

THE BOOK OF ISAAC

AIDAN SEMMENS

Free Verse Editions

Edited by Jon Thompson

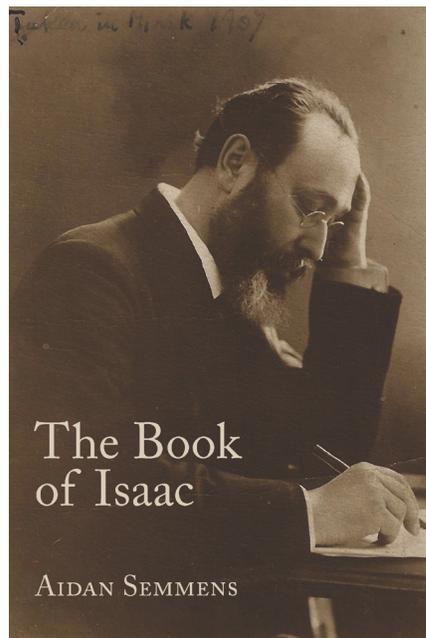
Information and Pricing

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The Book of Isaac is a sequence of 56 “distressed,” or damaged, sonnets in which Aidan Semmens endeavors to distil something of the Russian-Jewish experience from the history of his own family, in particular that of his great-grandfather, the economist, lawyer, journalist and socialist Isaac Hourwich. Drawing material from the apocryphal Book of Esdras, from FBI files and other historical sources as well as from Hourwich’s private and public writings, Semmens produces a fractured narrative running from the pogroms of the late nineteenth century through the beginnings of the American diaspora, to the Revolution and beyond. Other characters whose words or deeds are featured include the author’s grandmother, who as a young child was effectively orphaned when her mother was exiled to Siberia, and who later escaped the Russian civil war by marrying an English sailor; and her elder brother Nicholas Hourwich, the first leader of the Communist Party of the United States.

The disrupted syntax and sometimes unexpected word-use embody the theme of migration and dislocation and the experience of living in societies whose language is not wholly familiar to the user; much use has been made, in the process of composition, of translation, retranslation and mistranslation, thereby creating oblique effects, ambiguities, misunderstandings—and new understandings. The whole sequence, however, tells a fascinating and moving story and informative endnotes provide contexts and the means to make coherent sense of whatever might otherwise be difficult or unclear.

As a student at Cambridge in the 1970s, AIDAN SEMMENS was chairman of the Cambridge Poetry Society, co-editor of the influential *Perfect Bound* magazine, and winner of the Chancellor’s Medal for an English Poem in 1978, the same year his first pamphlet of verse appeared in print in the United Kingdom. His poems have appeared in *Jacket*, *Jack*, *Shearsman*, *Shadowtrain*, *Sstride*, *Great Works*, *Free Verse*, *Blackbox Manifold*, *Likestarlings*, *Poetry Wales*, *Tears in the Fence*, and *Notre Dame Review*. His first full-length collection, *A Stone Dog*, was published by Shearsman Books in 2011. He has also edited an anthology of poetry from the English county of Suffolk, *By The North Sea*, for publication in 2013.



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