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Rosenberg, Goran. ***Another Zionism, Another Judaism: The Unrequited Love of Rabbi Marcus Ehrenpreis*****. Other Press, 2025.**

Reviewed by Elaine Margolin, Hewlett, NY

Sometimes a biographer's personal story overwhelms his subject. Such is the case with Goran Rosenberg, the esteemed Swedish journalist and author, whom I feel compelled to address first. Many will be familiar with "A Brief Stop on the Road from Auschwitz," about his father's attempt to survive the aftermath of Auschwitz in a small industrial town in Sweden where the author Goran Rosenberg grew up. This work was hailed as a masterpiece on par with the works of Primo Levi, Elie Wiesel, and Paul Celan. The author's father, David Rosenberg, was liberated in 1945, and by chance got off the train in Sweden where he found his high school sweetheart who had also miraculously survived, and they married and had Goran and his baby sister. The story seems to call for a happy ending, but Jewish stories are never so simple. His father found work welding pipes in a local truck factory where locals still taunted him for his Jewishness and his mother did piecework sewing coat linings. His parents were both Polish Jews and had grown up in Lodz before being taken together to Auschwitz in a cattle car and separated upon arrival.

Goran Rosenberg remembers an almost idyllic life in Sweden growing up; he fell in love with the natural beauty of the place and did well at school. He imagined his parents were all right in the way children do when it is too painful or scary to think otherwise. He realizes in adulthood how nothing was ever okay and the trauma the entire family endured would grow more corrosive as time passed. Especially for his father. He tries to imagine his father's journey to the camps writing "You leave with nothing; you have become nothing. You have no record of who you are. You are a shadow, and you will be haunted by shadows." After his father's request for reparations from the German government was turned down, he commits suicide at thirty-seven leaving his son, Goran, fatherless at the cusp of adulthood.

The book, "A Brief Stop on the Road from Auschwitz" is Rosenberg's attempt to come to terms with his father's suicide and face a certain emptiness within himself that lay beneath his extraordinary success as a writer. Rosenberg is not a religious Jew. His wife and children are non-Jews, and he doesn't attend synagogue. He is representative of millions of secular Jews around the

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world who must struggle to figure out their Jewish identity in a world that finds them troublesome at best. They are never fully entrenched in the power structures that be and are always in the process of negotiating their Jewishness. Sometimes this means making compromises, while wondering to themselves why they can't sever the ties to their ancient heritage. It's a familiar Jewish paradox because Jewishness is stubborn and resilient. It catches you unaware.

His father, David Rosenberg, was taken to Auschwitz, then Braunschweig, then Wobbelin where the Americans freed him. He researches what Sweden was doing while his father was being brutally tortured and finds their 'neutrality' bordered on some kind of clouded barbarity. He uncovers a story in an old newspaper commenting on the over one million Jews that have disappeared from Europe but notices there is no follow-up to this revelation. The Swedish pretend they simply fell off the edge of the Earth. Still, Goran Rosenberg remains a loyal Swede; too easily ready to criticize Israel whom he finds repugnant in its excessive militarism and nationalism, as well as its treatment of the Palestinians. He lived in Israel for two years decades ago and found the entire societal structure distasteful and returned to Sweden. He has enjoyed his tremendous success there. By now, accommodating the non-Jews of Sweden seems to have become an automatic reflex; one he seems unaware of. He never questions whether if Sweden had been more proactive against the Nazis, perhaps his father might have been helped sooner. It's as if the part of his brain that deals with Jewish trauma and its lingering effects is kept in a separate realm from the rest of his thinking.

He does wonder why his father survived and pursues finding out as much as he can. It turns out his father being sent to perform slave labor in Germany most likely saved his life, but he isn't sure. He writes: "It's me [these facts} have a function for. I'm the one who needs them. I'm the one who needs every fragment that can possibly be procured…a fragment can be erased, edited, denied, explained, destroyed. A date. A list. A registration card. A photograph. The exact names and number of the days when [his father's] world is liquidated…The Germans have no intention of letting anyone survive to say anything, and those who survive don't know what to say to be believed." But facts alone do not explain the Jewish story; one he is hesitant to fully embrace.

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He wrote this memoir when he was already in late middle age. My guess is he hadn't planned to do so. Something pulled on him to find out things he had spent a lifetime neglecting. It most likely interfered with his love affair with Sweden and the life it had brought forth for him. He writes sometimes as if he is speaking directly to his father when he says mournfully "The place where I make the world into mine, is also the place where the world turns its back on you, which is also the place where you turn your back on the world." One senses remnants of a child's anger in his prose; a wish perhaps that his father could have fought harder to stay alive for him; a disappointment that he didn't.

Perhaps these feelings of sadness, regret, confusion, and unresolved childhood anger is what led him to his new work, "Another Zionism, Another Judaism" about the Grand Rabbi of Stockholm, Rabbi Marcus Ehrenpreis, who for decades pushed for Jews to remain in the Diaspora despite all the fuss about going to Palestine. Rabbi Ehrenpreis thought it was only by remaining a dispersed people that the Jews would be able to fulfill their mission to enlighten the world about tolerance for all others. One gets the sense that Goran Rosenberg sees in the life of Rabbi Marcus Ehrenpreis a reflection of his own view of the world, and the proper Jewish place in it. But both men seem to be in denial. Both seem infatuated with a world that didn't force Jews to become soldiers. As well as a world that would allow them to live as Jews in peace wherever they wished and as whatever kind of Jews they wanted to be. Goran Rosenberg seems oblivious to history's treatment of the Jews throughout the centuries that proved this to be nothing more than an illusory fantasy. They don't consider how Jews were mercilessly moved into filthy ghettos repeatedly and not allowed to fraternize with non-Jews. Or how often when Jews were repeatedly denied entrance to universities or pursuing career paths they desired. Or even when they tried to become Communists, or when they converted in despair hoping to be finally left alone. The animosity always returned. As did the pogroms. Yet, both Rabbi Marcus Ehrenpreis and Goran Rosenberg seem oblivious to the violent grotesque roadblocks that prevented their Jewish dreams of nonviolence and participation in the greater world become a living reality. Ehrenpreis thought if Palestine became an Israeli state; it would become just like any other state with an army and the violence and war that accompanies such fledging states. Particularly there, in the holiest of places. Rosenberg lives in our time and has seen Israel become enmeshed in countless wars and violence; the kind Rabbi Marcus

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Ehrenpreis feared would destroy the essential specialness of the Jewish people. But neither man seems to question why Israel had to come into being; how its existence is a result of the Holocaust that stole Rosenberg's father from him, and the regimented slaughter of Europe's Jews.

Rabbi Ehrenpreis (1869-1951) refused, despite the fiery escalation of antisemitism all over Europe, to relinquish his vision for a Zionism that aimed for what he described as "the spiritual and cultural renaissance of Judaism." He insisted the Jewish problem "must go hand in hand with a solution to the wider human problem he had to confront as a European-Jewish leader living in a time of aggressive nationalism, malignant antisemitism, and incessant ethno-national wars." He saw what he called his personal Zionism as the magic force that could save humanity everywhere. He wanted Jews to embrace the Hebrew language and make it a modern living language that would produce poetry and literature that would shine light on the world. It would allow many frustrated Jews to expand their studies beyond the Talmud that was becoming stale as the sole source of learning for Orthodox Jews. On the Day of Atonement in 1943, Rabbi Ehrenpreis addressed his congregation insisting they not give up hope and insisting the covenant with God must be maintained. It seems like an obscene carnivalesque performance when we read about it now.

There are other troubling things about Rabbi Ehrenpreis that Rosenberg mentions. His inclination is always to cut him slack. But we readers are not as willing. We hear about Rabbi Ehrenpreis's tendency to make friends in high places and revel in these relationships which allowed him access to the hallowed halls of power cut off to other Jews. Like his relationship with King Ferdinand, when he was the Grand Rabbi in Bulgaria. Rabbi Ehrenpreis had left his Talmudic studies when he was fifteen and enrolled in the University of Berlin while simultaneously studying to be a rabbi. Ehrenpreis conceded at the time he was having doubts about his faith, but they seem to have been rectified in short order. His congregation in Bulgaria sensed his Zionism was of a different order than their own but accepted him as time passed. The First World War seemed to mock his pretentiousness about Jewish potential in Europe, but author Goran Rosenberg seems to draw no such conclusions; nor did the rabbi himself.

As the Grand Rabbi of Stockholm in Sweden, he put out a book of Hebrew poetry in Swedish translation that he believed was "a testimony to the rebirth of the Jewish soul." He wrote eloquent

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essays about Hebrew literature emphasizing Chaim Nachman Bialik who was the recognized master of Hebrew poetry. He was already forty-five, and certain the revival of Hebrew as a modern spoken language would bring forth the ancient Israelite vision regarding universalist ideals for the future of European Jews. Rabbi Ehrenpreis wrote "the soul of our Jewish people has penetrated the marrow of all tribes of Europe, our whole culture is imbued with it, our past has drawn strength from it, and our future cannot be detached from it." But the Nazis would soon be in power. Rabbi Ehrenpreis seemed somewhat oblivious to the horror and wrote a book on the Talmud in 1933, still convinced learning was an antidote to antisemitism. He wrote defiantly and some would say haphazardly: "I want to save the people, not the land. The land is a means, not an end in itself." He was fine with Palestine becoming a spiritual place with no army or Jewish ruling body.

Rosenberg concedes there were already many who felt Rabbi Ehrenpreis didn't do enough to save Europe's Jews during the Holocaust. Budapest was in the middle of losing 200,000 Jews to the Nazis. Hungary's Jews were being decimated. Some said Rabbi Ehrenpreis was not adept in personal counseling though he gave great sermons. After the war, he gave two brief radio interviews, and then went stone cold silent except to criticize the burgeoning Israeli state whom he felt placed their emphasis on power and military might. His stubbornness and lack of regret at his lack of insight is frightening.

We find ourselves perplexed by what appears to be Rosenberg's admiration for this man. We learn Rabbi Marcus Ehrenpreis did arrange a Red Cross parcel drop over the camp where Rosenberg's father was which Rosenberg believes probably saved his father's life. But this story seems too simple and possibly just an imaginary wish on the part of the author to find reverence for a man who clearly was unworthy of such admiration. We learn about the calls Rabbi Ehrenpreis received to secure temporary visas for Jewish children and Jewish elderly from all over Europe and although he managed to do some things, he seemed very hesitant to overstep his bounds, fearful of some sort of blowback. He was not heroic despite his capacity for lofty rhetoric about matters of great importance. In 1944, he began writing his own memoir, which seems a malignant reaction to what was happening around him. Surely, there were better things to do with his time. The world was in shock; most of the Jews were gone; and everyone was suffering.

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So, we readers are left with all sorts of questions about the role of contemporary Jews in the world; and the conflicts we face again; and how we can proceed despite the divisions between us. The lure of secularism is greater than ever, but there is also an emergence of right-wing elements in Israel and America pulling it to embrace an intolerance that leaves the rest of us chilled by its intensity and unwillingness to bend in any direction other than its own. Rosenberg's first book about his father breaks your heart for what his father endured and left as a tragic legacy to his son, but his new work about Rabbi Ehrenpreis also worries us as we witness the author, seventy-six-year-old Goran Rosenberg, grapple with his past by embracing Rabbi Ehrenpreis, who seems such a flawed figure. Both Rabbi Ehrenpreis and Goran Rosenberg are quick to attack Israel; Rosenberg appalled by what is happening now, and Rabbi Marcus Ehrenpreis in his imaginings of what a Jewish state would become. But neither man seems interested in examining why Israel had to come into fruition in the first place and the miracle of its occurrence despite tremendous forces that still threaten its existence. We wonder why Goran Rosenberg seems so hesitant to do that. It seems a sinful thing to overlook and is a glaring omission from this otherwise engaging book.

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