



The Space of Words (Studies in German Literature Linguistics and Culture)

Jennifer M. Hoyer

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Nelly Sachs (1891-1970) has long been regarded as one of the most significant Holocaust poets. Her conception of language and words as a landscape has been understood by scholars and critics as an exilic ersatz Heimat for the lost German homeland of a displaced poet. This reading, however, is based entirely on her postwar poems. Such an isolated approach to her complex body of work is increasingly historically problematic; it is also at odds with Sachs's generally cyclical poetic process. In "The Space of Words," Jennifer Hoyer offers the first sustained critical analysis of Sachs's largely unanalyzed prewar poetry and prose, as well as the first analysis that examines structural and thematic ties between the prewar works and the Nobel Prize-winning postwar poetry. Through close readings of both Sachs's prewar and postwar works, Hoyer reveals a diasporic rather than exilic conception of the landscape of language, a position of constant wandering rather than static longing for return. This diasporic poetics promotes the intellectual and linguistic power of the wanderer and opens new insights into Sachs's essential significance as a Holocaust poet and a twentieth-century German-Jewish writer wary of the link of literary language to geopolitics and the narrative of nations. Jennifer M. Hoyer is Assistant Professor of German at the University of Arkansas.

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