

ISRAEL TRANK¹

(22nd Nov 1901 – 29th April 1943)

In the mid-1930s, around 1935, the Łódź Jewish literary family was enriched with a new, respected writer – Israel Trank. The name Trank was a pseudonym, a variation of Trunk – the renowned rabbinical-writer family. I first saw Trank at the end of the summer of 1936, at a writers' meeting on the premises of "ORT", during which the magazine "*Or*"² was initiated. The first issue of the magazine was published in December 1936. And the last – in 1939, a short time before the outbreak of the war. The "*Or*" radiated with fairy-colored rays of artistic word and image, the sunset of Yiddish culture, before descending into the "western night".

At the meeting, Trank was selected as editor of "*Or*", along with Moshe Broderzon and Israel Rabon. I had heard of Trank before, as a writer on unique topics, a philosophical-popularizer of the modernist theory Sigmund Freud called psychoanalysis. Incidentally, the "Torah" was supplemented with a whole "Talmud" commentary written by those who, based on the Freudian Bible, were anyway disagreeing about it. Commentator-Talmudists, such as Adler, Yung, and others, pondered the subconscious questions – each in its own way, and separate "*yeshivot*" were formed: adherents of "Beit Adler," "Beit Yung," and the like.

... He was of impressive appearance. A tall, well-built fellow in his early thirties, with a dark brown oval face that made an oriental impression. The look of the beer-brown eyes was in harmony with the good-natured, gentle-ironic expression on his face, and with the hearty

¹ TN: great-grandson of his homonym Rabbi Yehoshe'le Kutner and son of the Rabbi Yitzhak Yehuda Trunk.

² TN: Hebrew, "Letter" (of the alphabet).

smile, which often resonated. He was a teacher by profession. This gave him modest means of subsistence. He joined his profession without difficulty, gaining a position in a Jewish school, as well as in private lessons.

Between Trank, the co-editor of "*Ot*", and I were established, so to speak, "business" relations. I was a "*Ot*" subscriber-advertiser, touring dozens of Polish cities and towns. Gradually, a warm friendship developed between us: appetite came with eating³. Naturally, among literati the axis of collegiate conversations should be literature, art; But with Trank, as a literary scholar, the backbone of the conversations formed about his modernist-scientific acceptance, although he also showed proficiency and interest in the spheres of fine literature – in all its forms.

Being between a kind of cabinet-man and a scholar-sage, who continues the learning of his ancestors in his own, modern way – Trank was at the same time very socially active. He has taken part in various cultural activities: the "Friends of YIVO", "KiŻ" ("*Klub Inteligencja Żydowski*"), where he also participated in public discussions on various topics. From time to time, he also used to go into cafes and like to take part in the easy-going conversation of a circle of young writers – a conversation that could have been really easy, spicy, but never vulgar. He had a humorous "trance" in his speech, and easily shared a gesture or characteristic expression in anyone – not with any toxicity, gall, but with that kindness that softens the humorous "sting." We are left with many of his humorous accents. Once, he recounted, in his characteristic diction, the words of his rabbinical relative, who came to Łódź for a short time, and saluting Trank with an "aleichem shalom", exclaimed: "Israel, I have heard that you are working on psyche?". Although the popular rabbinic-scholarly expression "psyche" was not Trank's but the relative's, the young scientist became associated with the expression, through his unique interpretation.

Trank has published in "*Ot*" several essays. Which have attracted the attention of intellectuals, with their psychological analysis, as well as with the clarity and simplicity of their style. It is not uncommon for writing to be clear and concise – and at the same time vague – about complex issues. Many works in the field of science and art are like sharp essences – not to be used; first, the talented "laboratory technician", the popularizer, dilutes them in clear water "commonsense", making them acceptable and enjoyable. In this sense, the commentator is a partner in the original genius.

Some time later, Trank stopped collaborating on "*Ot*".

Rabon remained the magazine's editor and owner, as Broderzon was the only editorial editor.

In 1938, Trank's book was published in the publishing house "Literary Pages"; a study of "*Alfred Adler – The Man and His Teachings*", I believe, was the title of the book of which I have, unfortunately, no copy. For as long as I can remember, this book has received good

reviews from competent circles – writers and intellectuals, who have deep knowledge and interest in modern psychology.

My overview of Trank's literary and cultural activity, would not be full, if I did not mention editing a special issue of "Literary Pages", dedicated to young Łódź. This issue was to feature poems, novels, essays and dramatic miniatures by young Łódź writers, in particular. Incidentally, nothing came out of the whole thing. Nachman Majzil, the editor of the "Literary Pages", was not in Poland at the time.

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Shortly after the outbreak of war, I came across Trank. This was in the early days, when people could still move on the street, without the risk of being caught at work. The dreadful news stunned and surprised us all, like a thunderclap in a sunny sky – even though the sky had been darkened for several months by the black clouds of toxic demagogic propaganda coming from the West, leaving us stunned by the mound of poison, making no sense. All were shaken, especially Trank.

This did not bother him in his psychological observations. Walking down the street, he told me about sexual orgies of Polish recruits, before heading to the front, describing the drastic scenes with the neatness of a scholar, giving them nevertheless such a reality that they became more convincing than any theory, showing the relationship between "love and death."

When he left, Trank addressed me with the words, "We will not survive the war." These words expressed some kind of echo of a clear-sightedness coming from the depth of his mind. He did not survive this war.

After my release, I heard that Trank had been sent to a labor camp in northern Russia. As I was told, his sad ending was this: he worked in a knitting cooperative. One night he fell asleep – he had the job of a guard – falling asleep smoking a cigarette. A fire broke out and the business burned. He appeared in court: ten years in prison for "sabotage". He was sent from one "department" to another, worse one, but quickly and unexpectedly released from there and sent "home", to the relative "paradise", the "labor camp".

His relatives and brothers in need, welcomed him with joy and wonder at his quick release. But neither the joy nor the wonder lasted long. A short time later, Israel Trank expired. He "returned home" from prison only to die.

Thus perished in the cold northern distances of Soviet Union, one of the most colorful figures in the Łódź Jewish cultural environment, a writer-researcher by scope, a noble man and an outstanding neighbor.

Honor his memory!

Israel GOLDKORN
"Łódźer Portraits", "*Menorah*" Publishing
House, Tel Aviv, 1963

³ TN: Hebrew, from Gemara, "*Mitoch shelo lishmah ba lishmah*", i.e., "Good intentions will follow good actions."