

Modern Poems on the Bible - An Anthology.
Edited with an introduction by David Curzon.
The Jewish Publication Society 1994.

Although this is not a new JPS publication it is the first time that it has come across my radar, hence the review!

This is a wonderful collection of poems by 20th century Jewish and non-Jewish poets inspired by the biblical text. Most of the poems draw their inspiration from the five books of Moses, especially Genesis, but other texts that have stirred poetic thoughts include Samuel and Kings, the Prophets and Job, and Song of Songs, Ruth and Ecclesiastes.

David Curzon commences the anthology with a consideration of the midrashic genre of rabbinic literature and how it remains fresh and alive even in modern times; poetry thus becomes a form of modern Midrash which brings out nuances and themes from the more constrained biblical text.

Included in the anthology are poets such as Primo Levi, Howard Nemerov and Robert Frost, who, together with Yehuda Amichai, Jacob Glatstein and Dan Pagis one might expect to find in an anthology of this nature: but there are many other less likely entrants, some of whose work is extraordinarily powerful, including D.H.Lawrence, Stevie Smith and the Nicaraguan poet Ernesto Cardenal.

This is an anthology that will delight lovers of poetry and would be a valuable text for discussion and consideration of biblical texts too, whether in a church or synagogal context.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh