

SAMPLER

*Gethsemane*

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Rembrandt's Bible

Songs from Bialik: Selected Poems of H.N. Bialik  
Lives of the Dead: Collected Poems of Hanoch Levin

SAMPLER

Atar Hadari

# Gethsemane

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# Contents

Pietà	11
Another Pietà	12
Salmon	14
A Shroud in Turin	15
Healing on Sabbath	16
The Beginning of Healing	17
Fishers of Men	18
Leading Light	19
Remember You Are Loved	20
Den of Thieves	21
The Two Women	22
Magdalene	23
Magdalene Revisited	24
Blessing Before Bread	26
Convictions	28
Gethsemane	29
Caiaphas	31
The Baptist	33
Worthy	34
The General	36
Gamliel	37
Doubting Thomas	38
Business	39
Iscairiot	40
The Money Changer	42
Chaplain	45
Proofs	46
Torquemada's Kaddish	47
The Three	48
Iron in the Blood	49

The Invisible Man	51
Matthew	53
When Messiah Comes	55
William Tyndale Blues	56
Thomas More in the Tower	58
Homage to Master Tyndale	59
Riders	60
Herod	62
Pan on the Fire Escape	64
Christmas Eve, Sarajevo 1987	67

*Three Postscripts to a Commentary*

71

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## Pietà

His cries quieted eventually  
like ants disappearing down an ant-hole,  
he'd woken on the underground  
from a passion of outstretched on his mother's lap sleeping –  
the bottle had already dropped  
and she bent so his hand held stretched out  
almost touched the floor,  
but it missed and she picked the bottle up  
where it rattled on the train floor before it stopped,  
and he didn't wake only the copper lights  
with ornamental shadows made him rise  
outstretched, the bone-buttons bowed on his duffel coat  
and his lower midriff bared where the tee-shirt rode  
up on his mother's tartan pants  
and shining patent leather boots: he screamed, he screamed  
and she rocked him and comforted,  
eventually the ants fled  
but Judas came with his rifling hands  
and before sleep came again  
made sure they got off and proceeded round  
the station through a brilliant tunnel  
and some stairs rising toward the stars.

## Another Pietà

She is looking out over his shoulder  
Eyes wide awake to what's in store  
And the babe is no longer a baby,  
He sprawls across her arms, her chair.

His eyes too are now itinerant,  
He has a look like he has known  
Too many tables set like this,  
Sees a last one with twelve plates down.

But they sit there in a huddle,  
The radiant mother and longed for child,  
Both now more darkness in their eyes than wonder,  
Both now in wait for the lion on the prowl

That slouches toward Bethlehem,  
Trailing a crowd with prayer-shawls,  
Tourists desperate to believe in anything,  
Addicts who have seen it all

But want the blood to spurt  
Out of a tiny child holding a ball  
Before they watch the cracks  
Run to the ceiling as the cake crumbles,

His maid mother weeping with abandon,  
The streets run with blood entirely pure,  
The Temple empty finally of tourists  
When the last family meal has done.

Where is the baby, where is his mother?  
The lion's on the loose, stay in her lap, don't run.  
A man with a cup is looking to anoint another,  
Whatever you do, play dumb.

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## Salmon

He is not comfortable in her arms,  
No longer snuggling, or leaning close.  
He leaps athletically like an arch,  
A river flowing from her hands to earth.

And his sweet belly is no longer fat,  
He arches, you can see his ribs.  
The smile on his face like the Cheshire cat  
That's eaten more than just the cream.

And the admirers. People smile at him  
Randomly in the street, like he's a star.  
The girls stand on street corners to meet  
And say his name shyly, holding their heart.

This can't go on. She's holding strong  
But he is leaping like a fish to go up stream  
And in those pools where he was first a frogspawn  
There's a star that's turned into the blackest ice, an open seam.

## A Shroud in Turin

There was a man, they say, in Cairo  
Left his face burnt in a cloth;  
Not the sort of cross you'd make in biro  
Or the tale you'd leave in students' mouths

But his face – two eyes, a nose, some sort of pursed lip.  
How can you tell what a man kissed  
From the bits that burned frayed linen crisp?  
But they see him, those who believe,

Say they feel him in those prints  
Left by a man in the shroud in a tomb  
And found near Turin in a skiff.  
But who he was who can be sure,

What he said we barely know –  
But he wiped his mouth on a cloth one Passover night  
And two thousand years on  
The crumbs stick in the snow.

# Healing on Sabbath

It isn't meant to be any kind of labour.  
Light just makes its way – Out of me  
And the healing  
Comes with no disclaimer.

*Did you make a paste?*

I didn't make a paste. When I did that it wasn't a Saturday.

*Did you draw in sand?*

I didn't draw in sand. That was the adulteress.  
They don't stone to death on the Sabbath.

*Do they pay you?*

Are you kidding me? They don't put in the kitty for the sermon  
Let alone the healing.

*Did you squeeze lemon on the fish?*

There was no salmon consumed at this kiddush.

*Why do they report you desecrated the Sabbath?*

I have some students who pluck corn and eat it.  
You can't teach all your students.  
The best you can hope is to help them to cope  
With the truth  
When it trashes their preconceptions.  
And leave them a note  
They can sing  
When all your creditors  
Come to rearrange your bones.  
And a little path  
To walk  
When you are past caring for such things.



## The Beginning of Healing

Healing is a ticklish matter.  
When you held your hand above his knee  
He started, though his eyes were closed as shutters  
And he never let his head lay back again  
So long as you were in the room.  
Later you learned trust and permission  
But you never lost the hunger to perform:  
The instigators of your sudden vision  
Never learned to feel less than alone  
Though you whispered to them  
And comforted as you led them up to the stone  
Where all your oil was palm scented,  
Your towels were all warm  
But they always woke disconcerted  
From the touch  
And wanted to go home.

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