

A photograph of a stone staircase leading up to a stone building with a small arched window, framed by large trees. The scene is set in a dry, sunny environment with warm lighting. The staircase is made of large, rough-hewn stone blocks. The building in the background is also constructed from stone and has a small arched window. Two large trees with dense foliage are positioned on either side of the staircase, framing the scene. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and historical.

Hebrew poetry oasis:

with an introduction of Amir Or

Amir Or:
Poetics of Conflict and Vision,
Hebrew Poetry at the Beginning of the Millennium

1

We are used to regard the Old Testament as religious scripture, which was translated to in the past to European languages and is read today in archaic vernaculars. But this is not the case for the Hebrew speaker. Since Hebrew was revived as an every-day spoken language at the beginning of the 20th century, a linguistic gap of 2000 years was bridged. On the one hand, nowadays an Israeli school kid can read and understand the Old Testament in its original tongue, and on the other hand, if King David could have leafed through a contemporary Hebrew poetry book, he would have little difficulty with its language. Beside the spiritual and historical contents, for the Hebrew reader the Bible is a cultural and literary heritage, rich with rhythm, music, and forms of speech. Most of the Bible books are pure poetry of various styles and themes: the stories of creation and of the patriarchs, victory and love songs, prophecies, hymns, etc. In short, the beginning of the Old Testament is also the beginning of documented Hebrew poetry, about 4000 years ago. Nevertheless Hebrew poetry didn't cease with the canonization of the Bible, and even after the destruction of Judea by the Romans at the beginning of the first millennium a.d., Hebrew literature has been created continuously in the Jewish Diaspora. The ancient language of the scriptures hasn't been spoken in everyday life for two millennia but went on being studied and used in prayer even by laymen in every Jewish community. Religious and secular Hebrew poetry has been composed throughout these generations in the east and in the west, in far and near countries, in regions located now in Iraq, Spain, Italy, Yemen, Russia or Germany. Some of the first sonnets in Europe were

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written in Hebrew by Emmanuel the Roman in 13th century Italy, whereas Hebrew poetry written by Yehuda Halevi and Iben Gabbirol in Moorish Spain was influenced by Arabic poetics. Hebrew poetic forms were introduced into Christian liturgy by Romanos Melodos as early as the 6th century A.D. and on the other hand for centuries Hebrew poetic tradition has been enriched by other traditions in style, theme, and lyrical forms. Yet not unlike Latin, it lacked the vivid aspect of everyday colloquial speech. But this was to change with the rise of Zionism at the turn of the 19th century and with the return of Jews to Israel. There is no other example in human history of a successful revival of an unspoken semi-fossilized language such as Hebrew was. Linguists like Eliezer Ben Yehuda and David Yelin reconstructed the language and innovated or brought back into use thousands of Hebrew words. But it took three more generations until Hebrew became a truly modern language. Fierce debates were taking place: should modern Hebrew speech adopt Ashkenazi pronunciation or Sephardic? Should we base modern Hebrew on Biblical syntax or a later one? Many loan words were replaced by Hebrew ones, slang and various grades of speech had to be introduced. Poets like Byalik, Shlonski and many others were the leading force in putting the renewal of Hebrew speech into practice, and until the middle of the last century their works were celebrated both for their poetical merit and as a national achievement. These immigrant poets who started writing in Hebrew in the beginning of the 20th century had a huge task of bridging traditional poetry and modern poetry, exploring free verse, tonal meter etc., and making them an organic part of Hebrew verse. To a large extent, they had to adapt European models in order to create modern poetry in Hebrew. For them and their generation, creating a fluent poetic expression in an acquired language was the main challenge. I will not go here into lecturing you about Hebrew poetry in detail, but it will suffice to say that our linguistic and poet-

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ic condition has changed considerably since then. But thanks to these poets, what was a terra incognita at their time is our natural inheritance today. In this ongoing creative work of Israeli poets, the language is continuously unveiled through poetic expression. Nowadays, even though immigration to Israel is still taking place on a large scale, most of the writers in Israel are natives-of-the-country and their mother tongue is Hebrew. No wonder, contemporary poetry in Israel feels free to embrace and even mix a large variety of styles and forms, both traditional and modern to answer the needs of specific themes or atmospheres. For example, in my own generation we wouldn't hesitate to mix biblical connotations and contemporary slang in our poems. To the "native" poet, the Israeli reality and the unique possibilities and limitations of Hebrew are the unquestionable basic condition. Nevertheless, Israel is still a mixing pot of cultures, is a conflict area, and contains an Arab speaking Palestinian minority. Now, let's have a look at that mixing pot.

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The unique complexity of Israeli society and culture seems at times fascinating, and at times unbearable. It seems to be a bridge, or sometimes a limbo at the point where East and West meet. Israel has about 3 million inhabitants whose parents or grandparents have been expelled or emigrated from Arab countries only half a century ago. Hebrew is a semitic language, akin to Arabic and Kurdish more than to any other modern languages. For example words are based on consonants that form roots, whereas vowels serve to express shades of the different meanings. So, where in English LIVE, LOVE and LEAVE have different meanings, in Hebrew LEV (meaning "heart") and LIVLEV (meaning "flowered") share a common root meaning. Unlike Indo-European languages Hebrew often relies on the single word or root rather than the syntax and phrase. Each word

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may contain several meanings depending on the context, and diverse meanings are all connected through the logic of symbol and metaphor. For instance the words "hypocrite" and "painted" are the same word in Hebrew, that tells us the hypocrite's face is painted, hiding its truth. So is the case with the words "abstract" and "stripped" or "unclothed": to Hebrew, abstraction is simply stripping off our mental image from material perception. However, because of the common Judeo-Christian tradition and dialogue, because of Biblical imagery and narratives, and because of literary, philosophical and even social changes that affected both Jews and Christians in Europe, Israeli culture is more than anything European. In the Israeli mixing pot, the majority of Israelis and certainly the majority of poets and writers are European by origin. Moreover, historically, the founders of Israel were European - by origin, upbringing ideology and mentality. The first Zionists have come to Israel as pioneers. These fairly young people were dreamers, visionaries, adventurers. In more than one way they were the first hippies of the 20th century: they left their European middle class homes to create a new society, to cultivate a land, and to experiment with new ideologies. They formed communes, created a new culture in a new language, and on the whole they tried to transform mentally and to re-invent themselves. Historically the Zionist vision has so far succeeded tremendously, but these pioneers felt to a large extent disillusioned and deceived when the huge waves of immigration came in after the founding of the Israeli state. Israel has become one big refugee camp. People from the Arab world side by side with Holocaust survivors had now to live there together, to create new lives for themselves, new identities, new common values and agreements that had very little to do with the ideals and ideologies of the founding pioneer generation. To a large extent the holocaust was the most important founder of the independent state of Israel. But in spite of the suffering of the Jewish people in the 2nd world

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war, the new state of Israel was hardly welcome by Europe, and created a lot of enmity in the 3rd world, where it was seen as if the European final solution for the Jews was at the expense of the Arabs. War and isolation, as well as loss of income, dignity and identity, disillusioned many. More than 1 million Israelis have emigrated from Israel between the fifties and the eighties of the last century, most of them to the United States. Europe, that has been their home for almost two millennia, has massacred the Jews, and later locked its gates to the next generation of European Jews that have settled in Israel. However the majority of Israelis, have chosen to stay. They went on developing their country and fighting for its existence. People whose Israeli existence is one or two generations old, whereas their European history and lineage can be traced at least 50 generations back. They feel connected to European culture, and yet betrayed by European politics. They feel antisemitism has risen again, supported politically by the Muslim immigration to Europe, and by cold economical and political calculation of European governments. To a large extent Israelis feel that for many Europeans that have no clue of what Middle-Eastern mentality-and-culture is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has become a popular pastime discussion at their expense: a debate where European interests in our region are camouflaged by pseudo ethical standpoints. They feel victims of the European guilt of colonialism, and European wish to get rid of the holocaust guilt by presenting an implicit "equals-sign" between the Nazi regime and the Israeli rule in the Gaza strip and West bank, in order to justify something by this grotesque equation. This is done by the media too: the endless terrorist attacks on Jews are hardly to be seen on European TV channels, but every Palestinian casualty is being focused on - without any care for the context and complexity of the situation. Jews have been part of, and contributed to European culture-and-development for centuries, but at last they're out - politically, cul-

turally - but not psychologically. I think many of us, who feel like European exiles see it as a new chapter of Judeophobic syndrome. Nevertheless this is not to say the Jewish psyche came out intact and healthy out of the Nazi concentration camps and crematoria. At times it seems the Israeli mind is stuck somewhere between Massada and Auschwitz, but if one considers that these refugees arrived to a heavily threatened state, a small Western island in a sea of Muslim Arabic nations, he'll find it perhaps easier to understand the situation and the mentality that has evolved therefrom. The Israeli condition seems much more ambivalent and complex in real life. Israelis and Palestinians fight, but at the same time have a lot in common. Palestinian society and culture is still to a large extent tribal, and not modern or democratic. On the other hand Israeli Palestinians are gradually interiorizing these free democratic values, more than anywhere in the Arab world. Have you noticed? Often the two sides of a conflict become more and more similar over the years, like a husband and wife. Palestinians are called by other Arabs "the Jews of the Arab world". I must say they do suffer from discrimination in Israel, but a discrimination of European standards, not Middle-Eastern. To this, one must add the Jewish wish to have "A Jewish state", which in fact isolates and alienates the different ethnic group of the country. We can go on talking about the conflict forever, and some people even make a good living out of it, but to me it seems the only possible answer to this conflict is true understanding and integration. We need a true secular and civil state, where national and religious groups are more like clubs rather than separate enemy camps, and where culture is enriched by diversity rather than serves to mark borders and separations.

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Now, how all this has to do with poetry? Well, not much if you look at poetry as an old-fashioned form of artistic amusement.

But this is not the case if you look at poetry as an art that deals primarily with speech and thought. Throughout the ages, poetry has been providing human society with the sense of existential meaning beyond the dry facts, and the ability to touch the essence of our life. I would like to declare poetry and art in general as a basic set of things we have in common: thought and feeling, creativity, imagination, and sense of freedom and beauty.

Its attitude towards artistic creativity is an important factor in widening or narrowing the spiritual capacities of a society, and enhancing or weakening its creative imagination and vital powers. Philosophy, the famous authorized professional of our culture about wisdom, becomes less convincing when one considers “wisdom”. Philosophy is speaking about wisdom and insight, but it holds thought with thick pliers. Plenty of heavy slow words that clumsily catch hold of ideas that wisdom grasps in the blink of an eye. Only rare philosophers like Heraclitus, Plato or Nietzsche, who had poetic talent, could deal with this electric intensity of thought. It seems only poetry does to words what thought is doing to them, in their full power and scope: hears them, tastes them, understands and mis-understands them, combines them in strange ways, gets carried away by them, beats them against each other, tells. Poetry truly tells through words everything they can grasp and more. Poetry holds words alive in the moment they’re formed.

A society that fails in the field of art and literature is perhaps a society that has become mentally fossilized and harmed its own capacity for self-renewal and rejuvenation. After all, the history of human evolution is in fact the history of creative ideas: every achievement of humanity is an achievement of the human mind. Somehow a poet seems to create with the most primal materials, in the mental mass of life and possible realities. His works serve to enhance and reshape the world in which we live. A poetic insight

can serve as a renewed perception of reality, and draw new sketches or blue prints for its future development. A writer just sits there and “dreams” the world anew, but in this very action he gives validity and meaning to this reality we live; whether he is conscious of it or not, by his creative adventure the poet goes on creating the mental future from which our civilization of tomorrow will grow.

Poems of another century

A seed sown in sand waits years for rain.

-1-

This poem will be a poem of another century, not different from ours.

This poem will be safely hidden under heaps of words until,
among the last grains in the hourglass,
like a ship in a bottle, it gets seen. This poem

that will speak of innocence. And ordinary people,
who seem thrown up by the course of events, like late-coming
gods,

will listen to it for no reason that wasn't there before,
raising their backs like snakes

out of the junk, and there won't be anywhere else
to hurry from, and it won't have an end

different from its beginning. It won't be rich

and won't be poor. Won't bother anymore to keep promises

or carry out what it says
and won't understate or puff itself from here to there.
This poem, if it speaks to you, woman, won't call you
muse-babe, and won't sleep with you like its fathers did;

or if to you, man, won't kneel or kill, won't apply make-up
and won't take off its words and flesh, as it has not has not -

what? Maybe now I'll summon it, the bad poem
of the century: here, sick with health it's barely walking

drags its legs in the sticky current of contemporary thought
or gets stopped to show its papers and have its trivia counted

on an abacus. The inventory: flowers and staples,
corpses (yes, no worry), tall glasses. After staples -

also butterflies and many footprints and other hooks and
shelves
for the arguments of scholarly criticism, and also just to fool
around, teeth

against teeth, with the chaotic smiles of a chameleon that
doesn't know
its colors long since turned into a parable. Or in incomprehen-
sible tranquility

to try someone else's luck in games of to and fro
that have no goal other than, let's say,

a bit of fun the length of a line. Spread orange on the blue

of evening sky: now, plaster on a little cloud. Climb

on, look down: sea of sea, sand of sand.
Or fingers. Ten jointed worms

move with inexplicable charm. Now they encircle
a sphere whose curve is faulty, wonderful, fleshy, furthermore

you can say a word (it's a fruit, it's called
a peach). And these words their taste is full of the taste

of being, of a tone that accompanies the sight with wonder
and not with a thought-slamming din. And this is the poem:

it sings, let's say, to the tar that stuck to your foot at the beach,
to plastic bottles, to its own words. All it sees

is black on white, transparent or grainy.
It is no less naked than you. Also no more. Only through this
exactness

that has no measure except the curves of a bitch's body,
a pot of cyclamen or a hair on a bath rail.

Creatures here don't want to know. Creatures
there, wanting only that, are, for now, the possibility

of becoming creatures here, of becoming this antiquity
that has nothing to say other than me, me, without limit

without you. A dog lies on a step in the afternoon
sun and does not distinguish itself from the flies.

Rain. He's torn out from himself.

-2-

You bite, swallow, actually crack line after line
in front of this screen, spit the spaces as if they're

a Hungarian sound track. And it's OK by me, because it's OK
by you: to live between walls, to be covered by them and move

into a fetal rhythm: eat and drink, fill up a petrol tank,
order groceries, read poems, sleep. Faster:

a filmed commercial, video clips,
a microwave, peep booths at a porno movie. Faster:

capsules, transfusion, electrodes. Faster:
don't be born. You are not and you don't have an existence now

outside this poem. It doesn't begin and doesn't end
in a page, a line or a comma. This full stop is a point

that floats in infinite space just because you distance your
gaze from it.

Look, there are clouds on it, orange on the blue evening sky,

sea of sea, sand of sand, and people walking,
sitting, lying, swimming or making love. Choose for yourself

a place and time. Where are you? Now you've found a way
into a point of view. Perhaps you'd like to be born? In this here,

now is called by a number: twenty second

of the first, one thousand nine hundred and ninety-five,

twelve thirty, in the afternoon, Sunday. And good that you
came.

Tomorrow I'll write the poem you'll live in. Here: this home[1]

- solely yours. And its location, size, colors and furniture
- your perspective also its windows, which face

a home or homes on the outskirts of the poem, in its centre
or above it:

see its trees pass by, its inhabitants, cafes, and flying saucers,

cavalry, elephants, parchments from which the sea has just
withdrawn,
they all flicker between there-is and there-isn't, between a gaze
and its focus,

between being and me, between "this" and its names, (me,
me and more me: a pot of cyclamen, a hair

on a bath rail etc.). So go out and see: this poem, given over
to meaningless murmurs, it and I have nothing

but what is between here and I am. (This is not an end-line,
here –

I wrote another one.) Now –

Tendrils grope / coils / on groping tendrils.

-4-

Already too late to go back and dangerous to stop
what we spoke and so existed, actions like these.

Help yourself. A glass of liqueur, a cigarette, a TV
or any alibi you want (if you don't mind, I'll

continue to write: inside of a thigh, texture of lips, one palm
gathering a handful of a convex reality, a nipple in its middle).
True,

this poem repeats what is impossible to repeat
and, as from a door in a desert, it's impossible to leave

without meeting it outside. Look: roads and pavements
air and seaports, communication satellites. Look: outer

space from "here"; in a poem like this that's
a question of relationships like anything else

and not only that, every "there" is already here. Window
gapes toward window and memories -

devour the whole room: sea shore, palm trees, her boyish body
is stooped over the notebook, her head inclined and her hair,
black, smooth, falls

and covers the universe. Lips, inside of a thigh, breasts
that are budding now, a Japanese nose, buttocks.

The one who said and was this order - has no fear, or at least
has forgetfulness, while each moment his gaze buds on what
he sees.

I'll write it now: I'll let it disappear word by word
and not be so much; and each line will begin and end

like a fly landing in a room of mirrors. Once more:
sea of sea, sand of sand. Look and create them,

hold them for a moment between wandering boundaries,
fix them in letters like an orderly cry

to say what there isn't, wasn't, won't be,
and don't bother more than that. Now let go. And again -

Ronny Someck: Poems of Don Quixotes

This

This whose brain is the Commander of the body
This whose body conceals desire in the cave of genitals
This whose genitals moisten the lips of the hostages
This whose hostage is the broken tooth in the mouth shouting
commands
This whose command knows no borders
This whose border is stretched like a sock
This whose sock is silent
This whose silence crumbles threads from the gnarl of words
This in whose brains words are stuck like a fence
And after which nothing is left to say.
I am a lot of Don Quixotes.

I am a lot of Don Quixotes

Don Quixote who with one eye sees how Don Quixote
draws with the tip of his fingers a woman's head
on the wall built by Don Quixote from his imagination.
The imagination fantasizes about a horse and receives a donkey.
The donkey imagines the Messiah and gets the brush of wings
of the windmills.
The wind brushes the roofs of houses,
is sheared by the drawing out of a word
And slams the window shutters where Dulcinea gazes.
Don Quixote who in his blood steers her

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to the Don Quixote of the lips.
There she takes off her dress and dissolves
like a kiss.

Nails

In memory of Yizhak Zohar
to save his life in that war,

He sewed for the SS officers -
the very boots that kicked him.
“Look,” he once showed me his hands,
and I thought he wanted me to admire
the tough skin of a craftsman,
“Look,” he almost wept, “with these fingers
I would have strangled them, but every boot I made
saved me a brother. “

He never stopped hammering,
and if they'd given him a chair at the Academy of Language,
the nails would have had names like
Hitler, Eichmann or Mengele.
His pleasure would grow as he smashed their heads
and bent down their backs
until their complete surrender
into the darkness of soles.

Oh Revenge, if only because of this story
it's possible sometimes to fall in love with you.

Uncle Salim

In the days when there was respect for train tickets

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And they were printed on no less than green cardboard,
Uncle Salim would produce from his jacket pocket
A little stack he'd gathered at the Haifa Station
And helped us to imagine a steering wheel as wide
as the width between our hands.
We closed one eye, held the hole in the ticket close
for a second, and saw through it
a red tie sharp as a sword, that he wore
to diminish the shame of the rail workers' khaki.
Then he would breathe in the memory
of the locomotive of another country,
And the cars full of stories from the Tigris and Euphrates ,
They would breathe air cleaner than the moth ball atmosphere,
That clung to the suitcases of memory of the new immigrants

"The train to Eden," he heard
before he died,
"Leaves in three minutes,"
Just in time to load the cars
With the 99 years of his life,
The top hat he loved to move from side to side
And the leftover applause
he always saved for the voice of Abdel Al-Wahab.

One line on Bessie Smith

Her voice is the eyelash shed from the eyes of God at the moment he roared "Let there be light."

Translated from Hebrew by Karen Alkalay-Gut

Uri Hollander: Poems of Wandering Jew

Anatol Gurevich: A Black Pencil Drawing

He never said "Paint for me".
In a silent agreement I would paint.
The ceiling of his house, from the lowness of my gaze, rose to
the height of a chapel
whose prayers were diluted in turpentine.
There was a degree of Italian in everything: in the neglected
patio
in the stories of Kiriko, a lost cousin
who at the end of his days painted female nudes
with long red fingernails. Old men's
surrealism. In my grandmother's house hangs the portrait of my
grandfather
that he painted. The color of the eyes is faded, they say in my
family
and his eyes, too, faded slowly. Blindness landed
upon the brush. It was then that I stopped painting. A temporary
silence among canvased tales. When color returns
to the cheeks of memory
I will ask the interior designer of Mazeh Street
to nail his portrait to the wall of air

Love Triangle of Shtriker Street

Point A: the café. A mother and her son
whom I remember mainly as the providers of the snacks
I always bought, to their woe. Point B: the Rabbi's house

At the other end of the street (someone once whispered:
here resides a famous magnate, whose leg
was amputated). And thus my memory hobbles

Between onion-flavored Madeleine cookies
and beard-flavored cookies,
between the oven of childhood and that which was baked in it

In the gap between the foot and the pedal, and between the
high-school that stretches
to Point C, the school vertex
and that which froze in it. A possible love triangle

Of which every attempt to calculate, to bite its sides
is like asking Monteverdi
what he thinks of Shostakovich.
The Wandering Piano

Even melodies have a home
and they too ring out differently in a foreign land.
If a Jew is a pianist
in the world's parlor, the piano is probably
an oasis
between Chelm and Nineveh.
We may look at the protome of the pigeon
we may listen to the castor oil plant
we may move

from desolation to embarrassment.
When he was a young pianist, Father told him:
A carpenter also speaks of furniture
as of a family.

Translated from Hebrew by Shir Freibac

Yael Tomashov: Poems of Apoptosis

For Tim Buck

You have a grown-up daughter, gray hair and kind eyes.
The profile of a man who knows how to build, maybe also to
paint a fence.
To water a pip that becomes a small garden.
In the photograph you published – a balcony, a white plastic
chair and a small side table;
a diagonal of light leans on a beam
as an old friend who came to smoke in your company and say
nothing.
Outside the frame – a jug of chilled water, the land of Jones-
boro, Arkansas,
holding on to the heavy sole of a boot.

You have a guitar and whiskey in a suitcase.
Seasons and tornado storms.
The footsteps of squirrels on the roof of your house
sound like the tip-toeing of a hundred tiny elephants.

When your mother passed away in the neighboring state of
Missouri,
you spoke of a magnificent gray cat that turned up in her yard,
went up the wooden stairs, stretched out on the deck,
and laid so, at your feet, for a long time.
He had golden eyes and you named him Smokey.

I think I know Smokey.
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I know the grief that is never whole.
The feeling that there is nothing more elusive than acknowledg-
ing nothingness.

“Tim”, I am typing words of comfort,
“When we do not think of our dead,
they are thinking of us.”
Tim, what eyes that cat must have had.

The Recipe of Time

“...It means there are no partings.
There is only one great encounter.”
I. A. Brodsky

[1]
When Iosif Aleksandrovich was awarded the Nobel Prize in
Literature
I was six years old.
That morning, my grandmother braided her love
into the falls of coal that adorned my face.
I may have been ill.
Afraid of the outdoors, as I was, I studied the Lutsian square
through a tightly-locked window.
Between me and the square was a row of violets
on the cold, wide window sill, higher
than the seat of the chair I had climbed to look and forget.

My home town was born without me and grew in my absence.

I may have been ill, thanking God who resided in the square
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under the golden dome of the Pravoslavich church,
 for letting me stay at home,
 near the smell of dough on my grandmother's apron,
 who always stood in the kitchen with her back to me,
 her heart melting within her from every sudden hug –
 cheek to back, arms around belly – world hugging.
 And time and time again the ladle went missing, drowning in
 the cooking pot,
 and the soft hand stroked curls of coal,
 charting the recipe of time
 on my heart-board with a flour chalk.
 There were always words, there was a biscuit, even sugared
 cream.
 A quick whisk, a dish from the lower shelf
 and I tip-toed back to my window sill, equipped with a small
 culinary achievement.
 An hour later, during lunch, my grandmother boasted to all
 of having been greatly helped and what would she have done
 without me?
 I was yet to learn how to conceal a smile.
 I chewed thoughts and gazed at the windowpane until the
 merging of whiteness and light blue:
 pale autumn slices, chunks of clouds and a black cross.
 A scarecrow in the sky of my memories

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 Apocatastasis

“Only, I don't believe in Apocalypses. I believe in Apocatastases.
 Apo-cata-stasis. What it means:

- 1) Restoration, re-establishment, renovation. 2) Return to a
 previous condition.
- 3) (Astronomy) Return to the same apparent position, comple-
 tion of a period of revolution”

Neil Gaiman & Dave McKean / Signal To Noise
 I am remembering a record of a children's story. The swan freez-
 es or is forgotten
 or dies of loneliness. I am seven and the pain wounds me
 each time it's played.

Summer is ending right now. A fan turns slowly,
 propelling the air that's cooling outside the window.
 The sound of a deep, distant thunder gargles above the city that
 darkened early,
 I live one hour backward.
 My rain forests are piling up on the table.
 As long as I shall read them
 I will not die.
 The swan freezes or dies of loneliness
 and I breathe shallow breaths, growing to a medium size
 and kick the transparent door of actuality. Behind it is the
 blooming garden of emotions;
 my little hell.
 Maybe there was no swan. But something in that story got left
 behind
 and Death sat with Autumn on the spinning vinyl disc
 like two mice, silently.

Right now, summer is reaching its end. The fan keeps stubborn-
 ly
 turning back the pages.
 There, in the white condensed space before the first word,
 an error.

Translated from Hebrew by Shir Freiba

Nethalie Braun: Poems of Deborah

Ahlam

In her life and in her death Ahlam was an idea
while she had no idea
she was entirely herself.

Five and half years old
in a crumpled and perforated dress
in the scorched alleyways
she was slowly
becoming
scenery

Her flesh and blood
lasted in the abstract
while she herself
faded
away
only
her name
remaining
like a
skeleton

Ahlam is a common Arabic name which means: dream

Hunger

They left me in the forest.
My sister who is me and I
are lost and lost
I've doubled myself because loneliness is
the truest animal
and in the depths of the forest no one speaks my language
(from the poor mouth outward overflowing with darkness,
from the clenched innards to a palate opening ancient fangs)

Memory narrows in the sentence:
The hunger was very great (Description)
I ate and ate and was never sated (Cause)
They left me in the forest (Result)
They left me in the forest (Repeat)
They left me in the forest (Obsessive repetition)

I dream of a candy house
at forest's edge;
inside the house a wide-hipped woman
is waiting

K'

Vanity of vanities K' whispered
vanity of vanities
falling in slow-motion shot by an RPG
(all is nothing)
in the gravel plot that was his home

His face falls
now his forehead touches the ground
imprinting a mark

Here was the children's room, no
it was the bedroom. Here his dead
firstborn son was
realized

A time to throw stones
a time to gather

Vanity of vanities snored K' no
remembrance of former things or
of things to come

All is nothing, a wind's creation –
winds that erase letters from the soft sand
Here K' passed by
K' is gone

Note:

The poem's title – K' – is a reference to Kohelet the eponymous author of the biblical book of Kohelet, known as Ecclesiastes in English. In the first chapter and verse of this book of proverbs and wisdoms, Kohelet is introduced as "the son of David, King of Jerusalem". Lines 1, 13-18, and 20 in the poem all utilize phrases from this text.

Libel

The doe dozes her eyes aglow
pseudo-silence hovering
at the house's entrance
quiverings of her ears show
claws over hooves
I am a doe an animal
of prey consumed
who can tell
truth from libel
blood from blood
the noise is the voice
of another
and the hands are
my hooves

Two Who Are One

Two banished girls in bright blue Superman shirts
fly through the sky two who are
one

A great wind blows a ram's horn
their echoing voices make love
their echoing voices have the time of their lives
their soles crisscross the horizon vertically now
they pass by the sun now
they set off after no-star
seven years of hunger
seventy years in the cave
left their mark on them
walking among humankind they remained

foreign foreign
identifiable only to themselves
sweet sustenance for themselves
one a palm tree the other a spring of water

Listen listen to the light
look at the music
sings the Palm and expands in arcs
Weep weep in boulders

because your mother was lost the day you were born
cries the Water flowing into the desert dryness

Naked orphaned bruised and blue girls
 lazing in the sky's streams two who are
one

Their eyes fall from above
their eyes are the first rain

they traded skin for light and letters
signs for you to know

akin and alike they'll console

Translated from Hebrew by Rachel Tzvia Back

POETS' BIOGRAPHIES

RONNY SOMECK, born in Baghdad in 1951 and came to Israel as a young child. He studied Hebrew literature and philosophy at Tel Aviv University and drawing at the Avni Academy of Art. He has worked with street gangs, and currently teaches literature and leads creative writing workshops.

He has published 11 volumes of poetry (The last called "horse power")and two book for children with his daughter Shirly (The last called "monkey tough, monkey bluff").

Selections of his poems have appeared in Arabic translation, French, Catalan, Albanian, Italian, Macedonian, Yiddish, Croatian, Napali, Dutch, Danish, Portuguese , Spanish, German and English.

He is recipient of the Prime Minister's Award, Yehuda Amichai Award for Hebrew poetry, 'Ramat Gan prize for poetry, The "Wine poem award" in Struga Poetry Evenings, Macedonia, 2005 and Hans Berghhuis prize for poetry 2006 in the Maastricht International Poetry Nights, Holand.

URI HOLLANDER, born in 1979, poet, translator, musician, literary critic and journalist. He graduated summa cum laude from the Israeli Music Conservatory in Tel Aviv in 1997. In 2002, he studied at the Department of the Hebrew Bible at Tel Aviv University and from 2002 to 2005 he was a student in the Adi Lautman Interdisciplinary Program for Outstanding Students at Tel Aviv University. He received his MA in Judaic studies from the Tel Aviv University in 2005 and is currently a Doctoral student at the Department of Hebrew Literature at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His publications include Notes from the Miracle Fair: Essays on Modern Poetry (2003), a Hebrew translation of E. E. Cummings: Selected Poems (2003), a book of poetry The Wandering Piano (2005), selected poems in Hebrew translation Max Jacob: Les vrais miracles (2006), Portrait on the Edge of Darkness: Essays on the poetry of Israel Har (2007), poems and a classical music CD Days of the Tel-Aviv Conservatory (2007). He is the recipient of several awards including the Metula Poetry Festival Prize and the Israel Ministry of Education Prize for Young Poets. He lives and works in Tel Aviv,

Yael TOMASHOV, poet and literary editor in Tel Aviv. Her book of poems Unknown Sea (in Hebrew) was published in 2012.

NETHALIE BRAUN, born in 1978, poet and filmmaker. She completed her BA in literature and philosophy, and an MA in film at Tel Aviv University. She also completed a poetry course at Helicon poetry group. Her two short fiction films Tabur (2004) and The Last Supper of N. Braun (2005) were screened at film festivals

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