

This is a shortened translation of the original. Born in Vilna, Roskies has retained the intellectual honesty & desire for truth that are characteristic of Lithuanian Jews and which gave him the decisiveness to see things as they are. Prof. Roskies has been teaching Jewish lit. (both Hebrew & Yiddish) for many yrs. & from it he draws the material for an analysis of Jewish history. His approach combines deep professional erudition with a personal relation to the facts & events of our history. This has also been fully reflected in one of his best books, Against the Apocalypse.

The title of the book & esp. its subtitle express the author's design exactly. Roskies refuses to interpret the catastrophe of European Jewry during WW II as an event of apocalyptic character. Jewish history from long ago has been accompanied with persecution & oppression that stimulated the emergence & development of the so-called apocalyptic literature. The authors of the apocalypses aspire to know the mysteries of the world, the secrets of creation & of the Creator, & to understand what will be the end of the world: will it bring only new trials or also the long-awaited redemption? According to Jewish religious tradition, the end of the world will be preceded by ~~a~~ global cataclysm, the war of Gog & Magog, therefore every time at the hour of terrible trials & tribulations Jews awaited the approach of the total end. But Roskies is with those who, though admit that the scale of the last catastrophe is incomparable to the numerous other catastrophes that befell the Jewish people, are nevertheless convinced that this is not the End & that Jewish history continues & will continue as always happened before, after the destruction of the First & Second Temples, after the bloody Crusades, the expulsions & the exterminations. That is precisely why he rebels against the term accepted in the West - Holocaust, a word that in Greek means "wofully burnt" implying total & final destruction. Truer, the author believes, is the term accepted in Yiddish - The Third Destruction - because it reflects the connection to the two previous great catastrophes.

Delving deeply into the Biblical texts, into the Liturgy, & into the secular poetry, taking examples from the works of Jewish writers-rebels who did not accept religious traditions, the author shows how the comprehension of the catastrophe changed in the national & individual consciousness; he analyzes this information & simultaneously explains to the reader what precisely allowed our nation not only to survive but also to rise to new spiritual heights.

Here the author himself explains his position relative to the Catastrophe: "Today I think that to approach the very edge of the abyss & to recoil from it for the sake of the search for the meaning, the language,

p. 261?

p. 9

& the song is a much $\frac{1}{2}$ more fruitful act than the blind confession of apocalyptic despair, when the alternative — to concentrate completely on the event as such — only robs the dead of the fullness of the lives they lived, so that the concrete person becomes Everyman & the Catastrophe the abstract Everything... I have set myself the goal of battling this apocalyptic tendency, to show the vitality of the Jewish tradition of response to catastrophe-traditions that have never been so strong as in the last century."

The author's interest is concentrated primarily on modernity, however quite a few pages of the book are devoted to the ancient past. Roskies investigates the relation of the religious traditions to the destruction of the Second Temple & to other tragic events for Jews, beginning with the Roman period & to the Middle Ages. His main thesis consists of the following: the destruction of the Second Temple created a "paradigm of destruction & desecration," a paradigm of national disaster, which to one degree or another determined the reaction of Jews to all following catastrophes. Disasters took their place in the liturgy of the yearly cycle & remembrance became an integral part of the collective prayers.

And still next to the belief in the unbreakable union of the ~~people~~ nation with God, there remained room for complaint & protest at the infinite tolerance of the High On (1/18 of 5L): "You have heard the blasphemies & the humiliations of the wicked ones, ~~but~~ You have kept silent!" From this protest, in the Middle Ages, a new genre developed: the genre of parody, which in the modern period was developed by such writers as Mendele Mokher-Sforim, Peretz Markish, & others. These secular writers, who received a traditional Jewish education, created in ~~the~~ period when Jewish society was extremely polarized; ^{when} tempers were running highest in the polemics between the secular apologists, the religious rationalists, ~~mythics~~ ^{the} mystics, & the Zionists. Jews, and this, of course, was reflected in the artistic creations, put everything in doubt in search of ideals & values to correspond to the spirit of the times.

Even then ~~the~~ catastrophe remained one of the central themes requiring explanation. The wave ^(of) persecutions, begun with the pogroms of 1881 in Russia, lead to the appearance of a specifically Jewish poetic genre: "the pogrom poem" in which a direct rejection of the traditional submission to ~~the~~ Fate's blows was sounded and an assertion was made of the priority of the subjective experience over the fact.

Roskies devoted a separate chapter to the process of the destruction of ~~shkH~~ life, to which WWI & the Russian Revolution dealt ~~an~~ ^(an irreparable) ~~blow~~ blow. Among the authors of the time there was no

single attitude to the ~~shetl~~ shtetl: some romanticized it, others cursed it. ^{The} Material for Roskies discussions is, in particular, Sh. Y. Agnon's "Guest for a Night" (1939) whose hero returns to his native town, destroyed by war. On the one hand, there is nostalgia; the town of Shikesh is seen by the hero through the prism of his childhood, ~~but~~ ^{which} is forever gone. On the other hand there is horror ~~of~~ the present, the ruins, which like a mirror reflect the crisis of the hero's own life. Turning to the works of other authors, both known & unknown to our readers, Roskies investigates their influences ~~of~~ ^{on} the path of the Jewish culture's formation.

An entirely special place is set aside in the book for the "chroniclers of the ghetto" - Emmanuel Ringelblum & Ytzhak Katzenelson. When before being exterminated in the death camps, East European Jews were hoarded into the Ghetto, by fate's cruel irony it was there that mutual animosity subsided and for a short time what can almost be called "holy ^{friendship} fraternity" emerged. On the threshold of genocide literature flourished, a new & anti-traditional art was born. Ringelblum was the initiator of the creation of the Warsaw Ghetto archive, the great part of which was, fortunately, preserved & thank to which we, the descendants, can learn the true history of the perished generation. The poet & dramatist Ytzhak Katzenelson taught at an illegal gymnasium in the ghetto, and was one of the leaders of the underground publishing house which published original works by ghetto authors as well as translations from Hebrew to Yiddish of the best Jewish writers. The "ghetto chroniclers" aspired to record everything that occurred before their eyes & tried to understand the sources of ~~heroism~~ the nation's heroism ~~in~~ in extreme conditions. About all this we still know pitifully little & Roskies fills the gap with his richly document narrative.

In contrast to E. Ringelblum & Y. Katzenelson, the poet Avraham Sutzkever survived but his family perished in the Vilno ghetto. About Sutzkever, Roskies writes that "the poet has made the memory of the dead the basis of his creation & recorded three stages ⁱⁿ of his relation to tragedy: from romantic sentimentality to pained confession, to ~~public~~ from private grief to public sermon, from epic statements back to private, metaphysical communion with the dead."

The last chapter of the book is entitled "Jews on the Cross." In it the appearance in Jewish literature of the image of Jesus Christ as a symbol of Jewish catastrophe is described. A central place is given here to the poet Uri Zvi Greenberg who wrote, in 1922, the poem "Uri Zvi before the Cross." "Greenberg ~~expressed~~ ^{proclaimed} openly," writes Roskies,

p. 229

"What a religious Jew perhaps thought but would never dare express & what a secular Jew would never dare even think: Europe was a 'kingdom of the cross,' where hatred of Jews grew directly from the church & the inescapable ringing of its bells. A Jew could finally free himself from them only at home, in the Land of Israel."

The author shows how their attitude to ^{the} Catastrophe was differently expressed in the works of Sutzkever & Greenberg on the one hand & Wiesel & Bashevis-Singer on the other. The former ~~first~~ excluded [after the Catastrophe] from their work any ~~of~~ references to Jesus Christ, placated their former ~~with~~ rage at the Jewish nation for its passivity, setting as their goal the creation of an image of collective holiness. Wiesel & Bashevis-Singer aspired to be understood also by the non-Jewish reader and, therefore, when preparing their books for translation into French & English, deleted that which expressed a national belief in the overcoming of the Catastrophe & "highlighted the terrible isolation of the individual in the post-war world."

David Roskies' book is an exceptional book. It is interesting first of all in its breadth of literary material, the majority of which is still inaccessible to the Russian reader. On its pages the satiated spiritual life of East European Jewry comes to life, a whole culture, which the Nazis mercilessly wiped off the face of the earth. And in his deep, sharp, & emotional narration, Roskies as though returns the voice to those who have left forever.

Despite the fact that the great part of the book is devoted to the descriptions of destruction, desecration, ~~death~~ and death, this ~~book~~ is a book about the continuity of existence & on the ability of the Jewish people for rebirth.

Roskies thinks not only about the past but also about the future, and about what the Jews could do today. His "answers" are the answers of poets, writers, & artists whose creative work he analyzes. To overcome the apocalypse one needs not the narrow platforms of one ideology or another but the creative forces of the whole people.