

them to all the ramifications of a given situation. I let them hope."

Such an approach is also evident in Eilat's adaptation, which conveys much humor, some fear and the right amount of surprise. This is a work that will be appreciated, in different ways, by different age groups as it contains both dramatic depth and dexterity.

Duel's five actors turn in fine performances, though Alona Kimche (better known for her movie roles to date), falters a bit in the role of Edith, the beautiful young immigrant painter who is wooed some decades earlier by the artistically inclined Heinrich, but is ultimately won by the aggressive Rudy. Kimche stumbles a bit, though Finkel, Smadar and Dina Doron do not let her fall.

Also impressive is Yoav Tzafir, whom many Israelis will recognize for his sympathetic role in the award-winning local film, *Late Summer Blues*. Tzafir is alternately whimsical, philosophical, witty and a complete klutz, as he first befriends and then begins to intervene in Heinrich's life. This is also one of the play's shortcomings, however, in that the narra-



Alona Kimche and Shimon Finkel in *Duel*

tive's jumps back and forth between the 12- and 28-year-old David are too sudden and too jarring. One wonders whether a real 12-year-old might not have been more convincing in some of the scenes.

Technically, this production is first-rate, from the fine mood music (written

by Dori Parness), to the multifunctional set (by Moshe Sternfeld). A co-production of the Khan Theater and the Tel Aviv-based Eldad Bimot V'badim, *Duel* is likely to prove itself a commercial hit, with a national tour all but guaranteed to follow its current run in Jerusalem. ■

Rachael Hirsch

BOOKS

Insanity as the Norm

Reviewed by David George

A Scrap of Time by Ida Fink. London: Peter Owen, 138 pp.

Twilight by Elie Wiesel. Translated by Marion Wiesel. New York: Warner Books, 271 pp.

The King of Children by Betty Jean Lifton. London: Pan, 404 pp.

The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Response to Catastrophe, edited by David G. Roskies. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 652 pp.

The Journey Back from Hell by Anton Gill. London: Grafton Books, 509 pp.

Among the tens of thousands of pages written about the Holocaust, Ida Fink's slender volume, *A Scrap of Time*, is destined to occupy a place of its own. This book is one of the cruelest testimonies of what men and women did to other men and women. It is a book that carries with it the pitiless verdict that absolutely anything can be done to another human being.

One finds not a touch of artfulness in this collection of stories. Nor is there any

trace of the sentimental and trite writing one too often encounters when reading about the Holocaust. Fink uses words sparingly to report the impassioned cries of people living in situations so unbearable that one cannot read their stories without being profoundly moved.

These are people who live in a special framework of time — one not measured in days, weeks or months, but in actions. These are chronicles of the moral struggles, adventures and crises of people trapped in the ghetto, trying to hide or simply waiting to be taken away to be slaughtered.

Each of these powerful stories focuses on an individual or small family unit captured in what Primo Levi called "the bizarre and marginal moments of reality." They tell of nearly unimaginable hardships — pain, cold, terror, hunger, weariness and the feeling of exclusion from humanity. Here too is a wolfish sense of exile, as people hide in closets, sewers, pig pens, forests and collapsed buildings. People eat, work, sleep, even fall in love, just a few feet from where others are digging their own graves. These are tales in which the usual lines between normal and abnormal waver and often vanish.

This book does not offer much in the way of hope. It belongs in a special and separate space on one's shelves, together perhaps with Tadeuz Borowski's *This Way to the Gas*, *Ladies and Gentlemen* and Primo Levi's *If Not Now, When*. As with those books, the reader is left with an enormous sense of sadness. This is as much as one dares ask from any writer dealing with the Holocaust.

ELIE WIESEL is also concerned with questions of normalcy and madness. To Wiesel, the major issues today are the same as those in his earlier novels: the primacy of memory and the need to bear witness.

In *Twilight*, Wiesel follows the haunted mind and tormented memories of Raphael Lipkin, who has been searching for years for a friend who saved him from the Holocaust. In his wanderings, Lipkin finds himself in an asylum with patients whose delusions have biblical sources. Surrounded by men convinced they are Abraham, Cain, Adam and even God, Raphael remembers his own encounters with a unique form of madness — the Holocaust.

Lipkin's memories allow Wiesel to restate now familiar themes — the differences between paradise and prison, between the world of the normal and that of the certifiably insane, and the question of the very meaning of having survived. There is no question that Wiesel is a masterful storyteller. As Lipkin ponders on hiding from the Germans, on friends and family members who disappeared and lovers who were forever separated, we cannot help but be drawn into the insanity of his history. Nor can we avoid the awareness that Wiesel's principal concern is a personal one — how finally to come to grips with the meaning of the Holocaust in his own life.

Yet Wiesel's literary vision of the Holocaust is too stylized, too touched with pathos and indignation. If there is a problem in reading Wiesel, it is that he specializes in shocking us, and these shocks may cause us to forget that the

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truest horror of the Holocaust may be evoked in its day-to-day banality – the terrible assumption that what happened was natural.

BY APPROACHING the Holocaust from the perspective of what happened to a single, albeit extraordinary person, Betty Jean Lifton's *The King of Children* can be read on two levels. On the micro level, the book is a comprehensive and insightful biography of Janusz Korczak. At its more inclusive level, it is about the resilience of the human mind and character and how enormous the moral and intellectual dilemmas of the Holocaust were confronted.

Loved and admired as a writer, teacher and advocate of the rights of children, Korczak was a Polish-Jewish doctor who has remained one of the most intriguing and enigmatic figures of Holocaust history and literature. Born in 1878 to an eminent and assimilated Polish Jewish family, Korczak was a spiritual descendant of the Enlightenment. He once wrote that "the lives of great men are like legends – difficult but beautiful." He might well have been writing about his own life.

Although his legend began during the early days of the Nazi liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto, he had long before dedicated himself to the needs and plight of children. It was Korczak who introduced to Poland progressive orphanages designed as just communities, trained teachers in what we now think of as moral education, and worked in juvenile courts defending children's rights.

On August 6, 1944, the Germans ordered his famous orphanage evacuated, and Korczak was forced to gather together the 200 children in his care. With quiet dignity, he led them on their final march through the ghetto streets to the train that would take them to their deaths in Treblinka. He refused a reprieve offered on the condition that his children be sent off without him. He died as Henryk Goldszmit, the name he was born with, but it was by his pseudonym that he would be remembered.

In a broad sense, this book is an extraordinarily sound spiritual biography of an entire generation of European intellectuals, who found themselves confronted by "the accursed problems of the first half of the twentieth century."

THERE ARE those who claim that Holocaust literature is a unique genre, one that responds to experiences that are without historical analogy and therefore defies normal uses of language. David Roskies rejects this point of view, and in *The Literature of Destruction*, he presents 100 powerful selections from a 2,000-year-old tradition of Jewish literary responses to recurrent historical catastrophe.

According to Roskies, throughout the

centuries and across numerous dispersals, the Jewish response to catastrophe has been governed by the same four components: the Bible, in which the covenantal scheme was laid out for all time; a set of historical archetypes, some biblical, some postbiblical, that can be reapplied to all future events; sanctioned vehicles for expressing one's rage both against God and against the gentiles; and an evolving set of rituals designed to rehearse all future catastrophes and persecutions.

The book presents biblical lamentations on exile, rabbinic homilies on martyrology and chronicles of the Spanish Inquisition. This wide historical overview encompasses Jewish tragedy from the destruction of the Temple to the advent of the crematorium. Prose selections taken from such modern voices as Sholem Aleichem, Peretz, Babel, Ansky, Brenner, Singer and Agnon are presented together with haunting verse from such great poets as Bialik, Halpern, Markish, Greenberg, Sutzkever and Alterman. No less stunning are numerous pieces from writers previously untranslated into English.

Some of the selections are merely terse descriptions, almost anecdotal in form; others linger, drawing out the smallest details to make their despairing and memorable statements on the theme of powerlessness. Still others, with sweeping, chaotic brilliance, more often poetry than prose, portray vast and terrible sagas.

The distillation of experience in this collection is astonishing and often intensely moving. Through it all, however, one never loses track of a sometimes subdued but nearly always present sense of commitment, hope and longing. An anthology of sweeping brilliance, based on immensely rich pieces of writing and packed with learned allusion, action and even humor, the book is a tour de force of literary, moral and emotional complexity.

DESPITE THE vast body of literature devoted to life in the concentration camps, there still remains a paucity of knowledge about those who survived them. Forty-five years after the last camp was liberated, time is running out on the chance to document what happened to those people who somehow managed not to perish. Anton Gill's *Journey Back From Hell* is concerned primarily with the lives of such survivors.

By reporting his interviews with 120 survivors in 14 different countries, Gill examines how these people have or have not come to terms with their traumas and memories. He explores the impact of their concentration camp experiences on the emotional, spiritual, psychological and political ways of perceiving and dealing with the world.

From all that has been written, one can

easily construct a list of attributes essential for survival in the camps: a sense of humor, adaptability, the ability to form small self-help groups, and the capacity to maintain a sense of personal dignity and decency. It is far more difficult to list what was needed to adapt back to normal life. For the concentration camp survivor, there is no return to the person he or she formerly was. Nor is there any final laying of the ghost. These encounters point out that the journey back from hell is one every survivor is still making, with pain, with effort, and with varying degrees of success.

As one reads through these oral recollections and personal histories, it becomes clear that every experience recounted here is simultaneously unique and universal. Gill concludes that "the physical and mental scars are there for good; one's life-expectancy is reduced. But if [the survivors] are lucky, and strong enough, they can live and that in itself is a triumph." ■



Jonathan Edelson's Holocaust Children