

"When tall trees grow in close proximity
 "Bright sunshine thru their boughs ne'er reaches them
 "And each stem thwarts the growth of the other's stem,
 "They are bound to wither both lamentably.

"To hold us both, this land is rather small:
 "There is a water-shortage in the well,
 "Too near the doorstep of our abode, as well
 "As near, too near of our living rooms the wd l.

"Thus gradually our peace is vanishing:
 "Quite frequently our households are quarreling;
 "We shall be better off when gone apart.

"God shan't forsake us in our parted state."
 They took leave of each other without hate.
 Northbound Abraham, Lot - southward.

STEEPED IN SILENCE AND IN PEACE

The woodland's steeped in silence and in peace.
 A blood red stripe above it where the sun
 Had set. Dolerously wan
 A manly form hangs on a cross midst trees.

Before Him soldiers stand and cruelly
 With scoffs and jeers sm the form in hate abuse:
 "Now then, King, Messiah, now produce
 "A miracle of the God who is in liege with Thee!"

His tired eye is raised, he views the abject sight:
 They are casting lots for his habiliment.
 He is numb with feverish frigidity.

He looks at the heavens and with gather strength
 His voice broks thru the peacefulness of night:
 "My God, O why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

A heart's beloved, a faithful friend, a bed,
 A Table, and one's home intime;
 This - the grain, and this - the shed,
 And this - the sky about which I dream.

These - the pleasures that will do for me.
 Whenever it mean little to, for me it is enough!
 And I shall cut my morsel into three,
 And leave the wine untouched in my caraffe.

(continued)

From the Yiddish of Davie Kenigsberg

If the first step made is right,
Hence the road is well surveyed:
I'll have my road, of a blue night,
Over rose and thorn laid.

If I live in dire need -
'Twixt grief and lust my fortune cast,
My fame will fashioned be indeed
Of the splendors in my breast.

On my head I'll place a crown
And a minstrel I shall be --
O ifeel that I am drawn
To the bard's fate with his minstrelsy.

Imber 119-121

THE BEACON

What is a beacon? Just a solitary light
That blazes forth amidst the tempestuous sea.
When the frail craft is wrecked by gale and tide
It illumines the wildest reaches of the sea.

As the survivors come at last ashore,
Their perils past, they shout and cheer with glee
In celebrations rapturous galore,
In joyous feasts they wend their *est*asy.

And when the skyline has cleared up, seabound
The travelers are then, to face the peril once more.
The beacon who remains on desert ground -
A lonesome, locked-up nest on a desert shore.

One's wish not to be left alone is inmost;
At heart so poor, tho in appearance rich, yet - lone!
One's wish is to go out to the tempest
And suffer and hope there, with everyone!

What is a beacon? A mere solitary light
Altho impelled to it are those who sail the sea.
And when some boats are met by gale and tide
The desert-flame is yearning for the sea.

Translated by Michel Licht

Imber 115
"The Lighthouse"

STROLL THROUGH BRONX PARK: EARLY EVENING

She, in the blossom of her youth,
I, in the ripeness of my blossoming,
Hooded in the night,
Frigid with the touch of a November breeze-,
Tonight, so tender and mild, full of shadows
Like a pale girl overbrimming
With reveries of desire,
Lost in dreamy longings for love's release.

Our chatter about things wistful, objects
Passionate, defiant and meek;
All sense lost of everyday griefs,
As if magic alone were the rule;
My heart, all a-flutter . . . (and hers? . .)
Through each golden day and week
In search of newer ecstasies,
Sailing into an exquisite dream-pool.

In the park-road there, the flicker of fog-light,
Branches of autumn trees in the mist, awake
With stilly stifled supplications,
Fog-contours in the lamp-light beams,
Outlines of cryptic maggots in the air,
Unbodied spirits etched on the surface of the lake-,
My heart murmuring in soulful despair,
Her soul shying at her heart's dreams.

The roadside silence is violated by
The spookish swish-swish of passing motors.
In the lamplight-fog, mottled Terpsichoreans
Dancing rituals of love.
From a-far where life carouses in twinkling shadows,
Merriment breaks hysterically through to us;
Yet we are far away from all, hidden in
The reams of the fog's silver trove.

Ah, she in the bloom of her youth
And I in the midmost of my bloom--
How beautiful song is, yet she
At your side in the night is beautiful thrice.

When hearts are consumed with lightning,
Lips a-flame with desire--
The devil how succulent the air! She points out
A scarlet strip in the skies.

Ah! What's in the making of a poem
When there's a girl to be kissed?
What sense in argued beauty when you've felt
The ravishment of beauty in her skin?
I lift her chilled hand, my lips
Touch two fingertips in the mist--
How am I to leave her? something in me querries,
Yet the cruel parting hour sets in.

Stroll Through Bronx Park (continued)

Too tender is the fog-night with her dream-stuff,
Too deep with her longing, serene and mad.
Ecstatic will-o-the-wisps chase each other
In a too swift pursuit and mistily dart.
We two, though young, walk untoward no goal,
As if ironclad were our hearts, or snowclad,
Chattering about love and pleasure
Immortalised in glorious works of art.

(suggested by a poem by J. Slonim)

Michel Licht

Water currents run thruout the world.
 Impetuous,
 vigorous.
 Slender flowing torrents
 stripe themselves,
 whet themselves
 and glisten.
 Water currents run thruout the world
 and seek.
 Run with sun
 with moon
 with dusk-
 and shout.
 Mountain-high,
 valley-deep.
 Water currents purl around and eddy within
 Roundabout and round in streaming rows
 crookedly upward and evenly downward.
 Pursuingly
 rustlingly,
 a joy to the world.
 The grandest hymning -- and furthermore.
 Everytime altogether -- and even more.
 Scintillating laughter:
 Translucent flux.
 Everlasting festival.
 Water currents run thruout the world
 and roar.
 Furious and gasping with cheerful snow,
 leap and splash themselves with dew.
 Well-up and silver clouds brew.
 A squirt and a spout and a snap.
 A snap and a leap and a sparkle.
 A sparkle, a song and a say.
 A say and a song and a dash.
 A dash and a fall and a hop.
 A hop and a fall in advance.
 A leap -- and lost in the flow.

A stone.

Waters overrun the stone
 braiding pigtails on the run.

Trees--

Water courses by a tree,
 bids it farewell audibly.

A meadow--

To the meadows water tides
and they lip on all sides,
hug it trembling from sheer joy,
promise it -- and ship ahoy!
Course unwearied, never spent,
telltale, yet conceal the end.

Rest?
There is no place for rest.
Remain?
No place there to remain.
Everywhere is here.
Every here is there.
Every there means onwards.

Translated by Michel Licht

Imber 197-201

THE HAND OF GOD

The Hand of God lies somewhere sadly mangled,
The Hand of God lies somewhere bruised and cut;
And I---I shield myself from being strangled,
I stay within---all doors and doorways shut.

Like pieces of a snake curves^d the sundered,
So leaps of God's main every particle;
And every fling reveals the final Wonders
Unveiling furthermore my screening wall.

I shield myself no more from being strangled,
I call for him who seeks his final prey to thrust;
The hand of God lies somewhere bruised and mangled
And I--like snake-parts in the gory dust.

*Translated from the Yiddish
of H. Leivick.
by Michel Dicht*

/H. LEIVICK

Leave me, forget...
Like a rope there coils around me
My longing for thee.

I dare not pull
The rope with my own hand
To accelerate the end.

In or out of doors
Everyone I meet my eye imbues
With: "Tighten the Noose/"

But none beholds.
I shall have to return to thee
And pray: "Strangle me/"

*Translated from the Yiddish
by Michel Dicht*

Imber, p. 171

A LETTER FROM THE SEVEN BROTHERS TO THE SEVEN BROTHERS

Dear seven Brothers, we give you the truth,
though the Ocean between us makes the truth appear paler.

We are well-off, over here:

We have fuel to keep us warm;
We have salt for our bread,
and the old songs are with us, yet,
day and night - and fish, and birds,
and rainbows in our skies.

But our beautiful Strength is stalking
mean, terrific roads,
and speaks the language of the demented whore.

She lives on Pleasure Alley
and makes us feel ashamed,
us, your seven Brothers.

We greet you and send herewith
three wild nuts weighing seven measures,
a flask of wine and two dried fish.

Your seven Brothers who write you the truth
(though the Ocean separating us
makes the truth appear paler).

(From the Yiddish of Mark Shweid
by M. Licht)

Imber 285

THE APOSTATE

With the ashes of your creation that in ruins lie
Beneath your sorely stricken feet, you will convert me,
With the crimson-crested waves I will engirt me
And unto you surrender, like a slave with casted die.

Whence comes the donkey upon its riders back
And what fate heralded by my skull?
I'll gather all the sheaves of a presaging fiery gong,
My heart shall braid asunder the beautiful sweet tongue
And withal return to your door in a victor's plumages,
Assemble all the scalding images
And look for ruth in the wake of your feet.

(From the Yiddish of ^{N.B.} Minkoff)

by Michel Licht

OUR BANQUET

In the net, crushed, on the embankment, tight
Lies our holy lone Leviathan;
The crew, merged into one with the night,
Dreams about Kingdom Come.

The night sheds her coast-mist in an enchanted fling;
Her blackness rinses in the waters of quietude and peace.
Her heart alone is slowly combatting
With deep abysses, tending for the black surcease.

In the red light of revealing mysterious growths
They're waiting in excitement ^rmate.
A sweet fear rises to their throats
Having e'en their petrified limbs imbued.

There is no embankment, only to the highest span,
Whence the canny fishes lie, ascends a sombre call
Of our slowly extinguishing clan
And ghosts supplant us in the banquet hall.

N.B.
(From the Yiddish of Minkoff)
by Michel Licht

SONNET

from the Yiddish of Pradel Shtock

Shall I conceal myself somewhere
And cry inaudibly, with bowed head,
and dry again my eyes, so tired and sad,
Foredoomed to restlessness long ere,
And let, as heretofore, my roaming glance
Wander off into grey distances
And cast it hither-thither at all instances,
Pursuing fortune in morbid turbulence,

Or shall I cast myself in wild despair
Into the gutter with flaming eyes instead
And, tigress-like, with growls fill the air,
With nostrils distended in painful breath --
Or shall I conceal myself somewhere
And cry inaudibly with bowed head?

Translated by Michel Licht

Imber 311

MY FATHER THE SOPAR (the scribe) by Yosseff Levi

His face, the graven image of hapless infants;
His heart, a sorrowladen vessel on the surface unbetrayed;
(with cargo unidentified) version
His childhood within airless schoolwalls misspent, a shadow
undismayed,
A thing that savored of sanctimonious blisses
Swayed and rapt and showered the soul with kisses.

Those pious, wee-reflecting eyes, so blue and modest,
Whose smile would be taken for the soul's tragic quiver,
Whose gaze was like the sun reflecting in a crystal river,
In fasts unfed his body, cleansed it, kept vigils every morrow,
Like the glorious Shechinah soaked with Israel's grievous Sorrow.

*Translated from Yiddish
by Michel Dicht*

Two sonnets by David Kenigsberg

Belief (Faith)

O there are those convinced of their good dreams:
The saint unqualifiedly takes God's word;
The poor and lowly shall inherit the Earth;
The poet's passion are his synonyms;
The prophets harp upon Eternal Peace;
And some, Kaballah's secret thought pursue
In hope 'twill bring within their soul's purview
The hidden meaning of bonded man's Release.

The children swallow whole a fairy tale;
And nonsense victimizes brainless fools;
The wise ones are but systematic tools
Of their pet theories - corrupt and frail;
The sceptic 'pon none but himself relies -
And I trust in the beauty of your eyes.

On Sacred Books

On sacred books your heads, in waiting mood,
Have leaned until the coming of the Lord
and the Darkness be rent by Daylight's sword
Still - as by a torpor o'ercast - you brood.
The Shofar's heralding 'pon barren ground
Is lost - like muted dovelike minstrelsy.
So silent will Messiah's footfalls be
in your ears' unreverberating sound.

Arise from your deep lethargy - arise!
Look at the sun unfurled in the skies.
Bid slumber leave you - be awake, alert!
Lest He whom you await, with loins girt,
Come hither, find you in amorphous traps,
Return never to retrace His steps.

(From the Yiddish)

Michel Licht

DAWN AND TWILIGHT

Dawn has a maiden-like beauty:
Eyes crystal-clear and so blue,
Arms widespread, as with wings it were aiming
Its flight into a world that's new.

Twilight has a maiden-like beauty:
Brows of agate; eyes sombre and sad;
Cheeks as if burning with shame, hued
with a paleness that's stranger than death.

Dawn . . . Twilight . . . Their bewitching beauty
Raises in my soul an uproar:
I know not which: dawn than twilight
Or twilight than dawn I love more.

(From the Yiddish of Aaron Karlin
by M. Licht)

IN CONEY ISLAND, by M. L. Halpern

Moishe Laib, Moishe Laib,
It's not the wench from grandfather's fields you see.
- Eh, wherefrom then? - A product of nativity.
A bird from a Broadway scene
She is, you mean?
- Maybe. -

But then perhaps
These nimble feet, this pretty face
Hail from a Coney Island pleasure-place
And every night she's crowned as Fool's Queen.
Maynot that be so?
- Don't know. -

And then, you see,
Perhaps she is the petted mistress of some lord
Who frets all day and is bored
by appearance grim
of servants catering to her least whim?
- Maybe. ☺

If that be so,
What keeps her lord from calling here
And break her passion's bar?
Or, he too, poor ~~man~~, feels lonesome and drear
As you, Moishe Laib, are?
- Perhaps. -

From the Yiddish by M. Licht

from Uri Zvi Grinberg

I shall persist in loving you on and on
and shall not weary of hunting your footsteps.
The mild wounds will drip blood.

No tawiness of other hair, no sapphire of an eye
Will enchant my heart while I am aware
Of you - far off - somewhere -

Yet one who is undeserving will possess you,
An eye that never sheds a tear - behold you,
And I shall be bowed, e'en to the earth -

*Translated from Yiddish
by Michel Dicht*

from Uri Zvi Grinberg

My ship shall lie anchored till the end of my life
At your dim shore.
The cabins hold spiritual cargoes:
Spices and fruit, chastened chants
And the gold of twenty five summers.

The sail is blue as the sky.
And specks of gold are woven into the azure...
It is vesper time...

Come at vesper-hour, starclad - look:
I sit on the threshold
holding a heat in my hand.
Before me the sea is playing its nocturne.

*Translated from the Yiddish
by Michel Dieht*