

CHOICE

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Humanities

ROSKIES, David G. Against the apocalypse: responses to catastrophe in modern Jewish culture. Harvard, 1984. 374p ill index 83-18663. 20.00 ISBN 0-674-00915-0. CIP

An extraordinarily sensitive and probing book. An examination of how Jewish writers (and in the modern period also artists) have responded to catastrophe, it also makes a personal statement: Jewish existence after the Holocaust depends on the capacity to read collective tragedy not as all-consuming apocalypse but in words and images that reach back beyond unprecedented evil to earlier archetypal religious traditions and responses. Roskies, who teaches Jewish literature at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, argues that the modern Yiddish and Hebrew writers on whom he focuses have shown how reinterpretation (neoclassicism), even when it transforms and subverts the heritage, keeps alive the nourishing roots. His book is fragmentary, surprisingly omits responses to the Jewish expulsion from Spain, and sometimes becomes entwined in adjacent literary issues. Nevertheless, its penetrating analysis of literature and art in confrontation with catastrophe speaks profoundly, first to Jews, but also to everyone stirred by the problem of recovering religious and historical continuity across an apparent abyss. The work is not comparable to any other volume. Highly recommended for upper-division undergraduates and graduate students in the humanities.—*M.A. Meyer, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion*

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