

IZAK AND ISHMAEL:  
A.M. KLEIN'S ZIONIST POETRY  
AND THE PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

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Fifty-eight years before the current Palestinian *intifada* began, A.M. Klein published this lament in his poem, "Greeting on This Day":<sup>1</sup>

The white doves flutter  
From the roofs  
Where stones did utter  
Dark reproofs.

That these pale pigeons  
Be alarmed  
Guerilla legions  
Have been armed.

Effendi, Mufti,  
Holy Ones—  
They are not thrifty  
With their stones.

This is the manner  
Doves take flight:  
The sky a banner  
Blue and white. (54-69)

Klein refers to the Jerusalem riots of August 1929, triggered by a dispute over the Wailing Wall, at that time a Holy Muslim property, the *Buraq*, the third most sacred shrine in Islam (Kayyali 95-7). Muslim notables and worshippers objected to certain Jewish observances at the Wall. A crowd of young Jewish men "staged a hitherto unprecedented procession through the streets of Jerusalem to the foot of the Wailing Wall. There they raised the Jewish flag and sang the Zionist anthem—*Hatikvah*—against the

specific instructions of the (British) High Commissioner" (Kayyali 138-44). Muslims held a counter-demonstration, and bloodshed followed. The religious dispute, as Klein knew, fueled the growing fire of Arab hostility toward Zionism.

"Greeting on This Day" was Klein's response to the intensification of conflict in 1929-1930. The poem seemed even more apt after the Palestinian Revolt of 1936-39, when the struggle between Zionists and Palestinians (with the British playing the middle) finally reached the stage of organized and protracted violent conflict. For Klein, a life-long Zionist, the Palestinian Revolt—not recognized as a popular uprising by Zionists—took place against the backdrop of Nazism and worsening anti-Semitism. Klein was one of the first Zionist spokespeople and Jewish writers to warn against the Nazi menace. Klein was hardly concerned with the claims, grievances and fate of Palestinian Arabs. The fiat was a Jewish homeland in Palestine, and events in Europe strengthened resolve, added urgency, and reinforced the biblical and historical rationale for Zionism.

Zionism was part of Klein's immediate heritage. He was born in Ratno, a small Russian Jewish town in Northwestern Ukraine. The persecutory, impoverishing Czarist laws of 1882, and the murderous pogroms of 1881, 1903 and 1904, resulted in the emigration of over four million Jews from Russia and Eastern Europe from 1881 through the mid-1920s. Klein's family emigrated to Montreal in 1910. "Ratno itself was finally struck by devastating pogroms in 1915," writes Usher Caplan, Klein's biographer (18). Klein's father was a pious Jew, emphasizing prayer and devout study. His attitude toward oppression, however, was one of "passive stoicism" (Caplan 29), a posture which mystified his young son. In his high school years, Klein drifted away from orthodox Judaism and religious devotion, yet his commitment to his people's culture, history and survival flowered throughout the next three decades.

During his youth, the ideological current of Zionism flowed through Montreal's Jewish community. "In practical terms, Zion was still only a beautiful distant dream, a place where pious Jews were buried, not where modern Jews lived. But the hope of re-establishing the ancient national home was alive in Jewish hearts. Zionist songs were sung at local gatherings and Zionist politics were followed with keen interest" (Caplan 24). Portraits of

Theodor Herzl, the European founder of political Zionism, were hung in many Jewish homes. There were also Labour Zionists, who tried to combine socialism and Zionism. The unionization of Jewish workers (including Klein's father) in Montreal, and his close friendship with David Lewis during high school and college, added elements of humanistic socialism to his Zionism. As an undergraduate at McGill, Klein joined Young Judaea, a Zionist youth organization: "He agreed with the 'cultural Zionist' Achad Ha'am that the land of Israel was not to be just a political haven for Jews, but rather a spiritual centre for the renaissance of Jewish creativity around the world" (Caplan 47). In 1928 Klein became editor of *Judaeen*, an organ of Young Judaea, and became the group's educational director. Theodor Herzl—a cultured European lawyer, journalist and bon vivant, turned messianic leader—became one of Klein's heroes. In 1934 Klein became national president of Canadian Young Judaea and active in the parent body. He helped establish the *Canadian Zionist* and became editor in 1936.

According to Caplan, "Although the militant Zionist response to persecution was a major element in his political thinking, it played only a small role in his poetry. Klein seemed to sense that the Jewish literary tradition out of which he was writing could not easily accommodate a fierce militancy; if the Jew is ever spared from evil, it is only by a divine miracle" (62). This statement is partly accurate, since "fierce militancy" makes infrequent appearances in Klein's poetry. As well, the more recent Jewish literary tradition offered few precedents. For example, Abraham Sutzkever, a European emigré and Israeli citizen, wrote nature poems and fables as an aestheticist in the 1930s, and began writing his powerful verse on the modern Jewish experience when the Nazi onslaught was underway. Irving Layton, Klein's younger friend, for all the "fierce militancy" of his poetic personae and stances on many subjects, wrote a small handful of poems on Jewish themes before his preoccupation with Jewish history and Israel's survival in *For My Brother Jesus* (1976) and *The Covenant* (1977).

Caplan's assessment, though, fails to acknowledge that Klein, in 1928-30, was writing poems about Jewish oppression, survival and transcendence of historical fate before, arguably, any other Jewish poet in North America. "Design for Medieval

"Tapestry" and "Out of the Pulver and the Polished Lens" are two remarkable poems of this period. Moreover, Caplan's comment does not allow for other dimensions of the Zionist vision: Israel as spiritual homeland, creative centre and power-source, land of renewal, and geopolitical reality which redeems Jews from the nexus of historical oppression and Diaspora. These other dimensions can also be expressed militantly—especially if "militant" can mean a passionate commitment, not necessarily violent. Zionism, for Klein, would reverse the assimilative and destructive patterns, and restore Jews to the present and future. Finally, Caplan overlooks the occasions in Klein's poetry when he clearly accepts the necessity of armed militancy on behalf of Israel, Zion, and sheer survival. This acceptance is usually mournful, but occasionally presented with vindictive satisfaction.

One of Klein's earliest published poems, "Five Characters,"<sup>2</sup> retells the Book of Esther. King Ahasuerus of Persia, dissatisfied with his wife Vashti, seeks another and chooses the Jewish Esther. The wicked Haman, advisor to Ahasuerus, seeks the destruction of the Jews. With the help of her uncle Mordecai, Esther wins her husband's support for her people, foils Haman's plot and rescues the Jews, while annihilating Haman's faction. Klein shows Haman "Enchanted by the accolade-caress / Of hempen rope swung from a gallows-tree..." (59-60). Militant violence, for the sake of survival, is explicit in the poem and its biblical source. Klein's satisfaction at the destruction of Israel's enemies is undeniable. G.K. Fischer notes that "Greeting on This Day" is "directed at grief" (32), and the observation is applicable to "Five Characters." In the former, triumph over grief is uncertain, a visionary longing. Triumph is assured in the latter through the biblical precedent, a source of hope for Klein's Zionism.

"Sonnet in Time of Affliction"<sup>3</sup> is clearly in the militant tradition, though Klein's ambivalence about militant violence is overt. Klein begins with the centuries-old, and Zionist, complaint about the loss of Palestine and the Diaspora:

The word of grace is flung from foreign thrones  
 And strangers lord it in the ruling-hall;  
 The shield of David rusts upon the wall;  
 The lion of Judah seeks to roar, and groans..

He asks, "Where are the brave, the mighty? They are bones. / Bar Cochba's star has suffered its last fall" (5-6). Bar Cochba was the Jewish leader of the disastrous rebellion against Roman occupation in 132 A.D. Bar Cochba believed he was a messiah and descendent of King David. The rebellion was put down savagely, and Bar Cochba was killed in battle. Klein's reference to Bar Cochba's star would seem to be a sign of his despair that Jews can ever resist their powerful oppressors or secure Zion with arms. The sestet of the sonnet, however, contains a different allusion:

Ah, woe, to us, that we, the sons of peace,  
Must turn our sharpened scythes to scimitars,  
Must lift the hammer of the Maccabees,  
Blood soak the land, make mockery of stars... (9-12)

The Maccabees fought the Seleucid Greeks for twenty-five years and with vastly inferior numbers defeated the huge Greek army in 164 B.C., recapturing Israel and founding a dynasty. Max Dimont describes the campaign as "a new kind of war, the world's first religious war, fought with grim determination, heedless of cost and sacrifice" (85). The emphasis of the sonnet has shifted to the towering example of Jews as warrior-defenders of themselves and their homeland.

Published in October 1929, the poem reflects the tensions in Palestine which led to the Jerusalem disturbances of August-September 1929. Klein may bemoan the necessity to "lift the hammer," yet the sonnet concludes with a plaintive apology for his own position as a Zionist: "And woe to me, who am not one of these, / Who languish here beneath these northern stars..." (13-14). We will later see more examples of the poet's ambivalence about armed militancy. As a journalist, however, Klein was a staunch defender of militant self-defense. For example, in an article published in *The Judaeen* in December 1929, "The Modern Maccabee," he writes,

The courage of submission which scoffed at the faggots of the priest and scorned the knouts of the Cossack is once more with the emancipation of our people and with their return to Palestine being transformed from passive endurance to active resistance, from martyrdom to Defence—*Haganah*. With the return to the Homeland, the spirit of invincible defence has returned....But if there be

those who reject our offers of friendship and spurn our messages of good-will, answering the outstretched palm with the brandished scimitar, then do we declare that the spirit of the Maccabees is not dead in us, and that if we must defend ourselves, the Shield of David is at hand. (10-11)

The growing tensions in Palestine predate "The Modern Maccabee" and "Sonnet in Time of Affliction" by more than a decade. The organized phase of Palestinian opposition to Zionism commences with the British Mandate (occupation) in 1917. The seeds of conflict were sown with the first wave of Jewish immigration (*aliyah*) during 1880-1903. Tensions heightened during the second *aliyah*, 1904-07, and reached the critical stage with the Balfour Declaration of November 2, 1917, and the Jaffa Revolt of May 1921. The period of 1923-1928 has been referred to as "The Lull" by Palestinian historian A.W. Kayyali (130-151). According to Kayyali, the setting for the conflict was established during 1800-1908, and polarization of Jews and Palestinians occurred during 1917-1920. After the Jerusalem riots of 1929, Kayyali argues, came the "Prelude to Revolution" (1930-1935). The period of "lull" was a time of "deadlock" between the two peoples.

The Zionists presented a relatively united front, in contrast with the Palestinians, who were organizing in various factions and with diverse strategies, who functioned within traditional religious and social hierarchies left over from the feudal period, and who were pieces on the larger chessboard of the pan-Arabic revival. And there were the British, in Palestine for geopolitical purposes, whose role gradually changed from colonial-imperial power, mediator and manipulator, to active combatant caught in the cross-fire. The years 1923-28 may have been a "lull" in terms of violent confrontation, but they were hardly quiescent in terms of Zionist expansion, Palestinian displacement and resentment, Palestinian Arab organization, and polarization of increasingly hostile camps.

Klein's response to Palestinian hostility in "Greeting on This Day" is representative of the Zionist position:

O Chronicler, pull down the heavy tome;  
 Open a blank page, fashion a pen from bone;  
 Dip it in skulls where blood is ink; inscribe  
 The welcome Jews received on coming home. (9-12)

If Klein was surprised at the "welcome," he can be partially forgiven, for Zionist policy could not afford to enlighten Jews and non-Jewish supporters about the status and attitudes of Palestinians. Max Dimont, in his popular *Jews, God and History*, presents the Zionist perspective:

The Zionists decided to redeem Palestine by buying land on a grand scale for all Jewish settlers. Suddenly, the scraggy soil of Palestine, neglected for fifteen centuries by its alien custodians, acquired value. (399)

The Jewish "miracle in the desert" is indisputable. Palestinian historian and literary critic Edward W. Said writes of the "relatively backward Arab natives" whose agricultural practices were "traditional," and whose social structure was largely feudal (8). Zionists did purchase their land, often for lavish sums. To this extent, Dimont is correct. Beyond this, his formulation of Jewish settlement of Palestine is inaccurate, and the loaded words—"alien custodians," "desert land"—reflect the Zionist view of Palestine as a barren land occupied by "strangers" who did not belong or deserve to be there.

When the first wave of Jewish immigrants arrived, Palestine was still ruled by the decadent Ottoman Empire. In 1880, seventy percent of Palestinian Arabs were peasant farmers, paying taxes to an exploitative Turkish feudal system. Indeed, cultivable land was returning to desert, but more because of Ottoman rule than Palestinian ineptness. Even in 1880-1914, Palestinian peasants who survived Turkish exploitation supported themselves on their farms. There were cities, too, primarily developed and occupied by Palestinians: Acre, Jerusalem, Nazareth, Jaffa, Jericho, Hebron, Haifa, Ramleh. Palestinians constituted the majority in the region until the "uprooting" of 1948. The dominant landowners who sold to Jewish settlers were: 1) absentee Lebanese and Syrian landowners; 2) the Ottoman government, through auctions of land on which peasants could not pay taxes; 3) Palestinian Christian families; 4) Palestinian Muslim notables. Those landowners share responsibility for the conflict, but their distance and power spared them. Palestinian hostility was directed at their visible opponents, the Jewish settlers who purchased and occupied their land. During the first *aliyah*, dispossessed peasants and other

labourers were hired by Jewish settlers. This practice was halted during the second *aliyah*, 1904-07, as a conscious feature of Zionist policy. Known as *Avada Ivrit* (Jewish Labour), this feature had two purposes: 1) to develop Jewish self-reliance and totally Jewish settlements; 2) to eliminate the accusation of exploitation by removing Arab workers. The first purpose was achieved. The second only exacerbated resentment, since *Avada Ivrit* further undermined Palestinian subsistence. With the policy of Jewish Labour, the Zionist attitude toward Palestinians entered a second phase. The first phase involved the denial that Palestinian Arabs had a legitimate claim to the land, either as historical inhabitants or cultivators. This phase emphasized the Palestinians' radical and inferior *difference*. They were allowed an existence, if only in the object position of a binary opposition. The second phase was the beginning of the denial that Palestinians existed. Theodor Herzl wrote in his diaries,

We shall have to spirit the penniless population across the border by procuring employment for it in the transit countries, while denying it any employment in our own country. Both the process of expropriation and the removal of the poor must be carried out discreetly and circumspectly. (88)

In 1969, Moshe Dayan stated,

We came to this country which was already populated by Arabs, and we are establishing a Hebrew, that is Jewish state here. In considerable areas of the country we bought the land from the Arabs. Jewish villages were built in the place of Arab villages. You do not even know the names of these Arab villages, and I do not blame you, because these geography books no longer exist; not only do the books not exist, the Arab villages are not there either....There is not one place built in this country that did not have a former Arab population. (14)

For the Zionists, the Palestinians were the *other*, just as the Arab world had been the *other* to European civilization and Christianity for over a thousand years. Said explains that "epistemologically the name of, and of course the very presence of bodies, in Palestine are—because Palestine carries so heavy an imaginative and doctrinal freight—transmuted from a reality into



a nonreality, from a presence into an absence" (10). The "otherness" of Arabs helped the Western world accept the Zionist claim and comply with the transmutation of Palestinians into an "absence."

Two other factors must be mentioned. As Kayyali points out, "The growth of Jewish nationalism coincided with the rise of Arab nationalism in the provinces of the Ottoman Empire" (14). Within Palestine, Arab nationalism was an organized reality as early as 1918-23, with the first six Palestinian Arab Congresses:

The first stirrings of a national awakening among the politically minded urban middle class combined with the Islamic sentiments of the masses to fuel Palestinian Arab opposition to foreign domination and to Zionist encroachment. Visions of independence and pan-Arab union left no room for a Jewish Palestine. Resistance to the Balfour Declaration and to the Zionist enterprise was a cardinal tenet in the platforms of all organizations and parties. (Schlaim 4-5)

During the 1920s and 1930s, Palestine nationalism generated political parties, students' and women's organizations, protests, boycotts, frequent negotiations with British overseers, violent revolts, and numerous British Commissions and White Papers. The objective of Palestinian efforts during this time was to halt Jewish immigration and the Zionist program, and to reclaim Palestine for the majority Arab population.

The second factor was the British presence. As the Ottoman Empire decayed, France and Russia were setting up shop in the Levant. Britain had its route to India and other imperial interests to protect. With the defeat of the Turks in 1917 and the emergence of pan-Arab nationalism, the geopolitical importance of Palestine became clear to the British. The result was the Declaration of Lord Balfour in 1917: "His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people" (Kayyali 45). The British Mandate in Palestine made Zionism the core of its geopolitical strategy. As for the Palestinian inhabitants, Lord Balfour wrote in a memorandum,

For in Palestine we do not propose even to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants of the country....The four great powers are committed to Zionism and Zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is

rooted in age-long tradition, in present needs, in future hopes, of far profounder import than the desire and prejudice of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land. (Said 16-17)

For the British, however, those Arabs and their "desire" would not go away, and twenty years later, in response to the Palestine Revolt, the Peel Commission recommended the partition of Palestine. The Jews reluctantly agreed to the plan, while the Arabs rejected it, claiming that Zionists would receive the best land.

A.M. Klein, however, was among those Jews who adamantly denounced the Peel Commission's partition plan:

The issuance of the Report is timed with a sense of the macabre. Particularly at a time when in Poland, in Germany, and in other countries where legislation and statistics have rendered our people a surplus population, thousands of Jews are clamoring for entry into their Homeland, particularly at such a time, is it cruel and callous to constrict that Homeland to a strait-jacket. For the Royal Commissioners have, in fact, not recommended a Jewish State; it is a Jewish suburb that they are setting up, a ghetto on the Mediterranean. (Klein *Beyond* 33-4)

If Klein was outraged by the Peel Commission's recommendations, he was even less amused by the British response to Arab indignation, the British White Paper of 1939, which proposed to limit, then halt, Jewish immigration. The British were clearly wavering in the crossfire of the Revolt. The Arabs accepted this second proposal, sensing it could stop Zionism. The Zionists, of course, rejected this plan. World War Two offered a respite, of sorts.

Meanwhile, Arab nationalists had been pointing to the McMahon agreement, concluded during World War One between the King of Hejaz and the former British High Commissioner in Egypt, which guaranteed Arabs certain Middle Eastern territories, including Palestine, if the Arabs would revolt against the Turks. Dimont summarizes the Zionist response:

There is no reason to doubt the good faith of either the Arab or the British claims....Neither is there any merit in arguing which took precedence, the Balfour Declaration or the McMahon correspondence; they were documents of equal

validity. The subsequent course of Palestinian history would have been essentially the same if neither had existed. The fundamental issues boil down to this: the Arabs claimed the right to be sole rulers of Palestine by virtue of constituting a majority of the population at the end of World War I. The Jews claimed the right to Palestine by virtue of their conquest of that country in the twelfth century B.C., and by virtue of having been a majority in that country far longer than the Arabs. (401)

The challenge to Zionists was, in fact, the question of that "majority." Klein responds to this challenge in his attack on the Peel Commission Report, "Balfour! Thou Shouldst Be Living at This Hour":

It is inconceivable, is the exclamation of horror that 400,000 Jews should hold subject a population of one million Arabs. It is forgotten, of course, that this number of Arabs are not natives, but immigrants who have come into the country as a result of that impartial policy which limited the entry of Jews to economic absorptive capacity and the entry of Arabs to their facilities of walking across the border. (Klein *Beyond* 32)

In effect, Klein denies there were any Arabs in Palestine when Jewish settlement began. The problem was that the Arab majority refused to behave as an *absence*.

In "Greeting on This Day," Klein does acknowledge the presence of the Arab peasants, the fellaheen. The young Zionist poet is also a humanistic socialist, and is able to account for fellaheen hostility and violence by invoking notions of class structure and manipulation:

We are a people of peace. Shall I then say,  
 Showing the whites of my eyes upraised to you,  
 "Forgive them, Lord, they know not what they do?"  
 Not so, not so; no peace can be until  
 Sleek Syrian landlord and fanatic priest,  
 The greater and the lesser lice have creased  
 Their paunches to a pellicle.  
 No peace to them—the bandits batten on blood!  
 No peace!  
 Rather the dagger to the hilt,  
 The bullet to the heart,  
 The gallows built,

And the ignoble cart! (94-106)

Here, Klein identifies the enemies of Zion, those responsible for violent protest, as absentee landlords (outside "agitators") and Muslim notables and Mufti. Then he addresses the peasants:

To them no peace, but unto you, O fellaheen,  
 O workers in the smithy of the sun,  
 Dupes of ventriloquists who belch the Unseen,  
 Good men deluded by the Evil One;  
 I, the son of a worker, and a worker myself,  
 I, who have known the sweat that salts the lip,  
 the blister on the palm, the aching hip,  
 I offer you companionship. (107-114)

No doubt, many fellaheen were exploited by Arab landlords. "Bandits" and "ventriloquists" are as prevalent in Arab political, religious and economic establishments as in any other culture. But Klein paints a picture which is simplistic, at best, and may be grossly inaccurate (Kadi 117-8, Kayyali 116-20, Sayigh 11-14). Klein's need, of course, is not to explore the socioeconomics and ideology of revolt, but to envision reasons which correspond to and validate Zionism, and which rally his socialist humanism to the Zionist cause. In "Greeting on This Day," Klein does not deny the fellaheen's existence, but he must strip them of all human capacities—including the desire for a homeland and cultural survival—except the capacity to be duped and agitated into violence. His offer of solidarity to the Arab "worker," generous and attractive on its poetic surface, is suspect on two counts. Klein was not a "worker" in the sense his poetic discourse implies: leaning too heavily on his childhood experience and father's situation, he condescends to the fellaheen from his privileged position. This gesture further privileges the Zionist as the one who defines the terms of relationship and determines whether an uprising is popular.

The conclusion of Klein's poem, nevertheless, is a lovely vision:

The muezzin upon the minaret  
 Announces dawn once more; the Moslem kneels;  
 Elation lifts the Jew from off his heels;  
 Izak and Ishmael are cousins met.  
 No desert cries encircle Omar's dome,

No tear erodes the Wall of ancient pain;  
 Once more may brothers dwell in peace at home;  
 Though blood was spattered, it has left no stain;  
 The greeting on this day is loud Shalom!  
 The white dove settles on the roof again. (120-29)

There is no condescension, no privileging of the Jewish position, and the Moslem is granted a humanity equal to that of the Jew. Here, if briefly, Klein establishes metonymic and symbolic equivalencies which resolve the conflict. The resolution, however, is primarily in religious terms: the crucial geopolitical (and economic) oppositions are absent from this discourse. Klein, a sharp political thinker on certain other matters, is unable to acknowledge the preconditions in Palestine for the spiritual tolerance and kinship he envisions.

Nevertheless, there is profound sincerity in Klein's desire for fellowship, even if this desire fluctuates as he responds to anti-Jewish threats. The conclusion of "Greeting on This Day" prefigures the stance at the conclusion of Klein's "Out of the Pulver and the Polish Lens," his 1931 poem based on Baruch Spinoza.<sup>4</sup> The following excerpts are from the eighth and final section:

For thou art the world, and I am part thereof; thou  
   art the  
 blossom and I its fluttering petal.  
 I behold thee in all things, and in all things: lo,  
   it is myself;  
 into the pupil of thine eye, it is my very countenance  
   I see.

.....  
 I am thy son, O Lord, and brother to all that lives  
   am I. (90-94, 113)

Spinoza (and Klein) addresses the Lord, and Klein expresses the pantheistic monism which attracted him to Spinoza's philosophy. This desire for brotherhood and *oneness* with all things recurs throughout Klein's poetry, along with his anguish over the fragmentation of this oneness in our world. Hence, his offer of camaraderie to the Palestinian fellaheen is not a superficial poetic gesture, but is rooted in his longing to be "brother to all that lives" and part of a unified world. In the context of a divided

Palestine, however, it was no substitute for the realization that Palestinian Arabs could argue a distinct cultural, spiritual and geopolitical legacy in the region, and an accumulating history of grievances against Zionism, which were layered on the sediment of Turkish and British occupation. It is true that the Palestinian Arabs were (and are) treated as pawns and betrayed by various Arab elite, such as King Abdullah, the Hashemite ruler of Jordan. Even so, the focus of grievance has rested on those who, in the Palestinian Arabs' view, have taken their land.

Klein expended little poetic energy on the fellaheen. His overriding concern was the Jews facing a new threat in Europe and the Jews battling for survival in Palestine. In "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" (1940),<sup>5</sup> he confronts this dual threat:

And there is also Palestine, my own,  
Land of my fathers, cradle of my birth,  
Whither I may return, king to his throne,  
By showing the doorman, Mr. Harold's worth  
Several thousand pounds (and not by loan!)  
Redemption for the pawned and promised earth!

.....  
O mummied Pharoah in thy pyramid,  
Consider now the schemes thy wizards schemed  
Against those shrewd proliferous Israelites!

.....  
Rejoice, Judaeophobes!  
The brew you brewed and cellared is not flat!  
(30-35, 36-38, 42-43)

Now, Klein's Zionist vision is confronted by the pincer movement of Nazi anti-Semitism and Arab hostility. In "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage," Klein falls prey to the "passive stoicism" which once perplexed him in his father, and to despair. He considers the answer of Esau—"the argumentative bullet," "steel blade," "assassin's bomb"—but rejects them: "Alas, for me that in my ears there sounds / Always the sixth thunder of Sinai" (144-45). "Sonnet in Time of Affliction" shows that Klein can sometimes accept the necessity of violence, and "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" provides more evidence of his ambivalence. It is a curious ambivalence, considering his mastery of Torah: the sixth commandment did not preclude the use of violence against Israel's enemies. Klein's ambivalence, though, does reflect the

tension between his political awareness that Zionism, to triumph on the terms it had established, had to militantly defend itself, and his longing to be "brother to all that lives." "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" concludes,

'Tis not in me to unsheathe an avenging sword;  
 I cannot don phylactery to pray;  
 Weaponless, blessed with no works, and much abhored,  
 This only is mine wherewith to face the horde:  
 The frozen patience waiting for its day,  
 The stance long-suffering, the stoic word,  
 The bright empirics that knows well that the  
 Night of the cauchemar comes and goes away,—  
 A baleful wind, a baneful nebula, over  
 A saecular imperturbability. (163-72)

The tone and signification are full of despair and "stoic" "waiting"—without the promise of Zion or a final release from oppression. Klein's "frozen patience" and "bright empirics" echo forward to the forlornness and last-ditch stand in "Portrait of the Artist as Landscape," with the poet as "nth Adam" whose "secret shines....At the bottom of the sea." The paradox of the drowned poet has its counterpart in Klein's "Childe Harold," another Wandering Jew, whose pilgrimage is a tour of Jewish suffering through the centuries, and whose poetics are an ironic solace within "a saecular imperturbability." In 1940 the "cauchemar" had returned. For Klein, a homeland in Palestine seemed more essential and more remote than ever.

Radically different stances and moods are presented in "Ballad of the Dancing Bear" (1932) and "Yehuda Halevi, His Pilgrimage" (1941).<sup>6</sup> "Ballad of the Dancing Bear" is an allegory of *shtetl* Jewry in feudal Eastern Europe and Russia, of Ashkenazic survival, and of Princess Paulinka, an implicit figure of Jerusalem-Zion. The Jews are taxed and starved by the wicked landlord Pan Stanislaus and his corrupt priest. Paulinka is the lame princess in a tower who "sings / Of The Lord's unfavoured things" (149-50). As the Jews waste away toward death and Stanislaus grows rich and fat, the latter calls for a dancing Jew to amuse him at a banquet. Motka—an Chassidic hero—appears and his dancing saves the day: "Lo! the Pan, sucking a bone / Suddenly forsakes his throne, / With him in the circle hop / All

the lords; they cannot stop" (223-26). Paulinka is miraculously cured and joins Motka in a waltz: "Paulinka the princess sings / Of God's unforsaken things" (239-40). The village becomes a paradise of harmony among Christians and Jews.

The importance of this poem within the framework of Klein's Zionist vision involves the elements of miracle and Chassidic dance and celebration. Chassidism was a dominant force in his parents' native Ratno, as it was throughout the Ashkenazic communities of Eastern Europe and Russia from the mid-1700s onward. Klein's father was a pious Talmudist, rather than a Chassid, but his mother brought with her some of the essence of Chassidism: an equally pious devotion to Jewish folklore and what Dimont, commenting (condescendingly) on Chassidism, calls "the triumph of ignorance over knowledge. The Talmud said that no ignorant man could be pious. Hasidism preached the reverse. It affirmed the Jewish spirit without the Jewish tradition....Hasidism was strength through joy, an affirmation of the ecstatic....In one fell swoop, the Bal Shem Tov turned weakness into strength, defeat into triumph" (280). The belief in miracle and the power of the dance were central to Chassidism. In the hard-pressed *shtetls*, Jews could commune with God through song, dance, simple prayers; they could support one another with religious folk-tales and belief in divine miracles. This, too, was a path to Zion.

Klein took an increasing interest in Chassidism in the 1930s. In "Ballad of the Dancing Bear," he shows there are more ways to survive, rescue the Princess, prosper, and be "cousins met" than "fierce militancy." Moreover, Motka is an analogue and solution for the poet who languishes under Northern skies and cannot bring himself to "unsheathe an avenging sword." Motka "Leaps and dances," thereby transforming enemies into comrades. Motka restores the Princess to herself and to "God's unforsaken things." The poet, too, can restore the Jews to Zion and Zion to the Jews.

Chassidism could offer Klein temporary solace, hope, even joy. Yet it did not prevent the approaching catastrophe of Hitlerism, nor help avert the 1936-39 Revolt in Palestine. Still, Klein's devotion to, and dependence on, the diverse richness of Jewish tradition summoned another kind of allegory. "Yehuda Halevi, His Pilgrimage" is another quest poem with a burden of grief and longing, but unlike "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage," the sojourner is



blessed with a shining vision of the Promised Land, even though he is murdered on the threshold of Zion, another "Princess": "The princess Zion is that princess fair / Gaoled by the cross-marked arrogant Frankish knight."

Yehuda Halevi is a prominent figure in Jewish history. Born in Islamic Spain in 1075, he became a Talmudic scholar, then successful physician, and married into a prominent Jewish family in Toledo. He abandoned this to become a wandering poet, went to Cordoba and became a wit, sensualist and love-poet. Halevi tired of this life. "From a versifier of love, he became a 'Troubadour of God'," writes Dimont. "Nineteenth-century Jewish nationalism was foreshadowed in Halevi's great philosophical poem, *Ha-Kuzari*, modeled after the book of Job" (198). Dimont reflects that Halevi's life symbolizes the life of Jews in Islamic civilization (197-9). Klein, painfully aware of the historical persecution of Jews by Christians, emphasizes the "cross-marked arrogant Frankish knight," yet concludes his poem with the image of the murderous "Arab on his thundering steed"—Halevi's pilgrimage, in Klein's poem, must pass through both gauntlets.

In the early stanzas of this long poem, Halevi is the successful wit and troubadour of love, disturbed by a presence:

Still is there aught which troubles him; it hath  
 No name nor appellation, yet it is.  
 Sometimes, it is a shadow on his path,  
 But thrown by whom he doth not know, y-wis! (82-85)

The princess Zion appears to him in a dream, revealing the cause of his malaise. At first, Halevi does not know her true identity, and travels the world seeking a woman. At last, "He is upon the dusty roads that go / Bowing to Palestine" and discovers she is "the glorious Hierusalem!" He sees her beauty and suffering. Earlier, he rejected the analytic methods of Talmudism in favour of secular romance. Now, there is a transformation from the secular to the spiritual—the sensuousness is transmuted and redirected toward "glorious Hierusalem." The process mirrors the development of non-Talmudic traditions and strategies—mysticism, Chassidism, visionary longing. The figure of Halevi also appeals to the poet who was not sustained by Talmudic exegesis and the more logistic concerns of Zionist policy. Klein's Halevi says,

"O Zion, altogether beautiful!  
 Thy sons rejoice them in thy time of peace,  
 And in thy sorrow, their cup, too, is full.  
 They weep thy ruins, yet they never cease  
 From striving towards thee from captivity,  
 They bend the knee unto thy gates, thy sons,  
 Scattered on mountains, driven over seas.  
     Remembering Zion, thee,  
 Yearning to touch the plinth of thy shattered stones  
 O but to touch the boughs of thy palm-trees! (328-37)

The poet wishes to evoke hope and radiance in a dark, bitter time. As Hitler's armies advance, Klein's pilgrim is offered as a representation of both the struggles of contemporary Jews in Europe and Palestine and the spiritual and political journey of the Jewish people from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century.

"The princess Zion" is "gaoled," a captive. Her liberator in this allegory is not unlike the poet, Klein. Though not a sensualist, Klein was a wit and scholar-lawyer who became a poet. Yehuda Halevi and Theodor Herzl merge in the background of Klein's poetic role as a Zionist. Halevi's final and ultimate quest is to free the princess. Halevi weeps with grief at her suffering and with joy that he may, at last, behold and free her:

Would that with these tears this tale might end,  
 Even with this sad guerdon, this poor meed!  
 Zion abased by the irreverend,  
 Yet Zion, seen; Zion beheld, in deed!  
 But so 'twas not ordained, not so decreed;  
 Lo, from afar, and shouting a wild oath  
 Rideth an Arab on his thundering steed.  
 Nameless that rider, save for war-name, Death.  
 Zion, O Princess, receive thy minstrel's trampled breath!  
 (358-66)

Halevi, however, does not die in vain: "The daughter of the king will yet be free":

Liveth the tale, nor ever shall it die!  
 The princess in her tower grows not old.  
 For that she heard his charmed minstrelsy,  
 She is forever young. Her crown of gold,  
 Bartered and customed, auctioned, hawked and sold,  
 Is still for no head but her lovely head.

What if the couch be hard, the cell be cold,  
 The warder's keys unruined, stale the bread?  
 Halevi sang her song, and she is comforted! (376-84)

Klein had an obvious need to distance himself somewhat from the dreadful position of Jews in 1936-1941. The allegorical mode and an historical figure served such a purpose. Klein had often resorted to allegory, historical figures and centuries-old conventions and motifs to address the Jewish experience of oppression and longing. Yet this distancing was not an evasion of reality. This quest-poem is a strategy for viewing the struggle of his people as part of an ongoing, and not hopeless, process and journey.

The Palestinians, meanwhile, have been compressed by Klein into the ominous "Arab on his thundering steed"—like a horseman of the Apocalypse—nameless, "save for war-name, Death." Klein, of course, refers to the entire Arab world surrounding Palestinian Jews. In the conclusion of "Yehuda Halevi, His Pilgrimage," Klein sees the Arab as the ultimate *other*: Death. Arab as nightmare *presence*. Beyond that, Klein had little poetic energy to spare for the Arabs. The fact of the Nazis was too inexorable, and Klein turned his poetic eye on Hitler and his cohorts in *The Hitleriad* (1944).

Klein's faith in the Zionist dream was sorely tested by contemporary events. To mitigate his distress, Klein could draw on the fact of Jewish survival for three thousand years and the Zionist dream rooted in the tradition of the *Haggadah*. Klein published "Haggadah" in part over the years 1929-39. The *Haggadah* is the story of Israel's bondage in Egypt and the exodus to freedom, and is the narrative read aloud at the Passover *seder*. Klein's poem is about the Passover celebration and story. Passover and the *Haggadah* give Klein and his childhood family strength, hope and the quality of spiritual royalty "Once in a long unroyal year" (*Complete* 129). The *Haggadah* is the great moral and political promise in Jewish history: deliverance from oppression, the destruction of the enemy, the return to Zion. The poem's final section, "The Still Small Voice," concludes,

And those assembled at the table dream  
 Of small schemes that an April wind doth scheme,  
 And cry from out the sleep assailing them:

*Jerusalem, next year! Next year, Jerusalem!* (84-87)

In the early 1940s, Klein's preoccupation with the Nazi peril drew him away from poetic treatment of the Zionist dream. He also absorbed himself in a project begun in 1939, an attempt to write a modern sequel of the Psalms of David, and which resulted in "The Psalter of Avram Haktani." The title of this series contains a play on his name: "Haktani" in Hebrew means "small" or the Yiddish and German "klein." The sequence contains thirty-six poems, and Miriam Waddington points out that "As for the number thirty-six, Klein is especially partial to it because it is the designated number of saintly men, *zadikim*, who, according to Jewish legend, support the world with their spiritual strength while their true identity remains hidden from themselves" (Waddington 63). This concept, developed by 16th and 17th century Kabbalists and later by the Chassidim, held metaphorical power for Klein during 1939-44.

The "Psalter" offers few of the specific references to Zion and Palestine which are found in poems such as "Greeting on This Day" and "Yehuda Halevi, His Pilgrimage." The emotional values of the sequence are often those of grief, doubt and despair. Yet the subtext of the "Psalter" is the faith that Jews will survive the Nazi darkness and enter the light of the Promised Land.

After the publication of *The Hitleriad* and his Jewish-centered poems in *Poems 1944*, Klein abandons in his poetry (at least overtly) his concern for the fate of Jews and of Zionist Palestine. Critics have speculated why he abandoned, in his poetry, his Jewish concerns. Certainly, he sustained his focus on the Zionist vision and Palestine in his journalistic writings. Perhaps the stress of the Hitler years and the ongoing struggle in Palestine, and the energy expended on *The Hitleriad*, "The Psalter of Avram Haktani" and other Jewish poems, necessitated a shift—within the psychically demanding medium of poetry—to investigations at some remove from Jewish history and survival. The subjects and themes of *The Rocking Chair* (1948) parallel the Jewish themes of oppression and survival: the fate of French Canadians, Aboriginal Peoples, the poet. But these are less emotionally-charged for Klein.

Before Klein became mentally ill in the mid-1950s, and then fell silent, he did write his one novel, *The Second Scroll*. In August

1949, Klein was sent by the Canadian Jewish Congress on a fact-finding mission to Israel and the Diaspora communities of Europe and North Africa. *The Second Scroll*, published in 1951, draws on this journey and presents another quest: a Canadian Jewish journalist searches for his Uncle Melech, the most brilliant of young Jewish scholars at the time of the Ratno pogrom in 1915, who had survived but abandoned his faith in favour of Marxism. The Canadian narrator traces his Uncle Melech's decades-long journey through Europe and North Africa. He finally learns that his uncle became a Zionist and emigrated to Israel, where he was killed in an Arab guerilla attack. Yehuda Halevi has become Uncle Melech. The wandering son of Zion has returned home, and his homeland is a nation. The nameless Arab is now organized in terrorist units.

Klein would live until 1972, five years after the Six-Day War, but he had long been silent, and there is still no record of his thoughts on Palestine after the early 1950s. The Israeli War of Independence (1948-49) firmly established the Jewish State, with the support of the United Nations Declaration of September 1947, which ended the British Mandate and endorsed the partition of Palestine. For Palestinian Arabs, 1948 is the year of the "Uprooting," or *ghourba*, Arabic for "exile and alienation," the Palestinian equivalent of Diaspora. Palestinian Arabs took flight: 104,000 to Lebanon; 82,000 to Syria; 100,000 to Transjordan; 200,000 to the Gaza Strip; 360,000 to the West Bank. The first Israeli census, after the Uprooting, counted c. 60,000 Arabs remaining in Israel.

The Zionist signification of this event differs radically from the Palestinian. What was an "Uprooting" to the Arabs was a "flight" to Zionists.<sup>7</sup> Here is Klein on this flight/Uprooting:

Not a single Palestinian Arab was ever expelled from the country by Jews! The flight of the Arabs was never the result of an imposed banishment; it was to be, so thought the 'refugees,' no more than a strategic withdrawal...maintained until such time as the invading forces drove the Israelis into the sea; then, the 'refugees' were to inherit the lands and the possessions of their enemies....

.....  
 And these [Arab] leaders were...the very authors of the Arab misfortune; they it was who induced the panic, persuaded the reluctant, held forth promise of glory and booty! Yet not

one Arab country has granted these refugees rights to citizenship! (Klein *Beyond* 409-10)

Lilienthal is obviously responding to this view when he writes, "One such Israeli myth has been that the Palestinians all fled from their homes and land of their own volition, intending to return under the banner of victorious Arab armies recruited in neighboring Arab lands. According to this mythology, those few Palestinians who might have owned anything have only themselves to blame, for they had gambled on force and lost" (53). What Klein does not mention, for instance, is the massacre of the Palestinian Arab village of Deir Yassin by the Irgun and Stern Gang (Jewish military forces). This attack was condemned by such Zionist writers as Jon Kimche and Don Peretz, who recognized it as a tactic designed to trigger panic and flight (Lilienthal 156). Arthur Koestler referred to it as "the psychologically decisive factor in the spectacular exodus of Arab refugees" (160). There is no doubt some validity to Klein's assertions: the Palestinian longing for a counter-attack by armies of neighboring Arab countries; the maneuverings and duplicities of Arab leadership; the panic of Palestinians when support did not materialize. Beyond this, though, Klein has lapsed into crude simplifications that could never explain the sudden exodus of any sizeable population. His Palestinian Arabs in 1948-49 are, once again, mindless "Dupes," cartoon characters focused on "glory and booty" and bolting upon the hypnotic commands of Muftis and sheikhs. Klein's rendering of the situation can be understandable only when placed in the context of everything he knew and felt about Jewish suffering in the Diaspora, Nazi genocide, and the struggle for a secure homeland.

Sayigh states that the primary causes of the Palestinians' flight were "direct military attack on the villages; terrorism; lack of leadership; lack of arms; in short, chaos and fear" (64). However much truth there may be in the Zionist version of the flight/Uprooting, there is incontrovertible evidence that armed attacks by Israelis helped usher the Palestinian Arabs on their way. For the next twenty years, Israel's strategic concerns would focus on hostile neighbors: Egyptians, Syrians, Jordanians. The Palestinians finally seemed to be gone, or at least irrelevant. Ironically, the Six-Day War of 1967 brought them back. For larger

strategic reasons, the Israelis did not relinquish the occupied territories. This meant the return of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to within Israeli jurisdiction and consciousness. It was wishful-thinking that they would emigrate to, and be absorbed within, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. The Palestinians longed for the return of their homeland. The neighbouring states, with their political and economic agendas, did not welcome the responsibility of the Palestinian masses, and preferred to use them in their own deadly chess game with Israel and in Mideast geopolitics.<sup>8</sup> Palestinians were more useful in the occupied territories.

"The long-run goal," writes Edward Said, "is, I think, the same for every human being, that politically he or she may be allowed to live free from fear, insecurity, terror, and oppression, free also from the possibility of exercising unequal or unjust domination over others. This long-run goal has different meanings for the Palestinian Arabs and for the Israeli Jews. For the latter, it means freedom from the awful historical pressure of anti-Semitism whose culmination was Nazi genocide, freedom from fear of the Arabs, and freedom also from the blindness of programmatic Zionism in its practise against the non-Jew. For the former, the long-run goal is freedom from exile and dispossession, freedom from the cultural and psychological ravages of historical marginality, and freedom also from the inhuman attitudes and practises toward the oppressing Israel" (53-4).

This is the geopolitical version of Klein's admirable vision in the conclusion of "Greeting on This Day." Unfortunately, Klein's understandable preoccupation with Jewish suffering and the need for a sanctuary-homeland predisposed him to a narrowly Zionist view of the Palestinian conflict. His poetry is, on occasion, more tempered than his journalism regarding the "hostile" Palestinian Arabs. The Zionist concerns and features of his poetry, however, correspond to two historical developments. The Jewish people shattered the old nexus of Diaspora oppression by securing a homeland. A new nexus of endangerment for Israel was created by the Zionist stance on Palestinian Arabs, and Israel itself became an oppressor of Palestinians. Klein's Zionist poetry suggests that the tension between required opposition and longed-for fellowship in Palestine would be resolved once Zion was secured for Jews. This rationalization may seem tragically

naive or self-serving to contemporary readers and students of the Palestinian conflict. In the period 1927-1951, it was Klein's only formula for hope.

## NOTES

1 "Greeting on This Day" was first published in *Menorah Journal* XVIII, 1 (Jan. 1930): 1-4, and later in Klein's 1940 collection of poetry *Hath Not a Jew*. All quotations of Klein's poetry are from A.M. Klein, *Complete Poems*, ed. Zailig Pollock, 2 vols. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

2 "Five Characters" was first published in *Menorah Journal* XIII, 5 (Nov. 1927): 497-98. *Complete Poems*, 33-36.

3 "Sonnet in Time of Affliction" was first published in *The Judaeae* III, 1 (Oct. 1929): 6. *Complete Poems*, 147.

4 "Out of the Pulver and the Polished Lens" was first published in *Canadian Forum* XI (Sept. 1931): 453-54. *Complete Poems*, 208-12.

5 "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" was first published in *Opinion* 8, 8 (Sept. 1938): 15-16. The quotations are from Version 1 in *Complete Poems*, 475-80.

6 "Yehuda Halevi, His Pilgrimage" was first published in *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* (19 Sept. 1941): 9-12. *Complete Poems*, 544-56. "Ballad of the Dancing Bear" was first published in the Centennial Jubilee Edition of the *Jewish Daily Eagle* 8 (July 1932): 43-44. *Complete Poems*, 156-67.

7 It is intriguing to compare the significance of the fate of Acadians in the 1760s. Anglophone texts do acknowledge that there was an "expulsion". Recent Acadian texts, such as Antonine Maillet's *Pélagie*, however, go further to articulate "disruption," "upheaval," "Dispersion," and "Exile." The favoured terms of Anglophone historiography admits only the act of expelling Acadians, and excludes the experience of Acadians during and after the "Expulsion." Their forced migrations, their relocation, their decades in exile are more than marginalized by "Expulsion," they are negated. Maillet's language returns their experience to the centre of history.

8 For example, Avi Schlaim, writing about King Abdullah, the Hashemite ruler of Jordan, states that "Britain became an accomplice in the Hashemite-Zionist collusion to frustrate the United Nations partition resolution of 29 November 1947 and to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian Arab state" (1).



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