

Two poems from the series "Jews"
by Yisroel Shtern
translated by Miriam Koral (2005)

I

Harnessed
to the rusted scraping wagon
of the nations,
from city to city we transport
casks of blood.
Wherever we come, the seed gets fat;
at the youngest sounding of our old step
the children of the land laugh like the spring
but we
grow pale.

Harnessed
to the soaked and rotten wagon
of the nations,
all the paths beneath us become
sweet and sticky.
But the flesh crawls from our bodies,
we don't have the strength
to bend, to lick
our blood and grow wild...

Harnessed
to the wide, heavy, wet wagon
of the nations,
we color the open bosom
of the summery day
and if we run into
a white stone on the highway
we cry our eyes out till we grow weary.
Weary.

Leaden-grey
half dead
we stride and sleep
happy,
that beneath us the earth is soft
as a pillow.
And no one senses, that stuck to our soles

Are scraps of flesh
of downy children.

II

Gentiles,
from your grey eyes
a knife flashes
its point turned around
aimed at our side.

You are frightened by the stillness
 of our sleep.
Just as Samson's strength lay
in his dark deep hair,
so our life is made real
through our dream.
Wild fright torments you
from the silenced demand
that thirteen million judges
nurture in their laps.

And if the little grey window
of your eye opens –
a knife hangs ready
its point turned around
aimed at our side.
