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Alan Mintz. *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature.* Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996. xiv + 283 pp. $19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8156-0424-2; $84.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-231-05634-2.

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Meaningful Catastrophe

In *Hurban*, Alan Mintz skillfully traces paradigm shifts in Hebrew Literature as it responds to catastrophe. The traditional literary paradigm for responding to catastrophe, according to Mintz, is found in Deuteronomy. There, destruction and suffering are clearly linked to sin. Mintz argues that after the destruction of the first Temple, the book of Lamentations can be seen as wrestling with the received covenantal paradigm: "The awareness of sin in lamentations is therefore secondary to the experience of abandonment and the horror of destruction" (p. 3). While ultimately Lamentations does make the traditional association of suffering with sin, the traditional paradigm was shaken.

According to Mintz, the next key moment in Hebrew Literature's response to catastrophe comes in the eleventh and twelfth century Crusader massacres in the Rhineland Jewish communities. After this devastation, there was a rupture in the traditional pairing of suffering with sin: "The correlation between the massive visitation of destruction and the massive commission of transgression was an admission that the self-perception of the Jews of Mainz, Speyer, and Worms could not authorize" (p. 6). A new paradigm emerges, one that utilizes the notion of "afflictions from love." Suffering is now seen as being visited upon the Jewish people as a sign of divine love; the idea is that "suffering is an opportunity awarded by God to the most worthy for the display of righteousness and for the garnering of the otherworldly rewards" (p. 6). This new "afflic tions from love" paradigm holds right through subsequent devastations in the Jewish community, such as the Black Death crisis in 1348 and the Chmilenicki destruction in 1648.

It is not until the Russian pogroms of 1881-1882 and 1903-1905 that Mintz detects a further shift. In response to this suffering, a small group of Hebrew writers (Mintz highlights the work of Abramowitch, Tchernichowsky, and especially Bialik) utilize the traditional Deuteronomic paradigm in a radically new way; they show how sin must now be defined not as failure to obey God's command, but as weakness–political and physical. In this new paradigm, Jewish suffering comes from Jewish weakness; thus a proper response to Jewish suffering is Jewish strength–and Jews can only be strong in their own country.

Ingeniously, Mintz argues that it is because of this "Zionist paradigm" that for the Yishuv the Holocaust was not technically a catastrophe "in the narrow sense of an event which possesses the potential for unhinging meaning," (p. 9). The writers in this "Zionist paradigm" mode had *already established* the idea that European Jewry was doomed to destruction, and while no writer predicted the Holocaust, when it did come, the Holocaust was "a tragic realization of an inevitable tendency" (p. 9). All this helps explain the almost complete absence of serious Hebrew literature on the Holocaust until after the 1961 Eichmann trial. The two exceptions to this postwar silence, the poetry of Uri Zvi Greenberg and the fiction of Aharon Appelfeld, do not usher in a new paradigm as much as they show how the Zionist paradigm falls short. In Greenberg's poetry and in Appelfeld's short stories, Mintz shows how Zionist ideology is no effective shield from Jewish suffering. In the wake of the Eichmann trial, Mintz sees Israeli literature making tentative steps to confront the Holocaust. And so, to conclude,Mintz looks at the Holocaust poetry of Israelis Abba Kovner and Dan Pagis, and the "Holocaust" novels" of several contemporary Israeli writers.

Mintz covers a lot of ground in this work. His argumentation as to the shifts in paradigms is sound, and his close reading of texts, especially those of Modern Hebrew literature, is elegant without being too jargon-laden. The major criticism I have with this work is that Mintz leaves the reader in 1996 exactly where he left the reader in 1984 (when it was first published by Columbia University Press)–this book contains no additional text by Mintz. This is most problematic in Mintz's treatment

of Appelfeld. While it was audacious in 1984 to entitle his chapter on Appelfeld "The Appelfeld World" and then go on only to consider Appelfeld's short stories published between 1962 and 1971, it simply is preposterous to do so in 1996. Appelfeld has by now just too many published novels for Mintz to get away with this. Additionally, an overview of the last dozen years in Hebrew literature would have allowed Mintz to conclude his work less tentatively than he does so here. He ends *Hurban* by saying "the long estrangement between the contemporary Zionist enterprise and the full Jewish past is ready to be lessened. The encounter is just beginning" (p. 269). But if Mintz is right in saying that the Eichmann trial was a catalyst for this beginning, then the last twelve years have added a substantial chunk to the encounter that Mintz speaks of, and it would have been edifying for him to have commented on it. Of course, my criticism can constitute a compliment as well, for what I am saying is that Mintz is such a wonderful reader of Hebrew literature that I am disappointed in him for not taking the opportunity of giving me as much as he could have. Still, Mintz's work here on "responses to catastrophe in Hebrew literature" is convincing, and if you didn't read this book in the 1980's, take advantage of its new life in the 1990's.

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