

S. Kerbel ed., *Jewish Writers of the Twentieth Century*, an imprint of the Taylor and Francis Group, New York–London 2003, pp. 695.

S.L. Kremer ed., *Holocaust Literature. An Encyclopedia of Writers and Their Work*, vol. 1–2, Routledge, New York–London 2003, pp. 1499

In 2003 two extremely important encyclopedic publications on Jewish literature were issued – *Jewish Writers of the Twentieth Century* and *Holocaust Literature. An Encyclopedia of Writers and their Work*. They fill a gap in the literature, complementing it with the latest information about research into works of writers of Jewish origin coming from different countries and representing various cultures and languages. The lexicon of Jewish writers encompasses literature that arose at the turn of the XIX and XX centuries till the beginning of the XXI century. Works of 345 writers are discussed in 695 pages. In a short preface the editor emphasizes the aim of this work, which is to show the rich and diverse input of Jewish writers from the whole world into the development of literature. The survey begins with a discussion of the dramatic works of T. Herzl, of works of the fathers of contemporary Yiddish literature – Mendele Moykher Sforim, Sholem Aleykhem, I.L. Peretz and finally of the father of Jewish theater – A. Goldfaden and of the pioneers of Hebrew Literature Kh.N. Bialik, M.Y. Berdyczewski, Y.H. Brenner. The list of names is completed by the names of modern writers such as the American A. Goodman, the Israeli S. Liebrecht, and the Dane H. Mulisch. The editors emphasize with pride that this publication includes the outstanding writers of the world literature, such as M. Proust, T. Tzara, F. Kafka, E. Ionesco or I. Erenburg, as well as Jewish Nobel Prize laureates such as S.Y. Agnon, S. Bellow, Y. Brodsky, E. Canetti, B. Pasternak, N. Sachs, N. Gordimer and I. Kertesz. The works of the writers whose fate was stricken by the Holocaust are also mentioned: N. Nathansen of Denmark, P. Levi and P. Celan – all of them committed suicide. Those who perished in concentration camps were not passed over either: M. Jacob, J. Korczak, G. Kolmar, I. Babel. Much is also devoted to those who survived and gave testimonies about the Holocaust in their later works, as for example E. Wiesel, R. Auslander, KATsetnik 135633 (Yechiel Dinur).

The Jewish literature of the XX century is a wide-ranging phenomenon and therefore it is no wonder that the names of the writers of single articles about the Holocaust are not noted here. The editors admit it openly. However, the article of Sue Vice aims to redress this insufficiency by discussing synthetically the Holocaust literature itself. The subsequent summarizing articles bring closer Yiddish literature of the twentieth century (Joel Berkowitz), the birth of Hebrew literature (Leon Yudkin) and the heyday of Jewish literature in North America and Great Britain, mentioning lesser known authors of the XX century and even of the XXI century. The editors of the lexicon decided to accept a wide definition of the notion „Jewish writer”:

Defining who is a Jew proved to be a challenge. Anyone who was born a Jew qualified for inclusion, even if he or she had subsequently converted or otherwise dissociated himself or herself from Jewish life. Muriel Rukeyser suggests that "to be a Jew in the twentieth century / is to be offered a gift. If you refuse / wishing to be invisible, you choose / death of the spirit, the stone insanity". Conversion was and is after all an aspect of Jewish experience. In the aftermath of Nuremberg, a person with only one Jewish parent qualifies for inclusion. We accepted as Jewish anyone who identified themselves as a Jew, or was perceived as such by others (p. VII).

It is difficult to define the phenomenon termed „Jewish literature“. In practice the widest possible definition was accepted, according to which Jewishness was marked by such obvious factors as language (Hebrew or Yiddish) and writing about „Yiddishkeit“, that is about the way of existence in cultural formation as *shtetl* was. In other cases the Jewishness of literature was conditioned by the experience typical of this nation, as for example by the feeling of seclusion, marginalization, being a „schlemiel“ or even a wise fool who becomes a victim of a more self-confident world. In the works of some writers (especially English, French and Russian) experience of Jewishness was hidden because of various outer conditions and that can be recognized as a specific trait of the Jewish condition in the XX century. After the Holocaust the deciding factor about Jewishness is the remembrance of the Holocaust.

The above mentioned article devoted to literature about the Holocaust discusses interestingly the literary works according to genres and the ways of creation of the literary vision. It is done by the examples of diaries of A. Czerniakow, chronicles of the Lodz Ghetto, diaries of A. Frank and V. Klemper, memoirs of E. Wiesel and P. Levy, and by the works of literary fiction, as prose of J. Kosiński, I. Fink, L. Begley, Ch. Appelfeld. The important representative of this current in the history of the Holocaust literature is poetry of P. Celan and works of generation of survivors' children – the author mentions here the comics of A. Spiegelman *Maus* (1986 and 1991) as well as novels of D. Grossman (Israel) and A. Michales (Canada). There is also information about those who wrote about the Holocaust despite the fact that they had not experienced it themselves, such as Ph. Roth, S. Bellow, C. Ozick and J. Skibell. It must be stressed here that the article lacks any note about Polish writers of Jewish origin in whose works the Holocaust plays a very significant part, mentioning just a few of them like H. Grynberg, H. Krall, W. Szlengiel or S. Wojdowski.

A very good article is about Yiddish literature (Joel Berkowitz), focussing on its birth, development and the end caused by the Second World War. It also demonstrates its connections with other literature and cultures, its variety of genres and its presence in different latitudes. Yiddish literature, as the authors of the article conclude, testifies to mass migration of representatives of the Jewish nation, political coups which resulted in persecution and mass extermination:

... in so doing, it stands as one of the richest and most powerful expressions of the modern Jewish experience (p. 22).

However, this article also keeps silence about over twenty years of the development of Yiddish literature in post-war Poland. One name was not even mentioned. Unfortunately, this period in the history of Yiddish literature is passed over in silence in almost all the historical-literary studies, as if nothing was happening in Poland. After all, it was the period when exactly in Warsaw there was the only Jewish publishing house in the Soviet block as well as a Jewish theater and two periodicals in Yiddish were issued regularly, whereas in

the Soviet Union there was no activity... Omitting the facts is more symptomatic in case of this article where – as it turns out – the author mentions name of a poet from post-war Poland which is detached from the context of his whole life. For example, the author mentions Binem Heler as an Israeli poet, thereby annulling his literary activity and his participation in the creation Jewish literary life in post-war Poland.

While expressing gratitude to editors for preparing such a necessary study, some significant problems should be mentioned. There is a lack of any information about Polish Jewish literature developing before and after the Second World War. What is more, introductory articles in the lexicon do not give any information about the development of Jewish literature in national languages – Czech, German, Russian, etc. whereas it was an extremely important phenomenon which „exploded” at the turn of the XIX and XX centuries, testifying to the modernization of the Jewish nation, which started with Haskalah and dispersed all over Europe.

The lexicon came into being thanks to cooperation of 148 researchers. Among the writers who wrote about Yiddish literature are such researchers as: H. Beer, J. Berkovitz, D. Clifford, H. Denman, G. Estraiikh, K. Hellerstein, L. Prager, J. Sherman and H. Valencia. Only two persons wrote about Polish literature – E. Grözinger (doctor of philosophy, researcher and lecturer at the Department of Judaism in Postdam) and the late K. Więclawska (assistant in Insitut of Jewish Culture and History at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin). Here a question should be directed to the editors, namely why they limited the circle of cooperators to researchers „behind the iron curtain” and did not invite anybody from Eastern European research institutes, even for advisory purposes. This could have resulted in the presentation of other outstanding Polish writers of Jewish origin. This absence arouses a longing, heightened by the lack of proportion between so called Jewish literature in the western world and Jewish literature in the eastern Europe. Polish Jewish literature is represented only by writers such as J. Korczak, B. Leśmian, A. Rudnicki, J. Stryjowski, J. Tuwim and B. Schulz.

Personal entries in this volume consist of four parts: a biographical note, a bibliography of selected works, a list of works deepening the subject (English language studies take precedence) and a synthetical discussion of the works of an author. A biographical note usually does not exceed three columns. Additionally in the lexicon there is an alphabetical and chronological index of the writers and, as previously mentioned, articles which go on to introduce the issues of American-Jewish, British-Jewish, Hebrew literature, writings about the Holocaust and Yiddish literature. At the end there is an index of titles of selected literary works together with the date of publication. By each title there is the author's name in parentheses which refers to the proper personal entry. The last additions are notes about the authors of the particular entries.

More words of praise may be expressed about the other monumental work – *Holocaust Literature. An Encyclopedia of Writers and Their Work*. This encyclopedia constitutes a source publication which presents literature of the Holocaust of various nations in a wide comparative perspective. The works of over 300 writers were discussed, not only of Jewish origin, who represented all the literary genres and different generations – from those who went through the Holocaust themselves to generations of their children and grandchildren touched by the Holocaust. The editor admits with pride that the encyclopedia contains discussed works of Algerian, American, English, Australian, Czech, Danish, French, Greek, Hebrew, Iberian-American, Yiddish, Canadian, German, Polish, Russian, Tunisian, Hungarian and Italian writers. The part consisting of entries is preceded by an excellent

(and extensive) essay by S. Lillian Kremer in which the author revises theoretical and critical publications on the Holocaust. The great erudition of the writer is worth emphasizing. Her expertise goes far beyond the knowledge of selected aspects of the Holocaust literature written in one language. It allows her to bring the reader to a wide context of discussion concerning the phenomenon of writing about the Holocaust. The author of the essay reports the views of those intellectuals who had the greatest impact on the direction of the discussion about the way and essence of the literary record of the Holocaust experience: Th. Adorno, M. Blanchot, S. Friedländer, G. Hartman, D. La Capra, B. Lang, S. Horovitz, L. Langer, A. Rosenfeld, S. DeKoven Ezrahi, M. Hirsch and J. Young. She writes about it against the background of problems such as: literary testimonies of the Holocaust, a construction and a reconstruction of the memory of survivors, memory of the second and the third generation, a theory of trauma, the Holocaust in the light of gender studies. Besides the general introduction to the subject matter a reader will find here the characteristics of the Holocaust literature in German (Germany, Austria), Italian, Slavic (with special consideration of Poland), Danish, French, Yiddish, Hebrew, English (Great Britain, Canada, USA) and Iberian-American. The introductory article is completed by two bibliographies – one includes critical sources of a general character, the second brings information about the most important English language publications which discuss the Holocaust literature of individual nations and languages.

The personal entry consists of a biographical information and a syncretical study of the works which include the problem of the Holocaust. The subject and object bibliography complete the entry which encompasses the most important studies, including those not in English. The encyclopedia contains maps showing areas occupied by Germans and the localization of the selected ghettos in Eastern Europe, and a few extremely important appendices, such as a list of countries from which the writers came with information about the language they wrote in, a list of names of the writers according to the language they wrote in (very useful!), an alphabetical list of the discussed genres and a list of subjects present in the Holocaust literature (both lists include the names of the writers representing the particular genre or describing a particular subject – very useful!), moreover there are lists: of ghettos, labor camps, concentration camps and death camps, historical events and characters which were noted in the Holocaust literature. Both ghettos and different kinds of camps, historical events and characters were enriched by a short characteristics and information about the writers who wrote about them. In the end there is also an index of the authors and an index of the titles.

The editors of this encyclopedia deserve recognition for preparing such an excellent publication which cannot be criticized much as far as essential and editorial matters are concerned. (However, there are some spelling mistakes, for example in foreign names). The cooperation with a larger circle of researchers (also those from the Eastern Europe) was fruitful – it can be just mentioned that this Encyclopedia discusses 30 Polish writers.

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