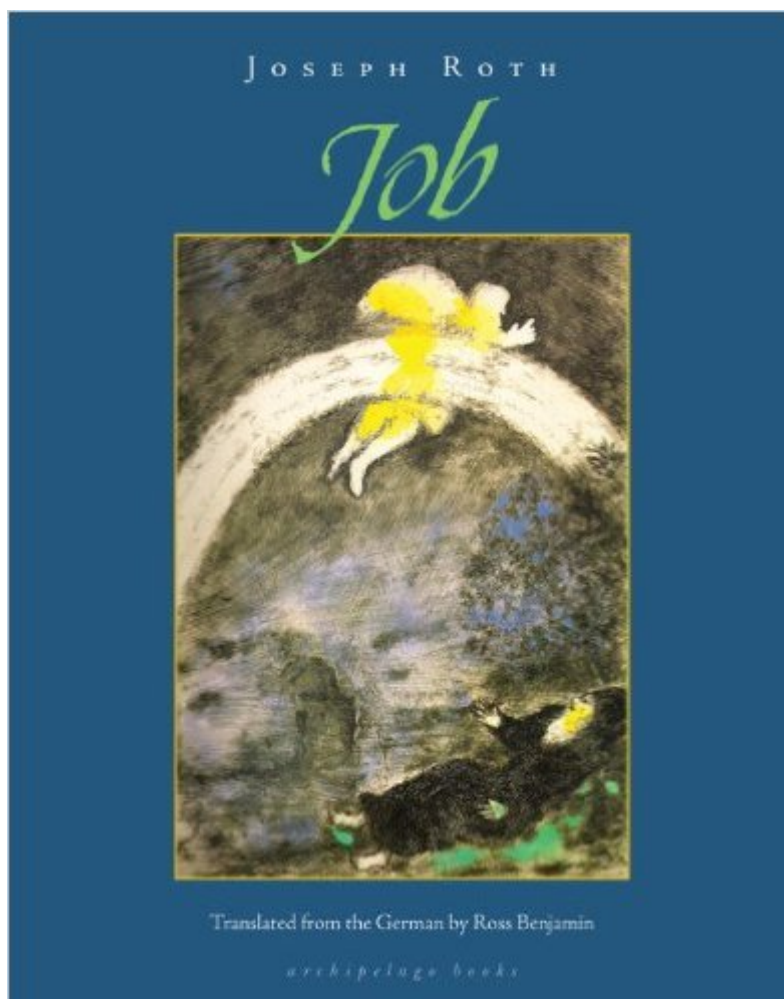


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Job



Synopsis

Job is the tale of Mendel Singer, a pious, destitute Eastern-European Jew and children's Torah teacher whose faith is tested at every turn. His youngest son seems to be incurably disabled, one of his older sons joins the Russian Army, the other deserts to America, and his daughter is running around with a Cossack. When he flees with his wife and daughter, further blows of fate await him. In this modern fable based on the biblical story of Job, Mendel Singer witnesses the collapse of his world, experiences unbearable suffering and loss, and ultimately gives up hope and curses God, only to be saved by a miraculous reversal of fortune.

Book Information

Paperback: 211 pages

Publisher: Archipelago (November 24, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0982624603

ISBN-13: 978-0982624609

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.6 x 7 inches

Shipping Weight: 8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars See all reviews (21 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

Mendel Singer is a pious Russian Jew, who has to bear many afflictions: of his three sons, the youngest, Menuchim is severely handicapped and can neither walk nor talk; the eldest, Jonas, is conscripted into the Tsarist army (the story is set in the early 20th century); the middle one, Shemaryah, flees to America to escape conscription. His daughter Miryam was bringing disgrace on the family by promiscuous relationships with Cossacks stationed in the nearby barracks. To escape this disgrace, Mendel takes her and his wife Deborah to United States, wrenchingly leaving Menuchim behind to be looked after by a neighbouring family. After his initial bewilderment in America (brilliantly described), Mendel settles down, and life appears good to him and to his family in the United States; and he even has good news from and about his sons in Russia. In the evening of his days (he was an old 59) he was, for the first time in his life, free from worry. But this is a book about a twentieth century Job, and the blessing that Mendel thought God had bestowed on him

turned into new worries as the war broke out; and then a series of disasters pour down upon the old man's family until he is feels left utterly alone. And the formerly pious old man cursed God and was about to consign his prayer shawl, his phylacteries and his prayer book to the flames. His Jewish friends, though they had been increasingly secularized in America, still had remnants of their faith and argued with Mendel, re-enacting and also citing the story in the book of Job, telling him that God was testing him. And passionately did Mendel turn their comments aside. He was present during prayer meetings, but refused to join in. He took no interest in anything that went on around him.

Alert: Spoilers are suggested, but not defined!! rejoice! I shout with happiness. I have found an adult novel with a glorious ending! Joseph Roth took a 180 turn from "The Holy Drinker," a despairing and depressing book, the first Roth I read several months ago (and reviewed), with this, a work of wonder, "Job: The Story of a Simple Man." Getting to the wonder, the joy, the miracle was an uneasy slug through one bad circumstance after the other, until about mid-way through the novel. What typically encapsulates man is his inability to act in a given circumstance, usually by birth. As in life, fictional characters are born, slug through life, and die--all in one setting, as if there is no world beyond. What sets "Job" apart and made this reader literally sit up and take notice was the family's move to America. What courage! What imagination to consider a world beyond a tiny Russian village! How unimaginable within context of fiction. I thought, Roth as creator is planning big here. If Mendel Singer is Job and suffers major losses as Job, how is he going to America? To what end? Let me begin at the beginning. Mendel has a wife, Deborah. They have had three children, all pretty much grown when little Menuchim is born. If the word "freak" weren't probably politically incorrect, I would use it to describe the deformed, sickly, pitiful child. However, both Deborah and Mendel love him. When one of their sons immigrates to America to avoid being drafted into the Russian army (and sure death), he succeeds and sends for his family. Mendel makes arrangements for Menuchim to stay behind. So, how does Mendel's story compare with Job's. One son goes into the army--lost. One son goes to America--lost. His daughter sleeps with Cossacks--lost.

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