

## By Haim Chertok

The English poetry issue of *The Tel Aviv Review* is not only an admirable undertaking but a rich one. Editors Alkalay-Gut and Moked have selected poems by 28 Israelis, all but one of whom originated in the English-speaking world. In this God's plenty, no more than two or three inclusions seem to me borderline. Many are not merely familiar names but, this being Israel, acquaintances. As I tread this minefield, do not, Aloma, Reva, Lois, others, judge harshly if you are scanted. Suffice it that you are in excellent company and that had another fixed his gaze upon this issue, he could easily have chosen otherwise and been entirely justified. My own inellegant strategy has been to focus on striking efforts by writers I have not yet had the pleasure of meeting.

The opening four poems honor the memory of Yitzhak Rabin. The one whose gravity and obliquity render it most memorable is, I feel, Rochelle Mass's parabolic "On the Mountains of Gilboa." The first of its two movements follows:

*there is a farm on the mountains of  
Gilboa where a wild boar comes out  
each night  
tears seedlings of sage and thyme  
out of the earth rolls away lettuce  
heads till they are cold  
and lost like a skull  
each dawn the farmer  
returns the shrubs to the  
mounds he made for them  
each night the beast yanks  
the tender growth from its  
place each day each  
night  
till the night is november  
when a new grave was dug*

Let me merely point out that the dearth of punctuation (about which I am often skeptical), the lurch of the enjambments, and the severed positioning both of "heads" and the next-to-final "night" portend radical disorder. Poet, like beast, yanks us to and fro until righting us into provisional but deceptive balance with the steady facticity of the final two lines. I can't imagine that this could have been improved upon.



Karen Alkalay-Gut, one of the editors of *The Tel Aviv Review*.

# Light Up

Sharing many of Mass's technical virtues as well as her poem's perpetual backdrop of night into day is the fierce, sinuous, despairing argument that Sharon Kessler calls "Geologic Time":

*At nine the fog  
burns off, the sky  
becomes the color  
of metal's  
touch, the stones  
take their places  
again as  
eternal day  
burns down  
its candle.*

Scene and image recall Marlowe's vision of hell as under a metallic sky, stones like actors take their place in the well-worn daily

drama burning sunrise, burning sunset.

*One  
understands, then,  
the geology  
of hatred, how it forms  
slowly out  
igneous core,  
imprints itself  
over centuries,  
embedded  
in heartstone,  
so that we lave  
in its hot  
river, so that  
everything we build  
in this land, everything  
we love in it,  
is its carbon-dated residue,  
its indelible name.*

The impersonal, capitalized "One" evokes both depersonalized speaker and, more daringly, refers to an inversion of God as "Hatred" (summoned forth again in the final line's "indelible name." Since the hellish core from the igneous depths not merely covers the surface but is its very heartstone, the works of "love" (undone, trumped by "lave") are an utter illusion. As geologic time mocks mere human perspectives, man's nightly dreams are daily mocked again by the perdurance of stony sentinels of

hate. As in Wallace Stevens, for Kessler the sun operates as an ultimate reality check.

Craving an ebullient, open-ended, full-throated antidote to taut, feminine despair? Whitman, cummings, and Ginsberg jog along with decapitated (sorry) Richard Flantz in these designer lines near the end of "The Poema: My Name. The Name is Another Poema":

*now to make music though the D-String's  
missing,  
tuning the G-String by the A-string on the  
G-fret  
into alternating rhythms:  
E-G; G-E  
& its just for me  
and you  
as I learn some more  
a Jefferson airplane  
I'm also not.  
Nor a door.  
Shabbat Shalom.  
my loved one sleeps  
and  
now  
I  
light  
up  
now*

They labeled it a "special issue." It's truly so. Seek out *Tel Aviv Review* 4, and light/up/now. ■