

"הכל פוליטיקה: מה בין טוני בלייר לבין קיקרו": על ספריו של רוברט האריס, סופר צללים, תרגם מאנגלית מרדכי ברקאי, אור יהודה, 2008; אימפריום, תרגם מאנגלית מרדכי ברקאי, אור יהודה, 2009; בתוך: *הארץ ספרים* (10 בפברואר 2010).

[‘All is Politics: Between Tony Blair and Cicero’: Review of Robert Harris, *The Ghost*, Translated into Hebrew by Mordechai Barkai, Or Yehuda 2008; Idem, *Imperium*, Translated into Hebrew by Mordechai Barkai, Or Yehuda 2009, in: *Haaretz Book Review Supplement* (10 February 2010).]

"קיקרו – המומחה לידידות שהופקר בידי חבריו": על מרקוס טוליוס קיקרו, על הידידות [לאיליוס על הידידות], תרגם מרומית אברהם ארואטי, בנימינה, 2013, בתוך: *הארץ ספרים* (19 בנובמבר 2013).

[‘Cicero, the Expert on Friendship Let Down by His Friends’: Review of Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Laelius De Amicitia*, Translated into Hebrew by Abraham Arouetty, Binyamina 2013, in: *Haaretz Book Review Supplement* (19 November 2013).]

Compiled by Avshalom Laniado

### Mordecai Ephraim Ostwald

(1952-2013)

Mark Ostwald had all the advantages: his parents, Martin and Lore Ostwald, were financially comfortable and universally honored, and he himself had a first-class mind, intellectual curiosity, and ambition. He did not even lack a sense of humor: when the Swarthmore College *Phoenix* retold the story of how Prof. Russell Meiggs of Oxford had frightened Mark and his brother David by pretending to keep a hippopotamus in his apartment, the two of them, now teenagers, shot off an immediate denial. It was a rhinoceros, they indignantly informed us.

Before entering college he discovered the intellectual and spiritual riches of Judaism. He began to use his Jewish name, Mordecai — even his family stopped calling him Mark — and asked Yale to wait so that, as he put it, he could ‘fill himself up with Torah’. Yeshivot that catered to late bloomers were beginning to appear at the time, but it was not his way to go anywhere but the top. He began studying at Mir Yeshiva in Brooklyn, an institution prestigious enough for his ambitions and large enough to let him choose his own way of study. Yale is still waiting.

The orthodox world respects and indeed venerates scholars, and it was not his change in direction that thwarted his intellectual career; it was a careless driver. He was hit one morning while bicycling to yeshiva, and his leg so badly smashed that only after a year and a half of hospitalizations, operations, and infections was he able to walk again. He emerged from the experience overweight, limping, and understandably hypersensitive; most damagingly, he had missed the stage of his education in which a student learns to organize his thoughts into a thesis, to support it with arguments and evidence, and to write it clearly and convincingly. He had also missed the stage at which a yeshiva student starts looking for a wife. He was left an outsider in all fields: an academic with no university, a Torah scholar with no yeshiva, a man with no wife. That he was brilliant and almost superhumanly diligent in his studies just made the pill that much bitter to swallow.

He never blamed G-d nor, for that matter, anyone else for his predicament; nor did he ever stop studying. At one point he claimed to know thirty languages, and I doubt that he was exaggerating; although later he decided that he had enough languages — ‘It becomes an obsession’, he told me — he kept reading in many of them, ancient and modern. When a visiting tourist described sitting on a bus next to a man in ultra-orthodox garb and being surprised to see him pull out a Loeb edition of (if I remember correctly) Gregory Nazianzen and start reading, I knew who had been on the bus with him. Entering his apartment was difficult and almost

dangerous: bookshelves not only lined the walls but stood in the middle of the room, and more books stood in piles on the floor and on every other surface. I don't know that he, or anybody, could have read all of them, but his conversation made it clear that he had read very many, and held firm opinions about them.

Settling in Israel, he became a fixture at academic conferences, well known both to Torah scholars and to academics, respected by everyone but close to none. Although I saw him infrequently, I always felt a special connection to him both because of my love for his parents and because I had known him since childhood; it was a standing joke between us that since his father was my teacher and a person's students are considered to be his children<sup>1</sup> we could consider ourselves brothers. I can't claim to have felt comfortable with him: for one thing, I was always afraid I might say or do something that would offend him, and for another, his conversation always included people that he presumed I would know, books he presumed I had read, and opinions about which he presumed I had a position, when the truth was — though only now am I willing to admit it to myself — that he knew a lot more than I did, and I had to try hard not to sound like an ignoramus when talking to him. Had we realized earlier what he had to offer, perhaps we could have profited from his erudition instead of hiding from it, and the scholarly world would have been richer. That did not happen. He and his knowledge are gone from this world, and I can offer no better epitaph than one written centuries ago:

Here rests his head upon the lap of earth  
A youth to fortune and to fame unknown.  
Fair Science frowned not on his humble birth,  
And Melancholy marked him for her own.

Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere,  
Heaven did a recompense as largely send:  
He gave to Misery all he had, a tear,  
He gained from Heaven ('twas all he wished) a friend.

No farther seek his merits to disclose,  
Or draw his frailties from their dread abode,  
(There they alike in trembling hope repose)  
The bosom of his Father and his God.<sup>2</sup>

David M. Schaps

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<sup>1</sup> Rashi on Num. 3:1, Deut. 6:7.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Gray, *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*, 117-28.