I feel obliged to begin by explaining a point of literary culture that will be self-evident to any literate Hebrew reader but that may be slightly perplexing to anybody else. The Bible, though standing at a remove of two and a half to three millennia from the contemporary world, remains a potent presence in Hebrew poetry. Perhaps the closest analogy in English would be Shakespeare, though there is, I think, a difference at least in degree. Admittedly, biblical literacy in Israel and therefore engagement in the Bible are not what they once were, but the Bible is still the strong and perennially relevant foundation on which subsequent strata of Hebrew expression have been constructed. There are obviously many Hebrew poets now, minimalist or otherwise, who avoid any reference to the Bible, yet one suspects that it takes a certain conscious resolve to do so. It is hard, writing in Hebrew, to think about outrageous or unreasonable sacrifice without referring to the Binding of Isaac; to contemplate the futility of human endeavor without alluding to Ecclesiastes; to celebrate the joy of erotic experience without recalling the Song of Songs; to confront the manifest injustice of the world order and its terrible toll of undeserved suffering without invoking Job. A literary person in Israel of course may be moved by all sorts of writers outside the framework of Hebrew tradition, from Homer to Proust to Faulkner. Accessible in his or her own language, however, are the Psalms, the great narrative of David, the poetry of Isaiah, and much else – all of which is as good as it gets in any literature. There are, one must concede, some hindrances, but for the most part only minor ones, to this linguistic accessibility. I would say that the distance between the language of the Bible and modern Hebrew is roughly like that between Elizabethan and modern English. There is a vast wealth of vocabulary that the language has acquired after the Bible, from the rabbinic period to the day before yesterday. The grammar is slightly different, and some biblical words have changed in meaning. The verb that in modern Hebrew means “to think,” for example, in the Bible means “to plan” or “to devise”; so a contemporary reader could misconstrue certain statements, just as a contemporary English reader might think that “meat” in Shakespeare was something bought from a butcher and not a general word for food. Notwithstanding such bits of static in the transmission of the biblical language to the modern ear, a Hebrew poet in the twentieth century or even in the twenty-first can read, say, the sublime celebration of creation that is Psalm 8 or the somber, mesmerizing prose-poem that begins Ecclesiastes and be immediately moved by its language, perhaps even drawn to use it in some way.
It is instructive that the generation of Hebrew poets who became active in the 1950s, though they had agendas that might have led them away from the Bible, reverted to it with surprising frequency. This is true of Natan Zach, whose role in the literary scene I will explain momentarily; it is true of Dalia Ravikovich; it is true of early and late Yehuda Amichai, who at the end of his career devoted an entire section of his final volume of poetry to contending with the Bible.

Natan Zach has long been a cultural eminence in Israel (in one of the poems we will look at, he even describes himself as having been enlisted, despite himself, as a national prophet), but he is a relatively unfamiliar figure elsewhere, so a few words of introduction are in order. He was born in Berlin, in 1930, and came with his parents to Palestine in 1935. (It is an odd coincidence, strictly the product of the historical circumstances of those years, that three of the leading poets of this generation – Zach, Amichai, and Dan Pagis – were native speakers of German.) At the beginning of the 1950s, he was part of a small group of young poets self-designated as Likrat ("Toward") that aimed to bring about a revolution in Hebrew verse. The poets who had been dominant in the 1930s and 1940s characteristically cultivated a high literary Hebrew, often exhibiting ingenious linguistic artifice, and favored metrically regular rhyming forms, influenced by Russian models. The Likrat poets, by contrast, enamored of Anglo-American modernist verse, aspired to make Hebrew poetry colloquial, in touch with the sounds and rhythms and lexicon of everyday life, in modes that were understated and ironic rather than rhetorical. Zach’s role in Likrat, and in the years after its brief lifespan, was that of literary ideologue, sometimes excoriating the poets of the previous generation, and articulating a poetic agenda. He seems to have aspired to be a kind of Ezra Pound for his fellow modernizing poets and even claimed, against all evidence, to have been the mentor in style of Amichai, who would prove to be by far the greatest poet to emerge from this group. Zach himself has been a prolific poet over the years (his collected works take up three large volumes) but it is my candid opinion that much of the poetry is rather mediocre. Some of his poems, like many of Amichai’s, have entered Israeli popular culture by being set to music; most of his poetic production strikes me as uninspired, however, more self-consciously willed than poetically imagined. In my view, he has been more a figure in Israeli poetry than a poet of the first order.

Yet Zach’s engagement with the Bible has generated several of his most deeply interesting poems. It may not be an entirely anticipated engagement in a poet who advocated a vernacular idiom and sought to follow the path of Eliot, Pound, and Auden. Unlike Amichai, whose relation to the Bible is usually expressed through allusion and sometimes a kind of creative exegesis (often
pointedly heterodox), Zach is more drawn to rewriting the biblical texts as a mode of personal expression. The three poems about Job that I would like to consider manifest three rather different ways of treating the biblical materials.

“For Job It Was a One-Time Thing” carries out a strategy that has often been deployed by the Anglo-American modernists in relating to classical texts. One might think of Eliot’s “Sweeney Among the Nightingales,” in which Aeschylus’s Agamemnon is invoked in the Greek epigraph and in the final stanza; in this poem, however, the high dignity of Greek tragedy has been reduced to vulgar figures in a sordid setting – some sort of cheap pub – and Clytemnestra’s modern avatar, “Rachel née Rabinowitz,” is an animalistic creature that “Tears at the grapes with murderous paws.” (The anti-Semitic innuendo is part of the contrast Eliot intends between lofty Greek tragedy and a fallen modern reality infested by vile Jews.) In Zach’s poem, the aggressively colloquial diction, reflecting the speaker’s modern, very post-biblical location, is flaunted from beginning to end.

For Job It Was a One-time Thing

For Job it was a one-time thing
While he was yet speaking, there came also another
first the cattle, then the camels and the sons and the daughters,
what can you say, good healthy blows.
Then came the eternal debates,
the claims and the blames, and the promises, the promises.

For me it’s not so dramatic.
A tiny blow in the morning, sometimes just
a slap or an accidental tap.
Sometimes even a glitch, not divine.
And a little bruise, sometimes a black eye
or just sight problems, or forms,
or a landlord, work, or letters, a wife, in the evening.
And on Friday two blows, to pay your dues,
and on Saturday you rest and recover.

Once I was in another land,
where no one knew my name,
and God and the Adversary didn’t compete over my righteousness
and altogether nobody made a fuss, no breach and no shouting, and
it was a bit boring but wonderful. And everything was
okay but not as it should be. And I returned to my place
and, look, I’m a prophet,
a nationalized Jobchik kicking and screaming
me me.

The italicized second line, of course, is a quotation from the point in the frame-story of Job when the messengers appear, each bearing successive ill tidings.
Everything else in the language of the poem, with one additional exception, is flaunted vernacular. The flaunting begins with the very first word, etsel, which is slightly lower in register than my English equivalent “for” and reflects a colloquial usage that derives from the homey Yiddish bei. The same register, of course, is manifested in “a one-time thing” (had-pa’ami). The opening line also nicely articulates a sharp contrast between two different orders of time: Job, a figure in a memorable literary narrative, moves through the linear time of a clear-cut plot in which one thing follows another until a resolution is finally achieved. His dreadful suffering occurs in a quick sequence of catastrophic events, triggering his debate with the three comforters, and then is reversed in the restoration of his fortunes at the end of the story. For the speaker of the poem, however, misery is both habitual and trivial, and time a cycle of banal repetitions. Instead of a catastrophic “blow” – in the Bible, makah often implies lethal force and is also a term for “plague” – what he receives is a makon-et, “blow” with a diminutive suffix, represented in my translation as “tiny blow” because of the difficulty in English with diminutive endings. The suffering of Job’s modern counterpart is a matter of routine – an annoying bump here or there, sight problems, landlords, paperwork, domestic difficulties.

The generalized modern ordinary man of the first two verse-paragraphs becomes explicitly autobiographical in the final one. Zach is no doubt alluding to his extended stay in England in the 1960s, some of it in the provinces. There he enjoyed the comfort of anonymity, being off-stage both from cosmic drama where Job’s fate was played out and from Israeli culture. In this setting, “nobody made a fuss” (more literally, “bothered,” hitrid), and, in the poem’s other biblical citation, there was “no breach and no shouting” (Psalm 144:14). Not being the object of divine or human attention was obviously something of a relief, yet it also left the speaker with a sense of lack of reality – “everything was okay but not as it should be.” The place to which he returns is of course Israel, where he finds himself a recognized cultural figure, a kind of prophet despite himself, “a nationalized Jobchik” – not Job, with his one-time suffering etched in narrative, but a Job with a comic diminutive suffix, a pygmy Job whose pain is devoid of dignity or drama. The biblical Job is an exemplary figure of human suffering. His diminished modern counterpart, dragged by his heels into the public arena, merely wants to be himself, to be left alone with his petty miseries, bearing no message, prophetic or otherwise, simply yelling “me me.”

The second Zach poem I will consider, “Sometimes He Misses,” does not trace the familiar modernist antithesis between contemporary reality and foundational text but instead expresses a relation to the biblical story that one can call midrashic. In keeping with this aim, the language of the poem is not
flaunted colloquial, like that of “For Job It Was a One-Time Thing”; instead it exhibits a kind of modern middle diction, more literary than vernacular, in which the bits of biblical citations and echoes are seamlessly integrated rather than standing out in sharp contrast. It is worth noting that the biblical intertext for this poem is exclusively the frame-story of Job, not the debate and complaint against God that make up the poetic body of the book.

**Sometimes He Misses**

Sometimes God misses    
His sweet servant Job. But he’s dead.    
Job is now far from God    
as from other things, angels.    
What should God do?    

He’s reading – believe it or not –    
in Psalms. He still doesn’t know it by heart,    
and the words there are so soothing:    
so many poems.

A great and wide sea and numberless    
beasts great and small    
and trees, lots of trees, and always water.

*There is no darkness nor shadow of death,*    
He recites to Himself in a faint voice    
and then remembers something in loving rebuke:    
God is already weeping,    
refusing to be consoled, He has no consolation    
for His sweet servant Job, the sweetest of servants,    
each of whose eyeballs was like an Eden,    
there’s been none like His servant Job, to this day, in all times.

We recall that in the frame-story God repeatedly refers to Job, with pride and satisfaction, as “My servant Job,” both in His initial exchanges with the Adversary and in His closing affirmation of Job’s righteousness. Yet the God of the biblical story remains a remote and rather enigmatic figure. If He is so pleased with His devoted servant, why does He agree to the perverse wager that the Adversary proposes? What does He feel about the hideous chain of afflictions that the man He supposedly cherishes is made to undergo? Biblical narrative in general famously abounds in unexplained gaps, a trait spectacularly evident in the frame-story of Job. One of the characteristic operations of midrash is to fill in these gaps, thereby offering explanation and motivation where none is provided, thereby fleshing out what is unstated in the biblical text. In Zach’s poem, this process of filling in the gaps begins when the seemingly unfeeling God of the biblical tale is said at the outset to “miss” (or “long for”) Job; in the
next line the poet inserts the adjective “sweet” into the biblical epithet “My servant Job.” An implicit problem in the biblical book is the immense distance between God and Job. (The Zelda poem, as we shall see, highlights this feature.) Determinations about Job’s fate are made in the celestial assembly far above him, of which he cannot have the slightest inkling. In the poetic body of the book, God does not answer any of Job’s complaints and accusations until His thundering speech from the whirlwind, which is hardly an intimate response.

The God of Zach’s poem does not express remorse or sorrow over Job’s sufferings but rather painful regret that Job has died, as all people must. God, it seems, has missed an opportunity, as most of us do in our loving relationships: when Job was with Him, He could have been close to His sweet servant; on the evidence of the biblical text, however, He failed to do so. Now Job is gone, and God, who for better or for worse is immortal, struggles to come to terms with the loss. The fitting – and also amusing – source of consolation He seeks is Psalms, another of the various books He has inspired, though He confesses that He does not yet know it by heart. At this point, the poem glides smoothly into quotation and reminiscence of the biblical book in question. God reads a verse from the great panoramic ode to creation that is Psalm 104 – in the King James Version of verse 24, cited here, “this great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts.” Perhaps if He can no longer enjoy the presence of Job, He can at least contemplate the teeming riches of the wonderful creation He has made. The many trees invoked recall the trees of the forest that in other psalms sing out joyously, just as the water alludes both to the streams, in the very first psalm, by which the flourishing tree of the righteous is planted, and to the repeated references to the breakers of the sea, over which God holds sway.

The concluding verse-paragraph begins with a quotation not from the Book of Psalms (which God has been reading) but from Job 34:22: there is no darkness nor shadow of death. In a strategy not uncommon in classical midrash, these words are recontextualized to mean something quite different from what they mean in their biblical source. The entire verse in Job reads: “There is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.” Zach, omitting the latter part of the verse, represents the bereaved God as seeking in the biblical words a consoling notion that death will have no dominion. God’s voice, however, is faint – He really doesn’t believe it. In a crescendo of repetitions of the loving epithet, Job at the end is not only a sweet servant but “the sweetest of servants.” His preciousness to God is concretized in the penultimate line, “each of whose eyeballs was like an Eden.” This slightly odd locution is probably a transmogrification of an idiom, found in both
Hebrew and English, for great affection (kevavat eyno, “like the apple of his eye”) and is encouraged by the paired alliterations of galgal ayin and gan adanim, which my translation tries to emulate with each / eyeballs / Eden.

In the end, the gap in the biblical text that Zach’s poem fills is not a matter of explanatory detail or motivation but an emotional gap. He transforms the remote God of the Book of Job into a compassionate, loving God. This deity, however, is not a loving God in any Christian sense but instead a thoroughly humanized figure. If in fact He had great feelings of fondness (not expressed biblically) for His servant Job, He now is inconsolable in missing him, just as we ordinary humans are when we have lost a loved one, with the added anguish that He will go on missing Job forever because, unlike the flesh-and-blood bereaved, His existence is without end.

If the first of these three Zach poems is colloquial and the second cast in middle diction, the third is entirely biblical. Indeed, it presents a limit-case for literary allusion, for its twelve lines contain not a single word that is not a quotation from the Bible – specifically, from Psalms, Genesis, and Job. What is remarkable is that through the simple strategy of repetition, syntactic variation, and interweaving three biblical texts Zach has created a haunting original poem.

**Man As the Grass His Days**

Man as the grass his days.
His days as the grass.
The days of man as the grass
his days.
Fear not.

Man unto trouble is born.
Is born unto trouble.
Man is born unto trouble
is born.
Fear not.

And the sparks fly upward.
Upward the sparks.

My translation throughout uses the phrasing of the King James Bible, the English version most familiar to readers of a literary bent. The Hebrew, one should say, is more arrestingly compact than the English, a reflection of the powerful concision of biblical Hebrew that is difficult to reproduce in any modern Western language. The poem’s first line, just three words in the Hebrew, is taken from Psalms 103:15; withering grass as an image of ephemerality is a poetic commonplace in the Bible and occurs with slightly different wording in Isaiah
and elsewhere. The next verse in Psalm 103 continues this somber meditation on the frailty and brevity of life: “For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.” The poem’s second, third, and fourth lines each repeat the first, merely changing the order of the words. The effect is to transform the three biblical words initially cited into a kind of mantra on mortality: the poem turns “man,” “days,” and “grass” round and round in a mesmerizing spell, making the reader deeply absorb their message of human transience. The two words of the fifth line introduce a counterpoint. “Fear not,” al tiyra, appears numerous times in the Bible, usually spoken by God in reassurance to a human being. Its first occurrence is in Genesis 15:1: “Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield.” The speaker, confronted through the text from Psalms by the bleak terror of mortality, seeks, perhaps desperately, for consolation in these two reassuring words found in other biblical texts.

The phrases from Psalms and Genesis are then juxtaposed, for the remaining seven lines of the poem, with a verse from Job (5:7): “Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.” This, of course, is still another unsettling image of man’s existential plight. Zach again uses the strategy of repetition to produce an almost hypnotic intensification of the already somber biblical words. “Trouble” is repeated three times and “is born” (one word in the original Hebrew) four times, the fourth coming at the end of the sequence; these repetitions invite us to focus on the ill-starred condition of being born, the entering from the womb into the cycle of futility and mortality that is the lot of humankind. This bleak perspective, like the one from Psalms, also needs the urgent counterpoint of “Fear not.” The poem’s final two lines pick up the second part of the verse from Job. There may be an implicit linkage between the image of sparks and the image of grass – flying sparks can ignite withering grass – so that the metaphors combined transfigure human transience and trouble into an altogether combustible condition. The penultimate line is an exact quotation of Job, with the miniscule difference that instead of “as,” ke, Zach uses “and,” ve. Then in the final line he once more turns around the syntax, eliminating the verb “fly,” uf. The effect is slightly disorienting: the sparks rise up (yagbihu), but are denied actual flight; the poem’s final image is disembodied sparks rising into the void.

The decision to weave “Man As the Grass His Days” entirely from phrases from the Bible is an unusual one, yet its execution is a tour de force. It places the Book of Job, with its dark sense of suffering as humanity’s ineluctable fate, in dialogue with the psalmist’s notion of the ephemerality of human life, and then strives to set God’s two-word assurance to His chosen ones against both of these. By emphatic, artful repetition, the chasm between the biblical texts and the modern reader is bridged: the biblical words that constitute the poem become both the poet’s and ours as readers of the poem.
Zach, as I have indicated, is a perfectly secular poet to whom the Bible, and the Book of Job in particular, speaks strongly in a variety of ways. I would now like to take up the instructive counter-example of a seriously devout poet who also proves to be a boldly challenging reader of Job. Zelda (born Zelda Schneerson) (1914–1984) was from a distinguished Hasidic family; she was a cousin of Zalman Schneerson, the Lubavitcher rebbbe, some of whose followers consider him, even after his death, to be the messiah. Though I doubt that Zelda ever entertained such notions about her cousin, she certainly remained a pious ultra-Orthodox woman all her life. She was also a remarkable poet, with a sensibility that often seems daringly modern – not what one usually thinks of as Orthodox. It is revelatory that Amos Oz, in his autobiographical *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, reports that when she was his teacher in a religious elementary school in Jerusalem, she took him aside, recognizing him as a student with literary gifts, and would read with him works by Uri Zvi Greenberg and other Hebrew modernist poets. She also had no difficulty in befriending the younger feminist poet Yona Wallach, famous, among other things, for writing an erotic poem that involved the paraphernalia of male prayer in the act of sex.

Unlike the Zach poems, there are no quotations from Job in Zelda’s “Be Not Far”; indeed, there is no unambiguous indication that the poem has anything to do with Job until the revelation in the final line makes clear that the entire poem is a profound and illuminating response to the biblical book.

**Be Not Far**

The comforters come into the outer
court
standing by the gate
that faces the valley of the shadow of death
and its terror all around.
To stand by the gate is all
the comforters can bear.
My soul, too, is thousands of leagues
from the self of the weeper. A divine decree.

Creator of nights and wind,
is not this terrible weeping before You,
be not far –
let not millions of light years
stand as a barrier
between You and Job.

The first word of the poem, *hamenahamim*, “the comforters,” provides a minimal clue about its the relation to Job. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar are not ex-
plicitly termed comforters in the Bible but rather *re'im*, “companions” or “friends.” But they are linked with the verb “to comfort” when they first come to visit Job after the disasters that befall him. In any case, the initial setting of the poem looks distinctly contemporary, not something from the land of Uz. The house, with its outer court surrounded by a gated wall, sounds like the sort one would find in Meah Shearim, the prominent ultra-Orthodox quarter in Jerusalem. The speaker of the poem, evidently standing outside and looking at the comforters, who appear to have come to the home of the bereaved in observance of the mourning practice of *shivah*, is herself part of this contemporary scene.

In the fourth and fifth line, however, Zelda effects one of the startling shifts of perspective that characterize much of her poetry. Beyond the gate there may or may not be an actual valley, but here it becomes a mythic vista, “the valley of the shadow of death / and its terror all around.” The term for “terror,” *eimah*, is more than mere fear, and is associated in biblical usage with the awesome might of the deity and with the panic-inducing fright of devastating defeat and death. We then return to the comforters, their hesitation in standing at the gate an expression of their incapacity to cross the chasm and enter into the anguish of the bereaved person. Here we might well begin to think of Job’s comforters and their abysmal failure to understand what he has undergone.

At this point, the speaker of the poem explicitly introduces herself, defining her distance from the mourner – pointedly, he is not called this but rather is identified as someone weeping – not as the distance from the gate to the house but, psychologically and emotionally, as thousands of leagues. (The Hebrew term used here inscribes a small but effective midrashic gesture, amplifying the mythic thrust of the poem, because *parsa'ot*, “parasangs,” which I have rendered as “leagues,” has a distinctive coloration of early rabbinic literature.) The phrase at the end of the first verse-paragraph, “A divine decree,” *gezeirah hi*, points to a kind of theological nuance in this remarkably efficient and concise poetic vehicle. It is how a pious person would say, “Well, that’s the way things are.” The problem is that there is something disturbing about the way things are as, presumably, God has determined them to be. Built into human nature itself, as the speaker painfully realizes through unflinching introspection, is a kind of monadic egoism. We may aspire to deep empathy with others in their suffering, but each of us is imprisoned in his or her own self, unable to bridge the gap, despite the best of intentions, between self and other. If this is how God has decreed things to be, one might be drawn to question the decree. This sort of questioning returns us to the Book of Job, to the behavior of the comforters and to God’s own seeming impassivity. The second verse-paragraph then turns directly to God.
Zelda’s phrasing in the first three lines of her address to God reflects the ease with which she works with traditional Hebrew while making it something quite new. The words of the poem’s title, *al tirhaq*, “be not far,” occur frequently in psalms of supplication (again, I offer them in the King James Version) as the expression of a desperate sense of abandonment by God, and here that feeling of God’s being far away is given startling poetic realization. “Creator of nights and wind,” *yotseir leyot varuah* (the last word could also mean “spirit”) sounds biblical, but it is biblical with important differences. It appears to build on an epithet for God in Amos 4:13, *yotseir harim uvorei’ ruah*, “shaper of mountains and creator of wind.” In the poem, however, instead of “mountains” we have “nights” in the plural – not the night that with day constitutes the diurnal cycle but the nights when each of us is alone with his or her fears and grief. The full force of “the weeper” at the end of the first verse-paragraph now becomes evident: the speaker, standing by or outside the gate, has been hearing a terrible sound of weeping from within the house. Can God, who we are told is merciful, remain distant from this intolerable suffering? The speaker’s sense of her distance, and that of the comforters, from the mourner’s anguish is in the poem’s second movement extrapolated to God’s apparent distance. Another small verbal choice brilliantly articulates the distance: the speaker’s removal at thousands of leagues becomes the divine removal at millions of light years. Here, the midrashic and biblical frame of reference explodes into a modern scientific vision of a vast cosmos millions of light years in breadth.

The end of the poem, where Job’s name finally appears, offers a searching perception of the biblical text. In the poetic debate, Job’s anger and anguish are repeatedly focused on his feeling that God remains remote from him in his suffering. He would like to confront God face to face, to exact from Him some answer, judicial or otherwise, about why he has been subjected to such catastrophes. In Zelda’s reading, God has interposed a barrier of millions of light years between Himself and Job – and, by implication, between Himself and every human sufferer – and the speaker, invoking the two-word phrase from the psalms of supplication, implores God to cross that terrible distance. It is hard to imagine how a biblical text could be put to more powerful use: the poet makes Job’s comforters into an image of the distance between the present-day comforters and herself and the bereaved person’s grief; identifying with Job, she picks up Job’s desperate sense of a vast unspannable chasm between himself and the God whom he feels must somehow be responsible for what has befallen him.

It should be evident from these examples how the Book of Job – the plot of its frame-story, the substance of its poetic argument, bits of its language – becomes a rich resource for both these modern Hebrew poets. Intertextuality,
moreover, as has often been observed, is a two-way street. The poets, exploiting the biblical text in unanticipated ways, also end up throwing light on it. Job has been the object of endless philological analysis and of literary and theological interpretation, some of it even instructive. Yet one might argue that certain aspects of the ancient text become most urgently alive through the modern literary remakings of it. In the exemplary instance of *Moby-Dick*, Melville understood – and made us see – with far greater penetration than the scholars the radical implications of the rejection in Job of the anthropocentric view of creation. Zach’s three poems respectively illuminate the contrast between the high drama of Job’s suffering and the banality of our everyday equivalent; the missing element of divine compassion in God’s reported relationship with His favored servant; and the full, frightening power of the Job poet’s vision of human life as relentless trouble, transience, and instability. Zelda’s poem helps us to understand more keenly the existential isolation that is inseparable from Job’s suffering: the friends who ostensibly come to console him have no access to his zone of anguish, and the God to whom he addresses his pleas remains remote, hidden, inscrutable. Any foundational literary work continues to live most amply in its imaginative interpretations and transformations by subsequent writers. These two modern Hebrew poets, who directly engage the Book of Job in its original language, make that vividly clear in their respective poems.