

# H-Net Reviews

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Michael Taub, ed. *Israeli Holocaust Drama*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996. ix + 332 pp. \$19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8156-2674-9; \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8156-2673-2.

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## A Valuable Contribution

Michael Taub's *Israeli Holocaust Drama*, a significant addition to Holocaust studies, includes five important plays not readily available in the United States. Unlike previous anthologies of the Holocaust drama by Elinor Fuchs and Robert Skloot, this one narrows its focus to works by Israeli playwrights. Taub's book includes: Leah Goldberg's *Lady of the Castle*, Aharon Megged's *Hanna Senesh*, Ben-Zion Tomer's *Children of the Shadows*, Motti Lerner's *Kastner*, and Joshua Sobol's *Adam*.

Taub begins his anthology with two helpful introductory chapters. The first, "The Problematic of Holocaust Drama," concerns the issue of Holocaust art: should people write about the Holocaust, and if so, what forms of writing are appropriate? Taub wisely begins with the ideas of Adorno and Steiner, who expressed disapproval of Holocaust art. He provides an excellent overview of attitudes toward Holocaust art and the aesthetic reactions it creates, drawing upon scholars such as Lawrence Langer, Ellen Schiff, and Irving Howe. Taub then provides an insightful discussion of the aforementioned five plays. He divides the works into two distinct categories—drama from the 1950s and 1960s (*Lady of the Castle*, *Hanna Senesh*, and *Children of the Shadows*), that focus on Jewish resistance and the plight of survivors of the Shoah, and contemporary plays (*Kastner* and *Adam*) that are more controversial because they deal with provocative issues such as collaboration.

Goldberg's *Lady of the Castle* (1955) dramatizes a 1947 encounter between a Holocaust survivor and two rescuers, one of whom works for Youth Aliya and tries to convince her to move to Palestine. The girl, Lena, had escaped the Nazis with the help of an aristocrat, who hides her in his castle. He eventually falls in love with her and thus neglects to tell her that the war has ended so that she will remain with him. In the play, Goldberg deals with the guilt experienced by survivors; they wondered why they lived while their loved ones perished. Lena also feels guilty for leaving the count, who had risked his life

to save hers, and she feels nervous about leaving her familiar surroundings for the unknown in Palestine.

*Hanna Senesh*, written in 1958 by Megged, deals with the altruistic and heroic actions of a woman who refuses to turn her back on her people. The play, translated by Taub himself, involves a heroine who flees Hungary for Palestine but who returns to help her fellow Jews upon learning of the Nazi abominations. Admirably, she refuses to turn over the names of her colleagues, even when offered a lighter punishment in return.

Guilt figures significantly in Tomer's *Children of the Shadows* (1962). Yoram, like Lena in Goldberg's play and Rose White in Barbara Lebow's *A Shayna Maidel*, experiences guilt for having escaped the sufferings of his family: Yoram left Poland for Palestine and thus survived. He encounters Sigmund, who considers himself a collaborator because he survived in part because he was a member of the Judenrat.

Lerner's *Kastner* (1985) and Sobol's *Adam* (1990) are documentary dramas; both plays deal with historical characters yet include the playwrights' interpretations of history. Lerner provides a sympathetic account of Rudolf Rezso Kastner's attempts to rescue Hungarian Jews bound for Auschwitz by maintaining clandestine negotiations. Kastner feared that the revelation of the Nazis' intentions would result in widespread panic. The playwright provides a balanced account, defending Kastner but revealing his manifold faults. *Adam* concerns Itzhak Wittenberg, the leader of the FPO in the Vilna ghetto. The play involves the moral dilemma of Wittenberg (*Adam*): whether to turn himself in to the Nazis, who have demanded his arrest and threatened to harm ghetto inhabitants in retaliation, or to maintain his freedom so that he may help the armed revolt.

Taub's anthology is important primarily because it publishes these essential contributions to Holocaust drama that are rarely found in the United States; Sobol's

*Adam*, for instance, has never been published in English before (previous publications were in Hebrew and German). Regrettably, Sobol, who has written arguably the best plays about the Shoah, is known in the United States almost exclusively for *Ghetto* (1984), his most anthologized drama (*Underground* , the other play in Sobol's triptych, which he penned in 1991 has been published in English by the journal *Theater* but is relatively un-

known). Michael Taub's *Israeli Holocaust Drama* will prove a helpful anthology to students of Holocaust literature for decades to come.

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