

From Reservation to Enchantment: Hebrew Poetry Observes Christian Art

Avner Holtzman

Poet Ya'akov Cahan (1881-1960) travelled to Italy in 1927. This visit brought about the poem *The Dome of Milan*, published the same year in a modernistic Hebrew periodical.¹ Cahan, who then lived in Poland, was forty-six years old at the time, a versed, esteemed Hebrew poet since the early twentieth century. He was no less renowned for his ideological pursuits in advancing the revival of the Hebrew language and culture, and for his political activism in the right-wing maximalist branch of the Zionist Movement headed by Ze'ev Jabotinsky. He was a proud, aware, nationalist Jew; this information is critical in order to explain the emotional state from which the poem arose. He writes in the first-person singular, yet it is clear that the poet is encountering the Milan Cathedral not only as an individual enthused by a spectacular work of art; he explicitly views himself as a representative or an envoy of a nationalist group bearing meaningful historical memories. This is exactly what the poet Shaul Tchernichovsky had done almost thirty years earlier as he stood, emotional and fervent, before the Statue of Apollo, proclaiming, "Here I am—the Jew. Our quarrel is eternal!"²

The Dome of Milan

My heart will not be seized by the great glory of their holy temples

The invaluable delight of all ornaments will not lure me;

In mute sullenness I pass them:

I will remember all their transgressions and malevolence.

Indeed I know: their souls have already drifted –

Yet their animus against me still imbues every brick;

And this dim secret within them is scheming against me,

And from their spire the cold golden cross pierces me.

Yet before you I absentmindedly halted my step,

The Dome of Milan! I stood and did not pass,

I am all gaze and wonder, I am all silence:

This pyramid of turrets, casting up high,

This flight of strength, this stillness and glorious height...

Here is a worthy foe, deserving of loathing!



Figure 1. The Dome of Milan (*Duomo de Milano*) (© Jiungwang Wang / CC-BY-SA-3.0)

The poem is written in the form of a sonnet. According to the conventions of this poetic genre, there is tension, and at times a reversal, between the first eight lines and the last six lines. The first two stanzas convey the pained, distressed, wary and even hostile position held by Jews as a whole towards the Church. As a physical structure, the church is an impressive monument whose massive presence is designed to instill a sense of greatness and reverence in passersby. In the historical Jewish consciousness, however, the Church evokes difficult memories of multi-generational persecution and hostility expressed by Christians towards those whom they considered to have murdered the Messiah. The memory is at least one thousand years old, since the period of the Crusades at the outset of the second millennium. Most Jewish authors in that era, including

Ya'akov Cahan, came from small, provincial towns in Eastern Europe in an environment marked by apprehension and tension due to their close proximity to their non-Jewish surroundings. Many of them had grown up in the shadow of a dominant church overlooking the city landscape, protruding from it like a challenge and a constant threat, as we can glean from the vast works of fiction and memoirs stemming from that period. One of the defense mechanisms that Jews employed as a result of their inherent fragility in this Christian environment was a rich folklore of pejoratives targeting the Church, its rituals, its symbols, its holidays, and its priests. We see a glimpse of this in Cahan's poem, which succinctly hints at Christians' "transgressions and malevolence" directed at Jews. The cross displayed at the spire of the church pierces the Jew's eye and flesh, whether he has directly experienced active expressions of antisemitism or not.

Yet the intellectually evolving Hebrew poet at the outset of the twentieth century was also a modern man, usually secular, striving for beauty and sensitive to esthetic revelations. He knew that most of Western art's accomplishments had been achieved under the auspices of the Church, encouraged by the Church, and within its physical boundaries. As such, what would he do when faced with the spectacular vision of the Milan Cathedral dazzling his senses? How would he reconcile the contradiction without compromising his national and religious loyalty? The second part of the poem addresses this dilemma in a sophisticated way. Indeed, those of us who have been fortunate enough to have stood before the Milan Cathedral will never forget the experience. It is one of Catholicism's most magnificent, striking buildings, a massive edifice whose construction began in the fourteenth century and lasted approximately six hundred years. It merges the powerful North European Gothic style, soaring to the skies with tremendous vertical force, with the grace, elegance, and refined harmony of Italian art. All this is depicted in the texture-rich block of marble adorned by abundant turrets and domes, standing with its gleaming whiteness in Milan's Piazza del Duomo like a mighty cream cake that magically fell from the sky.

In light of this splendorous spectacle, the Hebrew poet seems to disarm: "*I am all gaze and wonder, I am all silence.*" Nevertheless, he is unable to let go of his deep-rooted national and religious animosity. To him, surrendering to the wonders of the beauty of the church would be a betrayal of generations of his forefathers being tortured on the altar of Catholic antisemitism. His meager solution is outlined in the final line of the poem: "*Here is a worthy foe, deserving of loathing.*" This is an almost comical crux: the enemy is an enemy, this cannot be denied; yet his might is so spectacular and captivating that it evokes deference and appreciation. In some such way, this also reinforces the Jew's sense of self-worth. In any event, when faced with such an intimidating rival, he becomes like a modern David presenting for battle against the giant character of Goliath.

Cahan was not the only Hebrew poet to be enraptured by a Gothic cathedral. Years earlier, his friend and contemporary, Zalman Shneur (1887-1959), a dominant voice in Hebrew poetry of that era, stood before the Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris, and was inspired by it to write the poem *On the Banks of the Seine*. This contemplative poem describes the church as an old queen who had fallen from grace at the outset of the Age of Enlightenment and secularization. He imagines the ghosts of generations of church construction workers rising up at night and fondly reminiscing about the sublime building to which they had dedicated their lives. Shneur's enchantment with the Notre-Dame and his identification with its builders are undeniable, but much like Cahan, he stands before the church as a nationalist Jew and preserver of the legacy of his People. As such, he does not neglect to mention the deadly history of antisemitism associated with the Gothic churches, and indicates this sentiment scathingly: "*The torment of the Goths in the halls of the temple / This torment of mystery has accumulated for generations and eons / Taken by the sword and by blood and by zeal / And with the destruction of my People.*"³ Even when those horrific periods had passed, he says, the horror impressed within the walls of the church had yet to dissipate; even the intoxicating scent of incense and the pleasant melodies of the pipe organ could not diminish it.

Another piece by Shneur, the acclaimed poem *Vilna* (1917) centers on the imperiled Jewish existence in the shadow of the Catholic Church, even in a city brimming with Jewish culture known as *Yerushalayim DeLita* (the Jerusalem of Lithuania). A colorful Catholic procession making its way down the city streets is a wondrous esthetic sight, but, as expressed by the poet: "*It is angst / To the ear of the Jew whose blood has been poisoned for an eternity / From fear of the traveling gentile believers wielding the cross in their hand.*"⁴ The poem culminates with the poet standing before the Vilnius Cathedral, where he discovers a replica of Michelangelo's Moses statue in one of the exterior alcoves of the building. The poet uses the sculpted Moses sitting against the backdrop of the crosses of the church as an allegory and a reminder of Christianity's hostile usurping of the Jewish Holy Scriptures, appropriating them for their own heritage: "*The forefathers – their fathers and prophets – their prophets... And is this even their first redeemer? Woe woe, what was stolen from us?*"⁵ The statue of Moses is seen as a hostage plundered from his People and forced "*to preserve the temple of our haters,*"⁶ thus reflecting the subjugation of the entire community of Vilna. Naturally, the statue is silent, but the poet interprets this as an expression of alienation, and fears that Moses had converted his religion under the influence of his Christian surroundings. At night, he has a nightmarish vision: "*With a cross in his arm the legislator dances / ... Jews weep / and the Tablets of Testimony collapse like mountains on aghast gentiles.*"⁷



Figure 2-3. The Vilnius Cathedral; Moses (© the author)

A third, harsher, more complex example is in the works of Uri Zvi Greenberg (1896-1981); he, too, was from Eastern Europe, and is one of the most highly acclaimed Hebrew poets of recent generations. A sizable share of his poetry is a bitter, profound reckoning with Christian Europe, including its faith. “*I hate classical art: which is religious Catholic,*” he declared in 1928 in one of his poetic manifestos.⁸ Greenberg portrays an account of eternal loathing between Judaism and Christianity even before the birth of Christianity, when Abraham smashed the idols and committed to a singular, unseen god, in contrast with pagans and Christians who worshipped idols made of wood and stone. In his eyes, magnificent Christian art is a ploy to obscure the murderous anti-Semitic nature of the Christian religion: “I hate the symbol of Mater Dolorosa with the shining infant, a symbol of idolatry that enslaves and obfuscates the mind so that the ploy is ignited in the depths of emotion.”⁹ He views the painters and sculptors as accomplices of the priests’ transgressions in that they create visual exhibits that serve as tools to inflame and incite against the Jews. These forms of expression were further amplified in his written works following World War II. After the Holocaust, he wholly renounced European art and literature, and viewed them as the impure culture of the murderers of the Jewish People that should not be acknowledged.

On the other hand – and herein lies the complexity – Greenberg did not hide his profound

attraction to the character of Jesus himself, even to the point of identification. He referred to him as “our brother in blood and flesh.” He claimed that one could even recognize his origins as a young Jew from the Galilee through his painted and sculpted portraits in churches and cathedrals, before he was expropriated by Christianity and was reduced to serve as a tool for encouraging the hatred of Jews. He felt similarly about Jesus’ mother, who he also regarded as the paragon of a graceful, merciful Jewish mother. He felt that she, too, was ultimately distorted and defiled by “artists of the paintbrush and the sculptor’s gouge” in turning her into a Christian symbol.¹⁰

This same stance is demonstrated when Greenberg encounters the Gothic cathedrals. He wholeheartedly acknowledges his attraction to Gothic architecture, and views it as one of the most monumental expressions of the human spirit in its aspiration for exaltedness and sanctity. As a natural expressionist, he is drawn to the anticlassical character of Gothic cathedrals characterized by vertical compositions, angular shapes, and pointed arcs breaking the classic conventions of harmony. On the other hand, he asks, how can one ignore the history of antisemitism imbibed within these same cathedrals? The solution for Greenberg is to make a mental distinction analysis between the form, which he admires, and its cumulated content, which he abhors: “It is not the Gothicism that was made by man’s hands that I hate, but rather the enslaving Christian Gothicism, which has no definitive god, an internal god.”¹¹

The three poets I have mentioned – Cahan, Shneur, and Greenberg – share the same ambiguous, contradictory position in regard to Christianity in general and to Gothic cathedrals in particular: an attraction to their esthetical power, and a recoiling from the bitter memories they evoke for every Jew who has a sense of national cognizance and historical retrospection. There is an additional, less overt common denominator shared by these three instances. It is important to note that all the descriptions of these cathedrals are solely of their façades. Despite being a modern man and despite his attraction to Christian esthetics, the Eastern European-born Hebrew poet and student of the world of Jewish tradition is unable to cross the threshold of the church doors. He can walk past it, observe it from afar or up close, and appreciate its exterior composition and astute construction, but entering it is still a taboo that is difficult to break. In a sense, entering a church’s interior would be participating – if only passively – in the ceremonies and prayers that are held there. This hesitation would still be difficult to overcome. In the rare instances in which we find a Hebrew poet of that generation entering the church, we see him making a palpable effort to neutralize the religious, ritualistic, Christian element, describing his spiritual experience in purely personal or universal terms. This is evident in a poem by Yeshurun Keshet (1893-1977) which he dedicated to the dome of the St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome, designed by Michelangelo in his twilight years. He describes

the dome as a sublime temple, an embodiment of “a pure vision devoid of stipulation,” granting its visitors a spiritual surge to the extent of reaching the divine spirit: “Where a supreme honor is reflected through the onyx fanlights / A shelter from the wind, undeterred by any corruptor.”¹² Between the personal aspect and the universal aspect lies the poet’s notable elision of the religious, Christian, unspoken facet of the building that is paramount to Catholicism.

When was this taboo broken? When did Hebrew poetry begin to feature descriptions of the interior of churches? Above all, when did the poets begin to delve into concrete representations of the Christian narrative without any hesitation or reservation? The shift is first detected sometime in the 1950s, when a new generation of Hebrew poets surfaced who did not have a complex attitude towards Christianity, and the painful historical memories it evokes were not part of their worldview. These poets emerged from a modern secular culture, and absorbed an affinity for fine arts as a natural component of their education and as a critical factor in their esthetic world. One expression of this can be seen in the significant increase in the number of ekphrastic Hebrew poems, poems devoted to the imaged representation of visual artistic objects, including Christian works of art. The deep-rooted Jewish inhibitions regarding visual art, whether stemming from religious prohibitions or from national restraint, had faded and waned, due to either awareness or indifference. The Hebrew poet was now willing to enter the church and to be enthused by the spectacular artistic display it contained. His interest and sensitivities were no longer centered on the historical contexts of the Christian artwork, nor on the meaning it carried for the Jewish beholder. These were suppressed, if at all, to the covert layers of the poem. The poet’s overt attention was now directed towards their design and esthetic fabric, and mostly towards the human narrative that they conveyed. Here, too, I will limit myself to just three examples from an immense reserve.

An Israeli poet with a consistent affinity to the esthetic world of Christianity is Pinchas Sadeh (1929-1994), a unique personality in Hebrew culture in the second half of the twentieth century. In his autobiography, *Life as a Parable* (1958), he shares his earliest childhood memory as a two-year-old Jewish boy in the Polish city of Lvov, watching the procession of monks on the snowy street, astounded by its colors and mystique. At the age of four, he urged his parents to take him to visit the nearby church; they acquiesced, much to their chagrin, after inundating him with warnings about the dire sin this would entail. The visit left him with a murky picture: “I just remember that the church was very colorful and that I dipped my toes in the holy water.”¹³ About fifteen years later, he fought in the Battle for Jerusalem in the War of Independence. With everything he went through, he was left with the imprint of the Christian religious revelation that he experienced in the partially demolished Notre-Dame monastery, in a small chapel that featured a statue of Virgin Mary. In the

heart of the physical ruins, he recounts, “She who symbolized the spiritual birth stood, the gleeful release of the spirit from within the material existence.”¹⁴ Standing before the statue, he was struck by a sudden burst of inspiration. He grabbed a piece of paper and wrote a poem of adoration and admiration of the Mother of God, beginning with the words: “Your feet are white, white / Like roses of death.” From that point onwards, the Christian narrative and its heroes unfurled from a position of identification, like that of the poem *On the Road from Bethlehem* written some thirty years later.

On the Road from Bethlehem

*In a freezing landscape
Of the golden Judean Hills
You are carried, embraced in your mother's arms
An infant dressed in red,
Doll-God*

*In the light of the noon sky
Your mother, in a sky dress,
Sitting upright on the donkey's back,
Like you, as you enter Jerusalem
In three and thirty years.*

*In a freezing landscape
Of the golden Judean Hills
You are carried to Egypt,
An infant dressed in red,
Doll-God*

*No image, nor sign of man, around.
Only a few cypresses
Standing, alone, in the midst of the beauty.
Of them a tree will be taken, into which nails will be hammered
In three and thirty years,*

In a freezing landscape of the golden Judean Hills,

*An infant dressed in red,
Doll-God.*

*So were you painted, my eyes seeing
In Florence, by Brother Angelico,
After one thousand, four hundred and forty years.¹⁶*

The entire poem is a compassionate second-person dialogue directed at Baby Jesus who is carried in his mother's arms on a donkey's back as they escape from Bethlehem to Egypt. It is a distinctly ekphrastic description of a mural painted by Fra Angelico in the Convent of San Marco in Florence. It presents an explicit depiction of the landscape and the characters, sensitive commentary on clues hidden in the painting regarding Jesus' fate later on in his life, as well as a self-documentation of the poet standing and observing the painting more than five hundred years after it was painted. The connection between the poet and the painting is human and universal; it is devoid of patent tension towards the weighty historical baggage it belies for the Jewish observer.



Figure 4. Fra Angelico, *Flight into Egypt* (1452), Basilica di San Marco, Florence
(©Wikimedia Commons)

Another poet of that generation, Tuvia Ruebner (1924-2019), discovered that he possessed just as profound an affinity to fine arts in general and to Christian art in particular. He dedicated an entire book, *Sculpture and Mask* (1982), to poetic contemplation of an array of visual works, including several poems about the life and death of Jesus. One of these is the poem *Pietà Rondanini*, dedicated to the observation of Michelangelo's final statue that is currently on display in Milan. The *Pietà*, Mary lamenting over her son's body at the moment he was taken down from the cross, had intrigued Michelangelo since the beginning of his artistic journey, and this is the last, and certainly the most revolutionary of the four versions he created of this scene. The unconventional, vertical composition, the manner in which the two characters merge into a single block, the astounding stance of the deceased Jesus, the incredible, elongated proportions, the severed arm as a remnant of the preceding version of the statue – these all signify the crystallization of a new spiritual and artistic vision, which the elderly artist did not have time to bring to completion.



Figure 5. Michelangelo, *Pietà Rondanini* (1552-1564), Castello Sforzesco, Milan
(© Sailko / CC-BY-SA-3.0)

Pietà Rondanini

*I beseech you not to go to these depths
Your head still on my shoulder, my hand
Where are your hands?
The two of us are still one arc, still
The scream is in the stone. There is still a word between us. Oh
Your body slipping away. Not
There, not there. Why
My son¹⁷*

Ruebner's poem is arranged as an emotional monologue by the mother to her son, as his deceased body is slipping through her arms. The closeness of the two sculpted heads to one another might suggest that she is whispering something in his ear. The expression's center of gravity stems from a sense of loss consuming the mother, as she becomes increasingly aware of the elapsing of time that is gradually taking her son's body from her. Her repetition of the word "still" creates a rhythm and rhetoric of lamentation, while at the same time, highlighting the fragility and transience of the moment. Her words incorporate short descriptions of the statue itself, of its bold design as a symbiosis of two inseparable entities. "The scream is in the stone," she says, connoting Jesus' final exclamation on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" The parts of the poem simultaneously accompany the literal description of the statue and its interpretation. Ruebner does not shirk from writing a poem about a statue whose subject matter is manifestly Christian, but he neutralizes the religious dimension by homing in on its sculptural attributes and on the manipulation of form and structure that create the human, intimate situation between a mother and her son. As such, he turns the statue and the poem into a visual illustration of bereavement as a universal human experience.

And from one *Pietà* to another. Natan Yonatan (1923-2004), like Pinchas Sadeh and Tuvya Ruebner, belongs to the first generation of Israeli poets. His poem *In the Duomo of Florence* is dedicated to the statue called the Florentine *Pietà* or the Bandini *Pietà*, housed in the Florence Cathedral, depicting Jesus being taken down from the cross, and possibly his burial.

In the Duomo of Florence

*In the rear of the Duomo of Florence stood the Pietà
The final parting word of Michelangelo*

*For whom everything surrendered to his fingers; the tenderness of the woman
The tyranny of the gods, blocks of marble quarried from the Carrara mountains
Turning blue. It was a festive twilight, moments
Of prayer and thanks; the Christian kneeled
And the sun crept in through the stained glass grids
With the remainder of its light on us and on the Pietà
And we who had nothing stood for an eternal moment
Without envy, one body with that heavenly stone
Of the divine Michelangelo¹⁸*



Figure 6. Michelangelo, *The Deposition / Bandini Pietà* (1547-1555), Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence (© Marie-Lan Nguyen / Wikimedia Commons)

The poet does not involve himself in a debate between researchers and commentators on the nature of the situation, the identity of the sculpted figures, or the expressive composition. He experiences a distilled moment of esthetic exaltation when observing the work of the artist, whom in his lifetime was already known as The Divine One. Following words of admiration for the great artist, the poet's attention wanders to the church's interior, and he becomes addicted to the spiritual

experience befalling him in that twilight hour. It is a time for prayer: the faithful kneel, the sun slants through the multicolored stained glass windows, its beams enveloping the poet and the statue with delicate, mystical light. All is ready for a moment of spiritual elevation: the poet feels that he is an integral part of Christian Mass. He is cleansed of all negative emotion, and eliminates any trace of envy from within. Is this the Jew's envy ("we who had nothing") of the Christians' rich visual culture and the beauty of their rituals? Perhaps. In any event, the end of the poem is marked by a marriage of the bodies and souls in an "eternal moment" beyond time; in other words, we are encountering a distinctly religious experience.

Natan Yonatan's poem can be described as a symmetrical antipode of Ya'akov Cahan's poem, which was discussed above. Cahan stands outside the cathedral, but entering it is unfathomable to him, whereas Yonatan stands in the heart of the cathedral's interior, even including himself in the faithful's "moments of prayer and thanks." Cahan carries onerous historical memories of Christianity's loathing of Judaism and its devastating consequences, whereas Yonatan is free of all baggage of national and religious animosity. Cahan attempts to incite a hatred within himself towards the magnificent church in order to avoid being tempted by the charms of its beauty, and Yonatan devotes himself, without reserve, to these same charms, even revealing a covert envy of Christian esthetics. Cahan visualizes the cross as a knife cutting into the Jew's flesh, whereas Yonatan clings to the image of Jesus being taken down from the cross, going so far as to fuse with him into a single body.

The progression of the poems I have presented could point to broader aspects of modern Hebrew culture's position in the face of Christianity and its artistic personifications. In 1910, when author Yosef Haim Brenner endeavored to write an essay replete with an affinity for the Christian 'legend' and for the figure of Jesus in particular, he was rebuked, persecuted, and almost banned by the Hebrew literary establishment of his time. In contrast, when Amos Oz recently published his final novel, *Judas* (2014), there was no surprise, and certainly no objection, over his empathetic infiltration into the Christian cohort in an effort to decipher the story of Judas Iscariot's alleged betrayal of Jesus. In this respect, Hebrew literature of recent generations can be described as an agent for moving toward Christianity. In the last one hundred years, the life stories of Jesus and his inner circle have gradually become part of a legitimate reserve of Hebrew poetry and prose, and they continue to appeal and intrigue. In this sense, Hebrew literature is more open and tolerant than Israeli society as a whole, whose ingrained inhibitions and apprehensive perception of Christianity as a threat and a challenge are still valid and present in one way or another. It is not for naught that the New Testament, one of the defining books of Western civilization, was never allowed to

be included in the curriculum of Israeli schools, even in their most secular and liberal segments. In this current environment, it appears that this phenomenon is unlikely to change. Nonetheless, authors and poets will continue to operate undeterred. The figure of the young man from Nazareth will continue to reverberate in their works, to take on a complex role in their world, and to captivate them as both a distant and close presence, both belonging and not belonging, and ultimately, an intrinsic component of Israeli culture.

The Hebrew poems quoted in the paper

הדום דמילן / יעקב כהן

לא יִשָּׁב לְבִי גֵאוֹן הַדְּרוֹת הִיכְלִי-קֹדֶשׁ
וְיִקַּר חֲמֻדַּת כָּל-שְׂכִיזוֹת-בָּם לֹא יִמְשֹׁכֵנִי;
בְּקִדְרוֹת-אֱלֹם עַל פְּנִיָּהֶם עוֹבֵר הִנָּנִי:
זָכַר אֶזְכֹּר אֶת-כָּל-פְּשָׁעִם לִי וְרִשְׁעִם.

אֲמַנָּם יִדְעֵתִי: גִּשְׁמָתָם פָּרְחָה זֶה-כָּבֹד –
אֲךְ אֵיבָתָם לִי עוֹד כָּל-אֶבֶן בָּם כּוֹבֶשֶׁת;
גַּם זֶה אֶפְלוּלִית-רָז בָּם רַע עָלִי חוֹרֶשֶׁת,
וּמֵרֹאשָׁם דּוֹקְרָנִי צֶלֶב-הַפֹּז הַקָּר.

רַק לְפָנַי בְּלִי-מִשִּׁים צַעְדֵי עֲצָרָתִי,
דּוֹם דְּמִילָן! עֲמַדָּתִי וְלֹא עֲבָרָתִי,
כָּלִי מִבֶּט וְתִמְהוֹן, כָּלִי דְמָמָה:

פִּירְמִידָה זֹו שָׁל-צָרִיחִים, אֶל-עַל חוֹתְרָת,
תַּעֲוֹפֶת-אוֹן זֹו, שֶׁקֵּט זֶה וְרוֹם-תִּפְאָרָת...
הִנֵּה אוֹיֵב הַגּוֹן, רֹאיוֹ לְמִשְׁטָמָה!

על חוף הסיננה / זלמן שניאור

[...] חֲשֻׁכַת-הַגּוֹתִים בְּהִיכְלִי-הַמִּסְגָּד: –
זֹו חֲשֻׁכַת-מִסְתוּרִין שְׂנֵצְבָרָה דוֹרוֹת נְיוֹבָלִים,
שֶׁלֶקְחָה בְּתָרֵב וּבְדָם וּבְקִנְאוֹת
וּבְחֶרֶב בַּת-עַמִּי; [...]

וילנה / זלמן שניאור

[...] האבות – אבותיהם ונביאים – נביאיהם.... ידעתי, ידעתי:

ואף זה גואל ראשון להם הוא? .. הוי-הוי, מה שדדנו! [...]

עם צלב בנרועו מרקד המחוקק... יהודים מתנפחים,

ולוחות-העדות מתמוטטים בקהרים על גוים נבדלים...

בדרך מבית לחם / פנחס שדה

בנוף קופא

של גבעות יהודה הנהובות

אתה נשא, חבוק בנרועות אמה,

תינוק לבוש אדמים,

אלה-בבה.

באור שמי צהרים

אמה, בשמלת שמים,

זקופה יושבת לה על גב האתון.

כמוד, בכניסתה לירושלים

בעוד שלוש שנים ושלוש שנים שנה.

בנוף קופא

של גבעות יהודה הנהובות

אתה נשא מצרימה,

תינוק לבוש אדמים, אלה-בבה.

לא דמות, אף לא סימן אנוש, מסביב.

רק ברושים אדומים

עומדים, בדרך, בתוך היופי.

מהם יוקח עץ, עליו במסמרים תוקע

בעוד שלוש שנים ושלוש שנים שנה,

בנוף הקופא של גבעות יהודה הנהובות,

תינוק לבוש אדמים,

אלה-בכה.

פה צִירַת וְעִינֵי רוֹאוֹת,

בְּפִירְנָצָה, בִּידֵי הָאֵחַ אֲנִי לִיקוּ

מִקֵּץ שָׁנִים אֶלֶף וְאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת וְאַרְבָּעִים.

פִּיאָטָה רוֹנְדִּינִי / טוֹבִיָּה רִיבֶנֶר

אֵל נָא תִלָּךְ לִמְעַמְקִים הָאֵלָה

עוֹד רֹאשֶׁךְ לְכַתְּפִי, עוֹד יָדִי

אָנָּה יָדִיךְ?

עוֹד שְׁנִינוּ קֶשֶׁת אֶחָד, עוֹד

הִצָּעָקָה בְּאָכֹן. עוֹד מְלָה בִּינִינוּ. וִי

גּוֹפֶךְ הַחֹמֶק. לֹא

שָׁמָּה, לֹא שָׁמָּה. לְמָה

בְּנִי

בְּדוּאוֹמוֹ שֶׁל פִּלּוֹרְנִץ / נֹתָן יוֹנָתָן

בְּדוּאוֹמוֹ שֶׁל פִּלּוֹרְנִץ בִּירְכָתִים עֲמֻדָה הַפִּיטָה

מֵלֶת פֶּרֶדָה אֶחְרוֹנָה שֶׁל מִיכְלָאֲנֶ'לוֹ

שֶׁהִפֵּל נִכְנַע לְאַצְבָּעוֹתָיו; עֲדַנְתָּ הָאִשָּׁה

עֲרִיצוֹת הָאֱלִים, גּוֹשֵׁי הַשֵּׁשׁ שֶׁחֲצַב מִהָרִי קֶרֶךְ

הַמִּכְחִילִים. הִנֵּה שַׁעַת דְּמֻדּוּמִים חֲגִיגִית, רִגְעִי-

הַתְּפִלָּה וְהַהוֹדָּה; הַנּוֹצְרִי כָּרַע עַל בִּרְכָּיו

וְהַשֹּׁמֵשׁ הַתְּגַנְּבָה בְּעַד סוֹרְגֵי הַיִּטְרָז'

בְּשֹׁאֲרִית אוֹרָה עֲלִינוּ וְעַל הַפִּיטָה

וְאֲנוּ שְׁלֹא הָיָה לָנוּ כְּלוּם עֲמֻדָנוּ רִגַע נִצָּחִי

כְּלִי קִנְיָה, גּוֹף אֶחָד עִם הָאָכֹן הַשְּׂמִימִית הַהִיא

שֶׁל מִיכְלָאֲנֶ'לוֹ הָאֵלֹהִי

Notes

- 1 יעקב כהן, "הדום דמילן", *הדים*, ה' (1927), עמ' 247; *כתבי יעקב כהן: שירים* (תל-אביב: דביר, 1960), עמ' 119.
- 2 שאול טשרניחובסקי, "לנוכח פסל אפולו", *חזיונות ומנגינות*, ב (ורשה: תושיה, 1901), עמ' 51.
- 3 זלמן שניאור, "על חוף הסינה" [1909], *שירים*, ב: *פואמות תרס"ג-תרע"ז* (תל-אביב: עם עובד, תשי"א), עמ' 120.
- 4 זלמן שניאור, "וילנה" [1917], שם, עמ' 364.
- 5 Ibid., p. 368
- 6 Ibid., p. 369
- 7 Ibid., p. 370
- 8 אורי צבי גרינברג, *כלפי תשעים ותשעה* (תל-אביב: סדן, 1928), עמ' 44.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 אורי צבי גרינברג, "הוד אמנו היהודית", *רחובות הנהר* [1951], *כתבים*, ו (ירושלים: מוסד ביאליק, 1992), עמ' 67.
- 11 אורי צבי גרינברג, *כלפי תשעים ותשעה* (תל-אביב: סדן, 1928), עמ' 44.
- 12 ישורון קשת, "סן פייטרו" [1923], *החיים הגנוזים* (ירושלים: מוסד ביאליק, 1959), עמ' 157.
- 13 פנחס שדה, *החיים כמשל* (ירושלים ותל-אביב: שוקן, 1968), עמ' 24.
- 14 Ibid., p. 168-169.
- 15 Ibid., p. 169.
- 16 פנחס שדה, "בדרך מבית לחם", *נסיעה בארץ ישראל והרהורים על אהבתו הנכזבת של אלוהים* (ירושלים ותל-אביב: שוקן, 1974), עמ' 81-82.
- 17 טוביה ריבנר, "פיאטה רונדניני", *כל עוד* (מרחביה: ספריית פועלים, 1968), עמ' 63.
- 18 נתן יונתן, "בדואומו של פלורנץ", *שירים עד כאן* (תל-אביב: ספריית פועלים, 1979), עמ' 58.