

Literary Hues and Textures

The essays in this section focus on literary relationships of several kinds. **Jules Piccus** displays the scholarly strength of historical detective work and the use of precise linguistic evidence to demonstrate that the Hebrew *Amadís de Gaula*, Book I (c. 1540) was the translation of a lost *Amadís* probably used by Montalvo for his edition of 1508. While his paper requires immense linguistic learning, the non-specialist can appreciate the significance of Piccus' research in establishing critical relationships in literary and cultural history. He shows in specific detail how the interpenetration of texts illuminates the perpetuation and revision of cultures in defining works. In the field of intertextual history, God is in the details, and Piccus offers an abundance of detailed examples to make his case for the importance of the Hebrew text.

Robert Rothstein's comparative approach brings literary analysis to bear on the social implications of folksongs. Examining the similarities and differences between Ukrainian and Yiddish folksongs about the sad lot of women, Rothstein illustrates the plight of the daughter who has been separated from her biological family by marriage, and has become subject to the criticism, or worse, of her mother-in-law and her surrogate family. Rothstein classifies the songs by thematic groups and gives examples of the Ukrainian and Yiddish variations of their basic motifs. In the Yiddish versions, for example, the mother-in-law does not teach her son to punish his wife, as in the Ukrainian songs. Rothstein also indicates how some songs were parodied and how the Ukrainian songs also record resistance to familial oppression. His analysis can be read as a contribution to our understanding of family dynamics in patriarchal cultures.

In the modern era, the most pervasive Jewish cultural commentary has been joking and humor, as **Jules Chametzky's** essay reminds us. "Jewish jokes and humorous stories flourish when traditions are changing or being undermined, when life is precarious (and when isn't it, in Jewish history?), or when the spectacle of human folly or vanity unfolds daily to the perceptive observer." As forms of identity maintenance and directed aggression, jokes and humor have been sustaining ways of evoking a space of freedom in the midst of constraints and impingements. Chametzky's richly condensed survey of Jewish comedic expression shows how marvelously responsive these forms have been to the instabilities and shifting geographies of modernity. Particularly in America, the circulation of Jewish humor in popular culture, musical comedy and theater rivals, perhaps, only medicine in the extent of its impact on the whole of society. Itself a form of medicine, the levity of Jewish humor has acted as a counter-force to the gravity of modern anxieties.

In this section's final essay, **Sigrid Bauschinger** celebrates the poet Else Lasker-Schüler. She begins by reviewing the thought of Leo Baeck, a leading figure in Jewish liberalism much admired by Lasker-Schüler. For Baeck, the transmission of religious texts was a process of interweaving past and present, figuring the present associatively through the past and projecting the present into the past. Christian theology can be understood, then, as a transformation of the thinking of Jesus, an appropriation and distortion of Judaism. Like Baeck, Lasker-Schüler looks back to the original gospel as part of the history of Jewish belief.

For Lasker-Schüler, the lost bridge between Christians and Jews is Jesus himself, who would have led Jew-Christians. Bauschinger ends her essay with the story of Else Lasker-Schüler's narrative (in Germany, 1932) and play (in Zurich, 1933) of Arthur Aronymus, which combines elements of the poet's family history and historical event in Westphalia in the nineteenth-century. In this work, Lasker-Schüler advocates the unity of Christians and Jews in a time of persecution of Jews by Christians, the same conviction that would lead her to ask Pope Pius XII to declare Jews innocent of blood libel in 1940. Bauschinger presents Else Lasker-Schüler as an exemplar of a unity and transcendence that was to be radically violated in the years ahead, but which she continued to personify to her last years in Jerusalem.

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