

**MICHALESHIK'S BEAUTY AND TRAGEDY: A *KLOGLID***  
**(This manuscript is untitled)**

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**(Page 1)**

October 22, 1993

Dear Friend Hirshe Dovid Katz,

I write here a *kloglid* (song of woe, dirge, burial song), *Eykhe* (Lamentations) for our beloved *shtetl* Michaleshik, that your father, of blessed memory, loved so much and described so beautifully.

Michaleshik, my *shtetl*! Your beauty I cannot forget. The market with the seven stores, the Viliya river, there is no such other beauty. The pine forests, Peshlak's<sup>1</sup> meadows by the Viliya, the *Vilner gas* (Vilne street) where I spent my young years, *di hebreishe shul*, where I studied and belonged to the school's drama circle, and later to the great drama circles of our *shtetl*. And to the soccer organization *Maccabi*, and to volunteer firefighter brigade, and to *Khalutz Hatzair*. In the drama circle we used to stage plays several times a year, in the summertime, when there were many *dachnikes* (vacationers), and it took place at the *Bikur Cholim* (Visiting the Sick) society premises.<sup>2</sup> I played Tevye the Milkman, and Menakhem-Mendl in Ossip Dymow's

**(Page 2)**

*The Soul of My People*, in *The Innkeeper*, played Azriel in *The Dybbuk*, Miropoler in *Back From Katorga* (penal hard labor), *The Exile* and so forth, others I don't remember.

Though I have been *in der goldener land* for about forty something years, I have not forgotten you, the *shtetl* where I was born, even for a minute. Deep in my heart you are always with me, to the end of my life. Same as your father, till he *hot oysgehoikh zayn neshome* (literally, *breathed out his soul*), he never forgot Michaleshik. I watched the film which you have sent to me, and hot tears run on my face, such a destruction, the cemetery, desolation and ruination. Close to three hundred years of the Jewish toil and work were cut short. Disappeared *di shul*

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<sup>1</sup> Translator Note: This appears to be the local name for the owner of the fields near the Viliya, which could be the name of the owner in generations past. It does not appear to be a Jewish name, although it could be a nickname.

<sup>2</sup> This was possibly the *hekdesch*, the only premises known to have existed at Michaleshik that would have belonged to the *Bikur Cholim* society. Given that a *hekdesch* was commonly thought of as a place of filth and squalor for the indigent, Urke, when penning this memoir for Dovid Katz on 22 Oct 1993, might have chosen simply to call it *the Bikur Cholim society premises*. Based on the writings of Esther Katz Livingston (both *Our Town Michaliszki* and *Michaliszki Names* and the Berl Klor map), one knows that the *hekdesch* (or poorhouse) was next to house no. 70 belonging to Rahmiel Levin at the southwest corner of Antokol Str. and Shul Gass, next to the *beseylem* (cemetery) and across Shul Gass from the *bey's medrash*; and that next to the *hekdesch* was the *táyre-shtibl* (referred to as *mortuary* by Esther Katz Livingston).

See: Meir, Natan M., "Home for the Homeless? The *Hekdesch* in Eastern Europe" in Richard I. Cohen (ed.), *Places in Modern Jewish Culture and Society* (New York, 2018; online edn., Oxford Academic, 23 Aug 2018).

(*Beit Midrash*) where on the women's part was our class, with a long tables and benches, there are no our Hebrew teachers. To this day I remember the pieces that I recited, *Kever David* (David's Grave), *El hatzipor* (To the bird), Bialik's<sup>3</sup> *Be-sade* (In the field), *Be-yom kaitz* (In the summer day), *Beyn ha shmashes*<sup>4</sup> (At twilight/dusk) by Tchernikhovsky,<sup>5</sup> and

**(Page 3)**

*Miever le-Shambation*<sup>6</sup> (Beyond the Sambation) and so forth, I don't remember more.

I have sent you a photograph which a newspaper reporter made of me at the memorial in Newhaven,<sup>7</sup> on a yearly *hazkarah* (memorial ceremony), that we prepare every year as the realization of the *tsavoe* (will) of the martyrs, that we should not forget and forgive the murderers and their helpers that have killed a third of our people. I was sitting absorbed in my thoughts, and in my head went again all the events of those times that happened to our people. and how the world forgot our greatest tragedy. The murderers were set free, and others in Germany were greeted with flowers upon leaving free the court of law.

So, the photographer saw how I was listening to the speakers, what they were saying about those times, and photographed me without my consent, and the next morning my likeness was in the

**(Page 4)**

Newhaven paper. Many people have called me and sent me the paper, the one I sent to you.

Dear brothers, our generation, to the very end in going to see to it that the future generation will not forget and forgive and will be familiar with the *Eykhe* (Lamentation) of our time, forever and ever. So that it will be remembered as other many tragedies that happened to our people a thousand of years ago and we grieve over them like we grieve on Yom Kippur about the Ten Martyrs, the greatest from our people, including Rabbi Akiva. But such a tragedy as was in our time, six million, one third of our people, killed in such an atrocious manner—never happened before in our long history of martyrdom. And the world was looking and remained silent.

I hope that the winds have brought the mountains of ashes of my burnt people to the clouds, and they will burst, and the deluge will fall upon Germany from all sides as in the Noah's times.

U. Blakher

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<sup>3</sup> Haim Nakman Bialik (1873-1934) a Russian (Ukraine) born Jewish poet who wrote mainly in Hebrew but also in Yiddish, considered to be a pioneer of modern Hebrew poetry. [Wikipedia]

<sup>4</sup> *Beyn hashmóshes'* (At Dusk/Twilight) from Hebrew *bein hashmoshot* (twilight/dusk).

<sup>5</sup> Shaul Tchernichovsky/Saul Gutmanovich Tchernichovsky 1875-1943, Russian (Ukraine) born Hebrew poet identified with nature and the culture of ancient Greece. [Wikipedia]. According to Dovid Katz, Tchernichovsky was widely known and loved before World War II.

<sup>6</sup> *Miever le-Shambation* (Mey-éyver l'Sambatyon) (Beyond the Sambation). Rabbinic literatures identifies the Sambation River as the river beyond which the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel were exiled. Legend has it that its *foaming waters raise high into the sky a wall of fire and smoke that is impossible to pass through*. [Moses Roses, "The Recipe" 1987 in Michael Ritt, *The Face of Survival: Jewish Life in Eastern Europe Past and Present*, (New York, NYU Press, 1992)]. [from Wikipedia]

<sup>7</sup> This is clearly a reference to New Haven, Connecticut some 28.08 miles due south of Southington, Connecticut. As Urke wrote it as one word, it has been left as one word in translation.