

Passover Poetry Resource

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Good Resource Books for Passover Poetry:
Available in the Temple Sinai Library

The Passover Anthology, edited by Philip Goodman

Mishkan HaSeder, A Passover Haggadah, edited by Rabbi Hara E. Person and Jessica Greenbaum

Getting Out of Egypt
by Hagit Ackerman

Not with a strong hand
And not with an outstretched arm
And not with great awe
And not with signs
And not with wonders
Rather hesitantly, with small steps, terrified by darkness
Softly
Dedicated
Purposefully
With accuracy
And love
Carrying little signs like the wrinkles of passing time,
the transition of seasons, my changing body, the pearls of my longings.
Getting out of Egypt (Exodus)

The Kid from the Haggadah

by Nathan Alterman, Translated by Rachel Korazim

He stood there in the market, among she goats and billy goats
Swinging its tail
As small as a pinkie
A kid from a poor home
A kid for two coins (zuzim)
With no adornments
No bell and no ribbon.

Nobody paid attention, since no one knew,
Neither the goldsmiths nor the wool combers;
That this kid
Will enter the Haggadah
and will be the hero of a song

But dad approached with light on his face
And bought the kid and caressed its forehead...
And this was the start of one of the songs
That will be sung forever,

The kid had licked dad's hand with its tongue
And touched it with its wet nose,
This, brother, was the first rhyme
for which the verse is "D'zabin Aba" that father bought....

It was a spring day and the wind was dancing
Girls were laughing with blinking eyes,
And dad and a kid entered the Haggadah
And just stood there both.

That very same Haggadah was already full
With wonders and great miracles
Therefore they stood on the last page
Hugging and pressed to the wall

The very same Haggadah then silently said
Okay, stand there kid and dad
In my pages smoke and blood are walking
I am talking of greatness and secrets

Yet I know that the sea will part for a reason
There is sense in breaking through walls and deserts
If at the end of the tale
A father and a kid
Are waiting for their turn to shine.

Reflections on the Seder Night

by Yehuda Amichai

Reflections on Seder night, Mah nishtanah, we asked,

“How is this night different from all other nights”

“How changed?”

Most of us are grown up now and have stopped asking, but some
go on asking all their lives, the way one asks

How are you, or what time is it, and keep on walking

without waiting for an answer. Mah nishtanah kol Layla, “How changed is every night,”

Like an alarm clock whose ticking is soothing and soporific.

Mah nishtanah, ha-kol yishtaneh, “What has changed, all shall be changed.” Change is God.

Reflections on Seder night. Of four children does the Torah

speak: one wise, one wicked, one simple and one who knows

not how to ask. But nothing is said there

about a good one, or a loving one.

And that’s a question that has no answer,

and if there were an answer I wouldn’t want to know.

I who have passed through all the phases of the children

in their changing constellations, I’ve lived my life, the moon shed its light

on me for no reason, the sun went on its way, the Passovers

passed without an answer. Mah nishtanah. “What has changed?”

Change is God, Death is his prophet.

Seder for 1862
by Nanette L. Avery

The historical account of J.A. Joel and fellow soldiers of the 23rd Ohio regiment at Fayette, West Virginia, during the Civil War. With Passover near, twenty Jewish soldiers requested an absence from their duties to observe the holiday. I have recreated in poetic form their most remarkable Seder from his narrative.

In the woods of West Virginia
Away from family and friends
Request granted for a Seder
Passover preparations began
A party forged the countryside
A service hut was built
And though no horseradish could be found
Local weeds of bitterness grew
Two kegs of cider
A spring lamb
Chickens and some eggs
The camp sutler, a Jewish lad
Shipped matzah for two days
Horset fixings were too scarce
But with symbols, they prevailed
The celebration by the order
Hagaddah blessings and prayers
Silenced battlefields and cries
This gathering of twenty
Colt rifles leaning by their sides
They told the Exodus story
The Civil War could not curtail
The Seder of '62
A full moon, awakening stars
Next year in Jerusalem

Drawing upon her experiences and the backdrop of life growing up in the Virgin Islands, **Nanette L. Avery** is an eclectic author who transcends many genres. She lives outside Nashville, Tennessee, with her husband and orange cat.

Every Year We Open The Door For Elijah

by Bruce Black

Every year we open the door for Elijah
and pray for the peace that legend says
the prophet will bring into the world.

We watch the door swing open
and wait for the sound of his sandals
to scrape against the floor and the swish
of his robe to brush against the table.

We study the goblet of wine that we filled
and set for him in the middle of the table,
and wait for the gentlest ripple of air,
the slightest hint of a breeze,
to stir the liquid's surface.

It's like waiting for a ghost to reappear
each year as we sit at the table hoping for
a glimpse of his beard, his eyes, his hand
as it lifts the cup with gratitude to his dry lips.

Every year Elijah comes without letting himself
be seen and departs again, invisible, like a dream
that we dream every year.

We call him Elijah the Prophet but we could call him
Elijah the Ghost since we never set eyes on him, even
though he comes each year to our table to see if we are
still waiting, still willing to believe he will return.

Bruce Black is the editorial director of The Jewish Writing Project. His poetry and personal essays have appeared in *Poetica*, *Jewthink*, *Lehrhaus*, *Hevria*, *The Jewish Literary Journal*, *Soul-Lit*, *The BeZine*, *Tiferet Journal*, and elsewhere. He lives in Sarasota, FL.

Reflections
by Rabbi Amy Ruth Bolton

We clean, and cook, shop and prepare
Removing all traces of bread and crumbs
Simultaneously cleansing our hearts and souls In hopes of rejuvenation and renewal.
We journey out of Mitzrayim, Egypt, the narrow straits,
To a better place—in our hearts as well.
The broken matzah is a symbol of the brokenness in our hearts
As we search for wholeness and healing.
The shank bone reminds us of sacrifices we've made,
ones that perhaps we miss now that our loved one is no longer here to care for.
The maror helps our tears flow freely, as our sadness is still fresh—
And yet, The haroset reminds us of what is sweet, in memory and in possibility
The egg, of the cycle of life, interrupted, yet ever-continuing
The Karpas affirms that Spring is here, a chance fore new life and renewal.
We pour Elijah's cup till it overflows
With our hopes for a brighter year.

-Passover R

This Fragile Moment: Breaking the Middle Matzah
by Cathleen Cohen

Tonight we break the middle *matzah*
of our present world.

We try to still this sweet
and fragile moment together,

but know
we must snap in half

the unleavened bread and hide it,
scattering crumbs.

We pray that our children
will find and return it,

making the moment whole.
Each must search

for wise ways to live
among fragments.

Each must learn
from the Exodus story –

tyrant, slaves, the wandering
migrants, spokesman, a God

of wrath and promises,
of rules and lovingkindness.

Each of us must emerge
from this year, this story

and bring to the table
our pieces

to share what's luminous
among us.

Send Your Spirit
by Solomon Ibn Gabirol, Translated by Peter Cole

Send your spirit
to revive our corpses,
and ripple the longed-for
land again.

The crops come from you;
you're good to all—
and always return
to restore what has been.

Shelomo Ibn Gabirol, "Send Your Spirit" from *The Dream of the Poem: Hebrew Poetry from Muslim and Christian Spain 950-1492* translated by Peter Cole. Copyright © 2007 by Princeton University Press. Reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press.

Finding Freedom
By Anita Jawary

Years ago, we sang it in praises
at the parting of the sea,
beat our timbrels in ecstasies to shed our collars,
and believed we could dance all the way to Freedom.

We pursued a palpable promise,
watched it flare and recede
on each horizon, a haze by day,
a flame by night,
and we walked and walked and walked and walked.

But even the flutter of butterfly wings
is attached to a worm.
You can cross 100 seas,
wake before the birds to graze on manna sweet,
and even pass over the great Jordan itself.
At which point can you say you are truly free?
Throw off your slave's collar,
its shadow still chokes.

*Walk. Walk. Walk my children. Walk.
Remember the promise.
Freedom. Freedom will be yours.
Soon. Soon.*

"Do you promise?" they ask. "Do you promise?"
Walk. Walk. Walk my children. Walk.
Thousands upon thousands
walk, faster and faster,
on the basis of a promise made long ago,
a mother's lullaby by night,
a shepherd's lyre by day,

and I, an old man,
lie down in the shade of a rock
and watch, as a stampede of human rags
thunders past me,
too hungry to see

that even Freedom trails her shackles behind her.

The last cloud of dust disappears over the horizon.
The desert sky, so high, a distant, inscrutable blue,
and the mountains skip like rams.

Anita Jawary is a Melbourne artist, writer and poet. She has published poetry in *JLJ*, *JWOW*, *Mockingheart Review*, *Songs of Eretz* and *The Eckphrastic Review*. Her poems have been broadcast on TBI Daily Daven as well as the Pier-Glass Poetry Panel 1.6.

Passover

by Primo Levi

Tell me: how is this night different, from all other nights?
How, tell me, is this Passover, different from other Passovers?
Light the lamp, open the door wide, so the pilgrim can come in,
Gentile or Jew; under the rags perhaps the prophet is concealed.
Let him enter and sit down with us; let him listen, drink, sing and celebrate Passover;
Let him consume the bread of affliction, the Paschal Lamb, sweet mortar and bitter herbs.
This is the night of differences, in which you lean your elbow on the table,
Since the forbidden becomes prescribed, evil is translated into good.
We will spend the night recounting, far-off events full of wonder,
And because of all the wine, the mountains will skip like rams.
Tonight they exchange questions: the wise, the godless, the simple-minded and the child.
And time reverses its course, today flowing back into yesterday,
Like a river enclosed at its mouth. Each of us has been a slave in Egypt,
Soaked straw and clay with sweat, and crossed the sea dry-footed.
You too, stranger. this year in fear and shame,
Next year in virtue and in justice.

“Pesach in Blacksburg”

by Erika Meitner

is ushered in by the neighborhood Easter egg
hunt, my kids scrambling beneath backyard
playsets for chocolate, by the ads I’ve been
seeing on Facebook for weeks for the Messianic

Jews welcoming Yeshua at the local Holiday Inn—
is matzo that comes in giant bulk multi-packs
of six stacked on an end-cap shelf at the Kroger
though each of the few Jewish families in town

only needs a single box or maybe two and someone
(a stockboy?) has hung a neat row of Fried Pork Skins
nestled against the Manischewitz Matzo Ball Soup Mix,
the Kedem sparkling grape juice and gefilte fish slabs

suspended in glass jars. Pesach in Blacksburg is a
complication, an exile, and we are the small but
holy remnant so we open the door during Seder
for Elijah the Prophet to find a neighbor selling

magazine subscriptions for a Young Life fundraiser.
We welcome the stranger but I’m sure this is not
what the Haggadah meant when it says *Let all
who are hungry come and eat*, and this year
again we defrost the shankbone Jenny left
before she moved to Baltimore, and this year
the kids wear plague masks I ordered from
amazon.com (hail, lice, locusts, boils, fire,

and a few others, though I still find the closed
eyes on the Slaying of the First Born unbearable)
and this year again only some of us know the songs
but we sing them over and over: *Dayenu*, if He had
supplied our needs in the desert for forty years
it would have been enough—and the kids eke out
a weak Four Questions with the help of the adults
then ransack the house for the *afikomen*. This is a
shadow of the seders of my youth, the lace table
cloths, my survivor grandfather in his resplendent

satin robe at the table's head leading, switching
between Hebrew and Yiddish, but we do what

we can, so I string together folding tables in the
dining room and guests roll in with wine and extra
chairs and here is the bread of affliction, of far-
from-home, of *galut*, that we eat and eat and eat.
© Erika Meitner 2018

Erika Meitner's most recent poetry collection is "Useful Junk." Meitner is 2018 winner of the National Jewish Book Award for a poetry collection, "Holy Moly Carry Me."

Afikomen
by Jean Nordhaus

I've written the soup, the parting of the sea,
the savage plagues and the candles—
how they guttered when the door

fell open for Elijah: wind from the hall,
where a shadow of flame
tongued incinerator walls.

What more can I write of ritual foods
and repetitions, exile and return?
However we angle it, a Rite of Spring.

Let it mean whatever we need it to mean—
this year, the flood of refugees
and Pharaoh's fear of aliens.

Why, then, when you ask for a poem,
am I haunted by the afikomen,
the shy half-matzah

wrapped in a napkin-babushka,
then spirited away
to be hidden in a corner cabinet,

behind a bookcase,
in a cushion, a crease,
reluctant as Moses to be chosen,

and only hours later,
when the children are nodding
and we're flushed with sweet

wine and singing, remembered
and rescued—redeemed
for a dollar, a pittance, a coin.

Jean Nordhaus's books include *Memos from the Broken World*, *Innocence* and *The Porcelain Apes of Moses Mendelssohn*.

Passover During the Bombing of Kosovo

by Alicia Ostriker

Hevel may be translated vanity

or mist or vapor
the name of the first man
whose brother was not his keeper

It is evening it is morning one day
like mist from ten thousand feet
above the hills bombs fall
like vapor the thin air
is full of them
roads crawl with tanks soldiers
like mist tens of thousands
of refugees cross the border
like vapor from morning to dusk
unmanned families
like mist women in slippers
children in bare feet
like vapor carrying blankets
suitcases of clothes
like mist money
ripped off by border guards

Not new under the sun
not new on throbbing bluelit screen
but the eye tires of seeing
the ear of hearing
oh we still prepare our feast
of liberty and memory
we remain your children

And you, you--
father of rain
what are you thinking

Alicia Ostriker has published nineteen volumes of poetry and has twice received a National Jewish Book Award. Her explicitly Jewish-themed books are *The Book of Life* and *The volcano sequence* (poetry), *The Nakedness of the Fathers: Visions and Revisions* (midrash) and *For the Love of God: The Bible as an Open Book* (essays).

Passover
by Linda Pastan

1.

I set my table with metaphor:
the curling parsley – green sign nailed to the doors
of God’s underground; salt of desert and eyes;
roasted shank bone of a Paschal Lamb,
relic of sacrifice and bleating spring.
Down the long table, past fresh shoots of a root
They have been hacking at for centuries,
You hold up the unleavened bread—a baked scroll
Whose wavy lines are undecipherable.

2.

The wise son and the wicked, the simple son
and the son who doesn’t ask, are all my son
leaning tonight as it is written,
slouching his father calls it. His hair is long:
hippie hair, hassid hair, how strangely alike
they seem tonight. First Born, a live child cried
among the bulrushes, but the only root
you know stirs between your legs, ready
to spill its seed in the gentile gardens.
And if the flowers be delicate and fair,
I only mind this one night of the year
when far beyond the lights of Jersey,
Jerusalem still beckons us, in tongues.

3.

What black-throated bird
in a warm country
sings spirituals,
sings spirituals,
to Moses now?

4.

One exodus prefigures the next.
The glaciers fled before hot whips of air.
Waves bowed at God's gesture
for fugitive Israel to pass;
while fish, caught then behind windows
of water, remembered how their brothers once
pulled themselves painfully from the sea,
willing legs to grow from slanted fins.
Now the blossoms pass from April's tree,
Refugree raindrops mar the glass,
borders are transitory.
And the changeling gene, still seeking
stone sanctuary, moves on.

5.

Far from Egypt, I have sighted blood,
have heard the throaty mating of frogs.
My city knows vermin, animals loose in hallways,
boils, sickness, hail.
In the suburban gardens
seventeen-year locusts rise
from their heavy beds
in small explosions of sod.
Darkness of newsprint.
My son, my son.

The cup of Eliyahu
by Marge Piercy

In life you had a temper.
Your sarcasm was a whetted knife.
Sometimes you shuddered with fear
but you made yourself act no matter
how few stood with you.
Open the door for Eliyahu
that he may come in.

Now you return to us
in rough times, out of smoke
and dust that swirls blinding us.
You come in vision, you come
in lightning on blackness.
Open the door for Eliyahu
that he may come in.

In every generation you return
speaking what few want to hear
words that burn us, that cut
us loose so we rise and go again
over the sharp rocks upward.
Open the door for Eliyahu
that he may come in.

You come as a wild man,
as a homeless sidewalk orator,
you come as a woman taking the bima,
you come in prayer and song,
you come in a fierce rant.
Open the door for Eliyahu
that she may come in.

Prophecy is not a gift, but
sometimes a curse, Jonah
refusing. It is dangerous
to be right, to be righteous.
To stand against the wall of might.
Open the door for Eliyahu
that he may come in.

There are moments for each
of us when you summon, when
you call the whirlwind, when you
shake us like a rattle: then we
too must become you and rise.
Open the door for Eliyahu
that we may come in.

Marge Piercy, "The Cup of Eliyahu" from *The Crooked Inheritance*. Copyright © 2006

Maggid
by Marge Piercy

The courage to let go of the door, the handle.
The courage to shed the familiar walls whose very
stains and leaks are comfortable as the little moles
of the upper arm; stains that recall a feast,
a child's naughtiness, a loud blattering storm
that slapped the roof hard, pouring through.

The courage to abandon the graves dug into the hill,
the small bones of children and the brittle bones
of the old whose marrow hunger had stolen;
the courage to desert the tree planted and only
begun to bear; the riverside where promises were
shaped; the street where their empty pots were broken.

The courage to leave the place whose language you learned
as early as your own, whose customs however dan-
gerous or demeaning, bind you like a halter
you have learned to pull inside, to move your load;
the land fertile with the blood spilled on it;
the roads mapped and annotated for survival.

The courage to walk out of the pain that is known
into the pain that cannot be imagined,
mapless, walking into the wilderness, going
barefoot with a canteen into the desert;
stuffed in the stinking hold of a rotting ship
sailing off the map into dragons' mouths,

Cathay, India, Siberia, goldenh medina
leaving bodies by the way like abandoned treasure.
So they walked out of Egypt. So they bribed their way
out of Russia under loads of straw; so they steamed
out of the bloody smoking charnelhouse of Europe
on overloaded freighters forbidden all ports—

out of pain into death or freedom or a different
painful dignity, into squalor and politics.
We Jews are all born of wanderers, with shoes
under our pillows and a memory of blood that is ours
raining down. We honor only those Jews who changed

tonight, those who chose the desert over bondage,
who walked into the strange and became strangers
and gave birth to children who could look down
on them standing on their shoulders for having
been slaves. We honor those who let go of every-
thing but freedom, who ran, who revolted, who fought,
who became other by saving themselves.

Marge Piercy, "Maggid" from *The Art of Blessing the Day*. Copyright © 1999 by Marge Piercy

The Seder's Order

by Marge Piercy, Translated by Vavi Toren and Rachel Korazim

The songs we join in
are beeswax candles
burning with no smoke
a clean fire licking at the evening

our voices small flames quivering.
The songs string us like beads
on the hour. The ritual is
its own melody that leads us

where we have gone before
and hope to go again, the comfort
of year after year. Order:
we must touch each base

of the haggadah as we pass,
blessing, handwashing,
dipping this and that. Voices
half harmonize on the *brukhahs*.

Dear faces like a multitude
of moons hang over the table
and the truest brief blessing:
affection and peace that we make.

Marge Piercy, "The Seder's Order" from *The Crooked Inheritance*. Copyright © 2006

Every Person Needs to Have a Certain Egypt
by Amnon Ribak

Every person needs to have a
certain Egypt,
To deliver themselves from
with a strong arm,
or with grinding teeth.
Every person needs terror and great darkness,
and comfort and promise and redemption,
that they would know to look up at the sky.
Every person needs
One prayer,
that would always be on their lips.
A person needs to bend once –
Every person needs a shoulder.
Every person needs to have a
certain Egypt,
to redeem themselves from, from the house of slavery,
to get out in the middle of the night to the desert of fears,
to march straight into the waters,
to see them open on both sides.

Every person needs a shoulder,
to carry the Joseph's bones,
Every person needs to straighten their back.

Every person needs to have a
certain Egypt,
and a Jerusalem,
and one long journey,
that they will remember forever
in their feet soles

Passover

by Jessie E. Sampter - 1883-1938

It's a far, far road from Egypt
To our own, our happy land,
From the pyramids of Egypt
Built beneath the tyrant's hand;
Its road so strange and marvelous
That few can understand.

See, the Lord had passed us over
For his sign upon our gate!
He has spared the crushed and driven,
He has judged the proud and great.
When the hosts of Israel rise to go
He makes the crooked straight.

It's a far, far road to Zion
For the slave afraid to flee;
He must pass through flood and desert,
Yet his land he shall not see.
But the man that knows the sign of God
On Pesach eve is free.

In the public domain

My Father and I Observe the Passover Exodus

by Ellen Sazzman

“... [T]he law speaks distinctly of the four different characters of children:
the wise, the wicked, the simple, and the one who does not know how to ask.”

The Four Children of the Haggadah

I point with newly arthritic fingers to thick blocks
of prayer in the Haggadah. We mumble Kiddush
to the hiss of oxygen tanks, then sip sweet purple wine.
In the crowded dining hall of Hebrew Home we stumble
along in motley formation with the seder's strict progression.

You are attired in a polyester dress shirt worn
to transparency. Withered arms tattooed with plum
bruises stick out from short sleeves. Your navy tie,
dribbled with grease, lies askew. “So where's your brother,
the big doctor?” you ask. I retell last year's news –

your son has died. We pretend to wash our hands again
and again as if to rid them of regrets – the doctor I never
became or even married, the confidences I meant to share
with my brother. You try to chew the parsley, spring's symbol

bathed in tears, but the food's too tough, your bite gone slack.
You choke – no longer able to swallow the loss of eyesight,
of years spent peering into timepiece inner workings, of a son's
respect, the first-born who refused to honor the covenant,
just a few visits for the sacrifices his parents made.

I slap your back to staunch the coughing. Your chest quieted,
you glare at me – I am no Miriam. I couldn't save my brother.
You recline in your seat but this is no different than any other night
when you slouch in your wheelchair, as your tablemates lean
toward the safety of walkers, their hips and minds already broken.

Who amongst this group can ask the Four Questions? It is the duty
of the youngest. Still we were all children once and some have returned.
Together we chant Mah Nishtanah. “Why isn't your brother here?”
you ask. We intone the ten plagues, the last – slaying of the first-born,
and drip wine from our cups onto the plate to make our own red seas.

We sing Dayainu. You bleat off key: "It would have been enough if God had brought us forth from Egypt." Enough already. I have not answered your question. I know now I have questions of my own. They're not simple. Why couldn't I be the wise child or at least the wicked? I pray it's not too late in the story for examination, debate, reconciliation.

Previously published in *Poetica* and *The Shomer*

(F)Re(e)form Judaism

By Barbara Ungar

I didn't clean the house or throw out the *chametz*.
I didn't put away two sets of dishes & take out two more:
I don't have four sets of dishes, or even one—
just mismatched and chipped plates
from thrift shops in colors I love.
I didn't invite anyone or cook
an elaborate meal, it was just Izaak and me.
I made some matzoh ball soup
from a box, opened a jar of gefilte fish
(I did not grind my own from carp
swimming in the bathtub, the way
Grandma did). I couldn't find
Aa Haggadah, A Seder plate—
we just winged it.

We did the four questions and the ten plagues,
but when I tried to tell him the story,
he said, *I saw the movie*, jumped up and acted it out.
We didn't get drunk on Manishevitz,
but I did put a cup out for Elijah,
whom IZ took for a girl: he left
her a crystal with a note that said
I love you. Of course he found
the *afikomen*. There was no
competition, no candied fruit slices
or disgusting macaroons. He was glad
not to have to sit through a big *magid*
or be forced to eat too much. I sang *Dayenu*
till he told me to stop. We did put pillows
on our chairs to remind us: we are free.

Barbara Ungar's *Save Our Ship* won the Synder Prize from Ashland Poetry Press and was named to *Kirkus Reviews*' Best Books of 2019. A professor at the College of Saint Rose in Albany, NY, she has poems in *Scientific American* and *Cutthroat*. <http://www.barbaraungar.com>

The Trans Haggadah Companion

by Bev Yockelson

On this night

I remember Nachshon
who was not Moses who
walked into the Red Sea
and called for God
to meet him there

On this night

I am only a body and you
are only a body

On this night

nothing is hidden
only the afikomen

On this night

God was here and I
I knew it

Source: *Poetry* (February 2019)

Identity Class

by Hamutal bar Yosef, Translated by Rachel Korazim

I am from here, my parents were born in the Gola (exile)
They called the Jewish state Geulah
I was born to the square Hebrew, upright, hungry
That was a good reason to be proud.
I was born in a kibbutz I walked barefoot
For good and for better we grew up like brothers,
The girls with the boys the happy times with the fears

In our kibbutz there was no synagogue
But erev Shabbat was a different time, special:
After a warm shower, We were all dressed in white shirts
that had arrived all ironed from the communal laundry

And on erev Pesach
We reaped the new wheat
The Chaver who played the great Cohen had asked:
Did the sun set?
And we all responded: It did, it did and he asked again: shall I reap?
And we all responded: Reap! Reap!
Then we gathered to celebrate the Seder
And we were all together
We did not think that what we had done was Jewish
We did not think that it was a good reason to be proud.

I am from here, most women light Shabbat candles here
For a whole week every year it is hard to get bread in most places.
One day a year, a desert silence paralyzes most of the traffic
Two day a year the sound of the siren is a fire skewer
Heart wrenching.

Not a big people, not numerous
Living in a Jewish state
The only one we had loved and will love
And whatever it is worth for good and for better
It is a good reason to be proud,
Even now.

Seder-Night
by Israel Zangwill

Prosaic miles of streets stretch all round,
Astir with restless, hurried life and spanned
By arches that with thund'rous trains resound,
And throbbing wires that galvanize the land;
Gin-palaces in tawdry splendor stand;
The newsboys shriek of mangled bodies found;
The last burlesque is playing in the Strand—
In modern prose all poetry seems drowned.
Yet in ten thousand homes this April night
An ancient People celebrates its birth
To Freedom, with a reverential mirth,
With customs quaint and many a hoary rite,
Waiting until, its tarnished glories bright,
Its God shall be the God of all the earth.

The Burning Bush is a Blackberry Bush
by Sarah Mathes

I wrote the poem. And then I rewrote it, and made it worse.
I thought time would heal it. Time passed. I did research: Exodus,
midrash, my mother. I rewrote the poem. I ate fistfuls of soft berries. Navy
lips. Purple lips. Juice bursting out of black balloons. I made it worse.
The poem knocked around my mind like unlabeled preserves darkening in the fridge.
Outside the page: tableaus of simple beauty.
Three different trees in one line of sight—plum, pear, palm.
Inside: A hand runs under a faucet, the soap stinging invisible cuts to life.

Have you seen a blackberry bush at the exact moment of its blushing,
when its tight little spheres bleed the green seeds bloody—
have you walked by shoeless on the way to the lake,
the sun lifting the hairs on your cheek,
no matter where you turn, something you love coming after you,
the bush burning in the stripped light,
unripe, alive, surviving—

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