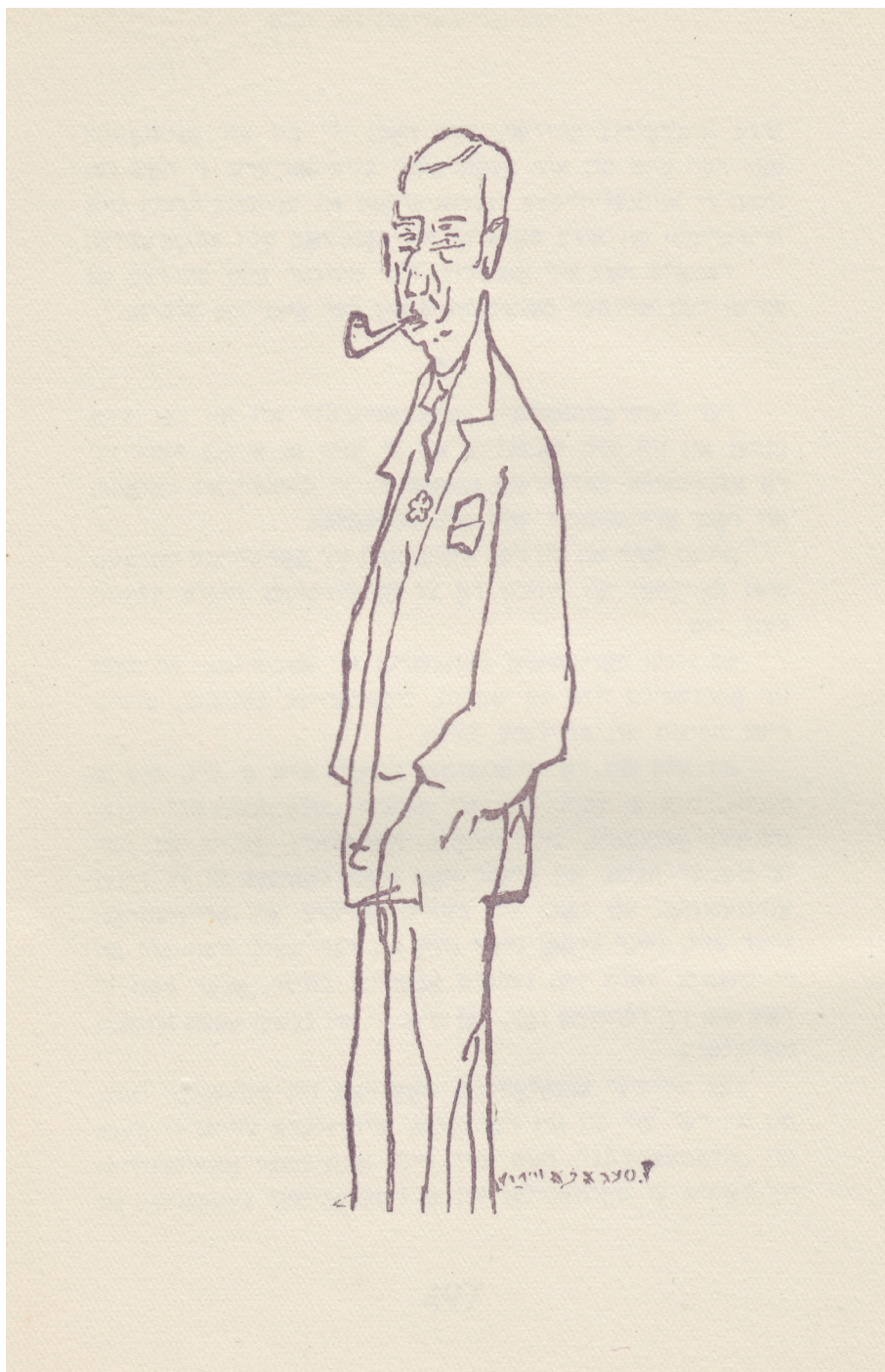
10 Cf. Mendelsohn 1987: 47.

11 Shmeruk describes Yiddish culture in interwar Poland as part of a trilingual polysystem, where Yiddish culture was the most developed of the three cultures making up the system, but was threatened in the 30s by the increasing dissemination of Polish culture (Shmeruk 1997: 1). A majority of Jewish children attended Polish state elementary schools. According to Joint statistics from 1936, 55.86% of all Jewish students were in institutions of the traditional educational system (Khorev, Beyt Ya'akov, and yeshivas), in which Yiddish was the language of instruction. The Tarbut and Yavneh schools, where Hebrew was the language of instruction, had 33.5% of the students. The bilingual Shul-kult had 1.2% of Jewish students. The institutions of Tsisho, in which Yiddish was the language of instruction, were attended by 9.5%. In all of these schools Polish language was an obligatory subject (*ibid.*: 14).

mic life and their mass emigration from the country as the solution for Poland's social and economic problems.<sup>7</sup> In consequence of these repressions, the impoverishment of broad sectors of the Jewish population increased. At institutions of graduate education Jewish students were discriminated against by means of quotas; by 1937 they were also moved to "Ghetto-benches" in the lecture halls, benches constructed specifically for them.<sup>8</sup>

Still, the Jewish minority of Poland could offer the individual a clear Jewish environment, a Jewish normalcy.<sup>9</sup> To be sure, the minority was neither socially nor economically, neither politically nor culturally homogeneous; it





Zusman Segalowitch as drawn by Ephraim Kaganowski.  
*Yidishe shrayber in der heym* ("Yiddish Writers at Home"), Paris 1956: 497.

ly with difficulty. Below right: “An Indian from Bucharest/ A starcatcher .../ drinks more than he eats/ drink on, Manger! Z. Segalovitch.”<sup>6</sup> Above left: “From Bucharest to Warsaw came

אני אינדיאנער פֿון בוקארעסט / א שטערן־פֿאנגער... / טרינקט 6  
מער ווי ער עסט / טרינק ווייטער מאנגער / ז. סעגאלאוויטש  
Zusman Segalovitch [Segalowicz] was born in Bialystok in 1884, and died in New York in 1949. He was at the time a poet and novelist and journalist, a prominent figure in Yiddish literary Warsaw. He was chairman of the Warsaw branch of the Yiddish PEN Club, and deputy chairman of the Jewish Writers' Union. The “king of cravats” (Auerbach 1974: 221) published in the big Yiddish dailies *Haynt* and *Der moment*, and was chiefly popular for his novels, despite criticism of their sentimental perspective. In the interwar period he published 33 books, among them five volumes of poetry. The relation between Manger and Segalovitch was marked by clashes. In 1930, Manger sharply criticized Segalovitch from inside the literary scene (see p. 211). But for the 30th anniversary celebration of Segalovitch's poems, Manger wrote an appreciative portrait of him (*Shriftn in proze*: 257 ff). In September 1939, Segalovitch fled at night, with some of his Warsaw colleagues, to Lithuania. By way of the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Turkey, and Syria he reached Tel-Aviv in 1941. From the moment of his flight, and to the day of his death, he lived according to the laws of mourning, and went neither to the cinema nor to the theater. He sketched poetic images of Jewish life in Poland before the destruction, and registered both his horror and his pain at that hellish event in elegies. See Rotenberg 1997, Liptzin 2007: 2, Cohen 2008: 2, and the cited secondary literature.

tism. The central point of its political program was a call for national-cultural autonomy, with Yiddish as the national language. The Bund had journalistic publications, libraries, the *Tsentrale yidishe shulorganisationsye* (*Tsisho*), and the *Kultur-lige* (cultural league), and by means of all of these it decisively shaped the structure and development of modern Yiddish secular culture in Poland between the wars.<sup>14</sup> To that end cultural and educational institutions were established, in a broadly rooted network across the entire country. They linked the Party, its ad-

A third to a half of Polish Jewry lived in traditional communities led by rabbis or rebbes, mostly in shtetls, spoke Yiddish, sought no alternative to life in diaspora, was content to be represented politically by the *Agudes yisroel* (“The Union of Israel”).<sup>12</sup>

Zionism, one of the leading political powers in the 20s, proposed sovereignty in *Erets Yisra'el* as a response to antisemitism, but demanded for the transition period both national-cultural autonomy and Hebrew as a national language. Its adherents came mostly from the middle layers of society, though there was also a socialist wing of the movement, the Poale Zion.

Regarding the Zionists – considered as 'bourgeois' – and their plan to emigrate to Palestine, the Jewish workers' party, called the Bund, distinguished itself sharply from them; it sought a socialist solution in Poland to the problems of the Jews.<sup>13</sup> In the 30s the Bund became the most important force in the struggle against the Polish right wing and against antisemi-

12 Beyrau 1982: 212, Mendelsohn 1987: 61.

13 Their motto was *doikayt* (“hereness”); cf. Mendelsohn 1987: 45, Pickhan 2001: 282 ff.

14 “The cultural systems of the Jewish languages – Hebrew and Yiddish – were identified with particular Jewish-national ideologies. Hebrew culture was based on Zionist ideology. Modern, secular Yiddish culture in Poland, on the other hand, was established predominantly by the Bund and its members, also by those Communists who opposed assimilation, but to a lesser degree by socialist Zionists or Folkists.” The ideological character of the respective culture segments, Shmeruk argues, was accompanied by a demand for exclusiveness and for a rejection of the two other linguistic cultural systems (Shmeruk 1997: 1–9). On the contribution of the Bund to the development of Yiddish secular culture see Halpern 2009 [1987]: 865, Cohen 1998, Pickhan 2001: 220–262.

herents, and Yiddish culture activists together, and engaged young people as well.<sup>15</sup> The Bundists understood themselves as an extended family; they spoke of *undzere bundishe mishpokhe* ("our Bund family") and of *khavershaft*, fellowship, camaraderie.<sup>16</sup>

Like other secular parties, the Bund was attempting, with its broad-based array of services, especially in the area of education, to fill the gap created by the movement away from the traditional world of Jewish life. With its schools, its Medem Sanatorium for children, its educational associations and youth movement and summer camps, the Bund was creating, in place of the "old home" of religious community, a new life space, into which the close family connections of the old home were transposed.<sup>17</sup>

Itzik Manger was not a member of the Bund, but was closely connected with it. From 1935 on he regularly published in the *Naye folkstsaytung*, gave lectures in the people's university, was active in the Bund's educational and cultural events (lectures, readings, panel discussions), wrote for the experimental *Yung-teater* that the Bund financed and for the *Teater far yugnt*, was an associate editor of the weekly review *Foroys* that was launched at the end of 1937, received in connection with the Party's fortieth anniversary in that same year the Bund Prize for literature, and enjoyed in public debates the solidarity of his Bundist friends. The Bundist cultural network was for him, as a freelance artist, of existential importance; it offered the poet a stage and the possibility of gainful employment. If Manger retrospectively called Warsaw his "true home," the Bundist milieu with its familial dynamic of interaction played a leading role in that home.

a poet/ to enjoy himself and to drink/ but he's still sober! From/ Me, Yosl/ Kotler."<sup>7</sup> Above right: "Believe me, every word is shit, so says Lev Niak."<sup>8</sup> Below left: "Dear Ber, perhaps you can tell me who this person is – in vain I look and look and have no idea. I. Manger." And on the right side, "Warsaw, Warsaw, may you burn

7 פֿון בוקארעסט קיין ווארשע איז געקומען א דיכטער / צו פרייען זיך און טרינקען / נאָר ער איז נעבעך נייכטער / ממני יאסל / קאטלער Yosl Cutler (Kotler), born in 1896 in Troyanets (Volhynia) and resident in New York since 1911, satirist, artist, caricaturist, playwright, and puppeteer, was in Europe on tour. After appearances in England, France, and Belgium, Modicut, the Yiddish marionette theater company founded by Cutler and the artist Zuni Maud in 1925 on New York's Lower East Side, had considerable success in Warsaw as well: Cutler and Maud gave 200 sold-out performances at the Warsaw Writers' Union. *Literarische bleter* published two of Cutler's plays (December 13th, 1929: 985), three reviews, and an interview (October 4th, 1929: 787; December 6th, 1929: 964; December 13th, 1929: 984f; March 14th, 1930: 212). Cutler was considered a brilliant political satirist, regularly publishing his caricatures in the New York Communist daily *Morgn frayhayt*; he illustrated the works of other Yiddish authors, published in 1934 his illustrated volume of poems *Muntergang*, and in 1935 made a short film of three of his puppet plays. He was killed in a car accident on June 11th, 1935. See Reisen 1929: 426ff., Hoberman 1991: 351 ff., Portnoy 1999.

8 גלייבט ס'איז אלץ ווארט אַ קאַק / אַזוי זאָגט אייך לעוו ניאַק Probably the same as S. Livniak, who on the photo (note 10) can be seen between Alter Kacyzne and Ber Horowitz. I could find no information about him.

15 On the conditions and perspective of Jewish youth in interwar Poland see Mendelsohn 1987: 48, 59f and Moseley's analysis of the autobiographies written at the suggestion of YIVO (Moseley 2001).

16 Cf. Pickhan 2001: 128ff.

17 See Kazdan 1972. The "state-within-a-state" situation depends not least on the fact that the Polish state did not treat the needs of its Jewish citizens on an equal basis (Mendelsohn 1987: 48).





occupations" and members of the underworld.<sup>20</sup> The pariahs among the transport workers were rope-haulers and pushcart-pullers.

אויף ושימנע, פאר די האַלעס, אויפן מיראָוסקע-פּלאַץ, אויף די נאַלעווקעס און אין אַנדערע ערטער זיינען זיי געשטאַנען גרופעסווייז. זומער און ווינט-ער האָט מען די שטריק-טרעגער געקענט זען אין דעם זעלבן אַרעמען הילוך: שווע-רע שטייול, וואַטאָוע הויזן, אַ וואַטענער שפענצער, די לענדן אַרומגעוויקלט מיט גראַבע שטריק, ווי מיט אַ גאַרטל, – אַזוי האָבן זיי געוואָרט אויף אַ קעסטל אָדער אַ פעקל ערגעץ אַפצוטראָגן. אַז אַ קונה האָט געקויפט אויף ושימנע גאַס אַ קעסטל ציטרינגען אָדער פאַמעראַנען אָדער אַנדערע פּרוכטן, האָט ער געדונגען אַ שטריק-טרעגער עס אַפצוטראָגן. דער טרעגער האָט דאָס קעסטל פאַרוואָרפן אויף די פלייצע, אַרומגעבונדן עס מיט דער שטריק אַרום זיין ברוסט-קאַסטן און אַזוי, אַ האַלב איינגעבויגענער, האָט ער געשלעפט דאָס קעסטל טייל מאָל אַ גאַנץ ווייטן וועג.

[...] די וועגלעך-טרעגער [...] האָבן אויך געהאַט סטאַציעס אין די האַנדעלס-געגנטן און זיי זיינען דאָרט געשטאַנען מיט זייערע קליינע האַנט-ווע-געלעך. אַז אַ סוחר האָט געהאַט אַפצופירן עטלעכע קעסטלעך אָדער פעקלעך סחר רה, וואָס איין שטריק-טרעגער האָט ניט געקענט נעמען אויף דער פלייצע, אָדער אַז אַן אַרעמאַן האָט געדאַרפט איבער-פירן זיינע בעבעכעס פון איין דירה אין אַ צווייטער און האָט ניט געהאַט גענוג אויף אַ גרויסן וואָגן, – האָט מען געדונגען אַ וועגעלע-טרעגער. דער טרעגער האָט פאַרוואָרפן אַ שטאַרקע שטריק איבער אַן אַקסל, – ער האָט זיך פשוט איינגעשפאַנט אַזוי ווי אַ פּערד – און האָט געשלעפט דאָס וועגעלע [...] ווינטער-צייט האָט מען אַפט מאָל געקענט זען, ווי אַזאָ טרעגער שלעפט מיט די לעצטע כוחות אַ וועגעלע אין טיפע שנייען. צו מאָל האָט זיך געטראָפן, אַז דער וועגעלע-טרעגער האָט ניט געהאַט גענוג כוחות אַרויפצושלעפן דאָס וועגעלע באַרג-אַרויף אָדער אַרויסשלעפן עס פון אַ טיפן שניי, – מענטשן האָבן דאָס באַמערקט, זיינען זיי צוגעלאָפן און האָבן אַ ביסל אונטערגעשטופט דאָס וועגעלע ביז אַ לייכטערן אַרט.

On Zhimna Street, by the great market, in Mirowski Place, on Nalevki Street, in other places as well they stood around in groups. In summer and in winter alike one could see the rope-haulers wearing the same shabby clothing: heavy boots, lined trousers, cotton jackets, their loins surrounded by coarse rope like a belt – so dressed they would wait for a box or a package, for something to transport.

20 Ibid.

stic interest in the figure of the Besht. Horowitz was touched and impressed by Manger's connection to the Romanian landscape and Romanian folksong, by his life story, and by his poems. The tall, broad-shouldered blond poet with the resounding laugh shares other things with Manger as well: a Bohemian artistic self-image, and an unrest that never let him remain anywhere for long.<sup>12</sup> On March 7<sup>th</sup>, 1929 he portrays his friend in a poem, which will be printed two weeks later, and which records an encounter between two men of elective affinities.<sup>13</sup>

און טרויערן מיר נישט טרויריקער פֿון וויזשניצער נגון,  
מיר קענען אָבער אונזער צער פֿאַרוויגן.  
ווייל מיר זענען געקושטע פֿון שכניה,  
ווייל מיר גלויבן אין בלעטער גרינע.

And is our sorrow not more sorrowful than  
the Vizhnits melody?

But we can weigh out our sorrow,  
for we have been kissed by the shechinah,  
for we still believe in green leaves.<sup>14</sup>

12 Cf. Turkow-Grudberg 1964: 71.

13 Horowitz 1929; at the same time five of Manger's poems are published, and so is Nakhmen Mayzl's article, "Yitzchak Manger, the Yiddish Poet from Romania." The printed version of Horowitz' poem differs at several points from the manuscript (YIVO, RG. 3 CSA).

14 Quoted from the print version. Shechinah: the "indwelling" of God, the divine presence. The feminine manifestation of God in the world. Many Romanian folksongs begin with the coded phrase "green leaves."

The drawing is made at the beginning of Manger's second visit to Poland. Between the two visits his first book of poems had been published in Bucharest, and he had managed to publish four issues of his journal *Getseylte verter* ("Some Few Words") in Czernowitz. His poet friend Horowitz is portraying him now for the second time; this time there is no poem, though, rather a drawing, an affectionate caricature with remarkable realism: the squinting look, the high forehead, the long neck, the three-cornered face. But Horowitz is not mocking Manger; he likes the man he is drawing, he sees him, he does not transfigure him. He shows Manger's disproportions – a lot of head and only a little body – his birdlikeness, his haggardness. His hat has a strange look, too big, and the face looks spent. But the longer one looks, the more the hat recedes, and hair and forehead and cheeks and eyes come to the fore. The eyes seem sad, they bring a reflective and distant quality into the figure, they make the smile seem defensive. Horowitz exaggerates the hat and the points of the lapel, so that the jacket seems almost a tuxedo, the overall image almost overdrawn.<sup>15</sup> But the face is not caricatured, Manger has a dignified effect, and the artist seems well disposed to him.

<sup>15</sup> Melech Ravitch shares this perception when he writes to Manger, "you are emaciated, and are wearing a big Don Quixote hat" (*Getseylte verter*: 6, [2], June 1930: 2).

The poet Moyshe Knaphais, who had known Manger since his arrival in Warsaw and had been one of his students in the translation course, stated that the Jewish Manger had discovered himself in Warsaw. Manger did not, he said, need to look hard for the prototypes of his biblical characters; rather he encountered them daily on the streets, on Nalewki, Franciskańska, Walowa, or Przejazd. And then, Knaphais stated, he transferred them, unaltered, in already finished form, into his biblical poems.<sup>22</sup>

It seems evident that Manger's sense of being at home in Warsaw was significantly strengthened by his living with Rokhl Auerbach.<sup>23</sup> Manger himself, however, was silent on the matter after his bitter separation from her. In November 1962, in a letter to Melech Ra-

If, say, some customer on Zhimna Street bought a box of lemons or oranges or other fruit, he engaged a rope-hauler to get it moved. The hauler threw the box on his shoulders, tied it around his chest with the rope, and carried it away, sometimes a considerable distance, bent deeply forward. If a wealthy lady had to carry a large parcel, she too would often engage a rope-puller.

[...] The cart-pullers [...] too had stations in the business districts, where they would stand ready with their small hand-wagons. If a merchant had to deliver some boxes or bundles of goods to deliver that a rope-hauler was unable to carry, if a poor man had to move his things from one dwelling to the next and had no money for a large wagon, he would engage a cart-puller. The puller threw a strong rope over his shoulders, harnessed himself to the cart like a horse, and pulled the cart along [...] In winter one could often see such people pulling carts through the deep snow with their last gasps of energy. Sometimes it even happened that the puller did not have the strength to pull the cart up a steep path or out of the deep snow. People would see that, run to his aid, and help shove the cart along to a more easily traversable spot.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*: 79.

<sup>22</sup> MA 8: 4005, 4; Moyshe Szulzstein expresses a similar view (1971: 91 f).

<sup>23</sup> See below, "Rokhl Auerbach," p. 282.

Tłomackie 13  
Second building from the  
right; the writers' associa-  
tion club was on the second  
floor (JHI).



**Warsaw 1929** Late in 1928 Manger travels for the first time to Poland. Once arrived in Warsaw, he goes to see Melech Ravitch, then Secretary of the Jewish Writers' Union; he has no appointment but looks him up in his office on Tłomackie 13.<sup>16</sup>

אַן אַ קלאַפּ אין טיר, אָן אַ גוט־מאַרגן קומט אַרײַן אַ הויכער יונגערמאַן, אַ ברונעט, אַ פאַרדרייטער קאַפעלוש אויפן קאַפּ און ער זאָגט באַפעלעריש: איך בין געקומען קײן וואַרשע און איך וויל, אַז דו זאָלסט מיר אײנאַרדענען אַ קבלת־פנים. דו ביזט דאָך מלך ראַוויטש. – יאָ, איך בין מלך ראַוויטש און דו ביזט מאַנגער און איך וועל דיר אײנאַרדענען אַ האַרציקן קבלת־פנים. אָבער מיט אײן באַדינג, אַז דו זאָלסט דאָ אין וואַרשע, אין אונדזער פאַראײן ניט מאַכן די שטוקעס פון מאַיאַקאָוסקי און יעסיענין אין מאַסקווע. – איך וועל טאָן, וואָס איך וועל וועלן. – און איך וועל טאָן, וואָס איך וועל וועלן. און ער איז אַרײַן אין גרויסן זאַל.

Without knocking on the door, without even a “good morning,” a tall, brown-haired young man comes in, his hat aslant his head, and says in a commanding tone, “I’ve come to Warsaw and I want you to arrange a reception for me. You are after all Melech Ravitch.” “Yes, I’m Melech Ravitch, and you’re Manger, and I’ll arrange a reception for you, a warm welcome. But under the condition that you not perform Mayakovsky’s and Jessenin’s Moscow theater-pieces here in Warsaw at the Union.” “I shall do what I shall wish.” “And I shall do what I shall wish.” And he went into the big hall.<sup>17</sup>

16 Cf. the Sub-Chapter “Tłomackie 13,” p. 219.

17 Ravitch 1969.

rising; he pointed at it and said, “Look, a big loaf of white bread!” The event was later forgotten, Manger continued; but years later, in Poland, during his time of great need, when hunger came back into his life, he hallucinated a moon resembling a loaf of white bread. “I transformed my hunger into a dramatic vision.”<sup>25</sup>

24 RA 95-IV. The ballad appeared in *Shtern oyfn dakh*: 22. The photo is in the anthology edited by Ravitch, *Dos amolike yidishe varsh* (“The Jewish Warsaw of Yesteryear”) published in Montreal in 1966, on p. 18; the ballad itself is on p. 420.

25 Pat 1954: 185.

vitch, he attempted to formulate the significance of Warsaw for his poetic work. The stimulus for his attempt was a photograph Ravitch had sent him, of Jewish boys on Krasieński Square. Almost all his books, he explained to Ravitch, were written and printed in Warsaw; *Clouds Over the Roof*, published in London in 1942, contained many poems written in Warsaw, and even his debut book *Stars on the Roof*, published in 1929 in Bucharest, had a number of poems written in that same city. “Warsaw was my great inspiration,” he wrote; “often I had nowhere to sleep, not seldom I was hungry, but breathing the Warsaw air was a pleasure. My muse was frequently pregnant. The first large poem on Warsaw is ‘The Ballad of White Bread,’ linked to the city not topographically but by subject and mood.”<sup>24</sup>

Manger told Yankev Pat a more complicated story about the genesis of this poem. During World War I, he and his brother often stood in the bread distribution line whole nights through. Meanwhile, he said, their mother sat on a bench and waited with them. During one of these nights Manger’s brother noticed the moon



Warsaw was more a metropolis than Bucharest was, or Jassy or Czernowitz, and was more Jewish than any other great European city. It was considered "the paradise of Yiddish and the great rising sun of Yiddish world literature in miniature."<sup>26</sup> In this "great herring-barrel, whose name was *yidish-varsh*,"<sup>27</sup> the Jewish-cultural upheaval took on a more polyphonic form than it did elsewhere, and it was possible here for the young poet to put in closer counterpoint, as a part of his artistic program, those contrasts that he had named during his first presentation at Tłomackie 13: "the local" and "the European," "the folksonglike" and "the dissonant."<sup>28</sup> Moreover: in this field, shaped by the interactive dynamic of an extended family (writers understood themselves as a *שרייבער-משפחה*, a family of writers), Manger's Romanian origin was usable as initial capital; almost all the Yiddish writers and artists active in interwar Warsaw came from elsewhere and valued each other's respective local coloring.<sup>29</sup> Still, in a period when Manger was dissatisfied with his positioning within the Yiddish literary scene, he wrote to New York, "too bad, dear Leivick, that Warsaw has spoiled my disposition, made me skeptical of the whole species called 'Yiddish Writer' [...]"<sup>30</sup>

There is a stage in the big hall, and over it a photograph of Yitskhok Leybush Perets. The hall is a place for readings, evenings of discussion, receptions for arriving and departing colleagues, theatrical performances, and celebrations.<sup>18</sup> On January 12<sup>th</sup>, 1929, a Saturday evening, Manger comes on the stage of this room as the first guest from Romania to address the Warsaw public. His presentation has been announced in the press and is subsequently discussed there.<sup>19</sup> The young Manger is regarded as representing the Yiddish literary clan of Romania; and journalists note that though Romania borders on Poland, Romanian Yiddish literature is less familiar to Warsaw listeners than that written in America. It is only in 1928, in connection with the jubilee celebration of the Czernowitz language conference of 1908, that one has begun "to make connections between the Yiddish cultures of Romania and those of Poland."<sup>20</sup> Manger in turn acknowledges his longing "to have a closer knowledge of one of the most important

18 The hall – "when packed full it was like a barrel of herring" – had three hundred seats and standing-room places (Ravitch 1975: 332).

19 Ravitch announces the event in the literary supplement of the *Naye folksdaytung* (January 11 1929: 10), and on the same day *Literarishe bleter* publishes an interview with Yitskhok Manger (anon. 1929.1). Reports on the evening's events are published in *Literarishe bleter* (anon. 1929.2) and in *Der moment* (anon. 1929.3).

20 Anon. 1929.1, reprinted in *Shriftn in proze*: 281 ff.

26 Ravitch 1975: 111.

27 Ibid.: 21. A shortage of housing was a constant problem in Jewish Warsaw between the wars.

28 See the excerpt from his speech, p. 32, and cf. Gal-Ed 2011: 37f.

29 "From his first appearances he attracted the attention of critics and readers, whether because of the particular material and tone that each of his poems possessed or because this was the first significant greeting from the Yiddish [or Jewish] community of Old Romania. We would stress this last point – not Bessarabia, Old Romania" (Meisel 1946: 396).

30 Letter of February 10<sup>th</sup> 1936, YIVO, RG. 315/31.

Yiddish cultural centers”; he sees the poets of Romania, wanting to get to know the centers of nearby Poland or Russia, as the descendants of Tantalus, cursed by the gods, bending down to the water below him, stretching his hand up to the fruits above, while water and fruits alike withdraw from him; he maintains that his journey from the provinces to Poland is “the first *salto mortale* across this mythic-fantastic curse.” Playing this role, he cannot say that the literary space of Romania has become too narrow for him; rather he speaks with pride about the culture work accomplished by his colleagues and him, about the literary group he belongs to, about the Yiddish literature developing in Romania.<sup>21</sup>

Alter Kacyzne is the first speaker that evening, and greets the guest in the name of the Writers’ Union. Manger begins his account of Yiddish literature in Romania with a sketch of the peculiar beauty of the Romanian landscape and folklore, of the atmosphere surrounding Jewish life there, of the social circumstances and cultural impulses that determine Romanian literary work. He speaks about Goldfaden and Zbarzher, the tangible role models, and about their influence on the new literature. He tells the story of *Shoybn* (“Windowpanes”), and explains fables, grotesqueries, and ballads as the typical artistic forms of a group of poets who have dedicated themselves in their work to “mas-

21 Ibid.

*shund*, trash, books of cartoons, sophisticated literary journals. Some of them were short-lived, others managed to continue publication for years.

31 The motto was, “modern national Jewish culture in Yiddish” (Ravitch 1975: 92). Its path lay “somewhere between Europe’s present day and Judaism’s eternity” (ibid.: 106). On the Yiddish literary center in Warsaw see Shmeruk 1997: 2 and Cohen 2003 (passim).

32 Cohen 2003: 95ff. In 1938 the print run of *Haynt* was 35,000 copies, of *Der moment* 19,000, of the *Naye folkstsaytung* 21,000 (Pickhan 2001: 254). According to the register of the Journalists’ Association there were, in the Warsaw of 1938, 119 Jewish journalists, 24.6% of all the journalists in the city (Cohen 2003: 69).

Yet it was precisely Warsaw’s fermenting, non-homogeneous Yiddish cultural life that drew Manger in and induced him to stay in the city till his deportation. Despite the narrowing of individual rights and freedoms and the hostile surroundings, the Yiddish minority, lacking state recognition and support, formed from its own means a dynamic cultural space, in which opposing conceptions of the vision of a modern Yiddish culture were somehow held together.<sup>31</sup>

For one thing, a varied scene of professional journalism was developing, which offered Yiddish writers reliable sources of income: proofreaders were needed, copy editors, translators, columnists, feuilletonists; prose and poetry were both published regularly. In 1935 there were eleven Yiddish dailies, with a total printing of 180,000 copies. The established daily press organs – *Haynt*, *Der moment*, the *Naye folkstsaytung* and *Dos yidishe togblat* – faced competition from sensationalist rags like *Varshever radyo* (“Warsaw Radio”), *Hayntike naves* (“Today’s News”), *Undzer ekspres* (“Our Express”), and *Yidisher kurier* (“The Yiddish Messenger”).<sup>32</sup> In addition there were numerous literary reviews: weeklies, monthlies, illustrated publications disparaged as

Groups of modernist writers and artists were publishing at the beginning of the 20s in *Ringen*, *Khalyastre* ("The Gang"), *Albatros* and *Di vog* ("The Scale"). Important fora for discussion in Yiddish of art and literature were provided in the 30s by the Bund's *Vokhnshrift far literatur, kunst un kultur* ("Weekly Journal of Literature, Art, and Culture," 1931–35) and *Foroys* ("Onward," 1937–39), as well as by unaffiliated publications like *Globus*, published from 1932 to 1934 by Arn Zeitlin and Isaac Bashevis Singer, and Alter Kacyzne's fortnightly *Mayn redndiker film* ("my talking picture"), 1937–1939. An epitome of living Yiddish culture was offered by Nachmen Meisel's weekly *Literarische bleter*, published regularly between 1924 and 1939, and with subscribers both in Poland and outside it, among other places in New York, Buenos Aires, London, and Paris.<sup>33</sup>

There were calls for "naked poetry" and arguments against rhyme,<sup>34</sup> arguments about which of the Yiddish centers – Moscow, Vilna, Warsaw, or New York – was most important for the development of Yiddish literature.<sup>35</sup> There were reports on the newest things in world literature, in the world of film, in art and theater.<sup>36</sup> A whole issue was dedicated to the painter Yankl Adler, who had left Germany in 1933 and was now staying temporarily in

querade" and to the "theatrical." At the end he declaims some of Shteynberg's fables and some of his own ballads. The public finds both the lecture and the poems inspiring. After the event, a small celebration was improvised in honor of the poet, quite spontaneously: tables are pushed together and decked out, a few dozen writers and artists sit down to them together, Herz Grosbardt recites a few more of Shteynberg's fables, and those in attendance draft a collective letter to Eliezer Shteynberg and Yankev Shternberg.<sup>22</sup>

Manger is received in Warsaw as a member of the family.<sup>23</sup> He is both impressive and offputting. Ravitch fears that Manger will be simply a new edition of the Expressionist Perets Markish, whose posings everyone had had enough of. But then Manger impresses him with his knowledge of world literature and his unerring critical feel for the genuinely literary. "He knows what he wants from others, and also what he wants from himself and his poetry. He knows his capacities and uses them purposefully; he also knows his limits, and works hard not to go beyond them unnecessarily."<sup>24</sup>

22 Anon. 1929.2, reprinted in *Shriftn in proze*: 284 ff; Anon. 1929.3; letter to Bickel of January 14<sup>th</sup>, 1929, YIVO, RG. 569; see the excerpt from the lecture quoted on p. 26.

23 Moyshe Knaphais, undated typescript (MA 8: 4005 21), Szulzstein 1971: 87.

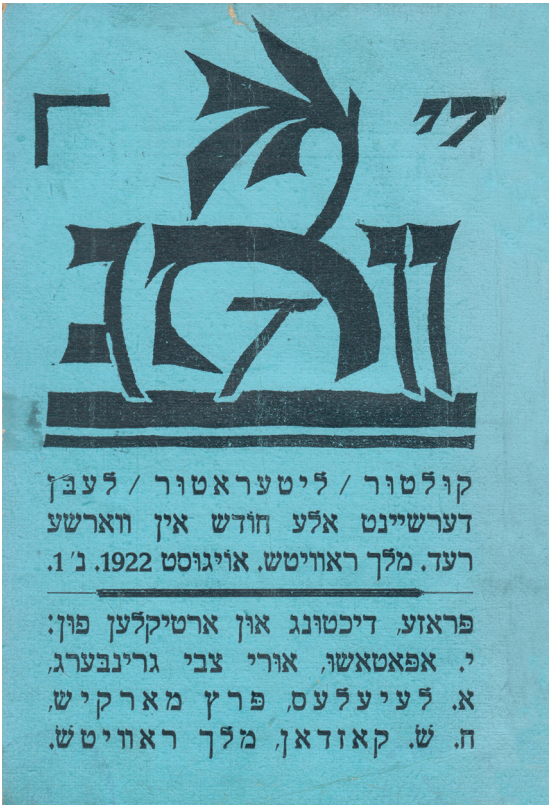
24 Ravitch 1936.

33 On the individual newspapers and magazines see Cohen 2003 (Index); on *Globus* see Lifshitz 1997.

34 Ravitch 1922.1 and 1922.2.

35 See among others Ravitch 1922.3, Bergelson 1926, Almi 1934, and Nathan Cohen's overview (2003: 115–125).

36 E.g., on Rilke's death, on the riddle of Kaspar Hauser, on Panait Istrati's lecture in the Vienna Cultural Congress, on the awarding of the Prix Goncourt to André Malraux; on the Chinese film actress May Wong (*Vokhnshrift* 10, March 27<sup>th</sup> 1931: 155); on exhibitions of the work of Jewish painters in the galleries of Berlin and on the death of the "black Raphael," Kalifala Sidibé in Sudan (*ibid.*: 5, February 20<sup>th</sup> 1931: 75); on Max Fleischer's switch to making animated films in color and on the lasting success of the Soviet feature film *Chapaev* (*Literarische bleter* 1, January 4<sup>th</sup> 1935: 13).



Title page of the first of the three issues of the journal *The Scale*, edited by Melech Ravitch in 1922 (NLI).

Warsaw (a transmigrant in his own city, one might say).<sup>37</sup>

Warsaw writers participated in the discussion kindled in New York of "museum-like Yiddishism," and published an open letter to Bernard Shaw.<sup>38</sup> There was an interview with Henri Barbusse, then editor of the socialist magazine *Le Monde*, including a discussion with him of the "crisis of ideas in European literature."<sup>39</sup> Social motifs in Abramovitsh's novel *The Nag* were investigated, as was the use of metaphors in the work of Sholem Asch.<sup>40</sup> After his two-month visit to the Soviet Union Israel Joshua Singer reported on the present situation of Soviet Yiddish literature; Peretz Hirschbein, then living in Shanghai, described traditional Chinese theater; Dr. Yisroel Rubin described the Yiddish writers' corner in the Romanische Café in Berlin, and Nachmen Meisel recorded, week after week, the current cultural events in Yiddish Warsaw.<sup>41</sup>

37 *Literarische bleter* 8, February 22<sup>nd</sup> 1935. Manger too published a brief portrait of, and a greeting of welcome to, this "true artist" and "Gypsy" (ibid.: 119). At the time there were also other Jewish artists in Warsaw who had fled there from Germany, among them Alexander Granach and Kurt Katsch, who performed in Warsaw's Yiddish theaters.

38 On the occasion of the founding of the "Yiddish Culture Society" in America, Borekh Rivkin, writing in the New York monthly *Di feder*, sharply criticized Chaim Zhitlowsky and S. Niger. The *Vokhnshrift* reported on the controversy and took a position about it (August 22<sup>nd</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> 1931: 1). In his "Open Letter to Bernard Shaw," the actor Avrom Morewski responded to a "Polemic About Theater" in *The Times*, which he had read about in the Polish press. The editors of the *Vokhnshrift* published his texts as an artistic document of its time, distancing themselves from his presentation of "the problem of theater" and from his exaltation of the role of the actor (30, August 7<sup>th</sup> 1931: 1).

39 Barbusse granted the socialist magazine *Vokhnshrift* an interview in his editorial office in Paris. He received the magazine's correspondent warmly, and said, "there is an idealism present in Jews; the Jews interest us greatly" (ibid. 7, March 6<sup>th</sup> 1931: 98 ff.).

40 *Undzer tsayt* 5, 1928: 66f; *Literarische bleter* 2, January 11<sup>th</sup> 1935: 1. In 1928 the Tsentral Press released a new complete edition of the works of Mendele Moykher Sforim (Abramovitsh).

41 *Literarische bleter* 1, January 7<sup>th</sup> 1927: 4 and 7; 2, January 10<sup>th</sup> 1930: 28, and Meisel's column "From Week to Week."