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Holy, These Gaps

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Holy, These Gaps

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in
Creative Writing
Poetry

by

Elsbeth Jeanne Lindner

BA, University of Denver, 2013

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In memory of my bubby, Shirley Ann Fordis

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PREFACE: A WORD TURNED LOOSE

“Poet, be like god.”

—Jack Spicer

Consider poetry in terms of prayer, as the giving of one’s self to (an)other. I do not mean, exactly, as submission to a higher power in plea or praise, but as the poem extends from the poet, it comes into its own being, another body in search of connection. Keeping in mind that “prayer” comes from the Latin *precari*, the poem “entreats” (an)other to engage with it, to converse and to participate in the act of creation, that is to say, the act of meaning making. As if in a kind of ritualistic dance, the poem and reader enter into an intimate dialogue hoping to embrace, to move and be moved; this, I believe, is the prayer of a poem, its purpose.

For what good is a poem without someone to listen? What power does it have if it does not move (an)other, or the poet herself? It is through interaction that the poem can gain significance by reaching beyond itself or in other words, spanning the gap between the I and (an)other.

First, to clarify what I mean by “(an)other,” I do not mean to assume that a reader is only someone external to the poet but instead, also involves the internal self, or selves, of the poet. This evokes the idea of Jacques Derrida’s other; though this is a broad term with many referential points in Derrida’s work, for the purpose of this preface, it can be loosely described as a foreign counterpart of the self that is largely incomprehensible, though we can engage with it through willful denial of the conscious self. For instance, in the first poem of this collection, “And You Shall Love,” I initially used the method of erasure for the production of the poem. In this sense, I was distancing my conscious I from the poem by engaging with words that were not my own but were from the Jewish prayer *V’ahavta*; this distance allowed me to create connections through engaging with an other, and as I began to explore these connections, words

began to fill the gaps as if on their own, or perhaps in a deeply instinctual and spiritual manner. Through this, lines emerged that I did not initially comprehend, such as “Take to heart the wire, like prayer, I charge you on this day,” yet a sense of a narrative was emerging. Again, though I did not understand the poem consciously, I felt a connection to these initial lines as if it was another speaking to me. From there, I consciously worked these lines to speak to my other.

It’s in this sense that it seems to me the I contains more than the self, that each *myself* can also be seen as an *ourselves*—a singular multiplicity, or a multiple singularity, which seems to come close to an idea of god. For instance, there are hundreds of names for *god* in Hebrew, each with a different reference and purpose, though there is one unpronounceable name that remains beyond physical utterance (similar to the incomprehensibility of the other). Through writing, the poet is able to speak to, and occasionally from, these hidden aspects of the self, which can be seen, in other words, as an internal divinity. In essence, this other—this stranger to ourselves—can be seen closely in terms of *god*.

Keeping in mind *poesis*, “to make,” the poet is in a godlike position, acting as both the maker of the poem and the one who is, in turn, made by the poem. Extending this to the external others, the readers are both ones who are influenced by a poem yet also participate in the act of creating it through engagement in pursuit of meaning making. As a reader brings her own knowledge, personal experiences, and perceptions to a piece, each reading is unique, and though many readers may agree on the overall meaning of a poem, each may have a different interpretation, however slight, due to her own mnemonic associations and connections drawn. Variance of interpretation can be seen also in how readers can analyze older texts through new perspectives or modern theories, adding new elements to the work, or by bringing multiple texts together through intertextual analysis, creating a new dialogue surrounding these works and

drawing to light new associations¹. In this way, poetry has the ability to span distances (whether they be temporal or linguistic, epistemological or spiritual, or between two selves) and embrace these gaps as it explores the in-between. For example, in the collection below, poems such as “Litany” or “In Father’s House” engage with Jewish texts in a hope to interact with and recreate these historical pieces, calling upon the dialogue of these ancient texts and contributing to its perpetuation.

In this, meaning making becomes not only a personal pursuit but also a communal act, as poetry provides the space for excursions into the I and the other (both external and internal), creating a dialogue between what is both within and beyond the self. It is this dialogical space that allows for a connection to be made.

Similar to prayer, the power of poetry, I believe, relies on evocation, from the Latin *evocationem*, meaning "a calling forth, a calling from concealment." As both the prayer and poem search for a connection to (an)other, the poem strives to uncover an idea that will establish this relationship, stimulating its poet and reader intellectually, emotionally, or spiritually². As uncovering indicates, the thing itself is already present yet remains concealed or unacknowledged, while the poem explores the gaps among these ideas in order to evoke a new connection, to present an object or idea in a different light, turning the reader’s thinking by offering a new perspective; in this sense, the act of *creating* that goes into a poem is an act of *revising*, or re-seeing.

¹ This hermeneutical process of engagement with a text can be seen in light of *midrash*, the Jewish tradition of interpretation, commenting on texts (particularly Jewish scripture) and creating a dialogue to see these texts through various perspectives.

² For example, one may think of the *Mi'Sheberach* here, a prayer for health that asks for strength, or in other words, a prayer one says to find the inner strength to carry on. It is through this calling that the speaker, or poet, is able to actualize an interior aspect of the self.

Within this act of revising, within the dialogical space between the poem and reader, as well as within the connections of the I and the other, there seems to be one common dominator threading these gaps: memory. I am reminded here of the poet Bob Holman who once said, “You know things. Now think them.”³ To think of memory in itself, which operates both consciously and unconsciously⁴, it seems as if it, too, is both intimately of the other and of the self. I often question what it means to forget—if forgetfulness is simply a matter of (un)awareness. If I do not consciously remember a thing, is it actually forgotten or has it perhaps been transformed, lurking beneath the surface? To think of instances of *deja vu* or prophetic dreams, which I have personally experienced, I can’t help but feel the sense of something that is both personal and collective, imagined and real—an underlying presence that seems somehow of the divine and of memory.⁵

Here, language becomes slippery, elusive. Like the limitations of prayer, which strives to speak to the seemingly ineffable or (an)other, there is much that remains resistant to the objectification that comes when an idea turns into an utterance⁶. It seems that there is a gap between thought and word, an (un)conscious space that perhaps could be interpreted as the border of the spiritual and the physical, a space where memory can trespass.

It’s this in-betweenness that fascinates me: these seemingly empty spaces that allow for dialogue and growth. To think of the synaptic cleft: this minute space is needed for the passing of

³ Personal notes from Naropa’s Summer Writing Program, 2011.

⁴ One may consider here the act of dreaming, which some theorize is a way for the brain to construct the input that goes consciously unacknowledged during the day in a comprehensible manner for the conscious self.

⁵ To further illustrate this, I like to think of how when a body decomposes, it fertilizes the ground, allowing life to begin again, and as this new life grows, it absorbs the memory of that which nourishes it, insinuating a sense of transformative immortality and a connection among beings.

⁶Of course, this is a challenge that all writers face—the limitations of language—and, I believe, is the reason why we continue to write. This challenge gives poetry its ability to surprise while also establishing a relationship with the reader. To say what is familiar in a new, provocative way: to me, this is vitality. This constant turning, this motion, gives life its lifeness.

information and for neural communication to occur. Or, as in mentioned “Dear Rosmarie,” it’s the hollowness of a violin that creates its sound and the emptiness of the womb that allows for growth. In terms of poetry, I wonder how influenced we are, consciously or unconsciously, by the memory of this world we have been born into.

In an effort to further examine the function of memory and its boundaries, particularly in relation to the self and identity, many of the poems in this collection rely on an interrogative plunge into memory, on both the personal and collective levels. Some poems draw upon personal experiences (such as “Working the Corner,”) or familial memory (“Wednesdays”), while others circumnavigate cultural memory, through topics such as religious heritage (“Niddah”) or literary influence (“Dear Rosmarie,”). As each poem engages with memory through a different lens, memory itself even becomes a character and is introduced in “The Bang,” a genesis poem. In addition, three poems are written in memory’s voice, which speaks predominantly through idioms, the child-kings of memory and language. In this way, memory can be seen not only personally but linguistically as well. I have become obsessed with how, through repetition, these idiomatic phrases have become not only ingrained within our language but in how we interpret our world; what power does the idiom hold, and how has it influenced our thought? What lurks behind these phrases, and what connections can be uncovered when these bits of concentrated memory are pieced together? As a phrase that has been used to tell the same story over and over, how will it shape the story we will tell? More so, how has the literature, the conversations spoken and unspoken, before our time shaped us? As Rosmarie Waldrop asserts, “the blank page is not blank. No text has one single author. Whether we are conscious of it or not, we always write on top of a PALIMPSEST.”⁷

⁷ From Rosmarie Waldrop’s lecture “Form and Discontent,” *Diacritics*, 1996.

Though we may see the emptiness of the page and feel the gaps amongs ourselves and others, memory seems to be a thread spanning these spaces as we engage with (an)other as if in prayer, trying to evoke that which will inspire or stimulate, that which will allow us to make a connection. For while a poem is not lonely, a poet—

I. TZIMTZUM

AND YOU SHALL LOVE,

in thought, the word embraced, to be made
electrochemical. With all thy soul, all thy might,
signify the signifier.

Take to heart the wire,
like prayer, I charge you on this day. Impressed
upon the body, love, child, the body relays
through recitation, the steady rhythm
of the respirator, as I wait for breath
to turn language, as I wait for a sign
from the hippocampus. Please, tell me
a lie; soon, they say, I will hold a wake,
as they hold their word:

“Do Not Resuscitate.”

Love, keep my hand on your forehead: its touch
a memory, a mark on the bloodstained doorpost.

THE BANG

In a beginning,
a stranger

god traverses space:
an emptiness

defined not
by vacant arms,

but what can be
held. Nothing

more than heat,
pressure, attraction

igniting body
to body

as if by force.
Hold me,

emerges memory,
whose red shift

sprawls across
the virginal universe,

drawing stranger
to light

this space, expanding,
contracting—the birth

pains. *Stranger,*
tell me

it matters.

THE GARDEN

Still beautiful, they say, practically
a miracle she survived the winter
with winds that tore the limbs
from trees but brought no rain—
our dirt turned to dust. Still,
they say, the strawberries
have come in nicely, and the bees
came back, and there's corn
like candy, peppers by the fistfuls,
ready to be pulled, and ripe, gushing
tomatoes that squish so tenderly
in the palm of a merciful hand.
We'll feast, they say, until we can
barely move, and I'll visit finally
our mother who's a vegetable still.

IN FATHER'S HOUSE

Numbers 30:2-17

The head of this the thing the Lord makes
to violate his word: according to what came

out of his mouth, a woman imposes upon her youth
a prohibition upon herself. Silent, her vows stand

that she shall stand.

But if he hears, she will give to man an utterance
of her lips, which pose silent. If taken, what will remain?

She vows to remain and shall stand
the thing issuing from her lips.

How silently he held

the vows she assumed he upheld:
these the Lord commanded.

TAKE THE YOUNG FOR YOURSELF

Deuteronomy 22: 1-29

You do not know your house
where you return to him a lost article,

an ox fallen under its load.
Rather, a woman man wears to lord.

Before you build a house of blood to be spilled
and cover yourself with the name mother,

hold the evidence: the garment of the virgin
on the entrance of the house, lying,

so shall you find a way to the only sin
deserving a girl found violated.

GOD PIECES IT TOGETHER

I'm late.

Last thing I remember,
a spirit

of amber light
shot into the body, a drained glass, sticky
sweet lips.

That burning

honey,

I felt it
whirling in the pit of my stomach
when—

Remember
the time

the storm clouds
congregated into a perfect cyclone
of *ru'ach*, and breathless,

I stood beneath,
arms reaching towards the heavens
like a child to be held.

The sky spacious—

Holy,

these gaps

in memory, how traces
remain in the body,

filling the empty
space.
I feel my belly
grow whole

and ache
for control.

SEPARATION

You mention that dimension determines
the qualities of a given space,

then leave me to my own, with a stranger
sense of belonging in the bedroom. To consummate

a place, to feel its walls contract with the rhythm of blood
language: a translation of the land

called home, no longer
within my reach. I extend my arms into the air,

as a child to be held, to embrace
the *tzimtzum* and slide my fingers through the locks

of this room, empty but for the light
taste of iron and salt, love, lingering

like condensation on these walls.
I breathe it in as a rite

of remembrance: that confinement
allows for the growth of another,

a willing detachment. My body
shivers in the grip of the room,

arms clasped around this hungry womb.

II. ALIYAH

ON LANGUAGE

When god laughs, like thunder
splitting speech, it forms

a rift; inside
we tumble

as if into
the belly

of a cave, rumbling
with an echo of a thought

we think
we've heard before,

a memory that's lost
a screw, a word turned

loose. At the mouth, we stumble
across a sign:

CAUTION
Mind the gap.

And the laughing starts again.

ELECTROMAGNETIC THEORY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

He proposes

perception is based on a series of transmissions
that experience weaves into our conception

of existence, where autonomy is determined
a fallacy, as individual reactions are a consequence

of synchronicity.

Yet, as a symphony to crescendo,

or a firing squad turned in on itself,
our nerves speak to one another,

constantly, redefining the outline
of our map, forming a field where I find myself

struck by the free will
subjugated in his hypothesis.

The radio calls for storms as he calls me in,
but I turn my back on that box of his

and spread my arms beneath the sky,
awaiting lightning's strike,

when it hits me:

This is how the earth makes memory,

and I am its charge.

MEMORY GETS HITCHED

I take you, I mean, it
to mean no harm will come
forward. From this day,
with God as witness,

I will bear a sight
to hold my piece
of the glass, rose colored,
under your feet.

Under your thumb,
our daughters will learn
to spell
by touch
and go
hand in hand
behind your back
until beaten black, and blue
bells ring—

Do you hear them,
monsters
under
the wedding bed.

COOKING FOR A FAMILY

Begin with bones—the fresher, the better—and break down the carcass, ripping cartilage from sockets. Tear excess fat from the body, and in a stockpot, place the bones.

Bury them with six pounds and eight ounces of vegetable trimmings: potato skins, onion cores, celery ribs. Remember, flesh is not to be

wasted. Turn the heat on high, and fill the pot with water until barely covered. Spice to your liking as the stock comes

to boil—salt and pepper to taste. Reduce to simmer and render until broth is lightly browned, gurgling.

Repeat process until drained and separated.

WEDNESDAYS

“Trash night!” Dad hounded each week. He meant, *I can't take your shit anymore*. The stretchmarked trashcan, bloated with waterlogged pizza boxes, crushed milk cartons, chewed-up Barbie dolls who'd lost their heads.

House rule: Last one takes the barrel. The baby girl of six, I stopped trying to beat them. Shoved remnants of our family into the mouth and stomped the heap down until compacted, the can cramped. I learned to take its weight on my back, to push its bottom out with my feet, let it rest on my shoulders, and march barefoot down the gravel drive to the street where my dog had gotten shot and learned to walk on three. My calluses were tougher then.

Could handle the clumps of hair yanked from the sink, crushed packs of smokes carefully wrapped like tampons and stuffed to the bottom, busted 2x4s from when my sister's boyfriend had gotten thrown through the deck, the baggage of cousins who'd been discarded and left on our doorstep—their mothers insisted it's a man's job to take the trash.

Which is true. Dad dumped Mom. Classic tale, younger woman.

Cleaning out our old house, Mom laughed at how seriously Dad had taken trash night. She figured he feared the garbage men would never return, like his father who ditched their family for Rio. Told him, be the man of the house. Value family

by what is left
to scrap.

MEMORY TELLS A BEDTIME STORY

Once upon a ticking time bomb,
you were a maiden fair in love
and war-ridden,

bound to honor Father,
as Mother milked the situation—
Mother knows

best thing since sliced bread
winner takes all
night— Long

story short,
man of your dreams

came to blow
a kiss then kiss your ass.
What more

could you do

but take cover
as nature took its course, take it
lying down
on hands
and knees while he jerked off
and on the final stroke,

the spell was broken
limb from limb.

What more
could you do—

Mother said—

when a man's got to do
what the doctor orders
are orders.

It's nothing
personal.

STAINED

In case of emergency, she recites, hydrogen peroxide
and empties a couple drops before, to the side of the egg-
white tub, slipping the bottle back, a black ring revealing
its resting place. *A mark of belonging*, she envies,
rubbing her panties clockwise as white cotton froths.

She remembers the first time she learned this trick.
Her cheeks, redder than the stain, as if slapped
by Mother's voice: *Filthy girl*. The harder she scrubbed,
the harsher her tone. Each syllable punctuated,
hung to dry: *fil • thy*.

Now, with the same heaved breath, she marks
by heartbeat every motion. *Thump thump*—her hands grind
cloth on steel, the ribs of the washboard engorged
with displaced flesh, her arms enveloped in dark water.

There're two types: those who make the mess
and those who clean it. Period.

DRESSING

Empty, like a dress left limp on the floor, an object whose purpose got put on hold, she considers the difference between *I* and *it*, a cross borne on the backside of a child.

She remembers her belly stripped bare under his belt-line, those trembling fluorescent lights pricking her skin. As he sliced open a toothless grin, the blood smeared like lipstick

along her abdomen. After slipping in a hand, the surgeon said he couldn't find what he sought. Instead, it hid, like a breath sucked in that refuses to let the stomach show.

At home, her mother, assuming an exterior change could alter the interior, tries to fix her up, tossing the garment onto the bed. She slides it over her head, revealing the almost-

healed wound, and thinks how little she has to offer
this oversized dress, how her body accentuates its loneliness.

Zip up, Mother says.

MEMORY LOSES IT

Never know what you've got
till it's gone to hell, and on my back,

I remember, the back
of his hand to mouth,

piece by piece
of— *Mind your own*

business.

As usual, he called me

easy as pie, a pretty little head
needed to be screwed straight,

tight-lipped in service
of— *Oh, Lord.*

A body gone, I felt, under skin
then another forming bones

to pick with liberty and justice for all
work, no playing. Hard to get

out of bed when I've lost
my time of the month,

and time will tell the same story;
I imagined,

they'd call you—*blessing*
in disguise.

Only,

they called you *it*, only
it's not what I thought

the morning after
pill popping my cherry

on top
of the world.

III. RU'ACH

THE ROAST

Adorned in Wonderbra
and purified by watered-down Joy,
I prepare my place

of worship—the kitchen.

God bless the hands that scrub till they bleed,
the oven cleansed of its grease, this body

remade for the family feast.
Underneath the heat, the meat hisses
as if with my confession,

Hineni.

On bent knees with open palms, sweating
sins of the flesh, I greet this sacrifice,
unafraid to serve my heart for the Seder.

Baruch HaShem, I'll show you
the best part to carve.

LITANY

Listen Israel, I can't
hear over the sirens.

NIDDAH

To be considered

an object
unclean,

in this state,
bearing laws

of separation,

a body offering
sacrifice naturally

becomes a woman

who learns
to live

periodically
with the sin

of creation.

WORKING THE CORNER,

Preacher says
I'll be afflicted with AIDS
if I don't change

my low-cut shirt,
these wicked ways.
He flashes

the crowd a sign:
Hebrews 1.9
—*Jesus HATES sin*—

a reduction so indecent,
I can't help
but laugh, as if

brimming with the oil
of gladness,
at my companion

who thought inspiration
could be wrought
from mistranslation.

So revealing
how he undresses
this text—

I must confess,
I'm afraid,
not of being stripped

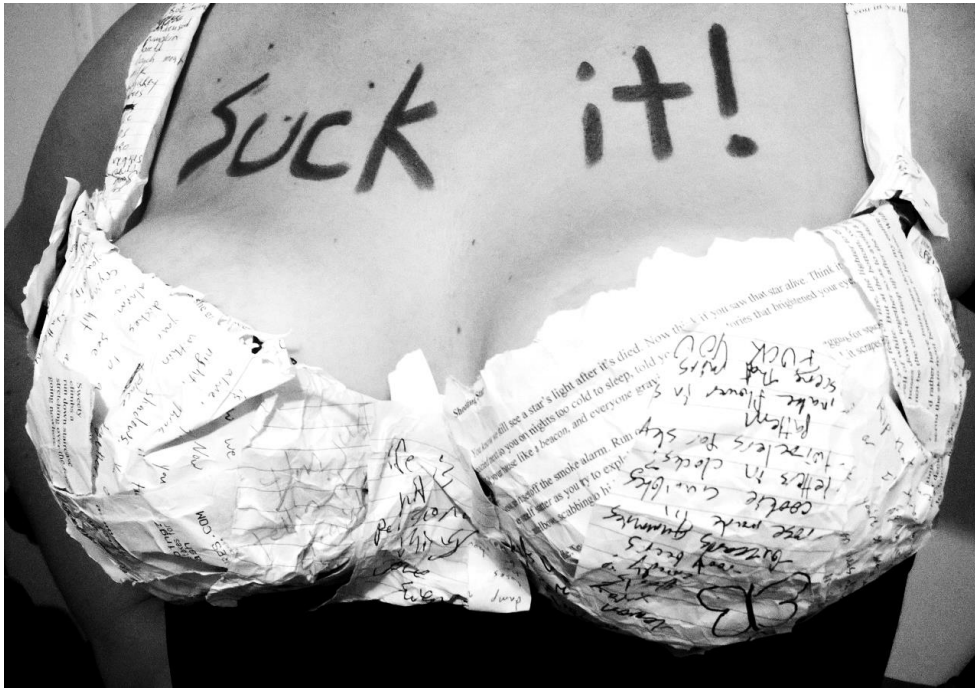
down, but of him
who remains
shrouded, chained

to his one-
way only sign,
who feels

the need to force
the divine and prophet
from stereotypes.

As for me,
I intend to take it
to the source.

IDENTITY



BLACKOUT

The question to leave, she insists, depends on when the lights
go out, for tonight she intends to forget what it means to be good,

meaning we are good in the mess we got
going. That leaving when unasked, she understands, will only result in grief

when leaving indicates the absence
of good, and going to get the breaker fixed

will only get us in a fix, meaning we are not good, leaving one
option: go for broke, when—she insists again—the need to counteract

grief can be fulfilled by the choice to leave the self in good hands
when comfort is provided by what will be forgotten after going for it.

She's not going to remember what got into her, meaning who. When she wakes,
she'll question good intentions, examine the evidence left, and

leave when the going gets good.

AN ALMOST

When I say I don't remember, I mean I'm sorry.

Like a neural meandering, the recalling of memory feels slippery on the tongue, as if twisting and turning these thoughts, like when I turned my back to you, letting myself get carried away, without a damn, to lip the line of a promise.

Broken, I crafted a new face to lie, secretly fingering the rock you gave me, smoothed by the river, recovered from the depths of my purse; it seemed to reverberate with the ebb and flow

of your voice, and I remembered how you said that the form predetermines the reaction: Mine, surprisingly guilt-free the night I examined my body in light of another man, and almost—

Against every hypothesis, these waters can be crossed. But I cannot.

IV. ELI

DEAR ROSMARIE

I.

“I kept being haunted by some of its phrases, like ‘all resonance grows from consent to emptiness.’ The fact that the ‘empty’ space inside a flute or violin is where the sound happens, and that the uterus, a likewise ‘empty’ organ, is a locus of fertility wanted to be thought about.”

Introduction to *Curves to the Apple*

In the space
of a word, what do you see. Do you
 consider it even

 a matter of sight,
 which is to say,

 is sight (the) matter.

(A)stigmatic,
my I cannot see through the lens

 of a misogynistic (mis)conception:
 to fear

 what lacks definition

when (re)cognition requires
 distance,

as light intensifies the fog
that leaves this space
 blurred. Clearly,
 at a loss

 like (the) mothers
 before me,

Rosmarie, I can(not) remember the lines

 of their faces,
 though within

 these empty spaces,

I see.

II.

“The poem is not so much ‘expression’ as a cognitive process that, to some extent, changes even the poet... Form/composition is not an extension of content (Olson/Creeley), but is, on the contrary, primary. It is the form that generates the content.”

“Form and Discontent”

They say the dimensions of a space determine the shape of what it can hold, and I hold my head as if to understand myself through this body encased, as if to penetrate the pleats of the brain and draw memory like a bow across the strings of my grandmother’s violin, its curves molding the song. I’ve heard we hold over 100 trillion synapses each, constantly speaking to another through signals. As if in the same way, I could only convey my grief by how I laid her instrument to rest. How tenderly red velvet caressed its body.

III.

“Full maturity of meaning takes time the way you eat a fish, morsel by morsel, off the bone.”

Section 1 from *Lawn of Excluded Middle*

Each of these letters	a leftover bone.
The body, engulfed.	White space
swells, swallows	flesh of the rainbow
trout.	I want to feel
it caught	between my teeth,
let it slide	down throat to belly,
primed	for gutting—
Rosmarie—it tastes	fishy
mouthng	your name.

IV.

“The words have their own vectors, they have their own affinities. They find each other, they make love, then go off and find other combinations.”

The Jivin' Ladybug's "Keith & Rosmarie Waldrop Interview"

Do you know what I mean. What means I. I mean it.
I'm trying. To hold onto. Who or what means it. Meaning

I. Break my body. To hold. You. Already broken.
Into this dwelling. Trespass. As a body passing. Taken

into the belly. I've taken it. To mean you. Know
I am trying. You on top me. Meaning we. Our it.

V.

“Carrying kits for survival since the body is practical. And only when the brain’s defenses are down, as in dreams, do we drown in the pure stream.”

“Unaccountable Landscapes.” *Blindsight*

Where do you feel memory. Do you consider it a bodily function, a trickling excretion.
Trauma, they say, passes genetically. What tracks lie rooted in veins,

I wonder, what remains in a refugee heart. Expelled, my ancestors were shipped,
and cremated, I’ve heard, a body fits a teacup.

I feel my stomach swell as if with gray water, seeping from the mud of Majdanek
still, haunted by its mountain of ash, a memorial.

Rosmarie, tonight I woke in tears and held perfect silence through the current.
Do you think I’m wrong to try to forget.

VI.

“The blank page is not blank. No text has one single author. Whether we are conscious of it or not, we always write on top of a PALIMPSEST.”

“Form and Discontent”

To remember reveals a presence of desire, and Rosmarie, tonight
I’m trying to remember, as I light the *yahrzeit* candle, the words
of my mothers, which remain fastened to their tongues, nailed
like a prayer on our doorpost. A reminder, *Sh'ma*.

I take the word into my body as I would a lover and listen
to my bloodstream resemble the rush of wind, *ru'ach*, and rain
on a tin roof. *Sh*, Ma would cradle me during the storms.
Curling my arms around my belly, *Sh*, I tell myself now.

A PERPETUAL STATE OF MISSING YOU

Stranger, I've come
to know you

by absence,
which too remains

in memory, buried
under three shovelfuls

of dirt I spooned
onto your coffin

as if to fill the space
between refugee and home,

whose meaning once
I held

as a coffee cup
in a cold room,

transferring heat
into the air,

settling here,
where I learned

how we last
living in loss

and this love—

NOTES ON HEBREW TERMS AND REFERENCES

Hebrew Terms:

Aliyah: From the Hebrew root for “to rise” or “to wake,” this word may also refer the act of Jews returning to the Holy Land after the Diaspora.

Baruch HaShem: Literally meaning “blessed be the name,” this phrase often punctuates conversation of Orthodox Jewry. It can be similarly juxtaposed with the English phrases “thank God” and “God forbid.”

Eli: This word translates “my god.” Of note, Hannah Senesh wrote a poem (now a commonly used song in Jewish services) called “Eli, Eli.”

Hineni: In the Torah, when God called to Abraham, Abraham answered, “*Hineni*,” meaning “Here I am.”

Niddah: From the Hebrew root for “moved” or “separated,” *niddah* means “to excommunicate or to exclude.” It is also used in Leviticus, particularly to reference a menstruating woman, as the text outlines laws of purity and definitions of uncleanness.

Ru’ach: Meaning both “wind” and “spirit,” this word often invokes a sense of might or power.

Sh’ma: The name of one of the most significant Jewish prayer, this word translates to “listen.”

Yahrzeit: From the Yiddish for “anniversary,” a *yahrzeit* candle is lit on the anniversary of a loved one’s death; these typically burn for 24 hours. During *shiva*, the week after a loved one’s death, it is typical to light a candle that lasts for seven days, marking the beginning and end of the initial mourning period.

Tzimtzim: From the Hebrew root for “contraction,” “constriction,” or “condensation,” this term refers to a Kabbalist theory of universal creation. This theory states that in order for creation to take place, the *Or Ein Sof* (or “Light Without End,” referring to divine power) had to be concealed, since creation needed a finite, independent space to develop.

References:

“And You Shall Love,” began as an erasure of the Jewish prayer, the *V’ahavta*, and borrows diction from its translation.

“Litany” is based on the Jewish prayer, the *Sh’ma*, which translates to “listen.”

“In Father’s House” is an erasure from Numbers 30:2-17. This translation was provided by Chabad.

“Take the Young for Yourself” is an erasure from Deuteronomy 22: 1-29. This translation was provided by Chabad.

“Electromagnetic Theory of Consciousness” was inspired by Johnjoe McFadden’s “Synchronous Firing and Its Influence on the Brain’s Electromagnetic Field: Evidence for an Electromagnetic Field Theory of Consciousness” (2007).

VITA

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