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.

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.