Uri Zvi Greenberg

WITH MY GOD THE BLACKSMITH · IM ÉYLI HANÁPAḤ* · עִם אֵלִי הַנַּפָּח

כְּפִרְקֵי נְבוּאָה בּוֹעֲרִים יְמוֹתַי בְּכָל הַגִּלּוּיִים
וְגוּפִי בֵּינֵיהֶם כְּגוּשׁ הַמַּתֶּכֶת לְהִתּוּךְ.
וְעָלַי עוֹמֵד אֵלִי הַנַּפָּח וּמַכֶּה בִּגְבוּרָה:
כָּל פֶּצַע, שֶׁחָתַךְ הַזְּמָן בִּי, פּוֹתֵחַ לוֹ חִתּוּךְ
וּפוֹלֵט בְּגִצֵּי רְגָעִים הָאֵשׁ הָעֲצוּרָה.

וְהוּ גּוֹרָלִי־מִשְׁפָּטִי עַד עֶרֶב בַּדָּרֶךְ.
וּבְשׁוּבִי לְהָטִיל אֶת גּוּשִׁי הַמֻּכֶּה עַל עֶרֶשׁ,
פִּי — פֶּצַע פָּתוּחַ.
וְעֵירוֹם אֲדַבֵּר עִם אֵלִי: עָבַדְתָּ בְּפָרֶךְ.
עַתָּה בָּא לַיְלָה; תֵּן — שְׁנִינוּ נָנוּחַ.

Kefírkey nevúa bóarim yemótay
[beḥól hagilúyim
2 Vegúfi veynéyhem kegúṣ hamatéḥet lehítuḥ.
Vealáy ómed éyli hanápaḥ umáke bigvúra:
4 Kol pétsa, ṣeḥátaḥ hazmán bi, potéaḥ lo ḥítuḥ
Ufólet begítsey regáim haéṣ haatsúra.

Zéhu goráli-miṣpáti ad érev badáreḥ.
7 Uvṣúvi lehátil et gúṣi hamúke al éres,
Pi—pétsa patúaḥ.
9 *Veéyrom* adáber im éyli: avádta befáreḥ.
Áta ba láyla; ten—ṣnéynu nanúaḥ.

Born in 1895 in Galicia, Uri Zvi Greenberg began his literary career with a volume of Yiddish verse published in 1915. After serving in the Austro-Hungarian army during World War I, he joined the Zionist pioneers in Palestine. His earliest book of Hebrew poetry (*Anacreon at the Pole of Melancholy*, 1928) is strongly marked by the influence of German Expressionism, but at the same time foreshadows his subsequent work in its total identification of personal experience with an impersonal Jewish-Messianic destiny.

In his poetic manifesto *Against the Ninety-Nine* (published in the same year) he violently attacks the "99 citizen-writers" who are trying to produce in Hebrew a literature nourished by cosmopolitan, "extra-territorial" influences rather than by their real life as individuals within the unique revival of Hebrew nationhood. These "melancholy esthetes, sneezing at the scent of lilacs in the twilight," long for the "idyllic ride upon camels under the beautiful, melancholy sky, behind fast trains . . ." He calls for a volcanic "Literature of Destinies" as opposed to the "Literature of Talents," for a poetry that will embody in the idiom of the tribe a "Jewish answer from the blood," a prophetic cry springing from the "dynamic principle of Israel." All his subsequent work has been in the very deepest sense political, a *cri de cœur* springing from national tribulations and victories.

During the 1936 riots of the Arabs against the settlers, for example, Greenberg published *The Book of Denunciation and of Faith*, calling for revenge and denouncing the complacency of his generation in failing to see the eternal enmity borne by "the cross and the crescent" against the messianic destiny of the Jews. During Israel's struggle for independence, Greenberg was involved in the underground activities of the Irgun, and in 1949 he was elected to Parliament. His poetic production has since 1928 been consistently extremist in content and tone, drawing on the tradition of biblical prophecy.

(1) *Like chapters of prophecy, my days burn*

in all the revelations, (2) *My body among them like a lump of metal to be forged.* (3) *And over me stands my God the blacksmith and hammers with might:* (4) *Each wound [which] time has cut in me opens like a crack for Him* (5) *And emits in sparks of moments the pent-up fire.*

(6) *This is my destiny-sentence till evening [come] upon the road.* (7) *And when I return to throw my beaten lump on the bed,* (8) *My mouth is a gaping wound.* (9) *And* NAKED *I speak to my God: "Yours has been hard labor.* (10) *Now night has fallen; come—let us both rest."*

Readers who find this poem reminiscent of "Holy Sonnet XIV," in which John Donne asks his God the artisan to "breake, blowe, burn and make [him] new," may rest assured that Uri Zvi Greenberg was not familiar with Donne when this poem appeared in 1928. The similarities, however, are not superficial. As in Donne's sonnet, the deity is presented as entirely human; the implied relationship with Him is extremely intimate; the imagery far-fetched; the diction alive and direct; the tone ranging from the rhetorical to the personal. Greenberg's sources are exclusively biblical here. The prophetic chapters referred to in the first line, for example, are, among others: "Is not my Word like as fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh rock in pieces?" (Jeremiah 23:29). But the Bible is used only as background, for the dominant note of the poem points to a personal experience and an acquaintance with God which are unbiblical, culminating in the ironic friendliness of the conclusion—"come, let us both rest!" By contrast, the stern biblical echoes serve to sharpen the irony.

The metaphors of the first stanza are richly mixed. The "fire" of the poet's days, which is his prophetic destiny, burns both miraculously and painfully while the divine blacksmith hammers at the red-hot bar of metal which is the speaker's body. (The root idea appears in Ezekiel 22:20: "As they gather silver, and brass, and iron, and lead, and tin, into the midst of the furnace, to blow the fire upon it, to melt it; so will I . . . melt you.") In lines 4-5, Time is both within and without: it cuts open wounds out of which "sparks of minutes" are emitted from "pent-up fire." The last phrase (*haéṣ haatsúra*) is also a biblical echo ("His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones," Jeremiah 20:9).

This identification of violent prophetic destiny with violent ravages of time carries the primary sense of the stanza. In the visible effects of time upon his body, the speaker sees his fate, the fact of his election, and his kinship with the prophets. This is expressed in imagery of great precision. As anyone knows who has seen a blacksmith at work, the hammered red-hot iron seems to receive new bloody wounds with each blow, and the sparks come out of these wounds.

Stanza 2 opens in a matter-of-fact way. The heat, pain, and violence are accepted as inevitable, a "destiny-sentence," a way of life. When evening comes, the speaker lays his "beaten lump" on the bed and sees himself rather grotesquely, his open mouth a gaping wound. It is a wound because it is red and also an opening of his body. This image has a tie to Greenberg's view of specifically Jewish destiny. In his poetic manifesto noted above, he wrote: "Our body is very wild. It is a wandering body of symbols. And is our nerve-system in any way like that of the Gentiles? The Hebrew mouth is more like a wound; behind the Hebrew forehead an eagle screams."

The conclusion of the poem gains its effect from the deliberately stressed *éyrom* ("naked") and the short phrases addressed to the blacksmith. Lines 9-10 bring the speaker and his God into complete sympathy. God has been working hard, making the poet suffer; the poet has been suffering the violence of time and destiny because God has chosen him: now they both deserve respite. The state of *éyrom* in which the poet now speaks expresses this intimacy and also his human defenselessness. The word harks back to I

Samuel 19: 23-4, where Saul found David in the company of the prophets: "the spirit of God was upon him also . . . And he stripped off his clothes also, and prophesied before Samuel in like manner, and lay down naked all that day and all that night."

"With My God the Blacksmith" is one of the few Hebrew poems of the twenties to have withstood the great changes that have occurred in literary taste and in the language itself. It reads as if it had been written yesterday. To realize its full sonal value, however, the reader should make the Ashkenazi stresses as indicated by the acute accents in our transliteration. The rime scheme is appropriately irregular: *abcbc defdf*. The formal meter, a traditional amphibrach (∪ — ∪) with slight variations, merely gives shape to what is strikingly rare in the Hebrew poetry of its period: out of the printed page a living voice, dramatically modulated, speaks.

— ARIEH SACHS

Uri Zvi Greenberg

ON A NIGHT OF RAIN IN JERUSALEM · BELÉYL GÉṢEM BIRUṢALÁYIM

בְּלֵיל גֶּשֶׁם בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם

This poem was published in 1954. As in all of Greenberg's work, "Jerusalem" implies divinely appointed national destiny.

(1) *The few trees in the yard moan like forest trees,* (2) *Heavy-rivered [are] the thundered clouds,* (3) *The angels of peace [are] at the head of my children's bed,* (4) *In the moaning of the trees and the thickness of the rain.*

(5) *Outside—Jerusalem: city of the father's glorious trial,* (6) *The binding of his son upon one of the mountains,* (7) *The fire-from-dawn still burns on the mountain,* (8) *The rains have not put it out: fire between the* [ritual] *pieces.*

(9) "*If God commands me now as He commanded* (10) *My ancient father—I shall surely obey,*" (11) *My heart and my flesh sing on this night of rain;* (12) *And the angels of peace [are] at the head of my children's bed!*

(13) *What of glory? What is like unto this miraculous feeling* (14) *Alive ever since the ancient dawn until now [and] toward the mountain of myrrh [Moriah]?* (15) *The blood of the Covenant in [this] father's prayer-full body sings,* (16) *Ready to make the sacrifice on the Hill of the Temple at dawn.*

(17) *Outside—Jerusalem . . . and the moaning of God's trees* (18) *Cut down there by enemies in all generations . . .* (19) *Heavy-rivered clouds: within them lightnings* (20) *And thunderings, that to me on a night of rain [are] tidings* (21) *From the Mouth of The Might until the end of generations.*

That this rainy night is charged with manifestations of Providence is made clear in line 4. *Haṣrát gṣamím* ("thicknesses [or] dark densenesses of rains") harks back to David's song of thanks for deliverance: "And he made dark pavilions round about him, dark waters [*haṣrát máyim*] and thick clouds of the skies . . ." (2 Samuel 22:12). The "moaning forest" in the storm, the violent "rivers" of rain, are the divine messengers of the life that is connected with the "few trees" in the yard and with the day-to-day continuity of the speaker's family life. Line 3 establishes the theme, for it is as a loving father, awake in the stormy night while his children lie safe in sleep, that he experiences a revelation of his essential relation to God.

Stanza 2 derives its force from the rich texture of biblical allusions. "One of the

עֲצֵי מְעַט בֶּחָצֵר הוֹמִים כַּעֲצֵי יַעַר,
כִּבְדֵי נְהָרוֹת עֲנָנִים מָרְעָמִים,
מַלְאֲכֵי הַשָּׁלוֹם לִמְרַאֲשׁוֹת יְלָדַי
בְּהֶמְיַת הָעֵצִים וְחַשְׁרַת הַגְּשָׁמִים.

בַּחוּץ — יְרוּשָׁלַיִם: עִיר מַסַּת הוֹד הָאָב
וַעֲקֵדַת בְּנוֹ בְּאַחַד הֶהָרִים:
הָאֵשׁ־מִשְׁחֶרִית עוֹד דּוֹלֶקֶת בָּהָר
הַגְּשָׁמִים לֹא כִבּוּהָ: אֵשׁ בֵּין הַבְּתָרִים.

'אִם אֵל יְצַוֵּנִי כָעֵת כְּשֶׁצִּוָּה
לְאָבִי הַקַּדְמוֹן — אֲצַיֵּת בְּוַדַּאי',
רָן לִבִּי וּבְשָׂרִי בְּלֵיל הַגֶּשֶׁם הַזֶּה
וּמַלְאֲכֵי הַשָּׁלוֹם לִמְרַאֲשׁוֹתַי יְלָדַי!

מַה מֵּהוֹד מַה מָּשָׁל לְזֶה רֶגֶשׁ פִּלְאִי
חַי מִקֶּדֶם שַׁחֲרִית עַד כָּעֵת אֶל הַר מוֹר:
מִתְרוֹנֵן דַּם הַבְּרִית בְּגוּף אָב תְּפִלִּי
נָכוֹן לְקָרְבַּן הַר הַבַּיִת עִם אוֹר!

בַּחוּץ — יְרוּשָׁלַיִם .. וְהֶמְיַת עֲצֵי יָהּ
שֶׁכְּרָתוּם הָאוֹיְבִים בָּהּ מִכָּל הַדּוֹרוֹת..
עֲנָנִים כִּבְדֵי נְהָרוֹת: בָּם בְּרָקִים
וּרְעָמִים, שֶׁהֵם לִי בְּלֵיל גֶּשֶׁם — בְּשׂוֹרוֹת
מִפִּי הַגְּבוּרָה עַד סוֹף הַדּוֹרוֹת.

Atséy meát beḥatsér homím kaatséy yáar,
Kivdéy neharót ananím mor'amím,
Mal'aḥéy haṣalóm limraaṣót yeladáy
Behemyát haetsím veḥaṣrát hagṣamím.

Baḥúts—yeruṣaláyim: ir masát hod haáv
Vaakeydát bnó beaḥád heharím:
Haéṣ-miṣaharít od doléket bahár
Hagṣamím lo ḥibúha: eṣ beyn habtarím.

'Im el yetsavéni ḥaét keṣetsivá
Leaví hakadmón—atsayét bevadáy'
Ran libí uvsarí beléyl hagéṣem hazé
Umal'aḥéy haṣalóm limraaṣotéy yeladáy!

Ma mehód ma maṣál lezé réges pil'í
Ḥay mikédem ṣaḥarít ad kaét el har mor:
Mitronén dam habrít begúf av tfilí
Naḥón lekorbán har habáyit im or!

Baḥúts—yeruṣaláyim . . vehemyát atséy ya
Ṣekratúm haoyvím ba mikól hadorót . .
Ananím kivdéy neharót: bam brakím
Ureamím, ṣehém li beléyl géṣem—bsorót
Mipí hagvurá ad sof hadorót.

mountains" (6) comes from the account in Genesis 22 of God's challenge and Abraham's unquestioning obedience in offering Isaac. But "one of the hills" is at the same time Jerusalem, a city built upon and surrounded by hills. Thus the "glorious trial" (5) of Abraham becomes the archetype of the rainy Jerusalem night that is the poem's actual setting.

Throughout Greenberg's poetry, fire is a central symbol for divine Jewish destiny (cf. "With My God the Blacksmith," p. 60) and in this poem the "fire-from-dawn" (7) has especially rich resonances. It appears in the passage from Genesis noted above ("he took the fire in his hand," etc.); at the same time, it recalls the miraculous fire in Abraham's earlier vision of God when the Covenant was first renewed ("And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold . . . a burning lamp [*lapíd eṣ*, "a torch of fire"] passed between those pieces" (Genesis 15:17). The "fire-from-dawn," then, is both the fire that now appears in the poet's raging vision and the fire which Abraham at the dawn of the race saw: *beyn habtarím* ("between the pieces") of the animals and birds he had sacrificed to God on the fateful night of the Covenant. But *btarím* has still another touch here. Line 8 echoes the Song of Songs' "many waters cannot extinguish love," which is strengthened by the further allusion

to *hárey váter*—the "cleft mountains," also from the Song of Songs (2:17).

If the speaker is Abraham, his children, guarded by the angels of peace, are like Isaac, the seed of future glory. And so the rainstorm becomes the occasion for a renewed Covenant, in which the speaker realizes that his own faith is no smaller than that of his primordial father's. Like Abraham, he can say "I shall surely obey." His entire being, his "heart and his flesh," rejoice with the knowledge, induced by the storm, that he too is ready to sacrifice his own children. The drama of his imagined sacrifice is intensified in line 12 by the repeated reference, now concluded by an exclamation point, to his children's angelic sleep.

The ecstatic faith of stanza 3 is followed by an attempt at analyzing it (in stanza 4). But the ecstasy is beyond analysis (13). As in many other poems, Greenberg makes observations frequently found in mystical writers: that the poem itself is only a weak reflection of the ineffable experience from which it sprang; that faith is miraculous and the moment of revelation beyond time. Here (14) the image of *har hamór* richly sums up the miracle, for it means both "the hill of myrrh" and divine love (Song of Songs 4:6; 5:1) as well as the "Hill of Moriah" to which Abraham brought his son as a sacrifice—and on which Solomon's Temple was subsequently built (2 Chronicles 3:1). In addition, it is the hill on which the temple will be rebuilt when the ancient covenant is millenially fulfilled.

The various strains of imagery in the first three stanzas—the inextinguishable flame atop the sacred mountain, the sacrificial shedding of blood, the national destiny that transcends all temporal events—converge in *korbán har habáyit* (16): literally, "the sacrifice on the mountain of the temple."

— ARIEH SACHS

Uri Zvi Greenberg

UNDER THE TOOTH OF THEIR PLOUGH · TÁḤAT ṢEN MAḤARAṢTÁM

תַּחַת שֶׁן מַחֲרֵשְׁתָּם

The Streets of the River (*Reḥovót Hanahár*, 1951), from which our poem is taken, is Greenberg's passionate lament for the loss of European Jewry. The expression of horror, hatred, and sorrow in this poetry is shatteringly direct, unweakened by self-conscious doubt or aesthetic sophistication.

(1) *The snows have melted again there . . . and the murderers are now farmers.* (2) *They have gone out to plough their fields there, those fields that are my graveyards (fields of my graves).* (3) *If the tooth of their plough digs up and rolls over on the furrow* (4) *One of my skeletons, the ploughman will not be saddened or shocked.* (5) *He will smile . . . recognize it, recognize in it the mark [*lit. *hit] of his tool.*

The entire poem draws bitterly on the pastoral mode in its portrayal of the beautiful Polish countryside: "snows melting . . . farmers ploughing . . . birds singing . . . herds by the shining stream . . . flourishing trees . . . church bells tolling." Simultaneously, it points to the reality that this pastoral scene disguises. The farmers are the murderers, the fields are graveyards, the trees suck blood.

This tension between pastoral and real is present even in the title, for the ploughshare,

שׁוּב הִפְשִׁירוּ שְׁלָגִים שָׁם.. וְהַמְרַצְּחִים הֵם עַכְשָׁו — אִכָּרִים.

Ṣuv hifṣíru ṣlagím ṣam . . . vehamratsḥím
[hem aḥsáv—ikarím.

הֵם יָצְאוּ שָׁם לַחֲרֹשׁ שְׂדוֹתֵיהֶם, שְׂדוֹת קְבָרֵי הַשָּׂדוֹת הֵם!

Hem yats'ú ṣam laḥaróṣ sdoteyhém,
[sdot kvaráy hasadót hem!

אִם בְּשֶׁן מַחֲרַשְׁתָּם יְחֻפַּר וְיִגְלְגַל עַל הַתֵּלֶם

Im beṣén maḥaraṣtám yeḥupár
[vigulgál al hatélem

אֶחָד מִשְׁלָדַי, לֹא יֵעָנֵם הַחוֹרֵשׁ, לֹא יָחֳרַד.

Eḥád miṣladáy, lo yeegám haḥoréṣ,
[lo yoḥrád.

יְחַיֵּךְ.. יַכִּירֵהוּ.. אֶת מַכַּת כֶּלְיוֹ הוּא יַכִּיר בּוֹ.

Yeḥayéḥ . . yakiréhu . . et *makát kelyó*
[hu yakír bo.

שׁוּב אָבִיב שָׁם בַּנּוֹף: פְּקָעִים וְלִילָךְ וְצִפְּצוּף צִפֳּרִים.

Ṣuv avív ṣam banóf: pkaím veliláḥ
[vetsiftsúf tsiporím.

מִרְבַּץ עֲדָרִים עֲלֵי נַחַל נוֹצֵץ וּמֵימָיו רְדוּדִים..

Mirbáts adarím aléy náḥal notséts
[umeymáv redudím . .

אֵין־עוֹד יְהוּדִים עוֹבְרֵי־אֹרַח זָקָנִים וּפֵאוֹת.

Eyn-od yehudím ovréy-óraḥ zkaním ufeót.

בַּקְרֶצְ׳מִיס אֵינָם בְּטַלִּית־וְצִיצִית עַל כְּתֹנֶת;

Bakrétṣmis eynám betalít-vetsitsít al kutónet;

וְאֵינָם בַּחֲנֻיּוֹת הַסִּדְקִית אֲרִיגִים וּמַכֹּלֶת;

Veeynám baḥanuyót hasidkít arigím
[umakólet;

אֵינָם בְּבָתֵי מְלַאכְתָּם, אֵינָם בָּרַכֶּבֶת;

Eynám bevatéy melaḥtám, eynám barakévet;

אֵינָם בַּשְּׁוָקִים, אֵינָם בְּבֵית כְּנֶסֶת;

Eynám baṣvakím, eynám bevéyt knéset;

הֵם מִתַּחַת לְשֶׁן מַחֲרַשְׁתָּם שֶׁל נוֹצְרִים.

Hem mitáḥat leṣén maḥaraṣtám ṣel notsrím.

פָּקַד אֱלֹהִים אֶת גּוֹיָיו בְּרֹב חֶסֶד — —

Pakád elohím et goyáv beróv ḥásed— —

which connotes rural peace and honest toil, has a "tooth" and is therefore a kind of burrowing cannibal. The tension is heard in the sound of the language formed in lines 1-5 by two alliterative elements that are in complete contrast: the recurrent *ṣ* from the opening words on— *ṣuv hifṣíru ṣlagím ṣam . . .* —reflecting the hushed peace of the countryside, and the gutturonasal and gutturopalatal *gool, gal, tel, kel.* The word *vigulgál* (3) literally means "will be rolled over" but is very close in sound to *gulgólet*—a skull. The black irony of the stanza is most apparent in line 5, where the farmer appears as a kind of retired artisan accidentally coming across one of his *œuvres* and smiling with pleasurable recognition and pride: it was done with his own "instrument"—an axe or a knife (as opposed to his plough).

(6) *It is springtime again there in the landscape: bulbs and lilac and twittering birds,* (7) *[Where] herds lie down by the shining stream whose waters are shallow.* (8) *No more wandering Jews, beards and side-curls.* (9) *No [more] in the inns* [*krétṣmis:* a Yiddish word] *(with) talis and tsisis* [prayer-shawl and fringes] *over their shirt;* (10) *And no longer in the trinket, clothing and grocery shops;* (11) *No longer in their workshops, no longer on the train;* (12) *No longer in the markets, no longer in the synagogue;* (13) *They are under the tooth of the plough of Christians.* (14) *God has remembered (visited) His Gentiles with abounding grace.*

אֲבָל אָבִיב הוּא אָבִיב — וְהַקַּיִץ אַחֲרָיו מְדֻשָּׁן.
Avál avív hu avív—vehakáyits aḥaráv [medušán.

דְּשֵׁנִים גַּם עֲצֵי־יַרְכְּתֵי־הַדְּרָכִים כִּבְגַנִּים.
Deṣeyním gam atséy-yarketéy-hadraḥím [kivganím.

מִימֵיהֶם לֹא הָיוּ אֲדֻמִּים הַפֵּרוֹת כַּאֲשֶׁר הֵם
Mimeyhém lo hayú adumím haperót [kaašér hem

אַחֲרֵי שֶׁאֵינָם הַיְּהוּדִים — —
Aḥaréy ṣeeynám hayhudím— —

לַיְּהוּדִים לֹא הָיוּ פַּעֲמוֹנִים לְצַלְצֵל לֵאלֹהִים,
Layhudím lo hayú faamoním letsaltsél [lelohím,

בְּרוּכָה הַנַּצְרוּת, כִּי לָהּ יֵשׁ פַּעֲמוֹנִים בַּגְּבֹהִים!
Bruḥá hanatsrút, ki la yeṣ paamoním [bagvohím!

וְקוֹלָם הַהוֹלֵךְ בַּמִּישׁוֹר בָּאָבִיב־שָׁם עַכְשָׁו,
Vekolám haholéḥ bamišór baavív-šam aḥsáv,

בִּכְבֵדוּת זְרֻמָה בְּמֶרְחֲבֵי נוֹף זִיו וְנִיחוֹחַ,
Biḥvedút zrumá bemerḥavéy nof ziv [veniḥóaḥ,

הוּא אַדִּיר וְשַׁלִּיט עַל הַכֹּל: אֵין עַל מָה עוֹד לִפְסֹחַ,
Hu adír veṣalít al hakól: eyn al ma od [lifsóaḥ,

כַּאֲשֶׁר פַּעַם פָּסַח עַל גַּגוֹת יְהוּדִים — —
Kaašér páam pasáḥ al gagót yehudím— —

בְּרוּכָה הַנַּצְרוּת, כִּי לָהּ יֵשׁ פַּעֲמוֹנִים בַּגְּבֹהִים!
Bruḥá hanatsrút, ki la yeṣ paamoním [bagvohím!

לִכְבוֹד אֱלֹהִים הַמֵּיטִיב לַנּוֹצְרִים וְהַכֹּל..
Liḥvód elohím hameytív lanotsrím vehakól . .

וְכָל הַיְּהוּדִים תַּחַת שֵׁן מַחֲרַשְׁתָּם מְנֻחִים;
Veḥól hayhudím táḥat ṣen maḥaraštám

אוֹ תַּחַת עִשְׂבֵי הַמִּרְעֶה;
O táḥat isvéy hamir'é; [munaḥím;

אוֹ בְּקִבְרוֹת הַיַּעַר!
O vekivrót hayáar!

אוֹ עַל גְּדוֹת נְחָלִים וְאִם בָּם..
O al gdot neḥalím veím bam . .

אוֹ בְּצִדֵּי דְּרָכִים.
O vetsidéy draḥím.

הַלְלוּ לְיֶזוּנְיוּ בְּפַעֲמוֹנֵי הַכָּבֵד: בִּים־בָּם!
Halelú leyezunyú befaamonéy hakóved: [bim-bam!

(15) *But springtime is springtime—and the summer that follows is fat (thriving).* (16) *The roadside trees are fat as [trees] in gardens.* (17) *The fruit has never been so red as it is* (18) *Now that the Jews are no more—*

The pastoral *mirbáts adarím* ("the herds lying down," 7) has many biblical antecedents whose echoes deepen the sarcasm. The shining stream has a special poignancy in Greenberg's verse, which often uses the image of clear, flowing water as a symbol of his happy childhood in Poland.

In lines 8-14 it is ostensibly the *goyím* ("Gentiles") who are exulting, but at the same time it is the poet himself lamenting: *eynám . . . eynám . . . eynám . . .* ("they are no more") 9,10,11,12. The relationship between the two simultaneous voices changes in line 14, and from now on it is the poet only who speaks. By joining *goyáv* ("His Gentiles")—

here a contemptuous use of the word—to a lofty biblical phrase *berov ḥésed* ("with abounding grace"), line 14 almost turns the tone of benediction into an oath. A similar discordant effect is achieved by the other allusions to and quotations from the Book of Prayer, twisted with bitter irony (notably lines 9, 14, 26).

The tone of contained rage carries over into the third stanza. The fact that spring returns, heedless of catastrophe, is seen as an insult to the dead. And the summer that follows is *meduṣán*, "overfat," stupefied with abundance. The uncared-for trees by the roadside are as *deṣeynim* ("fattened," 16) as the trees in cultivated gardens, because their roots have found secret sources of nourishment in the corpses lying under the roadside. All nature is now cannibalistic.

(19) *The Jews had no bells with which to ring to [summon] God.* (20) *Blessed is Christianity, for it has bells in the heights!* (21) *And (their)* [bells'] *voice goes over the plain now, in the springtime* (22) *Flowing heavily over the breadth of a landscape of brightness and fragrance,* (23) *It is mighty and the master of everything: there is nothing more to [be] pass[ed] over* (24) *As once He passed over the roofs of Jews — —* (25) *Blessed is Christianity, for it has bells in the heights!* (26) *To honor a God who does good to the Christians and to all . . .* (27) *And all the Jews are laid under the tooth of their plough;* (28) *Or under pasture grass;* (29) *Or in graves in the forest!* (30) *Or on the banks of rivers, or within them . . .* (31) *Or on the roadsides*

(32) *Praise ye Yézunyu with the heavy bells: Bim-Bam!*

In the irony of the last section the Chosen People are the Cursed People who have no bells with which to summon God. The mournful tolling of *eynám* ("they are no more," 9,10,11,12) which pervaded the second stanza, is, as it were, defined by the bells (19) which now become the dominating symbol and sound. The poem which follows "Under The Tooth Of Their Plough" is entitled "Under Bells" and contains the line "In the ringing-roaring-of-bells it is announced: that they are no longer" (*ṣeeynám*). Note that the sound of church bells has always struck religious Jews as a desecration and blasphemy.

Sarcasm is everpresent in the language employed: The bells toll (22) *biḥvedút zrumá*, "with flowing solemnity," and the word *zrumá* echoes the account in Ezekiel (23:20) of the Egyptian paramours, "whose issue [*zirmá*—"seminal emission"] is like the issue of horses."

The poem closes with a burst of mortal contempt: Praise ye "Yézunyu"—the Polish affectionate diminutive for Jesus. *Bim-bam*—doubling the sound of *veím bam* (30)—sounds the final note of meaningless, self-satisfied, bestial stupidity.

— ARIEH SACHS

Uri Zvi Greenberg

MARTYRS OF SILENCE · KDOṢÉY DUMIYÁ · קְדוֹשֵׁי דוּמִיָּה

בְּלֵילוֹת הַלְּבָנָה אוֹמֶרֶת אִמִּי הַקְּדוֹשָׁה
לְאָבִי הַקָּדוֹשׁ:
כְּשֶׁנּוֹלַד לִי הַבֵּן אִיקְלְעָה הַלְּבָנָה בַּחַלּוֹן,
מִיָּד הוּא פָּקַח אֶת עֵינָיו וְהִבִּיט בָּהּ; מֵאָז
רוֹנֵן זֶה זִיוָהּ בְּדָמוֹ עַד הַיּוֹם
וּלְבָנָה מְהַלֶּכֶת מֵאָז בֵּין שִׁרָיו — —

הַרְבֵּה כֶּסֶף־אַלְדֳּמִי הָיָה בְּאָבִי
אֲבָל רֶכֶב הַנְּדוֹד לֹא עָמַד לְעֵת כֹּסֶף
סָמוּךְ לְבֵיתוֹ..
לָכֵן הוּא יָדַע דּוּמִיָּה וְנִגּוּן,
וְאַהֲבַ־בְּעֵינָיו כַּנְפֵי צִפֳּרִים.
— בִּרְצוֹתָן לָעוּף, הֵן עָפוֹת לָהֶן.. כָּךְ.'

אַךְ אִמִּי.. רִתְמַת רֶכֶב נְדוֹד לְכָסְפָּהּ:
לְפִי דַּפֵּק הַלֵּב יָדַע כָּל יֶשָׁהּ גַּם לֵילֵךְ
בְּרַגְלַיִם מַמָּשׁ עַל הַיָּם:
לְפִי מִשְׁעוֹל־הַלְּבָנָה־עַל־גַּלִּים
אֵלַי, אֶל הַבֵּן, בְּצִיּוֹן —
אַךְ לֹא מְצָאַתְנִי יוֹשֵׁב עַל הַחוֹף מְחַכֶּה־לָהּ
וְחָזְרָה עִם מִשְׁעוֹל־הַלְּבָנָה־עַל־גַּלִּים:
עֵיפַת נְדוֹד, חֲמַת רֹאשׁ, מָכַת יָם.

עַכְשָׁו — גַּם אִמִּי כְּאָבִי: קְדוֹשֵׁי דוּמִיָּה.
יֵשׁ מִשְׁעוֹל־לְבָנָה עַל גַּלִּים נוֹצְצִים;
וְיֵשׁ הַבֵּן הַיָּחִיד
הַשָּׂרִיד
בָּעוֹלָם — —

Beleylót halvaná oméret imí hakdoṣá
Leaví hakadóṣ:
Kṣenolád li habén ikleá halvaná vaḥalón,
Miyád hu fakáḥ et eynáv vehibít ba; meáz
Ronén ze zivá bedamó ad hayóm
Ulvaná mehaléḥet meáz beyn ṣiráv— —

Harbé ḥósef-aldomí hayá veaví,
Avál réḥev handód lo amád leét kósef
Samúḥ leveytó . .
Laḥén hu yadá dumiyá venigún,
Veaháv-beeynáv kanféy tsiporím.
'—birtsotán laúf, hen afót lahén . . kaḥ.'

Aḥ imí . . ritmát réḥev nedód leḥospá:
Lefí dófek halév yadá kol yeṣá gam leyléḥ
Beragláyim mamáṣ al hayám:
Lefí miṣ'ól-halvaná-al-galím
Eláy, el habén, betsiyón—
Aḥ lo metsaátni yoṣév al haḥóf meḥaké-la
Veḥazrá im miṣ'ól-halvaná-al-galím:
Ayefát nedód, ḥamát roṣ, mukát yam.

Aḥṣáv—gam imí ḥeaví: kdoṣéy dumiyá.
Yeṣ miṣ'ól-levaná al galím notsetsím;
Veyéṣ habén hayaḥíd
Hasaríd
Baolám— —

"Martyrs of Silence" is one of a series of four poems entitled "At the Rim of Heaven," and indeed the conversation in the first stanza appears to take place in an imaginary world somewhere between eternity and time. It is reported in the present tense, yet both parents are dead. They are *kdoṣim:* "holy, sacred" and also "sainted, martyred" in the sense of "dead for the Sanctification of the Name of God" (*kidúṣ haṣém*). The poet overhears his mother talking about his birth, in which she perceives something miraculous,

for as a newborn baby he was fascinated by the moon shining through the window, the very moon whose radiance still "sings in his blood" and "walks among his poems."

(1) *On nights of the moon says my sacred mother* (2) *To my sacred father:* (3) *When the son was born (to me) the moon happened by in the window,* (4) *At once he opened his eyes and looked at her* [the moon]; *since then* (5) *This radiance of hers sings in his blood, until this day,* (6) *And since then the moon goes walking among his poems.*

(7) *Much never-stilled longing was there in my father,* (8) *But the Chariot of Wandering was not there [*lit. *did not stand] at the time of longing* (9) *By his house . . .* (10) *That is why he knew stillness and melody* (11) *And loved-with-his-eyes the wings of birds* (12) *"—When they want to fly, they just fly off . . . so."*

(13) *But my mother . . . her longing had [was harnessed to] a Chariot of Wandering:* (14) *By the heart's beat, her whole being even knew how to walk* (15) *With [her] feet actually upon the sea* (16) *By the path-of-the-moon-on-the-waves* (17) *To me, to the son, in Zion — —* (18) *But she did not find me sitting on the shore awaiting her* (19) *And [she] returned with the path-of-the-moon-on-the-waves:* (20) *Weary (of) wandering, feverish [*lit. *head hot], seastruck.*

(21) *Now—my mother too, like my father: [they are] martyrs of silence.* (22) *There is a moon path on the sparkling waves:* (23) *And there is the only son* (24) *The remnant* (25) *In the world — —*

Stanza 2, speaking of the father, explains that his soul's restless longing (7) was fixed upon "silence and melody" (*nigún*, 10, refers to Hasidic melody, hence to religious dedication). When the son left home and settled in Zion, the father saw him as a fledged bird constrained to leave the nest, and though, as the son says, the father "loved-with-his-eyes" the wings of the birds that want to fly off, he accepted the separation. The "Chariot of Wandering" (8, 13) is a common figure in medieval Hebrew verse, signifying "parting" or "departure on a long journey."

The mother's reaction to the son's departure was of a different order (stanza 3). The very passion of her longing was a mystical attachment which enabled her to "follow" in her son's paths (13-17). And it was the son who failed her by failing to await her on the shore (18-20).

But now that both parents are "martyred and silenced" (21), the mother's longing has been stilled. And all that is left is the memory of her longing when she was still alive (the moon's path on the sparkling waves, 22) and the poet's desolation.

The moon, the central symbol of the poem, provides the setting at the rim of heaven. It epitomizes the poet's unique destiny—the moon "happened by" in the window—the word is the Aramaic *ikleá* rather than the Hebrew *nikleá*, and it implies something akin to the annunciation made to Abraham or to Samson's father, Manoah. The moon embodies the speaker's world of poetry and imagination (5-6) and it "provides" the path for the mother's impassioned longing (stanza 3). It is also connected with the present silence of the parents, and with their different "longings" when alive, for *kósef* ("longing," 7, 8, 13) is strongly related by sound in this context to *késef* ("silver"), hence the "silvery" moonlight.

The recurring phrase "moon's-path-on-the-waves" (16, 19, 22) has an extremely musical quality in Hebrew, achieved by the counterpoint of the anapestic beat and the alliterated *ol* and *al: miṣ'ól-halvaná-al-galím.* The sea-that-separates appears frequently in Greenberg's poems on his mother, and the variation on "moonstruck" in line 20—*mukát yam*, "seastruck"—is both novel in its use of language and meaningful in its context.

The economy and concentration throughout the poem are remarkable. Elaborating a tightly knit set of symbols (the magical moon, the chariot of parting, the separating sea), the poet presents his triple portrait with highly dramatic intensity. The successive shortening of the final three lines and the rime *yaḥíd-saríd* (23-24)—the first rime in the entire poem—combine to slow down the reading. Compelling the voice to dwell upon each word, they stress the desolation of the scene.

— ARIEH SACHS

Uri Zvi Greenberg

AMPUTATION OF THE WING · KRITÁT KANÁF · כְּרִיתַת כָּנָף

לְפֶתַע וּלְפִתְאוֹם בְּבֹקֶר לֹא עָבוֹת	Leféta ulfit'óm bevóker lo avót
וְרֵיחַ כָּל הַצּוֹמֵחַ נָדַף	Veréaḥ kol hatsoméaḥ nadáf
וְכָל הַצִּפֳּרִים עָפוֹת בְּמִין כָּנָף אַחַת..	3 Veḥól hatsiporím afót bemín kanáf aḥát . .
אֲלַלַי לְכָל רוֹאָן בְּכָךְ וְהוּא לֹא נָטַל בִּידָיו	Aleláy leḥól roán beḥáḥ vehú lo natál
אֶת עִנְבֵי עֵינָיו וְלֹא סָחַט!	Et invéy eynáv veló saḥát! [beyadáv
גַּם הַצִּפֳּרִים עַצְמָן אֵינָן יוֹדְעוֹת מִי קִצֵּץ לָהֶן כָּנָף	Gam hatsiporím atsmán eynán yod'ót [mi kitséts lahén kanáf
לְפֶתַע וּלְפִתְאוֹם הֵן עָפוֹת כָּךְ בָּאֲוִיר	Leféta ulfit'óm hen afót kaḥ baavír
נוֹטוֹת אֶל צַד..	8 Notót el tsad . .
וְאַף דָּם אֵינוֹ נוֹטֵף וְאֵין הֵכֵּר כִּי לְכָל צִפּוֹר	Veáf dam eynó notéf veéyn hekér ki
הָיוּ שְׁתֵּי כְנָפַיִם לְהַעֲבִיר	Hayú ṣtey ḥnafáyim lehaavír [leḥól tsipór
לְבָבוֹת דְּכְסִיפִין מֵהָכָא לְהָתָם —	Levavót diḥsifín mehaḥá lehatám— —
עַכְשָׁו אֵין יוֹתֵר לְהָתָם.	12 Aḥṣáv eyn yotér lehatám.
בִּדְבַר אֱלֹהִים כְּמוֹ בַּחֲלוֹם נֶחְתְּכָה כָּנָף	Bidvár elohím kemó vaḥalóm neḥteḥá ḥanáf
וְעַל מְקוֹם הַחִתּוּךְ חָתַם.	Veál mekóm haḥitúḥ ḥatám.

This lyric appeared in 1955 in "At a Time When the Face Is Covered," a series of poems whose theme is estrangement, "the Face" referring both to God's and the speaker's. In the stark title poem of the series, the soul, "covering itself" paradoxically with the "autumn of its summer," tells how "God has bestowed-forsaken the earth to men:/ Do with it what you will, I shall hide my face from you—/ He said as He entered His heavens and became silent." The predominant note of these poems is a bitter lyricism quite different from the rage of Greenberg's earlier, "prophetic" poems. The directness is muted and the imagery works largely through allusion and symbolism.

(1) *All of a sudden one cloudless morning* (2) *And the fragrance of all growing things spread (about)* (3) *And all the birds flying with a sort of single wing . . .* (4) *Woe to him who saw them thus and did not take in his hands* (5) *The grapes of his eyes and did not press (them)!*

(6) *Even the birds themselves do not know who cut off their wing* (7). *All of a sudden they fly thus through the air* (8) *Inclining to [one] side . . .* (9) *And no blood at all drips and there is no sign that each bird* (10) *[Once] had two wings with which to transport*

(11) *Longing hearts from over-here to over-there — —* (12) *Now that there is no longer any over-there.* (13) *By the Word (command) of God as if in a dream a wing has been severed* (14) *And the place of the severing He has sealed.*

Two kinds of meaning, that of nightmare and that of waking reality, are interfused. At first reading, all we perceive is an intensely visual rendering of some ineffably horrible experience, in terms as untranslatable and

inexplicable as those of a dream. Line 13 may suggest that the surreal landscape portrayed in the preceding lines has indeed been witnessed in a nightmare or vision. Yet the opening of the poem gives the setting as a "clear morning," thus creating the deliberate opposition between dream and reality that gives the entire poem the strange vividness of something seen simultaneously with the inner and the outer eye.

The shocking appearance of the single-winged birds (3) creates a visceral tremor; the horror of the sight is beyond words, making the viewer wish to pull out and crush "the grapes of his eyes" (5). The final word—*ḥatám* ("sealed")—makes of the entire experience a sacrament of irrevocable loss.

But if the immediate impact of the poem depends on the appeal of its surrealistic imagery to primordial fears of mutilation, it does lend itself to more discursive discussion as well. Many of the migratory birds which seasonally pass through Israel originate in Europe. In lines 10-11 we learn that each bird "once had two wings with which to transport/ Longing hearts from over-here to over-there." The birds, then, that before the annihilation of the people in Europe had been viewed with nostalgia and yearning (cf. "Martyrs of Silence," p. 68), suddenly appear one "clear morning" as horribly and senselessly mutilated. The amputated wing itself symbolizes the murdered kin, and in line 12 we learn that the "over-there," once the land of the heart's desire, no longer exists. The birds' grotesque flight is completely aimless now: they have nowhere to go.

Line 11, except for the word *levavót* ("hearts"), is in Aramaic. This transition from Hebrew to Aramaic and the riming of the repeated (11-12) Aramaic *hatám* ("there") with the Hebrew *ḥatám* ("sealed") in line 14 is both striking and natural, and gives great finality to the conclusion. The varying length of the lines effectively counterpoints the natural pauses of the speaking voice throughout the poem.

Rimed lines, for the most part couplings through identical or similar sound of differently spelled words (e.g., *nadáf-beyadáv*), alternate with unrimed lines, to create a subtle rhetorical pattern. The rimes are: *áf* and *áv* endings—2, 4, 6, 13; *at* and *ad* endings —3,5,8; *avír*—7,10; *atám*—11, 12, 14.

— ARIEH SACHS

Simon Halkin

TO TARSHISH · TARṢÍṢA · תַּרְשִׁישָׁה

Born in White Russia in 1899, Simon Halkin emigrated to the United States in his fifteenth year. Following his university studies in New York and Chicago, he came to Tel Aviv in 1932 where he remained as a teacher until 1939. He returned to America for a decade. In 1949 he was called to the Hebrew University to succeed the late Joseph Klausner as Professor of Modern Hebrew Literature. Halkin is well known to readers of English for his *Modern Hebrew Literature: Trends and Values*, and to readers of Hebrew for his verse, novels, criticism, and his translations of Whitman and Shakespeare in particular.

The trained reader will see in Halkin's poetry a confluence of various traditions experienced and grasped deeply. Moral and mystical concepts of Judaism clash with a European intellectual heritage as well as