

RACHMIL BRYKS

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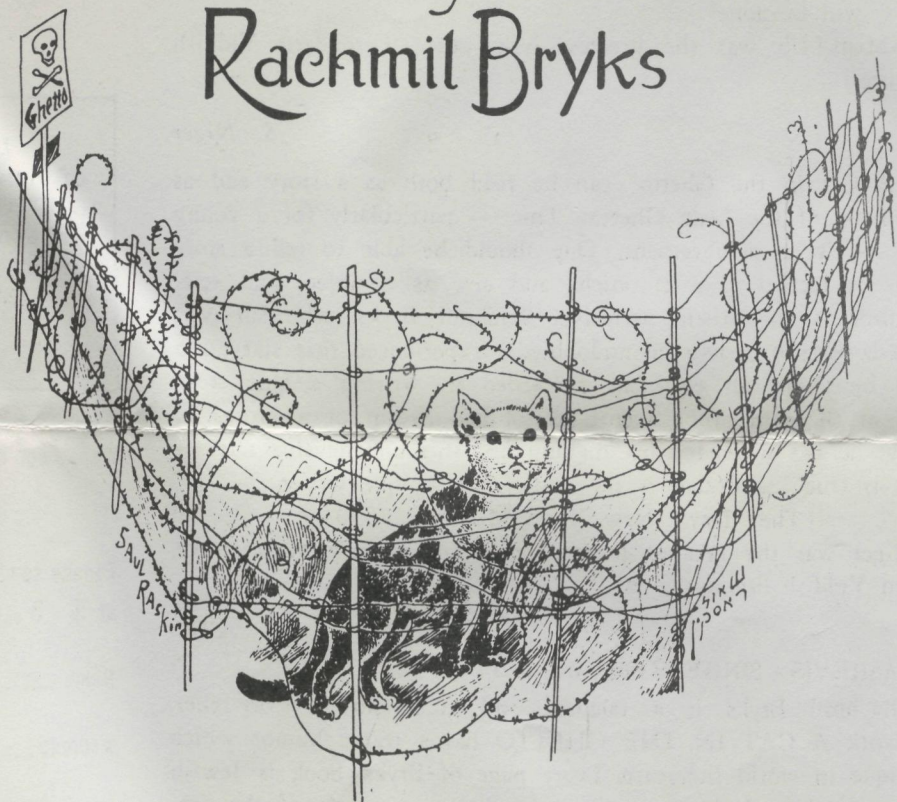
A CAT IN THE GHETTO

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BLOCH

# a Cat in the Ghetto

by  
Rachmil Bryks



WITH A LETTER BY ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

# **A CAT IN THE GHETTO**

**RACHMIL BRYKS**

**WITH A LETTER BY ELEANOR ROOSEVELT**



*By the same Author (in Yiddish)*

YOUNG GREEN MAY (Poems)

OIF KIDDUSH HASHEM

A KATZ IN GHETTO

# A CAT IN THE GHETTO

## FOUR NOVELETTES

*By*

RACHMIL BRYKS

*Translated from the original Yiddish by*

Dr. S. MORRIS ENGEL

*With an introduction by*

Prof. SOL LIPTZIN

*and preface by*

Prof. IRVING HOWE



New York

BLOCH PUBLISHING COMPANY

1959

# A CAT IN THE GHETTO

Four Novelettes



MRS. FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT  
202 FIFTY-SIXTH STREET WEST  
NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

May 4, 1959

Dear Mr. Bryks:

I realize that we need reminders of human suffering. Your book "A Cat In The Ghetto" was hard for me to read and yet it is well written and one should read it in order not to forget.

Very sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Eleanor Roosevelt".



To the Grand Russian  
Folkswriter, Konstantin  
Fedin A Little Gift  
with best wishes

Rachmil Brykes  
N.Y.C. Dec. 17, 1962

To the Grand ~~Roshan~~ <sup>Russian</sup>  
Folkswriter <sup>Russian</sup> Kalgone  
Konstantin Fedin

A Little Gift  
with best wishes

Rachmil Brykes Book Com.

860 Columbus av.

New York 25, N.Y.

U. S. A.

BOOK RATE



# "A CAT IN THE GHETTO"

\$ 5

## CONTENTS

by RACHMIL BRYKS

*Mani-Leib*

I have read the story of the Cat in the Ghetto and want to compliment its author.

All that I have read about our Catastrophe and years of martyrdom under the Nazis — and some of the authors who described our tragedy were very talented — they produced no more than a chronicle. Rachmil Bryks succeeded in creating an artistic work that is tragicomic; a superb fable in which intense Jewish suffering and tragedy develops around the cat.

"A Cat in the Ghetto" should be dramatized and presented on the stage or screen. The cat is the central figure, the treasure by means of which Jewish people can obtain bread to save their lives.

A dramatization of this novel would be a great tragi-comedy symbolizing our disaster in a manner never before achieved by the documentary writings of the Catastrophe. I strongly urge this, and hope it will be done!

(Mani-Leib was the greatest lyric poet of modern Yiddish literature.)

*S. Niger*

"A Cat in the Ghetto" can be read both as a story and as a chronicle of the Lodz Ghetto. This — particularly for a young writer — is an achievement. One should be able to tell a story that is as factual as a chronicle, and also as complete and self-sustaining as an artistic narrative. Rachmil Bryks, who survived the Lodz Ghetto, where he undoubtedly experienced that starvation which blots out all else, has succeeded in writing a true story which at the same time seems like a bad dream or a grotesque fantasy; he has succeeded in "making up" this unbelievable tale — which is true...and that is the mark of a unique writer.

(The "Day," New York, March 5, 1950)

[S. Niger was the greatest literary critic and literary historian of modern Yiddish literature]

### I. BASHEVIS - SINGER (Forward, N.Y. 1953)

Rachmil Bryks is a talented and conscientious story-teller. His work **A CAT IN THE GHETTO** has a tragic humor which is unique in world literature. Every page of Bryks' book is Jewish history. If there had remained as detailed a chronicle of the destruction of the Temple as Bryks has succeeded in recording, Jews would read it every Tisha B'Ab and shed rivers of tears. It is a sacred duty to buy and read Bryks' book.

*A LETTER by MRS. ELEANOR ROOSEVELT*

*I INTRODUCTION by Prof. Sol Liptzin*

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*III A CAT IN THE GHETTO*

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*Folk-Melodies to the folksongs in*

*"A Cat in the Ghetto"*

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Eleanor Roosevelt

**RACHMIL BRYKS BOOK COMM.**  
860 Columbus Ave., New York 25, N. Y.

Tel. MO. 3-3436

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The factual truth deals with a single concrete event, while the literary truth illuminates the essential verity of millions of events. "A Cat in the Ghetto" by Rachmil Bryks is certainly not a factual truth in all of its details, yet it describes the ghetto more revealingly than many chronicles. It gives the inner truth not only of the Lodz Ghetto, but of all the ghettos during the Hitler era. It does not give the truth about the thousands, even millions of facts which are entirely omitted, but their truth is embodied and eternalized by literary veracity and literary symbolism.

In story-telling it is frequently (and perhaps always) necessary that the particular truth be destroyed so that the universal truth may blossom in a fixed individual form, just as when the wheat kernel dies the fertile stalk blossoms.

("The Jewish Post," Melbourne Australia, Jan. 22, 1954)

[I. Rapoport is the most unique critic of modern Yiddish literature]

#### HEBREW POET DAVID SHIMONI ABOUT "KIDDUSH HASHEM" (Israel).

The book *Oyf KIDDUSH HASHEM* by Rachmil Bryks stirred me deeply because of the artistic realism that permeates its pages. *OYF KIDDUSH HASHEM* will be included in the treasure-trove of the martyrological works of the Jewish people as one of its most precious and honored possessions. Rachmil Bryks has succeeded in revealing glorious sparks of holiness in the Jewish soul, which remained unsullied even under the most terrible suffering and tortures.

*A. Schulman.*

"Notre Voix" (Socialist Press) Paris, March 20, 1956

"A Cat in the Ghetto" is a remarkable narrative, perhaps one of the most remarkable not only in Yiddish but in world literature.

#### PROFESSOR AARON ZEITLIN

Rachmil Bryks is a young writer who survived the Catastrophe. *A CAT IN THE GHETTO* is tragically-fascinating. Bryks tells us things which none of the authors who described the ghetto ever revealed before, and in a very, very simple manner — "just the way it happened," — which is deeply moving.

(Aaron Zeitlin is one of our greatest Yiddish-Hebrew poets, dramatists, essayists and scholars.)

#### PROFESSOR N. BLUMENTHAL (Israel)

I read *A CAT IN THE GHETTO* with great interest. This is a new theme, particularly in Ghetto and Catastrophe literature; of great artistic value. It contains many sharp psychologically-valid observations. As a description of ghetto life, it also is of great value to scholars.

### *About the Author*

RACHMIL BRYKS was born in Poland, the son of orthodox parents. He received both a traditional Jewish and secular education, later specializing in literature and in the theater.

His first book of lyrical poems, entitled "YOUNG GREEN MAY" which appeared in 1939, was highly praised by the critics. However, the Nazi onslaught on Poland took place immediately afterwards and Bryks found himself behind the barbed wire of the ghetto of Lodz, Poland's second largest ghetto. Under indescribably adverse conditions of hunger and suffering, he continued his writing.



In August 1944, he was transported together with the remaining Jews of the Lodzer ghetto to the greatest extermination camp — Auschwitz. There the Germans annihilated more than 6 million people, about half of them Jews. However, since the Germans were in great need of slave labor, Bryks, together with the other young people of the camp, was transferred to a Nazi work camp in Germany.

Jews have always had a tradition of holding their folks-writers in high esteem. Here, too, his fellow inmates assisted and protected him so that he would be able to write and retell the story of their suffering and pain.

Bryks was liberated by the American Army on May 2, 1945. Ill and physically exhausted by his experiences, he was brought to a hospital for treatment. Afterwards, he was sent by the Red Cross to Sweden for additional medical care. During his confinement at the hospitals and sanatoriums, he wrote several novels, which are highly moving descriptions of his experiences in the Lodzer ghetto and in the extermination camp of Auschwitz.

In March 1949, he was brought to New York by the "Yiddish Scientific Institute — YIVO". His novels are being published here and they have been widely hailed by the literary world. The novels have also been produced in dramatized form on radio and on the stage. The works of Rachmil Bryks are now being translated into Hebrew, Polish, Swedish, German and English.



# The Churchman

*Editorials*

THE book, *A Cat in the Ghetto*, by Rachmil Bryks (Bloch Pub. Co., \$5.00), contains stories of the Lodz Ghetto and the removal of its inmates to the hell on earth of Auschwitz. It is by a young Yiddish author who personally saw what he describes. It is a book

## *Hell on Earth*

not all persons should—or can—read; and some ought not to read it—especially very young persons who have never heard of the Nazis. But the danger of a revival of Nazism, even in the United States, is steadily with us—especially, it seems, among the young, that is among those who know nothing about it but its glamor, discipline, and irresponsibility. The people who ought to read this book, and it should be compulsory reading for them, are the anti-semites, the pro-Germans, the isolationists, the stuffy self-satisfied people who do not care what goes on in other countries as long as their own is not invaded. It may awaken them to the dangers we still are in, as long as race hatred, segregation, isolationism, and unbridled sadism are abroad in the earth. The prison camps and extermination centers of the Germans were run by pure sadists, recruited from the scum of the earth. It is said that the woman in charge of Jewish women at Auschwitz was recruited from a brothel; the story bears it out.

Pure agony is not a pleasant subject to read. But that would include the Lives of the Saints. In fact the martyrdom of these Jewish women reminds us of the Vitae Sanctorum more than once. For example, their visions on the eve of their destruction in the gas ovens were very much like the visions, full of horrible symbolism, we read in the Martyrdom of Ss. Perpetua and Felicitas. And so were their cries to heaven for mercy, and their dying faith in God—though they cried “O God, where are you?” (Like the one on the cross, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?”) No Christian can read this book without tears, or the resolve to do whatever he can to stop this hellish, diabolical, animal brutality that has been disguised as anti-semitism for two thousand years, but is really treason to the Christian faith and everything it stands for. It is not a “political” viewpoint or principle, but anti-human bestiality, which must be ground beneath the hell of all civilized, decent people, certainly of every Christian. [The author’s address: Rachmil Bryks, 860 Columbus Avenue, Apt. 13 H, New York City.]

PROFESSOR FREDERICK C. GRANT

## PROFESSOR N. BLUMENTHAL (Israel)

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RACHMIL BRYKS

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# In the World of BOOKS

## Required Reading

A CAT IN THE GHETTO. By Rachmil Bryks. Bloch Publishing Co. 160 pp. \$3.75

The publication of *A Cat in the Ghetto* makes available in English four novelettes by the well-known Rachmil Bryks. Originally written in Yiddish, these stories translate into artistic form some of the harrowing experiences of the author behind the barbed wire of the ghetto of Lodz in Poland and inside the extermination camp in Auschwitz, Germany.

Most people find Auschwitz and Buchenwald—grim reminders of the liquidation of one-third of the Jews of the world—too unpleasant to remember. Many refuse to read accounts of Nazi brutality. Some may even find that concentration camps are an unfit subject for literary expression. However, Rachmil Bryks



RACHMIL BRYKS

has proved in these stories that the true artist can capture the almost extinguished spirit of dehumanized human beings and communicate the poignant tragedy of their lives in an unforgettable manner.

The first novelette, "A Cat in the Ghetto," is the best of the four and a masterpiece of its genre. The cat, which was worth a precious loaf of bread to any Jew who turned it over to the Germans, serves as a comic thread that ties together a tragic chronicle of life in the Lodz ghetto. It is also a symbol of defeat. The Jews in this inferno remind one of Franz Kafka's shadow-like characters in *The Trial*. Bits of grass, a lettuce leaf, a few coffee grains take on such an importance in the ghetto that the Jews there become nightmarish figures ever yearning for food. Yet they seem all too real. Despite their misery, their hearts are filled with tenderness and with a common contempt for Mordecai Chaim Rumkowski, "the king of the ghetto." They even keep their folk humor.

The second tale, "A Cupboard in the Ghetto," has a similar tragicomic flavor which makes this account of human suffering bearable. Its protagonist, Hershl Zeif, is almost a character from Sholom Aleichem in the best tradition of classic Yiddish literature. "Berele in the Ghetto" is a short story full of pathos. It deals with the struggles of the children against tyranny. Dr. S.

Morris Engel has managed to capture the spirit of the earthy, folkspeech in his fine translation.

The third novelette, "Sanctification of God's Name," is painful reading indeed. There is little relief from the monotonous horror of Auschwitz, with its gas chambers and flames shooting out of the crematory ovens. The women and little girls, with their shaved heads, and the degenerate and sadistic behavior of the attendants suggest some grotesque, medieval bedlam. But it is not the Jewish martyrs who are deranged; it is the doctors who manifest symptoms of ghoulish madness. The piety of Dvora-Leah, with her potato candle-holders and her wicks of margarine and dress threads, is unusually touching. Her death, like that of Reb Aaron, comes like a clap of thunder at the story's end.

There is a fine introduction by Professor Sol Liptzin and an inspiring preface by Professor Irving Howe. *A Cat in the Ghetto* is a remarkable book and one that should be read by everyone, if we are not to forget the most calamitous of Jewish tragedies.

Dr. LOUIS FURMAN SAS

"A CAT IN THE GHETTO" \$5.00

by RACHMIL BRYKS

I realize that we need reminders of human suffering. "A CAT IN THE GHETTO" by Rachmil Bryks is well written and one should read it in order not to forget.

Eleanor Roosevelt

A. Schulman.

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