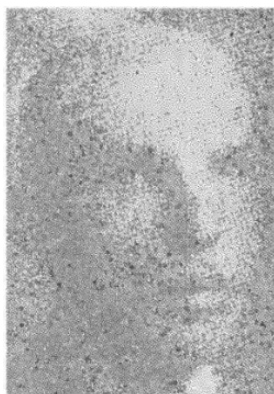


Raphael Federman

Jechiel Lewensztajn z''l



Jechiel Lewensztajn

On Sunday, 29th April 1956, Jechiel Lewensztajn died - the funeral was held on Monday, 30th April 1956. Jechiel Lewensztajn was born on 8th July 1900 in Częstochowa. His father, Mojsze Lejb, was renowned in Częstochowa [as] one of the first true propagators of Yiddish newspapers, which appeared in Warsaw. Mojsze Lejb was an enlightened Jew. He was not just a propagator of newspapers, he was also a correspondent of the Warsaw papers *Hajnt* [Today], *Moment* and others. Later, Reb Mojsze Lejb also became a regular contributor to the *Częstochower Zeitung* and wrote weekly reviews [entitled] "*What did [I] Hear?*" [and] "*What did [I] See?*", under the pseudonym "*Lewioson*"^{*1} [aka *Lewiatan*]. This is the environment in which Mojsze Lejb's three^{*2} sons and daughter were brought up - periodicals, books [and] literature were their daily bread.

Mojsze Lejb's eldest son, Zacharia [Charlie], was one of the founders of the SS Party in Częstochowa. Zacharia came to America in 1905. Here, he tied his activity to the Czenstochover Young Men's Society, was their secretary for many years and was intensely active within the [United] Czenstochover Relief [Committee] and Ladies Auxiliary in New York. He died at the age of 50, on 5th January 1940.

Reb Mojsze Lejb's youngest son, Elje [Elek], was connected with the Communist Party in Poland and was sentenced to several years in prison due to his Communist activity. The onset of the Second World War found Elje in jail, thanks to which he was set free [and] travelled to Soviet Russia. He never returned from there - he perished together with thousands of his comrades.

Jechiel Lewensztajn departed from this world prematurely, at the age of fifty-six. Till the age of thirteen, Jechiel studied in a *cheder* and also in a Polish primary school. At fifteen, together with his brother Chune^{*3}, he became active in theatre - for which both brothers had a great inclination. As amateurs, they had successful theatrical performances with existing amateur circles in town. Later, they performed with the famous character actor Szlojme Herszkowicz, with [Lejzer] Żelazo and with others. In 1919-20, for some period, Jechiel performed in theatre in Germany. Jechiel came to America in 1920.

Chune, then being a soldier in the Polish Army, during the war years of 1920-21, fell into Russian captivity and remained there. He later came to the drama studio in Leningrad and was successfully employed as an actor in the Yiddish theatre of Soviet Russia.

In America, Jechiel was a labourer in various workshops, in various trades, but he concurrently joined the Yiddish theatrical association named "*Unser Teatr*" [Our Theatre] which existed then under the directorship of M. Elkin, Peretz Hirschbein, Dovid Pinski and the renowned German-

^{*1} [TN: R. Federman writes above on p. 150, that in the last years before the Holocaust, these same reviews, using the same penname, were written by Dr Józef Kruk.]

^{*2} [TN: From the following account it emerges that there were in fact four brothers: Zacharia, Chune, Jechiel, and Elje.]

^{*3} [TN: See Czenstochover Yidn p. LII, and Pinkes Bendin (the Będzin Memorial Book) p. 104 for more details on this person.]

Yiddish actor Egon Brecher. In 1929, he joined the bygone Artef Theatre. Over the course of the years during which the Artef existed, Jechiel Lewensztajn took part in almost all the pieces and variety evenings that this theatre held. He particularly distinguished himself in several roles. After the Artef went under and the Yiddish Theatre Ensemble was organised, Lewensztajn joined it and helped establish the group, which was like a continuation of the Artef. Jechiel Lewensztajn was generally well-acquainted with everything happening in the theatrical world - on the American stage as well as on the Yiddish. He was also an attentive reader of Yiddish literature.

Jechiel Lewensztajn had strong feelings for his hometown Częstochowa, hence he was active throughout his years in the [United] Czenstochover Relief Committee. [He] sat at all the meetings until the end and had an open hand when a donation was needed for the Relief Committee's purposes. He also showed great interest in the publishing of the book *Czenstochover Yidn*. For months on end, Jechiel went about in pain and, when the doctor decided to operate on him, he requested a fortnight's "period of grace", for the reason that "After all, the show must go on..." - a celebration of Sholem Aleichem's *yuhrzeit* needed to take place at the time.

Jechiel was overjoyed when, in 1946, he found out that his brother Chune Lewensztajn had returned from Russia to Poland and was continuing to perform Yiddish theatre in Niederschlesien [Dolny Śląsk; Lower Silesia], together with Ida Kamińska. In his lonesome life here, he dreamt of meeting with his brother Chune. With tears, Jechiel soaked every letter he received from him. The last news Jechiel received from Chune was not joyous. This, too, caused him plenty of grief. He did not live to see Chune [again].

Yiddish Theatre, Yiddish Literature, the [United] Czenstochover Relief Committee [and] the *landsleit*, with Jechiel's premature demise, all lost a devoted, loyal [and] sincere friend, comrade and contributor. He shall certainly be remembered lovingly by all his friends.

Pro domo sua [Lat., For his own house]! Dear Comrade Jechiel! How bitter it would have been to your heart, had you been able to read today, in 1957, the letter from your only brother Chune. Chune writes:

*Allow me to introduce myself. I am Chune Lewensztajn, an actor in the State Jewish Theatre in Poland. I am the brother of the recently departed Jechiel Lewensztajn. The space here does not suffice to write about everything. The [weekly Torah] portion is now Lech-Lecho^{*1}. I go about with a troubled mind and an aching heart. I need assistance in leaving Poland, [so that] I can be able to settle down somewhere. We possess no material means. This is the fate of Our People. The negro has done his [work] and [now] the negro may go.*

*Whether one wishes it or not, we are again forced to take up the wanderer's staff and set out into the wide world, to seek for a place where we will - once and for all - be able to live and work in peace...^{*2}*

With my scant words I bring, dear Jechiel, a flower to your tomb. The close friends, who understood you, will always remember you.

^{*1} [TN: Heb. Go! or Leave!; this section encompasses Genesis 12:1–17:27, and opens with the verse: "Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee:", to which the writer alludes.]

^{*2} [TN: The book "Our Dramaturgy" (Yiddish; New York, 1961), which contains a brief biography of Jechiel Lewensztajn and mentions this brother, states that at the time the article was written (1961), Chune Lewensztajn was living in Israel, where he continued acting in the Yiddish theatre (there, p. 531).]

