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Evaluation of Ms Weronika Romanik's doctoral dissertation entitled "Transformacje pamięci. Pisma Mordechaja Tenenbauma-Tamarowa z białostockiego getta" [Transformations of Memory: The Writings of Mordecai Tenenbaum-Tamarov from the Białystok Ghetto]

Mordecai Tenenbaum was the legendary hero of Ghetto Białystok. Ms Romanik's important doctoral dissertation, which restores this extraordinary figure to the area of Holocaust Studies and invites further research, focuses on Tenenbaum's five texts which were found in the Białystok Ghetto Underground Archive. The handwritten form of the text affirms the authenticity of Tenenbaum's authorship. The texts include: two parts (aleph and bet) of Tenenbaum's Diary, "Akcja [round-up] in Białystok" [Round-up in Białystok] accompanied by "Hearot" ["Commentary"] as well as "List do siostry" ["A Letter to (my) Sister"], which was never sent to Tamara Tenenbaum, who was at the time in Palestine. The writings were found in the Białystok Underground Archive. Except for the "Letter," which was written in Polish, all texts are in Hebrew with occasionally appearing phrases, or terms in Yiddish, Russian, German, and English. The texts were published in two editions of Tenenbaum's writings: the 1947 publication, entitled *Dapim min hadleka* [Pages from the Conflagration Site (trans. mine)], edited by Yitzchak (Antek) Zuckerman and the 1984 publication by the same title (the subtitles differ), edited by Cwi Szner and Bronka Winnicka-Klibańska. The three editors knew each other well. Zuckerman befriended Tenenbaum in Ghetto Warsaw, Klibańska was Tenenbaum's courier and romantic interest in the Białystok Ghetto, whereas Szner was closely acquainted with both Zuckerman and Klibańska in Israel.

Despite the close connections among the editors, their treatments of Tenenbaum's legacy considerably differ. Ms Romanik argues and effectively proves that her work of Tenenbaum's writings entailed comparative study of three narratives: her archival study of the narrative in Tenenbaum's original texts juxtaposes with two conspicuously differing narratives in the two editions. The diverse Hebrew language registers of the translations of the Polish text of Tenenbaum's "Letter" into Hebrew, as well as the annotation method in the editions provide characteristic examples of such divergences. Whereas Zuckerman's edition uses vernacular Hebrew and often dispenses with pieces of information about the locations and circumstances in Tenenbaum's texts, the second edition, as Ms Romanik shows, uses literary, quite old fashioned Hebrew register and fills in information gaps with detailed annotations. The discrepancies between the editions could be explained by the differing historical distances from the Holocaust events. Whereas the proximity of the Zuckerman's edition to the events might have determined both the relatively vernacular Hebrew style and the deletion of what the editor, himself a celebrated fighter of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising might have considered well-known and



therefore superfluous information, the treatment in the second edition of Tenenbaum's texts seems to have recognized the historical distance that required a more formal Hebrew register and a detailed explanation of the particular sites and life conditions of the Ghetto inmates. Certainly the readership of the 1947 immediate post-Holocaust Israel differed considerably from the readership almost forty years later. Ms Romanik explains the discrepancies among the original text and the editions within a theoretical context of social-cultural memory studies.

At the outset of the dissertation, Ms Romanik outlines a theoretical apparatus which focuses on the ways in which the meeting of text and history produces an ideological message, or, as she defines it, how the relations between "narration and memory" are determined by cultural and political considerations. Summoning the authority of scholars such as Jan and Aleida Assman, Renata Lachmann, Birgit Neumann, among others, she discusses various kinds of collective and individual memory, arguing that both kinds of memory are indelibly related and inexorably mutable. In this sense, she subscribes to Halbwachs and his premise of social memory as a product of the needs of the collective. I believe that Ms Romanik's work is at its best when she uses the theoretical concepts of memory studies to show, through the method of close reading, the intentional to memory shaping in the writings of Tenenbaum, and the and the work of his editors.

I was particularly impressed with Ms Romanik reading of Tenenbaum's intentions, which, on the one hand, wish to enable the intended future reader to understand the Jewish tragedy, and, at the same time express Tenenbaum's own need to fulfill his responsibility to commemorate the past. The search to make the horror he experienced comprehensible to his future readers emerges in the literary strategy of intertextuality. His references to the passion of Christ and Werfel's *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, the quote from Shakespeare, "to be or not to be," the comparison of Yitzhak Katzenelson, the Warsaw Ghetto poet, to Chaim Nahman Bialik – all aim at contextualizing the real time horror of the Ghetto for the future reader, allowing him a measure of inference. It is quite possible that the author needed to establish an extent of association of his horrific experience in the prewar reality to be able to find words to represent his reality. At the same time, as Ms Romanik convincingly shows, his preoccupation with writing and considering the best hiding place for the archives signals his compulsion to commemorate his fallen friends. Tenenbaum's heartbreaking confessions of his inconsolable grief over his dead family members and friends, makes it reasonable to suggest that the act of writing provided the author with some comfort; it was, in a sense, the only way of to cultivate the illusion of having some extent of control over the situation that, as he knew very well, was hopelessly predetermined. In this sense, I completely agree with Ms Romanik that while consciously writing for the archives, Tenenbaum was aiming at transforming his personal story that he wrote in real time into a future historical knowledge, the domain of the collective memory. Tenenbaum's multilingual disruptions of the Hebrew texts with expression borrowed mainly from Yiddish draw a self-portrait which would make his future reader aware of his search for proper words to represent the inexpressible.

However, as Ms Romanik makes us realize, by the time Tenenbaum's writings reached his editors, his personal memory had been "dead," that is, he was no longer able to communicate his experiences, recall, change them, or explain them. In this sense his personal memory became a legacy inherited by those who remained alive, namely, his editors. It was now their responsibility to transform it into cultural memory, which would fit the post-Holocaust collective objectives. As Ms Romanik demonstrates, these cultural objectives did not always comply with the personal objectives of the author. Whereas Tenenbaum strove to make his horrific present



accessible to his future readers by contrasting, through literary devices, such as intertextuality, his personal experiences with the prewar culture, his editors felt the need to adjust his narrative to the reality that they were facing, so that it would contribute to the culture they were generating in the present-day Israel.

Here Ms Romanik provides an insight into the premise that memory is mutable in that it can be adjusted to the collective needs. While they wanted to commemorate the camaraderie among the fighters, the editors also wanted to construct a history which omitted the shortcomings or failures of the relationships among fighters. An example of the cultivation of the myth of camaraderie may be found in the concluding article of the 1984 edition. The “Introduction, by Yitzchak Zuckerman” to the first edition was renamed into “Mordecai, my Friend, by Yitzchak Zuckerman. Thus, the editors wish to conclude the volume by emphasizing not only the close relationships of Zuckerman with Tenenbaum in the past, but also Zuckerman’s guardianship of the legacy of the Ghetto fighters (Zuckerman, who, as mentioned above was one of the leaders of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, was a founder of Beit Lohamei Hagetaot [Ghetto Fighters’ House Museum]).

At the same time, the editors were not hesitant to delete excerpts from Tenenbaum’s texts which they considered unsuitable in the historical memory of they were constructing. Thus they erased passages in which Tenenbaum harshly criticized Chajka Grossman, a fellow Zionist, whose behavior he considered treacherous. Grossman has become an Israeli prominent politician and a Knesset [Parliament] member and it was not certainly politically expedient to keep Tenenbaum’s critical comments about her in the edition. Edited out were also his critical comments about the Zionist movement, Hashomer Hatzair. One may only guess that the fact that Mordecai Anielewicz and the hero of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was a member of that movement accounted for this omission.

I would like to conclude with a comment on about the scholarly quality of Ms Romanik’s work. I believe that she correctly focused her research to the five handwritten texts. It allowed her to engage in a solid and thorough analysis of the texts and the related edited versions. She “ploughed” through the archives at Yad Vashem – which may be quite a complex and not always easy undertaking – and I am pleased to see that she continues to negotiate with the archivists with regard to the organization and accessibility of the materials.

Her focus on the particular texts does not mean that we do not get a general picture of the reality of the Ghetto. Ms Romanik helpfully offers a calendar of the history of the Białystok Ghetto. She explains the relationships between *Dror*, Tenenbaum’s Zionist movement, and other movements as well as their collaboration or lack of it among them. She also elaborates on Tenenbaum’s relationships with the *Judenrat* and the Jewish police. Thus the study of the five particular texts is conducted in their social-historical context. Ms Romanik’s comparison among the three narratives is both methodical and meticulous; she consistently notes every difference among the texts, commenting on and interpreting even the discrepancy of the use of punctuation marks.

I am particularly impressed with Ms Romanik’s profound knowledge of the languages in Tenenbaum’s texts and especially her proficiency in Hebrew. Her comparison of the texts in the three narratives in terms of the Hebrew grammatical constructs is impressive. It is also indispensable to this study, as it is the linguistic transformations of the Hebrew in the narratives that to a large extent allow to evaluate the meanings of the historical memories that they intended to construct.

My critical comments concern the future editing of the text. Though very often reiterations of the previously made points are very helpful in view of the complex research that

entails three texts, I would suggest to cut down on the repetitions. I also believe that the theoretical introduction could be shortened. Some of it is superfluous and does not contribute to the analysis. These changes should be made before publication. These comments notwithstanding, I would like to reemphasize unequivocally that Ms Romanik has produced a serious, emotionally moving, and conceptually serious research. I thank Prof. Melchior for the opportunity to get acquainted with this important episode of the Holocaust.

Sincerely,



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