

# The Alphabet

BY KARL SHAPIRO

The letters of the Jews as strict as flames  
Or little terrible flowers lean  
Stubbornly upwards through the perfect ages,  
Singing through solid stone the sacred names.  
The letters of the Jews are black and clean  
And lie in chain-line over Christian pages.  
The chosen letters bristle like barbed wire  
That hedge the flesh of man,  
Twisting and tightening the book that warns.  
These words, this burning bush, this flickering pyre  
Unsacrifices the bled son of man  
Yet plaits his crown of thorns.

Where go the tipsy idols of the Roman  
Past synagogues of patient time,  
Where go the sisters of the gothic rose,  
Where go the blue eyes of the Polish women  
Pas the almost natural crime,  
Past the still speaking embers of ghettos,  
There rise the tinder flowers of the Jews.  
The letters of the Jews are dancing knives  
That carve the heart of darkness seven ways.

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