**To T.S. Eliot**

Eminence becomes you. Now when the rock is struck  
your young sardonic voice which broke on beauty  
floats amid incense and speaks oracles  
as though a god  
utters from Russell Square and condescends,  
high in the solemn cathedral of the air,  
his holy octaves to a million radios.

I am not one accepted in your parish.  
Bleistein is my relative and I share  
the protozoic slime of Shylock, a page  
in Sturmer, and, underneath the cities,  
a billet somewhat lower than the rats.  
Blood in the sewers. Pieces of our flesh  
float with the ordure on the Vistula.  
You had a sermon but it was not this.

It would seem, then, yours is a voice  
remote, singing another river  
and the gilded wreck of princes only  
for Time’s ruin. It is hard to kneel  
when knees are stiff.

But London Semite Russian Pale, you will say  
Heaven is not in our voices.  
The accent, I confess, is merely human,  
speaking of passion with a small letter  
and, crying widow, mourning not the Church  
but a woman staring the sexless sea  
for no ship’s return,  
and no fruit singing in the orchards.

Yet walking with Cohen when the sun exploded  
and darkness choked our nostrils,  
and the smoke drifting over Treblinka  
reeked of the smouldering ashes of children,  
I thought what an angry poem  
you would have made of it, given the pity.

But your eye is a telescope  
scanning the circuit of stars  
for Good-Good and Evil Absolute,  
and, at luncheon, turns fastidiously from fleshy  
noses to contemplation of the knife  
twisting among the entrails of spaghetti.

So shall I say it is not eminence chills  
but the snigger from behind the covers of history,  
the sly words and the cold heart  
and footprints made with blood upon a continent?  
Let your words  
tread lightly on this earth of Europe  
lest my people’s bones protest.

—Emanuel Litvinoff, 1973  
(written c. 1950)