Rethinking the Book of Esther: Feminist Hermeneutics and Shechinah Theology in the Poetry of Amy Levy

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Abstract

In this essay, Amy Levy’s biblical hermeneutic on Esther 9:22 is examined. Levy was an acculturated Anglo-Jewish woman triply marginalized by the upper-middle-class community of which her family belonged and that afforded women little intellectual space, the conservative Reform Judaism of the period, and as an obviously Jewish woman socializing in predominantly Christian circles. In the process of reengaging with the biblical texts, Levy, by her own figuring an exile in every sense, develops relational theological perspectives through imagery and themes resonant of Shechinah, the presence of God in exile since the destruction of the Temple. By doing so, Levy’s poetry visualizes the eschatological prospect of return and restoration to come; these proto-feminist hermeneutics also insert the symbols and language of divine presence into the Esther narrative, which conventionally makes no direct reference to the divine. This is important as Jewish feminist theology is generally considered to be a Second-Wave phenomenon. Moreover, the recovery of the sacral elements of the Levy corpus is vital to our awareness of previously marginalized, and even forgotten, Anglo-Jewish women writing theology in the late-Victorian period.

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Book Description: Amy Levy has risen to prominence in recent years as one of the most innovative and perplexing writers of her generation. Embraced by feminist scholars for her radical experimentation with queer poetic voice and her witty journalistic pieces on female independence, she remains controversial for her representations of London Jewry that draw unmistakably on contemporary antisemitic discourse. Amy Levy: Critical Essays brings together scholars working in the fields of Victorian cultural history, women's poetry and fiction, and the history of Anglo-Jewry. In “Amy Levy,” Elaine Feinstein finds a nineteenth-century precursor for what the poem takes to be her own anomalous position as an educated Jewish woman poet. The uniqueness of feminist theology is its use of women's experience to expose the male-centered bias of classical theology and articulate a faith that incorporates full humanity. Whereas the traditional paradigm begets domination and subordination, feminism seeks a mutuality that allows for variety and particularity in women and men. The goal is not to diminish males but to affirm both sexes whole, along with all races and social groups. Yet St. Paul himself, as a participant in the Christian missionary movement, modified its egalitarian vision even while he promoted it. Fearing orgiastic behavior in worship like that in contemporary pagan cults, he restricted the role of women (but not of men) to insure decency and order. Finding books BookSee | BookSee - Download books for free. Find books. Whirlwind: Essays on Job, Hermeneutics and Theology in Memory of Jane Morse (JSOT Supplement Series). Stephen L. Cook, Corrine L. Patton, James W. Watts. 11.91 Mb. #29. Strong Hermeneutics: Contingency and Moral Identity. Nicholas Smith. 639 Kb. Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History: Applied Hermeneutics. Dieter Misgeld, Graeme Nicholson, Lawrence Schmidt, Monica Reuss. Category: Philosophy. 825 Kb. #100. Music Analysis in the Nineteenth Century: Hermeneutic Approaches. Ian Bent.