

THE JEWISH ANTHOLOGICAL IMAGINATION IN THE HOLOCAUST, 1940–1945

Żydowska wyobraźnia antologizująca wobec Holokaustu, 1940–1945

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Abstract

In this paper the author analyzes five anthologies published in Yiddish, Hebrew and English. They represent individual and collective Jewish responses to the Holocaust both inside and outside the occupied war zone. When we read synoptically, each of them can be perceived as different national, transnational or communal Jewish response to the catastrophe. When we read dialogically, however, each anthology betrays a dissonant or discordant voice, and it is precisely the anomalous utterance that calls out the Holocaust's screaming contradictions. By "listening anthropologically," combining a synoptic and dialogical reading, the Jewish anthropological imagination in wartime becomes audible in all its tragic complexity.

Keywords: anthologies, Jewish, The Holocaust in Poland, wartime writing, Jewish responses to Shoah, Zionism

Streszczenie

W artykule zostało przedstawione i poddane analizie pięć antologii opublikowanych w języku jidysz, hebrajskim i angielskim. Reprezentują one indywidualne i zbiorowe żydowskie odpowiedzi na Holokaust zarówno w okupowanej strefie wojny, jak i poza nią. Czytając je synoptycznie, można powiedzieć, że każda z nich stanowi inną narodową, transnarodową lub wspólnotową żydowską odpowiedź na Zagładę. Kiedy jednak czyta się je dialogicznie, każda antologia zdradza głos dysonansowy lub ujawnia dysharmonię, i to właśnie różnorodność kontrastów wypowiedzi wydobywa na światło dzienne wyraziste sprzeczności pisania o Szoa. Dzięki „antologicznemu słuchaniu”, łączącemu lekturę synoptyczną i dialogiczną, żydowska wyobraźnia antologiczna lat wojny staje się słyszalna w całej swej tragicznej złożoności.

Słowa kluczowe: antologie żydowskie, Zagłada w Polsce, pisanie w czasie wojny, żydowskie reakcje wobec Szoa, syjonizm

Berlin in the 1920s was an auspicious time and place for the Jewish anthropological imagination. The huge influx of east European Jewish artists, writers, actors, journalists and intellectuals into Weimar engendered, among other things, a renaissance of Hebrew and Yiddish publishing. Eshkol was one of three vibrant Hebrew publishing houses that was active in Berlin at the time, each vying with the others for the quality of the typography, the prestige of the authors and the cultural significance of the project.¹ One particularly ambitious and handsome publication was a three-volume anthology called *Sefer hadema'ot* (Book of Tears; 1923–1926) covering Jewish literary responses to persecution from the era of the Maccabees to the Haidamack revolt in Ukraine at the end of the eighteenth century.² It was the crowning achievement of the Galician-born historian, journalist, editor, and translator Shimon Bernfeld (1860–1940). His timing was right, because the traumas of the First World War were still fresh in the reader's mind, and this vast compendium of anti-Jewish violence and persecution was proof positive of the staying power of the Jewish people. Bernfeld's project was infused with the romantic nationalism of Zionism, which placed a premium on the ingathering of traditions – in Hebrew. As Israel Bartal reminds us, the continuum of texts embodied the historically continuous national existence to which Zionism laid claim.³ It was Bernfeld's hope that the chronological sweep of these sources would in and of itself become a source of national resolve and self-knowledge.

In the summer of 1940, three months before the Warsaw ghetto was officially sealed, Eliyohu (Eliasz) Gutkowski (1900–1943) partnered with a younger colleague, Antek (Yitzhak) Zuckerman (1915–1981), to produce a 101-page mimeographed anthology called *Payn un gvure in yidishn over in likht fun kegnvart* (Suffering and Heroism in the Jewish Past in Light of the Present) on behalf of Dror-Hechalutz.⁴ Although of different generations and of different political persuasions within Labor Zionism, both men were born Litvaks, had recently arrived in Warsaw – Gutkowski from Łódź and Zuckerman from Vilnius – and were deeply committed to Hebrew and Yiddish culture. While Gutkowski would go on to become a key member of the Ringelblum Archive, he continued to maintain close contact with Dror, at whose underground gymnasium

¹ G. Weissblei, *Kav venaki: tehiyatah shel omanut hasefer ha'vri berepublikat Vaymar* (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2019). Vide L. Fuks, R. Fuks, "Yiddish Publishing Activities in the Weimar Republic, 1920–1933," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, vol. 33 (1988): 417–434.

² S. Bernfeld, ed., *Sefer hadema'ot: me'ora'ot hagezeirot veharedifot vehashmadot*, 3 vols. (Berlin: Eshkol, 1923–1926).

³ I. Bartal, "The Ingathering of Traditions: Zionism's Anthology Projects," in *The Anthology in Jewish Literature*, ed. D. Stern (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 245.

⁴ J. Kermish, Y. Bialostocki, eds., *Itonut-hamahteret hayehudit beVarsha*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1979), 44–52.

he taught Jewish history and where *Payn un gvure* was tailor-made to serve as both a textbook and guidebook.

Gutkowski and Zuckerman made explicit the ideological agenda of their joint project. “History shows us that we are a great people – great in our suffering and in our desire to live,” they wrote in the introduction. “Such a people can be oppressed, but it cannot perish.”⁵ Speaking as secular Jews, however, Gutkowski and Zuckerman had no intention of rehearsing Jewish suffering and martyrdom merely to demonstrate that the Jews were a long-suffering people and as such, would withstand the present onslaught as well. Otherwise they would simply have cut and pasted from Bernfeld’s anthology that lay at hand. What was new about the present collection was its emphasis on self-defense. Gutkowski and Zuckerman gave greater weight to “heroism” than to “suffering” as the selections moved seamlessly from the Hebrew chronicles of the Crusades and the Chmelnicki massacres to the new genres of epic poetry, historical fiction and drama in Hebrew, Yiddish and Russian, and from the past to the contemporary Zionist thought of Yosef Hayyim Brenner, Hayyim Nahman Bialik, Ahad Ha’am, and Nahman Syrkin. For all that, *Payn un gvure* was something of a slapdash affair, inadequately annotated, unevenly translated and edited in a highly tendentious manner.⁶ Inasmuch as the two anthologists underscored the textual continuity between traditional texts from the past and innovative texts of the modern era, they also wished to signal the need of a radical break.

The text that best served their programmatic purpose was “Masada,” a historical epic poem by the Hebrew Expressionist poet Yitzhak Lamdan (1899–1954). With either Gutkowski or Zuckerman presumably responsible for its translation into Yiddish, “Masada” was the only work that the editors chose to punctuate the anthology as a whole, in four separate excerpts.⁷ There were several compelling reasons to do so. One was the epic story of Masada itself, a historical account of the Jewish revolt against the Romans and the mass suicide of the last defendants that the Rabbis had forced underground.⁸

⁵ A. Zuckerman, E. Gutkowski, “Suffering and Heroism in the Jewish Past in Light of the Present,” trans. S. Beinfeld, in *The Posen Library of Jewish Culture and Civilization*, vol. 9: *Catastrophe and Rebirth, 1939–1973*, eds. S. D. Kassow, D. G. Roskies (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2020), 4.

⁶ A. Żółkiewska, M. Tuszewicki, eds., *Archiwum Ringelbluma: Konspiracyjne Archiwum Getta Warszawy*, vol. 26: *Utwory literackie z getta warszawskiego* (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny im. Emanuela Ringelbluma, 2017), xxxiii–xxxiv.

⁷ Y. Lamdan, “Masada,” trans. L. I. Yudkin, in *The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe*, ed. D. G. Roskies (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 367–370. Roskies replicates the selections in *Payn un gvure*.

⁸ B. Schwartz, Y. Zerubavel, B. M. Barnett, “The Recovery of Masada: A Study in Collective Memory,” *Sociological Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 2 (1986): 147–164.

In 1927, Lamdan resurrected this buried episode from first century C.E. to lay claim to this last outpost of Jewish political sovereignty in the wake of the pogroms, the world war and the Bolshevik revolution in Europe. The expressionist pathos of the “fugitive” speaker in the poem; the religious terminology turned to secular ends; the sense of global chaos – all these spoke directly to the hearts of Zionist youth in the occupied war zone. Most poignant was the poet’s cry, “Never again shall Masada fall” (III:5), a *cri de guerre* that carried across space and time. In order to make history, the members of the Zionist underground would first need to know their history.

When the Jewish Publication Society of America published *Candles in the Night: Jewish Tales By Gentile Authors* (1940), edited by Rabbi Joseph L. Baron of Milwaukee (1894–1960), the United States had not yet entered the war. Anti-Semitism in America was on the rise, however, and so was isolationism. Never had American Jews felt more insecure. Hearing Gentiles telling lively and interesting tales about Jews was designed to be balm for the grieving collective soul. By December 1942, when he put his next anthology to bed, the situation was quite different and something far more ambitious was called for. By now the world was “rocked by the storm of total war,” and civilization was “rent by the fury of resurrected paganism,” therefore what would “spell hope for the world of tomorrow” was to foster “a broadened sense of human kinship.”⁹ On the surface, there was nothing exceptional about this moving backward to rescue voices from earlier eras and forward to create new understandings, a new vision of the future. Rather, what was different, perhaps unprecedented, was Baron’s exclusive reliance on Gentile voices.

He called it *Stars and Sand: Jewish Notes by Non-Jewish Notables* (1943), drawing its title from the Book of Genesis (22:15–17):

And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham and said:
 ‘I will multiply thy seed as the stars in heaven, and as the sand on the shore of the sea;
 and in thy seed shall all the nations on earth be blessed.’¹⁰

Originally, this had been the covenantal promise made to Abraham on Mount Moriah. With Rabbinic sleight of hand, the voice of God’s angel was here replaced by the voices of more than seven hundred non-Jewish notables, statesmen, religious authorities, philosophers and artists, who held the Jews in high esteem, not just now, but all through the ages, “beginning with Themistius and Augustine and ending with Churchill and Roosevelt,” as the flyleaf promised;

⁹ J. L. Baron, ed., *Stars and Sand: Jewish Notes by Non-Jewish Notables* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1943), xvii. The title is also a pun on *Stars and Stripes*.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

their expression of philosemitism, furthermore, was “culled from a score of languages and from the national literatures of forty-four lands.” This densely-printed and richly illustrated 555-page anthology represented a huge investment on the part of the Jewish Publication Society, which seemed to have been vindicated when a second printing came out, in 1944.

Yet one dissonant voice could cast doubt on the whole harmonizing endeavor. Intent upon forging a common front between Gentiles and Jews, living and dead, east and west, now that America had mobilized for total war, Baron cast a net so wide that it included Lenin, Molotov and Stalin. As quoted by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, Stalin spoke in Sovietspeak. “Anti-Semitism, as an extreme form of race chauvinism, is the most dangerous survival of cannibalism,” he proclaimed, and ended by assuring American Jews that “In the U.S.S.R. anti-Semitism is strictly prosecuted as a phenomenon hostile to the Soviet system. According to the laws of the U.S.S.R. active anti-Semites are punished with death.”¹¹ If the purpose of Baron’s anthology was to assure his liberal Jewish audience that they had not been abandoned by the world, Stalin’s strident, totalitarian voice hardly bespoke a broadened sense of human kinship.

Reading synoptically, we hear two different sets of wartime voices, one emanating from Warsaw, the other, from Milwaukee, which is to say, from within the occupied war zone and from without. One was a Jewish national voice calling for solidarity and resistance and the other, a transnational voice calling for the broadest possible coalition across space and time. Listening dialogically, however, we hear one defiant, transtemporal voice (of Yitzhak Lamdan) placed strategically to rise above the Jewish choir, and one misplaced, stenographic voice (of Joseph Stalin) that disturbs the tenuous balance of the gentler, Gentile voices. The discrepancy between these two modes of reading exposes just how desperate was the attempt to authorize a coherent Jewish response to this unfolding catastrophe.

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In Mandatory Palestine, 1943 was an anthological watershed year. Montgomery’s victory at El Alamein had saved the half million Jews of the Yishuv, the Jewish-national presence, from the German onslaught, ushering in a period of unprecedented productivity and patriotism. *Tav-shin-giml* (5703/1943), the first almanac produced by the Histadrut Labor Federation, was crammed with facts, figures and photos from all points on the Zionist compass. It was probably produced in competition with the *Ha’aretz* daily, which published its own yearbook,

¹¹ Ibidem, 316. Vide also: J. D. Sarna, *JPS: The Americanization of Jewish Culture, 1888–1988* (Phila: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 188.

Luah Ha'aretz, to showcase the collective accomplishments of the liberal wing of the movement.¹² Pooling their meager resources, forty-three of the leading Hebrew writers and intellectuals contributed to *Basa'ar* (In the Storm). “Presented to the Hebrew Soldier Male and Female,” it was designed to deepen the spiritual resources and broaden the historical horizons of those who had volunteered to fight alongside the British, some in separate Jewish units.¹³ Among the poets, scholars, essayists and prose writers who contributed to the volume were some members of *Al Domi*, the Do-Not-Be-Silent group of intellectuals who convened in Jerusalem on December 17, 1942, soon after the first substantiated reports of the Final Solution were made public.¹⁴ European-born and situated outside of the political establishment, they hoped to raise public consciousness of the Shoah, the great catastrophe that they were among the first to name, and to spearhead an organized campaign of rescue. Thus, anthologies issued by a sponsoring Zionist agency became a powerful means of building a national consensus during this fateful year.

Entering the fray was the intellectual giant of the Zionist Labor Party, Berl Katzenelson (1887–1944), whom everyone called Berl, and it was his decision to establish a major publishing venue called *Am Oved*, “The People of Labor,” that was to change the literary map of the war.¹⁵ Given a *carte blanche* as editor-in-chief by Mapai, Berl decided to dedicate a separate library to raising the Yishuv’s consciousness about the world at war. Calling it *Min hamoked* (From the Conflagration), he appointed Berakha Habas (1900–1968), one of the first women journalists in the Yishuv, to oversee the project.¹⁶

In addition to commissioning translations from English, French, Russian, Polish, Yiddish, and then some – twenty-one volumes in all – to help situate the Yishuv within the global war effort, Habas edited two anthologies under her own name: *Kol demei ahim* (The voice of the blood of the brothers, 1943), a miscellany of journalism and eyewitness accounts drawn mostly from reports published in her newspaper, *Davar*; and *Mikhtavim min hageta'ot* (Letters from the Ghettos),

¹² *Tav-shin-giml ba'olam ba'uma, batnu'a uva'arets* (Tel Aviv: Davar, 1943); *Luah ha'arets letav-shin-giml* (Tel Aviv: Ha'aretz, 1942). For a remarkable sample from *Tav-shin-giml*, vide S. D. Kassow, D. G. Roskies, eds., *The Posen Library of Jewish Culture and Civilization*, vol. 9: *Catastrophe and Rebirth, 1939–1973* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 60–62.

¹³ *Basa'ar: me'asef mugash lahayal velahayelet ha'ivrim me'et sofrei Erets-Yisrael* (Tel-Aviv: Agudat hasofrim ha'ivrim, 1943); Z. Gries, “Basa'ar: Me'asef lahayal velahayelet ha'ivrim me'et sofrei Erets Yisrael,” *Et-mol*, no. 205 (June 2009): 22–25.

¹⁴ D. Porat, “Al-Domi: Anshei-ruah be'Erets-Yisrael nokhah hasho'a, 1943–1945,” *Hatsiyonut: Me'asef letoldot hatsiyonut vehayishuv heyehudi be'Erets-Yisrael*, vol. 8 (1983): 245–275.

¹⁵ A. Shapira, *Berl: The Biography of a Socialist Zionist. Berl Katzenelson 1887–1944*, trans. H. Galai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 300–317.

¹⁶ D. G. Roskies, N. Diamant, *Holocaust Literature: A History and Guide* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2012), 37–38.

two hundred and fifty letters documenting the life-and-death struggle of Zionist youth under Nazi occupation. The powerful synergy of the anthological medium and the wartime message would make this a stand-alone volume in the Min hamoked library.

Last letters were always new and newsworthy. They were an authentic source and artifact unfolding in real time that conveyed a sense of immediacy and great urgency. Last letters from the front were an especially effective vehicle of nation building, for the disparate voices of fallen soldiers helped forge a collective identity through the figure of the lost generation.¹⁷ As a seasoned journalist, Habas may have known about the iconic postwar collection of *Kriegsbrieife deutscher Studenten* (eng. *War Correspondence of German Students*, 1918), and even more likely, was familiar with its German-Jewish spinoff, *Kriegsbrieife gefallener Deutscher Juden* (eng. *War Correspondence of Fallen German Jews*, Berlin, 1935), designed to prove that German Jews had also been killed in large numbers in defense of the Motherland. Habas's collection added an egalitarian dimension: not only were they newsworthy and full of national zeal; the majority were written by women.

“From these letters,” she wrote in the voice of an engaged journalist, “rise the desperate calls that knocked on the heart of the world, and on our hearts, the bold attempts to cross borders, to save and to be saved, the majesty of Jewish girls who took upon themselves the mission that fate had assigned them, the tireless covert endeavor to acquire weapons, to plan a last and desperate uprising – all this is revealed in between the lines of these brief, ordinary letters, written in coded phrases by inexperienced underground resistance fighters.”¹⁸

Adding to the pathos of the moment was that most of their identities could not be revealed, for unlike fallen soldiers, if they were still alive, their identities had to be protected, and only the names of those known to have perished could now be made public. Alas, the number of these latter kept growing with each passing day.

One whose name could definitely be revealed was Tosia Altman (1918–1943). A leader of the Zionist youth movement Hashomer Hatzair, Tosia was one of the fighters thought to have perished in the bunker on Miła 18. Her last letter, however, was anything but a battle cry of freedom.¹⁹ Addressed to her closest male friend living on kibbutz, the locus of the Zionist revolution, the letter was

¹⁷ W. G. Natter, *Literature at War, 1914–1940: Representing the “Time of Greatness” in Germany* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999), 78–121.

¹⁸ B. Habas, “Letters from the Ghettos,” trans. T. Keller, in S. D. Kassow, D. G. Roskies, eds., *Catastrophe and Rebirth*, op. cit., 12.

¹⁹ Z. Shalev, *Tosyah: Tosyah Altman, mehahanhagah harashit shel hashomer hatsa'ir lemifkedet ha'irgun hayehudi haloheh*, ed. Levi Dror (Tel Aviv: Moresheet and Tel Aviv University, Dept. of Jewish History, 1992), ch. 2.

also directed at the collective “you,” to all those living in freedom, whom she unsparingly indicted for their silent complicity. Compounding their crime of omission was the crime of genocide, the systematic murder of the Jews, described in coded, encrypted language. “Israel,” referred to as an individual, was code for the People of Israel, the Jews of eastern Europe.

But what can be done? This is how things are. I am doing everything to prevent it and to save the person who is most dear to me, but unfortunately there are factors that block the strongest will. Israel is vanishing before my eyes and I wring my hands and I cannot help him. Have you ever tried to smash a wall with your head?²⁰

Among the most attentive readers of this anthology were the members of Al Domi, and Tosia’s letter struck an immediate nerve in one member in particular – Yitzhak Lamdan, the same Lamdan who had written “Masada” sixteen years earlier – who read her indictment as if had been addressed to him. After reading the letter out loud to the other members of the group, Lamdan read an anguished mea culpa in reply.²¹

Lamdan’s visceral response to one letter from among two hundred and fifty has something important to teach us about the art of listening anthologically. Taken together, *Letters from the Ghettos* were a collective dialogue; two hundred and fifty voices from across the entire occupied war zone speaking to their direct counterparts in the Land of Israel. It was as if one war zone were speaking to another. Although Tosia’s unsparing voice was one among many, it was not lost in the choir. Her unassimilable voice, so scandalous because it remained unheeded and had come too late, broke through to the listener’s consciousness.

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One group of Jews in the free world needed no reminding of the war raging in Europe and of the fate of their brethren: the members of *landsmanshaftn*, hometown associations.²² Landslaid as a rule read the Yiddish press, which was full of screaming headlines about the destruction of European Jewry, and still had kith and kin in Europe. Among *landsmanshaftn* in Greater New York, the Jews from Łódź were an especially active group, hailing as they did from the industrial hub of Russia-Poland and from a major center of the Jewish labor movement. In the New World, many of them belonged to Łódź branches of the Workmen’s Circle. If in peacetime, one mandate of the *landsmanshaft* had been

²⁰ B. Habas, ed., *Mikhtavim min hageta’ot* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1943), 43. The letter was originally written in Polish.

²¹ *Ibidem*, 42.

²² D. Soyer, *Jewish Immigrant Associations and American Identity in New York, 1880–1939* (Denver: Wayne State University Press, 2018).

to send aid to the impoverished folks back home, how much greater was the need of the Łódź Jews, who were rounded up into a ghetto in April 1940, when the city was renamed Litzmannstadt and was annexed to the German Reich? And so, in March, the United Emergency Relief Committee for the City of Łódź was established and three of its members, led by Louis Opert, decided to launch a major anthological project: a yizkor book, a memorial volume, for their beloved home that was being destroyed. The proceeds from this volume were to aid the refugees and survivors.²³

Opert's introductory chapter to the yizkor book is full of apologies: why the book took three years to produce; why the self-portrait of Jewish Łódź was far from complete; because all contact with Łódź-Litzmannstadt had been cut off, why it was so difficult to glean first-hand information about the fate of their brothers and sisters. Graphically, two bookends signify its commemorative mandate: the volume opens with a commissioned work of art by the celebrated Łódź-born artist Artur Szyk, a "split-screen" illustration that shows a German bayonet thrust through the Łódź municipal coat of arms, above the grieving heads of three Polish Jews: an elderly bearded man, his kerchiefed wife, and their very young son.²⁴ Towards the end comes a black-bordered commemorative section for those who died or were killed. Upon closer inspection, however, the black borders are largely dedicated to family members who died in America, of natural causes. Read synoptically, the last two hundred and twenty pages might just as well be an anniversary journal, complete with space ads, mostly in English. Louis Opert, for example, took out a quarter-page ad that urged members to buy his insurance policies.

Was this a souvenir journal of the living landsmanshaft or a memorial tome to the martyrs? The anthological medium said one thing; its dialogical arrangement said another.

From the time the volume was conceived until it finally appeared, America had joined the war effort. Just before the space ads there were three pages of photos dedicated to the American-born sons of Łódź who were now fighting in the U. S. Army, like Opert's son, Corporal Morris Opert, who enlisted in 1941 and was serving in army intelligence in Fort Hamilton. But what was known about the true fate of Łódź Jewry? The only eyewitness accounts of the Nazi occupation came from a single source – *Dos blut ruft tsu nekome* (The blood cries out for revenge; Moscow 1941), collected from Polish-Jewish refugees who

²³ L. Opert, "Dos lodzher yizker-bukh," in *Lodzher yizker-bukh* (New York: United Emergency Relief Committee for the City of Łódź, 1943), 8–10.

²⁴ Vide Artur Szyk (1894–1951): *Dziedzictwo polsko-żydowskiego artysty* (Kraków: Stradomskie Centrum Dialogu, 2011), 94. This illustration is missing from the copy of the *Lodzher yizker-bukh* at the New York Public Library, which was subsequently scanned by the Yiddish Book Center.

had fled eastward. One, by the popular poet and songwriter Moyshe Broderzon (1890–1956), was a sorry attempt at gallows humor.²⁵ What's more, these atrocity stories were sorely out of date.

Yankev Kirshboym (1896–?) was a professional Yiddish journalist from Łódź, who managed to get out of Poland in 1938 via Danzig, where he had worked for fifteen years. Since 1942 he was employed by the Yiddish daily *Forverts* in New York, which gave him access to whatever news was arriving from Europe, and it was he who contributed the pivotal chapter called *Khurbn Lodzh* (eng. *The Destruction of Łódź*). In twenty densely-written pages, Kirshboym provided precise facts and almost-accurate figures about the systematic murder of Łódź Jewry in Chelmno and Auschwitz. Forty thousand Jews, he reported, inter alia, had been gassed in Chelmno, in the course of fifty days. What was done to their bodies before and after they were gassed he also described in shocking detail.²⁶ Here was a native son whose word could be trusted.

But a yizkor book published in 1943 was not and could not be the same as one published three or four years later.²⁷ After the war, eyewitness accounts by the few survivors would account for a third of the volume and would not be followed by reports on the current activities and accomplishments of the landsmanshaft. After the war, the black-bordered pages would be reserved for the martyrs alone. The placement of Kirshboym's chapter and the relative amount of space it was allocated reveals just how difficult it was for the landslajt to admit the Holocaust into their consciousness. Of course one can never know how many landslajt who took this heavy tome home from the annual banquet skipped over this chapter entirely; the extent to which, in other words, Kirshboym's voice literally brought home to them the true scale and meaning of the *khurbn*. Listening anthologically, however, we can hear the voice of a generation too old to enlist but old enough to remember every street and courtyard of the home they left behind and might never see again; a generation caught between celebrating their American presence and commemorating their European destruction.

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1943 was a bitter year for the Archive Department of the Łódź-Litzmannstadt ghetto. Four of the seven staff members who had worked on the *Daily Chronicle Bulletin* – Julian Cukier, Szmul Hecht, Dr. Bernard Heilig and Dr. Abram S. Kamieniecki – died that year of tuberculosis, even though they belonged

²⁵ M. Broderzon, "Fashistisher 'humor'," *Lodzher yizker-bukh*, op. cit., 145–146.

²⁶ Y. Kirshboym, "Khurbn Lodzh," *ibidem*, 164–181.

²⁷ Vide J. Kugelmass, J. Boyarin, eds., *From a Ruined Garden: The Memorial Books of Polish Jewry*, with bibliography and geographical index by Z. M. Baker, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

to a protected class of intellectuals.²⁸ By then, what was left of the ghetto population, after the mass deportations in the winter and fall of 1942, was marking time under labor camp conditions, sans schools, Zionist agricultural plots and concerts. By the end of the year, Łódź was the last major ghetto in former Poland.

Against this bleak backdrop, the Archive Department mobilized ten of its staff, under the direction of Dr. Oskar Rosenfeld (1884–1944), to begin work on an anthological project unique in the annals of the war. On the surface, it amounted to little more than an alphabetical lexicon, containing biographical data on high-ranking officials in the Jewish administration and prominent personalities in the Łódź ghetto as well as information about the ghetto's agencies.²⁹ But Rosenfeld, an eminent author, journalist, translator and theater director who had been deported to Łódź from Prague in 1941, had a much more ambitious plan. This is how he summarized the rationale for the *Encyclopedia of the Ghetto* on December 1, 1943:³⁰

A group of people living together under extreme coercive conditions without the conscious intent of forming a community of common fate created forms that were only possible on the basis of the ghetto. Everyday life required certain norms of work and existence. It created its own structure, its own language, its own terminology. Nowhere in the world was there a human community comparable to that of the ghetto.

To do justice to Rosenfeld's anthropological mandate, to render this dystopian reality with its own societal norms, economic structure and forms of communication, there was no better medium than an encyclopedia, going from A to Z. Though staffed by some of the same people, the *Encyclopedia* was multilingual and dialogical, while the *Daily Chronicle*, now being written in German alone, was not. Written in a uniform style, the timeline of the *Daily Chronicle* went day by day, while the mandate of the *Encyclopedia* was to recapitulate, to find the parts that stood for the whole, while allowing each of the ten encyclopedists to speak in own voice and language.

Like Rosenfeld, "O. S.," Dr. Oskar Singer (1883–1944), was a German-speaking deportee from Prague. A lawyer, dramatist and journalist, Singer took a special interest in the realia of ghetto life, and had something to say about each of the cigarette brands used in the ghetto:

²⁸ L. Dobroszycki, ed., *The Chronicle of the Łódź Ghetto* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), xii–xiv.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, xii.

³⁰ A. Sitarek, E. Wiatr, eds., *Encyclopedia of the Ghetto: The Unfinished Project of the Łódź Ghetto Archivists*, trans. K. Gucio, Ł. Płęs, R. M. Shapiro (Łódź: The State Archive in Łódź, 2016), 5.

BALLERINA. German brand of cigarettes produced in Litzmannstadt; originally of poor quality, however, as no alternatives were available, it became, so to speak, the prima-ballerina of the Tobacco Department and was then only at the disposal of the Chairman. (p. 23)

BELGISCHE (ZIGARETTEN). A large batch of extremely low quality cigarettes imported from Belgium by the *Gettoverwaltung*, encased in colorful packaging with frivolous names, all equally bad. They contained no trace of real tobacco. Children used the colorful packets for making playing cards. These were eagerly traded. (p. 29)

The typical encyclopedic entry was similarly crammed with social data, was a capsule of ghetto time, and could betray the author's sensibility. "It became, so to speak, the prima-ballerina of the Tobacco Department" was written tongue-in-cheek, and the afterlife of the ersatz tobacco among the children turned the whole subject into light comedy.

The tone and substance of J. Z., Josef Zelkowicz (1897–1944), were very different. As someone who had been living in Łódź and reporting on the city for the Yiddish press since 1925, his entries were tinged with social satire, as when he explained the evolution in meaning of the Yiddish-Turkish word *balegan*. (Please note that all my examples begin with the letter B.)

BALEGAN: [...] In the ghetto's unique conditions, the noun's meaning changed. It was used not only to describe the state of general disorder in the ghetto, but also a special kind of chaos and confusion observed at distribution points and among people waiting in lines.

The word "balegan" meant the front of such a line, comprised of a whole cluster of people crowding the entrance to the distribution point or at the counter window of the ration cards collection office. (p. 26)

And so, a word that usually carried jocular connotations took on a highly differentiated and sinister meaning under the conditions of extreme deprivation and rationing. Taking the long view on the life of this word, J. Z.'s entry suggested that ghettospeech was not the end of the road, just as there were still so many letters left in the alphabet.

Those encyclopedists like Zelkowicz and the Łódź-born mathematician and Yiddish teacher Jerachmil Bryman (1908–1944), "J. B.," were schooled in Polish-Jewish life. For them, to recapitulate was to begin with life before the ghetto. Thus, in the entry on Benej Choraw [Sons of Sinai], for example, Bryman traced its origins to prewar Łódź, then summarized its five-year struggle to maintain religious discipline and Hasidic praxis in the ghetto, both for their own sake and for the benefit of children and orphans upon whom the future rested. "The association's office at 22 Łagiewnicka St. was closed," the entry concluded, "but Benei Choraw did not stop its activities. Each Friday, the so-called *mesibes* or parties were organized in the apartments of different members, *tishn* or Hasidic

meals were held, and the children's choir performed traditional *zmires*, table hymns. Members of the school board would speak. On March 28, 1944, on the fifth anniversary of Benei Choraw, an official ceremony was held, attended by all the active members of the association" (p. 30).

Because Bryman could still imagine a future, the religious terminology of *mesibes*, *zmires*, *tishn* did not require lengthy annotation. (The explanation has been added today, for our benefit, by the team of editors and translators.) The *Encyclopedia of the Ghetto* assumed a postwar reader thoroughly at home in Yiddish, Polish and German, much like the authors themselves. Ghetto administrators, personalities, institutions, expressions and material culture were all mixed up together, with only the alphabet to establish order. In this scheme, dissonance was the rule rather than the exception. Reading synoptically, we hear the voice of a collective speaking as a collective. Listening dialogically, we hear the ghetto speak in real time – time in the Bakhtinian sense, which is to say, open-ended and unfinalizable.

* * *

Taken together, these five wartime anthologies have much in common. Gutkowski's and Zuckerman's literary-historical miscellany, Baron's book of Jewish-friendly quotations, Habas's collection of last letters from the ghettos, the *Łódź Yizkor Book* and the *Encyclopedia of the Ghetto* all enjoyed institutional support, were written with a firm editorial hand, adhered to an ideological mandate and had a specific audience in mind. Whatever diverse materials they contained, whether complete or fragmentary, were mediated, embedded, and recontextualized with the aim of authorizing a Jewish response to the most dire of historical catastrophes. Whatever truth claims each advanced was filtered through an editorial practice of selecting, recapitulating and harmonizing. If read synoptically, each anthology was, at best, an exercise in Jewish self-understanding; at worst – a piece of wartime propaganda.

Yet when each is read dialogically, to allow for its dissonant and discordant voices, it is precisely the anomalous utterance that is decisive. No matter what the editorial intent, the anomalous voice stakes out a competing truth-claim. The unassimilable rumors, decrees, statistics, deportations to places unknown; the ever-growing discrepancy between the progress of the Allied war effort and the pace of destruction of Jewish life and property; the collapse of all time-tested political strategies – all this challenged the ability of even the most accomplished anthologist to match the medium to the message. Such was the complex nature of wartime anthologies produced as the ever more calamitous events were unfolding.

Given a commanding presence in Gutkowski's and Zuckerman's anthology, Yitzhak Lamdan's apocalyptic voice weighed the scale definitively towards *gvure*, heroism and resistance at any price. It was Lamdan's voice, therefore, that re-echoed most clearly three years later, inspiring Antek Zuckerman and his Zionist comrades-in-arms to turn the Warsaw ghetto into a latter-day Masada. Of all the historical precedents, Masada alone would reestablish the broken link of Jewish armed resistance.

Hearing Stalin's strident voice denouncing all manifestations of anti-Semitism, liberal-minded American-Jewish readers may very well have questioned whether their putative allies in the present moment were nearly as reliable as those Gentiles who had lived long ago. As in the real world, virtual alliances were only as strong as their weakest link.

Tosia Altman's despair, her rage and regret, exposed all moral claims made by the Yishuv of being the vanguard and savior of the Jewish people. Lamdan's *mea culpa* was direct acknowledgment of the moral and political debacle.

For what emergency exactly had the United Emergency Relief Committee for the City of Łódź finally published the *Lodzher yizker-bukh*? If it was merely to raise money on behalf of the survivors, as if this were just another war, then it was business as usual. Yankev Kirshboym's forensic evidence was simply unassimilable within the larger scheme of communal activism and activity.

United in purpose, the Łódź ghetto's ten encyclopedists were wildly divergent in voice. So long as that polyphony lasted, there was hope of sustaining Jewish agency in the face of all odds. The *Encyclopedia* was not a summation of the past so much as a desperate lifeline to the future.

* * *

What can be heard from reading wartime anthologies that cannot be heard any other way? Read synoptically, they cover the full expanse of the individual and collective Jewish response to the catastrophe. They are the voice of the many people, who speak through the one – Zuckerman and Gutkowski, Baron or Habas. They are also the voice of the many who speak in many voices – notably, the Jews of Łódź, whether banding together voluntarily in America or struggling to survive in the ghetto. But when read dialogically, they voice the screaming contradictions of an unfolding catastrophe without historical precedent: between martyrdom and resistance, universal amity and cynical abandonment, patriotism and betrayal, mourning and denial, polyphony and silence. By “listening anthologically,” combining a synoptic and dialogical reading, the Jewish anthological imagination in wartime becomes audible in all its tragic complexity.

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