

MEDIEVAL RELIGIOUS POETRY

A

MY HEART IS IN THE EAST

My heart is in the east, and I in the uttermost west –
How can I find savour in food? How shall it
 be sweet to me?
How shall I render my vows and my bonds,
 while yet
Zion lieth beneath the letter of Edom, and I in
 Arab chains?
A light thing would it seem to me to leave all
 the good things of Spain –
Seeing how precious in mine eyes to behold the
 dust of the desolate sanctuary.

Judah Halevi

Pour over me your pleasure
 As once you poured your rage.
Must my sin between us
 Stand from age to age?
How long until you join me?
 Must I wait in vain?

You who dwelt on Cherubs'
 Wings, in Temple spread,
Made me slave to strangers,
 Who was your garden bed,
Savior, look from heaven,
 To save my throngs again.

Judah Halevi

To you the stars of morning sing.
 Because their lights from Your lights spring.
Like them the angels on their watches
 Night and day extol their King.
Your holy people follows them:
 Each dawn their songs from Your house ring.

Judah Halevi

Submit to God, my cerebrating soul,
 And run to worship Him in holy dread.
To your true world devote your nights and days –
 Why, why so bent on chasing empty breath?

For you, like God, have everlasting life.
 And he is hidden just as you are hid:
And is your God immaculate and pure?
 You too are pure, you too are innocent.
The Mighty One bears the heavens in His arm.
 Just as you bear the mortal, speechless clay.

My soul, greet God, your Rock, with gifts of praise,
 For nothing has He put on earth like you.
My body, bless your Rock for evermore,
 To Whom the soul of All sings ever praise.

Solomon Iben Gabriel

Before I came to be, You did select me.
 And while Your breath is in me You protect me.
Where can I stand steady if You shake me?
 How can I find my way if You deflect me?
What can I say? – My very thoughts are Yours.
 Whatever can I do if You neglect me?
I come to You in time of favor – hear me!
 Shield me with Your grace, do not reject me.
Rouse me at dawn to come into Your temple,
 To bless Your great and holy name direct me.

Judah Halevi

SECULAR POETRY OF THE MIDDLE AGES

If you're like me, and want to pour the wine of joy,
 Hear what I have to say.
 I'll teach you pleasure's way, through you don't want to hear.
 You friend of sighs and pain.
 Five things there are that fill the hearts of men with joy,
 And put my grief to flight:
 A pretty girl, a garden, wine, the water's rush
 In a canal, and song.

Samuel the Nagid

Like Amnon sick am I, so call Tamar
 And tell her one who loves her is snared by death.
 Quick, friends, companions, bring her here to me.
 The only thing I ask of you is this:
 Adorn her head with jewels, bedeck her well.
 And send along with her a cup of wine.
 If she would pour for me she might put out
 The burning pain wasting my throbbing flesh.

Solomon Ibn Gabriel

Caress a lovely woman's breast by night,
 And kiss some beauty's lips by morning light.

Silence those who criticize you, those
 Officious talkers. Take advice from me:
 With beauty's children only can we live.
 Kidnapped were they from Paradise to gall
 The living: living men are lovers of all.

Immerse your heart in pleasure and in joy.
 And by the bank a bottle drink of wine.
 Enjoy the swallow's chirp and viol's whine.
 Laugh, dance, and stamp your feet upon the floor!
 Get drunk, and knock at dawn on some girl's door.

This is the joy of life, so take your due.
 You too deserve a portion of the Ram
 Of Consecration, like your people's chiefs.
 To suck the juice of lips do not be shy,
 But take what's rightly yours – the breast and thigh!

Moses Ibn Ezra

Bear my greetings, mixed with tears,
 Mountains, hills – whoever hears –
 To ten lovely fingernails
 Painted with blood from my entrails;
 To eyes mascaraed with black dye
 From the pupil of my eye.
 Though she'll never call me dear.
 Maybe she'll pity me for my tear.

Judah Halevi

Ofra does her laundry with my tears
 And spreads it out before her beauty's rays.
 With my two eyes she needs no flowing well;
 Nor sun needs she: Her face provides the blaze.

Judah Halevi