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THE POETIC DRAMAS OF YAAKOV KAHAN

by

Daniel Lee Kaplan

Thesis submitted in partial
fulfillment of requirements
for Ordination.

Hebrew Union College-
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DIGEST

Despite the fact that Yaakov Kahan is one of the most prolific writers in the field of modern Hebrew literature, very little has been written about his works, especially his poetic dramas. It was his play In Luz, to which my father introduced me, that prompted me to pursue the field of his poetic dramas as the topic for my thesis.

Kahan's poetic dramas may be divided into two main categories: 1) the phantasies, whose scope covers time from the era of the Nephilim to modern Israel and 2) the plays that deal with characters of Biblical times. In these Kahan draws upon not only the Bible, but from the Talmud, the Midrash, and general and Jewish history and literature. Being quite conscious of integrity in art, Kahan works out of his sources rather than reshape them to suit his own purposes.

Endowed with a fertile imagination and a sensitive soul, Kahan often rises to great poetic heights. Yet this sensitive soul is frequently troubled by the problems which face mankind and the evil things men do. When so confronted, his poetry becomes powerful and disarming, forcing us to think and meditate about the basic problems of living. He discusses the concepts of love (The Solomon Trilogy), martyrdom (In the Path of Suffering), ethics (Jephthah), immortality (The Pyramids) -- to give but a few examples. To these profound questions Kahan has no "pat" answers, but we

see throughout his indomitable faith and optimism that man can redeem himself.

Yaakov Kahan must be thought of as a romantic poet -- and playwright. He is a master of the Hebrew language which he uses not to cloud issues, as so many moderns do, but to present in a dramatic fashion the various themes he thinks are significant. A product of both the Jewish and European cultures, Kahan challenges aspects of each, yet always remaining open-minded to see their contributions.

At the age of seventy-seven Yaakov Kahan still continues to create. His words of beauty and meaning hold much in store for the student of modern Hebrew literature.

" ... a poetic work is better insofar as it is incommensurable and inaccessible to the mere understanding ... "

---Goethe---

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PREFACE

Yaakov Kahan is one of the most prolific writers in the field of modern Hebrew literature. Despite this fact, very little has been written about his works, especially his poetic dramas. Joseph Klausner in Hadoar (March 31, 1950) wrote similarly: „כל הסיפורים והמחזות הללו הם יצירות פיוטיות ופרוזאיות ממדרגה ראשונה, שעדיין לא נעשו מחקרים להסביר אותן לקהל קוראיהן..."

It is clear that attention to these writings is long overdue. Therefore, I present in this thesis a partial analysis of this poet's works, limiting myself to his poetic dramas. My approach will be that of taking each individual drama and analyzing it in terms of theme and major characters rather than discuss its literary quality in terms of poetry and style. Using this method I hope that this thesis will make some small contribution to a greater understanding of Yaakov Kahan and to a deeper appreciation of some of his ideas and insights.

In the preparation of this thesis, I am indebted to my father for his suggestion of this topic, his guidance and aid in my study, and for his fine translation of the sections quoted herein.

CHAPTER ONE

A. What is Poetic Drama?

A poetic drama is a play written in verse, with the avowed purpose or hope that it will be presented before an audience. The "closet drama" on the other hand, is primarily intended for individual or group reading and permits the reader to concentrate on the ideas and style without the distractions of scenery, acting, and other devices of stage production which might divert attention from the play itself. Thus, depending on the type of drama, we should expect it to follow certain "rules" of technique in dialogue, in stage setting, in character and plot development.

Although the drama is an ancient art form, it did not appear in Hebrew literature until the latter part of the Renaissance and certainly beginning with M. H. Luzzatto. However, it did not acquire many nor expert protagonists who might have developed it into a popular literary medium.

Modern Hebrew drama is virtually in its infant stage. Indeed, modern Hebrew literature has had little more than a century in which to produce creative writing. Thus, it may be unfair to be as demanding of it as we might be in the case of English or French literature. And because modern Hebrew drama is "new", certain defects in technique and style are evident.

The earliest dramatic works were cast in poetry and

distinguished as either tragedy or comedy. In time, the drama was no longer confined to verse nor was the distinction between the tragic and the comic drama as finely delineated. Often these opposite emotions were combined into what might be called the "romantic" drama.

One of the main problems in literary analysis is defining and distinguishing between the "classical" and the "romantic". H. J. C. Grierson in his essay Classical and Romantic deals with this problem, showing how these terms are now used in a relative manner, and erroneously, he feels.

Following the French critic Bruntière, Grierson defines a work as "classical" when it meets the following criteria: imitation of nature, preoccupation with form and style, concern with national as well as universal themes, and presentation of didactic and moral principles. It can be a product only of an advanced civilization that believes its view of life holds more strongly to the above four principles than the preceding civilization. Its concern is with a balance of matter and form, trying to attain a high degree of worth in both. A literature which simply imitates the ancients one might call "classicist" literature, says Grierson.

Romantic literature lacks this balance even though it may possess beauty and profundity. "Words become symbols not labels, full of colour and suggestion as well as clear, definable meaning, and the rhythms of verse and prose grow more varied and subtle to express subtler if vaguer currents of

thought and feeling." It represents the quest for new refinements and the manifestations of men's dreams. "The great romantic knows that he lives by faith and not by reason."

B. What Type of Poetic Dramatist is Yaakov Kahan?

To label any artist is often not only difficult but unjust. Nevertheless, in order to form a clearer picture of Kahan and his writing, I feel it necessary while realizing the many limitations that become manifest.

The question arises as to whether or not Kahan's dramas were meant for stage production or written merely for literary consumption, that is as "closet drama". Although some of his plays would be impossible to produce, many could be done; his play David was even translated into English for a New York stage production. How many may eventually be enacted is unknown, yet I feel that a number of his dramas could be presented with great success before the public.

Kahan is a master of the Hebrew language. Because of this, even his weakest plays give the reader pleasurable moments. At times one feels that the poet relies too heavily on his ability to use the word, yet at other times it is this same talent which lends power or beauty to his theme. Thus any weakness present in Kahan's writings seldom will be found in this area.

Though one volume of Kahan's writings includes plays written in prose, he is considered chiefly as a poet. Through

this medium he enjoys the company of men such as Frye and Eliot, who also write in verse, but the reader will find Kahan's style much less complex.

Yaakov Kahan is not a writer of comedies. On the other hand, not all his plays are tragedies, though one will find that this type predominates. At first glance this is quite startling since Kahan the man is an optimist whose faith in mankind is deeply rooted. It is, perhaps, his realism, the recognition that life holds both good and evil, and that all too frequently evil conquers good, that invests his dramas with their particular nature. Often his characters find themselves in the existential dilemma, their choice of action usually bringing disaster. But Kahan does not condemn these people, rather does he make us see that no situation is "black or white." His characters seem to say: "If we have done wrong, perhaps you, o future generations, will learn from our mistakes!"

If one accepts Grierson's definition of "classical" and "romantic", then Yaakov Kahan can only be regarded as a romantic poet. His questioning of everything being "black or white", his disatisfaction with the present and hope for the future, and his fantasy-dramas -- all negate the possibility of Kahan being designated as a "classical" poet. Indeed, Kahan may be thought of as a "great romantic (who) knows that he lives by faith and not by reason."

CHAPTER TWO

A. Yaakov Kahan - Some Biographical Data

Yaakov Kahan was born on Rosh Hodesh Tammuz, 5641 (June 28, 1881), in the town of Slutsk, in the province of Minsk. His early childhood was spent in Zgarzh, near Lodz, Poland, where he studied first in a traditional heder and then advanced into a "progressive-type" heder. Here he received the impetus to read on his own and the first book which he read without the aid of a teacher was Mapu's Ahavat Tzion.

The traumatic experience of his mother's death when he was but ten years of age precipitated the birth of his writing career, and his first literary effort was a poem. The creative fire within fed his talent and he began his actual literary career early, writing lyrical poems which were published in leading Hebrew periodicals. The first collection of his poetical works appeared in Warsaw in 1903.

To continue his education, he went to Switzerland and matriculated at the University of Bern, remaining there from 1903 - 1909, when he received the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. His thesis was entitled "A Critique of the Concept of the Genius." During these years, a second collection of his poems was published (Odessa - 1905). A third collection was also published in Odessa in 1913. In 1906, he founded and directed in Bern an organization for the advancement of Hebrew letters, "Ivriah". He continued to engage in these activities

when he moved to Berlin (1910) where he became secretary of the Society for Hebrew Language and Culture.

Though primarily interested in his own literary work, he devoted much of his time to editorial duties for various literary publications. Thus in 1912, he became editor of "Haivri Hehadash" (Warsaw), and served as editor of "Haogen" in 1917. He was editor of the "Shtybel" publications from 1919 to 1923, and from 1919 to 1925 was co-editor with Lahover of "Hatekufah".

With his translation of Goethe's "Iphigenia auf Tauris" into Hebrew in 1920, Kahan embarked on a new phase in his literary career. That same year, he published his own dramas "Hazon Hatishbi" and "Hakedoshim." He returned to the works of Goethe and translated the "Torquato Tasso."

For a time Kahan engaged in Jewish teaching, serving as supervisor of a Hebrew High School in Poland for three years. Subsequently he assumed the duties of lecturer in Hebrew literature at the Institute for Jewish Studies in Warsaw, a position which he retained until 1933.

These pedagogic pursuits left him ample time for writing and editing. He published (1928) a new edition of his lyrical poetry, "Neurim Unedudim." One year later he became editor of the publication "S'neh." He also became a member and served as president of the Hebrew Pen Club in Poland. Warsaw's Jewish community paid him a much deserved honor in 1931 by awarding him their literary prize.

In 1930, he published an edition of his national poetry, "Ben Horaboth". His deep concern and love for a rebuilt Israel led him to become a member of the Central Committee of the Revisionist Zionist Organization and subsequently one of the leaders of the Jewish State party. He visited Palestine in 1932, and was so impressed by what he found that he decided to make it his home. He settled in Palestine in 1934.

His various literary activities were continued in the land of Israel: as editor -- "Hatekufah" (1936), co-editor with Lahover of "Knesset", the annual publication of the Bialik Foundation (1936); as poet -- increasing his prolific output; as recipient of prizes -- receiving the Bialik prize (of Tel Aviv) for his play Leyad Hapyramidot; as president of the Hebrew Pen Club in Israel after the death of Tchernichovsky; and as translator -- this time Goethe's Faust in 1943. Though by this time past sixty, he felt that he still had much to contribute.

In 1950, Kahan initiated the project of publishing his collected works in ten volumes. There are now twelve volumes published with more anticipated. The first volume appeared only a year after he received the literary prize in honor of David Yellin awarded by the city of Jerusalem. Kahan continues to work with unabated vigor, publishing in modern Hebrew pediodicals and adding volume upon volume to his collected works.[1]

[1]General information of the biography of Kahan was secured from the following references: A. Universal Jewish Encyclopedia; B. Ben-Or, History of Modern Hebrew Literature; and C. Toren and Robinson, Our Beautiful Literature From Bialik to the Present.

B. General Observations on His Work

I. Kahan as Lyricist and Romanticist of Nature

Yaakov Kahan fulfills the poetic demand of Verlaine: "Foremost - the music." Not only is his poetry musical in its language and its rhythms but frequently he uses[1] the actual modes of music, as in his symphonic poems. He writes with an ear that is sensitive to the sounds of his poetry, and prefers "strings and wind-instruments to brass", composing chiefly charming and delicate melodies.[2] In the main his language has a classical style.[3]

His early poems are nature poems, "full of color and power."[4] While this may be somewhat exaggerated as applied to his nature poetry, his national poems do, indeed, attain a tremendous fervor and power.

Kahan's love poems picture both physical passion and "pure love". Women are both attractive and repellent, gentle and rapacious, and always an unsolved enigma.[5]

„האשה מקרבת ודוחה גם בימין וגם בשמאל
ולא יחדור לנשמתה אלא מי שיתמכר לה
התמכרות שלמה וחלוטה...״

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[1]Berash, A., "The Poetry of Yaakov Kahan" in D'var Hashavuah. July 19, 1951. (Hebrew)

[2]Goren, N., "Yaakov Kahan" in Hashavuah. March, 23, 1950. (Hebrew)

[3]Berash, A., op. cit., That so many of Kahan's settings are Biblical makes it only natural for him to write in this style.

[4]Klausner, J., "Fifty Years of Creativity of Yaakov Kahan" in Hadoar. March 31, 1950. (Hebrew)

[5]Klausner, ibid.

Much of Yaakov Kahan's poetry may never be "out of date," since the problems with which he deals are universal. He approaches his subject matter with a fresh outlook and tries to penetrate to its inner significance.

II. Kahan as Nationalist Poet

Many regard Jacob Kahan as the national poet of Hebrew literature in our day. For the Diaspora he had only contempt[6] and for the way people either lamented over their lot in it or romanticized it.[7] But he gave voice not only to words of anger, vengeance, and rebuke, but also of encouragement and comfort.[8] He felt himself alienated until he settled in Palestine.[9] Once there, his poetry came to reflect the new life that was being created and he encouraged the builders of Israel in poetry that rang with strength and beauty.[10]

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[6]In last scene of the drama "Ezra and Nehemiah," Nehemiah speaking to Judean "Tories" says: "You slaves! You fawners! Whom think you to deceive? You speak in high-sounding phrases but crawl like worms. The power of conquerors is in your mouth, but your heart is the heart of a rabbit... Why lie to yourselves, when it can not succeed? Speak truly! 'We have sunk too low to be free... We are dependent on the kindness of others... Let us try to win them over -- perhaps they will lift their yoke from us a little... If thus you had spoken, I should have said to you: Go and return to the Golah - there you belong. And don't interfere with us -- who dare to rebuild the land and revive the nation!'"

[7]Klausner, op. cit.

[8]Toren and Robinson, op. cit., biography of Kahan.

[9]Nedava, J., "An Interview with Yaakov Kahan" in Bitzaron. May-June 1956. (Hebrew)

[10]Klausner, J., A Brief History of Modern Hebrew Literature. 1939. (Hebrew)

"...הגאולה לא רק דרוש כי גם דין פלילי..."

"...בדם ואש יהודה נפלה ובדם ואש יהודה תקום..."

Kahan is the spokesman for that Jewish romanticism which influenced the rebuilding of Israel and still continues to influence it.[11]

III. Kahan as Religious Optimist and Universalist

> "... They come and ask me, what was the idea that I meant to embody in Faust. As though I knew it or could express it! 'From Heaven through the world to Hell' -- that's something of an indication. But that's no idea; it's the course of action. Furthermore, the fact that the Devil loses the wager and that a man who never ceases to strive to something higher from the midst of dreadful errors, can be redeemed, that is a very effective notion and it explains a good deal... "[12]

These words of Goethe may have exerted an influence in the life of Yaakov Kahan.[13] For like Goethe, Kahan deals with the world and all it contains, with the fate of men and peoples, past and future, with life and death.[14] Though he sees

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[11] Wallenrod, R., The Literature of Modern Israel, 1956.

[12] Lewisohn, L., Goethe: The Story of a Man, 1949, V. 2, pp. 383-384. A quote of Goethe.

[13] In Nedara's conversation (op. cit.) with Kahan, one feels that the poet admits to no great literary influence. However, in a similar interview between Kahan and Zalman Yebahi (Hashavuah, March 23, 1950) we see quite the opposite. Goethe stands out before Kahan as a master of style whose words are filled with profundity as well as pain, hope, and beauty. There seems to be little doubt of Goethe's influence upon Yaakov Kahan.

[14] Berash, op. cit.

only too clearly the sorrowful state of man, he retains his faith in man's potential greatness and believes that ultimately good will triumph over evil. Man can and will be redeemed.[15]

Perhaps the greatest expression of Kahan's faith in man in his epic poem "Ari-el". In this poem there is a "Song to the Small Lives" -- to farmers, workers, sailors, shepherds, to the mother who cares for her child and keeps her two-room apartment clean, etc. In their simplicity and suffering these unsung heroes are great people in the eyes of Kahan. They are the foundation upon which the structure of Man's spiritual welfare can be erected. But this is not all. Science has created in recent years unbelievable weapons of destruction, and yet through its discoveries it has conquered many diseases and lengthened the span of man's life. Perhaps through science, therefore, man may find the key to the riddle of his existence ...[16]

"... I see more and more," Goethe said, "that poetry is a universal possession of mankind and manifests itself in all ages in hundreds and hundreds of people. One does a little

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[15] Wallenrod, op. cit.

[16] Klausner, Hadoar, op. cit. „העיקר: לשאוף למעלה... לגדלות ולהתעלות. לא להתייאש ולא למאוס בחיים מפני שקיים המוות. שאיפה לגדלות בלא לבוז לקטנות שמקרבות את שירת הגדולות. באחת: לחייב את החיים ולא לשלול אותם. להתעלות ולהתרומם ברוח הגוף ובעוז הנפש כאחד. חיוב-החיים כולו: אהבת את בני-האדם כולם לדכא כל רע, ולהאמין בטובה, באלהים, בעדן ובתיקון הגדול של האנושיות."

better than another and so remains visible a little longer. That is all... I am fond of seeing what other nations are doing and I advise everybody to do the same. National literatures are no longer so significant in themselves; the epoch of world literature has arisen and it behooves each of us to promote its development... "[17]

Goethe achieved this universalism in spite of his Germanic training and experience. Kahan comes to it more naturally, for this is part of Jewish tradition. Jewish nationalism was from the very beginning set against the backdrop of universal history. "In the beginning... the heaven and the earth"... "These are the generations of man."...

The restricted and circumscribed life of the East European ghetto excluded the Jew from the developing political and economic as well as scientific and cultural activities of the nineteenth century. It had also alienated him from nature, including much of his own physical nature, so that he became a "book-worm" or a mystic. Bialik exposed these weaknesses and summoned his generation to become men again. Tchernichovsky extolled the beauties of physical might and power which he found in Hellenic culture. Both waged war against the Jewish realities. Yaakov Kahan seems to take for granted that these great "battles" are really skirmishes that were already won or soon will be won. Jews need but return

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[17]Lewisohn, op. cit., p. 382.

to the ancestral homeland and they will renew themselves and their culture.

Perhaps this is the reason why Yaakov Kahan has chosen so many Biblical themes for his dramas. Jephthah or Hosea, David, Solomon, Elijah -- are all figures in Jewish history but the struggles in which they engaged and the spiritual dilemmas which confronted them were and are of universal significance.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PHANTASIES

In a series of dramas which Yaakov Kahan calls phantasies, he draws upon sources from the Bible, the Talmud, the Midrash, and general and Jewish history. All these phantasies, except for the Song of Kinneret, are to be found in Volume Four of Kahan's collected works. They are: The Nephilim, David-King of Israel, In the Path of Suffering, The Pyramids, and In Luz. They deal with the internal struggles of man as well as with the many external conflicts he encounters. We see throughout these plays Kahan's critique of men who, nontheless, do not diminish his indomitable faith in man. Though pain and evil exist in abundance, Kahan feels that one must live and hope. Rather than "while there's life there's hope", Kahan seems to say, "while there's hope there's life!"

THE NEPHILIM (1939)

This drama might well be entitled "Conflict" for there is hardly a scene without some conflict, internal within the hearts of the characters themselves or external between warring brothers, jealous super-men and others. The theme for this drama was taken from a few sentences in Genesis[1] which speak of the Nephilim, of the violence (on the earth) and the universal flood which it brought as a consequence, from which only Noah and his family were saved.

There are three main characters in this drama: two Nephilim, Aza-el and Uzah, and the lovely daughter of Lemech, Naamah. She plays the role of a pre-grecian Helen of Troy. Her brother Tuval-Cain is leader of the farmers who periodically raid the flocks of the shepherds led by his half-brother, Yaval. Tuval-Cain has learned the art of metallurgy and thus has forged more efficient war instruments. Yuval, Naamah's other half-brother is deeply distressed by this war of brothers and remains aloof from the din of battle, singing his songs

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[1]Genesis 6:4-8 "The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men that were of old, the men of renown. The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, 'I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground, man and beast and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.' But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord."

and dreaming of peace. Yet he too has no peace, for he is possessed by a deep and unrequited love for his half-sister, Naamah -- as indeed are all the men who behold her.

Nor are the Nephilim immune to her incomparable beauty. Aza-el is the first to succumb upon meeting her in the mountains. In his favor is the fact that Naamah is moved to reciprocate his love. However, at their first meeting, the wild and fearless Uzah appears and as soon as he sees her, he claims her for himself. Aza-el rejects this demand and turns Naamah over for "safe keeping" to her brother Tuval-Cain. Uzah, thwarted for the first time in his life from satisfying his immediate desire, seeks revenge.

An opportunity presents itself shortly when he meets Yaval, who likewise seeks revenge from Tuval-Cain and the farmers. Their plot is successfully launched during the celebration of the holiday dedicated to the worship of the sun by Tuval-Cain and his men when they are feasting upon the very sheep stolen from Yaval's men. The farmers' fields are set afire and while they hasten to save what they can, Aza-el also leaves Naamah, to help. Yaval and his men appear and take Naamah as a prize of war for Uzah, their protector.

Uzah brings her to his cave, where his overtures to love are rejected. He takes her by force and then leaves her for awhile, stationing two guards at the entrance to guard her and giving her a weapon to protect herself -- if need be, even from the guards. She connives to escape by enticing one

guard to kill the other with the promise of her favors as his reward. This done, like the female spider she kills him and escapes. The experiences of the day have corrupted her and now she is driven by only one consuming desire -- to lord it over all men and to make them crawl before her regal power. Her lovely appearance seems to remain unblemished. She meets Ah-riman, master of the Nether-world, whom she accompanies to his domain.

Meanwhile Tuval-Cain is determined to make this a war to the finish but some of his own men turn against him, and one shoots an arrow which kills him. Aza-el, standing by his side, believes the arrow was meant for him. Nevertheless, he, too, sees war as fruitless and tells the people to return to their homes and to live in peace. He then goes off to search for his beloved Naamah.

He comes upon Noah and his family engaged in building the Ark. Aza-el charges Noah with being a naive dreamer, for how can man improve what God, Himself, has made so poorly. He leaves and meets Yuval and both travel together until they come upon the domain of Ah-riman where they find Naamah, enthroned as mistress of the Nether-world.

Suddenly the rains come and all go off in every direction, Aza-el and Naamah following Ahriman into a cave. Here Ahriman falls into the yawning abyss that opens beneath him. Feelings of claustrophobia impel Aza-el to seek the outside. As he prepares to seek the highest peak, Naamah expires in

his arms.

Uzah appears out of the dark waves, still rebellious and cynical. Then he sees the ark of Noah floating in the distance and he decides to save himself by swimming to its promise of safety. A sea monster overtakes and devours him. Aza-el remains perched on top of the last unsubmerged peak until the rising waters engulf him too. His final words sound some hope for a continuation of life -- if not for a better and brighter future.

The Nephilim is one of Kahan's finest dramas, not merely because of his use of timeless themes but because of the manner in which he presents them. The love triangle, the rivalry between two different economic societies, even the psychological revelations of man's thoughts and feelings have been presented time and again before Kahan. The greatness of this poetic drama lies in the author's ability to express the themes in a language appropriate to them and in a convincing, if imaginary, setting.

It was not chance which moved Kahan to select the generation of the flood as the setting. It requires but little imagination to draw an analogy to our own times when we may yet be submerged under the rains of Hydrogen and Cobalt bombs and intercontinental missiles. Noah's generation refused to believe him. We, too, run the risk of becoming a generation that made the great refusal.

Basically the problem with which Kahan deals is the duality within man. The Psalmist (Psalm 8:4-5) expressed it

very simply, "What is man that Thou are mindful of him and the son of man that Thou dost care for him? Yet Thou hast made him little less than the angels and hast crowned him with glory and honor." Why is man who has been endowed with such tremendously creative powers also torn by such demonic and destructive drives?

The protagonist of this unending tragic conflict within the soul of man is Aza-el. In the opening scene when an old man, a woman and a young boy bring him gifts, this duality is expressed. He accepts his position as a god to whom all must bring their offerings. And yet when they apologize for the smallness and modesty of their gifts, the old man for the fruit, the woman for something that she has spun as a little rug, and the young boy for the dove that he has captured, Aza-el says that the old man's blessing is even greater than the gift-offering, the old lady's thought will be a kind remembrance to him and as for the dove, he insists on sending it free, so that it may soar with its wings into the blue sky.

Aza-el asks Yuval to play and sing him a song. Yuval's song voices the same spiritual travail as he sings of

> "the far distant places, in the garden of the Lord, there is my homeland; there the tree of life bears its golden fruit which gives life eternal; no sooner had I opened my eyes to distinguish between good and evil, than I was driven forth so that now I am compelled to eat the bread of pain, earned by the sweat of my brow; all my life I wander as a stranger upon the earth, while my heart is in my homeland."

As contrasted with Aza-el, Uzah represents brute power

and force, the utter and complete gratification of physical lust in all its manifestations. It is to Kahan's credit that he follows Jewish tradition[1] here rather than Pauline theology in that he recognizes that these demonic drives could not be found in man unless they too were of divine origin. The difference between them is perhaps best described by Aza-el when he says that Uzah was "a ray of light from the original creation and like a ray of light all he knows is to sparkle, to play and to drive away every shadow of darkness." As for himself, he would like to be a ray of light but instead he is a volcanic mountain, or a mightily flowing stream or a wandering cloud. He is everything which is restless, that aspires, that seeks, that breaks all bounds, everything that has in it a living soul and a longing for freedom, for freedom without bounds as are the spaces of the heavens. And yet he feels himself bound to the earth as a slave unto it forever. If only he could get his wings again, even for one day, so that he might fly and escape from this earthly prison to which he is bound eternally and not remember for at least one day that he has fallen.

Uzah persuades him to forget these things and go with him to the mountains. Aza-el agrees and yet before leaving he says:

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[1]Isaiah 45:7 " ... עשה שלום ובורא רע ..." -- "... Who makest peace and created evil... "

> "Some hidden bonds tie me and draw me to man. I can never find my peace again amidst the trees and the stones of the primeval. Even though I despise them and their foolish noise until I can crush them like dung, my heart goes out to them, these poor children of affliction, who have been endowed with knowledge so that they can know their tragedy. They are my brothers in sorrow, closer to me than all creation."

In a later conversation between the two, Aza-el reviews their prior existence in heaven and how as young children they were trained by their elders, taught songs and prayers and how to throw thunder bolts and lightnings. Then as they grew, they suddenly found this boring. They felt an inner struggle; they wanted something else without knowing what it was. They called to God but they received no answer and then they knew that there was no freedom even in heaven. When next they prayed their lips moved but their hearts remained untouched. Soon they dared all and then their wings were burned and they were cast down to the earth until they found themselves in the form of men.

Uzah pleads with him to forget the heavens and think only of the hard earth and the men who live upon it, creatures who have understanding and are much-troubled and plagued by all sorts of desires. "Teach him to laugh, to mock and to have contempt; increase his rebellion so that he will be exalted above the lot of his life and his death; let him be master, free and strong living for himself and let the earth be unto itself a fortress of mighty rebellion against heaven."

Aza-el suggests that he too, has had such thoughts but

then he recognizes that man is not iron, so that he can be fashioned in the fire and annealed under the blows of a hammer. Man is like a piece of pottery, easily broken and needs a loving hand. They agree together to try to help man. But at this very moment Naamah appears and the covenant between them is quickly broken. In the words of Aza-el: "There is no covenant. It but saw the light of life and died. The eyes of a pretty girl killed it within one moment."

While the troubles within the heart and mind of man are basic, the external conditions created by civilization and by man's culture increases the tensions. Thus Kahan introduces the conflict of two economic societies -- between the shepherds and the farmers. The war between Uzah and Aza-el now has a real human battlefield on which it can be waged. This combination of human rivalry and demonic drives brings the world to the brink of destruction. Thus Lemech explains the pass to which things have come when he says "Once I slew a man unwittingly and all my days I found no rest. Today, murder has become our daily bread and the blood of brothers is spilled as water. Yet no one sees the evil and no conscience is troubled."

The ultimate in the demonic forces is represented by Ahriman, who gloats of his success when he says to Aza-el, "My kingdom is expanding... I have learned to entice mankind with momentary pleasures... anything to take them out of themselves... For of all his creatures, God succeeded least with man." Ahriman revenges himself against God who drove him

forth by drawing men unto him and thus undermining God's throne.

Naamah is, of course, more than womankind. At one point she indeed expresses the cry of the unemancipated woman who feels that all of the important careers in life have been taken over by men and nothing has been left for her. Therefore, she will make the most of the weapon which she received as a divine gift. She will seek her prey and pour forth her rule, subduing the most evil of all the beasts, men. Nevertheless, Naamah incorporates not only the fatal charm and fascination of woman, but all that is essentially beautiful to which man aspires.

Naamah's failure is due only partly to the weakness inherent in her. It is her misfortune that the men who seek her, either seek her from afar with faint heart, as does Yuval, or else like the Nephilim they seek her to possess her, rather than be possessed by her. Kahan seems to say to us that through our seeking after truth and beauty we do not truly aspire to ennoble our lives and make these abstract virtues real in our human situation. Rather do we seek to bend them to our will and put them to our use, and hence our efforts are fore-doomed to failure. We corrupt our very ideals.

And yet the play is not concluded on an altogether hopeless note. Here the Biblical story of Noah and the Ark comes to Kahan's "rescue" even as in the ancient Semitic world it was the symbol of the rescue of mankind. Speaking to Aza-el, Noah says:

"Verily violence has increased on the earth and all the impulses of man's thoughts are only evil, so that life such as this is not worthy to be lived. And yet the way to God is always open in the world. The God of lovingkindness will not fulfill his intention, if men will only return to Him."

Aza-el counters by saying,

"Why try to save a life which has no expanse of freedom? If God did not succeed in making man in accordance with his thought but instead fashioned him weak and confused and put him in straits from which he cannot extricate himself and planted within him evil to betray him and to involve him even more, who are we to improve that which the creator of the world destroyed with His own hands."

Noah will not be turned aside, however, and says,

"Verily though man was fashioned out of the dust, yet did God breathe into him a spirit from on high which draws him always upward to the source of its light and raises him above every trouble and vain desire. Though I know life is not good, yet I have been commanded to save a remnant from the flood. That which God will give me to save, I will save, and that which God wishes to destroy, He will destroy. Let man but pay heed to his own tasks and let him not be fainthearted. The results are in the hand of God. If man's heart will then be pained, his conscience will be clear."

Though he sees no other way out than through this simple faith of Noah, Kahan nevertheless concludes the play with a final scene between the two Nephilim. Aza-el is perched on the top of a peak when Uzah suddenly appears from the water. In mocking cynical terms, Uzah describes how men overtaken by the flood rushed around like rats in a trap. "This, too, is the master's evil shrewdness", says Uzah, "in that he planted

in the heart of the living, this mighty will so live regardless of the trouble that crushes him." Aza-el suggests that perhaps they ought to take their own lives, instead of waiting for the end to overtake them. Even if they anticipate death by one day they will establish their honor so that this day may stand forever as a reminder of greatness and rebellion. Uzah agrees until he suddenly sees in the distance the floating ark of Noah. In spite of his agreement, he determines to swim to it in the hope that he can save himself.

Here Kahan wanted us to see the absolute moral emptiness of brute force and power. These know only their own laws. They have no honor. A pledged word means nothing. Agreements mean nothing. (Is this perhaps a reference to fascism and communism?)

Aza-el sees Uzah devoured by a sea monster. While he waits patiently for the waters to engulf him, he, too, looks at the ark that is floating quietly by and says,

> "Will there once again come forth great life from this remnant? If so, then I too have a remnant, though I shall soon die. My spirit I will surrender but it will not die. Between earth and heaven it will hover, attaching itself to every burning cloud in the evening, arousing itself with every storm that breaks forth, gathering strength from every volcanic eruption that spews forth its heart in a flame. Wherever there will be a living and suffering being upon the earth and so long as there will be one to think and dream and aspire, my spirit will awaken, inspire rebellion and seek an answer from the God who hides Himself. It will know no rest. It shall be an everlasting complaint on the part of the living creature, - the child of heaven and prisoner of the dull earth, - to the very heights of the heavens."

DAVID, KING OF ISRAEL

This symbolic play is an expansion of the poem by Abba Konstantin Shapiro, _____. When Shapiro wrote his ballad, there was little in contemporary Jewish history other than the small beginnings of the Hoveve Zion to justify any real hope of an early redemption.

Yaakov Kahan's play, begun in 1919 after the Balfour Declaration had been issued and finished (with revisions) in 1937, could take into consideration the Zionist movement, its successes and failures, as well as the realities brought into being by the Yishuv in Palestine.

When the play opens, two friends, symbolically named Uri (the Illuminated One) and Gershom (he who is indissolubly identified with the exile) -- stop before a thick forest in their long and weary search for the cave in which King David lies asleep. David is not dead. He only waits for some one to pour water on his hands. Then he will awake and bring the redemption.

Uri's first speech consists of only six words and Gershom's reply has five words. Such is Kahan's poetic gift that in these eleven words, he conveys the essence of the two characters. Uri says: "Hark! The sound of a harp! Delicate and sad tones!" Gershon replies: "I only hear the wailing of the wind through the trees."

Gershon is despondent, filled with doubt and fear. He rationalizes these into the conclusion that even if they

should find the cave, "the dead are dead" and cannot be awakened. In vain does Uri urge him on by saying "Happy are we, the first who may be privileged to arouse the King from his sleep of thousands of years."

They come upon a peddler bent under his yoke. Learning of their quest, he tells them that he too had heard something about the cave and of David sleeping there. He doubts if it is true and if it is, whether anyone is righteous enough to have the miracle happen to him, that he should find it. Uri's answer is quite characteristic. He does not regard himself righteous. He knows, however, that he has a pure and just desire to find it and the faith to go on with the search. The peddler discourages them so that Gershom yields to this pessimism and chooses to follow the peddler back to "civilization."

A group of mockers are next introduced. They delight in deriding Oholivah, a Princess who is being kept in utter servitude and degradation by the forest-witch. Somehow, Oholivah is still aware of an earlier existence in which she was indeed a princess. Uri and Oholivah meet. Uri tells her of his dreams and what he is seeking. He describes his wanderings until he and his friend came to this thick forest. Uri's words strike a responsive chord in Oholivah's heart and she says, "Is this the dream that just I heard or is it the dream that once I dreamt." Suddenly the witch appears and Oholivah runs away. Seeing Uri, the witch tries her "craft"

upon him by enclosing him within a charmed circle. Uri is now torn between his consuming desire to press on to his goal and his compassion for the poor princess whom he cannot forsake.

Oholivah, of course, is the name used by Ezekiel (23:1-4) for Jerusalem. Here, it seems, however, that Kahan makes Oholivah the incarnation of all that is noble and beautiful and inspiring in the life and history of Israel. It is as if he says to us that if we would truly return and restore the glory of David's time, we cannot do so by coming with a "tabula rasa." This is not to be confused with the position of the "Canaanites" in present-day Israel nor even with the position of Ben Gurion in his recent announcements about returning to the Bible or at most to the period of the Maccabees. Kahan includes the whole of Jewish tradition. In the three symphonic dramatic poems which follow this play he deals with the Jewish historic experiences of martrydom, mysticism and Hassidism, and shows how each made a positive contribution to Jewish life and hope.

To help resolve the conflict confronting Uri, the song of the angels is heard singing, "David, the King of Israel still lives." Uri pleads with the Prince of the Forest (in Ben Or's brief analysis of the play, he identifies the forest with the exile and the "Prince of the Forest" with the guardian angel of Israel) appears to Uri who asks to be reassured that the things are true which his father told him and which generation had told to generation with such longing about the

cave of King David. The Prince of the Forest reassures him, but tells him that the goal is "more distant than one can chart the roads to it, but nearer than those who weary, think it is." He warns him further, that the pitcher of water is too heavy for one person to lift.

Uri is now concerned that should he find the cave, he will have to return as empty-handed as he went. The Prince of the Forest says, "Calm thyself, my son, and quietly accept thy fate. Thinkest thou that thou art the first? Nor art thou the last. Not a few have tried -- even many -- by all roads to find their way to the cave. They come singly and they leave singly."

Here we may find part of Kahan's criticism of the Zionist efforts which were espoused by the Weizmann group and which called for slow and steady colonization, step by step, here a settlement, there a settlement, instead of the dramatic maximum demand for full statehood which Jabotinsky and the Revisionists favored.

Before taking leave of Uri, the Prince of the Forest urges him to go on and when he will find himself in straits, he should remember the treasure he has with him, a treasure which has been the source of divine comfort to his fathers and which can become for him once again a new well-spring of strength. Uri is determined to go on. Yet he wants to see Oholivah once more before he leaves, to see if perhaps God has destined one fate for them both. Oholivah returns and

tells him of her dreams of a prince who would come "and with a holy phrase untie the bonds of her excommunication."

They are about to set off, when Uri discovers that he is in a charmed circle and can't get out. Then he sees a book lying at the foot of the tree. He picks it up and discovers that it is the Bible. Now he realizes that it was to this book that the Prince of the Forest referred when he said: "You have a shield in time of danger." Uri feels that, "With the might of this holy book", - and Oholivah adds "with the strength and the love sanctified by God," they will achieve their goal.

After much wandering Uri and Oholivah come to the Holy Land, where Uri meets up with a mystic. Kahan pays his respect here to the traditional yearning for the Messiah as exemplified by the generations that lived out their lives praying and hoping for his coming. Unlike other Hebrew writers, Kahan recognizes our indebtedness to these mystical dreamers who kept the longing alive, even though by themselves, they could never bring the redemption. Uri asks the mystic what he would do, if King David should arise. Would he with his strength weakened by fasting, be able to lift the pitcher of water to pour on the King's hands? The mystic answers that with the four letters of God's name, no one can be stronger than he. Uri replies: "No, no, you are not the man to rouse the king. I will awaken him." The mystic conscious-stricken by his presumptuousness that he could bring the redemption, then gives voice to the "Calvinistic" streak, which

is also found in the Jewish mystical approach. "I am a sinner! How did I dare to raise my miserable soul to such great things, O Lord? Pay no heed to the sins of my lips! Now I must go to immerse myself in purifying waters and confess my sin."

Kahan has Uri summarize the mystic's approach by saying,

> "He is hastening his own end, not the end of days... Nevertheless, there is something in this man. He has something of the light of truth and of the mighty longing for that fountain hidden for all the plagues of the world... I cannot follow him, for I must have green grass under my feet, and the gold of the sun is better to me than all other gold. Yet there is something in this man."

Here we see Kahan's sympathetic understanding of the entire gamut of Jewish life, wherever he finds a longing for purity, for the healing word, for that which will make man's life whole again.

Uri next hears some Arab horsemen drive by. In these brief few lines, Kahan suggests the difficulties with the Arabs. A bit later Uri falls sick and we have a description of the effects of malaria, the dread disease that struck down so many of those who came to reclaim the land. Moreover, even in the Holy Land, itself, the witch appears, the witch who symbolizes the base drives which deflect men, who start out with ideal purposes, from achieving their ideal ends.

During the fever which seizes Uri he sees many visions. He sees King David himself, walk by with eyes closed and sword drawn, as if waiting for the word which will arouse him and set him at the head of the people. There is a second vision,

in which he sees his former friend Gershom, who now describes for him a pogrom in their home town in which Uri's father, mother and sister have been desecrated and killed by the mob. Fortunately, at this point Oholivah returns having found some herbs with which she helps to restore Uri's health.

In the final act, Kahan introduces a group of dwarfs digging the soil in search of treasures belonging to a king who once ruled there. They express their despair at not finding anything, and one suggests that the treasures are only to be found in the song and not in the earth. Evil spirits are also introduced led by their chief. They organize all their forces against this effort to enter the cave and bring on the redemption. The contest begins between the evil spirits abetted by the witch, and between the dwarfs, -- the little people with their petty, personal desires for self-aggrandizement, whom Uri persuades to help dig away the debris and rocks that block the path to the cave. But as soon as one dwarf is wounded, they all want to throw down their spades and quit. The analogy with what happened in Palestine after Arab attacks and the reaction of many Jews, is far too clear, to need any further comment.

Finally Uri stands before the cave. He knocks once, twice and three times. The cave's door is opened and a silver-blue light bursts forth from the cave, so that Uri and Oholivah are stunned and step back. They see King David lying fully dressed on a gold bed, his harp at his head, to his right on

the wall the drawn sword and on the other side a large pitcher of water. They are frozen to the ground. The king puts forth his hands. Uri rouses himself and says, "Oh the pitcher of water", but as he runs to the cave the light is extinguished, his feet slip and he falls. Stones drop from the top of the mound over the gate of the cave and half bury him.

After a moment, Uri says "Everything is lost. We stood faint-hearted in this great moment for which we had waited day and night. And when the king stretched forth his hands, we could not pour the water and thus failed to rouse him from his sleep." Oholivah tries to reassure him, "Perhaps this great moment will return." And he says "No, it cannot return. One step from our goal were we, and we could not take that step. Now the moment has vanished. What a shame! What a shame!"

Oholivah pleads with him.

> "Hear me! While we were on the road I too grew and became a new person. I am no longer the little girl of the forest who knows only her prison. From the fire of your heart, a holy fire was kindled in me. Now I know that I am your wife. When the fever seized you and I hastened to find a healing for you, evil spirits surrounded and threatened me. Then my hands seized hold of the earth under me and I stretched my body forth to lie on the bosom of the earth. I dug my fingers into it and became like a tree that has thick roots. Thus must we now take hold of this holy land and become rooted in it. Here we will dwell and work, strike roots and wait with hope for the great moment."

Uri replies, "These words open my heart for God speaks from your mouth, though you may not know it." Oholivah answers,

> "But these are your own words which you have spoken -- that from the breasts of this our mother-earth, if we only cling to her in love and in faith, we will be able to nourish ourselves with a new life's marrow. If God should bless our love with a child, he will flourish here in the fields of our renewed motherland. The winds of freedom will nurture him with strength, and he will grow straight and righteous before the sun. A foreign yoke will be unknown unto him and he will not spend his strength in wandering. Clear of eye and strong, he will know how to respond to the great moment, to rouse the king from his sleep."

Kahan recognizes that even with the rebuilding of the ancient home-land and with the establishment of the State, the Messiah has not yet come. He knows however, that this is the path and this is the only path that can lead to the redemption. The people must return to the ancestral soil, to Mother Earth (a phrase which, I believe, Bialik first used in Hebrew poetry in his poem, "BaSadeh.") There is a reciprocal relationship between the people of Israel and the land of Israel. In redeeming the land, the people redeems itself. As they free the land from the neglect and abuse of centuries, so they remove from themselves the degradation and pettiness which the misery and suffering and rightlessness they endured, covered their princely love of freedom and full humanness as with a corroding rust.

IN THE PATH OF SUFFERING (Via Dolorosa)

General Introduction

In these three symphonic dramas, Yaakov Kahan deals in deeply moving poetic language of three great phases of Diaspora Jewish life, in all of which he finds heroism and beauty and dedication to the highest spiritual goals of the traditions of our people.

The first of these, "Ha-Kedoshim", deals with Jewish victims of a pogrom. The group of characters does not include great scholars, teachers and saints but rather simple people: a merchant, butcher, an elementary Hebrew teacher, an old sexton, a largely assimilated young student and a young girl. Kahan sees the futility of their life and martyrdom and yet he writes with pathos and great compassion. He does not rail at them as did Bialik in "The City of Slaughter."

In the second entitled, "Towards the Messiah", Kahan introduces a young mystic, a hidden saint (one of the 36 נסתרים), a repentant sinner and an ill-assorted company of beggars, whom misery has reduced almost to a sub-human level. Even the beggars are responsive to something higher, to a vision of redemption, if only for a few moments, now and then. True, they want the ease which they hope the Messiah will bring but they want the Messiah himself as well.

In the third "movement" entitled, "The Third Outcry", Kahan describes the Berdichever Rebbi's assault on Heaven in

his efforts to force the hand of God and hasten the coming of the Messiah. Kahan weaves into this drama the story of the Ten Martyrs of the second century C. E.

The thread that runs through all three "movements" is the longing for redemption, from the suffering of the exile, but even more from its degradation. These symphonic poems may be regarded as parts of an unfinished symphony that has only three movements. In the 18th Century and even in the 19th Century, the "fourth movement" could not be envisaged. Sufficient unto those days was the miracle that the hope for redemption continued to illumine the hearts and minds of Jews. It had to remain an unfulfilled hope, a promise that still awaited its realization.

I. HA-KEDOSHIM - The Martrys

The scene opens on a windy mountain road into which various paths lead and up which dead people are walking. A merchant, a butcher and an elementary school teacher meet. Shortly they become aware of the fact that they are dead.

As they lie down to rest, the angel Gabriel and Mother Rachel appear. Rachel bemoans her fate. She cannot longer even bring her children a balm for their suffering. Now she can only weep with them over their destruction. Gabriel tells her that the Patriarchs bear their sorrow quietly and with long-suffering patience, and Rachel replies,

"How can I compare myself to the Patriarchs, those lions, mighty of spirit and great in faith who bow their hoary heads under the judgment of God? May God not regard this unto me as a sin, I have no such strength, for I am a weak woman. I saw the death-throes of these victims and heard their death groan. With each one, a whole world was destroyed. I hastened to the throne of God, threw myself at His feet and remained silent. From the quiet of my lips no cry came forth and there was no answer."

The scene shifts back to the dead, who are now joined by an old Sexton and a young student. All recount how they met their death. The merchant tried to protect his wife and children from two wild drunken men who were not content with pillaging or even murder. They blinded him in one eye and then defiled his wife in his presence. He threw himself against them and they killed him.

The student interjects, "And God did not bring His lightning down upon their heads!"

The old sexton had tried to save the Holy Scrolls and the wild mob threw him down the steps and ripped the Torah Scrolls to shreds.

Again the student interjects, "And God did not bring the lightning down on their heads!"

The butcher had heard the news of the pogrom and he went forth with his axe, striking to the right and the left to take vengeance on the inhuman beasts until he, himself, fell. The old sexton speaks with resignation, "Yet they are the many and if God had not been our fortress, where would we now be? Breathren, let us go on our way, for the Lord has

called us. Suddenly by a mighty decree He has called.us."

To this the student answers, "Whither and why did God call us? I do not understand your words which are as riddles to me. If God is our fortress, why has He not protected us? Why did He abandon us to these wild beasts, so that every leprous dog licks our blood and every ass tramples upon our honor." He reviews his own defection from his people. On the very day of the pogrom he went forth not to help his people but to fight for this foreign nation and for a rule of justice for all. When he came upon the scene and saw what was happening to his brethren, his spirit stormed up within him and he knew only that he wanted revenge for his people, until he was struck down by a bullet.

He laments for the life that he had hoped to live, a fruitful and creative life. He had had visions and faith which burned within him with a holy flame and with a great hate for injustice. He also had a friend, a pure pearl, who had shared his dreams.

Suddenly this girl appears. Both are shocked at seeing each other. The girl keeps her eyes lowered in shame and all understand what had happened to her. Once again the student bursts forth with indignation.

> "How can all the world not mourn? And how can men yet live and retain a sense of honor? How can a man eat his bread in peace, smoke his pipe, even embrace his wife as he did formerly, after the vileness that was done unto you? Here you stand silently bearing your shame, a symbol of the whole people's shame, Let the poets of every nation and land come,

> let the professors of the universities and all those who speak high and lofty words about man's exalted worth and achievements, let them come and stand before you. Let them listen to your dead silence and see your pale cheeks, understand your suffering, the suffering of the whole people."

All turn and ask God why they have been so punished. "Why has all this innocent blood been spilled? A Bath-kol answers: "Ye are all holy, holy." Here Kahan gives the traditional answer and perhaps the only answer which can even in a measure "explain" the martyrdom of the countless generations of Jews who died to sanctify God's name. Where previous generations could accept this in simple faith, our generation can no longer do so. Kahan, therefore, has these people question the answer of the Bath-kol. And he does this very subtly.

The butcher disclaims his right to the title of "holy" since he was an ignorant man who did not even know how to observe the commandments. He was not always honest in his dealing nor did he refrain from drinking, from using vile language or from quarreling. How can he be a holy one?

The merchant enumerates his sins, imposed upon him by the difficult and competitive struggle to earn a livelihood. How can he be a holy one?

The poor teacher reminding himself how he died like a rat running from his persecutors and had not the courage even to stand up to their wickedness asks how can he be a holy one?

The girl and the student choose to challenge God. They

have not lived yet and they demand of God that He return to them their unlived lives. The others join them in this demand. Only the old sexton says, "I gave you my life, O Lord, as a free-will offering. Thou art the judge of all creatures. Our life and our death are in Thy hand. But these Holy Scrolls, wherein have they sinned? Why didst Thou not have pity on the honor of Thy Name? How couldst Thou see this and keep silent, my God?"

The student continues rebellious,

> "I do not know who Thou art and where Thou art. I have long since ceased thinking about you and I have not made mention of Thy Name. Be Thou whoever Thou art and wherever Thou art, look and hear. The dead speak to you! The dead who are mute forever, open their mouth and that which a living being will never say with the lips of the living... the dead will say. Hear me then! We have seen Thy power, Thy great terror. But we have not seen Thy righteousness. Where is Thy righteousness?"

The scene shifts to the fields near the Garden of Eden where Rachel welcomes them, saying that the gates of all the heavens are now open to them, for their sufferings have washed away all their sins.

> "Though you may have died for the sins of your fathers, you will now become as a strong, pure spring of water for their children. Thus the people lives in an ever-changing eternal cycle which is yet always one and the same. All the generations are surety one for another and each receives from its predecessor the candle of life, for which each pays, a little or much. But life loves the generous and he who gives much, lives much and you my children gave the blood of your hearts."

Soon they all seem reconciled to their fate -- the butcher, the teacher, the merchant, even the young girl. Only the student remains adamant. The girl turns to him and says, "Why do you stand at a distance? Why do you keep silent and permit your gaze to wander? Has the bitterness not yet gone out of your heart? Has your soul not yet made its peace with God?"

The student answers: "My rebelliousness has become congealed in me. I know nothing. I still cannot grasp nor understand all these things."

The girl reminds him of the dreams they had, how they had wanted to be two pure souls who would fly over the heads of people as if from another world to pour the light of the hidden treasures of the heavens upon them. "Now, our dream has been fulfilled, more than we expected. Together we can fly over the earth and do our holy work."

The old sexton adds, "You died with your people and on its behalf and you are our brother." All call him and say, "Come, our brother." Mother Rachel tries to reassure him that he has a portion in the field of life and that his blood was not spilled in vain. Whether he understands or does not understand the path of the star, the star stays in its orbit. The student concludes by saying, "I go, since it is a decree but I still do not know if the 'Hand' is good or evil. I only know that it is strong and wonderful."

II. TOWARDS THE MESSIAH

The scene is laid in an ancient forest on a moonlit night. A young mystic, old far beyond his twenty-five years and weak and emaciated from his long wanderings and fastings, contemplates his surroundings and listens to voices that seem to call him. He feels that his end has come but he has an unfinished task upon the earth that keeps him back, though he is not certain what this is. A repentent sinner and one of the thirty-six hidden saints enters.

The saint is in search of the Messiah and he has undertaken to wander through the world to plumb the suffering of the exile to its depths. The penitent and the mystic both are at one with him in longing for the Messiah, who alone can bring healing to the sickness of man. Wherever he came, the saint saw sad eyes looking for something without knowing what they were looking for. He heard the sighs of men's hearts. He saw people running to their daily tasks, busy all the day, but the most essential thing was missing from their lives. Even when they were happy their joy was not complete, for their soul hungered for what they knew not.

The "saint" had been everywhere -- wherever legend said the Messiah was to be found, in Rome and in other places. Nowhere did he find him. When the penitent says "Perhaps he has not yet been born", the saint says, "Think not such a thing! Is it not said, 'though he tarry, wait for him everyday that he may come?' He is living and is prepared to come

every moment but we in our sins have delayed the redemption. Only when the sparks of all these mighty longings join into one great holy flame that will spread and kindle all the scattered segments of Israel and become a mighty, fiery cry for the Messiah, only then will he come."

A group of beggars enter: a man who has lost everything in a fire, a blind man, a hunchback, a cripple, an old woman, a deserted wife and her young child. The beggars hear the talk about the Messiah and they rejoice. Perhaps the Messiah is indeed coming. The blind man says, "He will open my eyes and I will see." The hunchback says, "He will straighten my back." The cripple says, "He will heal my leg."

The innocent child asks, "Mother, who is this Messiah?" His mother answers, "It is a man of God, whom He will send to redeem us." The penitent adds: "Us and all Israel." The mystic adds, "And the entire world." The child continues, "And he will give us bread to eat?" "Yes, my son," says his mother. "And new clothing?" asks the child, "Yes, my son." "And perhaps then father will come back to us?" "Certainly, my son."

The "saint" looks over the motley group and says, "Not among these is the Messiah." The Penitent says, "But they are Jews and they also need the Messiah." To this the "saint" says, "Yes and perhaps these, the afflicted of the afflicted, they may be the first to go to meet him."

The beggars begin to quarrel about all the good things

that they will have when the Messiah comes. The saint is so upset by their talk that he asks the penitent to speak to them. The latter does so, saying:

> "Listen, O Jews! Everything will receive its fulfillment and every man's request will be satisfied according to his merit. But the Messiah will come first to all Israel, not to any individual Jew. Hear ye not the storm in the forest? When the storm comes up, all the trees wail together in a single voice! Are you not Jews? Do you not feel the sorrow, that you come, each of you, with his own needs?"

They finally agree to go forth to seek the Messiah. While going the storm rages even greater and the beggars shrivel in fear and turn against the mystic and the saint and say, "If it were not for you we would not be in the forest now." In contrast to this company, the saint, the penitent, and the mystic express their unending and untarnished longing for the Messiah.

As all fall into a sleep, a company of dark shadows appear, dancing and singing around them. These shadows rise from the darkness of the abyss and bring with them the dread of destruction, the consuming heat of hell.

Then the Messiah appears and lightly touches the eyes of each of the sleepers. He speaks,

> "Voices have drawn me, the longing voices of weak people. But can this band of poor humans welcome me? Can these shriveled hands break my chains? Impotent dreamers they are and torn fragments of human beings! They no longer have the spirit to rebel and they have forgotten what freedom is.

> These unfortunate look for me to help them and do not know that I am more unfortunate than they. For I have been destined to break the bonds of a great people in exile, when I cannot loosen the bonds that tie my own hands. And they whom I am to redeem, must first redeem me! I must wait to be saved by those whom I am to save! How can a people be strong when it is not redeemed and how can a people be redeemed ere it is strong?"

In these last few lines, Kahan expresses the terrible paradox which alone can explain, even in mystical terms, the tragic pathos of the undying hope for the Messiah and of the intuitive understanding that the Messiah's strength can only be forged on the anvil of the people's courage and daring, as well as its need.

Of all the sleepers, only the child opens his eyes for a moment and sees the Messiah pass by. The mystic has a feeling that the Messiah was there -- since he saw his shadow. The child says, "I saw him, the Messiah." He tries to describe him. "He smiled to me," says the child. The mystic, the saint, the penitent all say, "He smiled to him, to the child he smiled, who saw him while we slept."

They rouse the beggars to join them in going towards the Messiah. The beggars are angry because their sleep is disturbed. The penitent (quite in character, for there is no fantic like a reformed sinner) pours abuse on them saying, "Give them a piece of bread and a place to lie down and what else do they need." The saint says, "Great indeed is a piece of bread and great and important is a resting place for the weary. What do you ask of these poor souls? As for the

redemption, it will not begin with these. They will not be the first to go forth and meet the Messiah." When the penitent wants to know who will bring the Messiah, the saint says, "All of us together, one a little sooner and another later, but all of us together. As for the child, he will never forget that once he saw the face of the Messiah. He will carry this light with him wherever he goes and perhaps he may one day be one of his attendants."

The mystic continues slowly to ascend the road into the mountains. He pleads with God that he may see the Messiah for just one moment before he dies. "All my youth I brought as a burnt offering unto the Lord. I gave up my strength and consumed my flesh and blood in the hope that I could refine my soul and make of it a pure flame to hasten the redemption." Voices answer him, "You ask for too much! You art still very young to ask for so much." The mystic says, "I am young? I, who knew no youth, who traversed my life with seven-league boots? Who are you that thus speak to me?" The voices answer, "We are the many generations who preceded you in suffering, generations that also dreamt and waited for the Messiah. Do you not know us?" The mystic says, "Yes, I see rows following each other, generation upon generation, walking with closed eyes and hearing only the voice of their hearts which leads them on." The voices say, "It is the voice of God which He planted in us from earliest times. This has preserved us in all the storms and directed our steps towards the Messiah.

Come now unto us, for thine hour has come."

The mystic still begs, "I thought I would see him in my lifetime." The voices, "So did we, everyone of us, every generation. But we learned to be patient and humble. You have learned the one. Now learn the second." The mystic asks, "Shall my portion not be even as that of the young child, who before he could understand the Messiah's greatness, saw him?" The voices, "There are times when he reveals himself to innocent children, because they do not understand his greatness. Years pass and the vision becomes unto them as a dream which once they saw."

The mystic ends by saying, "Happy is the man whose whole life has been a prayer for the Messiah! Happy the people that directs its sons towards him. On the road leading to him, every burden becomes light and even in their death they continue to live." The voices respond, "Be blessed in our midst, Thou who has lived for the Messiah."

III. THE THIRD OUTCRY

Kahan based this poetic drama on a recorded episode in the biography of Reb Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev. It is told that in 1793 he fell into melancholia and became slightly deranged. That same year there was considerable commotion in Heaven because of Reb Levi Yitzhak's wrestling with the angels and with God himself, for Reb Levi Yitzhak was the great defender of his people.

The scene is laid in Reb Levi Yitzhak's study. It is the Eve of the Ninth of Ab, the great Black Fast. Reb Levi Yitzhak stands and pleads with God. Soon the people will gather, sit upon the ground in darkness like mourners weeping for their dead, reciting the ancient elegies, and giving voice to the age-old hope for their redemption.

> "Here I stand, a poor shepherd of lost sheep, looking and hoping for a sign that he will come... Each year I stand and wait in vain, as my fathers and their fathers before them, as our entire people has waited in vain, these hundreds upon hundreds of years. How long, O Lord wilt Thou chastise us? Have we not been tossed around enough? Are the rivers of our spilled blood and the seas of our tears not sufficient unto Thee? What else dost Thou demand of us, O God of zealousness? ... Why are we so singled out from all the peoples and wherein are we more guilty than they, that Thou hast given them freedom and the sunny expanse and hast made us dust under their brutal feet? ... And if we have sinned, hast Thou not punished us sufficiently, generation upon generation and jubilee upon jubilee? Thou hast driven us from land to land and nation to nation and made us pass through fire and water... Does a father punish his children and not forgive their sins? ... We are Thy sons and Thou art our father and Thy Holy Name which is a burning in our hearts, we have carried

on our lips through fire and water even unto the very yawning rim of the abyss, where death hovered over our heads...

"Thy Torah which Thou didst give us is a Torah of life! Thou didst create the world, not that it shall be void but that people may live in it. How can we build the world in accordance with Thy will and our desire, when it is fenced off from us and we wander like paupers begging at the gates of the lands? ... Thou didst command us a Torah of loving-kindness, to know the needs of the poor and to support the hands of the forsaken, to have pity on the widow in her affliction. Who is as widowed as Zion? And who is as persecuted as Thy people Israel? ...

"Is there not one law for Thee and for us? And one system of justice? Didst Thou not wish to refine us with Thy attributes? ... In the name, therefore, of this one Law, in the name of the eternal law, I Levi Yitzhak, the son of Sarah, servant of thy servant, call Thee to the bar of justice!"

Reb Levi Yitzhak then turns to the Heavens and calls upon the Patriarchs: Jacob who wrestled with God and was victorious; Moses, the shepherd who knew how to turn aside the wrath of the Lord; Rachel, our mother, who tore open the Heavens with her weeping; Jeremiah, the Prophet, who with his own eyes saw the destruction. He challenges them and wants to know why they pay no heed to the sufferings of their people. He calls them to gather together and to raise their voice on high so that the wheels under the throne of God will quake and the peace on high will be disturbed, that the stars might be stopped in their movements.

A mighty storm breaks out and voices of tortured and afflicted souls rise out of the depths. They are the voices of all the myriads of the Jewish people who died to sanctify

God's name. They describe the shame and humiliation which they endured without a murmur. They never cried from pain. They only cried to God and their soul expired with "Shema Yisrael" on their lips. Women took their own lives rather than be defiled. Children, whose eyes, had just opened to see the world, were murdered with innocent laughter on their lips.

Reb Levi hears these voices, especially those of the children and says,

> "All the waters of the world may cleanse the world of its filth, but they can never wash away the stain of your blood... Would that the cry of your soul might penetrate all seven firmaments! But if you have no longer a voice and your sigh is choked, let your fearful silence be heard! May the silence of generations, tortured and killed to sanctify God's name, become mightier than every cry demanding retribution for your shame, the shame of the whole people as well as for the shame of God."

The laughing voice of the devil is heard mocking Reb Levi. "If words cannot help, the silence will help? The silence of the dead shall now meet the silence of the heavens, and the redemption will come on wings! They are twins, these silences -- one rules in the nether world and the other has seized control of the heavens."

Reb Levi Yitzhak is stunned at these words. Here, perhaps we see Kahan's great skill and fundamental Jewishness in that every line of Reb Levi Yitzhak's outspoken and daring challenge hurled at God is filled with deep piety and faith in God in spite of all, whereas in the few casual light words

of the devil there is the ultimate of heresy and of atheistic denial.

But there is no answer from Heaven even to the Devil. Reb Levi Yitzhak now calls upon the Ten Martyrs in the days of Rabbi Akiba. He asks them how could they have accepted the judgment with such equanimity. In giving the answers of some of these men, Kahan analyses in part the traditional explanations offered for Jewish suffering. Rabbi Simeon says that he did not want to die, nor did he know why he was being killed. The fact that he was the Nasi may have been sufficient in the eyes of the enemy but wherein had he sinned before God. And yet perhaps he had sinned? Or perhaps he was paying the price of the sins of distant ancestors, or the sin of the people whose Nasi he was. He therefore accepted his fate and blessed the name of the Lord.

Rabbi Akiba thought that his death might have been a punishment for the sins which he committed during his youthful wanderings. Or perhaps it was the final test, more difficult that all the tests that he had yet endured, and he was determined to meet this test. Besides, who was he that he should not bear his portion in his people's anguish?

Rabbi Hanina had spent all his life in a song of wonderful love for the Torah. Every letter in it was a source of strength, life and joy for him and now that he was burnt in the fire together with the Torah, he felt comforted.

Reb Levi Yitzhak is not moved by these pious words of

resignation. He then turns to Rabbi Ishmael, the High Priest, and asks why he has not said anything.

Rabbi Ishmael says that he was the first to know of the evil decree. He accepted it and strengthened the spirit of his friends. When he saw Rabbi Simeon the Nasi killed, every string in his heart burst and he wept and moaned until the enemy approached to kill him. When they began to tear the skin off his head, he did not utter a word but when they reached the point where the Tephillin rested, he could no longer contain himself. He cried out with a great and bitter cry from the depths of his soul so that Heaven and Earth trembled. Then he cried a second time and the Throne of Glory trembled. Then a Bath-kol was heard saying, "If I hear one more sound, I will turn the entire world back into void and emptiness." He remained silent!

Reb Levi Yitzhak said, "Indeed Thou art a symbol for thy suffering people. No matter how much we cry and storm Heaven and Earth and the Throne of Glory we never cry the third great cry, lest the world be turned back into void and emptiness." Suddenly he pulls himself up and as the visions disappear, he says,

> "No, no, it cannot continue thus! A whole people cannot die to sanctify God's name! Because of its love for the world, it must not give up the right to live in the world! There must be an end to these sufferings... We demand this of you, O Lord. I am the spokesman for the suffering of our people. I, who have been chosen to bear the pain and anguish of the people in my heart and to become a voice unto

> Thee, O God of mercy, here I stand and I shall not move until Thou dost answer me. This very hour Thou must answer me! And if not, then I will cry that third great cry which Rabbi Ishmael refused, and the world shall indeed return to void and emptiness."

There are shooting flames and lightning and storms in the heavens. The Cherubim fear that the world is coming to an end. The firey Angels are angry and surprised that a mortal man should have dared to challenge the world's Creator. The souls of the righteous weep that all their sacrifices will now have been in vain, since the world will be destroyed.

Reb Levi Yitzhak is unmoved. "Let the world be destroyed", he exclaims, "and this Thy Torah, the Torah of truth and life for which we have been stoned and burned and tortured, our old and our young, our wives and our babes, let this Torah also be burned! Let it go up in flames and let its cold ash be scattered upon all the seas of the void!"

Gabriel appears to Reb Levi and says, "Hast thou dared to call the Creator of the World before the bar of justice?" Reb Levi Yitzhak says, "Yes, return to your Master and say to him, "It is written in the Torah 'Thou shalt not defer to the great; in justice thou shalt rule' (Lev. 19:15). I have called Him before the bar of justice even though He is greater and more exalted than all on high and I am only a worm, a driven leaf, a grain of sand! Woe is me, my head, my head!"

Reb Levi Yitzhak is doubled up with pain and falls upon the pulpit stand before him. The Cherubim lament that such a wonderful "vessel" should have been broken. The fiery

Angels say that it is the punishment of a mortal who relied on his own wisdom. The souls of the righteous sorrow for the wise and all-feeling son who was thus broken by great suffering. They ask God to heal him.

The Angel Raphael appears and tells Reb Lovi to open his eyes and see a new world. Feeling his spirit return, Reb Levi Yitzhak says, "Art thou indeed the Angel Raphael? Tell me then, is there a healing in the world for the sick?" Raphael replies that he is only a messenger and knows only what he has to do. All life, however, is a hope and we live.

Then Michael, the Guardian Angel of Israel appears and says that the Torah of God is in their hands and it is the Torah of life.

Reb Levi Yitzhak is taken aback by the appearance of Michael, who seems so pale and thin and his wings have no suppleness. Michael answers that he wanders with the people and shares their afflictions. Together with the people he is waiting for the great day that is to come.

Reb Levi Yitzhak still complains that the path has been far too long and the exile has been longer than can be measured, far beyond human endurance. Raphael says, "Therefore you have the Torah to help you bear your suffering." Gabriel adds, "And you have trust in the Lord, who is omnipotent and will return your captivity." Michael adds, "And the love for God which teaches us to accept evil as well as good."

Kaddish is heard in the distance and Michael continues,

"When death with its heavy shadow passes over a Jew and his world darkens around him and he no longer knows the path before him, then he stands up, lifts his heart to God and says, 'Yisgadal, magnified may He be.' At the moment of his greatest suffering he sends forth his heart to God, a heart burning with love and says, 'Yisgadal.' ... And when destruction comes with a sudden fury like a storm, then the prayer will ascend like a raging fire and be heard like a cry of love, of faith and trust which nothing shall turn aside and which shall never cease. 'Yisgadal v'yiskaddash sh'meh rabbo.'"

The sexton enters, looks around the room and sees the rabbi leaning on the pulpit stand. He approaches and says, "Rabbi, the time has come for reading the Kinot." Reb Levi Yitzhak rouses himself, turns and says, "Kinot." His eyes ablaze, he raises his voice and with restrained ecstasy says, "Yisgadal v'yiskaddash sh'meh rabbo."

BEFORE THE PYRAMIDS

This dramatic symphony by Yaakov Kahan deals with the theme of immortality.

No people of antiquity was so concerned with the problem of survival after death as were the Egyptians. They developed embalming and mummification and built great pyramids as tombs in which the dead were thought to live on in ghostly fashion. Their chief God was Osiris. Whatever his origin may have been as a Syrian God of Agriculture, he came to be worshipped in Egypt as the great God of the Dead ruling the underworld of the tombs. This is why Kahan selected the plains of Gizeh in front of the great Pyramids, as a fitting arena in which to examine this gnawing hunger in the heart of man for immortality.

A lonely wanderer stops before these great "guardians of the wilderness". He soliloquizes:

> "Here is the dwelling place of eternity! Here the earth has shed every blossom and every blade of grass. It has taken off all false adornment and looks up into the endless skies with their countless shining stars and all her thought is eternity. Perhaps that is why the silence is so deep here, as deep as the abyss into which all the desires of man fall with his death, all those attributes of soul and creative powers within him, the powers that come to him from God. Is it indeed possible that death swallows, without leaving any trace, all that God had fashioned with such great understanding? What do these wondrous lights from on high tell us? What does the heart of man say? What do these ancient proud generations dream, they who set up these mighty fortresses on the edge of the desert? And what has happened to their dream? ... Here the ways of the world seem far away and puny... The cities and their

> hub-bub give forth no echo here. Perhaps they have sunk and disappeared and are no more... Here I want to rest, if only for a night, to find surcease from the constant din. Perhaps there will come to me some inkling from these thinkers of eternity who strove with all their might to achieve eternity."

The wanderer lies down to rest, and the builders of the three great pyramids now appear upon the scene, Cheops, Khafre and Menkure. Kahan attempts to make each one representative of a particular point of view, though they have much in common. Cheops seems content with the fact that they have built well and that their pyramids are still standing. Though they have been looted by many, the fame of the builders of the pyramids has by these very "thieves" been carried to all the ends of the world.

Khafre is more concerned to know what changes have taken place upon the earth. He notes that along the banks of the Nile a strange people now resides who does not understand the language they spoke and does not recognize their gods. He wonders if the stars are still moving in the same orbits or if the constellations have altered their course.

Menkure represents the classic Egyptian view that all life is an endlessly repetitive, meaningless cycle. Things change and come back to be as they were. Only once does he remember being aroused from his sleep by some powerful natural disturbance which came from the side of Sinai. He had never heard such noise nor seen such lightning. It seemed as if the flame enveloped the whole world. Then the voices stopped,

the flashes of lightning were extinguished, and the world returned to what it had been before. Cheops questions this:

> "Is it really so? In the utter silence and in the abyss of the darkness which surrounds me, I see at times little lights burning in quiet houses of God, in the rooms of lonely figures bent over parchment or over delicate work. I hear the trembling of the sparks, their silent humming, of a longing for some noble hope and I know that something mysterious is being woven in the world. I do not know its nature but I know it is being woven."

Kahan then introduces a number of the great Pharaohs from Sahure in the Third Dynasty 2400 B.C.E. to Thutmoses in the Eighteenth Dynasty, 1450 B.C.E., and Rameses II of the Nineteenth Dynasty (1292-1225 B.C.E.). Each one speaks of all that he had accomplished in building Egypt's empire, increasing its wealth and extending its sway.

Choeps speaks to them and says that indeed they had done valiant things and their deeds will be told until the end of time upon earth. Menkure denies this, "Later generations do not know your accomplishments and what little they know are fragmentary echos from the distant past. All of your achievements have vanished. They are blotted out from the land of the living." Khafre asks them to think of the mighty emperors who lived before them, who also had done great things. Only their memory remains and in some cases, even their name has been forgotten.

Rameses inquires if they are trying to comfort them or make their hearts heavier. To this Cheops says, "Far be

it from us, for this is also our sorrow." Again characteristically Khafre says, "Let us remember even in our sorrow that we still left some trace." Menkure says, "Let us look the truth in the eye."

The kings begin to look for the great cities which they had built, the great palaces and fortresses. They discover that nothing is left but tombs and ruins. All has been destroyed by civil war, by enemy invasions, and most of all by time which like subterranean water eats away secretly and swallows things up without leaving any trace.

Cheops says that in the night which has lasted thousands of years there are times when he dreams that he hears the sound of waters running over the earth. Then he knows that it is the holy river Nile overflowing its banks and bringing its blessings to man and beast. The sound is sweet in his ears and he imagines then that he too is part of this flow, which though it changes its form and ways, can never cease.

Khafre describes how his spirit wanders at night over the dull earth and searches out the stars. When he sees that constellations seem to have veered a bit, he draws hope from this slight change in nature and renews his faith in that which is yet to be. To him, this is proof that something does move in the eternal heavens and that nothing has been finally decided. There is a higher will that can change even an eternal law.

Menkure says that all he wants is to sleep and not to wander any more. He does not want to see the toil under the heavens and the false glitter that deceives man with its enticements only to increase his sorrow.

The other Pharaohs join the conversation. One says that he only wanted life. If he could be a simple fisherman or a poor shepherd and live, and eat bread with the sweat of his brow, he would be happy. Another says that he was born to rule and to thrill to the storm of battle and drink fully from the wine of life. Thutmoses said that he had lived only for Egypt. When the sister-wife, whom he loved above all, proved faithless to him, only one great passion remained unto him -- Egypt. Now there are times when he thinks that he hears Egypt calling, begging him to come and redeem her.

Rameses says, "I have had enough of life! My heart is sick because of my life's work which has been destroyed. Wherefore did Egypt fall? Why have the treasures of generations been despoiled? And to what purpose wore all our efforts, our heroism, our patience, our aspirations? What is the meaning of all activity under the sun?"

One of the Pharaohs says, "Let us call the priests and ask them what all these things mean." Menkure says, "How can they know now when they are dead, things they did not understand when they were living?" The oldest priest says, "Our temples are in ruins, but our gods live eternally, though they have new names and new forms... "

Khafre wants to know "Where is all this going?" And another priest answers, "There is a wheel that turns around and around on its axis all the time." Rameses finds this unsatisfying and says, "But we were men of flesh and blood who once lived upon the earth. What is our part in this endlessly continuous flow?" Sesostris wants to know why have the gods planted in the heart of man the desire for eternal life and withhold that life from him?

New voices are heard, of slaves and soldiers and a large throng of people who gather before the pyramids. They have heard the conversation of the Pharaohs and mockingly they say, "Have you heard? They want eternal life. Not enough for them the life they lived, and the evil and exploitation they practiced. They want eternal life!"

The Pharaohs want to know who dares to speak thus and they answer, "We want the life of which you robbed us through back-breaking labor." The soldiers add, "You sent us like sheep to be slaughtered in the fields of battle." And the masses of the people say, "You sucked our blood with taxes like leeches."

The priests are angered by these voices of rebellion but Khafre seems to rejoice in them and says, "I hear new sounds." The Pharaohs insist that what they did, they did to glorify Egypt. But the people say that they got only the privilege of licking the dust under the burden of this greatness. Menkure's cynicism again comes through and he says,

"Why pay attention to their words? They can't return to life!" But the voices reply, "You also cannot return, and this is our consolation."

Music is heard and a sound of drums. Ikhnaton appears with Nefertiti. The priests and the Pharaohs greet him with disdain saying, "Here is the rebellious son who turned against the teachings of his fathers." Ikhnaton begs them not to drive him away in their anger since he came not quarrel with them. Ikhnaton then explains how from his childhood, when he was still a suckling on his mother's arms, he was taught to look up to the Sun and think of it as God. All his life was a song unto the Sun which became for him the only God. He felt himself chosen by God from all the thousands of his creatures to sing his praise and to announce his truth throughout the world.

The Pharaohs object to his boasting and his blasphemous utterances. But Ikhnaton says, "The ears of the tired, who have become congealed in their error, cannot bear the sound of truth which disturbs their peace." He then explains how he tried to implant this new truth in the heart of all his people. Though he wished to be an enlightened ruler he had to do it with a strong hand for nothing is ever accomplished by man without overcoming thousands of obstacles. Man cannot introduce anything new without forcing some change.

He is asked why he tried to blot out the memory of his fathers. He answers that his own name which his father gave

him and which his mother uttered with lips of love, he destroyed this name too. All the dreams and prayers of his youth, all the songs on which he had been raised, all the sacred things which had been taught to him, all these he brought as a burnt-offering on the altar of the God of truth.

Nefertiti enters the scene and in a beautifully romantic exchange they speak of their love for one another and how much this love meant to each of them. Ikhnaton refers to the great pain which came to them when God tested them and took their little girl. Nefertiti says, "Eternal as my love is the sorrow of my heart." And Ikhnaton replies that the heart was purified nevertheless and grew stronger.

He reminds Nefertiti how one night, she bared her suffering spirit to the melody of her heart and danced before the stars under the heavens and with this dance redeemed her pain and his pain as well. As he watched the beauty of her dance he felt saddened for this beauty which would pass. Suddenly he felt a new illumination. "There is no change! There is no death! That which once was, exists forever!"

Nefertiti finishes her dance and remains standing quietly, her head bowed in humility and her hands on her heart. Ikhnaton speaks again. "Now I know it more clearly, now I know it a second time. Nothing comes in vain and goes from the world. Nothing is lost! And death is only an illusion."

The Pharaohs are amazed at these words and Ikhnaton continues:

"The curtain of life is woven of one piece, from eternity unto eternity. Generations go and come and every generation and every man is taken into the weave. Each weaves his own portion in it, be it little or great. Happy the man who weaves his soul into it and thus adds to its beauty. This beauty will remain forever. I know that I did my life's work faithfully. It was a work of truth and it shall endure forever...

"Like a passing storm I swept away the debris of generations and the decay of thousands of years and uncovered the virgin soil for a new fruitfulness. My wings carried a seed of a higher and more noble truth. Who knows where this seed fell and where it took root? Nothing is lost! The great work of your lives may have become mounds of ruins and yet your work has been woven into the great curtain of life as an eternal adornment...

"There is an eye that sees from one end of the world to the other. There is an ear that hears every sound. What is human knowledge and what are the memories of generations compared to this? Sweet is the thought to man that many days after he leaves, he will be remembered and distant descendants will rejoice to see the footprints of his work, to hear the thoughts of his spirit. But seventy times seven more ennobling is the knowledge that we have become a part of the whole order of existence, a partner to God, and that no power can take our portion out of the world. We are woven into the fabric of life forever."

While Cheops is delighted with this thought, Menkure finds even here something negative to say. "There is one lot for the good and the evil and there is no difference between man and creeping thing." Everything exists forever?" Khafre asks: "Is there indeed one fate for the good and the evil and everything is just a foolish game?" Ikhnaton answers, "Life loves beauty. Life thirsts for God and there is a reward for the good and the beautiful and the seeker of truth. This is the path for the enrichment of life. This is the

hidden shuttle in the eternal weaving. Happy the man who walked this path. The threads of his weaving shall shine in the curtain of life."

Then the voices of the slaves, the woldiers and the masses are heard saying, "What portion have we in eternity?"

Ikhnaton says:

> "All of us have been fashioned from the same clay, from the light of the same sun. Whatever a man be and whatever he does, if he is true to his source, his source will not deceive him. You built a world. You carried the burden of the earth on your shoulders. How then can your portion not be found in the curtain of eternity? ... You transmitted powerful forces and mysterious treasure from generation to goneration. There are threads that are finer than the fine, that no eye can see and none can count. Yet they are present in the curtain of life. Did I not bring a glow into your eyes with the fire of truth which I kindled? This you bequeathed unto your sons though no man be aware of it... There was no great work in the land in which you had no portion, no crown in which your radiance did not shine."

All disappear and a new melody is heard. Dawn is approaching. From behind the mound, the figure of the wanderer appears again and he speaks:

> "It was a dream and with the light of morning the dream melts and is gone. And yet there are dreams one dreams at night that are more true than the day. What is truth, if not the truth that lives and creates life? ... Blessed be every thought that brings a vision of redemption to man, healing to the broken-hearted, reward to the toiler who seeks only the good...
>
> "And now I must return to the noise of the world. I know that my wandering on the earth has not yet ended and my spirit shall have no rest. It is not yet weary of seeking, nor tired of distributing the treasures with which God has graced it.

"This night shall never be forgotten from my heart and my way from henceforth shall be different. The heavens over my head will be different. For though I have seen it only in a dream, the song resounds within me, that life is one great tapestry. However much it may change and be altered, I, too, have a portion, be it much or be it little, in eternity."

IN LUZ - (B'Luz)

This is undoubtedly one of Kahan's better and more sensitive plays, both in style and theme. Here the poet displays the full creative powers of his fertile imagination, his deep concern with ethical problems and his felicity of expression. From Talmudic literature, he excerpts a strange and fanciful legend and makes it the vehicle for a very realistic and critical appraisal of our twentieth century civilization.

The city of Luz is described in this Talmudic passage[1] as a city in which the Angel of Death had no jurisdiction. It is an hermetically sealed city, into which none may enter from the outside world. It is an idyllic community, simple and patriarchal in its structure and unspoiled in its rustic charm.

This very simplicity gives rise to the central conflict of the drama, when for the first time a visitor from the "outside world" gains admission into the city. To the young people in the town he brings new and exciting ideas. He paints for them attractive word pictures of the colorful kaleidoscope of his world, compared to which their life is

[1] Sotah 46b, ...

pallid and dull. Within a few days he disrupts the entire fabric of the life-pattern which took centuries to develop. Though he talks beautifully and thoughtfully of the constructive achievements of civilization, the one concrete example of civilization which he has brought with him is a gun. With this he kills a man, after setting the young men against their elders. In the end, when he is told to leave the city, he takes with him the young woman whose love he has won away from her betrothed.

What made Kahan select this legen of Luz as the theme of his play? The destructiveness of modern technological civilization obviously concerns him deeply. Was he trying to examine Mahatma Gandhi's call for a return to the "spinning wheel" and simple home industry as a solution to the ills of capitalist economy? Was he holding up the mirror to those naive prophets who keep calling us to return to "the good old days?"

Ordinarily one can select with some assurance the character through whom the author is expressing his personal views. Here it is not so easily done. There are times when one feels certain that Saraph, the mayor and patriarch of the city, is the one who expresses Kahan's views. At other times, it seems that it is Barkus, the interloper, the "visitor from Mars" who gives voice to the poet's ideas and views. Kahan, like Barkus, believes in progress and in the continuous unfolding of civilization. Though no longer a young man, Kahan is still youthful in his call for personal heroism and for

resistance to evil as well as in his refusal to believe that our life's course is determined by fatalism.

This difficulty of determining which of the two protagonists represents the poet's views may be due to the fact that the poet cannot be decisive in an area where our whole society has thus far been unable to find its way. One need not be an existentialist to recognize that there are certain existential dilemmas which confront us today, as indeed they confronted man at all times. Kahan presents in this play the tow opposing camps: the stable, settled older generation which has found certain basic principles by which and for which it lives and the restless, rebellious youth who hunger for new experiences and change, sometimes without being aware of the meaning of this hunger. In the old order there is peace and serenity and a restful kind of beauty. It is oblivious of and indifferent to the storms which rage in the hearts of the young. It leaves no room for bursts of energy. There are no new trails to be blazed. There are no untrodden paths. Meanwhile, the young grow old in watchful waiting and their opportunity to lead and make decisions comes when they are too old to care about making changes.

Luz might be the Garden of Eden in which Adam was placed. What would have been the history of civilization if the serpent had not entered to tempt Eve? Eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge brought in its wake a surrender of immortality and pain and toil in the business of carrying on the

human race. But apparently there was no other way.

It is this dilemma which Kahan presents with such fine poetic charm and grace in _B'Luz_. As one reads the opening scene in which the family prepares to celebrate Saraph's birthday, one cannot help feeling, "How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together." When a bit later Saraph refers to his wife who died fifty years earlier, he speaks in a most moving way of the profound and lasting love between a man and a woman and how even in her death this love inspired him to affirm life and to live creatively.

When the stranger appears in the city, the young people flock to him. He strikes responsive chords in their hearts and minds and the poet makes us feel that Barkus is not really fomenting the revolution. He merely brings into the open those feelings and urges which have been suppressed and driven into the subconscious by the dead hand of tradition. Here the poet seems to be with Barkus. Yet before long, one sees the destructiveness which is wrought in the city when due to Barkus, blood and death make their presence felt in Luz for the first time.

In yet another way does Kahan demonstrate that this is an insoluble dilemma. Barkus gains his very admission into the city as a result of an act of kindness on the part of the watchman, who could not have refrained from acting the way he did without violating the very essence of the code of ethics of which B'Luz was a symbol.

Barkus had been wandering about in the hills, lost and his supply of water gone. He resigned himself to death, when he heard the sound of a running stream. He followed the stream and suddenly came upon the gates of the city. He beat upon the gates, saying "I am a man, dying of thirst. Give me some water." At that very moment the old watchman was watering his vegetable garden. How could he give water to the plants and refuse it to a human being. Thus he committed the terrible offense of opening the gates to admit a stranger -- in order to save his life. That Kahan should have selected this manner of explaining Barkus' entry into the city, is convincing proof of his feeling that one cannot stop civilization from reaching the most isolated places. Civilization undoubtedly creates great and difficult problems but we cannot evade or escape the responsibilities of coping with these.

SONG OF KINNERET[1]

In this one-act phantasy Kahan again draws on Jewish folklore for inspiration. In the Talmud[2] we find the "explanation" for the Hebrew name given to the lake mentioned here (also known as the Sea of Tiberias and the Sea of Galilee). The Rabbis say that "Kinneret" is like the Hebrew word "kinnor" (violin) and thus the lake came to be called because the fruit that grow in the vicinity are sweet like the strains of a violin. And in this drama when Mother Kinneret sings, she is accompanied by a violin.

There is another legend which Kahan incorporates into this play, that concerning the well of Miriam. According to tradition because of the merit of Miriam who sang a song to the sea, the Jews were accompanied in the desert by a well that sank in the Kinneret after the Jews arrived in Israel. The tale continues that Miriam and her well possessed strange and wondrous powers of healing.

The theme behind this phantasy is the struggle between Israel and her Arab neighbors and the hope for peace, and possible, on the larger scale, the picture of troubled mankind and the hope for redemption.

The drama opens with a scene at twilight and Mother

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[1]Published in Moznaim, Tel Aviv, April, 1957.

[2]Megillah 6a.

Kinneret musing and then singing her song. She says that even-tide is the time when the world reflects from whence it came and to where it is going. She then tells of the birth of Kinneret, Kahan graphically portraying this as the birth of a child. But the days go by, day after day, and redemption has not come: "...יום יום חלף וגאולה לא באה..."

Mother Kinneret next sings a "Song of Burning Longings" which expresses her pained yearning for Messianic times.

"...לבין מלכות שמים, עולם שכלו טוב..."

Her daughters, the waves, having gone to sleep, awake and tell each other their dreams. The first tells of a beautiful fish who came to see her but then disappeared, never to return again. Here Kahan may be referring to those Jews who waited for the Messiah to return them to Israel, but in time they realized that theirs was an empty dream.

Another daughter tells of her dream of a lovely star in the heavens to which she ascended, grabbed it, pressed it to her heart, and then returned. This is perhaps Kahan's "attack" of those who wanted to settle Israel "piece-meal" or against those who did come but left after the struggle became too difficult. ?

A third dreamt of human beings and their greatness, especially one whom she loves and desires. In this dream they brace each other as true lovers. This seems to be the symbol of the Halutzim and those who continue to come in and

build the land and make it their home.

And the fourth daughter says that she touched a charming young girl and wanted her to stay, but she returned to the dry land. This last type may bring us to the present day with Jews of Europe returning to Europe and young students and tourists from outside of Israel who go there just "for a visit".

Miriam appears in the moonlight and another of the waves claims to have seen her. A sister says this is foolish, yet the former wave denies this, saying her sister did not see Miriam because she did not believe. We then hear Miriam sing her song, her belief that the the song of the Jewish people has not died.

Mother Kinneret then warns her daughters of the approaching sandy winds (Arabs) who will come to plunder. They do come and make overtures of love but the daughters prevail. Indeed, Israel struggles continually with the Arabs but has thus far been victorious.

The winds of morning then appear; these are the true lovers. The waves sing a "Song of Universal Hope" and depart with their lovers. The waters momentarily come to rest only to be roused by the pressence of fishermen who sing a song of gratitude to the bountiful and trustworthy Kinneret.

The phantasy ends with an Epilogue in which Yaakov Kahan tells of the desire of man to put his own seal to that which his eyes see. And the poet, through his imagination

(perhaps a justification for writing a phantasy), may even be closer to the truth. At any rate, he tells us, it expresses the feelings of his heart, the abundance of his love for this land, the land of his fathers. This land of Israel whose beauty makes his heart tremble rings out with the sounds of the heavenly violin -- to the Kinneret.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE BIBLICAL DRAMAS

Except for Hosea, the remaining dramas are to be found in Volume Five of Yaakov Kahan's collected works. They are: Jephthah, The Solomon Trilogy (Solomon and Shulamith, Solomon and the Daughter of Solomon, The Queen of Sheba), and Ezra and Nehemiah. Although endowed with a fertile imagination, Kahan does not reshape the Biblical text or its intent to suit his own desires. Rather does he work out of it, using it as his source in much the same way that the archaeologist does in his reconstruction of ancient days. To this Kahan will often add themes which he has read from later sources which "comment" on the texts he uses. In the "Solomon Trilogy" we again see the influence of Goethe on the writings of Kahan.

Perhaps because Kahan works here in a more "restricted" area than in writing his phantasies, his "controlled" imagination prevents him from reaching the heights which he attains in the previous chapter. Nevertheless, it is with profit and interest that these plays, too, may be read.

JEPHTHAH

The story of Jephthah is one of the most moving stories not only in Biblical literature but in all literature. The Bible devotes exactly one chapter of forty verses and seven verses in a second chapter to this episode in early Israelite history. Of these forty-seven verses, the first eleven tell of Jephthah's early life and his career as a "Robin Hood" until he is summoned back to lead the people of Gilead. The next eighteen verses recount his attempt at diplomatic negotiations with the King of Ammon, (with about the same success as our State Department has had with the Arab countries in the Middle East). The last seven verses (Judges 12:1-7) tell of his undiplomatic relationship with the men of Ephraim. We are thus left with a total of 12 verses which cover the story of his war with the Ammonites, his vow, his victorious return, the tragedy that overwhelms him and his daughter, her pathetic request for a slight reprieve, and the memorial established to her by the maidens of Israel.

Such is the consummate art of the Biblical writers that within these few verses there is enough suggestive material for a poet like Kahan to write a five act drama of eighty pages. Obviously, Kahan had to expand the Biblical text but he did so in complete accord with the spirit of the original story. In this, he followed the pattern of the ancient Midrashim, though he did so out of the richness of his own creative imagination. Here and there, he attempted to justify Jephthah -- not because

Kahan approves of Jephthah's sacrificing his daughter -- but because he wished to show that Jephthah had no alternative, being the kind of person he was and living in the times that he did.

This does not mean that Kahan accepts Greek Fatalism. Not at all. Towards the end of the play when the priest Azanyhu appears, Kahan suggests the possibility, at least, that had the priest been there at the time, Jephthah might have been persuaded to refrain from carrying out his terrible vow.

The play opens with a brief picture of Jephthah's home life. His lovely daughter, Ketziah, expresses her devotion to the Asherah, but horror of Baal, whom she finds too mighty and cruel. When the chief steward of their household says that Baal is the greatest of the gods, the King of Heaven and Earth from whom all life comes, Ketziah counters that the Lord, the God of Israel, is greater than he.

Jephthah is portrayed as a very stern man. When he and his men return from a raid on a Midianite caravan and there is some question of distributing the spoils of war, he says that first they will eat and then distribute the booty. In the meantime, no man is to dare to take anything or if he has taken something, let him return it at once, else "his blood will be on his own head".

One of the young men, Resheph, had taken a beautifully embroidered scarf which he planned to give as a present to

Ketziah. On hearing Jephthah's announcement, he produces the scarf. One might have expected the leader to say, "All right, put it with the other things and when we divide the things you may have this as part of your share." Instead Jephthah says: "I won't count this as a sin unto you but I cannot leave the scarf with you. It is now dedicated unto the Lord as the first of the booty. We dare not forget to make atonement before God, lest He remove His lovingkindness from us. This scarf shall be burnt."

He demonstrates his sterness once again after his acceptance of the invitation to return and lead the men of Gilead. His army had not eaten yet, and when one of the men suggests that perhaps they should eat first, Jephthah says, "Give him his portion of the meal and let him go. There is no place in Jephthah's army for one who is concerned about his stomach. A man who worries about his own comfort is of no use to us." It takes the pleas of the men of Gilead to persuade Jephthah to forgive one of his own soldiers. Later when Resheph tries to persuade Ketziah to run away with him, Ketziah answers, "You don't know my father. He is like a rock of flint."

At only one point in the play -- prior to the tragedy which destroyed his life -- does Jephthah show any softness. When Azanyahu notices the Asherah and its adornments which Ketziah had placed around her statue, he fulminates against idolatry. Turning on Jephthah he says, "This horrible

abomination! Who here is serving these foreign gods? This evil is present in your house, Jephthah, and you keep silent? And you wish to go forth to make war and be victorious?"

Jephthah turns to his daughter and says, "I have told you again and again that these are foreign gods and we have no portion in them." He rebukes his housekeeper for having permitted it and she says, "Oh, the child is only playing." Azanyahu demands that the sacred tree dedicated to the Asherah be cut down. Ketziah feels deeply hurt and says but one word, "Father." Jephthah softens a bit and says: "Let it be, O Priest, desist from your anger! We are leaving this place in any event. Let us go."

The next important character trait which Kahan develops in Jephthah is his utter patriotism. Even before he is summoned back to lead his people in a national war, he demonstrates his concern for his people and his devotion to defending them from foreign marauders. Thus after returning from despoiling the Midianite caravan, he says "no longer shall the Midianite caravans pass here securely. No longer shall the robbers from the east come and pillage the fields of Israel without retribution." A bit later when he seemingly refuses the invitation of the men in Gilead since they had rejected him, the men of Gilead say that under his rough and brusque exterior they know that he is not merely a great warrior but one who avenges his people's wrong from the hand of its enemies. This is why his hand and those of his men never harmed an

Israelite, nor preyed on Israelite property. Jephthah admits that on more than one occasion, he had thought of attacking Gilead and taking revenge, yet he never could bring himself to do it. Finally they drive home their point by saying, "We know that you have it in your heart to forgive and that your heart is large enough to understand the affliction of your people."

Jephthah's piety is clearly brought out by Kahan. Reference has already been made to this trait in connection with the burning of the scarf, and to his statement that "we dare not forget to make atonement before God, lest He remove His lovingkindness from us." In that same connection, one of Jephthah's men Ivtzan says of him, "For Jephthah is a righteous and God-fearing man." In the scene with Azanyahu, the priest, Jephthah says "You know my heart that it has always been faithful to the God of Israel, a zealous God who is great in lovingkindness and who does wonders for those who fear Him."

The acme of his piety is reached, of course, when he is confronted by the tragic dilemma of sacrificing his daughter or disregarding the solemn vow that he had made unto the Lord before he went into battle. We may, of course, question this evidence of "piety." As contrasted with the piety of an Isaiah or a Jeremiah, which from their day unto ours has illuminated the minds and won the devotion of small groups of people here and there, the ritualistic and unreasoning piety

of a Jephthah has grown rampant as the weed. To this day statesmen and nations continue to sacrifice their young with less reason than did Jephthah sacrifice his daughter.

Finally, Yaakov Kahan makes us feel that Jephthah is not merely a warrior, stern in his relationship with his men and no less with himself and his family, devoted to helping his people even though he had been driven forth from his father's household with none rising to defend him and faithful to the God of his fathers. He lets us look into the soul of Jephthah, and see a man capable of deep emotions. Years after his wife died, he still feels a great love for her, a love which he transfers to his daughter, Ketziah.

When the Gileadites invite him to return, he turns on them and says, "Where were you when my brothers drove me forth?" Then he describes his lot as a poor young man forced to wander around without a roof over his head, to fight for survival with the beasts of the forest and with the elements of nature. His brother promises to return to him his portion in the family estate. To this he replies,

> "Yes, my portion you can return. Can you also return to me the years that were spent far from home, years of wandering and suffering, when like a lost sheep I strayed from one desert path to another? Can you return to me the innocence of my heart destroyed before its time? Or my wife, the love of my youth who died under the trials and burdens that we endured? Or my honorable name which you made a thing of shame?"

He is aware of the deeper emotions which move men as when he speaks to his men, before his brothers and the elders

arrive and tells them, "For you have known how to convert the bitterness of your soul into contempt and into a consumming flame of rebellion."

This is the Jephthah that Kahan paints for us. There is little in the Biblical text specifically to support the portrait. Kahan presents us with a living human being and there is not a single jarring note in the picture. One is impelled to say, "Such indeed was the man Jephthah."

One of the interesting and psychologically sound additions that Kahan makes is that he has Jephthah's eldest brother appear as a member of the delegation that comes from Gilead. It is part of justice that he, who was perhaps largely responsible for driving Jephthah out, should come to plead with him to return. It would have been in character for Jephthah to refuse to come back, unless such an overture had been made by members of his own family.

In the second act, we find Jephthah's brother returning wounded from the battle. In the course of his report, he tells the housekeeper that he saw Resheph, the young man whom Ketziah loves, fall by his side. Ketziah, in the meantime, is talking to her girl friends and recounts a dream that she had. She saw herself in the forest and suddenly a wild giant of a man comes towards her with a knife in his hand, his eyes like cold steel. He lifts the knife and she screamed, "Father!" Then she awakened. As they talked, Ketziah notices that one of the girls has an embroidered scarf, quite similar to the

one which Resheph had wanted to give her. She begs her friend to let her borrow it and after a promise of rich gifts in exchange, her friend gives it to her.

Kahan seems to make much of this scarf. Ketziah wears it when she goes forth to meet her father, as he returns victorious from the battle. Later, Keren, the friend who had loaned her the scarf, says, "Ketziah had worn it all the time." When one day Ketziah returned the scarf to her, she knew that Ketziah had buried her youth and was prepared to die.

The brief but tragic encounter between Jephthah and Ketziah, who is the first to come forth to meet him, is treated in numbered words by Kahan. There is no attempt to elaborate the Biblical story here. It is permitted to stand in all its stark horror without any embellishment. Jephthah cries out when he sees that his daughter is the first to come forth from his house, "Thou hast brought me low, my daughter." He tells her of his vow. She fall into the arms of the housekeeper, who turns, with maddened eyes to Jephthah and says, "Thou miserable, unfortunate man, what hast thou done?" Jephthah answers, "Indeed the most miserable of all men, am I. Cursed be the day when the sun first shone upon me! Cursed be the day when my tongue learned to speak! For lo I opened my mouth unto the Lord and I cannot undo it!"

In Act III, Ketziah's girl friends, who have been staying with her during her two-month's "reprieve", plot to bring Resheph to see her. Resheph is determined to make her escape

with him. They go off to carry out their plot and Ketziah, left alone, soliloquizes. She speaks to the moon and says that she has come to see her place in the stream of history. Now she understands her lot, both tragic and fortunate. Hitherto she had been a foolish and dreamy girl. Now she knows that she is to serve as atonement for her people, before the gods. When the scales of war were rising and falling, her father "threw her" into the scale that was being lifted against her people, and she tipped it in their favor. She is proud that she is the one chosen by the chief of the gods (Baal), whom she had always feared. Now she will be sanctified unto him. And yet she sorrows that she will no more see the earth, its lights and its shadows, nor hear the whispers of the wind in the trees or the gentle noise of the birds' wings in their morning's flight. She lifts her face to the moon and says, "O Thou, Mother of Mercy, plant strength in my heart and courage to bear my heavy burden with holy silence, as befits one chosen by the gods and the daughter of Jephthah."

Resheph appears and pleads with her to run away with him. He argues that the God of Israel does not want human sacrifice, that this is the perverted teaching of the Baal cult which Israel had destroyed. People will rejoice to learn that she escaped to a "new life".

Ketziah answers him, "You came too late. Had you come earlier, I would not have asked whether it is the light that

you bring or only an illusion. I would have followed you." Now her way is clear before her. A pale light, but a pure and delicate light, has brought peace to her soul and her path has been revealed to her. If she were to escape, the curse of God would follow her and she would bring tragedy and shame on her people, her father and on him whom she loves. Resheph wants to touch her, hoping that he could still win her by his love. She draws herself back and says, "Do not touch me! I am sacred unto God and no man may put his hand on me."

Resheph leaves and at first Ketziah gives way to the weakness and anguish she feels. "Why did I drive him away so cruelly when my heart cries so for life?" She returns, however, to rationalize her sacrifice by saying, "Had I been a youth I would have gone forth in battle and died a hero's death. Can I now do less, being Jephthah's daughter, to redeem my people's victory and to offer my life on its behalf?"

In the fourth act, we hear two of Jephthah's men discuss his withdrawal into a shell. He is torn by the vow that he made and dreads the necessity of fulfilling it by sacrificing his daughter.

Resheph appears and asks Pithon, one of Jephthah's most trusted men, to use his influence to make him change his mind. Pithon says that it is no use, since he has forbidden anyone to talk to him about this matter.

Several of the Gileadite Elders discuss the impending

tragedy and express concern that Jephthah has not consulted the Kohanim, regarding his vow, nor has any Kohen come to him. Later, when Jephthah is speaking to Azanyahu he explains why. He had no confidence in the Kohanim and there was no peace between him and them from the moment of his return. He found them to be "purveyors of petty platitudes" and he saw them as hypocrites who made a business of the word of God.

When Resheph, himself, pleads with Jephthah for Ketziah's life, Jephthah compounds his sin and strikes back blindly at another person whom he loves, Resheph. He orders him put in chains. The leaders of Gilead plead with Jephthah in vain. Jephthah insists that the vow was between him and God and no one else can alter it.

At this point, Kahan introduces the delegation from Ephraim. In this he veers a bit from the Biblical account and with sound psychological reasons. In the Bible, the story of the Ephraimite affront is told after Jephthah has fulfilled his vow and after the period of mourning. Kahan introduces it before the sacrifice and it becomes quite understandable why the man who had shown such diplomatic tact in dealing with the Ammonites, is completely impatient and "trigger-happy" in dealing with his own brethren of the tribe of Ephraim. Jephthah spurns the demands of the Ephraimite delegation, to turn over to them the booty that had been won in the war with Ammon. Instead, he declares war "without mercy" against Ephraim.

Nevertheless he is torn by the necessity to wage a second war before the first war and its terrible consequences are fully behind him. He cannot understand what God wants of him. Does He wish to test him again or is He angry because of the delay in fulfilling the vow? How can he go into battle without having fulfilled the vow which first brought him victory? He must offer Ketziah as a sacrifice before going off. He and his daughter do not belong to himself but to the people. Ketziah appears and says, "I have come, my father." Kahan spares us any details of the sacrifice.

The final Act of the play describes events five years after the sacrifice of Ketziah. Kahan introduces a group of Ketziah's friends and some younger girls who had not known Ketziah but have only heard of her story. They lament the tragic fate that befell her.

Jephthah weakened by sorrow more than age, his left hand paralyzed as a result of a stroke, wanders in the mountains where Ketziah had spent her last days with his old, crippled houseman, Shuppim. We learn from Jephthah's words that he knows that he is shunned and hated by all especially by Keren, Ketziah's closest girl friend, who lashes him with her tongue unmercifully. Jephthah sees Keren wearing a gold bracelet which had been Ketziah's. Keren said that Ketziah had given it to her in exchange for the scarf. Jephthah asks to see it and Keren at first refuses to let him touch it. Then she assents. Jephthah examines it and fondles it lovingly.

When he hands it back to her, she refuses to take it since by touching it, Jephthah has defiled it.

Azanyahu appears. He had come to investigate the new practice about which he had heard, the festival of lamenation and mourning for Ketziah. He was concerned lest this be a new idolatry or worse yet, service to the God of Israel perverted by a foreign importation. He speaks of the "foreign lie that steals into the Torah of truth and blends with it until one can no longer distinguish between the sacred and the profane, between the pure and the unclean." Then he asks Jephthah if now he realizes his error and his guilt.

Jephthah answers: "If to err is to be guilty, I am very guilty and have been severely punished. Yet I could not have done otherwise, for there was no one to remove the cataract from my eye."

Azanyahu says that he had been in the north when this happened. He returned as soon as he heard the news but came back too late. Jephthah says that it might not have mattered for he may not have listened to him. "If God wants to destroy a man, nothing can avail." Whatever he accomplished in life, he paid a very heavy price for it. He was raised to the peak of success and then confronted by the demand to sacrifice his most precious possession.

Azanyahu says that it was a grave mistake and Jephthah says: "All the greater the tragedy, for the sacrifice was a vain sacrifice." It changed him into a wild beast so that he

turned against the Ephraimites and killed without mercy as God had not had mercy on him. Now all the people have turned against him. Even his paralysis is interpreted as punishment. But if punishment, why was the left hand stricken and not the right which raised the knife to slay his daughter?

Azanyahu says that the right hand was spared because it had helped the people in its great hour of need. Here we see that even the "good" priest still operated with a quid pro quo concept of religion.

Jephthah feels his end approaching. He asks Azanyahu why did God make him stumble thus through his vow. Azanyahu says, "We cannot explain the ways of God." But even this great error has been turned by God into a blessing, though in itself it was a curse. The people were so horrified by this act that they have sworn never again will such a thing be done in Israel. Thus Jephthah saved the people not only from a foreign yoke but cleansed their spirit from foreign sins. "Happy is the man who not only through his righteousness, but even through his error, has brought strength to his people."

Jephthah thanks Azanyahu for these words of comfort. He asks him to keep his memory alive, the memory of an unfortunate man, who suffered much, who did much good and evil, though he wanted only good and even the evil which he did, he did for the sake of the good. He was guilty, but not altogether so. And he died for his guilt.

One cannot read this play of Yaakov Kahan's without feeling that in more ways than one he has made the period of the Judges come alive. The events which he describes, the profound feelings which he lays bare, the unrestraint, the lack of the powerful moral imperative resounding as it did later through the voice of the Prophets, all these come through and we begin to understand the Biblical phrase, "In those days every man did what was right in his own eyes." (Judges 17:6)

THE SOLOMON TRILOGY

I. SOLOMON AND SHULAMITH

In this five act drama, Yaakov Kahan deals with the material covered by the first three chapters of I Kings. He pictures for us the attempt of Adonijah to set himself up as a king, Nathan and Bath-Sheba's successful efforts to thwart this plan, Solomon's accession to the throne and the early years of his rule.

We see Solomon first as the young prince, who is much more the son of David the shepherd, than of David the king. Thanks to the instruction of the Prophet Nathan, Solomon is a deeply sensitive and spiritual young man, in love with nature and with the simple, pastoral life. He is also in love with a young shepherd girl, Shulamith. He does not want to be king and does not seek power and authority. He is afraid of the responsibilities and burdens of royal office.

The combination of his mother and the Prophet Nathan are too much for him, however, and he is made to accept his destiny. Then the inevitable happens. The man who shunned power, seizes it and uses it for unjust ends, even though his conscience troubles him somewhat. He, whose name denoted peace, indulged in murder. He did not have to soil his own hands to commit these deeds for the work was done for him by Benaiah, his Commander-in-Chief.

Other than the legendary Shulamith (from the Song of

Songs), the only non-Biblical character introduced in this play, is Ashmedai (from Rabbinic literature). On more than one occasion, Kahan makes it clear that (as a post-Freudian author) he regards Ashmedai as Solomon's sub-conscious. This is specifically stated when in the course of Bath-Sheba's pleading with Solomon that Abishag should be given Adonijah as wife and Solomon refuses, Ashmedai, who is standing behind Solomon suddenly says, "This very day Adonijah shall be put to death." Solomon turns to him and says, "What did you say?" And Ashmedai says, "Only that which you thought in your heart."

Similarly when Solomon fails to win Abishag's love and in a moment of royal "weakness" agrees to let her return to her home, Ashmedai appears to taunt him that he had acted so unregally. Just before this appearance of Ashmedai, the image of Nathan had appeared to Solomon in a vision and Solomon lays bare his inner conflicts saying, "Yes, I know all that you think about me! Do you not see that my soul knows no rest because I hastened to spill my brother's blood in the anger of jealousy. To this day I do not know if indeed I sinned, or if I acted in self-defense and to protect my throne."

Throughout the play, we have the feeling that Solomon is being slowly corrupted from within. It is not only that he orders the murder of Joab and of Adonijah. He turns against his father's trusted aides, including his uncle, and surrounds himself with younger men who are more responsive and responsible to him. (Perhaps Kahan borrowed here from Rehoboam's

conduct as described in the Bible.) Even the building of the Temple is motivated not by love of God primarily but as a sort of "occupational therapy", as a refuge from the thoughts and the problems that oppress him as king.

While the Temple is being built, Solomon travels around incognito. He comes upon men working in the quarries and sees how the taskmasters beat them because they are not working diligently enough. Solomon is disturbed by this, and for a moment we again have something of the spirit of the Prophet Nathan coming through. But soon Ashmedai persuades him that nothing great can ever be accomplished without sacrifice and pain and people dying in the process.

The play reaches its climax in the fifth act when Pharoah's daughter comes to Jerusalem to become the Queen. At that very moment, Shulamith has returned to the palace to give birth to Solomon's child. In somewhat melodramatic fashion, Kahan juxtaposes the coronation feast of the Egyptian Queen in the royal reception hall with a small inner chamber of the palace, in which the dying Shulamith gives birth to a little girl. Messengers run back and forth from Bath-Sheba, who is with Shulamith in her great crisis, summoning Solomon so that Shulamith might see him before she dies. The king finally excuses himself from the festivities, but comes too late.

It is a tribute to Kahan's psychological insights that he doesn't present us with a simple character. Like his father before him, Solomon is a very complex person. He

seeks the true and the good and the beautiful but also has within him those deeper recesses in which the baser physical drives operate and which made him the man of a thousand wives, builder of Temple and palaces, and the man who imposed such a heavy burden of taxation on the people that his death was followed by a civil war. In his best moments, Solomon is never altogether free from the responsibilities which summon him back to duty. Thus, before he is made king, he rejects the crown and says "Let Adonijah rule since he aspires to it." He is persuaded by his mother and Nathan that his own safety and security as well as the needs of the people demand his acceptance of the crown.

When he announces his intention to build the Temple, Benaiah tells him of the danger threatening on the Egyptian borders and that they ought to spend the money for defense, to build fortresses. Solomon is torn between the two needs. It is then that he speaks of his lot and says,

> "And I said, 'who is as free as the king? I need only think of something and shall do it. I will command and it shall be fulfilled. But how great are the obstacles I did not forsee! More frequently than not, I am only a witness to what happens and not the master of these events. Obviously, there are limits which no man can overcome and the king stands impotently before them exactly as the poorest man.'"

Again when he is with Shulamith in an idyllic respite from the trials of the throne and they are about to enjoy a meal which she has prepared, word comes to him that he must

hasten to Jerusalem because of affairs of state and the threat of an invasion. In a very real sense, Solomon's soul is the arena of the struggle between the spirit of Nathan at its best and the spirit of Ashmedai. This inner conflict which isn't resolved in these five acts, but which is examined further in the remaining two parts of the trilogy makes Solomon for us a living human being.

There are other parts of this play which are delightful and charming and which bear the original imprint of Yaakov Kahan's reading of the Bible. Thus, for example, he makes us feel that the request of Adonijah for Abishag's hand was motivated by a really true and pure love between them, a love which was reciprocated. So pure in fact was this love that just before he met his death, Adonijah had asked Abishag for a kiss and she refrained from giving it until the permission of the king for their marriage would have been granted. They had hoped then to go away from Jerusalem and live somewhere in quiet and peace, content in the love that they had found for one another.

We also get a picture of Bath-Sheba which helps to round out the little that the Bible tells us about her, after the great dramatic events in which she was such a central character. The Bible knows only of her collaboration with Nathan to have Solomon made king and then of her appearance before Solomon to ask for Abishag's hand for Adonijah. In this play we see her as a real person, one who

is ever ready to help her son, to suggest softness to him when he is hard and to pour a bit of iron into him when he is inclined to be soft.

The relationship between Bath-Sheba and Shulamith is a most tender one. She takes Shulamith to her heart and treats her as her child. When Shulamith was concerned that she had fallen in love with the Prince who is soon to be king instead of with an ordinary shepherd, Bath-Sheba reassures her. Shulamith does not want to be one of many wives and Bath-Sheba tells her to accept her lot, since she will not be one of many wives so long as she is the beloved one. At one point we feel that Bath-Sheba was about to rebuke the king as only a mother may. This occurs in the very last scene, when Shulamith is dying in childbirth, and Solomon tarries and delays his coming until it is too late.

The character of Abishag, who is only a phantom in the Biblical story, takes on flesh and blood in this play. Not only do we see a tender, pure person, very much like Shulamith in her relationship to Adonijah, but a young woman of surpassing beauty and heroic proportions. She rejects the king's overtures with courage and dignity and pleads successfully for her life and freedom. The fact that she succeeds with Solomon is evidence of the great integrity of her person.

The Prophet Nathan is a somewhat minor character in the play. Yet one of the great moments, is that in which

Nathan is only referred to by name. After the murder of Adonijah, Bath-Sheba finds the corpse and learns how Adonijah had met his death. She is so wrought up that she asks the men not to take the corpse away but to call the king that he might see with his own eyes this foul deed. Her maid comes to tell her that she must hurry to Nathan, who suddenly fell sick. Bath-Sheba inquires how this happened and she is told, "They saw him hurrying to the king. As he walked rapidly up the steps, there was in his eyes a burning fire. Then he wavered and fell. His face turned into a grimace, his left side became like a block of wood and speech was gone from his mouth." In these few lines we have a picture of the Prophet, who once again felt the burning zeal of the Lord that moved him to tell David the parable of the rich man and the poor man, culminating in those fiery words, "Thou art the man!" Had he not suffered this stroke, Solomon, too, would have heard such words from him.

In Benaiah and some of his associates we have a picture of the military clique that surrounded Solomon and was determined to remove every obstacle that might thwart or delay the successful building of an empire. Contrasted with them, we have the older men who had been loyal to David and who had shared David's campaigns. These are disheartened by the new spirit that pervades the palace. They see the courtiers, the sycophants who admire everything the king does and make a fuss over each of his wise sayings as though he were some

precocious child uttering words of wisdom.

This first part of the trilogy might well have been called "The Young Solomon." In his youth Solomon was a very attractive person unsophisticated in the ways of the world but wise in his understanding of the beauties of nature and of the human capacity for pure thought, true love and deep reflection. It seems as if with the death of Shulamith, Solomon's youth came to an end. His marriage to the daughter of the Egyptian Pharoah brought in not merely the idolatry, astrology, magic and divination for which Egypt was famous, but a cruel and worldly sophistication which changed Solomon more and more into an oriental potentate. True, he never lost altogether his concern with justice and righteousness, but these were now only redeeming moments, small oases in the vast expanse of power and self-indulgence which his life became.

II. SOLOMON AND THE DAUGHTER OF SOLOMON

OR

THE TOWER IN THE SEA

This second part of the Trilogy is based entirely on a legend which is found in Levner's collection of Jewish legends and is taken from the introduction to the Midrash Tanhuma (in the edition of Buber). Kahan has elaborated this legend by introducing many characters and scenes which are the product of his own fertile imagination.

The Solomon pictured in this play is a somewhat older but not necessarily wiser man. The conflict between the spirit of Nathan and Ashmedai continues with Ashmedai scoring victory after victory as Solomon yields to the lusts of the flesh and power. From time to time, thoughts disturb his peace. He walks about gazing at the stars and trying to read what the future might hold. He has his moments of doubt and skepticism. The questions, later so eloquently stated by Kohelet, begin to gnaw at his mind.

How deeply trapped Solomon is we see in the second scene of the first act when Ashmedai appears. He tells Solomon that he had gone to explore the sources from which gold flows and he found that gold is indeed very beautiful and better for man than wisdom. Gold increases man's appetite and makes his desire for power all the greater. He then shows Solomon a special treasure which he had found, a Carnelain stone, more beautiful than anything that had ever been seen.

He gives it to Solomon to put into his crown or wear it around his neck. He describes how he got this stone (which incidentally figures prominently in the third part of the Trilogy). He had been on a ship going from Ophir when suddenly he saw a great rocky promontory in the distance. He caused a great storm to blow up so that the ship was smashed against the rock and only he was saved. Knowing that the captain had a little bag with wonderfully precious stones around his neck, he took advantage of the situation and seized it.

Solomon rebukes him for his frivolousness in making sport with the lives of men. Ashmedai challenges him and says, "Is there only one who is permitted to do this without being guilty?" Solomon refuses to take the precious stones "for the blood of men cling to them." Ashmedai says, "Look at this perfect saint! I knew a man who caused the blood of living human beings to run and paid no heed to it, as he walked securely to his throne." Solomon defends himself by saying that this was the hand of fate, the will of Heaven, or the command of the stars. Ashmedai says that it was no less the will of Heaven that the people on the ship should go down to their watery grave and that these precious stones should be in his hands.

Solomon is confused. He says that he does not understand why people call him wise. Is it because he can read their hearts as one reads a book or because he understands

the language of birds and of trees? He may be wise in their eyes but in his own eyes he feels very simple, as one who knows nothing. He may be a king and a mighty ruler, and he has but to command. Yet he feels himself like the dust under his feet, and he sees how truly impotent he is. That which will happen to every other man will happen to him too, for he is only a tool in the hands of those who rule on high. They will do with him as they please.

Ashmedai says, "Rebel against them! Stand up to them!" Solomon says that he cannot and Ashmedai says, "You can! Say to yourself that you can and you can." Then he explains how he achieved his strength through rebellion. All of the other angels knew only how to submit, to lament and complain. He alone girded himself with strength and said that he did not like the game in which they were asked to play. Thus he became stronger than all the living creatures and perhaps even than "He".

Solomon says, "Your ways are strange to me, I shall not follow them." And Ashmedai answers, "You are mistaken. My ways are not strange to you. More than once, we have walked together like friends." Solomon says, "Yes, but then I left you." And Ashmedai says, "Only to return to my ways. Ask your blood and it will tell you! Consult the sources of your soul. What is the use of hiding your face from the truth when it shouts from every muscle, from every vein."

Ashmedai disappears and Solomon concludes by saying,

"He said his piece and disappeared. Who is he that speaks thus to me? What am I here upon the earth? Am I only a wave among waves driven by the wind? Can I command the stream of life that it should change its path even by one span? Am I a servant or only a guest invited to the banquet of others? Or do I have a part, my own small part, in the order of the universe? Who is so wise that he can make me understand these things?"

How deeply dependent Solomon has become on star-gazing divination becomes apparent in a conversation between him and Zavud, the son of Nathan the Prophet. Zavud is not quite the man his father was. Still there is in him something of the same thirst for righteousness and justice and purity. He is deeply in love with Solomon's daughter Tofat but thinks more of her good and of his king's good than of his own.

Solomon tells Zavud of the love that he bore to Shulamith and that now all he has left is the daughter she gave him. Many princes have come to seek her hand and his courtiers indeed think of these as opportunities for important political alliances. (His conscience bothers him, even when he speaks to the son of Nathan.) But he wants to make sure that his daughter will be given unto the man who truly deserves her, one who will know how to guard faithfully this treasure which he has kept so well for him. Who is this man to be?

Then he tells Zavud that as he gazed into the stars, he suddenly fell asleep and he had a frightening vision. He saw a barefoot man, dressed in tatters, his hair wild, his face lean almost unto death from hunger, a man without hope and without power. And suddenly he knew that was the chosen

man. But he will not submit to this vision. "No! It shall not be. This time, O ye stars of eternity, I will nullify your counsel. I will not obey you no matter what sacrifice you demand of me, no matter what atonement, I will not obey you."

Zavud urges Solomon to disregard the star-gazing. If, however, what he saw, he saw in a dream, then it may be that God has vouchsafed unto him a true vision and he should not set himself up against it.

Once again, Ashmedai subconsciously asserts himself in Solomon. What might have been a "subliminal" impression in the story that Ashmedai had told him earlier of the ship-wreck, now comes back to Solomon. He remembers the great rock on which the ship had foundered. On this very rock he will now build a tower, as a carefully guarded fortress and here he will place his daughter, well provided for and well cared for but where no man can reach her. Then he will see what will happen.

From this point the play is a fuller development of the well-known legend. A poor young man, a fisherman's son from Kinneret, sails down the Jordan river until he reaches the Dead Sea. By then his food is gone and he finds himself in the midst of desolation. He starts wandering about among the hills and crags, fighting against the elements and against birds and beasts of prey. After many weary days, which sap his energy and strength, he comes to Etzion-Geber. He finds

work and for six months he is happy, though he longs to go to sea. Finally this life's ambition is realized. They are at sea a short time when the ship is shipwrecked and he is cast by the waves onto this rocky fortress.

The young man, Iddo, is saved by Tofat and her girl friends. They hide him for a time and restore him to health. In due time a great love develops between Iddo and Tofat, a love which they consummate in a wedding ceremony of their own devising.

Word reaches Solomon that something is amiss in this tower and he hastens to visit his daughter. Confronted by the events that have transpired and hearing the story of the young man, he realizes that the vision he had seen that night was indeed a true vision and he bows to the stars saying,

> "Verily, ye have conquered me, O ye stars of God and I unwittingly helped you in your victory. I sought to run away from your outstretched rod which seemed to me from the distance a rod of wrath. Instead, it seems I ran towards it. But when I reached it, behold, there was a scepter of lovingkindness in your hands. Be blessed therefore, ye eternal stars, for your great and faithful gift to me and to my daughter... We children of dust, whose range of vision is short, we can only set our steps by your exalted twinkle that comes like a golden ray of light from the darkness of the world into the prison of our heart and quietly sets it aquiver."

In the Levner version of the legend, the closing words by Solomon are, "All of my efforts have been in vain for there is no wisdom and no understanding and no counsel that can frustrate the plan of God." It is not insignificant, perhaps, that Kahan has Solomon acknowledging his defeat before the

stars and not before God.

Throughout this second play, which again has some charming episodes especially in the exchanges between Iddo and Tofat and which are reminiscent of the young Solomon and Shulamith, we find little of growth or development in the character and personality of Solomon. If anything -- as has already been suggested -- the inner decay and corruption continue. This is brought out most clearly in the scene between Solomon and Ashmedai after Solomon has learned that things have not gone well in the tower and that his daughter is sick.

Ashmedai suggests slyly, "Suppose something happened?" The implication in the words and the sardonic laughter that accompanies them, is obvious. Tofat is no longer the young, innocent girl whom Solomon sent away. Ashmedai tells him not to worry too much for he will know how to cover things up. Just wait "one year" and keep everything hush-hush! Even the thirty eunuchs who know what has happened -- present no problem, for thirty eunuchs can be put in thirty sacks and thrown down from the top of the fortress.

Solomon says, "But she who committed this sin, she herself will know! How will she be able to meet any of the princes who want her hand. She will never be able to face anyone. She will not be able to sit among the honored women of the realm, knowing that she bears within her the secret of her downfall and her shame." Ashmedai says: "Unpleasant things can be quickly forgotten. And there are none so quick

to forget such things as women. The shepherdess who is taken into the house of the king, forgets in two weeks her humble origins and struts around like a princess. And a woman who has too soon lost her innocence, in no time at all parades as a righteous and modest woman neither feeling nor remembering what she lost."

Solomon says that he will never be able to forget it. Then he turns against Ashmedai and says, "And you, with all your wisdom, you who counselled me to rebel against all the forces in heaven, how can you bear the shame of this defeat?" Ashmedai says, "A general cannot become despondent because he suffers only little defeat. When you go out to make war, you have to be prepared for losses. It's a game; it's war. Sometimes 'He' is stronger and sometimes I." Solomon says, "That's all we are, creatures of affliction, pawns in a game, a foolish game which you play." Ashmedai says, "This complaint you should direct to Him, your creator." Solomon insists, "But you are the source of evil and evil comes to us only from you." Ashmedai says,

> "This is how man behaves. When things go well with him, he boasts, 'I have done all this. Who is like unto me in wisdom and intelligence?' But just as soon as things turn against him he looks for someone on whom to put the blame. O you thankless creature! Am I not the one who cleared the path before you to the throne? Did I not multiply your wealth, your wives and servants all human pleasures? I brought you the daughter of Pharaoh, with all the power and might that went with her. I gave you the key to hidden treasure. I gave you even the 'shamir' that splits asunder any stone. I knew that in your eyes I was only like a bridge you could

> cross or a ladder up which you could rise. But I said to myself: 'you think what you will! The moment is mine and yours, and tomorrow we shall meet again.'"

The only other side of Solomon that we find in this play is in Tofat's description of her father as she knew him -- a gentle, wise and loving parent, who implanted in her the love of beauty and truth and righteousness. Iddo tells her about the oppressive taxes under which people labor, their enslavement and the beating to which they are exposed at the hands of the king's servants. Tofat defends her father saying that he does not know of these wicked deeds performed by his servants. Iddo replies, "As is the ruler, so are his servants! Their sins are his sins for they do his command." Tofat refuses to believe this. It cannot be, "For who knows the heart of the king as I do? Is it not he who taught me righteousness and justice and to love mercy. Did he not plant in my heart feelings of purity and faith? There may be times when a ruler has to be hard. Yet I know that he loves me and he will fulfill my request that we may never be separated."

Solomon redeems himself in part for his neglect of Shulamith and for his having sold out to Ashmedai, by permitting the marriage of Tofat and Iddo. This brings the second play to its Hollywood ending.

III. THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

OR

THE CARNELIAN STONE

In the third part of the Trilogy we find Solomon after he has reached the zenith of his life and power. His fame had been carried to many lands; he had beautified the land of Israel with roads and palaces, cities and Temples. But there is unrest in the land. The people groan under their heavy taxes and the tribe of Ephraim especially has found a leader around whom to rally in rebellion against the king. Solomon's loyal officers and soldiers suppress the malcontents but they never succeed in capturing the leader Jeroboam. Ultimately he finds safe refuge with the new Pharaoh of Egypt, who is only too happy to harbor him so that together they may plot against Solomon.

Unlike his father, David, who had been weakened and spent by the many wars in which he had engaged, by the personal misfortunes in his family which sapped his energy and peace of mind, Solomon still retains much of his manly vigor. He still searches for wisdom and tries to plumb the meaning of life.

The coming of the Queen of Sheba brings a new great love into his life. The love which develops between them is unlike his other loves -- with the possible exception of his love for Shulamith -- in that it is a deeply intellectual and spiritual as well as physical relationship. This is

Solomon's swan-song, like the fiery sky when the sun is about to set. The golden hues of the sun radiate across the western sky, but these fires are not the fires that burn and sear. They have a warm glow but after this glow comes the cool of twilight.

In the opening scene between Solomon and Ashmedai, we are prepared by the author to see Solomon in the third of his "profiles." Here the roles are somewhat reversed with Ashmedai appearing in the dress of a Nazirite and Solomon still trying to maintain that he young and virile enough to love and live. It soon becomes clear that this is only an illusion. Apparently Kahan wants us to understand that Solomon was beginning to question if the time had not come for him to act his age. He had his moments of weariness and moments when he counted the silver hairs in his beard. Ashmedai needles him by reminding him that there is no fun in drinking so much wine, for soon wine tastes like water, nor in having many women for in time there is no difference between one and another.. Moreover, all the glory and the buildings which he had multiplied cannot stop the gnawing question of "why" and "for what purpose" did he do all these things. Solomon is aroused from his sad reveries and he turns against Ashmedai.

Ashmedai then directs his attention to the new affair that is awaiting him, the coming of the beautiful Queen of Sheba. Solomon pretends that he is not interested, for he is sick of women. Ashmedai says, "Yes, you have grown old, Solomon, that's true enough." Everything had come too easily

him. Women had become his bondswomen. They were there to serve his needs and whims and he would deign to confer his kindness upon one or the other from time to time. The woman who was now coming, however, was different. She was a proud queen with a stormy spirit, a beautiful widow who had known both happiness and pain and whose heart was not at rest. She continually aspired to that which is noble and wonderful and her blood longs for the hidden.

At the very moment that the Queen's party arrives, another rebellion led by Jeroboam takes place and Ashmedai plants in Solomon's mind the determination to have Jeroboam killed.

Solomon goes off and Ashmedai says,

> "I have not yet given up hope to break this proud spirit and make him kneel under my feet. I shall see him writhe in pain, frustrated and disappointed in all his dreams until he will hurl a wrathful curse against the heavens and their makers. Let him become involved a bit more in affairs of state and let him play a little longer, while the spark still burns in his veins. That which I was unable to accomplish in his youth, I will now succeed at the time of the setting sun."

The relationship between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba begins on a purely intellectual plane and continues as a friendship between two equals. They rejoice in each other's company. The Queen propounds riddles and Solomon answers them. When Solomon ventures to make overtures of love the Queen holds him at bay. Solomon takes the rare carnelian which he had received from Ashmedai and presents it on a

chain to the Queen of Sheba.

Later the Queen's general who is deeply in love with her and the high-priest who accompanied her from Sheba, feel that it is this carnelian which has bewitched the Queen so that she is prolonging her visit and gives no indication of any desire to return home. The general is angered because he loves the Queen and has illusions that he may yet claim her as his own. The priest is worried that the Queen is beginning to fall under the spell of the God of Israel. Both are disturbed by the probing questions that are asked of them by Solomon's noblemen -- about their land, its riches, its potentials, etc. They sense that a plot is brewing for a marriage of their Queen to Solomon, which would mean a merger also of the two countries, separated though they be by land and sea. They, therefore, arrange to have this precious carnelian stolen by one of the Queen's maids in the hope that they can thus break the spell in which their Queen has been caught.

With a touch of irony, Kahan has the very loss of the carnelian prove to be the "final touch" that brings Solomon and the Queen of Sheba together. The Queen is dressing one evening, preparatory to visiting King Solomon in his chambers. She ask for the carnelian and the gold chain for she wants to appear before him in all her radiant glory. It is then she learns that the carnelian is missing. She is heartsick for she feels that she has no right to appear before Solomon when

she has been so remiss in guarding this most precious of all jewels that he had given to her. Even the kind persuasiveness of Puah -- one of Solomon's oldest wives, who had befriended the Queen seeing how much joy and happiness she brought into Solomon's life with her coming -- even Puah fails to persuade her to go without the carnelian.

Word reaches Solomon that the Queen is not feeling well, and he goes to her. In a very moving scene he pleads with her not allow their few moments to be lost in sad and moody reflections. She gives him a cup of wine to which she has added some of the special spices from the land of Sheba. He drinks it and says, "Never have I drunk such wine. Your spices have added to it a precious fragrance and taste and new strength. What secret charm did you whisper over it that enveloped all my senses as in a flame?" He tells her that he has one riddle to propound to her -- but she will have to guess both the riddle and the answer. Should she fail to guess the question, then that too will be an answer. With that he leaves.

The Queen knows the question and later that evening, she goes to Solomon to answer it with her person.

Soon the general and high-priest realize that their use of counter-magic had failed and they take the direct approach. The general declares his love for the Queen and summons her to return to Sheba. She spurns his love and rebukes him for daring to aspire so high, assuring him that

even should they return, he can never hope to become her consort. Thus rebuffed, he declares open rebellion and announces to the troops that they are returning home. The priest also comes to persuade her to return. At the same time, he gives her back the stolen carnelian.

At this point, the merchant, Tamrin, who was responsible for arranging the royal visit, comes back from his business trips to Tyre, Sidon, and other places. The Queen commands him to speak to the people and have the general put to death if need be, for his open rebellion. Tamrin and the general duel and Tamrin kills the general. Now the Queen realizes that she must return to her land and her people.

The farewell scene between Solomon and the Queen is presented with great restraint. They take leave of each other, grateful for the love and friendship which they had shared and for the wonderful memories which they will always retain of the days spent together. Looking over the city, the Queen expresses her love of the city and why she feels she must leave:

> "To see the city once more and the divine expanse around it! How exalted is the light that hovers over the city! How inspiring the silence! Here the creator opened His great, good eye and set it on His chosen city. In turn she modestly hides her face from before Him! How wonderful is this place, how good to walk around it, for everywhere one feels the closeness of God...
>
> "You know, my king, and understand from your own experience. My land calls me! My people call me! O if I were not one but two, so that I could be both here and there! But I am only one and have

> one heart! Now it is torn! I go from here but it does not want to leave and yet I must leave. Surely you understand me."

Solomon replies, "How sad that we are placed in such straits, from which we cannot break forth! The heart knows no peace and though it does not understand, it refuses to make peace with the great pain." The Queen says,

> "My beloved, was it not you who taught me that we must be big especially in times of stress and difficulty? It was a difficult teaching to learn but it is only in the difficult that greatness lies. Let us therefore accept our lot silently and bless God for the good which He appointed unto us. I bless the city that first opened for me the gate to the heavens of God, whom I sought from my very youth. I bless you for the great and wonderful love which you bestowed on me, and for the gracious, true and wise words which I learned from you. They shall never be removed from my heart."

Solomon assures her that her portion was as great as his for it was the profound wisdom of her questions that inspired many of his thoughts and sayings which otherwise would never have seen the light of day. He adds, "It is for me to bless and thank you, most wonderful of women! You came to me with your great beauty and youth in the time of my sorrow, when my sun was about to set. With your pure love you lit up the heavens over me in spite of their clouds, so that they shone with a new and more exalted light of pure gold."

Ashmedai appears. He seems old and defeated. He says:

> "How strange and incomprehensible is man! Even though he stand at the pit of the grave, his mouth yet speaks song and praise. Though the song freeze on his lips with trembling, he still raises his eyes

with a last blessing to the heavens. It can only be that something of His strength, whose name I do not want to mention, some spark from Him broke into the primeval dark and refuses to be humbled, so that it destroys and builds again and never tires of pursuing its goal. What a joke that the mighty primeval forces must yield before this poor creature, this impotent man! And yet it is no joke! For when this poor creature dares to rise, like his Creator, before these forces, then I am seized with a trembling!"

Ashmedai shrivels up even more and then disappears completely. Solomon concludes,

"Slowly the flame of day is extinguished and silent shadows envelop all existence. In a moment, the stars will be dotting the heavens. One by one they come up silently and come to life. How good it is that the stars come up and shine when darkness covers the world. The heart knows that they will be there always to shed their light. You weep, my Queen? Do not weep, beloved! It is God who commanded that there should be leave-taking upon the earth. But it is He also who lit the stars in the heavens, these lights with which we have bound up our hearts. The stars travel in their orbit and shine both here and in your land, both now and in all of the distant times of the future. In the light of their eyes, our love shall also shine."

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After completing this Trilogy on King Solomon to which Kahan devoted some 270 pages, one is puzzled as to the motivation which prompted this fine poet to devote so much effort to writing about King Solomon. One might say that Kahan examines in these three plays, the three great loves in the life of Solomon: (1) the love of his youth, Shulamith; (2) the love of his early manhood, the daughter of the Pharaoh; and

(3) the love of his mature life, the Queen of Sheba. Shulamith represents pure innocence and unsophistication, and the Solomon who loved her was a shepherd's son and not a prince, destined to rule as an oriental king. The daughter of Pharaoh represents sensual love, the love of hot blood, heated in part by the thrust to achieve power and the murders committed in the course of Solomon's drive to establish himself as uncontested ruler. The Queen of Sheba is the love in which mind and heart had gained ascendancy over physical passions. Solomon still could feel the thrill of the senses but there was a deeper satisfaction which the Queen of Sheba brought into his life, that of a woman of great physical beauty and with an understanding and inquiring mind to crown her physical beauty.

Having said all this, it still seems difficult to understand why Kahan should have devoted so much space to King Solomon. He does not enlarge to any extent the Biblical stories about Solomon and his wisdom. Moreover, in all his other Biblical plays, he is concerned with some universal ethical and spiritual problems.

Perhaps the secret to the riddle of this Trilogy is to be found in the character of Ashmedai. It may be that Kahan here attempted to write a little "Faust". Solomon is confronted by Ashmedai in the very first part of the Trilogy and at the very beginning of his rise to power. Bath-Sheba and Nathan had just argued with him about his unwillingness

to rule. He insisted that he was much more interested in spinning his dreams and in searching out the meaning of all about him. Nathan brushes these objections aside telling him that it would be an unpardonable sin for him to reject this gift of God. Ashmedai appears and makes a bargain with Solomon though not quite on the terms on which the devil bargained with "Faust".

As a more modern author, Kahan, of course, recognizes that the devil is not outside us but a demonic spirit that dwells within every human being. The more power a person accumulates, the greater the danger that this demonic spirit will dominate him. Thus Solomon yields more and more to the Ashmedai, as he dedicates his great energies to women, to the physical pleasures of life and to building a powerful state.

When Shulamith dies, he has a few pangs of conscience. Later he channels his finer impulses into his concern for the daughter of Shulamith. He wants to protect her innocence and purity, since he no longer has either. He tries to do this, however, by isolating her from life completely and by trying to frustrate one of the true visions that came to him.

Finally, the Queen of Sheba brings him a new love and with it new and deeper insights. Man is both a physical creature and a thinking, feeling and searching being. And in spite of the rich variety of his capacities and experience man is a finite being who must accept his limitations. As

this realization dawns upon Solomon, Asmedai feels that he has lost the contest to gain Solomon's soul.

One may be grateful to Kahan for this Trilogy which has much charm and many fine passages without, at the same time, losing sight of the fact, that this is not a great play, on the theme of "Faust".

EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

In his footnote to this play, Kahan tells us that the main character is actually Nehemiah and that the original title had only his name in it. The name of Ezra was added out of respect to that great leader and also because of the author's feeling that though Ezra differed from Nehemiah, he never opposed the latter's program actively. He refused to permit the people to make him the rally point of the opposition and in the end showed the great spiritual courage of coming to Nehemiah and acknowledging the contribution which the latter had made to preserving the Jewish community of their day.

In most of the Jewish history books which describe the period, Ezra is portrayed as a religious zealot who had no concern for the physical well-being of the people, their security, or their economic life. Like some puritanical fanatic, he was interested only in their adherence to the laws of the Torah. One is reminded of a somewhat similar distortion on the part of some modern Jewish writers, who charged Ahad Ha-Am with wanting only a cultural center, as if Ahad Ha-Am were not sufficiently conversant with history and economics to understand that a cultural center could not thrive where there was no vital, vibrant political and economic community.

Yaakov Kahan helps to set the conflicting views of Ezra and Nehemiah in true perspective, and shows how they

compliment each other. Their difference was a matter of emphasis and priority. In the days of Herzl too, there were many who believed that there had to be a return to Judaism before there could be a return to Palestine; and on the other hand, there were those who maintained that only by returning to rebuild the ancestral home, could Jews redeem themselves from the defects which had corrupted their personal and national character in the exile.

Kahan presents us with a fine study of the character of Nehemiah. The character of Ezra is also well drawn though he appears only briefly in this five-act drama. But we get an especially good picture of the life of the people at the time. We see the nobles and the priests, the rich merchants and landowners who want business as usual. Anything that might interfere with their business is to be opposed and fought. They object to Nehemiah's coming, to his building the wall, to his alienating the "good-will" of the Samaritans, because this may mean a loss of business for them. They are prepared to sabotage his efforts, to serve as a fifth column and deal with the enemy by sending secret messages to Sanballat. They try time and again to incite disloyalty and spread dissension.

On the very opening page, it is one of the priests who sets the pattern for suspicion and distrust of Nehemiah's motives. When an officer says, "Is it true that Nehemiah is a God-fearing man and that he has brought many gifts to the

Temple?" The priest answers, "I don't know about that. But if he came as a governor, he will pay himself back ten-fold for whatever he brought."

In his opening speech to the people, Nehemiah tries to awaken in them their sense of self-esteem. He wants them to be equal to their opportunity and to act in accordance with their great traditions.

> "Do you not see the shame? Do you not hear the cry of these broken stones? Behold the remnants of Towers consumed by fire! Does not the glory of Zion mourn there? And this broken wall which has sunk into the sand, is it not the glory of Judea which is bowed down to the ground? Have you returned to your homes to be orphan in it? Or have you returned to your homeland and will you crawl among its ruins like lowly worms?"

The High Priest replies that the people know their sorrows and they have wept because of them. Each day they offer their heart to God together with the sacrifices that they bring, but God has not turned his wrath from the remnant of Judea.

Nehemiah's answer is, "Certainly God has not turned His anger aside, for you only know how to weep and offer sacrifices! Is this not your chief sin that your hands have refrained from doing anything, that your spirit has ceased to aspire, does not wish to take wing?" Nehemiah insists that they must immediately set to work to build the wall around Jerusalem. When some of the leaders object and say, "What will the nations, our neighbors say? They will only mock us and laugh at us." Nehemiah says, "Let them mock as they

please! They will soon stop! Little by little they will learn to respect us. They may hate us but they will not have contempt for us. We will build a wall, and every stone, every bit of mortar that we add to it, will increase our strength. Here the foundation will be laid for the people's strength." Ezra appears and locks horns with Nehemiah.

> "Do you intend to achieve this great work with such little patience? Should there not be a city before a wall and should there not be a people before a city? How can you build a wall when there is no city and no people in it? You have spoken great things about the city of God but the people is too small and poor to carry such heavy responsibilities. You see the breaches in the wall, but you do not see the breaches in the people."

Nehemiah insists that only as the people will heal the breaches of the wall, will it become strong. Later when Nehemiah has practically finished the work that he had set out to accomplish, he comes to realize how much truth there was in the words of Ezra. Then he says,

> "Indeed, great has been the toil of those who built the wall! But seven times more difficult will it be to rebuild the ruins of the people, to roll away the dust of desolation from its foundations and to heal its breaches, to set stone next to stone -- when these are not stones but living souls! What is the mortar that can bring one soul near to another? Is it not the great crisis in the life of the nation? The crisis has come and yet it seems it is not sufficient!"

At that point he seems to waver in his faith, but Ezra comes to reassure him. Here Kahan tries to teach us that only in the collaboration of the two types of leadership can we

find a way to heal the ills of our people, for when one weakens the other can be strong.

In their initial meeting, however, Ezra and Nehemiah seem not to understand each other. Ezra insists that the people must be true to the law of God, since for this it was chosen. Nehemiah counters that God did not choose it to bend its head and to bow its back to those who smite it so that Israel should be an eternal slave and its land given over as spoil to foreigners. Ezra replies that these things have happened because the people have been faithless to God. If they return to God, God will have mercy on them. He rebukes Nehemiah for trying to take the people of Israel into the paths of other nations. Nehemiah wants to know if to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem is to lead them into the paths of other nations and Ezra replies, "No, but your confidence in the wall and your trust in force, these are!" Nehemiah argues that God helps those who help themselves and that the enemy does not distinguish between one who keeps the Torah and one who destroys it.

Seeing that they fail of understanding each other, Ezra finally says to him, "Return to your own home, for you come before your time." And Nehemiah replies, "I have heard much about you and all that you have done for the people. Continue to teach them and to plant in their hearts the words of God. As for me, I must do that which I came to accomplish, to build the wall."

As the first act ends, the people seem to sense that "an irrestible force has met an immovable body."

In the second act, we see the people in various lights and shadows but mostly shadows. One of the men admits that he had sinned greatly against Ezra the Scribe, whom formerly he had regarded as hard-hearted and wicked. Now he sees that Ezra was right. When he is asked what changed his mind, he replies that he had occasion recently to see the Moabite women whom, under Ezra's pressure, he had divorced. He saw her and almost failed to recognize her, for she had become an old hag. Now he was delighted that he was rid of her. One of the nobles reports that he had heard secretly that Ben-Berechiah has joined the conspirators against Nehemiah. The other one says, "How could that be? He has accepted the responsibility for building two 'measures' of wall to our one." The second man replies, "That's just it! Ben-Berechiah always has two 'measures', one for Judea and the other for Ammon, where his daughter is married."

We learn of Nehemiah's struggles with the people who are trying to build. The petty, little people want business as usual and discourage and dishearten the builders. On the other hand, those who pose as the people's prophets and especially Noadiah, the Prophetess, berate Nehemiah and rebuke the people for daring to think that with their own efforts they can rebuild Jerusalem. Only the Messiah, the son of David, when he comes, will bring redemption. Shades

of the Neturei Karta!

Most of the nobles begin to turn against Nehemiah, though with hyprocritical double-dealing they continue to lend their efforts to the building of the wall. Shallum (Ben Ha-Lohesh), one of the officers of Jerusalem, is determined to do his work with unflagging zeal until the wall is completed. The others use every guile to dissuade him. They remind him of Ezra's antagonism toward the project, and insist that the people is with them. All they need is for leaders like Shallum to join them and they will turn from Nehemiah and re-establish the accord which has existed with their neighbors. Shallum refuses to join them. He will remain with the people and only when the people will have clearly spoken otherwise, then will he know what his place is.

In the meantime, Ezra had withdrawn into himself and spends his days at his home with only one trusted disciple who remained faithful to him. This young man busies himself making copies of the Torah. Ezra turns to regard his disciple Adin and says, "I had many disciples and now he is the only one left. My one spiritual heir! If only God will preserve him." The others left to take part in the building of the wall. Adin goes out for a moment and returns in great agitation having learned that one of the builders of the wall had been killed outside of Jerusalem. The description of this murder parallels the attacks against the halutzim by the Arabs in our days. Ezra is deeply shaken by this report and he

turns unto God and says,

> "O lord, how much longer, how much longer, O Lord? ... It can only be that our sins are great that here on the ancestral soil we also have no rest. In our own house, strangers crowd us and robbers attack us on the roads with none to hold them guilty. O Lord dost Thou really want to crush us again after we have returned, even though we have not returned unto Thee with a perfect heart, rejoicing to fulfill all Thy commandments? Is it to test us again with a great trial that Thou didst send us Nehemiah, that he might cause a conflagration all around us and throw the torch which will kindle our flesh so that the flame will burn at us and purify us a second time with a greater and deeper purification washing away all the dross? O Lord, if I only knew that this was your clear desire and if I knew too that Thy mercy will not be taken from us so that the remnant of our hope will not go up in flames!"

The nobles of Jerusalem appear to report the news of the murder to Ezra, hoping to use this as a lever by which they can pry Ezra loose from his isolation and impel him to lead the opposition to Nehemiah. Ezra refuses to accede to their plan. The nobles remind him that the people responded to his call when he demanded that they put away their foreign wives. Ezra says, "Yes, they did for a little while, and soon they returned to their accustomed ways." And the nobles were the first to betray their promise, even the very ones who were now talking to him.

Ben-Berechiah tries to explain that he made atonement for having married his daughter to an Ammonite by offering seven he-goats at the Temple and presenting one hundred silver shekels to the priest. Ezra says,

"Seven he-goats and one hundred silver shekels! And now you are clear of sin and at peace with yourself, though the plague is in the wall of your house and you have not cleaned it out. Woe for the altar that accepts such guilt offerings! Woe for the priesthood that sells atonement for silver! You know how I longed to see the Temple and what great treasures I brought to it from the exile. Who dreamt that so quickly it would be defiled and that it would become a house of deceit before God, where every sin is easily forgiven and the sinner fools himself by saying 'I have bribed the Lord and He will no longer regard my sin'."

Ezra turns on another noble in whose service the murdered man was employed and says, "You lament, Ben-Hur, for the murder of one of your men and for the two cows that were lost with him. I knew the man. How did it come that such a strong, vigorous man became one of your hired servants, seeing he had owned a field of his own?" Ben-Hur admits that in a time of famine, the man had to borrow money from him and a result (of the high usury), his field was taken over in payment of the loan and he and his family became servants unto Ben-Hur. Ezra says, "You saved his life, but made of him and his wife servants unto you. You walked in the ways of the gentile and instead of having pity on your brother and helping him stand on his own feet, you exploited his misfortune. Now you think well of yourself in your heart and say, 'I did a great act of charity'."

Ben-Berechiah thinks he can influence Ezra by flattery and he tells him that he has spoken like the prophets. If only he would go out to the people, they will follow him, but Ezra refuses to be duped by these self-seeking pseudo-patriots.

Kahan shows us here how the "leaders of the people" use every despicable means including flattery of their spiritural leaders in their efforts to make them tools in their own hands.

Adin, his one faithful disciple, announces that he, too, is leaving to join the builders, for he cannot continue to look at his soft arms and pale face when he thinks of the men who labor with every ounce of strength to protect the people while he sleeps quietly in his bed at night. Ezra pleads with him, saying that at all times there must be someone "to preserve the holy fire for the people in some hidden corner and to guard it with the faithfulness of his heart as a source of light and warmth and as a treasure of consolation. For this he was made, not to carry stones or to bear a sword, but to preserve the holy fire." Adin agrees to remain and both resume their copying of the Torah Scrolls.

In act three, Nehemiah's brother and his aide report to him of the unrest spreading among the people. Nehemiah's popularity is waning and the enthusiasm for the project of building the wall has cooled off greatly. Nehemiah is determined not to pay attention to this. The important thing is that the work should be done. Once the project is completed, even the faint-hearted will be won over. Nothing will deter him, neither enemy from without, nor friend or faint-hearted person from within. He knows that this is the way people behave. They start with tremendous enthusiasm; then they find fault and excuses for their slackness. They must be held in

line until they complete the work.

The nobles appear and try to frighten Nehemiah by reporting that they received letters from friends saying that the Samaritans, Moabites, Ammonites and others are gathering to attack Jerusalem with a great force and destroy the wall. Nehemiah turns to Ben-Berechiah and says, "Did the people choose you as its spokesman or is it you who has set the people against me with letters that you have exchanged with the crafty enemy?"

Some Judeans who had been living amidst the foreign nations and who were forced to return to Judea appear and voice their complaints. The builders turn against them and say, "Do you think that our life here is sweet and pleasant, we who have to work by day and guard by night? Let our tongue wither if we will curse or complain! We are building the wall around the city to protect our homes." Nehemiah is heartened by these words.

The high priest challenges Nehemiah and says that his stubborness is inviting a great massacre of the people. Nehemiah asks him what he suggest they should do, and the high priest says, "You brought the situation upon us. Now you find the way out." Nehemiah says, "No, you are the one who sees the impending tragedy that threatens us. You should therefore suggest the way out. Why do you keep quiet? Is it that your lips are afraid to bring forth to the light of day that which your heart plots in the secrecy of darkness?

Tell us, are we to give up building the wall?" The people shout, "No, no, we will not stop building the wall!"

They decide to redouble their efforts and to increase the watch. Every builder is to gird himself with a sword and be prepared to defend the city and the wall with his very life. As for the nobles, Nehemiah recognizes that they are both fools and traitors and are to be carefully watched.

In act four, the nobles continue their plotting. Ben-Berechiah persuades one of the itinerant peddlars to take a secret letter for him to Sanballat at Shechem. They also work on one of the prophets. In the middle of the night the guards are aroused by trumpet-blowing and the alarm is sounded. The messenenger sent by Ben-Berechiah is caught and Ben-Berechiah is man enough to admit that he is responsible for the letter. He did it out of most "patriotic" motives, to save his people and bring them peace.

Nehemiah says to him, "Though you have skillfully veiled your words, I know your true desire. Yet I will not punish you, for no harm can come from this letter. In truth you are right, for I do not seek war." When his aide objects to the fact that he let Ben-Berechiah off, Nehemiah says, "We revealed his shame before the entire people and that is punishment enough."

In act five, we find Nehemiah rejoicing over the completion of the work. A goldsmith brings him a beautiful cup which he had made with precious stones set in its four sides.

He gives it to Nehemiah and says, "This is a royal vessel that belongs on the table of kings." He seems to be expressing that which is being whispered among the people that now the time has come for Nehemiah to declare himself King of Judea. Nehemiah thanks him and tells him that he will be properly rewarded for his gift.

A messenger arrives bringing a letter from Sanballat in which Nehemiah is invited to meet him at a conference. The letter refers to rumors that Nehemiah and the Jews have rebelled against the King of Persia and that Nehemiah plans to make himself king. "Surely Nehemiah does not want this thing to become known to the King of Persia" ... Nehemiah sees through the treacherous plot and is determined not to be caught in the net that Sanballat is spreading for him.

Nehemiah's brother, however, asks whether he is so certain that the King of Persia will not believe these rumors. Nehemiah has unwavering faith in the King of Persia whom he loves dearly as a brother. Nevertheless, he agrees that it might be well to take every precautionary measure. "The smallest fly falling into a cup of the best wine, causes the wine to be poured out." He decides to write a letter to the king and send it with his own brother together with the gold cup that he had just received as a present. He will report to the king of all that they have been able to do thanks to the help and authority granted to them by the king. At the same time, he will ask for a lightening of the burdensome taxes.

As for Sanballat, he tells his brother to write very simply, "What you report is a lie! There never has been such a plan! You are yourself the author of these lies." When his brother expresses surprise at this brusque and frank language, Nehemiah says, "Yes, thus clearly and openly! We must tear the false mask off with a strong hand so that the naked eye can see the evil that is underneath it."

At that moment, Nehemiah's aide enters and tells him that the Prophet Shemaiah has insisted that Nehemiah must come to see him. There is a secret prophecy which he cannot reveal to anyone else and since he is ill and cannot leave his home, Nehemiah must hasten to him.

Nehemiah goes though he knows full well that Shemaiah is not to be trusted. Shemaiah relates a vision that he had in which he was men fully armed surrounding Nehemiah and set to kill him. There is only one escape and that is to hide in the Temple, in the innermost part, in the Holy of Holies. He, Shemaiah, will meet him there. Together they will close the doors of the Temple so that they might be safe. Nehemiah says,

> "Is it for this that you made me hasten to you? Are you advising me to run away, to lock myself up in the Temple, to profane the sacred precinct because of fear of a murderer? No, you are not speaking to me with the mouth of a prophet for God did not send you! Sanballat hired you and Tobiah conceived this plot that I might sin and be degraded in the eyes of the people and become a shame in the eyes of our enemies."

Shemaiah is taken aback and says, "No, not Sanballat, not Tobiah." Nehemiah says, "Then, who? Did you bring forth this poisonous blossom from the decay of your own heart? Did not some spirits from Samaria come to you whispering friendship and bringing you gold?" Nehemiah turns to his aide and says, "See this man like a bellows full of wind. He speaks great and exalted things but inside he is hollow. His vision is false and he does not even know that it is false. . . Thus his soul has been lost in the void of his wanderings so that he cannot find his way to God or to man. Do you not feel like spitting in his face? No, even that would be too great an honor for him. Leave him to his treacheries and let him disintegrate in his shame." They leave and Shemaiah says to himself,

> "There you have it, Shemaiah. Thus he tore your cloak from you with a cruel hand and set you naked before the world. And if this were not enough, he opened your heart and rent your innards open. These walls and these furnishings that serve your daily needs have seen you in all your shame and were not amazed. You boasted, 'I will capture this proud man; he will be broken in his strength and my laughter will shout in triumph over him.' But the stone that fell laid you low. I ran after great things and did not achieve even small things.

The high priest and the nobles come to see Nehemiah; they want to know why he is brushing aside the peace overtures of Sanballat and the other peoples. They are concerned, of course, about the business and the traffic with the other nations and the high priest expresses the hope that these

nations might be won over to the God of Israel and the Temple worship and more people would come to offer sacrifices. They speak with pious platitudes about the word of God. Nehemiah reminds them that the word of God had been given to Abraham that this land shall be given to his seed "from the river of Egypt until the great river". On hearing these words, they are frightened and Nehemiah turns to them and says,

> "Slaves, flatterers, whose heart think ye to steal? You speak in high sounding phrases but you crawl like worms. You have the strength of conquerors in your mouth, but your heart is the heart of a hare. Wherefore, take you the name of God and the name of His prophets in vain? Wherefore do you continue to lie to yourselves when it is of no use? Say honestly that you have sunk too low to be free, that we must be dependent always on the kindness of strangers, perhaps they will lighten their yoke from us, perhaps they will have mercy! Had you spoken thus, I would have said to you, 'Go and return to the exile for there you belong. And do not interfere with us who have courage and daring to rebuild the land and raise up the nation.'"

The last scene is between Ezra and Nehemiah. Ezra appears carrying a Scroll of the Torah, which he offers as a gift to Nehemiah. Nehemiah rises before him and greets him with a blessing saying, "Great is this day, in that you have come." Ezra replies, "I have come to say, thou hast conquered me! And my heart is full of joy that thou hast won. Indeed thou hast done great things!"

Nehemiah is grateful to Ezra for these words which restore his soul. Now he knows that his work has found favor in the sight of the Lord. He expresses his inability to thank Ezra sufficiently for this great gift. Ezra says,

"This gift is small compared to the words of God which are written in it. Receive them as you have received all the gifts of the Supreme Being and those yet to come. Let them be unto you a source of life and joy and may they guide you in leading the people."

Nehemiah says, "I am not the people's shepherd but its servant," and Ezra replies, "Let no man be small in his eyes when he has been chosen for great things." Nehemiah says, "I am the man of the wall. Now that the wall is finished, my work is ended. I have only to make sure that the city will be strong within the wall." Ezra says, "How can a man like you, in the flower of his strength, say my work for my people is ended." Nehemiah says, "I am tired and old, not months but years have I passed here."

Ezra urges him to stay for he cannot run away from his responsibilities. There is another wall to be built, not a wall of stone and iron but a wall stronger than these, against which no destructive force can avail and from which every enemy must turn aside in hopeless failure. Towers may fall, fortresses may be destroyed but this wall will stand and protect the people. He rolls open the Scroll of the Torah, and says, "This is the wall, the true wall of Israel. As the people guard it, so it will guard them. Arise now, you man of the wall and fortify the wall of God around the people, surrounded by enemies, even as you fortified the stone wall around its city."

Ezra reviews the sins of the people: the foreign marriages, the use of foreign tongues, the worshipping of foreign gods, the desecration of the Sabbath which had been given to Israel as a day of rest and freedom for the weary of body, for man and beast. But even more than this Ezra grieves over the social injustice, the enslavement of the poor by the rich, who take the children of the poor as security for a loan and then make them into slaves.

Nehemiah pleads his tiredness, his desire to rest but Ezra will not let him off. How can he remain indifferent to this evil which threatens to destroy the people so that the wall of stone that he built will not save it.

Nehemiah offers Ezra the high-priestly crown and Ezra says, "No, leave that for the head that longs for it. I will continue in the quiet of my room to copy the Torah of the Lord and to teach it unto all who wish to learn so that they may teach those who come after us. God made you a prince over his people. Will you leave its work when it is only half finished?" Nehemiah again expresses his longing to rest from his weary labors and Ezra says, "He who is chosen to rule, has been chosen to endure. How precious is such a burden on behalf of God and people!" Nehemiah asks Ezra if he will help him and Ezra says, "It shall be the greatest achievement of my life to serve you with the rest of my strength."

Nehemiah accepts the Torah and standing together, they hear the guards on the wall speaking to each other. One asks,

"Art thou awake?" and the other says, "I am awake." The guards join in saying, "We are awake." Nehemiah and Ezra echo their words saying, "We are awake."

The timeliness of this historical play is very clear. Nehemiah represents the political efforts of the Jewish people to re-establish their independence. Ezra symbolizes all that is sacred and sound in Jewish tradition, the goals and purposes which justify and ennoble the re-established State. Perhaps, it is reasonable to assume that the prototype of the Ezra that appears in the closing scene, was found by Yaakov Kahan in the late Chief Rabbi Kook. It seems no less reasonable to assume that had Yaakov Kahan written this play after the establishment of the State, when he saw the political maneuverings of the Religious Bloc, he might have changed the characterization somewhat. It may be well for us to remember the life and activities of Ezra and contrast these with the conduct of the "official high-priest" and the other "leaders" in ancient Judea. Verily, there are Pharisees and Pharisees.

HOSEA

This play, not found in Kahan's collected works to date, was published separately by "Massada" of Tel Aviv. The printed text includes a brief addendum in which the author explains the principles which guided him in writing this play.

Kahan tells us that the work is based upon those passages in the early chapters of the book of Hosea which deal with the prophet's personal life and with the tragic events that moved him to his first prophecies. Kahan then enunciates two basic principles which he believes must be adhered to by any author who would attempt to deal with such themes: (1) the prophets were human and not supermen; and (2) freedom is not to be confused with anarchy, even artistic freedom. This is especially true in the creation, or re-creation, of historical personalities.

Does Kahan fulfill his avowed purpose? And does he do so without doing violence to the main theme of the Biblical story? Kahan, indeed, portrays Hosea as a very human man, weak-willed and susceptible to all the enticing charms of Gomer. One may seriously question the assumption that the prophets were not only quite human but that they were like the weakest men of their time. The Bible indeed does not portray any individual as a saint who never sinned. But Kahan seems to have gone to the other extreme in his portrayal of Hosea. Not only has he shown Hosea to be "human", but he

has, it seems to me, focused attention on the sex motivation, almost to the exclusion of any other dynamic factor. Perhaps the author was here a bit too conscious of present day audience reaction to the staged play.

In his prose play, Confessions of Tarno, Kahan demonstrates the three great dangers which lie in wait to corrupt the artist: (A) the commercialization of art; (B) making art subservient to politics and the State and (C) the artist's loneliness and poverty.[1] It is precisely this first danger to which, despite his recognition of it -- Kahan may have succumbed in writing Hosea. For it is not merely that this is not a very great play; it is not even a very good one. Apparently the finest writers cannot always create at the peak of their ability. In vain does one read this brief drama to discover some insight into what really made Hosea the prophet that he was. The feeling one has at the end is "when will the play begin?"

This is not to say that there isn't action in the play or that there are not some scenes which can be staged with success. These scenes, however, are not about Hosea. To call this an "unfinished" play may not be altogether fair since Kahan disarms us at the very beginning, by stating clearly that the work is based only on those passages in the early chapters in the book of Hosea and on those tragic events

[1]Twersky, J., "The Artist in the Drama of Yaakov Kahan" in Gilyonot, Tel-Aviv, January-February, 1950. (Hebrew)

which moved him to his first prophecies. But even this promise has not quite been fulfilled.

The play might more properly have been called, Gomer than Hosea. We do have a portrayal of the character of this attractive and unstable girl who loved life and had a capacity for living a moral life providing this would not require her to turn her back on the normal opportunities for full living which every young woman desires. In a very real sense, Hosea may have been as responsible for her becoming a harlot, as was her own character.

The only insight that we have into Hosea's prophetic endowment, is when he returns from Jerusalem and describes this visit to his friend. He recalls that when he was only sixteen, he heard Amos for the first and last time. He felt so deeply stirred and moved then, that he became aware of the feeling that this is what he would like to become. Yet from that moment, he had done nothing to prepare himself or to move towards this goal until this visit to Jerusalem. Here, standing upon a hill and reaching out to the beauties surrounding him, he suddenly heard the voice of a young boy standing near him ask in simple childlike sincerity, "Are you a prophet?" The child went on to say that he was going to be a prophet when he grows up. Only then did Hosea feel the stirrings again.

There is another shortcoming in this play -- if it is to be called Hosea -- which is perhaps serious. For more than

2500 years now Hosea has been identified by all who know and love the Bible as the poet who loved tragically, but who learned to distill from his love great insights of compassion. True, these insights came to him slowly and gradually. With these, Kahan does not deal at all since he ends his play at the moment when Hosea pronounces his first great rebuke, giving voice to his conviction that God has rejected Israel.

Perhaps some day Yaakov Kahan will return to this theme and complete this unfinished work on Hosea. For the present, we may be grateful to him for a lighter work which helps us see the poet's creative imagination applied not to the great prophet but to some of the lesser characters in Israel of that time: the professional soldiers, farmers and townspeople, and above all Gomer, who unwittingly helped to make one of the greatest prophets in our people's history.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Though I have not discussed Kahan's style or rhetoric at all in this thesis, I think that from the sections quoted alone, one can see the heights to which this poet can rise.

In the Bible there is no more sensuous poetry than that found in the Song of Songs. One might say that the "melody still lingers on" in Yaakov Kahan's writings. His scenes between Solomon and Shulamith, his descriptions in The Nephilim, Hosea, and others give testimony that this man is very much aware of the passions of man. But more important is that he possesses the talent to express these feelings usually in a most lofty and poetic manner.

Kahan is perhaps best in his descriptions of nature. For this he has achieved his fame and rightly so. A sensitive man, Kahan knows that he must accept the evil in nature (floods and the like) while he is free to criticize man who can improve his lot. For this reason, the glory and beauty in nature are much more apparent to him than kindness and intelligence in man, where these exist in potentiality -- but not necessarily in practice.

As the stage technician Kahan is adequate. He uses foreshadowing, has a gradual introduction of his characters whose opening words reveal much of their nature, and injects humorous moments, now and then, to enable the reader (-viewer)

to give momentary release to his built-up tensions or to revive a waning interest. In this last aspect Kahan is not at his strongest. Often he will insert "canned" jokes as in Hosea where their presence gives characterization to the townspeople who tell them, yet might be done more affectively.

Likewise one finds that the dialogue in Kahan's dramas often lacks the power or delicateness that the poet could have achieved. Kahan himself may have been aware of this for he will frequently dig deep into his rich vocabulary and pour forth refreshing passages like a fountain spouting pastel waters.

Not only does Kahan's language impress the reader but his use of themes which, though they may be as old as man, never seem to give one the feeling of triteness. The love triangle, the lust for power, the inherent evil of rulership which denigrates the ideals even of the man who has risen to it in purity, the shallow dreams of small people, and so on -- all find their place in his dramas.

Yaakov Kahan's effectiveness as a playwright is thru his use of important and meaningful themes displayed and ornamented within the framework of a flexible and lovely language.

Man has always been concerned with the problem of immortality. This Kahan discusses in his phantasy The Pyramids. Yet as a poet, Kahan is also concerned about his literary immortality. In the drama In Luz the concluding line of the

play seems to reflect what Kahan would hope that the future will speak of him: "... the man has gone, but his light stands with us." In Volume 12 of his collected works, Kahan has even greater confidence that his "light" will continue to shine as the title of this poem testifies to: "I know, My Remembrance shall not be Lost." Is this a lack of humility? Perhaps it is, but one need only to read the writings of Yaakov Kahan to know that he speaks the truth.

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