

## Against the Apocalypse

*Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture*

**DAVID G. ROSKIES**

The Holocaust, in its enormity, has been viewed as an apocalyptic event, standing outside history, without analogy or precedent. ~~This view is fundamentally wrong, David Roskies contends. His book places the Holocaust, and the literary responses of victims and survivors, in the context of generations of Jewish response to persecutions, pogroms, communal catastrophes.~~

Challenging this view, DR.

48

Roskies is an eloquent interpreter of Jewish literature and culture, deeply engaged with his subject, as his autobiographical introduction makes clear. He is concerned with historical continuities, with the vitality of collective memory, with patterns of response to the recurrent traumas of history. Although the setting of his book is eastern Europe (in the century preceding World War II and the decades following), he takes a long look backward at traditional ways of coping with catastrophe that evolved over two millennia—the commemoration in Jewish liturgy of major calamities, the fashioning of archetypes of destruction and martyrdom.

from the 1840s to the 1970s

140

In the nineteenth century, Jewish writers and intellectuals—swept by the tides of secularism, positivism, realism—rejected the traditional modes of response even as the waves of violence and destruction in eastern Europe increased. Roskies analyzes the methods and strategies employed by writers of successive generations, their use of satire, irony, parody, rage, blasphemy. In the process he conveys the flavor and quality of the works in Yiddish and Hebrew of such major writers as Abramovitsh, Sholem Aleichem, Ansky, Bialik, Halpern, and Markish. When he comes to the extraordinary outpouring of creative writing in the Nazi ghettos, he is able to show, by a sequential reading of surviving diaries, articles, plays, and poems, the exact point at which the old archetypes were radically transformed and the Holocaust itself emerged as an archetype. After the war, with the culture of Jewish eastern Europe destroyed, Roskies sees in the poetry of Sutzkever and Greenberg and the painting of Bak and Bergner testimonials to the triumph of group memory over apocalyptic despair.

David G. Roskies is Associate Professor of Jewish Literature at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

May 6 1/8 x 9 1/4 21 halftones, 1 line illus. 352 pp.  
ISBN 0-674-00915-0 (ROSAGA) \$20.00t



Warsaw Ghetto Monument. (Photo by Nathan Rapoport)