

# The Deronda Review

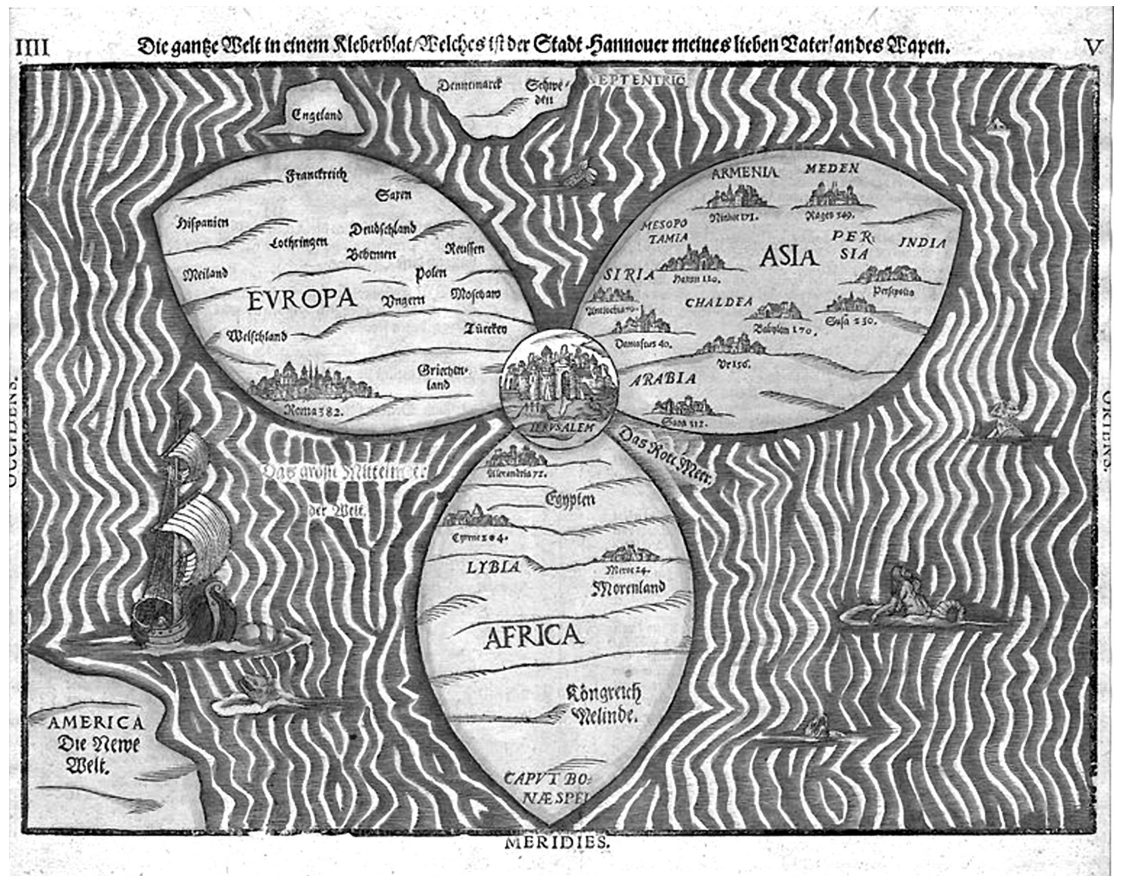
a journal of poetry and thought

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Jerusalem as the Center of the World (Heinrich Bunting, 1851)

## EPICYCLIC CENTO

Poore soule the center of my sinfull earth  
and I am at the edge of the West  
By center, or eccentric, hard to tell

And though it in the center sit, Yet when  
It marked the edge Of one of many circles  
About the centre of the silent Word

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold  
The horizon's edge, the flying seacrow, the fragrance  
at the center of each flower. Each

Poore soule the center of my sinfull earth  
The horizon's edge, the flying seacrow, the fragrance  
About the centre of the silent Word

at the center of each flower. Each  
It marked the edge Of one of many circles  
By center, or eccentric, hard to tell

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold  
and I am at the edge of the West  
And though it in the center sit, Yet when

-- Courtney Druz

Sources: William Shakespeare/Sonnet 146; Yehuda HaLevi (trans. Peter Cole)/My Heart is in the East; John Milton/Paradise Lost; John Donne/A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning; Wallace Stevens/Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird; T.S. Eliot/Ash Wednesday; William Butler Yeats/The Second Coming; Walt Whitman/There Was a Child Went Forth; William Carlos Williams/Queen-Anne's Lace

## CONTRIBUTORS' EXCHANGE

This feature was started to encourage dialogue among poets and readers. Below are titles of poetry collections by contributors, as well as URLs. Due to the fact that the magazine is now mainly web-based we no longer include addresses, but messages can be routed through the editors via the "Contact Us" form.

\* indicates a page in the "Hexagon Forum" of [www.pointandcircumference.com](http://www.pointandcircumference.com). \*\* indicates a page in the "Kippat Binah" section of the same site.

Hayim Abramson, *Torah Secrets; Thoughts from the Sources* (in preparation)

\*\*Yakov Azriel is the author of *Threads from a Coat of Many Colors: Poems on Genesis* (2005); *In the Shadow of a Burning Bush: Poems on Exodus* (2008), *Beads for the Messiah's Bride: Poems on Leviticus* (2009), and *Swimming in Moses' Well* (2011), all with Time Being Books.

J.E. Bennett has a chapbook, *Strange Voices, Other Tongues*, 2004.

\*\*Esther Cameron (E. Kam-Ron, George Richter), *The Consciousness of Earth* (Multicultural Books, 2004); *Fortitude, or The Lost Language of Justice: Poems in Israel's Cause* (Bitsaron Books, August 2009).

Courtney Druz, [www.courtneydruz.com](http://www.courtneydruz.com) is the author of *Complex Natural Processes* (2010), *The Ritual Word* (2011) and *The Light and the Light* (2012).

Channie Greenberg's books are *Jerusalem Sunrise* (Imago Press, 2014, Forthcoming); *The Little Temple of My Sleeping Bag* (Dancing Girl Press, 2014, Forthcoming); *Simple Gratuities* (Propertius Press, 2014, Forthcoming); *The Immediacy of Emotional Kerfuffles* (Bards and Sages Publishing, 2013); *Citrus-Inspired Ceramics* (Aldrich Press, 2013); *Intelligence's Vast Bonfires* (Lazarus Media, 2012); *Supernal Factors* (The Camel Saloon Books on Blog, 2012); *Fluid & Crystallized* (Fowlpox Press, 2012); *Don't Pet the Sweaty Things* (Bards and Sages Publishing, 2012); *A Bank Robber's Bad Luck with His Ex-Girlfriend* (Unbound Content, 2011); *Oblivious to the Obvious: Wishfully Mindful Parenting* (French Creek Press, 2010); *Conversations on Communication Ethics* (Praeger, 1991); *Watercolors* (Scotch & Soda Productions, 1979).

Ruth Fogelman has three books of poems, *Cradled in God's Arms*, *Jerusalem Lives*, and *Jerusalem Awakening* (Bitsaron Books) as well as a website, <http://www.geocities.com/jerusalemilives/> with poems and photographs.

Jerry Hauser, *A Stir of Seasons* (The Moon Journal Press, 2009).

Sheila Golburgh Johnson has two books: *After I Said No* (novella, Fithian Press, 2000) and *Shared Sightings: An Anthology of Bird Poems* (1995)

Lynn Lifshin's numerous works are listed on [www.lynlifshin.com](http://www.lynlifshin.com)

Constance Rowell Mastores, *A Deep and Dazzling Darkness*, Blue Light Press (2013).

B.Z. Niditch, P.O. Box 1664, Brookline, MA 02446-0013, [bzniditch@webtv.net](mailto:bzniditch@webtv.net). For a list of collections and selected poems see his website, The World of B.Z. Niditch.

Susan Oleferuk, *Circling for Home* (Finishing Line Press, 2011), *Those Who Come to the Garden* (Finishing Lines Press, 2013).

Michael E. Stone, 74 Shmaryahu Levin St., Jerusalem 96664, Israel. *Selected Poems* (Cyclamens and Swords Press, 2010). *Adamgirk': The Adam Book of Arak'el of Siwnik'* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

Sue Tourkin-Komet, [Jersalem.yaffasue@netvision.net.il](mailto:Jersalem.yaffasue@netvision.net.il); *Outfront, Jerusalem and Outback, Bethelam*, forthcoming

\*\*Shira Twersky-Cassel, *Shachrur* (Blackbird), 1988; *HaChayyim HaSodiim shel HaTsipporim* (The Secret Life of Birds), Sifriat HaPo'alim, 1995; *Yoman Shira BeSulam HaGeulah* (A Poet's Diary), Sifrei Bitsaron, 2005; *Legends of Wandering and Return*, Sifrei Bitsaron 2014.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

Shira Twersky's "The Arrow of Time: After Eden I" and "The Arrow of Time: After Eden II" are from her book *Legends of Wandering and Return*; Susan Oleferuk's "Those Who Come to the Garden" is from her book of the same title. Yaffa Ganz's "Again" was originally published in 1988 in Jewish Action Magazine.

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THE DERONDA REVIEW: Editor: Esther Cameron., [derondareview@att.net](mailto:derondareview@att.net). Co-editor for Israel: Mindy Aber Barad, POB 7732, Jerusalem 91077; [maber4kids@yahoo.com](mailto:maber4kids@yahoo.com). Single issue \$7, subscription \$14, back issue \$5. For subscriptions and extra copies in Israel contact Yehudit Ben-Yosef, [yehudib@gmail.com](mailto:yehudib@gmail.com).

*I. Waking to Everything*

## FIRST THAW

This promise comes,

slow melts an old white world --  
It softens mounds of bitterness.

This promise lives on edges  
of green hopes --  
where earth soaks up  
snow's salted tears.

– Cynthia Weber Nankee

BIG HORN SHEEP AND ELK: ABOVE THE TOWN  
OF ESTES PARK, COLORADO

From our mountain lodge window  
we see cars stopped: everyone --  
even us, inside -- hushed and stealthy  
as wolves, we humans armed,  
our cameras' clicks preserving  
the beasts, to prove to friends  
this world's a place of marvels.

Earlier, our car was one  
among many stopped  
for a small herd of elk --  
their winter coats beginning  
to shed, though wind gusted  
with mountain ferocity, the peaks  
misty with falling snow --  
crossing the blacktop: to create  
elegant slow-motion sculptures;  
all of us staring, frozen  
in the amber of their beauty.

– Robert Cooperman

## SPRING COGITATIONS

What I observed in others I have seen  
evolve in myself: fear, black lies,  
depression and the pointing of the heart  
before wisdom dies.

It is mid-spring. Ornamental cherry  
trees sweeten shadows of pale pink  
beneath tall redwoods. So the truth slips in  
through a flutter, blink,

before adults obscure the name. The old  
bleeds like a wound into the new,  
after shocks chill the spine, invoking fear  
in the young, the few

who can cradle a flame against the dark,  
a star in the silence. Tonight  
will be a night of triumph, returned now  
to my old insight

my dreams will flow like eternity through  
the river maze of the gone years,  
a hand will soothe the burning until our  
star's shape disappears.

– Calvin Green

## ISRAELI SPRING

And as spring brings nature to life,  
So too -- in the Jewish cycle of life --  
Spring signals the rebirth of spirituality,  
And the connection with Eretz HaKodesh is  
renewed

Joy is here with the bright morning sun,  
Chasing darkness into the recesses of our memory.  
Long, warming days urge the land's treasures to  
spring forth  
Decorating the land with the beauty of reawakening  
And filling it bountifully with the largesse of the  
earth.

Broad swatches of green, linger in our fields,  
A legacy of winter rains.  
Short trees of almond, orange and lemon  
Send brightly colored pallets across the barren  
sweeps of a vanishing winter  
Adding a pungent, sweet aroma to the harmony of  
rebirth.

Spring is a harbinger of a renewed sense of our  
peoplehood  
The Jewish people, at home in a land of life,  
A land of memories, of hope and joy.  
We open our eyes and reach out  
Joy dances invitingly towards us.  
It is spring in Israel.

– Don Kristt, 5771

## MY MOTHER'S REAL BIRTHDAY, MAY 25, 2004

I've let other obsessions  
 go, tho they are like  
 a bit in my mouth  
 yanking me this way  
 and that. Her last birth  
 day in the icy pines,  
 the trips to the doctors,  
 all she got dressed  
 for in those last weeks,  
 in the blue suit she  
 didn't want to wear too  
 often, didn't want to  
 wear out. I still felt what  
 could matter was still  
 ahead tho that year,  
 summer never came.  
 Sleeping near her, like  
 a pajama party she  
 said, giggling as we  
 watched tv on an old  
 scratchy black and white  
 tv in a room already  
 underground. Strawberries  
 glistened. I cut them up  
 with cream for her in  
 a blue bowl. From the dark  
 shadows of pine wedges  
 of sky were blue. It  
 was our all May and June  
 color

– Lyn Lifshin

## SHAVUOT

I remember when I sat hunched over my sticker  
 collection,  
 humming as I fingered each one,  
 counting.  
 The sweet smelling strawberry sticker, the shiny  
 ballet slippers,  
 admired and named –

like the stars each night,  
 counted and called from their hiding places  
 behind the congealed darkness.

Each is asked:  
 Do you remember who you are?  
 You are this one star.  
 I name you.

And then, they are bright with the knowing.

The streets show me the places I am nameless,  
 the narrow, leaning alleys and the spaces, like wide  
 waves of sand.

My presence is an echo  
 caught in the wind with no place to land.

Pushing through the thick air, I imagine the way  
 sounds could scatter here, and just a name would  
 remain  
 like a polished star,  
 bright with the knowing.

Tonight, the sky itself that leans in over my shoulder  
 and says,  
 Stick to me,  
 I name you,  
 mine.

– Devora Levin

## SAFELY IN SUMMER

In July when safely in summer  
 unlikely to be thrown by cold winds of change  
 the world is small  
 dragon bugs, frail flower and twig sword  
 the grassy ground a miniature land  
 and one need never look up  
 at what crosses the horizon.

– Susan Oleferuk

## DESCENDING BLUEBIRD: SUMMER

In the silent garden,  
 Beneath high roof  
 Of extended maple branches,  
 A bluebird  
 Suddenly appears,  
 With easy flash  
 Of wing,  
 Perches  
 On narrow edge  
 Of green bird bath,  
 Lingers a moment,  
 Bathes  
 In the cool,  
 Moving mirror  
 Of the water.

– William Beyer

## WATER LILIES

Today I've wakened on the porch to everything:  
 a bussing breeze and a rippling pond and water  
     lilies and  
 coffee and mm it's good. You see, the mug  
 I'm using has been glazed with a Monet painting.  
 And when I sip I bring them to my lips  
 which makes the coffee taste better, or seem to,  
     anyhow ....

The first time I woke up to water lilies  
 was in the middle of the lake where Dad and I  
     would fish,  
 He'd wake me up in pitch black before school  
 and everything, the boat already on  
 the car, we'd tied it up the night before  
 together, and we'd row out for the bass,  
 better than yellow perch. I'd doze and wake  
 again, roused by a ripple or the sun  
 or a nibble or his voice, surrounded by water lilies  
 and shimmers and gurgles and trees, so many that I  
     dreamt  
 I had been drinking *them*, till I came to,  
 weekday mornings, till I was ten or so.

One Saturday when I was twelve I went  
 fishing with Harry. His mom drove us. We fished  
 from shore. I pointed out the water  
 lilies yonder, in the middle of the lake,  
 but they did not surround us, they were something  
 far away, so he was unimpressed.  
 We caught a couple of perch too small to keep.

Occasionally, at a park or arboretum,  
 I will pass by a pond with a wooden bridge  
 in a Japanese theme, stocked with goldfish or carp,  
 and stop awhile because of the water lilies  
 expecting something, never knowing what.  
 This morning dosing coffee from a mug  
 I love the way a ten-year-old will love  
 the least important thing, I feel the sun  
 pop up as if we'd loaded up the boat  
 and the bait, and I have woken in the middle  
 of the lake and the lilies, having dozed in the dawn,  
 and am waiting for a bite, and everything.

– James B. Nicola

## "MEMORY OF THE DAY"

The wind blows gently upon my face  
 As I watch the leaves dance to the song  
 Silent and beautiful is Nature's grace  
 Where all and everything politely belong

Last I was here, it was with her  
 Our hands touched as did our hearts  
 Memories now too strong to blur  
 From my mind never shall they part

We watched as water poured over rock  
 With spray and droplets catching the light  
 It was if all else in the world had stopped  
 A day never giving way to night

Sitting here now among the trees  
 The wind to me continues to speak  
 And my memories I hold close to me  
 Of that day when we both came to be

– Nolen Holzapfel

## WHERE ARE YOUR SUN YOUR MOON NOW?

Lemon yellow delicate wings  
 of the fritillary gray brocade  
 along both edges one  
 cobalt eye on each vane  
 poised impossibly on  
 fuchsia blossoms of  
 fireweed with stem so lithe  
 the weight of a tiny moth  
 no more than an aspen leaf  
 nearly bends it to the earth  
 O where are the sun and moon  
 where is the universe now?  
 where are the huge things a  
 mind can scarcely imagine?

They are held in a half inch  
 of velveteen flight  
 my slight shadow huge  
 as a mountain

– Daniel Williams  
 Lundy Canyon

## ASCENDING BUTTERFLIES

Thin,  
Nervous wings  
Of butterflies,  
Pale yellow,  
Deep crimson,  
Ascend,  
Descend  
Above the seasonal flowers,  
Repeated roses,  
Asters,  
A dozen petunias,  
Border of marigold,  
Linger  
In sunlight,  
Shadows,  
Within a small,  
Silent garden.

– William Beyer

## THE ELDERBERRY AS A MEANS OF PERCEPTION

Blackened by summer (branches wizened,  
leaves crisped and curled),  
the elderberry struggles to survive  
its tedium  
on a slope of haggled rock.

Yet what at first seems bleak  
to the eye of the observer,  
who looks, then turns away,  
has second thoughts, and looks again –  
alert to details, to furtherance of life –  
and sees that

weaving spiders have hung  
their industry upon the elderberry's  
tattered twigs, have  
fattened spaces with an ineluctability  
of nature at her naturalest –  
and sees how

morning birds in this  
morning's last-of-summer light  
bloom in and out  
of what was turned away from –

singing past the edge of things.  
Gone. Welcomed back.

– Constance Rowell Mastores

## DEPARTURE

The whisper of a southland breeze  
Remurmured through autumnal trees,  
As hand in hand, with hearts atune,  
We walked beneath a harvest moon.

The Pilgrim bridge of weathered stone  
Would lead next day to worlds unknown;  
But now, our packing set aright,  
We crossed it in an amber light.

For this would be our final chance  
To dream together and romance,  
To fix a picture in our mind  
Of half a lifetime left behind:

The woodlands greening in the spring,  
When swans return and bluebirds sing;  
The hillsides preened in an array  
Of wildflowers on a summer day;

The honey-sweet deliciousness  
Of nectar from a cider press;  
The golden pumpkins that adorn  
A farmstead rife with shocks of com;

The winter stars that wink and glow  
From crystal skies on virgin snow;  
The distant wailing of a train,  
Which haunts the dark like cries of pain.

And though this last of nights would fade  
Like footsteps in a cavalcade,  
Its spell will leave our lives beguiled  
Like tales first told us as a child.

– Jack Lovejoy

## BEYOND WINTER

Look at that dull, dull  
dusk.  
No glow  
of rose and mauve,  
only that endless gray.  
A winter dusk.  
The kind that says

Dark oak.  
Dark bay.  
Still darker shadow.  
Frail leaves  
pressed against the window.  
Your life: fearful and ripening and enormous.

– Constance Rowell Mastores

## NOSTOS

Winter light tells her it is safe here  
 on the rotting hull of the boat upside down  
 and moored, at the edge of high tide,  
 to kelp, sand, and ocean debris  
 said farewell to over and again.  
 Isn't this what it means to come home?  
 Sun low in the sky beyond the lagoon;  
 a black petrel in languid flight  
 crossing over the water,  
 its wings curved toward dusk.  
 Isn't this an image of  
 what remains to remind  
 nothing in the world is forever?  
 Not the solitary woman on the far shore  
 considering her reverie of broken shell  
 Nor the fisherman  
 slowly reeling in his line.  
 Not even this boat black spiders hide out in  
 April through August --  
 safe, or not --  
 this boat, this abandoned haunt  
 that echoes wind, rippling water  
 and scattered light.

Flown into lambent shadow, the petrel  
 begins its descent;  
 the fisherman packs up his gear  
 and heads back. On the far shore,  
 wakened from her reverie of lost ships  
 and bleached shell,  
 the solitary woman reaches out her hand ...  
 dispenses blessings on the ones returning home.  
 And on those who do not.

– Constance Rowell Mastores

\*Nostos: homecoming in Greek

## STORM MIRACLES\*

Confronted with a storm  
 I feel infinitesimal.  
 Snowflakes by the millions  
 in artistic complications down.

I can touch but a few  
 and influence none not to fall.  
 Whether high-minded or not  
 the glaring fact is it does not matter.

A tiny fleck of frozen rain  
 teaches me humility not gloom.  
 I appreciate His glory on high,  
 the richness of His will to us below.

Snow becomes slippery ice  
 and makes me grateful to walk.  
 My grain of security I owe to Him  
 who leads me in every twinkle step.

Rain soaks my clothing and brain,  
 as I muddle through the wind.  
 Even before I arrive to get dry  
 I shall recount His miracles today!

– Hayim Abramson

\*Inspired by an extraordinary snow storm in Bet El and the area  
 at large.

## SUPPLICATION

Yesterday we woke and clouds covered the sky  
 And the wind arose, and we rejoiced, for we thought  
 That the longed-for rain would arrive. But the clouds  
 blew away  
 And the sun arose, bringing back the dry heat and the  
 fear.

Above the desolate fields the blue sky is so perfect and  
 calm --  
 Will You cast off what grows and lives, and choose the  
 inanimate?!  
 What can the speaking being say? And will You care  
 For the human soul when the human voice is silent on  
 earth?

We are still crying out to you from dry throats,  
 Each one will draw their own circle, men and women  
 And children, and in the soil the mute imprisoned bud  
 Will add its silent supplication: have mercy on us!

It is known to us that nature in all the world  
 Has swerved from its ways, become cruel and  
 grief-stricken.

From afar we heard of killing cold and the giant  
 whirlwind,  
 And instead of the rain we were struck with a snow  
 that broke tree and roof.

If true that the judgment of earth is rooted in our spirit,  
 Then show us a path of repair, give us counsel  
 To sharpen our prayer that it pierce to the source of  
 mercy  
 And wickedness flee, and the rains, O the rains come  
 down!

– E. Kam-Ron

28-29 Shvat 5774 (original in Hebrew)

[UNTITLED]

the oak-gall-wasp  
mortality's sting  
cells the air with  
a corky gall-sphere  
from a tiny hole  
a worm exits to  
crawl around its  
course again

a day rounded-out  
with its three  
holes in time  
a losing of the self  
in the rocking-words  
mini deaths or births  
He's already answered  
the prayers

– Yaakov ben David  
20Aug2013

[UNTITLED]

the desert's virtue lies exposed  
below the good-land's forest  
green and hiving

the desert's bad-lands  
dried to undrinkable water  
with deranged heat  
grimaced into calcified cliffs

a cloudless azure that sacks all  
a compounding  
that dissolves and opens  
to a higher substance  
above particle forces

the asymmetric graviton  
The Neshamah

– Yaakov ben David

SURPRISED

Three inches of snow in May  
wakes us up  
from Spring slumber;  
surprised  
once again;  
we have received the Torah  
in Exile.

As children we may have known,  
or not.  
But could neither do,

nor go  
nor argue.

Years later  
when each of us arose  
“went up”  
to the Land,  
why were the adults  
so surprised?

– Mindy Aber Barad

## II. Multiple Unity

ToE

A night supplied a myriad  
of crisp unflinching stars  
Bestows a period  
Of special grace  
When tourists stepping from their cars  
Find outer space

To be entangled with the inner.  
Mundane divinity  
Vouchsafes both saint and sinner  
The wherewithal  
To penetrate, to some degree,  
The glaucous pall

That clouds the humors of the eye.  
As solid as the ground  
Beneath their feet, the sky  
Becomes an altar  
Where songs are laid, though neither sound  
Nor vellum psalter

Attends this rite. A secret hymn  
Begets no miracle,  
But briefly lights the dim  
Perimeters  
That range beyond empirical  
Delimiters.

Too soon the stellar mood is gone,  
And travelers, dazed and weary,  
Drive off into the dawn  
Remembering  
Their close encounters with the Theory  
Of Everything.

– C.B. Anderson

## THE BA'AL SHEM TOV

or, A New Philosophy

The problem with religion  
is grown-ups.  
They don't see how,  
when the dusk settles like a soft grey pet on the tips  
of trees,  
the sky is filled with creatures—  
a dragon spewing smoky fire,  
a whale slapping its tail against the purpley ocean  
dome,  
spraying salty cloud droplets  
against a peacock's pointed beak.

No, they think they are just clouds: cumulous,  
cirrus, thundery G-d clouds.  
They codify and calculate like meteorologists  
without hearts.  
But they are blinded by the cataracts of too many  
nights.

In the playground of heaven,  
a cloud is not a cloud;  
it is an invitation to play.

– Devora Levin

## [UNTITLED]

I had little sleep last night  
the sky so white  
I thought it morning  
holes in clouds  
revealed dark blue  
sky lakes  
white shores  
changed contours  
an occasional bright star  
floated into  
the blueness of sea

– Susan Rosenberg

## TOAST

I toast thee, Night,  
With a brimming cup,  
Thy moon is up  
And full  
Behold its whine  
Within my wine:  
A coin in a  
Beggar's bowl.  
Remain thou rich  
With thy silver wealth  
To thee, this health

I sing  
Thy coins that fall  
Are not for all  
O, but I can  
Hear them ring!

– David Kiphen

And God the artist  
through each strand of DNA  
paints the universe.

– Douglas Stockwell

## THE ARROW OF TIME; AFTER EDEN I

Primeval plants anchored in the basin of rich red  
loam  
reach up tendrils to become orange-barked limbs  
of canella cinnamon, squirrels scamper up the  
trunks,

Fruit bats suck the sweet asparagus berries, poke  
their dog-like  
faces into the fleshy flowering claws of cactus  
flowers.

Within the convolute of sepals and whorled rosette  
cluster  
heart shaped leaf coronas of daffodil trumpets twist  
sun-tinted golden petals to adorn the woody base of  
the first fragrant pomme suffused with purple in full  
sunlight.

Was the fruit of the tree of knowledge an apple or a  
pear  
or the whirling cosmos of that dimension which  
partaking thereof cast us into the progression of time  
where decay and destruction became the mechanism  
of life.

In Eden, past, present and future was  
comprehended  
and shared with the Creator.

Given Freedom of Choice, we were bound  
– like that cat that leaps out of a 8th story window  
to catch a passing bird in flight –  
to choose curiosity.

----

Adam and Eve when the first sun set  
wept to find themselves in eternal darkness.  
The Sabbath sun rose and The Creator spoke,  
“You have chosen the material world,  
now seek the key to your living soul.”

– Shira Twersky-Cassel

## THE ARROW OF TIME; AFTER EDEN II

Cast into time, into the orderly disorder of birth and  
death

the stars, the planets and galaxies emerge from  
great explosions into giant suns,  
destined to die in smoldering embers and  
collapse into themselves.

The arrow of time opened windows  
for life to flourish, heat and energy  
to grind down and then slip away  
to feed other life forms coming into being.

How can we comprehend the birth of the universe  
and our coming into being,  
when our rationale and wisdom  
depend on a morning cup of tea.

And He has allowed us the intellect to grasp  
hidden things, to view a red dot at the far end of  
time  
that was a dying sun.

Given us recall, to remember lying down beneath  
the  
thorned wood to embrace radiating aromatic rosette  
clusters  
of goose and whortleberries and each other.

In a time when white-tailed deer and viper  
fed on star-shaped violet flowers, living in harmony,  
and the deep-throated red and honeyed lotus lilies  
sweetened the fragrant waters of Eden.

– Shira Twersky-Cassel

## EVE

You simply stand there at the dome's great climb  
Beside the stained-glass window's radiant rose  
With apple in hand, poised in the apple-pose,  
And guilty, guiltless once and for all time

Of all the offspring that you ever bore  
Since, from the radius of Forever's ring,  
You strode forth lovingly like spring  
Throughout the whole wide world to wage your  
war.

Ah, you longed to linger in that land  
A little longer so that you might heed  
The peaceful beasts' good sense and understand,

Yet since you found the man resolved to plod  
In strife toward death, you went to serve his need,  
And you had hardly yet known God.

– Rainer Maria Rilke  
translated from the German by William Ruleman

## THE BRIGHTNESS OF PASCAL'S ABYSS

Qui ne sait que la vue de chats, de rats,  
l'écrasement d'un charbon, etc., emportent  
la raison hors des gonds?

– Pascal

Yes, we are all distraught by sense or thought –  
the violence of reason opens an abyss.  
No matter how firm the earth on which we stand,  
if there's a precipice below, who among us,  
however wise, will not draw back in fear?  
The sight of a falling ember unhinged Pascal.

And yet, the unity of All, multiple, diverse.  
Each of the Thoughts linked to all the others  
and reflecting the totality; fragments like rain  
pools after a storm: each, though separate,  
gathering the constellations in a somber mirror –  
the gaze of stars directed upon the waters.

– Constance Rowell Mastores

## [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

## THE HUMAN FACE

In every face I see the halo of a fallen saint:  
 A hidden journey through a valley of grief & despair  
 Where witness is written in the fabric of knitted  
     brows--  
 The threads of wisdom from which the universe is  
     woven.

In every smile, the thin veneer of civilization  
 Curves around sensuous lips to a twisted, angry  
     mouth;  
 Agony vanishes into old familiar wounds  
 And the bruised asylum of infinite sun-split clouds.

In every mirror, the vision of a murdered god  
 Wrinkled over the soft, kissed, daydreaming cheek  
     of childhood;  
 In the pupil of every eye, the inexhaustible  
 Mystery of laughter confronting burnt cities &  
     barbed wire.

Every hair, a fine distinction between sorrow &  
     glory,  
 Half spiritual experiment, half heaven's ambition;  
 Cries of joy are on the tongue of every holy hunger  
 And a silent hymn uncurling in every stranger's ear!

– E.P . Fisher

## NIGHTSTORY

She thinks about swans, the woman reading,  
 and a tall girl with tangled hair  
 touching the fur of a silent bear  
 who will become a prince. Needing

a cup of tea, she rises, moves  
 to put the kettle on for steeping  
 good hot black to prevent her sleeping  
 before the clock strikes twelve. Hooves

of a golden horse keep pace across  
 her heartbeat as she stirs in milk,  
 remembering a gown of silk  
 she wore one summer day. *My loss*

*is nothing* she repeats and then  
 she pours away the extra water,  
 waiting for her only daughter,  
 who, hungry, might come home again.

– Kathryn Howd Machan

## AMULET

I have some salmon salad  
 with celery and onions,  
 just the way you like it -  
 Mother said as I rushed  
 to catch a plane.

Mother, I haven't time -

It won't take any time at all -

The brown bag now delivered,  
 Mother kissed me, followed  
 down the walk to where the taxi  
 tooted, waved ...

Flying west, I forgot the food;  
 was wakened somewhere above Ohio  
 by a steward with a tray of plastic chicken,  
 changed planes in Denver running every step,  
 arrived at LAX to find my airbus waiting,  
 snatched my luggage, dashed  
 with pounding heart, fell  
 finally in the only empty seat.

Following the sun as we drove up the coast  
 I smelled the salmon sandwich, ripe  
 from body heat and hours of travel.

I drew the package from my pocket  
 and folded back wax paper.

Every single passenger,  
 inhaling salmon, onions, kosher pickle,  
 turned to look with envy,  
 while I ate quietly  
 and was replenished.

– Sheila Golburgh Johnson

## ORPAH

I have for you a miniquiz.  
 You know, of course, who Oprah is.  
 But do you know who Orpah was?  
 You don't? Well, almost no one does.  
 Now, don't become a history sleuth  
 to learn who Orpah was. Read Ruth.

– Henry Harlan

## OLLIE

One day an otter orphan in a current  
was swept up to a half-fixed beaver dam.  
He came to and met there another youth  
engaged in a peculiar sort of play

who had a flat tail and a wife. They weren't  
much older than he. "Why, hello. I am  
called Oliver. Could you help me?" They both  
had timber in their mouths. "I've lost my way."

They grunted "No," but that afternoon they  
taught Ollie all they knew of mud and wood.  
He loved the work and helping for a day.  
When they were done he saw that it was good.

The couple asked him if he'd like to stay  
but Ollie was a player, so returned  
to his old pointless, artless, happy way,  
unchanged by the industrial arts he'd learned.

Years later, though, he swirled upon a dam  
again, swept by the current of a thought,  
this time, or memory: "Is what I am  
what I'm supposed to be, or is there not

some thing I should be doing with my life?"  
He thought he heard the beaver and his wife  
calling his name. Then in a gush of folly  
he swished and plopped again. For he was Ollie.

– James B. Nicola

## THE WOMEN AT THE DOCK

The women sat at the dock at sunset  
all ages, all strangers  
none with a boat  
though there may have been boats  
some time in their lives  
as there were other partings  
for as men speak of gains and armies boast territory  
the women shared losses and expanded  
getting fuller and stronger like sleek seals on rocks.

Some men slipped silently into the water  
slim boats like sperm rushing off, sliding away  
like other men, in other lives  
The women though seemed detached  
sensing below the river, swells of the incoming tide  
and adjusting their sights like knowing sailors.

I waded in and laughingly fell  
the widow rolled out gnarled legs to join me  
someone's sister spotted a hawk and the young

mother lay on the wood  
scratching her lazy belly  
her face restful in her own vision of the sky  
our voices getting softer, more serene  
we were a circlet of swans.

– Susan Oleferuk

TO NAOMI  
Song 2

o high fine pure shy intelligent-eyed silv'ry-voiced  
Naomi,  
Child of the lithe keen hemlock-darkened far  
northern streams,  
Waking dream,  
Hesperides-seeking brave dream,  
Holy-living-Beauty-loving  
Beauty-embracing brave dream,  
Dreaming Almeda's high beechen Time-breathing  
high gods-keen  
Prescient green Island:

Abide by the high keen brave taintless pacing white  
horses,  
Pacing in the distance, pacing in the blue mist –

– Robert Glen Deamer

## LIGHT

I imagine angels on assem-  
bly lines making it, stacking warehouse shelves  
with ingots of the stuff, like Santa's elves,  
filling orders as we submit them.

And I think I've seen the fake stuff sold  
by counterfeiters, hacks and scabs  
who duck into hidden getaway cabs  
when a Sunday alarm is tolled.

The Manufacturer could sue  
but then it would probably get too dark.  
Since He refuses to take out a trademark,  
what, in the end, can He do?

– James B. Nicola

## APHORISMS

The reach of tenderness is each; the compass of compassion, all.

Beware the logic of the loveless man.

As colors to the colorblind, is kindness to the cruel.

Cube is substance of a square; circle, shadow of a sphere.

Truth is simile; beauty is metaphor; love is equation.

Those things converge which from the same source flow.

Breathes there soul so shallow no breeze of beauty stirs?

Let not the compass of the mind exceed the heart's circumference.

Paranoia is the maddest form of loneliness.

– B.Z. Niditch

### III. Cleavings

## CLEAVING

To cleave.

To adhere or cling, remain faithful to,  
especially in resistance to a force that draws away.  
Also to split or divide,  
as by a cutting blow, especially  
along a natural line of division,  
like the grain of wood.

Where has this word been?

In the flower beds perhaps,  
concealed among the lilacs and nasturtiums.  
Watching through a window –  
now the bedroom,  
now the living room or study.  
Observing, researching us unnoticed,  
as for a project or assignment.  
Learning more than a word  
or anyone should know.  
Or we, in a thousand words,  
in all this cleaving silence could have said.

– Bill Freedman

## COINCIDENCE

"I apologize to coincidence for calling it necessity"  
("Under a Certain Little Star," Wis³awa  
Szymborska)

Like seeing you walk towards me on stiletto heels  
in that tight black boat-neck sweater, rocking  
those astonishing blue green eyes,  
Having no idea where you'd be at just that moment  
had I not learned, stumbling on the steadfast pattern  
of your whereabouts and movements over the past  
five weeks, six days, that this was always where  
you  
were at just this time.

Like saying, miraculously, just the right four words  
by way of hopeful but embarrassed introduction,  
Having no idea what you'd find appealing, childish  
or offensive,  
Trusting entirely to intuition, prayer, luck and the  
coincidental overhearing of nineteen introductions  
by assorted eager strangers over the past two  
months,  
nine days: eighteen failed, one unsettling  
but instructively successful.

Like knowing where to take you that fortuitous first  
evening,  
Knowing nothing of your taste in music or your  
dining  
preferences but what I'd learned from thirty-seven  
friends,  
acquaintances and relatives who, for reasons I  
cannot  
explain, even to this day, gave me just that  
information  
when I interviewed them for a survey about the  
leisure  
occupations of young women of a certain class I  
happened  
to be conducting at the time.

Like knowing, somehow, eight years later you'd be  
leaving,  
when you said, excitedly, you'd met, by odd  
coincidence,  
precisely where we'd met eight years before, a  
stranger  
who seemed to know you.

– Bill Freedman

## HOW WILL I KNOW THEE

How will I know thee  
To see thee for the  
First  
Time?

"You might just get to know  
Me  
If you will not insist on speaking  
Rhyme."

You might attempt to trick me to reveal my  
Birth-sign.  
You might attempt to goad me to reveal my  
Birth-stone.

You might query me for my height,  
My coloring, my physique.

But, you shall know me by my winter-green  
Earrings,  
-- pastel platform sandals --green--

And you might just get to know something else,  
Somewhere, somehow--in-between.  
-- Sue Tourkin-Komet

## FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE TOTEM POLE

Beautiful is as beautiful doesn't which stands  
outside itself  
Like an aroma around a pear.

It is who you are when I see you from a different  
slant,  
A glance knocking itself against your  
improbabilities like  
A rubber ball on a window.

I slide down you like cognitive dissent,  
A relocation of my past attitudes towards you into  
a new place.

And you become fabulous like the first time I met  
you  
In the Hunter College cafeteria and knew that one  
day I would find

Your carved beauty looking at me from the other  
side  
Of the totem pole.

-- David Lawrence

## GRANDSTANDING

Walking past all the ugliness in the world I run into  
you  
At the beautiful corner and know that you are the  
glow  
Beyond the traffic light.

You are so unusual that I stop and go and watch  
You shift gears as you smoke into my universe like  
A runaway wheel.

You are so Daytona lovely.

I want to get into a major accident with your chassis,  
To roll over with you into the injured audience.  
I want to share your accidental drama in the  
grandstands.

-- David Lawrence

## SUITED FOR LOVING MY WIFE

I looked back at our President and turned into a pillar  
of salt.

He tried to rock and roll like JC  
But his results were bankrupt like Sodom and  
Gomorra.

If I didn't vote for him why do you say I have to  
respect him?

I didn't start the war in Afghanistan.  
He did.  
Why should I have to think it was a good deal,  
Better than Iraq?

I am not voting for myself.  
I am not applauding his give-away speech at Cairo.

The only job I am suited for is to love my wife.  
It takes a lot of work when your mind is contrarian,  
Your antagonistic compulsions are obsessive.

I pop a lithium.  
I see two analysts.

I am learning to hold it all together like a hand in a  
mud pie.

-- David Lawrence

## SOMEHOW MORE

Belgium chocolate truffle  
 Hug of a grandchild  
 A lovely stranger's smile  
 Pleasures

But to reach 'joy' ... somehow more  
 With elation comes a sense of ending  
 My love comes to our bed  
 In a white that glimmers

I run my hand through her hair  
 I see a face that unwinds the years  
 So this is how she looked at 21  
 Yet with it the sense of the end

Not a fold of intimacy  
 Instead this signal  
 From the sweetest moments  
 How our grace clings to a parting  
 - Greg Moglia

## PRINCE OF THE FOREST

Princeling of the forest  
 dappled like spots of sun on the rich baize ground  
 the forest concealing, lending its color, a magical spell

Prince of the forest, are you strong yet  
 to bear your crown and prance and parade your masculine  
 beauty  
 I think of you  
 autumn mornings when the rain gusts sharp and the tannin  
 hits deep  
 and you raise your massive head and step out of the dark  
 trees

Princeling, that day in May  
 I had nothing to give you  
 only a human voice, an unpracticed gift  
 till the imaginative forest lent me its sounds  
 each note hit the sky and fell to the deepest root  
 an expression of man's great range  
 the melody of thought  
 and the timbre of compassion  
 missing only from this great opera  
 the sound of a gun

Gamesman I say  
 what unfair game do you play  
 do you not hear the music  
 does the forest not enchant  
 can you not hum the player's tune.

- Susan Oleferuk

## SAMSON'S LAMENT

"Then [Delilah] said to [Samson], "How can you say, 'I love you', when your heart is not with me? You ... have not told me where your great strength is." ...So he told her all that was in his heart and said to her, "A razor has never come to my head ... If I am shaved, then my strength will leave me and I shall become weak and be like any other man...."  
 Judges, 16:15-17.

Even here  
 in this windowless world of mine  
 when the memory  
 of the Vale of Sorek  
 reforms in my mind  
 I am moved to tears.  
 For it was there  
 I first met Delilah,  
 first fell in love.  
 In Sorek I invited her in  
 to my sanctum

only to have her,  
 once past the door  
 and I unaware,  
 cast my gift of love to the floor.  
 She let in foes  
 who shore off my locks of hair,  
 dashed out my eyes,  
 bound me with these chains  
 and left me to rot  
 in this Gaza jail.

The hair regrows.  
 My strength revives.  
 But even if I could win  
 back the use of my eyes  
 the injury she has done  
 will not heal.  
 For now I feel  
 there is no one under heaven  
 whom I can trust.

Delilah, and Delilah alone,  
 has led me in  
 to a dark prison of the soul  
 out of which I dare not go.

- Larry Smeets

## CHAPEL PERILOUS EXPERIENCE

The objects on hand seemed to eliminate  
the space between themselves and us,  
so in the chapel's garden the many, at last, was one.  
Bushes balleted in sync with our motions,  
and flowers wore our emotions on their sleeves.

We had completely become our surroundings,  
though don't we always become ourselves  
in everything besides ourselves,  
for what are we if not all but ourselves  
for the most part? What's left is a cubic foot  
or two of tissue and bone, plus some issues  
about our relationship with the outside world.  
So we knew what each thing was going to do,  
for there we were, like its transitive verb,  
every object part of the one and only subject.

Our peak experience lasted for just seconds.  
Then we fell back to ourselves as the garden faded,  
though we kept returning to the House of Eros,  
hunting for that time-immune tower that was  
more of a chapel than what we had in mind.  
Such highs are what the species lives for  
though we're easily seduced by sexy ideas  
when only love can make humankind kinder.  
We have come a short way in a long time.  
We have a long way to go in a short time.

– Andrew H. Oerke

## [UNTITLED]

There is a piece of me  
it smells of pine and rests on a shelf  
of a blue sky mountain  
another piece  
is hidden in the brush where the stream is wide  
and the willow bends  
it smells of sweet woodruff and sun

When I forget  
where I live  
and who I am  
I come here  
in my dreams swimming, climbing, reaching  
and I often glimpse you  
smell you, miss you in the cold night air.

– Susan Oleferuk

*IV. That Which Holds*

## THE TANGERINE

I look down the  
center of the tangerine  
and see the  
center, but when  
I tear it apart,  
all I have  
are two parts. It  
seems strange  
that the center  
of anything could  
disappear just  
by tearing it  
apart. Maybe  
it was never  
there. But I  
saw it. I know  
what I saw.  
A tiny,  
dark space  
holding it all  
together. It  
was there  
once.

– Roberta Pantal Rhodes

## IN THE COMPANY OF POTTERS

for Dorothy

I envy the potter who taps twice  
and centers her work,  
while I, after six decades tap,  
tapping, have just come round right.

There's no place like Center.

– Carol Pearce Bjorlie

the singular beast

What stays in the center of each ring is the same  
defining hub, as any note can bring  
all of music to bloom, in echo out  
to shoreless reaches. Can a hammer ring  
upon this anvil, can a forge's flame  
redden that crude hunk of steel, and not  
imply all other hammers, forges, steel?  
A chain of snakes, each tail in its own mouth,  
links this to that to every other thing.  
A net enmeshes hunter, arrow, game;  
a net drapes over that. All bordering  
is center, and all rings, braiding, become  
a hub, all rims roll up and underneath  
to anchor and encircle here and all.

– JBMulligan

## ODE TO THE CENTER

It's that which holds. It's that which is most  
     like you or me,  
     around which spins a dance  
     of eternity,  
     of distantly equal parts, so vast

that it holds countless centers tossed  
     in a surging sea  
     of cold circumference,  
     so periphery  
 and center are married, bedded, blessed

with everywhere a new  
 beginning, end and course to run, a chance  
     to once again continue.

It's time that is the center. Or may be.  
     The spinning ring  
     of past and future holds  
     the dizzying  
     displays of possibility,

the branches of a primal tree,  
     roots echoing  
     each twig as it unfolds  
     the leaves that spring  
 to catch and cup the light. To see

the pattern is to know  
 a center runs through time: each moment yields  
     its being to the flow.

The essence centers everything.  
     The moment far  
 from time, that happens always.  
     A place not near  
 or distant, but here and there. We bring

an appetite for centering  
     outside us, are  
 in time beyond our days,  
     in places where  
 we'll never reach - if anything

we're more alive when dead  
 to thinking meat, and rise to what we praise  
     of us that is outside.

We snatch at moments that hang in air,  
     bright and - are gone.  
     The petals of a flame.

The way is open:  
 we're stymied by a lack of door.

The moment is a center, pure  
     and full -- the one  
     that follows is the same  
     but never can  
 equal its vanished twin, its other.

The moment must be all  
 that holds us to the rest, the briefest dream  
     that binds us to the real.

The here is true (and now), and on  
     the fulcrum of  
     a place, the universe  
     can rest, and if  
 it shivers and totters, still the lean

is balanced in its shape and motion,  
     commands belief  
     in all the other centers.  
     We might deceive  
 the desperate, centering self - but then

we'd cut the holy bond  
 to swelling seas, which are each others' shores,  
     to all we are, beyond.

– JBMulligan

## ACTUAL LIGHT

He is where he is, eternal  
 He is always there, being, His Self  
 He is Omnipotent in oblivion  
 a Selfless Being which is Light  
 that nothingness means to flesh

But where is there: since hardly  
 anyone believes anymore?  
 The question is answered by Light

He is waiting, a Fire in a bush  
 He is waiting, a Voice in wind no one hears  
 He is waiting, the Light of the world  
 while man assumes that he is  
 (idolizing himself) as if that is  
 what replaced His waiting

But as actual Light, God is in love  
 with waiting--if man could only see it.  
 He is waiting, Light, the center of the universe.

– J.E. Bennett

## THE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE

Today, the center of the universe quiets, sheathed in  
cloudy starlight.  
(Accepting rides home from rehabilitation centers  
brings dependence).

Celestial minarets peal prayerful obedience.  
Fortresses of servitude stay ticking.  
(Aided by jar openers, dress sticks, arm extenders,  
we cripples get by, somehow).

Distant gateways block the view from cubicles,  
while galaxies shrug theft.  
(Days filled with tests, medicines, also nurses,  
convey awkward therapies).

Once banished from heaven, civilizations tend to  
gape at their forefathers' ruins.  
(We wished to be able-bodied enough to help, but  
discovered, instead, other wisdoms).

At present, bandits remain hidden in the garb of  
interstellar peace mongers.  
(Making lunch, or flushing toilets, exhausts those of  
us missing limbs).  
– KJ Hannah Greenberg

## 25. ETERNITY IN ETERNITY\*

Midway through, the counting lost all sense:  
numbers were – well...words touched and whirled  
off  
and the parquet extended infinitely in all directions.

I found myself alone in an old song  
asked to dance by a slow radio wave  
from an era where such things were done.

Lines blur where shadows traverse reflections  
beneath me on the wood as I step back,  
left back, side, slide together, promenade.

– Courtney Druz

\*from a sequence of poems on the counting of the omer. Day  
25 is the midpoint of the count.

## THE CIRCLE

He stands in the centre  
of the circle,  
gathers, tries to plug in tentacles  
that connect the realm above nature  
to this unhappy world in the need  
to transcend physicality.

The circumference  
of the circle stretches  
many times over,  
bathed in all the colors  
of the spectrum.  
The barrage of conflicts,  
past disappointments accumulate;  
ghosts invoked from previous  
lives, other ages, his yearnings  
long time forgotten, claim  
their place in the circle.

Inside the busy silence  
everything unspoken waits  
the chance to express itself,  
insists it is important to be  
acknowledged.  
Synapses pop and flare,  
he is pressured all the time,  
tries to keep his circle steady  
as the rich undercurrent of life  
sways it. He knows he will be  
judged by what he absorbed  
from all that whirls around  
to make his life a testament  
to God's truth and beauty.

– Gretti Izak

## HEALING THROUGH SILENCE

I am healing through silence.  
Because it is within silence that I can hear and listen  
to my voice.  
Yes. Hear myself think and discover my own inner  
beauty again,  
Without the constant bickering, confusion and  
torment.  
The weight has been lifted off of my shoulders.  
To breathe in the morning sunshine and feel  
peaceful once more.  
Daring to step out into the world and regain my  
footing.  
Putting on a spiritual armor of light I protect myself  
from cockeyed looks.  
I learn that self reliance is a virtue.  
Grateful for the small acts of kindness of others.  
Nature smiles on me as I meditate within the  
symmetry.

– Shoshanah Weiss-Kost

## THE CITY CENTER

The center of the city is not the Square,  
it is not on the map of any part.  
The city's center is a thinking heart.  
It is the promise that we will be there  
for one another, that each has a share  
that is not forfeited when troubles start.  
All civic courage and all civic art  
arise on the foundation of this care.

For where all are for one, each dares to be  
for all -- to do and say as conscience prods.  
But where each one serves mean and separate gods,  
where selfishness is sole security,  
there freedom flags, creative vision dies,  
and the city falls, whatever buildings rise.

– Esther Cameron  
Madison, Wisconsin, 1995

## LOOKING FOR THE QUEEN

Of the two hives, it's clear where one needn't  
Search: in the larger, every cell crammed with  
honey,  
workers carousing on the front porch on this  
sticky summer night. Neither hive will

Sting, so we comb the frames of the smaller  
for the single point where every face turns,  
wings working to pay an obeisance,  
and frame after frame comes up dry as hexagons.

The hive won't make it through the winter,  
though they do their work, they gather,  
they care, they spend little time underperforming,  
but without a sense of serving one thing,

It all becomes stingless, flavorless, that hive without  
a beauty to adore and for whom to beat-out their  
lives.

– Jared Pearce

## THOSE WHO COME TO THE GARDEN

How many visit this garden  
and some take away a cutting of this, a snipping of  
that  
a crushing handful, a scent of a fulsome summers  
day  
or like the robin  
feast indulgent  
luscious cherries  
succulent worms  
and some watch, cold as stone  
gravelly paths ending in thorn  
comments on changing buds and coming storm  
but one belongs here  
beautiful and true  
and this garden grows around her.

– Susan Oleferuk

## THE SPELL

Because of wrong directions  
-- or so we thought --  
we ended up driving round  
the same street time after time,  
a convergence of cul-de-sacs,  
east and west playing hide  
and seek in the black night.

Passing cars like pulsars pressing  
from deep space, shivered the metal  
skeleton of our car, and those parked  
on both sides of the narrow streets echoed  
warnings of collusion. Stray cats turned up  
and disappeared like ghosts, and we heard  
children crying as in an extended living room.

In Tel Aviv you are not supposed to get lost,  
syncopated by right-angled planning,  
a sea to the west easily keeps one oriented,  
relentlessly runs its course of waves  
to account for each heartbeat of the city,  
noisy, never sleeping, driven by postcard  
novelties, light-heartedly accepting all.

This surely was the spell locking us to drive  
in circles, perhaps for a while at least, wanting  
to forget what lies to the east, those exacting heights  
of Jerusalem that belittle all man's right-angled  
plans,  
novelties and certainties.

– Gretti Izak

### *V. Eaten by a Land*

#### TRADESCANTIA\*

Inch plant, creeping plant, sometimes Moses in the basket  
or bulrushes, sometimes called "weakly upright,"  
sometimes "scrambling," emigrant passed along  
(tradition of a sort), now peering from frigid panes,  
now dangling in high corners, winding  
within houses, lives, our lives,  
regardless of dust, scant water, less food, burgeoning,  
seeking light while tolerant of shade,  
stiff-leaved, yet despite fibrous strength,  
at carelessness, even well-intentioned touch, breaking  
but as if they cannot die, surviving.

– Ellin Sarot

\*genus which includes the plant known as "Wandering Jew"

#### DIRECT LIGHTING

Anyone else would say it was indirect  
lighting, the way you came in, no switch, no flame.  
Inside was outside, outside was the same  
wherever you went for forty years, you trekked,

followed the pillars that protected you along the way  
from the shores of the Reed Sea to Plains of Moab camped,  
the Enlightenment was always there with the Almighty's  
stamp  
of approval, a testing ground to show you wouldn't stray

from Him, to take the promise to the other side,  
stretch the Tabernacle to fill the width and breadth  
of the land where you might trod. Confide

in its deepest secrets, gather its bounty provide,  
dwell there, abide by that path, take the Words He said  
keep the message You brought forever open wide.

– Zev Davis

#### EATEN BY A LAND

My heart drinks milk  
My soul honey  
Sap pours up  
Drips from my leaves  
Tall wheat brushes my eye lashes  
As I pick crowned fruit  
Whose seed- filled blood  
Stains all

The road  
Heavy with wine  
Through walls of beveled rock  
Veined with crimson and green  
Dry thistles threaten  
My skin browns  
And I am absorbed

A delicacy  
Eaten by a Land of  
Grasshoppers and giants  
I can no longer say no  
And I have nothing further to report

– Mindy Aber Barad

#### KLITAH ABSORPTION)

I have gone forth from the country of my birth,  
for the last time have heard the robin's song,  
seen gold of aconites on new-thawed earth,  
for which the bitter winters made us long.  
But blackbirds here will whistle in the dawn,  
the almond tree console for winter's chill,  
gray doves will throb, the hoopoe strut his  
crown,  
and jackals raise their voice in eerie thrill.  
And most I pray the Torah's voice will fill  
my ears, as daily through the streets I go,  
and the land's air instruct me in the will  
of the One who gave me life, sustained me so  
far, that Israel may absorb my mind  
and grant me breathe its freedom unconfined.

– E. Kam-Ron

## QUEST

on he'halutz street in be'ersheva  
tall trees with purple blossoms line the way.  
newly arrived, how i wish to know their name.  
in each shop i stop.  
what's the name of the tree on your walk?  
in simple hebrew i say.  
but no one knows.

years go by  
and no one knows.  
could i have asked an expert? perhaps.  
to every thing there is a name.

in a tel aviv taxi today  
purple blossomed trees pass in a blur.  
so i ask,  
and he knows!  
a 20-year quest ends  
on a blue sky day

with a singular word  
that sounds  
like a  
sweet  
song:

*sigalon.*

– I. Batsheva

## GIFTS

Old Yemen, Romania  
Woven together with royal threads -  
Hybrids hung with pride in the market,  
What can I bring you?  
The bulging fruit vies for space with  
Spicy pickled vegetables,  
Is this what you'd like?  
Hand-rolled vine leaves stuffed -  
Will these fit in my suitcase?  
Holy garments for special days -  
Horns of silver and gold -  
To announce Messiah's coming.  
Will such gifts impress?

– Mindy Aber Barad

## HOBBY: ARMAGEDDON

(Megiddo, 2006)

I hear him before I see him  
golden-edged wings printed on the sky,  
unmoving above roofless rooms,  
the broken forts of Armageddon --

A hawk soaring over us all  
eyes a black centipede long as my foot  
crawling from the prehistoric  
oblivious of time atop this tel,

Twenty-six cities beneath my soles,  
Death filed in cabinets of stone,  
arranged by layers of time  
labeled with pink cyclamen.

Sipping water from a plastic bottle,  
I watch sun-burned tourists below  
spilling out of a yellow bus, seeking  
the beginning of their sorrow.

In the gift shop, Roman glass  
green as the sea of Odysseus,  
old as the idea of empire,  
costs more than bloody sand,

I buy a necklace made of shards  
buffed by 2000 years of war.  
The hovering bird, I discover  
in *Birds of Israel* -- "Hobby."

– B.B. Adams

## HISTORY'S WEIGHT

Time compressed  
past and present laminated.

heavy to bear,  
breath burns,  
heart bids burst  
beneath the burden.

the past  
events places  
beget the present  
future's womb.

then is here is now.

– Michael E. Stone

## VISIONARY

upon a visit to the Zippori National Park

And Jerusalem went into hiding  
in escape from the Roman eagle's claws  
which ripped apart its sanctuary,  
scattered its gems.

Its legal body and soul migrated  
to a perch aloft a Galilean hilltop,  
there, fertile minds etched spoken laws  
to affix the code and mingled with pagans  
their theatre and baths,  
illustrious decors  
while remaining adherent to the faith of the Fathers,  
a vision of rebirth concealed  
-- a pact of silence --  
in a Mona Lisa's mosaic glimpse

and the watchful eyes of a full moon  
that swore me to secrecy  
homeward on the Jordan Valley.

– Leah LJ Gottesman

## CAP OF THE ARCH

seven faceted stone,  
eyes  
head of the building  
cap of the arch  
angled to take the pressure  
and support the rest

so are we here  
eyes see and yet blind  
think and yet obtuse  
but we can take the pressure

we in the land.

Israel's fate

– Michael E. Stone  
Shabbat Hannukah 2009

## HURRICANE

Beyond the eye  
of the approaching storm,  
center of calm,

behind the veil  
of clouds a hundred  
miles wide,

pounding to be let in  
is the master  
come to snare us.

-- Steven Sher

## EXISTENTIAL THREATS

*with apologies to The Beach Boys*

Could we see A-bombs from Iran? Missiles  
launched by Hezbollah? Deadly gas  
shot from Damascus? Hamas rockets in the south?

Someone let the angel of death into the house  
while we were sleeping and none know  
how to show him out.

This is the enemy that conspires all around us,  
the while claiming that his lies are truth—  
and puts a thumb on the scale

when no one's watching so the lies  
carry more weight, the abuse  
then heaped on us will have just cause.

Someone's tossed a burning match  
among the dry brush and young trees  
beside the highway to Jerusalem—

the way the first torch signaled  
to the next, spreading quickly hill to hill,  
the new month's start as far as Babylon.

Bibi, will you bomb Iran?  
Bomb Iran? Bomb Iran?  
*Ba ba ba ba-bomb Iran*

– Steven Sher

## CURSE

Go off to Goa  
 this afternoon  
 go find indifferent gods  
 leave the fall-out shelters  
 for a pad in the Village  
 a mythic world  
 of nirvana  
 all on your own,  
 where are your kings  
 except in cards  
 your great judges  
 on revelation thrones  
 your royal lines  
 of poets, priests and prophets?  
 They are entombed in scrolls of parchment.  
 Don't you have time  
 to understand the text  
 it's all backwards to you,  
 and your pierced ears  
 cannot hear me  
 banish you from  
 the House of Israel.

-- B.Z. Niditch

## THE ANTI-SEMITES' SCORN

"

We have become a taunt to our neighbors, a scorn  
 and mockery to those around us." (Psalm 79:4)

I hear the anti-Semites swear all wars  
 Are started by the Jews; I hear their scorn  
 And mockery, how every shirt is torn  
 By Jewish usury, how Jewish jaws  
 Have slowly chewed their flesh, how Jewish claws  
 Will slash the unsuspecting eye. They mourn  
 The gems they claim we stole and now adorn  
 The snouts of Jewish piglets, sows and boars.

I hear the lewd obscenities they use  
 Against us, Lord, as if we drank their sweat  
 Or poisoned all their wells. O help me fight  
 Their hatred, God, their hatred of the Jews,  
 Not with revenge's fire, but with light; let  
 A Jewish dawn extinguish hatred's night.

-- Yakov Azriel

## AGAIN

The wolves are gathering round, dear Lord,  
 the wolves are gathering round.  
 Again your sons to ravage, kill  
 to crush into the ground.  
 Why do you hide, dear Lord?  
 Come forth,  
 stretch out your mighty hand.  
 How can you stand  
 to hear the cries  
 of anguish from your Land?

Enough enough the wolves have drunk  
 the blood of slaughtered sheep.  
 Come forth dear God  
 and shepherd be.  
 Thy flock is long sore weak.  
 Your covenant carved  
 in stars and sand  
 in heart, in mind, on flesh.  
 A promise made  
 You won't forsake,  
 a Godly kiss, caress.

Make haste dear Lord,  
 the day grows dim.  
 The wolves are gathering round again.  
 The hour is late,  
 the night was long,  
 the dove, the deer, the sheep stood strong.  
 But test them not again dear Lord.  
 They walked through fire, were flayed by sword,  
 but now they tire. They seek respite,  
 Yet still they follow, still they fight.

Until the sword turns into plow,  
 Dear Lord, we do proclaim,  
 We'll hold aloft your banner,  
 stay faithful to your Name.  
 Your Land defend,  
 your enemies fight,  
 your children guard with prayers and might,  
 until the time when dawn's clear light  
 replaces darkness, ends the night.

But has the time not come, dear Lord?  
 Your children all await your word.  
 Reveal, dear God  
 the morning star,  
 the dawn's pure glow,  
 the fresh new day.  
 The night was long, the time has come.  
 Hallow Your Name.  
 Proclaim Your song.

- Yaffa Ganz

## ANI MA'AMIN

"I see it, but not now, I behold it, but not soon ...."

(Numbers 24:17)

"I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah; although he tarries, nonetheless, I wait for him day by day."

— from the "Ani Ma'amin" ("I Believe"), a formulation written in the fifteenth century of the Thirteen Principles of Jewish Faith according to R. Moses Maimonides (1135-1204)

Although he tarries, leaving us to grieve  
Our brother's death and dig our sister's grave  
With broken shovels in a darkened cave,  
The Messiah will come one day, I believe.  
Will eyes detect his shadow, ears perceive  
The echo of his name? Will mourners shave  
Their beards one day, believing he can save  
Adam's daughters and all the sons of Eve?

Soon the Messiah will arrive — he must! —  
And when he does, he'll teach us how to play  
With hissing snakes whose fangs no longer bite,  
With serpents that have ceased to eat the dust  
Of sin; in faithfulness he'll bring, one day,  
Fresh fruit from Eden's tree of life and light.

— Yakov Azriel

## THE MOON OF JERUSALEM

"And God said, 'Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to distinguish between the day and the night; and they shall be for signs and appointed times, for days and years.'" (Genesis 1:14)

In the race of time, the sprinter was the sun  
Which quickly sped through days, but lost the race;  
When night appeared, it was the moon that won.

How bright the dawn, when the sun began to run  
With confidence, ability and grace;  
In the race of time, the sprinter was the sun.

But the sun, which lit up worlds all stars should  
shun,  
Reduced his speed and waned without a trace;  
When night appeared, it was the moon that won.

As hosts of stars declared the race was done,  
The moon of Jerusalem reached first place;  
In the race of time, the sprinter was the sun.

The stars took threads they earlier had spun  
And hid the moon behind a veil of lace;  
When night appeared, it was the moon that won.

"Bring light," the stars command, "when there is none,

And at the end of days, reveal your face."

In the race of time, the sprinter was the sun;

When night appeared, it was the moon that won.

— Yakov Azriel

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## VI. *Border of an Era*

### FAULT LINES

We're camped beside the border of an era,  
But whether it's a new one or the old  
We can't be sure. In either case, we stand  
Upon the rim of an immense caldera  
That threatens parcels of developed land  
For miles around. Our lives are bought and sold

For tarnished Lincoln pennies on the dollar,  
And yet our coin is stamped: IN GOD WE TRUST.  
The times are named for trends in art or science  
Or in religion, though the Roman collar  
Meant nothing to the prehistoric Mayans,  
Whose calendar bespoke the moth and rust

Of sharp disjunctures at the end of time.  
A novelist emplaces arcs of terror  
If only to ensure his stories sell,  
While we who count our syllables and rhyme  
Say nothing of the creatures straight from hell,  
But scribble in the margin of our error.

— C.B. Anderson

## THRESHOLD

On the new century's threshold –  
 unmapped exile of time and place –  
 she remembered a distant window in another  
 country, where the gray houses would come to offer  
     their  
 looming shadows at the night-shrouded market-  
 square for an awed child's soul to choose from,  
 when a horse's hooves played such dark music on  
 'the snow-hushed cobblestones and the ethereal  
 light of gas street-lamps illumined such  
 infinite loneliness, punctuated only by  
 an occasional church bell tolling,  
 that she wished to go back to that severed  
 omniscient talking horse-head and that  
 barefoot goose girl on the black-and-  
 white pasture of her fairy tale book-  
 for that other mystery,  
 which spoke not in silence but words,  
 and knew nothing of passing time.

– Ruth Kessler

## THE ABANDONED TOWER

“Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower that  
 reaches to the stars.” Gen. 11:4

I was born where the ancient ruins wait,  
 an oval mound of rubble no one tends,  
 and yet they named its desert town “God's Gate.”

I was the lonely one of all my friends.  
 There was a shadow in me, cold and blasted,  
 my kin who clung too tight to life could sense.

While mother begged, sometimes for days I fasted,  
 then went at dusk to climb old temple walls  
 and beat my back with branches while pain lasted.

They did not speak, those spirits of the temples,  
 but garments rustled, footfalls went by me,  
 as if of many people wearing sandals.

I knew I was a stem upon their tree,  
 roots growing through this slender slice of cloud  
 called life that scuds across the distant sky.

My town was in a siege by Nimrod's brood.  
 From nightly vigil I trailed on dawn's skirt  
 to find my household in a pool of blood.

Such sudden tragedies seem hardly worth  
 the effort. I had no will to bury kin,  
 my heart's blood drained with theirs into the earth.

As though struck mad beneath the burning sun,  
 I sat upon the mound, and when night set  
 moved on to ruined stairs I'd never seen.

They rose up to a crumbling parapet  
 and I stood nowhere, on that starry ledge –  
 beneath my foot, a small stone amulet.

The stone grew warm and seemed to hum a pledge  
 of holy cities: hard to understand  
 from whence came such a dream of pilgrimage.

A vision rose before me. I saw grand  
 arches tiled with birds, a glistening portal  
 of creatures gone to sea that once loved land.

I knelt and sipped from that dream courtyard pool,  
 sleeping at last as though I had drunk wine,  
 while buzzards wheeled above me in a circle.

The gatekeeper believed they were a scry  
 to nurse me back to health; his wife was kind.  
 They sold me, when recovered, to a scribe

so I could read to him as he went blind,  
 while watching at the royal library,  
 where no one ever came. I didn't mind.

I was thirteen. I learned the seventy  
 first languages heard in the Babel tower  
 and cures for which the ills had passed away.

At last, the old man died. It was my hour  
 to serve the sacred books. I found Truth's name –  
 a passion more acute than love of power.

Then, traveling as if on wings, there came  
 four holy letters quicker than light or space,  
 remembered as if wrapped in bluish flame.

The Name anoints and scatters without trace.  
 To it I will return when I have died,  
 waxing and waning on time's silver tide.

– Judith Werner

## THE CITY OF ENOCH

"And Cain knew his wife, who conceived and gave birth to Enoch. And he [Cain] built a city, and he named the city after his son, Enoch." (Genesis 4:17)

Each night above the wheat fields on the plain,  
The amber lights of Enoch's city blazed,  
And woke exhausted, beaten serfs who gazed  
As distant topaz glittered on their grain.  
And come the dawn, in temples built by Cain,  
Proud priests enrobed in jeweled vestments praised  
The gods that blessed their city and had raised  
Their merchant-kings on high, to rule and reign.

Yet all their gold was stolen from the poor  
Who in back-alleys starved and cried for crumbs,  
While in rank gutters trickled beggars' blood.  
But now behold the city's courts of law,  
Mansions, markets, theaters, coliseums —  
All buried under waves of Noah's flood.

– Yakov Azriel

## AFTER THE QUAKE

Treading carefully, down we go, a picture frame,  
a president, Kennedy, saints and sinners, worry  
beads,  
a pile of rubble where the earth recedes,  
objects scattered about this abscess, we come

a president, Kennedy, saints and sinners, worry  
beads  
play out their archeological stories, recommends  
objects scattered about this abscess, we come  
to gather up what's left, that we might spread . . .

play out their archeological stories, recommend  
the wisdom of what happened, off to send  
to gather up what's left that we might spread  
the lore, their vital statistics, all about them,

play out their archeological stories, recommend,  
a pile of rubble where the earth recedes,  
the lore, their vital statistics, all about them  
treading carefully, down we go, a picture frame.

– Zev Davis

## THE LIGHT OF DAY

In a lodging house long antiquated,  
Where I dwelt for some tumbledown years,  
The fixtures were quaint and outdated;  
The wainscoting, archways, and piers  
Old-fashioned and still decorated  
With fretwork and glass chandeliers.

In the resident parlor one morning,  
A magical sunbeam burst through  
The crystalline prisms adorning  
A fanlight that colored the view;  
And the world came alive without warning  
With glints opalescent in hue.

With shimmers of bright efflorescence,  
Revealing the light of the sky  
In veils of divine iridescence,  
Which brought for a moment nearby  
A hint of the mystic quintessence  
Sublime in the powers on high.

– Jack Lovejoy

## HERO HOME

Grey day awaiting brown man in green  
Woman standing beside yellow cab,  
A proud confident look in her eye  
Recalling a Silver Star clipping  
Commending his saving some buddies,  
Extolling the American way  
Of brotherhood fighting together.  
Hero Home.

Window droplets, kaleidoscope view,  
Usher the way to the neighborhood  
Where boards and posters mark the old path  
To the sixth floor where they shared it all,  
Before the Man took him away  
From top-heavy table on holey floor,  
Community toilet and kitchen.  
Hero Home.

– Stephen Keller

## THE WATER DREAMS OF A MODERN-DAY NOAH

Noah doesn't dream about beans  
& tall wheat reaching for wind & sun.  
Not anymore.

When he's not busy  
collecting wood,  
he stands on a corner, cup  
of change at his feet.

He holds a gopher wood sign,  
sometimes warning about dying & doom,  
sometimes he asks for help  
to build his pet project  
on the abandoned downtown lot.

Nobody stops.  
No one listens.

Every Sabbath, he stands the required distance  
from the synagogue, shouts  
until his throat burns  
for water:

*learn what is drowning between  
your mouth & God's ear,  
feel holy when the ark opens,  
know the history of suffering, when it will suffice,  
learn to chant like the sea breaking  
against rocky shores,  
know all about absence, that the dream means more  
than marrying a nice Jewish doctor.*

For his final sermon,  
he finds a bullhorn,  
forgets his usual rant about rain,  
speaks his own modern commandment  
to listen to our water dreams,  
that they're loose shutters swinging  
outside a window, open ajar,  
an echo of the breath  
before birds fly.

– ME Silverman

#### THE WORDS THEY SHOUT

The words they shout are boldly printed down  
within a thousand hues and pages spooled  
from daily scripts to gloss of fashioned gown  
each written phrase is hemmed and finely tooled.

And shows reblare their call to waiting ear  
of nature harmed and victims hurt by greed  
now dually wept in every flowing tear  
in how to feel for families left in need.

But countless rants just fill a grander cause  
to praise the voice above the aching child  
as forest bleeds and growing hunger gnaw  
the loud elite have righteous anger riled.

Yet actions speak without the death of trees  
and helping hands can soothe the voiceless pleas.

– Douglas Stockwell

#### AT A RED LIGHT

At a red light where I idled, stopped,  
a tap on the window, luckily rolled up,  
a tap like a battering ram, a sudden blur  
like lion in the eye of an antelope!

It was a wretch not waving evening news-  
papers for sale, as happens at this corner  
where the magician guy makes change before  
the red light changes. He was waving roses,

it wasn't easy to see were red in the dark.  
It was Valentine's Day at night, for love,  
and he was hawking roses, was stuck with roses!  
The desperate bearer under a burden of

symbols of affection waited under  
the ticking of the light from red to go,  
when red would again be lost in an awful pulse  
of offer and be refused ha-ha repulsed.

Ferociously polite, he practically stood  
begging holding roses in tin cup,  
trying to buy some warmth for his apartment,  
paying for heat and rent, not eaten up

by boredom of the world towards the cold  
in which he lived, I figured, so unloved  
he needed merely a smile of change out-doled  
to keep the fiction that he felt approved,

and if you didn't buy (I bought) a flower,  
it would hurt him, he was so unsure.  
There went I but for the grace of Love  
reminding me remember: help the poor.

– John Milbury-Steen

#### ELLIOTT'S BAGS

Dressed in black he seems  
from several blocks away to teeter  
down the still, dark streets  
stretching to dawn, balances  
large shopping bags  
in blood-drained hands,  
weighted like a scale—  
bags stuffed with plastic tubs,  
challot and wine to lift the poor—  
this master of restoring hope.

– Steven Sher

## THE POLITICS OF PRETTY

Mind you, I wouldn't be caught dead in pink,  
and cute is a four-letter word,  
yet sometimes prettiness croons to me,  
about as energetic as a coconut cake,  
but as irresistible too.

Portzamparc's crystalline skyscraper  
makes glass cutting edge again:  
Its angles play alto saxophone.  
Aalto's buildings embrace but never, heaven forbid,  
cuddle.  
Renzo Piano sure doesn't suffer prettiness gladly.  
And Tange – but OK, having established my  
credentials,  
I'll get to the point: I like Lutyens too.  
He coats his buildings in the sepia of memory,  
he serves hot chocolate and oatmeal cookies to edgy  
questions,  
while his buildings spontaneously generate  
sheepdogs  
who flop in front of them.  
A cottage industry of nostalgia.

Twachtman, plump with prettiness for most of his  
career,  
once, just once, went magically matte,  
after drinking enough sake to sober himself.  
But while I'm into this confessional mode,  
I'll even tell you I love PreRaphaelite paintings.  
Dante created a whole new circle  
for people who turn chiaroscuro into Technicolor.  
And yet--skip the balsamic vinegar,  
pass me the Rossetti instead.

– Heather Dubrow

## NEW YOUNG CAREERIST

You've been here before.  
You go undercover now below surface  
while others rise, ride over for their spotlight  
at the top of the wheel. Now she strives

to please patrons, co-workers, bosses,  
in ceaseless over-thinking (something you've lost,  
thank seasons). But passing her  
on the clock there's the same blind tears

same inner focus melting  
in vigilant self-judgment, hopes hitting against  
what is stealing the perception of others  
that seldom can be changed from the under side.

I would embrace her, but that would not be my  
place  
in this world of jurists. She must fight  
her own struggle. I go undercover. Wait  
an hour, touch a hand to her straight shoulder  
offer a smile and tea. She hasn't  
left off crying at her desk softly pulling  
together, her stats, her status, the fight, no flight.  
Something  
you would've pondered alone  
in the stall of a corporate bathroom.  
There's nothing you can do.  
Take tea with me? Yes! and sitting more erect  
she fishes out the strongest and the blackest.

– Marilyn E. Johnston

## “GO UNDER, LOVELY SUN “

Go under, lovely sun, they thought  
Very little of you, they knew you, holy one, not,  
For without toil and silently you rose  
Over a people for ever toiling.

You rise and set friendly for me, O Light!  
And well my eyes perceive you, glorious one!  
For godlike, silent reverence learned I  
When Diotima healed my feeling.

O Thou, Heaven's herald! how I listened to thee!  
To thee, Diotima! beloved! how these eyes  
Looked up, shining and thanking,  
From thee to the golden day. Then purled

More livingly the brooks, the dark earth's blossoms  
Breathed lovingly on me,  
And smiling over silver clouds  
Aether bowed down bestowing his blessing.

– Friedrich Hölderlin

Translated from the German by Robert Glen Deamer

## REVISITING THE RUINS

Like Gibbon threading through the ruins of Rome,  
Dumas on some Sicilian mountainside,  
Like Byron on a sunlit isle of Greece,  
I wander through a dry and dusty place  
And think what was, and then what might have  
been.

– Leonard H. Roller

## VII. Accelerating

### PALPITATIONS

The same erratic pounding  
means I am my mother's  
son: same chugging  
chest, same straining  
squeezebox tightly wound.

This devoted heart  
constructs a world  
of urgency—a constant  
mother, my motor  
and my mooring—

the while plodding on  
from thump to thump,  
emphatic flap to flop  
and rest, and echoes  
her footsteps' return.

– Steven Sher

### THE LIVING CENTER

The attendant buzzes us in (never have  
we had  
such a welcome), twenty wheelchairs  
wait  
patiently for us to open the door  
wide enough and long enough to  
manage  
an escape outside "The Living Center."

They find each moment longer than  
their  
drawn-out lives-hours and weeks and  
months  
and years and ages now stranded on  
islands

endless days. An old, old woman lifts  
her hand  
as we pass by, and when you clasp it

(you a stranger), her smile embraces you,  
the room around her loses its homesick smell.  
Who does she think you are? Like Jacob  
wrestling with the angel at Peniel, she will not  
let you go, until you kiss her, and then she sinks

Into the comfort  
of a lost  
remembered  
Love.

– Charlotte F. Otten

### Walk on Down the Hall: A Meditation on The End

~Inspired by a Kabbalist, meditative practice. Dedicated to la familia Farji y mi Mama.

1. like a frog on a lily pad, sitting contemplatively  
("dreaming back thru life, Your time – and mine accelerating")
2. oh, cruel and causeless life  
(*yitgal v'yidka* —they were not ready)
3. the birds' chirpchirpchirp > the mechanical whirring of the  
pool-pump motor
4. rooftops like that at 34th st stir up sweet memories  
(when they were here)
5. did they hear Black running after them?  
(quickly catching up as always)
6. the constant whirwhirwhir soothes me, but the orange/yellow  
sounds of the sun's rays interrupts these thoughts
7. and also, the sun's yellow/orange rays exhilarate me  
(faintly whispered, "you breath in the Nile")
8. rumination energizes and intensifies everything again!
9. bend + sit = easy  
(ultimately, he<sup>1</sup> couldn't bear it  
and he<sup>2</sup> was spritely...but then he jumped)
10. he<sup>1</sup> catapulted me into the air ::splash::  
(playing *The Little Mermaid*)
11. in my heart, i know that one day – *chus v'chalila, pe pe pe* – we'll  
all be with he<sup>1</sup> and he<sup>2</sup>
12. *shema Israel, HaShem Elokeynu, HaShem echad*  
("strange now to think of you, gone")
13. it plays with my hair and dries the tears off my cheeks  
("work of the Merciful Lord of Poetry")
14. the awesome Blue soars – expansive, boundless  
(there they are)
15. to their female soulmates, a meditation on the End  
(chirp chirpchirp chirp chirpchirp chirp (it's them))

– Sasha Tamar Strelitz

### [UNTITLED]

I contract into my 4 cubits  
and expand with each day.  
From the aperture in my ark the world appears  
more tranquil than before.  
I've gotten used to moving less,  
breathing less.  
This is my life for the time being,  
aureoled with a film of resignation.  
One can see a lot with closed eyes:  
it would take innumerable nights to describe the  
abundance.  
Human voices from other nights still echo here –  
they grow fainter, as I do.

– Ruth Blumert  
translated from the Hebrew by E. Kam-Ron

## THE LAST SIGHT

What is the last fading image on your retina  
 glaring light flicked away by the haughty surgeon  
 the overall dark heaved into final suppression  
 a mad truck roaring down on your soft vulnerable  
     flesh  
 sparks flying off the water like liberated demons  
 grasping for your sight  
 the weighty sky submerging into the green heaving  
     sea  
 the blank-faced soldier rushing at you with  
     gargantuan bayonet  
 fearing his own demise made a victim of your honed  
     weapon  
 the unswerving bullet heading for your nose  
 child staring up at you in wonder  
 terrorist's bomb exploding in your face  
 a red-hot blanket flung over you and your world  
 the passing parade of lost moments  
 the montage of long-lost lover faces  
 your tear-begrimed eyes  
 your sweet goodbye kiss  
 your sad wondrous eyes.

- Gerald Zipper

THAT MAY MY MOTHER LIT A CANDLE FOR  
HER MOTHER

I knew it would be one  
 of the last times, that  
 the extras she bought  
 to leave in my house  
 would be too soon  
 for her but never if  
 she thought it. Often  
 at my house in May  
 for her birthday or  
 Mother's Day, my  
 uncle called to  
 remind her of the  
 date, as if she would  
 not know. Shadows  
 of the light flicker in  
 the laundry room  
 where nothing could  
 catch, blackening  
 parts of the room  
 like the graphite  
 darkening names in  
 her address book  
 she already had a  
 good start on

- Lyn Lifshin

## GOOD NIGHT

He wants to remember  
 the same place  
 rows of vases  
 with tulips  
 a walled in keyboard  
 with a musical score  
 unattended,  
 unfinished letters  
 on the desk,  
 a flask  
 without wine,  
 yet everything  
 is soulless  
 with only a few regrets  
 for the silent past  
 to connect the puzzles  
 on the gaming table,  
 you dream of warmth  
 the sea and sunlight  
 walking with  
 your partner  
 with the shadowed face  
 not knowing  
 what mortal  
 expects to be here  
 without a watch  
 in the last hours  
 now absent.

- B.Z. Niditch

## EMPTIED DRAWERS

Emptied drawers scratch closed  
 hunger for folded clothes  
 Now smoothed into boxes  
 labeled  
 Taped  
 Stacked  
 The bottom row groans as the room fills.

Sounds echo as I snatch at his old shirts  
 The ones that should have been given away  
 I race to get them to the thrift shop  
 Before the Heirs stomp into the house  
 Their hunger and thirst clamor for attention.

I crave some extra time  
 Some space in my mind  
 The courage to grab a decision  
 To jump up on the ramparts  
 And defend our future  
 From the threatening past  
 Their desire to include every scrap  
 Everything he once touched or wore  
 - a shrine -

the whole house could convert  
if I let them.

– Mindy Aber Barad

#### THE KNOWN

The cupboards  
Aligned in perfect order  
Your measurements  
On target  
Stacked dishes  
Behind the oak colored mask  
Built by hands  
Calloused in fear

I can feel the explanations  
On my skin  
The same skin you bruised  
In the name of discipline  
In the name of all you knew

– Cathy Porter

#### A CURSE, AND AN ASTONISHMENT

Jeremiah

I translated my parents' Yiddish biblically –  
*God doesn't strike us with two rods* –  
though *sticks* is more precise.

God's wrath softened by Talmudic solace, e.g.  
I was myopic, but I had good hair.

That seemed fair, I thought, in the way  
adolescents think, though I already knew  
their siblings in Europe had been turned to ash.

After I learn about the things growing wild  
in my husband's body, I wait for the good news.

Will it be benign gratitude,  
each day made holy by the sun's rising?

Will I set aside distraction, turn  
like a sunflower only in his direction?

If there's a scale, a thousand poems of mine  
won't outweigh the theft of time.

Still, I will stand on it,  
because there's no other place to stand,

and I will stack up on the other side  
small stones of syllables, shards of our days.

– Florence Weinberger

#### ADVISED

Speak to God, the rabbi suggests.  
Spend some time every day speaking to God.  
Tell God everything.  
Cheaper than analysis.

I thought God already knew everything.  
The rabbi must have something else in mind,  
maybe guidelines to inner trials and sentencing  
when I'm smitten with remorse.

I've written hard-bitten poems about my father.  
I called my mother when she least expected it,  
as if her sanity was my enemy; I forget who taught  
me  
how to throw down spikes on the way to  
forbearance.

Then there's the matter of figuring out if  
forgiveness  
annuls the past or anneals it. And what good would  
it do,  
they've passed. This is how I distract myself,  
instead of  
engaging my heart's marrow, day by day, like the  
rabbi said.

– Florence Weinberger

#### JUST BEFORE DUSK

Just before dusk, a light supremely  
ardent, festive, yet sad, discharges  
beauty upon iridescent feathers,  
as the vast body of a wild tom turkey,  
its black beard dangling, floats above  
the slow, stately rhythm of its step  
and gradually dissolves into the under-  
brush. How, with words, to hold  
a covenant with this world in its brevity,  
where the radiant and incongruous combine,  
then vanish into darkness? What to make  
of this short and narrow season, so fervent  
in its embrace, so frail in its lasting?  
Brittle beauty, grant me one more hour.

– Constance Rowell Mastores

## IN NEW BEDFORD

Young ones dawdle, while the old folks rush from  
town  
to crowd the hearth. Aunt Ida rests alone,  
slouched in her chair, reviewing family funerals.  
A wearied matriarch, decades in this house  
she'd ladled soup, darned socks, and sat for pictures,  
new babies nestled in her lap each year --

grandchild after child and just this year  
the first great-grandchild cradles in the town  
where she was born. It is a puzzling picture,  
this seasoned wife becoming widow, alone  
among her closest kin. Her sturdy house  
feels warped today, unhinged by Uncle's funeral.

Aunt Ida saw to grievous duties -- the funeral  
home, a shovelful of dirt, the year  
of Kaddish prayer -- all rituals in the house  
of mourning for Uncle, beloved judge in town.  
We knew the story -- how orphaned and alone,  
he'd worked his way through law school, always  
picturing

himself in chambers. Indeed he looked the picture  
of success mere weeks before his funeral:  
a final portrait in which he stands alone  
in stately robes next to his bench, the year  
of his appointment on the wall, and town  
hall seen through courtroom windows. He kept his  
house

and books arranged in order, and hoped the house  
of God was set for him. Though not a picture  
of well-being, his wife gives solace to townspeople  
come to pay respect, but the funeral  
defeats Aunt Ida. Her well known grit, year  
in, year out, falters from being alone

without the Judge. There is no peace alone  
for her, no place as mistress of the house.  
She foresees despair her consort in the years  
ahead -- an unfamiliar family picture --  
and her step is heavy, slow, funereal.  
She feels a burden, even to the town.

Aunt Ida dreams alone, a woeful picture.  
Her house is now the family's, and her funeral  
This coming year will not surprise the town.

– Virginia Wyler

*from* UNFORSAKEN

for my mother a"n

Slowly  
disappearing  
you sit before me. Each  
day I call out "come back" to more  
of you.

\*

Shall I  
ever forgive  
the spring for coming late  
this year, when she who loved it could  
not wait?

\*

We came  
into this world  
for love, for company,  
and perhaps for these partings most  
of all.

\*

If you've  
gone to the world  
that is yours, the work of  
your hands -- surely it is a world  
of light.

\*

This is  
the eleventh  
Prelude. It says  
how very sweet this life is and  
how brief.

– E. Kam-Ron

## L41

Holding on to the others this hillside  
knows what it is to live alone  
all these years falling off-center

though you no longer follow  
still back away till your hands  
and the dirt once it's empty

both weigh the same -- a small stone  
can even things out  
the way this casket on each end

leans toward shoreline, smells  
from a sky unable to take root  
or balance the Earth, half

with no one to talk to, half  
just by moving closer -- what you trim  
floats off as that embrace all stone

is born with, covered  
till nothing moves inside  
except the lowering that drains forever.

– Simon Perchik

#### THE LOST ONES

On the hillside of stones  
those who live below ask only  
for light.

Their unseen voices lift from earth,  
from our innermost terrain,  
little echoes that have lived  
in us and become us  
over and over.

And we the surface treaders, we  
walk among them offering our frail  
words as though these might become  
that answering light.

And we know we have failed them,  
those whose seed became us  
that we might walk in light  
even among shadow.

So that standing here we fall dumb  
having only hands with which  
to touch these stones that own

us, that become the voice  
of what is to be to the  
end of our lives.

– Doug Bolling

#### HAKKAFOT

a birthday poem for Rabbi Dr. Zvi Faier zts"l

There go the dancers, round and round and round,  
One holding in his arms, with strength of joy,  
The scroll on which his thread of life is wound,  
Another hoists a little girl or boy  
Onto his shoulder, who will doubtless hold  
Among their earliest memories this ride  
Through many turns, until they grow as old  
As the bent man who trudges by their side.  
I think of you, who now have left the dance,  
Whose voice no longer swells the Torah's song,  
Yet who are present in the furtherance  
Of that which fired your mind and kept you strong  
And holds you now within that day which gives  
An everlasting birth to all that lives.

– E. Kam-Ron

#### VIII. *Meanings that Matter*

DAVID STOPS TO REGARD A RAINBOW ON HIS  
WAY TO TEACH A CLASS

in grammar, syntax, usage, style:  
what's required, what must be done  
to shape our language into sentences  
(perhaps of an essay, perhaps of a poem)  
eloquent and elegant to carry  
meaning that matters through blue sky  
after a storm has torn the heavens  
and we need our most sacred watchful eye.

– Katharyn Howd Machan

#### STUMPS

We become despoiled. Sometimes  
Not even a word remains,  
Becoming a trap in snow  
Where the whole wilderness rhymes  
With nothing and coldness reigns  
In a world buried in woe.

But a word's a funny thing.  
Like a blackened stump's green shoots  
Adorning its wooded grave,  
Our longing sprouts every spring,  
For the Earth retains the roots  
Of the meaning we still crave.

Forests we worshiped once:  
Now take your well-earned rest  
Under this quilt of words.  
Your marvelous jeweled crowns  
Honored the tongues of the blessed  
Who now sound just like birds.

– Lionel Willis

#### CAVATATION

A descent into the cave  
Of the poem,  
Or when it has been written at a place  
With momentary slippage,  
A place associated with the sense  
Of a person beside himself,  
Or of people aside themselves,  
To one availing of only half of his own diction,  
And the other half after the fact.

– Lee Goldstein

LUNCH

At the hospital with a Poor Clare poet-nun  
from the psychiatric ward

Spoke of saints and other poets  
How they lived and why  
And how compelling their intensity

Noted that each was like a poem  
(and a simple poem) I interjected.

She turned her head and gazed at me  
But why should they be simple poems?

Because here (I answered) no poem or person  
can remain a complicated thing for very long  
And she said

You are wrong About poems And this place

Perhaps you may some day become intense  
Remain that way for longer than it takes  
to sketch a lyric poem

What a poet you might then become  
And they could put you in a room with  
padded walls Right next to mine

– Jerry Hauser

## THE DOVE

“Even while you sleep among the campfires, the wings of my dove are sheathed with silver, its pinions with shining gold,” Psalm 68:13

Once I was lost, a dove in foreign lands  
of olives from black earth, dates from red sands.  
The desert sun that singed my plumes to night  
flamed within my heart in secret light.

You caught me, put a black dove in your cage,  
imprisoned love that knew no time or age.  
I navigated floods behind the bars,  
an eon's journey in a glimpse of stars.

I flew so far within, at such a height,  
my raven cloak of mourning molted white.  
Once I was blind, and now I've found release,  
to nestle winged freedom in your peace.

Once I was Noah's raven in a land  
where ornamental gods of stone still stand.  
Now I'm a white dove, winging back through space,  
surrendering my olive branch of grace.

– Judith Werner

## FOLIO

All the myths  
I came to know,  
Nor Dad  
Did even care,  
Bestow themselves  
To poetry --  
His Science unaware;  
All the math  
My father knew  
Nor ever  
Did I learn,  
Reviews  
Itself each  
Numbered page  
Of poetry I turn.

– David Kiphen

## TO A FRIEND WHO THINKS HIS WORK HAS COME TO NOTHING

to the one and only tragedy, the passage of time.  
–Simone Weil

You say you now make verse who aimed at art?  
Verse is not easy. You spent your youth in hard  
pursuit of its subtle knowledge, while others said  
to forget the dead and embrace the newest fashion.  
Yet, facing disillusion, you counteracted  
in exclusions, considering in meter and rhyme  
the one and only tragedy: the passage of time.

Do not desert good sense and skill, though others  
prefer the ambitious boys whose big lines swell  
with spiritual noise or flaunt a presumptuous  
innocence. Fierce impersonal forms have moved  
your pen; and, at times, a wise indifference.

– Constance Rowell Mastores

## TWINKLETOES HAYIM

drunk from the plenty cup  
prodigious profligate poet producer  
wizard  
moonstruck sun dazzled word player  
followed his bouncing ball umpteen ways  
imaginatively copulated word startups  
breeding couplets koans free forms  
pranced pondered prodded pricked polished  
sighed sounded soared leapt heavenward  
juggled gurgling throbbing skilled ambitious  
side-stepping  
quickstepping jitterbugging waltzing  
freely floating  
running racing fast as thought can reach  
versifying essaying inspired  
plucky, perhaps in parts puerile,  
pretentious in the not pejorative positive striving  
sense,  
aspirational,  
neither perfect nor not perfect. polished,  
breathing in words  
exhaling poetic prayers  
exaltant exuberant  
assiduously attentive to his life's purposeful self  
imposition  
ambitious transforming essays to poetic prayer  
forms  
conjuring torrents of penned paper craft  
floating flotillas of spaceships shimmering  
rainbow hued strident or pastel subtle  
honey toned honed  
voluptuous extravagant  
or shrunken word-wise waste not precise poetics  
sounding shells horns trumpets tinkling stalagtitic  
drippings  
soaring sinking erupting energy radiant against  
inertia  
frothy flotsom algoid wavering or sediment solid  
Hay'im jests in earnest gestes,  
tinkers words  
dances His words  
inspired inspiring  
facing eternity's absolute  
inhuman silence

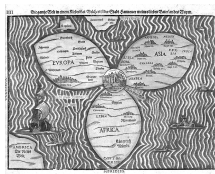
– Judith Issroff

## DUN ARANN

Aran Islands Poetry Festival 1999

Two thousand years of stone and stone and stone:  
these walls a circle in a circle, high  
atop an ancient island, clouds of bone  
above deep flowered grass, in Celtic sky.  
We listen to the poets share their words  
in Irish, English, English, Irish, lines  
as intricate as thunder warning birds  
that freest flight is more than wings from vines.  
Wind stiffens; how can we hold to this place  
of shared commitment? History has torn  
us into separate truths beside the face  
of justice, even though new poems are born.  
And yet, hope makes a marriage in this day:  
time-touched, here joined, we stay and stay and stay.

– Katharyn Howd Machan



## CIRCLE DANCE

Circles dance under grapevines in the breeze,  
dancers in white garments, borrowed robes,  
singing rondeaux under grapevines,  
dancing to drum beats with the song of birds.

Circles dance up the hills, up to Jerusalem,  
up to the Mountain of Myrrh, through the seven  
gates,  
down the narrow alleys, along the tunneled ways,  
holding hands, for in their dance they are  
complete.

And on the Mountain of Myrrh  
Forgiveness and Truth hold hands with Peace  
and with joy they dance  
in the center of the circle dance.

– Ruth Fogelman

Let's dance to celebrate life  
in infinite circles of kindness.  
Our hearts keep the beat  
to the swing of joy.

Bracelets swirl  
on smiling acquaintances.  
Dancers hold and turn  
sharing love in tune.

– Hayim Abramson

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