

By ARYEH AGRISS

This is the most complete story of Machal, (*Mitnadvim Chutz L'aretz*) the overseas foreign volunteers who came to fight in Israel's War of Independence, to date. The best previous attempt

Aryeh Agriss is a *Machalnik* who served in the Israeli air force.

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The Holocaust in literature

AGAINST THE APOCALYPSE: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture, by David G. Roskies. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1984. 374 pages. \$20.

HURBAN: Response to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature, by Alan Mintz. Columbia University Press, New York, 1984. 283 pages. \$26.

By JACOB KABAKOFF

Some four years ago, David R. Roskies and Alan Mintz collaborated in launching *Prooftexts*, a new journal devoted to Jewish literary creativity. It is noteworthy that the two editors have also shared similar research interests, which have now culminated in the two volumes under review.

Both Roskies' and Mintz's books discern a continuum of Jewish response to catastrophe beginning with the Bible and extending down to the

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Looking at Jewish feminism

JEWISH AND FEMALE: Choices and

can Volunteers and Israel's War of Independence.

Bercuson is a professor of history at the University of Calgary, which explains a heavy emphasis on the recruitment and war roles of the Canadian volunteers in 1948. He has had access to records and official archives in Great Britain, Canada, Israel and the United States which have not heretofore been accessible or used by other writers.

The secrecy part of the book's title is justified. As the author puts it, "The role played by foreign volunteers . . . has all but been

modern period. Of the two works, Roskies' is the more encompassing. While Mintz limits his discussion to Hebrew literature, Roskies surveys also the rich Yiddish cultural heritage of Eastern European Jewry and includes within his purview folk songs, ghetto writings and even the works of leading Jewish artists.

Roskies has provided a valid conceptual framework for his analysis of various literary texts that have responded to catastrophe. In these writings, he finds not an evocation of blind faith or apocalyptic despair, but rather a search for meaning and a rationale for Jewish living. He indicates throughout how various authors have made use of specific archetypes to express their innermost reactions to suffering.

In ages gone by, it was concepts like "covenant" and "martyrdom" that were at the heart of many literary outpourings. With the advent of modernity and the outbreak of pogroms, writers like Mendele Mocher Seforim, Sholem Aleichem and Chaim Nachman Bialik developed their own individualistic models of response.

The reader is introduced not only to the world of these major writers, but also to that of numerous others who

Before the United Nations resolution which partitioned Palestine into an Arab and a Jewish state, volunteers — mostly American and some Canadians — were helping to man the Aliyah Bet ships which were bringing illegal immigrants from Europe to Palestine. By the spring of 1947, David Bercuson was seeking foreign volunteers to help convert the Haganah into a conventional army.

Although some 30,000 Palestinian Jews had served with the British forces in World War II, very few had command or staff training and experience. Haganah commanders who had risen

wrote in Yiddish and other languages. In no other recent critical work will the reader find such a mine of insights into a whole assemblage of writers, many of whom have hitherto received but scant treatment in English. The works of Ansky, Weissenberg, Olitzky, Katzenelson, Shayevitch and Rabon, to mention but a few, are here illuminated from the special vantage of the author.

During the modern period, which saw the development of a secular literature, many writers refused to accept such traditional archetypes as guilt for sin and the hope for redemption as explanations for catastrophe. Beginning with Bialik, they were led to challenge the traditional bond between God and His people, which they felt had been shattered by destruction. Such ancient archetypes as the *akedah* (binding of Isaac), the covenant and even the crucifixion were given new application and were imbued with new relevance.

Of Roskies' special treatments of individual authors, one may single out the chapter devoted to Abraham Sutzkever, the Yiddish partisan poet of Vilna, who today makes his home in Israel. Roskies traces the various

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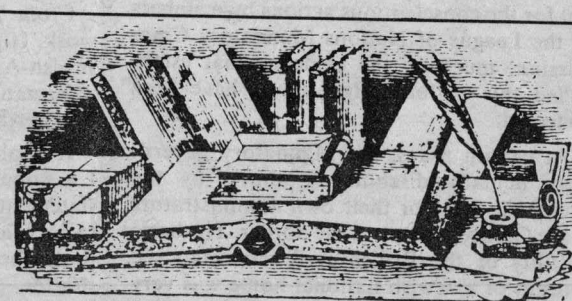
felt threatened and opposed BG's idea. But the American Col. David (Mickey) Marcus, on his first trip to Palestine, found not a unit of regimental size that could be moved and sent into combat. There were commanders aplenty for small units, but none who could command larger formations.

In the United States, Maj. Wellesley Aron, a veteran of the British army and Haganah, was put in charge of "Land and Labor for Palestine," an organization charged with recruiting infantry specialists in armor, artillery, communications, etc. "Service

airways" was set up to recruit air crew and aircraft maintenance experts. Zionist leaders in local communities raised the necessary funds, with the whole North American operation under the command of Teddy Kollek.

In Canada, former Maj. Ben Dunkleman emerged as the key personage in recruitment, and later served as commander of the Seventh Brigade in the northern command. The 79th Armored Battalion, under Canadian Joe Weiner, was the spearhead in clearing the western Galilee and the capture of Nazareth. "Foreign volunteers," writes Bercuson,

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Some exciting new books for Jewish children

By CYNDI SCHOENBRUN

We are known as "the people of the Book." Until the past few years, however, our young children did not have all that much variety in Jewish books to turn to for entertainment. The number of children's books in bookstores, public and synagogue libraries was noticeably lacking.

But this situation seems to be changing for the better. Many new children's books by Jewish authors and/or with Jewish themes have been published. This fits into the exciting new merchandising categories of children's books in general. There are counting books, pop-up books (this year's popular genre) and richly illustrated books.

Jewish Book Month is a good time to briefly look at some newer offerings. And with Chanukah fast approaching, the inclusion of one or more of these books in the presents cache will certainly delight your offspring, especially if you have the time to read with

of woman around traditional holiday and tells where to find the

the attractiveness of the Jewish-settled areas. Starting with the assumption that the rate of natural reproduction among Arabs settled close to Jews and Arabs living in the Judea-Samaria area, where health conditions were similar, could not be substantially different, she notes that the population growth in the Sharon Plain and the coastal region was

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motivating factor was to take from the Jews without giving an account.

"We cannot overestimate," Peters continued, "the intrinsic religious intolerance that is wound up in this so-called nationalism of the Arab Palestinians. And we cannot disregard their own words, in which they state very clearly that the Palestinian problem — as it is known — is a new tool in the effort to destroy Israel."

For Peters, the fundamental problem in today's Middle East is the Arab refusal to accept a Jewish state. "It doesn't matter whether this state is called 'Palestine' or 'Rhododendron,'" she commented. "The fact is that Arabs cannot abide, without pressure or coercion, Jews in their midst."

In her opinion, the Palestinian question is an Arab, not a Jewish, problem. She cannot forgive the Arab countries for refusing to absorb the Palestinian refugees, for allowing them to languish in camps so that they can be used as political pawns.

"But," Peters said, "the heart of the matter is not the Palestinian Arab refugees or even Palestine. The Arab leaders believe that by inventing an age-old Arab-Palestinian identity at the sacrifice of the well-being and the very lives of the hapless Arab refugees themselves, they can pre-empt Jewish identification with the Holy Land and accomplish politically what they have failed to achieve militarily — the destruction of Israel."

merely because they may have grown out of a distortion of history. A proper recognition of their historical origins, however, will help us to define a more realistic and proper response to those aspirations. As a result of Peters' work, that response hopefully will not be based on the mistaken image of a historic Palestinian people rooted in its land since time immemorial.

Peters has no qualms about Jewish terrorism. "The Jews would be abnormal if they did not rise up," she explained. "After generations of being hit over the head — literally — what would you have them do?" In fact, Peters marvels at what she calls, adapting a phrase used by the British, the Jews' incredible restraint.

She finds it disheartening that the Israelis have been so affected by PLO propaganda. "The inclination in the media has been very troubling," she said, "because it has an eye toward finding Israel guilty of something. It's an easy thing to find Israel guilty. Jews have been told they were guilty for so long that even when the shoe doesn't fit, it fits."

She believes, however, that the tide of public opinion is turning in favor of Israel. "There is a more receptive climate for the truth now than there was a couple of years ago," Peters noted. She bases her opinion on the reception accorded her book, which has gone into its eighth printing. "The Arabs can't continue to invoke history and moral rights as claims, then deny history when it rebuts those claims. They simply cannot have it both ways."

She hopes that her book will completely reverse the trend of thinking begun by the PLO, that "the cynical reworking of the truth" will be undone. She considers this task important for two reasons. "Not only does such reworking undermine the security of Israel," Peters explained, "but it also undermines the very fabric of the democracy we live in."

of a society but frequently acted like mirrors, reflecting what had already been culturally decided. We see how the decisions changed in the Diaspora, we see how the rabbis could sometimes alter their views when convinced of the basic injustice of a situation.

In chapters that cover all women's issues from divorce to rape to promiscuity, she traces the opinions of the scholars back to the first known records and through the various commentaries on these decisions. We watch as the fabled great rabbis, one after another, solidify a system of law that excludes women from its chambers and

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stages in Sutzkever's writing on Holocaust themes in which the poet bears witness to many searing events. For Sutzkever, as for many of his colleagues, literary expression became a means for coping with the trauma of Jewish suffering.

By viewing the totality of a century of Yiddish and Hebrew writing against the background of classic literary texts, Roskies has opened up new vistas for grasping the forces at work in modern Jewish literature.

The Hebrew term *hurban* (destruction) has come to be applied to the literature of the Holocaust. Mintz has employed this term as the title of his book which focuses attention on the reaction to the Holocaust in Hebrew literature. In seeking paradigms of meaning in Hebrew writing he, too, is led to analyze the traditional responses of classical Hebrew literature.

He contrasts, for example, the horror of destruction that is expressed in the Book of Lamentations with the midrashic interpretation of that book and of the events that precipitated the destruction of the Temple. The rabbis made use of additional biblical texts, parables and hermeneutical methods to account for the destruction and to strengthen the hopes for ultimate redemption.

to the despised contemporary Jewish mother and her ridiculous daughter, the Jewish princess.

Oddly, while frequently wincing in pain while reading this book, one still is left with enormous respect for the tradition and hope for its capacity to correct itself so that it can be more faithful to its basic principles.

If the men and women of the following generations do not become as equal in the eyes of the law as they are in the eyes of God, "male and female, made He them," it will be our fault, not the fault of the rabbis who lived in history, groping their way cautiously toward a better world.

Moving to the medieval period, Mintz discusses various liturgical poems and chronicles which offer a rationale for martyrdom and *kiddush haShem*. He contrasts their approach with that of the modern authors Mendele Mocher Seforim, Shaul Tchernichowsky and Bialik who were no longer ready to view martyrdom as an explanation for suffering. His detailed readings of the poems *Baruch of Mayence* by Tchernichowsky and *In the City of Slaughter* by Bialik underscore the new emphases of these leading poets of the Hebrew rebirth.

Regarding Israeli literature, Mintz points out that the Palmach generation of authors paid virtually no attention to the Holocaust during the fifties. It was only after the Eichmann trial that writers like Gouri, Bartov and Amichai devoted major novels to this theme.

Outstanding among the authors who did not fail to make the Holocaust their central concern were the poet Uri Zvi Greenberg and the prose writer Aharon Appelfeld. Individual chapters are devoted to an analysis of the motifs in Greenberg's *Streets of the River* and to the literary language and technique of Appelfeld's short stories.

Mintz's volume ably supplements that of Roskies. Together they point up the role of our literature in making creative Jewish survival possible in the face of catastrophe.