

LAND OF MANNA



MENKE KATZ





Menke Katz

**Land
of
Manna**

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WITHDRAWN

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A GARRET IN MANHATTAN

A manikin in a show window — a mocked bride,
 deprived of sorrow, condemned to smile till doomsday.
 Children on winged horses of a carousel ride
 like little folk of yesterday to her wedding day.
 Her wedding gown of mournful white — a starry shroud.
 The bridal train — the tail of a longing mermaid.
 Each ray, a mirror smashed by the evening crowds.
 The show window is a dazzling lake, her heart — bait.
 The day is rushed into shreds, crushed under tired feet.
 The sun, a squeezed lemon hugged to death in subways.
 The mermaid tossed through flame and steel, from street to street,
 on glorious Fifth Avenue, through skulks byways.
 My bride in the twilight trance, before her last dance.
 And I, self-doomed, drunk with death, fall in her fire-dance.

Comely woman under the cupid tree,
 planted by the frost on my windowpane.
 Faultless as the first snow you came to me:
 a deathless goddess craving death again,
 seeking the dark hallway of old New York,
 where wild-eyed with longing blood I brought you,
 a fatherless child on wings of a stork.
 Moonstruck, you sit in a silver canoe.
 The single paddle, hoary-leaved by frost,
 (You are the midnight on my windowpane.)
 propelled by a frigid, whitehearted ghost.
 O pray for dawn to turn you into rain!
 Love is eternal in the winterland.
 On ice grow sinless apples to the crown.
 On virgin leaves lies frozen Eros' hand.
 The sun is a flood where snowy maidens drown.

I am lonely as a Yiddish poet
in New York, as God in Safad on a
rainy autumn night. Against life and death
storm the blues of my forsaken poems.

Drab-lit buildings — my rust-eaten neighbors,
cast shadows of prophets on old alleys:
ashes on their heads, sackcloth on their loins.
The moon, steel-clenched, an open lion's den.

Daniel is a ghost trapped in a cobweb,
gnawed by the curse of a cheated spider.
What a stratagem! What deluded prey!
A beggar on a stone dreams like Jacob:

Angels ascend, descend with full almsbags,
take the beggar to the sky of pennies.
The stars crowd as a pack of dusty dreams,
each beam — a bud of a forbidden bush.

On Satan's throne play princes of darkness,
the reckless children of the underworld —
spendthrifts of the riches of the sunsets,
children hewn out of the womb of a rock.

The sun drops as the head of a squealer.
Garbage cans turn into suspicious gold.

Our castle is on the isle of Pitt Street.
 The skies of Manhattan are in your eyes.
 You are all wheat-scented, like Miriam,
 dancing triumph through a rain of manna.

Dusk. Our garret plunders seven heavens.
 Moses on a casement splits the Red Sea,
 his rod — an ember of the dying day,
 a day, patched and darned as the grief-worn street.

Beacons dwindle in the urban twilight.
 Birds serenade the freed slaves of Goshen.
 Night. Through New York, the goddess of cities
 climb, moon loved, the visions of Isaiah.

The child to lead the leopard and the kid,
 slumbers out of time — a lake-bound naiad.

On The Death Of A Day Old Child

All dead, day old children will welcome you.
 The wind will sing my lullabies to you,
 when the sun falls where the saddest grass grows.

You are the beginning when light is wise.
 God will guard to the end of days your day,
 in the land of manna, Eden of bread.

With ray and shade you will play pranks all day.
 Autumn will teem with the brown of your eyes.
 With my grief will forever weep the dew.

✕

Spring Rain In Manhattan

O brook of the streets after the first spring rain,
quarreling with Pan on the strange city stones,
licking the pavements, pleading with fate in vain,
seeking the fields in panic, O barren rain!
O cloud longing for the sky, O brook of pain!
The gutter in the sun is God's highest throne.
Naiad of the streets, born by a city rain,
you left a kiss on each cool, grateful stone.

✕

Evening

The old house still echoes your vanished voice.
The bricks like loose teeth hold the word good bye.
Blind beggars count pennies with lucky eyes.
Over old rays the young shadows rejoice.

I dream of you as of fire a fallen tree.
Each thing you touched, the ground on which you walked
envies even the ears which hear you talk,
is a conqueror's whiphand over me.

Mammon corners the day in a cobweb.
Mammon the merchant of life and death turns
you into stocks and bonds, a Wall Street urn.
Night and fire, fondling foes, leave me spear swept.

Good the sun is noosed in the spider's prey.
No darkness dismays as the light of day.

I light candles for you as for the dead.
 As on gallows hangs here headless your dress.
 Lilith comes to rip it to the last thread.
 Left of you is a tear, a frown, a guess.

The mourning candles wave to you farewell,
 in the sullen room of this condemned house.
 Visions with bodies of smoke, souls of hell
 dance on the fierce ceiling. A friendly mouse
 and this moon-mad poem is their sole meed.
 The night vies with the wretched lanes, homebound.
 On a faded wall, a stray dawnstreak bleeds.
 Flickering wicks in a merry-go-round :
 Foggy ringlets speed in a dreary race,
 touch the last flame as a guillotined face.

Broadway :
 I am the gay girl of your ravishing night.
 I build the rich castles of your cheap cabarets.
 I jig your lights, I vamp your life.
 At dawn I carry home the yoke of weary love.
 At dawn I lead you to a lurking lane astray.
 Some stingy dimes, a garret in the slums
 is all that is left of you — Broadway.
 The lone hours reiterate my toil :
 The tiny room is a huge goblet.
 The ceiling swears to elope with the floor.
 The old walls jazz their youth again.

Keeping vigil hours — ages on the April street,
hounding you, argus-eyed, dead or alive, in vain,
thinking of you as of a faithful counterfeit,
as loaded with foiled hopes roars by train after train, —

I see the towers scale as fabled beasts on the street,
carrying headstones to a far necropolis;
and I, patient and kind as dust, waiting to meet,
not you, but my grandchildren of far centuries,

when I am time-gnawn, a forgotten ancestor.
(I salute the evergreen flag of the grassland.)
Dusk. Each evening sash is a falling meteor.
The sun leaves on its own tomb a farewell garland.

The earth is teeming with you and me, with Aprils
fresh from their graves with distant sunsets which will bleed
yearning cities out of reach. I will wait until
we meet again, navel to navel, seed to seed.

**You are a minute late for our appointment.
I await you in a cafeteria,
in expectation of a great miracle.**

**In two minutes the thronged cafeteria
seems empty as after a calamity.
(Crowds flow around me as a quenchless river.)**

**In three minutes elves chewed off my fingernails.
I dread you may never come, could be you met
Icarus on the way and flew to the sun.**

**Four minutes are the hands and feet of a ghoul
who invades you as a treasure grave, thus and
so what is left of you if not a raped nymph?**

**Evening towers climb from mirage to mirage.
With each turn of the revolving door New York
returns to its unborn stage, to virgin wilds.**

**In five minutes I have a date with longing.
You never lived or died my love, still you roll
me under every wheel of my queened city,
still I am stoned by the mobbed streets of New York.**

Apple, as I take you in my hand to eat,
yielding so kindly, as if you grew for me,
that I may grind you lusciously with my teeth, —
I am your longing to return to the tree.

You mellow as the immortal rose I promised
my love, in these plucked gardens of Orchard Street.
(I am, like Abraham, an innate bigamist.
Eternity dies, moments are infinite.)

You still blush as a ripe bride, stripped to the skin,
still remember the thriving ache of each floweret.
O nail me forever to guilt, not for the sin
of eating you. Shame-eaten, I bow in regret,
when I think, chosen fruit of Eden, what you
will turn into after I gnaw the last bite,
(You will be again with God — dawn, earth and dew.)
I fear, I may leave sin-black the stained daylight.

The air is furtive with apple-scented deceit.
Vendors smell with the stale grapes of pushcart vines.
Even the sun peddles its gold on Orchard Street.
Furrowed apples of love dream of blossomtime.

**My love at the open window is attractive as danger.
The open window leads to wonder, through tempting height.
The wind escorts her last glance with timbrel and dance.
Evening shadows kneel to her, thrill with death her prayer,
through the gloom of Pike Street, in the stone twilight:
— O give the hundred rainy autumns to the pious crone.
I take the rainbow, the sin of the sacred trance.**

**The street yells with wind and want, with dust and jolly tramps.
I stand condemned in the autumn-lit park.
Strewn leaves strive to reach their mother tree again.
The cold boughs of the bare park embrace me, as with her dead arms.
I see her mournful hair as a twisted shroud.
The tall, craving shadow — a shrunken, craven hunchback.
Her eyes gloam in the frail light.
I see her falling from each window
and hear her body shattering like the voice of Mephistopheles.**

Night. Angels guard the rich dreams of the poor.
The old street, overawed, feeds its own doom.
A stray cat in the midst of a wild climb,
as if by a somnambulist lured,
grips with broken claws a steep chimney,
mewing for help to delirious stars:
A wingless cat-bird on a soaring tree.
Heaven is near, the earth as Eden far.

Autumn chills the rouged souls of two-bit girls.
Lonely harlots brood in veiled attics.
Banjos, cats and bums
welcome to hell condemned buildings.
The moon crowns each princess of sin
the kindest of women,
kind to the kind as to the brute, —
the friend of the streets,
noble as moonbeams
which give to dung as to the rose God's light.
Through the haggard night I am the wondrous
flute.

The twilight is a soaring orchard of wild cherries.
Golden fairyfolk haul the sun as a celestial corpse.
The night, city-bred, wine-wise,
a starry hag who flirts with each throe.
I follow her through steel and shame, iron and gloom.

I have the fate of a goat, the sin of a serpent.
My mother died of too much longing for beauty and for love.
My father still dreams of birds and hoboos,
in Sing-Sing behind eternal bars.
My childhood blossomed as a wound.

My childhood was a harlot,
when gnawed by hunger and dread of life.
I have been the home of unborn children,
playing under the barren leaves of a wrung berrybush.
I saw angels soar in the wind,
as seeds which never tasted fields.

The ghost of spiders is in my breath.
I saw my lovers glaring as venomous spears.
In the suspicious shimmer of a third backyard,
men tossed a handful of pennies
for my dozen skinny Aprils.
O dear gutter, remember me!

FOOL OF BOROUGH PARK

Rival memories of the knight age, disrobe her
on the Great White Way — a reminiscent nude,
(Of the forbidden wines is left a sober bore.)
as if, raped, against a jeering mob she stood.

She is shy as a huge diamond on display.
Hired mermaids in her eyes hound a wonder broom,
to sweep the autumns from her styled spring away.
Beyond the universe I stand — a slapped bridegroom.

She is hand and limb — gem, a dazzling typhoon:
a rose of a feigned garden, a hand made bride.
Nostalgic steel bleeds a bachelor's honeymoon.
The twilight elves seek a handsome suicide.

I see her vanish through shoving multitudes:
a frail reverie in a crushing embrace.
Flowed ripples of an arid creek, deluded
on Times Square still babble of her squandered grace.

The late day is a doubtmonger rent asunder.
Surging crowds carry an invisible hearse.
The city wind is a stereotyped laughter.
The sun rolls into the mouth of Mammon's purse.

On Bores

✕

A Young Bore

When a young business bore stands next to you,
you see real estate when you look at trees.
On bargain day one and one is a few.
Your dreams on the stock market are tax-free.

All his eminent humdrum is your own.
Heaven and hell are bought in general stores.
At the gem counter, rubies ever dawn.
In market town is a coin a meteor.

June of eighteen carat gold is on sale
in florid Florida, in December.
Bermuda skies sell blue angels wholesale.
In African wilds, you see skinned each bear.

The Milky Way in dew is a diamond store.
Midas turns tin debtors into gold creditors.

✕

An Old Bore

When an old insured bore sits next to you,
his colored tales, self-born, are skilled rainbows.
The reminiscent sky is of tired blue,
in the drowsy land of Nod where old storms doze.

Always on guard, a curved track has anxious claws.
Even in a breeze he hears ambushed sneaks chat.
Doves over carrion are imminent crows.
Dollars bate in his hands, like green spectral bats.

Fate is a wise palm of a lucky crone.
Young truth is a lie, he — the old lie is true.
His greed is the power behind Satan's throne.
Only his yellowed days the wind will strew.

His gathered summers are threshed, weighed, priced and stored.
The moon over his grave is a fabulous bore.

✕

A Traveling Bore

When you travel with a bore around the globe,
you think God made distance to have enough room
for you to ride through drab infinity, doomed
to curse, through space, the day you were born, like Job.

You plead: Elohim, when I come to Sheol,
in the bottomless pit of hell, do not spare
the infernal rod to tell me I once dared
to sin, laugh, cry, live and die, but I will call
you from the abyss of fire-fiends, O save me
from the plague of a contagious bore. I fear
his skill in grill and shrill may drill out of me
sour yoghurt and out of you — a monstrous tear.

I saw the sun, at dusk, pray long next to a bore
for a fate where there is no return anymore.

Borough Park dreams of a park since its birth,
 a dream, a lame duck in a stagnant pond.
 The streets hum and drum infinite humdrum.
 Change of season means change of tedium.
 O the boredom may outlive even God!

The moron as if out of a ghoulish land,
 leads the days and nights through deaf and dumb streets.
 Horse faced, under the horse load of his head,
 the Grand Booby walks through his own splendor,
 neighing thanks to himself that he was born.

Here is Shulamite, choice rose of Sharon,
 dyed on a cheap dress of a show window.
 Not Solomon is at the shepherd's tent,
 but he, the princely fool of Borough Park.
 He drinks from the goblet which needs no wine.

He sees Engedi — his private daydream,
 with eyes — wild berries of deadly nightshades.
 His bride leaves her dress in the show window
 and walks nude through the vines of Borough Park.
 The little hill can conquer all mountains.

The fate of the fool is ever thriving.
 Dawns rise with the glory of crowned blockheads.
 Gangs with gutter tongues shrewd as guillotines,
 salute him as their master mariner,
 the sailor clown on their boat of fortune.

June. The Brooklyn trees rage with jealous green.
Moons are skulked dastards of the underworld.
Alley cats mate, rejoice he is alive.
If he ever dies, who will dare to live?
The sad earth will return to genesis.

When Grand Booby took a free ride to hell,
under the bleak, night filled elevated,
he left a pack of wolves in his last howl,
and suspicion — a poison-toothed punk.
Winds in Borough Park laugh his horse laughter.

✕

A Hero In Bronze

A hero in bronze, rain-blinded in the autumn park,
Birds stain his gallant ire, he is all pitiful love.
On the kind bronze rest stray sisters of the flood-drenched dove,
in search of a green olive-leaf out of Noah's ark.

Battle-spent — a crowned bore, he prays for downfall or hell.
Gloom frightens each trembling glimmer of his faded wreath.
Good to see the leaves around him fall as yellow myths.
Only the saddest leaves which never grew never fell.

Dusk. Cherubs are wing-maimed, unborn children craving light.
The hero, sorrow-wreathen, tomb-eyed, a stoned captive,
does not know he was ever born, hence he never lived.
He may scare as a ghost, if left with a child at night.

The sea-gray trees face the oldest pirate — solitude.
I heard dead leaves say: No darkness is blind, no stone mute.

NAMES OF MICHALISHEK

It was I, wistful as my barefoot town,
a lost, rawboned boy praying on Broadway :
God, if I must go astray O lose me
in dark woods enchanted by Elijah,
where his glance makes kind each brute in its lair,
where elves play with fire in the eyes of wolves.

This I learned, you cannot long anywhere,
as on the crooked lane where I was born.
You cannot see light as sad anywhere
as on a gay New Year's Eve on Broadway.
The lights vanquish, riot, rout each other.
Each light seeks darkness as the darkness light.

The jolly horde roars as a beast of gloom.
The clamor overhead is like a whip.
The sun is condemned to immortal light.
It seems someone kidnapped the good, old night
and left the clowns to bargain the ransom.
Broadway, O grandeur of modern ennui !

The old year dies raging glory to doom
as if death were the fountain of triumph.
In my eyes — the warm, quivering lamplight,
in combat with the cold, crushing splendor.
A straw-roofed hut humbles the Great White Way.
Each frolic is avid of my sorrow.

Through Times Square as through a huge, garish den,
wayfares over tower-crowns my razed town,
where mute birds drag with their bills their clipped wings.
The moon is a base, yellow-fingered coin.
A brook complains, in vain, to hill and dale :
Not a shred, not a shade of wonder left.

Mine are the names outmoded as the kindness of my mother,
 humble as the cool shadows in the evening woodland,
 where echoes do not pine away for the love of Narcissus,
 but in yearning for a yell of the vanished children of Michalishek.
 The restless rivulet roving through hankering Pigstreet,
 will repeat forever and a day the names of Michalishek.

Listen :

Yeiske - Meishke - Blumke - Menke - Berke - Elchik.

Yeiske, real as this rhymeless prayer to love :
 a thrilling chill from the snows of my childhood,
 entrancing as Joseph through the dreams of Pharaoh,
 not in dungeons of Egypt but on mudlands of Lithuania
 cherished by a wish of a homeless, hunted Jew.

Yeiske, genuine as the light of my eyes.

Meishke, a name moving as an oar of a home-made rowboat,
 rowed idly by a lone, love-wounded lad.
 longing for his barefoot maiden over the Viliya river,
 which hugged the townlet of my bearded forefathers :
 rich in mighty dreams, proud with hoary wisdom.
 The crude oar in lover's hands, miraculous as Moses' wonder rod.

Blumke, brisk as stray seeds flung into your face by a slapping wind.
 Her hair braided with tough flowers growing out of the stones
 of a ruin.

Her fingers sore from plucking sorrel out of thornbushes.
 Winter, she mellows by the light of cherubs on wings of icicles.
 The sudden gust through frost-weeds rustled her in silks.
 Blumke, sister of dandelions — O tear kissed sister of mine !

Menke, laughworthy, not worth the eyehole of a needle, —
 but my eyebrows are opulent, bushy as thoughts of life after death :
 My father's eyebrows — the pride of the baretoed nights
 of Michalishek,
 eager as expectant moments of a long-awaited beloved.

**My walk is light and free as my mother's laughter.
I am dangerous as at twilight a falling day,
daring as a newborn word, startling as a freshly molded verse.
I am chatty as Yiddish, my mother tongue.
I dallied with dreams as in a game of jackstones,
when stars paved the crooked, unpaved alley where I was born.**

Midnight.

The candlelit house struggles with the night, blind as a mole.
Berke — a boy left all alone in the depths of a "cheder" tale,
where a dark forest glares only with the eyes of a threatening bear.
The bear is shaken by the awe of the pleading boy:
"O, bear, bear, bearele, be timid and kind,
mamma will surely bring you tomorrow
a tasty cooky flavored with poppy-seeds."

Elchik is the neighboring brother from the nearby cemetery:
a lad wrought on a windowpane of our age-weary house,
caressed by pitiless winter, pampered by bleak, freezing design.
Elchik — a name scorched under the ashes of fire fiends.
Michalishek in flames toward a deaf, godless sky,
carries him to heaven, like Elijah, on horses of fire.

The moon is a snow-apple of a delusive orchard,
to tease hungry little brothers and a fright-skinned sister.
Carved in traceries of frost-work appears Elijah of Gilead,
seeking death, in vain, under a broom-bush,
with God not in wind or fire, but in tender whisper.
The smell of caves of the wilderness on his clothes.
The kindness of a far lucky morrow in his eyes.
Real and near as the next-door neighbor,
he opens for the children a bagful of bread,
brought to him by ravens at the brook Kerith.
Elchik is the light of his long shining beard.
He scatters on the windowpane the three hundred bits of silver
which Joseph gave to Benjamin in the land of Egypt.
The cheery sister picks frost-beads for a fairy garland.
The wealthy little brothers gather the fancied coins.

✕

Dveirke - I

The dingy street — Zohar-lit, a wonderland.
Folks sing of the rarest gems found in tears.
Paupers give alms with Elijah's blessing hands.
Splendor crowds the lurid lanes when you appear.

Your steps in sandals are as Shulamite's,
though you keep not the vineyards of En-gedi,
but the simple brooks — the wandering myths
of Lithuania. Your breath of En-gedi.

Cabalists turn dust into flesh, bone into rays.
The moon frays the silver off its face with mud,
dreams and soot of the wistful alleyway.
Tales of princes bring a castle into each hut.

Legends slumber in crumbs of light, in stones and thorns.
Nearby swim starry maidens, river-borne.

✕

Dveirke - II

The trance of sephiroth in the dying day. Mean
winds bang the loose shutters of the old house.
We vow to love ever-craving as the stream.
Fresh from the stream the knit daisies of your blouse.

Dveirke, coy, dimpled maiden of my childhood,
with the yearning of my hometown in your eyes:
comely as Michalishek, where my cradle stood,
where beards are thick with pilpul and thumbs are wise.

My words to you untouched as kisses in a dream.
Yours — the treasure-hunt by an unknown poet owned:
a weeping flute playing for the stone-eared lost hymns.
Mine — what is left of you: gold of days, never dawned.

Forlorn I stand — a cursed tree which gives no shade.
Harvests yield the fragrance of your hay-scented braids.

✕

Dveirke - III

"Our day dream is a lone oasis through the crowds of New York.
Tender as the light of unborn days you come with aurora.
You walk through a golden Michalishek on streets of New York.
O Dveirke, your name: raw, strength of Yiddish, love of Deborah.

"The streets welcome you with carefree laughter of sparkling
children.

Nodding snowdrops in a schoolyard promise you the nearby Spring."
"I come from Oschwentchim, a strangled child of God's chosen
children.

I know, white flowers are sisters of snow, the first tears of Spring.

My heart is a black orchid, spun of ashes, my touch might
turn every stone into a tombstone, my dimples into scars.
The first rays are shamed, untouched wine-cups for our marrying
night,
as I leave beyond dawn, dreaming of you in a bed of stars."

I see Michalishek in heaven — the prettiest alley.
O bride of my daydreams, O Zion's lily of the valley.

I am a lover, a pauper, and a poet.
My heart is clean beneath the threadbare shirt.
I learned wisdom from the Talmudic skies of Lithuania.
I am gracefully uncouth.
I cleaved my grace from the slums of New York.

My father like Columbus dreamed of America, when I was born.
My childhood wanned at a patched window,
where I imagined a cake soaring like a cherub,
where I saw candy, toys, and cocoa,
under the wings of a nymph only.

The cruel hand of destiny led us through hunger, war and plague.
We were four little brothers and a scrawny sister.
In the autumn garret we heard the song of Spring,
as crawling doves would hear the giggle of their craven victor.
The wind through redolent meadows was a bleak laughter.

O our weary mother carried us
through the prosperous thorns of our scared little town, Michalishek,
From a fairy tale came the night — a spectral undertaker,
to bury the thorny day of Lithuania.
God was the baker from Eden who baked the tasty stars.

To Yeiske

✕

At A Cup Of Coffee

I write these lines to
you, unpolished as your name,
unmeasured as love.
My private island is a
table in a coffee shop.

Just an hour sojourn,
in self served meridian
splendor. I daydream
safaris on dazed camels.
Broadway is a crude cart road.

The safaris crushed
on rock, skull and cliff of the
nerve ridden city;
echoed and reechoed through
the hoarse air of Manhattan.

A cup of coffee
is my shield. A trance
eludes the jam on Times Square.
It is coffeetime — chat time,
from dawn to dawn in New York.

O the humble joy
of a cafeteria,
detouring hell with
you and glowing friends at a
cup of coffee — cup of dreams.

O your name may be
tender as the sore wing of
a baby eagle;
soothing — mother's first refrain:
—ai - le - loo - le, loo - le - loo.

Your name may be harsh
as Yiddish — proud mother tongue
of witch-hunted Jews;
when words hit with the wrath of
stones flinging against a foe.

Your name may be bleak,
as the house where you were born,
where I saw your first
light-hating dawn streaking gaunt
specters on the cold chimney.

The walls — mossed humps, (were
once gallant birch trees.) gilded
by the gloom of a
timorous wick. I saw you
a newborn apparition.

Our mother — tallow-
pale, fancy-stung. The rocking
cradle conjured the
shades of the haunted ruin:
the adjacent land of fiends.

O Michalishek,
our village in Paradise
dreams of herring and
potatoes. Our reveries
twine through the twisted alleys.

The trees of Eden
grow on frost fettered casements,
crave in vain the ax.
Your name — five frozen claws in
assault: Y! E! I! SSS! KE!

✕

If You Do Not Know

Inwrought essence of
my first and last hour — Yeiske:
If you do not know
what can shrink eternity
to the size of a peanut,

I will tell you: It
is a well dressed word of a
nude, love-proof woman.
Her tears — unwept, her laughter,
a shriek from a gold-ribbed urn.

If you do not know
why Eos is reborn each
dawn, I will tell you:
to show the unrivaled end,
how infinite birth may be.

If you do not know
why the sun dies at each dusk,
I will tell you: It
is to show how unsubdued,
ever handsome death may be.

✕

On Hunting

I heard the legends
of Michalishek at a
brook in New England.
I saw the deer take your moods
in a dash to the unknown.

O leave for the armed
coward the skill to
vie with a trapped deer ;
the fun to pierce the heavens
with the cry of a shot bird.

In the plundered nest
only ghosts hatch their cursed eggs.
Calm has a vile tongue.
Even stumps are wounds in the
twilight woods. Even stones bleed.

The cat bird — a pest
mews odes to a craven ghoul.
The wind strews baned seeds.
O hear a dead bird with a
broken beak peck someone's skull !

✕

On Tools

O the ecstasy
of sober tools. The plow splits
the ripe sod, prepares
the bridal seed beds, pledges
everlasting Spring on earth.

The sickle is a
new moon: a risky lover
through coquetting wheat.
The shovel is God's palm fresh
with the crust of verdant turf.

The searchlight through dark
danger is a mirage of
the miraculous
deserts of old Israel.

The sun is a perfect wheel.

Fingers are dwarfs who
pine for each numb piston of
a palsied engine.

A file is a darting glance
of the wise king Solomon.

The ax is an old
inquisitor of modern,
dark ages. Hammers
are gangsters with monster heads.
The saw — a steel, gnashing beast.

The chisel is
a constructive tooth of a fierce,
punitive giant:
beheading debased shadows,
boring silence out of stone.

The scythe — a razor
of a tough barber shaves the
chins of weedy lawns.
The pick is Samson's curved arm,
through the brute heart of a reef.



✕

On Blueprints

I saw on blueprints
the engineer's dream. I saw
New York dawn in the
farthest era — a young myth,
ascending for love and light.

I heard tomorrow's
subterranean cities,
merrily roaring
under a fortunate earth.

I saw America fly
to the nearby Mars.
O steel nerved poet of the
cautious motor and
the daring propeller: I
saw you build the eighth heaven.

✕

A Shade Or Two

We will die singing
Yiddish, heartrending folksongs:
hoary lovers with
the idle, witted delight
of our kind-jawed grandfathers.

Let us say there is
a Michalishek beneath
its ashes, beyond
our dust and we will play love
on the coiled lanes with elf maids.

Let us say there is
no end. The end is just an
instant earlier
than beginning. Darkness is
just a world older than light.

Just a wound between
thorn and violet, just a
flare between frolic
and gloom. Only a lightning
between silence and thunder.

O let us say there
is a bygone heaven not
a bygone love. Death
is simply a shade or two
other than life. No sunset

grieves to its last ray.
We are in the afterglow:
far, scintillating
beacons — hermits of the sky.
O ever circling, stray moons!

Years surge and recede:
a sea driven to the shoals.
We yearn through wind, dust.
Longing is a hurtful grace,
not within the grave to hide.

My hymn to you will
never end. At each moon-down
will ever meet in
mystic Safad two brothers,
two poets of long ago.

TO MY SON

O my father's house : the proud patch, mortgaged tear,
with the tale-spinners under the humblest tree,
which begged bits of sun on his ice and coal yard.
No birds — fullbearded, virile men found solace.
in the genial blight of its shriveled shade.
The carefree chat, the prime sport, rolled as a stream.

O my father's house, bleak as the winter night,
when out of quenched fires slipped in Eden neighbors
and hid in ambush, in the covered mirrors.
The moon went down as an indolent tumor,
in the dull-eyed hicktown, at Passaic River.
Stones knew the mute panic of silenced objects.

The gray street was a legendary snowland.
The tree : frost-rent, each limb — a shroud in the wind.
The urine of sewers was its smarting dew,
gnawing it from heartroot to crown gall alive.
The sole admirer left was the woodchopper.
Hewed down, it was my father's wood nymph again.

Heershe David, my handsome newborn son :
You came to greet my fiftieth birthday,
when the late, inglorious, evening sun
is still a span from the abyss away.

To the women, as my sins, beautiful,
you came to represent me my great son !
Strike all my charms when these words turn mournful,
when I will have my fervid battles won.

Find each beloved which I could not reach.
Thrill my neighbors just a few scores away.
Through barren nights when ghosts and eunuchs preach,
see me at dawn choose the comeliest fay.

You came manly, demanding with full fists,
a prince of love by sea-tossed maidens kissed.

Come O come, light of foot my year old son.
 Ho! With the dare of David, rise and fall.
 Your fingers like stonelets out of the brook,
 fate in hand — the valor of your people.

Sling Goliath with the aid of no one,
 may he be six cubits and a span tall.
 One more step, one more fall, ruddy son, look :
 Eden is a toyland of year old people.

Steep hills, treacherous sands seem on the way,
 fear not, a giant guard stands your father.
 Your father's hands are two forts to the right.
 The home-made bear in wondrous woods is your shield.

May you see many decades beyond me dawn,
 long — long after my last laughter, my last tears.

You have grown a man since the ninth of May.
 Each step, like a giant's, a mile farther.
 To the left, your mother's arms, girlish, slight :
 a longing cradle with lullabies filled.

After every fall O how good to rise.
 (To rise a child at dawn falls at dusk the sun.)
 You chatter the secrets the naiads say,
 in waves against rocks, in dance of the stream.

My father's lost skies are blue in your eyes.
 From roots to stem to crown we are ever one.
 O speak English, Hebrew, the tongue of fays,
 in Yiddish, you are — I, light of the same beam.

Find me in the wind on David's harp, my son,
 Playing my thirst for you to the end of years.

Bring no sissy toys for my three year old man.
 He will rip a stuffed queen to see her naked soul.
 He dares a stiff king to fight him man to man.
 To raze a doll kingdom is a gallant goal.

A tin eagle will fly as a falling star.
 The bent wings tell him when motion began.
 He craves David's harp, he wrecks a deaf guitar.
 When nymphs sing in the rain he is himself Pan.

Hand-made, dimpled milk-maids milking wooden cows, pray
 for his slap to escape the spurious lawn.
 A dumb watch — a numskull rolls merrily away
 to the beginning of time before the first dawn.

The steel-bound sunrise of New York in his glance.
 The mystic glory of Safad under his feet.
 An old adventurer hit by dare and chance.
 He eats the earth and it tastes like manna sweet.

Always in ambush, on the lurk, a decoy.
 Life and death of glass-eyed bumpkins in his hands.
 He tears a lame lion fighting a booby boy.
 The foe of ennui, inventor of toylands.

A finger dipped in mud is Adam's prime pen.
 He writes the earth-old wisdoms of the first ray
 when he scribbles love to his cat in heaven.
 Chico is safe, God took it to the stars away.

Leaves are green letters to grandma and to God.
 He wants heaven and earth to know he was born.
 He is boisterous as the wind through goldenrod.
 He is shock and thrill, turns roses into thorns.

No gun-games for him, he lets the cowards war.
He is of Isaiah's dauntless kin my son.
After his blessed day of manual labor,
I say: I am proud of your soiled ears, my son.

A cloud in Safad is a roving wonderland.
At dusk is rich in gold even a dung-heap.
Each stone is Jacob's pillow in this holy land.
Angels go down the dream-born ladder to sleep.

✕

When My Three Year Old Son Will Be Fifty Three

When you will be fifty three as I am today,
will still be left of me, at dusk, a single glow.
Looking at the twilight you will at random say:
my dad is dead long ago, dead long, long ago.

It may be on the streets of New York or Tel Aviv,
you will one day by reminiscence overrun,
see me as you do now ever and anon live,
see me longing in your eyes, my three year old son.

I will be the young sadness of each new sunset.
My poems: gold-lit boats on earth and sky will sail.
Yiddish in your mouth — a brisk, hasty rivulet
will flow agile, beyond me over hill and dale.

My son,
do not ever mourn in the marketplace,
so the pitying rabble may not see
your tears as an autumn drizzle,
sprinkling its monotony,
over the yellow ears of a pestering November day;
so that some sorrow-sick crocodile,
may not creep out of some old traveler's tale,
sobbing in view of all after devouring its prey.

My son,
may you never yawn
under the clipped wings of a virginal bore.
Mine is the fire-bed of the yet unborn Rahab,
the harlot of the yet unbuilt Jericho.
The farthest ray — the untouched kiss,
is more Satan and I, more you and Gabriel
than all the legal orgasms of a routine wife.

O a hundred years hence, my son,
seven year old, fool-proof prankster,
we shall all be merrily dead.

We will be in every wonder,
in miracles spun by spiders —
a tale of a hundred years hence.

Each echo will ever echo:
we are immortal, no wind is
born to vanish, no stone is dead.

A stone dropped in a stream will bring
round and round all the suns we saw
go down a hundred years ago.

We will join the unborn children,
untouched as snowflakes in a dream,
we shall all be blissfully dead.

The wind will be our next of kin.
(I hear falling leaves talk of birth.)
Just a hundred years hence, my son,
ho, death will be merrily dead.

I am a Yiddish poet — a doomed troubadour,
 a dreamsmith jeered by the soft-voiced yokel,
 the smooth snob with the swinging lash shrieking: jargon!
 O are the mocked tears of my people a jargon?

Yiddish,
 formed as Adam of the dust of the four corners of the earth;
 the quenchless blaze of the wandering Jew,
 the thirst of the deserts.

My mother tongue is unpolished as a wound, a laughter,
 a love-starved kiss,
 yearnful as a martyr's last glance at a passing bird.
 Taste a word, cursed and merciless as an earthquake.
 Hear a word, terse and bruised as a tear.
 See a word, light and lucent, joyrapt as a ray.
 Climb a word— rough and powerful as a crag.
 Ride a word — free and rimeless as a tempest.

Yiddish,
 The bare curse thrown against the might of pitiless foes.
 A "black year" shrouding dawn after a massacre.
 The mute call of each speechless mouth of Treblinka.
 The prayer of stone to turn into gale.

THE CONQUEROR

You leave each dusk all
 your days on my windowpane
 and a stone, no foe
 can conquer, no sea can drown :
 wonder-dumb — a golem's fist.

O the vengeful stone
 thrown from the ruins of my
 hometown — the ghost
 of a massacre which foe
 can surmount, which sea can drown?

A stone — a skull, strong
 as grief, the beheaded crown
 of the tree of hell,
 the dryad driven in the
 Valley of Hinnom, in my

bride's ashen wedding
 gown calls her lover — the tree
 with broken fingers
 like anguished roots : (Her yearning
 through me which death can vie it?)

— O dream of me, dream !
 The ax made of you no mast
 of a boat, no oar,
 not even a bier. Left of
 you is my cry in the woods.

The doomed, at dusk, climb
 Jacob's ladder like gallows.
 The dryad — the waif
 of the forest flickers on
 a stump, bereaved of her tree.

✕

A Prayer

Hear my prayer, Elohim, when I die,
O let me not be a rose or a thorn,
but a midnight sky on my childhood lane
where of my love is still left a shy braid,
out of a moon-beam spun — a hoary dream.

O let me lead the lovelorn, Elohim,
soothe the featherless crow, the whining mouse,
the mermaid bereft of her fableland :
the culled townfolk to serenade the hag,
before the archfiends in the ruins riot.

O let me be a smooth stone out of the brook,
that will fit into David's shepherd bag :
an old sling against a new Goliath ;
or a twilight window in a lone house,
where a self-doomed looks at the last sunset.

✕

The Conqueror

God, to whom will you come to atone for your sins,
when the last man falls, the last cries on earth — unheard,
when razed cities will pray to you in silenced din ?

A thorn-wreathed lea where the Empire State has been.
Ruins in deep slumber not by a living voice stirred.
God, to whom will you come to atone for your sins ?

Fall in Spring will gild forever all that is green.
Midas will lead us as an infinite gold herd.
God, come to the razed cities, pray to the hushed din.

Moon-browed alchemists will turn silver into tin.
Death will die like you and I, good, evil, beast, bird,
for no one will live or die, no one will sin.

The serpent — victor of Eden, hunger-worn, skinned,
will hiss at broken-winged cherubs on sterile earth.
Through razed cities will roar loudest the mute din.

The last war between death and death Satan will win,
will guard the tree of life with flaming sword girt.
God, in virtued ennui, you will miss as light our sins,
when razed cities pray to you in silenced din.

✕

To A Neighbor

O neighbor of a thousand years away,
walk tenderly, yonder lies the cursed age.
A modern prayer is a madman's rage.
A new dawn could strangle the farthest day.

Weep for the trees which scared the birds away.
With the plunder of the dead — the gay ghoul,
came God and Man, heaven and earth to rule.
Only graves admired the sad charms of May.

No lilacs were fair as gallows in bloom,
where the skies as the hangman's eyes were blue.
O who if not I am the lucky Jew,
who could choose the kind hour for my own doom?

Neighbor, beware, even God nearly fell,
against the gory conqueror — in hell!

The sun falls by the hammer, cut
by the sickle, left is the rod,
the inflicting hand and the night.

Silence has ears, darkness — eyes,
walls may betray, flowers gossip
with bees as poets of yore say.

A cliff shattered in a tempest
is a golem, a stoned Samson,
its shadow is a fear-struck serf.

The heart dares not know of the mouth,
crickets are chirping stoolpigeons.
Forbidden rays are fond of chains.

Stars are jailmates in each death-cell,
drowning as in a well, seeking
death throughout the long night in vain.

A grim guard with an iron brain
guards a patch of dawn, (The first beams
are children of tomorrow, safe
under the wings of nailed cherubim.)

his glance is a whip, his heart — black,
his terror — red, his flag is a
bone of his bones — a gory horn:

O new Sodom O fairyland!
Clouds are free to rove everywhere,
fish are free to fly, birds to swim.

Condemned for treason is the dream,
the beginning beyond the end.
Only spears may be born with souls.

Voices of the dead rumor in
ever-echoing caves, whisper
to gallows in daunted daylight.

No god is divine as the fist,
Prince and grub, dove and beggar pray
to the noose — the heathen's caress.

Each wraith laughs and cries at command:
O death, be gracious unto me,
return me to the stone, the friend
of the mute, the mocked, the hellborn.

✕

Still Life Of The Year Two Thousand

Isaiah — a chained prophet in the valley of vision.
A venomed child plays in the den of a kind basilisk.
Fire in wind turns the pages of a lone prayer book.

A dance of merry chimeras.
A heavenless God wailing through the ruins of Moscow.
Hand-made stars are serfs to darkness and to sin.
Jesus nailed to the cross again.

Fallen towers are twisted, steel dales in Manhattan.
Broadway is an old fire-bug.
The twentieth century is a young tomb.
The sun, gory-sceptered, frozen and blind.
And I am still a spark of the dazzling legend — New York.

✕

Mirror - Writing

I saw the cradle of my child — a tomb.
The sun at daybreak was a rising wound.
The blue of his eyes as skies seen by the doomed.
I saw the cradle of my child a tomb.
Streams wrung dry as bone-ache, might of gloom.
His only June to the winds of autumn tuned.
I saw the cradle of my child — a tomb.
The sun at daybreak was a rising wound.

✕

Palm Reading

The palm is a map of the end of days.
All clouds are damned to stray to the barren blue.
A mad moon dreams of Adam's erased face.
The life-line, the loneliest lane is for two.
The two are day and night, last weird lovers,
vestiges of the twentieth century.
A thousand new laughs which June discovered,
laugh at the quaint chatter of Spring-stricken trees.
The trees hate their roots like chains, crave to rove,
released from their earth, cursed by the foot of Cain.
The zeal of a thirsty mouth I once loved,
still drains from the blue a wondrous drop of rain.
The earth — a star or evil eye still rules
the sole island universe, proclaims doomsday
through abjured time and space as the chief ghoul.
O who is kind as saint satan on doomsday?

I met Beelzebub in my own lost paradise.
He said :
— Let us embrace, brother-demon.
I am with you whenever you fall.
I am the prince of fallen demons.
On the perpetual path of Baalzebub — the lord of flies,
it is your turn to sin, hate and cry.
I welcomed the cruel days beyond you.
I shall haunt the crueler nights ahead of you.
Rejoice!
A new dawn smiles as a hyena in love with carrion.
Before I leave, I wish you a happy death.
I will come again a blink before you die,
to show you,
more light in your last ray than in all lost Springs.

GRAND TOUR

✕

Winter Scene

The house — a snow boat.
Snowflakes — six winged seraphim,
sail to bring my love.

✕

On Harlots

Harlots are divine,
taught by Prince Satan to kiss
with a mouth of hell.

✕

On History

What is history,
if not a sea maniac,
who counts each swept wave?

✕

On The Birth Of My Son

My son, I am so
affluent with beginning
that if I die now
God will see me as first light
and he will say: "It is good."

✕

Methuselah

Woe, Methuselah!
Even you, our oldest bore
are with nine hundred
and sixty nine years humdrum,
a tarrying guest on earth.

✕

On Race

Two races were left
from time immemorial:
the race of mammon,
and the race of lone poets —
the blessed scum of the earth.

✕

Autumn Rain

The earth drinks a toast
to the true humility
of the worm, the guest
of the dead, the king of kings,
our master and commander.

✕

On Distance

The end of time like
the beginning is as near
as you can see it.
Farther than distance are you
whom my craving can not reach.

✕

On Thunder

God made the thunder
to roar against blue-mouthed
spinsters who dare not
call a harlot God's penny,
saint of mothers, Joan of Arc.

✕

Evening Garrets

Garrets — patched castles.
Windows sashed with sham beryl
dive for prince charming.
Each crevice — a miser's mouth
hoards the gold of sordid days.

✕

A Furnished Room

The silence of walls
has claws, teeth. A wolf threatens
to leave the painting.
A clock on the maimed table
is near a time disaster.

✕

Sandalphon

I see Sandalphon
tallest at gloaming to reach
your high, walled garret ;
to weave all hymns into crowns,
for my wonder stricken love.

✕

Beauty Contest

Tough rays gang the streets.
Scraps of pin up girls in the
wind run on ripped limbs
to a beauty contest in
hell for beheaded beauties.

✕

On Grace

The grace of all born
and unborn whores in your walk :
Gaea of the streets,
Two-bit bride of the homeless,
sacred as Jacob's stone bed.

✕

On Travel

Travel is for weak-
chinned braggarts, (champagne is for
sterile snobs.) but at
a cup of coffee a chat
is still the farthest, grand tour.

✕

On Freedom

No freedom is free.
Doomed we stand in endless row,
free-tongued slaves of death.
Free are birds on wings of hail
which never reach day or night.

✕

Oasis

Awaiting you, the
green attic turns into a
top oasis or
an old treasure boat before
sailing an unknown sea.

Even the vilest
seem welcome guests in the sun,
invited by God,
each with a handful of dawns:
the gift of generous dust.

✕

Lilith On Love

Return to Eden,
stoic angel — winged eunuch.
Come Charon, O wild oarsman,
as a torch, a mystic raid.
Come lover, wondrous and cruel!

MIDNIGHT THOUGHTS IN SAFAD

When I am old, lowly and kind, help me God
to be a beggar, not in Rome or Bombay,
but on the rear alleys of mystic Safad.

In sackcloth — a half naked Jeremiah,
to walk at sunrise through a sky-born New York.
To call the donkey — brother, the tomcat — Sir,

but mute to the prying passerby; akin
to small hills — Galilean humility.
To beg among beggars more humility.

To guard against the scythe the own-rooted weed,
the foe of gardens, in feud with the reaper,
beheads the crowns of the royal-rich flowers.

At dusk when stories are tall, legends are true,
to share my lucky almsbread with dreams and bats,
against the wailing jackels of the wadi.

When half moons, in ruins, are crescent horseshoes,
to follow a sorceress in each ruin,
to revel together our midnight orgies.

O my love is true as an untombed harlot.
She will vow in charmed streams: (Her life and death is
my own.) Selah, ever and anon your bride.

The woe and panic of a chased mouse is murder.
Her shadow in the moonlit fissure resembles my grief:
dainty-limbed, a graceful dream, dressed in sensitive fur,
and I am shabby to the core and I am clumsy as a rock.

Praise ye the Lord for each of our blessed faults,
 with psaltery and dance, with flesh and bone :
 the prankish shades which save us from the scorching sun.
 A pygmy without faults is a giant fault.
 Perfect is the boredom of the half-witted crone.
 Faultless is the false-eyed rose which cannot fade,
 the synthetic heart, the soul hand made.
 Grim numbers cannot err, impotent sticks cannot ache.
 The eunuch in a nude harem is all sin.
 The tiniest worm like the sunrise is genuine.
 Authentic is the shadow of a blade of grass.
 Dreams are real as the reflections of nighthawks which pass
 in the Spring, northward, over a moonlit lake.

I vow to tear my poems into tiniest pieces,
 throw them around me as a scattered garland.
 (Torn poems fall miraculously as manna.)
 and let fire save them from darkness,
 let light corrode them into nothingness, —
 and I through the flame — a rejected poem,
 a wolf running through a forest-fire.
 God, yellowed, inurned will burn—a blazing Eden.
 A small bottle like the tomb of a nymph
 will keep the ashes of each and every sore.
 From dusk to dawn, from twilight to twilight
 I will read, reread the zeal-blind ashes,
 will see each charred word — a streak of sunrise,
 a stray spark of Moses' ever-burning bush.

✕

Praise To The White Lie

The eighth wonder of the world is the white lie
we tell day in, day out to save our lives,
to redeem us from the terror of tedium.
Out of compassion God formed the white lie,
the daydream to change into wings our throttling ties,
to give us ease to live, mirage to marvel.

My last prayer will be to the white lie,
the angel of mercy flitting wingbroken
at my deathbed to charm out of my coffin
a rowboat cruising hell-deep the seas of dusk,
(with death as with a killing, wanton-eyed love,)
where Manhattan drowns in its own mirrors.

✕

Under The Tree Of Death

Shem, Ham and Japheth met at the end of time,
brothers again upon the face of the deep.
Wounded beasts climb over Noah's flooded ark.
The dove plucks from the tree of life the last leaf.

Says Ham: "The last ray of the last sunset bled.
Not an eye left to cry, not a grief to mourn."
Says Japheth: "Each soul as a grey zero fled."
Says Shem: "Give me the wrath of a claw, a thorn,

to feel even shadows do not pass in vain.
Tear me asunder to know there is still death.
Only the living die again and again.
Only when we live lives nearby also death."

"Woe Shem! Is there not even death for the dead?"
"Violets grow bluer, stones lock words, unsaid."

✕

Hymn To The Mouse

To be as great as a mouse,
hidden with God in a blind hole.
To shun the mob as the mouse :
O velvet-faced child, O cursed soul !

A poltroon in the light of day.
Fear frozen against the kind cheat
who feeds her trap with alms-meat.
To pray her fate may damn each ray.

To learn from God to weep alone.
To hear the queen of solitude say :
— Bless my darkness at break of day,
I am your grief, your flesh and bone.

Against modern moons to be
the alchemist who turns gold into rust.
To be with eternity,
before you return to dust.

✕

Good Light

God said : Only the light of the unkown star is good.
A cluster of stars is a council of the wicked.
Mine is the forgotten “forget-me-not” in solitude,
hidden from admirers, madly in love to pluck it.

God said : Mine is the homeless dog through night wind and rain,
hungry, with gnashing teeth, only my own hand may feed, —
the foe of the licking slave, the sated pet on a chain.
Mine is the dog no whip will bow, the pride of his breed.

Eve, shamesick, still weaves of leaves her gown,
 weary of good and evil, of heaven-crowds.
 Stray flocks of sheep still seek Abel in the clouds.
 Winds like harps play under the same old fig-tree :
 — Come, Adam drive awhile the seraphs away
 Drown! Nude Eve in a dream is the deepest sea.
 There is no life or death here, no night or day.
 Only seraphim and I — Adam's first kiss,
 bone of your bones, mother of all life again.
 The spotless sky is a blue humdrum. Ours is
 the stream of the cloudland, the splendidous rain.

Sad-eyed girl, you give my scorched longing no shade.
 Midmooned June through my eyes — a scolding bride-weed.
 The light of the day is of my gloom afraid.
 Holy Ari falls at sundown broken-kneed.

The sky — a bored, Mediterranean sea,
 waits in vain for love-mad clouds to come to play.
 The pomegranates, wound-worn on the crimson tree.
 The heart grieves the gentle coolness of the day.

At fifty three I am your novice bridegroom.
 The hours, apple-scented as my thoughts of you.
 I walk through orchards of tomorrow in full bloom
 and bathe with unborn maidens in untouched dew.

You are nearmost as the next sun, the next door,
 near, as to see you through real reveries soar.

Midnight. Rahab, the noble whore of Jericho,
 joins the king ridden concubines, the moon born harem.
 Stones attack with the terror of silence.
 Even the eyes of the blind are cabala lit.
 The cabala is a mystic river soul deep,
 wistful and winding as the alleys of Safad.

Rahab, the dust is fragrant with Spring and you.
 Each crocus is a harlot resurged from burial.
 I hear a cry with each stir of the earth.
 Is it a word moaning on a headstone?
 I hear a breeze as a fugitive phantom.
 Is it someone escaping a tomb?

Ten sephiroth emanate, guide us to the end of death.
 Even the hills span across the slumber of time.
 I see you break out of your ancient sleep
 with stalks of flax : a wonder bush
 to hide the hunted Jews on the town wall,
 from the medieval darkness of the shutting gate.

A white, braying donkey menaced by fate,
 calls Messiah to ride it through all eternity.
 Let us run, Rahab, back to hell again!
 My twentieth century threatens to rise!
 Left of you and me is your scarlet thread,
 to glide down beyond Adam's first tear.

Good the earth gathered us into one garland,
 Ours is the kiss with lips of stone.
 The longer the night the nearer the wonderland.
 Death has seven wonders, life none.

How sad,
 you do not know,
 I am the Yiddish long forgotten poet from Shangri La.
 I came to you from a neighboring century,
 openarmed as a tree in a dream.

How sad,
 you do not know,
 At daybreak, I am your prime admirer,
 born anew, day in, day out,
 awaiting you skyclad, eager as the light of dawn.
 At sunset, I am your dying lover,
 thirst maddened as the dust under your feet,
 following thrill-crazed each of your indifferent steps,
 wearing away in the waning twilight.

How sad,
 you do not know,
 all around you,
 I am the yearning wind from a desolate alley,
 playing serenades to you on God's flute.

I saw Adam at the first sunrise on earth.
 Alas!
 He did not see me.
 I would have told him:
 — Look, Adam,
 with all your two hundred and forty eight bones look!
 Only once sees a man the sun rise,
 then, he only sees imitation.

Messiah, when you come to wake the dead,
 O let me lie, long-forgotten, in peace.
 Deprive not the worms of their bitter bread.
 Bereave not the earth of Lilith's damned kiss.

Only faithful to dust, dew and grass,
 may I for all my days, my sins atone.
 May no bleak savior my soul caress.
 Drowned in sleep, rich in mourn, keep my longing bones
 from chaste flocks, from angelic mobs away.
 I seek death as at dusk the weary sun.
 For the gold of my lost, hereafter days,
 give wings to the worm, language to the stone.

Jackals wail over hill and dale in Safad.
 Shield me from the heavens, redeem me God!

My love of the year 2960:
 I will come to you —
 handsome with the sunsets of ten hundred years,
 washed by the rains of a thousand summers,
 cleared by the snow of a thousand winters.
 I will be light, dew and earth long before your birth.
 I will be in your water, in your bread, in your rainbow.



Abishag brings her wreath of Junes to the old king.
She has as many rays as King David sins.
As if out of a folk song she can only sing
like the dale or the angels for the Sabbath queen.

She comes from grapevines on his gray bosom to rest.
Valley creeks rush her maiden laughter away.
The sun falls as a manna orange in the west.
On David's rising crown play the caved-in rays.

David is an old harp, Abishag — a rare Spring.
His unknown psalms are in the light of her eyes.
The barren end thrives with unending beginning.
O a widowed child mourns beyond the sunrise.

Abishag, a comely bride in a moon-made dress,
will ever meet king David to yearn and caress.

I roved, moon in, moon out,
against a hard-eyed city sky,
in vain search for you
through the modern jungles of New York, —
till I saw you as one of Terah's broken idols,
limp up and down the Empire State building:
the dream-haunted ladder of Manhattan.

Now, on my way to you,
I see you chosen, petite and comely
among the tall daughters of Heth
as the tiny land of Israel
among the huge nations.
Distances contend to be nearest to one another,
to shorten the endless subway-ride
to the Brooklyn princess of Borough Park.

Now, you are mine
as if you walked out of one of my ribs
longing for me since the beginning of time.

I am old fashioned as your wine,
my love of a thousand years hence,
verse-mad as your dew, tears, sunrise.

I have been riding to you ten
longing centuries, no wonder
I am old fashioned as your wine.

O the slow circling moments O
the dragging vehicle of time,
modern as your dew, tears, sunrise.

Mine, the hands of the eternal
clock; yours, the wreath of a thousand
summers, old fashioned as your wine.

I yearn in stone an unsung ode,
mine, the glory of the unknown,
faithful as your dew, tears, sunrise.

God is old, only moments grin,
ages forever weep, my love,
I am old fashioned as your wine,
modern as your dew, tears, sunrise.

ACHING EARTH

✕

A Psalm - I

God, lead me to hell not to paradise.
May not a sin of me be ever lost.
May I hoard as gold of twilights each vice.
I drink to each outcast a bitter toast.

I spent my virtues in dolorous pace.
Out of the drab humdrum no ray could rise.
In chase of Venus give me the deer's grace.
Near nude Bath Sheba give me David's eyes.

Keep off my path the black cat and the Sir.
No, not the polished soul in a snug glove:
May the faults of the worm teach me to err
as the wrath of the brute taught me to love.

May my last smile as my first be coy.
May my last tear not even death decoy.

✕

To My Valentine

Learn kindness from the stones
like Jacob on the way to Haran
to meet the shepherdess
at the well's mouth.

Stones quarreled with one another,
each craved to be a pillow
under the wanderer's head
when the desert sun went down.

O I pray may Love — a fallen angel,
make of all the wrangling stones:
your heart — a kind stone.

Save me from the sinproof, I fear their sin.
 Not jeweled boredom of the eunuch's dowry.
 Love sing unto you bums with poisoned gin
 on stone beds of the homeless Bowery.

Bless my verse with the dare of the damned thief,
 fleeing a jail with mine and Satan's bliss.
 O self-condemned from the edge of a reef,
 I will throw to the wretched my last kiss.

I shall be in the trap with each fooled mouse.
 May angels hate me as blind bats hate light.
 May love me true the queen of a whorehouse.
 May old crows crow odes to me on their last flight.

In the dungeons of longing O doomed men,
 give ear to my psalm and say ye amen!

Women in love with death, life their only foe.
 Cheating God they choose their own fate, their last hour.
 Brides see death — a tall, dark and handsome bridegroom.

As Joshua they stop the sun at midday.
 As fantastic birds they fly down city towers.
 True friends are also ropes to confide their doom.

The sun rolls away as a lost wedding ring.
 O sorry you cannot feel my fine handshake.
 Sorry, you could not hear my wholesome laughter ring.

You saddened forever the light of day break.
 Shadows of your hair give shade to weary elves.
 O ever young, flowers of dust do not fade.

✕

Poems In The Vault Of A Bank
(To Ethel)

I see your every grace tarnish as evening gold.
Our winding chat around the charms of a cup of coffee
as a dry-lipped, thirsty stream shudders mute and cold.
Our words — seeds sown in the barren bed of a vault.
Love is a lone word longing under seven seas.

I come to you prompt as a hangman at a death-cell, calm
as a rope awaiting a self-doomed on a chosen tree.
The moon is a withered metaphor, an unprayed psalm.
Meek-eyed almsfolk, without Elijah reprobate, unalmsed.
God's light is caged, only darkness is forever free.

Elijah, desert-locked wanders through desolate verse,
through ailing words, fretful at each touch, fever-ridden.
His spurned blessings in the vault as elves in a hearse.
God seeks heaven and earth, bereaved of the universe.
My first and last dawn in the gloom of the vault hidden.

Abandoned imagery, whimsical shapes of Pompei.
Silence is a speechless uproar — the fiercest revolt.
Armed guards watch, in fear, words may suddenly break away,
to shatter good and evil, beast and Man, night and day.
The bank threatened by the loaded visions in the vault.

✕

A Bull

I saw a bull on the way to the slaughterhouse,
handsome with might, fervid with satanic love.
The romantic bull craved his mate
as a torrid field — rain.

I saw the giant lover against the frigid slayer:
a naked corpse, shroudless, unburied,
skinned grief frightening the plate.
I saw death chewed with kind mouths.

✕

On Lovers Of Birds

I chant an old tune of birds in a cage.
On the glossy bars their days and nights rot.
The skies through the panes tease the wings in cage.
They envy the free crows by hunters shot.

The cage — a tiny tomb buried their heights.
The sated birds are hungry for distance.
They see the sparrows on casual flights.
They flop their wings in cage in longing trance.

They sing to the wilds — the lioness' rage.
The tempest will ever rehearse her strife.
The might of the fearless echoes her rage.
(The eyes of doves and sheep mirrors each knife.)

Save from the kindness of lovers of birds,
no slaughterhouse will lure her dauntless herds.

✕

A Rejected Poem

A rejected poem,
only by the live silence of stones heard.
It lives only where the accurst have been.
On the lips of the doomed the unspoken word.
The word on lonely tombs by no one read.
The word which finds no rest as Noah's dove.
O poems,
I shape them of my bone and aching earth.

Meet me on mount Ararat, my love,
to see the first sunrise after the last flood.
To see an orchard bloom wherever a prison stood,
where only ripe apples may not elude the guillotine.
Gardeners instead of hangmen tend the trees.

Open locks as glaring mouths of kind beasts,
share their fate with useless, grieving keys.
The old gallows in the new East,
turned into a forest of wood-nymphs,
where I serenade you on the syrinx like Pan.

Meet me on mount Ararat, my love,
to see the last beggar's awry hand
hold pity as a blind, wingless dove,
which drops the bleeding olive-leaf.

The timorous slave, intrepid, a dancing reef,
throws a range of rocks as a stone tumbler,
through the spectered cobwebs of yesterland,
with laughing hands, in daring play.

Each tower climbs to mount Ararat, my love.
The hunter's moon is here without the hunter.
Tonight we are rich as Korah.
The stars are scattered dimes on the sidewalks of New York.

A spinster sits under the tree she chose,
in these lone woods as her private gallows.
Moon-led, she came here in her Sunday clothes.
A night-born hand cradles the restless boughs.

She lures death like nude Bath Sheba with her charm,
as she adorns her bride-bed under the tree.
Death — her lover, tender-eyed with fervid arms
is hers in this covert nook under the tree.

The tree, bent, shame-shrunk near the brother trees.
The leaves, green elf-maids toll the Elysian knell
and she, an elf-queen castled under seas,
hears, close, in her omened dream the wedding bells.

The moon unfolds a silver, soothing rope.
Memories wave ever with parting hands.
Her last glance, like the first, seeded with hope.
In her eyes the light of the wonderland.

Death — her lover inhaled her as morphine.
Left of her is his kiss avid and kind.
She walks God-sent with a mouth of jasmine,
to embalm the earth O bride of mankind.

This is my last poem, a death-bell each rhyme.
All the days are locked, the key thrown away.
When I reach the last line is the end of time,
the end of life and death of night and day.

These last words as condemned steps to gallows lead.
The sun — a golden noose in hangman's hand.
Beyond me, glowing, furrow-cloven, I leave
in lone metaphors my women stranded,
sensuous, longing for my manful touch in vain.
Women I know from a hundred years hence,
yearning for me as parched soil for plough and rain,
wave hands of tomorrow to my last glance.

The end ends at the beginning, before birth,
before ghost and ghoul, before heaven and earth.

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