

Ilana Rosen. *Sister in Sorrow: Life Histories of Female Holocaust Survivors from Hungary*. Translated and edited by Sandy Bloom. Raphael Patai Series in Jewish Folklore and Anthropology. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008. 269 pp. \$27.95, paper

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Professor Ilana Rosen's book, based on her 1994 dissertation, is a thought-provoking work which foregrounds the female experience in the Holocaust, using first-person accounts from Hungarian survivors, most of whom are now living in Israel. The stories are intrinsically gripping, as personal narratives, and provide additional layering of material on commonalities and differences among those who experienced the Holocaust (in particular, those from Hungary), and their lives before and afterwards.

However, the main framework, and indeed the point, of the book is to approach and present the accounts through a "literary-psychoanalytical analysis" (Chapter 2) and a "phenomenological-hermeneutic analysis" (Chapter 3). This approach, grounded in Freudian and Jungian psychology and used by, among others, Lawrence Langer and Stanley Fish, and supplemented by anthropological and folklore vocabulary, makes for fairly heavy going for those, e.g., historians, who might choose to read the stories as "straight" narrative. Since the discussion of the genesis of the dissertation (to a certain extent, her own family history) and the analysis cover the first 133 pages, and the individual stories are presented only as an Appendix, covering pages 135-221, Rosen's is definitely an unusual presentation of this important topic.

Rosen's approach does have the advantages of allowing the reader to become acquainted gradually with her interviewees, and to compare differing accounts of similar experiences, but it also generates some confusion, since focusing on particular points of an interviewee's narrative means taking things out of context. (Of course, part of the point of this approach is to show that the context is constructed.) The three-part index does allow for useful referrals when reading the narratives.

Although the subtitle of the book refers to "female Holocaust survivors from Hungary," the narratives presented in the book only include Jewish survivors living in Israel and in Hungary. A further constriction is that although Rosen had interviewed 39 survivors—26 women and 13 men—between 1989 and 1991, only 15 survivors' histories are provided in this book. These include two married couples (whose interviews are presented in one text) and a mother and daughter (two separate texts); the interviews are presented in English translation, though they were conducted in Hungarian and/or Hebrew. There is no explanation of the process Rosen used to select these particular narratives, to what extent they may have been edited (there is considerable variation in the length of the texts, but no ellipses are shown). Nor is there an explanation of her interviewing process: we learn that she used a tape-recorder and that some interviewees periodically asked for it to be turned off while they composed themselves or tried to remember something. While the transcripts show that Rosen occasionally made interjections or

asked questions, it is not clear whether there was uniformity in the basic questions asked or why some points were followed up, and others not.

The life histories themselves demonstrate both common themes found in survivors' narratives, such as the value of knowing additional languages, of having close friends or family members with them in the camps, of knowing—or being able to learn—a trade, of the benefits of female family and friends, and some specific to the Hungarian experience. (Here the term “Hungarian” refers to those who spoke the language, since they might at various times have been living in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, or Romania.) The specific experiences included a shorter, but more intense, period of direct Nazi occupation, and a particularly strong awareness of being treated as, but being different from, Roma (“gypsies”). Some of the interviewees came from religiously observant households, others did not—factors which, interestingly, do not seem directly related to whether or not they moved to Israel after the war.

While Rosen's approach may not suit all readers, it does provide a useful framework and reminder of the differences between oral and written accounts (even if the former are eventually transcribed), of the importance of “reading between the lines,” and in particular, of the need to be aware of both the lens the reader is using and the perspective of the narrator.