

A MONOLOGUE IN PLAIN YIDDISH

by Aaron Zeitlin

SURE I' ~~am~~ a landsman, MISTER ZEITLIN.

When I left Warsaw, MIND YOU,

All the women still wore wigs

And all the ~~men~~ ^{men} were beards.

A trolly with horses ran along the street.

At Heksler's a wheel cost only a ruble.

Merchants met in the Canary ~~Cavern~~ cafeteria.

Hasidim ~~lived it up~~ ^{lived it up} in the Gerer shtibl.

MIND YOU, sometimes when I forget PLAIN JEWISH

I can, to this very day

~~Speak the~~ ^{Speak the} ~~Way~~ in real Warsaw style, dialect,

If only our children could do the same.

And you, I hear, are writing for the PAPERS.

JEWISH is badly off by us, MISTER.

You can have the brains of a minister,

It's no good--and THAT'S ALL.

Your line isn't worth a thing.

You yourself are ALLRIGHT,

BUT your LINE is good for nothing.

~~As much as you try~~ What's the point of tooting your horn
~~As much as you make do (allright-ten)~~ ^{succeed} or putting up a front?
~~Till you're dead in the face~~
It'll help like bottles on a corpse.

SWITCH to another LINE, MISTER ZEITLIN.

Do I remember

The "ets" and the "enk" (dialect forms in Warsaw Yiddish) ?

You bet! BUT I and my MISSUS--

We USE a local JEWISH, YOU KNOW, PLAIN,

Capitalized words are English in the original.

longing
for old
home

assimilation

And besides, we speak English, you know,
Because of the business and because of the children.
Sure, as greenhorns we spoke differently,
But now--

We speak a ~~pa~~lin Jewish and a plain English.
Everything plain.

As a greenhorn I went around hungry most of the time.
Well, in those years I glanced into a Jewish paper.
I still remember a play by someone -- just what did they call him?
Jacob Gordin.

All that was long ago! Today I can't afford to
Because I've long become a citizen, you know.
With us in the United States
When you become a citizen, you know,
You don't bother with ^{this} greenhorn stuff.
You don't read a Jewish paper anymore,
And you don't go to Jewish shows.

On the other hand--

What's it all worth

If you're homesick and you live with the past.
So you're making money -- does that make it all worthwhile?
My son, the brat Reb Mike
Thinks of me anyway as an old kike.
You work like the devil, you know.
My daughter can't stand Jewish boys,
So she took herself an Irish goy.
I have shkotsim for grandchildren and a goy for a son-in-law.

And my MISSUS, my ^{old lady} ~~missus~~ DON'T YOU KNOW HER?

^{Runs around} ~~Crawls about~~ in pants, ^{takes in} ~~basks on~~ the BEACH

Paints and ^{dyes} ~~colors~~ and scrapes herself,

With a squeal—

It hasn't ^{got a} ~~the~~ Jewish flavor. +

Oh, Warsaw...

Muranov, Bonifrat, (names of Warsaw streets)

The Pawiak with its grates (the State prison)

Nalewki, Franciszkanska,

Itshe-Meir Prives,

^h ~~Zelazne~~ Brama...

A Warsawian loved his town

Like his own mother.

In a dream I can still see Grzybow St. as it was,

I go ~~one way~~, I go ~~the other~~, up and down —

Sometimes I even ^{wind up} ~~find myself~~ in Monketow,

Where the world is green.

^{new} ~~tone~~ — So what's new, ANYHOW?

It's no good with Jews, eh?

Hitler...Maidanek...

No more Warsaw, no more world...

Gone, everything gone...

WELL, YES, but you PERSONALLY--

How are you making out?

SURE, your LINE's for the birds,

BUT/ ~~me~~ you at least/ ^e ~~making~~ a ~~bit more~~ living?

What? HELL!

You say ~~that~~ you have died,

BUT you pretend ^{to be} ~~that~~ you're alive?

Moral
bank-
ruptcy

double
edged:
streets
of the
ghetto

1771h

WHAD'YA MEAN died? You mean to say that--

God forbid--

You've died ^{just} PLAIN and SIMPLE?

AHA, I GOT IT. It's a JOKE, a gag.

The truth, you say?

You say that in America you died,

But you ~~didn't receive~~ ^{weren't buried with} the proper rites?

WELL, I won't argue.

Maybe you're right.

BUT ANYHOW

Died, shmed--you make a living?

~~What are you thinking?~~ What's on your mind?

I see your heart is ~~sour~~ heavy.

WELL, no one's listening,

So I'll tell you MISTER:

I don't feel so hot myself.
~~Something's wrong with me as well.~~

BECAUSE, after all,

If God wills it, a broom can shoot--

But shoot for how long?

Not God--I mean the broom.

→ You're a landsman,

So ^{maybe} ~~perhaps~~ you will understand me.

As you see me here, I am all alone, in the world,

JUST all alone,

An old Jew without a beard

Like an idiotic king on a card,

And at night, when I cannot sleep

I ^I lie and lie,

And my years fly by

irony
of the
mono-
logue:
no
readers
now

And I think: here lies a Jew a fool,
A fool, a fool, a fool with a ^{swimming} pool
A Jew in America,

WAIT A MINUTE:

What was it all about, this America?

What did it mean,

And what does it mean?

My heart, BEG YOUR PARDON, cries.

Why does it cry?

Oh, Warsaw...

I am, you say, also a bit of a corpse?

→ WELL, I'll tell you, landsman:

You are—BETWEEN US—slightly correct.

BECAUSE today every Jew is some^{thing} of a corpse,

A dead man who does ^{not} sleep at night.

They say: Maidanek...everything destroyed..

REALLY,

I CAN'T UNDERSTAND, I CAN'T!

Simply PLAIN destroyed?

→ And I, old fool,

A fool with ^{swimming} ~~the~~ pool,

^{remember} I ~~recall~~ something

I long for something.

For what, for women in wigs?

For Jews with beards,

For ~~trollys~~ with ~~horses~~ horse-drawn trams

For homemade grits,

Even for my teachers with their pointers

and Their blows,

Even for my father's slap:

'Smoking on Shabbes, you brat?'

I long even for windows and walls

JUST for windows and walls....

Everything burned?

Like PLAIN and SIMPLE burned?

Do you understand this landsman?

NOT ME!

I SIMPLY CAN'T UNDERSTAND!

Burned? What's ^{left} ~~remains?~~

My son Reb Mike? My son-in-law the Goy?

MAYBE IN PALESTINE, YOU KNOW...

It's JUST so,

You can go PLAIN wad.

→ WHAT THE HELL, BUSINESS IS ALLRIGHT,

You make a buck, BUT--

You lie at night and think: ^{you}

Where is God in all this?

He used to be in the old ~~land~~, country,

Should HE JUST not be in America?

How can that be?

So What ~~of it~~, if BUSINESS IS ALLRIGHT?

It's not far to the grave,

And Reb Mike won't say Kaddish,

There won't even be a wagon,

^{They take you}
~~You're led~~ to the CEMETERY in a CAR,

Not in a wagon.

The cantor MISTER Pempik

Will say the prayer

Cold and hard,

and like an ELEVATOR

moral
demon-
stration

drop -7-

You will ~~descend~~ ^{drop} into the earth
And a machine ^{does the work} will let you down,
And the cars ^{beat a fast retreat} ~~flee in great haste~~
and GOODBY, SO LONG!

No wagon,

No casket, no stretcher,

No cleansing board,

and THE MAIN THING---

No Kaddish!

Go and hire one!

WELL, I DON'T GIVE A DAMN

For a hired American Kaddish.

It's really a shame,

BUT WHAT CAN I DO?

You'll have to rot JUST Like that.

As if you were a Goy.

YOU KNOW, MISTER ZEITLIN:

Just like we used to chain the doors

At night in Warsaw

So my heart is locked in a chain

Since I've been a CITIZEN in this America, ^{Breche}
~~you know what they say:~~
~~What's the phrase?~~ TAKE IT EASY.

NEVER MIND the tears in my voice:

As long as the dead are alive

They have to make a living---

THAT'S ALL!

1945

(translated by David Roskies)