

Souls in the Garden



Jardin de Moshé de León
Ávila, Spain

SOULS IN THE GARDEN

**Poems Inspired by My Travels
in
Medieval and Modern Jewish Spain**

Henry Rasof

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Other Books by the Author

The House (2009)

Chance Music: Prose Poems 1974 to 1982 (2012)

Here I Seek You: Jewish Poems for Shabbat, Holy Days, and Everyday (2016)

Web Sites by the Author

www.henryrasof.com

www.medievalhebrewpoetry.org

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for my parents
Beatrice Rasof (1918 to 2012) and Bernard Rasof (1918 to 2017)

and for my friend
Dina von Zweck (1933 to 2012)

about whom words cannot adequately describe
their unique brilliance
and the irreplaceability of their love and support

may our lightened
and enlightened souls
all meet again
in the heavenly garden

*souls in the garden rise
and reach the gate of heaven . . .
admire the burning splendor
of the column that spews fire . . .
kneel reverently.*

Moses de León

The Zohar—or Book of Splendor

(translation of part of Spanish text on metal pedestal
in Jardin de Moshé de León in Ávila, Spain,
shown in Frontispiece)

*Seeking but failing
union with the Divine
the souls circle Her in consolation
hanging on for dear life.*

Plotinus

Ennead II.2.2

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Timeline: See www.henryrasof.com
Geographical Index of People, Places, and Events: See www.henryrasof.com
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PREAMBLE

About the Dutch painter Hieronymous Bosch (ca. 1450-1516), whose well-known painting *Garden of Earthly Delights* probably is familiar to most readers of this book, a scholar writes: "[S]ome of [his] hidden symbols refer to the Christian's fear of . . . seduction by worldly pleasures, for which the 'Jewish world' serves as a warning example."

As I hope the reader will discover in reading the poems in *Souls in the Garden*, nothing could be farther from the truth about the "'Jewish world.'"

In fact, though not written in response to Bosch, Rabbi Moses de León—one of the most brilliant and famous mystics of any faith—in "his" poem in this book "Garden in Ávila"—does seem to respond:

I said the garden is a place of earthly delight
Where God can appear throughout the night
Each star a soul from the next world
Each sight a face aglow with millions of pearls

That said, the entirety of *Souls in the Garden*, though itself not consciously written in response to Bosch, does seem one long, multifaceted response, inspired by my two trips to Spain.

On the first trip, in 2000, I traveled primarily in southern and central Spain, visiting Málaga, Granada, Cazorla, Úbeda, Córdoba, Sevilla, Jérez, Toledo, and Madrid. The primary focus was flamenco, Spanish culture in general, and general sightseeing, with a secondary though still-strong focus on Jewish history and culture. On the second trip, in 2011, the primary focus was Jewish: I traveled mostly (but not entirely) to cities that had had a Jewish presence, moving in a roughly counterclockwise arc beginning in Barcelona and then, in approximately the following order, on to Girona, Bésalu, Figueres, Zaragoza, Tudela, Tarazona, Bilbao, León, Salamanca, Ávila, Segovia, and Madrid.

During and after both trips I took notes and began to jot down poems and ideas for poems, until perhaps 2014, when I had what I hope is now a cohesive group of poems inspired by "Jewish" Spain. During this period I settled on the title, which comes from a quotation—cut into the top of a small metal pedestal in the Jardin de Moshé de Léon (the self-same Rabbi Moses de Léon), in Ávila—from the *Zohar*—the *Book of Splendor*—the most mystical of mystical Jewish books.

Why the interest in Spanish Jewry when my own Jewish ancestry is Ashkenazi—Eastern European—and not *Sefardic*, Spanish-Jewish? About this sort of thing, the great Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges might have said, taken out of context, that "such a preference . . . would not have been inexplicable. . . ." By the way, and perhaps not surprisingly, given his "Catholic" literary sweep, Borges had Jewish ancestry.

But to answer the "why?" question:

First there is the emotional, intellectual, and "personal" connection I feel with the poets, philosophers, and mystics of the period. Many, like Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (better known as Maimonides) and Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra, were admirably and extraordinarily brilliant polymaths. And, all of them

were enmeshed with the three cultures (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), when, although scholars have now punched holes in the notion of a *convivencia* (the so-called harmonious relationships among the three religions), the period indeed did see an inspiring interplay of languages and ideas. In our own time, when conviviality among faiths is often lacking, this earlier period gives one hope that this sort of thing is possible, even if imperfectly realized, or the product of wishful thinking, or totally invented. If something like this can be imagined, then at the very least it is in the realm of possibility.

Second, I love flamenco music, and here too is a blending of cultures, including gypsy, Jewish, and north African, though much of the musical "scholarship" ("flamencology") seems either fanciful or downright made up.

Third, two of my favorite poets, born centuries apart, are Spanish though not Jewish: St John of the Cross and Federico García Lorca. St John wrote with the highest spiritual intensity, and Lorca, equally intense but in a different way, often reflects the distant Spanish past in his poetry. These enthusiasms, plus a newfound interest in St Teresa of Ávila, led to an unintentional, partial change in the focus of the later poems in *Souls in the Garden* toward St John and St Teresa. These two figures had Jewish ancestors, lived in cities home to Jews not that long before their own presence there, and move me in a somewhat similar way to that in which I am moved by the "fully" Jewish figures. I also would like to think—or at least want to believe—that their Jewish past influenced their mysticism and their rebelliousness toward the religious establishment.

As you read the poems you will notice that many are written in the first person of their subjects. Borges says about this sort of effort that there are two types of approaches: "One . . . outlines the theme of a *total identification* with a given author. . . . The other is . . . fit only . . . to produce the plebeian pleasure of anachronism or (what is worse) to enthrall us with the elementary idea that all epochs are the same or are different." (I plead guilty to both!) Although most of the subjects are men, some are women. Just one of the many unexpected benefits and pleasures I have had researching and writing the poems in this book was discovering fascinating people I had never heard of, in particular these women, one of whom I even fell in love with. In "channeling" their voices I have discovered a kind of "attitude" in myself that I have projected onto these women that I have been surprised and amused at.

Although the period encompassed by the poems had many rich Muslim voices as well, unfortunately I am less familiar with these voices, so only a few are included. In general, the choices of subjects have depended in great part on the names with whom I am most familiar and also the places and monuments I came across in Spain associated with the writers, philosophers, religious figures, and leaders who are my subjects.

As you read the poems you also undoubtedly will come across many unfamiliar names and terms. Including footnotes in a poetry book seems a poor idea; poets want their readers to understand their poems without any. However, including notes in poetry books is not unheard-of; most modern collections of medieval Hebrew poetry, for example, include copious notes. And so, in this tradition, I offer you, the reader who may need some help, brief notes, arranged by poem, at the back of this book. For the reader who wants more comprehensive notes and other reference material, these can be found at www.henryrasof.com.

I wish you a good trip traveling with me in medieval and modern Jewish Spain—oh, and also in Taos, New Mexico, once part of New Spain, a city with a longtime Jewish connection, albeit mostly hidden.

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And, last but not least, my good friend Lewis Daniels, for his help translating any written Spanish I came across while writing the poems and notes, including, most importantly, the source of the title of this book.

On the Sabbath
Jewish souls have a taste of the world-to-come.
Various traditional Jewish sources

Angels guide the righteous deceased
to the Garden of Eden.
Various traditional Jewish sources

The ascended souls then join
the Divine forevermore.
Zohar 1:235a

WHO ARE THE SOULS IN THE GARDEN?

Our souls are born in heaven, in what Howard Schwartz calls, variously, a "tree of souls," a "treasury of souls," a "field of souls." Before we receive a body, our soul descends to see what earth is like. It then returns to heaven for the finishing touches. The soul then is sent back to earth to be born in an earthly body in order for God to become completed. God is imperfect without us. We are a kind of laboratory experiment created for God's own purpose, namely, to become whole.

One of the epigraphs to this book describes the souls of the righteous as rising to heaven, to paradise. This happens on *Shabbat* (the Jewish Sabbath) and also after death; it is said that the Sabbath is a taste of the next world, so on the Sabbath, souls are offered this taste.

Aside from the author of *Souls* (as far as he knows), all of the souls are, obviously, dead, and so by now one assumes they have ascended, whether Jewish, or Christian, or Muslim by birth or conversion. There might be exceptions, of course, which the reader can decide for himself or herself.

These people are dead, yes, but their souls are still expressing themselves, to us, to one another, to friends and enemies, to God, in anger and with sadness, nostalgia, cynicism, bitterness, wistfulness, and more—the gamut of human emotions.

The souls of the dead in the garden are a mostly high minded group of souls, though there are some outliers. Their vocabulary is broad, their erudition often tremendous, their depth of emotion striking, their knowledge of literary forms (including, anachronistically, free verse) impressive. Some poems are told in this author's voice, or in dialogue between the author and his subjects. Time past, present, and future are one, and everyone is a time traveler, just like the ascending and descending souls, which, as was said, travel on *Shabbat* and after death as if there is no difference.

map t/k left
Spain and Portugal, perhaps Provence in southern France

map t/k right
mediterranean, italy, north africa/morocco, egypt, palestine

*And the Lord will create over the whole habitation . . .
and over her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day,
and the shining of a flaming fire by night. . . .*
Isaiah 4:5

SOULS IN THE GARDEN

Everything that breathes praises You, Lord God!

Note to the Reader

Most of the italicized texts in smaller type are quotations whose sources are in the Notes to the Poems at the back of the book.

Dialogue with the Jew of Málaga

I did not seek you
Found me

How do I know
Your voice is true

When you speak
My breathing is even

I sought your love
Though it was not to be had

I drew close
You pulled away

Now I understand
Your metaphors of love

I am glad you do not
Laugh at me

This is how my poet self wrote
And had to write

Godly love, womanly love—
I meant these

You now understand
As if you were writing as me today

Your rabbinic poet-philosopher Ibn Gabirol
Might have said:

This is love
Fountain of life
Simple and pure
Wisdom's crown
In all its complicated manifestations

Ghost of Granada

Twelve stone lions
Three-cornered hats

In the labyrinth
Indifferent faces

On the hill
A new mosque

Early morning
Frantic

I hear a voice
Cannot find its source

No one knows
Even the policemen

Louder here
Louder there

Scan the alleys
Memorize the map

The voice lost for a thousand years
Is in my chest

At night in Granada
I call on a puma to stalk

The most famous medieval Jew
Before Maimonides the philosopher

In a ravine where limestone cuts
And olive oil stinks

Night-blooming jasmine
Precipitates a childhood memory

Nowhere so many jasmines
In so small a space

That is no consolation for the failure
To locate even a trace of Shmuel Hanagid—Samuel the Prince—

Vizier poet
Talmudist patron of the arts

Military commander
Ghost of Granada

Abu Ishaq, There Is Only One God

Lā ilāha illā allāh There is no God but Allah

Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad Hear O Israel, the Lord is God, the Lord is One

Poetry tears through my mind

As I draw my tongue's sword.

At that point, it can pierce armor. . . .

Holding back would make me crazy.—Ibn Quzman

Abu Ishaq, I have summoned what's left

Of the dust of your pathetic dry bones from your grave in Granada

To this abandoned garden

Whose once-magnificent blooms

Are now but artifact

Of poetic memory

Not to pay homage to the souls

Of long-ago lovers

But rather to do battle with you

In the way only poets can

Pretty fancy qasida opening for a queer Jew

Better than the qasidas from a pederast like you

You rode the trends of our poets

Whose so-called poems sail the seas of poetry in third-class boats

Better a third-class boat than a fourth-class monkey

It takes one to know one, brays your friend the donkey

You copied our grammarians too

Whose rules derived from a second-rate language of fools

Your so-called architects built small synagogues in our style

Better so-called than boring; better small than bloated and vile

Too bad Abraham didn't kill Isaac his son

If he had, you wouldn't be here, since your father was named after him

Your prophets were superseded by ours

Whose religion is not just derivative but influenced by inferior stars

No Muslim could or should bow to the basest monkey of nonbelievers . . .

Also enemy bastards, I recall your saying in one of your menstrual fevers

. . . Nonbelievers whom we still protected
Better, unprotected unbelievers than syphilitic carriers like you of pathetic invective

We drank and sang together
You made us sit in back and drink the dregs that stank

We ruled in Spain for over seven hundred years
Thanks to our help in driving out the Visigoths by helping you overcome your fears

Our rulers were mighty
They fought amongst themselves, couldn't kill a flea, and were flighty

Your leaders were mere moons to our suns
Better moons than sons of bitches

You Jews and your leader had too many privileges . . .
You and yours had deservedly too few

. . . Too much money and power, fancy clothes, too many good jobs and huge mansions
It's not our fault you're poor, weak, lazy, and too concerned with fashions

You taxed and took us for all we were worth
You taxed our patience, have a brain as small as a tick's, and a tuches as big as the earth

The king should not have appointed as vizier a Jew
*Joseph, son of the beloved Samuel the Nagid—
whose first two names, by the way, are Abu Ishaq—
was more qualified than any Muslim in the que*

He was haughty and disrespected our religion
At least he wasn't being naughty in the kitchen

When he tried to kill the king, that was the last straw
Do you believe every rumor you hear in the raw?

My beautifully crafted heartfelt poem did the trick
You are a tedious, prosaic, vicious whiner with a brick for a brain

When I wrote this I struck a chord with the people:
Quick! Slaughter the Jews to bring you closer to Allah:
They're just fattened sacrificial rams anyway
Their murder isn't treachery
True treachery is letting them wreck your own land
You mean your kind of rabble

We had to do something to regain our pride
Did you need to incite the mob to crucify Joseph in 1066 in response to your lie?

He deserved what to him was coming
Your phrasing is stilted: Were all the Jews massacred that year as deserving?

*In 400 years a Jewish monkey
Will perhaps foolishly and unaware of the irony*

*Bankroll with taxes collected from your countrymen
The final victory of Christians over Muslims*

*Conquering Granada once and for all
Returning Spain forever more into Christian hands*

*On the Day of Judgment
Even your remorseful mother will cry out*

*"It isn't treachery to pardon him
"So do not pardon him"*

*Now that I have summoned what's left
Of the dust of your pathetic dry bones*

*I pray that it be ground even finer
Ground without mercy to its very atoms*

*Scattered to the ends of the earth
Then beyond the edge of the galaxy*

*So that there is nothing of nothingness
Not one speck of matter to resurrect*

*So that although you claim to belong to the "chosen people"
Your chosen people will never "build the world" you say they're destined to build*

*Poetry tears through my mind
As I draw my tongue's sword.
At that point, it can pierce armor. . . .
Holding back would make me crazy.*

*Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad
There is no God but Allah
Lā ilāha illā allāh
Hear O Israel, the Lord is God, the Lord is One*

Call Me Qasmuna

*No longer young
Still alone*

*My name means siren
Witch
Enchantress
Pretty face
Whatever you want*

*I do not know
My father or mother
If there's a brother
Whether I'm older sister or younger
Dead alive Arab Jew
Married
Or still waiting
I don't even know whether I lived
In the eleventh or twelfth century
Or whether I even lived*

*Although I do not know myself
Or you
Who you are, how you found me
Or why I am grateful
Please just*

Call me Qasmuna

your name is beautiful
and you must be too

though we have never met
even if you are not the daughter

of Samuel the Prince
ghost of Granada

or his granddaughter
or the older sister

i want to marry you
your poem has touched me

but even if
the poem is not yours—

the one in Arabic
in which you long for marriage

*In the garden
A lone gazelle
Beautiful fruit
No gardener*

—even if you didn't write at all
or even exist

i would want
to marry you

now that the war is over, Qasmuna
Orion's sword is sheathed

the generals are back
the harps silent

shall we meet on the Málaga beach
or by the twelve stone lions

or perhaps in a cave
where jews and renegade christians meet

to serenade their lovers
and drink cheap wine

yes let's meet there
where the cool air tempers the heat

where the moss drips
where we can meet without fear

and in thanks
let's praise the Holy One

Who makes all things possible
in the heavens and on earth

*Although I do not know myself
Or who you are
I am grateful
Please just*

Call me Qasmuna

Could it be that Hafiz the Persian was referring to you
When many years later he wrote:

You are Creation's sweetest bud

Fons Vitae (Fountain of Life)

*Why do souls repeatedly go up and down
Down and up
Drawing strength from the throne on high
Then returning to earth
If not to reveal God's glory!*

I sit looking out
As far as the eye can see over the Guadalquivir
Smelling the rites of spring

Saturated with the milky-white creaminess
Of the first camellia buds breaking through
The melting snow of an unusually cold winter

The sun arcs slowly
Up to its full height
Over the Alcázar and the daughter of the caliph

Stands looking over the wall what
Could she be thinking as the Christian soldiers move
Toward their inevitable conclusion?

Those camellia buds hold
Greater wisdom even than the sages
Of blessed memory

I do not ask why there was snow
This year: There can be
No answer

Even the gypsy fortunetellers
Living in the caves at Sacramonte
Do not know

How I could know
That these camellia buds
Would soon burst into their greatest display of my lifetime?

I just know as I am certain
The great river stretching
From the Sierra de Cazorla

To the Atlantic will carry
Each year floats of decaying flowers
After their long-awaited outburst

And blossoms too tinged red
Like the oranges they will grow into in later generations
Yielding a strange almost frightening aroma

During seasons of the moon
As it dances among the stars on nights
Almost too dark for human perception

I am sad
My friends have left
And the patrons of the Talmud

My fellow poets and philosophers as well
Jews and Muslims leaving me to sit
Awaiting all the many returns expressed in spring

These days will be
Unlike any other in history
What future will greet my poems

As I sit frozen in the space of the middle ages
A comet become a meteor? Will anyone
Even understand what I was saying

What I am saying now
Why I said I am saying it
This way if I myself

Do not understand
The mystery of childbirth
Or the reason for worlds within worlds

Why God elevates at whim
If after ascending the ladder of Jacob
All the way to the heights of angels

Even the noblest soul must
Descend what is the point of it all? This
I do not understand

*If you want to know
It's to revel
In the glory of the goodly. . . .*

So I sit here dreamily in a thicket of confusion
Detecting only the smells
Colors textures of flowers beginning to bloom

Ibn Gabirol says:

You finally found me.
I turned out to be Avicebron
Whose *Fountain of Life* irrigated

What surely will be the last
Spring of its kind
In the memory of humankind

(Rumi the Persian later would say
In the Name of the Prophet:

Up, down, close, far
What's the difference?

Mrs Dunash Ben Labrat Tells All

It's said my husband was the first
To use Arabic poetics in Hebrew poetry

*In a pomegranate orchard . . .
Accompanied by singers and musicians . . .
We'll fill up on food and drink*

Maybe so
But that letter poem I wrote him

The one you all made such a fuss over
The one you called

"The first fully realized personal poem
"In the new Andalusian style"

The one about the man
Who left Córdoba for parts unknown

By the first woman
To write poetry since Deborah

And the only to write
In the Middle Ages

Too bad you don't know my name
And what do you think we did

All day while our husbands were out
Philandering, drinking, or talking politics

Away on business
Or starting a second family

In another city or just lost
Trying to find their way home

And speaking of husbands:
Mine, whom I loved—

We exchanged jewelry
And tunics when we parted—

Mine, whom I loved,
Was forced to leave Spain

For years our son and I were sure
He'd return

Then I heard
He'd gone for good

How did I find out?
I saw the divorce papers—

At least he was kind enough
To do them—

And his letter that says
He knows he betrayed me

*And won't pick grapes
Or wheat*

And no:
I'm not sure I wrote other poems

But if I did, they're lost
Or I forgot about them

A woman widowed
By a living man

Does not find inspiration
Easily

And I'm not consoled knowing
That all but thirteen of his own poems were lost

Then again:

Most of the poems ever written
Have been lost

Testimony of the Jews of Córdoba

Think Córdoba

Think death

Bitter oranges
Cool white walls

They spoke of *duende* spirit of death
What did they know!

Hatred always fresh
We were always packed

Even in the Mezquita
Worshippers lacked manners

Under a waning moon
Our daughters' shoes clacked along the cobblestones

Dirges everywhere
Music far behind

You had to totally believe
And then some

We are going by night
To gardens and caves

Where the limestone is rough
And the Muslim ascetic Ibn Masarra might have lived

But the only *Torah*
Is right here now

Rambam Laments

Show me which way I should walk

For I lift up my soul to you

1

Calle de los Judíos
Where I received my medicine

The white houses
Are expensive

In my plaza
El Museo Taurino

Around the corner
Averroes and Seneca

Other philosophers
Centuries or cultures apart

You buried my children in the city walls
And gave me a statue in Córdoba

2

From the dialogue of faith
And reason came my child with the porcelain face

I invited everyone
To her birthday

All that remains
Souvenir shops selling Solomon's Seals

Still, I have a statue and a future
What about you?

Street of Jews
Square of Tiberias

Scent of fish
Taste of pork

In the beautiful waterfall that was
My daughter's black hair

Only costly white
Ash lingers in the stifling August air

The Barber of Seville

Think Sevilla

Think pain

One late August evening
104 in the shade

Oh the shops are pretty
The *tapas* tasty

One too many Jewish children
Buried alive, buried alive

Men with Jewish DNA
Selling hams in the shops

Flamencos in the clubs
Striving for the deep song

One too many Jewish children
Buried alive, buried alive

Young couples embrace
Obliviously on bridges and street corners

Old men in parks
Argue whether to exhume García Lorca

One too many Jewish children
Buried alive, buried alive

Bright white egrets perch
Beside the Guadalquivir

Colonies of feral cats
Screech in the rushes

One too many Jewish children
Buried alive, buried alive

Someone asks me directions
As if I were a native

How should I know
Where anything is?

One too many Jewish children
Buried alive, buried alive

Whitewashed towns kept fresh
Year after year by denial

Men still do not talk to their brothers
Women to their sisters

One too many Jewish children
Buried alive, buried alive

In countries like this
All a stranger can do is weep

Afterthought:

For the barber
García Lorca

Whatever his burial status
Had the last word

The Legend of Susona, La Fermosa Fembra

*Here Susona lived,
Loved, and betrayed*

I'm Susona
La Fermosa Fembra
The Lovely Woman La Bella Susona,
Once called Susan
Or Susana Even Esther
So they say

Fortunate to be alive
After all these years but unfortunate
Also to have been alive in 1480
Daughter of the *converso* Diego
Who plotted to kill inquisitors
So they say

To save my skin
And that of my old-Christian lover
I told him, who in turn
Turned in my own father
Who straightaway was hung or burned
So they say

Then I joined a convent
Or led an exemplary Christian life
Or became a whore
Commanding that when I died
My head be nailed to my house
So they say

Every night
After I died
My screams filled the streets
Of the old Jewish quarter
The Barrio Santa Cruz
So they say

None of this happened
Or I never existed
Or if I did it didn't happen
The way people say it did
And I didn't write those words
So they say

Still, I have my own street in Seville
Calle de Susona
Near an old sign reading

CALLE
DELA
MVERTE

And a plaque
Misspelling my name

IN THESE STREETS, THE ANCIENT
CALLE DE LA MVERTE HUNG THE HEAD
OF THE BEAUTIFUL SVONA BEN SVZÓN,
WHO FOR LOVE BETRAYED HER FATHER
AND WAS TORMENTED
AS WRITTEN
IN HER FINAL TESTAMENT.

Today
In the nearby house I grew up in
There's a tile
With a gruesome picture of my skull
And underneath my name in fancy lettering
SVSONA

The Vargas Family of Flamencos Performs at Hotel Triana

Triana—daughter of Sevilla

Mother of flamenco

I walk along Calles Levies and Pérez
into echoes of children's voices

Long live Sevilla, long live Triana

A thickness of ghosts
lamenting

A botanist cross-breeds strains of corn
seeking that wild ancestor

Cantaos seek
that wild lone ancestor

When I see babies held and hugged
I think—

I think—seek resolution
into one pure sound

In the Hotel Triana courtyard
gypsies dance until three am

A dancer penetrates the stage
her partner pulling on his fly

Hotel Triana
hotel of sighs

Night of waning moon
scent of orange

Black hate
kills beauty

I walk along the river
of wakeful dead souls

Scent of corn, *bulerías* rhythm, a gentle
lifting of motherly skirts

A baby cries, an old lady moans
a fat man rips his shirt

They sing here of Triana
they sing of Triana here in Sevilla

I walk out into three am streets
amid echoes of the wild ancestor

Smell of corn
waning moon

A sevellana says:

You led me on
You threw me out
Never again

Lament of the Jews of Jerez

Jews in the flames
Gypsies in the hills dancing at night

Lovers on their backs
Flotsam in the river

Plazas full of spectators
Bitter orange in the scent—

Jews on the racks
Moors on the run

Lovers out of love
Rivers of death

Grapes on the vine
Sherry in the casks

Lovers in the river
Fires in their loins

One last prayer
Murmured to God

Jews in the plazas
Burning in the flames

Gypsies in the hills
Rotting in the chalk

By the Waters of Granada
(*Cante Jondo*—Deep Song)

The Psalmist sang:

Al naharot bavel we hung up our harps
For how could we sing
The Lord's song in a foreign land
But we failed and failing
Sang this other song instead

In southern Spain before the Crusades
Sitting by the rivers Darro and Genil
Way upstream from the Guadalquivir
That was some town
In those days, home to half the species
Of Mediterranean fruit. The hills around the Alhambra—the palace of the rulers—
Sheltered hundreds of blue-black antelope imported
From the central rift in Africa, and during Semana Santa—
Holy week—A few of the Christians who hadn't run away sat down
With a handful of Jews and Muslims and played silly Egyptian card games.
Then came a change, not just in Granada
But in all of Spain. First the warrior poet Samuel the Prince died.
Then the poet-philosophers Ibn Gabirol and Halevi left
In that order followed by that greatest of nonpoet philosophers, Maimonides,
And so on. Those who remained
Began to sing of war. Jewish courtiers increased
Their donations to the Talmud schools but decreased
The number of poems they wrote
Praising the fawns who plied them with spirits.
The direction of the evening breeze changed
As well so that the sweltering August nights
No longer offered relief from the
Late-evening burning sun. Little Jewish boys
Began to disappear after the *Torah* reading and not because,
As some said, *kabbalistic* mystics from Girona in the north
Had kidnapped them to meet the insatiable needs of the
Disputants at the Jewish-Christian disputation of Tortosa
During which Jews were forced to defend
Their faith so as to not offend the Christians using
Jewish books to prove Jesus was the Messiah.
Mornings, too, began to change. Whereas
Breakfasts always had ended with strong, bitter coffee
And saffron-flavored pistachio pastries rolled in thin-layered crusts,
Housewives now began serving old tea, saved
From the last infestation of western European murderers, and hard biscuits
Rolled at the last minute in pathetic small grains of rat-chewed brown sugar.
The Holy Land lost its direction. When we prayed
We no longer faced southeast but began to turn
Increasingly every which way, even

Into the realm of Alfonso the So-Called Wise King of Castile and León,
During whose time songs were composed praising the Virgin
For her miracles saving Jews from themselves. Soon we knew
What had happened in the ancient world didn't matter.
Translators had sunk their teeth into the ancient philosophers,
Making a royal mess of their grand
Philosophies. Those same teeth began to rot
From the dizziness of attempts to reconcile the ancient learning,
Contemporaneous with many gods, with that Other learning,
Inspired by the One. Now no one paid
Any attention to any of it, turning instead
To the feverish promises of false Jewish prophets and messiahs.
It wasn't just lousy bread, or migrations,
Idols, or transmutation of gold into silver
Toward the inevitable rock-bottom world of lead,
Nor was it the disappearance of the poets—
They had continued to leave, like so many spiders leaving
Webs in decaying, crumbling buildings,
Their alphabetically acrostic poems everywhere, so you couldn't pray
One phrase in any service without staring through the bright blackness
Of their words crawling like ants
On the dung heap that people began to think
Was some sort of *genizah* dustbin of paper sanctified
By the name of God which even though many felt abandoned
Just could not discard for fear of sacrilege. Rabbis decayed too;
The stench grew revolting. We stopped drinking wine—it was
Totally foul—so instead of celebrating God we threw ourselves
At Him in the incantations of Rabbi Abraham Abulafia the crazy mystic
Chanting *yod hey vav hey*—the letters in the tetragrammaton—
In the six directions, then joining Rabbi Moses de León who claimed
To have found the most mystical of mystic Jewish books
In his search for the mystical body of God, as if God has a body,
Physical or *sefirotically* or numerologically metaphysical. Our families
Began disintegrating, and rather than repairing
The universe with mnemonic blessings and mumblings we began
To pray for its dissolution. I can tell you this
Because as we saw the end approach, like a rotting behemoth,
Lurching toward us only this time restrained but barely by the gleeful toothless priests
And canons swinging their Jewish wine bottles as their minions were burying alive
Who knows how many pale young boys and girls.
It was then that nothing stayed together,
And in a flash it was over,
Bodies in flames, teeth melting in skulls, sexual organs popping
Then exploding, nipples shooting into the air like miniature Chinese rockets, eyeballs
Bursting, bloodying bystanders' faces, some say actually penetrating
The cracks in the cobblestones that travelers and locals alike
Would walk on for hundreds of years. But I wouldn't know. It's just

That upon returning to this land of the two rivers
I know that in the cries of the *cante jondo*, the deep song,
In the moss growing up the banks, the fat of the hanging hams
In every shop and *tapas* bar, in the mites on the scalps of the pretty señoritas
And their haggard ugly young mothers, in the cast-iron gates running up the hill across
From the Alhambra, we could sometimes see, hear,
Smell the past as if it were present down to the last detail,
Including I swear the saffron flavoring the pastries.
And so I give a toast, *le chaim*, to your health
In a dingy little wine and *tapas* bar with the finest,
Darkest, sweetest, strongest *oloroso* sherry I can afford before going to the market
For my daily fix of blood oranges before strolling down to that same confluence
To witness the flow of small boats, plastic bottles, and dead flowers
Slipping downstream to the river Guadalquivir
And eventually to where it empties into the Atlantic.

The poet sang:

*Realizing we could not sing
The Lord's song in a foreign land
We hung up our harps
And sang this other song instead
The deep song
Praising and lamenting
All that was*

*Though not our choice
Fate had stilled our still-small voice*

*Aunque no es nuestra preferencia
El destino se hizo callar nuestra todavía pequeña voz*

Sensing Souls in Toledo

*Donde vas, bella judia
Tan compuesta y a deshora?
Voy an busca de Rebeco
Que espera en la sinagoga*

City of generations
Calling through brutal heat

*Where are you going, beautiful Jewess
nicely dressed at this hour?
I'm looking for Rebeco
who's in the synagogue*

I pace every inch
Of your restored synagogue

Sensing souls
Hymns still singing

*Where are you going, beautiful Jewess
nicely dressed at this hour?
I'm looking for Rebeco
who's in the synagogue*

Who still wants to drink
The blood of grapes?

The moon like a Hebrew letter writes
Golden tints on an aurora

*Where are you going, beautiful Jewess
nicely dressed at this hour?
I'm looking for Rebeco
who's in the synagogue*

Send to my beloved
An alas on the wind

A dusty path weaves among
Oak and cork trees

*Where are you going, beautiful Jewess
nicely dressed at this hour?
I'm looking for Rebeco
who's in the synagogue*

Remorselessly
Dry grass pig pens

[one space]

By dark moonlight
Shades of children

*Where are you going, beautiful Jewess
nicely dressed at this hour?
I'm looking for Rebeco
who's in the synagogue*

These streets have our
Names statues

El Greco the painter stares lost
Over the city of generations

*Where are you going, beautiful Jewess
nicely dressed at this hour?*

DNA remembers
Needs to be reminded

*I'm looking for Rebeco
who's in the synagogue*

*I'm looking for Rebeco
who's in the synagogue*

I Remember Ancient Graves

*one rose quickly wilts
but a rose garden lasts*

poets in their graves
ghosts in the gardens

kabbalistic mystics in the rivers
fleeing unholy fires

philosophers in the valleys
seeking higher ground

rabbis in the woods
preaching with the birds

including mores ibn ezra
writing death again and again

ancient graves
forgotten in the fields

spaniards in their hovels
heads in the sand

jews on the racks
stretching to the heavens

marranos in the stys
eking out a meal

ghosts in the gardens
poets in their graves

ghosts in gardens
that flower in the night

mores ibn ezra in his grave
penitential poet

mores ibn ezra
jeweler to the poets

mores ibn ezra
finally remembered in toledo

ghost in a garden of stones

**Scolding Alfonso the So-Called Wise
King of Castile and Leon**

*In Toledo . . . Christians . . .
found Jews . . . spitting on an image of Christ . . .
and killed them.*—Las Cantigas de Santa Maria 12

You are king
Called learned or wise

You say you have written
Some of the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*

Songs in praise of
The Virgin Mary and her miracles

And discuss philosophy with Jews and Muslims
Yet in the end

You are like all the rest of them:
You do not revere your Mary

Nor the sayings of your Savior
You are a hollow man

Hypocrite at heart
Poseur

Do you never wonder
Beyond your dilettantish ways

And in your great wisdom see
The impoverished legacy of a kingdom

Ruled by misery
And miserable dark-age men

In Toledo, your once-great
City of generations?

Leaping Mary Sings Her Own Song (for You)

*A seed breaks open and dissolves
in the ground. Only then
does a new fig tree come into being*

At the court of Alfonso X
King of Castile and Leon

In the thirteenth century
Someone wrote a song about me

Number 107
In the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*

"The Jewess thrown
"From a cliff"

That's me
But I wasn't thrown

At least not stripped to my shift
By Jews shouting "there she goes"

And although I'm called Marisaltos
Leaping Mary's not my real name

Whether it's Esther as some say
I can't say for sure

Yes I was beautiful
But I never leaped

Headfirst from a cliff in Segovia
If such is even possible

*Believe in the Holy Virgin
to save yourself grief*

Whether something happened between me
And a married Christian man

And because Christian men
Are better in bed

Which some say
Was my crime and motive

If it even happened
If I ever committed a crime

If there was any such motive
Is none of anyone's business

Where the Leaping Mary business came from
I haven't a clue

The Virgin Mary seems nice enough
But I never promised to convert

If she saved me and she never
Reached out from a cloud

*Believe in the Holy Virgin
to save yourself grief*

Killing and humiliation:
Those are Christian things

So maybe it was a Christian lady
Whose real name was Mary

Or it was the virgin who jumped
And saved herself to make a point—

When will these people stop
Inventing history

*Believe in the Holy Virgin
to save yourself grief*

Under the cliff they built a church
To celebrate the supposed miracle

And now I hear I'm the one
Who told this story in the first place

At a church of all places
When I've never even been in a church

I was then baptized and entombed
Under six small paintings of all of this

In the cloister
In Segovia Cathedral

What were they thinking
Those foolish Spaniards

I couldn't dispute it at the time
I was just a heap

Of crushed flesh and bone
At the foot of a fig tree

Or was it a cypress

*Believe in the Holy Virgin
to save yourself grief*

The *Fado* of Bonastruc ça Porta

*I don't know why or how
But this song consoles me*

In the disputation
I was forced to prove

The ancient rabbis did not believe
Jesus was the Messiah

I longed to fail but could not
And was forced to flee for my life

You today know nothing
Of this sort of thing

Of the treacherous hard travel
To the promised land from which there was no return

I longed for my family, for the wise
Company of mystics, poets, and statesmen

You told me that in your first hour
In Girona you felt the stab of pain

A heart attack
That takes the breath away

I longed for eternal life
For the Jews who stayed through the dark fires

Today the beautiful Institut d'Estudis Nahmànides
Bears my Latin name

Signs identify
The Jewish quarter

I longed for the little arches
Over the winding cobblestone streets

Even after
More than seven hundred years

I am not sure
I could stand the pain

I longed for the river
Along whose sides colorful houses now stand

Tell my descendants
That although I am doing well

And am happy
For my beautiful Girona

*The river
The hills, the whole place*

I still long
For the lush surrounding hills

*Everything
That grows*

And think of the cemetery
Where my ancestors are buried

*I can't see
Through the tears*

I long from the other side
Long to return

*In that case forgive me
For writing such a song*

Besalú

On the Sabbath

Jewish souls have a taste of the world-to-come

The reason . . . is their angelic nature

Fifteen minutes
Until the *mikveh* closes

Hurry down stairs
To that shallow ritual bath

Where does the water
Come from?

Jews were here, everywhere,
Then gone

From rain?
Underground?

We know what happened
To the Jews

Or do we? After returning
The key I cannot find my bus

Was I going to Girona?
What was my name?

This is what happens
When you don't take notes

Did the Jews ascend?
I still do not know

The *mikveh*'s source
Bucket brigade?

Someone reminds me:

What goes up
Must go down

Fado for Zaragoza

*Although I can't hold back the tears . . .
The grief disappears
When I sing*

It's autumn in Zaragoza
Leaves are turning and ready to fall
Over everything hangs a pall
There are no more poets

I wander your dark morning streets
Listening for deep-song music
But all I hear are excuses
For poetry from people feigning sleep

Students are up all night
But what do they produce?
Wrapped in rhymes that seduce
Only words that are slight

The old Jewish market is gone
All traces hidden in the winding alleys
The old Jewish poets had to flee
Before their heartsongs shattered, then dispersed

I mourn for them, for their thousands of verses
Scattered throughout this sad, sad land
Lost to a people whose hatred had grown out of hand
Whipped to a frenzy by ungodly priests in ungodly churches

Do not feel sorry this country fell into ruin
Or mourn the myth of a spring that could have been eternal
The torture was truly infernal
The Spaniards brought it upon themselves later if not sooner

Still I long for the love that could have been
For poems and songs that could have sounded
Like bright bells forged in a supernal foundry
Enchantment in place of sin

Go
My *fado*
Song of loss
And longing into
The sad sad night

Yehudah Halevi's Lament

*Souls blossom
on a tree in Paradise. . . .
What lovely gift will you bring us
from that garden?*

For many hundreds of years my poems
Which some call great gave hope
Expressed a longing
For embers grown cold
For a presence now absent
Something no longer there

*Hamonim asher shachnu lefanim betochenu
Horavot azavunu uferets bli nigdar*

How shall I describe that emptiness?
It is like *tohu* and *bohu*
Hollowness surrounded by more hollowness
Void awaiting fullness
Sadness beyond description
A vast *arava* of desolation

*Las multitudes que antiguamente moraban entre nosotros
Nos han dejado ruinas indefensas*

Over the years
I have searched for You
With or without form
For a glimpse of Your glorious radiance
A mere taste sweeter
Than date honey

*Ishmael's descendants ruined our Temple
Leaving us bereft and defenseless*

Long ago I wrote something I still feel:

High place of great beauty
Radiant bliss of everything that is

Who is like You

I want to be where You are
In the abode of pure awareness

Lighting the depths

In Your world
Even alas where You were

Fearful in praises, doing wonders?

Al-Ghazzali the Persian says:

*Since you came from a higher world
Your soul is angelic
After you leave
Your soul will return to that world*

The Ghost of Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra Returns To Spain

*I once had a garment full of holes
good only for sorting grain*

Now I have left behind
my threadbare garment
to write in the idiom
of your day.

*On my birth day
the fixed stars moved into the sign of bad luck*

Now I see that the stars seem to have moved
into a better configuration;
astrology is still in fashion,
and the wisdom of Spain I spread.

I look out the window
on the high-speed train from Zaragoza
to Tudela and marvel at the landscape of grapevines
so like those from the distant past.

You call me polymath, poet, rabbi,
philosopher, astrologer, mathematician,
traveling teacher, the first modern biblical scholar—
but let's pause a moment at this whistle stop:

I said if the Bible says pigs can fly
it's meant metaphorically:
the Bible does not contradict
reality.

Similarly since a blind man who blinds
a sighted man cannot be punished
by being blinded in return, so too is an eye
for an eye meant to be read figuratively.

If you want to call this modern
or even scholarly, be my guest:
to me it's just common sense
and not so original.

Of course I'm glad some of you
still remember me in your most literal of times,
but in truth I'm just another sad ghost
from another sad time.

**God Questions Rabbi Abraham Abulafia,
Mystic Prophet of *Kabbalah***

*Devote yourself to combining Holy Names,
and great things will happen to you. . . .*

*Like seeing roses blossom
over and over on the same bush*

Abraham, Abraham
who is chanting?

Your lowly servant
O God in heaven.

Abraham, Abraham,
what are you chanting?

Your hundred names
O God in heaven.

Abraham, Abraham,
why are you chanting?

To become one with you
O God in heaven.

Abraham, Abraham,
when are you chanting?

All day and all night
O God in heaven.

Abraham, Abraham,
how are you chanting?

Letter by letter in the six directions
O God in heaven.

Abraham, Abraham,
where are you chanting?

Wherever I am
O God in heaven.

[ONE SPACE]

Your lowly servant
Your hundred names
To become one with you
All day and all night
Letter by letter
Wherever I am

O God in heaven.
O God in heaven.

Tarazona

Shema Yisrael

Adonai Eloheinu. . . .

write these

and the rest of the words

on the doorposts

of your home

city without the romance
of Granada

confused with Tarragona
in nothing but name

another modern Spanish city
easy to get to

with a Jewish past
hard to find

sure Abravanel met
the Catholic monarchs here

sure signs
describe hanging homes

piles of rubble
that might have been cobblers' shops

vacant lots
that might have hosted fruit markets

notches on doorposts might mean something too
places for biblically commanded words

streets with names
that sound Jewish

and what *about*
the hanging homes

tall and narrow on cliffs
along terraced streets

why did Jews inhabit them
living like swallows

on the tall sides
of cliffs?

then again why
about most anything here?

Lament of the Jews of Pamplona

*God planted a garden in Eden . . .
created humans
then sent them away*

once we were
closer than man and wife

now i run for my life
like the bulls in the streets during holy week

the sun an obscured
red disk

in the meandering maze of alleyways in the old quarter
my poor mother struggles to find her way

her clothes in tatters
a strange smell floating over

the city our family lived in
a thousand years from which

we were then
banished

till seas and mountains
swallowed us

into final disappearance
our descendants sipping sherry

kill their poets
then argue whether to exhume them

meanwhile we
continue to wander

Search for Survivors

1

Walk lonely predawn León streets
Camera in one hand

Jews of Moslem Spain
In other

Search for Calle Misericordia
Where La Sinagoga Mayor once stood

Pass Plaza San Martin
Once a market

Streets of lignite artisans
Silversmiths and butchers

Finally find misery street
But synagogue? *Nada*

Wind past churches
To medieval wall

Then place of former
Cemetery

Not one trace
Of what I want

Once again lungs implode
In disappointment

Stop
Study map again

Perhaps this is
Wrong place

Sunlight warms
Cobblestone paths tracing wall

2

Today I found my eponymous street
Alongside a complex of dwellings:

Calle Moshé de León
Someone remembered me

Who gave the world the *Zohar*
That most mystical *Book of Splendor*

Whose radiance
Has changed the world

Forever from the moment it appeared
At the end of the thirteenth century

I contemplate the traffic circle
The vacant lots

Cross the bridge, look
For the Museum of the Three Cultures

Watch young women carrying packs
Walk over the scallop shells on their way

To the center of town
I walk the other way

3

In the cathedral
I admire famous stained-glass windows

Some are tall verticals
Others circular

Awed like others
In this city whose Jewish quarter

I have just wandered
Whose museums I have entered

Whose signs I have read
Whose food I have eaten

I know there is a history
Was a history

The French poet Mallarmé says cut endings
But no end in sight

Search not
For the Jewish history of this place

Not your place
In Jewish history

But the place in you
Of this Jewish history

Walk the street of the silversmiths
The street of silver

Search all you want for vibrations
From the past

Wonder who I was and where
I drew my inspiration

Connect the dots from León where they say
I was born though I don't know myself for sure

To Guadalajara where they say I lived
And wrote that most splendid *Zohar*

(No one is sure
And I myself have forgotten)

To Ávila where I'm told I lived
The rest of my days

And Arévalo
Where I'm told I died

Hunt even if you wish in the teachings
Of St Teresa and St John of the Cross

But always return to yourself in all this
Remember who you are

Read *zakhar*—remember—
For *zohar*—splendor

In your quest for who I was
Who I am since all I can do myself

Is remember the splendor of that time
The pinpoint radiance everywhere

Like stars and planets in the darkest skies
So close you could reach up and touch them

Or pluck and reassemble them
Into a cosmos here below

*[T]he Sepher ha-Zohar; or book of splendour; . . .
is so called because nothing can be understood of it at all,
for it sheds so bright a light
that it dazzles the eyes of the mind*

Mrs Moses de León:

From Her *Diary of a Kabbalist's Wife*

[I]ts wonderful words

came from the Heavens. . . .

When I asked where they came from

the answers conflicted.— Rabbi Isaac of Acre

Yes—

My husband was the famous *kabbalist*

No—

He didn't find the *Zohar*—the *Book of Splendor*—as he said

Yes—

He lied so people would pay attention

No—

He didn't care about money as some have claimed

Yes—

He was brilliant like his book

No one but me

Could know

That at night

He glowed in the dark

By day

He outshone the sun

When the moon was new

He took its place

We moved around a lot

But I can't tell you all the places

I also can't tell you anything

About his friends

You see, my husband

Was a strange man

Obsessed, you could say

With a legacy

To shine a light
Into the darkest of ages

I did everything for him
The housework, I mean

Which was okay
Because I wanted him to have

A legacy that would last
Through the ages

So when Rabbi Isaac of Acre
Showed in Ávila

Called the Jerusalem
Of Castile

Claiming he'd fled the Holy Land
To save his skin

The stories were swirling
Like a holy maelstrom—

He claimed that my husband
Had told him

The original *Zohar* and a copy
Were at our house

And that someone else
Had told him

Our daughter
Would marry a rich nobody

In exchange for the original
Just so we'd have food

And clothes
On our backs—

In case he found me
I was ready

That manuscript
Gathering dust in the closet

Had been dusted off
The title page replaced

Yes, I was ready to help
My dead husband attain immortal glory

You see . . .
When I wasn't doing dishes, I—

No, I can't tell
I shouldn't

Moses was my beloved
And a wife has to support her husband, even . . .

So when this Rabbi Isaac came to town
The same Isaac said to use holy names

To force angels to show him
The deepest of mysteries—

Although we never did meet
(No one can prove or disprove it)

You see . . .
In case Isaac came knocking . . .

I knew exactly
What to do

Garden in Ávila: A *Fado* by Rabbi Moses de León

The spirit can enter our world

Only after rising from our earthly Garden. . . .

Ah, bear in mind

This Garden was enchanted!

A small pedestal shiny as a star

Says the garden you're in

Is the garden of Moses de León

And in Spanish seems to quote the *Zohar*, my *Book of Splendor*

Hay momentos

There are times

Here in my garden of longing

Where birds are no longer singing

The grass is uncut

And all you can hear are the convent bells ringing

en que las almas que están en el jardín

when the souls in the garden rise

The Gate of Bad Luck

Is just over there

On the edge of the old Jewish quarter

Next to the square

suben y alcanzan la puerta del cielo

and reach the gate of heaven

Here where the brethren walk

Discussing fine points of *Torah*

We sometimes look up at the Ávila walls

But all we can see are the heavenly halls

el propio cielo rodea el jardín tres veces

The sky itself surrounds the garden three times

Beyond and below in the dark scary forest

Pigs run wild with their bristles aquiver

While in and alongside the cold narrow river

Frogs croak in an infinite chorus

y acompaña sus vueltas de un son armonioso

accompanied by a harmonious sound

I said the garden is a place of earthly delight
Where God can appear throughout the night
Each star a soul from the next world
Each sight a face aglow with millions of pearls

Las almas se asoman para escuchar la melodía y el esplendor ardiente
The souls peer to listen to the melody and admire the burning splendor

I already imagine myself a traveler
Transcending time at a pace oh so slow
With nothing to reap, nothing to sow
Nothing to show and nowhere to go

de la columna que echa fuego y nubes de humo
of the column that spews fire and clouds of smoke

Although I am afraid of what I will find
When I climb the hill
I long to return to the splendor still
Of my overgrown, peaceful little garden in time

y ante la cual se inclinan reverentes.
before which they kneel reverently.

Meeting in the Heavenly Garden

When Moses de León meets St Teresa
In the Heavenly Garden

Does she, the Catholic mystic, know
That he, the Jewish mystic,

Also lived in Ávila
Though two hundred years before she was born there

In the same neighborhood
Near the Gate of Bad Luck?

His *Book of Splendor* treats
Every aspect of existence

As an aspect of God
Every aspect of God

As if God is a human being
At the same time asserting

That although God cannot be named,
Described, or otherwise known

His presence is known to inhabit
The last of the seven heavenly palaces

Her *Interior Castle* describes her vision
Of the soul as a castle-shaped diamond

Inside which are seven mansions
The seven stages

Of the journey of faith
The seeker travels

Questing spiritual marriage
Of lower and upper

Toward the continuous radiance of Jesus
Toward union with God

Seven palaces
Seven mansions

Who can say
Whether she was influenced by him

Or whether our reading of him
Is influenced by her

Since the souls in the garden long ago
Rose and reached the gate of heaven

*Completed in this world
And perhaps joined here to the Divine
The ascended souls then join
The Divine forevermore*

St Teresa's Confession

I hereby confess that in defiance of the Church and its Inquisition I willfully, knowingly, gleefully, lovingly ordered my nuns to remove their shoes because we all were growing fat off the labors of the peasants; in order to honor the poor, who cannot afford shoes; to mimic the suffering of Jesus when he was bound to the pillar; and in remembrance of the Jews who made and fixed the shoes of the rich and then like my ancestors were burned at the stake after their children were buried. I also freely admit that *The Interior Castle* is modeled after the *Zohar*—the *Book of Splendor*—that Rabbi Moses de León knew my ancestors, that when I was a young girl I had a hiding place in the old Jewish quarter, and that my family lit candles when I was growing up. Don't think I've forgotten. You see—the poet got it right.

St Teresa's Three Secrets

From the painting in my sanctuary in Ávila
I see you staring at me in my beautiful habit.
For a few moments we are in silence
Before a horde of boorish French tourists descends.

I envy your freedom to be Jewish.

I do feel within me still
The aura of my ancestors.
It was not that long ago after all.
How could I forget?

What should I do?

I hid my love
For Juan de la Cruz
Though he hid his
For me less well.

Write what you want
As long as it is the truth.

The Burning Light

[T]he soul of a righteous person
is none other than a garden
in which the Beloved takes great delight.—Teresa de Jesus
A garden is a delight to the eye
and a solace for the soul.—Sa'adi

what if Teresa de Jesús and Juan de la Cruz
were secret lovers

if the long dark night of the soul was conceived
in his longing for her and her blossoming breasts

and his inspiration came
not from Song of Songs

or from troubadours but instead
from his ecstatic love for her

what if his most beautiful poem
about the flames of love was written to her

if his androgynous description of lovers reflected
how much she was part of him

and when he looked in his mirror
he saw his beloved, and his beloved was her

what if they discussed
not spiritual and Carmelite matters

but their shared *converso* heritage
and the Jewish mystical *Book of Splendor*

written near Ávila
nearly three hundred years before

what if he was levitating
out of joy at seeing her

gazing at him through the bars
of her cell window

[ONE SPACE HERE]

if Cupid was the angel
who shot the arrow into Teresa's heart

and her suffering that followed
was not for Jesus but for Juan de la Cruz

what if a key passed down through generations
was the key to his cell, not hers

if she founded the Carmelite sect of shoeless nuns
so she could justify walking barefoot into his room at night

if the chair we see today was one he sat in
with Teresa on his lap

and his chalice was used for a mystical wedding
or maybe just to share a glass of wine

what if his prison cell and her interior castle
were the same place

where together they climbed ever higher
toward final union

if the square of blinding white light I saw
in front of the Monasterio de los Carmelitas Descalzos in Segovia

was a remnant of the light of their love
that shines at that time on that day every year

what if after he died in Úbeda in the South
she was the one who

mysteriously from the next world
had his body taken

to bury in Segovia so she could be
near him but not too near, for fear her nuns

at the Monasterio de la Encarnación in Ávila
would see the burning light

[EXTRA SPACE HERE]

what if after he died someone moved him
from his crypt to the larger sepulcher

not for his glorification but so their bones
could mingle for eternity

what if she created the recipe for *yemas*
to remind him of her sweetness

or if instead the recipe
was his to remind her of him

what if the child
enfolded in her cape

is not really
the baby Jesus

what if . . .

(in the end, however,
poor St Teresa: her hard work was ignored

like a tasty chicken
he was dismembered

his legs and one arm going to Úbeda
the other arm to Madrid

the head and torso
to Segovia

even the pope was involved
though the fate of his nose is unknown)

And Now a Haiku

I am embarrassed.
Where did he get that idea
About the blossoming breasts!

Scent of Úbeda

Music is the soul of a nation

The green
Plates broke

And the blue one
With the sort-of star of David in the middle

In less than two months
It will be more than two years

Last year I wrote so many poems
I had no time to get drunk

I smelled the lemons
The way I hadn't

Mystic poet Juan de la Cruz sitting in prison
Perhaps contemplating

His *converso* past died here
The kilns are Moorish

I want to track
Animals again

You run out of music
When you are not singing

**Levitating in the Presence of Teresa de Jesús:
A Dialogue Between the Ancient Philosopher Plotinus
And the Medieval Spanish Mystic St John of the Cross**

*All beauty and good
Come from the Divine*

Leaving my body and coming to my deepest self

I felt so light
I could not help rising
to be closer to God

I experienced a remarkable beauty

Left behind
was the earthly body
of Juan de la Cruz

And decided I had joined a higher realm

I had no heavy thoughts,
had let go the dark heaviness
felt in prison

And felt at one with the divine

Had forgiven everyone,
forgotten the hurts
the miseries of the past

My soul—no longer bound—then was free

My body retained its form
but in truth was pure light, and being pure light
was light as well

And free from the world's creations

I contemplated the *auto-de-fé*
was consumed by the same fire
became the spaces between atoms

Rose even higher

I became pure form, no, not became,
rather, realized my nature as pure form
like the flame on a candle

Hurled into a life of ecstasy

Weightless but aglow, what Teresa
saw through the bars of her cell
in her convent in Ávila

Leaning only on God

Lament of the Saint of Segovia

*Why does the Holy One dispatch us here
only to snatch us back there?
To make us know His glory, of course*

Died in Úbeda
Some body parts there

Some in Segovia
But who can keep track of them

Here the vistas are grand
The river winds through

A small limestone canyon
Below the Jewish cemetery

My monastery is on the path
Where pilgrims visit my tomb

And contemplate the completeness
Of life lived in the shadow of the Alcázar

At the end of the Roman aqueduct that is
The signature vista of this city

Here I could contemplate
What I could not in the south

In the darkness that comes early
Even in summer and ends late

Reminding of smoke and ashes
The scent is not of blood oranges

Just blood and the flowers
Are not blossoms

Just petaled pools spreading
Across the narrowing landscape

Do I remember my ancestors
The answer is no

Was I aware of the long history of Jews
In Segovia both after and before I arrived

I was not
Nor was I aware

Of the Jewish mystics
Whose lives were lived in nearby Ávila

Was something in the air
In these twin sky cities

Conducive to the mystical quest
I cannot answer but must trust

Instead to the thoughts
And dreams of travelers

Who in the future
Will come here to resurrect

What's left of the dry
Bones in the field

Open vistas
Enclosing walls

Cool summer nights
Cold winter nights

The river cuts away
The ancient limestone

St John of the Cross says:

It is indeed the dark night of the soul
When we cannot remember any of this

*And cannot remember how after joining God
We can now be coming down*

*Or how our soul ever came to
Our body in the first place*

The *Yemas* of St Teresa of Ávila

Don't think I've forgotten

I stir a confection
For You

Each yolk reminds of the sun seen through
The Gate of Bad Luck in the old Jewish quarter

The sugar of the sweetness of my *abuela*
Making candles in her tiny kitchen

The cinnamon of the sands of the Holy Land
Numerous as stars in the universe

The water of the traditions
That once held a people together

The lemons should we ever forget
The sourness of our enemies

And the *yemas* of the totality of a nation that depends
One tribe upon another to achieve greatness in memory

St Teresa's Finger

In a glass case paintings
A spear in her heart

Jesus the Jew tied to a pillar
St John of the Cross levitating

Discarded slippers
By her cell window

An obsidian rosary
The key to her interior

Castle near her uncertain birthplace
On the edge of the old

Jewish Quarter but where's
Her missing finger

Which one is it
And which hand is it from

**Testimony of Don Fernando Pérez Coronel,
Formerly Rabbi Don Abraham Senior of Segovia**

*King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella,
by the grace of God, . . . order that,
by the end of July next of the present year [1492],
all Jews and Jewesses depart from these our said realms. . . .*

Isabella herself converted me
in the courtyard of my beautiful home
barely half of which survives
to this day. There is still a little well
in the courtyard,

A bedecked second story
and a view across the ravine
of the Jewish cemetery
What more could I have asked for?

You who accuse me of slipshod scholarship,
claiming I wasn't a real rabbi, may be right on one level
but are wrong on a deeper one.

If we left, we lost everything; if we stayed, we lost everything.
Better to suffer with money than without. Better unhappy
and rich than unhappy and poor.

Sure, my *Torah* learning was weak, my sermons lightweight,
my knowledge of life's mysteries thin, but who better
to understand the superficial futility of a time of duress?

Though if you prefer
To call me a traitor to real wisdom, a justifier, go right ahead:
I supported my community and the crown, before
and after, when I was a Jew on the outside and when
I was a Jew only on the inside.

Yes, I was afraid for my life, to lose everything,
leave behind everything good in *Sefarad*, run
country to country risking life and limb
or stay and save the remnants of my community

In small secret ways. Do you think I was a fool?
If you save your skin, you save your skin, no ifs, ands, or buts.
After all, God is God, and the *kabbalists*
were no better than the trinitarians, what with their ten faces
of the Godhead, male and female parts, endless divisions of oneness.

Each night I lay in bed
grateful for my decision and looked out
at the cemetery across from the slaughterhouse and asked myself who
in all the world except perhaps the One
had a better view of Jewish history.

The moon, never full, resembled a certain Hebrew letter
on its back. Isabella and Ferdinand continued to plot
the destruction of their empire, *converso* by *converso*, heretic by heretic.
The air around here always stank

A despicable odor, reminding everyone that we all
whatever our blood, lived in a cesspool of ignorance and arrogance,
illogic and fraud, surely the work of the Christian devil.

Imagine yourself in my time
Before judging any Jew in your time or in any other
For you do not know how you would act
or what you would believe
were you to find yourself
in Segovia in 1492.

Segoviana: A Souvenir of Segovia

From the moment you evicted us
From our white homes in the Segovian hills
I knew I would never love again.

Strange rites consumed us.
Strange men read the Hebrew letters on our foreheads.
A new moon struggled into the heavens.

Only the faint lingering scent of orange blossoms
Remains in the air, undisturbed
By the history of intervening years.

Don Isaac Abravanel: Unprophetic Prophet of His People

He fled to and from Spain

The Spain of mystics, poets, and philosophers

Of beautiful gardens, seashores, and mountains

Welcoming hostess by day

Treacherous femme fatale by night

Visiting destruction or death

To all within range of her siren call

Don Isaac

Man of complexity, conviction, contradiction

My most difficult subject

Born Lisbon, fled to Spain, then Italy

To save your skin, integrity, and fortune

Brilliant, bold, blind like your biblical namesake

By blind you allude to how I

Close observer of humans and history

Intimate of nobles and royals

Author of three books on salvation

Expert on prophets and all things prophetic including Daniel

Could predict our Messiah would come between 1503 and 1573

But not foretell the expulsion of the Jews from Spain

Although you consulted the same books as Daniel

You had neither his visions nor his dreams

Were perhaps so busy defending or attacking Maimonides and pursuing worldly interests

That in spite of your brilliance, sincerity, and almost too-desperate a longing for the Messiah

You simply lost touch with the obvious

And so your predictions were just calculations

"[M]any terrible evils have come upon the Jewish people

"In all places such as no eye has seen. . . ."

But the Torah says:

"When we are in the land of our enemies

"God will not reject us,

"Abhor us, destroy us,

"Or break His covenant with us"

You also seem to have forgotten

Whenever someone predicts the coming of the Messiah

The Messiah is sure not to show His face

Since although you were desperate for the Messiah to come

As even you said, miracles like the Messiah come from God

Only God knows when the Messiah will come

*The people mourned when they heard the terrible decree
And I said I hoped "to try to bring comfort to those
"Who stumble from the exile" . . .
"But sensing the end was near
"I had run out of ideas and lacked the strength
"To help others" so that all I could do was pray that God
Send someone to save us and our families
From the impending "great and terrible destruction"*

Although you praised a Portuguese king
And thought a planetary conjunction forecast the Messiah
You also said a king's wrath is an angel of death
The only king you like is the heavenly kind and only God guides Israel
Not any stars or constellations so that among these contradictions
You missed the chance to blackmail King Ferdinand because of his Jewish blood

*Grandfather had converted
As did Abraham Senior and thousands of others
To save their skins, property, and power
But I hated apostates and held fast to my beliefs:
The Bible is the word of God and the only truth
Everything comes from revelation
And divine law has just one principle:
The world was created from nothing*

In spite of your beliefs the Messiah never came to save you
So to save yourself and your family
You fled with everyone else in 1492
And in spite of what you and others have written
We aren't sure whether you asked the king three times or even once
To revoke the Edict of Expulsion or railed against them in person or even in writing

*Some would judge me
Usually those who see in me themselves
Including those who judge me kindly and others less so
All I can say is we can read documents
But not the human heart and shouldn't try
Only God who made that heart
Can know how it works and what's inside
It is His and He alone can judge it*

After you fled Spain you wandered Italy and Corfu
Writing commentaries on the Bible
Continuing to attack the philosophers—
Without faith, philosophizing is futile—
Coming up with the most damning arguments ever
That Christianity and its savior were a lie

*For several hundred years
After my death in 1508
Christians both admired my erudition
And sought to rip apart those arguments
Just as Jewish scholars today seek to discredit me
Yet what can any of them assert?
I had three famous sons and now can count among the generations
Many with my name who remain proudly Jewish*

In that case
Let me offer a prayer
Based on the words of Shmuel Hanagid—
Samuel the Prince—
Poet, and like you, scholar and statesman—
Who said, in an earlier context:

"May an advocate angel
"Elevate his sins and weigh his virtues
"And remind his Rock at the passing of his judgment
"Of his investigations of the Writings and expounding of *Torah*
"And he will hear that God has already approved his deeds
"And his good deeds will thus outweigh his trespasses
"And he'll rejoice at being transported to God's glory. . . ."

*I have great sympathy for your position
Trying to navigate the conflicting views
On what I and others wrote
The subtext of events
And the opinions of your contemporaries
But at some point shouldn't you let go the struggle?*

I am trying hard to do this but remain puzzled
That you did not "delve into the mysteries of the *kabbalah*"
Could only say
You "have no business with secret matters"
And it wasn't your cup of tea
So to speak

*You want me to speak about your souls in the garden
To explain to you how
On Shabbat they can be going up and down
At the same time
To apply Occam's razor
The way I do with everything else I write on
But in this case I'm sorry
And will need to leave you puzzled*

When the Messiah does come, Don Isaac:

*We will eat our own bread
And wear our own apparel. . . .
On that day shall the growth of the Lord
Be beautiful and glorious
And the fruit of the land excellent and comely
For them that are escaped of Spain and Portugal*

Amen!

The Rainbow

*An ancient curse still stands
on anyone who tries to predict the End of Days*

*Where are you going dressed in white like a bride
Queen Isabella?*

I'm going to the synagogue
to meet Don Isaac Abravanel

*If it's to discuss the edict expelling Jews from Spain
why even bother since your mind is made up?*

I cannot share
the nature of my visit

*Didn't he just loan you money
to defeat the Muslims in Granada?*

Yes, but I want to cleanse Spain of her Jews and Muslims
to make way for the Second Coming

*How many tears flowed into the water!
How many pieces of broken hearts did the ships carry?*

*Where are you going dressed in your gown of many colors
Queen Isabella?*

I'm going to the synagogue
to meet Don Isaac

*Where will you find another such brilliant man
to advise you?*

When the Savior returns
I won't need Jews to advise me

*You tried to kidnap his grandson
to persuade him to stay*

All he had to do
was accept the true Savior

*Where did you go dressed in a veil of myrtle and myrrh
Queen Isabella?*

I went to the synagogue
to meet Don Isaac

*I heard he tried hard to persuade the king
to cancel the edict of expulsion*

Three times and then that awful letter
heaping us with insults and threats

*You mean the letter
that didn't exist*

He begged for mercy
bringing up his people's past miseries

*I'll ascend steep cliffs and descend deep craters
Hoping you'll let go your anger*

*Where did you go with all your candles
Queen Isabella*

I went to the synagogue
to meet Don Isaac

*Did he explain to you
the meaning of the three stars?*

All that and the true meaning
of the Trinity as well

*It's said your husband made the decisions
and you backed him up*

Whatever you've heard
I'm the one who runs the show

*So cold and hard, my Lady?
Spare some sign, a syllable
for me.*

*Where will you go dressed in your garment of good deeds
Queen Isabella?*

I will go to the heavenly synagogue
to meet Don Isaac Abravanel

*Will you discuss his own messianic predictions
and the truth of what really happened between the two of you?*

That and what happened in Spain
before and after the fateful year of 1492

*What about the three stars—
will you take their meaning with you?*

Along with all of his meanings
embroidered on each of the garments he gave me as gifts

*Where then will you go
and for whom will you dress
in your ethereal garment of spiritual intentions
Queen Isabella?*

I do not know
I do not know

*We are pariahs
No one wants us*

*But . . . only God knows
who will enter paradise*

*A rainbow
glorious as a bride
will herald the Messiah*

Stumbling Upon Biblioteca Abraham Zacut

*The ships fitted out for Vasco da Gama's expedition
were provided with Zacuto's newly perfected astrolabe,
the first to be made of iron instead of wood*

Just as I was thinking yes
Salamanca is a beautiful but cold city

Its red sandstone buildings etched
with distinctive red street names

Its winding streets
full of out-of-work students

And memorials to Fray Luis—martyr, second-rate poet,
descendant of Jews, rabid Jew hater;

To Cervantes, quixotic pride of crypto-Jews;
and Unamuno, rebel with a cause

I stumbled upon the university library
named after Rabbi Abraham Zacut

Author of the massive *Sefer Yuchasin*
the *Book of Lineage*

Chronicling the whole of history
Through Jewish eyes up to his time

Booted from Spain to Portugal,
where the king immediately adopted him

Into the rest of history as the
cartographer, geographer, astronomer, and inventor

Who made possible the entire flourishing
of Portugal for the next three hundred years

Columbus may have discovered a new world
but without Zacuto no new world could have been discovered

Here's to Don Abraham Zacut, then,
whom, in a welcome but familiar move,

The Spaniards have claimed—or perhaps reclaimed—
as one of their own

The Night of Murdered Poets

The betrothal was really over. . . .

This was the end of everything. . . .

Watch out, poet
Nowhere will be safe

For you, your light verse
Or heavy

Beware speaking out
Against the malignant

Beware those who deny
You exist and what you say

Watch your tongue
Lest it be yanked

From your mouth
Along with the gestures

From your hands
The body language

From your soul
Keep alert, friend

They await
Your every move

With *toca*, *garrote*,
Porto, and *strappado*

They will wash it
Out of you

Jerk it
Out of you

Break it
Out of you

Twist it
Out of you

Yes it will be the first but not
The last night of murdered poets

**Yehudah Halevi Explains Why
He Left All the Good Things of Spain**

To leave all the bounty of Spain

Would be nothing

Compared with seeing the dust

Of the ruined Holy of Holies

In Tudela de Navarre at sunrise there is
From the top of the hill

A view of the shiny, glassy,
Sparkling surface of the Río Ebro

As its water moves slowly downstream
And when I walk along this and other Spanish rivers

By night toward my precious Jewish quarters
My head goes into the clouds

Where the constellations
Formed by the hand of God

Swirl in their wondrous patterns
And the moon again shaped like the Hebrew letter *yod*

Casts a blue-white light
Onto verdant orchards of fig trees, pears, oranges, and plums

My heart is in the East, and I'm as far as you can go West

Soon the philosopher Maimonides, the greatest Jew since Moses,
Will ignore my *Kuzari*, indeed my whole poetic endeavor

Favoring medicine instead
Which is only my livelihood.

Friends are dying or leaving
And daily I am grieving.

The plazas are deserts. Although by day they swarm
At night their lonely beggars are the only forms.

I have stopped noticing the year-round processions of boats
Ceased bantering with the priests

Day by day forming a prosaic plan
To join my ancestors in the Holy Land.

[NO EXTRA SPACE]

For although it too is likely a desert, sheltering fears,
I will take my chances and risk the tears.

En el este está me corazón, y en el extremo oeste estoy

In a dream I saw
In a corner of Tudela

A plaza with my name
And on a wall

Two short stanzas
From a poem

Well into the future
Travelers will come

To search for my traces
And those of Benjamin the Traveler

Abraham Ibn Ezra the polymath
Solomon Ibn Gabirol the mystic philosopher-poet

And many others
Who settled there

Libi vemizrach v'anochi besof maarav

The land of Israel is my people's homeland;
Only there can our aspirations be fulfilled

Among the buried footsteps, spice routes, bones lying well
Preserved in dust, awaiting resurrection from both heaven and hell

The ancient Moses will greet me
Arms outstretched, listen to my poems, and discuss philosophy.

One day flowers will bloom again in sand
Turning desert to promised land.

I'll be sad to leave those I know
But now I have to go.

You dig and dig a well
If you're thirsty, even if it's all the way to hell.

When I speak of all the things of Spain that are good
I do not mean to slight its beauty or its sod.

Libi vemizrach v'anochi besof maarav
En el este está me corazón, y en el extremo oeste estoy
My heart is in the East, and I'm as far as you can go West

It is not
As with Jacob

Who did not know
That God was in the place

Where he slept
It is that God is in this place

Where I want
To lay my head

Where in place of soft
Beds and fine rich soil

Are rocks, sand
And barren earth

Waiting for rain
That I know will come one day

En el este está me corazón, y en el extremo oeste estoy

Farther in the future it will be said
I was born not in Tudela but Toledo instead.

No matter: jinxed by that rationalist Maimonides
Few will read my poetry or philosophy.

It also will be debated
Whether I ever reached the Holy Land

Whether I was trampled by a camel
Or a horse or just died in Cairo in a hovel.

No matter: *I* know that in Toledo at sunrise there is
From the top of the hill through the sometime mist

A view of the shiny, glassy, sparkling surface
Of the Río Tagus

And although all is wonderful
Do you now understand why I had to leave?

My heart is in the East, and I'm as far as you can go West

*Libi vemizrach v'anochi besof maarav. . . .
Yaykal b'einay azov kol-tuv sefarad kemo
Yaykal b'einayim re'ot afrov devir nehorov*

I'm drowning in decadent Western luxury
For which I don't give a fig
Dreaming of decaying Eastern ruins
For a sight of which I would give my life!

The Return of Samuel the Prince

No one has ever escaped death

Mangia! I said as I walked along the street of sighs,
Crossed in front of Our Lady of Flours,
A bakery of no small renown, famous
For its Brazilian-style cookies called O-Rios, sandwiched
Between two churches and a synagogue,
And turned in to the biggest Korean market
In our medieval, sad little town, for the heart
Is a lonely hunter, even if Brazil is far away. What a relief
From poetry that sways like a drunk
Stranded during the parting of the Red Sea
To find row upon row of spicy pickled fresh cabbage,
Thready bean spouts, shredded bright-green seaweeds,
Julienned white radishes looking for all this world
Like orphans from Gabirolean spheres,
Strangers in a strange land, lost like me
In the space time forgot, in a time to be spaced.
There also were rows upon rows of sweets and salads,
Glutinous rices, frozen dumplings, fish cakes,
Taro and lotus roots, bok choy, *tofu* hard
And *tofu* soft, fried and baked, along with sliced beef,
Diced beef, shredded and dried beef. I crossed
Through the *sushi shuk* where the *sushi* chefs slice
The raw tuna and salmon and the *sakis* serve *sake*,
Where *ofers* offer from heady coffers. Stunned,
Slain by sideward glances from the wine-pouring slayers of sayers,
I moved more quickly than the lowliest package of *sushi*
Left over from a Saturday-night-fever party tray.
But I digress in my lectionary of exotic
Ornamental foods, having forgotten, like a courtier mourning after,
That dietary customs are not random, as it is said:
“You shall not eat of an animal that was torn in the field.”
And so I left, turned right
Onto the street of sighs and walked
Away from the biggest Korean market
In our sad little town past Our Lady of the Flours
Along the sighing streets. Mangia!

O Spaniards!

*Not one of the . . . writers of my age
has entered the ranks . . . of Spanish literature*

after murdering us once
in *auto-de-fé* and exile

At daybreak

why did you murder us again
in exile and omission?

I go to breathe the garden air

did not hundreds of us write
poems by the tens of thousands on your soil?

And in the fragrant shade

what more could you want
after burning, flaying,

Where lilacs grow in masses

stretching, and drowning us
in as dark a night of the soul as any

I seek my joy

the language in which we ended our poems—
was it not the same as yours?

My only fated joy

has not our work held up as well as yours
for over a thousand years

Which lives in the lilacs

we stuck it out
as long as we could

On their green branches

now you claim us as your own
sculpt us in stone and metal

On the fragrant blooms

write our poems on walls
name plazas after us

My poor happiness blooms

Solomon Ibn Gabirol in Málaga
Yehudah Halevi in Tudela

Moses Ibn Ezra in Toledo
Samuel the Prince in Granada

we made a new language from yours
and with it made beautiful songs

we were Jewish poets
living in Iberian gardens

writing about them
longing for them

*Why don't we visit the garden
Every plant's in bloom
Every tree's crowned high
Beautifully fruited*

yes we were Jewish poets
living in Iberian gardens

*The garden's coat's multicolored
The grasses' embroidered*

until one of us said
weighing the pros and cons

*Leaving Spain's delights behind
Would be easy*

some of your greatest
came from ours

St John St Teresa
Fray Luis Cervantes

O Spaniards!
why *did* you murder us twice?

Don't you know
That long ago

In faraway Persia
A mystic poet named Rumi said:

*The strong wind embraces
the weakness of the grass*

An Unanswered Question

Why are the four of you here to be burned at the stake?
What do Marranos, Moriscos, and Mozarabs have in common?

I don't know.
Our names all start with the letter "m."

That's all?
The second letters are all vowels.

That's it?
We claimed to be the trinity. The Marrano's the Father, the Morisco's the Son, and the Mozarab's the Holy Ghost.

So you're heretics. That's pretty serious. Anything else?
She lit candles in secret and Judaized; he wouldn't cross himself in public; I prayed only once a day.

So you're even worse heretics.
I said I was God, he said there is no God, and she only pretended to believe in God. And, those two secretly desecrated statues of the Savior and His mother.

Good Lord! Now I see why you're all here.
There's more. She preferred extramarital sex with Christian men, he wanted to become a woman so he could kiss a Muslim woman, and I preferred boys and young men.

So you're all fornicators as well. Anything else you want to confess?
I used my knowledge of Judaism to persecute Jews. She used her feminine wiles to persuade Muslims to voluntarily become Christians. He incited Muslims to kill hundreds of Jews. All of us betrayed our brothers and sisters and the God Who gave us life.

Why did you two convert?
I was forced to, and she felt she had a Christian soul.

And why did you stay where you were?
It didn't matter, because I don't have a soul.

Only the three of you today?
Only three of us left. The rest were burned, tortured, forcibly converted, or exiled.

Who's the fourth man on the cross, then?
A poet from the future who wrote the most exquisite poems about love and beauty, death, the Spanish soul, gypsies, and the Andalusian past, often using Arabic poetic forms like ghazals and qasidas.

Why then is he here?

He wrote a poem called "Murió al Amanecer"—"He Died at Dawn."

For that he's going to burn at the stake?

One stanza speaks of four nighttime moons.

I can't believe it!

Humankind cannot bear too much beauty. Plus, he was too sensitive.

Who were the others, and what did they do?

One was too sad, another too great, another couldn't decide if the world was created out of nothing or has always existed, another challenged the Church, another falsely claimed a book he wrote most of was written a thousand years before, still another won a Jewish-Christian disputation, one cozied up to Jews but really hated them, another one betrayed her lover's father, while still another didn't stand up for the Jews. Others bickered with their own kind, converted, then tortured their former sisters and brothers. Still others acted pious but ignored the Golden Rule and the first commandment, or betrayed their own parents, or just pretended to love everyone, or hated going to church, or pretended to love pork, or, God forbid, fell in love with the Virgin.

What a mixed bag!

Wait, there's more. One longed in public for a husband, one abandoned his wife to save his own hide, another didn't believe in the Resurrection or creatio ex nihilo, one woman lured men to their death, another commissioned songs that libeled Jews, another killed poets, still another was a Christian who met secretly with a Jew to talk about only God knows what. And finally, a famous cleric claimed to have talked to a dead Greek philosopher, another turned out to be an ignoramus who converted to save his property, a friend of his was more concerned about his money and power than about his fellow Jews, and another one believed he was channeling the voices of everyone else.

Will your souls and all of these others ascend to the Garden of Eden and then to heaven?

We are hopeful that after we have confessed, are martyred, and are then "relaxed" in the fires of the Inquisition we will be pure enough to ascend as you say.

Does everyone have to be burned at the stake before their souls can rise to heaven?

That question cannot be answered.

Three Riddles

1

I lived in Arévalo when I was young
Where the famous *kabbalist* Moses de León died
Almost exactly 200 years before me

My name means devoted to God
God is seven
And my God is an oath

It comes from Elizabeth
And before that from Elisheva
Wife of Aaron the High Priest

Replace B with R
Reverse two letters
And you get Israel

Permute some more to get Jezebel
Whose corpse was eaten by dogs
Poor woman

Who am I?

2

Some rabbis say I descend to Spain once a week
And leave after just a day

Good idea
Given what's going on here

Others say I leave each night
And descend each morning

Bad idea
Given what's going on here

Another rabbi says I go nowhere
Or am both here and there

One guy saw me go up
Then down at the same time

Good Lord
My head is spinning!

Could I be just an idea
Or do I really exist

Not an actual body
But an actual thing nonetheless?

A hypostasis
It's called by those who know

If I do ascend or descend or vice versa
What's the purpose?

The smoke's really not that bad
Why not just stay home?

Some question the logic of my existence
Others, the existence of my logic

All these souls in the garden
Dead or alive

Trying to figure out what's what
Trying to get to heaven

As if God has the answers
And what if He does?

I can't figure any of it out
Which is why I'm asking you

Who Am I?

3
It's said I'm otherworldly
Beautiful, Jewish, and . . . fickle

Innocent girl next door by day
Femme fatale by night

Luring unsuspecting men
To a fate worse than death

Wise woman incarnate
First of God's creations

His daughter or bride
Solomon's equal in wisdom

Wisdom to heal
Wisdom to hurt

I own just two wardrobes
Light and dark

Clothes woven of starlight
And clothes of dark matter

Everyone has a symbol
Mine's the owl

Long ago
Although I did nothing wrong

My beloved exiled me
From my homeland to Spain

To pay for the sins
Of others

At first I hid in clouds
like the moon

Later in the ruins
Of old buildings

Finally in desperation
At what I thought was the gate of heaven

He then felt bad
And sought me

Night after night I sought him too
Whom I loved

But eventually thinking me dead
He took an evil second wife

Utterly lost did I become
Becoming like her

Testing everyone
Destroying them all

So that people began blaming me
For their ills

Men feared bad luck
If they sang my songs

Women, miscarriage
Or faithless husbands

My only goal
To breed more of me

But I never forgot my origins
Keeping the Sabbath

At midnight studying *kabbalah*
At noon the Bible

All day praying for those who ruined me
Remembering that three stars signal the Sabbath's end

In 1492 I couldn't bear watching the ships
Propelled by grief

Their cargo of broken hearts
Destined to sink

Knowing my kin and I
Were meant to wander

Still I longed
To leave the wilderness

In a pillar of perfumed smoke
Leaving behind the rumors, lies, and myths

I was neither Virgin
Nor devil

García Lorca says I'm dead and buried
But in truth I'm still alive

Trying to remember myself and go home
Since whatever you've heard

I'm also a soul in the garden
Awaiting ascent

Who am I?

Postamble

1

i am camped
near taos, new mexico

under a comma-shaped moon
like the hebrew letter *yod*

testing the air
for remnants

of campfires long ago
listening for the sounds of hooves

on the hard, bitter earth
hoping for a view through the trees

of dark clouds pushed
this way over five hundred years ago

and for what
to pick up traces

of Jewish blood
that once flowed this way

in the veins
of a desperado army

first from spain
then mexico

who hid in the hills
mixing with the *penitentes*

piercing their wrists
or bearing an iron cross

today they show up
at city council meetings

display their certificates
from the spanish government

pardoning them
for past wrongs

some sell *challah*
at the saturday market

others just keep quiet
and eat pork

2

i am in taos
dreaming under a pinyon pine

taking in the scent
of the pine needles

tasting a few molecules
of a strange, smoky smell

from a bonfire
in a public square

the raging flames fed
by satanic spaniards

the faces of their apoplectic clergy
distorted by an ancient anger

turn them in
they cry

turn them out
across the border

back to spain
where machines await

toca strappado
porto garrote

hide now
before it's too late

no one
is safe

your former friends
laden with grudges

from the beginning of time
are waiting to take you away

[MAP: US w/N.M./Taos inset]

NOTES TO THE POEMS

Here are (mostly) short, limited notes that follow the order of the poems to the poems. Alphabetized notes and longer notes eventually will be available on www.henryrasof.com. I have modified some of the quotations, especially if from public-domain sources like ancient texts.

Each entry includes at least the first word of the line cited. After considering the options, I decided this was the easiest way for readers to find words or phrases they need to look up.

Unless otherwise noted, all cities mentioned are in Spain. Most of the people referred to are Jewish, even if entries do not identify them as such.

First Half-Title

Souls in the Garden, the title of the book, comes from a passage in the *Zohar*, or *Sefer ha-Zohar*, the *Book of Splendor*, or *Book of Radiance*. See notes to the first set of **Epigraphs** below for more information.

Frontispiece

The picture is of Jardín de Moshé de León, in Ávila, Spain, the garden dedicated to the *kabbalist* Rabbi Moses de León, described in the notes to the Epigraphs below. Inscribed on top of the metal pedestal is a passage from the *Zohar* that contains the phrase "souls in the garden" that is the source for the title of this book. Behind the garden is the Gate of Bad Luck (Puerta de Malaventura or Gypsies' Arch) leading out of the old walled city of Ávila.

Title Page

See note above to the **First Half-Title**.

Epigraphs

souls in the garden rise/and reach the gate of heaven . . . /admire the burning splendor/of the column that spews fire . . . /kneel reverently. The context of this first passage indicates that righteous souls in the garden rise to heaven or to the upper Garden of Eden on *Shabbat* (the Jewish Sabbath) and after death. The text is excerpted from a translation of a Spanish inscription of a passage from the *Zohar*, or *Book of Splendor* (also translated *Book of Radiance*), found on top of the pedestal shown in the frontispiece, in the Jardín de Moshé de León, in Ávila, Spain. A similar passage can be found in *Zohar* 2:211a, in *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, vol. 6, translation and commentary by Daniel C. Matt (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 202. The *Zohar*, which appeared in Spain at the end of the thirteenth century, is the most important Jewish mystical text. De León (1240-1305, probably b. León, Spain) (usually referred to as Moses de León, or Rabbi Moses de León) is the author, or one of the authors, or editor of this work, originally written in Aramaic, a language related to Hebrew. It is not known whether the Spanish translation was made from an Aramaic text or from a translation into another language, such as Hebrew, French, or English.

Seeking but failing/union with the Divine/the souls circle Her in consolation/hanging on for dear life. Adapted from Plotinus (c. 204/5-270 CE, b. Lycopolis, Egypt), *Ennead* II.2.2. *Plotinus: Psychic and Physical Treatises, Comprising the Second and Third Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna (London: Philip Lee Warner, 1921), p. 157. See also www.sacred-texts.com/cla/plotenn/enn066.htm. Philosopher influenced by Plato, who in turn influenced the medieval or Renaissance Jewish, Christian, and Muslim philosophers and mystics.

Preamble

About the Dutch painter Hieronymus Bosch (ca. 1450-1516, b. s-Hertogenbosch), whose well-known painting *Garden of Earthly Delights* probably is familiar to readers of this book, a scholar writes: "[S]ome of [his] hidden symbols refer to the Christian's fear of . . . seduction by worldly pleasures, for which the 'Jewish world' serves as a warning example." Johannes Hartau, "Bosch and the Jews," *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas*, vol. 27, No. 86, March 2005, www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0185-12762005000100002.

Rabbi Moses de León. See first note in **Epigraphs**, above.

flamenco. Originating in southern Spain and an amalgam of gypsy, Jewish, Muslim, and Spanish influences, a culture, art form, and way of life synonymous with Spain itself.

"such a preference . . . would not have been inexplicable. . . ." Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1996, b. Buenos Aires),

"Pierre Menard: Author of the Quixote," in Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writings*, ed.

Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (New Directions, New York: 1984), p. 40. The original translates "such a preference

- in a Spaniard," which I loosely interpret as "Spanish [*Sefardic*] Jew).
- Rabbi Moses ben Maimon. (1138-1204, b. Córdoba) Better known as Maimonides, his Latinized name, Jewish community leader, codifier of Jewish law, physician, most influential of Jewish philosophers.
- Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra. (1092-1167, b. Tudela) Polymath rabbi, biblical commentator, philosopher, poet, astrologer, and grammarian who brought to the rest of Europe his approach (influenced by Islamic works) to religious and grammatical texts. His biblical commentary uses common sense to explain difficulties such as contradictions.
- convivencia*. The period in Spain from 711 (marking the Muslim invasion) to 1492 (marking the conquest of an Islamic Granada and the expulsion of unconverted Jews from all of Spain) that some scholars have believed was a period when Christians, Jews, and Muslims intermingled, exchanged ideas, and influenced and tolerated one another. This point of view has been modified or challenged or totally thrown out in recent scholarship.
- St John of the Cross. Born Juan de la Cruz (1542-1591, b. Fontiveros), the brilliant poet and mystic known especially for his beautiful poem usually called "Noche oscura" ("Dark Night"), *Cántico espiritual* (*Spiritual Canticle*), *Subida del Monte Carmelo* (*Ascent of Mt Carmel*), and other works of poetry and prose.
- Federico García Lorca. (1896-1936, b. Fuente Vaqueros) Great and beloved poet, dramatist, folklorist, composer, and artist, assassinated during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939).
- St Teresa of Ávila. (1515-1582, b. in or near Ávila) Extraordinary Spanish mystic and founder of the Discalced (barefoot, shoeless) Carmelite religious order.
- "One . . . outlines the theme. . . the same or are different." Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1996, b. Buenos Aires), "Pierre Menard: Author of the Quixote," in Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writings*, ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (New Directions, New York: 1984), p. 39.

Epigraphs

- On the Sabbath/Jewish souls have a taste of the world-to-come.* Zohar 2:136a, in *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, vol. 5, translation and commentary by Daniel C. Matt (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 256. See also Howard Schwartz, *Tree of Souls: The Mythology of Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 312; Babylonian Talmud Berachot 57b ("*Shabbat* is one-sixtieth of the world to come"); and Rabbi Kalonymous Kalman Shapira, *A Student's Obligation: Advice from the Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto*, Micha Odenheimer, trans. (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1991), p. 196.
- Angels guide the righteous deceased/to the Garden of Eden.* Paraphrase from Howard Schwartz, *Tree of Souls: The Mythology of Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 168. Various traditional sources.
- he ascended souls then join/the Divine forevermore.* Inspired by Zohar 1:235a, in *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, vol. 3, translation and commentary by Daniel C. Matt (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 425. See also *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, vol. 2, p. 748 (see **FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION** for full citation).

Who Are the Souls in the Garden?

- Our souls are born in heaven, in a "tree of souls," a "treasury of souls," a "field of souls." See Howard Schwartz, *Tree of Souls: The Mythology of Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 164-167. See also Zohar 2:161b, in *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, vol. 5, translation and commentary by Daniel C. Matt (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), pp. 430-431.
- Before we receive a body, our soul descends. . . . God is imperfect without us.* See *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, vol. 2, pp. 745-754 (see **FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION** for full citation).

Maps (t/k)

Epigraph

Is. 4:5.

Second Half-Title

The epigraph is the title and first line of "Everything That Breathes Praises You," a poem in Henry Rasof, *Here I Seek You: Jewish Poems for Shabbat, Holy Days, and Everyday* (Louisville, CO: Temescal Canyon Press, 2016).

Dialogue with the Jew of Málaga

The Jew of Málaga is Rabbi Solomon Ibn Gabirol (1021/2-c. 1054/58/70, b. Málaga), philosopher and renowned poet, who wrote religious and secular poems. His main philosophical work is *Fons Vitae* (*Fountain of Life*), described in the first note to *Fons Vitae* (see below). His "crowning" poetic achievement might very well be "Keter Malkhut" ("Crown of the King" or "Wisdom's Crown"). For an English translation see Peter Cole, trans., *Selected Poems of Solomon Ibn Gabirol*

(Princeton University Press: Princeton and Oxford, 2002), pp. 137-195.

Málaga. Coastal city in southeastern Spain.

Fountain of life. See first note.

Wisdom's crown. See first note.

Ghost of Granada

The ghost of Granada is Shmuel Hanagid (Samuel the Prince) (993-1056, b. Córdoba), poet, rabbinic scholar, vizier to the Muslim ruler of Granada, military commander, and perhaps the most important Jew of his day (at least in Spain).

Granada. Important city in southeastern Spain that from the eighth century until Christian Spaniards conquered it in 1492 was the last Muslim-ruled city on the Iberian peninsula and also home to many Jews.

Twelve stone lions. Stone lions in the Alhambra, the spectacularly beautiful Islamic palace in Granada. Possibly a nod to the twelve Jewish tribes or to the signs of the zodiac. The palace is thought to have been built around a house and fortress originally built by Hanagid and his son. See first note.

Three-cornered hats. Obscure reference to *The Three-Cornered Hat* (*El sombrero de tres picos*), a ballet by twentieth-century Spanish composer Manuel de Falla (1876-1946, b. Cádiz), who lived in Granada, and also to the hat worn by Haman, the incarnation of hatred of Jews, in the biblical story of Esther.

On the hill/A new mosque. On the hill across from the Alhambra stands a new mosque (an Islamic place of worship), vizier opened in 2003.

The most famous medieval Jew before Maimonides. Shmuel Hanagid (see first note). Maimonides (1138-1204, b. Córdoba), the Latinized name of Rabbi Moses (or Moshe) ben Maimon, was a Jewish community leader, codifier of Jewish law, physician, and most influential of Jewish philosophers.

Nowhere so many jasmines/In so small a space. Quoted from the French writer Alexandre Dumas in Phillip Huscher, program notes for performances of Manuel de Falla's *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* (*Noches en los jardines de España*) at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra concerts May/June 2012.

(cso.org/uploadedFiles/1_Tickets_and_Events/Program_Notes/ProgramNotes_Rapsodie_Espagnole.pdf, p. 12). See fifth note.

Shmuel Hanagid—Samuel the Prince—. There might be a plaza with his name or a marker or statue of him in Granada, but I couldn't find it.

Vizier. A high-ranking official in Islamic countries, often standing just below the sultan or king.

Talmudist. A scholar of the Talmud—rabbinic discussion, law, and lore compiled 200-500 C.E.

Abu Ishaq, There Is Only One God

A Jewish response to a poem by the Spanish-Muslim poet Abu Ishaq al-Ilbiri (rendered in English Abu Ishaq of Elvira, a location near Granada, though possibly the place meant is Elviria) (d. 1067 or 1068). The form of the poem is vaguely inspired by an old Arabic genre in which poets exchange invective. References to "Abu Ishaq" in the notes below are to this poem, Poem 15 in James T. Monroe, *Hispano-Arabic Poetry: A Student Anthology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974). The lines by Ibn Quzman (1078-1160, b. Córdoba) are also in Monroe. Monroe provides the Arabic originals and his own translations.

Lā ilāha illā allāh There is no God but Allah. Central Islamic prayer.

Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad Hear O Israel, the Lord is God, the Lord is One. Central Jewish prayer.

Poetry tears through my mind/As I draw my tongue's sword./At that point, it can pierce armor. . . . Ibn Quzman, Poem 27 (p. 276), trans. Sahar Omar Taha Al Nima © 2017, modified by HR.

Holding back would make me crazy. Ibn Quzman, Poem 26 (p. 260), trans. Sahar Omar Taha Al Nima © 2017, modified by HR.

Of the dust . . . Granada. City in southern Spain that was the last Muslim foothold in Spain.

Pretty fancy qasida. Qasida—poetic form originating in pre-Islamic North Africa that became popular with both Arab and Jewish writers.

Better a third-class poem than a fourth-class monkey. Abu Ishaq calls Jews monkeys (p. 206).

Your so-called architects built small synagogues in our style. The mudejar—Islamic-influenced—style found in Spain.

No Muslim could or should bow to the basest monkey of nonbelievers . . . Cobbled from words of Abu Ishaq (p. 206), trans. Sahar Omar Taha Al Nima © 2017, modified by HR.

Also enemy bastards. Ditto previous note.

. . . Nonbelievers whom we still protected. Reference to laws, called *dhimmi* laws, protecting Jews and Christians.

We ruled in Spain for over seven hundred years. Beginning with their 711 invasion and ending with the 1492 conquest of Granada.

Thanks to our help . . . *Visigoths.* Germanic nomads who sacked Rome and settled in Spain and were not nice to Jews.

You taxed our patience . . . tuches. Last word is Yiddish for "rear end." The language doesn't fit, but the rhyme does. The king should not have appointed as vizier a Jew. Abu Ishaq (p. 206) was mad that a Muslim wasn't appointed. Samuel the Nagid (Samuel the Prince, Shmuel Hanagid) (993-1056, b. Córdoba), the father of Joseph Hanagid (1035-1066, b. Granada), was a poet, rabbinic scholar, vizier to the Muslim ruler of Granada, military commander, and perhaps the most important Jew of his day (at least in Spain). Curiously, the elder Nagid's full Arabic name was Abu Iṣḥāq Ismā'īl bin an-Naḡhrīlah.

Quick! Slaughter the Jews . . . //True treachery is letting them wreck your own land. Abu Ishaq (p. 210), trans. Sahar Omar Taha Al Nima © 2017, modified by HR.

In 400 years a Jewish monkey//. . . Christian hands. Reference to Don Isaac Abravanel (1437-1508, b. Lisbon), financier, courtier, statesman, biblical commentator.

So that although you claim to belong to the "chosen people"/Your chosen people will never "build the world" you say they're destined to build. Abu Ishaq (p. 210), trans. Sahar Omar Taha Al Nima © 2017, reworked by HR. A play of course on "chosen people," which Jews always claimed for themselves and which Muslims later seemed to claim for themselves as well.

Call Me Qasmuna

No longer young/Still alone. Lines by Qasmuna., trans. Sahar Omar Taha Al Nima © 2017, modified slightly by HR. For more on Qasmuna, see James M. Nichols, "The Arabic Verses of Qasmuna bint Isma'il ibn Baghdalah," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 13 (1981):156, cited in Emily Taitz, Sondra Henry, and Cheryl Tallan, eds., *The JPS Guide to Jewish Women 600 B.C.E-1900 C.E.* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2003), p. 287, and also this book, pp. 57-58. The uncertainty about who she was and when she lived is reflected in the poem, but most sources say she lived in the twelfth century.

Performance note. Qasmuna's lines—in italics—could be recited by a second, female reader if the other lines are recited by a male reader.

of Samuel the Prince. Shmuel Hanagid (Samuel the Prince) (993-1056, b. Córdoba), poet, rabbinic scholar, vizier to the Muslim ruler of Granada, military commander, and perhaps the most important Jew of his day (at least in Spain). ghost of Granada. See **Ghost of Granada**.

In the garden/A lone gazelle/Beautiful fruit/No gardener. See first note.

Could it be that Hafiz the Persian was referring to you/When many years later he wrote://You are the Creation's sweetest bud. Last line adapted from a ghazal by Hafiz (or Hafez) Shirazi (numbered differently). Many translations, including in "The Wind in Solomon's Hands," in Robert Bly and Leonard Lewisohn, trans., *The Angels Knocking on the Tavern Door: Thirty Poems of Hafez*, (New York: Harper, 2008), p. 44. Hafiz (1315/7-1390, b. Shiraz, Persia) was an influential poet, still influential and popular today, who wrote in Persian.

Fons Vitae (Fountain of Life)

Fons Vitae (Fountain of Life). Influential philosophical work originally written by Rabbi Solomon Ibn Gabirol (1021/2-ca. 1054/58/70, b. Málaga), philosopher and renowned poet, who wrote religious and secular poems. This work was written in Judeo-Arabic (Arabic using Hebrew letters) but is commonly known by its Latin title *Fons Vitae*. The work "treats the relationship between form and matter, makes no reference to the Bible or to Rabbinic literature, and is so universalistic in character that it was attributed by Christian writers to an unknown Christian or Muslim philosopher operating solely in philosophical categories" (Rabbi Louis Jacobs, *The Jewish Religion: A Companion*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 262. Also www.myjewishlearning.com/article/solomon-ibn-gabirol/). Also see entry below on Avicbron. A recent translation is *The Fountain of Life (Fons Vitae)* (no city: Azafran Books, 2017).

Why do souls repeatedly go up and down/Down and up/Drawing strength from the throne on high/Then returning to earth/If not to reveal God's glory! *Zohar* 2:13a, in *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, vol. 4, translation and commentary by Daniel C. Matt (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), pp. 62-67; and *Zohar* 1:235a in *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, vol. 3, translation and commentary by Daniel C. Matt (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 425. See also *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, vol. 2, pp. 745-748 (see **Further Reading: Philosophy, Mysticism, Theology, and Astrology** for full citation).

As far . . . Guadalquivir. Major river in southern Spain that runs through Seville and Córdoba.

Over the Alcázar . . . caliph. References to the Islamic castle and the Muslim civil and religious ruler.

Greater wisdom even than the sages/Of blessed memory. Reference to ancient Jewish sages.

Even the gypsy fortunetellers. Although especially identified with Spain and eastern European countries, gypsies are originally from Rajasthan, in northern India.

Living in the caves at Sacramonte. Area in Granada traditionally home to gypsies.

The great river stretching/From the Sierra de Cazorla. The Guadalquivir, the major river running through southern Spain.

originating in the Sierra de Cazorla mountain range east of Granada.

And blossoms too tinged red/Like the oranges they will grow into. Reference to blood oranges.

And the patrons of the Talmud. The Talmud is a compendium of rabbinic discussion, law, and lore compiled 200-500 C.E. If after ascending the ladder of Jacob. Reference to Jacob's dream in Gen. 28:12, in which he sees angels ascending to, and descending from, heaven.

If you want to know/It's to revel/In the glory of the goodly. Zohar 3:43b, in The Zohar: Pritzker Edition, vol. 7, translation and commentary by Daniel C. Matt (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), p. 265. See also The Wisdom of the Zohar, vol. 2, p. 789 (see FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION for full citation).

Ibn Gabirol says. See first note.

I turned out to be Avicbron. In the nineteenth century scholars discovered that Avicbron was the Latinized name of Rabbi Solomon (Shlomo) Ibn Gabirol (1021/2-ca. 1054/58/70, b. Málaga). Also sometimes written Avicbrol. See first note.

Fountain of Life. See first note.

(Rumi the Persian later would say/In the Name of the Prophet [Muhammad, founder of Islam]://*Up, down, close, far/ What's the difference?*). Inspired by verse in Rumi that seems derived, according to Professor Cyrus Ali Zargar, from a *hadith* (an extra-Qur'anic teaching of Muhammad) similar in meaning, though with varied wording, in the canonical collection *Musnad Ahmad*. See Jalaluddin Rumi, "Ascending and Descending," in *Jalaluddin Rumi: Feeling the Shoulder of the Lion: Poetry and Teaching Stories from the Mathnawi*. Versions by Coleman Barks (Putney, VT: Threshold Books, 1991), p. 41. See also *The Mathnawi of Jalalu'ddin Rumi*, vol. IV, Book III, 4512-4515, trans. and commentary by Reynold A. Nicholson (London: Trustees of the E.J.W. Gibbs Memorial, 1977), p. 252. Rumi (1207-1273, b. Vakhsh, in present-day Tajikistan, or Balkh, in present-day Afghanistan; d. Konya, Turkey) was the famous *Sufi* poet and teacher whose work was mostly composed in Persian. Rumi's first name is transliterated in various ways.

Mrs Dunash Ben Labrat Tells All

Mrs Dunash (c. 890-c. 950, b. Fez, Morocco), any other name unknown, was the wife of the poet Dunash ben Labrat (?-c. 990, b. Fez, Morocco, lived Córdoba), the first Spanish-Jewish poet to reflect the influence of the Arabic poetry of the time. For more on her, see Peter Cole, trans. and ed., *The Dream of the Poem: Hebrew Poetry from Muslim and Christian Spain 950-1492* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 363-365.

In a pomegranate orchard . . . //We'll fill up on food and drink. Dunash ben Labrat, "V'omer: Al ti'shan" ("He said: 'Do not sleep!'" is the first line; the poems were untitled), trans. HR. The whole poem, called "The Poet Refuses an Invitation to Drink," can be found in Hebrew and English in T. Carmi, ed., *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 280.

"The first fully realized personal poem/"In the new Andalusian style." In the style of the Muslim poets of the day who were writing in Arabic. Ezra Fleischer, quoted in Peter Cole, trans. and ed., *The Dream of the Poem*, p. 27. See first note for full source title. Andalusia—al-Andalus, in Arabic—was the name originally given to Islamic Spain; today the region of southern Spain that includes Seville, Granada, Córdoba, and other southern Spanish cities is called Andalucía.

Who left Córdoba. Important city in southern Spain.

To write poetry since Deborah. Female prophet and judge whose long poem makes up Judges 5 in the Hebrew Bible.

And won't pick grapes/Or wheat. Adapted from note referencing Ezra Fleischer again, in Peter Cole, trans. and ed., *The Dream of the Poem*, p. 365, probably referring to Dunash's complaints about his situation. See first note for full source title.

Testimony of the Jews of Córdoba

Córdoba. Historic city in southern Spain.

Think Córdoba/Think death. Compare Federico García Lorca, "Sevilla," in Federico García Lorca, *Poem of the Deep Song/Poema del Cante Jondo*, trans. Carlos Bauer (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1987), p. 45.

Bitter oranges. Also called Seville oranges, sweetened they make good marmalade. They also have medicinal uses and may have dangerous side effects or drug interactions.

The spoke of *duende*. Spirit, supernatural energy, according to the great twentieth-century poet Federico García Lorca "a momentary burst of inspiration" (p. viii), "a heightened awareness of death" (p. ix), something that "burns the blood like a poultice of broken glass" (p. 51) (Christopher Maurer, ed. and trans., *Federico García Lorca: In Search of Duende*, New York: New Directions, 1998). Lorca was a Spanish poet, playwright, dramatist, folklorist, composer, and artist, murdered August 19, 1936, by fascists during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939).

Even in the Mezquita. Originally a mosque, now a cathedral, still beautiful.

We are going by night . . . //And the Muslim ascetic Ibn Masarra might have lived. Muhammad Ibn Masarra (883-931, b. Córdoba) was a seminal Spanish-Muslim philosopher also called variously ascetic, *Sufi*, mystic, and various combinations of these terms. These are the gardens referred to in the third section of Manuel de Falla's *Nights in the*

Gardens of Spain (Noches en los jardines de España). However, since it seems more likely that Ibn Masarra lived in a cave (possibly a cave in or near these gardens), the poem says "gardens and caves."
Torah. The five books of Moses, or all Jewish learning.

Rambam Laments

Rambam. Acronym for Rabbi Moses (or Moshe) ben Maimon (RaMBaM), Latinized as (Moses) Maimonides (1138-1204, b. Córdoba). Seminal Jewish philosopher, codifier of Jewish law, Jewish community leader, physician.

Show me which way I should walk/For I lift up my soul to you. See Ps. 143:8.

Calle de los Judíos. Street of the Jews in Córdoba, where Maimonides was born.

Where I received my medicine. Riff on a verse by Enrique R. Baltánas in his *Alcalá, Copla y Compás/Coplas de Son Nazareno* (Seville: Fundación Machado, 1992), p. 15: "Calle la Mina,/donde yo tengo mi medicina" ("Mina Street,/where I received my medicine").

In my plaza. The Plaza de Tiberiades—Plaza of Tiberias—in Córdoba, which today features a large statue of a seated Rambam. See first note.

El Museo Taurino. The Bullfighting Museum, in the old Jewish quarter near the Plaza de Tiberiades in Córdoba.

Averroes and Seneca. Averroes (1126-1198, b. Córdoba) is the Latinized name of Ibn Rushd, one of the most important Muslim philosophers. Seneca. (4 BCE-CE 65, b. Córdoba) was a Roman philosopher.

And gave me a statue in Córdoba. Important city in southern Spain.

From the dialogue of faith/And reason. The agenda of Rambam (see first note) and Averroes (see three notes up), to explain religion using rational philosophical language.

Souvenir shop selling Solomon's Seals. Reference to six-pointed stars formed of two (sometimes interlocking) triangles and called stars of David by Jews, for whom they are the modern symbol of the faith.

Street of Jews. Calle de los Judíos, the street in Córdoba where the Rambam was born. See first note.

Square of Tiberias. The Plaza de Tiberiades in Córdoba, which features a large seated statue of the Rambam. See first and fifth notes.

The Barber of Seville

Title is a nod to the Rossini opera (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*).

Seville (Sevilla). Large city in southern Spain.

Think Seville/Think pain. Compare Federico García Lorca, "Sevilla," in Federico García Lorca, *Poem of the Deep Song/Poema del Cante Jondo*, trans. Carlos Bauer (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1987), p. 45.

The *tapas* tasty. Small plates of food served in Spanish (and, now, other) restaurants and bars.

One too many Jewish children/Buried alive, buried alive. A very high number is described in one source, but given the great scholarly revision downward of the number of Jews killed during the Inquisition, I have opted for this expression. However, one child, whether Jewish or not, killed during this period, or any period, for that matter, is one too many.

Men with Jewish DNA. Results of genetic tests published in 2008 indicate that 20 percent of the inhabitants of the Iberian peninsula (Spain and Portugal) living at that time had Jewish ancestry (www.nytimes.com/2008/12/04/world/europe/04iht-gene.4.18411385.html), an interesting statistic considering that according to some sources, in 2015 Spain was the most antisemitic country in Europe, sporting an antisemitic prime minister with, oddly, a name suggesting Jewish origins.

Selling hams in the shops. Reference to Spanish ham (jamón ibérico), perhaps the national food of Spain. See previous note and draw your own conclusion.

Flamencos. Flamenco musicians, singers, and dancers. Flamenco, originating in southern Spain and an amalgam of gypsy, Jewish, Islamic, and Spanish influences, is a culture, art form, and way of life synonymous with Spain itself.

Old men in parks/Argue whether to exhume García Lorca. Federico García Lorca (1896-1936, b. Fuente Vaqueros), poet, dramatist, folklorist, composer, artist, murdered August 19, 1936, by fascists during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and buried in a mass grave.

Beside the Guadalquivir. River running through Seville in southern Spain.

Whitewashed towns kept fresh. The white villages of southern Spain.

Men still do not talk to their brothers/Women to their sisters. Reference to ugliness still existing in Spain as a result of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939).

García Lorca. See four notes up.

The Legend of Susona, La Ferosa Fembra

La Ferosa Fembra. (Spanish) (ca. 1480-?, b. Seville) "The beautiful woman." See

leyendasdesevilla.blogspot.com/2011/01/historia-de-la-susona-la-ferrosa-fembra.html (Spanish) for more information

on the legend. There are many other Web sites, mostly in Spanish. See also Norman Roth, *Conversos, Inquisition, and the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain* (Milwaukee: The University of Wisconsin Press), pp. 245-246. Scholars seem to doubt the veracity of the legend and even her existence, while popular literature treats legend as fact, so Susona's attitude reflects the differences of opinion. *Fermosa* is a variation of *hermosa*, meaning "beautiful" or "pretty," while *fembra* is a variant of *hembra*, meaning "female."

Here Susona lived, /Loved, and betrayed. Adapted from text on wall plaque in Seville.

I'm Susona . . . // . . . Esther. Sources point out that Susona, Susana, Susan, etc., were not Jewish names for women. A few sources say her Jewish name was "Esther," from the biblical book. However, this is a common Jewish name and might have been pulled out of a hat by Christian chroniclers. The Hebrew root of Esther means "hidden."

Daughter of the *converso* Diego. *Converso*—see old-Christian note below. Her father's name was Diego ben Susán.

Literally, *ben* means "son of" but can also mean "from the Susán family," since Susona's full name is often written Susona (or Susana or Susan) ben Susán, or Susona (or Susana or Susan) de Susán. Of course, if she never existed, the spellings do not matter.

Who plotted to kill inquisitors. Perpetrators of the Inquisition, which persecuted converted Jews suspected of secretly practicing their Judaism (and many other converted Jews as well), Christian heretics, sinners, and other people the Church didn't like or felt threatened by.

And that of my old-Christian. As opposed to New Christian, or *converso*—someone who converted voluntarily, under duress, or forcibly—or was from a family who had converted, from Judaism to Christianity.

Calle dela Mverte. Muerte (Spanish)—"death."

In these streets, the ancient/Calle de la Mverte hung the head/Of the beautiful Svona ben Svsón,/Who for love betrayed her father/And as testament was tormented. The exact wording in translation of a plaque in Seville. See Web site listed in first note for a photograph. Again, the "v" is an alternate spelling of "u."

Note on the translations. These are mostly by Victoria Lauren Smith © 2017, modified by HR.

The Vargas Family of Flamencos Performs at Hotel Triana

Vargas Family. Famous family of flamenco singers and musicians (flamencos). Flamenco, originating in southern Spain and an amalgam of gypsy, Jewish, Islamic, and Spanish influences, is a culture, art form, and way of life synonymous with Spain itself. Hotel Triana is in the Triana district of Seville (Sevilla). This district is the possible birthplace, or one of the birthplaces, of flamenco music and dance.

Triana—daughter of Sevilla/Mother of flamenco. Inspired by "Sevillanas Corraleras de Rocío Jurado,"

www.musica.com/letras.asp?letra=1344974. The remarkable Rocío Jurado performs this *sevillana* (*sevillanas* are a popular cousin of flamenco and also part of the flamenco repertoire) in the Carlos Saura film *Sevillanas* at www.youtube.com/watch?v=Il4hhkvdKWk.

Performance note. The italicized lines could be recited by a woman if the other lines are recited by a man, or vice versa.

I walk along Calles Levies and Pérez. Streets with Jewish names.

A botanist breeds strains of corn. Though the word *corn* can refer to any grain, here it refers to the corn (maize) roasted and sold by vendors in modern Spain. Maize is native to the New World, so it didn't reach Spain until the sixteenth century.

Cantaores. (Spanish) "Singers."

her partner pulling on his fly. An observable behavior in some Spanish male flamenco musicians and singers, pointed out to me by a scholarly American aficionado writing an article on the subject.

Scent of corn, *bulerías* rhythm. *Bulerías*—fast, furious flamenco rhythm and genre. See first note.

sevillana. Popular Spanish genre of song and dance, adopted by flamenco musicians and dancers.

Lament of the Jews of Jérez

Lament of the Jews of Jérez. Jérez is a region in southern Spain that is home to sherry (English word for wine named after the region). See sixth note below.

Gypsies in the hills dancing at night. Inspired by Federico García Lorca (1898-1936, b. Fuente Vaqueros. Spain), "Dance (In the Garden of the Petenera)," in Christopher Maurer, ed. and trans., *Federico García Lorca: Collected Poems* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2002), p. 129. Gypsies are an ethnic group originally from Rajasthan, in North India.

Bitter orange. Bitter oranges, also called Seville oranges.

Moors. North-African Muslims who invaded and conquered much of the Iberian peninsula (now comprising Spain and Portugal) in the middle ages.

Sherry. Fortified wine made primarily from the Palomino grape in Jérez and the surrounding area. The word "sherry" is derived from "Jérez."

Rotting in the chalk. A reference to the chalky soil in Jérez that is conducive to the grape varieties—like the Palomino grape—used to make sherry.

By the Waters of Granada
(Cante Jondo—Deep Song)

By the Waters of Granada. Reference to rivers that run through southern Spain: The Genil and its small tributary the Darro, which flow through the city of Granada, and the Guadalquivir, into which the Genil flows near Córdoba and which then runs through Córdoba and Sevilla to the Atlantic Ocean. This line plays off the opening line of Ps. 137: "By the waters of Babylon I sat down and wept for the loss of Zion." Granada is a city in southern Spain held by Muslims until 1492 and that was home to many important Jews.

Cante Jondo. The "deep song" extolled by twentieth-century poet Federico García Lorca (1898-1936, b. Fuente Vaqueros), as the most soulful Spanish music. Lorca was a Spanish poet, playwright, dramatist, folklorist, composer, and artist, murdered August 19, 1936, by fascists during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939).

Al naharot bavel we hung up our harps/For how could we sing/The Lord's song in a foreign land. Ps. 137: 2-4. HR redaction.

In southern Spain . . . Crusades. Brutal adventures ostensibly intended to take Jerusalem and the rest of the Holy Land from the Muslims in the Middle Ages. However, scholars now believe that the Crusades also had political and territorial motives and involved rivalry between the Eastern and Western churches. And, for many Crusaders, religious motives were less important than economic gain and creating mayhem. There were three such Crusades.

Sitting by the rivers Darro and Genil. Compare Federico García Lorca, "Baladilla de los tres ríos" ("Little Ballad of the Three Rivers"), in Federico García Lorca, *Poem of the Deep Song/Poema del Cante Jondo*, trans. Carlos Bauer (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1987), p. 3. See first note for geographical information.

Of Mediterranean fruit . . . Alhambra. Reference to the spectacularly beautiful Islamic palace in Granada thought to have been built around a house or fortress originally built by Samuel the Prince and his son. See two notes down.

From the central rift . . . Semana Santa. Holy week, preceding Easter Sunday.

But in all of Spain . . . Samuel the Prince. Shmuel Hanagid (993-1056, b. Córdoba). Poet, rabbinic scholar, vizier, military commander.

Then the philosophers Ibn Gabirol and Halevi left. Solomon Ibn Gabirol (1021/2-ca. 1054/58/70, b. Málaga) and Yehudah Halevi (1075-1141, b. Tudela or Toledo) were poets, philosophers, and rabbis.

In that order . . . Maimonides. (1138-1204, b. Córdoba) Latinized name of Rabbi Moses (or Moshe) ben Maimon, religious leader, physician, Jewish community leader, and most influential of Jewish philosophers.

Began to sing . . . Jewish courtiers. Members of a royal court.

Their donations to the Talmud schools. Schools where students studied Talmud, the compendium of ancient rabbinic learning.

Praising the fawns. Handsome boys or young men waiting on men at wine parties.

Began to disappear . . . *Torah*. The five books of Moses in the Hebrew Bible.

As some said, *kabbalistic* mystics. Mystics of esoteric Jewish mysticism (*kabbalah*).

Disputants. Participants in a formal disputation in which Jews were forced to debate with Christians whether Jesus was the Messiah (the anointed one) predicted in the Hebrew Bible, but here pointedly referring to the Christian disputants. The city of Tortosa was the site of one such disputation.

Jewish books . . . the Messiah. See previous note.

The Holy Land. Jerusalem and other cities at one time part of the Land of Israel.

Into the realm of Alfonso the So-Called Wise King of Castile and León. Alfonso X (nicknamed "el Sabio," "the Wise") (1221-1284, b. Toledo), Spanish king important militarily and culturally.

During whose time songs were composed praising the Virgin. Reference to the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, composed during the time of Alfonso X, some of which, unsurprising, demeaned or libeled Jews. See previous note.

Translators had sunk their teeth into the ancient philosophers. In particular, the Greek philosophers Aristotle (384-322 BCE, b. Stagira, Greece) and his student Plato (428/23- 348/7 BCE, b. Athens or Aegina, Greece), and the Greek or possibly Egyptian philosopher Plotinus (ca. 204/5-270 CE, b. Lycopolis, Egypt) (especially influenced by Plato), all of whom influenced the medieval Jewish philosophers.

Contemporaneous with many gods, with that Other learning. Reference to Jewish learning.

To the feverish promises of false Jewish prophets and messiahs. Reference to Jewish pretenders to messianism.

Idols, or transmutation of gold . . . / . . . lead. Turning gold to lead is the opposite of the alchemists' aims.

Their alphabetically acrostic poems. Poems by medieval Spanish-Jewish poets like Solomon Ibn Gabirol (1021/2-ca. 1054/58/70) and Yehudah Halevi (1075-1141, b. Tudela or possibly Toledo) in which the first word of each line begins with a successive letter of the alphabet.

Was some sort of *genizah*. Storeroom for worn Jewish books, manuscripts, letters, etc., containing the name of God.

At Him . . . Rabbi Abraham Abulafia. (1240-1291, b. Zaragoza) Jewish mystic who sought ecstatic states and union with God.

Chanting *yod hey vav hey*. Transliterated Hebrew letters of God's four-letter name, used by mystics like Abulafia (see previous note) in their practice.

In the six directions . . . Rabbi Moses de León. (1250-1305, probably b. León) Rabbi and probably the author, one of the authors, or editor of the *Zohar* (translated variously as *Book of Splendor* or *Book of Radiance*), the most important work of Jewish mysticism.

To have found the most mystical of mystic Jewish books. Reference to the *Zohar*, which appeared in Spain in the late thirteenth century. See previous note.

Physical or *sefirotically*. Reference to the *sefirot*, attributes of God in Jewish mysticism.

The universe with mnemonic blessings. According to Professor Saul Wachs (though not referring specifically to mystical practices from medieval Spain), of Gratz College, blessings whose language contains a great deal of sound effects, such as repeated "m" sounds, and whose recitation can induce a trance or mystical state.

Because as we saw . . . behemoth. Animal described in Job 40:15-24.

And canons . . . minions. Play on *minyans*. Traditionally a *minyan* is the ten Jewish men needed to recite certain prayers.

I know . . . *cante jondo*. See second note.

From the Alhambra. Reference to the spectacularly beautiful Islamic palace in Granada thought to have been built around a house or fortress originally built by Samuel the Prince and his son.

And so I give a toast, *le chaim*. Hebrew for "to your health."

In a dingy little wine and *tapas* bar. Bar in Spain (and elsewhere now) serving small portions of food called *tapas*. (Most are not dingy.)

Darkest, sweetest strongest *oloroso*. Dark, sweet sherry.

For my daily fix of blood oranges. Oranges with red flesh.

Slipping downstream to the river Guadalquivir. See first note.

Realizing we could not sing. See Ps. 137:2-4.

Sensing Souls in Toledo

Toledo. Historic city in central Spain south of the modern capital, Madrid.

Performance note. The refrain could be recited by a second reader.

Donde vas, bella judia/Tan compuesta y a deshora?/ Voy an busca de Rebeco/Que espera en la sinagoga. See fifth note for information and translation.

City of generations. The word *Toledo* is erroneously thought to derive from *toledot*, Hebrew for "generations."

Where are you going, beautiful Jewess/nicely dressed at this hour?/I'm waiting for Rebeco/who's in the synagogue. Lyrics from a *petenera*, a flamenco form that some people believe is strongly influenced by Jewish music. Various versions are available of this song. Trans. Victoria Lauren Smith © 2017, adapted somewhat by HR. Another version is in Claus Schreiner, ed., *Flamenco* (Milwaukee: Amadeus Press, 2003), p. 73. You can listen for free to a snippet of one version of the *petenera* at www.amazon.com/s/ref=ntt_srch_drd_B005TM0BB2?ie=UTF8&field-keywords=David%20Moreno%2C%20Ramon%20de%20Cadiz&index=digital-music&search-type=ss.

Of your restored synagogue. The Sinagoga del Tránsito, a Jewish house of worship.

The moon like a Hebrew letter. The *yod* (י) bears some resemblance to a crescent moon. This image appears also in Samuel Hanagid, "Ehe Kofer l'Ofer" ("Invitation"), in T. Carmi, ed., *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse* (New York: Penguin, 1981), p. 298.

El Greco. (1541-1615, b. Crete) Greek painter resident in Toledo, whose house once belonged to Shmuel Halevi (14th c.), a Jew who was treasurer to Pedro the Cruel (1334-1369, b. Burgos), king of Castile and Aragon, and founder of the (now-restored) Sinagoga del Tránsito.

DNA remembers. Genetic research (published in 2008) shows that 20 percent of Spaniards have Jewish ancestry.

I Remember Ancient Graves

I Remember Ancient Graves. English translation of title of "K'varim min zeman kedem y'shanim," a poem by Rabbi Moses Ibn Ezra (1055-1135, b. Granada), one of the greatest medieval Spanish-Jewish poets, who is celebrated at the restored Sinagoga del Tránsito in Toledo that originally was a synagogue, then a church, and now again a synagogue (a Jewish house of worship). Note that this poem (and most others of this era) was not titled, so the Hebrew line above actually begins the poem.

one rose quickly wilts/but a rose garden lasts. Adapted from the "Introductory" to Sa'adi, *The Gulistan (The Rose Garden)*, the classic book written in 1258 by the Persian poet Sa'adi Shirazi (also spelled Sa'di and Saadi) (ca. 1210-ca.1291, b. Shiraz, Persia). See www.iranchamber.com/literature/saadi/books/golestan_saadi.pdf.

kabbalistic mystics. Followers of *kabbalah*, a system of Jewish esoteric wisdom.

rabbis. Jewish religious teachers.

ancient graves. Reference to the poem described in the first note.

marranos. A word sometimes referring to all Spanish-Jewish converts to Christianity but more often to those who continued to secretly practice their original faith. Also applied to their descendants. With the connotation "pigs."

moses ibn ezra. See first note.

jeweler to the poets. Sobriquet for Ibn Ezra (see first note) in his role as author of a book devoted to the art of literary ornamentation.

Scolding Alfonso the So-Called Wise King of Castile and León

Alfonso. Alfonso X ("el Sabio," "the Wise") (1221-1284, b. Toledo). Spanish king important militarily and culturally. Castile and León. Previously, kingdoms; today, regions of Spain.

In Toledo . . . Christians . . . found Jews . . . spitting on an image of Christ . . . and killed them. Las Cantigas de Santa Maria (songs in praise of Saint Mary, the Virgin Mary), Number 12 ("The Image of Christ Reviled by the Jews of Toledo") (csm.mml.ox.ac.uk/index.php?p=poemdata_view&rec=12). The *Cantigas* were collected during the period of Alfonso X. See first note.

Nor the sayings of your Savior. Reference to Jesus.

Toledo. City in central Spain that once had a thriving Jewish community.

City of generations. The word *Toledo* is erroneously thought to derive from *toledot*, Hebrew for "generations."

Leaping Mary Sings Her Own Song (for You)

Leaping Mary. Probably a fictional person, the event described in the poem supposedly occurring in 1237. A translation of the complete song about her ("The Jewess Thrown/"From a cliff" (No. 107) from the *Cantigas de Santa Maria (Songs of Holy Mary)*, songs praising the Virgin Mary, is in Kathleen Kulp-Hill, trans., *Songs of Holy Mary of Alfonso X, the Wise* (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2000), p. 134.

A seed breaks open and dissolves/in the ground. Only then/does a new fig tree come into being. Jalaluddin Rumi, *The Masnavi* (also written *Mathnawi* and other ways), VI, 4044-4053. See Jalaluddin Rumi, "Die Before You Die," in Rumi: *One-Handed Basket Weaving: Poems on the Theme of Work*. Versions by Coleman Barks (Athens, GA: MAYPOP, 1991), p. 119. Rumi (1207-1273, b. Vakhsh, in present-day Tajikistan, or Balkh, in present-day Afghanistan; d. Konya, Turkey) was the famous *Sufi* (Muslim mystic) poet and teacher whose work was mostly composed in Persian.

Performance note. The refrain "So they say" could be recited by a second reader.

At the court of Alfonso X. Spanish king, nicknamed "el Sabio," "the Wise" (1221-1284, b. Toledo), important militarily and culturally.

"From a cliff." In Segovia, possibly the Peña Grajera, the raven's (or crow's) cliff.

By Jews shouting "there she goes." This quote is from *Cantiga* No. 107. See first note.

And although I'm called Marisaltos. Spanish name, translated variously as "leaping Mary," or "Mary who jumps."

Whether it's Esther as some say. Some sources give Esther as her Jewish name.

Headfirst from a cliff in Segovia. Segovia is a small walled city not far from Madrid, the Spanish capital.

Believe in the Holy Virgin/to save yourself grief. Refrain to *Cantiga* No. 107, modified. See also Louise Mirrer, *Women, Jews, and Muslims in the Texts of Reconquest Castile* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), p. 36.

Under the cliff they built a church. A small church was built under the cliff. You can see the church and cliff in a photograph and listen to the *Cantiga* at juderiasdesefarad.blogspot.com/2012/03/la-juderia-de-segovia-la-leyenda-de.html—without risking a fall or leaving the comfort of your home.

The Fado of Bonastruc ça Porta

Fado. (Portuguese) Literally, "fate." Genre of Portuguese song about loss and longing.

Bonastruc ça Porta. Catalan name of Rabbi Moses ben Nahman, Na(c)hmanides (also called by his initials, Ramban) (1194-1270, b. Girona), biblical commentator, philosopher, mystic, and Jewish religious authority.

I don't know why or how/But this song consoles me. Inspired by "Foi Deus" ("It Was God"), a *fado* sung by Amália Rodrigues, the most famous of *fado* singers. Trans. F. Reis (lyricstranslate.com/en/foi-deus-it-was-god.html).

Performance note. The italicized lines are from *fados* and could be recited or even sung by a second person.

In the disputation. Jewish-Christian disputation about whether Jesus was the Messiah that Jews believe is predicted in the Hebrew Bible.

The ancient rabbis. Vague reference to Jewish religious teachers (not all of whom had the title "rabbi") from approximately the first century B.C.E. to the sixth century C.E. More specifically, the reference is to Talmudic sages, scholar of the Talmud—rabbinic discussion, law, and lore compiled 200-500 C.E.

Jesus was the Messiah. The Messiah is the savior of humankind, coming at the so-called end of days. Both Jews and

Christians believe in such a figure, but Christians believe the Messiah already has come, in the figure of Jesus, while Jews believe the Messiah is yet to come. The word literally means "the anointed one."
To the promised land. The land of Israel, not a very Jewish place in the middle ages.
Company of mystics. In this context, the mystics are practitioners of *kabbalah*, one of the main streams of Jewish mysticism.

In Girona. City north of Barcelona.

Today the beautiful Institut d'Estudis Nahmànides. The Nahmanides Institute for Jewish Studies, located in the Patronat call de Girona, the Museum of Jewish History in Girona.

I longed for the river. The Onyar River in Girona.

The river/The hills, the whole place. Inspired by "Fado Portuguese" ("Portuguese Fado"), a *fado* sung by Amália Rodrigues, the most famous of *fado* singers. Trans. F. Reis (lyricstranslate.com/en/fado-portuguese-portuguese-fado.html).

Everything/That grows. See previous note.

And think of the cemetery. Some of the gravestones from the former Jewish graveyard in Girona can be seen at the Jewish museum in the city.

I can't see/Through the tears. See two notes up.

In that case forgive me/For writing such a song. Inspired by "Que Deus Me Perdoe" ("Mary God Forgive Me"), a *fado* sung by Amália Rodrigues, the most famous of *fado* singers. Trans. Verginia Ophof (lyricstranslate.com/en/que-deus-me-perdoe-may-god-forgive-me.html-1).

Besalú

Besalú. Small city west of Girona and northwest of Barcelona.

On the Sabbath/Jewish souls have a taste of the world-to-come. *Zohar* 2:136a, in *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, vol. 5, translation and commentary by Daniel C. Matt (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 256. See also Howard Schwartz, *Tree of Souls: The Mythology of Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 312; Babylonian Talmud Berachot 57b ("*Shabbat* is one-sixtieth of the world to come"); and Rabbi Kalonymous Kalman Shapira, *A Student's Obligation: Advice from the Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto*, trans. Micha Odenheimer, (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1991), p. 196.

The reason . . . is their angelic nature. Paraphrase of "The reason of the human spirit seeking to return to that upper world is its origin was from thence, and that it is of angelic nature," in Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazzali, *The Alchemy of Happiness*, trans. Claud Field (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1991), p. 35. Al-Ghazzali (also spelled Ghazali) (c. 1058-1111, b. Tus, Persia) was one of the most important medieval Muslim thinkers.

Until the *mikveh* closes. Reference to Jewish ritual bath.

Was I going to Girona? City north of Barcelona.

Fado for Zaragoza

Fado. (Portuguese) Literally, "fate." Genre of Portuguese song about loss and longing.

Zaragoza. City in northeastern Spain (formerly spelled "Saragossa") that had a strong Jewish presence.

Although I can't hold back the tears . . . Inspired by "Lord, I Just Can't Keep from Crying," sung by U.S. blues singer Blind Willie Johnson. Complete lyrics and recording at www.oldielyrics.com/lyrics/blind_willie_johnson/lord_i_just_cant_keep_from_crying.html.

The grief disappears/When I sing. Inspired by "Lágrima" ("Tear"), a *fado* sung by Amália Rodrigues, the most famous of *fado* singers. Trans. Nat Dailey (lyricstranslate.com/en/lágrima-tear.html-0).

Yehudah Halevi's Lament

Yehudah Halevi. (1075-1141, b. Tudela or Toledo) Rabbi, beloved poet, and important philosopher.

Souls blossom/on a tree in Paradise. See Howard Schwartz, *Tree of Souls: The Mythology of Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 164.

What lovely gift will you bring us/from that garden? Sa'adi, *The Gulistan (The Rose Garden)* (www.iranchamber.com/literature/saadi/books/golestan_saadi.pdf). The classic book written in 1258 by the Persian poet Sa'adi (also Sa'di and Saadi) (ca. 1210-ca.1291, b. Shiraz, Persia).

Hamonim ashar shachnu lefanim betocheinu/Horavot azavunu uferets bli nigdar. "Our myriad ancient companions/Have abandoned us to naked ruins." See Yehudah Halevi, "Yeriot Shlomo" ("Curtains of Solomon"), in Heinrich Brody, ed., and Nina Salaman, trans., *Selected Poems of Jehudah Halevi*, ed. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1924, 1952), p. 116.

It is like *tohu* and *bohu*. Phrase in Gen. 1:2 usually defined, though not definitively, as "formless and empty."

A vast *arava*. Hebrew for "desert."

Las multitudes que antiguamente moraban entre nosotros/Nos han dejado ruinas indefensas. Trans. Victoria Lauren Smith © 2017 of the Hebrew lines in the fourth note.

Ishmael's descendants ruined our Temple/Leaving us bereft and defenseless. Trans. (loosely) HR, of the Hebrew lines in the fourth note.

High place of great beauty. Reference to a poem by Halevi that begins: "Y'fe nof m'shosh taivel" ("Beautiful of Elevation," in Heinrich Brody, ed., and Nina Salaman, trans., *Selected Poems of Jehudah Halevi* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1924, 1952), p. 19. From Ps. 48:2.

Who is like You/Lighting the depths/Fearful in praises, doing wonders? See Yehudah Halevi, "Mi Khamokha" ("Who Is Like Thee"), in Heinrich Brody, ed., and Nina Salaman, trans., *Selected Poems of Jehudah Halevi* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1924, 1952), pp. 94-95. The quotes in the Halevi poem are based respectively on Deut. 33:29, Job 12:22, and Ex. 15:11.

Al-Ghazzali the Persian says://*Since you came from a higher world/Your soul is angelic/After you leave/Your soul will return to that world.* Adapted from Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazzali, *The Alchemy of Happiness*, trans. Claud Field, revised and annotated by Elton. L. Daniel (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1991), p.35. One of the most important of the medieval Muslim thinkers (ca. 1058-1111, b. Tus, Persia), who was a contemporary of Halevi. (Name also spelled Ghazali.)

The Ghost of Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra Returns to Spain

Abraham Ibn Ezra. (1092-1167, b. Tudela) Polymath rabbi, biblical commentator, philosopher, poet, astrologer, and grammarian who brought to the rest of Europe his approach (influenced by Arabic works) to religious and grammatical texts. His biblical commentary uses common sense to explain difficulties such as contradictions.

I once had a garment full of holes/good only for sorting grain. Adapted (tense changed from present to past) from Abraham Ibn Ezra, "Me'il yesh li" (first line of poem, since no titles). A complete English translation titled "I Have a Garment," trans. Robert Mezey, can be found on www.medievalhebrewpoetry.org/poets/abraham-ibn-ezra/#garment and in Robert Mezey, ed. and trans., *Poems from the Hebrew* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1973), p. 65. Many other translations. See next note too.

my threadbare garment. Reference to Ibn Ezra's poem beginning "M'il yesh li v'hu . . ." ("I have a garment"), in which the poet describes his cloak as so threadbare that he can see the heavens through it. For an excellent translation and fanciful interpretation of the whole poem, see "Abraham Ibn Ezra and the Poetics of Imagination" at www.medievalhebrewpoetry.org/poets/abraham-ibn-ezra/. The poem in Hebrew (and titled "The Old Cloak" in English) can be found in T. Carmi, ed., *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse* (New York: Penguin, 1981), pp. 353-354. Note that the original poems in Hebrew were not titled.

On my birth day/the fixed stars moved into the sign of bad luck. Adapted from Abraham Ibn Ezra, poem that begins "Galgal umazalot" and is titled "My Stars" by Robert Mezey. See second note for online source and Mezey's book, p. 64. Again, many translations.

astrology is still in fashion. Abraham Ibn Ezra wrote many books on astrology and translated two others from Arabic, running contrary to the views of some Jewish religious leaders that the use of astrological intermediaries diminishes the perceived power of God.

and the wisdom of Spain I spread. See first note above.

Zaragoza (spelled Saragossa in the past). Interesting city in northern Spain that was the birthplace of, or home to, a number of famous Jews, including the philosopher Rabbi Hasdai Crescas (ca. 1341-1410/1, b. Barcelona), the mystic Rabbi Abraham Abulafia (1240-ca.1291, b. Zaragoza), and several poets.

to Tudela. City in northern Spain that was the birthplace of, or home to, several important medieval Jews in addition to Ibn Ezra, including Benjamin of Tudela (ca. 1130-1173) and possibly the poet-philosopher Yehudah Halevi (1075-1141). Benjamin the Traveler, as he sometimes is called in English, is known as the Jewish Marco Polo, who traveled the known world visiting and writing about Jewish communities.

traveling teacher, the first modern biblical scholar. Ibn Ezra has been called the first modern biblical scholar for his "rational" approach to biblical interpretation. See first note.

Similarly since a blind man who blinds/a sighted man . . .//. . . figuratively. Ibn Ezra criticized the medieval biblical literalists (the Karaites), arguing that "an eye for an eye" cannot be taken literally if a person injures a one-eyed person, because it contradicts another statement that the punishment for a crime cannot deprive the criminal of his or her livelihood. See also previous note and first note above.

God Questions Rabbi Abraham Abulafia, Mystic Prophet of Kabbalah

Rabbi Abraham Abulafia. (1240-ca.1291, b. Zaragoza) Founder of a type of *kabbalah* (a Jewish mystical system) that uses special practices to achieve mystical ecstasy and union with God.

Devote yourself to combining Holy Names, and great things will happen to you. . . . Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), p. 150. Passage slightly modified. The fourth lecture in this book is devoted to Abulafia and is well worth reading.

Like seeing roses blossom/over and over on the same bush. Jalaluddin Rumi, *The Masnavi* (also written *Mathnawi* and other ways), VI, 129-179. See also Rumi, "Opening," in *Rumi: One-Handed Basket Weaving: Poems on the Theme of Work*. Versions by Coleman Barks (Athens, GA: MAYPOP, 1991), p. 118. Rumi (1207-1273, b. Vakhsh, in present-day Tajikistan, or Balkh, in present-day Afghanistan; d. Konya, Turkey) was the famous *Sufi* (Muslim mystic) poet and teacher whose work was mostly composed in Persian. His first name is transliterated in various ways.

Letter by letter in the six directions. Hebrew letter by Hebrew letter.

Your hundred names. Some Jews believed and still believe that God has a hundred names, including familiar ones like Adonai, Elohim, and El Shaddai (which also means "breasts"), as well as unfamiliar ones like *hamakom* (which also means "the place").

Tarazona

Tarazona. Small city in northern Spain with well-marked Jewish quarter.

Shema Yisrael/Adonai Eloheinu. . . //write these/and the rest of the words/on the doorposts/of your home. Commandment and instructions for the *mezuzah*, the protective scroll religious Jews put on their homes. See second-to-last note below. of Granada. Major city in southern Spain.

confused with Tarragona. Port city on the eastern Spanish coast south of Barcelona.

sure Abravanel met. Don Isaac Abravanel (1437-1508, b. Lisbon), courtier, financier, biblical commentator. During his time in Spain, in service to the Catholic monarchs. See next note.

the Catholic monarchs. (Los Reyes Católicos) Queen Isabella (or Isabel) I (b. Madrigal de las Altas Torres, 1451-1504) and King Ferdinand (or Fernando) II (later called Ferdinand/Fernando V) (b. Sos del Rey Católico, 1452-1516).

describe hanging homes. Homes in the former Jewish quarter appear to hang from the steep rock formations they were built upon.

notches on doorposts might mean something too/places for biblically commanded words. An allusion to the *mezuzah*, the small parchment scroll containing verses from Deut. 6:4-9 and 11:13-21 that Jews are commanded (in Deut. 6:9 and 11:20) to put on the doorposts and gates of their homes. One can imagine that *mezuzot* (singular, *mezuzah*) once lodged in the notches seen on the doorposts of homes once occupied by Jews.

Lament of the Jews of Pamplona

Pamplona. Northern Spanish city famous for running bulls in its streets during the week before Easter Sunday.

God planted a garden in Eden. Gen. 2:8

created humans/then sent them away. Gen. 2-Gen 3.

Search for Survivors

The identity of the narrator is ambiguous, shifting between the author of *Souls in the Garden* and Rabbi Moses (or Moshé) de León (1250-1305, probably b. León), author, one of the authors, or compiler of the Jewish mystical book *Zohar*, the *Book of Splendor* (or *Book of Radiance*).

León. City in northcentral Spain with a rich Jewish history.

Jews of Moslem Spain. Classic though somewhat dated three-volume work by Eliahu Ashtor (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1973).

Search for Calle Misericordia. Literally, "street of mercy." A street in León.

Where La Sinagoga Mayor. Formerly the main Jewish place of worship in León.

Pass Plaza San Martin. Former marketplace in León's former Jewish quarter.

Streets of lignite artisans. Lignite is brown coal.

But synagogue? *Nada*. A synagogue is a Jewish house of worship. *Nada* is Spanish for "nothing."

Calle Moshé de León. Street named after Rabbi Moses de León. See first note.

Who gave the world the *Zohar*/That most mystical *Book of Splendor*. The *Zohar* is presented by De León as if written by a second-century rabbi. See also first note, to confuse even further!

For the Museum of the Three Cultures (Museo de las Tres Culturales). Museum in one of the old Jewish quarters of León that uses maps, time lines, clothing, documents, etc., to describe the intertwining presence of Christians, Jews, and Muslims in León. The same building serves as the Center of Interpretation and Reception for Pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago de Compostela (Centro de Interpretación y Recepciones de Peregrinos), since the Camino (the St James Way pilgrim's route) enters the city at about this point. See next note.

Walk over the scallop shells. Markers of the Camino de Santiago, the famous Christian pilgrim's path. The scallop was the

symbol of Santiago—St James.

In the cathedral. The Santa María de León Cathedral (also called the House of Light or Pulchra Leonina).

The French poet Mallarmé. Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898, b. Paris), important French poet.

Walk the street of the silversmiths. Near one of the old Jewish quarters in León, the home of Jewish artisans in times past.

Connect the dots from León where they say/I was born though I don't know myself for sure. Reference to the uncertainty of Rabbi Moses de León's birthplace. See first note.

To Guadalajara where they say I lived/And wrote that most splendid *Zohar*/(No one is sure/And I myself have forgotten). Reflecting the various views of its authorship and also alluding to the city where some scholars believe the book was composed or edited. See first and previous note. Guadalajara is a city about 40 miles northeast of the modern Spanish capital, Madrid.

To Ávila. Walled city northwest of Madrid.

And Arévalo. City about 30 miles (50 km) north of Avila where De León died.

Of St Teresa and St John of the Cross. St Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582, b. in or near Ávila) and St John of the Cross (1542-1591, b. Fontiveros). Carmelite mystic reformers.

Read *zakhar* . . . /For *zohar*. Play on sounds of Hebrew words for "remember" and "splendor," as in the key Jewish mystical book *Zohar*, whose title is often translated *Book of Splendor* or *Book of Radiance*.

Who I am since all I can do myself/Is remember the splendor of that time/The pinpoint radiance everywhere. Reference to the *Zohar*. See previous note.

[T]he *Sepher ha-Zohar*; or book of splendour; . . . // . . . that it dazzles the eyes of the mind. Reference to the *Zohar* (*Book of Splendor*), the main Jewish mystical book, which began appearing in Spain toward the end of the thirteenth century.

Jan Potocki, *The Manuscript Found in Saragossa* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 101. The movie made of this book is worth a look; be prepared for a surrealist trip!

Mrs Moses de León:

From Her "Diary of a Kabbalist's Wife"

Mrs Moses de Leon. Not much is known about her except in reference to her husband, Rabbi Moses de León (1250-1305, probably b. León), who wrote, co-wrote, or edited the *Zohar*; the *Book of Splendor* (or *Book of Radiance*), the most important Jewish mystical text. The information is based primarily on what is found in the *Book of Lineage* (*Sefer Yuchasin*) by Rabbi Abraham Zacuto (1454-1514), and translated and discussed in *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, vol. 1, pp. 13-18 (see **FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION** for full citation).

[I]ts wonderful words/came from the Heavens./When I asked where they came from/the answers conflicted. Loosely paraphrased from the aforementioned *Book of Lineage*, quoted in *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, vol. 1, p. 13 (see **FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION** for full citation). Or, see a digitized copy—paginated backwards—of the Hebrew book <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=osu.32435011166329;view=1up;seq=191>. Information about print books in Hebrew and English, plus information about Zacuto, are at <http://www.zacuto.org>.

Rabbi Isaac of Acre. Isaac ben Samuel of Acre (13th-14th centuries), a Palestinian mystic who fled to Spain in 1305 and before this time reportedly had studied with the famous Spanish rabbi Na(c)hmanides, who had, interestingly, fled Spain for the Holy Land, where he died in . . . Acre.

My husband was the famous *kabbalist*. Practitioner of *kabbalah*, the most important stream of Jewish mysticism.

He didn't find the *Zohar*—the *Book of Splendor*. See first note.

Showed in Ávila. Lovely walled city northwest of the Spanish capital Madrid.

Of Castile. At the time of the events in the poem, a large, strong kingdom in central-northcentral Spain.

Claiming he'd fled the Holy Land. The Land of Israel.

Garden in Ávila: A *Fado* by Rabbi Moses de León

Ávila. Lovely walled city northwest of Madrid.

Fado. From a Portuguese word meaning, literally, "fate"—a Portuguese genre of song about loss and longing.

Rabbi Moses de León. (1250-1305, probably b. León) Important Jewish mystic who wrote, co-wrote, or compiled the *Zohar*, the *Book of Splendor* (or *Book of Radiance*), the most important work of Jewish mysticism.

Performance note. The italicized lines could be recited by a second reader.

The spirit can enter our world/Only after rising from our earthly Garden. . . . Zohar 2:13a in The Zohar: Pritzker Edition, vol. 6, translation and commentary by Daniel C. Matt (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 64. Also see *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, vol. 2, p. 745 (see **FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION** for full citation).

Ah, bear in mind/This garden was enchanted! Edgar Allan Poe, "To Helen," quoted in Jorge Luis Borges, "Pierre Menard: Author of the Quixote," in Jorge Luis Borges, *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), p. 92. The "To Helen" poem referred to was the second one that Poe wrote with this title.

The italicized lines in Spanish are cut into the metal pedestal in the Jardín de Moshé de León, in Ávila, Spain, pictured in the frontispiece to this book. Here an English translation follows each line. The source of the Spanish translation is not known, since the wording differs somewhat from that in *Zohar*: 2:211a, in *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, vol. 6, translation and commentary by Daniel C. Matt (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 202. Following the poem is an original Aramaic version of the passage from page 80 of the user-friendly online Aramaic text of vol. 6 of *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition* (www.sup.org/zohar/Aramaic%20Texts/Vol%206%20Aramaic%20User-Friendly.pdf).

And in Spanish seems to quote the *Zohar*. See third note.

The Gate of Bad Luck. Called in Spanish the Puerta de Malaventura or Puerta de la Mala Dicha and also the Arco de los Gitanos (Gypsies' Arch). See first note above.

Discussing fine points of *Torah*. Strictly speaking, the five books of Moses in the Hebrew Bible, but also the complete Hebrew Bible or even all Jewish religious books and learning.

But all we can see . . . heavenly halls. A reference to the heavenly halls (the *hechalot*)—also called palaces—described in the early Jewish mystical *hekhlot* literature and also in the *Zohar*. See third note.

I said the garden is a place of earthly delight. An unconscious reference to "The Garden of Earthly Delights," the famous three-paneled painting by the Dutch painter Hieronymus Bosch (ca. 1450-1516). In the Abstract to his article "Bosch and the Jews," Johannes Hartau says, "It seems that some of the hidden symbols in Bosch's oeuvre refer to Christians' fear of . . . seduction by worldly pleasures, for which the 'Jewish world' serves as a warning example." The full article is at www.analesiiie.unam.mx/index.php/analesiiie/article/view/2188/2146.

I long to return to the splendor still. Reference to the Jewish mystical book *Zohar*, whose title in English is often translated *Book of Splendor*. See third note.

Text at the end. The Aramaic text of a section of the *Zohar*. See seventh note.

Meeting in the Heavenly Garden

When St Teresa of Ávila and Moses de León. St Teresa (1515-1582, b. in or near Ávila) was the extraordinary mystic and founder of the Discalced (barefoot, shoeless) Carmelite religious order. Moses de León (1250-1305, probably b. León) was the rabbi and important Jewish mystic who wrote, co-wrote, or compiled the *Zohar*, the *Book of Splendor* (or *Book of Radiance*), the most important work of Jewish mysticism.

In the Heavenly Garden. The upper Garden of Eden. (Some Jewish mystics also spoke of a lower Garden of Eden.)

Lived in Ávila. Lovely walled city northwest of Madrid, the Spanish capital.

Near the Gate of Bad Luck. Called in Spanish the Puerta de Malaventura or Puerta de la Mala Dicha and also the Arco de los Gitanos (Gypsies' Arch). City gate outside the old Jewish quarter in Ávila and directly opposite the marker in the Jardín de Moshé de León, the garden honoring the mystic Rabbi Moses de León (see second note). The garden is near the Convent of St Teresa, built over her birth house. (St Teresa had Jewish ancestors, so the location of her birthplace does not seem a surprise.) The marker in the garden has a quotation from the *Zohar*, the *Book of Splendor* (or *Book of Radiance*) that is the source of the epigraph to *Souls in the Garden* and of its title.

His *Book of Splendor*. The *Zohar*, the key work of Jewish mysticism.

Every aspect of existence//As an aspect of God. Reference to the *sefirot*, attributes of God, a term used in Jewish mystical literature, though only in some parts of the *Zohar*, the main work of Jewish mysticism. See previous note.

The last of the seven heavenly palaces. A reference to the heavenly palaces, or halls, described in the mystical book *Zohar* and also in the early Jewish mystical *hechalot* literature (*hechalot* = halls/palaces).

Her *Interior Castle*. A reference to *The Interior Castle* (*El castillo interior*), St Teresa's signature work, also called *The Mansions* (*Las moradas*), describing her vision of the soul as a diamond in the shape of a castle containing seven mansions, which she interpreted as the journey of faith through seven stages, culminating in union with God. The image of the mansions comes originally from The New Testament, John 14:2: "In my house are many mansions."

Seven palaces. Reference to the *sefirot*, attributes of God described in Jewish mystical literature, although the term *sefirot* is used only in parts of the *Zohar*. See second note.

Seven mansions. See two notes up.

Completed in this world/And perhaps joined here to the Divine/The ascended souls then join/The Divine forevermore. *Zohar* 1:235a, in *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, vol. 3, translation and commentary by Daniel C. Matt (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 425. See also *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, vol. 2, pp. 747-748 (see **FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION** for full citation).

St Teresa's Confession

Confession of St Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582, b. in or near Ávila), the mystic reformer and founder of the Discalced (barefoot, shoeless) Carmelite order. See also next note.

The Interior Castle. St Teresa's signature work (*El castillo interior*), also called *The Mansions* (*Las moradas*), describing

her vision of the soul as a diamond in the shape of a castle containing seven mansions, which she interpreted as the journey of faith through seven stages, culminating in union with God. The alternate title of her work comes from John 14:2 in the New Testament: "In my house are many mansions."

Zohar—the Book of Splendor. Hebrew—then English—title, of the most important work of Jewish mysticism, which began appearing in Spain toward the end of the thirteenth century. Also translated as *Book of Radiance*. See next note.

Rabbi Moses de León. (1250-1305, probably b. León) Author, one of the authors, or compiler of the *Zohar*. See previous note.

Don't think I've forgotten. Title of moving film (*Don't Think I've Forgotten: Cambodia's Lost Rock and Roll, 2015*) about Cambodian musicians before and after the Vietnam war. The line just seemed to fit.

St Teresa's Three Secrets

St Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582, b. in or near Ávila), the mystic Christian reformer who founded the Discalced (barefoot, shoeless) Carmelite order. Her most famous work is *The Interior Castle (El castillo interior)*. See second note to **St Teresa's Confession**, just above.

From the painting . . . Ávila. Lovely walled city northwest of Madrid.

The aura of my ancestors. Her ancestors were *conversos*, Jewish converts to Christianity.

For Juan de la Cruz. Better known to English speakers as St John of the Cross (1542-1591, b. Fontiveros), the brilliant poet and mystic known especially for his beautiful poem usually titled "Noche oscura" ("Dark Night"), *Cántico espiritual (Spiritual Canticle)*, *Subida del Monte Carmelo (Ascent of Mt Carmel)*, and other works of poetry and prose.

The Burning Light

[T]he soul of a righteous person/is none other than a garden/in which the Beloved takes great delight—Teresa de Jesus. St Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*, trans. Mirabai Starr (New York: Riverhead Books, 2003), p. 35.

A garden is a delight to the eye/and a solace for the soul—Sa'adi. Attributed to the Persian poet Sa'adi Shirazi (also spelled Sa'di and Saadi) (ca. 1210-ca.1291, b. Shiraz, Persia) and presumably from his *The Gulistan (The Rose Garden)*, the classic book written in 1258 (see www.iranchamber.com/literature/saadi/books/golestan_saadi.pdf). However, I cannot locate this line in the online English version. Courtesy Ariana Spillane, Traditional Medicinals.

what if Teresa de Jesús and Juan de la Cruz. St Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582, b. in or near Ávila), the mystic reformer and founder of the Discalced (barefoot, shoeless) Carmelite order. Juan de La Cruz, better known as St John of the Cross (1542-1591, b. Fontiveros), mystic poet, colleague, and confessor of St Teresa's. Author of *Cántico espiritual (Spiritual Canticle)*, *Subida del Monte Carmelo (Ascent of Mt Carmel)*, and other works of poetry and prose. the long dark night of the soul. Reference to St John of the Cross's famous poem usually titled "Noche oscura" ("Dark Night") and to his prose exposition of the poem. See previous note.

in his longing . . . blossoming breasts. A phrase from St John's poem "Noche oscura" ("Dark Night") described in the previous note. See Willis Barnstone, ed. and trans., *The Poems of St. John of the Cross* (New York: New Directions, 1972), p. 39.

not from the Song of Songs. Biblical book expressing love for God in human language (or perhaps vice versa), a conceit that influenced mystic poets like St John of the Cross (see fourth note above).

or from troubadours. Medieval singers, of love songs especially.

and when he looked in his mirror. The mirror is on display in the little museum attached to the Convento de Santa Teresa de Jesús in Segovia, a walled city north-by-northwest of Madrid and northeast of Ávila.

not spiritual and Carmelite matters. Having to do with the Catholic order of this name.

but their shared *converso* heritage. A *converso* is a Jew who voluntarily or under duress was forcibly converted to Christianity.

and the Jewish mystical *Book of Splendor*. One English translation of title of the *Zohar*, the most important work of Jewish mysticism, which appeared in Spain toward the end of the thirteenth century.

written near Ávila. Lovely walled city northwest of the Spanish capital city, Madrid.

what if he was levitating// . . . her cell window. This striking image occurs in a painting of St Teresa and St John. See third and fourth notes above.

if Cupid was the angel/who shot the arrow into Teresa's heart. In one of Teresa's most important visions, depicted in paintings, she sees and experiences the suffering of the crucified Jesus through an angel piercing her heart with an arrow.

what if a key . . . //if the chair we see today . . . //and his chalice was used. The key, the chair, and the chalice can be viewed in the little museum attached to the Convento de Santa Teresa de Jesús in Ávila.

in front of the Monasterio de los Carmelitas Descalzos in Segovia. Convent of the Shoeless (or Barefoot, though they wore sandals) Carmelites in Segovia, a walled city north-by-northwest of Madrid and northeast of Ávila, which contains the tomb of St John of the Cross. Also called the Convento de los Carmelitas Descalzos (the Convent of the Shoeless

Carmelites) and the Convento de San Juan de la Cruz—the Convent of St John of the Cross. See also fourth note above. what if . . . Úbeda. City in southeastern Spain where St John of the Cross died and where some of his remains are buried. to bury in Segovia. Beautiful walled city north-by-northwest of the Spanish capital, Madrid. at the Monasterio de la Encarnación. Convent/Monastery of the Incarnation in Ávila where St Teresa lived and worked. Also called the Convento de la Encarnación. what if she created . . . *yemas*. Confection whose recipe is attributed to St. Teresa. Madrid. Modern Spanish capital. (in the end . . . //even the pope was involved. The supposed fate of St John's bones. The author cannot—and, out of perversity and cynicism about other information he has attempted to verify, does not even want to try to—verify the accuracy of this information.

And Now a Haiku

Haiku. Japanese form of poetry using compressed language, a surprise jump, and three lines of five, seven, and five syllables, respectively. The poem is St Teresa of Ávila's (1515-1582, b. in or near Ávila) posthumous contribution to the genre. St Teresa was the mystic Christian reformer who founded the Discalced (barefoot, shoeless) Carmelite order. Her most famous work is *The Interior Castle (El castillo interior)*.

blossoming breasts. A phrase from St John of the Cross's famous poem usually titled "Noche oscura" ("Dark Night"). See Willis Barnstone, ed. and trans., *The Poems of St. John of the Cross* (New York: New Directions, 1972), p. 39. St John (1542-1591, b. Fontiveros) was the brilliant poet and mystic known especially for his beautiful poem usually titled "Noche oscura" ("Dark Night"), *Cántico espiritual (Spiritual Canticle)*, *Subida del Monte Carmelo (Ascent of Mt Carmel)*, and other works of poetry and prose. He also was the preceptor of St Teresa.

Scent of Úbeda

Úbeda. City in southeastern Spain where the great mystic poet St John of the Cross (Juan de la Cruz) (1542-1591, b. Fontiveros) died and where some of his remains are buried, with the rest in Segovia. St John's most famous poem is usually titled "Noche oscura" ("Dark Night").

Music is the soul of a nation. Line in *Don't Think I've Forgotten: Cambodia's Lost Rock and Roll (2015)*, moving film about the Cambodian music scene before and after the Vietnam War.

Plates broke. Úbeda is home to a very old ceramics factory that produces distinctive pottery, some of which has six-pointed-star shapes.

With the sort-of star of David. Six-pointed star that today is the symbol of Judaism, although it also appears in other cultures.

Mystic poet Juan de la Cruz. See first note.

His *converso* past. A *converso* was a Jew who converted to Christianity by choice or more often under duress or by force. The kilns are Moorish. Having to do with North-African Muslim tribes called Moors.

Levitating in the Presence of Teresa de Jesús:

A Dialogue Between the Ancient Philosopher Plotinus

And the Medieval Spanish Mystic St John of the Cross

An old painting shows St John of the Cross physically levitating in front of St Teresa of Ávila. See second and fourth notes. Teresa de Jesús. (1515-1582, b. in or near Ávila) Better known as St Teresa of Ávila, the mystic reformer and leader of the Discalced (barefoot, shoeless) Carmelite order.

Plotinus. Ancient Greek or possibly Egyptian philosopher Plotinus (ca. 204/5-270 CE, b. Lycopolis, Egypt), especially influenced by Plato and who influenced, either directly or indirectly, the medieval Muslim, Jewish, and Christian philosophers.

Juan de la Cruz. (1542-1591, b. Fontiveros) Better known as St John of the Cross, the brilliant poet and mystic known especially for his beautiful poem usually titled "Noche oscura" ("Dark Night"), *Cántico espiritual (Spiritual Canticle)*, *Subida del Monte Carmelo (Ascent of Mt Carmel)*, and other works of poetry and prose. An actual painting shows the mystic poet levitating as described in the poem. St John was a colleague and confessor of St Teresa's.

All beauty and good/Come from the Divine. Plotinus, *Ennead* I.6.6. *Plotinus: The Ethical Treatises, Being the Treatises of the First Ennead.* Trans. Stephen MacKenna (London: Philip Lee Warner, 1917), pp. 77-79. See also sacred-texts.com/cla/plotenn/enn066.htm. See third note for information on Plotinus.

After the epigraph, the lines in italics are adapted from the famous passage in Plotinus' *Enneads* IV.8.1. *Plotinus: On the Nature of the Soul, Being the Fourth Ennead.* Trans. Stephen MacKenna (London: Philip Lee Warner, 1924), p. 143. See also sacred-texts.com/cla/plotenn/enn400.htm and other translations. See third note for information on Plotinus.

Performance note. The italicized lines could be recited by a second reader.

I contemplated the *auto-de-fé*. (Spanish) The "test of faith" of a person's Christian beliefs that involved mental and physical torture, often culminating in being burnt alive at the stake.
in her convent in Ávila. Lovely walled city northwest of the Spanish capital, Madrid.

Lament of the Saint of Segovia

Saint of Segovia. St John of the Cross (1542-1591, b. Fontiveros), the brilliant mystic poet known especially for his poem usually titled "Noche oscura" ("Dark Night"), *Cántico espiritual* (*Spiritual Canticle*), *Subida del Monte Carmelo* (*Ascent of Mt Carmel*), and other works of poetry and prose. Segovia is a beautiful walled city north-by-northwest of the Spanish capital, Madrid.

*Why does the Holy One dispatch us here/only to snatch us back there?/To make us know His glory, of course. Zohar 1:235a, in The Zohar: Pritzker Edition, vol. 3, translation and commentary by Daniel C. Matt (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 425. See also The Wisdom of the Zohar, vol. 2, p. 748 (see **FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION** for full citation).*

Died in Úbeda/Some body parts there//Some in Segovia/But who can keep track of them. Úbeda, in southern Spain north-by-northeast of Córdoba, is where St John died and where some of his bones remain, with the rest in Segovia and possibly one arm in Madrid. See also last note for **The Burning Light** above.

Below the Jewish cemetery. Across a small canyon and the Clamores stream from the walled city of Segovia, the remarkable Jewish cemetery of Pinarillo features a number of partially excavated tombs.

My monastery is on the path. He seems to mean the Camino de Santiago, the pilgrim's path to Santiago de Compostela, but another path in Segovia (the St John of the Cross Route) connects the two religious houses of the Discalced (shoeless, or barefoot, though they wore shoes) Carmelite Catholic order—the Convent of St Joseph and the friary. Or, he may mean this metaphorically.

Of life lived . . . Alcázar. A Spanish Islamic castle.

The scent . . . blood oranges. Oranges with red flesh, introduced into Spain well after the lifetime of St John.

Do I remember my ancestors. Reference to St John's Jewish ancestry. See first note.

Of the Jewish mystics/. . . in nearby Ávila. Reference to the mystic Rabbi Moses de León (1250-1305, probably b. León).

Ávila is a lovely walled city northwest of Madrid and southwest of Segovia what was home to the important mystic Catholic reformer St Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582, b. Ávila) and, about 250 years earlier, the important Jewish mystic Rabbi Moses de León, thought to be the author, or editor, or one of the authors of the *Zohar*, the *Book of Splendor*, the most important Jewish mystical book.

In these twin sky cities. References to Segovia and Ávila, both walled cities on hills. Also a distant, obscure nod to Acoma pueblo in New Mexico, a Native-American "city" that is perched on cliffs and calls itself Sky City.

St John of the Cross says://It is indeed the dark night of the soul/When we cannot remember any of this. Reference to St John's famous and beautiful poem usually titled "Noche oscura" ("Dark Night") and to his prose exposition of the poem. See first note.

And cannot remember how after joining God/We can now be coming down//Or how our soul ever came to/Our body in the first place. Plotinus (ca. 204/5-270 CE, b. Lycopolis, Egypt), *Ennead* IV.8.1. *Plotinus: On the Nature of the Soul, Being the Fourth Ennead.* Trans. Stephen MacKenna (London: Philip Lee Warner, 1924), p. 143. See also sacred-texts.com/cla/plotenn/enn400.htm and other translations). (sacred-texts.com/cla/plotenn/enn400.htm). Ancient Greek or possibly Egyptian philosopher influenced by Plato, who in turn influenced the medieval Jewish, Christian, and Muslim philosophers and mystics.

The Yemas of St Teresa of Ávila

Yemas. Confection attributed to St Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582, b. in or near Ávila), the mystic reformer and founder of the Discalced (barefoot, shoeless) Carmelite order.

Don't think I've forgotten. Title of moving film (*Don't Think I've Forgotten: Cambodia's Lost Rock and Roll, 2015*) about Cambodian musicians before and after the Vietnam war. The line just seemed to fit.

The Gate of Bad Luck. Called in Spanish the Puerta de Malaventura or Puerta de la Mala Dicha and also the Arco de los Gitanos (Gypsies' Arch). Gate in the Ávila wall opposite a monument to the mystic Rabbi Moses de León (1250-1305, probably b. León).

The sugar . . . *abuela*. *Abuela* is Spanish for "grandmother."

The cinnamon . . . Holy Land. Reference to the land of Israel.

St Teresa's Finger

St. Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582, b. in or near Ávila) was the mystic reformer and founder of the Discalced (barefoot, shoeless) Carmelite order.

In a glass case. In the museum in the Convento de Santa Teresa in Ávila are the relics of St Teresa described in the poem, and depictions of some of her visions and experiences. See www.sacred-destinations.com/spain/avila-convento-santa-teresa.

A spear in her heart. A painting depicts St Teresa's vision of herself with the spear in her heart .

St John of the Cross levitating. St Teresa saw St John levitating, and this is depicted in a painting.

Discalced. Shoeless, or barefoot.

The key to her interior//Castle. *The Interior Castle (El castillo interior)* is her signature work, also called *The Mansions (Las moradas)*, describing her vision of the soul as a diamond in the shape of a castle containing seven mansions, which she interpreted as the journey of faith through seven stages, culminating in union with God. The alternate title of her work comes from John 14:2 in the New Testament: "In my house are many mansions."

Jewish Quarter. The former Jewish quarter in Ávila is near where St Teresa was born.

Her missing finger. From her right hand.

Testimony of Don Fernando Pérez Coronel, Formerly Rabbi Don Abraham Senior of Segovia

Don Fernando Pérez Coronel. (1412-1493, b. Segovia) Rabbi and Jewish community leader converted to Christianity by Queen Isabella (also Isabel) herself—Isabella (or Isabel) I of Castile (1451-1504, b. Madrigal de las Atlas Torres). Sometimes in his previous incarnation as Abraham Seneor and written sometimes with Spanish spellings and additional names. See also second-to-last note.

Segovia. Historic city north and slightly west of the Spanish capital, Madrid.

King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, by the grace of God, . . . order that, by the end of July next of the present year [1492], all Jews and Jewesses depart from these our said realms. . . . From *The Edict of Expulsion of the Jews* (April 29, 1492) (sephardicstudies.org/decreed.html). See also note Isabella and Ferdinand note below.

of the Jewish cemetery. Across a small canyon and the Clamores stream from Segovia, the remarkable Jewish cemetery of Pinarillo features a number of partially excavated tombs. Segovia is a historic walled city north-by-northwest of Madrid. claiming . . . rabbi. A rabbi is a Jewish religious teacher.

Sure, my *Torah* learning. Reference to knowledge of Jewish texts (like the *Torah*, the five books of Moses), traditions, laws, and beliefs.

leave behind everything good in *Sefarad*. As used here, *Sefarad* is the Hebrew term for "Spain," specifically "Jewish" Spain or Jewish life in Spain or the whole Iberian peninsula, which includes Portugal. (Also spelled *Sepharad*.)

After all . . . *kabbalists*. Reference to practitioners or adherents of the mystical "system" called *kabbalah*.

were no better than the trinitarians. Normally, a reference to Christian believers in the trinity, but here a slap at Jewish mystics who believed that God had ten parts.

were no better . . . ten faces/of the Godhead . . . oneness. A reference to the ten *sefirot*—attributes of God—described in Jewish mysticism.

at the cemetery . . . slaughterhouse. The old Jewish slaughterhouse, now a museum.

The moon . . . resembled a certain Hebrew letter/on its back. The letter *yod* (י) bears some resemblance to a crescent moon. This image appears also in Samuel Hanagid, "Ehe Kofer l'Ofer" ("Invitation"), in T. Carmi, ed., *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse* (New York: Penguin, 1981), p. 298.

on its back. Isabella and Ferdinand. Catholic monarchs (Los Reyes Católicos) Isabella and Ferdinand (or Fernando) II of Aragon (1452-1516, b. Sos del Rey Católico) (also called Ferdinand V), who married, established the Spanish Inquisition of 1478, and in 1492 signed the edict expelling all unconverted Jews from Spain. See first note too.

the destruction . . . *converso* by *converso*. *Conversos* were Jews who converted voluntarily or under duress or were converted by force. Abraham Senior was persuaded—chose—to convert. Ferdinand had a Jewish ancestor, and Abraham Senior's Christian name obviously was taken from the king's name.

in Segovia in 1492. The year Jews were expelled from Spain unless they converted to Christianity.

Segoviana: A Souvenir of Segovia

Segovia. City north-by-northwest of Madrid home to the mystic poet St John of the Cross (1542-1591, b. Fontiveros).

Strange men read the Hebrew letters on our foreheads. Reference to the powers of the contemporaneous Palestinian mystic Rabbi Isaac Luria (1532-1572, b. Jerusalem) to read a person's soul from Hebrew letters he saw (or whose absence he noted) on the person's forehead.

Don Isaac Abravanel, Unprophetic Prophet of His People

Don Isaac Abravanel (sometimes spelled Abarbanel) (1437-1508, b. Lisbon), statesman, financial, biblical commentator, community leader.

Daniel. The biblical prophet.

Note on the poem. The information published on Abravanel is often inconsistent, and scholars often quote primary sources or other articles or books containing unconfirmed information. These primary sources include Abravanel's own texts. The poem wrestles with these issues.

Could predict . . . between 1503 and 1573. Seymour Feldman, *Philosophy in a Time of Crisis: Don Isaac Abravanel, Defender of the Faith* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), p. 148. Exact quote from Feldman: "between 1503 and 1573."

Although you consulted the same books as Daniel. Dan. 9:2.

Were perhaps . . . Maimonides. (1138-1204, b. Córdoba) Latinized name of Rabbi Moses (or Moshe) ben Maimon, religious leader, physician, Jewish community leader, and most influential of Jewish philosophers.

That in spite of . . . Messiah. Savior of humankind, coming at the so-called end of days. Both Jews and Christians believe in such a figure, but Christians believe the Messiah already has come, in the figure of Jesus, while Jews believe the Messiah is yet to come. The word literally means "the anointed one."

"[M]any terrible evils . . . people/ . . . has seen." Eric Lawee, *Isaac Abarbanel's Stance Toward Tradition: Defense, Dissent, and Dialogue* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001), p. 129.

"When we are in the land of our enemies . . . //Or break His covenant with us." Lev. 26:44. Slightly modified by HR.

You also seem to have forgotten . . . // . . . His face. Howard Schwartz, *Tree of Souls: The Mythology of Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 500.

As even you said . . . God. Alfredo Fabio Borodowski, *Isaac Abravanel on Miracles, Creation, Prophecy and Evil: The Tension Between Medieval Jewish Philosophy and Biblical Commentary* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), pp. 59, 80, and 113.

The people mourned when they heard the terrible decree. Jane Gerber, *The Jews of Spain: A History of the Sephardic Experience* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), p. 138.

And I said I hoped "to try to bring comfort to those/Who stumble from the exile." Eric Lawee, "The Messianism of Isaac Abravanel, 'Father of the [Jewish] Messianic Movements of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,'" in Matt D. Goldish and Richard H. Popkin, *Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern European Culture: Vol. 1: Jewish Messianism in the Early Modern World* (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2001), p.15.

"But sensing the end was near/"I had run out of ideas and lacked the strength/"To help others." Chokhamela, Poem 157, in Rohini Mokashi-Punekar, trans, *On the Threshold: Songs of Chokhamela* (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2005), p. 41. Chokhamela was a great untouchable fourteenth-century Indian saint-poet.

The only king you like is the heavenly kind and only God guides Israel. *Abarbanel on the Torah: Selected Themes*. Trans. Avner Tomaschoff (Jerusalem: The Jewish Agency for Israel, 2007), p. 427.

Although you praised a Portuguese king. Alfonso V (1432-1481, b. Sintra, Portugal).

From the impending "great and terrible destruction." Quote is from Eric Lawee, p. 8. See fifth note above for full source.

As did Abraham Senior. Don Fernando Perez Coronel. (1412-1493, b. Segovia) Rabbi and Jewish community leader converted to Christianity by Queen Isabella (also Isabel) herself. Sometimes in his previous incarnation as Abraham Senior and written sometimes with Spanish spellings and additional names.

The Bible is the word of God . . . // . . . from revelation. Isaac Abravanel, *Principles of Faith (Rosh Amanah)*, ed. and trans. Menachem Kellner (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press: London and East Brunswick, N.J., 1982), p. 29.

And divine law has just one principle:/The world was created from nothing. Page 34 in source in previous note.

We aren't sure . . . three times or even once/To revoke the Edict of Expulsion. Abravanel wrote that he approached the monarchs three times to try to persuade them to revoke the edict (see next note) and also supposedly wrote them a strongly worded letter. All of these actions are now disputed by some modern scholars. See, for example, Norman Roth, *Conversos, Inquisition, and the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), pp. 298-299. The Edict of Expulsion, signed in 1492 by Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand, expelled, under threat of death or conversion, all unconverted Jews from Spain and would have led to the expulsion (or possible death) of Don Isaac Abravanel if he hadn't left.

Based on the words of Shmuel Hanagid—/Samuel the Prince—. (993-1056, b. Córdoba) Poet, rabbinic scholar, vizier to the Muslim ruler of Granada, military commander, and perhaps the most important Jew of his day (at least in Spain).

"May an advocate angel// . . . God's glory." What Shmuel Hanagid wrote in the last stanza of a poem titled in Hebrew "Hanimtsa Vereiai," in T. Carmi, ed. *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 301. Here the translation is by Gideon Weisz © 2017.

That you did not "delve into the mysteries of the *kabbalah*." Reference to the main stream of Jewish mysticism *Abarbanel on the Torah: Selected Themes*. Trans. Avner Tomaschoff (Jerusalem: The Jewish Agency for Israel, 2007), p. 404.

You "have no business with secret matters." Seymour Feldman, *Philosophy in a Time of Crisis: Don Isaac Abravanel, Defender of the Faith* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), p. 156.

On *Shabbat*. The Jewish sabbath.

Occam's razor. A medieval logical tool designed to simplify complex problems.

We will eat our own bread// . . . Spain and Portugal. Adapted by HR from Is. 4:1-2.

The Rainbow

An ancient curse still stands/on anyone who tries to predict the End of Days. Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 97b. See also Howard Schwartz, *Tree of Souls: The Mythology of Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 500.

Where are you going dressed in white like a bride/Queen Isabella?/I'm going to the synagogue/to meet Don Isaac Abravanel. The back-and-forth works off the refrain in **Sensing Souls in Toledo** (see notes to that poem).

Queen Isabella. Isabella (or Isabel) I (1474-1504, b. Madrigal de las Altas Torres, Ávila), Queen of Castile and eventually all of Spain. Co-architect of the edict of expulsion expelling Jews from Spain in 1492.

I'm going to the synagogue. To a Jewish house of worship and study.

to meet Don Isaac Abravanel. (1437-1508, b. Lisbon). Courtier, financier, biblical commentator. See previous poem.

If it's to discuss the edict. See third note.

Didn't he just loan you money/to defeat the Muslims in Granada? 1492, ending the reconquest of Spanish territory from Muslims, who had invaded Spain in 711.

to make way for the Second Coming. Of Jesus.

How many tears flowed into the water!/How many pieces of broken hearts did the ships carry! Ibn al-Labbanah (12th c., b. Denia). Trans. Sahar Omar Taha Al Nima © 2017, modified slightly by HR. For a translation of the whole poem, see Al-Mu'Tamid and His Family Go into Exile," in Cola Franzen, trans., *Poems of Arab Andalusia* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1989), pp. 88-89.

Where are you going in your gown of many colors. See Gen. 37:3, describing Joseph's coat of many colors.

When the Savior returns. Jesus Christ.

You tried to kidnap his grandson. Apparently Isabella and Ferdinand tried to have Don Isaac's son kidnapped to "persuade" him to stay in Spain after the Edict of Expulsion would force him to leave unless he converted.

Where did you go dressed in a veil of myrtle and myrrh. See, for example, passages in *Zohar* 2:195b-208b, in *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, vol. 6, translation and commentary by Daniel C. Matt (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 110-189.

Three times and then that awful letter. Jane Gerber, *The Jews of Spain: A History of the Sephardic Experience* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), p. 134.

"I'll ascend steep cliffs . . ./Hoping you'll let go your anger." Shmuel Hanagid, "Neshamah Me-asher" ("The Poet Leaves Cordoba"), in *Jewish Prince in Moslem Spain: Selected Poems of Samuel Ibn Nagrela*, Introduction, Translation, and Notes by Leon J. Weinberger (The University of Alabama Press, 1973), pp. 19-20//Shmuel Hanagid, "Hatakhis Malakekha" ("At Court"), in same source, p. 61. Trans. Gideon Weisz © 2018. Shmuel Hanagid, Samuel the Prince, is also known as Samuel Ibn Nagrela.

the meaning of the three stars. *Shabbat*, the Jewish Sabbath, ends when three stars can be seen.

of the Trinity as well. The Catholic father, son, and holy ghost, but of course the implication is that there is a true "Jewish" interpretation.

It's said your husband made the decisions. King Ferdinand (or Fernando) II of Aragon (later the V of Castile and then king of all of Spain) (1452-1516, b. Sos del Rey Católico).

So cold and hard, my Lady?/Spare some sign, a syllable/for me. Chokhamela, in Rohini Mokashi-Punekar, trans., *On the Threshold: Songs of Chokhamela* (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2005), p. 36. I changed the last word from "Lord" to "Lady." According to the introduction in this book, "Chokhamela was a fourteenth-century untouchable [outcaste] saint poet of western India."

Where will you go dressed in your garment of good deeds. See *Zohar* 2:210a/b, in *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, vol. 6, translation and commentary by Daniel C. Matt (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 197-199.

What about the three stars—. *Shabbat*, the Jewish Sabbath, ends on Saturday when three stars can be seen in the sky. *in your ethereal garment of spiritual intentions*. See *Zohar* 2:210a/b, in *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, vol. 6, translation and commentary by Daniel C. Matt (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), pp. 197-199.

We are pariahs/No one wants us. Chokhamela, in Chandrakant Kaluram Mhatre, trans., *One Hundred Poems of Chokha Mela* (CreateSpace, 2015), p. 20. See four notes up for information on the author.

But . . . only God knows/who will enter paradise. Adapted from Ahmed Ibn Mohammed Al-Makkari (c. 1578-1632, b. Algeria), *The History of the Mohammedan Dynasties in Spain*, p. 160. Vol. 1. Trans. Pascual de Gayangos (New York: Johnson Reprint, 1964).

A rainbow/glorious as a bride/will herald the Messiah. *Zohar* 1:72b, in *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, vol. 1, translation and commentary by Daniel C. Matt (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 428-429. See also Howard Schwartz,

Tree of Souls: The Mythology of Judaism (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 500.

Stumbling Upon Biblioteca Abraham Zacut

Biblioteca Abraham Zacut. Library at the University of Salamanca (founded in 1134) named after Rabbi (Don) Abraham Zacut(o) (1452-1515, b. Salamanca), important Jewish astronomer and mathematician whose astrolabe and astronomical tables revolutionized ocean navigation and contributed to Portugal's success as a trading nation and colonial power.

The ships fitted out . . . //wood. "Zacuto, Abraham Ben Samuel" (www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/15132-yuhasin-sefer-ha).

Salamanca. City northwest of the current Spanish capital, Madrid.

And memorials to Fray Luis. Fray Luis de León (1527-1591, b. Belmonte), theologian and poet, descended from Jews converted to Christianity, imprisoned for heresy.

To Cervantes, quixotic pride of crypto-Jews. Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (1514-1616, b. Alcáala de Henares), author of *Don Quixote* (arguably the first novel), descended from Jews converted to Christianity. Crypto-Jews were converted Jews or their descendants who, fearing persecution or execution, continued (or in some cases even today have continued) some Jewish practices.

and Unamuno. Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936, b. Bilbao), Spanish philosopher, poet, novelist, and playwright.

named after Rabbi Abraham Zacut. Zacut (or Zacuto). See first note above.

Author of the massive *Sefer Yuchasin*. The *Book of Lineage*. Also transliterated *Sefer ha-Yuhasin and other ways*.

The Night of Murdered Poets

The title comes from what is called the Night of the Murdered Poets, August 12, 1952, when thirteen Soviet Jews were executed on orders of Stalin, among them five Yiddish writers: Peretz Markish, David Hofstein, Itzik Feffer, Leib Kvitko, and David (or Dovid) Bergelson. All were members of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, and the trumped-up charges included espionage and counterrevolutionary crimes.

The betrothal was really over. . . //This was the end of everything. Introduction to David Bergelson (1884-1952, b. Sarny, Ukraine), *The End of Everything*, trans. Joseph Sherman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. xl. Originally published in 1913. This is a novel in Yiddish—*Nokh Alemen* is the Yiddish title—by one of the murdered Jewish writers described in the previous note.

With toca, garrote/Porto, and strappado. Torture methods or devices, associated with medieval Spain but sometimes with contemporary associations. Toca is water torture. Garrote is torture and killing by crushing the neck. Porto is torture on a device with sharp rungs. Strappado (or strapado) is torture in which the victim is suspended by his or her wrists tied together in back. These methods often resulted in death and perhaps were intended to avenge, in a commensurate manner, the torture and eventual death of Jesus.

Yehudah Halevi Explains

Why He Left All the Good Things of Spain

Yehudah Halevi. (1075-1141, b. Tudela or Toledo) Rabbi, philosopher, and one of the greatest Jewish poets.

Why He Left All the Good Things of Spain. Reference to his famous poem that begins "Libi v'mizrach" ("My Heart Is in the East"). I have opted to base the title on the classic translation of the opening of the original poem: "A light thing would it seem to me to leave all the good things of Spain," in Heinrich Brody, ed., and Nina Salaman, trans., *Selected Poems of Jehudah Halevi* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1924, 1952), p. 2. The Hebrew word Halevi uses for Spain (*Sefarad*, or *Sepharad*) occurs once in the Hebrew Bible (Obad. 1:20) and traditionally has meant Spain but probably meant another place.

Performance note. The indented verses and the rhymed-prose couplets could be recited by different readers.

To leave all the bounty of Spain//Of the ruined Holy of Holies. See second note above for source. Trans. Gideon Weisz © 2017, modified by HR.

In Tudela de Navarre. Tudela, a city about 190 miles (120 km) northeast of the modern capital, Madrid.

Sparkling surface of the Rio Ebro. The main river flowing through Tudela.

And the moon . . . the Hebrew letter *yod*. The letter *yod* (י) resembles a partial crescent moon. This image appears also in Samuel Hanagid, "Ehe Kofer l'Ofer" ("Invitation"), in T. Carmi, ed., *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse* (New York: Penguin, 1981), p. 298.

My heart is in the East/And I'm as far as you can go West. Translation of famous line in the poem cited in the first note.

Soon the philosopher Maimonides. (1138-1204, b. Córdoba) Latinized name of Rabbi Moses (or Moshe) ben Maimon—religious leader, physician, codifier of Jewish law, most influential of Jewish philosophers. It was said that from Moses to Moses, there was none other.

Will ignore my *Kuzari*. Halevi's great philosophic work, *The Kuzari*, in which a Jew, a Christian, and a Muslim try to

convince the kuzari, the ruler of the Central Asian Khazars, which system is best. Maimonides (see previous entry) never referred to *The Kuzari* in his writings and was not especially supportive of the poetic enterprise, though not specifically Halevi's. In *The Kuzari*, the ruler and his entire people convert to Judaism, although the story probably didn't occur. To join my ancestors . . . Holy Land. Former home to Jews in the ancient world. During Halevi's lifetime Jerusalem was part of a Christian Crusader kingdom.

En el este está me corazón, y en el extremo oeste estoy. Spanish translation of "My heart is in the East/And I'm as far as you can go West" by Victoria Lauren Smith © 2017. See second and ninth notes.

In a corner of Tudela. See fifth note.

A plaza with my name. Plaza de Yehudah Halevi, with a statue of the poet along with quotations from some of his poems. And those of Benjamin the Traveler. Benjamin of Tudela (ca. 1130-1173, b. Tudela), who traveled the world visiting and writing about Jewish communities.

Abraham Ibn Ezra. (1092-1167, b. Tudela) Polymath rabbi, poet, philosopher, astrologer, and biblical commentator.

Solomon Ibn Gabirol. Rabbi Solomon Ibn Gabirol (1021/2-ca. 1054/58/70, b. Málaga). Poet and philosopher.

Libi vemizrach v'anochi besof maarav. Transliteration of original Hebrew text of the lines "My heart's in the East/And I'm as far as you can go West." See second and ninth notes.

promised land. The Holy Land. Former home to Jews in the ancient world.

Libi vemizrach v'anochi besof maarav/En el este está me corazón, y en el extremo oeste estoy/My heart is in the East, and I'm as far as you can go West. Hebrew, Spanish, and English versions of the famous line. See second note above. The original poem and another English translation appear in T. Carmi, ed., *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 347.

As with Jacob. The biblical patriarch.

That God was in this place. In Gen. 28:16, *Hamakom*, Hebrew for "the place," is read as a name of God.

En el este está me corazón, y en el extremo oeste estoy. Spanish translation of "My heart is in the East/And I'm as far as you can go West" by Victoria Lauren Smith © 2017. See second and ninth notes.

I was born not in Tudela but Toledo instead. Halevi's birthplace is uncertain. Toledo is about 45 miles (70 km) southwest of the Spanish capital, Madrid.

Or a horse or just died in Cairo. Egyptian city where Halevi might have died after he left Spain, and where later, Maimonides (see third note above) lived.

No matter . . . Toledo. City about 40 miles south-by-southwest of the Spanish capital, Madrid.

Of the Rio Tagus. Longest river on the Iberian Peninsula, flowing through Toledo.

My heart is in the East, and I'm as far as you can go West. Translation of famous line in the poem cited in the first note.

Libi vemizrach v'anochi besof maarav. . . //Yeikal b'einay azov kol-tuv sefarad kemo/Yeikal b'einayim re'ot afrov devir nechorov/I'm drowning . . . // . . . give my life. See second note for source. The English is my loose translation.

The Return of Samuel the Prince

Samuel the Prince. Anglicized name of Shmuel Hanagid (993-1056, b. Córdoba), poet, scholar, vizier to the Muslim ruler of Granada, commander of the military, and perhaps the most prominent Jew of his time. The poem is modeled after his poem translator Peter Cole has titled "The Market," in Peter Cole, trans. and ed., *The Dream of the Poem: Hebrew Poetry from Muslim and Christian Spain 950-1492* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 68-69. His name is also written Samuel Ibn Nagrehla (and with other spellings).

No one has ever escaped death. From poem by Samuel the Prince that begins in Hebrew "Lo nimtsa et bo met," trans. HR. The whole poem in English is called "The Market" in Peter Cole's translation, listed in the previous note.

Mangia. "Eat!" in Italian.

Like orphans from Gabirolean spheres. Reference to organization of first part of long religious-philosophical poem "Keter Malkhut" ("Crown of the King" or "Wisdom's Crown") by Rabbi Solomon Ibn Gabirol (1021/2-ca. 1054/58/70, b. Málaga), poet and philosopher. For an English translation see Peter Cole, trans., *Selected Poems of Solomon Ibn Gabirol* (Princeton University Press: Princeton and Oxford, 2002), pp. 137-195.

Strangers in a strange land. From Exodus 2:22. Also title of famous science fiction novel by Robert Heinlein.

Through the *sushi shuk*. In this poem, a market selling Japanese-style raw fish preparations.

The raw tuna . . . *sakis* serve *sake*. *Sakis*—handsome boys or young men serving at wine parties. *Sake*—Japanese rice wine. Where *offers*. *Offers* are *sakis*. See previous note.

Ornamental foods . . . like a courtier mourning after [*mourning* is a homonym of *morning*]. In this case the courtier refer to a Jewish subject close to the Muslim court, after a wine party.

That dietary customs are not random. Reference to dietary laws in the Hebrew Bible. See next note for an example.

"You shall not eat. . . ." See Ex. 22:31. Reference to Jewish dietary laws.

O Spaniards

- Not one of the . . . writers of my age/has entered the ranks . . . of Spanish literature.* Based on a statement to a court by David (or Dovid) Bergelson (1884-1952, b. Sarny, Ukraine), one of the Soviet Jewish writers murdered on orders by Stalin on the Night of the Murdered Poets, August 12, 1952. The original statement reads, in translation: "I ask the court to take note of the fact that not one of the Yiddish writers of my age has entered the ranks of Soviet literature. . . ." Quoted in the Introduction to David Bergelson, *The End of Everything*, trans. Joseph Sherman (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), p. xxvii. The reference has been changed from Russian to Spanish literature.
- auto-de-fé.* (Spanish) The "test of faith" of a person's Christian beliefs that involved mental and physical torture, often culminating in being burnt alive at the stake.
- At daybreak . . . //My poor happiness blooms.* Ekaterina Beketova (1855-1892, b. Russia), "The Lilacs," trans. Laura Olson Osterman © 2016, modified by HR. Famous poem set to music by Sergei Rachmaninoff—Op. 21, No. 5. Many recordings with piano and voice and just piano.
- the language in which we ended our poems—/was it not the same as yours? Some medieval Hebrew (and Arabic) poems include a final few lines in what is sometimes called Romance, a Romance vernacular dialect that predates Spanish, Portuguese, and Catalan as we know them. These lines, called a *kharja* ("exit"), could also be in Arabic or in a mixture of Arabic and Romance.
- Solomon Ibn Gabirol in Málaga. Rabbi Solomon Ibn Gabirol (1021/2-ca. 1054/58/70, b. Málaga), the great Jewish poet and philosopher. There is a statue of him in Málaga.
- Yehudah Halevi in Tudela. Rabbi Yehudah Halevi (1075-1141, b. Tudela or Toledo), the great poet and philosopher. Plaques and a plaza dedicated to him can be found in Tudela, and a street in Córdoba is named after him.
- Moses Ibn Ezra in Toledo. Rabbi Moses Ibn Ezra (1055-1135, b. Granada), important poet and codifier of poetics. His poem "Kevarim min zeman kedem" ("I Behold Ancient Graves") (this is the first line, since the original poem had no title) is engraved on a wall in the courtyard of the Jewish museum in Toledo, Spain. See www.medievalhebrewpoetry.org/poets/moses-ibn-ezra/.
- Samuel the Prince in Granada. Rabbi Shmuel Hanagid (993-1056, b. Córdoba), poet, patron, scholar, vizier to the Muslim ruler of Granada, commander of the military, and perhaps the most prominent Jew of his time. There might be a plaza with his name or a marker or statue of him in Granada, but I couldn't find it.
- we made a new language from yours. A reference to Judeo-Spanish—Ladino—a language based on older Spanish that is spoken and written today by Jews originally from the Iberian Peninsula.
- Why don't we visit the garden/Every plant's in bloom.* Shmuel Hanagid (Samuel the Prince) "Yehosef yat levav avin bemilah," trans. Gideon Weisz © 2017, modified by HR. Complete poem in English in Jonathan P. Decker, *Iberian Jewish Literature: Between al-Andalus and Christian Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), p. 81. In Hebrew and English in Leon J. Weinberger, *Jewish Prince in Moslem Spain: Selected Poems of Samuel Ibn Nagrela* (University, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1973), pp. 66-67.
- Every tree's crowned high/Beautifully fruited.* From Shmuel Hanagid, "V'omar al tishan," trans. HR. Complete poem in Hebrew and English in Raymond. P. Scheindlin, *Wine, Women, and Death: Medieval Hebrew Poems on the Good Life* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1986), pp. 40-41, and in English in Jonathan P. Decker, *Iberian Jewish Literature: Between al-Andalus and Christian Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), p. 80.
- living in Iberian gardens. Reference to the Iberian peninsula, encompassing modern-day Spain and Portugal.
- The garden's coat's multicolored/The grasses' embroidered.* Reference, I would think, to Joseph's many-colored coat in Gen. 37:3 and picked up in Moses Ibn Ezra, "Katnot pasim lavash hagan" (the first line, serving as a title), trans. HR. Complete poem in English in Jonathan P. Decker, *Iberian Jewish Literature: Between al-Andalus and Christian Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), p. 86. Also in Hebrew/English in T. Carmi, ed. and trans., *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 323.
- Leaving Spain's delights behind/Would be easy.* From poem by Spanish-Jewish poet-philosopher Rabbi Yehudah Halevi that begins "Libi vemizrach" ("My Heart Is in the East"), in Heinrich Brody, ed., and Nina Salaman, trans., *Selected Poems of Jehudah Halevi* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1924, 1952), p. 2. Many translations.
- St John. St John of the Cross (1542-1591, b. Fontiveros), the brilliant mystic poet known especially for his poem usually titled "Noche oscura" ("Dark Night"), *Cántico espiritual (Spiritual Canticle)*, *Subida del Monte Carmelo (Ascent of Mt Carmel)*, and other works of poetry and prose.
- St Teresa. St Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582, b. in or near Ávila), mystic reformer, founder of the Discalced (barefoot, shoeless) Carmelite order, author most notably of *El castillo interior (The Interior Castle)*, also called *The Mansions (Las moradas)*, describing her vision of the soul as a diamond in the shape of a castle containing seven mansions, which she interpreted as the journey of faith through seven stages, culminating in union with God.
- Fray Luis. Fray Luis de León (1527-1591, b. Belmonte), theologian and poet, descended from Jews converted to Christianity, imprisoned for heresy.

Cervantes. Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (1514-1616, b. Alcáala de Henares), author of *Don Quixote* (arguably the first novel), descended from Jews converted to Christianity.

Rumi. See next note.

The strong wind embraces/the weakness of the grass. Jalaluddin Rumi, *The Masnavi* (also written *Mathnawi* and other ways), I, 3325-3343. See Rumi, "The Grasses," in *Jalaluddin Rumi: Feeling the Shoulder of the Lion: Selected Poetry and Teaching Stories from the Mathnawi*. Versions by Coleman Barks (Putney, VT: Threshold Books, 1991), p. 18.

Rumi (1207-1273, b. Vakhsh, in present-day Tajikistan, or Balkh, in present-day Afghanistan; d. Konya, Turkey) was the famous *Sufi* (Muslim mystic) poet and teacher whose work was mostly composed in Persian. His first name is transliterated in various ways.

An Unanswered Question

The title works off the title of a musical composition (*The Unanswered Question*) by Charles Ives (1874-1954, b. Danbury, CT).

What do Marranos . . . have in common? Marranos: Spanish Jews converted or forced to convert to Christianity (also called *conversos*); *Moriscos:* Spanish Muslims in the same boat; *Mozarabs,* Christians living in areas of Spain ruled by Muslims.

We claimed to be the trinity. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost in Catholicism.

She lit candles in secret and Judaized. Practiced Judaism or tried to reconvert Jews who had converted to Christianity.

I said I was God. . . secretly desecrated statues of the Savior and His mother. Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary.

A poet from the future . . . *ghazals and qasidas.* The poet is Federico Garcia Lorca (see next note). Gypsies originated in—yes—Rajasthan, in North India. *Andalusian past* refers to Al-Andalus (Andalusia) was the term for Spain ruled by Muslims. *Ghazals* are a poetic form used especially by Arab, Persian, Hindu, and the medieval Jewish poets to write about love, human or divine or both. *Qasidas* are a pre-Islamic poetic form originating in North Africa and adopted by Arab and Jewish poets. Garcia Lorca wrote some poems with the words "gacela" or "casida" in the title, although these don't seem to follow the Arabic forms.

Who's the fourth man on the cross, then? Federico Garcia Lorca (1896-1936, b. Fuente Vaqueros, Spain). Spanish poet, playwright, dramatist, folklorist, composer, and artist, murdered August 19, 1936, by the fascists during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939).

He wrote a poem called "Murió al Amanecer"—"He Died at Dawn." See Francisco García Lorca and Donald M. Allen, eds., *The Selected Poems of Federico Garcia Lorca* (New York: New Directions, 1955), pp. 46-47.

One stanza speaks of four nighttime moons. See previous note.

Who were the others, and what did they do? These are the other subjects of the poems in *Souls in the Garden*.

One was too sad . . . Jewish-Christian disputation. A formal spectacle in which Jews were forced to defend their religion and prove that the Hebrew Bible and Jewish rabbinical texts do not refer to Jesus as the Messiah foretold in the Hebrew Bible. Sometimes the Christian was a Jewish convert, who was able to use his Jewish knowledge to advance his position, and some of these converts were especially vicious disputants. *Virgin* refers to the Virgin Mary.

What a mixed bag! See previous note.

We are hopeful . . . "relaxed." Euphemism for being burnt to death or otherwise killed during the Inquisition.

Three Riddles

Riddles have been part of Jewish culture at least since biblical times. In the Bible there is Samson's riddle, riddles often pop up during Purimspiels, and in the middle ages and Renaissance, riddles became an important part of Jewish wedding ceremonies.

1 Isabella I (1474-1504, b. Madrigal de las Altas Torres, Ávila), queen of Castile and eventually all of Spain. Co-architect of the edict expelling Jews from Spain in 1492.

I lived in Arévalo. The city where Moses de Leon died. See two notes down.

Where the famous *kabbalist*. Jewish mystic.

Moses de León. Rabbi Moses de León (1250-1305, probably b. León), who wrote, co-wrote, or edited the *Zohar* (the *Book of Splendor*), the most important Jewish mystical text.

Wife of Aaron the High Priest. Aaron, the brother of Moses, was the first high priest of the ancient Jews.

Jezebel. (9th c. BCE) Phoenician princess who became the wife of King Ahab of Israel. See 2 Kings 9.

2 The Sabbath soul. See **Preamble** and **Who Are the Souls in the Garden** for more on this soul.

Could I be just an idea//But an actual thing nonetheless. The view of Ramban, Rabbi Moses ben Nahman, Na(c)hmanides (1194-1270, b. Girona), biblical commentator, philosopher, mystic, and Jewish religious authority. hypostasis. The underlying reality of something.

3 The *Shekhinah* (also spelled *Shechinah*), the feminine presence or aspect of God. See Howard Schwartz, *Tree of Souls:*

The Mythology of Judaism (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 47-66. Developed in the poem as well is a theory of the origin of La Petenera, a Spanish folk figure sung about in flamenco peteneras. Briefly: God exiles the Shekhinah, who ends up in Spain, wandering in search of redemption and return. God then marries Lilith, Adam's first wife, whom Adam has exiled because she is too independent and too sexy. Shekhinah, hurt and angry, seeks and obtains her revenge by turning into La Petenera, who in Spanish folklore is a *femme fatale*, a kind of Lilith. See also the fourth note in **Sensing Souls in Toledo**.

Beautiful, Jewish, and . . . fickle. La Petenera and her song are thought by some to have Jewish origins. However, writers on flamenco often, without sufficient cause, claim Jewish origins for some of the songs. See first note.

Wise woman . . . //Solomon's equal. . . . References to the Shekhinah. See first note.

Mine's the owl. A famous depiction of Lilith shows her flanked by owls. See first note.

(www.lilithgallery.com/library/lilith/images/SumerianBurneyRelief-1950BC-front.jpg).

Long ago/ . . . for the sins of others. . . . A Shekhinah myth. For full reference, see Schwartz, p. 55, in first note in this section.

At first I hid in clouds/Like the moon. See previous note.

Later in the ruins/Of old buildings. A hiding place of Lilith. See Schwartz, p. 59.

Night after night I sought him too. See Schwartz, p. 56.

Whom I loved. See Song of Songs, 3:1.

He took an evil second wife. A reference to Lilith. See Schwartz, pp. 59-60.

Utterly lost . . . //Destroying them all. See Song of Songs 3:2.

Men feared bad luck. Some flamenco singers even today will not sing peteneras. See first note.

Women, miscarriage//To breed more of me. Some of the Lilith myths. See first note.

Keeping the Sabbath. *Shabbat*, the Jewish Sabbath (observed Friday evening to Saturday evening).

At midnight studying *kabbalah*. *Kabbalah* is the main strain of Jewish mysticism. The ideal time to study it is late at night.

Remembering that three stars. The Sabbath ends when three stars can be seen.

In 1492 I couldn't bear watching the ships/Propelled by grief. In 1492 unconverted Jews were expelled from Spain. The other text is adapted from Ibn al-Labbanah (12th c., b. Denia), "Al-Mu'Tamid and His Family Go into Exile," in Cola Franzen, trans., *Poems of Arab Andalusia* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1989), pp. 88-89.

Their cargo of broken hearts. Adapted from Ibn al-Labbanah (12th c., b. Denia), trans. Sahar Omar Taha Al Nima © 2017, modified slightly by HR. For a translation of the whole poem, see Al-Mu'Tamid and His Family Go into Exile," in Cola Franzen, trans., *Poems of Arab Andalusia* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1989), pp. 88-89.

Were meant to wander. Adapted from Samuel the Prince, "Mezimotai Tekala'nah Levavi," trans. Gideon Weisz. For the whole poem, see "The Wanderer," in Leon J. Weinberger, trans., *Jewish Prince in Moslem Spain: Selected Poems of Samuel Ibn Nagrela* (University, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1973), p. 21.

In a pillar of perfumed smoke. See Song of Songs 3:6.

García Lorca says I'm dead and buried. Federico García Lorca (1896-1936, b. Fuente Vaqueros). Spanish poet, playwright, dramatist, folklorist, composer, and artist, murdered August 19, 1936, by the fascists during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). Reference to his poem "Grafico de la Petenera" ("Sketch of the Petenera"), in Federico García Lorca, *Poem of the Deep Song/Poema del Cante Jondo*, trans. Carlos Bauer, (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1987), pp. 56-71.

Postamble

near Taos. Taos is a historic city north of Santa Fe, New Mexico, in the United States. The poem is loosely a qasida, a poetic form originating in pre-Islamic North Africa that became popular with Arab writers and also Jewish ones.

like the hebrew letter *yod*. The *yod* (י) bears some resemblance to a crescent moon. This image appears also in Samuel Hanagid, "Ehe Kofer l'Ofar" ("Invitation"), in T. Carmi, ed., *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse* (New York: Penguin, 1981), p. 298.

mixing with the *penitentes*. A brotherhood active in New Mexico, with Spanish and Italian roots, whose members engage in, among other, perhaps more ordinary activities, self-flagellation.

display their certificates/from the spanish government. In 2013 Spain offered citizenship to Jews who could prove Spanish or Portuguese ancestry. This meant that crypto-Jews—Jews whose Jewish origins had been hidden—could apply for Spanish citizenship.

some sell *challah*. Egg bread eaten by Jews on the Sabbath, religious holidays, and other occasions. In 2016 I met a woman selling *challah* in the Saturday market in Taos. Her mother was Jewish, and her father was Native American.

dreaming under a pinyon pine. The pine that is the source of pine nuts.

toca strappado/porto garrote. Torture methods or devices, associated with medieval Spain but sometimes with contemporary associations. *Toca* is water torture. *Garrote* is torture and killing by crushing the neck. *Porto* is torture on

a device with sharp rungs. *Strappado* (or *strapado*) is torture in which the victim is suspended by his or her wrists tied together in back.

Map

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

This is a very basic list of resources in English or in bilingual editions. More resources can be found on the Internet and in your library catalogue.

History

- Ashtor, Eliyahu. *The Jews of Moslem Spain*. Three vols. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1973.
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- Gopnik, Adam. "Inquiring Minds: The Spanish Inquisition revisited." *The New Yorker*, January 16, 2012. www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/01/16/inquiring-minds. A good review that takes to task some of the revisionist books on the Inquisition.
- Gorsky, Jeffrey. *Exiles in Sefarad: The Jewish Millennium in Spain*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2015.
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- www.nytimes.com/books/98/04/19/reviews/980419.19kagent.html. A review of Henry Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998, an earlier edition of one of the books reviewed in the Gopnik article cited above.

Biography

- "Abraham Senior." www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/13423-senior-abraham. Also: www.geni.com/people/D-Abraham-ben-Eliyahu-Senior-Coronel/6000000004988963168.
- "Abraham Zacut(o)." www.zacuto.org.
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- "Luis de (Fray) León." www.newadvent.org/cathen/09177b.htm.
- Nuland, Sherwin B. *Maimonides*. New York: Schocken Books, 2005.
- Scheindlin, Raymond P. *Song of the Distant Dove: Judah Halevi's Pilgrimage*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- "St John of the Cross." www.johnofthecross.com/a-biography-of-st.-john-of-the-cross.htm.

Philosophy, Mysticism, Theology, and Astrology

- Al-Ghazzali, Abu Hamid Muhammad. *The Alchemy of Happiness*. Claud Field, trans., revised and

- annotated by Elton L. Daniel. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1991. Also, original edition of this translation at www.sacred-texts.com/isl/tah/.
- "Aristotle." plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle/.
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Music and Dance

Fado

Fados. Film about the Portuguese song form *fado*, by prominent Spanish director Carlos Saura (2007), who also filmed *Flamenco*, *Sevillanas*, and the flamenco trilogy described in the *Flamenco* section just below.

Flamenco

Flamenco. Film by Carlos Saura (1995). www.youtube.com/watch?v=plRZarZj6JE.

"Flamenco." www.andalucia.com/flamenco/history.htm.

Flamenco trilogy: *Bodas de sangre* (*Blood Wedding*) (1981) (based on the play of the same name by

Federico García Lorca), *Carmen* (1983), and *El Amor brujo* (*Love Bewitched*) (1986). Films by Spanish director Carlos Saura. Whether or not you are able to go to Spain to listen to or watch or learn about flamenco music, dance, and culture, watch these and the other Saura films, described below.

Lorca, Federico García. *Poem of the Deep Song/Poema del Cante Jondo*. Carlos Bauer, trans. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1987.

Machado y Alvarez, Antonio. *Cantes Flamencos y Cantares*. Madrid: Colección Austral, 1998. Collection of Spanish poems some of which inspired poems in *Souls in the Garden*. This Machado is also known as Demofilo and is not the same as the well-known modern Spanish poet Antonio Machado.

Maurer, Christopher, ed. and trans. *Federico García Lorca: In Search of Duende*. New York: New Directions, 1998.

Sevillanas. Film by Carlos Saura (1992). This film, focusing on the music/dance/culture of Seville, in particular the genre of song and dance called sevillanas, is even better than *Flamenco*, described above.

Cantigas de Santa Maria

"Alfonso X el Sabio - Cantigas Santa Maria (1221-1284)." [.youtube.com/watch?v=nj5Bc8zwwU0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nj5Bc8zwwU0).

Cantigas de Santa Maria for Singers. www.cantigasdesantamaria.com.

The Cantigas de Santa Maria. www.pbm.com/~lindahl/cantigas/.

The Oxford *Cantigas de Santa Maria* Database. csm.mml.ox.ac.uk/?p=intro.

Art

"El Greco." www.el-greco-foundation.org.

Exhibit

Musica y Poesia del sur de Al-Andalus: Music and Poetry from the South of Al-Andalus. Reales Alcazres de Sevilla. April 5-July 15, 1995. Exhibit catalogue in Spanish, English, and French, with general text and photographs.

Travel, Tourism, Flights of Fancy

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Alvarez, Ana Maria Lopez, Ricardo Izquierdo Benito, and Santiago Palomero Plaza. *A Guide to Jewish Toledo*. Toledo, Spain: Codex Ediciones, 1990.

Calvino, Italo. *Invisible Cities*. San Diego and New York: Harcourt Brace, 1974. William Weaver, trans. The conceit: Marco Polo has visited many wondrous cities and describes these to Kublai Khan.

Caminos de Sefarad. www.redjuderias.org/rasgo/index.php?lang=en. Your guide to travel in "Jewish Spain."

The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela: Travels in the Middle Ages. Marcus Nathan Adler, ed. and trans. Various reprints and free online editions, for example, *The Travels of Benjamin of Tudela*, www.sacred-texts.com/jud/mhl/mhl20.htm.

Red Juderias de Espana Caminos de Sefarad (Spanish Jewish Network Routes of Sefarad). Alfonso Martinez, ed.; text by Pancraccio Celdran Gomariz. Nicely illustrated bilingual coffee-table book that includes or supplements the information on the Web site Caminos de Sefarad two notes up.

"The Travels of Ibn Battuta: A Virtual Tour." orias.berkeley.edu/resources-teachers/travels-ibn-battuta. Fourteenth-century Muslim traveler Muhammad Ibn Battuta.

The Travels of Marco Polo. Many free editions online, for example, archive.org/stream/marcopolo00polouoft/marcopolo00polouoft_djvu.txt. There are a number of print editions, too.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Henry Rasof has degrees in music, creative writing, and Jewish studies. He has been writing poetry since 1964 and giving readings and publishing his work since 1968. After working in book publishing for thirty years, He taught composition at several community colleges and creative nonfiction at the University of Denver. He also has volunteer taught "Jewish" creative writing at the (now-defunct) Boulder Jewish Day School and learn-and-do workshops on Jewish incantation bowls, ethical wills, teshuvah, and Tishah b'Av and its poetry. In addition, he has edited literary magazines and a poetry chapbook series.

His poems have appeared in print, audio, and online publications, including *Black Box*, *Jewish Currents*, *Kansas Quarterly*, *Midstream*, *Numinous*, *Partisan Review*, and *Poetica*, and he has published three other books: *The House* (2009), consisting of the eponymous prose poem; *Chance Music: Prose Poems 1974 to 1982* (2012); and *Here I Seek You: Jewish Poems for Shabbat, Holy Days, and Everyday* (2016), a collection of liturgical poems.

In addition, he has two Web sites. One is www.medievalhebrewpoetry.org, which includes an anthology of other writers' English translations of medieval Hebrew poets like Yehudah Halevi; articles and original essays; a bibliography; photographs; and other relevant information. The other is www.henryrasof.com, which includes most of the poetry and prose he has written since 1964.

Henry Rasof lives in Colorado and somewhat frequently travels overseas. He has been to India three times and Japan twice, in addition to Latin America, Southeast Asia, Europe, and Israel. The poems in this book were inspired by trips to Spain in 2000 and 2010.