

Buber's interpretation of Kierkegaard. Interesting portraits of Buber's personality and his influence emerge from several pieces, especially those by Gordon and Menahem Dorman—one by critically appraising Buber's aesthetic, authoritarian, self-centered character, the other by assessing the changing influence of Buber's famous pamphlet "Herut" on the Jewish youth movement in Germany and then in Israel. And there is Pinchas Peli's richly documented study of faith and religiosity in Buber's "speeches on Judaism," begun in Prague in 1909 and continued throughout Buber's life. Peli nicely places the speeches in Buber's thought and characterizes the "real historical role" they played. "Jewish Religiosity"—both the speech and the concept—comes to life as part of a movement toward Jewish revival that is not narrowly national or moral but, rather, religious and hence comprehensive in a special way.

The papers, then, are frequently good and sometimes more than that. But the volume offers more than the papers, and this supplement makes it especially rewarding. One feels, as one reads the papers, a sense of respect properly mitigated by critical reflection, but at the same time one feels, too, a muted turbulence. Casual remarks or things barely said simmer below the surface of scholarly analysis and debate. Then, at one point in the discussion, the restraints are cast aside and a flood of issues—largely suppressed—overwhelm the participants. These issues, not surprisingly, concern Israel, Buber's Zionism, his binationalism, the role of Buber's thought for Christian theology, and Christian attitudes toward Israel. What precipitates the exchange is Helmut Gollwitzer's paper on Buber's significance for Protestant theology, in which the author endorses Buber's criticism of the political principle. He calls for a Christian "sharing in thought" with Israelis about how the state must avoid becoming a "master race" and how it must engage in a "persistent effort toward peaceful . . . coexistence with the Arabs inside Israel and with the Arabic neighbors" (p. 401). "We goyim," Gollwitzer says, "long to see Buber's Zionism become a real politics" (p. 402). With these words and in the pages of sparkling discussion that follow, one can sense the tensions that run through any serious attempt to assess or appropriate Buber in our day. For in the world of Auschwitz and an embattled Jerusalem, Rosenzweig's criticism—that Buber's thought swallows up both God and the world in timeless sociability—is a matter of historic urgency and no mere historical curiosity.

MICHAEL MORGAN, *Indiana University at Bloomington*.

MINTZ, ALAN. *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984. xiv + 283 pp. \$26.00.

ROSKIES, DAVID G. *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984. xii + 374 pp. \$20.00.

In the long run of Jewish history, certain dates and place names have acquired mnemonic significance of an unusually high order. To the literate Jew, as Alan Mintz explains, "586, 70, 135, 1096, 1492, 1648, 1881, 1903, together with . . . Jerusalem, Betar, Mainz, Spain, Nemirov, Kishinev" (p. 102), are instantly recognizable as the temporal and geographical coordinates of national upheaval, expulsion, persecution, and destruction. (The list naturally extends to include "1933-1945," "Auschwitz," "the Warsaw Ghetto," etc.) The

collective name that Mintz assigns to this series of negative events in Jewish history is "catastrophe," by which he means not only physical ruin but also the shattering of "the existing paradigms of meaning, especially as regards the bonds between God and the people of Israel" (p. x). Not just material devastation, then, but the threat of cognitive disorientation characterizes those events that command Mintz's attention in *Hurban*, a book that valuably studies responses to catastrophe in Hebrew literature from the biblical period to the Nazi era.

Catastrophe, so understood, is doubly horrific, for while it wreaks havoc within the community of sufferers, it can also "convulse or vitiate [their] shared assumptions" of communal destiny. Prior to the modern period, "this means specifically the terms of the covenant between God and Israel" (p. 2). How were these terms understood following the destruction of the Jerusalem Temples in the years 586 and 70? What was the nature of the Jewish response to the Crusader massacres in the Rhineland in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, to the Chmielnicki uprisings of the mid-seventeenth century, and to the numerous pogroms that terrorized and reduced the Jewish communities of eastern Europe a century ago? Finally, and most problematically, what sense, if any, might be made of the Nazi Holocaust from within the tradition of Hebrew literature?

In pursuit of answers to these questions, Mintz offers a series of carefully drawn and often acutely perceptive readings of major Hebrew texts written in the wake of national catastrophe. Focusing principally on the Book of Lamentations, early rabbinic midrashim on Lamentations, medieval liturgical poetry and historical chronicle, and modern poetry and fiction, he is able to develop a literary history of destruction that time and again shows both anguish and resilience, the damage of historical trauma registered but contained within newly drawn paradigms of meaning that originate in classical Hebrew literature.

Until the modern period and the weakening of the hold of this literature on the Jewish religious imagination, Jewish self-understanding could be refracted through a few key texts. A subtle expositor of these texts, Mintz convincingly demonstrates how, through their changing literary forms and figures, they evolved new and compelling variations on the covenantal theme. Thus, modes of lamentation, consolation, and apocalyptic vision established by the biblical writers (Lamentations, Second Isaiah, and Daniel) were taken up and adapted by the rabbis through a series of hermeneutical moves that, while not capable of restoring the original power of biblical prophecy, nevertheless sustained its promise of eventual deliverance. Succeeding the early rabbis, medieval writers, witnesses to the massacres by Crusaders and cossacks, evolved traditions of martyrdom and mourning based on original interpretations of biblical and rabbinic passages on sacrifice.

In each of these cases, earlier religious conceptualizations were shaken but never altogether dislodged from their basis in covenantal faith. Rather, following each new catastrophe, the community of sufferers found a way to renegotiate the terms of its succession within the history of the people of Israel and in relationship to the God of Israel.

In the modern period—and fully half of *Hurban* is given over to studies of modern and contemporary Hebrew literature—these hermeneutical moves are harder to make. It is not that writers like Sh. J. Abramowitsch, S. Tchernichowsky, and Ch. N. Bialik do not know the classical tradition but, rather,

that they refuse to apply it pietistically in their own writings. Instead, they turn against it, subvert it, mount a formidable counterstatement to its norms of understanding and belief. In turn, and this is especially so in the case of Bialik, their central writings themselves help to establish new norms, which have the effect of distancing or displacing the precursor texts. As Mintz explains the development, "What was once classical is now degenerate, the vital now effete. . . . What was appropriate and creative in its own time has become pretext and evasion" (p. 150).

While such a development was inevitable in the modern period, its effect was to put out of reach received traditions of consolation and mourning that were never so much in need as in recent decades. For when he turns to study the response of modern Hebrew writers to the catastrophe of the Nazi years, what Mintz finds, with only few exceptions (most notably U. Z. Greenberg and A. Appelfeld), is silence—not just discontinuity, but disconnection.

David Roskies sets out to break this silence in his *Against the Apocalypse*. Although Roskies devotes an early chapter to sketching in aspects of the classical Hebrew tradition, his focus is overwhelmingly on Yiddish literature during the years 1840–1948. As much a cultural critic as a literary critic, Roskies examines a broad range of writings—among them, songs, ballads, prayers, poems, novels, stories, and plays—and situates them skillfully and often dramatically within their historical settings. In his very last chapter he turns to examples of visual art and studies the representation of Jewish suffering in this manner as well. The result is a book that is admirably comprehensive in its treatment of eastern European Jewish responses to catastrophe in the modern period.

While Roskies's study is rich in detail and forceful in arguing for a counter-tradition to apocalypse in Yiddish letters, it lacks some of the conceptual rigor and critical refinement of Mintz's study. The term "catastrophe," for instance, is used often but without precision and does not always yield consistent meaning. The same is true for the critical term "archetype," which has a history of complexity behind it that one does not find registered in Roskies's pages, where at times it might be interchanged with "allusion," at other times with "paradigm" or "model." There is, on occasion, also a tendency to aestheticize his subject ("the pogrom as poem," "the poetics of violence," "the aesthetics of mass suicide"), which, given its inherent gravity, seems out of place and tends to detract from the seriousness of Roskies's undertaking. Finally, and no doubt a result of this being a passionately engaged book, some readers will find *Against the Apocalypse* overdetermined in its ideological drive and at times tendentious in some of its readings.

Nevertheless, this is a formidable study and will add immeasurably to our sense of what properly constitutes Jewish literary culture in the modern period. Together with Mintz's *Hurban*, it significantly advances our understanding of how a history of calamitous suffering has severely challenged but not overcome the Jewish will to creative survival.

ALVIN H. ROSENFELD, *Indiana University at Bloomington*.