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FROM *PIYYUT* TO POETRY: JUDAISM'S CREATIVE RESPONSE TO ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION IN SPAIN FROM THE TENTH TO THE TWELFTH CENTURIES

CHARISSE N. KRANES

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for ordination

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1985

Referee, Professor Dr. Ellis Rivkin

DIGEST

When society breaks loose of old patterns, it encourages, even necessitates, new patterns of thought as well. So the intellectual universe expands. This thesis examines one such expansion--the Islamic civilization in Spain, and the Jewish poetic renaissance it spurred. Citing examples from the poetry of Solomon Ibn Gabirol, Moses Ibn Ezra and Yehudah Halevi, I will trace the Islamic influence in three areas: the explosion of poetic convention; new themes, particularly the love of woman; and philosophy.

Jewish society prior to and continuing into the Islamic age was ruled by two individuals, the exilarch and the gaon. Initially the exilarch was in charge of political affairs, and served a liason between the government and the Jewish community. The gaon was the head of the academy, and intellectual, spiritual leader. Gradually, the gaon took upon himself greater political power, provoking a fierce rivalry between himself and the declining exilarch. At the same time, the practicality of a community being represented by a single individual was eroding. In the ninth century, any group of ten could be considered a group and appoint its own religious leader. In the tenth century, with Hasdai Ibn Shaprut, Jews as individuals could take power in caliphal courts.

The emergence of the individual had a profound impact upon Jewish creativity. The poet before this era was considered a public servant, writing for the community at large. Now, in the Golden Age of Spain, the poet was an individual, expressing himself, and through himself, his people. In order to appreciate the difference, a *piyyut* from the *paytan* Kallir is analyzed in chapter two. In addition to a technical analysis of the poetic conventions of this particular *piyyut*, a general review of form and structure provides the background necessary to appreciate the Golden Age of Spain.

The heart of the thesis is the poetry of the Golden Age of Spain. Chapter Three begins with some of the historical background which precipitated the change, and then a review of the three poets examined in this thesis. The section on analysis begins with the poetic conventions unique to this period, with three poems providing concrete examples. Each poem is provided in translation along with its undertext of Biblical verses. The next two sections examine two new themes, the love of woman and philosophy.

This thesis is not meant to be an exhaustive literary anaylsis. Instead, it demonstrates the link between Islamic society, gaonic structure and the creativity of the Golden Age of Spain by using the creations themselves to underscore the historical change.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When I was in Israel in 1975, I picked up a small Penguin classic of some 200 pages in a used book store in Jerusalem. It was entitled The Jewish Poets of Spain and was translated by David Goldstein. I don't know if this paperback with the beautiful illustration on the cover was my first introduction to the poetry that was to intrigue me over the next ten years, but it was the book I would page through regularly. Another Penguin Classic which helped me to grasp the parameters of my thesis was that by T. Carmi, included in my bibliography. Carmi helped me to see order in the chaos, as he did when my class spent our year in Jerusalem. His writing style is so clear and so insightful, and his translations and his poetry have graced many of my services.

During my studies at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, Dr. Ellis Rivkin, in an effort to bring a taste of Medieval Spanish Jewry to us, read a selection from the poetry of Solomon Ibn Gabirol. He brought tears to my eyes then, and I am indebted to Dr. Rivkin for his unflagging cheer and encouragment now. His literary suggestions and editing always helped me to communicate more clearly and I am grateful for his careful reading of my manuscript. Dr. Ezra Spicehandler and Dr.

Werner Weinberg graciously helped with my translations, and I apprciate the time they found for me in their busy schedules.

There are several individuals I would like to single out for special appreciation. Charlotte and Carl Stander provided me with a peaceful retreat in which to work over the summer. I will forever associate the beauty of these poets with the beauty of their home and hospitality. Back in the library in Cincinnati, there was never a book I needed that I could not find. To those people who helped me enter the computer age, particularly Paul Sellnow, no thanks can suffice! And after their initial terrorist attacks, my kittens not only adjusted to the computor, but looked upon it as another friendly lap.

Most of all, I wish to acknowledge my colleague Karyn Kedar. She pushed me on, she was excited when I was not, she made time when she had none. May the Muse shine brightly within her.

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to my mother,
may her memory be for a blessing,
who loved the written word,
and to my father,
who sees the poetry in his own backyard.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There is nothing comparable to the Talmud. Sprawling over thirty tractates are discussions, arguments, riddles and stories accumulated over many generations. While it is possible to name one or two editors, there are dozens of individually named authors who have contributed to this work. Within its pages exists a hierarchy of authority and power, but every scholar is expected to offer his own interpretation. No sage however prestigious could rule out the articulation of a differing opinion; no sage is so powerful as to speak with absolute authority. Through the discussion/argument style which the Talmud preserves, it is clear that the final answer was only a small part of the Amoraic goal: it was in debate and dialectical discussions that the world of the Amoraim came alive. Debate was not simply <u>tolerated</u>; it was the Amoraic hallmark! The scene of the debate was the academy, the gathering place for scholars, the subject and outcome open ended.

The external structure of the academy, right down to the seating arrangement, remained the same under the Gaonim. The most esteemed scholars sat in the first seven rows, with ten people in each row. There were additional seats in

the rear. One advanced in seating position according to one's scholarship. The Gaon was the religious authority by virtue of this competence: the Exilarch was the political authority. The acquisition of political power by the Gaonate marked a significant change in the academy. First we must briefly examine the role of the exilarch.

Political power was vested in the exilarch. When the Ummayads conquered Babylon, they confirmed the authority of the exilarch. Reputedly descending from King David himself, the exilarch in the early years of Islamic rule had three major functions: he was the Jewish representative in the caliphal court; he supervised the dispensing of justice and charity amoung the Jews; and he collected a poll tax for the Moslem government[1] During the Abassid dynasty(750c.e.) the scholars, represented by the Gaonim, heads of the academies, came to rival the exilarch.

Why at this time in history, did the scholar class acquire temporal power? Events in Islamic society could provide an answer:

> "The enhanced power of the scholars was perhaps influenced by a parallel development in Islam: the emergence of a class of jurists responsible for creating a systematic and logical groundwork for Islamic law."[2]

The "systematic and logical groundwork" for Jewish law was already laid in the academies. This earned the academies at Sura and Pumbedita increasing recognition and power in

the Moslem world. The power struggles that resulted between the exilarchate and the Gaonate were recorded in the literature of that time.

The academy ceased to be a strictly intellectual domain--temporal power entered its walls:

> "...to be a power, intellectualism must clothe itself in a concrete form, and for this there was no provision in the Babylonian Academies, as long as they were purely spiritual centers, destitute of every vestige of temporal authority."[3]

Since temporal power sits uncomfortably at best with a multitude of leaders, the gaonic academies acknowleged one head only. While there were two academies, one at Sura and one at Pumbedita, originally the title *Gaon* was reserved for the head of the academy at Sura[4]. That leader was recognized not by virtue of his erudition, for with the exception of Saadia, the gaonim were not head and shoulders above the other members of the scholar class. It was the authority of the gaonic institution itself which conferred authority on the individual.[5]

It was the individual gaon's exclusive right to respond to questions sent by Jews all over the world. The body of literature containing these replies, the Responsa, was the gaonic contribution to the development of Jewish law. This is similar to the Amoraim, for questions and answers are the heart of Amoraic methodology. It is dissimilar in that the gaon was asked questions by the community outside of the academy.

While the Amoraic system was loosely structured and allowed the scholar class virtually unrestricted freedom to debate the halakhah, the gaonic system resembled the authoritarian structure of the caliphal court. The goal of the Amoraic academies was to encourage free and open-ended dialectical discussion of the Mishnah and other tannaitic texts--a goal sharply at variance with that of the gaonate which was to determine what the law was.

Originally it was the caliph who appointed the exilarch, and the exilarch who appointed the gaon. Over time however, the exilarch was reduced to a figurehead, whose caliphal appointment required the approval of the gaon. As for the gaon, he was chosen by a small number of influential families, and the scholars at the academy transmitted their seats to their sons. When there was no heir, some other member of the family was given preference to an outsider. Such an oligarchy ensured that no one beyond the traditional seventy scholars and their descendants had access to a seat in the academy. It was this hereditary group before whom the questions at issue were brought for discussion by the gaon who alone determined the authoritative halacha in all spheres for Jews living under the sway of the caliphs. The scholarly oligarchy could help the Gaon with their counsel, but the *Gaon* made all decisions:

> Although the Gaonate venerated the Talmud, the Mishnah and the Bible, it acted independently, with full power to solve problems, to decide what the twofold law meant NOW."[2]

Another significant difference between the Amoraic and the gaonic academy was money. The exilarch had received a salary, but now for the first time, the head of the scholar class, the Gaon not only received a salary; he also received a percentage of all contributions to the academy. Previously, a scholar would rely on an outside craft to support himself. The Gaonic income amounted to more than a modest sum. After the extinction of the Gaonate, there were no more fees. The greater the prestige of the scholar, the less appropriate money became.[7]

The historical changes which provided the background for the Spanish Hebrew poets of the tenth and eleventh centuries began to occur in the seventh century. The Arabs swept through Syria, Palestine, Egypt and Persia beginning in 630c.e. In 661 came the consolidation of the Ummayad caliphate, and by 715, Spain became Muslim territory. The Abbasid dynasty gained power in 750:

> "The spectacular collapse of the Umayyad Calliphate in Syria, and the accession of the Abassid dynasty, finally loosed the bonds which linked Andalus to Damascus."[8]

Spain greatly benefitted from this freedom, as we shall see in a later chapter. This is not to say that Andalus was not influenced by events in the East. When the Ummayads set up their own independent caliphate in Cordova in 756, Abd al-Rahman I brought the organizational structure of the Abassids to his caliphate in Cordova and improved upon it. During the reign of al-Hakan I(d. 822), the fusion between

the Arab aristocracy, neo-Muslims of Hispanic origin and non-Muslims occured since non-Arabs could occupy important positions at court. Abd al-Rahman II brought many of the customs of his former enemies, the Abassids of Baghdad, and lived surrounded by luxury, music and art. After the succession battles were settled, came Abd al-Rahman III (912-961). It is here that Hasdai ibn Shaprut became the government administrator, advisor and chief physician. In general there was a constant jockeying for power in the Arab world: periods of great cultural activity alternated with periods of great uncertainty.

There are certain patterns which seem to repeat themselves in the course of history. One such pattern regards the conquest of an empire. After an expansive period of conquest follows consolidation, and then deterioration seems to sets in. The strength of the centralized government declines; as a result, the regions within the empire have freer reign, their economies are not as drained. The regions flourish for a time; ultimately they too decline, opening the way for a new stage of imperial conquest. In the case of the Abassid empire: when Abassid hegemony collapsed, the vitality of the gaon lessened.[5] The death blow to the power of the gaonate came in 830. Calif Maimun declared that every ten individuals who so desired could elect their own chief. Jews no longer had to go through one official.

While Jews still looked to the East to the Babylonian

gaonim, Hasdai ibn Shaprut began to set up a structure in Spain. In addition to his official duties, Hasdai did not forget his fellow Jews. As the calif was to his subjects, so was Hasdai to the Jews, earning for himself the title of *nasi*. This biblical word acquired a whole new meaning with Hasdai. He was "in charge" of the Jewish community, but unlike the gaonim, he did not run a dictatorship. Instead of appointing himself as an authority on Jewish law, he brought rabbis and Talmudic teachers from Babylonia and Andalusia. He set up separate academies, and in his position, he no doubt influenced the migrations of Jews to Andalusia.

Hasdai ben Isaac Ibn Shaprut revolutionized Jewish life in Spain. He was not the first influential Jew in the Islamic world. Jewish bankers had had access to the ear of the caliphs in the East, but that was on an informal basis. Hasdai was officially appointed to a post of authority over Muslims.

In addition, Hasdai is an example of the new kind of Jew who emerged in Moslem Spain: the court Jew. As Islamic society flourished, the *dhimmi*, the non-Moslems were not economically segregated. While previously most Jews were rural dwellers, now Jews participated in all forms of commerce, particularly silk, textiles and garments.[10] The wealthier Jews helped to acquire ancient manuscripts. At this turning point in Jewish history, Jews became almost completly urban.[11] In Islamic society the creation of a town was highly praiseworthy, for this facilitated communal

prayer in a fixed building. The atmosphere of city living had a marked influence on Arab development, leading to the "decorum of cities rather than the disorder of the fields or the desert."[12] This influence is evident in Hebrew poetry also, as we shall see.

In Christian society,Jews were second class citizens in name and in deed, able to imagine God in all "his" glory, but certainly not themselves. In Islamic society, Jews were generally second class citizens in name only. The code of Umar spelled out the limits, but the caliphs' pragmatic bent by and large overruled their religious dictates. In Baghdad, individual Jews were influential behind the scenes; in Spain Jews like Hasdai were in public positions of power.

In addition to intrigue, the Umayyad court was full of dancing, music and drinking.[13] Groups of people would gather for poetry clubs, as it were, for the express purpose of reciting verse.[14] These recitations consisting of historical narratives, anecdotes, and poetry, provided the evening's entertainment, and were good places for poetic improvisation.[15]

As usual, where the Arabs led, Jews were not far behind:

> The Jewish youth of the wealthier classes imitated the Arabic youth, whiled away their time pleasantly in vineyards, gathered in companies around beakers of wine, sang happy songs throughout the nights, jested and laughed, and treated each other to cheerful witticisms.[16]

Jews lived at court, drank in an atmosphere of freedom, let their poetic imaginations run wild. Indeed, there were Jews whose "wealth resembled the heavens upon the earth." These Jews in positions of influence like Yekutiel did not forget the Jewish communities from whence they came. Jews would come to court with their problems and Yekutiel would satisfy their every desire (ah, for such politicians today!). "His mouth has good tidings for everyone,...whose charity is clearer than pearls." Counsel, advice, money--all flowed abundantly from one such revered man. What inspired so many of these poets to glorify one mortal after another? In addition to sincere admiration, there was the necessity to earn a living: the Islamic era ushered in the age of patronage.

The political leader was not a one dimensional figure. In addition to maintaining a force to secure their power militarily, a respected leader also became a cultural power. The quest for enlightenment was a political one; scholars and poets were sought out to enhance the stature of the court. To be immortalized in poetry appealed to their patrons, and the poets wanted to insure themselves a lengthy stay at court. Of course, when the whim of the patron changed, and the poet was once again out on the streets, the poetic immortalization could be a vituperous one, as in the case of poet Menaham ibn Saruk and his former patron. Poets struggled to be accepted by a generous patron at court. Despite complaints that the patron was never on the same

level as the poet, (who felt perpetually unappreciated) there were no options outside the patronage system.

Earth-shattering changes were to take place in the Islamic world. Those values Westerners tend to associate with the twelveth century in southwestern Europe actually saw their birth in Bahgdad and then in Cordova. The values of chivalry, courtly romance, adventure epics, new architectural ideas, even the notion of universities, had their precedents in the Islamic countries. The cultural renaissance which flowered at the caliphal courts was due largely to the tremendous impact which the revival of ancient writings had upon Islamic society. Oral transmission remained popular,[17] as is evidenced by the entertainment at court. However written manuscripts also sped through caliphal courts:

> In three-quarters of a century after the establishment of Baghdad the Arabic-reading world was in possession of the chief philosophy of Aristotle, of the leading Neo-Platonic commentators, and of most of the writings of Galen, as well as of Persian and Indian scientific works.[18]

Greek and Roman classics were translated into Arabic, and translators strove for higher and higher quality. In Baghdad the caliph Ma'mun established the *Bayt al-Hikmah*, House of Wisdom, in 830. This was a combination library, academy and translation bureau.[19] Often the Arabs themselves did not know Greek, so they turned to other nationalities, Jews among them, for assistence. Arabic prose became more fluent,

literary style improved.

Beyond the level of translators' skill, the content of the manuscripts, philosophy for one, had a significant impact upon Islam as well. The *Mu'tazilites* maintained that religion should be held accountable to reason. This blend of philosophy and religion led eventually to the emergence of a great Muslim philosopher/physician/scientist Avicenna in the eleventh century. He in turn influenced the Jewish greats, from Gabirol and Halevi, and including Maimonides in the next century.

It was no coincidence that many philosophers were skilled in medicinal arts. The same scienctific logic was applied to the empirical world of medicine or to the abstract world of thought. The major sources came from the Greek and Persian worlds. Abd al-Rahman II opened diplomatic relations between Cordova and Constantinople, and the gifts from the Byzantine Empire included *De Materia Medica,* the textbook on pharmacology. It was translated in the mid ninth century, with Hasdai ibn Shaprut contributing to the effort. Inspired by these discoveries, Arab medicine matured with treatises written in Arabic by people who were themselves Persians, Syrians and Jews.

One of the greatest revolutions in Hebrew poetry was the development of the Hebrew language itself, provoked by initial developments in Islam. It was inevitable that Hebrew grammatical study should be weak since Hebrew was not a

spoken language. Arabic became sacred while remaining spoken and this had a great impact upon both cultures. According to Zinberg:

> The living speech of the people, when it became a sacred language, was also raised to the level of a flourishing cultural language, the language of science and literature.[20]

The classical forms of Islamic literature originated at this time, from 900-1100. At first, Moslems collected and edited poetry from their oral tradition.[21] Eventually prominent poets emerged. In the West, two forms were brought to perfection; the *muwashshah*,or "girdle" poem, and the *zajal*, each based on a refrain for a chorus.[22] In order for Arabic prose to become more artful, more precise grammatical skill had to be applied. Renewed attention was given to the study and translation of the Koran, and this led to developments in philology and lexicography. Al Iraq and Al Basrah led the way for a scientific study of Arabic, primarily for making the Koran clear for converts, and also to close the gap between classic and spoken Arabic. In turn, the poetic muse became linked to the study of Arabic.[23]

The Moslem return to the sources led to a Jewish return to the Bible. The language of the *paytan* was far removed from the majestic clarity of the Biblical author, and the Spanish Hebrew poets expanded their Biblical legacy, with Dunash Ben Labrat leading the way. He lived from about 920-990 and wrote "the first poetic work in Hebrew written strictly according to the principles of Arabic meter."[24] The

rival philologist, Menahem Jacob Ibn Saruk wrote the *Mahberet*, the first Bible dictionary in Hebrew. The true father of Hebrew grammar was one of Menahem's disciples, Jehudah ben David Hayyiy. In the tenth century, he discovered the three letter root in Hebrew, even though he wrote in Arabic.[25]

Before we turn to the fruits of the Islamic influence, we must first appreciate the *piyyut* before. Even though their range was more limited, and their scientific understanding weak, the *payytanim* nonetheless created poetry with its own beauty.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Robert M. Seltzer, Jewish People, Jewish Thought: The Jewish Experience in History, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1980), p.334.

[2] Ibid, p.335.

[3] Louis Ginzberg, Geonica, (New York: Hermon Press, 1968), p.3.

[4] Ibid, p.37.

[5] Ibid, p.vii.

[6] Ellis Rivkin, The Shaping of Jewish History: A Radical New Interpretation, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), p.108.

[7] Louis Ginzberg, Geonica, (New York: Hermon Press, 1968), p.13.

[8] P.M. Holt, Amir K.S. Lambton, and Bernard Lewis, The Cambridge History of Islam, v.2, (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press, 1970), p.409.

[9] Ellis Rivkin, The Shaping of Jewish History: A Radical New Interpretation, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), p.112.

[10] Eliyahu Ashtor, The Jews of Moslem Spain, (USA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1973), p.276.

[11] Robert M. Seltzer, Jewish People, Jewish Thought: The Jewish Experience in History, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1980), p.331.

[12] P.M. Holt, Amir K.S. Lambton, and Bernard Lewis, The Cambridge History of Islam, v.2, (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press, 1970), p.446.

[13] Philip K. Hitti, History of the Arabs, (New York: Martin's Press, 1970), p.227.

[14] Eliyahu Ashtor, The Jews of Moslem Spain, (USA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1973), p.384.

[15] Dan Pagis, *Shirat Hahol V'torat Hashir L'moshe Ibn Ezra Uv'nai Doro*, (Jerusalem: *Mosad Bialik*, 1970), p.40.

[16] Israel Zinberg, History of Jewish Literature, (USA: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1972),

p.39.

[17] Dan Pagis, *Shirat Hahol V'torat Hashir L'moshe Ibn Ezra Uv'nai Doro*, (Jerusalem: *Mosad Bialik*, 1970), p.43.

[18] Philip K. Hitti, History of the Arabs, (New York: Martin's Press, 1970), p.306.

[19] Ibid, p.310.

[20] Israel Zinberg, History of Jewish Literature, (USA: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1972), p.14.

[21] James Kritzeck, Anthology of Islamic Literature, (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1964), p.71.

[22] Ibid, p.141.

[23] Eliyahu Ashtor, The Jews of Moslem Spain, (USA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1973), p.243.

[24] Israel Zinberg, History of Jewish Literature, (USA: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1972), p.19.

[25] Ibid, p.23.

CHAPTER II

PIYYUT

Prior to the Golden Age of Spain, poetry did exist within Judaism. The title *piyyut* could include all religious poetry, but technically it refers to a period which peaked between the sixth and the seventh centuries. Each generation added something to the religious service that the individual worshipper could include if they so chose. Palestine was the home of *piyyut*, but from the eighth to eleventh centuries, Babylonia and North Africa housed *payytanim* as well. Historically, *piyyut* can be divided into three periods: pre-classical, spanning the fifth and sixth centuries, the most prominent poet being Yosi ben Yosi; classical, from the mid-sixth through the late eighth centuries, the most prominent poets being Yannai and Kallir; late Eastern, from the mid-eighth through the mid-eleventh centuries. Though poetry took a very different course in Spain (see chapter III), *piyyut* continued to flourish. It evolved out of its traditional background(see below), then assimilated new strophic patterns and thematic material. All in all, the Palestinian influence upon the Spanish *piyyut* was minimal:

> But generally speaking there is no recognizable spiritual influence from the Palestinian communities upon Spanish Jewry. In Italy, France, and Germany,

> the Jews accepted the midrash and the *piyyut* (liturgical poetry) stemming from Palestine, and these became so popular among them that their own scholars composed *midrashim* and *piyyutim* in the Palestinian manner. But this cultural influence is nowhere evident among the Jews of Spain.[1]

Piyyut became even more varied and experimental than secular, or non-liturgical poetry, complete with its own syllabic system.[2] *Piyyut* adopted the Arabic form of the "girdle" poem, ignoring its profane and hedonistic origin.

To understand *piyyut* one must first understand something of the development of Jewish liturgy. Today there are a myriad of prayerbooks for all occasions: prayerbooks with a liberal bias, a Zionist bias, a feminist bias; prayerbooks with literal translations, elevated translations, no translations; prayerbooks from a Sephardic tradition, an Ashkenazic tradition, a mystic tradition. In short, there are prayerbooks of many colors. Amidst all this diversity, we all nonetheless pray with the written word. This is radically different from preceeding generations--*not until the ninth century did a written prayerbook exist, and not until the printing press in the seventeenth century were prayerbooks common!* It is easy to appreciate the fact that the scholarly pursuit of Jewish liturgy is a complex one indeed.

What did exist were liturgical landmarks which are preserved in the Talmud, pegs for the prayer leader, the *sheliah tsibor* to hang his prayers upon. How he got from

one peg to the next was up to the skill of the leader, with the congregation answering "amen." The *payytan* composed poems to make this process more graceful:

> In fact, their monumental sequences, which were recited by the cantor or prayer-leader, could replace the entire prose passages of the liturgy.[3]

Special *piyyutim* brought out the differences in specific holidays, and in general, "served the purpose of revitalizing the synagogue service."[4] The *payytanim* saw themselves as liturgists who were contributing to synagogue worship, originally a substitute for the preacher[5] They were not "poets" in the sense of independant artists, their work was never anthologized. They placed their creations instead in the prayerbook.

There are two broad categories of *piyyut*: those based directly on individual prayers, like *ahava raba*, *ofen*, and others; and those related to holidays, like the *azharot* connected to Shavuot. Among those *piyyutim* related to specific prayers is a large category called penitential *piyyutim*.

The forms used to express the different themes varied. There is the *alpha beita*, which contains a recurring idea in an alphabetical order. Also common is the acrostic *piyyut*, spelling out the name of the *payytan*, or simply of the alphabet. In the weekday service, the bridge between the *yotzer* and the following angelology is "*El Baruch*." Each word proceeds in alphabetical order: "*El* (with aleph),

Baruch, Gadol, Deah.... A backward acrostic appears in a *piyyut* about the dew. A request for dew is included in the *Amida* during the winter months. In this *piyyut* each stanza begins with *tal* (dew) and ends with *b'tal*.[6]

The opening form of all different kinds of *piyyut* was called a *r'shut*, and served as an introduction to the prayer upon which the *piyyut* was based. Among the different forms of *piyyut* one can distinguish between four elements. First is the *pizmon*, or refrain, consisting of either a full strophe, or one line. Second, the *mistagiv*, a returning word in the *piyyut*, which can be seen in Yannai's "In the Middle of the Night." The word *laila* is repeated after each line. Third, the *shlishiya* or the *shniya*, are made up of units of two or three verses. Fourth, the prayer for dew is an example of a *shalmonit*, which consists of stanzas of four lines each.

There are four characteristics of the pre-classical *piyyut*. The major genres were generally unrhymed. The alphabetic acrostic set the limit of the line of the verse. Word-meter was often the organizing rhythmic principle, and the vocabulary was primarily biblical.[7] Constant Biblical allusions often take the place of a direct name:

> Simple though the prayer is--and brief--the fact that Israel, the Land of Israel, and the Torah are all referred to by circumlocution shows that it has been composed in the payyetanic mode.[8]

The strength of the pre-classical *piyyut* lay in its

directness: "Their diction is unadorned and their rhythms are clear and forceful."[9]

The classical *payytanim* established the intricate patterns and intensified use of already existing devices which characterizes *piyyut*. They developed a specialized vocabulary in addition to a biblical vocabulary, their acrostics became very elaborate. These poems required active participation from the reader. Classical *piyyut* developed a strictly observed strophic structure, and a permanent rhythm based on a fixed number of words in each line. A major innovation of classical *piyyut* is an obligatory rhyme. The rhyme now set the boundary of the line of the verse and strophe, with the end rhyme based on sound parallelism. Originally, two of the three root consonants had to participate in the rhyme, with the last syllable being identical. Eventually only the last syllables had to agree. For each poem, there was only one rhyme per strophe: aaaa, bbbb, etc. All strophes were identical in the number of lines, meter, and rhetorical pattern.

The greatest of the *payytanim* was Eleazar Ben Kallir, also known as Ha-Kaliri. We know Kallir's name by virtue of his acrostics, but even this could be just a pen name, not his actual name. For a long time Kallir's place of origin was in dispute. Again through a poem he named *Kiryat Sefer* as his birthplace. This is a biblical town, harking back to the book of Joshua, but it had long since ceased to exist.

As is often the case with the *payytanim*, Kallir used this term symbolically.[10] Speculation ranged from Italy, to Pumbedita, but finally scholarly consensus was reached: Just as Palestine was the home of *piyyut*, so was Palestine the home of Kallir.[11] The period during which Kallir lived was also disputed, but it is now agreed that he wrote during the sixth century, prior to the Islamic conquest.[12]

While nothing has remained chronicling the life of Eleazar Kallir, a vast treasury of his *piyyutim* is left us. He wrote *piyyutim* for every day of the Jewish year. We had over two hundred before the discovery of the *geniza* in Cairo; the number has probably doubled now. Of these *piyyutim* most of them are *k'rovot* within the *amida*, although he wrote *piyyutim* for every benediction of the eighteen. Kallir wrote *piyyutim* for every holiday, including the minor ones and the days in between the holidays (*chol hamoed*). He wrote *piyyutim* for each of the four special Sabbaths, *Shabbat Shira*, for instance. And when the versions of a prayer differed from the morning service to the afternoon, Kallir wrote different *piyyutim* for each one.[13] The legacy he left behind is wondrous, not only in its volume, but also in its quality:

> In richness of his language and creative expression, he [Kallir] rises above all the rest of the *payytanim*...[14]

Kallir's vocabulary is basically Biblical, the terms he uses can easily be traced back to their original Biblical root. Additionally, Kallir drew upon every possible midrashic

source as well,including the *pesiktot*. He worked with textual material, but was not a slave to that material. It was Kallir, not the Biblical text, that was the master.[16] Kallir's dramatis personae were "often designated by epithets and periphrases, many of which became the stock-in-trade of liturgical writing"[17] The highly allusive use of language, and the abundant references to the written and oral tradition charactize the Kallir style. We do not find "sweep of genius" or tremendous depth in this poetic master, for Kallir stayed within familiar midrashic circles.[18] Nonetheless, Kallir's historical role was significant: he created a framework for *piyyutim* in general, and he fixed the rules of *piyyut* for future generations.[19]

In order to better understand the differences between the classical *piyyutim* and the Spanish poems that followed, I have selected Eleazar Ben Kallir's "*Aym Habanim*," "The Mother of Children," to explicate. It is impossible for one *piyyut* to be truly representative of them all, but it will highlight many of the major characteristics of the age. Following is the text in its entirety, as translated by T. Carmi.

> The mother of children moans like a dove; she mourns in her heart and complains out loud; she cries bitterly, calls out desperately; she sheds tears, she is silent and stunned:
>
> "My husband has abandoned me and turned away, and has not remembered my love as a bride; he has scattered and dispersed me far from my land; he has let all my tormentors rejoice at my downfall.
>
> "He has cast me off like an unclean woman,

> banished me from his presence; he has harshly ensnared me, given me no respite; he has chastised me till my eyes failed. Why has he forsaken me, forgotten me forever?"
>
> "O my dove, O plant of delight in my garden bed, why do you cry out against me? I have already answered your prayer, as I did in days of old, when I dwelt crowned in your midst.
>
> "I have turned to you with great compassion, and now I march through the gate of Bath-Rabbim [Jerusalem]. Your enemies, ever more numerous--I shook them till they were snuffed out like smoke.
>
> "My dark one, I shall never desert you; I shall reach out again and take you to myself. Your complaint has come to an end: my perfect one, I shall not forsake you or forget you."

Someone with even the most minimal understanding of Hebrew can immediatly hear some structural characteristics of this *piyyut*. Each line contains four words, each stanza contains four lines, each of the four lines in the stanza has the same ending rhyme. This is an alphabetical acrostic. Another characteristic is revealed in the first two words of the *piyyut*: "the mother of children" is taken from a verse in Psalm 113: "[God,] who maketh the barren woman to dwell in her house as a joyful *mother of children*." Unfortunately, when we meet this mother of children, she is not rejoicing. The Biblical verse stands in contrast to the intent of the *piyyut*. The fact that the term "mother of children" is used at all, instead of the more direct "Zion", or "Israel" is typical of *piyyut*. An allusion is preferred to a direct name. In this case, Kallir uses the more personalized image "mother" connotes, while at the same time communicating that

this "mother of children" is the source of all future generations. She speaks individually and also as our representative.

The moaning dove is not a common image. Usually "dove" is a term of endearment between lovers; this meaning is used in verse thirteen. Again a joyful term from the Biblical context takes on ironic meaning in its present context. This use of dove is closer to the verse in Jeremiah, 48.28: "O ye that dwell in Moab, leave the cities, and dwell in the rock; and be like the *dove* that maketh her nest in the sides of the pit's mouth." This dove lives on the edge of danger. Is it any wonder that she is moaning?

The next verse begins with a *bet* in order to continue the acrostic, but this format does no damage to the grace and smoothness of expression. Kallir does not force his acrostic, he simply chisels carefully until the desired effect is achieved. The word *mitonenet* occurs in Numbers 11.1 and is commonly translated as "murmer." The word "mourns" instead foreshadows the loss of her husband, by means of God abandoning the mother of children. In any event, the line "she mourns in her heart and complains out loud," includes both the private and public domains. In this stanza, each line ends with the sound *et*, and in this case the last two syllables (*emet*) rhyme. Lines one and four each begin that syllable with a *hey*; lines two and four begin with the silent letters. Line two begins with a noun and then a verb, with six syllables in the first part and seven

including the connecting *vav* in the second part. The next line, verse three, starts more crisply with the verb and has less syllables than the verse above. Kallir achieves a dramatic effect, building with this alteration in sound. Each verse has four words, but Kallir is skillful enough to "achieve internal variety by the shift of the caesura and the use of internal rhyme."[20] The fourth line is different from all of the above because it is broken up into three parts instead of two. Kallir specifies many shades of misery: moans, mourns, complains, cries, calls out, sheds tears, silent and stunned. The cumultative impact cannot fail to leave its mark.

"My husband" is the common Biblical metaphor for God. The mother of children is speaking about God, but not to "Him." She cannot bring herself to complain directly, but is undoubtedly sure that God will hear. Twice in Psalms, once in Psalm 51 and again in Psalm 71, the psalmist pleads with God not to forsake him. The verses which follow the citation in Psalm 71 also bear upon the *piyyut* by Kallir:

> Cast me not off in the time of old age; when my strength faileth, forsake me not. For mine enemies speak concerning me, and they that watch for my soul take counsel together, saying "God hath forsaken me...(Psalm 71.9-11a)

Already in the sixth century, Israel felt that her youth was a lifetime away. Now she is old and feels abandoned. She speaks using God's own images as they are recorded in Jeremiah 2.2: "I [God] remember for thee the affection of

thy youth, the love of thine espousals..."

The metaphor of God as husband/lover is a common one in the Bible, particularly in the Song of Songs. "He has scattered and dispersed me from [literally] my borders": this verse echoes one in First Kings 14.15, but Kallir significantly leaves off the end of the verse which offers an explanation:

> for the Lord will smite Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water; and He will root up Israel out of this good land, which He gave to their fathers, and will scatter them beyond the River; because they have made their Asherim, provoking the Lord.

In addition to meeting the requirement of his rhyme, Kallir's choice of the word *g'vulay* has a subtle overtone with the word "River." It was God who set the border for the waters, as the rabbis understood it. The first and the last verses in this stanza both recall Psalm 71. The internal rhyme in this stanza is different than the first, although externally, the structure is the same.

The first two words of the third stanza are accurately translated above, but the Hebrew *taraf* originally connoted animals tearing off their food from a live animal, beasts of prey. This food is forbidden to Jews by dietary restrictions. *Nida*, the unclean woman, is literally "the menstruating woman," who is bloody just as the animal is bloody, and also ritually unclean. "Ensnared" reemphasizes the animal imagery above. In line three, her eyes fail due to crying, as they do for the Psalmist in Psalm 69.4. The

last verse in the stanza is a question, and Kallir uses a verse from Isaiah which leads directly into the next stanza. Zion complains that she is forsaken. The prophet answers in God's words that God will never forget Israel:

> But Zion said; "The Lord hath forsaken me, and the Lord hath forgotten me." Can a woman forget her sucking child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, these may forget, yet will not I forget thee. (Isaiah 49.14-15)

After Israel's question, God begins to speak. This time it is a dialogue in second person, in the tone that a husband or lover would use. Again there is the use of allusion; my dove, plant of delight refer to Israel. This time "dove" is used in its traditional way of endearment. God has already begun to answer Israel's pleas. The *piyyut* ends with an assurance that God will not forsake Israel, bringing to mind not only the passage in Isaiah, but also the famous verse in Psalm 137.5: "If I forget you, O Jerusalem..."

The opening stanza introduces the poem by painting a very explicit picture of the mother of children. She speaks to God indirectly in the next two stanzas, and God replies in the next three. There are numerous Biblical references which constantly reinforce the message of the *piyyut*. Structurally this is a *shalmonit* with stanzas of four lines each. The intricate internal rhyme patterns mark this as a classical *piyyut*, as well as the obligatory rhyme in each stanza. The grace with which Kallir executes this *piyyut*

reveals him to be a master poet.

The very rise of the influence of *piyyut* paved the way for its decline. Originally the Amoraim were not strongly committed to poetry, as the paucity of it in the Talmud implies:

> The fact that the vast corpus of the Talmud, which spans almost five centuries, contains so little poetry, testifies, at most, to the absence of a bond between the poetic creation of the period and standardized religious practice.[21]

As *piyyutim* became more popular, the gaonim became uncomfortable with what they perceived as a loss of authority. In general, *piyyutim* were tolerated as long as certain religious criteria were met. Gaon Natronai ruled that whatever flights of fancy took place in-between, *piyyutim* must at least begin and end with the subject at hand in the benediction.[22] The gaonim struggled against the *piyyutim* and their Palestinian influence until finally the gaonim won out. Rav Amram began the standardization of the prayers when he sent his famous letter to the West. The fixing of liturgy made *piyyut* merely ornamental. It could no longer replace sections of the liturgy in poetic fashion. It could only add to what was already there. It became impractical to include the lengthy *piyyutim*, so cantors starting adapting as they saw fit. A further sign of Babylonian influence was the adoption of the annual cycle of Torah readings, instead of the Palestinian triennial cycle. Those epic *piyyutim* no longer matched the Torah reading they

were based on. Again, local cantors edited as they saw fit:

> The outcome of such editorial licence was that the overall structure, the logic of internal development, the relationship to the liturgy, and, of course, the authorship of the original composition, were often blurred beyond recognition.[23]

A more positive change which signalled the denoument of classical *piyyut* was the emergence of Saadia Gaon. Saadia was a grammarian, philosopher, poet, and exegete in addition, or as Ginzberg would say, in spite of his being a gaon.[24] While one of the gaonim, Saadia did not belong to the gaonic school, since he was an outsider.[25] The Spanish Hebrew poets considered Saadia their poetic father: without Saadia's grammatical grounding, later generations could not have flown. Saadia's rhyme evolved into the Hebrew Spanish quatrain.[26] He set the precedent of writing secular verse on public issues, and he brought philosophic themes to sacred writings.[27] More than any one individual, Saadia was the bridge between one world and the next.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Eliyahu Ashtor, The Jews of Moslem Spain, (USA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1973), pp.138-9.

[2] T. Carmi, The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse, (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), p.29.

[3] T. Carmi, The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse, (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), p.16.

[4] Jakob J. Petuchowski. Prayerbook Reform in Europe: The Liturgy of European Liberal and Reform Judaism, (New York: World Union for Progressive Judaism, Ltd, 1968), p.28.

[5] Israel Zinberg, History of Jewish Literature, (USA: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1972), p.16.

[6] Joseph Heinemann with Jakob J. Petuchowski, ed., Literature of the Synagogue, (New York: Behrman House, 1975), pp.237-8.

[7] T. Carmi, The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse, (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), p.15.
This section is indebted to the analysis of T. Carmi and Benjamin Hrushovski.

[8] Joseph Heinemann with Jakob J. Petuchowski, ed., Literature of the Synagogue, (New York: Behrman House, 1975), p.218.

[9] T. Carmi, The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse, (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), p.18.

[10] Yitzhak Moshe Elbogen, *Hat'fila B'yisrael B'hitpathutah Hahistorit*, (Tel-Aviv: *Hotzaat D'vir*, 1972), p.234.

[11] Ibid, p.235.

[12] T. Carmi, The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse, (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), p.89.

[13] Yitzhak Moshe Elbogen, *Hat'fila B'yisrael B'hitpathutah Hahistorit*, (Tel-Aviv: *Hotzaat D'vir*, 1972), p.237.

[14] Ibid, p.238.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] T. Carmi, The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse, (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), p.89.

[18] Yitzhak Moshe Elbogen, *Hat'fila B'yisrael B'hitpathutah Hahistorit*, (Tel-Aviv: *Hotzaat D'vir*, 1972), p.239.

[19] Ibid, p.238.

[20] T. Carmi, The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse, (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), p.90.

[21] Ibid, p.15.

[22] Joseph Heinemann with Jakob J. Petuchowski, ed., Literature of the Synagogue, (New York: Behrman House, 1975), p.210.

[23] T. Carmi, The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse, (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), p.20.

[24] Louis Ginzberg, Geonica, (New York: Hermon Press, 1968), p.72.

[25] Poznanski, "Ginzberg's 'Geonica'," Jewish Quarterly Review, p.410.

[26] T. Carmi, The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse, (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), p.21.

[27] Ibid.

CHAPTER III

POETRY OF THE GOLDEN AGE

In a very real sense, Spain was a whole other world than the old established centers in the East. It was a frontier area, similar in some respects to the American West. Plagued or blessed with numerous competing nationalities(which were not controlled until Abd al-Rahman III became caliph), it could not afford to obediently listen to the caliphs thousands of miles away, even if it were so inclined, which it was not. There was no love lost between Ummayad Cordova and Abassid Baghdad. The soil of Spain was freer, less rooted to the past. This freedom influenced religious development, encouraging the *Qadarites*, who reacted against the harsh predestination of Islam,[1] and the *Mutazilite*, who tempered Islam with reason. In general, Spanish rulers were influenced by, but independent from the caliphs across the Mediteranean.

The most dramatic shift that occurred for poets was moving from the public domain to the private one. Whereas the traditional *paytan* wrote in the service of the community, and perceived himself as the instrument for the prayers of the community, the Spanish Hebrew poets were above all individuals. They too drew from their Jewish

heritage, but the fluidity of poetic expression and the personal impress mark their poems as highly individualistic achievements. Ibn Ezra for instance, wrote out of his own personal experience, and touches us to the degree that we have had similar experiences, and can therefore appreciate his poetry. We must go back as far as the Psalmist to find such personal outreach to God. As in Ibn Ezra's day, the psalmist was expressing his deep religious feelings as prompted by his poetic impulses and not as the mouthpiece of the community at large. Such was not the case with the *payytan,* who was highly constricted to what ought to be expressed. The oligarchic gaonic system did not encourage individual flights of religious feeling. the Spanish community by contrast, allowed for, even encouraged, the poet to draw upon his own soul for religious inspiration. He was free to draw upon the abundant riches of the Bible and of the Islamic world to give wings to his spirit. His individual expression ended up in the liturgy, but its beginning was with himself. As Zinberg put it, as cultural life develops individuals emerge who reflect both the collective consciousness and their own soul. With the emergence of Islam, "The national literature was produced by <u>individuals</u> who stood above the people, and the people created separately for themselves."[2](emphasis mine).

Since the poets functioned primarily as individuals, financial support became an issue. Many poems were inspired not simply by the religious drive as by the necessity to

earn a living. The Islamic era ushered in the age of patronage.

The first truly great Spanish Hebrew poet was Solomon ben Jehudah Ibn Gabirol. Born around 1021 in Malaga, Gabirol spent his adolescence in Saragossa. His unquenchable thirst for wisdom propelled him as a poet and as a philosopher: happiness consisted of attaining pure truth.[3]

An emotional understanding of Solomon ibn Gabirol hinges upon two factors: due to the early death of his father, Gabirol had no childhood; due to a predisposition of his soul, he lived his life as if he knew its duration was short, cramming all the passions, drives and energies of seventy years into a mere thirty. This seething cauldron produced exquisite love poems, vituperous attacks, and cries of despair. Together with his sensitive emotional makeup, Gabirol was an analytical philospher. While people of his temperment might very well have gone before him, Gabirol lived in a time and place where he could express the whole range of his interests.

> Formed like a Gothic cathedral, rising to the heavens, is Hebrew poetry in the work of Solomon Ibn Gabirol; here, profane songs are unknown. Shortly thereafter, however, a young poet bubbling with love of life and childlike youth burst into this noble cathedral with loud laughter. Beneath its melancholy vaults resounded his cries for the pleasures of life. The name of this poet was Moses ben Jacob Ibn Ezra.[4]

Moshe ben Ya'akov Ibn Ezra, or Moses ibn Ezra, was born in Granada to a wealthy family between 1055 and 1060. He and his three brothers received an extensive education in both Jewish and secular spheres. Moses Ibn Ezra studied Jewish and Arabic philosophy, as well as the classics in the original Greek. All in all, it was a very good life, and an exceptional one: he and Shmuel HaNagid were exceptions to the rule of the poor poet.[5] However, Ibn Ezra's good luck ran out when he was about thirty five years old. Invaders from North Africa, the Moravides destroyed Granada, impoverishing many, including Ibn Ezra. In 1095, a few years after the invasion, Ibn Ezra left Granada, fleeing to Christian Spain. For the rest of his life, Moses Ibn Ezra wandered bitterly, cut off from the once vibrant culture of Granada, surrounded by Christians he considered boorish hypocrites.[6] He was estranged from his children. When Ibn Ezra finally had the chance to return to Granada, he chose not to return, for everyone he cared about had died. Ibn Ezra formed a lasting friendship/competition with Yehuda HaLevi--a source of some pleasure at least.

When he was younger, Moses Ibn Ezra had the luxurious privilege of absorbing all the knowledge his generation could offer him, complete with instruction from the poet Yosef Ibn Giat. In his older years, surrounded by a foreign culture, he could appreciate the riches he had grown up with all the more. The wild lustiness of his youth mellowed into sorrowful religious hymns. In addition to fiery poetry in

intricate forms, Ibn Ezra wrote a book on poetic theory, Torat HaShir and The Book of Discussions and Remembrances, S'farim Iuniim. Ibn Ezra is considered the poet most greatly influenced by Arab culture, but he felt free to draw as well from Jewish treasures.

The poems of Moses Ibn Ezra are tremendously varied. He wrote love poems with a gaity and lustiness that has no equal. He experimented a great deal with meters and rhythms, constantly twisting words inside out, pushing Hebrew further and further in its development. When he left his youth behind, his poems were filled with an aching despair and melancholy.

> The immortal song of earthly love and desire became holy; it lost its corporeal dress and became a "secret of secrets," a divine mystery. In Halevi also the song of earthly love and physical beauty was transformed into religious enthusiasm and mystical ecstasy.[7]

Jehudah ben Samuel Halevi was born in Toledo around 1080. In 1085 Toledo fell into the hands of the Christians, and in his youth the Crusaders beseiged Jerusalem. Even though he grew up in an ostensibly Christian environment, Halevi's father sent him to Arabic tutors. Rabbi Isaac Alfasi contributed to Halevi's Jewish and poetic background--a backgroun not easily accumlated, since the Christians and Moslems were struggling for control of Spain at this time. But,

> notwithstanding the religious conflicts, Jehudah Halevi seems to have

> found ways and means in his youth of securing a sound intoduction to the cultural trends of the time.[8]

He was not ignorant of the Christian world surrounding him, but as a poet and thinker he was nurtured on the great Arabic culture.

In his day, Castille lay under the relatively mild rule of the Catholic king Alfonso VI, with only occasional persecutions. In general, Catholic society continued the same societal patterns of poetry that the Moslems had set up, with court Jews, patrons and parties. Islamic-style poetry continued to flourish even after the Christians had begun the conquest of Spain. A convienent periodization of Hebrew poetry dates the Muslim period from c.950-1150 and the Christian period from 1150-1492.[9] Halevi lived under a Christian king, but was nonetheless an Jewish-Moslem poet.

Halevi became a physician (having studied Arabic science), a philosopher and a poet in Toledo, and was bound to Spain by the love of both his daughter and grandson. His love of Zion however proved greater than any other passion, and at the age of fifty, in 1141, Halevi set off for the land of Israel.

We have some information on the time he spent in Alexandria and other places in Egypt, but only misty legend of Halevi's Palestinian sojourn. As a consequence, even the date of his death can only be guessed at, though 1142 is the one most scholars suggest.

Halevi was the most God-intoxicated, precise, and

religious of the Spanish Hebrew poets. His unrivalled mastery of the Hebrew language and the musical patterns he employs set him apart from all the others.

In all of his endeavors, God was ever-present:

> The truth is that, even more than Spinoza, Jehudah Halevi was "God-intoxicated" or, to use Heine's phrase, "God-kissed." God, not the physician, was to him the Healer; God, not human reason, was the source of truth. The physician was but God's servant, and by Him endowed with such gift of healing as he possessed.[10]

One of the greatest revolutions in Hebrew poetry was the development of Hebrew itself, provoked by the flowering of Islamic poetry, and by the scientific interest in grammar, philology, etc. that went with it. In its own way Hebrew, a sacred language non-spoken, went through a similar metamorphasis that Arabic, a non-sacred, but spoken language went through--to a language of high culture, of elevated poetry and of science and literature:

> The living speech of the people, when it became a sacred language, was also raised to the level of a flourishing cultural language, the language of science and literature.[11]

Initially when Arab influence began exerting itself on Hebrew poets, Menahem ibn Saruk fought bitterly to maintain the "purity" of Hebrew letters. The tide was against him though, and Dunash ben Labrat and the rest brought Hebrew into its Golden Age.

The "new style" in Arabic literature emerged in the

early Abbasid period. In praise and in satire, the descriptions were hyperbolic, with a simplicity of expression, an avoidance of strange words, and padding.[12] It was a literature of contrasts: skepticism and blind faith, asceticism and hedonism, economy and lavishness, strict form together with hackneyed theme.[13] Arabic poetic theory at the time was not concerned with originality, as we are in the modern age. They distinguished between different levels of imitation to determine quality.[14] The skill of poetry was a technical one indeed, where each individual verse was valued more than the whole.[15] The new idea was no great achievement. It was how the poet expressed an old one which gained him immortality:

> Poetry to those judges animated by an achaism, half-sentimental, half-philological, was primarily craftsmanship; its outstanding merit trueness to established form not adequacy of self-expression.[16]

The poet had to stay within a strict structure, but Arab poetry used a variety of meters and rhythms to determine that structure. The fluidity which Arabic attained was made possible by an interest in the science of language. Influenced by the logic of the ancient Greeks, Abu-al-Aswad al-Du'ali(688) was considered the founder of Arabic grammar.[17] The scientific study of Arabic, begun and carried on mainly because of foreign converts,[18] went hand in hand with study of the Koran. Jewish intellectuals, determined not to be left behind, applied Arabic knowledge to Hebrew,

since the languages do share a Semitic background. The scientific nature of grammar may seem cold and technical, but mastery of grammatical principles is critical to poetic masterpieces. While all philologers were not poets, all poets were by necessity philologers.

The Moslem return to the sources led to a Jewish return to the Bible. The language of the *paytan* was far removed from the majestic clarity of the Biblical author, and the Spanish Hebrew poets expanded their Biblical legacy. Even if a word did exist in Biblical times, the meaning often changed over time. New words were added even while the original meaning remained,[19] with Dunash Ben Labrat leading the way. He lived from about 920-990 and wrote "the first poetic work in Hebrew written strictly according to the principles of Arabic meter."[20] Among his poetry are drinking songs which are very much like their Arabic counterparts.[21] Fearing controversy, Dunash qualified these poems with a religious warning.

The rival philologist, Menahem Jacob Ibn Saruk lived for part of his life at the court of Hasdai ibn Shaprut in the tenth century. He wrote the *Mahberet*, the first Bible dictionary in Hebrew. The true father of Hebrew grammar was one of Menahem's disciples, Jehudah ben David Hayyuj. In the tenth century, he discovered the three letter root in Hebrew, even though he wrote in Arabic.[22] Hayyuj wrote The Book of Weak Letters.

The classical forms of Islamic literature originated at this time, from 900-1100. At first, Moslems collected and edited poetry from their oral tradition.[23] During the Umayyad dynasty, the love lyric emerged from its status as introductory passage to an independent form. In addition to long forms, shorter love poems, known as *ghazals* emerged.[24] Eventually prominent poets emerged. In the West, two forms were brought to perfection; the *muwashshah* (the Arabic strophic poem) and the *zajal*, each based on a refrain for a chorus.[25] In Hebrew the *muwashshah* is known as the *azor* poem, or the girdle poem. It was "belted" by a repeating verse which held the poem together. Often meant to be sung, these poems arose under the influence of old Roman folk songs, and prospered with an abundance of rhymes.[26] Four kinds of meter were common: regular meter, where a short syllable alternates with a fixed number of long ones; free meter, where an irregular order of short and long syllables are fixed into a permanent scheme; long syllable, where short syllables were avoided; and syllabic meter, where there were a regular number of syllables in a line.[27] These poems often concluded with a couplet in vulgar Arabic or Romance, hedonistic or otherwise.[28]

Poem 167 reflects the improved grammatical ease with the Hebrew language, for Ibn Ezra very easily manipulates words and rhythms in a classic *piyyut* form called an *ofan*.

Ibn Ezra 167

Angels crowning, worshipping in every region,
Sanctifying, clamouring, roaring with great acclamation,
Terrifying, while not seen, wonderous, and miraculous--
Saying: Holy, holy holy is the God of hosts!

They worship his name eternally with great trembling, with fright,
Roar of the Seraphim, in the heights of flight, like lightning they run to and fro.
They ask permission of one another to sanctify God in reverence,
Saying: Holy, holy holy is the God of hosts!

The abundance of witnesses trembling, with excitement they worship God,
Speaking their sanctifications three times the santification of God,
In a thunderous voice with great pleasantness in a voice that shows to be seen again
Saying: Holy, holy holy is the God of hosts!

BIBLE

many verbs from Shacharit
v.4 Isaiah 6:3. And one called unto another, and said: Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory.
v.6 Nahum 2:5. The chariots rush madly in the the streets, They jostle one against another in the broad places; The appearance of them is like torches, they run to and from like the lightnings.
v.7 Shacharit.
v.9 Ezra 10:9. Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered themselves together unto Jerusalem within the three days; it was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month; and all the people sat in the broad place before the house of God, trembling because of this matter, and for the great rain. faithlessness of the Jews in captivity.
v.11 Exodus 20:18. And the people stood afar off; but Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was. prior--revelation.

The *ofan* is directly connected to the liturgy: the *kadosh, kadosh, kadosh* refrain is from the Sanctification, and throughout the poem Ibn Ezra uses many verbs from the

morning service. This kind of a poem is impossible to translate into the English and still retain a sense of the Hebrew rhyme, so here in transliteration is the first verse:

Malachim mamlichim ma'aritzim b'chol payot,
Makdishim mar'ishim, margishim b'rov t'shuot,
Noraim, v'ayn nirim, niflaim v'niflaot--
Omrim: Kadosh Kadosh Kadosh Adonai Tz'vaot!

Because all the plurals in Hebrew have the same endings, either *im* for masculine or *ot* for feminine, a simple rhyme is not difficult to construct. For the Hebrew and Arabic poets in the Middle Ages, this simple rhyme did not count. These poets discovered more complex ways of rhyming.

In the first three verses of each stanza the line contains four words or phrases of equivalent stress patterns, each with three syllables: *mal-a-chim mam-li-chim, ma-'a*(chataf patach)*-ri-tzim b'chol payot*(any *chataf* or *sh'va* *na* does not count in the rhyme scheme, since grammatically, these are not really syllables). The last line of each stanza is the refrain, three repetitions of *kadosh*, preserving the pattern of three, but before he does so, Ibn Ezra breaks the pattern with a two-syllable word, *omrim*. Breaking the pattern before resuming catches our attention, causing *kadosh, kadosh, kadosh,* to stand out--as well it should. This is the verse from Isaiah which is included in the liturgy of the sanctification: this is the verse around which the poem is based.

The first two words are very similar, with only the *aleph* distinguishing them. The verb *malach* is usually used

in connection with the noun *melech*: a king rules. But instead of kings, *m'lachim*, Ibn Ezra chose *malachim*, angels. The prototypical king is God in rabbinic imagery, and even though Ibn Ezra is referring to the angels and their glorious proclamations, there is no doubt that God is the source of all. The first three words of the first two lines are active participles, and both lines end with a prepositional phrase. Another play on words is in line three, *noraim* and *nirim*. The angels are awesome and yet unseen, in the same way that God too is awesome and yet unseen. The last two words of that line are also paired. They are identical except for their ending, one masculine plural and the other feminine plural, but their meanings are not identical.

The first two lines of each stanza begin with the same letter (and vowel), and they spell *MoSHe*, an acrostic of Ibn Ezra's first name, perhaps even a reference to the Moses of the Bible--after there are two of each letter! Moses is the one, according the midrashic legend, who heard the angels singing the sanctification. In the first stanza we must wait to the end before the poem mentions God directly, thereby allowing some dramatic tension to build. In the second stanza, reference is made immediately: "his name." This time a prepositional phrase is part two of the four part line in the first two lines. The word *r'shut* in line seven is only one of several verbs from the morning service. The sanctification appears during other services, but this *ofan*

was probably meant for the morning one.

The third line of stanza two has a very strong rhythm. The third syllable is stressed each time and the first two phrases are paired just like the equivalent line in the stanza above, but the lines themselves sound very different. Even though the phrases are paired, the first leads into the second, depends on the second. In the first stanza, the two phrases contrast each other.

The first two words of verse ten sound identical: *hamulatam, k'dushatam.* The next two phrases also have the "u" or "oo" sound. The speed accelerates at this point because each phrase has the same rhythm as the one before. One can feel the excitement of the angels, the thunder and the lightning intensify, and we *can* see the voice that cannot be seen "saying: *Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh, Adonai Tzvaot!*"

This next poem is very different from the bombastic glory of poem 167. Included is the first through the seventh stanzas, and the fifteenth throught the last stanzas. It is exceptionally beautiful.

Ibn Ezra 170
translation Carmi

With all my soul I long for You in the night.

My soul longs for the home of her soul, she yearns for her fountainhead, she pines for her holy dwelling--*she would travel there day and night.*

There, with her mind's eye, she would look on the delights of His glory; she would fly to Him

without wings; she would hasten to Him and marvel--*at twilight, as the day fades, and in the dark of night.*

She would see His splendour in His handiwork; she would long to approach Him; day after day she would speak His praises, *and night after night.*

You have always kept the banner of Your love over me; Your awe is never absent from my heart. O Lord, you have examined me and known me, *You have tested my heart and watched me by night.*

I have had my fill of sleepless nights, tossing on my sick-bed. My feet have hurried me to the holy houses of worship even *when deep sleep falls upon men and they have visions in the night.*

I was a fool, I blundered all the days of my childhood; I am ashamed that I wasted my youth; that is why *tears are now my food, day and night.*

O pure one, held in the body's prison, observe that this world is nothing but a passageway. Then rouse, rouse yourself at the beginning of every watch, *rise and cry aloud in the night.*

My youthful days vanished like a shadow, my years flew away more swiftly than eagles. Of all my joys I cannot remember *a single day or night.*

Proud men oppress me and gloat over me; they speak words of peace as their teeth bite into me. Let their evil doings be remembered *before You day and night!*

You who invoke the Lord's name--call a solemn assembly, wash yourselves, purge your hearts of dross, stand fast, do not be silent *day or night.*

[God:]"My daughter, know that I shall yet endow you with My grace; I shall gently lead you to My dwelling and instal you there. You have no kinsman closer than I: *now go and sleep through the night.*"

BIBLE

Isaiah 26:9. With my soul have I desired Thee in the night;

Yea, with my spirit within me have I sought Thee earnestly; for when Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.
v.5 Exodus 13:21. And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; that they might go by day and by night.
v.8 Genesis 24:21. And the man looked steadfastly on her; holding his peace, to know whether the Lord had made his journey prosperous or not. (servant at the well)
v.9 Proverbs 7:9. In the twilight, in the evening of the day, in the blackness of night and the darkness.
v.10 Psalm 19:2. The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork;
v.12 Psalm 19:3. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night revealeth knowledge;
v.14 Song of Songs 2:4. He hath brought me to the banqueting-house, and his banner over me is love.
v.17 Psalm 17:3. Thou hast tried my heart, Thou hast visited it in the night; Thou hast tested me, and Thou findest not that I had a thought which should not pass my mouth.
v.21 Job 4:13. In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on me, (v.18) fear came upon me, and trembling, and all my bones were made to shake.
v.23 Job 27:12. Behold, all ye yourselves have seen it; Why then are ye become altogether vain?
v.25 Psalm 42:4. My tears have been my food day and night, while they say unto me all the day: Where is thy God?
v.29 Lamentations 2:19. Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the watches; Pour out thy heart like water before the face of the Lord; Lift up thy hands toward Him for the life of thy young children, that faint for hunger at the head of every street.
v.61 Zachariah 14:7. And there shall be one day which shall be known as the Lord's, not day, and not night; but it shall come to pass, that at evening time there shall be light.
v.62 Ezekiel 35:13. And ye have magnified yourselves against Me with your mouth, and have multiplied your words against Me; I have heard it.
v.63 Micah 3:5. Thus saith the Lord concerning the prophets that make my people to err; that cry:"peace," even their teeth have any thing to bite; and whoso putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him:
v.65 Nehemiah 1:6. Let Thine ear now be attentive, and Thine eyes open, that Thou mayest hearken unto the prayer of Thy servant, which I pray before Thee at this time, day and night, for the children of Israel Thy servants, while I confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against Thee; yea, I and my father's house have sinned.
v.67 Isaiah 1:25. And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purge away thy dross as with lye, and will take away all thine alloy:
v.67 Isaiah 46:8. Remember this, and stand fast; bring it to

mind, O ye transgressors.
v.69 Isaiah 62:6. I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, they shall never hold their peace day nor night;
v.73 Ruth 3:13. Tarry this night, and it shall be in the morning, that if he will perform unto thee the part of a kinsman, well; let him do the kinsman's part; but if he be not willing to do the part of a kinsman to thee, then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee, as the Lord liveth; lie down until the morning.

The first stanza begins with the verb used in the leading verse, *ivta*. The choice of *m'kom* for the soul's home is appropriate, for *makom* is another word for God in rabbinic language. *M'kor* in the next line was the same word Solomon Ibn Gabirol used when he titled his book of philosophy, *M'kor Haim*. It is entirely possible that Moses Ibn Ezra was aware of this: in any event, God can be thought of as the "fountainhead" of the soul. There is no set meter in this poem. The ending rhyme of the first three verses is identical: aaab, cccb, etc. The beginning letter of each stanza combines to form an elaborate acrostic spelling out "I am Moses son of Rabbi Yaakov *hazak*." On a literal level, verse one speaks of a place, a general designation. Verse 2 refers to a fountainhead, which is an abstract, philosophical kind of word. Verse three speaks more intimately of a dwelling, and at the same time uses the formal "holy" together with it. All three images complement each other, and the three verbs which are very strong, add to the intensity of the soul's desire. The soul would travel "day and night," a merism equivalent to "constantly." This verse is from Exodus, when God was a pillar of cloud and fire in order to be constantly by Israel's side.

"With her mind's eye" the soul would see everything--How else but through knowledge, philosophy, could the soul hope to see God's glories. She would fly, not physically, but metaphysically. She hastens to God as Rebecca hastened to greet Eliezer at the well at the end of day: the verb *tishtaeh* in line eight, and the verse from Proverbs in line nine weave together perfectly. Ibn Ezra uses an abundance of Biblical verses, but they are never thrown together. Each is gently placed with its mate, effortlessly it would seem. The tone of the verse from Proverbs is dark: "in the blackness of night and the darkness." The reference to Rebecca at the well is hopeful and idyllic. Indeed the soul in the poem is both at once. God's marvels delight the senses, but the soul itself is distraught with yearning.

Psalm nineteen is the undertext to the next stanza. The soul hopes that more and more will be revealed, for the Biblical text states that "night unto night revealeth knowledge." The sun coming out of the night is like a bridegroom coming out of his tent. The soul in this poem would approach all of God's splendour. She would speak God's praises, but "there is no speech nor are there words." It is as if Ibn Ezra is having a running dialogue with his Biblical texts.

It is here the nature of the poem changes. Up until now, the subject was God's handiwork, the metaphysical splendour. In stanza four the focus shifts to the soul

itself. The transition is God's love, making God immanent in addition to transcendent. The "banner of Your love" is from Song of Songs when the lover brings his beloved to his banqueting house. The imagery of the bridegroom in stanza three provides the bridge. But this verse speaks less of love than of testing, the result of which seems positive, at least from the Biblical text. Even so the next stanza speaks of sleepless nights, hours when the fear and trembling of Job oppress human beings. Unlike Job are the words which follow in stanza six.

Is Ibn Ezra looking back on the wild days of his youth when he writes "I was a fool,...I am ashamed that I wasted my youth..."? *Havalti* is from the book of Job, but Job never condemned himself this way. Given the ill turn of events in Ibn Ezra's life, the verse from Psalms must have struck a deep chord:

> My tears have been my food day and night, while they say unto me all the day: "Where is thy God?"

In stanza seven, the body is the prison of the soul. Judaism is not an ascetic religion, but when the oppression of this world becomes too much to bear, our gaze inevitably turns elsewhere. The verse from Lamentations aptly ends this stanza with cries and misery.

These selections now skip to stanza fifteen through the end. The poet is near the end of his years, taking an unhappy look back. This time, the Biblical verse stands in sharp contrast to the tone of the stanza. Zachariah speaks

wondrously of the day of God when even in the evening there shall be light. There is no such light for the poet, even the shadows have vanished. Out of the darkness comes one final attempt to scorn the forces which beset the beleagered soul. Then in stanza seventeen, an attempt to rouse other wandering souls.

The last stanza is gentle and tender: God is speaking. All the turmoil is gone, there is no homelessness, no isolation, no nightmares. The dwelling in this stanza is different from the first, and there has been a long road from the philosophical beginning. Night no longer functions as a symbol. The closing verse is from the love story of Boaz and Ruth, and brings to mind idyllic tenderness after a hard day's journey. Once again it is a time for sleep.

The song of (human) praise was a new form in the poetry of this time. and the standard beginning was some kind of love poem. An alternative was an introduction not of love, but simply of a different subject than the poem itself: wine, the travails of lonliness, or simply a universal meditation. The link between the introduction and the body was called the *maavar*. The closing could be lines of friendship.[29]

In their introductions, instead of looking away in horror or disgust, the poets integrated the pleasures of the body with the pleasures of the soul. This is no better exemplified than in Gabirol's merging of the beloved and the priest in poem 65.

Gabirol 65
translation, mine

> And you are a dove, are a lily of Sharon, and your rim of your dress is full of bells. And the pomegranates on your garments are golden which resembles the garments of the Aaronides. And when you go before me, I compare your walk to the sun in the sky. Sit here, beauty, next to me, toss joys to your beloved. Take the drum and the harp and sing your melody upon the ten-stringed instrument. Rise up, praise your beloved, your chosen one Yekutiel, chief of the princes and rulers, the light of the world, the pillar of heaven, the one whom all the rulers look to, and to his word all the chiefs wait who would settle toilessly, be solicitous to their desires, to the point of weariness, like a father seeks to find food for his sons, whose utterance is good tidings for everyone, and whose charity is dearer than pearls. In his spirit grace abides, charity is in his heart, and his lips are faithful at all times. He is a prince who resembles the heavens upon the earth and indeed his hands bring showers like clouds: When they are withdrawn--people die, and when they rain down, in their showers--people rejoice. God will speedily fill his requests, and may my requests to him be given.

BIBLE

v.1 Song of Songs 2:14. O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the cliff, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.
v.1 Song of Songs 2:1. I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.
v.2 Exodus 28:33-5. And upon the skirts of it thou shalt make pomegranates of blue, and of purple, and of scarlet, round about the skirts thereof; and bells of gold between them round about: a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, upon the skirts of the robe round about. And it shall be upon Aaron to minister; and the sound thereof shall be heard when he goeth in unto the holy place before the Lord, and when he cometh out, that he die not.
v.3 Deuteronomy 26:15. Look forth from thy holy habitation, from heaven, and bless thy people Israel, and the land which Thou hast given us, as Thou didst swear unto our fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey.
v.5 Psalm 92:4. With an instrument of ten strings, and with the psaltery; With a solemn sound upon the harp.
v.7 Proverbs 10:25. When the storm passes the wicked is no more: but the righteous is an everlasting foundation.

v.11 Deuteronomy 23:24. That which is gone out of thy lips thou shalt keep and perform; according as thou hast vowed of thy free will to the Lord thy God which thou has promised with thy mouth.
v.12 Psalm 45:9. Myrrh, and aloes, and cassia are all thy garments; out of ivory palaces stringed instruments have made thee glad.

Rabbinic interpretation equated the beloved of the Song of Songs with the entirety of the people of Israel, but Gabirol's singling out of the priest is very bold. The religious leader is a sensual presence, not a mere officiant. It is striking that the image of woman best evokes the ethos of priest. Her beauty, her majesty, her grace, her expressive voice--who better to sing praises: as a woman, to the political leader Yekutiel; as a priest, to God "himself." The rabbis often described a metaphorical woman. Gabirol's woman is in addition flesh and blood.

What a beautiful understanding of human beings! Gabirol could not have arisen in a Christian environment. The dichotomy between body and flesh was too great. Even in Judaism, while the body was accepted, it was not religiously glorified. For Gabirol, body and soul were one, beloved and priest are synonymous. Gabirol drank up the Arab enjoyment of the body and encouraged his Hebrew readers to do the same.

For a twentieth century reader, the hyperbole applied to a political leader is glaring. For the reader in Islamic society in the Golden Age of Spain, this was established practice. The poet's goal was to take a kernal of truth and embellish it in the most glamorous poetical way imaginable.

Only the skill of the poet prevented it from crossing into sycophancy. The Arab poet was not defaming God by attributing godly virtues to human beings. The reader did not expect otherwise and certainly did not read the poem as historical truth. The same applied to the Hebrew reader. Hyperbole was not foreign to Jewish poetry, but hyperbole is not called hyperbole when it refers to God. No virtue is too great, no deed too magnificent, no perfection too perfect to be applied to the Sovereign of Sovereigns, the Holy One, Blessed be. There is no end of Biblical source material to draw from. The Spanish Hebrew poets took the metaphors referring to God, and moved them into the world of humans. While they did not mean it literally (if metaphor is genuine it is not literal, even in the Bible), it nonetheless was a very glamourous way of seeing themselves.

A practical reason why these poems of praise were so popular was the economics of the poet's life. A potential patron could be encouraged to provide employment to the author of a particully effusive poem of praise. Woe to the patron who tired of his court poet though, for poems of disgust were also crafted by disgruntled (and unemployed) poets! Only the early poets of this age would provide specific details, general praise was the approved method.[30]

The first phrase in poem 65 already contains two references to the Songs of Songs. The dove and the lily of Sharon are synonyms for a beautiful beloved. In order to fit the rhyme scheme Gabirol uses *sh'ronim* instead of *sharon*.

The meter of this poem is called *m'rubeh*: lines are divided in half, the syllable pattern in as follows (-=stressed, .=unstressed):

--./---./---.//--./---./---.

The second phrase begins a description of the beloved's clothing. We could normally expect a more leisurely depiction of the beloved herself, but Gabirol is pushing to establish a connection between the beloved and the priest. The skirts, pomegranates, the bells, the gold--these are come from the description in Exodus of Aaron ministering in the Temple. The bells served a practical purpose. When Aaron would come out of the Holy of Holies, the people would hear the sound of the bells and know that he was alive. The bells on the skirts of the beloved are strictly pleasure.

In the Biblical verse, Aaron walks out of the Temple; in the poem verse three the walk of the beloved is like the sun in the sky. After the walk, the poet calls to the beloved to sit down. In verse four, *yaalat hain* was the common synonym for beloved in Arabic and Hebrew at the time. Then, requesting that she pick up the instruments of the Psalmist, the sensual introduction leads into the official praise section of this poem of praise. "Your beloved, your chosen one" are phrases the rabbis used to describe the people of Israel in relation to God. Now, in addition to the flesh and blood woman in the sensual introduction, Gabirol makes one specific Israelite, Y'kutiel, the beloved. He is one of the righteous upon whom the world stands, as

spoken of in Proverbs.

The first image of Y'kutiel is the pillar, some cosmic force sustaining and lighting the world. Next, he is chief of the chiefs, like a father toiling for his sons. In accordance with Deuteronomy are verses ten and eleven: his utterance is action, his heart a free-will offering. His power is as absolute as the heavens: "When they [his hands] are withdrawn--people die, and when they rain down, in their showers--people rejoice." "Showers" is an Arabic metaphor for generousity. The last line is simple--Gabirol too would like these good tidings showered down upon him!

Since religion no longer limited the Spanish Hebrew poets, a plethora of poetical themes emerged. Due to Halevi's unique experience of his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, he wrote poems on uncommon topics for his time; the longing for Zion, the pain of leaving his cultural environment, the perilous sea voyage.[31] Like his contemporaries, he covered the poems of praise, prayer, wedding poems, drinking songs and everything else in order to make a living. If Gabirol's recurring theme was Wisdom, beauty was Halevi's.[32] His passionate love poems are unexcelled.

While the rabbis of the Talmud were more comfortable about the human body than were their Christian counterparts, nevertheless it suffered greatly in comparison to the spirit. The body was somehow created by God, and therefore had to be respected, but it was also resented for limiting

the spirit. The poets, including Gabirol, saw it differently:

> The body is not the prison of the soul, for everything bears the image of God, everything is in God and God's reflection is on everything. All things without exception are illuminated and permeated by the divine light, both common matter and noble form.[33]

God represented complete unity, the union of form and matter. Since matter was a part of this unity, Gabirol's opinion of human beings was very high: we are a "link in the great chain of being,...a significant part of the vestment in which divine wisdom discloses itself."[34]

Since the synagogue was no longer the only place for poetry, love poetry with nary a religious theme took root in Jewish soil. In addition to a religious ethic, a whole other system arose in Islam, which was the secular ethic of chivalry. In the tenth century, "Cordova saw itself as the heir and revivor of that Eastern capital's [Baghdad's] glories."[35] These glories included the revival of ancient studies, the emancipation of courtly women, and love and nature poetry.[36] Ladies of the royal households had a relatively high degree of freedom. There were three qualities most praised among women: noble descent, rare beauty, and a proud and lofty spirit. In Ummayad Cordova we hear of one such woman called Sukaynah. She encouraged the arts, and no doubt inspired many poets to dedicate their words of love to her.[37] Jews envious of Arab refinement strove to "create not only religious but secular poetry in

Hebrew, employing Arabic forms and principles of meter."[38]

What more exciting secular poetry is there than love poetry? Metaphorically, the love of woman was nothing new to Judaism; Israel is a bride, a beautiful beloved. The Song of Songs even described purely physical love, although the rabbis treated this metaphorically. It was in the Golden Age of Spain that Hebrew poetry reached heights unknown even in the Bible.

It was not sensuality alone that distinguished the Golden Age. The way in which Biblical texts are interwoven through their poety set the Spanish Hebrew poets apart. The *payytanim* used Biblical verses, but in a more straightforward manner. Now four different techniques were most commonly used: quoting the verse verbatim, slightly altering the verse, making an elliptical reference, or taking a different or contradictory meaning.[39] The most extreme example of the last was a poem by Abraham Ibn Ezra. The poem itself was about a fly; the Biblical verses are far removed from insects![40]

While every poem is not strewn with references to the Song of Songs, it nearly always contains Biblical touchstones. One such poem will be analyzed below. It is a cycle about the joys and travails of unrequited love, and while the Biblical illusions add layers to the poem, it is not essentially Biblical or religious. Secular delights mixed with religious imagery to create a new genre of poetry. Emotions of all kinds, sexual or otherwise, were

allowed to surface.

The line between religious and secular poetry was a false one in the Golden Age. Liturgical and non-liturgical is a more apt division, for not all "God-intoxicated" poetry is fit for the synagogue. Yehuda Halevi's love poem demonstrates a good example of this: "*Y'didi, hashachachta,*" "My love, have you forgotten how you lay between my breasts?" In actuality, it is a *piyyut,* specifically *r'shut* which would theoretically be positioned before the *nishmat* prayer. Theoretically, since once the gaonate began fixing the entire liturgy and not just the landmarks of the *Barchu, Shema* and others, any additional *piyyutim* were seen as a challenge to gaonic control. This sensual *piyyut* marked a clear departure from the *piyyut* of the past. While this poem is clearly religious, it is questionable whether or not it is liturgical or non-liturgical.

The relationship of God and Israel is often compared to that of a man and a woman. The Spanish Hebrew poets, perhaps none better than Halevi, draw out the physical nature of that love. The loftiness of the relationship does not exclude sexual imagery.

The first poem we will analyze is a love cycle by Solomon Ibn Gabirol, beginning with "*K'tamar at b'komatayh,*" "You are in stature as the date tree." The translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

Gabirol 76a

> You are in stature as the date tree and as the sun in your beauty, I thought you were just, an Avigail in your righteousness--You found that you smote me like Jezebel in your wickedness. Utterly splendid, beautiful [to behold] I am sick with love of you, lift my soul from Sheol, and I will not die before you!

BIBLE

v.1 Psalms 92:13. The righteous man flourishes like a palm tree, he grows like a cedar in Lebanon.

Gabirol 75b

> "Search out and love," O friend who has wearied me, "Find a balance for your love and a path!" Until I saw in my searchings of loves a delicate one sitting by me as a queen and she says, How long has your love been secret, and has been unseen and not revealed? (When its already harvest time,) and they harvest with a heavy hatchet, place a sickle upon it the crop rises and scythes. After all, the son of Jesse in the full strength of his love, does he not send and call for Avigail!"

BIBLE

v.1 Proverbs 16:11. A just weight and balance are the Lord's: all the weights in the bag are his work.
v.2 Nehemiah 2:6 And the king said to me (the queen also sitting by him) for how long shall thy journey be? And when wilt thou return? so it pleased the king to send me, and I set him a time.
v.4 Psalm 74:6 and now they break down its carved work altogether with hatchets, and with hammers. Thy enemies have destroyed everything.
v.5 Job 21:23 One dies in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet.
v.5 1 Samuel 25:39 And when David heard that Naval was dead, he said, Blessed be the Lord that has pleaded the cause of my reproach from the hand of Naval and has kept his servant from evil: For the Lord has requited the wickedness of Naval upon his own head. And David sent and spoke with Avigail to take her to him to wife.

76c, translation Carmi

> What is the matter with Abigail, that first she took my soul with her eyes and then forsook it?

All her suitors told her that I hate her with a most enduring hatred. Yet despite this slander, and though she has forgotten my affection, I shall keep love's pact, I shall not forget. The son of Jesse sent messengers to Avigail's house, but I shall go to her in person, not by proxy. In time of exile no sacrifices can be offered to God; then shall I slaughter whole offerings and sacrifices to this woman!

Gabirol 76d

My beloved is praised among women, she is a queen like the sun in its den, She's a sister of the sun, and mother of the moon, her friends call her Tamar--whose name goes forth in the glory of her splendor, and mention of her is good and beautiful in the countries. You quarrel with me when I will shed tears and I will lead my cheeks to wells. I answered her "And how can I be happy and rejoice and how can I bring joy to my heart when there is no wine and must (new wine) in the wine cellars and no grain and wheat in the grainery?"

BIBLE

v.1 Deuteronomy 26:15 Look down from thy holy habitation, from heaven, and bless thy people Israel and the land which thou hast given us as thou didst swear to our fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey.
v.2 Song of Songs 6:10 Who is she that looks out like the dawn, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners.

Gabirol 76e

I, Amnon, am sick, Call Tamar to me, for he who desired her had fallen in the snare and the net. My friends, my companions, bring her to me, I have only one request from you which I will state: Bind a crown upon her head, prepare her jewels, and place in her hand a cup of wine. Come and kiss me, perhaps you will extinguish the fire in my heart, which consumes my flesh which stands on edge.

BIBLE

v.1 2 Samuel 13:1 And it came to pass after this, that Avshalom the son of David had a fair sister, whose name was Tamar; and Amnon the son of David loved her. (Amnon fakes being sick to get Tamar)
v.3 Psalm 75:9 For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup,

with foaming wine, it is full of mixture and he pours out of the same: but its dregs, shall all the wicked of the earth drain and drink.
v.4 Job 4:15 Then a spirit passed before my face, that made the hair of my flesh to stand up.

Gabirol 76f

> He sees me but his eyelid sickly, and the cup filled with the image of his cheeks, And the utterance of his were jewels upon jewels, and the laughter of his mouth cannot be valued in gold, and the utterances with which he kills me are collected like the utterances of a debt collector to a poor and degraded man. The cup runs like the sun in the heavens, and the day wanders like a wanderer from his friends and exiled, and my blood drips upon me, and rushed to my cheek--and doesn't set or rise!

BIBLE

v.1 Job 8:21. Though I were innocent, yet would I not know myself: I would despise my life.

76g

> Pass the cup, and if there is none--Drink it and see it in the image of your clear cheek. One who is made sick by you and almost dies--Revive with painted eyes. Rule us with the command of the one who dwells in heaven, and if there is righteousness in your heart--do it!

BIBLE

v.2 Ezekiel 23:40. And furthermore, you sent for men to come from afar to whom a messenger was sent; and lo they came: for whom thou didst wash thyself, didst paint thy eyes, and didst deck thyself with ornaments.

76h

> My beloved made me heartsick with her eyes, how you enslave me--you who are my redeemer. If there is no mercy in your heart concerning me, to the land of the gazelle I will go, and to its wine cellar and I will drink its wine: Perhaps you will be jealous of the gazelles you will see camping like doves around my tent.

BIBLE

v.4 Daniel 11:16. But he who comes against he shall do

according to his own will; and none shall stand before him: and he shall stand in the land of beauty and in his hand shall be destruction.

76i

> He left me as if I were poor and despised, a splendid deer whose fine gold cannot be compared to gold, because of his presence my flesh has failed and my skin weakens and is consumed in longing after him. He adjures sorrows when he sends them forth not to let go of me until I wear out and die. Bring to me the balm of Gilead, my beloved, and if there is none--Take my soul and I'll be at ease, because bearing sorrows all my days, I feel weak and sick. I called to him "Will you still destroy my insides and capture my heart and cause me to be sick?" I replied: "There is still much time, for the sun has not encamped in Aries!

BIBLE

v.2 Psalm 73:26. My flesh and my heart fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.
v.2 Lamentations 3:4. He has made my flesh and my skin to waste away, he has broken my bones.
v.5 Nehemiah 2:1. I had not been sad in his presence.

Section "a" of this poem introduces the beloved in a standard hyperbolic manner, using the imagery of the date tree and the sun in its opening line. The sun is a common metaphor in Arabic poetry of the time referring to the wisdom or beauty of the one praised. Gabirol does not waste the overtones of *tamar*: In Psalm 92:13, "the righteous one flourishes like a palm [date] tree", and in the next verse Gabirol mentions the beloved's presumed righteousness. Originally he thought she was like Avigail: when she rejected him, she appeared closer to Jezebel. In this poem lies the crux of the cycle: Avigail is indescribably beautiful, the poet is indescribably lovesick, and the feeling of the one is not reciprocated by the other.

The first three lines are identical in word number and syllable pattern. The ending rhyme is a *kamatz*, plus *taych*. The fourth line is a different word pattern, two phrases of two words each in the first half, then three words in the second half. The three verses above are three words plus two, the last line is three words plus three. Each verse is divided into two parts, each beginning with a *sh'va*. It is a five-line stanza with a rhyme pattern as follows (.=short, -=long): (24.722)

---./---.//---./---.

In this love cycle, the poem is essentially secular, but with repeated religious descriptions. The would-be lovers are paralleled to David and Avigail. Section three mentions sacrifices to God, and Amnon and Tamar appear in section five.

The meter in section two is *m'rubeh* (see page x). The stanza begins with a push from a friend to find a love. Wearied by this advice, the poet finally does see a delicate beauty beside him. A verse from Nehemiah ties in the two ideas of journey and queen, or paramour. This beauty chides him for hiding his love, using the example that when it is time to harvest, it is time to harvest! Act now, for David did not wait--he called for Avigail. In the first stanza the beloved is like Avigail in righteousness. Now the detail of David acting assertively with Avigail is mentioned. It would seem that a romance is in the bud.

But according to section three, "it seems as though she

has forgotten my affection." The poet is not willing to concede that their love died a natural death, and blames her other suitors for spreading lies. For a poet though, no romance is ever over. He will go furthur than David did; the poet himself will plead his case. The exile and the subsequent ban on sacrificial offerings will not deter the lovesick poet--he shall "slaughter whole offerings and sacrifices to this woman!" Clearly there is a Biblical context in this stanza, but just as clearly this is a "secular" love poem.

We must wait until the fourth section of this poem until we find a description of the beloved. The hyperbole precludes any physical description. She is related to both sun and moon. Considering that mere mention of Tamar is enough to bring good and beauty to the land, it is little wonder that she berates the poet when he sheds tears. He laments, explaining that there is no wine. Wine accoutrements are sprinkled in several of the sections. In Arabic poetry, wine objects are not limited to drinking songs. In section five there is a foaming cup; section six, "the cup ran like the sun in the heavens; section seven, the reference is direct--"Pass the cup,"; also in section eight, the wine cellar.

In stanza five, the poet resorts to subterfuge (at least within his poetic imagination). In 2 Samuel Amnon (the son of Jesse in earlier stanza is now the son of the son of Jesse) pretends that he is sick in order to snare the

Biblical Tamar. The stanza opens with the words "I, Amnon, am sick." He pleads with his friends to crown her, bedeck her with jewels and bring his beloved, cup of wine in hand, to his side. The cup of wine in Psalms is a dangerous one. The wicked must drink the dregs at the bottom, and in this poem, the poet is already sick (unless he, like Amnon, is pretending). The "flesh which stands on end" is a reference to Job. The poet is in desperate shape indeed.

The spirits of wine run more heavily in this cycle as we go on, and the next stanza feels like a drunken stupor. Almost every phrase begins with a connecting *vav*, making each one a continuation of the one before. The "he" that the poet refers to is none other than his own projection in the wine cup. The cup runs, the day wanders, and his blood drips--all very gripping images which mirror the by now overdose of wine. There is a moment of revival in stanza seven, but depression and frustration join in stanza eight.

As is also the case with God, the beloved is at once the enslaver and the only redeemer. The poet finally comes to grips with the beloved's rejection, and hopes to at least inspire jealousy. The cycle ends with a cry of desperation. The beloved here is a man, and the poet is consumed in body and spirit. If there is no Biblical balm of Gilead, than he yearns to die. It is a very sad ending for a cycle which began so hopefully.

Gabirol does not employ a great deal of direct sexual imagery--he is too much the romantic for that. His beloved

is righteous and beautiful and noble. She resembles Jezebel only in that she rejects him. In section four, Gabirol alludes to a verse from the Song of Songs, but carefully excludes its last negative piece:

> Who is she that looks out like the dawn, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, *and terrible as an army with banners.*

His love is not the playful variety, it comes with "fire in his heart, which consumes my flesh." Relative to the despair in some of his other poems, this is mild, but nonetheless Gabirol knows how to utter despondent cries. Playful love is the territory of Moses Ibn Ezra, as we can see in the following poem.

Ibn Ezra 143

section aleph
translation Carmi

> My heart's desire and my eyes' delight: the hart beside me and a cup in my right hand!
>
> Many denounce me for loving, but I pay no heed. come to me, fawn, and I will vanquish them. Time will consume them, and death will shepherd them away. Oh come to me, fawn, let me feast on the nectar of your lips until I am satisfied.
>
> Why, why would they discourage me? If there be any sin or guilt in being ravished by your beauty--let the Lord be my judge! do not let your heart be swayed by the words of my tormentor, that obstinate man. Oh, come put me to the test!
>
> He was lured and we went to his mother's house. There he bent his back to my heavy yoke. Night and day I alone was with him. I took off his clothes and he took off mine, I sucked at his lips and he suckled me.
>
> But once his eyes had done away with my heart,

his hand fastened the yoke of my sin, and he looked for grievances against me. He raged and shouted in fury: "Enough! leave me alone! do not drive me to crime, do not leave me astray!"

Oh, do not be unrelenting in your anger fawn. show me the wonders of your love, my friend; kiss your friend and fulfill his desire. If you wish to let me live--give me life; but if you would kill--then kill me!

BIBLE

v.5 Psalm 49:15. Like sheep they are appointed to Sheol; death shall be their shepherd; and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; and their form shall waste away in Sheol, leaving behind their dwelling.
v.6 1 Samuel 2:29. Wherefore do you kick at my sacrifice and at my offering, which I have commanded in my habitation; and honorest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people.
v.8 Numbers 32:7. And why do you dishearten the children of Israel from going over into the land which the Lord has given them?
v.10 Proverbs 5:19. A loving hind and a pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love.
v.10 Ezekiel 48:35. It shall be round about eighteen thousand measures: and the name of the city from that day shall be, The Lord is there.
v.13 Song of Songs 3:4. Scarce had I passed from them, when I found him whom my soul loves: I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her who conceived me.
v.19 Lamentations 1:14. The yoke of my transgressions is fastened on by his hand: they are knit together, and come up upon my ncek: he has made my strength to fall, the Lord has delivered me into the hands of those against whom I am not able to rise up.
v.20 Job 33:10. Behold, he finds occasions against me, he counts me for his enemy.
v.20 Job 35:15. But now, because his anger does not punish, and he does not heed the multitude of the words, therefore does Job open his mouth in vain, and multiplies words without knowledge.
v.23 Ezra 9:14. Should we again break thy commandments, and make marriages with the peoples of these abominations? Wouldst thou not be angry with us till thou wouldst consume us, so that there should be no remnant nor any to escape?

section bet
translation, mine

The secret of my heart and conscience revealed

streams of my eyes.

Strive me, cease! Gazelle learned to tear apart its prey then stubbornly, its passions grieved me and left me.

The youth's loins became impovershed, the sun opposite him, and with the arrows of his two eyes he stole my sleep and with his entire mouth he ate me.

I will not forget in my lifetime the night he lay close by my side on my couch and my carpet--He kissed me till the morning, and the juice of his mouth gave me suck.

How pleasant and good is his path, How sweet the fruit of his palate but his libation is both lie and emptiness. He mocked me and deceived me, and without sin he silenced me.

I was impatient for him, and my ears tingled with his voice, I tried magic with all my strength:
[Arabic] I'll think well of him. Perhaps he'll return and remember me.

BIBLE

v.9 Judges 19:11. And when they went by Yevus, the way was far spent,...(pass on to Israel, story like Sodom.)
v.12 Isaiah 9:11. And they devoured Israel with an open mouth. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.
v. 20 Jeremiah 8:14. Why do we sit still? Assemble yourselves, and let us enter into the fortified cities, and let us be cut off there: For the Lord God has cut us off, and given us water of gall to drink because we have sinned against the Lord.
v.20 Jeremiah 10:14. Every man becomes stupid without knowledge; every founder is put to shame by his carved idol: for his molten image is false and there is no breath in them.
v.20 Isaiah 30:1. Woe to the rebellious children says the Lord, that take counsel but not of me; and that prepare a plan but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin.
v. 24 Habakuk 3:16. When I heard my belly trembled my lips quivered at the sound: rottenness enters my bones, and I tremble where I stand, that I should wait for the day of trouble, when he comes up against the people whom he invades.
v. 1 Samuel 3:11. Behold I will do a thing in Israel at which both the ears of everyone that hears it shall tingle.

section gimel
translation Carmi

Caress the breasts of the lovely girl at night, and kiss the lips of the beautiful girl all day long!

Spurn those who chide you for loving, who counsel you to their own advantage; and heed my words of truth: there is no life but in the company of beauty's daughters, who stole out of Eden to torture the living, and there is no man living who is not full of desire.

Plunge your heart into pleasures, make merry, drink out of wine-skins by the riverside to the sound of lyres, doves, and swifts; dance and rejoice, clap your hands, get drunk, and knock on the door of the lovely girl!

These are the delights of the world; take your part as [did the priests] from the ram of installation. Always allot yourself the very portion that was your leaders' due; do not stop sipping the moist lips until you hold your rightful portion--the breast and the thigh!

BIBLE

v.8 Ecclesiastes 2:1. I said in my heart, come now, I will try thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also was vanity.
v.14 Exodus 29:27. And thou shalt sanctify the breast of the wave offering, and the shoulder of the heave offering, which is waved, and which is heaved up of the ram of the consecration, of that which is for Aaron, and of that which is for his sons:
v.15 Deuteronomy 33:21. And he provided the first part for himself, because there the portion of a lawgiver was reserved; and he came with the heads of the people, he executed the justice of the Lord, and his judgments with Israel.

This poem falls in the category of the girdle poems and its meter is as follows:

-- --.- -.--

It begins with a couplet, definitly hedonistic, but not the wildest of the cycle. Each stanza also ends with a couplet,

preceeded by three lines, each of which has the same ending sound: *eshmaaim*, *achniaim*, *yiraim*. The couplet, the girdle of the poem, has the same rhyme throughout: *ainee*.

The first section is an example of those wild youthful days, or more appropriately, those wild, youthful nights. The fawn and the hart were common synonyms for the beloved in Arabic poetry, whether those beloved were male or female. And this time, the night holds none of the terrors of Poem 170.

One cannot automatically assume that the poetic persona speaks with the voice of the poet. This poem is not evidence that Ibn Ezra was a homosexual, or even bisexual. But that he felt free enough to write poetry in this manner marked a sharp break with tradition. From the beginning, Ibn Ezra admitted that he was flaunting the religious code. In the last stanza, for example we detect an ambivalence in the lover, who is still aware of official disapproval: "'Enough! Leave me alone! Do not drive me to crime.'" Despite this disapproval, Ibn Ezra's love of beauty is too natural not to be pursued. He reminds us that we are all equal when shepherded away by death, regardless of our state of "sin."

Ibn Ezra's sexual descriptions are very vivid, with as many juices as lovemaking itself: "let me feast on the nectar of your lips," "I sucked at his lips and he suckled me," "kiss your friend." Lips and kisses are common motifs in his poetry. Such sensual arousal indicates a real feasting approach, not just a quick senseless act. The

sensual pleasures are considered sustenance as necessary as bread and wine, and are not to be depreciated by religious disapproval. To consider them sinful was to be out of tune with the spirit of the Golden Age of Spain.

Section two of the poem continues with heated passion. This time the lad who was once his ardent lover abandoned the poet without seeming cause or warning. While the voice of the poet claims that he had not sinned, the numerous Biblical verses all allude to sin:

> verse 20, Jeremiah 8:14. Why do we sit still? Assemble yourselves, and let us enter into the fortified cities, and let us be cut off there: For the Lord God has cut us off, and given us water of gall to drink because we have sinned against the Lord.
> verse 20, Jeremiah 10:14. Every man becomes stupid without knowledge; every founder is put to shame by his carved idol: for his molten image is false and there is no breath in them.
> verse 20, Isaiah 30:1. Woe to the rebellious children says the Lord, that take counsel but not of me; and that prepare a plan but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin.

The text behind the text is very sinful, even though the pain of a lover's desertion is what dominates the poem.

Section three is the wildest poem in this trilogy, and is a real "eye-opener" for people who consider the "olden times" dark and dusty. The tone is playful and outrageous, without any trace of guilt. Each of these three poems in this cycle begin with an introductory couplet, and this one, "caress the breasts...and kiss the lips" says it all! The first poem did indeed begin this way, but all did not follow

smoothly. By contrast, in section three, the merriment is sustained throughout.

In the last stanza, Ibn Ezra compares his contemporaries to the priests of old, just as Gabirol did. Well, not exactly like Gabirol. Gabirol was using the metaphor to exalt, but Ibn Ezra's purpose was to shock. Gabirol may have correctly assessed the priests as a sensuous officiants, but the priests could hardly have approved of carefree sexuality.

The next poem is a love poem of a different sort by Yehudah Halevi. It is the second of a lengthy cycle of seven poems.

Yehuda Halevi 175b
translation Carmi

O graceful doe, pity this heart in which you have dwelled all your life. Know that the day you leave me, your going will be my ruin. And even now, when my eyes dare to glance at your splendour, I am stung by the serpents that guard your cheeks, for their poison burns like fire and they drive me out.

She ensnared my heart with the breast that lie upon her heart--a heart of stone, and yet it put forth two apples! They stand guard, to the left and to the right, like lances. Their fiery [nipples burn] in my heart, though they have never come near me. Their mouths have drunk my blood, they felt no shame at all!

This doe violates the laws of God with her eyes: she kills me with malice aforethought, yet no one avenges me. Have you ever seen the heart of a lion joined to the eyelids of a gazelle? Her eyelids have learned to tear like a lion, they hurl sharpened arrows at me, they drain my heart's blood to the dregs. They are out for my life.

One day, when I was reeling like a drunkard, longing for the wine of her love, she dispatched

envoys to me bearing greetings and complaints; and when they returned to her, she begged them: 'O messengers of peace, come again and yet again!' These tidings seduced my heart and revived my spirit.

But one day when my hands were grazing in her garden and fondling her breasts, she said: 'Now take away your hands-they are not skilful enough.'(they [my breasts] have not yet experienced such things.') And her words were so seductive that they melted my heart: [Arabic and Romance] 'Do not touch me friend, I do not like those who hurt me. My breasts are soft and sensitive. Enough! I shall refuse one and all!

BIBLE

v.2 Genesis 42:4. But Benjamin, Joseph's brother, Jacob sent not with his brethren; for he said: 'Lest peradventure harm befall him'
v.3 Exodus 19:24. And the Lord said unto him: 'Go, get thee down, and thou shalt come up, thou, and Aaron with thee; but let not the priests and the people break through to come up unto the Lord, lest He break forth upon them.'
v.4 Proverbs 23:32. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like a basilisk.
v.5 Proverbs 6:27. Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?
v.10 Genesis 2:25. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.
v.12 Numbers 35:20. And if he thrust him of hatred, or hurled at him any thing, lying in wait, so that he died;...he is a murderer.
v.16 Psalm 78:65. Then the Lord awaked as one asleep, like a mighty man recovering from wine.
v.17 Isaiah 53:6. All we like sheep did go astray, we turned every one to his own way; And the Lord hath made to light on him the iniquity of us all.
v.21 Song of Songs 6:2. My beloved is gone down to his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies.
v.21 Ezekiel 23:3. And they committed harlotries in Egypt; they committed harlotries in their youth; there were their bosoms pressed, and there their virgin breasts were bruised.
v.22 I Samuel 17:39. And David girded his sword upon his apparel, and he essayed to go [, but could not]; for he had not tried it. And David said unto Saul: 'I cannot go with these; for I have not tried them.' And David put them off him. [regarding the Philistines]

The entire cycle is called "*El Hatz'viya*", "To the Deer". The form of the poem was a Spanish-Hebrew innovation

based on the strophic *muwashach*, or "girdle" poem in Arabic. These poems were often frankly hedonistic: Ironically, they became in Hebrew a very popular form for *piyyut*.

In this poem Halevi has set an arbitrary meter as follows:

--- --./------.-

It is not uncommon for the poetry of this era to be written in any stress/unstressed pattern imaginable. In a girdle poem, as long as the poet was consistant (to faciltate singing), he was free to set his rhythm.

In addition to the form of the poem, the use of the deer as a metaphor is nothing other than the common Arabic metaphor for the beloved, in this case a woman. In Halevi, we have animal allusions but the tone is vastly different than a Bambi movie. Halevi's erotic animal allusions are violent and almost too vivid: "serpents that guard your cheeks," "her eyelids have learned to tear like a lion, they hurl sharpened arrows at me..." Love is rarely rejected so violently, with burning poison and blood sucking. Most striking is the transformation that occurs to the woman's body. She begins as the only positive animal image, full of splendour. But the image sours as serpents guard her cheeks. Worse yet, her heart becomes stone and her breasts become lances, with fiery nipples which drink blood. Every part of her body is destructive, specifically those parts which arouse the poet.

Yehudah Halevi too is a master of the art of Biblical

verses. In the second verse, the word *asoni* is from the book of Genesis. Jacob could not part with Benjamin when the brothers went down to Egypt. He had already lost one son of his beloved wife. The poet cannot bear to part with his scornful beloved. When he dares to look upon her, it is as if he wishes to trespass where only Aaron is allowed to go, prepared to ignore God's express command. The fiery poison burns, as in Proverbs.

While the poem is very erotic, it is so only in a veiled sense: a heart of stone puts forth two apples. He does not mention nipples directly, yet his words are such that we can draw obvious conclusions. "Breast" is the only direct reference. In the last stanza he is "grazing in her garden." It is ironic that the same poet who uses imagery more violent than we have seen is also so refined in his sexual allusions.

The nature imagery soon returns, and we are finally given a pleasant respite: "when my hands were grazing in her garden and fondling her breasts." The breasts which were like fiery lances are now "soft and sensitive." Halevi is truly nature-intoxicated, whether nature's manifestation be nurturing, benign or destructive.

An element in this poem which we have seen before is the wine: "they drain my heart's blood to the *dregs*," "reeling like a drunkard, longing for the wine of her love..." This is a love poem, with wine as its accompaniment. When the mouth of the nipples drank blood,

they were far from innocent, but through Biblical allusion they are compared to the pair in the Garden of Eden.

In stanza three, the doe violated the laws of God, but earlier, through Biblical allusion, the poet was all too eager to violate those same laws. She kills with her eyes, the poet condemns her with allusions to Numbers as a murderer. Pain in poems of unrequited love is common, but the sense of danger here is acute.

At this point in the poem, Halevi finally breaks the mood. The fourth stanza offers a modicum of hope, and if we begin the fifth stanza too carelessly, we might suspect the poet's trials are over. There is a reference to a verse of love in the Song of Songs. But alas, the beloved has changed her mind, although with words of seduction, not violence. The poem ends with a refrain in a combination of Arabic and Romance.

It is ironic to posit that Jews began in earnest the search for philosophy as against more generalized wisdom during the Islamic Age in Spain. Since the rise of the Pharisees study had been elevated to the level of religious commandment, and it was early Islam that had first denoted the Jews as the people of the Book. The equality that the Pharisees heralded meant that anyone, through study rather than through heredity, could become a religious leader. A *religious* leader, because that was the arena open to Jews: political involvement outside the academy was not feasible. Moreover, study in the academy was of a different nature

than the pursuit of philosophic wisdom. Prior to the gaonic period, the best minds assembled and, working strictly with the materials handed down to them framed a daily Judaism through legal debates, novel legislation which encompassed every aspect of their lives. Aggaddic materials were not within a philosophic framework. Given this basis, the gaonim took the problems of their day, and modified the Jewish tradition to accomodate them. In the words of Louis Ginzberg:

> Every age has its problems, and though *the law* remained unchanged for all times among the Jews, *the laws* underwent modification along with the times.[41]

The pursuit of wisdom as an ideal was popularized in the Book of Proverbs, and the Apochryphal book of Ben Sira. Wisdom was seen as God's handmaiden, and was the vehicle by which we came to know God:

> My son, if thou wilt recieve my words, and treasure up my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thy ear to wisdom, and apply thy heart to understanding indeed, if thou criest after wisdom and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her like silver, and searchest for her as for hidden treasure; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. (Proverbs vs.1-5)

Wisdom, as opposed to knowledge, was gained through experience. It was not achieved by mathematic deduction, nor by armchair philosophy. But Gabirol referred less to the common-sense wisdom, than to Neo-Platonic wisdom. He

based himself in Proverbs, but continued in a philosophic direction.

In the academies before and during the period of the gaonim, Jewish text was the framework. But even in the early days, Moorish Spain was different:

> Even in those early days of Judeo-Arabic culture in Andalusia one can perceive the scientific goal that is characteristic of the spiritual life of the Jews of Spain in every generation. In their study of the Gemara, too, the striving for exactitude and system is conspicious.[42]

Islamic society opened up other possibilities. In the first place, the "text" itself expanded--the early Greek classics, upon which modern Western society is grounded, were revived. Arab scholars were busily translating, and Jewish scholars entered these texts into their working vocabulary. Both Solomon ibn Gabirol and Yehuda Halevi wrote lengthy prose expositions using philosophical tools. Moses Ibn Ezra undertook a scientific appraisal of poetic theory in his book *Torah Hashir*. Gabirol affirmed neo-Platonism; HaLevi, the the Kuzari philosophically denounced philosophy.

The tremendous influence from the Moslem world did not mean that relations were always harmonious. But insofar as the intellecutal classes were concerned, they shared the same interests and looked down on the non-literate and the less learned. Anyone whose thirst for wisdom was low, or who did not value the gifted poetic muse, became an outsider.

The latest of the three poets was Yehudah Halevi. The

Kuzari reveals an influence from Shiite philosophy. Sufism alligned with liberalizing intellectual trends and neo-Platonism attracted some of the best minds of Islam.[43] Some of Halevi's main terms have a similar meaning in Shiite doctrine: *amr*, the hierarchical nature of the prophet, and *safwa*, the concept of chosenness, to name two examples.[44] Influenced as he was by the interest in philosophy, Halevi was not its advocate. His philosophic reasoning did not assume a coldly logical view, and ultimately he rejects philosophy for this reason. Heinemann terms Halevi a visual thinker, meaning that Halevi accepts truth from his sensual vision and not just his abstract philosophic logic.[45] As an empiricist, he refused to fit all reality into a "Procrustean bed of a theology subject to philosophic proof."[46]

Moses Ibn Ezra wrote the *Sefer Iyun*, a philosophic work. The Arabic title translates as The Book of Discussions and Remembrances.[47] He is most well known for *Torat Hashir*, where he anlyzes Hebrew poetry according to general principles of Arabic poetry.[48]

It is the earliest of these three poets who made the most direct philosophic contribution. The spirit of direct philosophic inquiry that the Moslems kindled burned brightly in Gabirol. While his poetry is a brilliant weave of biblical imagery and Jewish sensitivity, the overall framework is philosophic. Gabirol's concept of God was not based on faith alone, and is evident from his prose work

M'kor Chaim, or the Fons Vitae. So abstract is this work, and so non-revealing of Judaism as a particular faith, that for centuries Christians preserved the work as one of their own. Even Gabirol's poetry was hidden: not until the end of the nineteenth century were most of his poems discovered.

The "chain of being" is a phrase which fits into the Platonic system, and indeed, Gabirol was a neo-Platonist. That he had no trouble whatsoever combining this intellectual backdrop with the most passionate poetic expression is a result of the magnificent time in which he lived. Gabirol did not restrict his poetry to sparse intellectualisms; it is enough to leave guideposts which speak to the initiated. Such guide posts are the characteristics of "*Keter Malchut*," "The Royal Crown."

Platonic philosophy begins with the assumption that all created beings are constituted of form and matter. Gabirol insisted that spiritual substance is also material. There is no wall between divine and earthly. Gabirol then breaks down the world into three categories: the first substance is God; matter and form are the world; the intermediary between the two is the will--*hahefetx ham'suman*. The infusion of God into our world is represented by the metaphor of light. God filters down into the world via emanations:

> v.22 Thine is the existence from the shadow of whose light every being was made to be, and we said "Under His shadow we shall live."

There is a direct relationship between God/light and human

beings:

> vs.64-67 You are supreme light, and the eyes of all pure ones will see you. You are light hidden in this world, and revealed in the world to be seen, on the mountain of God it will be seen.

God's light appears to those who deserve to see it, but even they must wait until the world to come. The customary phrase for the world to come is *haolam haba*. Gabirol uses *olam hanireh*, employing the root which means "to see," toying with the idea of light, vision and sight. We are continually seeking God's light but we are steps removed from that light due to the process of emanation.

In the ninth stanza the predestined will, *hefetz ham'zuman*, appears. Its task is explicitly defined beginning with verse ninety-seven:

> to draw the dimension of something from nothing, as light is drawn that goes from the eye.

The best parts of these verses are destroyed in the translation; "nothing" and "eye" do not sound the same as *ain* and *ayin*, and the poetics of rhythm and sound are lost. But the philosophic point remains. The emanations of light are the model for the creation of the universe.

Part two of "The Royal Crown" shifts from God per say to the work of his hands, as it were. Each planet and star are fixed in a specific place and with their own area of our human lives to serve in. Gabirol's layout of the universe draws on the same Platonic background as the Zohar--each

emanation results in another sphere. The light of the sun and the light of the moon, the light of the stars and the light of the planets--all these are glorified, each in their turn, but God is above them all, in control of them all: "But there is a master above them. He darkens their lights."(v.141)

The poem climaxes in the third section. Through this confessional, we move directly into our human world. We are squarely contrasted with a God who gets bigger by the minute. Gabirol vividly paints our sins, shortcomings, weaknesses and in general the futility of our human endeavor. The references here to God's light and shadow are not the objective musings of the philosopher, nor the awed exclamation of the observer of the seen and unseen world. When face with the dismal picture of the medieval world, Gabirol throws himself upon the compassionate aspect of God's light, the protective qualities of the shadow:

> v.563ff If you should search out my sin
> I shall flee from Thee to Thee. I will
> hide from your wrath in your shadow,
> and I will grasp the skirts of your
> mercy until You have mercy on me.

It is a remarkable feat that abstract philosophic truths exist side by side with very human metaphors and neither diminishes the other. This liturgical poem has a fixed place in the liturgy of the Days of Awe, and yet it reaches beyond religion alone. Gabirol inspires generation after generation, as he weaves worshipper and philospher into one.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Philip K. Hitti, History of the Arabs, (New York: Martin's Press, 1970), p.245.

[2] Israel Zinberg, History of Jewish Literature, (USA: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1972), p.11.

[3] Ibid, p.53.

[4] Ibid, p.65.

[5] Dan Pagis, *Chidush Um'soret B'shirat Hahol*, (Jerusalem: *S'firat Keter*, 1976), p.16.

[6] Dan Pagis, *Shirat Hahol V'torat Hashir L'moshe Ibn Ezra Uv'nai Doro*, (Jerusalem: *Mosad Bialik*, 1970), p.11.

[7] Israel Zinberg, History of Jewish Literature, (USA: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1972), p.91.

[8] Isaak Heinemann, "Jehuda Halevi: Kuzari" in Three Jewish Philosophers, (USA:Athenium republication of Jewish Publication Society of America, 1977), p.10.

[9] T. Carmi, The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse, (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), p.24.

[10] Heinrich Brody, ed., Selected Poems of Jehudah Halevi, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1952), p.xiv.

[11] Israel Zinberg, History of Jewish Literature, (USA: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1972), p.14.

[12] James Kritzeck, Anthology of Islamic Literature, (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1964), pp.71-2.

[13] Ibid, p.12.

[14] Dan Pagis, *Shirat Hahol V'torat Hashir L'moshe Ibn Ezra Uv'nai Doro*, (Jerusalem: *Mosad Bialik*, 1970), p.102.

[15] James Kritzeck, Anthology of Islamic Literature, (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1964), p.12.

[16] Ibid, p.13.

[17] Philip K. Hitti, History of the Arabs, (New York: Martin's Press, 1970), pp.241-2.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Dan Pagis, *Shirat Hahol V'torat Hashir L'moshe Ibn Ezra Uv'nai Doro*, (Jerusalem: *Mosad Bialik*, 1970), p.51.

[20] Israel Zinberg, History of Jewish Literature, (USA: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1972), p.19.

[21] Eliyahu Ashtor, The Jews of Moslem Spain, (USA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1973), p.254.

[22] Israel Zinberg, History of Jewish Literature, (USA: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1972), p.23.

[23] James Kritzeck, Anthology of Islamic Literature, (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1964), p.71.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid, p.141.

[26] Dan Pagis, *Shirat Hahol V'torat Hashir L'moshe Ibn Ezra Uv'nai Doro*, (Jerusalem: *Mosad Bialik*, 1970), p.40.

[27] T. Carmi, The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse, (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), p.63.

[28] Ibid, p.30.

[29] Dan Pagis, *Chidush Um'soret B'shirat Hahol*, (Jerusalem: *S'firat Keter*, 1976), p.21.

[30] Ibid.

[31] T. Carmi, The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse, (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), p.107.

[32] Israel Zinberg, History of Jewish Literature, (USA: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1972), p.85.

[33] Ibid, p.57.

[34] Ibid, p.48.

[35] P.M. Holt, Amir K.S. Lambton, and Bernard Lewis, The Cambridge History of Islam, v.2, (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press, 1970), p.30.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Philip K. Hitti, History of the Arabs, (New York: Martin's Press, 1970), p.237.

[38] Israel Zinberg, History of Jewish Literature, (USA: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1972), p.15.

[39] T. Carmi, The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse, (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), p.27.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Louis Ginzberg, Geonica, (New York: Hermon Press, 1968), p.203.

[42] Eliyahu Ashtor, The Jews of Moslem Spain, (USA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1973), p.122.

[43] P.M. Holt, Amir K.S. Lambton, and Bernard Lewis, The Cambridge History of Islam, v.2, (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press, 1970), p.633.

[44] Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam for Institute of Asian and African Studies, (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1980), p.217.

[45] Isaak Heinemann, "Jehuda Halevi: Kuzari" in Three Jewish Philosophers, (USA:Athenium republication of Jewish Publication Society of America, 1977), p.11.

[46] Ibid, p.25.

[47] Dan Pagis, *Shirat Hahol V'torat Hashir L'moshe Ibn Ezra Uv'nai Doro*, (Jerusalem: *Mosad Bialik*, 1970), p.12.

[48] Ibid.

CONCLUSION

Jews have wandered over many continents, and have scattered through history no great physical monuments. What they have accomplished had to travel with them, and in the mind is the most portable treasure of all. All of their creative energies were therefore bound up in their literature.[1] From the folk literature of anonymous individuals emerged poetry, "the essence of the human spirit and of its creativity,"[2] which became increasingly independent. As poetry developed, changes began to occur:

> the various elements which in the beginning were intimately bound together eventually separate into independent and discrete forms--lyric, epic, drama, etc.[3]

If discrete forms of poetry develop, then discrete individuals emerge are prerequisites. According to Zinberg, this is part and parcel of the development of a literature. But literature cannot develop in a vacuum, and the Hebrew poetry of the Golden Age of Spain is indebted to the Moslem environment in which it thrived. On a practical level, the

Arab courts with its patron and its audience gave poets a means by which to support themselves. Meters and rhymes of Arabic poetry gave Hebrew poetry a new challenge to rise to and integrate. On a deeper level, the departure from the Gaonic academy and the narrow world of the pre-court Jew had profound implications for the direction of Hebrew poetry.

For the first time, poets could see themselves as individuals, not merely as representatives of the community at large. Poets could write not only for a specific prayer or a specific service, but in order to express their deepest fears and longings. The liberal atmosphere allowed them to draw deeply from both their religious traditions and their private fantasies. The hierarchical structure of the gaonic academy stifled creativity instead of encouraging it. At the caliphal court, for the first time a Jew could step into the hierarchy and blossom.

Given the same structure, not every Jewish poet in the Golden Age of Spain was a magnificent poet, any more than every English poet in the Elizabethan age was a Shakespeare. But without that structure, individual genius, manifested in Solomon Ibn Gabirol, Moses Ibn Ezra and Yehuda Halevi, could not have thrived. Had not the prestige of Arab courts hung on intellectual accomplishment, the classics of ancient Greece might have remained untranslated. Philosophy, the art of scientific thought would have laid dormant in the dusty treasures of history. If the individual Jew had not been released from the authority of one Gaon, individual poets

could not have emerged. The structure of a society influences on both a practical and a psychological level.

The implications are enormous. The structure of the society in which we live set the framework and limits of our imagination. Education is not enough. How is power divided, what kind of a hierarchy exists, does a hierarchy exist at all? And then the questions which invariably follow--what alternatives are available to us? How can we construct our society in such a fashion so that genius like the Spanish Hebrew poets can prosper? Most important, what are the limits in <u>our</u> imaginations? Where are the stumbling blocks we must remove?

FOOTNOTES

[1] Israel Zinberg, History of Jewish Literature, (USA: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1972), p.xxvi.

[2] Ibid, p.4.

[3] Ibid.

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