

There are no pianos in Hell
(For Stephen Klein, 1955-1994)

There are no pianos in Hell.
Hell's only music is
the cacophony of those who claim to be holy
in the midst of the belly of God,
but who never knew your music because
there are no pianos in Hell.

If truth be told, there is only muzak in Hell
and the pallid theology
of those convinced they are saved,
those satisfied on self who sit before immense t.v. screens
watching the reruns of a life lived without forgiveness
in the day room of a poorly decorated Hell.

There are many things in Hell:
old handguns, diaphragms and condoms without passion,
cigarette burns, torturers of animals and children.
But there is not a single musician there,
because God himself forgives those who sing to him.
A song of beauty, any song, raises up those who reside in Hell.

I summon up a lengthy litany of those who aren't in Hell:
Ellington and Monk, Joni Mitchell (even if she's still alive).
And it goes without saying that Hayden and Bach are both above
Scoring pieces for the harp and harpsichord.
You loved their music and you taught me how to listen well
If I wished to avoid living in a private Hell.

They say that sinners writhe in Hell,
But I submit that they are wrong.
What does it mean to love the sinner
and to hate the sin?
It's just a poor excuse to go on hating
those we wish would burn in Hell.

When one man loves another, that can be Hell,
if one keeps silent and the other doesn't know.
Forty years ago I loved a pretty girl and you?
I suspect that you loved me.
We read each other's poetry and we swore
there is no poetry in Hell.

Tonight, I cannot imagine the imperfect symmetry of Hell.
And so I know you are not there, just because you called yourself a queer.
But if I strain I can almost hear you leading a transcendent choir
and when I lift my eyes to offer up this Kaddish now to you

I look above because I know
there are no pianos in Hell.

Steven Lebow is a rabbi who has published fiction on line and in print in Aphelion Magazine of Science Fiction, Infernal Ink, Literally Stories, Literary Heists, The Aironaut, Literally Stories, The Bitchin' Kitsch Flash Fiction Online, Penny Shorts, The Scarlet Leaf Review, Down in the Dirt, and Danse Macabre.

~ *♦*❁*♦* ~

The Pangolin Review, Issue 14 (8 January, 2020)