

Soviet prisoners of war and large sections of local non-Jewish populations) and providing the possibility of genocide as a solution to the apparently mundane problems of military and civilian occupation in war-time, such as food and housing shortages. Furthermore, in emphasising the importance of the local in the emergence of genocide, this volume (collectively) demonstrates the degree to which, if the Holocaust is explained as the whim of a few ideologically driven lunatics in Berlin, one must fail to grasp the extent that the organised community as a whole was, in any one occupation area, engaged in a policy of mass murder. This killing effort embraced agencies as diverse as the Wehrmacht and local food supply planners, and was not simply the result of the criminal excesses of the SS.

All this is certainly a long way from the mindless simplicities of the intentionalist thesis that proposed the causal equation: antisemitism equals genocide. Yet this is a collection, as a whole, which is not without problems. By placing emphasis on the importance of the locality to such a degree, many of the essays could leave readers unaware of the context in which all of these localised murder projects took place. National Socialist extermination policies were just that, National Socialist. At their grandest, these policies were organised on a supra-national, continental scale. Human beings were shipped hundreds of miles in order to be murdered in purpose-built camps, or worked to the verge of death and then killed. Equally each of these individual murder projects emerged at a similar time (with the possible exception of the example of Serbia). This was not simply a coincidence, something with which every one of the contributors to this volume would agree; and yet coincidence is often the implication of this book as a totality.

However, despite this lack of context, there is little doubt that the essays in this volume, individually and as a whole, represent for the English reader a valuable addition to scholarship on the emergence of the genocidal policies that collectively, with the aid of context, we now call the Holocaust.

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TOM LAWSON

DAVID D. ROSKIES, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture*. Syracuse University Press, Syracuse NY, 1999. viii, 374 pp. \$19.95.

If the title of this book sounds familiar this may be because it was originally published in 1984 and is generally regarded as a classic. Much to my shame I had not read it until this new edition. However, not only can I now confirm that it is a classic but that everybody either teaching or studying Jewish history and culture *ought* to have a copy. Why? Well, its first obvious recommendation is that it is a darned good read. In a world overburdened with academic works of the most dire turgidity, *Against the Apocalypse* reads like a dream. It is simply the most beautifully crafted prose. Perhaps this is just as well. It is, after all, primarily a commentary on some of the very greatest nineteenth and twentieth-century Yiddish and Hebrew writers—Abramowitz, Asch, Sholem Aleichem, Bialik, Ansky and Oyzer Warshawski included. But then, there have been many very fine literary studies of the modern Jewish secular renaissance. By the same token, the Jewish survivor response to the catastrophe of the Holocaust is now a major subject of Jewish and broader investigation. Roskies's striking originality is not just in marrying a narrative of Jewish catastrophe to a specifically secular cultural discourse but in placing both squarely within a *Judaic* framework. Not a simple task, given that any argument for a continuity of tradition is confronted at almost every modern turn by realities which militate against its very possibility. And not least when it is the Ashkenazi heartlands of Russia and Poland—the epicentre, in other words, of

the final Jewish catastrophe—which is the geographical as well as historical focus of this work.

Indeed, in many ways what makes the modernists *modern* is the conscious attempt to break loose from the all-encompassing religious bonds which answer the torments of exile, persecution and martyrdom with repeated invocations of *Kiddush Hashem*. On the contrary, in the face of the new wave of pogroms which swept the Pale of Settlement from the 1880s onwards, these writers, so closely attuned to the new external realities as well as the popular Jewish voice, sought to subvert a talmudic or midrashic-informed meaning altogether. And they did so not only by focusing on the violence being perpetrated from without but also on the social disintegration which was eroding the sinews of traditional *bet-midrash*-centred communities from within. Roskies, for instance, in the course of a particularly rich and deeply textured chapter entitled 'The Rape of the Shtetl', makes much of Warshawski's First World War novel *Smugglers*. In this, rape, prostitution and general sexual debauchery are not the prerogative of the shtetl's enemies but rather arise out of an openly venal desire on the part of its inhabitants to take advantage of wartime shortages in Warsaw. Nobody in the shtetl, dayan or student, middle-aged married woman or rabbi's daughter, is ultimately immune from its corrupting influence, and the neighbouring goyim, in a significant inversion of normal roles, are also more than willing to play the Jewish smugglers' tune. Inevitably, it all leads to personal tragedy and the marked inference that the end result will be more than simply the shtetl's moral collapse.

But if the theme here is the relentless and irreversible disintegration of the value-system as well as physical fabric of the old society, the pervading undercurrent in *Against the Apocalypse* suggests a paradox. Writers like Warshawski and Weissenberg were not hell-bent on a flight from their Jewish selves, even though, by comparison with others like Bialik, they lacked the consolation of Zionism. Instead, their writings are a reflection of a growing political, psychological and philosophical awareness that, in the face of cataclysm, entirely new approaches would be needed to save Jewry. It might involve, as in the writings of Lamed Shapiro, replacing the *talush*, the intellectual but scrawny book-worm, with the *ba'al-guf*, the loutish village tough, as the true hope for the future, or even turning the *talush* into the *ba'al-guf*. More extreme still, it might be expressed, as in Babel's *Red Cavalry*, as the need to overcome the Jew in oneself altogether in order to become a new hard 'iron' man who could cope with and even perpetrate violence. But the message, whether with a Zionist or universalist spin, has ultimately a shared commonality. In order to survive, the eastern Jew would have to transform him or herself into some other different type of Jew.

Roskies's explorations on this theme are important for another reason. By locating the origins of the modern Jewish response to catastrophe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the culminating counterpoint to which was the great wave of military massacres committed during and in the aftermath of the First World War, he squarely concretises the genre in pre-Holocaust terms. This may sound peculiar given that some of the earlier themes, such as the man of action struggling towards redemption by way of nihilism, had become a complete irrelevance in the face of total catastrophe. Yet even here Roskies manages to find a sort of inverted connecting thread. While early century exponents, he argues, were busily trying to subvert the traditional relationship between covenant, Torah and *Kiddush Hashem*, those writing in the very midst of the 'final solution' were left groping for meaning by way of subverting the subversive. Simkhe-Bunem Shayeitsh's heart-rending poem *Lekh-lekhe*, for instance, written in the immediate aftermath of a mass deportation of children from the Lodz ghetto, is presented as an 'unmistakeably modern response to catastrophe in which the oldest and newest strata of Jewish culture come together in a ragged formation of humanism and transcendental faith, artistic self-awareness and the intimacy

of prayer" (p. 217). There cannot be any solace in the final lines of the poem, where the father's injunction to his little daughter reads: 'So child, let us go with devotion renewed / And our old proclamation of *chad*' (ibid.), but it is, nevertheless, clearly a return to the collectively Judaic.

Perhaps this explains why Roskies has so little time for the writings of Isaac Bashevis Singer or, for that matter, Elie Wiesel. The isolated survivor struggling against meaninglessness in the post-war world is contrasted entirely negatively here with the poems of Shāyevitsh and Yitzhak Katznelson, both of whom died in the Holocaust, and above all the great surviving Vilna poet and writer Abraham Sutzkever, each of whom in their own very personal ways, Roskies argues, returned to the substance as well as form of the ancient tradition. This rejection of the better-known icons makes Roskies's book interestingly iconoclastic in itself. The admittedly non-Ashkenazi Primo Levi is not even mentioned here. If the penultimate chapter of *Against the Apocalypse* is a veritable paean to Sutzkever, whom Roskies clearly adores, it is hard to ignore its implicit, if not explicit contention that, in the face of collective Jewish martyrdom, the need for a return to ancestral images as well as a specifically Jewish solidarity, as exemplified by Sutzkever, becomes all the more compelling and powerful.

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MARK LEVENE

DAVID PATTERSON, *Along the Edge of Annihilation: The Collapse and Recovery of Life in the Holocaust Diary*. University of Washington Press, Seattle/London, 1999, xi, 311 pp. \$19.95 (pb).

'If my life ends, what will become of my diary?' The final line of Chaim Kaplan's *Warsaw Diary* opens David Patterson's inquiry into what made so many Jews in ghettos, in hiding, even in the death camps of occupied Europe risk their lives in an attempt to record for posterity, to reflect for themselves on their experiences in diary form. Kaplan perished in the death camp of Treblinka in December 1942 or January 1943, but his and thousands of pages from other diaries survived buried in caches or given to gentile hands for safe-keeping. Patterson's book affirms the Holocaust diary as a means of spiritual resistance to Nazi genocide. He compiles his material from more than fifty diaries of Jewish Holocaust victims of all ages and from different occupied countries. His work is singular in the number of diaries and original texts it interrogates.

The back cover of the paperback edition also proclaims, in the words of Milton Teichman, the uniqueness of Patterson's book

in the questions it raises and in the approach it takes from within Jewish traditions and contexts. [...] Throughout, he draws upon his impressive knowledge of Jewish texts, ancient and modern—Torah, Talmud, Midrash, Zohar, the medieval commentators, the Hasidic masters, and modern Jewish philosophers and thinkers.

Indeed, on his opening page, Patterson presents his own activity of research as a profoundly religious act:

According to the Talmud, it is a religious duty to 'carry out the wishes of the deceased' (*Gittin* 14b); just so, it is a religious duty to respond to Kaplan's question and to the cries of those who shared his fate. Like it or not, the voices of these victims and the truth that they sought persist. That is why this book delves into

their diaries. Written from a Jewish perspective, it is a Jewish response to Jewish outcry.

Outside of an orthodox Jewish faith, I feel ill-qualified to offer an opinion on such a project. What I can speak of is the eloquent and emotive qualities of Patterson's writing. To give you just a taste, the opening of his chapter on 'The Fragmentation of Home and Family':

We are approaching our new graves, as we call our new home,' writes the diarist from the Auschwitz *Sonderkommando*, Salmen Gradowski (99). As this brief remark suggests, the home that in the world constitutes the center of life and meaning becomes an abyss of death and absurdity in the antiworld. [...] This grave is the black hole of emptiness that remains wherever the assault on God, Israel and Torah takes place. For the Torah, intertwined with God and Israel, begins with the letter *beit*, which is also the Hebrew word for 'house' or 'home': all that is in the Torah, like all that comprises the sanctity of our lives, issues from the womb of this letter that is also a word. In the words of Martin Buber, 'Good' is the movement in the direction of home (*Between* 78) [...] (159).

And yet, I feel uneasy with the way in which Patterson renders the Holocaust an exclusively Jewish anguish and his attempt to endow it with meaning becomes a way of reading a rich variety of Jewish texts and experiences through a particular religion. His work reads well as a series of scholarly meditations, but I wonder if it is more than my own theological position that makes Patterson's situation of his volume as academic criticism within the field of Holocaust studies problematic to me. His opening remarks criticise previous treatments of Holocaust diaries, James Young's *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust* in particular, for attempting to dehistoricise their material. Yet could not Patterson himself be faulted on precisely such an agenda? Interlacing short extracts from his sources with personal reflection and Jewish traditions of interpretation, he makes it difficult for readers to build up an accurate picture of each individual diary, its particular aims and context. Diaries which do not fit his model, such as Etty Hillesum's *An Interrupted Life* with its lack of existential questioning, are dismissed at the outset as not authentic Holocaust diaries. Patterson's own sense of his intended audience in his preface both constricts and enlarges the sphere of influence he hopes for in its inference: 'Who, then, is ultimately the audience of this outcry? All who have ears to hear—above and below' (p. xi).

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NAOMI HETHERINGTON

CAROLE BELL FORD, *The Girls: Jewish Women of Brownsville, Brooklyn, 1940–1995*. SUNY Press, Albany NY, 2000. xiii, 217 pp. \$16.95.

As Carole Bell Ford reminds us in her affectionate analysis of the community in which she was born and grew up, until recently the specific life-experiences of Jewish women were neglected in Jewish communal and local histories. She presents compelling evidence why this should arouse concern as a grave omission from the historical record, not just as a matter of political correctness. Brownsville from the 1920s to the 1950s was a working-class Jewish neighbourhood that famously nurtured talent, throwing forth three generations of enterprising, high-achieving Jewish men. Local chroniclers, including Gerald Sorin, one of the best modern American Jewish historians, have paid tribute to this record. But Carole Bell Ford observes that, judged by these criteria, Jewish women 'failed'. They were only allowed to succeed, and indeed

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