

The Deronda Review

a journal of poetry and thought

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Walls, photograph by Courtney Druz

OVERHEAD AT THE FOOT OF MOUNT SINAI

Mother, why can't I go there,
to where grass sprouts and red flowers bloom
and lilies nod their heads?

*Shhh, darling, there's the border.
None of us may cross it, not even touch.
Look, even the sheep and cows remain in their
folds;
they too, may not cross.*

Why not, mother, why not?

*The border is there to protect us, darling,
to protect us.*

From what?

*From the Holy One,
so He does not destroy us.*

Why would the Holy One, the Compassionate One,
who brought us across the Red Sea,
and feeds us manna sweet as honeycomb,
want to destroy us, mother? Why?

*He doesn't want to destroy us,
but we should stand here,
each one of us, witnesses to Him.
But His glory can devour us – a blazing fire
if we draw near, my child."*

She trembles, drawing her daughter close.

– Ruth Fogelman

CONTRIBUTORS' EXCHANGE

Since its inception as *The Neovictorian/Cochlea* in 1996, *The Deronda Review* has included a Contributors' Exchange of addresses (surface, email, URL) and available books. As of this issue, the Contributors Exchange will be a separate .html file, and in future will include contributors to past issues as well as the current one.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Ken Seide's "Neilah #1" was first published in the 2012 issue of *Kerem*. Courtney Druz' "The Wander-Root Court" appears in her book *The Light and the Light* (2012, www.courtneydruz.com).

IN MEMORIAM: IDA FASEL

"The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree . . . Even in old age they shall bring forth fruit; they shall be full of vigor and freshness. . ." (Psalm 90)

Since the previous issue went to press, *The Deronda Review* has learned of the passing of a senior - in more than one sense - contributor, Ida Fasel, who died January 13, 2012 at the age of 102.

Ida Fasel lived in Denver, Colorado, where she had moved in 1959 with her husband, Otto, whom she lost in 1973, and where she had taught for thirty years at the Colorado College for Women and the University of Colorado before retiring. Her passions included ballet, Milton, gardens, angels, and the human future. She published 12 collections of poems and two chapbooks; all but the last (*Milton on My Mind*, finished only a few months before her death) are listed on www.idafasel.com. She was a righteous Gentile and a staunch friend of Israel.

Ida Fasel's poems appeared in every single issue of *The Neovictorian/Cochlea*, and in four of the eight previous issues of *The Deronda Review*. The qualities of her poetry? Keen intelligence, wonder, a rich culture, courage, warm humanity... All of her contributions to this magazine, up to a few years ago, are posted in the "Hexagon Forum" section of www.pointandcircumference.com. For a farewell, let me here reproduce one of the two poems that appeared in the first issue of NV/C, in 1996. Having been blessed with her presence for so many years, may we continue to draw on her legacy of "vigor and freshness." - EC

READING DANTE LATE AT NIGHT

Strong as winters of spring, jonquil adjacent
to snow;
secure as small perfect industries
of the sea;
hidden as psalm numbers behind church columns;
suitable as the wooded corner of Wyoming
with its stark connections,
strange as the familiar making itself known:
strong, secure, hidden; suitable, strange,
to read so far from where I am
on my side of the lamp

till I am startled - the shadow
your page makes as it turns,
the lift of your face in the corner
of my eye
as you wait for my look to meet yours.

What a blessed crossing, our separate ways,
in the love that moves the sun and the other stars.
Strong, secure, hidden, suitable, strange

to move lenient within another motion.

To recover quiet.

- Ida Fasel

I. Marking Time

MARKING TIME

High in the sky two cranes spin and glide
with ballet precision as on earth the last
summer days slip off like a loosened harness.
The forecast is the furrowed clouds may bring
rain to a soil raked by fever.

I wish the sky to gleam with water,
to fondly embrace us and clear up our heated brain
so we can look in the mirror and recognize our true
self,
the one envisioned by our Maker.

O let me wake in Monet's garden of flowering azaleas,
narcissi, masses of pink, mauve and off-white roses,
the air thick with bees, the sky of bright blue marking
time,
when a year becomes a second like somewhere over
the edge
of the Milky Way, giving me more time to pray and
entreat,
to supplicate the Lord to take away my heart of stone.

I have known this mood before.
But I am becoming more and more desperate.
I want my love to be greater and truly substantial;
I beg to have the signature of the Holy One etched
on my errant heart, on each thought I have,
and on everything I write.

– Gretti Izak

END OF ELUL

We had a hard summer this year,
Hotter and harsher than usual.

And the journey across the mountains was difficult.
For I've come from a distant country;
Here is my bread –
Fresh, with a pleasant aroma, when I left
But now stale and crumbling.

Here is my wine-gourd, which I had filled
with cool wine,
Now empty, worn and rent.

Look at my garments and sandals –
Tattered and torn from the journey.

This is the oath I swore was true,
An oath
Full of lies and deceit.

For the end of *Elul*

Has pounced upon us
And I want to – I need to –
Make a covenant
With You, O Lord,
To be allowed into the camp.
Even as a hewer of wood.
Even as a drawer of water.

Everyone knows
That after *Elul*
A person can fall from a cliff,
Like the scapegoat to Azazel.

O Master of forgiveness, *Adon HaSelichot*,
If You permit me
To be one of the congregation,
I will testify
Forevermore:
The Lord, He is God,
The Lord, He is God.

– Yakov Azriel

TASHLICH

Saying Tashlich between the olive green branches of the
willows.
I sway with them in unison.
Watching over the aqua filled pond in the park.
Orange goldfish are swimming in schools.
Large groups of them under the muddy waters.
Mallard ducks take off in flight on mysterious missions.

It feels good sending the past year adrift.
Time for facing our inner selves.
The cool wind feels refreshing on my face.
The leaves are turning yellow on the tops of trees.
Fall is nearby.

The New Year has crossed the threshold of our
doorposts.
Welcoming it in with blessings of apples and honey.
May we be at the head instead of the tail.
May our enemies and obstacles be torn asunder!

The Teruah sounds out the day.
We must recognize this inimitable cry.
Tears well up inside.
The Shofar notes are flying out of the blue and white
stained glass windows.
Crowning the Creator of the World once more.

– Shoshana Weiss-Kost

NEILAH #3

The gates of brokenness barely hang on their hinges and stand open.
 The gates of illusion only seem to close.
 When the gates of judgment close, they really close; don't stick your foot in.
 The gates of mercy can tell when you're faking contrition; don't try it.
 When the gates of eternity open, another opens behind it, and then another, then . . .
 The entry to the gates of mirrors can't be located.
 The gates of memory have another name, but it has been forgotten.
 The gates of change have been reconfigured again; you can't go in that way any more.
 The gates of secrets have a way in, and no one knows it.
 The gates of wisdom never open for some people; sound like anyone you know?
 This strange pendant that I've worn for as long as I remember, is it a key to my own gate?

– Ken Seide

NEILAH #1

The last prayer
 I uttered
 before Neilah
 had only four words.
 Help me, God.
 Amen.

But the Gates of Prayer
 snapped close
 and snipped my prayer in half,
 which means
 I pray
 that my sigh
 at least
 slipped through.

– Ken Seide

[note: Neilah is the closing prayer of Yom Kippur.]

CLOSING DOORS

Rain through the woods.
 Autumn. You could see it
 in the wind.
 A yellowing, the broken leaves
 crookedly drifting.

Some where in this I am,
 memories coming and going
 as though not mine,
 small boats aimless
 or driven toward
 unknown shores.

Once I kept a diary.
 Once I believed in the
 surety of words

as though they could
 gather even the sun
 even the moments
 that hide behind the
 face of a clock.

Now a door is closing
 pushing back the tomorrows,
 turning all green things
 into chimeras

a form of sleep
 a small dying
 like roots
 not seen
 deprived of
 water.

– Doug Bolling

NOVEMBER MORNING

No winter promise,
 no dawn glitter
 of eastern hope
 this frigid day,

a call to look out
 at the sputtered cries
 of park geese pretending

to fly south again
 with preparatory clatter
 before settling once more

on Soldier Creek,
 where the Choctaws
 watered long ago.

My window offers
a sweep of gray
behind the silhouette

of fingers, skeletal
and reaching for some
escape from this nothing
of cold, empty air.

– Carol Hamilton

SNOWFLAKES DRIFT

Snow flakes drift tranquilly from ashen skies,
small remnants of the storm that howled last night
in winds whose fury shook the dark with cries
of winter's deepening grip upon our town.

Now, as morning whispers silver silence,
snowflakes drift tranquilly from ashen skies.
They layer sheen of white on white across
the lawn. Against my door snow piles waist-high.

Heavy lifting, alone, can clear my ties
to the great outside. But for now I'll watch
snowflakes drift tranquilly from ashen skies.
Rest is on the land and death – along with

nascent life. These all look the same within
cold burn of winter light – deftly defy
my mind's habit of drawing boundary lines.
Snowflakes drift tranquilly from ashen skies.

– Charles H. Harper

ON THE SHORTEST DAY OF THE YEAR

a woman goes into darkness,
past the black ruby roses
and is never heard from again.
She moved quietly past the
bleached grass a December
day it got into the sixties. It
was a day, foggy and warm,
very much like today. It was
today. Now you probably
think it could be me, it seems
there are reasons. But listen,
I've never seen, only imagine
those tissue thin roses and
that last minute before light
collapses. A garnet leaf
on the pond is less red than
my hair blazing, a lighthouse
beacon past the trail of
petals to bring you closer
than you imagine you are

– Lyn Lifshin

AT PEACE

When did nature take this hold
Over me and my mood?
When did she take me under her wing
Like one of the chicks in her brood?
The sky is gray flannel and inside my head
My thoughts are fuzzy, I think.
It seems as if nature is weary as well –
It seems as if we are in sync.
She doesn't want to open her eyes –
She wants to stay asleep.
She's quiet and pensive allowing me
To ponder my thoughts as deep.
Everything's muffled and only a bird
Sounds through the silence today.
Nothing else utters even a word.
Background noise fades away.
It's one of those days where it threatens to rain,
But not a drop falls all day long.
It's one of those days where I threaten to change
In a feeble attempt to belong.
But under blue-gray and overcast skies,
My senses as numb as my mind,
I can only manage a normal routine:
"Hello, how are you?" "Just fine."
So as gray turns to black and another day's gone
I ask myself, "What is the reason?"
Ah, but nature she knows, as she takes to her rest:
"To everything there is a season."

– Connie S. Tettenborn

RICH MOON, POOR MOON

Moon is back again, a pock-marked
one-eyed beggar at my window.

Through cycles of life, moon drifts –
lost, and sometimes penniless.
Still, moon hangs on,
hitching by with a smile, existing
on mere slivers of sustenance.

Camping among the gypsy stars,
moon continues to roam. In sympathy,
the heavens arrange a periodic
crossing of paths with fortune.
Moon more than tithes for the favor,
giving all to the darkness.

Yet, on its richest of nights,
moon trades its coin for silver,
steals close,
gives dreams of treasure.

– Cynthia Weber Nankee

II. *Costs of Living*

WEALTH

White metal,
Silver –
Yellow metal,
Gold –
Red metal,
Copper:
All are wealth
I'm told;
Yet what'll
All these buy me
When I'm old
Or nearly dead –
That a meadow
Cannot give
Me now,
Properly
Instead?

– David Kiphen

AND YOU MY FATHER

One evening younger than school time,
I wandered on to the back porch.
Saw my father sitting on the top step.

I sat down next to him and asked,
"What are you thinking about?"
He seemed to look through me.
Like for several seconds. Then said,
"Just wondering why I am not happy."

For moments I gazed at him.
Then, as if to offer solution, said,
"I'll tell mother." It seemed right
to make that offer. Mother would help
when I was unhappy.

When I started toward the screen door,
he called, "Wait, Jerry." I stopped, but held
onto the door latch.

"Don't tell your mother." "But why?" (my query).
"Don't tell her what I just said to you.
Do you understand?"

I reassured him that I did.
My father turned away and
settled into twilight silence.
Maybe to watch the purple martins
swoop for flying insects.
The night seemed flooded with them.

I remained near to him – turned
furtive glances his way while
the mosquitoes whined.
But didn't seem to bother

him.

– Jerry Hauser

THE BOTTLE OF TEETH

baby teeth, dried blood
still on them. Sharp
still as certain phone
calls. None of them
crumbling. Labeled.
"Rosalyn's 1st lost
tooth, July or was it
September," kept like
diamonds or a flapper
dress studded with
crystal on silk that
falls apart at a touch.
Packed away just so
she could put her hand
on them, as she wanted
me to be. She saved
every letter since
second grade, old
jewels, touchstones,
hand knit baby clothes,
triplicate news clips,
every mention of
my name as if they
were me

– Lyn Lifshin

A MOTHER'S LAMENT

How she judges me, my child –
well, child no longer.
She casts me a wild look,
fierce, full of hunger.

Her rebellious disquiet,
her pitiless truth:
What kind of justice is this?
Age closes my throat.

We shared a bed half a decade.
She gives no quarter.
I suckled her; for whose sake,
did I nurse till I ached?

Yet she accents all my fears,
measures atonal,
stress upon stress, no pyrrhics.
I'm old. I a tone.

Eyes the color of celadon,
she chants her hwyl.
Her hardness once hidden,
she flashes steel.

Well, her solo has glory!
Forged in this new self,
what if she should come to me,
my daughter, my weft?

We weave our mutual fury.
I'll not cock my ear
or pretend I can hear her
if I be deaf by then.

— Zara Raab

DYBBUKS AND DEMONS

As if the world had not shifted
the table set as it should be:
fork on the left, stirring spoon on the right.
Pastry houses with chocolate roofs
upright on a scalloped plate
its painted flowers blooming
in a permanent state.

Anxiety leaks from my friend's eyes
as she drifts in her tiny kitchen
bouncing from sink to stove.
Broken blinds sag like
a face giving way to gravity and exhaustion.
Her daughter beyond reach.
The kettle shrieks its warning of
ravens on a chipped stone wall.

I know what it's like to live with a teenager
a look of contempt thrown across a room
her door slamming;
Such condescension, as if mothers were born
for this.
Still I am the lucky one
with a daughter who brings home stacks of
books
fusses only over hair and clothes.
Her stubby fingers reach in a box for earrings
not for a metal spoon, plastic bag, a flame
releasing a rage of dybbuks and demons.

— Carol V. Davis

and then in cairo
the guide takes us
to "weavers college"
leading us through
warehouse gloom
past rolled-up carpets
to a back room
where
11-year old girls
at looms
flick restless
deft fingers
pulling, twisting
snapping rough yarn
into place
bleeding young
hands of flesh
in preparation
upon graduation
in two years
for a life of beggary

— miriam chaikin

BY THE SEA OF SODOM

"Lot settled among the cities of the plain and
pitched his tents toward Sodom." Gen: 13:12

Here, on a morning at the marina,
heat glittering off the salty sea,
my brief boy attends me, resting his curls
on my lap like a limp butterfly
not dry from its delicate cocoon.
If I did not know I had no son
I could rest in him as he rests in me.

Do I take your name in vain or are you
in this near-man child? Remember the nights
I guarded your secrets in Haran,
climbing the curved worm tunnels alone,
burrowing up baked river earth to stand
at last sprinkling rosewater over prayers
chiseled on the sacred shelf of heaven.

There I watched your wet breath blow the moon
through slit windows in your ziggurat,
turning the marks of dusty alphabets
to liquid silver as the moonbeams struck.
My grief has been this mute attendance
at your mysteries, when all your magi
are ash already in a brimstone fire.

This morning, when I can hardly stop
melting in my blue-and-white burnoose,
show me favor, my difficult master,
with the elixir of your blessings,
one drop of which gives me my voice,
so, climbing your stairs at dark, I might
once more roar praises from the ramparts.

— Judith Werner

THE FORECAST OF WINDS

This sadness has swept in before
 on a chilly breeze that carries me
 to an evening long ago
 when the sun turned sullen
 and the tall pines became dark and hooded - cruel
 I stood by the pool shivering and turned to you
 but I was alone
 and I knew then
 as clearly as if a mage had studied my stars
 and read to me of the painful designs
 printed on a page of black
 the forecast of winds that would bring strong love
 and the breezes in memory of their loss.

— Susan Oleferuk

ACROSS

I've drunk white whispers from across a lake
 and once, between words, in a loved one's sighs.
 (The air and liquid clear the routes sounds take
 so ears can "feel" what's too remote for eyes.)
 And ink conveys like water, or the cliff,
 to render audible whole worlds unknown,
 between their author's breaths — but only if
 we pay attention, that is, when alone,
 or being quiet by the shores of ponds.
 And through the crystal of an empty wine
 glass (crystal "ball") the universe responds —
 to silence-sippers . . . Red . . . White? . . . Red,
 then. (Note how it's reflected in the stein,
 flush with the mystery of all, unsaid.)

— James B. Nicola

WAITING FOR ANNA

*

Scotch broom
 fraught with yellow pleasure
 and luminous with dusk
 straggles down the hillside.
 In contrast with the purple clouds
 that loom to the east, its glow
 is ravenous, preternatural.

*

Across the valley, on a high ridge,
 a lone eucalyptus — usually
 such a messy tree — swaying,
 groaning, throwing off bark —
 stands darkly etched,
 each leaf a perfect point,

each white blossoming flower
 a study in stillness . . .
 the world on hold.

*

And then, from the quiet stealth
 of evening, voices emerge. Some cry out
 with a desperate will to live;
 others whisper with wasted breath.
 Within me, yearnings — traces
 of that old surmise — passion dense
 as fatigue, faithful as pain —
 as joy foreboding. I know them well.
 Lift anchor! I will abroad!
 Renew myself on double pleasures!

*

*But how much further do you want to go?
 Why not refuse the bossy insistence
 of new impressions?
 Behold in stead your own fields and hills.
 Regale yourself with the lilac
 about to flower, the gold cups
 of the flannel bush, the crimson beauty
 of the wild rose.
 Stay awhile. Replenish in repose.*

*

Thus did reason speak to me . . . And thus
 do I sit, in my sigh-blown age, on a bench
 within a garden — marvelous and reminiscent —
 and wait for my dear friend Anna.

— Constance Rowell Mastores

BEING THE SAME AS DUST

What I miss
 you and me our
 words, and pieces of words,
 which may cross universes,
 the long distances between stars
 the purple black
 empty nothingness
 which knowing you gulfed
 but then to throw me into an
 impossible abyss
 me left open
 and the nights fearsomely dark
 and the hurt dark thoughts which exist now
 within my brain, and I cannot
 discuss the great not understoods
 standing between me and

— Peter Layton

EXPONENTIALLY THE WORDS DESERT

In my singularity, I used to hear words.
They rushed in on me. All I had to do was listen.

Now in my forgettable years, I'm either deaf,
or they, of their own stubborn will, have severed

the connection. Perhaps they're increasing
with Chaos, off on a merge with the Great Sprawl.

They'll organize its lifestyle. Subject it to Bach.
I liked it better when they sang to me and me

alone. Now when I'm able to grab a few snatches,
the lyrics seem pointless, absurd. The message

a kind of Babled-down version. Sleepy-time talk
for a Lear in his dotage. Of course it's none of my

business what they do out there. Although I suspect
they are moving one square to the next, to the next,

building on their increasing order. Building toward
the Poem of all Poems. Toward epic seizure.

What Homer wrote. Or even Virgil. *Sing, goddess—
Tell me, Muse – Arma virumque cano.* I shall go

back to the beginning. Undo myself rhyme by rhyme.
Then start again, with one word. Two words. And so
on.

– Constance Rowell Mastores

THE DIAMOND MERCHANT

A diamond is forever.

– B.J. Kidd

The buoys of memory have faint bells, noticed in the night.
I have left these chiming seamarks for the time of my return.
They ring out there, but faintly, so faintly I can hardly hear.
I think they want me to remember the severances of the soul,
if soul is more than mere electric tissue. If Death is king
and I do not reclaim what I have jettisoned, it goes to him.
I do not want the king to have my life. Therefore, each night at sea,
I must set out to find the ringing buoys and haul aboard
the lagan realities, for now my aging body, my emotional mal de mer,
lend renewed reality to the cold, damp camps. One numbered friend
should wear a wedding ring, another was engaged, and yet a third,
below and silent, had eyes like Tavernier blue diamonds set in Fabergé
eggshell by the master. I cannot put a name to the smiling face I see,
but she existed, who is now the faint dream of a denouement.

Shalom alekhem Shalom alekhem

So now I sail all night to find them and their symbols, to
connect with them whatever seems appropriate, their rings,
their eyes, their ways: but not alone to find the persons
but to find the meanings of the persons to myself, the electric
mind, before the king should claim them from my life.

– E.M. Schorb

FOR THE HEAD-STRONG & STUBBORN

This old sword still serves me
For the steel is still sound;
This old dog moves slowly
But can still get around.
This old heart is broken
Yet manages to beat;
The head-strong & stubborn
Don't go down to defeat.
This dark beard is graying
But grows thicker each day;
For grim costs of living
Each return some small pay.
Through mid-life's tough sledding
Our bright youth must grow old;
But with wisdom's increasing
We're repaid some tenfold.

– Steven M. Sloan

HOW MANY MORE

1/28/2011

How many more birthday mornings
Will I awake sans mortal pain

How many more poems will I write
Before I leave this human stain

How many more thoughts will visit
This increasingly scattered brain

How many more years will I know
Of sunshine, snow, of wind & rain

How many more? Do not tell me –
Just let me breathe and hear and see

– George Held

HARD

Dad, it was hard to see you lying there –
And all the weight of nightmare on your chest
Pressing you down. Your death was in the air.
Wisdom offended when it dared suggest
That all that weight and pain were for the best.
No tears, I tell you, gathered at my eyes.

My orphan status I'd not yet confessed.
I cursed myself for being strong and wise.

I wished you to grow stronger and to rise –
And knew my wishes were a childish joke.

Philosophers I called on to advise
My infancy were not ashamed to choke.

I showed up and was present when you went –
But still can hardly face the gray event.

– Tom Riley

LEVAYAH

for Dr. Pollack

Heaven unlocks
the gate of tears,
a crashing wave

of black umbrellas,
topcoats,
hats and veils.

Dark waters
 cresting
cleanse the street.

The hearse
rolls forward
and we follow

down the block –
debris
receding in its wake.

– Steven Sher

DUPLICATES

If it's days of spring you want, I've seen you gazing
 ahead in the field,

Reddish buds opening on a green background
Winking toward the plain that rears up.

Which way are you headed? Which way will your feet
 carry you?

Many paths are deceptive. They plunge into wadis,
 they disappear.

In the distance appears a Bedouin leading his flock, an
 everyday occurrence,

And a sweating camel gallops through the desert to
 gulp artesian water.

Where are you? And you? Where are they? Where's
 everybody??

We're all duplicates. On far-off stars

Our likenesses, our actions, past, present, and future,
 are duplicated.

Our thoughts, our inventions, our actions on our own
 behalf –

Out there in the stars, far away and close up, they're all
Thinking the thoughts that were once ours

Doing the deeds that we once did

Do the lines of a poem need immediate explanation?

Give time time to play with the wind, with our creative
 spirit.

Isn't it enough that our works are written down

To be duplicated in our future mirroring

Preserved on other planets

Even after the Big Bang

For future eternities, and after them?

Shall not all of us, as envisioned, arise and renew and
 be renewed

As though we had not been here before, as though time
 had stopped running . . . ?

– A delina Klein

From the Hebrew: E. Kam-Ron

ECHOES

When the soft, sweet sounds of love are whispered,
their echoes fill all the hills and canyons,
 repeating every word

over and over, and over again

to touch all who are near or far away;

 so, we must be aware

the sounds of love make form our memories,

once spoken they last for eternity,

 and will be repeated

through the long corridors of timeless time,

be heard by every thing and every one,

 and echo forever.

– Robert William Russell

III. There For a Reason

FENCES

I knew that the fence was close
and that I could climb it,
using all of my determination
and cunning,
but I didn't.
It's there for a reason.

I'd peek through,
pressing my cheek
against its fissures,
thinking,
Doesn't that feel like me.

I came to know the difference
between the sound of a door opening,
and the sound of a door closing.

Dams form
while waiting for the next
interesting thing to happen.

What *is*,
is what's happening
and what's apprehending.
So the individual validation
of significance
is the part of the equation
that keeps an inventory
on where the body
has been
and where
it is going.

I know all
these tragedies that will befall me,
just not their order.

Impermanence is practical,
and infinity is romantic.

Time is loss.
Time is gain.

Inherent nobility as a reflex
is what I'm after,
but my surroundings
are roadblocks,
as they should be.

Nature tells me nothing
of morality.

I gesture
from car windows.

Staking and tying
the boundaries of convictions,
I claim this tiny portion
of existence
mine.

Fences are just trees
rearranged.

The further you get from something,
the more it becomes you.

– Daniel McDonell

my space

i do not speak
of a cinema seat

space i cannot
stray from, step out of
move aside in or share

temporarily
vacated, and
claimed again

i speak of space
wholly mine, until
as from shadow
ousted by time

but of a space
i alone occupy,
space the air
defines as mine

– miriam chaikin

space about which
they say,
"there she is,"
when i am there

[Untitled]

Take one more breath
Before the soul arrives,
One more breath of freedom,
One more breath of light,
Before the soul descends to the world of constrictions
Take one more breath –
Tender, lucid, lovely –
That will fill you wholly,
And try, my soul, not to forget everything in the
constriction,
Try to remember a little of the light,
So that the light may shine for me in dark hours,
Illuminating freedom, flight, existence,
So that I may never forget, my dear soul,
That I came from there, from the light,
And that to that place I am destined
To return

– Ma'ayan Or Batt

A FRAME

A frame holds me, borders me,
and within the frame
I splash purple, crimson and peacock blue.
The colors whirl and create circles and heptagons.

Within the colors
I place quavers and semibreves.
The notes play their song
and their melody is heard beyond the borders.

Within the melody
I pen letters.
The letters join together and form words.
The words – a fence around the truth.

Truth sprouts white wings,
gains strength and flies
to a canopy standing on four poles
and under the canopy, Truth's bride –

Peace.

– Ruth Fogelman

POOLING SAND

It's disruptive
hearing the front door open and shut
I who am mostly seeking solitude and silence.

The whole open outdoors
exposed now to my house
veins of light
from lampposts, an occasional passing car,
the noises of the street.

Why is it
that the thought locked front door jamb opens
swinging from the caught wind
the nasal smell of tumbleweeds
the tumbling ghosts whose
whereabouts, what-about, like you,
remain unknown?

– Peter Layton

HORIZONS

1.
Bare oak filigrees
engrave the pewter sky.
Each twig obeys genetic dictates
while growing this way or that
at the whim of the wind.
Random yet preordained,
a tree is a fractal struggle
between entropy and destiny
that somehow yields a perfect peace
like the patient lattice
of atoms in a single snowflake.

2.
Poplar skeletons along a ridge
are poised to paint in unison
a blood-hued sunset.
A dogged blaze of hubris
is a self-deluding prelude
to benighted havoc:
an unintended apocalypse of folly.

3.
Our view from the train
renews itself like each passing day,
yet we can't see past
the vain prophecies
called the foreseeable future.
While accident engulfs intent,
we plan and make lists,
unaware of the black swan
beyond the horizon.

– David Olsen

A PERFECTLY SPHERICAL BEAD

At the beginning each is issued a separate spherical bead,
perfect, that contains them, one by one,
Translucent boundary, order of self,

And everyone is able to press
a face against the bead's hard surface,
from inside, or outside,
catch glimpses,
shadows shifting –
but always clarity is marred.

If one were to chip away at the bead as at coal veins,
only tiny shivers would come away,
even with the hardest of tools, leaving the
perfectly spherical surface blemished – imperfect,
and marring what clarity there once might have been.

Each life being a separate, perfectly spherical bead
and the path upon its surface never marked,
each path to be determined by each step upon it,
commencing at the very first,
and never a real trace that can be used
for following the lost to where they've gotten to.

Each perfectly spherical bead –
bumping up against other perfectly spherical beads,
making it possible for the joining of hands
and the linking of paths
even as each proceeds within one's own
separately rounded shelter;
– making it also possible for
pushing and shoving off paths and
sometimes into the final step – before its time.

Each life being a perfectly spherical bead,
with only the end marked,
the choice being to blaze the path
and always flee the final step,
or simply to circle it over and over again,
until it becomes familiar.

Or to stride directly for it
and hesitate perhaps, at the last,
just before the final stride
that will cause the bead to collapse upon itself
to its shadowed center.

Each life being a perfectly spherical bead
whose curve conceals the ending,
so that even when the ending is pursued,
it is always beyond the horizon,
not taunting you in an open field
to come forward and take it.

– and the irony that no matter what direction,
what labyrinthine path,
the final step, though concealed,
is never more than a step away
and, if looked for, in the proper light,
always visible.

– Harry Youtt

JACK-IN-THE-BOX

When the lid is open
I experience a world of beauty and song.
alive and full of energy.

But when the lid is closed
I am pushed down
deep into empty darkness;
I experience only fear and despair.
Directed inward
I can see no further than my little box
and forget how it feels to be free.

But I know,
deep within my heart,
that a time will come
when the lid will be opened again.

Then the sun will shine on my face
Light through my being
I will laugh, sing and be filled with love. . .

Oh how ecstatic I shall be!

– Avril Meallam

OCEAN WITHOUT END

I am a spirit
Like all other human spirits
A point of light
An aura.
I am a universe
Endlessly expanding . . .
Contracting to . . .
Nothingness.
I cannot sail all
Of my cosmic seas
Nor behold all
The jewelled galaxies
Or widening black holes
Of my ocean without end;
My craft is too frail
My candle too dim
And my wick,
Though constantly relighted,
Too soon snuffed out.
Yet I would proclaim myself.

– Roy L. Runds

FENCED IN/OUT

My virtual white picket fence
keeps out the respectful
and the law-abiding

but not the trespassers,
terrorists and proselytizers,
and it's pervious to viruses,

paranoia, and the perverse,
and fear seeps through it, fear
of life lived beyond its pale,

fear of the teeming street
with its filth and otherness,
its wildness and allure.

o how I need and detest
my virtual white picket fence!

— George Held

THE COUNTRY OF THE SOUL

“... at the skin my being doesn't end.” — George Faludy

A porous organic fence built not only for defense but as
an explorer of the unknown and an envoy to the familiar;
antenna and transmission tower: the skin.

That's the border of the country of being, but being
doesn't have to stop there if the border guards let
the soul slip in and out on the waves of the universal wing;

where are you now? Still hiding in your skin?
The outside stops where you hang your skin curtain,
but it doesn't have to be of iron, does it?

Teased by the fingertip lights of life it becomes
tight and you're ready to jump out of it;
but if life throws tear drops at your skin,
are you willing to step out and ask why?

Better yet, just ask how? Reach out and ask how
you can help to stop the flow of tears; but even better
yet, show there's life beyond the skin; beyond
the pain and pleasure, that's where life begins.

— Paul Sohar

From *SONNETS TO ORPHEUS, SECOND SERIES*

29

Hushed friend of many distances, feel how
your breath is even now extending space.
From belfries' darkened carpentry let you
be heard to strike. Whatever being draws

its nourishment from you grows strong from this.
What, of what you've lived through, gave most
pain?

Explore all sides of metamorphosis.
Is your drink bitter? Change yourself to wine.

In this night's immensity, become
the magic where your senses undergo
their nexus, unexplained: be what it means.

And if the spirit of the world disdains
your memory, tell the still earth: I flow.
To the rushing water say: I am.

— Rainer Maria Rilke
from the German: T.P. Perrin

NIGHT-BRIGHTNESS

The night is peerless and serene,
Its brilliance luminous.
Each house stands marvelous within
A silver universe.

A magic brightness reigns in me
So rich and prodigal
It fills my being clear and free
From sorrowing or trial.

In my heart's house I cannot cage
All this rich light alone:
It will, it must, escape, must break
The final barriers down.

— J.G. Seidl
from the German: T.P. Perrin

[Note: this poem was set to music by Franz Schubert.]

"GUN-FIRE OR FIRE-WORKS? "

May 2001 Jerusalem
Yom HaAtzma'outh (Israeli Independence Day)

Gun-fire or fire-works?
Damn those terrorists
Damn those jerks
More gun-fire; G-d I'm tired.

Fifty-third "Atzma'outh" Anniversary
Oh my G-d: Absurdity.

Went to Shul, went t'Efrata
Debated myself, if I ought ta

Almost didn't go, almost didn't show
Shall I walk by our "Berlin wall;"
But they say, I'm not so tall, so
Maybe the bullets'll sail . . .
Over my head, and I shan't be
All that dead?

Stay at home or celebrate outside?
Darn it, I must decide!

Went to Shul, davened Hallel;
Din't ask th' enemy t' go t' Hell.

"Gaba'eet " insisted I stay 'n dine
'Twas of no use . . . I tried t' decline,
As she convinced me all too well.

Food was great, my mood improved
'N Local Joe guitar'd us with
Old-fashioned tunes.

Guest speaker was smart enough
Not to preach; rather,
T' entertain us with a
Relevant speech.

Neither moralizing nor polarizing
Nor imploring nor ignoring
Past wars and scars
From our present-day wars.

But...that un-welcome sound
On familiar ground, it's been
Seven months of machine-gun rounds.

We heard it again, we quietly shrieked,
Some got up, out of our synagogue seats.

We mildly yelled at each other:
Fire-works, or, machine-gun fire?
Some ran out doors to take a look;
Most sat in our seats and clenched our teeth.

Eventually I too walked home
Electing main-street Gilo
On the fire-works side
Leaving aside the "Berlin wall "
A big-black-hole of Nothingness
Walking home, breathing G-dliness

Getting home with Holiness.
Getting home from a great big mess.
Getting home. Emptiness.
Getting home. Empty-nest.
Getting home. That's the best.
Getting home. Away from blasts.
Getting home safe.

While it lasts.

— Sue Tourkin-Komet

IN NO MAN'S LAND

what happens to those afraid to move
frozen forever like a shadow
behind an indifferent oak

a dream can still freeze me in the drama
of my run across the border
a tableau pregnant with bullets and finales

what happens to the footsteps
frozen to the spot
not knowing which way to run

what happens to the corpses of
those shot at the border
trying to escape the script

what happens to the prayers
that turn into stones and attack
their own tired feet

what happens to the oaks
that failed to report the escapee
hiding behind them

and how do the oaks feel now
the ones that refused to tell
the hunted which way to flee

oaks are indifferent border guards
they guard neither the border
nor the shadow hiding behind them

don't look back at the border you've
crossed alive
it might come after you

— Paul Sohar

BOUNDARY

Here, beside the sources of the Jordan
 River that's been like a brother to me,
 the brother who carried me, striding
 in the only direction, on his shoulders,
 I awoke from a wild drive
 in a blazing-hot, desolate place,
 not knowing where, in my life and in all your lives
 is the boundary line
 between the fertile pastures of generosity
 and the field mined with weaknesses.

– Hamutal Bar-Yosef
 from the Hebrew: E. Kam-Ron

(e)the(real)
 87.

hark the hark
 & herald the herald
 wince as a
 mighty voice preens,
 slapped back into
 a fable full of
 puns & symmetry.
 how daring these
 puffs of air
 tampering with the songs
 of zions living
 on the edge of quicksand
 & a red, red, sea.

– Guy R. Beinig

ASYLUM SEEKERS' FEARS

Gathering storms of uncertainty frighten them
 as they assemble at the border of prolonged wait for
 unjust decisions
 At the frozen glacier of complex asylum system, they
 breathe fire
 Their immigration status causes constant panic and
 fear
 Minute by minute they are petrified by their
 predicament
 Night is naught as it brings no hope of heroism
 Instead nightmares terrify these sleepless asylum
 seekers

Possible detention propel nervousness
 as they become scared of being locked like foreign
 criminals
 They pray unceasingly for the removal flights to be
 cancelled

because they are deeply horrified to return to their
 homelands
 They are frightened by prospects of poisonous prisons
 Where vast hell cannot endure human rights abuses
 Honestly, sanctuary seeking is journey littered with
 endless trepidation

– Handsen Chikowore

THE ETHIOPIANS

War being war
 only trouble harrowed our days.

Even the oases dried up.
 Wild horses roamed
 the shrinking marshes
 kicking up dust.
 Migrant birds didn't stop
 to visit between continents
 but scud missiles did.

To keep the heart alive
 rumours flew:
 the improved model
 of the world will end
 this latest celebration
 of egomania –
 (as Jeremiah foretold)

while the Ethiopians'
 chocolate doe-like eyes
 beseeched the sky for explanations.

To reach their ancestral home
 they travelled on foot
 across deserts and drought
 as deliberate as the gap
 between atomic and rotational
 time around the sun,
 when leap seconds rush in,
 global winds and the moving
 molten matter in the planet's interior
 relate to distant points in the solar system –

wonders understood by scientists
 and, of course, the Ethiopians,
 who knew that nothing in nature
 recognizes borders,
 territorial claims or invasions.

– Gretti Izak

OFFENDING BORDERS

It's so hard to break the American shell
I find myself in, ignorant of cultures not my own.
All I know is imported, what they sell

like Ferrari dreams, sushi, and tequila. They'll
try to immigrate, those foreigners, then bemoan:
"It's so hard to break the American shell."

George W. wanted a patrolled wall to compel
Mexicanos to stay at home (because they are brown?).
All I know is their rhetoric, what politicians sell

(being a jingoist is why Bush is going to hell).
Voting for big oil, the cost is well known.
It's so hard to break the American Shell

Oil Company's hold- all the CO² we expel
while driving a truck on vacation to Yellow stone.
All I know is capitalism, what TV ads sell.

How does it affect the world? Some foretell
disaster, some say we're a citadel, some disown.
It's so difficult to break the American shell;
all I know is what I buy, what they sell.

— Ryan Peeters

EXTRAS

Thrilled by Titicaca's wicked syllables,
I'd begged to be Peru; I am El Salvador,
Mrs. Richardson told me I was. I sit
in a semicircle on a school stage
between Ekwador and Gwatamala.
Alphabetical order trumps geography,
but we are all Paramount or MGM
Mexicans, extras, scratchy serapes
draped over siesta slumped shoulders
our sweeping sombreros with *Tijuana*
or *Ensenada* stitched to the crowns.
Put them on backwards so no one sees.

In late hours of the century, *No one saw...*

light slanting off the barrels of our M-16's
or heard the shrieks as villages vanished.
No one smelled rotting cattle, burnt corn,
or felt the smooth wood of unstained coffins
surrendered to soil that grew only crosses.
No one heard low voices settle on prices
none could afford; no one saw faint desert
traces, or, in Yuma, baffled faces scanning
boxcars or a Greyhound passport they could
not decipher. These extras never wore

sombreros on multi-purpose room stages.
Now, in a century's young light, we see.
Mrs. Richardson was right; *Yo soy El Salvador.*

— John O'Dell

ONCE UPON A TIME

I bear with it to honor creation,
still curious as to what is around
the bend.

I bear with it to sanctify courage,
to give it a stage to grapple
with itself

I bear with it for the amazing wonder,
the mind leaping probing deeply
into the aethers

I bear with it most days trying hard
as a man can, yet inside saving some
for my soul

I bear with it to witness the arithmetic
the literary history of my people
through our myths

I bear with it in comprehension
of the unseen, certain of the isolation
of relations dreamed

I bear with it with deep empathy
as the parade, the cortege, of the mortal coil
passes by

I bear with it to build an arc of words
a bridge that passes from here to there
once upon a time

— Michael S. Morris

A FAMILY RECIPE, AKRON

Latkes, fried potato pancakes with frayed
edges from the onions Emma stirred in –
derived from *latka*, Yiddish for patches made
to clothes worn through, reworked, and worn again.
Latkes for her family, whole at Thanksgiving
since the children who had married out refused
to come for Hanukkah. Meanwhile siblings
renewed their childhood scraps, each one abused

in turn, as in-laws glared and children squirmed.
Just eight, I noted what a ragged thing
family gathered to give thanks could become,
how bitter herbs were always blossoming,
though not from Seders we also wouldn't share.
Then latkes patched all squabbles till next year.

– Will Wells

JOURNEYINGS

We were exiled from land to land, from one
continent to another,
And when we gathered in a place that was wretched
compared to its past
It was already inhabited and hostile.
Although the wind blew on it from far off,
We set up housekeeping there.

Now we are exiles in the guise of tourists:
Two weeks in Patagonia, a few hours in the Louvre,
Stuck in travel agencies,
Spending the night in airports,
Equipped with backpacks and suitcases packed to
bursting
Like a promise that there is somewhere to go back
to.

And where
Where are we going to, ascending and descending
–

Near-experts at reading foreign signs –
And again, where is the gate to our desired
destination?

In the meantime,
Like chameleons we suit ourselves to the
background
So as not to be caught in some definition that would
commit us
And cancel the exclusive group individuality we
almost acquired
On our most recent journeyings.

– Ruth Blumert
from the Hebrew: E. Kam-Ron

THE KINGDOM OF UNCERTAINTY

Lies one accidental quantum-event horizon
Slightly north of the last book you've been reading.
You may have heard it referred to cryptically
By students of an arcane mathematical discipline
In the hallways of certain secular institutions.
Few people arrive there intentionally.
You can't just jump in your car and get there overnight;
There are no national or international flights;
No street signs, Atlas Road Maps or GPS indicator
Will get you to any fixed geographical coordinates.
The metes and bounds are not recorded
In your local courthouse. There are no gas stations,
Libraries with sacred texts, or places of worship
To hang your hat. There are no rail lines
Running on Time through the boroughs or spanning
The continent, bringing bankers, speculators
And 21st century carpetbaggers looking to exploit
Natural resources and take up residence
In luxury hotels. And finally there is no veranda
Where you can sit in your bathing suit
Admiring the setting sun lighting up ice cubes
In before dinner drinks, while you stare
Mindlessly at the horizon which always appeared
To circumscribe your whole idea of the beginning
And end of everything.

What may happen to you is this: You'll wake-up
One night in a cold sweat – that open book on the
nightstand

Beside your bed, the windows and shutters will be rattling,
The foundation of your heretofore ordinary safe house
Will be rumbling – and you will say to yourself,
"Where am I?" And, "How in the name of all that's holy
Did I get here?" Relax. But be forewarned,
You've just cleared customs, crossed
A heavily guarded border into uncharted territory,
Becoming the expatriate of a country
Where you can never, ever return.

– Tom Chatburn

BOUNDARIES

are set in the mind,
 afraid to cross, because
 of what you might find.
 Standing at the water's edge,
 you hedge.
 The spirit is weak,
 the wind begins to shriek.
 You will not cross today.
 Perhaps tomorrow
 you will find a way.

– John F. Gruber

SHADOWS

Obscure signs that have
 been posted.
 Their message hangs in the mist.
 “No trespassing.”
 But you have inadvertently
 stepped over the boundary.
 No sirens blare, or searchlights glare.
 You continue on,
 knowing the night and you
 Have much to share.

– John F. Gruber

ULTIMA THULE

Before we discovered that continents slide about,
 tethered to nothing, and the universe is
 an infinite sphere
 with its center everywhere,
 ancient mariners worried about plunging
 over the edge of the world, and
 marked a point on their maps as
 Ultima Thule, the exact spot
 where you ran out of wind and fell
 into a vast deep stillness.
 Astonishing now to think once the world
 was a tidy well-lighted room
 sealed up tight
 with an inside
 and nothingness night outside.

And us, what of us?
 carried out here in a dimensionless dark
 with a defective compass
 on a ship that reshapes itself
 with the fluidity of its motion,
 plotting our course by exploding stars
 and the unsettled, momentary tracks
 of seabirds.

Will there once again be
 a room with walls we know by touch
 in the dark,
 a floor nailed down flat,
 or the memory of a steady light,
 fixed on rock
 in a harbour that is still there
 when we open our eyes?

– Stanley J. O'Connor

THE HARBOR

“... O Lord, hear my prayer, listen to my
 supplications in Your faithfulness, answer me in Your
 righteousness.” (Psalm 143:1)

There has to be a well-protected bay,
 A harbor or a port which offers me
 Some respite from a restless, endless sea;
 There has to be a simpler, shorter way
 To find a jetty than long routes that play
 A game of hide-and-seek; there has to be
 A docking-area for boats, a quay
 Where ships can moor before they drift astray.

How long, my God, how long before I reach
 The haven of Your shore? Suspicions haunt
 The bowels of my craft; I want to bring
 My vessel to Your islands' safest beach,
 O Lord, I want to touch dry land, I want
 To disembark, my Anchor and my King.

– Yakov Azriel

THE SLIPPERY TERRAIN OF PROTECTION

1
 For my friend, the painter,
 it is now time to admire
 the fuchsia tree so earthbound
 and content, so totally untainted
 by our own experience,
 draping big satin leaf clusters
 and pink flowers over the great
 liquidity of the sea.

2
 He prepares the canvas
 by creating a barrier of gesso
 between linen and pigment.
 The tangibility of things
 sways his mind with storms of logic:
 Should he feel guilty building barriers,

boundaries, devices for the fuchsia tree
which borrows so discreetly hues
from the amenable sea?

3

Veil over veil of glazes,
another shield, blocking façade,
oils and thinners gnaw at cloth,
sheath deep into weave and fibre;
streaming skeins of paint
form themselves into changing shapes –
slippery nuances of colour swept across
the body of canvas

nameless energy he understands
as total perfection that if not contained
will consume him like an arrow of fire.

– Gretti Izak

POET OR PRETENDER

for Gwilym

Left or right.

On or off.

Nought or one.

Tyranny of either/or.

In your binary humility
you call yourself a pretender,
but you slalom
the convoluted surface

of the space-time continuum,
neither inside nor outside,
ever curling back
upon yourself

in constant quest
of memory and future,
unaware that both
lack certainty and shape.

Toiling in thickets of meaning,
poets are always in process,
always becoming,
like galaxies or gardens.

– David Olsen

TOWARD THAT WHICH DOES NOT STRICTLY COHERE

A noisy universe of disquiet voices.
No drama in that life except the literary kind.
A poet whose most inspired lines
occur in fragmentary poems
that would yield unprecedented beauty
if there were only a way

to make them all fit together.
His work stands, in its misfit glory,
as various sized building blocks – some rough,
others exquisitely fashioned –
of an impossible but marvelous monument.
Pessoa the master nonbuilder!

Or one could compare his oeuvre
to a set of ruins. Like the temple complex
of one or another acropolis, where
only ghosts of gods take their solitary way
through what remains, and Apollo's lyre
barely twangs in the breeze.

Thinking of Pessoa's works in this way,
as ruins, what one hears is not the sound
of plucked strings but a seemingly incongruous,
wistful progression of chords. From one
of Chopin's Preludes, Opus 28. Twenty-four
brief compositions that sound more like remnants

than beginnings; tonal improvisations
that in their delicate hovering seem to exist in some
mysterious, other-than-real realm – as on
a heavenly Olympus above the earthly one –
works realized to the point of divine perfection –
after which they fall to the ground and break

into pieces, most of which are lost irretrievably.
From the few exceedingly beautiful that remain –
whispers that send us back to the source –
we can discern something of that
original splendor, for which we feel, as humans,
a natural longing, an old affinity.

– Constance Rowell Mastores

DREAM VOICE

Again she opens her mouth
 Takes a deep, hopeful breath
 Feels the air vibrate
 Across her throat
 Across a range of notes
 Ready to grasp a mike
 Then illusions drop away
 Leaving one long, real sound
 A sad sigh
 No change
 Just an ordinary voice
 Where is the line she wonders
 Where is the line between
 A good and great voice.
 Where is the line between
 Personal Will and Divine help
 She will try again tomorrow
 And tomorrow
 Waiting for the shift
 For her dream voice to emerge

– Heather Gelb

gatekeepers

i turn
 restless
 longing for sleep
 waiting
 for the little folk
 to appear
 behind my eyes
 tiny beings
 eyelash high
 arriving singly
 erect with intention
 moving in silence
 in slow motion
 forming a fence
 around me
 closing ranks
 drawing closer
 to one another
 closer still
 ever closer
 lifting me from
 my landscape
 setting me down
 in theirs

– miriam chaikin

BOUNDARIES

Beached on the gritty sand of sleep
 awareness only bubbles on the rim,
 I hear voices call me
 in the soft Yiddish accents of my childhood
 that changed the vowels
 of my name to sighs.

I am again the child
 who chants herself to sleep
 each night with the ancient rhythm
 of *Shema Yisrael* . . .
 and by day skims over glazed sidewalks
 on crimson runners, the sled
 attached firmly by a rope
 to my mother's hands, her boots
 tamping fresh snow before me
 with the sound of certainty. In a world
 as patterned as the six-pointed snow flakes
 melting just now on my tongue,
 I throw my arms wide to greet the day
 rushing toward me on a stream of powdered air.

– Sheila Golburgh Johnson

QUINTINA LENTE

When all the stars but one shine bright at last,
 and cast their wan beams o'er the sleeping, lest
 pure darkness shroud their pallid forms, the list
 of souls forgotten grow, and leave the lost
 to pine eternally in fruitless lust,

then wake the demons, rouse the walking lust
 that barring long-old teeth that them outlast;
 they wander blind, and even ever lost
 they never can return to face light, lest
 their figure drop a rung on quondam list,

their unsaid purpose only to enlist
 those night-tossed human shapes for whom they lust,
 and ring the mortals from their slumber, lest
 their slender, empty husks the night don't last,
 and wake up dead, the morn as life but lost.

And, never meeting, never getting lost,
 the cohorts trundle down their ancient list,
 white shadows in the night, until the last
 gem winking starry eye sand-blinks the lust
 from waking night, and gilds the sidewalks, lest

the purple velvet settles. Shuffling, lest
the burning, rubbing eye catch sight of lost
and homeless spirits, aching in their lust
for respite, for the ragged, exed-out list,
the shadow-figures hide themselves at last.

Ere the least of the midnight army's loosed
liest asleep the lowest of the laced.

– Daniel Galef

SANDPIPERS

Quick scurry-legs; so happy. Chasing foam
to nibble newborn bubbles in the sand,
investigating (is it edible?)

They live between the waves. And if their home
requires frequent exits and dry land
by way of refuge (up, if possible)

we're not so different; we do plenty of
our own expectant perching. Watch them chase
a crunchy sand-flea; you'll identify.

For just a second, zig-zagging above
the inundation, they're oblivious,

and you're convinced they'll capsize. But one eye
is always ready for the wall of foam,
and so are we. Two species, beach-mad. Home.

– Kathryn Jacobs

ONE MORE MILLENIUM

All of a sudden you look back
how time has travelled . . . almost nothing
is left. No more room, everything
in little boxes, memory chips in jars
with machines that record them. History, a playback

generations, like a talisman you wear
on your neck, reminding yourself, pearls of wisdom
that you carry around. Sitting on a park bench
far away in time, repeating what each one tells
what itched . . . you scratched, as sweat
the size of worry beads, one more link in the chain.

That was a funny joke, you laughed, when
it was fresh. Eyes follow the images
the YouTube inside your head the doctor ordered.

It keeps you happy when you are down and
out . . . one more prayer,
one more reason to forgive. You smile

to survive here is to know
the stuff you hold means something. There is a
reason

for you to be, to keep what was there
here and now forever.

– Zev Davis

THE FERRIS WHEEL ON NAVY PIER

My childhood favorite when
the carnival came to town
with all the sound of gritty oil
smoothing the turn of metal gears,
the smell of carny sweat and cotton candy,
the fake glitter that dazzled our excited eyes
was this lift and swing through air
and view of our flat landscape smoothed
out clear to where the sky
was pinned to earth, our 360° view.

We thrilled to our daring,
tipping dangerously at the top,
frail metal scaffolding our only safety,
and below, cabbagey heads were clumped,
none marveling at us,
all seeking their own dangers.

When we decided to see Chicago
from that giant wheel
looking

to lake and city both, it moved so slowly
in its huge circle that we did not
gasp once or even fear for our lives.

He was too young to make such comparisons,
but I decided, once and for all,
that the creaky old imperfect things,
the worn-to-nothing bathrobes,
the small chattels of childhood,
can never be surpassed
by the awe-inspiring displays
of our *biggers* and *bettters*. Never.

– Carol Hamilton

BERNICE ABBOTT

WPA wasn't ideal
but it was the happiest

day when I got a
grant. I did New York,

the old tenement
building. I'd take my

photos around, went
to the Bowery. A man

said nice girls don't
go to the Bowery. I

said, I'm not a nice girl,
I'm a photographer,

I'm going anywhere

– Lyn Lifshin

BARRIERS

I was about to say something
but stopped
against the window pane
his face – his eyes
stone grey met mine –
no recognition
in angry pain perhaps
staring at his reflection
I at mine or
was it his
overexcited
behind the double glazing
I shouted non-messages
into echoing silence . . .

I wish,
I wish that there had been
an open window to let in
the moon to catch
the moment to hear
the string quartet
tuning up to clear
the fog to see and touch . . .

But what if his eyes
were dead and his hands
on the strings
were stone?

– Ruth Stern

STONEWALLED

To the beat of your lifelong drum
the height of your wall extends,

stone on hard cold stone. By the time
I get home from work, you've slit

sweetness from daybreak's kiss,
blocked your hold around my waist,

skin to skin, dogs nuzzling for warmth.
This stonewalling sours the moment

our tongues taste succulent morels you've
prepared for us with brandy and cream,

locks you in darkness when evening light
invites us to wander under redbud's last

bloom. I see life recede through holes
in your wall. I whisper *I love you*.

Crack filler splashes (and stings) my eye
from the safety of your side of the wall.

– Molly O'Dell

ENTICEMENT

Your mood is granite and your opinions do not give.
You are the stone faces on Mt. Rushmore.
Nothing flexes.
Something might.
But the backside of the moon is the reflection
Of superstitious cheese.
Settle for green?
Why not?

You are as far away from enticement as temptation
On the sly.
I am trying to get in to your reluctance,
To be with you when you pull off your blanket.

– David Lawrence

NO BOUNDARIES FOR THEM!

In that family there were no boundaries
Particularly with language
Everybody just leapt right in
And said whatever they wanted
And asked whatever they wanted.

It paid to be on guard, watch
 What one said in case it came back twisted, bent into a
 sharp
 Tool that pricked the flesh and
 Made it smart and opened old wounds with a new betrayal.

In that family there were no boundaries
 Everyone chimed in and joined every private conversation
 Turned every phone call into a conference call
 And each piece of mail into an item of communal property.

A new friend underwent due diligence from three
 generations
 And might not be approved.
 Yet over time even the rejected ones became family friends,
 absorbed in the crowd.

Each courtship was in the public domain, with running
 commentary about each intimacy observed, and
 much debate about the prognosis, and all of this
 was shared with friend, on phone, email, Skype and
 Facebook.

Each illness gave permission to share and circulate the most
 private workings of the failing flesh . . .
 After all, everyone just wanted to help.

The small children winced, old enough to understand that
 their secrets were being traded,
 Like shares in a mutual fund.

And old age and end of life issues?
 Well the welfare of the matriarch became a constant topic of
 conversation
 Within the family and beyond.
 She had become a mascot
 The survivor of the survivors
 Yet for herself she kept some boundaries
 Cultivating a veil of mystery which
 She cherished till the very end.

– Ruth S. Sager

[untitled]

I didn't know that leaving was this hard

It came like a wave of forgotten soldiers lying in ambush.
 It fell like a claw from a caged tiger.
 It crawled on my senses stealing scratches by mercy.
 I couldn't believe the way my stomach screamed.
 It felt bloated beyond scarred fury.
 It was a door closing from beyond.

– T. Anders Carson

YOU ARE THE OTHER

You are the other, longing to receive him
 Into the maze of mirrors
 That waits at the door of wonder and suspicion
 And inhibition in the presence of difference
 A wish to go out into the expanses of the
 other –
 Who is not in doubt
 Because no one understands his way; his court;
 his occupation;
 His thoughts; his difference
 So who will take him to their heart? Their
 circle?
 To the hourglass that waits
 For some consequential, general
 Change in status to take place
 Which will lead the individual and the
 community
 From impatience
 To unconditional acceptance
 And the other will be like you, his bread and
 sustenance
 And yours one and the same
 Understanding his different world
 For all is breath and vanity
 And all have been mistaken in their grasp of
 And their reservation from the other, the
 different
 Who is actually no different and no other
 In the nape of accepting understanding

– Adelina Klein
 From the Hebrew: E. Kam-Ron

YES, BUT

The other is only I
 And I am only the Other
 Within the One

Down here there is difference
 Yes and no
 Public and private
 Right and wrong
 Sacred and profane
 Friend and foe
 Mine and thine

Down here is a pattern
 Whose complex, articulate,
 Differentiated, infinitely
 Nuanced unity
 Reflects the One
 Go and study

– E. Kam-Ron

TELL ME

Hide it in my desk where I will find it.
 Show me the policy. Guide my digit
 down the arcane index, indicate.
 Give me the conditions. Spell it out.

Preach it to me. Teach me a ditty of it.
 Dictate a summary memo of it. Let
 further treatment expand to nothing but
ditto, ditto, as was said, pronounced,

as something impossible to contradict.
 Give me verdict, sentence. Give it not
 in leaving benediction, but in judgment,

the parting shot before you abdicate.

Dedicated, addicted to it, late
 I wait. I can take it. Dish it out.

— John Milbury-Steen

WILL

When I fall
 Short
 Before my goal,
 And all control
 Is out-of-hand,
 My soul
 Finds peace upon the sand —
 Yet when I hear,
 Beyond a hill,
 The sigh
 Of, still,
 What might remain,
 My will
 Encounters every grain.

— David Kiphen

SELF REFLECTION

Smite smote smitten
 words find redemption
 even provide a mood
 for the doubtful and surreal
 the dreamers and the gloom
 but no syntactic legerdemain
 can explain
 how we hate those we hurt
 love those we help
 trust those we betray

Maybe reason can be read

in the pitter patter of our DNA
 though I suspect our lineage was not a logical leap,
 linear and upright
 maybe a swirl like a shell
 a limpet, a damp barnacle
 with suction cup insecurities
 and our motives blurry
 far under the sea.

— Susan Oleferuk

[untitled]

I didn't think
I was
A brain open to all winds and wild spirits
Seized with fears
Struggling
Constantly
In a cell –
A tattered skeleton –
Cudgeling itself with subjects beyond the clouds

Sometimes with a kind of satisfying arrogance –
Sometimes with an understanding
That barely managed
To lay
An outsize egg
That would roll out of the nest

– Ruth Blumert
from the Hebrew: E. Kam-Ron

THOUGHTS FOR THE LONGEST NIGHT

I have had to face
the terrible egotism
at the core of all poetry

“Husks in the finite, expandable,
in each
another form in-grows, in-sticks “*

Every intimation of wholeness
contingent
on some caesura.
Some limitation.

So was/is Creation
a showing-forth or
a concealment

and do we do well
to imitate it?

To live, I had
to join words together
hoping thereby
to give life.
Now, I'm not so sure.

Somewhere I cannot
see
hangs a scale.

In the one pan a plethora
of poems,
the odd good deed perhaps
mixed in among them.

In the other the harms I have done.
Some small.
Some maybe not so small.
And the waste.

And one pan, I cannot see,
inclines.

– E. Kam-Ron

* “Hüllen im Endlichen, dehnbar,/ in jeder/wächst
eine andre Gestalt fest “ – Paul Celan, *Fadensonnen*

LOST BETWEEN WINDWARD AND LEE

- I Knife-edged dunes 'twixt windward & lee,
 Ranks in shadow & light ...
 A sea of sand, or a sandy sea
 That sets my heart a fright.
 As far as any eye can see —
 Wastes of withering light!
 A tiny speck of nothing, me,
 Praying for cool of night.
- II In this world 'twixt windward & lee,
 Awash in hapless plight ...
 Resolve, & hope, & decency,
 As well as will to fight,
 Succumb to foul despondency
 In wastes of hellish light.
- III Even hubris abandons me
 As arid winds snarl & bite,
 And Sol climbs to ascendancy
 Gloating in grim delight,
 For I am struck with lethargy
 As life and strength take flight.
- IV Once in Sol's grip he doth decree —
 "You'll never know respite.
 For though you pray with fervency
 To speed the Moon & night,
 Entreating her in urgency
 To shield you from my light,
 Her cold can kill as easily —
 The cold of desert-night."
- V Adrift on the sands of a sandy sea,
 In night or broad daylight,
 I've lost what was and was to be
 And think in black-and-white . . .
 My infinite becomes finite
 As past and futures flee,
 For as I die of cold & heat
 I see what is, and is to be.

— Steven M. Sloan

HELL ON EARTH

THE HOTTEST HELL IS HERE ON EARTH,
 I THINK I'VE HEARD IT SAID, . . .
 OR WAS IT SOMETHING THAT IN SCHOOL
 I THINK I MIGHT HAVE READ?
 PERHAPS 'T WAS SOMETHING DREAMT AT NIGHT
 WHILE DEEP ASLEEP IN BED(?), . . .
 THAT HELL RESIDES WITHIN THE HEART
 FROM WHICH ALL HOPE HAS FLED.

– S.M. Sloan

SCHIZOPHRENIA II

the paralyzing illness, leveler
 of hopes and dreams, the shy boy
 reclusive as a man, the stars
 reflect in eyes of green.

The boy who should have grown to complete
 manhood, toppled at the age of twenty,
 circler of streets, the darkness
 below his angry eyes,

the winds of time sound in the church bells,
 old ogler of beautiful women, too
 old and sick to do much, worn
 out and without charm,

looking at the world through slits of guilt,
 trying to wash himself clean of shame,
 hidden in the dark of still rooms,
 the smoke of disenchantment.

– Calvin Green

IN THE DARK OF YOUR ROOM

I'm afraid of your hands
 weaving threads of despair
 into blankets of doom
 in the dark of your room

I would pluck petals
 toss them in air
 infuse their perfume
 in the dark of your room

I would offer a moonbow's
 flash from the sky
 interlaced on the loom
 in the dark of your room

I would promise my shoulder
 to cushion your head
 eclipsing the gloom
 in the dark of your room

I would wrap you in color
 and dip you in scent
 herald new bloom
 in the dark of your room

– ellen

THE JUST

“Happy is the man who has not walked in the
 counsel of the wicked, nor stood in the path of
 sinners, nor sat in the seat of scorners. But his
 delight is in the Torah of the Lord, and in His
 Torah does he meditate day and night.”

(Psalm 1:1-2)

Happy is the climber who finds a way
 To walk on jagged mountain cliffs, despite
 The threat of blinding sleet and hail by night,
 Despite the fear of falling rocks by day.

Happy is the sailor who learns a way
 To stand and steer his ship on course, despite
 Destructive typhoon winds and rains by night,
 Despite vast surging tidal waves by day.

Happy is the weaver whose loom is blessed
 With iridescent cloth his fingers weave
 Both day and night, from multicolored threads;
 With trembling hands, he sits and makes a vest
 For climbers and for sailors who believe
 In words he sews as yellows, blues and reds.

– Yakov Azriel

IV. *The Silent Channel*

THE SILENT CHANNEL

On the radio I heard
a poet talking about
the "silent channel,"
that hungry Muse
who lives in all who
refract being through
self to show
their truth.

Her truth was parents
who passed through
the valley of the shadow,
all-determining event,
dark beating chord,
underlying
our here and now,
our place and time.

our dream was other,
building, creation.

then that thing
irrupted,
deep dark,
beyond imagination.

Will that thing so stamp us,
that nothing else remains?
In memorializing the unthinkable
will we lose the dream?

– Michael E. Stone

THE GAME

"123 here I come!" I heard Tatte say in a stage whisper from the hallway. My five year old brother, Yankele, and I were hiding in the cupboard under the stairs under piles of *shmatte*s Mama used back in the days when she still cleaned the floors. I heard the sounds of Tatte opening and shutting cupboard doors in the kitchen.

"Where are they?" he said, "Could they be in the larder? No – not in here."

Yankele giggled and I cupped my hand around his mouth.

"Shush Yankelush, he'll hear you," I whispered in my brother's ear.

"Are they under the bed?" My father's voice rang again, "No not under here. Maybe they're behind the cabinet? Wrong again. Where did those *kinderlach* disappear to?"

I marveled at how long it was taking for Tatte to find us. Had I have been playing this game with Zelda like I usually did, I have no doubt she would have found us by now. I heard Tatte's heavy footsteps approaching the cupboard door. His shadow blocked the chink of light that was seeping in from the space between the door and the floor.

"Hmm, the cleaning closet," came Tatte's voice again, "I wonder if they're hiding in there?"

Yankele could no longer suppress his excitement and he let a high-pitched laugh slip from his mouth. I instinctively covered his mouth with my hand again.

"What is this?" Tatte said, "The closet is laughing? Since when do closets laugh?"

Despite my restraining hand, Yankele erupted into fits of giggles. Tatte opened the closet door. "Aah, it isn't the closet that is laughing, it's the *shmatte*s. I should have known!" He lifted the cloths high in the air and exposed our hiding place. By now Yankele was uncontrollable and grabbing on to me, squealing in delight. Tatte bent down and picked him up, hoisting him over his shoulder. I followed them into the sparse living room where Tatte plopped down into the battered armchair he so treasured. He held Yankele in his arms.

"Yankelush, your sister found you a good hiding place and you hid very nicely. Good boy." Tatte smiled and kissed Yankele's forehead. As he held my brother's face in his hands his smile disappeared and was replaced with the same look that Mama had when she heard *tzorres* about friends we knew. "I am proud you – both of you. But you know *zeesa kinderlach*, when we play the real game, you must remember not to laugh. If you make a sound, the Germans will find you and then you will lose the game."

– Deborah Danan

ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF BABI YAR

I hear a poem about hope
 read. I think of the men
 rounded, 33,000 marched
 to the edge of the ravine,
 the blood turning leaves
 and grass burgundy. I
 think of my grandparents
 packing in the night,
 taking a samovar,
 some wrinkled apples,
 then running past straw
 roofs on fire. Years
 before, as if the wind of
 dead roses let them
 know something was
 coming. I think of
 weeks seasick in steerage,
 weeks of fog and fog
 horns, no words
 to ask for what was
 ahead. They pulled away,
 arms waving, those
 left with streamers tied
 to the ones on the
 boat until they snapped,
 floated, rainbow
 colors on the surface
 until black water
 ate them

— Lyn Lifshin

DRILJ - ILZA; THE QUEEN'S TEARS

Bonfires burning crop residue
 cast curls of smoke and scent into the cold air.
 Red-gold maple and elm leaves bathed in bright sunlight
 bower the approach road to my mother's shteitle, Drilj.

South of Radom I see the signpost in Polish, "Ilza."
 Nestled in a green valley is the town, narrow winding streets
 ancient leaning houses and in the distance medieval castle ruins
 on the barg — the hill where my mother and her friends played.

Beyond the boundaries of time and place, I see her there.
 Fearless girl, she defies a young sheygitz bullying
 a heder child. Was it her fiery eyes or her fair girl-child face
 that vanquished his Jew hatred for that instant?

In the here and now, I enter the village
 to walk the cobbled streets of the Jewish quarter.
 In Market Square Meir Provizor's house still stands.

On the wrought iron balcony of Sabah Meir's house,
 Zev Jabotinsky joined Zionist meetings.
 Like Herzl he looked out on the lands of exile
 and said, "Here will be our tomb."

Unwind the hours. Between the red brick and wooden house fronts
 peasants brandishing pitchforks storm the square.
 Meir Provizor stands defiant, fists raised. He shouts,
 "Townfolk! Neighbors! What are you doing?"

My mother and her brothers and sisters huddle under the counter
 of the family's fabric emporium. Yankel the eldest
 runs out to the street to pull their father inside.
 They push the counters forward to bar the wooden doors.

Imprisoned for Zionist incitement, when he is released
 Sabah Meir orders the family to pack — Sifrei Kodesh
 and what they can salvage from their lives, from their livelihood.

Temporary and enduring, transient and perpetual,
 of the moment and unceasing,
 beyond the boundaries of time and place,
 I am with them on the perilous trek home to Eretz Israel.

DRILJ

My brother and I would raise eyebrows at our Imma's longings
 "for the sweet waters of Drilj,"
 and how could a miserable shteitle be so charmed?

Beyond the measure of time and death, the transience of life,
 I beg your forgiveness Imma, for here I am in the beautiful Ilza.

Pure spa waters course down the bright mountainside.
 This is the wooden bridge over the "luskhki," a quiet stream
 set in the green glen leading to the synagogue — no longer -
 where the family took Shabbat afternoon shpa tzirs.

Hourglass sands slide forward. It is 1946.
 The survivors, Imma's childhood comrades
 and Zionist shuleh classmates, now appear in her dreams.

After such a night, the phone will ring,
 dear voices will call up from the street below,
 "Pnina, Pninichka." In our small Bronx flat
 the beloved faces of Imma's photo album take voice,

Night after night, I listen as they relive a shared childhood
 – Drilj's bright waters, the happy times.
 Mute cries tell of the Ilza German Slave Labor munitions camp,
 of Jewish fingers bleeding from the corrosive burn of gunpowder.

Can human voice resonate such endless pain that a six year old
 child
 listening in her sleepless bed will forever call it her own?

'ILZA; Queen Casimir's Tears

Did King Casimir's bride weep centuries of sweet waters
 down the jagged hills of Ilza to mourn the destruction of her castle
 or for the cruel fate of her shteitle's Jews?

– Shira Twersky-Cassel (Provizor)

CEREMONY AT THE TRAIN STATION BARDEJOV, SLOVAKIA MAY 15, 2012

The mayor reads his prepared speech
 about the deportation and the war
 while schoolchildren stand fidgeting

listening to stories
 of something that happened
 long before they were born

they blink at us
 strangers and wonder
 why we have come here

I look for you everywhere
 in this heartbreaking beauty
 I search for you in the cemetery

but the entire
 row of your generation is missing
 erased

I would have placed my hand on your cheek
 played games with you as a child
 ran after you in the square

sat on your lap in shul
 if I had known you
 grandfather

I would place a stone on your grave
 but there is no grave
 and not enough stones in the world.

– Dina Jehuda

YAD VASHEM

with The Book
 in my hand
 and The Name
 on my lips
 I cry
 concrete corridors with displays of
 death
 schemes of blood and ashes

I must sit
 I must breathe
 return to the letters in The Book
 black tears on melted white

I am blind, I say, take my hand

I will lead you
 we will wade through
 tools of hate
 the cold, dark narrative
 harsh forms
 nightmares alive
 the screams

I will pull you through
 to the other side
 into the sun
 away from mourning
 up from the deep gash
 in the mountain

look – where the water trickles
 from the rocks

smell – the fresh pine needles

hear – His whispers

now
 we are cleansed.

– Mindy Aber Barad

THE JEWS OF SAINT JOHN, N.B.

I

The synagogue in Saint John, New Brunswick is for sale, the big sanctuary closed like a barn in winter.

The community center is a museum of past glory. Twenty families remain and only a few show at the chapel to carry on the tradition of the fathers.

II

The congregation is so small it doesn't have a Rabbi. The rabbi comes in from Halifax, probably drives to Digby and takes the ferry or he drives all the way.

He has to arrive before *shabbat* or *yontiff*. He sleeps in the museum with the ghosts of the past. The wind howls a Holocaust melody and he can't sleep.

III

Among the first Jews in Saint John was a Mr. Gales. His children married Christians because there were no other Jews.

They assimilated like the lost tribe or the English at Roanoke in the 1600's who created blue-eyed Indians. And will Saint John have circumcised Christians?

IV

There were once over two hundred and fifty Jewish families in Saint John - fourteen hundred souls for God to watch.

Now who prays for justice and mercy? Where have all the Jews gone? Are there any left? Will there be a last Jew in Saint John?

– Zvi A. Sesling

MIXED MEDIA OF SPRING

sanguine Spring in Newspeak:
mass executions, muddied dead bodies
butchered families, whole towns
whatever happened to land renewed, and dew

once upon a Spring
frosts mimicked death only
while sustaining life –
silent investment in the future
am I the only one left
who remembers buds?
rustlings after a long dormancy?
except for passed over door posts
where once we sprinkled blood
this does not resemble Spring at all.

– Mindy Aber Barad

MY GRANDMOTHER'S SKIES

For years they dressed me
in my grandmother's grey skies,
in the oncoming rain
of her winter memories.

For years spring was forbidden
and the sun, when it came,
burned a hole in my heart.

Despite all their precautions
I jumped into the puddles of light
and wore the summer sun
in my hair like a ribbon.

I always knew my grandmother
wept for the lost ones,
especially for the children,
yet even she still looked out at the light
of each day with a welcome,
thankful to be here.

Despite the irony of her dark forebodings,
she burned the colors of good memories
in her Shabbos candles,
and dressed our futures
in the hope of fortune and blue skies.

– Estelle Gershgoren Novak

SHULAMIT

Return, return, O Shulamit . . .
Song of Songs 7:1

Snow blacker than witches covers the camp.
Voices lower than whispers echo in the woods.
Pelting rain does not wash the ground clean.
There, your brush, and combs for your hair, Shulamit,
Your velvet purse, your patent-leather shoes.
There, an orchestra played, and the lines marched on.
Some hacked the snow; others shoveled ashes.
Curses darker than wizards' cover the camp.
Footsteps softer than foxes' echo far from forest paths.
Thunder storms do not drown out their sound.
There, liner for your almond-shaped eyes, Shulamit,
There, an image of your children, yet to be born.

On eagles' wings you returned to the mountain of
myrrh,
For blessings, like pearls of dew, cover our Land,
Shulamit.

— Ruth Fogelman

TEACHER'S NOTE

There is a Jewish participant in my group

suffering as the daughters of Holocaust survivors
suffer,

who sat last night and said:

"The ghost of a nun has twice visited me in the dead of
night."
(We sleep in Montreal above a crypt, abandoned nuns
burned in the hundreds).

You can tell she is convinced this is true (and who am I
to say what is true?).

But listening to her account of these nocturnal visits

made it near impossible for me to write a picture book
for class, let alone sleep.

In Israel the monsters tend to approach lo aleinu in
broad daylight, and in public and to be

on the express lane to the Next World, not returning.

— Gila Green

VI. *The Journey Home*

AT THEBES

We strain at ropes to drag great blocks of stone
Up winding ramps at Pharaoh's rising tomb,
A labor which has been the grueling doom
Of thousands since he first took up his throne.
We build for Pharaoh's afterlife alone,
To seal his mummy in a buried room
With all his treasure, ready to assume
His place among the magically reborn.

When we die we are cast into the sand,
Forgotten, vanished into nothingness.
It is an empty, hopeless destiny.
And yet we build more royal tombs to stand
Vast and lonely in the wilderness
As if no other kind of world could be.

— David Stephenson

RETURN TO THE HOMELAND

You soft breezes! Heralds of Italy!
And you with your poplars, beloved river!
You billowing mountain ranges! O all you
Sunny peaks, so it is you again?

You still place! In dreams you appeared distant
After a hopeless day to the yearning one,
And you my house, and you playmates,
Trees of the hill, you well-known!

How long is it, O how long! The child's peace
Is gone, and gone are youth and love and delight;
Yet you, my fatherland! you holy one —
Patient one! see, you are still here.

And because they are patient when you are patient,
rejoice
When you rejoice, rear you, dear one! your own also
And remind them in dreams, when they wander
Far away and stray, the disloyal.

And when in his fervid breast the self-mighty desires
Of the youth have been soothed
And are still before fate, then
The mellowed one more gladly gives himself to
you.

Farewell then, days of youth, you rose-lined path
Of love, and all you paths of the wanderer,
Farewell! And take and bless you my
Life, O heaven of my homeland, a gain!

— Friedrich Hölderlin
from the German: Robert Glen Deamer

CLOSING TOWN

A twilight deeper than a summer dusk
 Is lengthening the shadows of this town,
 The mill is closed, the company moves on,
 Whatever does not fall is taken down.
 Rust-red tobacco barn, the general store,
 No-longer-needed uproots built-to-last,
 On dying streets, the people congregate,
 Each, in their way, bids farewell to the past.
 As cars crawl out beyond the Mobil sign,
 The rotting bandstand echoes one last song;
 Its chorus blares be gone, there's nothing here,
 Its melody sighs, here's where you belong.

— John Grey

THE DANCE OF THE DEER

In the meadow, the herd danced their dance of young
 grass
 the young males on the side, legs tucked under
 well-brought up guards
 the does in their Puritan brown
 still demure in their leaps and stretched necks
 their sameness the security of sisters
 their joy for the end of the dark, bare bark and ice-held
 ground
 my joy too, but I was not welcome to the rich meadow
 nor would I ever dance
 in the kindness of my own kind.

— Susan Oleferuk

ANOTHER MARTIAN SENDS A POSTCARD HOME

1
 Tunes live on a saucer
 that never flies

When slid into a closet,
 they wake up

2
 Rain turns sunflower leaves
 into giving hands

3
 Yellow scarves flail about
 as if in wind, then
 melt into a
 shrinking
 pool of
 blood

Which grins like a cat
 (curled in the hearth)
 before disappearing

4
 Pulleys close thin eyelids
 against sun

5
 Their child sleeps for six days
 and rages the seventh

For comfort they rock it back and forth
 by its arm

It gobbles tidbits from the floor

When its stomach fills,
 they give it a new one

— Susan Richardson

A FAILED TEST OF EMUNAH: TOMORROW, I'LL
EAT WATERMELON

Sparrows pick stale bread,
 Before the makolet closes,
 While children, hunger-activated, sigh,
 Eyes wide open.

Elsewhere, "Kol Tov " to basil in clay pots,
 To jarred jasmine,
 Beneath a lavender sun.
 Water drips on my merpesset.

Primeval acacias yet bind,
 Ishmael's brood,
 More than Avraham's heart:
 Yitzhak's children await perfection.

The golden onion glowers;
 Perils become politicized.
 Prayers for the Beit HaMikdash,
 Barely appear in private papers.

In crowds, it's lonely,
 Loitering for Moshiach,
 Amongst wisdom-draped fringe,
 Which sway, rise, and lean on stone.

Today, I woke Yerushalmi.
 The Kotel was a bus away.
 The sky was all Shemyim.
 Tomorrow, I'll eat watermelon.

— KJ Hannah Greenberg

SLICED BREAD

Preparing lunch, I discover
that a slice of plain white bread,

when cut in half, is shaped like
the two tablets of the law.

And even my son's leaving
uneaten ends of bread

when rushing off to play
suggests the corners of a field

and how these gleanings
will sustain the poor.

— Steven Sher

THE JOURNEY HOME

The road Beer-Sheva-Tel-Aviv
is shorter than the same road south,
being later, straighter, while the other
follows the older curvy path.

Beside the new, a bush or two,
a palm, are claimed as "landscaping,"
while by the old, the eucalyptus
trees, plenish the skyline, whispering

of silver olive leaves, of shedding
snake skin bark, of dragonflies.
I relish driving north, but oh —
the journey home, the journey home.

-- Amiel Schotz

IN QUEST OF EL DORADO

"He [God] calmed the sea's tempest, and the waves
of the sea were stilled. Then they rejoiced because
the waves were silenced; and He brought them to
their desired haven." (Psalm 107:29-30)

Our ship has landed us upon this shore
Beside a quiet bay. Beyond the sand
There stretches out a vast, uncharted land
Not one of us has ever seen before.

Dare I become a brave conquistador
Who does not fear to seize the upper hand
In search of fabled wealth and lead a band
Of men across broad plains we must explore?

You've brought us to the continent of faith,
My God, extending like a coral reef
No diver has revealed. But I've been told
That if we climb faith's mountain peaks and
bathe
In unpolluted rivers of belief,
We might yet reach Jeru salem of Gold.

— Yakov Azriel

WHERE KINGS ONCE WALKED

I'm not interested in planets
speed of lights away
want to know whether King David saw the same sky
as me
what Rachel wore to the wedding feast

Was the sky different three thousand years ago

In the harbor soft waves lap
against the board walk
fishermen cast poles
where there's a restaurant
a king once walked

— Lois Michal Unger

JERUSALEM

In the beginning the Shechina was in a tent,
Small-size in size-large in kedusha, very sacred.
Our teacher Moshe awake or asleep alert
could feel the rhythm of the divine voice speaking to him.

The skins covering the Mishkan/Tabernacle included Tachash,
A mysterious animal that came around there and left.
There were furs to cover this mini-palace
Full of smoke, cloud and mystery of fiery angelical gold.

Listen Israel, now that we are in the ascendancy
Joining the league of nations again.
The voices tell us that there is a holiness in His place,
As a flood of Berachot/blessings-running.

Now David wanted to crystallize his aspirations for the Temple,
But God did not give the keys to build it directly to him.
The next king, Shlomo does not need to fight and peace grows
In the ascent of the full moon, he fills all its glory.

Why this privilege of the holy city Jerusalem?
In your yesterday and in the morning you renew the present
salvation.
Here are physical boundaries that limit and infinite spiritual
ones
You the city which as a lung-heart breathes and beats in all of us.

In this point the universe began and expanded infinite
Herein lies "the joy of truth" which is the key of language.
In seventy languages everyone will come to visit and appreciate
you
Since the words coming out to the mind bring closer your truth
divine.

— Hayim Abramson

Sources: The Deronda Review, Vol IV, No. 2 Winter-Spring 2012,
Jerusalem.

Keywords: awake, voices. Waterfall, crystallize R. Lavett Smith, p.23;
key, quarrel, E. Kam-Ron, p.23; breathing, the joy of truth, G. Izak
p.27; boundaries; "words are a fence around the truth" S.Twersky-
Cassel, p.26.

Tachash: Bamidbar 4:6 "They will put up a cover of leather tanned
tachash, and it had a light blue cloth, and insert the rods" (which hold
the Ark).

Gold Kravim-angeles: They were made of gold, giving remembrance
fire of Sinai. There are many secrets here, including that they had a
connection to the throne of glory, See Sefer Siyune HaTorah to Parshas
Terumah; Sifte Cohen Shemot 25:18 and others.

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Jerusalem: The Eye of the Universe, NCSY-
OUJC, NY1976

BLUSH FIELDS

I have seen
the terraced fields
blush pink
at the sun's dawn wink

I have heard the birds
In harmony
With the bells of goats
Despite the stony silence
Of the camels

I have watched the fog creep
And shrug shoulders around
The boulders and trees
Before it tugs itself away
Into the day.

— Mindy Aber Barad

VII. The Mountain Says

DOORS AND ARCHES

Some look for redemption
in water
or hurl over burning coals
to test their ardor.

For me salvation lies
through the doors and arches
of a painting in the back room
of a gallery on 5th Street.
Weekly I visit the narrow picture
as necessary as our summer
pilgrimages to my Aunt Fanny in Brooklyn
to pay our respects.

At the far end a small window opens
on a stubble of grass.
Thorns pierce the canvas, masquerading
as flecks of paint on a vine
that twists over slats of fence.
Ghosts of huckleberries droop
like the chins of schoolchildren.
caught stealing penny candy.

You could arrest me as an intruder
as I slink through the painting
rooms off its hallway
belonging to someone else
but I take nothing, disturb no one.

Such devotion is rare in this city
 where rosary beads break amid scandal
 over the tiles of St. Vibiana's Cathedral
 while in my box of family treasures .
 the knots of my father's *tallis*
 unravel even as we speak.

– Carol V. Davis

[tallis: Jewish prayer shawl]

UNLESS

The spirit moves from wrong to wrong, from harm
 to harm done others in a moral mess,
 an aged man's a stick within a coat
 of impotence of age and rage unless.

Unless exactly what? you may enquire.
 Unless precisely what kind of a thing?
 Unless restored by that refining fire.
 Unless soul clap its hands, oh clap and sing.

So Yeats and Eliot say life is just
 the same address, about six feet of dust,
 more a burial than life unless
 I can refine my scabs of flaking rust.

I will remain a stick six feet in height,
 merely vertebral support for clothes,
 unless soul clap its hands and get me done
 serving the time I serve. Excuse me, those

spirit hands and my flesh will are un-
 connected by a nerve, though I today
 am connected wifi to all lands.
 How does one call up his spirit hands

and bid them clap and not hold back but clap
 in some refining serious hurray
 spring destickment into rising sap?
 How to access a joy so far away?

– John Milbury-Steen

MOMENTS OF GRACE

Where then are you, moments of grace,
 when all becomes right,

all in a total confluence
 into a singular whole,
 like a flawless rock-crystal
 in which the universe is incarnate and manifest,
 like some unheard-of, inaudible music
 that wafts down from the spheres.

Alas, the rock-crystal is flawed,
 the music screeches,
 and nothing is right any longer,
 all is unwhole.

– Haim Schneider

THE MOUNTAIN SAYS

How taciturn
 the airless hours
 are no longer mine
 a pile of conjectures
 besieged by distance
 of a mute grey sky
 exposing a snagged life
 like Sisyphus
 unable to rise
 even from repetition
 let alone reputation,
 only believing
 there were those
 who heard poetry
 from the ancients
 in a voice on high.

– B.Z. Niditch

AN EARLY ZIONIST

He grabbed a fistful of Israeli soil
 a mixture of ancient dirt
 and ashes settled on the ground from the skies of
 Europe
 and pointed his fist to the sky and cried
 how could You?
 Now help us or get out of the way!

– Drew Nacht

A SECRET HOPE OF TEXTURES

It makes one tender and aligned / getting out of the car because of traffic / a hidden marsh by the base of some road / one hundred shades of green are wanted / bodies spread out in the thicket / sand slipping into very hip boots again / curly hair bobbing along ahead / clear above the salty brush line / it is a little patch of wilderness / the mire leads to the beach / the beach is part of the Sound / and the Sound connects to the ocean / where it all unites with the sky / knowing what lives in the distance / still believing in the swamp / squishing mud and grass underfoot / hoping that the world won't go / away and a way forever / until the colors turn unrecognizable / lately thinking suffocation under so much oil/humpback whales that can't breathe / water is sick around the continent / go help wash the creatures' backs / liquid dish soap is so strange / it would make anyone cry to do / we have to cry its good to feel/and know what is really happening / but still to be so grateful for / one hundred shades of green / a bog plushy with wild flora / the best that has ever even been smelt / no sense to anything but tall grass / a companion to pass over land / so wide or miniature to size / it is large in our minds / in marsh as in a lover's bed / everything fits together just right / bodies spread out in the thicket / all is beautiful for a moment / still walking in the swamp / squishing mud and grass underfoot / it makes one tender and aligned / because on the surface there always lies / a secret hope of textures

— Alexis Wolf

 REVIVAL OF THE POETIC SELF

From the darkness there are yellow and orange rays of illumination.
 Geese fly overhead murmuring muffled sounds in the sunrise over the lake.
 Angel tears melt into the morning mist.
 Searching for the poetic self takes time.
 Our souls move slowly as we process our observations of the natural world.

Fast paced rhythms of time beat quicker each day depleting our energy.
 Media and metal mini phones trump our solitude.
 Noise and clutter drown out our ability to think with clarity.

Peaceful prayers heal our inner selves with tranquility.
 The heavenly white light centers the well of being.
 Retreat into trance states and restore the inner vision.
 Music uplifts the spirit, so we can move beyond the present moment.

Set aside the traps of modern man.
 Move into seclusion and create an orderly sacred space.
 Our voices will speak out again.
 Breathe new life and sustenance into the bones and sinews,
 Nature beckons us to listen and learn.
 Watching the waves wash in creates strength and wholeness again.
 Hope awakens us to realize that the truth lives within.

--Shoshanah Weiss-Kost

EVIDENCE OF THINGS UNSEEN

The difference between carnivores and those
 who eat only plants is part of it. Empathy
 is in the works even when spoken in whispers.
 These things converse with trees, call them
 from their wooden sleep to restart their green
 machinery. They are in the dance going on
 between the oceans and the moon, the way
 wind moves from one space to another, in
 the secret knowledge that helps salmon
 return to their place of birth, dogs and cats
 to cross entire continents just to return home.
 The unseen are everywhere. Their evidence
 is in what makes music possible and why art
 has such a mind of its own. If none of this
 convinces you, think of time. We do not see
 it and do not know if we are traveling through
 it or whether it is passing among us choosing
 who will go to the right and who to the left.

– Fredrick Zydek

THE BAAL-TESHUVAH

“The Lord knows the thoughts of man – that they are
 vanity.” (Psalm 94:11)

I thought I'd have to put aside my eyes
 In order to believe, and put aside
 My brain, because belief in God had died
 I thought, when hearing helmsmen eulogize
 Its recent death or imminent demise.
 The sea of faith was shrinking and its tide
 Had surely turned, so I felt justified
 Surmising that its shallows swarmed with lies.

Or so I thought. For I was full of pride,
 Self-confident the human mind was wise
 Enough to analyze the brine of life.
 Oh what a fool I was, my God, to hide
 Behind this mask and wear this cheap disguise,
 While stabbing oceans with a pocket-knife.

– Yakov Azriel

BLESSING OF THE SUN

April 8, 2009

Blessed are you who makes the work of creation.
 We make this blessing once every twenty-eight
 years
 on an early April morning to praise the creation
 of the sun, on the fourth day, in its first position.

We make this blessing once every twenty-eight
 years,
 enough time to have moved along in our lives
 like the sun in earth's day, in reversed position,
 amazed at its travels across the sky.

Time is enough to move us along in our lives
 even if we stay still as the sun
 amazed at its travels across a sky
 that does the work of turning while it burns.

Even if we stay still as the sun,
 even without reference for our movement,
 we do the work of turning while we burn
 our gathered sugars in a gorgeous flame.

Even without reference for our movement,
 our spheres of influence are each a planet.
 We gather sugars till the gorgeous flames
 of autumn burn and crumble into soil.

Our spheres of influence are each a planet
 springing into life on one half only
 as autumn burns the other to crumbs and soils
 the green unfolding and the new life blazing.

Springing into life on one half only
 makes you dizzy, like a child's spinning.
 The green's unfolding and a new life's blazing,
 evolving here to still another translation

that makes you dizzy, like a child's spinning
 on an early April morning. To praise the
 creation,
 still evolving, here's another translation:
blessed you make the making of the beginning.

– Courtney Druz

THE RELAY

for C.D.

I hoped to write a poem about the sun
 After the ceremony of the blessing,
 Waited for a line but it did not come.
 Another sign, I guess, of powers lessening.

Twice before, as a girl almost grown,
 And later, as a woman just past prime,
 I might have met that ray, had I but known;
 Likely it will not find me here next time.

But now I've read the song I'd wished to write
 In the voice of another, younger by one turn
 Of that great wheel. Then let me bless G-d's might
 By which the powers that leave with me return.

Bless G-d, there will be sky, there will be sun,
 There will be song when my brief stave is done.

— E. Kam-Ron

ELEANOR AND HICK

Yosemite, July 1934

High in the Sierras,
 land of waterfalls and granite faces
 reaching to a height of thirteen thousand feet
 (that beauty captured in photography by Ansel
 Adams),
 here, two women camped and contemplated
 their lives, their loves, and most of all
 their destinies.

Here, too, famously, her Uncle Ted
 had spent a night with one John Muir
 beholding God's playground,
 pledging to keep it safe
 from the ravaging hand of greed.

But for Eleanor, it was a time to choose between
 the private life she longed for
 and the public life she had come to contemplate.

Hick, less athletic than the president's lady,
 overweight, a smoker, panting at the height,
 found she was reporter no longer, only a friend.

Attended by their guides,
 they dodged reporters, fled the peering eyes
 of celebrity hunters.

The president himself
 was off somewhere in the Pacific,

Hawaii perhaps,
 his letters following his mate's adventures.

Eleanor had borne him children, five still living.
 Reluctant First Lady, Hick was later to call her,
 sharing her memories of her famous friend.

Sleeping under a heaven full of stars
 gives pause,
 and when she came away, rejoining her husband in
 San Francisco,
 she knew.

The past — a wife and mother;
 the present — deep depression and a nation's
 poverty;
 the future still to come —
 a world at war, the rights of Negro children.
 These were commitments she had yet to make.

"What should I have done, Hick?" she asked.
 "I've been betrayed by my one true love."
 "I know."
 "I offered him divorce."
 "Out of the question, for an ambitious man."
 "We reconciled, and then the paralysis . . ."
 "No one could fault you, Eleanor."
 "I'm so pleased for him, but for myself . . ."
 "It would be pleasant, just to disappear."
 "Did you know that Alice always made fun of me?"
 "Your cousin? I wouldn't doubt it."
 "And Aunt Edith . . ."
 "I've given up a career or two myself."
 "Women will have to learn to stop bickering."
 "Tell me about it."
 "Hick, I've never had such a friend as you."
 "I'll always be here for you."
 "That's good to know."

And so their conversation might have gone,
 or not.

Perhaps it needn't have been said at all.
 Friends share sometimes in silence
 what won't spill out in words.

At any rate,
 she came down from the mountain
 renewed, committed to a very public life,
 reluctantly.

— Nancy M. Fisher

SN'EH

The morning bush awakes to the dry desert
Does not guess that today it will burn in the fire and not
be consumed
What was in your future? Would you have been like
tumbleweed before the wind
A powder of dry twigs, to be reabsorbed into the
elements?
You were immortalized in words. You are not entitled
to applause.
You did not know your eternity, nor the revelation
revealed by and in you.

A desert shrub, almost inanimate
You put up no barriers, you could be a clear mirror
You would have been consumed in a minute
In you great mercy and fire are reconciled.

– Tziporah Lifshitz
from the Hebrew: E. Kam-Ron

[sn'eh (Hebr.): bush]

A PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

AMENDMENT 28
for the 28 dead of Newtown

WHEREAS, the principle of freedom of speech
Was meant to shelter conscience and debate,
Not license spectacles and words that teach

Crimes against human persons, furnish hate
With mental images a certain few
In the large audience will imitate;

WHEREAS, it has been shown that crimes ensue
When crimes are publicized in their detail
And pictures and accounts of those who do

The crimes, are widely shown, or where the tale
Of heinous acts can bring the felon gain;
WHEREAS, such practices break down the pale

Of life, the foremost right, and thus make vain
Pursuit of happiness, and liberty;
And WHEREAS, harmful speech tends to restrain

Legitimate speech, from fear no longer free;
THEREFORE, it is declared that governments,
State, local, federal, have authority

To ban such works by law and ordinance,

As breaches of the peace, whereby alleged
Artistic merit shall be no defence,

Since to life's service all true art is pledged.

– E. Kam-Ron

[Note: The above will be posted, G-d willing, at
www.stopdeadlyspeech.org.]

12. The Wander Root Court

In the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on
the first of the month, right here, right now,
it has been long enough.

Turn and enter – whichever way you are facing,
turn and enter.

What has already bloomed is old; the fruit in the
unopened bud is what you will bring.

Come with me to the field where the trees are
budding.

We will tend them as they flower, we will lodge
in the villages, we will note the first fruits
ripening there and designate them for God.

*

Adorn them with ribbons, prepare the bowls.

Pare your own slice of the pebble moon and fill
it.

Carry it on your shoulder as you translate your
story.

*

Come and build what you must build.

It is authorized to you.
It is not too late.

– Courtney Druz
from her book *The Light and the Light* (2012)



Adrienne Rempel, *Ochre Form*/ oil on canvas / 18" x 23"/2012

Know, reader, what the elder poets knew
and what the distant disk of Earth now tells us:
that all things have their limit and their term
and in that term and limit is their form,
their beauty, and the laws which give them life,
shaping the energy which otherwise
would lose itself in boundless dissipation.

– George Richter
The Consciousness of Earth

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