

ing Precedent Seriously: On Halakhah as a Rhetorical Practice," in Walter Jacob and Moshe Zemer, eds., *Re-Examining Reform Halakhah* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), pp. 1–70 (<http://huc.edu/faculty/faculty/washofsky/takingprecedentseriously.pdf>); and "Against Method: Liberal Halakhah Between Theory and Practice," in Walter Jacob, ed., *Beyond the Letter of the Law* (Pittsburgh: Rodef Shalom Press, 2004), pp. 17–77 (<http://huc.edu/faculty/faculty/washofsky/againstmethod.pdf>).

74. Cohen, *op.cit.*, p. 11 (on the need for an "independent examination" of the claims of tradition), and p. 15 (on the value of stepping "outside normative halakhic discourse").
75. *Reform Responsa*, p. 22.

"Kotso shel Yud" ("The Tip of the Yud")

Stanley Nash

The Hebrew epic poem "*Kotso shel Yud*," "The Tip of the Yud," written by Yehudah Leib Gordon (1830–1892) in 1875, is the best-known work of the Haskalah, the Hebrew Enlightenment period, and it is a principal, hitherto untranslated, document for Jewish "feminist" research. The poem is a powerful indictment—a satire¹ and, hence, by definition, an exaggerated and one-sided indictment—of the status of women within Judaism. Gordon began working on this poem at least as early as 1870, according to his correspondence with the highly educated Miriam Markel Mosessohn and her husband Anshel Markel.² Miriam Markel, a writer and translator, was remarkable for her command of Hebrew during an era when Jewish women, if they were educated, were more frequently fluent in Yiddish or Russian. It was in 1868, during the height of the nascent modern Hebraist struggle to bring rabbinically dominated Judaism into consonance with the needs of modern Jewish life (*milhemet hadat ve-ha-hayyim*), that Miriam Markel sent Gordon a portion of her rendering into Hebrew of a book in German about Jewish history. Gordon was so impressed by Markel that he decided to dedicate "*Kotso shel Yud*" to her. In that same period Gordon wrote journalistic pieces, such as his "*Binah le-To'ei Ru'ah*," "Enlightenment for the Intellectually Misguided," in *Ha-Melits*, 1871, where he penned such lines as:

Is it really such a good thing...that Jewish girls should grow up without any training or education—they who are going to be the mothers of children and homemakers; and how will they rear their children when they themselves received no rearing in their youth?"

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It is clear that Gordon was mindful of the larger, more positive, profile of the attitude toward women in Judaism. We know this from his letter to Miriam Markel, in which he writes that Judaism could boast its great heroines and positive role models such as "Miriam, Deborah, Hannah and Abigail...Judith, Esther and Bruriah" and that

in our nation these false views [about the inferiority of women] never struck root and Jewish wives never fell below the level of their husband: our ancestors did not lock up their wives and daughters and they did not imprison their spirits, inasmuch as [this spirit] is a gift from God...and on the [messianic] day that the earth will be filled with wisdom the prophet promises us that our sons and our daughters will prophesy and in those days to come, even upon *maidservants* will God pour out His spirit; because gender differences exist only in human bodies, but the spirit obtains for both male and female alike.³

Notwithstanding Gordon's awareness of the more balanced appraisal that Judaism deserves on the issue of women, Gordon clearly saw that there were enough serious abuses at least potentially capable of being implemented under rabbinic law and particularly, with the widespread prevalence among Jews of woefully benighted societal attitudes, to merit Gordon's scathing portrait of the plight of his luckless fictional heroine Bat-Shua in *Kotso shel Yud*. Gordon keenly felt the need to dramatize the inequities of Jewish law, and he testified to having written this poem "with blood and tears."⁴ He attested that it would be enough for him if this poem

will in the future save one Jewish woman from being doomed forever through the lack of knowledge of grammar and Bible among the Rabbinic authorities, even in matters that school children are familiar with.⁵

In the intensity of his work, Gordon mirrored trends then current among Russian writers, such as the poet N. Nekrasov and the novelist N.G. Chernyshevsky, toward the amelioration of the plight of women.⁶

As Ben-Ami Feingold points out in his masterful study of "*Kotso shel Yud*," Gordon's very first chapter presents his ideological target as a caricature in a string of intensifying "comic-grotesque" characterizations. Judaism views the "Hebrew woman" "like a menstru-

ant woman," "an idol-worshipper," "a slave," "a hen," "a whore," "an object." He purposely debases his rhetorical-linguistic register to include words such as "nakedness," "monster," "excrement," and "the snake's pollution." Gordon employs a distinctively "satirical-rhetorical strategy." From the very outset, says Feingold, Gordon employs the technique of "demeaning his ideological opponent *a priori*," thereby subtly introducing a

system of norms...into the vantage-point of the reader. Thus the characterization of the satirical object is accepted as if it were part of an objective description of the world and not the result of tendentious hostility.⁷

Furthermore, by turning to the reader in a familiar way in the second person, Gordon gives the impression of having an intimate conversation with him, inviting him to share in his impressions of his tragic subject.

The hyperbolic second chapter highlight's the aristocratic nature of Gordon's heroine. This, too, is a continuation of Gordon's thrust toward caricature, for Bat-Shua emerges as something of a demigoddess who becomes defiled by contact with the real world—in this instance, the world of Judaism. This epic poem resembles the allegoristic style of writing that typified the earliest works of the Haskalah with an admixture of publicistic militancy.

In spite of its use of stereotypes, *Kotso shel Yud* contains a certain delicacy of portraiture that invites the reader's empathy. In the words of one critic, it is a "novel in verse." Set against the backdrop of the coming of the railroads, it fleshes out a picture of societal change that helped to sound the death knell of the *shtetl*. The character of Fabi as the new Jewish man affords a picture of new possibilities for the Jews in European society. But the stultifying baggage of the traditional patriarchal society—with its prejudices and superstitions—threatens to anchor the Jew to his past, just as "the anchored Jewish woman," the *agunah*, can never escape her fate. Gordon's occasional asides in which he reflects on the broader implications of the miniature "soap opera" taking place before our eyes project his story on to a wider canvas. One aside is during Bat-Shua's wedding ceremony at her arranged marriage:

But what is that gut-wrenching groan
That rivets our ear more than the tumult of the timbrels?

"That is not the sound of a groan but rather the sound of the glass
 Being smashed in remembrance of the destruction of Jerusalem."
 The city's destruction we remember for thousands of years
 But to the destruction of our people we harden our hearts,
 And with the clatter of the ceramics
 we break on the wedding day
 We do not hear the screaming of our children
 who are to come after us.

The second memorable aside is when Bat-Shua and Fabi are waiting for the messenger to bring the *get*, the bill of divorce, from Hillel. Gordon notes in a somewhat understated, but nonetheless surprising, way: "And as the Eternal People [the Jews] await the Messiah's arrival, / So did the two of them await the day of the courier's coming." In Hebrew the rhymes accentuate the fatalistic pathos of these two asides. The first aside critiques Jewry's addiction to mourning and its proclivity for becoming mired in the past. The second parodies the Jews' quietistic awaiting of the Messiah. Both passages hint at Judaism's chronic resistance to change, an inertia that renders dubious much of the Jewish enterprise on both the personal and national levels. And yet, the dramatic power and prophetic temperament that come through in this epic poem stir the reader to a sense of anger and frustration that are a stimulus to effect change. And that, of course, was Gordon's professed hope in his recourse to satire. In one memorable comment, Gordon made a pun on the words "*satirah*" (סאטירה), "satire," and "*setirah*" (סתירה), "demolishing," with the intent of a thoroughgoing rebuilding and restructuring of Jewish societal attitudes.

Even Gordon's harshest critics, such as Reuben Brainin, who felt that Gordon's portraiture was not sensitive or realistic, succumbed to the charm of his character portrayals in "*Kotso shel Yud*." There is a quality of sincerity and deep caring that comes through in this work, and those who read it in an engaged manner, and also take into account its differences in genre and style from our own day, will enjoy a very special esthetic and ideological literary experience.

A Note on the Translation

The translation of "*Kotso shel Yud*" offered here is almost entirely literal with only an occasional archaism or alliteration attempted to parallel the highly stylized Hebrew original. By and large, the purpose of the English rendering is to enhance access to this great

poem both for potential Hebrew readers and for those English readers interested in getting as close as possible to the content and meaning of the text. I have made no pretense of demonstrating the type of literary virtuosity necessary to do justice to Gordon's poem. It is my hope that with the help of my translation future writers will try their hand at rendering a poetic translation of this gem of the Haskalah period, a literary era, which is, in terms of the amount of material translated, the most neglected of all areas of Hebrew literature.

Notes

1. See the amply referenced article by Ben-Ami Feingold, "Kotso shel Yud - Anatomy of a Satire," *Mehqerei Yerushalayim be-Sifrut Ivrit*, II (1983), 73-104 and see Michael Stanislawski, *For Whom Do I Toil? Judah Leib Gordon and the Crisis of Russian Jewry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 127-28.
2. Yosef Klausner, *Historiyyah shel ha-Sifrut ha-Ivrit ha-Hadashah* (Jerusalem: Achiasaf, 1963), IV, 344-45. And see Carol B. Balin, *To Reveal Our Hearts: Jewish Women Writers in Tsarist Russia* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2000), p. 13ff.
3. Klausner, *Historiyyah*, IV, 344-45. Cf. Stanislawski, *ibid.*
4. Klausner, *ibid.*, p. 363.
5. *Ibid.*
6. See especially, N.G. Chernyshevsky, *What Is to Be Done?* [Russian original, 1864] (New York: Random House Vintage Books, 1961).
7. Ben-Ami Feingold, *ibid.*, pp. 83-84.

קוצו של יוד

(א)

(1)

אשה עבריה מי ידע חייה?
בחשך באת ובחשך תלכי,
עצבך ומשושך, שברך מאוייך
יולדו קרבך, יתמו תוככי.
הארץ ומלאה, כל טוב ונחת
לבנות עם אחר לסגלה נתנה,
אך חיי העברית עבדות נצחת,
מחנותה לא תצא אנה ואנה;
תהרי, תלדי, תיניקי, תגמולי,
תאפי ותבשלי ובלא עת תבולי.

Hebrew woman, who knows your life?
You were born in obscurity and in obscurity will you depart,
Your woes and your joys, your hopes and desires
Are born within you, and inside you they die.
The earth and its fullness, all pleasure and comfort
Are vouchsafed to daughters of other nations.
But the life of a Jewess is perpetual servitude,
Never leaving her store to go one place or another;
You conceive, give birth, you nurse, you wean,
You bake and you cook, and prematurely — you wither.

(2)

ומה כי חננת לב רגש ויפי,
 כי חלק האל לך בשרון ונדעת;
 הן תורה לך תפלה, יפי לך דפי,
 כל בשרון לך חסרון, דעת מגרעת,
 קולך ערנה ושער ראשך מפלצת;
 ומה את בלד? חמת דם נפרש!
 זוהמת הנחש מאז בך רובצת*
 וכמו דנה עמו יזרד ויגרש
 מבית הספר, מהיכל אלוה
 ומבתי משוש לשאת רק נה.

And so what if you were graced with a feeling heart and beauty,
 If the Lord gave you talent and intelligence!
 For you, knowledge of Torah is a taint, beauty a detriment,
 For you, all talent is a deficiency, all knowledge a drawback,
 Your voice is indecency, your hair, a horror;
 And what are you in your entirety? A vessel of blood and excrement;
 Ever since Genesis, the snake's pollution rests inside you*
 And like a menstruant woman, your people expel and banish you
 From the house of schooling, from the sanctuary of the Lord
 And from places of rejoicing — to express only lamentation.

* According to one tradition Eve had intercourse with the serpent.

(3)

טוב לך כי לא תדעי שפת אבותיך,
 כי בית אלהיך בפניך נעלו,
 כי עתה לא תשמעי ברבת מנאציך
 "שלא עשם אשה" יום-יום יתפללו,
 פעכו"ם וכעבד את למו נחשבת,
 פתרנגלת לגדל אפרוחים עומדת.
 למה, עגלה דשה, פרה חולבת,
 למה לך אפוא היות מלמדת?
 למה על חנוכה יעמלו חנם -
 וההולך בעצתך יורש גיהנם?

It is best for you that you know not your ancestors' language
 That the house of your God is shut in your face,
 For now you cannot hear the blessing of your scorners
 "That he did not make them a woman," daily they pray,
 Like a heathen or slave are you considered by them,
 Like a hen always prepared to raise fledglings.
 Why then, oh stomping heifer, oh milking cow,
 For what, hence, have you a need to be learned?
 Why should they invest for naught in your education —
 When whosoever follows your advice inherits Gehenna?

(4)

המעט כי פרי-בטן מנע אלוה,
 כי לקח בנער ממך הבעל,
 כי מבחר ימך אסירת נה,
 עוד תשמרי היבם לחלוץ לו נעל.
 על אבך בקית יותר מאחך,
 ובעזבונו רק הם בליתך נחלו.
 אך לא רק טוב ארץ גזלו מידך,
 גם טל השמים לך לא אצלו!
 להם, צרי עין, רמ"ח מצות מנו
 ולך העלובה רק שלש נתנו.

Is it not enough if God withholds from you offspring,
 If in your youth he takes away your husband,
 If the best years of your life you're a prisoner of woe,
 You have yet to deal with the levirate, to do *halitsah** with his shoe.
 You may have cried over your father's death more than your
 brothers,
 Yet of his estate only they are the beneficiaries.
 But not only have they stolen from you the benefits of this earth,
 They have deprived you even of heaven's dew of blessing!
 For themselves, these miserly males, have counted out 248 mitzvot,
 Whereas for you, pathetic female, they have allotted only three.**

* In order to be exempted from marrying her brother-in-law, the childless widow must remove his shoe in a rather humiliating ceremony.

** The three mitzvot assigned specifically to women are *hallah*, *middah* and *hadlakat ha-ner* (setting aside a portion of the hallah, observing marital purity, and lighting Sabbath and holiday candles).

(5)

מה אמלה לבנתך, אשה עבריה:
 תתאווי לדעת, לחיים ואין, -
 צמח אדני אובד במקום ציה,
 גם שמש לא ידע, לא ראה לעין:
 קרקע עולם את פרי תנובה מזרעת,
 אך נירך לא ינירו, תגדלי פרע:
 עוד לא היית לנפש משפלת יודעת
 וכבר היית לאיש ותחיי זרע,
 ובטרם למדת היות בת להורך
 נשאת ותחיי - אם לילדך.

How wretched is your heart, Oh Hebrew woman!
 You desire knowledge and life experience,
 but you receive nothing. —
 A flower of the Lord wasting in the wilderness,
 It doesn't even know the sun; light has never illumined it fully;
 You are a piece of neglected earth,
 a seed of what could have become good fruit,
 But they did not cultivate your soil; instead you grow wild;
 You had not yet become an intellectually mature, aware individual,
 And already you were taken by a man, and you conceived offspring,
 Before you learned to be a daughter to your parents,
 You were married and became — a mother to your children.

(6)

נשאת - הנדעת האיש לו תנשאי?
האהבתו? הראיתו עין בעין?
האהבתו? - אמללה, הטרים תדעי
כי אהבה בלבב בת ישראל אין?
ארבעים יום טרם אמה חבלתה
הכין לה אלוכה המזוג זויגים,
ומה-ימריצה אם תראנו עתה?
מה-תתן, מה-תוסיף אהבת תענוגים?
אהבה מן הן לא ידעו אמותינו -
הכזונה נעשה את אחותנו?*

Married were you —

Did you know the man to whom you were wed?
Did you love him? Did you get to see him up close?
Were you in love? — Wretched thing, don't you know yet,
That love in the heart of a Jewish girl there cannot be?
Forty days before her mother gave birth to her,
The Heavenly matchmaker found her a husband,
So what good would it do her if she were to see him now?
What would a passionate love give her,
what would it add to her life?
Love of that sort our mothers did not know —
Shall our sister be treated as a whore?*

* In the style of medieval poetry, Gordon has embedded whole a verse from the Bible (Gen 34:31), creating an ironic new context.

(7)

הביאי ראשך בצעיף, פניך הליטי
וקנצותיך אל תחת התער:
אל העומד על ידך מה-זה תביטי?
אם גבן או דק הוא, זקן או נער?
אחת היא לך: הן לא את הבוחרת,
הוריק יבחרו, הם בך ימשלו,
כחפץ נמכר מרשות לרשות את עוברת.
הארמים הם פי פי נערה ישאלו?
יד אביך מושלת בך בבתולך,
ובצאתך מביתו - בעלך עליך.

Put a kerchief on your head, conceal your face,
And consign your locks of hair to the razor;
Why should you look at the one standing at your side,
To see if he is a hunchback or spindly, an old man or young?
It is all the same to you! You are not the one who chooses,
Your parents do the choosing, they rule over you,
Like an object that is sold from domain to domain do you pass.
Are they Arameans that they should ask the opinion
of the young daughter?*

The hand of your father rules over you in your virginity,
And upon departing his house —
your husband comes to dominate you.

* The sarcastic reference is to Gen 24:57—58.

(8)

בְּעֵלְךָ - גַּם הוּא לֹא גָדַל בְּנַעַר,
 לֹא נָטַע כְּרֶם, לֹא בָּנָה לוֹ בַּיִת:
 כְּכֹלֹת שָׁנוֹת אַרְחָתוֹ, בְּאַבּוֹד הַמַּהֲרָ,
 וְכַהֲשֵׁתָרְגַּ עָלָיו שְׁתִּילֵי הַזַּיִת,
 אִזּוּ יַחַל לְבַקֵּשׁ חַיִּית יָד וּפְרִינָסָה
 כְּאִישׁ אֲבִד עֲצוֹת, חָסֵר לֵב וְתַבּוּנָה,
 וּבְרָאוֹתוֹ כִּי אֵין כָּל, כִּי כָּל תִּקְוָה נָסָה,
 יָנוּס בְּאֶשׁ יָנוּס, יַעֲזֹבֶךָ עֲגוּנָה...
 אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת כָּל אִשָּׁה עֹבְרָה -
 אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת בֵּת-שׁוּעַ הַיִּפָּה-פִּיָּה.

Your husband, too, was not reared properly in his youth,
 He did not plant a vineyard, nor did he build himself a house;
 At the end of his stay in your parents' house,
 when the dowry runs out,
 And when you are overrun with little olive shoots [children],
 Then he will begin to seek out a profession and a living,
 Like a man totally at a loss, bereft of intelligence and know-how,
 And then when he sees that all hope has fled,
 He will run away somewhere, deserting you and leaving you an
agunah, an anchored woman...
 This is the history of all Jewish women —
 This is the history of the beautiful Bat-Shua.

(ב)

(9)

מִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא רָאָה בֵּת חֶפְר בֵּת-שׁוּעַ
 לֹא רָאָה מִיָּמָיו אִשָּׁת יִפַּת תֵּאֵר,
 לֹא רָאָה בְּהַדְרָה, מִבְּלֵי צַעֲצוּעַ,
 מִבְּלֵי מַעֲשֵׂה חָרֵשׁ, הַבְּרִיאָה לְטַהֵר.
 אֲבָנִים שְׁלֵמוֹת צָלַע זֹאת נִבְנְתָה,
 לֹא חָלוּ בָּהּ אוֹמָנִים בְּעֲלֵי חֲרָשָׁת.
 תַּחַת יָדָם תִּמְתָּה לֹא נִשְׁחָתָה
 וַיִּגַּע כַּפָּם לֹא אָכַל הַבִּשְׁת.
 עַל כֵּן כָּל מַדּוֹת בָּנוֹת צִיּוֹן הַמְּצַיְנוֹת
 כָּלְלוּ נִפְשׁ בֵּת-שׁוּעַ הַיִּפָּה בְּבָנוֹת.

Whoever has not seen Hefer's* daughter, Bat-Shua,
 Has never seen a beautiful woman in his life,
 Has never seen Creation pristine, unadulterated, unadorned.
 This female was constructed of whole stones,
 Unsullied by human artisanship or craft.
 Her perfection was not marred by their plying hands,
 Nor subject to the futile failures of human endeavor.
 Therefore did the soul of Bat-Shua —
 the most beautiful of women —
 Encompass all the excellent qualities of the daughters of Zion.

* The root ḥ-f-r (חפר) has "shame" as one of its possible meanings.

(10)

טְהִרָה וּפְרִישׁוּת וְחֲרִיצוּת יְדִים,
 תּוֹר אָדָם הַמְעֵלָה עִם שְׁפִלוּת רוּחַ,
 שְׂכָם נְטוּי לְסִבְלָה, אֶרְךְ אַפִּים,
 עַל כָּל כְּבוֹד חוּט חוֹן וְחֶסֶד מְתוּחַ.
 אֱלוֹ לְאַנְיָעוּת נִתַּן דָּם וְעֲצָמוֹת
 וּבֶשֶׁר וְעוֹר קָרַם מִלְמַעְלָה עָלֶיהָ
 לְשֶׁבֶת בְּדַמּוֹת אָדָם עָלֵי אֲדָמוֹת--
 הִזָּה לָהּ תֵּאָר בֵּת-שׁוּעַ וּפְנִיָּה;
 כִּי לֹא כְּבָרוּא כָּל אָדָם אִשָּׁה זֹאת נִבְרָאָה
 כִּי בִּבְרִיאַת נְשִׁיקָה מִיַּד יוֹצְרָה יִצְאָה.

Purity and modesty and skillful diligence,
 The image of a superior person blended with humility,
 A readiness to shoulder heavy duties, a slowness to anger,
 And enhancing all of these, a quality of grace and kindness.
 Were modesty to be given blood and bones
 Taking on flesh and skin upon them,
 To dwell in human form upon the Earth —
 It would have the image and form of Bat-Shua;
 For not like other humans was this woman created,
 But rather by the Divine's creation-through-a-kiss
 did she enter the world.

(11)

קֶרֶן אֹר לָקַח מִנְּגִיחָה לוֹ סָבִיב,
 אֶגְל טַל אֲרוֹת וְרִסִּיס דִּק שְׁמַיִם,
 וּשְׁחֹק צְדִיק תְּמִים וְרִיחַ הָאֲבִיב,
 וְיֶשֶׁם בְּצִלְמוֹ מְמֹרֵט שְׁבַעֲתַיִם,
 וְנִשְׁמָה זָכָה הוֹצִיא מִן הָאוֹצַר,
 עוֹד לֹא יָדְעָה תִּבְל וּמִמְתַּקִּיָּה,
 וּבְרָגַע רְצוֹן נִפְחָה בְּאֶף הַנוֹצַר
 וּתְהִי לְנִפְשׁ חַיָּה -- וְיִשְׁקָהּ,
 וּבְנִשְׁיָקָה זֹאת אִשְׁתַּ חוֹן נִבְרָאָה
 וּבְשֵׁם בֵּת-שׁוּעַ בְּאָדָם נִקְרָאָה.

A ray of light God took from the radiance around Him,
 With a droplet of luminous dew and a speck of Heaven's ether,
 The chuckle of a perfectly righteous man and
 the springtime's fragrance —
 These He placed into his Image, which was sevenfold burnished,
 And a pure soul did He take out from his treasure house,
 The likes of whose sweetness the world had not yet known,
 And in a moment of Grace He breathed into this creation's nostrils
 And when it emerged as a living being — He kissed it,
 And with this kiss a gracious woman was created
 And by the human name of Bat-Shua was she called.

(12)

בְּנִשְׁקָה נִוּלְדָה, בְּנִשְׁקָה גְדֻלָּה.
 אוֹמְנִים וּמְנִיקוֹת עֲרָשָׁה לֹא הִקִּיפוּ,
 אֲדָ נִפְשָׁה בְּסִתֵּר לְרִקּוּם לֹא חִדְלָה
 וּבְקָרִים וּרְגָעִים יִפְלֶה הוֹסִיפוּ.
 כֵּן בְּצַחִיח סָלַע הַגֶּפֶן תֵּדָ שְׂרָשׁ,
 הַשׁוֹלְחַת אַרְבּוֹת שָׁמַיִם בְּדִיהָ!
 הַזְּאֵבָה הַיְנִיקָה רוֹמוּל וְכִרְשׁ
 הַשְּׂבִיעָה גַם אוֹתָהּ חֵלֶב שְׂדֵיהָ,
 כִּי לְמַד לְבְרִיאָה אָבִיהָ אֱלוֹהַּ
 הָיִית אוֹמְנַת טוֹבָה מֵאִין כְּמוֹהָ.

With a kiss was she born, with a kiss was she reared.
 Neither governesses nor nursemaids surrounded her cradle,
 Yet her soul did not cease from developing in secret
 And each new minute and dawn added to its beauty.
 Thus in the dryness of rocky terrain a vine will strike root
 That extends its tendrils toward the portals of heaven!
 The she-wolf that suckled Romulus and Remus
 Gave plentifully to her, too, of the milk of its breasts
 Because her father the Deity gave Creation instructions
 On being a governess of unparalleled excellence.

(13)

עֲתֵרֶת הַגֶּפֶן, קוֹמַת הַתְּמָר,
 אֵלֶּה הָעֵינַיִם לְלֹאוֹת הַתְּכֵלֶת,
 וּלְחַיֵּי הָרִקְמָה -- תוֹלַע נֶאֱמָר,
 זֹאת אִשׁ הַמָּסִים בְּשֶׁלֶג נוֹזֶלֶת,
 זֶה מְגִדֵּל הַשֵּׁן -- לוֹ צִנּוֹר יִקְרָאוּ.
 גְּבַעַת בְּרָכָה זֹאת מִתְחַבֵּאת מְעִין,
 הַלִּיכּוֹת אֱלֹהִים בְּרוּחַ נְשָׂאוּ,
 וַיִּפֵּי קוֹל בְּהֶדֶר נוֹזֵל כִּיּוֹן --
 מִי הוּא הַיּוֹצֵר חֲכָם הַיְדִים
 הַמְּחוֹלֵל כָּל אֵלֶּה עַל הָאֲבָנִים!

A grapevine's luxuriance, a date palm's stature,
 These eyes like loops of light blue,
 Her cheeks an embroidery of scarlet and white wool,
 Fire melting into thawing snow,
 This tower of ivory called her neck.
 This aggregate of blessing sequestered from the eye,
 Bears itself with Divine stateliness as upon a breeze —
 And a beauteous voice trickles majestically like wine —
 Who is the craftsman of such deft virtuosity,
 Who has forged all of these in his workshop?

(14)

אִשָּׁת חוֹן זֹאת נִצְבֶּת לְקִרְאָתֵנוּ
 בְּקוֹמָתָהּ וּבְצַבִּיּוֹנָהּ, בְּעֲצָמָהּ וּבְשָׂרָהּ;
 כָּל נוֹסִיף נְבִיט לֹא תִשָּׁבַע עֵינֵינוּ
 אֶת נֵעַם פְּנֵיהָ, אֶת מְכַלּוֹל הַדְּרָה.
 שְׁלֹשׁ וְעֶשְׂרִים פְּעָמִים חִדַּשׁ הַחֲרָף
 תִּקְוֹפָתוֹ שָׁנָה שָׁנָה עַל פְּנֵיהָ
 וּמֵאוּם לֹא אָחִז כָּל טָרְף,
 כִּי בְעֵלְת בַּעַל הִיא לֹא עוֹד בְּבַתּוּלִיָּה
 יֵשׁ לָנוּ רַק עֵדוֹת נֶאֱמָנֹת אַחַת --
 הַפֶּאֶה הַנִּכְרִית עַל הַפְּדֻחַת.

This charming woman stands before us
 With her stature, her figure, the full force of her presence;
 No matter how much we look at her our eye is not sated
 With the loveliness of her face, the perfection of her beauty.
 Three and twenty times has the winter renewed
 The ravages of its season upon her countenance
 And not a whit of the effect of aging has it inflicted upon her.
 That she is a married woman no longer in her maidenhood
 We have only one bit of reliable evidence —
 The wig and head-covering over her forehead.

(15)

חֶפֶר אָבִיהָ נוֹשֵׂא פְּנִים וְקֶצֶן
 בְּמִקּוֹם מוֹשְׁבּוֹ, הִיא הָעִיר אַיְלוֹן
 רוֹכְבֵי הַרְכָּשׁ יַחְזִיק שָׁם, תָּא הַרְצִיוּ,
 גַּם שְׁלַחַן עָרוּף לְנוֹסְעִים וּמְלוֹן.
 וּבֵתוֹ הַיְחִידָה בְּבֵיתוֹ הָעֶקֶרֶת
 כִּי אִמָּה מָתָה עָלֶיהָ בְּנְעוּרֶיהָ,
 וְסִגְנִים הַנוֹסְעִים דָּרְדָּר זֹאת הַקֶּרֶת
 כָּלֶם פֶּה אֶחָד יַעֲיִדוּ עָלֶיהָ
 כִּי אֵין בְּאַרְץ אִשָּׁת יִפֹּת תֹּאֵר
 כִּי־הַיְחִידָה בֵּת מַחְזִיק בֵּית-הַדָּאָר.

Hefer, her father, a respected citizen and dignitary
 In the place of his residence, the city of Ayalon,*
 Holds the lease for the postal station, for riders and horses
 of the mail,
 He also maintains there a restaurant and inn for travelers.
 His only daughter is the manager and lady of his household,
 For her mother died while she was still young,
 And the officers who journey through this town
 Are unanimous in professing about her
 That there is not another woman so lovely
 As the Jewess, the daughter of the postal station manager.

* Probably a play on the word *aylonit*, a congenitally sterile woman.

(16)

יענו בה גבעלי שושנים אלה
 אם לא, לו למדונה, נגן היטיבה;
 רגל אילה זאת אם לא עשתה פלא
 לו אותה ממחול לא אחור השיבה.
 בית-ספר לא באה, דקדוק לא למדה,
 ובלשון עם ועם צחות דוברת,
 וכצד השעה וככל חקות "המודה"
 אורגת, רוקמת, טוה, תופרת.
 שמעו קולה הערב את תזמר חרש
 ותישן בערב את בתה בערש.

Let these arms like lily stems give witness
 That she could have, if taught, played music beautifully;
 And this leg like that of a doe —
 that she might have done wondrously
 Had she not been prevented from learning to dance.
 To school she never went, nor grammar did she learn,
 And yet she speaks fluently in several languages.
 And she is able when need be to follow all the latest fashions
 In weaving, embroidery, spinning, and sewing.
 Listen, too, to her sweet voice when she sings quietly
 And puts her daughter to sleep in her cradle.

(17)

וביום השבת בעלותה בית-הכנסת,
 הביטו וראו בה מה-תיף בהדרה!
 על שלמת משי סדין שש לובשת,
 עיר זהב ופנינים על חלקת צנארה:
 הצניף הטהור כנזר על ראשה,
 כמלכה קוממיות בין רעותיה צועדת.
 גם הפרוש, עץ היבש, יתגנב לראותה
 - כי גם לו בסתר נפש חומדת -
 ושכינת האל מתענגת עליה
 עת קומתה הזקופה דוחקת רגליה.

And on the Sabbath day, when she goes to the synagogue,
 Look and see how lovely she is in her splendid garb;
 Over a silk dress she wears a fine linen apron,
 A golden brooch and pearls on her smooth neck;
 The pure white head covering like a crown on her head,
 Like a queen she strides among her fellow women,
 Even the ascetic scholar, that dried out piece of wood,
 will come stealthily to see her
 — Because even he secretly has a lustful spirit —
 And the Shekhinah of God's presence gets pleasure from her
 Even as she displaces the Shekhinah with her erect stature.

(ג)

(18)

אך כל זה הָיָה זֶה רַבּוֹת בְּשָׁנִים:
 עָתָה בְּקוֹמָה זְקוּפָה זֹאת תְּלוּיִם רַחֲמִים:
 טְרָדוֹת פְּרִנְסָה, צֶעַר גְּדוּל בָּנִים,
 כִּי חֲנוּת לְבַת-שׁוּעַ וְיִלְדִים שָׁנִים.
 וְכִמּוֹ עַל מִשְׁטְרוֹ נֹצֵב אִישׁ-חַיִל
 יוֹם-יוֹם בְּחֲנוּתָהּ בַּת-שׁוּעַ יוֹשֶׁבֶת,
 וּמֵאֵז הַבֶּקֶר עַד נֶכוֹן הַלַּיִל
 מוֹדְדָת, שׁוֹקֶלֶת, מוֹנֶה, חוֹשֶׁבֶת.
 גַּם בֵּיתָה צוֹפֶיָה וְתַגְדֵּל בְּנִיָּה,
 כִּי גַם אִם הִנֵּה - גַּם אָב לִילְדֵיהָ.

However, all this occurred many years ago;
 Now upon this erect stature millstones are hung;
 The stresses of making a living and the woes of raising children,
 Because Bat-Shua has a store as well as two children,
 And like a soldier staunchly standing at her post,
 Day-in and day-out Bat-Shua sits in her store,
 From early morning until after nightfall,
 Measuring, weighing, counting, computing.
 She also oversees her home and she rears her children,
 For behold she is a mother — but also a father to her children.

(19)

אָב לִילְדֵיהָ - וְאָבִיהֶם אֵיְהוּ?
 אוֹיֵל בְּדַמִּי יָמָיו הַמָּוֶת כָּרְתוֹ?
 אוֹ רוֹכֵל הַמַּחְזִיר בְּעִירוֹת הַנְּהוּ?
 אוֹ יוֹשֵׁב אֶהָל הוּא וְעוֹסֵק בְּתוֹרָתוֹ?
 אוֹ אוֹיֵל חֶסֶר-לֵב שָׁב בֵּית אָבִיהוּ
 וְלֹאֲשָׁה כְּזֹאת נָתַן סֶפֶר-כְּרִיתוֹת?
 בֵּית אָבִיו לֹא רָאָהוּ, שְׂאוּל יֹאמֶר: "לֹא-בֵי הוּא"
 וּבֵית הַמּוֹדֶדֶשׁ: "עֲזַבְנִי לְצַמִּיתוֹת",
 גַּם בְּשׁוּק אֵל תִּבְקָשׁוּ, לֹא תִמְצָאֵהוּ שָׁם -
 הוּא יֵתַע לְבַלִּי-אֶכֶל בְּמַדִּינוֹת הַיָּם.

A father to her children — but where is their father?
 Perhaps death cut short his life at a young age?
 Or, perhaps he is a peddler selling his wares out in the villages?
 Or, one who stays at home, busying himself with the study of Torah?
 Or, perhaps he is a man so foolish
 that he returned to his father's house,
 And to a woman like Bat-Shua, he has given a divorce?
 No. His father's house has not seen him,
 Sheol would say: "He's not here."
 And the house of study: "He has left me in perpetuity."
 In the marketplace...don't go looking there, you'll not find him —
 For he's wandering in faraway countries without a morsel.

(20)

בְּחַמֵּשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה לְחַיֵּי בַת-שׁוּעַ,
 מָצָא לָהּ אָבִיהָ חֲתָן כְּלָבָו.
 הֵם פָּגִים לֹא הִתְרְאוּ - לָמָּה זֶה וּמְדוּעַ?
 יִנָּשְׂאוּ, יַחֲיוּ יַחְדָּו, וְסוּף הָאֵהָבָה לְבוֹא,
 הִרְאָה אֲבֹתָהֶם פְּנֵי שָׂרָה אִמְנִי
 עַד הִקְרִיב לְבוֹא אֶל נַחַל מְצָרִים?
 כֵּן חָיו אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, כֵּן יַחֲיוּ בְּנֵינוּ,
 כִּי שִׁדְכָנוּ הַיּוֹשְׁבֵי בַשָּׁמַיִם:
 אִף בַּת-שׁוּעַ לֹא תִמְרָה פִּי אָבִיהָ
 אִם כִּי לְשָׁנוֹת מְאוּן הִיא כְּבָר הַגִּיעָה.

In the fifteenth year of Bat-Shua's life,
 Her father found her a bridegroom after his own heart.
 They did not meet face to face — why and for what?
 Let them get married, let them live together, and love will
 eventually come.
 Did Abraham see the face of Sarah our matriarch
 Until he drew close to the river of Egypt?
 Thus did our forefathers live, so shall our children.
 For our Matchmaker is the One who dwells in heaven;
 Hence Bat-Shua was not about to disobey her father,
 Although she was already the legal age of majority, of refusal.

(21)

כָּל הוֹלְכֵי דְרָךְ אֶת עַבְדּוֹן יִדְעוּ,
 מִחֲזִיק בַּיִת-הַמְשָׁקִים בְּכִפּוּר פְּרַעְתּוֹן;
 גַּם נָעַר כְּשִׁחִיף עַץ בְּלִי סִפְק שֵׁם רְאוּ,
 הוּא הֶלֶל בְּנוֹ הַיָּחִיד - הוּא הַחֲתָן.
 לוֹ עֵינֵי עֵגֶל, לוֹ פְּאוֹת כְּזַנְבוֹת,
 לוֹ פָּגִים כְּפָנֵי גְרוּגְרֶת רַבִּי צְדוֹק,
 אֵךְ "עֵלוּ" הוּא, בְּקִי בְּשֵׁלֶשׁ בָּבוֹת
 וּבְחֲרִיפוֹתוֹ יְדוּשׁ הָרִים וְדֹק:
 וּבְהַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ בַּר-מִצְוָה בְּאֵלֶּה הַיָּמִים
 דָּרַשׁ בְּסוּגֵיית "הַדְּבִיק שְׁנֵי רְחֻמִּים"....

All travelers are acquainted with the man Avdon,
 Lease-holder of the saloon in the village of Piraton*:
 Undoubtedly they've also seen there a lad scrawny as a wood
 shaving,
 This is Hillel, Avdon's only son — he is the bridegroom.
 He has the eyes of a calf and side curls like tails,
 And a face as gaunt as one of Rabbi Tzaddok's chewed-up dates,
 Nonetheless, he was a "prodigy," proficient in the three "*Bavot*,"**
 And with his acuity he could smash mountains into fine pieces,
 And upon becoming a bar mitzvah in recent days,
 He had given a *drasha* on the talmudic subject concerning
 "the cleaving of two uteruses"....

* The Hebrew root פִּרַע can denote a calamity brought about as a result of Divine punishment or retribution.

** A short reference to the names of three talmudic tractates.

(22)

את הדרשה הזאת, כל הכפר החרידה,
 שמע חפר ותדבק נפשו בדרוש
 ויאמר: אך זה חתן לבתי היחידה,
 אך זה קדיש לי, זה בן לי ויורש:
 ויהיו התנאים: כי עוד לשנתים
 ילך החתן לשיבת ולזון,
 נדה יתן חפר זקוקים מאתים
 ושלש שנים על שלחנו מזון,
 ובשוב הלל מנלזון יהי יום הלולא
 בחצי החודש שמאלו בתולה.

This exposition, which had stirred the entire village,
 Hefer heard and his heart, enamored, cleaved to the expounder,
 Saying: "Indeed he alone is a bridegroom for my only daughter,
 He alone will say *kaddish* after me, he is to be my son and heir.
 The conditions of engagement were as follows: another two years
 The bridegroom would attend the Volozhin Yeshiva,
 With Hefer providing a dowry of 200 coins
 And three years of board at his table.
 And upon Hillel's return from Volozhin there was to be a feast day
 In the middle of the month whose sign is Virgo."*

* Auguring good luck for the young virgin.

(23)

כל בנות אילון בבת-שויע קנאו:
 "המאשרת: במה זכתה לזאת הגדלה?"
 וחיים של עשר וכבוד לה נבאו.
 ובת-שויע -- מי ידע סתרי לב בתולה?:
 בתולע האדימה יום בוא הבשרה
 ותדם - ומלה איננה דוברת:
 ושתיקה כהודאה אם כלל הוא בתורה
 בלי ספק שמחה בחלקה היא ומאשרת,
 ומי יאמין לדברי הנשים הטפלות
 האומרות כי בת-שויע בוכה בלילות?

All the young girls of Ayalon envied Bat-Shua.
 "That happy girl! By what virtue did she merit this bounty?"
 And they prophesied for her a life of wealth and honor.
 As for Bat-Shua — who knows the secret thoughts of a maiden?
 Like scarlet she blushed on the day the good news came
 But she was silent — and spoke not a word:
 And if "keeping silent is tantamount to confession"
 be a rule in Torah law,
 Without a doubt she must be happy and content with her lot,
 For who would give credence to the words of lowly women
 Who were saying that Bat-Shua cries at night?

(24)

בוֹכָה - לָמָּה תִּבְדֹּךְ? עַד כֹּה הִיְתָה גּוֹלָם,
 עֲתָה יַעֲשֶׂנָּה כְּלִי אִישׁ דָּגוּל מִרְבָּבָה:
 אִישׁ - אִם אֵינּוּ יוֹדֵעַ לְשֹׂאוֹל בְּהוֹיּוֹת הָעוֹלָם
 עוֹקֵר הָרִים הוּא בְּהוֹיּוֹת דְּאֲבֵי וְרָבָא:
 אִם אוֹמְנוֹת וְלִשׁוֹן אֵינְנוּ יוֹדֵעַ
 יוֹדֵעַ הוּא כִּי אִשָּׁה נִקְנִית בְּשֵׁלֶשׁ דְּרָכִים:
 אִם מִיָּמִיו לֹא רָאָה צוּרַת מְטִבֵּעַ
 אָלֶף דָּף גְּמָרָא לוֹ בְּקוּפָסָא מוֹנָחִים
 מְתַבְּלִים בְּמַהְרָשׁ"א וּב"פְּנִי-יְהוֹשֻׁעַ", -
 הֲאֵין דִּי לָךְ בְּזָה, מוֹדַעְתָּנוּ בֵּית-שׁוּעַ?!

Cries?— why would she cry?

Until now, she was like an unfinished mass of clay,
 Now a man preeminent among ten thousand
 will make her into a finished vessel,
 A man— even if he knows not a thing about matters in the real
 world,
 He can still uproot mountains in the ethereal matters of Abaye and
 Rava,
 If he does not know a trade or a language
 He knows that a woman is acquired in three ways.*
 If in all his days he has not had the slightest knowledge about money
 He still has one thousand pages of Talmud in his pocket
 Interlaced with the commentaries of the Maharsha
 and the Pnei Yehoshua—
 Is this not enough for you, our friend Bat-Shua?

* A sardonic allusion to the fact that of the "three ways" — money, contract, and intercourse — the groom undoubtedly understood the latter.

(25)

וּבִשְׁבַע עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה לְחַיֵּי בֵּית-שׁוּעַ
 הִשְׂיָאָה אָבִיהָ לְבַחֵיר לְבָבוּ,
 וְתָהִי הַחֲתָנָה בְּיוֹם הַקְּבוּעַ
 בְּעָרֵב שַׁבַּת קֹדֶשׁ פְּרֻשֶׁת "כִּי-תָבוֹא".
 אָתָּה יוֹם תּוֹכַחָה: מִזְלָךְ גְּרִים
 כִּי לֹא נִתְקַיְמָה נְבוֹאָת רַעֲיוֹת בֵּית חֶפְרָה,
 כִּי בְּמָקוֹם חַיֵּי אֲשֶׁר הָיָה חַיֵּיהָ מְרִים,
 כִּי רַבְצָה בָּהּ הָאֵלֶּה הַכְּתוּבָה בְּסִפְרָה,
 כִּי בְּעֵלָה הָעֶלְוִיב נִשָּׂא אִשָּׁה טָרָם
 וְכִין לְשִׁבְתוֹ בֵּית וּמֵאֲכָלוּ כָרָם.

And when Bat-Shua was seventeen years old,
 Her father married her off to the chosen one of his heart,
 And the wedding took place on the assigned day
 On the eve of the Sabbath of the "Ki Tavo" Torah portion,
 Woe you day of biblical rebuke and curses! Your bad omen caused
 The prophecy of Bat-Shua's girlfriends not to be fulfilled,
 That instead of a life of happiness her life was bitter,
 Because the curse written in the Torah portion crouched within her,
 Because her pathetic husband had married a wife
 Before having prepared a house for dwelling
 or a vineyard for his sustenance.

(26)

את הלל בן עבדון זה מפרעתון
הבהילו ביום החפה מבית-הכנסת,
ויפתח החזן את פי האתון
ותען אחריו: הרי את מקדשת...
ובכלות הרב את שבע הברכות
נערו המשררים כגורי אריות,
ומכל פנה המטירו השפחות
על ראש חתן וכלה כשות וקליות,
וכלי-הזמר הרעימו בקולי-קולות
והנשים מחאו כף ותצאנה במחולות.

This Hillel son of Avadon from Piraton
They whisked away from the synagogue on his wedding day
And the hazzan caused the donkey to open his mouth*
And he repeated after him: "Behold, you are sanctified to me..."
And with the completion of the *sheva berachot* by the rabbi
The cantor's assistants brayed like lion cubs
And from every corner the maidservants showered
Upon the heads of the bride and groom hops and parched corn,
And the musicians made the most raucous noises
While the women clapped hands and came out dancing.

* See Num 22:28.

(27)

ומה האנחה גוף אדם שוברת
תרצע אָזננו משאון המצלתים?
"אין קול אנחה, כי קול פד החרס
המנפץ לזכר חרבן ירושלים",
חרבו העיר אלפי שנה נזכרה
ולחרבו האמה נקשית לבנו,
ובקול כלי החרס ביום החפה נשברה
לא נשמע נאקת בנינו אחרינו:
"הה, הפח נשבר ואנחנו נלכדנו,
ויבנבכי ים מאין מעמד הורדנו"

But what is that gut-wrenching groan
That rivets our ear more than the tumult of the timbrels?
"That is not the sound of a groan but rather the sound of the glass
Being smashed in remembrance of the destruction of Jerusalem."
The city's destruction we remember for thousands of years
But to the destruction of our people we harden our hearts,
And with the clatter of the ceramics we break on the wedding day
We do not hear the screaming of our children
who are to come after us:
"Woe, the glass packet [pun on the word for "a trap"]
is broken yet we are trapped,
And into the ocean's swirl with no foothold have we been lowered."

(28)

כְּקָרִיעַת יַם סוּף הַזְּחוּגִים קָשִׁים:
 בֶּן וּבַת יִשְׂרָאֵל - אֵלֶּה חַיֵּיהֶם:
 מִסָּבִיבָם מִדְּבַר עֲקָרְבַיִם וּנְחָשִׁים,
 בְּעַקְבָּם הָאוֹיֵב, יָם זֹעֵף לִפְנֵיהֶם -
 "דַּבֵּר וַיִּסְעוּ!" יֹאמְרוּ שְׁלֹנֵי עוֹלָם,
 וְהֵם קוֹפְצִים הַיָּמָה בְּאַמוּנָה אֶמֶן:
 רֵאשִׁית דְּרָכָם צְלָחָה: מִימִינָם וּשְׂמֹאלָם
 הָיוּ נוֹזְלִים לְצוּרִים זָבִי דָבֵשׁ וְשֶׁמֶן,
 בֶּן לִילָה יָשׁוּבוּ הַפְּמִים הַזְּדוֹנִים...
 וּבַעֲמֶק הַחֲרוּץ הַמְּנִים-הַמְּנִים!

Like splitting the Red Sea is match-making difficult!
 A Jewish boy and girl — such is their life.
 Around them a wilderness of scorpions and snakes,
 On their heels the enemy with a raging sea before them,
 "Speak and let them journey forward!"
 say the complacent ones of this world,
 And they jump into the sea with the purest faith.
 At the outset their road is fortune-filled:
 To the right and left of them
 It is as if the walls of water have congealed into rocks
 dripping with honey and oil,
 But overnight the treacherous waters return...
 And flood the channel of dry land with waves upon waves!

(ד)

(29)

וּבַת-שׁוּעַ וּבַעֲלָה יָשְׁבוּ שְׁלֹשׁ שָׁנִים
 וַיֹּאכְלוּ דָגָן שָׁמַיִם עַל שְׁלַחַן רַב חֶפְרָ:
 הִיא הִרְתָּה וַיִּלְדָּה וְהִינִיקָה בָּנִים,
 הוּא הִתְפַּלֵּל וְלָמַד וְקָרָא בְּסֵפֶר.
 בְּרַב־עֵיִת פָּסַק הַמֶּן, וְאוֹכְלֵי הַבֵּיטוּ
 מִסָּבִיבָם וַיִּהְיוּ לְנֹצֵיבֵי אֶבֶן:
 מַה-יֹּאכְלוּ הֵם? מָה לִילְדֵימוֹ יוֹשִׁיטוּ?
 אֵיךְ יִבְנוּ בֵיתָם מִבְּלֵי לִבְנִים וְתִבְנוּ?
 כִּי מֵיטֵב שָׁנוֹתָם חָלְפוּ וּמְאוּמָה לֹא עָשׂוּ
 בְּלִתֵּי אִם הַנִּפְשׁוֹת אֲשֶׁר רָכְשׁוּ.

Thus Bat-Shua and her husband sat for three years
 And ate from heaven's produce at Hefer's table.
 She conceived, bore, and weaned children,
 He prayed, learned, and read books.
 In the fourth year the manna ceased, and those eating it looked
 Around them and became petrified, pillars of stone.
 What would they eat? What would they give to their children?
 How would they build their house without bricks and straw?
 For their best years had elapsed and they had done not a thing
 Except for the souls [the children] they had acquired.

(30)

גַּם רַב חֶפֶר רָאָה בְּיָמַיִם הָאֵלֶּה
 אֶת הַיָּד הַגְּדוֹלָה הַמְּשַׁפְּלֶת רַמִּים,
 וַיְמִי זֶה הָאָמִין כִּי יַעֲשֶׂה פֶּלֶא
 גַּם בְּדוֹר לֹא-אֲמוּן זֶה כְּשֵׁנוֹת עוֹלָמִים?
 רָכַב אִשׁ וְסוּסֵי אִשׁ עֲפִים בְּקוֹל פְּחָדִים,
 מִיִּמּוֹת אֱלֹהֵיו לֹא נִשְׁמַע כְּמֹהוּ
 נִשְׂאִים בְּסַעֲרָה דְרָךְ הַקָּדִים;
 עַל יָדָם בְּרוּחַ נְטוּי קוֹ תִּהְיוּ -
 הִקְוּ יוֹלֵדֵי הַקּוֹל, יָרִיץ מִכְתָּבִים,
 וַיִּבְרָכֵב אִשׁ יַעֲבְרוּ עוֹבְרִים וְשָׁבִים.

Rav Hēfer, too, witnessed during these days
 The great hand that brings low the mighty,
 And who could believe that a miracle would be wrought
 Even in this faithless generation, as in days of yore?
 A fiery chariot and fiery horses speeding along with terrifying
 sound,
 The likes of which had not been heard since the days of Elijah,
 Were carried along with hurricane force from the East;
 Next to them in the air a magical wire was extended—
 The wire transmitting a message, sending letters quickly,
 While in the fiery chariot travelers were passing to and fro.

(31)

אֶרְחוֹת אִיד אֵלֶּה הִקְיִפוּ הַפְּלֶךְ
 אִם כִּי עַד אֵילוֹן טָרָם יִנְטוּ:
 וַיִּכְבֵּר חֲדָלוֹ הַרְכָּשׁ, רָצִי הַמְּלָךְ,
 הַנוֹסְעִים בְּסוּסִים יוֹם-יוֹם יִמְעָטוּ,
 יוֹם-יוֹם יִדַּל חֶפֶר, יִרְזֶה צְרוּר כְּסָפוֹ,
 הָאֲרוֹת חֲרָבוֹת, הַסוּסִים נִמְכְּרוּ,
 תָּם כְּסֹף הַנוֹסְעִים וּשְׂכַר הַמְּסַפּוֹא
 רַק סוּסִים אֲרַבְעָה בְּאֶרְזָה נִשְׁאָרוּ,
 הֵם יִתְּנוּ לַעֲת זַקְנָה לוֹ לֶחֶם לַחֵץ
 גַּם אוֹתוֹ עִם יִלְדָיו עַל-כְּרָחוּ יִחַץ.

These woeful innovations encompassed the region,
 Although they had not yet been extended to Ayalon;
 Already the mail delivery system had ceased, the royal couriers,
 Who traveled on horses grew fewer day by day,
 Each day Hēfer grew poorer, his money purse thin,
 The stables in disrepair, the horses having been sold,
 Gone was the money of the travelers
 and the profit from the horse-feed,
 Only four horses remained in the stable,
 They were to provide for him in his old age a bare subsistence
 But even this he would be compelled to divide with his children.

(32)

אז יחל הלל לשחר לטרף...
 אך שוא יגזור על זמיו, יחתף על שמאל,
 בכל ההצלחה תפן לו ערף,
 כי לא נאכל היום אם לא נכין מתמול,
 ומה יעשה תלמיד חכם שאין בו דעה?
 להיות גובה המס -- לא ידע לשון המדינה,
 לשוחט -- רך לב הוא, למלמד -- חלוש ראה,
 לסוחר -- אין לו כסף, לחזן -- קול גגינה:
 עוד יש פרנסת שמשים, שדכנים,
 אך על אחת מהנה שבעה בטלנים.

Then Hillel began looking around for food...
 But in vain did he make overtures on the right
 and snatch at things on the left,
 In everything success turned its back on him.
 Because we cannot eat today if we did not prepare yesterday.
 And what is a Torah scholar without practical knowledge to do?
 To become a collector for taxation,
 he does not even know the language of the country.
 To be a ritual slaughterer — he is too weak-hearted,
 To be a teacher — he is weak-lunged for screaming,
 To be a merchant — he has no capital; a cantor — he has no ear,
 There still are the livelihoods of sextons and matchmakers,
 But, for each of these, seven idlers are queuing up.

(33)

ובין כה יום ירדף יום, ירח ישיג ירח,
 הלחיים והקבה חלקם ידרשו!
 הכסף המזמן נמס בקרח,
 גם מתנות-הדרךשה באו בית הנשה.
 מה-אחריתנו, הלל? - תשאל בת-שווע -
 התשפח כי הנד בעל אשה ובנים?
 - למדינות הים אנסה לנוע:
 שם, יאמרו הבריות, הכסף כאבנים.
 אולי יקרה אליהו לקראתי
 ויגל עיני לראות מקור פרנסתי.

In the meantime one day follows the next, month follows month,
 The cheeks and stomach demand their due,
 The ready cash has melted like ice,
 Even the wedding gifts have been seized by the creditor.
 What will befall us, Hillel — asks Bat-Shua —
 Have you forgotten that you have a wife and children?
 — To distant lands I will attempt to journey:
 There, people say, money is like stones,
 Perhaps Elijah will appear and come my way
 And reveal to me the source of my livelihood.

(34)

הוי הלל, מה-תפעל, בת-שוע, מה-תחילין?
 מעל הטלית העטרה הסרתם
 ובתי-הכסף מכיס התפלין,
 ובכסף נמאס לצורך מכתם:
 כסף קדשים זה אחרית קנניו
 לקח הלל לבלי ינצל את ביתו
 וילך אל ארץ מפני אשתו ובניו:
 ובת-שוע מכרה תכשיטיה בצאתו,
 ותפתח לה חנות ובית מרפלת
 למכור פל ועדשים, גרש וסלת.

Oh, Hillel, what are you capable of doing, Bat-Shua,
 what can you hope for?
 You removed the gilded embroidery from the prayer shawl,
 And the silver cases from the pouch of the phylacteries.
 And for a paltry amount you sold them to the jeweler:
 This holy money, the last of his possessions
 Hillel took so as not to take his family's last resources,
 And he went to another country, away from his wife and children.
 And Bat-Shua, having sold her jewelry upon his departure,
 Opened for herself a store and grocery
 For selling peas and lentils, cereals and flour.

(35)

בחנותה זאת על משמרתה עומדת
 יום-יום בת-שוע מבקר עד ליל,
 תמיד גם תשקול גם ביתה פוקדת,
 גם בניה תגדל, אשת-החיל.
 שורו נא הילד בן חמש שנים
 בבקר בבקר הולך החדר,
 רחץ למשעי ולחם לו לבש שנים,
 גם פתו אתו וספריו בסדר -
 הכרת פניו תען בסקירה אחת
 כי עין אם רחמניה עליו משגחת.

Inside this store of hers, Bat-Shua stays at her post
 Day after day from dawn until dusk,
 She would measure and weigh and also manage her household,
 She would rear her children, too — this woman of valor!
 Just look at this boy of five,
 Every morning he goes to the *heder*,
 He is washed thoroughly and to keep him warm
 he is dressed in flannel
 He also has his loaf of bread along and his books in order,
 Just a cursory glance at his demeanor reveals
 That the eye of a caring mother is watching over him.

(36)

וְאַחֲזֵנוּ הַיְלָדָה בֵּיתָהּ נִשְׁאַרָה
 פְּנֵיהָ מִשְׁנֵה קְלִסְתָּר פְּנֵי אַחִיהָ,
 אִמָּהּ תִּלְבִּישֶׁנָּה וּתְסַרֵק שְׁעָרָה
 וּבְשֹׁחוֹק נַחַת שׁוֹמֵרֶת אֶת פִּיהָ.
 כִּי יָדֶיהָ הַקְּטָנוֹת כְּפּוֹתֵינוּ עַל לְבָהּ,
 עֵינֶיהָ בְּאִמָּהּ וּבְשִׁלְמָתָהּ הַחֲדָשָׁה,
 הַקְּטָנָה בְּקוֹל יוֹנִים קוֹרְאֵת בְּחֻבָּה:
 "תּוֹרָה צְנָה לָנוּ מִשָּׁה - מוֹרְשָׁה...
 אֲשַׁמַּע מוֹסֵר אָב, תּוֹרַת אִם אֶקְשִׁיבָה,
 וּבְעֵינַי אֶל וְאָדָם דְּרָכֵי אִיטִיבָה."

And his little sister remaining at home.
 Whose face is a duplicate image of her brother's,
 Her mother would dress her and comb her hair
 While with a gentle smile the young girl is politely quiet.
 For her little hands are folded on her chest,
 With her eyes intent upon her mother and upon her new dress
 The little girl with the voice of a dove recites lovingly:
 "The Torah did Moses command us, a heritage...
 [to the community of Jacob]"
 "I will listen to the instruction of my father;
 I will pay heed to the teaching of my mother,
 And in the eyes of God and man, I shall conduct myself properly."

(37)

מוֹסֵר אָב תִּשְׁמְעֵי -- הוּא יְתוּמָה חֲזָה:
 אָבִיךָ תַּעֲהָ בְּאַרְצוֹת מְבַקֵּשׁ אֶת אֱלֹהָיו.
 מִי יָדַע מְקוֹמוֹ? לֹא תִשׁוּרְנוּ עֵין אֵינָה.
 אֲתִכֶּם שָׁכַח -- גַּם קוֹל מְלִיךָ נִחְבָּאוּ.
 בְּשָׁנָה הֶרְאִישׁוּנָה עוֹד הַרִיץ לִפְעָמִים
 אֲגָרוֹת אֶהְבָּה וּמְכַתְּבִים נְמַלְצִים,
 עֵתָה חָדְלוּ אֲמַרְיוּ זֶה רַבִּים יָמִים:
 לִשְׁוֹא תִצְפֶּה בַת-שׁוּעַ דְּרָךְ בֵּית הַרְצִים:
 "שׁוּמֵר מַה-מְלִילָה, שׁוּמֵר מַה-מְלִיל!"
 מִתִּי יָבוֹא מְכַתֵּב וּבִשְׂרָה מִהֲלֵל!

To the instruction of your father you shall listen —
 Oh, living orphan, your father is wandering abroad
 in search of Elijah.
 Who knows where he's located?
 Not even the eye of a hawk can spot him.
 You he has forgotten —
 even the sound of his communications has grown faint.
 During the first year he still occasionally dispatched
 Loving letters and flowery missives,
 Currently, his dispatches have ceased for many days now:
 In vain does Bat-Shua anticipate along the route of the couriers'
 station:
 "Watchman, what of the night,
 Watchman, what of the night?" [Isaiah 21:11]
 When will a letter and some news arrive from Hillel?

(38)

בין כה יום ירדף יום, ירח ישיג ירח,
 וכבר פעמים החליפה האדמה
 בגדי קיץ וסתיו, דשא וקרח,
 ועיניה הסערה עוד לא נחמה.
 עוד עיניה פלות, לבה נגוע:
 וכבר קרא לה שם חדש בשער,
 כי לא עוד בשמה תקרא "בת-שויע",
 "העגונה" יקראו לה זקן ונער,
 ותחת היותה סמל הקנאה בעלומיה
 היתה למנוד ראש עתה בין רעותיה.

In the meanwhile, day rushes upon day, month follows month,
 And already twice has the earth changed
 From summer to fall garb, from verdure to frosty ice,
 And the unhappy storm-tossed soul remains unconsoled,
 Her eyes are still spent with longing, her heart afflicted.
 And already she is being referred to by a new name,
 For she is no longer called by her name "Bat-Shua,"
 "The *agunah*" she is called by old and young alike.
 And in place of her being a symbol of envy in her youth
 She has now become an object of shocked lament among her friends.

(39)

ומרדפי אמרים יפיהו קרת
 ושמועה על שמועה יוליד העוף:
 זה יאמר: נשא הלל אשה אחרת,
 וזה: טבע במים שאין להם סוף:
 זה: עשה עשר וילד אי כתיים,
 וזה: המיר דתו, נמפר לעקר.
 ובגישראל אין אז כתבי-העתים
 לדרש אחרי הבועלים, להכחיש שמועות שקר
 לא נשאר לנשים עזובות אמללות
 רק מחלת-לב נצחת ועינים פלות.

And gossip mongers diffused rumor throughout the city
 And rumor upon rumor was spread as if by a bird in flight;
 This one would say: "Hillel married another woman."
 And this one: "He drowned in an abyss of water."
 And this one: "He became rich and moved to the isle of Crete."
 And this one: "He renounced his religion and became a Christian."
 And among Jews, there were not yet periodicals
 To advertise a search for runaway husbands, to refute false rumors.
 There remained for the wretched abandoned women
 Only eternal heartache and eyes wasted from longing.

(40)

גם אח יש לצרה - רע לשעיר:
 חפר מת פתאם, עת אזניו שמעו
 כי תעבר גם דרך אילון העיר
 מסלת-הברזל השבץ אחזהו.
 עתה בת-שוע על דרך חיה
 גלמודה עומדת, אין בא לישועתה!
 עוד תתחזק אל עין ראים, תעמיד פניה,
 אף כי בלילות תמסה ערשה בדמעתה!
 ובכך-- מהרי, הישועה, מאשר תבאי,
 פן ידקנה עניה וישימנה פראי.

One trouble begets another, calamity comes in pairs:
 Hefer suddenly died; at the time his ears heard tell
 That the route of the railroad was to pass through
 The city of Ayalon, as well, he suffered a stroke.
 Now Bat-Shua stood all alone on her life's path,
 Lonely and abandoned, with no one coming to save her;
 She maintained her composure, pretending, before the public eye,
 But, at night, she made moist her pillow with tears;
 Hence hurry up, salvation, from wheresoever you may come
 Lest her affliction grind her down and
 render her a terrible sight to see.

(41)

אך דמעת עשוקים לא מים מגרים,
 באוצר תנתן כמרגלית טובה:
 אנקת אביונים לא שריקות עדרים -
 יש און שומעת וישועה קרובה.
 אם רע לב אדם, סבלות מתי שוא,
 ימלאו פני תבל מטה וצעקה-
 עין אל לברואיו ורחמיו על כל מעשיו,
 הוא יעשה לעשוקים משפט וצדקה:
 התאוששי, בת-שוע, קוי נפש זכה,
 גם לך הקדים אל חנון הרפואה למכה.

Aye, the tear of the oppressed is not merely spilled water,
 In a treasure-house is it placed like a precious jewel:
 The painful cries of poor people are not the cry of sheep,
 There is a listening ear and salvation close by.
 If the evil of human hearts, the foolishness of evil lying people,
 Fill the earth with corruption and outcry,
 The eye of God is upon His creatures
 and His mercies over all the works of His hands.
 He will effect justice and righteousness for the oppressed:
 Regain your strength, Bat-Shua, dare to hope, oh pure soul.
 Even for you has a merciful God anticipated a cure
 for your affliction.

(ה)

(42)

הַסֵּתוֹ עָבַר וַיְמִי הָאָבִיב בָּאוּ,
 שְׁלֵמָתָהּ בַּחֲרֹף הָאֲדָמָה פִּשְׁטָהּ:
 אֶכֶר וַיּוֹגֵב לְמַלְאכְתֶּם יֵצְאוּ,
 כָּל נַחְלֵי הַבְּתוֹת יִהְיִמוּ עִתָּהּ.
 גַּם אַיָּלוֹן הִקְיָצָה לְחַיִּים חֲדָשִׁים:
 הַמְּלֹאכָה הַחֲלָה. מִכָּל צֶד כְּנֹשְׂרִים
 יָבֹאוּ אֵלֶיהָ סוֹלְלִים, חֲרָשִׁים,
 סוּפְרִים גַּם חוֹפְרִים וּבּוֹנֵי הַגְּשָׁרִים
 וּפֶאֶבִי הַמְּפַקֵּחַ עַל בְּנֵי הַמְּסֻלָּה
 לְשִׁכּוֹר פּוֹעֲלִים לְמַלְאכָה בָּא בַתְּחִלָּה.

Fall has passed and the days of spring arrived,
 The earth has shed its winter garment:
 Farmer and husbandman have gone out to their work,
 All the rivers of the wasteland are now rushing.
 Ayalon, too, has awakened to new life:
 The work project is under way. From all sides there come
 Flocking toward Ayalon, like eagles, builders, craftsmen,
 Clerks, as well as excavators and bridge builders
 And Fabi, the supervisor over the building of the railroad track,
 Came early on to hire workers for the project.

(43)

וּפֶאֶבִי אִישׁ יְהוּדִי (פִּיבִישׁ שְׁמוֹ לְפָנַיִם)
 מְשֻׁכָּל בְּכָל דְּרָכָיו, לְבוֹ לֵב מִתְנָה,
 אֶלְמָן הוֹלֵךְ בְּגִפּוֹ (אִשְׁתּוֹ מָתָה לֹא-בָנִים)
 וַיְמִי חָיָו שְׁלֵשִׁים וּשְׁתַּיִם שָׁנָה.
 בְּאַמוּנַת רוּחַ וּבְלִשׁוֹן לְמוֹדִים
 הִפִּיק מֵאֵת כָּל יוֹדְעָיו רְצוֹן וַיְדִידוֹת:
 נֶאֱדָנָיו (אִישׁ נוֹצְרִי, לֹא מִזְרַע הַיְהוּדִים
 עַל כֵּן יָתַן לַיהוּדִים עֲבוּדָה וּפְקֻדוֹת)
 רָאָה רַחֵב דַּעְתּוֹ, נִפְשׁוֹ נִפְשׁ בְּרָכָה,
 וַיִּתְנֶהוּ רֹאשׁ עַל עוֹשֵׂי הַמְּלֹאכָה.

And Fabi was a Jewish man (Faybish being his name beforehand),
 Enlightened in all his ways with a magnanimous heart,
 A widower living alone (his wife had died without children),
 And thirty-two years of age.
 With his integrity and cultivated speech
 He elicited good will and friendship from all who knew him:
 And his employer (a Christian man, not of Jewish nationality
 Who, therefore, would give work and administrative responsibility
 to Jews)
 Perceived the breadth of his knowledge and of his soul,
 which was bounteous,
 And so made him chief over all of the workers.

(44)

בֵּית הַחוֹמָה נִכַּח חֲנוּת בַּת-שׁוּעַ
 בְּנוֹי לְתַלְפִּיּוֹת מִכָּל בֵּיתֵי הָעִיר,
 שָׁם שָׁם רַבִּי פֶּאֶבִי לוֹ מִשְׁכַּן קְבוּעַ,
 שָׁם לְשֵׁכֶת הַסּוֹפְרִים, עָלֶיהָ יַעִיר.
 אֶל שֶׁלַחַן הַמְּכַתֵּב הַשְּׁחֵר יִמְצְאוּנוּ
 וְלְדוֹרְשָׁיו יִמָּצֵא עַד עֶשֶׂר שָׁעוֹת,
 מֵאֲזַ עַד הַצְּהַרִים בְּמַעוֹנוֹ אֵינְנוּ,
 כִּי יִשׁוּט בְּעִיר בְּגִזְזֵיכֶם וּבְעֶרְכָּאוֹת,
 אַחֵר יִצָּא הַשָּׂדֶה לְרֵאוֹת בְּמִלְאָכָה,
 וּבְעֶרֶב יָנוּחַ - יוֹם יוֹם יַעֲשֶׂה כָכָה.

A dwelling in the city wall facing Bat-Shua's store,
 Built higher than all the houses of the city
 Is where Fabi established his permanent residence,
 In the same place as the clerk's office, which Fabi supervised.
 The dawn would find him at his writing table
 And for those wishing to see him, he was available until ten o'clock,
 From then until noon he was not at home,
 Because he would walk around the city,
 in the archives and legal offices
 Afterward he would go out to the field to oversee the work,
 And at night he would rest —
 every day he would follow the same routine.

(45)

וּבְנִיחָה לֹא יִבְלֶה עֵתוֹ בְּהַבֵּל,
 כִּי יִהְיֶה בְּסִפְרִים, יִכְתּוֹב וַיַּחְבֵּר,
 יִקְרָא כְּתָבֵי-הָעֵת, יִפְרֹט עַל נֶבֶל,
 אוּ בְּמוֹשֵׁב חֲכָמֵי לֵב נְגִידִים יְדַבֵּר:
 אוּ בְּגִנַּת הַבַּיִתוֹ יִצֵּא לְשׁוּחַ.
 אוּ כִּי יִחְלִץ בַּת-עֵינוֹ בְּשִׁפּוֹפֶרֶת,
 יַעֲמֵד עַל יַד הַחֲלוֹן הַפְּתוּחַ,
 יִשְׁגִּיחַ אֶל הָעוֹבְרִים בְּרָחוֹב הַקֶּרֶת,
 וּבְקִמְטֵי מִצַּח אִישׁ וּבְנֹטְפֵי זַעַת אָפָיו
 יִקְרָא כַּעַס עֲנִינוֹ, יִרְאֶה רֵיב שְׂרַעְפָּיו.

And while resting he would not spend his time on nonsense,
 But rather he would peruse books, write letters and essays,
 He'd read journals and play a musical instrument
 Or he would speak impressively among fellow intellectuals,
 Or go out to the garden to stroll, muse, and think;
 Or he would peer through a telescope,
 standing next to the open window,
 Gazing at the passers-by along the street of the city,
 And in the wrinkles of a man's forehead
 and the droplets of sweat on his brow,
 He would read that individual's problems and inner stresses.

(46)

וַיֵּרָא אִשָּׁת יֶפֶת-מִרְאָה רְכָה בְּשָׂנִים
 נֹכַח פֶּתַח בֵּיתוֹ בְּחֲנוּת יוֹשֶׁבֶת:
 וַיֵּרָא כִּי בָּבֹא אִישׁ לִקְנוֹת תְּצַהִיל לוֹ פָּנִים
 וּבְצֵאתוֹ יִקְבְּצוּ פָּארוֹר, יִתְּנוּ עֲצָבֶת.
 וַיֵּרָאָהּ יוֹשֶׁבֶת שְׂמֵאלָהּ תַּחַת
 רֵאשָׁה וַיִּמְיֶנָה טַפְחָה עוֹלְלָיָהּ,
 וּבְרַחֲמִים גְּדוֹלִים אֲלֵיהֶם מְשַׁנַּחַת
 וּדְמָעוֹת נִגְרוֹת מְרִיסֵי עֵינֶיהָ:
 וַיִּשְׁאַל: "מִי זֹאת הָאִשָּׁה הַהַגּוֹנָה."
 וַיַּעֲנֶהוּ: "הִיא בֵּת-שׁוּעַ הָעֲגוּנָה!"

And he saw a beautiful young woman
 Sitting in a store opposite the entranceway of his house:
 He saw that when a person came to buy
 she would put on a happy face
 But when he left, her face would turn gloomy, betray sadness.
 And he would see her sitting with her left hand beneath
 Her head, while with her right hand
 she attended to her small children,
 And with great compassion looking after them
 While tears poured from her eyelashes;
 And Fabi asked: "Who is this decent woman?"
 They answered him: "She is Bat-Shua the *agunah*!"

(47)

רַבִּים לְמָרוֹם מְכַשְׁלִים וּפְגָעִים
 הַנְּכוֹנִים לְבַחֲרֵי-הַיְצוּרִים בְּאֶרֶץ:
 מִי יֵשֵׂא רֹאשׁ מְשַׁלַּחַת מְלֶאכֶי רָעִים,
 יִפְרְצוּהוּ כָּל יָמָיו פָּרָץ עַל פָּרָץ?
 כָּל נֶגַע, כָּל מַחְלָה, קָלוֹן וּקְצָפָה.
 מִסְּפָנוֹת וְחֹסֶר, נִקְיוֹן שָׂנִים,
 קִנְאָה וּשְׂנִינָה, פְּלָצוֹת, זִלְעָפָה,
 לֵב רָגַז, מֵר נֶפֶשׁ, כְּלִיוֹן עֵינַיִם,
 וּלְאִשָּׁה עֲבָרָה עוֹד נֶגַע אֶחָד:
 "הָעֲגוּן" - הַכֹּל יְכִיל וְכוּלֵּם יַחַד.

Heaven has many obstacles and afflictions
 Awaiting Man, the pinnacle of creation;
 Who can list the bevy of evil angels
 That beleaguer him all his days with affliction upon affliction?
 Every plague, disease, disgrace, and source of anguish,
 Penury and lack, virtual starvation,
 Anxiety of heart, bitterness of soul, devastating longing,
 And still for the Hebrew woman there is one additional plague:
 "Iggun," "to be made an *agunah* —
 including and exceeding all the above.

(48)

אֶל שְׁמַע שֵׁם זֶה אָחֳזָה פֶּאֶבִי חֲלָחָה
 וַיִּכְמְרוּ רַחֲמָיו לְחַמְלָה אֵלֶיהָ,
 כִּי שָׁעַר בְּנַפְשׁוֹ נֶפֶשׁ הָאִמְלָלָה
 וַיֹּאמֶר לְרֵאוֹתָהּ לְדַעַת חַיִּיהָ.
 עַל כֵּן בָּא בַחֲנוּתָהּ לְמִקְנָה וּלְקַנְיָן,
 וּבְדַבְרוֹ עָמָה שִׁסַּע אוֹתָהּ בְּדַבְרִים
 וַיִּשְׁאֵאָה בְּצַדִּיקָה מֵעַנְיָן לְעַנְיָן,
 וְהִיא עֲנִיתָהּ וְנִחֲוֹת בְּפִי יִשְׂרָאֵל,
 וּמִמֶּתֶק אֲמַרְיָהּ מֵעֲצַת נֶפֶשׁ
 הִבִּין כִּי אָבֹן חוֹן לְפָנָיו מְגוּלָלָה בְּרַפָּשׁ.

Upon hearing this appellation Fabi was seized by fright
 And his mercies were aroused to have pity on her,
 Because he imagined the soul of this miserable woman
 And he was determined to see her to find out her life story.
 Consequently he went to her store for purchasing and buying,
 And in speaking with her, he would subtly interrogate her
 And shrewdly lead her from subject to subject,
 And she would answer him directly and candidly,
 And from the sweetness and soundness of her responses,
 He understood that here was a precious gem
 tossed about in the refuse.

(49)

בְּלֵילָה הַהוּא שָׁנֵת פֶּאֶבִי נִדְדָה
 וַיִּתְהַפֵּךְ מִצַּד אֶל צַד עַל מִשְׁכָּבוֹ,
 כִּי תַמּוּנַת הָעֲגוּנָה נִגְדוּ עִמָּדָה
 וַתִּגְרַשׁ שְׁנָה מֵעֵינָיו, מְנוּחָה מִלְּבָבוֹ.
 גַּם שָׁנֵת בֵּית-שׁוּעַ נִגְזְלָה הַפְּעַם:
 בַּפְּעַם הָרֵאשׁוֹנָה בִּימֵי מְרוּדֶיהָ
 דִּבֶּר אֶתָּה טוֹבוֹת אִישׁ תָּם בְּעַל-טַעַם
 וּבִלְבַב דּוֹאֵג לָהּ שָׁאַל עַל אוֹדוֹתֶיהָ.
 הַנְּפִשׁוֹת הַטְּהוֹרוֹת עוֹד לֹא יָדְעוּ מְאוּמָה
 מֵה-יִגְזַל בְּלֵילוֹת מֵעֵינָם תְּנוּמָה.

That night Fabi was unable to sleep
 And he tossed and turned on his bed,
 Because the image of the *agunah* stood starkly in his mind
 And banished sleep from his eyes and composure from his heart.
 Bat-Shua's sleep was also disturbed on this occasion:
 For the first time in these days of her sorrowful existence
 A man of integrity and good sense had spoken kindly to her,
 And with a genuine concern had inquired about her circumstances.
 These ingenuous souls did not yet realize anything
 As to what was depriving them of their ability to sleep.

(50)

ויוסף פאבי לבוא לעתים מזמנות
 בחנות בת-שוע בראות כי איש אין:
 יבוא לקנות מרקחים ומגדנות
 ויקנה לבה בחפו הטוב מין.
 ותספר לו בת-שוע בהתגלות לבה
 את רע מעמדה זה כשנתים,
 כי בעלה אשר נשאה בעודה באפה
 עזבה בחסר כל וילדיה השנים.
 ותוסף לאמר כי על דעת הקהל
 נמצא אישה כעת בעיר ליוורפאל.

Fabi continued to come on frequent occasions
 To Bat-Shua's store whenever he saw that there was no one around.
 He would come to buy spices and delicacies,
 But he bought her heart with his palate (words) sweeter than wine.
 Bat-Shua explained to him, opening her heart,
 The severity of her situation these past two years,
 That her husband who married her while she was still very young,
 Had deserted her and left her without support
 and with her two children.
 She said furthermore that according to hearsay
 Her husband was now located in the city of Liverpool.

(51)

ולפאבי מודע בליוורפאל ושמו, "שסון"
 המשלח חשקי ברזל למסלתו,
 ויבקשהו לבקש את הלל מפרעתון
 וכתם ירח קבל פאבי את תשובתו,
 כי נמצא הלל בן עבדון מפרעתון
 בליוורפאל רוכל המחזיר בעירות,
 והנו יורד באניה "נחש עקלתון"
 ההולכת בעוד חדש לאי עפרות,
 ולאשתו ספר-כריתות לשלוח יאות
 אם תשקל על ידו כסף חמש מאות.

Now Fabi had an acquaintance in Liverpool named "Sasson"
 Who shipped railroad ties for his tracks,
 And Fabi asked him to look for Hillel from Piraton,
 And at the end of a month Fabi received his answer,
 That Hillel son of Avdon from Piraton was
 A peddler in Liverpool making the rounds of the villages,
 And he was set to board ship on "The Crooked Serpent,"
 Which was to depart in a month's time for the Azores,
 And to his wife he would agree to send a bill of divorce, a *get*,
 If she were to pay him 500 silver pieces in cash.

(52)

את כל זה לבת-שווע פאבי לא מלל
ועוד ביום ההוא נתן צו אל מפרו
לשקול את הכסף המתכן על ד הלל
ולתפשו בכף לבלי-יחל דברו.
וכתם ירח קבל פאבי מלינוןפאל
דיעה נצחת על פי "הטליגרף"
כי עשה מפרו כל אשר שאל,
ובו ביום כתב הלל בבית הרב
גט-פטורין לאשתו כדון וכהלכה
וימסרהו בידי השליח להולכה.

All of this Fabi did not relate to Bat-Shua
And on that very day he authorized his associate
To pay the assigned sum to Hillel
And to hold him firmly to his commitment lest he back out.
And at the end of a month Fabi received from Liverpool
Conclusive notification by "telegraph"
That his associate had done what he requested,
And that same day Hillel had written in the rabbi's house
A *get* for his wife in accordance with Jewish legal requirements
And he had transmitted it to a courier for delivery.

(53)

עתה בא פאבי אל בת-שווע שמח
ויבשרה כי קרוב יום גאלתה,
ומשוש לב "העגונה" מי זה ישוחח!
אז מי ישער תקף אשרה ושמחתה
בכרע פאבי פתאם לפניה ברך
ובקול יונים יוצא מעמקי הנפש
התחנן לה: "בת-שווע יקרת הערד,
היי נא לי לאשה בצאתך לחפש:
כל ימך ריש ומררים תשבועי
ובחיקי פראוי לך אשרך תמצאי."

Now Fabi came to Bat-Shua happily,
And gave her the good news that her day of redemption was near,
And who can relate the heart's delight of the *agunah*!
All the more, who can imagine the intensity of her happiness and joy
When Fabi suddenly went down on bended knee before her
And with a dovelike voice coming from the depths of his soul
He beseeched her: "Bat-Shua, most precious one,
Be my wife when you go free from wedlock:
All of your days you've had your fill of harsh bitterness,
But in my bosom you shall find your happiness as you deserve."

(54)

הרמו מזוה, נשים מטילות ארס,
 בנות "צאניה וראניה", בנות "קרבו מנחה",
 הברדלו שערי שמים, מרגלי חרש,
 מהדורי מלי ומלחכי פינקא!
 שפת הנשמות, לשון האהבה, לא תדעו,
 פן תמלאו חצות אילון רכיל ודבה,
 עת אחרי הדלת והמזוזה תשמעו
 את בת-שוע עונה לפאבי בחבה:
 "המנצח בקרב ישא שביהו-
 אמתד אני, פאבי - ותשקהו."

Begone, ignore you women who spread malicious gossip,
 Devout readers of the "Tsena v'Re'ena" and "Korban Minhah,"
 Get away from here those who scandalize heaven, who spy in secret,
 Incessant talkers and obsequious hypocrites.
 You do not know the language of the heart, the language of love,
 Lest you fill the streets of Ayalon with gossip and slander,
 In the event you might eavesdrop in back of closed doors
 And hear Bat-Shua answering Fabi lovingly:
 "Let the victor in battle carry away his captive —
 I am your maidservant, Fabi!" — as she kisses him.

(55)

עוד שבועים ארבעה, כי כן ילך
 ההולך מלינוורפאל עד אילון,
 שנים באניה ושנים בדרך המלך,
 אם לא ימצא על דרכו שטן וכשלו:
 את הימים האלה בכליון עינים
 ספרו הנאהבים כימי העמר,
 בין כה תארו למו עתידות החיים,
 ובת-שוע שבה ותפרח כתמר,
 וכחכי עם עולם לביאת משיח
 כן חכו שניהם ליום בוא השליח.

Another four weeks passed, for that is how long it takes
 For one to travel from Liverpool to Ayalon,
 Two weeks by boat and two by the main highway,
 If he encounters no obstacle or setback along the way:
 These days with impatient longing
 The lovers counted like the days of the omer.
 In the meantime they imagined to themselves their future life
 together,
 Bat-Shua would once again blossom like a date palm
 And as the Eternal People [the Jews] await the Messiah's arrival,
 So did the two of them await the day of the courier's coming.

(56)

וּפֶאֱבִי הִחְלִיט בְּגִמְרוֹ אֶת הַמְּלָאכָה
 לְהַחֲל מֵאֲלוֹ לְבָנוֹת בְּמִסְלוֹת
 וּלְהַעֲתִיק אֶהְלוֹ אֶל עִיר הַמְּמֻלְכָה
 וּלְכוּנֵן שָׁם בֵּיתוֹ בְּמַעֲרְכֵי תְהִלּוֹת.
 כָּל זֶה הוֹדָה לָהּ וּבְחָבוֹ לֹא טָמֹן,
 אֲף הִיא הִיְתָה מִתְכַּנְּנֶת לְגִמּוֹר אֶת דַּעְתּוֹ
 לְתַת יְלָדֶיהָ עַל יַד פְּדָגוֹג אָמֹן
 וּלְהַכּוֹן לְעֵקֶרֶת הַבַּיִת בְּשַׁעֲתוֹ,
 וּלְמַלְאֵת חֶסְרוֹן גְּדוּלָה בֵּית חֶפֶר
 לְלִמּוּד נֶגֶן וּכְתוּב, לְשׁוֹן וְסִפֵּר.

And Fabi decided that after completing his assignment,
 He would begin to build railroads as an entrepreneur,
 Transfer his residence to the country's capital,
 And establish his home there in a grand style.
 All this he confessed to her and did not keep it to himself.
 For her part, she was intending to abide by his wishes
 And place her children in the care of a trained governess
 And to prepare herself to become a homemaker
 at the appropriate time,
 But for now, to complement the deficits in her upbringing in her
 father's house
 And to study music, writing, language arts and literature.

(57)

בֵּין כֹּה נִמְצָא כְּתוּב בְּכַתְבֵי-הָעֵתִים
 כִּי אָנִיִּת הַסּוֹחֲרִים "נְחֹשׁ עֶקְלֶתוֹן"
 נִשְׁפָּרָה אֶל הַסָּלַע עַל חוֹף אֵי כַתִּים
 וְכָל קַהְלָה אֶבֶד בַּיּוֹם הָאֶסּוֹן.
 שְׁמָעָה בַת-שׁוּעַ וַתֵּרֶד בְּדַמְעוֹת
 עַל אִישָׁהּ הָאֲמֻלָּל כִּי קָמַט פָּתַע,
 וּבְלֵב נִמַּס הוֹדָתָה לְאֵל הַמוֹשְׁעוֹת,
 עַל הַחִישׁוֹ בְּעֵתָהּ לָהּ פְּדוּת וַיִּשַׁע,
 כִּי לֹא־לֹא שָׁלַח אֶת פֶּאֱבִי לְקַרְאָתָהּ
 כִּי עָתָה הִיְתָה צְרוּרָה עַד בּוֹא חֲלִיפָתָהּ.

In the meantime a notice appeared in the newspapers
 That the merchant ship "The Crooked Serpent"
 Had smashed into the rocks on the shores of Cyprus
 And all of its passengers had been lost at sea
 on the day of the disaster.
 When Bat-Shua heard she broke down in tears
 For her poor husband, who had so suddenly met his end,
 And with a melting heart she offered thanks to the God of salvations,
 For His having sped salvation and redemption to her just in time,
 Since had He not dispatched Fabi to come her way,
 She would have been shackled until the day of her death.

(58)

וּבְיוֹם עֶרֶב שַׁבַּת פְּרִשַׁת כִּי-תְבוֹא
 (הֵיא, יוֹם מוּכָן לַפְּרִעָנוּת): אַחַר הַצְּהָרִים
 בָּא הַשְּׁלִיחַ וַיָּבֵא מִכְתָּבוֹ -
 אִךְ הָרַב דְּמָתָא כָּבֵד יָצָא הַמַּיִם:
 עַל כֵּן קָבַע יוֹם הַרְאֵשׁוֹן בְּשַׁבּוּעַ
 לְמַסִּירַת הַגֵּט. בֵּין כֹּה הָמָּה הַקְּרַת
 לְשִׁמוּעָה הַבְּאָה כִּי הַעֲגוּנָה בַת-שׁוּעַ
 קִבְּלָה גֵט-פְּטוּרִין וּלְכֹל אָדָם מִתְּרַת.
 וּמְשׁוֹשׁ לֵב בַּת-שׁוּעַ וּפֹאֲבֵי עֵתָה -
 שְׁעַר בְּנִפְשָׁד, קוֹרְאֵי, אִם בַּעַל נֶפֶשׁ אֶתָּה.

And on the eve of the Shabbat of *Ki-Tavo*
 (Alas, a day preordained for calamity): in the afternoon
 The messenger arrived and brought his missive —
 But the rabbi of the town was already indisposed:
 He therefore appointed the following Sunday
 For delivery of the divorce document. The town was humming
 Over the rumor circulating that Bat-Shua the *agunah*
 Had received her divorce and was permitted to any man.
 Now, my dear reader, if you possess any sensitivity,
 Just imagine the jubilation of Bat-Shua and Fabi.

(59)

אִךְ מָה תִּקְוַת אָנוּשׁ, מָה הַתּוֹחֶלֶת,
 אִם סָבִיב יִבְעַתְהוּ נַחְלֵי בְּלִיעַל:
 הַתַּדַּע הָרַמָּה בְּדָשָׂא זוֹחֶלֶת
 אִי מָזָה עָלֶיהָ הַמַּפְיץ יַעֲלֵ?
 אִם עֵין אֵל לְבְרוּאֵיו וְרַחֲמָיו עַל כָּל מַעֲשָׂיו
 וּבְחֻכְמָה יִסַּד אֶרֶץ וּבְצַדִּיקָה,
 אֶהְיָ, רַע לֵב אָדָם, סִכְלוֹת מְתֵי-שׁוּא
 לְשַׁחֲתוּ רַחֲמָיו וַיִּמְלְאוּהָ צַעֲקָה.
 אוֹי אוֹי לָךְ, בַּת-שׁוּעַ, גַּם לָךְ, נֶפֶשׁ זָכָה,
 הַקְּדִימוּ רוֹפְאֵי אֱלִיל לְרַפּוּאָה הַמַּכָּה.

But what hope has a man, what good is his wishing,
 If all around him currents of wickedness are menacing:
 Does a worm crawling in the grass know
 From whence the crushing boot will rise to stomp upon her?
 If God's eye extends over all of his creations
 and His mercy over all His works
 And if in accordance with wisdom and justice
 He established the earth,
 Alas, the evil heart of man and the folly of perfidious individuals
 Will nullify His mercies and fill the earth with atrocity.
 Woe, woe for you, Bat-Shua, in your case, too, pure soul,
 Quack doctors have fabricated a new affliction
 even before your prior ill's remedy.

(ו)

(61)

(60)

לְפָנִים בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהֵיטוֹת הַתּוֹרָה אֹר,
 לֹא קָרְדָּם לְחַפֵּר בּוֹ, לֹא חָטַר גְּאוֹה,
 הָיוּ הַגְּאוֹנִים מְתֵי מִסְפָּר בְּכָל דֹּר וְדֹר,
 כָּלֵם אֲנָשִׁי קִדָּשׁ וְשָׁמֵם לָהֶם גְּאוֹה:
 עֵתָה - מִסְפָּר הַרְבָּנִים הָיוּ הַגְּאוֹנִים
 עַד כִּי בָשָׂם זֶה יִתְקַלְסוּ הַצְּעִירִים,
 אִף יֵשׁ לָנוּ גְאוֹנִים מִגְּאוֹנִים שׁוֹנִים:
 גְּאוֹנִים אֲמִתִּים וְגְאוֹנִים אֲדִירִים
 וְגְאוֹנֵי גְאוֹנִים, שְׁנִים וְשְׁלִישִׁים,
 וּמְאוֹרוֹת וְנִשְׁרִים, עֲמוּדִים, פְּטִישִׁים.

וּבְאֵילֹן רַב מִמְדְּרָגָה הַמְּעֻלָּה,
 לֹא גְאוֹן פְּשוֹט אֶדְ גְּאוֹן נְאֻדְרִי
 אֶחָד הַמְּיוֹחָד מִיחִידֵי הַסְּגֻלָּה
 וְכָבוֹד שֵׁם תִּפְאָרְתּוֹ: רַב וְנֶפְסֵי הַכְּזָרִי,
 "נֶפְסֵי" יִקְרְאוּהוּ כִּי כֵן שְׁמוֹ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל,
 אֶדְ מְדוּעַ "כְּזָרִי" שֵׁם מִשְׁפָּחָתּוֹ?
 הַאֲמָנָם אָבִיו תִּתְרִי מְזָרַע יִשְׁמַעְאֵל?
 לְחַלִּיט אֶת זֹאת לֹא אֶתֵּן חֲכִי לְחַטּוֹא,
 אֲבָל כְּבָר שְׁמַעְנוּ מִפִּי דְרָשִׁי רְשׁוּמוֹת
 כִּי בָּא סְנַחְרִיב וּבִלְבָּל הָאֲמוֹת.

Aforetimes when the Torah was a light in Israel,
 Not a spade to dig with, not a pedigree of bravado,
Geonim (Torah geniuses) were only very few in number
 out of each generation,
 All of them were holy individuals
 whose reputations preceded them;
 Now — the number of *geonim* has equaled the number of rabbis
 So much so, that even our younger rabbis laud themselves
 with this title,
 We even have *geonim* of various and sundry varieties;
 "True *geonim*" and "formidable *geonim*"
 And "the greatest of all *geonim*," to the second and third degree,
 As well as "luminaries" and "eagles," "pillars," "hammers."

And in Ayalon there is a rabbi of the most superior rank,
 Not an ordinary *gaon* but a "*gaon* par excellence,"
 The "one most extraordinary of the chosen few"
 And the name of His Excellency is Vofsi the Kuzari.
 "Vofsi" he is called because that is his given Jewish name,
 But why is "Kuzari" his family name?
 Is his father really a Tatar of Ishmaelite [Muslim] extraction?
 I dare not make such an assertion
 Although we have indeed heard from antiquarians
 That Sennacherib came and intermingled the nationalities.

(62)

אֵד נֶשְׁמַת רַב וּפְסִי נְדָאִי תַתְרִית,
 אִין בְּה אָף אַחַת מִן הַמְּדוּת הַמְּשַׁבְּחוֹת
 שֶׁנֶּצְטִינּוּ בְּהוּ זְרַע קִדְּשׁ, בְּנֵי בְרִית:
 עַל מָמוֹן יִשְׂרָאֵל עֵינּוּ לֹא תַחוּס,
 דְּרָדָּ שְׁלוֹם לֹא יָדַע, חֲמֵלָה לֹא זָרָה:
 יָדַע רַק חֲרוּב וְהַחֲרָם, הַטְרִיף וְאַסּוּר:
 וּבְבִקְיָאוֹתוֹ בְּפוֹסְקִים וּבְגִמְרָא
 בְּרֵאיוֹת לְפִסְקִיו לֹא יָדַע מַחְסוּר,
 נִיצָא לֹא שֵׁם כְּרֹאשׁ הַמַּחְמִירִים,
 וַיִּמְנָה בֵּין הַגְּאוּנִים הָאֲדִירִים.

Be that as it may, Rab Vofsi's soul is definitely Tatar,
 There is not whithin it even one of the excellent qualities
 That distinguished the holy people, the Jews [*bnai brit*]:
 For the money of Jews he has no compassion,
 He's unaware of the principle of seeking a harmonious resolution,
 pity is alien to him;
 He knows only to destroy and confiscate,
 to declare food unfit [*treif*] and forbidden:
 And with his erudition in the Talmud and decisors [*poskim*]
 He is never lacking for proof-texts for his decisions.
 He acquired a reputation as the foremost strict interpreter
 of the Law
 And hence was accounted one of the "formidable *geonim*."

(63)

בְּיוֹם הַרְאָשׁוֹן לְסִדֵּר "נִצְבִּים"
 קָרָא רַב וּפְסִי אֵלָיו אֶת שְׁנֵי דִּבְרָיו,
 וַיִּפְתַּח הָאֶחָד אֶת צְרוּר הַמַּכְתָּבִים
 וַיּוֹצֵא אֶת הַגֵּט וַיִּקְרָאֵהוּ לְפָנָיו:
 "הַכֹּל בְּהִלְכָּה, - אָמַר - כָּל רְעוּתָא אֵין:
 הַשְּׁלִיחַ יוּכַל לְמַסְרוֹ אֶל הַנְּגִרְשָׁת."
 אֵד כְּמַעַט שָׁם רַב וּפְסִי בִּגֵּט עֵין
 קָרָא אֶל הַשְּׁלִיחַ: אֵל תִּקְרַב לְגִשְׁת:
 הַטְרָם תִּרְאוּ כִּי הַגֵּט אֵינְנוּ כָּשֵׁר:
 הַשֵּׁם הֵלֵל כְּתוּב בּוּ בְּלִי יו"ד, חֲסֵר.

On the Sunday preceding the synagogue chanting of "Nitzavim,"
 Rav Vofsi summoned to him his two judges,
 And one of them opened the bundle of letters
 And he took out the *get* and read it aloud.
 "It's precisely according to law," he said.
 "There's not a thing wrong with it.
 The courier can deliver it to the woman who is being divorced."
 However, Rav Vofsi, having only barely glanced at the *get*,
 Declared to the courier: "Don't you even come close!"
 Can't you all see that the divorce paper is not valid:
 The name Hillel is written without the letter *yud*, defective.

(64)

הדין הקורא, מקבל, יודע ח"ו,
 החליט על פי "הארי" כי הלל נכתב חסר,
 גם השני על פי "בדק הבית" אמר כן -
 ושניהם גלו דעתם כי הגט כשר,
 אך רב ופסי החליט כי הלל מלא
 כדעת הז"ם והס"ם על פי השלחן-ערוך,
 ויגער גם ויאמר כי בעיניו יפלא
 איך שכחו גם שניהם פסק-דין ערוך.
 ובכן עמד על דעתו כדרך וקעץ שתול
 ויקרא בקול גדול יהודית: "ה ג ט פ ס ו ל"

The judge who read it aloud,
 a man versed in Kabbalah and other esoterica,
 Decided on the authority of the "Ari" that
 Hillel is indeed to be written defective, without the *yud*,
 The second judge, too, said the same thing on the authority of the
 "*bedek habayit*," [a halachic work by Yosef Karo] —
 The two of them expressed their opinions that the *get* was valid,
 But Rav Vofsi decided that Hillel should be written with the *yud*,
 As was the opinion of the "*Zam*" and the "*Sam*" [two books about
 divorce], based on the *Shulhan Aruch*.
 And he scolded them saying that he was amazed
 How the two of them had forgotten a formalized ruling.
 And thus he held to his opinion like an iron spur,
 and like a firmly rooted tree [*ke'ets shosul*],
 And he proclaimed in a loud voice in Yiddish:
 "The *get* is *posul*, invalid!"

(65)

נגע צרעת כי תהיה באדם,
 כל חלי כל מדוה כי ישיגהו,
 יש רופאים בארץ וקסמים בידם.
 יש תקוה לחולים כי ינשעו:
 כי יחטא איש לאיש או איש לאלה
 ופללו השופט מפדי רשעתו,
 יש שופט אחר גבה על גבה
 וישנה דין הנשפט כי תבוא צעקתו:
 אך דבר מפי הרב - מי ישנהו,
 ולמי יפנו האובדים וישועו?!

If a man have the affliction of leprosy,
 If any illness or disease befall him,
 There are doctors in the world with remedies at hand,
 There is hope for the ailing that they may be saved.
 If a man sin against his fellow man or against God
 And the judge sentence him more severely than his crime,
 There is another judge and yet another above him
 Who will alter the sentence of the condemned man when his appeal
 is heard:
 But a statement from the mouth of the rabbi — who can alter it,
 And to whom can the doomed ones turn and raise an outcry?

(66)

כְּכדור יֵטל מִפְּלִי קָרֵב
 בְּאֶשֶׁר יִפְגַּע שָׁם הָרֵג וְאַבְדּוֹ וּמָוֶת,
 כֵּן נָגַע דְּבוּר מְפוֹצֵץ זֶה מִפִּי הָרֵב
 בְּלִבֵּב הָאִמְלָלָה שְׁמָה יוֹשֶׁבֶת.
 אִיךָ הִיָּתָה כְּרָגַע כָּל תְּקוּנָתָה לְשִׂיאָהּ:
 פְּתֹאֵם אַחֲזָה הַשֶּׁבֶץ וְתִלְכָּת
 וּבְקוֹל כְּנִשְׁמָה הַיּוֹצֵאת מִן הַגּוּיָה
 נִפְלָה לְאַרְץ-מֵתָה אוֹ מִתְעַלְפָּת:
 וַיִּרְמוּ הָרֵב לְשִׁמְשִׁים שָׁנִים
 וַיִּשְׂאָהּ וַיּוֹצִיאָהּ עַל כַּפָּיִם.

The way a lead ball shot from a military weapon
 Wreaks killing, destruction, and death wheresoever it lands,
 So did this crushing remark from the mouth of the rabbi
 Impact the heart of the wretched woman sitting there.
 How had all her hope turned to calamity in an instant:
 Suddenly she was seized by a paroxysm and she fainted...
 The rabbi motioned to his two attendants
 And they lifted her up and carried her out on bodily.

(67)

כָּל הַנִּצְבִּים שָׁם הִתְבוֹנְנוּ הָאָנוּ,
 רָגְזוּ אִישׁ תַּחְתּוֹ וַיִּכְסַּם צִלְמוֹת,
 כִּי גַם נַפְשָׁם הִיבְשָׁה, לִבָּם הָאָבוּ,
 יָדְעוּ כִּי דִין זֶה לָהּ דִּין מִשְׁפָּט-מָוֶת.
 וּבְעִיר יִצְאָה הַשְּׂמוּעָה כְּבָרֵק:
 "הֶעֱגוּנָה - עֲגוּנָה!" פָּה לָפָה הִבִּיעַ.
 שָׁמַע פֶּאֶבִי וַיִּתְעַבֵּר, שָׁנִיו חֶרֶק,
 אָדָּה הַחֲרִישׁ כִּי יָדַע כִּי אֵין מוֹשִׁיעַ:
 וַתִּמְיַמֵּי-לֵב סָפְדוּ לָהּ: "הוּי אִשָּׁה מְצָרָה,
 לֹא נַחְשׁוּל בַּיָּם טִבְעָדָּה כִּי אִם יוֹד זַעִירָא"

Everyone in attendance observed the injustice,
 They all shook in their tracks and a deathly pallor covered them,
 For even their dessicated souls, their hearts of stone,
 Knew that this verdict was a death sentence for her.
 And within the city the rumor spread like lightning
 Each mouth uttering: "The *agunah* is going to stay an *agunah*."
 When Fabi heard he grew irate, clenched his teeth,
 But he kept silent because he knew there was no recourse or savior:
 The pure of heart lamented for her: "Alas, oh suffering woman;
 Not some huge wave at sea was it that drowned you —
 only a tiny *yud*!"

(ז)

(69)

(68)

אָבן פֿי יָדוּ בְּנֵהָר מְשַׁקֵּעַ מַיִם
 רָגַע יִתְגַּעְשׂוּ מִיָּמָיו, יִהְיוּ יַחְמְרוּ,
 הָאָבן תִּשְׁקַע, תִּעָלֶם מֵעֵינַיִם
 וְכַמְקֻדָּם מִי-מְנוּחֹת יִצּוּפוּ יְנַהְרוּ.
 כֵּן גַּם הַחַיִּים בְּשַׁצֵּף זִרְמָתָם.
 יוֹם אַחַר יוֹם וְשִׁלְשָׁה חֳדָשִׁים עָבְרוּ,
 כָּל הַדְּבָרִים בְּאַיְלוֹן שָׁבוּ אֶל קַדְמָתָם
 וַיַּעֲוִרֵי בַת-שׁוּעַ עַל מַחְלָתָהּ גָּבְרוּ,
 וַהֲנַחִי מִקְדַּחְתָּהּ וַתֵּרֵד מִן הַמֶּטָה
 אֲשֶׁר עָלְתָה עָלֶיהָ בַּיּוֹם נִפְסַל גִּטָּה.

מָה רַבּוּ חַסְדֵי בְּנֵי עִירָהּ בַּחֲלוּתָהּ:
 כָּל הָעָם מְקַצֵּה חָרְדוּ אֵלֶיהָ,
 גַּבְּאֵי "בִּקּוּר-חֹלִיִּים" יוֹם-יוֹם בָּא לְרֵאוּתָהּ
 וְנָשִׂים רַחֲמָנִיּוֹת טִפְחוּ עוֹלָלֶיהָ.
 רוֹפְאֵי אֱלִיל! מַה-יּוֹעִילוּ נְטֹפֵי רְפוּאוֹת
 לְשֶׁבֶר גָּדוֹל כַּיֵּם, לְמַחְלָה בְּלִי מְצָרִים?
 רַחֲמִים וְצַדִּיקוֹת לֹא יַעֲשׂוּ יְשׁוּעוֹת
 בְּאַרְצָ עֵיפָתָהּ צַלְמוֹת וְלֹא-סִדְרִים:
 שָׁשׂוּר וְטִיחַ לְשִׁמִּיר וְנִשִּׁית
 אִם הִנָּגַע עוֹמֵד בְּקִירוֹת הַבַּיִת.

If a stone be hurled to a river's sediment-covered bottom
 For a moment its water will churn and whirl,
 The stone will sink, disappearing from sight,
 And as before calm waters will surface and flow.
 So, too, is life in the raging current of its flow.
 Everything in Ayalon returned to how it was before
 And the youthful vigor of Bat-Shua overcame her illness.
 She recovered from her fever and descended from the bed,
 Which she had entered on the day the divorce writ was nullified.

How numerous the mercies of her townsmen during her illness:
 All the people from every corner rushed to her side,
 The Gabbai of "The *Bikkur Cholim* society" came daily to see her,
 And compassionate women took care of her children.
 Quack doctors! Of what use are droplets of medicine
 For an affliction as large as the sea, for an illness without bounds?
 Compassion and acts of charity will not bring salvation
 In a society benighted unto death and without social safeguards.
 Vermilion and plaster will not arrest the inroads of thorns and
 thistles
 If the plague has already spread to the inner walls of the house.*

* There is no remedy, according to the Bible, but to destroy the house.

(70)

עָתָה תִּבְקֹשׁ לָהּ בַּת-שׁוּעַ פְּרִנְסָה אַחֲרַת,
 כִּי בַחֲלוּתָהּ חֲנוּתָהּ מֵאַפֵּס יָד נִסְגְּרָה:
 וּבְעוֹדָהּ מִבְּקִשְׁתּוֹ הִבִּיאוּ לָהּ אֲגֵרֶת
 כְּתוּב בָּהּ לֵאמֹר: "אֲהוּבָתִי הִיָּקְרָה:
 אִם לֹא תוּכְלִי לְהִיּוֹת לִי וְגַם אֲנִי אֶלֶיךָ,
 אִם לֹא תוּכְלִי לְחַלּוֹק עִמִּי הוֹנִי וּמְעוֹנִי,
 הוֹאִילִי נָא אֶפּוֹא וְאֶכְלָכֶל מִחֲסוּרֶיךָ:
 וְכֹל צְרֻכְךָ בִּסְתֵר יִנָּתֵן עַל חֲשׁוּבוֹנִי:
 כִּי רַק אֲזוֹ אֲרַגִּיעַ, רַק אֲזוֹ אֶמְצָא אֲשֶׁר,
 בְּדַעְתִּי כִּי נִסְתַּרְתָּ אֶת מַעְנֵי נַחֲסֵר"

Now Bat-Shua was searching for a different source of livelihood,
 Because, while sick, her store was closed for lack of an attendant:
 And as she was still searching, a letter was brought to her
 In which the following was written: "My dear beloved:
 If you cannot be mine and I, yours,
 If you cannot share with me my money and my dwelling,
 Allow me therefore to assist you in your support,
 And let all of your needs be secretly provided for at my expense;
 For only then will my mind be set at ease,
 only then will I find happiness,
 In my knowing that you are sheltered from poverty and lack."

(71)

"לֹא פֶאֶבִי, לֹא אֶקַח חוּט וְיִשְׂרוּף נֶעֱלֶה
 -הַשִּׁיבָה הָעֲנִיָּה לוֹ תִשׁוּבָה נִצְחָת-
 אִשָּׁה בֵּית אִישָׁה - יָרַב לָהּ הַבְּעֵל,
 אֵד אֶתְנֶן מִיַּדִּי זֶר חֶרֶף לְקַחַת.
 אִם לֹא חֶפֶץ הָאֵל כִּי אַחֲיָה מִמְקוֹר עֵמֶד,
 אֲדַנִּי הוּא - הַטוֹב בְּעֵינָיו יַעֲשׂ!
 לָךְ-לָךְ לְדַרְכְּךָ וְאֱלֹהִים יְרוּמְמוּךָ,
 גַּם אוֹתִי לֹא יַעֲזֹב, הִסֵּר מִלְּבָבְךָ כְּעֵשׂ:
 בְּזַעַת אַפִּי אֶכֶל לֶחֶם כָּל עוֹד בִּי כֹחַ
 וּמִיַּדִּי זֶר מִתְּנִת חֲנָם לֹא אֶקַח לְקַחַח."

"No Fabi, I will not take even a thread or a shoelace" —
 The poor woman replied to him decisively —
 A wife in the home of her husband has him to fend for her,
 But a gift from a stranger is unseemly for her to accept.
 If God has not willed that I should be sustained by you,
 He is God — let Him do what is best in His eyes:
 Go your way and may God help you to prosper
 Me, too, He will not abandon, remove distress from your heart;
 By the sweat of my brow I will eat bread
 while there is yet strength in me,
 But from a stranger's hands I will not accept gratuitously."

(72)

"לא חפץ האל!" - אבינו שבשמים,
 כל עלילות בני האדם גללו אליך,
 ואתה חסין-יה, אל נשא, ארך-אפים,
 תחשה מעולם תתאפק ותשב ידך,
 בשמך אבות ואמות רחמיהם השחיתו
 ובניהם בידיהם באש שלחו,
 בשמך כהני און המדורות הצייתו
 ולמאות ואלפים אדם זבחו,
 ובשמך, אל רחום, בעלי הדרךשות
 בקוץ יוד מנד יהרגו כמה נפשות!

"God has not willed it!!"— our Father in heaven,
 All libelous human perversities they project upon You,
 And you Almighty God, forgiving, long suffering, God,
 Have kept silent from Eternity,
 restraining and withholding your wrath,
 In Your name fathers and mothers have obliterated their mercies
 And with their own hands cast their children into the fire,
 In Your name wicked priests have ignited the pyres
 And offered up human sacrifices by the hundreds and thousands,
 And in Your name, compassionate God, the homileticians
 Over a displaced tip of a *yud*, kill so many and so many souls!

(73)

יום אחר יום ושלשה חדשים ברחו:
 פאבי עזב העיר לא נודע איהו,
 רחמנים בני רחמנים בת-שוע שכוהו,
 כלם לדרךם פנו, איש לבצעו מקצהו.
 רק חובשי בית המדרש ויושבי קרנות,
 רק הם לא שכחוה ותהי להם למלה,
 רק הם עוד ישיחו לעתים מזמנות
 בעגונה אשר עגבה על בונה-המסלה:
 וכך המירו שם "העגונה" בשם "אשת-איש",
 ולפאבי קראו פיביש ולפיביש - "וי ביש".

Day followed day and already three months had flitted by:
 Fabi had left the city and no one knew his whereabouts,
 Our compassionate folk had forgotten Bat-Shua
 Each going his own way,
 each and every one in the grip of self-interest,
 Only frequenters of study halls and street-corner idlers
 Only they did not forget her, and she became their prime gossip,
 Only they would converse frequently
 About the *agunah* that ogled* the railroad builder,
 And already for "*agunah*" they substituted "the married woman,"
 And from Fabi they reverted to Fayvish
 and from Fayvish to "*vay-bish*"**

* Literally "that lusted for."

** A pun: (1) *vay* = woe; *vay-bish* = luckless, or one with bad luck; (2) "done in by a woman," from the Yiddish word *vayb*, "woman."

(74)

וּמְלֹאכֶת הַמְּסֵלָה כָּלִיל שְׁלֵמָה,
 וּכְבֹר רֶכֶב הָאֵשׁ בְּסוּפָה וּסְעָרָה
 עַל מַעְגְלֵי בְרָזל וּבִהוּד נַחְרוֹת אִימָה
 יָנִיעַ יוֹם-יוֹם אֶלְפֵי אָדָם בְּכַבְרָה.
 (עֲתָה בְּבֵית-הַמִּדְרָשׁ אֶת הָעֲגוּנָה הַשְּׂמִיטוֹ
 וּבִהֲלַכְתָּ הַמְּסֵלָה יַעֲסֹק כָּל תַּלְמִיד-בְּחוּר,
 וְאַחֲרֵי שֶׁקָּלָא וְטַרְיָא פָּה אֶחָד הַחֲלִיטוֹ
 כִּי מְכוֹנֵת הַקֵּיטוֹר הִיא הַכָּלֵב הַשְּׂחוֹר
 אֲשֶׁר בּוֹ יִשְׁתַּמְשׁוּ לְקַפִּיצַת הַדֶּרֶךְ,
 כְּפִתּוּב בְּסֵפֶר "בְּרִית מְנוּחָה" בְּאַרְבֵּי.)

And the work of laying railroad track had completely been done,
 And already the fiery chariot with hurricane fury
 Over iron rails and with majestic and awesome snorting
 Was magically whisking people by the thousands.
 (By now in the study hall they had dropped [the topic of] the *agunah*
 And every Yeshivah student was pondering the legalistic theory
 [halachah] of the railroad.)
 And after much learned deliberation they agreed unanimously
 That the locomotive was none other than the black hound
 That was used for miraculously swift travel "*kefitsat haderech*" —
 As described at length in the book "*Berit Menuhah*")

(75)

וּבַחֲנוֹת הַמְּרַכְבָּה עַל שַׁעְרֵי אַיְלוֹן
 וְהַנוֹסְעִים יֵצְאוּ לְסֵעוּד לֶבֶס בְּחַפְזוֹן
 תְּבֵאנָה לְקִרְאתֶם מִבְּתֵי-הַמָּלוֹן
 עֲבָרִיּוֹת עֲנִיּוֹת מוֹכְרוֹת כָּל מְזוֹן:
 וּבַתּוֹכָן אִשָּׁה אַחַת עֵינַיִם תְּחַזְיָנָה:
 יִפֹּת תֵּאָר מְנוּלֶת לוֹבֶשֶׁת סְחָבוֹת,
 שַׁעְרָהּ הַפֶּדָּ לָבֵן אֶף כִּי זָקְנָה אֵינָנָה,
 קוֹמָתָה כְּפּוֹפָה, עֵינֶיהָ צְבוֹת,
 וְעֲרוֹמִים וְיַחֲפִים מְשַׁנֵּי צְדִיקָה
 לֵאחֲזוֹ בְּכַנֵּף בְּגָדָה שְׁנֵי יְלָדֶיהָ.

And when the train would stop at the gates of Ayalon
 And the passengers would get off to eat a hasty meal
 There would come toward them from the hotels
 Poor Jewish women selling all kinds of food:
 And amongst them they would see one of them
 An erstwhile beauty with ruined good looks
 wearing ragged clothing,
 Whose hair has whitened although she is not an old woman,
 Her stature is bent, her eyes swollen,
 And naked and barefoot to both sides of her
 Her two children holding onto the hem of her garment.

(76)

“מי אתה, עלובת הנפש, ומה חייך?
 פניך יעידו כי לא לכך נוצרת:
 האלהים אם אנשים היו בעוכריך?
 כי באת עד הלם, כי כה השברת קדרתך?
 -לא, אנשי חסד, לאל מעול חלילה:
 הן כשרנות טובים חנני צורי שדי,
 גם ההצלחה לי פעם פנים הצהילה,
 כמעט הייתי בכל טוב אני וילדי
 וכנשי התענגות חייתי גם אני -
 אך קוצו של יוד הוא הרגני.

“Who are you, oh pathetic soul, what is the nature of your life?
 Your face bears witness that you were not created for this lot:
 Was it God or human beings who have led to your downfall
 That you’ve reached this sorry state, so broken and downcast?”
 No — kind people, perish the thought that God could be complicit:
 After all, my Almighty Creator endowed me with fine talents,
 Fortune once shined her face upon me,
 I had practically reached the point of having it all,
 I and my children —
 But it was the tiny tip of a *yud* that brought me to ruin.

Book Reviews

Studies in the Meaning of Judaism by Eugene B. Borowitz, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2002), 473 pp.

Gene Borowitz has been my best friend for sixty years, so I am not well positioned to treat his new and powerful book with objectivity. But he can be very critical of all of us in his usual self-deprecating way, including here a strong refutation of the neo-Kantianism of Steven Schwarzschild, the rationalist member of our old triumvirate, whom we have mourned for more than ten years. Borowitz, to be sure, is critical of classical Reform Judaism with its naïve and premature messianism. But he equally unmasks the pretensions of Orthodoxy and the paralyzed ambivalence of Conservative Judaism. He is no less hard on himself, though, it seems to me, with far less reason. Still, he employs a sanguine tone that clashes with my own bad conscience about liberal Judaism. No one has worked longer or harder than Borowitz has. He patiently mastered Hebrew, modern and ancient. He learned modern philosophy from its most difficult texts. He studied Jewish classics every day of every year. He thinks hard and writes carefully. He is a wonderful teacher and writer, and a wonderful friend.

This volume, only the second in this Jewish Publication Society series of studies devoted to a Reform Jewish scholar (most of the rest are dedicated to members of the Conservative wing, with which the Jewish Publication Society has an almost incestuous connection), is the very first by a self-acknowledged Jewish theologian. The book proceeds chronologically, not topically as in the other studies. That is all to the good, since it results in a kind of intellectual autobiography while showing clearly the evolution of our single most important American Jewish theologian, one of the few important Americans of any faith to produce a body of work like this. I hazard that Eugene Borowitz will be recognized by historians as the Reinhold Niebuhr of the Jews; no one else has been so massively important in so many ambitious ways.

The seed of all his later accomplishments is already present in his earliest attempts as a young student, hardly in his twenties. Sensing that the humanist or universalist moment in liberal Judaism had exhausted itself, he understood that a new kind of thinking, one deeply influenced by the German religious renaissance of the early