

From Israel: Three Poems

by [Esther Cameron](#) (December 2024)



Arab Pogrom (Yitzchak Roman, 1968)

2014*

I loved you once, America; and still
that love, perhaps, is not quite dead in me,
could I but see you as you were until
you fell to folly—brave and proud and free.

I dwell with friends to whom you are untrue
and, proving so, your deepest vows unsay.
Could you still hear a voice that summons you
back to yourself, though from so far away?

The Cruel Year

First came the onslaught of the foulest breed
Of vampires which the suffering earth has borne,
Who in commission video'd the deed

To brand with horror the brains of those who mourn,
Reveling in crime for all the world to see
And its residual conscience to suborn,

And then the friend who kindly crossed the sea
Promising aid and comfort—and a State
For neighbors sworn to erase us utterly.

Our foes abroad came out to celebrate,
All dams of inhibition swept away:
Their media hastened to excoriate

Our every move, and faithfully relay
The murderers' allegations, while the hum
Of Academe was drowned out by the bray

Of "from the river to the sea," the drum
Of "intifada." In the realm of Art
All word of us, not slander, was struck dumb—

Boycott and ban replaced the listening heart.
On streets, on campuses, Jews feared to wear
The signs that marked them as a race apart,

No longer worthy of the policeman's care
If coshed upon the head. All this was so
Familiar to the ones who had been There...

And whose, descendants, living Here, now go
To battle for the future of those dear
To them, and for the land where Hope could grow.

And we go on, who daily wipe the tear
For the massacred, the kidnapped, and the slain
In battle—who say Psalms to beat back fear—

And must, as well, a load of grief sustain
For friends abroad who cannot see our right,
Who love us still, we guess, but can't refrain

From seconding our foes—to whom our plight
Appears somehow deserved. So they gain peace
And need not see the approach of their own night.

And among us are those who do not cease
To castigate the fighters, and delude
With dreams that in appeasement there is peace,

And with our two-faced-foreign friend collude
Who feeds us, but commands us feed our foes
And feeds our foe, himself, with far more food!

Yet we fight on, for our own lives, yet know
We fight for all. The soul of humankind
Shall not go under! And this gives a glow

No flood can quench, although the world be blind.
God is *our* God. God-less are those who slay
The innocent, and pleasure therein find.

We believe! even though our hearts quake at the sway
Of monsters on this earth. We watched from far
To see if that cohort would win the day

Which coddles that cruel creed, which seeks to mar

The dual human image, and suppress
The female, which those "faithful" also scar,

And with respect to us designs no less
Than our effacement... Or if one would win
Whose many faults there is no need to guess

But who has been a friend sometimes, and in
His heart designs no worse than his own good,
We think...

O may a better time begin.

Reprieved

We are reprieved; our punishment is stayed;
The flawed has triumphed over the insane;
Let us give thanks, and for a while refrain
From finding flaws in that for which we prayed,
But pray the more, that the Almighty aid
This man—that he may see His hand, and gain
Humility and wisdom, to explain
Our right to those with whom our ties had frayed.

Something still lives, we see, upon that sod
Once pledged to justice and to liberty—
Plain common sense, perhaps, or fear of God
Or love of Life, which needs the He and She.
Then may the Even rise, to restrain the odd,
And make the land fair once more from sea to sea!

November 7, 2024

*This first poem, curiously, owes its form and most of its

first line to Pushkin's "Ya vas lyubil," perhaps the most famous love poem in the Russian language. It came to me on the morning of the day in August 2014 (right after a war in which the US had briefly blockaded Israel) when I signed a contract for a condo in Maale Adumim in the "West Bank" (i.e. Judea).

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Esther Cameron is a dual citizen of Israel and the US, now living in Jerusalem. She is the founding editor of *The Deronda Review*. Her poems and essays have appeared here and there; she has published her *Collected Works* on Amazon and has had one book published by an academic press—*Western Art and Jewish Presence in the Work of Paul Celan* (Lexington Books, 2014).

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