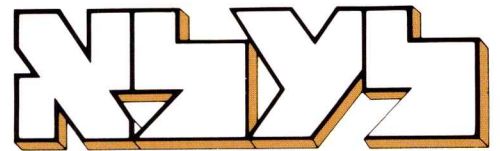


L'EYLAH



A JOURNAL OF JUDAISM TODAY



Anti-Semitism in the 1980s
Religion in Today's World

Religious Holocaust Literature
Jonathan Sacks on Fundamentalism

Stein, saying that the singular Jewishness of the Holocaust is thus threatened.

If Edith Stein is a saint, then the Holocaust becomes a general disaster belonging to Catholics as well as Jews. The Nazis never intended to rid the world of every last Catholic. They did not believe that Catholic women and children were a cancer in the public body. The Catholic church in whose sanctuary Nazi war criminals slept should not yet make a Catholic saint out of a Jewish intellectual whatever her religious convictions.

But as well as anger, there is also hurt and sorrow expressed here. Sorrow about the way in which American Jews and Blacks have got so wrapped up arguing about whose suffering — slavery or death camp — was worse, that have turned to fight each other, rather than the common enemy who could yet still oppress them both. Sorrow, too, about the way in which young modern American Jews are turning their backs on 'old values' declaring that Wall Street and military might are the only reliable ways to ensure Jewish security. The Holocaust is too painful a part of the past, so all of the past is done away with.

As the book progresses, so the anger cools. Its place in the growing library of Holocaust literature, — as Roiphe points out, the Jewish publisher's current maxim is 'There's no business like Shoah business' — is etched.

Although essential, it is not enough to remember the Holocaust and record its dead and its deeds, but we need, Arab, Jew, Israeli, American, all of us, to look at the Holocaust and see if we cannot elaborate its message, beyond never again, what else is there encoded in the facts of the Final Solution to guide us?

That message, paradoxically enough, turns out to be one of hope. The well-documented stages of mourning — denial, anger, and eventual acceptance and rehabilitation — are being gone through by the Jewish people. For an individual, suffering an individual loss, the process can be completed in one, two or more years. For an entire people, losing a third of itself, the process is much longer. Roiphe's book is very much of the second angry stage. But its conclusion — the healing of the title — sees the possibility at least of eventual resolution.

A forest fire can reduce thousands of acres of lush green to charred black in a few hours. But after a few years the green shoots are shoulder high, she says. The re-emergence of a young committed generation bears out the thought that the same is true of the Jewish people. Our challenge is to move on and ensure the continuance of that trend.

Not everyone will agree with everything in this book. But it is one to read nevertheless. It will challenge, annoy and offend. But it is the single most gripping piece of Holocaust literature I have ever seen.

Ian Goodhardt

Language and Literature

THE LITERATURE OF DESTRUCTION, (editor) David Roskies, Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1988.

The aim of this anthology is to record the articulated Jewish response to recurrent historical catastrophe. It

includes translated extracts — some of which are indeed substantial — from the Bible, Midrash, medieval historiography and chronicle, the modern Hebrew short story and poetry, and contemporary reportage and diary. In short, there are few literary genres not represented here. Also, few parts of the European Jewish world, although Eastern Europe and the recent past predominate.

The theme of 'destruction' might well suggest tragedy and inconsolability — and both are present in abundance. It is an unavoidable understatement to write that suffering has marked much Jewish history. But the mood induced in the reader is not one of despair. There is protest, pathos, bitterness, unutterable grief and lament.

But the final call is not to despair. That is not to say that the authors of these chronicles, short stories, etc. all had confidence in Divine Providence and ultimate survival. Far from it — but they also did not reject the world despite all the cruelty that it had wrought. The call for revenge on the perpetrators is also muted. What is present is as noteworthy as what is absent. What I have in mind are the various attempts made to understand catastrophe in historical and naturalist terms.

There are two very varied examples here: Shlomo ibn Verga's *Sceptre of Judah*, written in the aftermath of the expulsion from Spain, examines dispassionately the expulsion both from the point of view of the persecutors and in the light of the faults of the Jewish victims. The second example, even more astounding and moving, is Ringelblum's assembly of the Warsaw Ghetto archives. And the archival material enshrined in these archives should be written, Ringelblum emphasis, "as if the war were already over".

If I do have a criticism it relates to the selection and composition of the material. A jarring note is introduced when a proclamation of the Bund is quoted, saying that "ignorant, debased and enraged masses took part in the Kishinev pogrom. The intelligent class-conscious Christian worker is our comrade; he fights together with us under a single flag, under the flag of international socialism." It is immaterial whether this is true or not — the fact is that revolutionary rhetoric, though unquestionably part of the Jewish literature of destruction, sits uneasily with poetry and all the other forms of *belles-lettres*.

This is part of a larger question — the problematic juxtaposition of fact and fiction in which fact shows itself immeasurably superior in power of representation. For example, in the First World War S. Ansky wrote a diary-memoir based on personal observation of the devastation brought by war to Galician Jewry. This compares favourably indeed with the same sort of depiction in literary form, especially when the additional problem of the translation of poetry is borne in mind.

Another questionable point is the almost complete absence of rabbinical responsa, apart from Maimonides' *Epistle on Martyrdom*. This anthology is primarily literary so that the philosophical and practical problems arising from suffering and loss are largely disregarded.

This book could never be read for enjoyment — but it inspires a reverence for the multitudinous contributors who never lost their trust in the power of the word to record the history they endured.

Lionel Kochan

TELLING AND RETELLING; QUOTATION IN BIBLICAL NARRATIVE, George W. Savran, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 1988.