

*A Yeshiva Curriculum in Western Literature**

By: DAVID P. GOLDMAN

Why should observant Jews learn the literature of the West? It seems a reasonable question. First, the greatest cultural achievements of the Christian West cannot be appreciated in isolation from their religious inspiration. Second, secular notion of a Western high culture has its origins in a sort of idolatry, namely, to make out of art a substitute for religion, starting with the German Classic at the end of the 18th century and continuing through the efforts of Matthew Arnold late in the 19th. Third, the project itself has failed: in his 1995 book *The Western Canon*, the critic Harold Bloom complains that Western literature no longer can be taught to undergraduates who do not have sufficient background to understand the dialogue among writers of different generations. If the Christian West no longer cares about its high culture, why should Jews?

Judaism has its own autonomous high literature in *Tanakh*, Talmud, rabbinic commentaries and Hebrew poetry. It is argued that the elevated literature of the West embodies the best of the universal human experience. Judaism, though, looks less toward the universal human experience, and rather to the exceptional experi-

* This essay incorporates some material previously published in *First Things*, *The Tablet*, and *Asia Times Online*.

David P. Goldman writes the Spengler column at *Asia Times Online* and blogs at PJ Media. He has written on Jewish topics for numerous publications including *First Things*, where he was a senior editor during 2009–2011, as well as *Tablet*, *The American Interest*, and *Commentary*. He is also a Fellow at the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs. His book *How Civilizations Die (and Why Islam is Dying, Too)* was published in 2011 by Regnery. A book of essays, *It's Not the End of the World—It's Just the End of You* (Van Praag) also appeared in 2011.

ence of a people apart. Dante and Shakespeare require a longer attention span and finer interpretative skills than romance novels or detective stories, but scholarship in traditional Jewish sources demands such capacities more rigorously than any kind of secular literary criticism.

Orthodox students who plan to apply to universities, to be sure, study the standard English literature curriculum to pass the usual examinations. The literature curriculum at Orthodox day schools preparing students for university cannot vary much from that of secular schools. Yeshiva students, however, have no such requirement. But should they study Western literature? There are compelling reasons in favor. The most obvious is to master the arts of persuasion—what the classical Greeks and Romans called “liberal arts,” that is, the arts of free citizens: grammar, rhetoric and logic. Prosperity and political survival demand the capacity to use the language of the Diaspora with skill. Mastery of language is something to be learned from the great masters. Modern language is inherited from the great literature of the past; those who are ignorant of the language of Shakespeare, the King James Bible translation, Milton and Keats never will fully command English usage and cadence.

There are yet more important reasons, though, to study Western literature. Although Jewish religious culture may be thought of as autonomous from Western culture, the Diaspora Jew lives in Western culture and cannot extricate himself from its influence, except by sealing himself off in an alternative culture. Some Hassidim have created an alternative culture in Yiddish, including teen fiction and musical comedies. To isolate ourselves from the Christian culture of the West, though, blinds us to a basic fact of Jewish existence: Western democracy as embodied in the United States and its political institutions have given the Jewish people a unique degree of security as well as honor in the Diaspora. In its best manifestations, the political culture of the West draws deeply on Torah sources, as Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks argued forcefully in his 2007 book *The Home We Build Together*. We cannot understand the West without engaging its high culture, any more than gentiles can understand their own history without engaging the Jewish people and the distinct and separate culture of Torah. And without understand-

ing it, we cannot act effectively on behalf of our interests as well as the universal principles that the Torah embodies.

Great literature typically is taught as a “Western Canon,” as a continuing, consistent corpus of thought. The survey courses that form part of the core curriculum at some secular liberal arts colleges dilute the original idea of a “Great Books” reading list, formulated at the University of Chicago during the 1930s. In this canonical view, Greek and Latin thought segue into Christian civilization; Hebrew sacred literature is a byway. The concept of a “Western Canon” as such constitutes an implicit form of Christian apologetics, with a distinctly Christian bias towards Hellenic rather than Hebrew sources. Students read Homer, Virgil, Dante, and Shakespeare as if they constituted an unbroken chain of genius within Western Civilization. The curriculum is supposed to edify, uplift and acculturate students in the great apologetic project of the West. The “Western Canon” approach emerged as a secular, cultural response to the declining authority of religion in Western thought, with the aim of substituting artistic and philosophical sources for religion. Inevitably it was abandoned except for a few surviving pockets in academia. The “Western Canon” had no inherent authority except for custom and habit by which to determine what belonged to the canon and what did not. It is not surprising that this “canon” has for the most part failed to defend itself against multicultural incursions (ethnic studies, women’s studies, and so forth): it has no claim to be authoritative except for the aesthetic taste of a cultural elite and its claims to exclusiveness are easily challenged as arbitrary and subjective.

The beauty of moral truth is foremost in Jewish thinking. But the beauty of artifice has a place as well, from the construction of the *mishkan* to the verse of Yehudah HaLevi. The classical curriculum in Western literature justified itself on aesthetic grounds alone. The modern curriculum sacrifices aesthetic criteria on putatively moral grounds, but these moral grounds stem from multicultural concern for the self-esteem of minorities, for example. The literature curriculum at major universities is increasingly Balkanized to meet the demands of various constituencies. Secular Jewish literature is taught under the rubric of Jewish studies as one more minor-

ity contribution to the multicultural mix. According to the multicultural criterion, Philip Roth is as Jewish as Maimonides.

There is an alternative to learning Western literature uncritically in the same fashion as secular schools. That alternative exists in large measure because Jews made enormous contributions to the literature of the West. Some of these contributions came from forced converts. Jews have been in the West but never of it. Although Christian civilization ultimately rests on its Jewish antecedents, it has often sought to suppress or even expunge Jewish influence. We do not accept the presumption of apologists for Western Civilization, namely, Christianity blended Greek Reason and Hebrew Religion into a harmonious synthesis. From the Jewish vantage point, Western Civilization embodies great achievements as well as great flaws. Both are mirrored in its literature. Modern literature arose as a critique of the failings of Christian civilization. Some of the foundational works of modern literature were a covert cry of protest on the part of Jews compelled to convert to Christianity. For Jews to engage the literature of the West is to come to grips not only with the achievements of the West, but also with its flaws. We should not attempt to stand the “Western Canon” approach on its head, and turn the study of literature into Jewish apologetics in place of Christian apologetics. Critical learning of Western literature can help religious students to understand the worthy contributions of Christian civilization as well as its failures, without compromising the autonomy of Jewish religious culture.

And there is something more: Jews do not have a monopoly on insights into Jewish sources. During the 19th and 20th centuries, Orthodox religious authorities drew insights about *Tanakh* from the great literature of their time, especially in Germany. Sometimes there is a great deal to learn from gentile thinkers. Some of the high literature of the West proceeds from *Tanakh*—Goethe’s great drama *Faust* among others—and great rabbis of the past did not hesitate to glean insight from this literature.¹

¹ See for example R. Isaac Rosenberg (1860–1940), “*Kobelet* and Goethe’s *Faust*” <http://jbjq.jewishbible.org/assets/Uploads/372/372_goethe1.pdf>. Also R. Marc Angell, “Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch and Friedrich von Schiller,” online lecture <<http://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm>>

Some of the works selected in the rough sketch of a literature curriculum below would seem out of place in a conventional university curriculum, for two reasons. First, no pride of place is assigned to works written in English. My concern is not English literature, but the literary engagement of Jews with the West throughout our history. Second, I have chosen works that embody a Jewish response to Christian civilization. Some of these works, such as Fernando de Rojas' *Celestina* and Tirso de Molina's *Don Juan* play, have a minor role in the literary canon today. In their own century, though, they were the equivalent of blockbuster bestsellers, the most widely read and influential fiction of their age. The subject of this curriculum is not literary aesthetics, but the conflict of great ideas through the history of the West, in which Jews and Jewish thinking played a decisive, if underappreciated, role. Rather than array the sources according to period or genre, in the conventional way, I suggest three great themes: Time, Love and Evil.

- I. Time: Homer *vs.* *Tanakh*
- II. Love: Medieval Romance *vs.* *La Celestina*
- III. Evil: *Don Juan* and the Paradox of Christian Salvation

Topic I: Time: Homer *vs.* *Tanakh*

Readings:

- 1. Homer, *The Odyssey*
- 2. Etienne Gilson, *God and Philosophy* (Yale University Press 2002), chapter one ("God and Greek Philosophy")
- 3. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*, "Odysseus' Scar"

/745805>. For a discussion of the influence of Goethe's *Faust* on Rav Michael Friedländer's translation of *Kobelet*, see David P. Goldman, "Faustian Bargains," in *The Tablet*, December 14, 2010 <<http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/53221/faustian-bargains>>. See also David P. Goldman, "Hast Thou Considered My Servant Faust?" (First Things, Aug/Sept. 2009) for a discussion of *Faust* and the Book of Job.

*Dizzily it bears you along on restless streaming waves;
Behind and in front you only see heaven and sea.*

—Friedrich Schiller, “The Epic Hexameter”

*Revelation is the first thing to set its mark firmly into the middle
of time; only after Revelation do we have an immovable Before
and Afterward. Then there is a reckoning of time independent of
the reckoner and the place of reckoning, valid for all the places of
the world.*

—Franz Rosenzweig, “The Star of Redemption”

The poetry of Homer is supremely beautiful, but it is beautiful in a specific way. As the Schiller epigram above states, there is an eternal sameness to Homer’s heroic verse that stems from the world outlook of pagan Greece. The concept of beauty itself has a different meaning for Greeks than for Jews. Judaism does not accept the Greek concept of beauty as it was carried over into Christianity. For Plato, beauty is the perception of harmonious order. Plato’s concept embedded in Christianity makes beauty into an attribute of God. That is alien to Jewish thinking. Rabbi Meir Soloveichik observes that not once does the *Tanakh* call God “beautiful” (*yafeh*). God is called *adir* (splendid), and his voice is called *hadar* (majestic). As Rav Aharon Lichtenstein wrote:

The verse says (*Tehillim* 29:4), “*Kol Hashem ba-koah; kol Hashem be-hadar*—The voice of God is power; the voice of God is splendor.” We perceive God in one sense as boundless, unbridled power. In another sense, we perceive Him in terms of values, of truth and goodness. ... *Hadar* is presumably some kind of objective beauty, a moral beauty, a beauty of truth.

But that is moral beauty, not visual or sonorous beauty as in the Christian definition. In all of the *Tanakh* we find God and beauty mentioned only once in the same verse: “I have observed the task which God has given the sons of man to be concerned with: He made everything beautiful in its time; He also put an enigma [*ha-Olam*] into their mind [*b-libam*] so that man cannot comprehend what God has done from beginning to end” (*Kohelet* 3:11, ArtScroll translation). What ArtScroll translates (following the *Targum*) as “enigma” and Koren as “mystery,” *ha-Olam*, is rendered in its more

common usage as “eternity” in other translations. Ibn Ezra supports the latter reading, noting that in the whole of the *Tanakh*, the word *olam* is used only in the sense of time and eternity. Perhaps the ambiguity sheds light on the implicit Jewish understanding of beauty.

Kobelet tells us that beauty comes from God. We are obligated to say the blessing “*shekakha lo be-olamo*” when we see beautiful things. But God made things beautiful *in their time*. Creation is contingent; even the world itself will wear out like a suit of clothes, and God will replace it (*Tehillim* 102:26). Beauty is not an eternal characteristic of nature in its recondite essence, accessible to the adept through special knowledge, as Plato taught; much less is it an attribute of God. Beauty, rather, is temporal and *hevel*, or “fleeting” (rather than “vain” as *Kobelet* is usually rendered).

Next to this terse statement about beauty we find a statement about man, namely that God has put an enigma (eternity) into the minds of humans such that we seek after eternity, even if we cannot fully comprehend it. This reading of *Kobelet* 3:11 gains clarity if we read *Kobelet* 3:15 in the Koren translation by the 19th-century *rosh yeshiva* Rabbi Michael Friedländer: “That which is, already has been; and that which is to be has already been; and only God can find the fleeting moment.” As I wrote in another context for *Tablet Magazine*, Rabbi Friedländer might have had in mind the celebrated wager that Faust offered the Devil in Goethe’s tragedy. Faust would lose his soul and will if he attempted to hold onto the passing moment, that is, to try to grasp what only God can find.² Goethe’s

² The devil Mephistopheles offers Faust his usual bargain:
“Then Faustus, here,
Here do I bind myself to be thy servant,
And at thy nod forsake repose and ease:
When in another place we meet hereafter,
Thou’lt do the like for me.”
Faust rejects this: “What can’st thou give,
Thou miserable fiend?” He proposes a wager instead. If ever he should say
to the passing moment
““Linger, still linger, beautiful illusions,”
Then throw me into fetters; then I’ll sink,
And willingly, to ruin. Ring my death-knell.”
(Translation S. T. Coleridge)

drama in turn drew inspiration from *Kohelet*, according to a monograph by the German Orthodox Rabbi Isaac Rosenberg. Time belongs to God, and the time of human existence stretches between the memory of promise and the hope of redemption. The impulse to seize the moment and hold onto it is in a sense idolatrous; it is an attempt to make ourselves immortal by our own force of will, to cheat eternity, to wrest control of time away from God. As we will see below, the narrative style of the ancient Greeks attempts to fix the moment in time, while Biblical narrative proceeds in the light of eternity. The distinction between pagan and biblical time will become clearer by example below. Rashi comments that the day of our death is unknown, so that a man says, "Perhaps my death is far off," and builds a house or plants a vineyard. Because the time of our death is concealed from us, we should rejoice with our portion and follow God's law while we yet live. But rejoicing in our portion throughout the days of our lives is never quite enough, for eternity is set in our hearts, which is to say that our hearts are set on eternity. St. Augustine paraphrased *Kohelet* in the opening words of the Confessions: "You have made us for Yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until we come to You." We might think of beauty as an intimation of the eternity that God has set in our hearts. God has planted in our hearts the enigma of eternity, which is the same as the mystery of human mortality, and beauty is an intimation of that eternity. We do not say that God is beautiful, for we have never seen His form. For Jews, unlike Christians, beauty is not an attribute of God, but rather a fleeting human perception of God's action in the world.

The perception of beauty from the Jewish standpoint therefore is a human act that occurs in time. To distinguish between Jewish and Greek concepts of beauty, we must first consider the differences in their perception of time. Literature is first of all narrative, and narrative proceeds in time. In the "god-infested world" (Etienne Gilson) of the Greek pagans, time is simply the demarcation of movement, ultimately of the indifferent, perpetual motion of the heavenly bodies. Past and present, as Friedrich Schiller wrote in the above-cited epigram on the heroic meter of Greek poetry, appear the same. By contrast, time is an illusion to Jews ("That which is, already has been; and that which is to be has already been; and only

God can find the fleeting moment,” *Kobelet* 3:15 [Koren]). This concept of time permeates Jewish practice. “All you who cling to Hashem are alive today” (*Dev.* 4:4). Every Jew who left Egypt stood before Mount Sinai. Creation is guided not by the perpetual sameness of time but by its suspension, namely Shabbat. *Teshuvah* literally changes the past, for the Jew who does *teshuvah* becomes a different person, and that different person would not have committed the sin in question; retrospectively the sin becomes a *shogeg* rather than a sin of intent (R. Jonathan Sacks).

This distinction is stamped on literary style from the beginning of written memory. The philologist Erich Auerbach, a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany, contrasted Greek and Hebrew modes of thought in a classic essay comparing two stories: the binding of Isaac in Genesis 22, and the story of Odysseus’ scar told in flashback (*Odyssey*, Book 19).³ Auerbach’s essay is justly one of the most celebrated exercises in literary criticism of the past century.

Homer’s hero has returned incognito to his home on the island of Ithaca, fearful that prospective usurpers will murder him. An elderly serving woman washes his feet and sees a scar he had received on a boar hunt two decades earlier, before leaving for the Trojan War, and recognizes him. Homer then provides a detailed account of the boar hunt before returning to his narrative. The story stops for several hundred lines while Homer recounts the origin of the scar. Homer places everything on the surface, Auerbach explained:

The separate elements of a phenomenon are most clearly placed in relation to one another; a large number of conjunctions, adverbs, particles, and other syntactical tools, all clearly circumscribed and delicately differentiated in meaning, delimit persons, things, and portions of incidents in respect to one another, and at the same time bring them together in a continuous and ever flexible connection; like the separate phenomena themselves, their relationships—their temporal, local, causal, final, consecutive, comparative, concessive, antithetical, and conditional limitations—are brought to light in perfect fullness; so that a continuous rhythmic procession of phenomena

³ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask. Princeton, 1953, repr. 1974, chapter one.

passes by, and never is there a form left fragmentary or half-illuminated, never a lacuna, never a gap, never a glimpse of unplumbed depths.

Auerbach adds, “And this procession of phenomena takes place in the foreground—that is, in a local and temporal present which is absolute. One might think that the many interpolations, the frequent moving back and forth, would create a sort of perspective in time and place; but the Homeric style never gives any such impression.” The “local and temporal present is absolute,” in Auerbach’s words. Biblical time, as Auerbach explains, transcends the present; each moment is lived in the memory of past promise and the expectation of future redemption. The self-evident, simple present of Homer does not exist for biblical man; in its place, past and future join together in his consciousness. In place of the meticulously decorated moment—for example the hundreds of lines of background to the discovery of Odysseus’ scar—biblical narrative implies and evokes the presence of God in the world and the human response to Him with an infinite subtlety and depth. A different mode of writing pertains to Hebrews and Greeks.

Stark and spare, by contrast, is the story of God’s summons to Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac. Where Homer tells us everything, the Bible tells us very little. God speaks to Abraham, and Abraham says, “Here I am.” Auerbach observes, “Where are the two speakers? We are not told. The reader, however, knows that they are not normally to be found together in one place on earth, that one of them, God, in order to speak to Abraham, must come from somewhere, must enter the earthly realm from some unknown heights or depths. Whence does He come, whence does He call to Abraham? We are not told.”

Abraham and Isaac journey together. Auerbach writes, “Thus the journey is like a silent progress through the indeterminate and the contingent, a holding of the breath, a process which has no present, which is inserted, like a blank duration, between what has passed and what lies ahead, and which yet is measured: three days!” In contrast to the “local and temporal present” in Greek narrative, the narration of the Aqedah “has no present.”

Auerbach concludes:

On the one hand, externalized, uniformly illuminated phenomena, at a definite time and in a definite place, connected together without lacunae in a perpetual foreground; thoughts and feeling completely expressed; events taking place in leisurely fashion and with very little of suspense. On the other hand, the externalization of only so much of the phenomena as is necessary for the purpose of the narrative, all else left in obscurity; the decisive points of the narrative alone are emphasized, what lies between is nonexistent; time and place are undefined and call for interpretation; thoughts and feeling remain unexpressed, are only suggested by the silence and the fragmentary speeches; the whole, permeated with the most unrelieved suspense and directed toward a single goal (and to that extent far more of a unity), remains mysterious and “fraught with background.”

The radical difference between the Hebrew and Greek concept of divinity, Auerbach adds, implies a radically different concept of character:

God is always so represented in the Bible, for he is not comprehensible in his presence, as is Zeus; it is always only “something” of him that appears, he always extends into depths. But even the human beings in the Biblical stories have greater depths of time, fate, and consciousness than do the human beings in Homer; although they are nearly always caught up in an event engaging all their faculties, they are not so entirely immersed in its present that they do not remain continually conscious of what has happened to them earlier and elsewhere; their thoughts and feelings have more layers, are more entangled. Abraham’s actions are explained not only by what is happening to him at the moment, nor yet only by his character (as Achilles’ actions by his courage and his pride, and Odysseus’ by his versatility and foresightedness), but by his previous history; he remembers, he is constantly conscious of, what God has promised him and what God has already accomplished for him—his soul is torn between desperate rebellion and hopeful expectation; his silent obedience is multilayered, has background. Such a problematic psychological situation as this is impossible for any of the Homeric heroes, whose desti-

ny is clearly defined and who wake every morning as if it were the first day of their lives: their emotions, though strong, are simple and find expression instantly.

The Jewish and Greek vision of God, man and time itself are fundamentally incompatible. The aesthetic character of Homeric and biblical narrative is radically different.

Topic II: Christian Love and Its Paradoxes

<i>World of nightingales, how fair! Where instead of worship rendered To the true God, Love, the false god, And the muses were adored.</i>	<i>For the lady was no Laura, She whose eyes, sweet mortal stars, In the minster on Good Friday Lit the fire for ever famous —</i>
<i>Clergy, crowned with wreaths of roses On their tonsures, sung the psalms In the happy Languedoc, And the laity, good knights.</i>	<i>Was no chatelaine who, radiant In the bloom of youthful beauty, O'er the tourneying presided. And bestowed the wreath of laurel —</i>
<i>Proudly ambled on their chargers, Conning rhymes and amorous verses To the glory of the lady Whom their heart was happy serving.</i>	<i>Was no casuist who lectured On the law concerning kisses, In the college of a court of Love, a learned doctrinaire.</i>
<i>For with love there must be ladies, And the lady was as needful To the tuneful minnesinger As, to bread and butter, butter.</i>	<i>She, beloved of the Rabbi, Was most sorrowful and wretched, Piteous spectacle of ruin, And was called Jerusalem.</i>
<i>And the hero whom we sing of, Our Jehuda Halevy, Had his heart's beloved lady. But a strange one he had chosen.</i>	<p>—Heinrich Heine</p>

Readings:

1. Dante Alighieri, *La Vita Nuova*; *The Divine Comedy (Inferno)*; Selections from *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*
2. Petrarch, *Selected Sonnets*
3. Yehudah HaLevi, *Selected Poems*
4. Fernando de Rojas, *La Celestina*
5. Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote* (Book I)

6. William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*

In the fragment quoted above, the German-Jewish poet Heinrich Heine gently ridicules Romantic love as portrayed in Christian medieval literature, contrasting it to Yehudah Halevi's love for Jerusalem. If love is the great theme of literature, the critique of the Christian concept of love is the great contribution of Jews to Western literature. Judaism and Christianity understand love in very different ways. Rabbi Meir Soloveichik observes:

Over the years, many Christian theologians have expressed abhorrence at the idea of God's preferential love. The twentieth-century Swedish theologian Anders Nygren, for example, contrasts the different depictions of divine love found in Jewish and Christian Scripture: "In Judaism love is exclusive and particularistic," while Christian love "overleaps all such limits; it is universal and all-embracing." God's love stands in stark contradistinction to human love, absolutely "unmotivated." It expects nothing back, no return on the emotional investment.

[The Orthodox theologian Michael] Wyschogrod takes issue with just this sort of understanding. The Hebrew Bible does not depict such a radical distinction between divine and human love. Humanity was created in the image of God; our love is a reflection of his. God can desire to enter into a relationship with us; He can be drawn to some aspect of our identity. In the Hebrew Bible, writes Wyschogrod, God's love is "a love very much aware of a human response. God has thereby made himself vulnerable: He asks for man's response and is hurt when it is not forthcoming." Further, because "God's love is directed toward who we are ... there are those whom God loves especially, with whom he has fallen in love."⁴

The Christian concept of love informs the crowning achievement of European medieval literature, Dante Alighieri's *Commedia Divina*. Dante's guide to Heaven is the spirit of Beatrice, a young Florentine woman whom Dante had met twice during her brief life, and whom he loved from a distance with absolute devotion. Dante's

⁴ Rabbi Meir Soloveichik, "God's First Love: The Theology of Michael Wyschogrod," in *First Things*, November 2009.

love for Beatrice, which had no possibility of consummation, follows in the tradition of so-called courtly love, which considered love to be pure only when the object of love was unattainable.

From the medieval Christian standpoint, only unrequited love might be considered “unmotivated,” unselfish, asking nothing in return, corresponding to the “*agapic*” love of the man-become-God who sacrificed himself to take away the sins of the world. The term “Romantic” was coined at the end of the 18th century to describe a literary movement that sought to restore the Christian medieval concept of love. The German poet and critic Friedrich Schlegel wrote in 1790, “I seek and find the romantic among the older moderns, in Shakespeare, in Cervantes, in Italian poetry, in that age of chivalry, love and fable, from which the phenomenon and the word itself are derived.”

The father of all Western poets, and perhaps still the greatest, was the 14th-century Florentine poet-diplomat Dante Alighieri. He remains the Christian poet par excellence, folding the experience of human love into a great division of Christian order: *The Divine Comedy*. Dante’s collection of reminiscences and poems, *La Vita Nuova* (“The New Life”), reports his first meeting with Beatrice at the age of nine with these enraptured words:

Nine times already since my birth the heaven of light had almost revolved to the self-same point when my mind’s glorious lady first appeared to my eyes, she who was called by many Beatrice (‘she who confers blessing’), by those who did not know what it meant to so name her. At that moment I say truly that the vital spirit, that which lives in the most secret chamber of the heart began to tremble so violently that I felt it fiercely in the least pulsation, and, trembling, it uttered these words: ‘Ecce deus fortior me, qui veniens dominabitur michi: Behold a god more powerful than I, who, coming, will rule over me.’ At that moment the animal spirit, that which lives in the high chamber to which all the spirits of the senses carry their perceptions, began to wonder deeply at it, and, speaking especially to the spirit of sight, spoke these words: ‘Apparuit iam beatitudo vestra: Now your blessedness appears.’

Beatrice reappears in Dante’s *Commedia*. In crisis “at the midpoint of our life,” Dante envisions a journey through hell, with col-

orful depictions of his contemporaries in torments that fit their sins. His guide through the Inferno is the Roman poet Virgil. He then passes through Purgatory and Paradise, for which he requires a more elevated guide, the spirit of Beatrice. The poet's unsullied, unselfish love for the girl he worshipped as a young man lifts him into Heaven. A similar concept of love is elaborated a generation after Dante by his countryman Petrarch in love sonnets inspired by the vision of an unattainable woman he called Laura. Petrarch struggles with the Christian concept of courtly love and desires of the flesh, and elaborated this contest in the form of sonnets that defined the poetic form.

At the conclusion of the Purgatory episode of the *Commedia*, Virgil—the noble pagan—can no longer guide Dante, and hands the poet over to the spirit of Beatrice. Dante sees the spirit of the erstwhile object of his earthly love, and compares himself to the disciples of Jesus who watched his transfiguration into a figure of light on the mountaintop (Matthew 17:1-9).

Beatrice tells Dante:

*“Here you shall be—awhile—a visitor;
but you shall be with me—and without end—
Rome’s citizen, the Rome in which Christ is
Roman.*

(Purgatory Canto 32, translated by Allen Mandelbaum)

Dante's pure love for the mortal Beatrice has a salvific character in Dante's story, for her spirit becomes his angelic guide through Heaven where he achieves a beatific vision beyond description:

*Then my mind was struck by light that flashed
and, with this light, received what it had asked.
Here force failed my high fantasy; but my
desire and will were moved already—like
a wheel revolving uniformly—by
the Love that moves the sun and the other stars.*

(Paradiso Canto 33)

That is the pinnacle of Christian literature, the participation of unrequited, unselfish human love in Divine love. It is a love untainted by the body and its desires. And it is radically different from covenantal love, which is a partnership between God and His peo-

ple. “The carnal election of Israel is not unconnected with Judaism’s view of the body. God chose to embrace a people in the fullness of its humanity. But this had to include the bodyness of this people alongside its national soul. God therefore loves the spirit and body of the people of Israel and it is for this reason that both are holy,” Michael Wyschogrod wrote.⁵

Christianity, by contrast, does not proclaim God’s love for a particular people, but invites the nations of the world to become children of Abraham of the spirit (Paul, Galatians 3:7) while keeping their gentile, ethnic identity. Christians (to cite Wyschogrod again) maintain a sort of dual nationality, with a spiritual membership in God’s People, a sort of spiritualized Israel, and a fleshly membership in their *gens*, the nation of their birth. In Christian self-understanding, the flesh is always in some way sinful, tainted by its gentile origin. In its purest form, Christian love must be spiritual rather than carnal. No Christian nation can see its flesh as a vessel for the *Shekhinah*, for that would exclude all other Christian nations. Thus the Christian concept of love that gives but asks nothing in return—the Greek neologism of the New Testament for this is *agape*—is integral Christian self-understanding. From the Gothic invasion of Italy in A.D. 401 to the defeat of the Magyars at Lech in 955 and the conversion of St. Vladimir in 1015, the Church brought the barbarians into Christian life not as individuals joining a self-styled new People of God, but as tribes brought into Christendom through conquest or alliance. As pagan tribes, the newly converted Christians had no claim on a special, covenantal love such as God showed to Israel. The pagans could not make themselves holy through the *Mitzvot*, and love God by cleaving to His will. They could only become the passive receptors of an ineffable grace, the *agapic* love that led the Christian God to sacrifice himself on the cross. Jews consider the body of the people of Israel to be holy, and honor its holiness in marital relations. Christianity from the beginning tended to separate body and soul, and considered sexual abstinence preferable to marriage.⁶

⁵ *The Body of Faith*, p. 177.

⁶ “It is good for a man not to marry... Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. But if they can-

Western civilization was the Catholic Church during its first thousand years, from the fall of Rome in 476 to Luther's rupture in 1517. Not until the end of the Thirty Years War in 1648 did the Church accept the sovereignty of non-Catholic rulers, and not until the Second Vatican Council half a century ago did the Church abandon the concept of a state religion. The civilization in which the Church was embedded existed only because a single Church rose above the welter of Roman remnants and barbarian invaders who inhabited Europe in the wake of Rome's fall. That is the nub of Hillaire Belloc's celebrated phrase "Europe is the faith, the faith is Europe."

The Church's concept of unmotivated, *agapic* love had a dark side. As R. Joseph Dov Soloveitchik wrote (in *And From There You Shall Seek*):

Pragmatically, fearing God precedes loving Him. Western metaphysical religious philosophy, born out of the union of the Greek eros and the Christian agape, says much about the plenitude of love for the spiritual and higher realms. But all its statements remain hollow utterances devoid of reality, because it has never understood fear in all its terrible essence. It therefore has often turned apostate and brought chaos to the world. From time to time, Satan has taken control over the realm of Western religiosity, and the forces of destruction have overcome the creative consciousness and defiled it.

It was scandalous, the Church thought, for the Jews to insist on a special relationship to God after the Catholic Church had come to offer salvation to all the nations equally. God's promises to Abraham, the Church insisted, had passed instead to the descendants of Abraham "of the spirit," namely Christians. Not until 1982 did Pope John Paul II speak of "the old covenant, never revoked" in recognition of God's special relationship to the Jewish people. To hate the Jews in the spirit of *agapic* love was a monstrous anomaly in Christian doctrine. The anti-Judaism of the Church, moreover, incubated ethnic ambitions on the part of its constituent nations.

not control themselves, for it is better to marry than to burn with lust" (I Corinthians 7).

As Franz Rosenzweig observed, once the gentile nations embraced Christianity, they abandoned their ancient fatalism regarding the inevitable extinction of their tribe. It is the God of Israel who first offers eternal life to humankind, and Christianity extended Israel's promise to all. But the nations that adhered to Christendom as tribes rather than as individuals never forswore their love for their own ethnicity. On the contrary, they longed for eternal life in their own gentile skin rather than in the Kingdom of God promised by Jesus. After Christianity taught them the election of Israel, the gentiles coveted election for themselves and each gentile nation strove to be the chosen nation, at the expense of Israel as well as every other gentile nation.

Christianity proposes absolutely unselfish love, a love of the spirit rather than a body, a love that asks nothing of the beloved. But the Christians too often preferred the old carnal love of tribe and nation to the insubstantial spiritualized love that Paul called *agape*. And this atavistic tribal love too often turned into a motive for the persecution of God's people Israel.

In an important way, modern literature begins as a response to this anomaly—the great gulf fixed between the *agape* preached by the Church and the Christians' residual love of their gentile flesh. The first great modern work was a distinctly Jewish critique of Christian hypocrisy, written just after the 1492 expulsion from Spain. It presented a withering critique of the Christian concept of Romantic love, and, by extension, of the flaws at the foundation of Christian society. *The Tragicomedy of Calixto and Melibea*, known simply as *La Celestina*, appeared in 1499; by 1506 it had been translated into Hebrew by a prominent Jewish poet. Its 23-year-old author, Fernando de Rojas, was a converso whose family had been persecuted by the Inquisition:

In 1485, when Rojas was only nine, some of his family living in Toledo (Rojas's aunts, uncles, and cousins surnamed Franco) appear to have been permanently dishonored as Judaizers by the Toledo Inquisition... an early captive of these procedures was a man named Alvaro de Montalban, who would later become Rojas's father-in-law... Alvaro was accused and found guilty of observing certain Jewish rituals, and also of violating the Catholic fast of Lent. At the same time as Alvaro's sentenc-

ing, his deceased parents were also found guilty of Judaizing. Their bodies were exhumed and burned... His father-in-law, who had been charged almost forty years earlier with breaking Lent, was brought before the Inquisition again in 1525, at almost seventy-five years of age. In this case he was charged with denying basic Christian doctrines... he named [as attorney] his son-in-law—"the Bachiller Fernando de Rojas, who is a converso," as his choice.⁷

La Celestina became the runaway bestseller of the 16th century, read by the entire literate world in every major language:

Rojas's work *Celestina* was so rapidly popular that numerous editions were produced almost immediately—the first edition was published in Burgos in 1499, with the second following in Toledo in 1500, the third in Seville in 1501, and the fourth in Salamanca in 1502. By the end of the sixteenth century, at least thirty editions had been published, with possibly as many as eighty. *Celestina*'s popularity was not confined to Spain alone. Translations were produced in Italian (1505), Hebrew (1507), German (1520), English (1525), and French (1527) during the lifetime of the author. Others followed after his death—Flemish (1550) and Latin (1624). By the mid seventeenth century the work had received at least fifty-eight translations (one into Latin, one into Hebrew, four into German, four into English, five into Flemish, nineteen into Italian, and twenty-four into French).⁸

Why did *La Celestina* fascinate the literate world for a century after its publication? The simple answer is that it told the truth about the character of Christian society at the threshold of modernity. A gentler (and ultimately more popular) critique came at the turn of the 17th century from Miguel Cervantes in *Don Quixote*. But nothing in modern literature had the cultural impact of de Rojas' work.

⁷ Shon Hopkins, "Joseph ben Samuel Tsarfati and Fernando de Rojas," doctoral dissertation (University of Texas at Austin, 2011).

⁸ Hopkins.

Celestina is perhaps the most frightful character ever to walk the Western stage. She is as courageous as she is evil, and brilliantly manipulative. Next to her, Shakespeare's Iago, or even Goethe's Mephistopheles, are mischievous schoolboys. Hired to help a young man seduce the socially superior girl he desires, Celestina sets events in motion that cause the death of the entire cast. As a genre, tragicomedy has its roots in antiquity, but in the modern world, the juxtaposition of comedic and horrific elements begins with De Rojas' gallows humor under the shadow of the Inquisition.

De Rojas created his anti-heroine in the image of the Spain that persecuted his family. The world he portrays is the opposite of Dante's harmonious order permeated by Divine love. It is at war with itself:

"It is the saying of that great and wise philosopher Heraclitus," he begins his introduction, that all things are created in manner of a contention or battle ... The stars encounter one another in the whirling firmament of heaven; your contrary elements wage war each with other; the earth, that trembles and quakes as if it were at odds with itself; the sea, that swells and rages, breaking its billows one against another; the air, that darteth arrows of lightning and is moved this way and that way; the flames, they crack, and sparkle forth their fury; the winds are at perpetual enmity with themselves; times with times do contend; one thing against another, and all against us... the very life of men, if we consider them from their first and tender age till they grow grey-headed, is nothing else but a battle. Children with their sports, boys with their books, young men with their pleasures, old men with a thousand sorts of infirmities, skirmish and war continually.⁹

The corrosive element that turns the world into a cockpit of perpetual strife, de Rojas argues, is romantic love. He has pulled Dante and the courtly poets inside out, turning the Christian ideal of love into an agency of destruction rather than (as in the *Commedia*) salvation. "Our country," he wrote by way of introduction, "needs the present work because of its multitude of young men in

⁹ From James Mabbe's 1631 translation.

love.” In a series of prefatory poems, de Rojas warns against romantic love. “You who love, take this example to heart, this piece of armor with which you may defend yourselves...forget the vices which have taken hold of us; do not trust in frivolous hopes...Ladies, matrons, young men, husbands, note well what happened to [Calixto and Melibea], and keep as a mirror the end to which they came. Clean your eyes which have erred so blindly...Do not let Cupid’s golden arrows pierce you.”

By 1506, Joseph ben Samuel Tsarfati, a prominent Hebrew poet, physician to the pope and leader of the Italian Jewish community, translated *La Celestina* into Hebrew. The translation itself is lost but an introductory poem survives. It begins by reiterating de Rojas’ warnings to lovers and then shifts suddenly to its true subject: the despoliation of the Spanish Jews fourteen years earlier by Isabella of Spain:

*How all the wise leaders of the people, like Calcol,
Sit ashamed robbed by the hand of a woman.
Destitute and barefoot they go by the thousands,
Scattered on every corner, they wander to and fro;
I will tell their tales, their vagabond ways, and their travails
As they suffer a heavy load, like that of thousands of mules,
When they stumble, wither, and perish
With burdens too heavy for them.¹⁰*

Tsarfati does not mention the Spanish queen by name, but Jews could have read these lines in no other way. The great Jewish tragedy of the time preoccupied the poet-physician. He addressed another poem “to the exiles of Spain who descended to Rome,” warning them to “go forth from the midst of the Amelekites,” and instructing them to “loathe the people of anger and decadence in every region of Rome and Italy before you are destroyed in their sin.”

De Rojas’ drama is a window into the soul of Amelek. The young nobleman Calixto is obsessed with Melibea, a young girl just past adolescence, to the point of idolatry; as he tells a servant, his religion is “Melibeism.” Both are from noble families, although it is clear from context that Melibea’s social status is more elevated. His

¹⁰ Translation by Hopkins.

first attempt to approach her in open country leads to a harsh rebuff. Despondent, Calixto takes the advice of a servant to seek the help of Celestina, who keeps a brothel, mixes love potions, and performs various unsavory functions. Celestina has access to Melibea's home as a purveyor of needles, thread and other sundries. She will have one chance to approach the young girl, at great personal risk, for if Melibea denounces her, the family will have her killed as a procuress. The old woman knows that Melibea is wary of Calixto and prepared for just such an approach, and that she is staking her life on the outcome. She is afraid, but her pride in her powers and native courage overcome her trepidation.

Celestina gains Melibea's confidence and sympathy by making the girl pity her age and poverty, and then tells her that she has come on behalf of Calixto. Melibea is about to denounce the old woman. But Celestina is prepared for her. She has come not as a lover's emissary but in a mission of mercy, to borrow from Melibea a relic that will help cure Calixto of a toothache. Her story seems so harmless, and so credible, that the girl falls for it, and lends her belt to the old woman to assuage Calixto's toothache. By appealing to the girl's kindness and religious faith, she plants a thought that soon will turn into passionate love. Disasters ensue that kill off the whole *dramatis personae*, including Celestina, who is killed by her servants when she tries to cheat them. After Calixto's death Melibea throws herself from a high window and dies before the eyes of her despairing father.

Spanish society with its illusions and hypocrisy is no match for Celestina, who has more intelligence and presence of mind than her social superiors. She manipulates the young girl's innocent emotions, and molds them into a violent and self-destructive passion. In the narrow sense, De Rojas' drama deals with emotions at the intimate level of personal encounter. In the broader sense, though, we should read it precisely as did Tsarfati, as a work of social criticism. The unselfish *agapic* love that Christianity proposes does not suffice; its complement is the carnal love of tribe and nation that erupted again and again through the history of the West, and repeatedly took the form of Jew-hatred. Unrequited, selfless courtly love expressed in the intimate sphere what *agape* expressed in the social realm. By the same token, carnal passion corresponds to the

brutal love of each nation for its own ethnicity. When Tsarfati writes in his introduction to *La Celestina*, “How all the wise leaders of the people, like Calcol/Sit ashamed robbed by the hand of a woman,” it seems clear that he is referring to Isabella of Spain. But the drama is not simply an allegory, a work of political criticism disguised as theater. It is a work of great art, in which weakness in the face of malevolent evil stems from the inner flaws of the characters.

A century later, Shakespeare invented similar characters. Othello’s nemesis Iago bears more than a passing resemblance to Celestina, while Romeo and Juliet recall Calixto and Melibea. Students should read the two Shakespeare plays in contrast to *La Celestina*. As a poet, Shakespeare’s sublime expressiveness is of an entirely different order, and the richness of his language transcends anything found in de Rojas. Shakespeare is a Christian; his world presumes an inherent order, in which disturbances (Othello’s jealousy, Romeo and Juliet’s passion) do their damage and then dissipate. De Rojas, by contrast, presents a diseased and disordered world in which a disturbance like the intervention of Celestina lays everything to waste.

Topic III. Evil and the Paradox of Salvation

Readings:

Tirso de Molina, *The Trickster of Seville*
Voltaire, *Candide*

Celestina’s literary grandson is Don Juan, the invention of Tirso de Molina, a Spanish monk from a family of converted Jews. If the 48 translations of *La Celestina* establish de Rojas’ tragicomedy as the great bestseller of the 17th century, Tirso’s drama and its imitators dominate the 17th and 18th centuries. One scholar lists 1,720 published variants on the theme since Tirso de Molina printed *The Trickster of Seville* in 1630. No other character in literary history has inspired so many versions. Like *Celestina*, it is also a tale of love, manipulation and violence that links the most intimate failings of its characters to the grand failings of society. Concealed in its puppet-theater plot is a Jewish joke: Don Juan exists to prove by construction that a devout Christian can be a sociopath, and by extension, that the Christian world can be ruled by sociopaths. For the

two centuries between Tirso and Byron's eponymous epic poem, Don Juan dominated the literary imagination like no other personage in history.

In a post-Christian world that has lost interest in the problem of sin and salvation, Don Juan is passé. By 1821, when Juan appears in Byron's eponymous masterwork, Juan was on his farewell tour. E.T.A. Hoffman's and Kierkegaard's fascination with the subject is a response to Mozart's astonishing music, not to the literary theme. Baudelaire's poem "Don Juan in Hell" and Shaw's intermezzo of the same title make Juan into a defiant hero. Juan held the audience of the 17th and 18th centuries in thrall, because he personified the Christian world's foreboding about its own vulnerability. Tirso's trickster poses an impossible paradox for the Christian concept of salvation: The story is not about eros, but evil. Christian society is founded on the premise that it requires "only one precept," as St. Augustine put it: "Love, and do as you will." Once humankind accepts the utterly unselfish love of Jesus Christ, Christianity asserts, the elaborate body of Jewish law becomes redundant, for Christian love will elicit the right behavior spontaneously.

The trouble, Tirso demonstrates, is that society that depends on conscience has no defense against a sociopath who has none. Don Juan is a predator inside the Christian world with no natural enemies. Juan enjoys murdering the male relatives of his female victims almost as much he enjoys seducing the women. To the extent that we can speak of Juan's descendants in today's fiction, they are not so much lovers as serial killers.

Tirso's theological mousetrap had more than hypothetical importance for the audience of 1630, a dozen years into the Thirty Years War that would ruin the Spanish Empire and kill not quite half of central Europe's population. His world was infested with sociopaths in positions of power, including Spain's King Philip IV, one of whose illegitimate sons would eventually stage a coup against the legitimate heir to the Spanish throne. Philip makes an appearance in *The Trickster of Seville*, lightly disguised as the 14th-century king Alfonso XI, who also peopled the Spanish royal line with bastards. Alfonso's bastard son, Henry of Trastámara, incited Jew-hatred to overthrow his more tolerant half-brother, the legitimate heir Pedro I of Castile. Henry led the massacre of 12,000 Spanish

Jews in Toledo on May 7, 1335. The Jews had fought alongside Pedro in a prolonged civil war and suffered horribly after Henry won and beheaded his brother with the words: “Where is that son-of-a-whore Jew who calls himself King of Castile?”¹¹

Tirso drives the paradox still deeper. The original Don Juan of the Spanish Golden Age is a believing Catholic, who has no doubt that repentance and forgiveness through the Church can save his soul: For that reason he can devote his youth to evil and repent sometime later. “You’re giving me plenty of time to pay up!” (“que largo me lo fiais”), he mocks whomever urges him to repent and save his soul. (A variant of *The Trickster of Seville* was published under the title *Que largo me fiais*, making clear that the play hinges on Juan’s twisted but orthodox theology.)

Juan’s servant Catalinón (Leporello in Mozart’s opera) warns him that even a long life is short, and sin will be punished. “If you give me so much time to pay up,” Juan replies brightly, “let the tricks continue!” Besides, he adds, his father is the king’s favorite. Christianity, as Tirso observes, can produce a monster who does nothing but evil precisely because he believes in Heaven, hell, and the sacraments of the Church. Tirso might have had *Kobelet* 8:11 in mind: “Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.” But Christian reliance on the Attribute of Mercy at the expense of the Attribute of Justice, as the theologian Michael Wyschogrod puts it, frees Juan to formulate a sociopath’s theory of salvation.

Tirso’s critique of Christianity follows the rabbinic reading. As Rav Joseph Dov Soloveitchik puts it, “Subjective faith, lacking commands and laws, faith of the sort that Saul of Tarsus spoke about—even if it dresses itself up as the love of God and man—cannot stand fast if it contains no explicit commands to do good deeds, to fulfill specific commandments not always approved by rationality and culture.” In Don Juan, the Christian world saw its own susceptibility to chaos. That is why the European audience could not take its eyes off him for 200 years.

¹¹ “Historia social, política y religiosa de los judíos de España,” by José Amador de los Ríos (T. Fortanet, 1876), p. 254

No writer portrayed this chaos and its theological sources more vividly than Tirso. The usual account of Don Juan and his 1,719 literary imitations reduces Tirso's brilliant and complex play to a simple-minded morality lesson. Christian critics do not seem to grasp how great and enduring was the pain of the Spanish Jews; even worse, they evince a deaf ear for Jewish irony. *The Trickster* is a Jewish joke, and the critics don't get it. The theologian David Bentley Hart, for example, wrote recently that "Juan was the greatest immoralist of European literature precisely because he served as the negative image of the moral convictions and capacities of his time and place, the exemplary contradiction of an entire and coherent vision of the good, whose story magically combined a certain nostalgia for fading cultural certitudes with a certain cynicism toward them."

Tirso drew on folk tales in which a living person invites a dead man to dinner and perishes when the invitation is returned. But Juan is not an archetype of legend: He is a metaphysical construct unique to his time, and to the tragedy of the Spanish Jews. He is a devout believer who has figured out that the system entitles him to be thoroughly evil for the interim. His existence points up the hypocrisy around him; because the Christian world cannot deal with this monster, it must accommodate him. Both *Celestina* and *Don Juan* haunted the literary imagination with the same message: Your world is badly made, and it will come to a horrible end.

Don Juan fascinated a Europe with the paradox of Christian faith. A century later, the 18th-century skeptic Voltaire fascinated a world that had lost its faith. After Tirso's work and its many imitators, the next story that the whole literary world read was his 1769 novel *Candide*. The eponymous hero wanders through sundry disasters of mid-18th-century Europe, under the tutelage of "Dr. Pangloss," a lampoon of the philosopher-mathematician Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, who reassures him after each mishap that this is "the best of all possible worlds." This is a caricature of Leibniz's views, but in general Voltaire's critique is accurate.

Candide finds himself in Lisbon during the 1755 earthquake that leveled the city, killing up to 100,000 people. Untold thousands more perished along the Mediterranean coast. No matter, Dr. Pangloss explains after their narrow escape: If we hadn't gone

through the earthquake, we wouldn't be sitting here now eating strawberries. Voltaire taunted the theologians with this question: How could a benevolent and omnipotent God slaughter so many innocents at random? If this is the best of all possible worlds (as Leibniz maintained), because a good God would not create a worse one, why do such awful things happen? That is one trouble with the so-called clockmaker's argument, one of the five classic proofs for the existence of God cited by St. Thomas Aquinas. The workings of nature are so complex and perfect, the argument states, that they bespeak a design, and a design must have a designer. The trouble is that the same clock seems to set off a bomb at random intervals.

But there is another way of thinking about man's relationship to nature, emphasized in rabbinic Judaism and espoused eloquently by Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveitchik: God made an imperfect world and gave the task of improving it to his junior partner in Creation, humankind. As Rabbi Soloveitchik observed, the final perfection of nature is a messianic vision: In the prayers for the New Moon, for example, Jews look to the day when God will restore the moon to parity with the sun. But there is a great deal to do in the meantime. Man is not the passive victim of earthquake, flood, famine or disease. We can build defenses against natural disasters, cure disease, and eliminate hunger. Whatever harm might befall us today we can change our destiny in the future. God does not reveal his infinite mind to us, except through an infinite procession of discoveries, to which we are led by intuition, or, if you will, inspiration.

We are not the passive victims of nature. We strive to establish human dignity by mastering nature. We are neither gods who can grasp the infinite mind of the God of Creation, nor mere animals for whom evolution is destiny. We do not need to worry whether there is an Intelligent Design, nor whether we might grasp such a design if it indeed exists: As creative beings, we are part of the design. We do not know the full scope of the design, because we do not know what we have yet to accomplish. God does not need us to justify His position as creator; our task is nobler, and incomparably more challenging, namely, actually to advance His work of Creation.

The Christian concept of *agapic* love cannot account for evil, either in the form of human malevolence or natural disaster. Western

literature comes into being as an allegorical representation of Divine order founded on *agapic* love (Dante). Modern literature begins as a critique of romantic love (de Rojas) and the susceptibility of the Christian order to evil (Tirso de Molina). The literature of the Enlightenment is a weapon turned against faith itself. **For Jews, the point is not to admire the accomplishments of the West, but to assess their contributions and failures from the autonomous vantage point of Judaism's own high culture of Torah. ❧**