

# **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**

**2018**

**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](http://www.henryrasof.com)

[www.medievalhebrewpoetry.org](http://www.medievalhebrewpoetry.org)

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for my parents, grandparents,  
friends, and special friend  
Dina von Zweck

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

and for the great poet  
Federico García Lorca  
for the inspiration of his deep songs

may their memory be a blessing  
and may our lightened  
and enlightened souls  
all meet again one day  
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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## 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, Jerez, 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.

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 I am most familiar with and also the places and monuments 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](http://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. But before we go, I need to confess that I have grown fond of and perhaps overly attached to my subjects and feel I want to visit with them every day, even if it's just to change a comma in a poem.

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And, last but not least—in fact, most important of all—the subjects of the poems, whether or not they ever existed, for inspiring and allowing me to speak in their voices, which has been a most humbling experience.

## WHO ARE THE SOULS IN THE GARDEN?

*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

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 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

Cantaores 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 up in 1305 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 a sojourn in the Divine  
We can now be descending*

*Or how our soul ever entered  
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]**

**Blank**



## 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 may be available on [www.henryrasof.com](http://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 the notes to the first set of **Epigraphs** for more information.

### Frontispiece

The picture is of the Jardin de Moshé de León, in Ávila, Spain, the garden dedicated to the *kabbalist* Rabbi Moses de León, described in the notes to the **Epigraphs**. Inscribed on top of the metal pedestal is a passage from the *Zohar* (the *Book of Splendor*) 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 Jardin de Moshé de León, in Ávila. 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) (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](http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/plotenn/enn066.htm). Philosopher influenced by Plato, who in turn influenced the medieval and Renaissance Jewish, Christian, and Muslim philosophers and mystics.

### Preamble

About the Dutch painter Hieronymous 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](http://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, flamenco is 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. Although scholars now have challenged or discarded the concept of conviviality and tolerance, I believe that the other characteristics of the period still stand.

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*, trans. Micha Odenheimer, (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.

*the 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 (see **FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION** for full citation), p. 748.

### 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 (see **FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION** for full citation), pp. 745–754.

### Maps (t/k)

#### Epigraph

Is. 4:5.

#### Second Half-Title

The epigraph is the title and first line of "Everything That Breathes Praises You," in Henry Rasof, *Here I Seek You: Jewish Poems for Shabbat, Holy Days, and Everyday* (Louisville, CO: Temescal Canyon Press, 2016), p. 4.

### Dialogue with the Jew of Málaga

The Jew of Málaga is Rabbi Solomon Ibn Gabirol (1021/2–ca. 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.

Your rabbinic poet–philosopher Ibn Gabirol. Ibn Gabirol was a rabbi, a Jewish religious teacher.

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, Jewish religious 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 the modern 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), 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](http://cso.org/uploadedFiles/1_Tickets_and_Events/Program_Notes/ProgramNotes_Rapsodie_Espagnole.pdf), p. 12). See fourth 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—Jewish religious 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, Jewish religious 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-Naḡrīlah.

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), Jewish 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 Baghdadah," *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 she probably lived in southern Spain 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, Jewish religious 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. 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 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 Jewish religious 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/](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/solomon-ibn-gabirol/)). See also "I turned out to be Avicbron," the third-to-last note below. 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, (see **Further Reading: Philosophy, Mysticism, Theology, and Astrology** for full citation), pp. 745-748.

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 Jewish religious 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 (see **FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION** for full citation), p. 789.

Ibn Gabirol says. See first note.

I turned out to be Avicebron. In the nineteenth century scholars discovered that Avicebron was the Latinized name of Rabbi Solomon (Shlomo) Ibn Gabirol (1021/2–ca. 1054/58/70, b. Málaga). Also sometimes written Avicebrol. 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 *Musnad Ahmad*, one of the six canonical collections of Sunni *hadith*. 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), in Christopher Maurer, ed. and trans., *Federico Garcia 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, an important city in southern Spain, 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](http://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—or perhaps not so oddly, given a history of some Jewish converts becoming rabidly anti-Jewish.

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 [leyendasde Sevilla.blogspot.com/2011/01/historia-de-la-susona-la-ferrosa-fembra.html](http://leyendasde Sevilla.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 references treat legend as fact, so Susona's attitude reflects the differences of opinion. *Ferosa* 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 two notes down. 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 along with other converted Jews, 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*—a Spanish Jew 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](http://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](http://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, Jewish religious 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 Jewish religious 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. Practitioners of *kabbalah*, the main stream of Jewish mysticism.

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, unsurprisingly, 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, or 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 mystical 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 of Gratz College (though not referring specifically to mystical practices from medieval Spain), 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 such places today 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](http://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, formerly 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 (a Jewish house of worship), was then a church, and is now a museum. 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](http://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](http://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 southwest of the Spanish capital, Madrid, 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](http://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 acronym, Ramban or the Ramban—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](http://lyricstranslate.com/en/foi-deus-it-was-god.html)). See first note.

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, scholars of the Talmud—Jewish religious 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. See second note.

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-portugues-portuguese-fado.html](http://lyricstranslate.com/en/fado-portugues-portuguese-fado.html)). See first note.

*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](http://lyricstranslate.com/en/que-deus-me-perdoe-may-god-forgive-me.html-1)). See first note.

## **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](http://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](http://lyricstranslate.com/en/lágrima-tear.html-0)). See first note.

## **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](http://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* (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 apparent 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 at [www.medievalhebrewpoetry.org/poets/abraham-ibn-ezra/#garment](http://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/](http://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, and known as the Jewish Marco Polo, 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 a statement like "an eye for an eye" cannot be taken literally: If a one-eyed man deprives a fully sighted man of one of his eyes, punishing the first man by depriving him of his own good idea would deprive him of his ability to make a living, contradicting another injunction. See also previous and first notes.

### **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), Jewish 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* (plural of *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 with a rich Jewish history, northwest of the Spanish capital, Madrid, in northcentral Spain,

*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 Martín. 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), an 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 previous and first notes. Guadalajara is a city northeast of the 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 based on this book is worth a look; be prepared for a surrealistic trip!

### **Mrs Moses de León:**

#### **From Her "Diary of a Kabbalist's Wife"**

Mrs Moses de León. 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, (see **FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION** for full citation), pp. 13–18.

[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 (see **FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION** for full citation), p. 13. 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 [www.zacuto.org](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 Jardin 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.

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 *hekhalot* 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](http://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 speak 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 Jardin 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*), which 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 also first 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 *hekhalot* literature (*hekhalot* = 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 interprets 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 interprets 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*, Spanish-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](http://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 third note).

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* was a Spanish 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. A striking image in a painting of St Teresa and St John. See third note.



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 third note.

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 the posthumous contribution of St Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582, b. in or near Ávila) 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 (see first note)

### **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 motifs.

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 Spanish 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](http://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](http://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 that 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 is called the 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](http://sacred-texts.com/cla/plotenn/enn400.htm) and other translations). ([sacred-texts.com/cla/plotenn/enn400.htm](http://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](http://www.sacred-destinations.com/spain/avila-convento-santa-teresa).

A spear in her heart. A painting depicts St Teresa's vision of herself with a spear in her heart.

St John of the Cross levitating. St John of the Cross (1542–1591, b. Fontiveros) was 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. A painting depicts St Teresa watching St John levitating.

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 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](http://sephardicstudies.org/decreed.html)). See also third-to-last note.

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 Jewish (and later on, Christian as well) 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 (or Isabel) and Ferdinand (or Ferdinand) 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 Spanish Jews who converted voluntarily or under duress or forcibly. 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), Jewish 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. Avner Tomaschoff, trans., *Abarbanel on the Torah: Selected Themes* (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), Jewish religious teacher and community leader converted to Christianity by Queen Isabella (also Isabel) herself. Also spelled Abraham Senear and sometimes written 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.* See p. 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, Jewish religious 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. Avner Tomaschoff, trans. *Abaranel on the Torah: Selected Themes*. (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) Jewish courtier, financier, biblical commentator. See previous poem.

*If it's to discuss the edict*. See previous 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. Dénia). 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. A little more on this Spanish-Muslim poet can be found at [https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/ibn-al-labbana-SIM\\_3267](https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/ibn-al-labbana-SIM_3267).

*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 (Isabel) and Ferdinand (Fernando) tried to have Don Isaac's son kidnapped to "persuade" him to stay in Spain after the Edict of Expulsion would force Abravanel to leave unless he converted. See fifth note.

*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), pp. 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, "Hatakhish 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 Saturday evening.

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 Saturday evening 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*, vol. 1, trans. Pascual de Gayangos (New York: Johnson Reprint, 1964), p. 160.

*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](http://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. Alcála 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 (and 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.

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 from 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 (Jewish religious teacher), 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 northeast of the Spanish 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 second note.

Soon the philosopher Maimonides. (1138–1204, b. Córdoba) Latinized name of Rabbi Moses (or Moshe) ben Maimon—religious leader and teacher, 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 religion 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 did not 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 Jewish religious teacher (rabbi), poet, philosopher, astrologer, and biblical commentator.

Solomon Ibn Gabirol. (1021/2–ca. 1054/58/70, b. Málaga). Jewish religious teacher (rabbi), 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 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) lived.

No matter . . . Toledo. City about 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 (at least in Spain). The poem is modeled after his poem that 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 Solomon Ibn Gabirol (1021/2–ca. 1054/58/70, b. Málaga), Jewish religious teacher (rabbi), 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 Ex. 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 *ofers*. *Ofers* are *sakis*. See previous note.

Ornamental foods . . . like a courtier mourning after [*mourning* is a homonym of *morning*]. In this case the courtier refers 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. (1021/2–ca. 1054/58/70, b. Málaga) The great Jewish religious scholar (rabbi), poet, and philosopher. There is a statue of him in Málaga, a southeastern Spanish coastal city.

Yehudah Halevi in Tudela. (1075–1141, b. Tudela or Toledo). Jewish religious teacher (rabbi) and great poet and philosopher. Plaques and a plaza dedicated to him can be found in Tudela, a city northeast of the Spanish capital, Madrid, and a street in Córdoba in southern Spain is named after him.

Moses Ibn Ezra in Toledo. (1055–1135, b. Granada). Jewish religious scholar (rabbi), 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, a city south-by-southwest of the Spanish capital, Madrid. See [www.medievalhebrewpoetry.org/poets/moses-ibn-ezra/](http://www.medievalhebrewpoetry.org/poets/moses-ibn-ezra/).

Samuel the Prince in Granada. Shmuel Hanagid (993–1056, b. Córdoba) Jewish religious teacher (rabbi), poet, patron, scholar, vizier to the Muslim ruler of the important southern Spanish city of Granada, commander of the military, and perhaps the most prominent Jew of his time (at least in Spain). 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 still is spoken and written 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. Decter, *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. Decter, *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. Decter, *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 rabbi-poet-philosopher 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, and 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. Alcála 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 *Jelaluddin 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 García Lorca (see next note). Gypsies originated in—yes—Rajasthan, in North India. *Andalusian past* refers to Al-Andalus (Andalusia), 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. García 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 García 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 García 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 other Jewish religious 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 the Jewish holiday of Purim), and in the middle ages and Renaissance, riddles became an important part of Jewish wedding ceremonies.

**1** Isabella (also Isabel) 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. (1250–1305, probably b. León) Jewish religious teacher (rabbi), 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 Rabbi Moses ben Nahman (Ramban, or the Ramban, after his acronym, RaMBaN, 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](http://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. NOTE FLAMENCO ROM.

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 Saturday evening.

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. Dénia), "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. A little more on this Spanish-Muslim poet can be found at [https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/ibn-al-labbana-SIM\\_3267](https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/ibn-al-labbana-SIM_3267).

Their cargo of broken hearts. Adapted from Ibn al-Labbanah (12th c., b. Dénia), 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. See previous note for a source of more information on this poet.

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. (Ibn Nagrela is Samuel the Prince, Shmuel Hanagid).

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 Kofér l'Ofer" ("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.

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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](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plRZarZj6JE). "Flamenco." [www.andalucia.com/flamenco/history.htm](http://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](http://www.cantigasdesantamaria.com).

The Cantigas de Santa Maria. [www.pbm.com/~lindahl/cantigas/](http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/cantigas/).

The Oxford *Cantigas de Santa Maria* Database. [csm.mml.ox.ac.uk/?p=intro](http://csm.mml.ox.ac.uk/?p=intro).

### **Art**

"El Greco." [www.el-greco-foundation.org](http://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**

*The Adventures of Ibn Battuta, a Muslim Traveler of the Fourteenth Century*. Ross E. Dunn, trans. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989.

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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://archive.org/stream/marcopolo00polouoft/marcopolo00polouoft_djvu.txt). There are a number of  
print editions, too.

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- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. [www.plato.stanford.edu](http://www.plato.stanford.edu).
- [www.jewishencyclopedia.com](http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com). General information on a wide range of topics of Jewish interest.
- [www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org). General information on a wide range of topics of Jewish interest.
- [www.medievaleuropeonline.com/general.html](http://www.medievaleuropeonline.com/general.html). Medieval Europe.
- [www.myjewishlearning.com](http://www.myjewishlearning.com). General information on a wide range of topics of Jewish interest.

## 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](http://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](http://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.