5-22-1992

Hebrew Poetry Written with a Gothic Script

Ken Frieden
Syracuse University

Follow this and additional works at: https://surface.syr.edu/rel

Part of the Religion Commons

Recommended Citation
https://surface.syr.edu/rel/69
People

The rock décays
From which I spring
To sing my songs of God.
Headlong I rush from the way
And murmur deep within,
Seaward, distant, and alone.
Over the wailingstones.

I have flowed so far away
From the must, the ferment,
Of my blood.
And still, still the echo
In me,
When to the East, awesomely,
The decaying rock of bone,
My People,
Cries out to God.

with "the manner in which Jewish themes, broadly defined, impinge on the subject's sense of meaning."

Mr. Yudkin begins the book with a sketch of the poet's life, summing up her literary career with the comment that "she was particularly prominent as a woman writer, not just as a writer who happened to be a woman, but a woman whose femininity is her primary subject and characteristic." As for the Jewish character of her verse, Mr. Yudkin cites the label "Hebrew poetry in Gothic characters" that was applied to her work by Uri Zvi Greenberg and others. Mr. Yudkin notes that Lasker-Schueler clearly had notable forerunners in English, German, and Hebrew. Each poet reappropriated the biblical genre in a distinctive fashion.

Mr. Yudkin refers to Isaac's play *sacrifice* and comments that, in Lasker-Schueler's version, "relying on the cover of this immaculate innom- ence something sinister is afoot."
The final line cannot do justice to the subtle irony of the German original, "Der aber liebte seinen Knecht." The poet, even in fine understatement, hints at the problems of theodicy: How can God both love Abraham as he commands the sacrifice of his only son?

In two additional chapters, Mr. Yudkin situates Lasker-Schueler in relationship to both Expressionism and the broader German-Jewish context. A particularly interesting passage considers the notion of Jewish writers as marginal Jews "who were not to be a full part of the German literary tradition, and who had nevertheless been estranged from their ancestral religion." Within Mr. Yudkin's purview fall writers such as Alfred Doblin, Jakob Wasserman, Stefan Zweig, Franz Kafka, Joseph Roth, and Sigmund Freud. For Lasker-Schueler, "The Jew, particularly at this time and this place, was an outsider, victim and catalyst." One wonders whether the conclusions of Mr. Yudkin's analysis are pertinent to 20th-century American Jewish authors.

"Else Lasker-Schueler" is an enlightening introduction to her work for the general reader. Clearly written, the book eschews arcane debates in order to present a broad picture of this neglected poet. Mr. Yudkin reads the poetry in relation to both Hebrew and German precedents, thus taking steps toward resolving some of the enigmas that surround the Jewish content of Lasker-Schueler's work.

Mr. Frieden is an associate professor at Emory University, where he directs the program in Judaic studies and literature.

"My People" translated by Audri Durcaklug and Jeanette Litman-Demestere in Else Lasker-Schueler's, "Hebrew Ballads and Other Poems" (Jewish Publication Society).