

I Want to Fall Like This

Selected Poems of Rukhl Fishman

A Bilingual Edition

Rukhl Fishman

Translated by Seymour Levitan

Introduction by David G. Roskies

"Rukhl Fishman was a modern lyric poet who found within the confines of a secular kibbutz language and memory enough, love and natural beauty enough, to sustain and enrich her muse through all the seasons of the year. So much contained within so little. Like the land and the people of Israel. Like Yiddish. Like poetry itself."

—David G. Roskies, *From the Introduction*

I Want to Fall Like This showcases the inspired poetry of Rukhl Fishman (1935-1984), the youngest and only American-born Yiddish poet of the "Yung Yisroel." This group of young poets and writers from across the world settled in Israel after World War II, and used Yiddish, instead of Hebrew to bridge gaps across time and place.

Readers can trace Fishman's American influences to Malka Heifetz Tussman, the Yiddish modernist poet, who was Fishman's mentor and role model and from who she derived her literary style, as seen in her preference for free verse and sparing use of rhyme, her delight in puns and wordplay. Yet in subject matter, Fishman's poetry differs greatly from the poetry of her contemporaries. Neither erotic, biblical, nor political, her poetry concentrates instead on simple subjects—nature and animals and the world around her. What makes her poetry brilliant is its ability to illuminate these subjects with fresh curiosity and intimacy.

Her later poetry reveals a far less rosy view of the world, paralleling the changes in her own life. As Fishman matured and her health turned poor, she began to ponder the passage of time by viewing nature through a darker and more restrictive lens. From this she created some of her most thoughtful and stirring work, all of which is captured and expertly translated in *I Want to Fall This*.

Rukhl Fishman is the author of two volumes of verse in Yiddish, *Zun iber alts* (Sun Over Everything) and *Derner nokhn regn* (Thistles After Rain), and two bilingual selections of poems in Yiddish and Hebrew, *Shamayim B'eysev/Himl tsvishn grozn* (Heaven in the Grass) and *Vilde tsig* (Wild She-Goat). The winner of the prestigious Manger Prize for Yiddish literature in 1978, she moved from the United States to Israel in 1954, where she lived until her death in 1984.

Seymour Levitan was educated at the University of Pennsylvania and Simon Fraser University. His translations of Yiddish poems and stories are included in *Voices Within the Ark*, *The Spice Box*, *Identifications*, *The Penguin Book of Yiddish Verse*, *A Treasury of Yiddish Stories*, and other anthologies. He lives in Vancouver, British Columbia.

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