

Gaza
Paris
Jerusalem

Meital Hillel Kurman

(Biography)

Meitar Hillel Kurman. Born in 1993, awarded the 2018 Rachel Negev Prize for the encouragement of young poetry. Published poems and translations in various journals and anthologies, including 'Ho!', 'Newspaper 77', 'Carmel', 'Etter', 'Misdaron', and 'Netivim'. Lives in Tel Aviv.

Dedicated to my beloved family;
and to Guri, a soulmate who left too early.

Gaza

Peace

It's surely not the walls that make the place a home
only the longing and the caresses bind
and it's surely not mistakes that turn bridges into barriers
only trenches of grief dug out of one's mind

and words surely can't create out of nothing
but only provide the means
and sorcery surely won't make hands shake each other
after all, the magic is performed by human beings.

The Other Hand

Ideals have dried up, have the brave given up?
(Hama Tuma, Lament)

"When it rains bullets it pours"
he said and leaned back, breathing heavily
picked up a lighter which had fallen
and after sitting up straight
looked at me and said:

"Want one?" he lit a cigarette
"I'll pass, it's bad for your health"
we heard gunfire in the distance
so he stopped
staring at me and said

"long live the revolution, it is good to die for our country"
he lied to me and to himself
scraped shit off his army boot
and at the sound of a blast
covered his ears, looked at me and yelled:

"duck down so you don't fly away"
I'm not gonna scrape you off the floor
I've had enough with this shit"
we heard another burst
a bullet found the center of his chest
(in their childhood the enemy would play darts)

he lay on the floor stunned
vomited the words "it pours"
I took away his cigarette
it's bad for your health
and shot him
so he'd chill out.

Hand Extended

The hand is extended
and the boat is spinning in place
the pool is empty, the water gone
the fish too.

The fishing rod is also worn out
from lack of use.

The ever-absent feels his way
an ever-baby is born to a prison
among the fetters
he pretends to be a chameleon
the Invisible Kid is blind, can't see
and can't be seen
and can't exist
until his innocence
sees him through.

On the Bus to Kosovo We Spoke of War

There's no end to the waste
of blood and time
we possess eternity
no wonder people are sent off
to gather
bits and pieces of other people
into heaps and graves

looking back, perhaps
we should have looked ahead.

Bird Song

A bird song sounds like a bullet's whistle
fired from the muzzle of a revolver
ducks run like soldiers at a shooting range
where do they all fly when the lake freezes over?

A few more heavy breaths and the medic will be here
a few more hours and there'll be nothing left to mend
it's so damn awful to leap into the muzzle
a bird song sounds like a lovely end.

In the End It Will Come

Look out into the horizon and picture a mountain
over there
right there, a mountain
green in bloom and white with snow
wrapped in desert sand

quite elusive, I know
what isn't elusive these days?
Maybe these are just bloated words
but you can see it alright, I mean
it's there, the mountain – just now, see?

Gently dipped in mist
head bathing in a cloud
clean
now it's here
now over there
just now, see?

Now look out into the horizon
and picture peace
(in the end it will come to the mountain).

Paris

Separation from Anxiety

Abandoned
in the middle of the bed
suddenly, a knock on the door
"it's open!"
I yell, I lie
and no one comes.

Running in a Thorn Field

Souel, 2016

Running in a thorn field
body thrust by the wind, blood smeared – a thistle's touch.
A space full of air stretched from ear to head
a world full of sound yet nowhere to be found.

The voice of a creek, a leap – feather-light
but slow and steady landing, while the wind is prowling
the hair succumbing to a dance
and in the heart of the field
a fence.

Running in a thorn field
destination known
giving out songs of forgiveness to every fear.
A space full of air
stretched between delivery room and morgue
and everything that has ever come out – exists.

Louis the 14th Bites the Hand

A deep gaze at the body
a shaft of light pierces through
I am the flesh.

The arrows ran dry raining down
on yesterday's targets
we're left hanging from the bows.

Marseille

I turn left into a small alley
to go around the museum in Marseille.

A few steps and the world opens up:
a vast sea
embraces all whose lungs welcome air.
All that was shut inside a zealous urban cage
inside a propaganda of chores – is forgotten.

Nothing ties me down
the sea whispers
take – infinity – escape
come back whenever, or never.

Pleasure cruises sail out of the port
slowly
watching out for boat rowers
who paddle backwards
out of choice –
to each their own eternity.

Is there a wave that could hit me
so hard I couldn't escape my shadow?
I won't know until I stop being rescued.

To inhale and exhale – to crack the formula
how to survive without living by the sword
how to feast without filling up on bitterness
how to capture a thought and keep it free
in this wild air
welcomed by a port city
and soaring seagulls' lungs.

Learning How to Be Saved

It drags on
I'm treading water
the shadow of my sole – a wish:
to quit being a hunter
and learn how to be rescued
easy prey
swallowed ship
ripe fruit

for a hungry mouth

the daily use of arrows
and targets
an entire life
can be spent
learning how to hunt
but learning how to be rescued
is impossible -
only how to get lost.

The Half Full Glass that Never Runs Out

A glass of white wine
a few words on how time spills
away, poured into another
glass of white wine

a letter and another and another
a few drops of black ink
on the white page

how lonley
must a man be
to write to his drunk self
a note to buy more white wine.

It's You

Don't blame the slanted tree
or the soft wind
or the geese
quiet and idle

don't blame the caressing sun
or the clear water
or the fall fighting with greenery

you
stand hidden between the yellowing leaves
on the bank of a secluded creek

it's you who feels lonely.

Hide and Seek

Out of loneliness I wove words never spoken
I filled the night with the fragrance of dead love
like a stuffed animal collector toying with his corpses
I was spit out of every present, moment by moment

I found myself creating your image
in the shadow cast by a neon light
flickering sluggishly like a sun in denial
of its job to illuminate the creations

I played hide and seek with the truth.

Who Smiled

Who smiled at me today?
I made a list
who gave me a moment of her eyes
who shined on me
and who radiated

like a spaceship floating
between empty spaces
I gazed at graceful planets
who've never met men
and I knew I had too little fuel
to land and return.

The Lousy Poet

The meticulous lousy poet
needs to evoke pity and win admiration
to wash the smoking head and win admiration
to impress the women-gatherers of words and hunt
for admiration - the meticulous lousy poet in the washroom
the mirror empty of adoration.

Exile

There will always be exile
and it will always rain
somewhere in the world
it's 5 o'clock
and someone is whispering in the ear
of someone else's woman
"you'll never run out of exile,
the mute heart wanders and remembers."

Love Will Come

You don't know yet
love will come
you're still blind in a dark room
moving, meandering with the perfect photograph
and stumbling into silent walls

you're yet to stumble upon the open door
where she waits for you.

Jerusalem

At the Airport

*The air hostess said put out all smoking material,
but she didn't specify, cigarette, cigar or pipe.
I said to her in my heart: you have beautiful love material,
and I didn't specify either
(from: Air Hostess, Yehuda Amichai)*

She asks in a formal tone and tired eyes
"did you pack alone?"
she knows I did
based on advanced profiling methods
she knows I did, after all I'm alone
and there's nothing in my backpack save words
which I diligently arranged, alone
with the help of some dead poets.

Every time I resist the urge to ask:
"and you, are you also alone?" I know she is
after all, an inviting smile says it all
I know she is – her eyes are married to mine
not to my backpack
and the ring finger is naked.

I once garnered courage and leaned forward
as though I came bearing news:
I packed alone and I am alone, and
you are lonely too.
I've got a few words in my backpack
and an extra ticket to a vague destination.
other than that, I carry no deeds
only a meager present
and delusions of the courage I never had.

A Fiddler and His Violin

It's raining outside and in my bed
you're peaceful in the pocket
of my shoulder
a fiddler and his violin
I fiddle out a detailed whisper
of the things I'll reveal
to you and the things I'll discover
in you

we'll have plenty of days
heavenly ladders
and earthly downfalls,

and here in bed I'm immersed
in you.

Syndrome

Four weeks in Jerusalem
and as I step out of my four walls
on Friday to buy Challah bread
the deluge strikes.

An old man peeks out of his coat like a turtle
smiles and says:
"go on quickly now young man,
a quarter hour and you're there."

I feel like Sisyphus climbing up Mount Sinai
though the city is teeming with purpose.

"Keep it to yourself!"
an old man turns down a limping Yeshiva student
who waits in the rain
for a chance to wrap bypassers in Tefillin.
(the tall man wraps an arm around his woman and leaves)

messianic loneliness.
The entire syndrome in a nutshell.
I keep it to myself
and go on quickly.

Times of Plague

My house is a temple void and vast
a friend is a wall is a Western Wall
nine kabin of darkness and hunger's call
nothing to do but chew on the past

the window blinds are barred
and at night I roll from side to side
locked up on a desert island, trapped inside
the cutting edges of a broken shard

the Mount of the Empty-House
the weekend is here
my clock hands spilled, the hours fled

there's this thirst I can't douse
for voices far but near
broken walls crumbling over my bed.

*nine kabin: in Jewish tradition, the amount of water used to cleanse a body before burial. Equivalent to about 12 liters.

Judge

I never judge a person in grief
I never judge at all

coal-black springs lie behind you
brown walls and green shame
my scars aren't so different
perhaps in other colors and in silence

I never judge but only ache
to see you this way – trapped in flames
I never judge but I'd like
to wish you also happy thoughts.

Purpose

The rain pouncing on a shoulder
ends up in a watering can:
the eternal fear of finite existence.

Damned be the hand that first wrote
the words which turned out to be nothing
but a mouse trap for people:
purpose – existence – meaning.

A dog chasing its tail, soon disillusioned.
Scrupulously planning sand castles
that wobble and threaten to surrender
to every wave. Planning
without a reason.

At dawn naked on the shoreline
it's not the sun rising but the written word.
The darkness stays
and the rain quenches thirst.

Grandpa and Grandma and Benny

Rain falls on the cemetery
the brown flowerpots are delighted
and the dead stay silent
two umbrellas groan as they protect a pair
today they mark fifty years
since they gently lay down
a fruit of the womb deep in the ground

no point watering the flowerpots
but they flower them anyway
force of habit
fifty years
hundreds of flowerpots
thousands and thousands of words that could
have been said but the dead stay silent
and the rain stays heavy.

Floods

I don't have enough emotions left
to contain the sorrows of the world
saturated earth – that's how floods occur
from time to time under a heavy rain
strong currents burst out
met with no response
anything that penetrates within
comes out in tears.

Awe

*“Therefore hear this now, you who are given to pleasures, who dwell securely, who say in your heart, ‘I am, and there is no one else besides me; I shall not sit as a widow, nor shall I know the loss of children’”
(Isaiah 47 verse 8)*

A man stares in awe
at the palm of his hand and knows:
I am and there is no one else besides me.

And in his mouth
all the trifles of this world
and all that's sacred
is chewed into a single flesh.

In awe he turns
his eyes to his other hand.
A woman holds him and he knows:
I am no one.
And desires more.

Storm

Our moods are fluid
an abyssal loneliness in the middle of the sea,
a storm of emotions soon abates
the oximeter waveform of the blankets
we go to a standstill

while our moods move
out of the dusk of childhood to the darkness of oblivion
to swimming butterfly and pushing against the water:
even the injured need wind in their sails.

The world is open wide before your fair features
and when you cry the dewdrops join in
and when you smile the wind replies with a blessing.

Edinburgh of the Seven Seas

When you left the room crying
I too wanted to leave
to sail into the grey horizon
to Edinburgh of the Seven Seas

the journey out of Cape Town
takes six
and on the seventh day I'll be created anew

in the remotest town on the planet
clean from tears and rolling in filthy riches
collected by an attentive and surrendering heart.

* Edinburgh of the Seven Seas is at a distance of seven days of sailing from Capetown, South Africa.

Back from a Sea Voyage

I came back from a sea voyage
to the bed at home
cozy and warm
cozy and warm

lying supine
beneath me a damp mattress
dances and rocks
dances and rocks

in this bed we knew
there is no beginning without an ending
there is no shore without a sea
and there are no waves
without the memory of waves

and we learned how to sleep.

The Big Bang

Two lovers wrap themselves in a blanket
two bodies in a closed space
astronomical gravitational pulls
and a quiet push

when did the Big Bang occur?
when the bodies realized - it is not good
to be alone and turned circles around themselves
without finding rest

now they are resting, wrapped up and traversing
the line between tension and relief
longing for the touch of moonlight
to pierce blankets, atmospheres
kidneys and hearts.

Shut Eye

The clock strikes – the digits come to a standstill
the cold wind whispers, leaving me awake and stubborn.
It's not enough to shut the eyes
the objects in the room keep moving
the bones in the body stay frozen
and the heart beats in clusters
the blanket is shrinking
and a prickly thought goes out for a walk
until sunlight creeps up on the blinds.

Lately we've been successful
at shutting our eyes tight enough.
Only yesterday I woke up at dawn
and forgot all about that thought.
The blanket was ample enough, the wind at rest,
the clock running smoothly, the heart beating.
I felt the urge to open my eyes
and look at you
and only you.

She Sure Knows How to Write

She sure knows how to write
and she sure keeps quiet a lot
the street lamp stares at me
as I drink the night
my thirst wide awake

and she sure knows
how to wring out tears
by listing what I'm not
the darkness is thick
and the light protests

I'm left out of the game
she sure knows how to stab
that one spot
lamp and bench and drunk.

Two Are Holding On

I'm holding on
to the guitar without strumming
late at night
voices younger than mine
sing the Beatles under my window
the owl troubadours

tomorrow my love will come
my impossible
and infinite love
to cut out my tongue

to cut
and paste and cut
a conversion to silence

and only a circumcised word
will be permitted.

The Gate

Once the door was shut
the gate was locked
our memories signed off with a tear
I walked into the room as though into Chernobyl
and cleared out the rubble of war

smiles on the walls
documenting a love's growing shadow
and candy notes in a jar
and the scent of wet hair
grieving on the pillow

the sheets are tainted by dead love
the clothes tainted and disgraced
the walls emptied of color and
the face.

The Other Cheek

*And you shall gather all its plunder into the middle of the street, and completely burn
with fire the city
(Deuteronomy 13, verse 16)*

Piercing silence in the building's staircase
the door closed and she knew
to keep the sound of tears
on her side

you decided to terminate
the foundations of a building
and burn an entire city

I couldn't hear you crying
I felt a cold tear
on the other cheek.

The Train Station

The rails went off the train
that's what the end looks like
choo choo the train honks twice
that's what the end sounds like

who says goodbye
instead of see you soon?
one last look and nausea strikes
that's what misery feels like

maybe you forgot something at home?
and what if you suddenly decided to come back?
in the meantime I'll lie down on the tracks
until the sun comes up.

Labor Pains

What news bears the flesh? We reached the phase of the touch
I hoped for happiness, truth is I can't promise much

what care offers a caress? Warmth numbs emotion
a lost man is entranced by the conquered voices of the ocean

what good is a goodbye? Alleviating the fear of the end
the birth of lonely silence and the pains of new land.

Spring Groundsel

Might as well cry in front of green fields
a silent eternity stares into the horizon
clinging to the depths of the photograph
it feels good to cry in front of it

in these fields are flowers I won't pick for you
and you won't smile for me from cheek to cheek
dreams of a future we gently weaved
have bloomed and flown away
(did you not blow on them?)

A Drop

to Aviva

There are moments when everything becomes empty
the stomach the heart the thoughts
and only you remain
swimming in a lovely spring
on the outskirts of Jerusalem
and every drop touching you
is pure and lucid

over these waters we set sail to our dreams
face to face
in a slow and sweet stream
this spring was an anchor
growing stronger and stronger

and there are moments when everything becomes empty
and nothing remains
but a single drop on the pillow.

It Takes the Light a While to Arrive

to Guri, in hindsight

Here I am, gazing at stars
which are gone by now
I'm also gazing at your photograph
a long while
it takes a long while
for the light.

Here There Were Once Clear Borders

And today we're swimming
in an abstract image
a line and a point
without a place
missing a shape

tears pour out of the phone
you said it would never happen to us
well it did
cold silence on the line
now the point is clear.

I Don't Love You Anymore

You breathed heavily and spat out stinging words
now more than ever – my skin turned red
you lay your head between your knees
like a fetus withdrawn
hungry for rest and for nursing compassion

you whispered a few more words
but I could no longer listen or pay attention

you'd like to pity yourself
lonely out of choice and giving in to fear
seeking the familiar touch
while making me a stranger

you said your feelings blew away like the wind
and the rain comes and goes every once in a while

(always reminisce on the buds of your love
as one reminisces on old melodies).

And the Longing Too

“Cold out, isn’t it?” / You say, and get an answer / “Cold out, isn’t it?” / How warm it makes you feel / That someone is there to answer. (Machi Tawara, "Salad Anniversary")

The little heater works overtime
and the longing too

a cold winter in Jerusalem
an icy wind creeps through the house windows
under the sheets
and towards the beating heart

the little heater gives off little consolation.

Body

This winter the blankets were useless
and useless were the coats
and useless the gloves
and the scarves

what I needed was body heat.

The Weather

Thousands of people have died and I
need medication for a trembling heart
the pandemic is quickly spreading
and all I can think of is you

naked and timid
devoted to me
with a beauty divine
winter fades away, spring comes today

but the emptiness is here to stay.

Some Other Guy

The sun tells the truth while you lie:
I wasn't on time though I really did try

two clock hands in futile pursuit
an empty distance meets the arm
the fate of tears is to hide in the pillow
the fable of grace – to keep quiet and swallow

the sun speaks four languages
in all of which the truth is bitter
she sent a kiss that fluttered and fell
but she never said farewell

the tape measure between us swings like a sword
time is an excuse to curl up like a fetus
to spend evenings sipping on memories amassed
and to dream of a future become past

the sun tells the truth while you lie:
she couldn't possibly be with some other guy.

In His Shade

I dull my senses with a dull routine
with a tranquilizer
I avoid the bitter root
and stare at leaves

we would sit under a tree and whisper
how good it is that Man was created in his shade

there were times when I believed
and do so now, ever since you left.

Before the Break of Dawn

On this bed
I sit shriveled up and scratch the wound
there's blood – and there's pain
and there's the bitter taste
of words we once said

you said love and left
I whispered getting over
and stayed to scratch the wound
on our bed
before the crack of dawn.

Glass Wall

*How could I fall asleep tonight / when the moon is shining bright
(Dogen)*

There is no fairer one around
the hand reaches out to an unbreakable glass wall
she vanishes amidst a golden scenery of fall
in a coat of red light corrupting its way into town

your name is written in the clouds
in a quiet full-mooned autumn night sky
above your house where we would love or try
our differences always were too loud.

Wailing Police Cars

At midnight
police cars are wailing
the city is awfully awake
and I can't sleep
your indentations still haunt the pillow
your scratch marks haunt my body
and besides

I sold you over to the poems.

Conclusion but also Introduction

This entire book is written in code
and you are an unknown
in these poems I will find you again
naked and pure

this book is but thin words whispering a secret
in these poems I will find you again
and even then I will keep looking.

Citations

1. Hama Tuma, "Lament", from the website Lyrikilne
2. Yehuda Amichai, "Air Hostess", from "More Love Poems", Shocken 1994
3. Machi Tawara, "Salad Anniversary", translated from Japanese by Jack Stamm, 1988
4. Dōgen, from "Within Thin Snow: The Zen Poetry of Dōgen and Ryōkan", Keshev Leshira 2011

Order of poems

(Back cover)

"The poetic tone may be minor, as that of an insignificant individual, yet the writer triumphantly presents an internal world belonging to a master of the poetic spirit."

- Yotam Reuveny

This book contains a deep, personal, and intimate collection of poems, bringing together a decade of writing and contemplation. The book, with its three sections – Gaza, Paris, and Jerusalem – sheds light on different periods and processes in the author's life, tying together the most hidden layers of the self with the general, communal, and universal exterior.