ABRAHAM MOSES KLEIN
(1909-1972)

630 – HE EATS AT THE FAMILY BOARD

Because to Him in prayer shawl, he prays,
My father’s God absolves his cares and cares;
My wedded sister likes no empty phrase.
Her spaniel brings her cash, not learned barks.

My brother in his bed-room den displays
The dark capacious beard of Herr Karl Marx;
My uncle scorns them all; my uncle says
HerrZ will turn the Jews, now moles, to larks;
My cousin, amiable, believes them both,
Serving a beard of Herzlian-Marxian growth.

And as for me, unlike the ancient bards,
My idols have been shattered into shards.

(Hebrewic and Poems)

630 – EGLI MANGIA AL DESCIO FAMILIARE

Poiché lo prega avvolto nello scialle,
Dio a mio padre assovvia affanni e ansie;
Mia sorella sposata vuote frasi non ama,
Dal suo lecchino vuol soli, non alti latrati.

Nella sua tana ha in mostra mio fratello
La grande barba scura di Karl Marx;
Mio zio li sdegna tutti perché HerrZ
Gli ebrei da talpe in allodole trasforma;
Garbato, mio cugino crede a entrambi,
Di HerzL-Marx la barba sua é al servizio.

In quanto a me, non come i bardì antichi,
I miei idoli in frantumi son finiti.

630 – EREDITà

Mio padre non lasciò vaste tenute;
Né chiavi o partitari per me in eredità;
Solo libri sacri con date di yahrzeit1
Scritte dal cordoglio sul bianco di un risguardo…

Libri del Baal Shem Tov2, dei suoi prodigi;
Libretti sul demonio e la sua criaca;
Preghiere contro demoni di strada e streghe e tuoni;
E molti tomi adatti a un buon ebreo.

Stupendi: ma senza una figura, tranne
Lo Scorpione che striscia su un sentiero stampato;

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1. Anniversario di morte di un parente stretto.
2. Fondatore del movimento misticco Hassidico serto in Polonia alla metà del XVIII secolo.
The Virgin floating on a scriptural wave,
Square letters twinkling in the Zodiac.

The snuff left on this page, now brown and old,
The tallow stains of midnight liturgy —
These are my coat of arms, and these unfold
My noble lineage, my proud ancestry!

And my tears, too, have stained this heirloomed ground,
When reading in these treatises some weird
Miracle, I turned a leaf and found
A white hair fallen from my father’s beard.

(Thou not a Jew...)

A PSALM OF ABRAHAM, TO BE WRITTEN DOWN
AND LEFT ON THE TOMB OF RASHI

Now, in this terrible tumultuous night,
When roars the metal beast, the steel bird screams,
And images of God, for fraud or fright,
Cannot discern what is from that which seems, —
I, in bewildерment, remember you,
Mild pedagogue, who took me, young and raw,
And led me, verse by verse, and clue by clue,
Mounting the spiral splendid staircase of the Law, —
You, Rabbi Solomon bar Isaac, known
Rashi, incomparable exegete,
Who did sustain my body and my bone
With drink talmudic and with biblic meat, —
Simple, and for a child were they, your words,
Bringing into the silent wooded script,
Texts that came twittering, like learned birds,
Describing mightily the nondescript.
Not these can I forget, nor him ignore,
That old archaic Frank expounding lore
From his Hebraic crypt.
Nothing was difficult, O Master, then,  
No query but it had an answer, clear,  
But now though I am grown, a man of men,  
The books all read, the places seen, the clear  
Too personal heart endured all things, there is  
Much that I cannot grasp, and much that goes amiss,  
And much that is a mystery that even the old Gaul  
Nor Onkelos, nor Jonathan, can elucidate at all.

Yours were such days, great rabbi, like these days,  
When blood was spilled upon the public ways,  
And lives were stilled, for mere glut of gore,  
As they marched on, those murderous four,  
Hunger and hate and pestilence and war!  
Wherefore, O Parshandatha of the law,  
Unriddle me the chapter of the week:  
Show me the wing, the hand, behind the claw,  
The human mouth behind the vulture beak;  
Reveal, I pray you, do reveal to me  
Behind the veil the vital verity;  
Show me again, as you did in my youth,  
Behind the equivocal text the unequivocal truth!

O vintner of Troyes,  
Consider the cluster of my time, its form and shape,  
And say what wine will issue from this bitter grape!

I wait your answer; in the interim  
I do, for you who left no son to read  
The prayer before the sacred cherubim,  
Intone, as one who is of your male seed,  
A Kaddish:

May it reach eternity  
And grace your soul, and even bring some grace  
To most unworthy, doubt-divided me.

(Poems)
A PSALM OF ABRAHAM, CONCERNING THAT WHICH
HE BEHELD UPON THE HEAVENLY SCARP

1
And on that day, upon the heavenly scarp,
The hosannas ceased, the hallelujahs died,
And music trembled on the silenced harp.
An angel, doffing his scaphic pride,
Wept; and his tears so bitter were, and sharp,
That where they fell, the blossoms shrivelled and died.

2
Another with such voice intoned his psalm
It sang forth blasphemy against the Lord.
Oh, that was a very imp in angeldom,
Who, thinking evil, said no evil word—
But only pointed, at each Te Deum
Down to the earth, and its abhorred horde.

3
The Lord looked down, and saw the cattle-cars:
Men ululating to a frozen land.
He saw a man tear at his flogged scars,
And saw a babe look for its blown-off hand.
Scholars, he saw, snuffing their bottled wars,
And doctors who had geniuses unmanned.

4
The gentle violinist whose fingers played
Such godly music, washing a gutter, with lye,
He saw. He heard the priest who called His aid.
He heard the agnostic's un-directed cry.
Unto Him came the odour Hunger made,
And the odour of blood before it is quite dry.

5
The angel who wept looked into the eyes of God.
The angel who sang ceased pointing to the earth.
A little cherub, now glimpsing God's work flaw'd,
Went mad, and flapped his wings in crazy mirth.
And the good Lord said nothing, but with a nod
Summoned the angels of Sodom down to earth.

UN SALMO DI ABRAHAM, SU CIO CHE
EGLI CONTEMPLÒ SUL PENDIO CELESTE

1
Ed in quel giorno, sul pendio celeste,
Morrirono gli osanna e gli alleluia.
Tremò la musica sull'arpa resa muta.
Un angelo, smesso il scaphico orgoglio,
Lacrima piana, si aspi e amare,
Che dove caddero, i fiori avvizzirono, morti.

2
Un altro con tal voce intonò un salmo
Che fu quel canto una bestemmia a Dio.
Fu un diavoletto dell'angelica schiena,
Che, pur pensando il male, non lo disse—
Ma puntò solo il dito, a ogni Te Deum
Giù sulla terra, e all'aborriria orda.

3
Il Signore vide già i carri-bestiame:
Uomini ululavano a una terra gelata.
Vide un uomo strapparsi piaghie sferzate,
E un bimbo cercarsi la mano recisa.
Vide studiosi fumare gas di guerra,
E medici dal genio svilito.

4
Il dolce violinista che eseguiva
Arie divine, lavar la cunetta, con lisciva,
Egli vide. E udit prete invocare il Suo aiuto.
Degli agnostici udi il grido senza guida.
A Lui giunse l'odore della Fame,
E l'odore del sangue non rappreso.

5
L'angelo che piangeva Dio negli occhi guardò.
L'angelo che cantava cessò d'indicar la terra.
Un cherubino vide il guasto nell'opera di Dio.
E, impazzito, aleggiò di gioia folle.
Il buon Dio non parlò, ma con un cenno
Gli angeli di Sodoma sulla terra chiamò.
MONTREAL

1
O city metropole, isola fluviale!
Your ancient pavages and saluted routs
Traverse my spirit's conjured avenues!
Splendor erable of your promenades
Foliates there, and there your maisonry
Of pendent balleon and escalier'd march,
Unique midst English habitat,
Is vivid Normandy!

2
You populate the pupils of my eyes:
Thus, does the Indian, plumèd, furitivé:
Still through your painted autumms, Ville-Marie!
Though palisades have passed, though calumet
With tabac of your peace enfumez the air,
Still do I spy the phantom, aquilino,
Geneflect, mocassin'd, behind,
His statue in the square!

3
Thus, costumed images before me pass,
Haunting your archives architectural:
Courant de bois, in ports where pelts were portaged;
Seigneur within his candled manoir; Scot
Ambulant through his bank, pillar'd and vast.
Within your chapels, voyaged mariners
Still pray, and personage departed,
All present from your past!

4
Grand port of navigations, multiple
The lexicons uncargo'd at your quays,
Sonnant though strange to me; but chieftest, I,
Auditor of your music, cherish the
Joined double-melodicité vocabulaire
Where English vocable and roll Ecossie,
Mollified by the parle of French
Bilingualfact your air!

MONTREAL

1
O città metropole, isola fluviale!
I tuoi lastricati antichi e le tue sante folle
Traversano i viali rievocati del tuo spirito!
 Splendore erablico delle tue promenade
Lì mette le foglie, e lì le tua maisons
Di balconi sporgenti e processione di escaliers,
uniche nell'habitat inglese,
Son viva Normandia!

2
Tu popoli le pupille dei miei occhi:
E così fa l'indiano, piumato, furtivo
Immobile negli autunni tue dipinti, Ville-Marie!
Benché le palazzate sian scomparse, anche se il calumet
Col tabacco della tua pace rende l'aria enfumée,
Scorgo ancora lo spirito, aquilino,
Genuflessi, in mocassini, dictro
La sua statua nella piazza!

3
E così, figure in costume mi passano davanti,
Come fantasmi nei tuoi archivi architettonici:
Courant de bois, per portare le pellicce alle stazioni;
Seigneur nel suo manor a lume di candela; scozzese
Ambulante sulla sua riva, rinfocolata e vasta.
Nelle tue cappelle, marinai di tanti viaggi
Pregano ancora, e personaggi defunti,
Tutti presenti dal tuo passato!

4
Gran porto navigato, multiformi
I lessici sbarrati sui tue moli,
Sonnant anche se estrani a me; ma soprattutto, io,
Che ascolto la tua musica, assaporò la
Doppia melodia del vocabulaire congiunto
In cui vocabolo inglese e rullare Ecossie
Fatti moli dal parle del francese
Bilinguefanno la tua aria!
Such your suaver voice, hushed Hochelaga!
But for me also sound your potencies,
Fortissimos of sirens fluvial,
Bruit of manufactury, and thunder
From foundry issuant, all puissant tone
Impleishing your hebdomad; and then
Sanct silence, and your argent belfries
Clamant in orison!

You are a part of me, O all your quartiers –
And of dire pauvrete and of richesse –
To finished time my homage loyal claim;
You are locale of infancy, milieu
Vital of institutes that formed my fate;
And you above the city, scintillante,
Mount Royal, are my spirit’s mother,
Almative, poiturinate!

Never do I sojourn in alien place
But I do languish for your scenes and sounds,
City of reverie, nostalgic isle,
Pendant most brilliant on Laurentian cord!
The eagles of your boulevards — my signiory —
Your suburbs are my exile’s verdure fresh,
Your parks, your fountain’d parks —
Pasture of memory!

City, O city, you are vision’d as
A parchemin roll of saecular exploit
Inked with the script of eterne souvenir!
You are in sound, chanson and instrument!
Mental, you rest forever edified
With tower and dome; and in these beating valves,
Here in these beating valves, you will
For all my mortal time reside!

(The Rocking Chair and Other Poems)
THE CRIPPLES

(Onaïro de St. Joseph)

Bundled their bones, upon the ninetynine stairs—
St. Joseph's ladder—the knobs of penance come;
the folded cripples counting up their prayers.

How rich, how plumped with blessing is that dome!
The gourd of Brother André! His sweet days
rounded! Fulfilled! Honeyed to honeycomb!

Whither the heads, upon the ninetynine trays,
the palsied, who double their aspen selves, the lame,
the unsymmetrical, the dead-limbed, raise

their look, their hope, and the idée fixe of their maim,—
knowing the surgery's in the heart. Are not
the ransom'd crutches worshippers? And the fame

of the brother sanatorial to this plot?—
God mindful of the sparrows on the stairs?
Yes, to their faith this mountain of stairs, is not!

They know, they know, that suddenly their cares
and orthopedics will fall from them, and they
stand whole again.

Roll empty away, wheelchairs,
and crutches, without armpits, hop away!

And I who in my own faith once had faith like this,
but have not now, am crippled more than they.

(Poems of French Canada)

GLI STORPI

(Onaïro de St. Joseph)

Infagettate le ossa, sui novantanove gradini—
la scala del S. Giuseppe—vengono i bozzi della pena;
gli storpi ripiegati a contarsi le preghiere.

Com'è ricca e pungie di benedizione quella cupola!
La zucca di Frate André! I dolci suoi giorni
compiuti! Coronati! Patti favo melato!

Dove quei capi, sui novantanove vassoi,
i paralitici, piegati come tremuli pioppi, gli zoppi,
gli asimmetrici, dalle morte membra, levano

lo sguardo, la speranza, e l'idée fixe della mutilazione,—
sapendo che il chirurgo è dentro al cuore. Non sono
tanti fedeli le grucce riscattate? E la fama
del frate non risana questo campo?—
E Dio non si cura dei passerì sulle scale?
Sì, per la loro fede questo monte di scale, non è!

Essi sanno, essi sanno, che d'un tratto le loro pene
e le deformità cadranno, e ancora
saranno tutti interi.

Rota l'euvo suole, sedie a rotelle,
e grucce, senza ascelle, via con un balzo!

E io che nella mia fede avevo questa fede,
e più non l'ho, son più di loro storpio.