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Kathrin M. Bower

University of Richmond, kbower@richmond.eduFollow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/mlc-faculty-publications>Part of the [German Literature Commons](#)

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Nelly Sachs

(10 December 1891 – 12 May 1970)

Kathrin Bower
University of Richmond, Virginia

SELECTED BOOKS: *Legenden und Erzählungen* (Berlin: F. W. Meyer, 1921);

In den Wohnungen des Todes (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1947);
Sternverdunkelung (Amsterdam: Bermann Fischer Verlag, 1949);

Eli: Ein Mysterienspiel vom Leiden Israels (Lund, Sweden: Privately printed, 1951);

Und niemand weiß weiter (Hamburg: Verlag Heinrich Ellermann, 1957);

Flucht und Verwandlung (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1959);

Fahrt ins Staublose (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1961);

Zeichen im Sand (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1962);

Glühende Rätsel (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1964);

Späte Gedichte (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1965);

Die Suchende (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966);

Teile dich Nacht (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971);

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TRANSLATIONS: *Von Welle und Granit* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1947);

Aber auch die Sonne ist heimatlos (Darmstadt, Germany: Georg Büchner Verlag, 1956);



Nelly Sachs and King Gustav VI Adolf of Sweden at the 1966 Nobel banquet in Stockholm (photograph by Jan Collstöö; PRESSENS BILD/Scanpix/Retna)

Johannes Edfelt, *Der Schattenfischer* (Darmstadt, Germany: Georg Büchner Verlag, 1958);

Gunnar Ekelöf, *Poesie. Schwedisch-Deutsch* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1962);

Erik Lindegren, *Weil unser einziges Nest unsere Flügel sind* (Neuwied/Berlin: Luchterhand-Verlag, 1963);

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Nelly Sachs was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1966 on her seventy-fifth birthday, a coincidence of dates that her father had been fond of noting during Sachs's girlhood in Berlin. In her acceptance speech, Sachs made reference to her father's annual teasing every December 10 and acknowledged that the award was like a dream come true. Nelly Sachs's work was largely unknown outside Germany and Sweden when the prize was announced; she had been writing in relative obscurity for almost two decades. Two literary awards she received in Germany in 1960 and in 1965 had earned her a reputation as "the poet of Jewish fate," a title grounded in her powerful, poetic testimonies to the victims of the Holocaust. Those poems, written and published in the 1940s, reached only a limited audience, and it was not until the 1960s when Germany began the process of confronting its Nazi past that Sachs's writings found a broader readership. Some critics have argued that the sudden recognition of Sachs's qualities as a poet in the 1960s reflected a tendency to appropriate her work as a symbol of Jewish-German reconciliation, while others have focused on the unusual nature of her poetic language and her role in infusing German literature with a new spirit. Sachs herself was wary of categorizations that limited her to a Jewish identity, but she graciously accepted the Nobel awarded "for her outstanding lyrical and dramatic writing, which interprets Israel's destiny with touching strength"; she shared the award with Shmuel Yosef Agnon, an Israeli author who wrote in Hebrew.

The Nobel Prize in Literature had been shared only twice prior to 1966—once in 1904 and once in 1917—and only once since—in 1974. The split of the Nobel award between two writers who shared neither the same nationality nor literary language sparked considerable controversy, as did the emphasis on the Jewishness of the two authors. While some hailed the award to two authors whose works were devoted to Jewish themes as an overdue recognition of the suffering resulting from the Nazi atrocities of the 1930s and 1940s, others regarded the split award as evidence that essentializing definitions of Jewish identity that were the legacy of Nazism still held sway. Thrust into the limelight of international recognition on the occasion of the Nobel award, Sachs's works enjoyed a brief period of prominence and became the subject of serious scholarship. Despite the fact that she is one of only twelve German-speaking writers to have received the Nobel Prize to date, her works are largely unknown outside academic settings and then most often for her Holocaust poetry.

Leonie (Nelly) Sachs was born on 10 December 1891 in Berlin to William Sachs (1858–1930), a wealthy rubber manufacturer, and his young wife, Margarete

Sachs, née Karger (1871–1950). An only child in a bourgeois, assimilated Jewish family, Sachs grew up in a sheltered environment that encouraged her penchant for fantasy, music, and dance. Sachs was sensitive and nervous, and because of these traits she spent only a brief time in private school before her parents decided to have her tutored at home. Sachs read avidly and was particularly fond of German Romantic writers such as Novalis and of fairy tales and legends. She received a copy of Selma Lagerlöf's *Gösta Berlings Saga* on her fifteenth birthday, and this gift sparked a fascination with a writer who in 1909 became the first woman Nobel laureate in literature who would later be instrumental in Sachs's escape from Nazi Germany. Sachs had a very strong bond with both of her parents, but their power over her life also had detrimental effects. In 1908 Sachs met a divorced older man whom she would later refer to as the love of her life, but whom she was forbidden to marry. Unhappy to the point of despair, Sachs experienced the first of what would become a series of psychological illnesses and turned to writing as a means of solace. The poems she composed at this time were written in traditional rhyme and verse, modeled after the poetry of German Romanticism. Some were destroyed by Sachs's own hand; others she took with her into exile, although she distanced herself from this early work and did not release it for publication. That did not mean that Sachs was reluctant to seek public recognition for her writing. Inspired by Lagerlöf's example, Sachs wrote the collection *Legenden und Erzählungen* (1921, *Legends and Stories*) and sent a copy to Lagerlöf after the book was published. Lagerlöf responded that she could not have done better herself, and the correspondence between the two women continued until Lagerlöf's death in 1940.

In 1923 the financial situation of the Sachs family changed after William Sachs fell ill. By 1924 he was largely confined to bed, cared for by his wife and daughter until he died of cancer on 11 November 1930. The Sachs family had several properties in Berlin and after William's death, Sachs and her mother moved to the house in the Lessingstrasse where they occupied the ground-floor apartment, managed the building, and collected rent from their tenants. This would serve as their main source of income until the Nuremberg Laws limited their right to own property. Although Sachs had never been active in the Jewish community, the growing discrimination against German Jews after Adolf Hitler assumed control of the country restricted her access to cultural activities outside of Jewish circles. She joined the Jewish Cultural Association founded by Rabbi Leo Baeck in May 1933 and made the acquaintance of writers such as the poets Kurt Pinthus and Gertrud Kolmar. As a member of the association, Sachs found an outlet

for her literary interests and a group of kindred spirits with whom to share her work. Her poems were read at association literary evenings and were printed in publications supported by the association, as well as in Jewish newspapers in several major German cities. During this time Sachs began selectively to explore her Jewish heritage, choosing areas that particularly appealed to her taste for mysticism and Romantic spirituality. She discovered Martin Buber's translations of Hasidic tales and became interested in Kabbalah.

After the state-orchestrated pogrom against the Jews in the Reich on 9–10 November 1938, the dire predicament of German Jews became undeniable and Sachs sent a series of letters to her childhood literary idol, Lagerlöf, pleading with her to serve as reference for Sachs's immigration to Sweden. Sweden had a restrictive immigration policy and it was no small feat to obtain visas for two German-Jewish women who had no professional training and little promise of earning a living by their own means. Lagerlöf was old and sick when she received Sachs's desperate letters, and it was not until Sachs's close friend, Gudrun Dähnert, traveled to Sweden and personally made a case for Sachs's survival that Lagerlöf fully understood the gravity of the situation and agreed to endorse Sachs's visa application. Forced to sell their house on Lessingstrasse in 1939, Sachs and her mother moved into several furnished rooms in Charlottenburg, where they lived in constant fear of deportation. With the outbreak of war in September 1939 it became extremely difficult to leave Germany, and possible exits via Denmark or Norway were closed by 1940. By May 1940 Sachs had made all the necessary payments to the German government to enable her departure from Germany, but the visas for herself and her mother had not arrived from Sweden. Sachs's desperation turned to despair after she received her deportation papers for a work camp. A friend visited the Swedish embassy in Berlin and found that the visas had been sent there. On the advice of a sympathetic Gestapo official, Sachs destroyed her deportation orders and purchased seats on the last available flight to Stockholm. She and her mother arrived safely in Sweden on 16 May 1940 with nothing more than hand luggage and ten reichmarks between them. They were taken in by the Stockholm Jewish community and spent their first night in an orphanage that served as temporary housing for refugees.

Sachs was forty-eight years old when she began a new life in Sweden. Her hopes of establishing herself as a poet in Germany had been dashed by National Socialism, but it was her response to the horrific events unfolding in Germany and Europe that secured her place in world literature. The first years in Stockholm were difficult. Sachs did not speak Swedish and was dependent on the Jewish

community for financial support. Her mother was not well, and Sachs cared for her with the devotion of one who had lost all other ties to home. The two women shared a tiny, one-room apartment at Bergsundsstrand 23, a building that housed other refugees and remained Sachs's address until the end of her life. Here Sachs worked to develop her Swedish language skills so she could earn some income as a translator of Swedish literature. Because of her diligence and poetic feel for language, Sachs had become an accomplished translator by the end of the 1940s. It is a testament to the quality of her translations that several of the poets whose writing she translated responded in kind by translating some of Sachs's poems into Swedish. Sachs's own style of writing underwent a dramatic transformation during this period as the result of a combination of factors. One was the influence of the modern Swedish poets whose works she came to know intimately. The other was news of events in Germany, reports on the deaths of friends and relatives, and Sachs's growing awareness of the scope of the genocide.

In 1943 Sachs learned of the death of the man whom she referred to as the love of her life, but whose identity she never revealed. Despondent about his death and the death of so many others, Sachs turned to poetry as a means of expressing her sense of loss, her identification with the Jewish people, and as a testament to the memory of those who had been killed. Between 1943 and 1945 she wrote cycles of poems and one lyrical drama that would later be recognized as among her most powerful and compelling work: "Dein Leib in Rauch durch die Luft" (Your Body in Smoke through the Air), "Gebete für den toten Bräutigam" (Prayers for the Dead Bridegroom), "Grabschriften in die Luft geschrieben" (Epitaphs Written in the Air), and the lyric drama *Eli. Ein Mysterienspiel vom Leiden Israels* (Eli. A Mystery Play on the Suffering of Israel). In these works Sachs developed the vocabulary of mourning and remembrance that she would continue to refine in her later poems. Words such as *sand*, *dust*, and *ashes* were accorded special emphasis and resonated with associations to biblical imagery, mortality, and death. Objects such as shoes also took on a deeper significance, evoking the wandering of the exile, the wandering Jew, and, in the absence of the wearer, symbolizing the traces of myriad extinguished lives. The combination of the quotidian and the cosmic and the link between individual fate and universal significance found in these writings recur in a variety of forms throughout Sachs's works.

Although Sachs composed her poetic responses to the tragedy taking place in Europe in solitude and in a language that was both her mother tongue and the vernacular of the perpetrators, she was not without ambition to see them published eventually. She was convinced that the voice that spoke through her poems

represented a message larger than herself and was meant to be heard by others. When the war ended and the Nazi regime was destroyed, she began the search for a German publisher. In the postwar atmosphere of denial and ruin, this proved to be a difficult task. With the support of Johannes Becher, Sachs finally found a home with Aufbau Verlag in the Soviet-occupied zone of East Germany for the collection of poems written during the first years of her Swedish exile. The press agreed to publish the collection, but under a different title than her originally suggested "Dein Leib in Rauch durch die Luft." After signing the publication contract, Sachs wrote to Curt Trepte in Schwerin that she felt gratified that her poems would be read in a region "wo das Leid seinen Anfang nahm" (where the suffering began; letter of 10 October 1946). The book appeared in 1947 under the title *In den Wohnungen des Todes* (In the Habitations of Death). This collection of poems established Sachs's reputation among the critics as "the poet of Jewish fate," and the dedication to the volume—"to my murdered brothers and sisters"—underscored her kinship with the victims of the Holocaust. That same year Aufbau Verlag published Sachs's first book-length collection of Swedish poetry in translation, *Von Welle und Granit* (Of Waves and Granite). But two years later the situation had changed: the Soviet zone had become the German Democratic Republic, and Aufbau Verlag had a different agenda. Sachs's second volume of poetry, *Sternverdunkelung* (Darkening Star), was published by Bermann Fischer Verlag in Amsterdam in 1949. This volume was praised by the few critics who read it, but sales of the book were so low that the publisher pulped most of the print run.

These setbacks in gaining recognition for the poems that she had composed with such passion, conviction, and sense of mission added to the psychological devastation she experienced when her mother died on 7 February 1950. Sachs's relationship to her mother had been extremely close, and the years in exile had deepened their bond. Although her mother had been ill for a long time, Sachs was inconsolable at her loss and suffered a nervous breakdown in March 1950. The year ended with yet another blow when her application for Swedish citizenship was denied because of her uncertain financial circumstances. In order to control her sorrow and maintain her sanity, Sachs began an intensive phase of writing: the cycle of poems *Briefe aus der Nacht* (Letters from the Night) and the lyric dramas *Abram im Salz* (Abram in Salt) and *Nachtwache* (Nightwatch), both collected in *Zeichen im Sand*, 1962, stem from this period. She also delved further into works of Jewish mysticism, and was particularly inspired by the *Zohar* (The Book of Splendor) in Gershom Scholem's German translation. Her conception of a cosmic spiritu-

ality unfettered by institutionalized religion was reinforced by her study of Kabbalah and the *Zohar*, and her readings of the latter text gave rise to a cycle of poems composed in 1952, the year that her bid for citizenship was finally granted.

In the latter half of the 1950s Sachs's work began to be published in West Germany. Groups of her poems were published in newspapers and journals, and the only published prose text describing her personal experience in Nazi Germany, *Leben unter Bedrohung* (Life under Siege), appeared in the journal *Ariel* in 1956. Younger German writers such as Peter Hamm and Alfred Andersch were impressed with the spiritual intensity and poetic vision in Sachs's work, but Hamm in particular was skeptical that the German public was ready for such writing (*Du*, no. 232, June 1960). Hamm's view was apparently shared by the Suhrkamp publishing house, which, according to Siegfried Unseld, had contemplated a Sachs volume in 1958 but decided that the time was not ripe (*Echo der Zeit*, 17 October 1965). Despite such misgivings about Sachs's potential readership, two book-length collections of her poetry were published in Germany by the end of the 1950s: *Und niemand weiß weiter* (And No One Knows Further, 1957) and *Flucht and Verwandlung* (Flight and Transformation, 1959). The poems in these collections make reference to the persecution and destruction that had inspired Sachs's writing in the 1940s, but also present new directions with reflections on exile, the rejuvenation of language, and an evolving poetics of transcendence. These volumes and an inspired essay on Sachs's poetry by Hans Magnus Enzensberger in the journal *Merkur* (volume 13, issue 138, 1959: 770-775) laid the groundwork for more public recognition of Sachs's work.

In 1958 Sachs received her first award, the poetry prize of the Swedish Writers' Association, albeit not for her own poetry, but for her outstanding translations of Swedish literature. The Cultural Committee of the Association of German Industry in 1959 was the first organization to recognize officially Sachs's accomplishments as a German poet. This literary prize was followed by a series of awards that culminated in the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1966. Sachs received the Droste Prize in Meersburg in 1960. The city of Dortmund established a cultural award in her name and named her its first recipient in 1961. In 1965 Sachs became the first woman ever to be awarded the Peace Prize that had been established by the German Book Trade Association in 1951. Sachs traveled to Germany to accept the Droste award in Meersburg and the Peace Prize in Frankfurt. She had not been in Germany for two decades and her apprehension about the trip was ameliorated by the presence of young German writers such as Ingeborg Bachmann and Paul Celan who were staunch admirers of her work and gave her hope for the

future. It was in Meersburg in 1960 that Sachs met Unsel, who became her editor at Suhrkamp. Suhrkamp published its first collection of Sachs's poetry, *Fahrt ins Staublose* (Journey into the Vacuum) in 1961, followed by a collection of her dramatic writings, *Zeichen im Sand* (Signs in the Sand), in 1962, and another collection of poems, *Die Suchende* (The Seeker), in 1966. These publications brought Sachs's work to the attention of a broader readership and increased her following among younger German writers such as Ilse Aichinger, Horst Bienek, Günter Eich, and other writers of the Gruppe 47.

The journey to Germany in 1960 reinforced Sachs's belief in the younger generation, but the psychological stresses of the trip proved too much. Sachs suffered a nervous breakdown upon her return to Sweden and was hospitalized for treatment of paranoid psychosis. Her letters from this period attest to the depths of her paranoia and delusions of persecution, delusions that intensified during the Adolf Eichmann trial in Jerusalem in 1961–1962. Sachs was convinced that she was under surveillance by Nazi spies living in her apartment building and surmised that they were seeking revenge for Eichmann's execution. She spent three years in a sanatorium, interrupted at intervals by attempts to return to an independent existence, and was subjected to electroshock treatments for her paranoia. The shock treatments made it difficult for Sachs to write and affected her memory, but did nothing to erase her fears. Despite her illness and the radical nature of her treatment, Sachs was remarkably productive, composing two complete poem cycles and two segments of a third. By 1964 she was back in her own apartment and by 1965 felt strong enough to travel again to Germany, this time to Frankfurt, to receive the Peace Prize. References to the Holocaust were unavoidable in Frankfurt, which from 1963 to 1965 was host to the Auschwitz trials, and some critics have remarked on the difficulty of Sachs's situation as a German-Jewish recipient of the Peace Prize. The tension between genuine recognition for her accomplishments as a poet and her appropriation as a symbol of reconciliation permeated her reception in Germany until the end of her life and affected reactions to her Nobel Prize award.

Because of her work as a translator, Sachs became acquainted with several writers who were members of the Swedish Academy. Three of these writers, Johannes Edfelt, Gunnar Ekelöf, and Erik Lindegren, had helped publicize Sachs's work in Sweden, and Edfelt had already praised the literary quality of her work to the Academy in 1963. Two German literary historians, Walter Berendsohn and Walter Jens, were called upon to provide their judgments on Sachs's work, and both responded with high praise for her poetic talents and a

clear endorsement of her worthiness for the award. When Sachs was announced as one of the two Nobel Prize recipients in October 1966, the committee chairman, Anders Österling, proclaimed her work to be a combination of beauty and lament, full of pain yet free of hatred. Although the Academy strenuously denies that political considerations play any role in the award, it is difficult to regard the decision to split the prize between two Jewish writers, one working in the Hebrew language and the other in German, as well as the timing of the award, one year after Germany and Israel had established diplomatic relations, as completely without political intent. In Österling's presentation speech at the ceremony, he described Sachs's writing as "the most intense artistic expression of the reaction of the Jewish spirit to suffering," thereby emphasizing her position as the poet of Jewish fate and indirectly alluding to her refutation of Theodor W. Adorno's famous dictum that "writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric."

The Nobel Prize brought Sachs international attention and sparked a wave of translations of her poetry and lyrical drama into a variety of languages. The critical reactions to the award vacillated between those eulogizing her poetic sensibilities and her role in rehabilitating the German language and those questioning whether the Academy's decision was made primarily on moral grounds. As a result of the award, Sachs's work increasingly became the object of scholarly studies and dissertations. But Sachs herself did not produce another book after the publication of *Die Suchende* in 1966. She continued to write in creative spurts, but her health was failing. In March 1967 she suffered a heart attack and a recurrence of paranoia that necessitated further psychiatric treatment. In spring 1968 she was hospitalized for colon cancer, and in 1969 again underwent surgery to battle the disease. Although she spent months convalescing in the hospital, she never regained her health and died on 12 May 1970 after years of fighting to overcome psychological and physical pain. Sachs was given a Jewish funeral on 19 May 1970 and buried in the Jewish cemetery in Stockholm. In 1971 Suhrkamp published *Suche nach Lebenden* (Search for the Living), a collection of Sachs's poems spanning the years 1964 to 1970 and intended as a companion volume to the earlier collection *Fahrt ins Staublose*. These two volumes represent the poetic oeuvre for which Sachs is known today. Although she continued to work on ideas for lyric dramas after the publication of *Zeichen im Sand*, no drama of hers composed after 1962 has been published. Sachs's dramatic works have not received as much scholarly attention as her poetry and only a few were performed during her lifetime, in part because the mixture of dance, music, and mime these

works demand together with the complexity of the language and the scenery made them difficult to stage.

Despite her status as a Nobel laureate and the burgeoning interest in Holocaust representation, Sachs's lyric dramas are out of print and it was only recently that Suhrkamp decided to issue a critical edition of her collected works in four volumes, scheduled for publication in 2009. Peaks in scholarly interest in Sachs's work can be grouped roughly into three main phases: the first around the time of the Nobel Prize award, the second after her death, and the third in the 1990s. The typecasting of Sachs as the poet of Jewish fate, a restrictive category that she endeavored to distance herself from in her later work, has guaranteed her a regular place in anthologies of Holocaust literature, but there are numerous secondary studies that address other aspects of Sachs's writing, such as her affinity with Romanticism; her integration of mystical and religious imagery; the universal, ethical message infusing her poetry; and her transformation of German poetic language. Other studies have attempted to place her work in the context of broader questions of German-Jewish identity in literature, comparing her to writers such as Else Lasker-Schüler, Gertrud Kolmar, and Rose Ausländer, as well as Franz Kafka and Heinrich Heine. Despite these worthy efforts at expanding the dimensions by which Sachs's corpus of writings is measured, Nelly Sachs remains best known for her moving, lyrical transfigurations of Jewish suffering inspired by the events of the Holocaust, which had radical and lasting effects on her life, her psyche, and her poetic style.

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Papers:

Collections of Nelly Sachs's manuscripts, correspondence, and books from her personal library are housed in the Royal National Swedish Library in Stockholm and in the State Library in Dortmund, Germany.

1966 Nobel Prize in Literature Presentation Speech

by Anders Österling, Member of the Swedish Academy

This year's Nobel Prize in Literature has been awarded to two outstanding Jewish authors—Shmuel Yosef Agnon and Nelly Sachs—each of whom represents Israel's message to our time. Agnon's home is in Jerusalem, and Miss Sachs has been an immigrant in Sweden since 1940, and is now a Swedish subject. The purpose of combining these two prizewinners is to do justice to the individual achievements of each, and the sharing of the prize has its special justification: to honour two writers who, although they write in different languages, are united in a spiritual kinship and complement each other in a superb effort to present the cultural heritage of the Jewish people through the written word. Their common source of inspiration has been, for both of them, a vital power.

Shmuel Agnon's reputation as the foremost writer in modern Hebrew literature has gradually penetrated linguistic barriers which, in this case, are particularly obstructive. His most important works are now available in Swedish under the title *I havets mitt* (In the Heart of the Seas). Agnon, now seventy-eight years old, began writing in Yiddish but soon changed to Hebrew, which, according to experts, he handles with absolute mastery, in a taut and sonorous prose style of extraordinary expressiveness. He was only twenty when he left his native town in East Galicia, where, as the scion of an old and respected family, he had been brought up in a scholarly tradition. He felt drawn to Palestine, where now, as an aged classical author, he can look back on the long struggle for national reestablishment, and where the so-called cultural Zionism possesses in him one of its finest creative champions.

Agnon's unique quality as a writer is apparent chiefly in the great cycle of novels set in his native town of Buczacz, once a flourishing centre of Jewish piety and rabbinical learning, now in ruins. Reality and legend stand side by side in his narrative art. *Hakhmasat Kalah*, 1922 (The Bridal Canopy), is one of his most characteristic stories, in its ingenious and earthy humour, a Jewish counterpart to *Don Quixote* and *Till Eulenspiegel*. But, perhaps, his greatest achievement is his novel *Oreah natah la-lum*, 1939 (A Guest for the Night), which tells of a visit to Buczacz, the war-ruined city of his childhood, and of the narrator's vain attempts to assemble the congregation for a service in the synagogue. Within the framework of a local chronicle we see a wonderful portrayal of destinies and figures, of experience and medi-

tation. The lost key to the prayer house, which the traveller finds in his knapsack only after his return to Jerusalem, is, for Agnon, a symbolic hint that the old order can never be rebuilt in the Diaspora, but only under the protection of Zionism. Agnon is a realist, but there is always a mystical admixture which lends to even the greyest and most ordinary scenes a golden atmosphere of strange fairy-tale poetry, often reminiscent of Chagall's motifs from the world of the Old Testament. He stands out as a highly original writer, endowed with remarkable gifts of humour and wisdom, and with a perspicacious play of thought combined with naive perception—in all, a consummate expression of the Jewish character.

Nelly Sachs, like so many other German-Jewish writers, suffered the fate of exile. Through Swedish intervention she was saved from persecution and the threat of deportation and was brought to this country. She has since then worked in peace as a refugee on Swedish soil, attaining the maturity and authority that are now confirmed by the Nobel Prize. In recent years she has been acclaimed in the German world as a writer of convincing worth and irresistible sincerity. With moving intensity of feeling she has given voice to the worldwide tragedy of the Jewish people, which she has expressed in lyrical laments of painful beauty and in dramatic legends. Her symbolic language boldly combines an inspired modern idiom with echoes of ancient biblical poetry. Identifying herself totally with the faith and ritual mysticism of her people, Miss Sachs has created a world of imagery which does not shun the terrible truth of the extermination camps and the corpse factories, but which, at the same time, rises above all hatred of the persecutors, merely revealing a genuine sorrow at man's debasement. Her purely lyrical production is now collected under the title *Fahrt ins Staublose*, 1961 (Journey to the Beyond), which comprises six interconnected works written during a twenty-year creative period of increasing concentration. There is also a series of dramatic poems, equally remarkable in their way, under the joint title *Zeichen im Sand*, 1961 (Signs in the Sand), the themes of which might have been taken from the dark treasure house of Hassidic mysticism, but which, here, have taken on new vigour and vital meaning. Let it suffice here to mention the mystery play *Eli* (1950) about an eight-year-old boy who is beaten to death by a German soldier in Poland when he blows on his shepherd's pipe to call on heaven's help when his parents are taken away. The visionary cobbler Michael manages to trace the culprit to the next village. The soldier has been seized by remorse and, at the encounter in the forest, he collapses without Michael's having to raise his hand against him. This ending denotes a divine justice which has nothing to do with earthly retribution.

Nelly Sachs's writing is today the most intense artistic expression of the reaction of the Jewish spirit to suffering, and thus it can indeed be said to fulfill the humane purpose underlying Alfred Nobel's will.

Doctor Agnon—according to the wording of the diploma, this year's Nobel Prize in Literature has been awarded to you for your “profoundly distinctive narrative art with motifs from the life of the Jewish people.” We should be happy if you would consider this international distinction as a sign that your writing need not be isolated within the boundary of its language, and that it has proved to have the power to reach out beyond all confining walls, and to arouse mankind's sympathy, understanding, and respect. Through me, the Swedish Academy conveys its sincere congratulations, and I now ask you to receive the Prize from the hands of His Majesty, the King.

Miss Nelly Sachs—you have lived a long time in our country, first as an obscure stranger and then as an honoured guest. Today the Swedish Academy honours your “outstanding lyrical and dramatic writings, which interpret Israel's destiny with touching strength.” On an occasion like this it is natural also to recall the invaluable interest you have shown in Swedish literature, a token of friendship which, in turn, has found a response in the desire of our Swedish writers to translate your work. Offering you the congratulations of the Swedish Academy, I ask you now to receive this year's Nobel Prize in Literature from the hands of His Majesty, the King.

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Sachs: Banquet Speech

Introductory remarks by Ingvar Andersson of the Swedish Academy at the Nobel Banquet at the City Hall in Stockholm, 10 December 1966:

“Shmuel Yosef Agnon, Nelly Sachs—This year's literary Prize goes to you both with equal honour for a literary production which records Israel's vicissitudes in our time and passes on its message to the peoples of the world.

Mr. Agnon—In your writing we meet once again the ancient unity between literature and science, as antiquity knew it. In one of your stories you say that some will no doubt read it as they read fairy tales, others will read it for edification. Your great chronicle of the Jewish people's spirit and life has therefore a manifold message. For the historian it is a precious source, for the philosopher an inspiration, for those who cannot live without literature it is a mine of never-failing riches.

We honour in you a combination of tradition and prophecy, of saga and wisdom.

Miss Sachs—About twenty years ago, through the Swedish poet Hjalmar Gullberg, I first learned of your fate and your work. Since then you have lived with us in Sweden and I could talk to you in our own language. But it is through your mother tongue that your work reflects a historical drama in which you have participated. Your lyrical and dramatic writing now belongs to the great laments of literature, but the feeling of mourning which inspired you is free from hate and lends sublimity to the suffering of man. We honour you today as the bearer of a message of solace to all those who despair of the fate of man.

We honour you both this evening as the laurel-crowned heroes of intellectual creation and express our conviction that, in the words of Alfred Nobel, you have conferred the greatest benefit on mankind, and that you have given it clear-sightedness, wisdom, uplift, and beauty. A famous speech at a Nobel banquet—that of William Faulkner, held in this same hall sixteen years ago—contained an idea which he developed with great intensity. It is suitable as a concluding quotation which points to the future: ‘I do not believe in the end of man.’”

Sachs's speech (Translation)

In the summer of 1939 a German girl friend of mine went to Sweden to visit Selma Lagerlöf, to ask her to secure a sanctuary for my mother and myself in that country. Since my youth I had been so fortunate as to exchange letters with Selma Lagerlöf; and it is out of her work that my love for her country grew. The painter-prince Eugen and the novelist helped to save me.

In the spring of 1940, after tortuous months, we arrived in Stockholm. The occupation of Denmark and Norway had already taken place. The great novelist was no more. We breathed the air of freedom without knowing the language or any person. Today, after twenty-six years, I think of what my father used to say on every tenth of December, back in my home town, Berlin: “Now they celebrate the Nobel ceremony in Stockholm.” Thanks to the choice of the Swedish Acad-

emy, I am now in the midst of that ceremony. To me a fairy tale seems to have become reality.

In der Flucht
welch grosser Empfang
unterwegs—

Eingehüllt
in der Winde Tuch
Füsse im Gebet des Sandes
der niemals Amen sagen kann
denn er muss
von der Flosse in den Flügel
und weiter—

Der kranke Schmetterling
weiss bald wieder vom Meer—
Dieser Stein
mit der Inschrift der Fliege
hat sich mir in die Hand gegeben—

An Stelle von Heimat
halte ich die Verwandlungen der Welt—

(Fleeing,
what a great reception
on the way—

Wrapped
in the wind's shawl
feet in the prayer of sand
which can never say amen
compelled
from fin to wing
and further—

The sick butterfly
will soon learn again of the sea—
This stone
with the fly's inscription
gave itself into my hand—

I hold instead of a homeland
the metamorphoses of the world—

(Translated by Ruth and Matthew Mead, in *O the Chimneys*, 1967)

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