

5. Itzik Manger "Hagar's Last Night in Abraham's House" (1935).

I. The centrality of the Bible in Jewish civilization.

A. In Judaism, the measure of creativity is = uncover that which is already contained in Scripture.

There is no premium on pure invention.

B. After the חורבן בית המדרש

The Hebrew Bible did not go out of fashion

Secular Jewish writers

do not inhabit a God-centered universe

theirs is centered on humanity

radically democratized the biblical text.

The power of the Bible is in no way diminished.

It becomes a guide to the present all over again.

Itzik Manger and Dan Pagis refract the present through two very different biblical lenses.

II. Manger combines midrash and mock-epic.

A. MIDRASH

to fill in the many gaps in the biblical narrative and

to resolve its ambiguities.

One such sticking point is Abraham's cruel behavior toward Hagar (Gen. 21:9-21).

ותאמר (שרה): גרש האמה הזאת ואת בנה כי לא יירש בן-האמה הזאת עם בני, עם יצחק

In context: Abraham banishes his first-born son in order to secure the alternative line of succession through Isaac,

this bears out the covenantal promise

Torah preoccupied w/issue of birthright

the younger always usurping the older.

Manger ignores this completely

offers a more plausible explanation from a contemporary perspective:

Abraham and Hagar were lovers

Sarah was consumed with jealousy.

Abraham succumbed to his wife's blackmail and sent his *shiksa* servant

packing!

B. MOCK-EPIC

"Like the mock-epic, Manger's mock-Biblical form contrasts the poorer, flatter present with the heroic grandiose past.

East-Galician shtetl @ turn-of-the-century vs. Ancient Israel!

Unlike the ordinary mock-epic, however, it seems to suggest that the present, however puny, is an ethical improvement over the past."

theme of unrequited love = clichéd, but true
folk-simile
smoke [chimney, train] fleeting love
_____ = _____
burning fire, furnace burning love

D. TRAIN

Au recherche du temps perdu = past
tomorrow: will take her away
metaphor: eternal present

How are they both comical and lyrical at the same time?

Is Manger an antireligious poet?

IV. Manger's Moral Stance

- A. MEN vs. WOMEN
- B. RICH VS. POOR
- C. JEW VS. GENTILE

IV. View of history:

Mankind becoming more sophisticated, morally refined
vs. cruel, patriarchal past
the image of the "shtetl"

6. MANGER vs. PAGIS

1. Biblical episode recast into a domestic tragedy.
2. Play the modern experience off against the ancient.
3. Profoundly secular: remove God

FORM IS CONTENT

MANGER: Folk ballad
underlying optimism
shtetl = home to lovers, sinners, and fewer saints
imbedded love song

PAGIS: torn MESSAGE scribbled in pencil
underlying horror
lives inexplicably cut off

USE OF SCRIPTURE

MANGER: Comic discrepancies
the stuff of the Purim-shpil

C. FOLK BALLAD

1. The typical 4-line stanza
mana rhyme scheme
2-sentence structure w/pause at end-line
4/3 beat
2. Use of dialogue
triangular plot
theme of love-and-death
action in lieu of thought
impersonal voice of the folk bard

III. A Mini-Drama

A. ANACHRONISMS

Kitchen, oil lamp, pots and pans
divorce; bastard vs. polygamy
hope chest

1. blood-red beads: luxury item
2. green silk apron: more practical
3. straw summer hat: pure leisure

TRAIN

romantic love

B. SETTINGS

Kitchen

her refuge; her workplace
shadows = projections of her inner state
also sleeps there
where she keeps her hope chest/trousseau
sweeping, scouring; mindless labor = working through
is she angry or still in love?
last stanza: will make it shine!

Shtetl

rigid hierarchy; שיינע / פראסטע יידן
Sarah di pushke-gabete
Jewish-gentile relations

B. TIME

Present: The last night before she is cast out (1-3)
has just received the terrible news

Past: Their romantic trysts (4-6)

Future: Tomorrow morning (7)

Present: Reconciliation; determination (8-9)

C. Embedded TEXT

Yiddish-Slavic love song
lyric expression